



International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research
 Vol. 24, No. 10, pp. 230-253, October 2025
<https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.24.10.11>
 Received Jul 23, 2025; Revised Sept 10, 2025; Accepted Sept 16, 2025


Embedding Quality Culture in Tourism Polytechnic Institutions: A Development Framework in Indonesia

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Abstract. This study explores the role of quality culture in strengthening vocational tourism education in Indonesia, particularly in the context of post-pandemic recovery and global competitiveness. As tourism rebounds, the demand for resilient, adaptable, and sustainability-oriented human resources has intensified. Using a qualitative explanatory approach, this research examines six Indonesian tourism polytechnics to understand how institutions conceptualize and implement quality culture across curriculum design, teaching practices, leadership, and industry engagement through in-depth interviews with relevant officials. The study adopts a three-dimensional analytical lens encompassing national challenges, global competitiveness, and capability transformation, particularly regarding digital maturity and green innovation. Findings indicate that while institutions vary in maturity and resource capacity, there is a shared institutional commitment to continuous improvement. Seven core indicators of quality were identified: student performance, curriculum innovation, teaching experience, faculty professionalism, research and community contribution, institutional leadership, and industry linkage. The study concludes that embedding quality culture is essential for producing globally competitive graduates and achieving educational resilience. It offers a strategic framework for tourism polytechnic institutions aiming to align with both national development priorities and international standards in a rapidly evolving tourism landscape.

Keywords: Tourism Education; Vocational Education; Quality Culture; Tourism Polytechnic; Development Framework

1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the most influential and dynamic industries in the global economy, recognized not only for its contribution to national gross domestic product (GDP) and employment but also for its potential to drive inclusive and sustainable development (Grandcourt, 2020; Page & Connell, 2020). In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the resilience of the tourism sector is once again under scrutiny. International tourist arrivals are projected to return to 88% of pre-pandemic levels by 2024, while global tourism's contribution to GDP has nearly reached USD 9.9 trillion, signalling a near-complete recovery to its 2019 status (TTDI, 2024). This rebound reflects suppressed travel demand and increasing mobility, especially from emerging Asian markets. However, beyond the recovery narratives lies a deeper need to address structural vulnerabilities that were exposed by the pandemic, particularly in the areas of human resources and education.

As the tourism industry evolves, so too must the educational institutions responsible for training the next generation of tourism professionals. The unprecedented disruption caused by COVID-19 has created new urgency to rethink the foundations of tourism education—not merely in terms of delivery modes, but in terms of the values, skills, and adaptability it imparts. The post-pandemic era, marked by volatility, rapid digital transformation, and shifting consumer expectations, demands a workforce that is not only technically proficient but also resilient, ethical, and sustainability-oriented (Higgins-

Desbiolles, 2018; Ioannides & Gyimothy, 2020). This is particularly true in vocational education, where students are being trained to enter directly into industry roles that require high levels of interpersonal, operational, and adaptive competencies.

Vocational tourism education, by design, emphasizes the acquisition of practical, work-based skills. It offers experiential learning pathways that align with the service-oriented nature of the tourism and hospitality industries. However, while this approach is effective in providing technical capabilities, it often falls short in fostering long-term values such as critical thinking, innovation, and ethical responsibility. These limitations became even more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the shift to remote and hybrid learning modes challenged the traditional vocational training model (Haryanto, 2020; Syauqi et al., 2020). In this context, it is increasingly apparent that vocational tourism education must evolve beyond short-term skill development to embrace a more holistic and sustainable framework—one that is underpinned by a culture of quality.

The concept of quality culture in higher education refers to the shared values, beliefs, and behaviors that prioritize quality as an institutional norm rather than as an administrative goal (Bendermacher et al., 2016; Dziminska et al., 2018). Unlike external quality assurance systems that often emphasize compliance, quality culture fosters intrinsic motivation for excellence among educators, administrators, and students alike. In vocational tourism education, quality culture can translate into a systematic commitment to service excellence, ethical practice, customer empathy, and environmental responsibility—all of which are essential attributes for a sustainable system and a workforce equipped for long-term adaptability.

Global institutions such as the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) have emphasized the need for education systems to align with principles of sustainability, ethics, and innovation. Initiatives like the TedQual certification system aim to standardize and elevate the quality of tourism education globally. However, the uptake and implementation of such frameworks vary widely, especially in developing countries where educational institutions face infrastructural, financial, and institutional barriers (Sadq et al., 2019; Sharpley, 2009). As such, it is important to investigate how local contexts interpret and integrate the principles of quality into their vocational education systems.

Indonesia offers a compelling case study in this regard. As an archipelagic country with vast natural and cultural tourism potential, Indonesia has made tourism a central pillar of its national economic strategy. In response to industry demands and the need to professionalize the tourism workforce, the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy has established six state-run tourism polytechnics—located in Bandung, Bali, Medan, Makassar, Lombok, and Palembang. These institutions are tasked with producing graduates who are technically skilled, industry-ready, and globally competitive. However, questions remain about how effectively these institutions embed quality culture within their

educational ecosystems and whether they can fulfill the dual mandates of national development and global competitiveness.

Historically, vocational education in Indonesia has focused on fulfilling labor market needs in sectors such as hospitality, culinary arts, and travel management (Sutono, 2024). However, while these programs have contributed to employment and service delivery, they have not always emphasized long-term adaptability, sustainability, or innovation. Moreover, the vocational model often struggles with perception challenges—being viewed as a second-tier option compared to academic universities, thereby affecting student motivation and institutional prestige (Moodie, 2002; Sutono, 2020). To address these challenges, tourism polytechnic institutions must not only update their curricula and pedagogy but also cultivate internal cultures that value continuous improvement, industry collaboration, and social responsibility.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed weaknesses in vocational education, particularly in the tourism sector. The suspension of practical training, limited access to digital infrastructure, and a lack of contingency planning disrupted the core of experiential learning. At the same time, the crisis presented a unique opportunity to rethink how vocational education can become more resilient, flexible, and sustainability-driven (Collins-Kreiner & Ram, 2021; Ntounis et al., 2021). In Indonesia, this means that tourism polytechnics must realign their institutional goals with broader development priorities—namely, achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs), supporting post-pandemic recovery, and enhancing national competitiveness in the global tourism economy.

To do so, three strategic dimensions are crucial: (1) national challenges, (2) global challenges, and (3) new capabilities. Nationally, tourism education must address issues of uneven human resource quality, limited regional access to vocational training, and gaps between academic competencies and industry needs. Institutions must also play a role in community empowerment, poverty alleviation, and cultural preservation—goals that are enshrined in Indonesia's broader development agenda (Sutono, 2024).

At the global level, tourism education must be aligned with internationally recognized standards and benchmarks. In an increasingly interconnected world, students must be prepared to meet the expectations of international employers, adapt to diverse cultural contexts, and engage with global sustainability discourses (Croes et al., 2020). The ability of Indonesian tourism polytechnics to gain recognition through certifications like TedQual and participate in global research collaborations is an important step toward enhancing visibility and credibility on the world stage.

The third dimension, capability transformation, involves reorienting the education system to embrace digital literacy, green competencies, and future-proof skillsets. As the tourism sector becomes increasingly digitized and sustainability-driven, vocational institutions must ensure that their graduates are not only job-ready but also innovation-ready (Albrecht, 2013; Sadq et al., 2019).

This includes integrating content such as zero-waste tourism, climate-aware operations, digital marketing, and responsible travel ethics into both theory and practice.

Against this backdrop, this study explores how Indonesia's tourism vocational education institutions conceptualize and implement quality culture as a strategy to navigate these three strategic dimensions. Using a qualitative explanatory approach, the research draws on interviews and field observations from six tourism polytechnics across the country. The study employs a conceptual model of quality culture development adapted from Sutono (2020), which categorizes institutional progress into six sequential stages—from symbolic representation to full cultural internalization of quality principles.

By analyzing how each institution positions itself within this model, the research aims to identify critical gaps, best practices, and institutional learning processes that can inform both national education policy and broader theoretical frameworks on tourism education. In doing so, the study contributes to a growing body of literature that seeks to make tourism education more responsive to the challenges of a post-pandemic world and more aligned with the principles of sustainability, inclusion, and excellence (Buckley, 2012; Budeanu et al., 2016; Liu, 2010).

Ultimately, this study argues that building a quality culture in vocational tourism education is not a peripheral concern but a strategic imperative. As tourism re-emerges as a leading sector in global economic recovery, the institutions that educate its workforce must themselves become models of resilience, adaptability, and quality. In Indonesia and beyond, achieving this goal will require a concerted effort from educators, policymakers, industry stakeholders, and students themselves.

2. Literature Review

Ultimately, amid the massive development of tourism globally and the growing opinion that tourism is a "win-win solution" with minimal impact, this is not entirely true (Mason, 2020). Many scholars have long studied the broad spectrum of impacts of tourism, mainly negative ones. Tourism will have quite a broad and multi-sectoral impact on the destination where it lands. This has become the forerunner to the emergence of many tourism impact study theories and frameworks to direct tourism development in many tourist destinations with minimal impact (Jordan et al., 2019).

Indeed, the tourism sector is dynamic and, in its development, has experienced rapid progress. With the changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these dynamics have become more massive and require each actor to engage in critical adaptation efforts to adjust and adapt so they are not disadvantaged. The spread of COVID-19 is increasingly forcing every party involved to be adaptive and find solutions to deal with change so that the level of resilience is more robust (Ntounis et al., 2021). In the realm of academic support, the tourism sector, which depends heavily on service trade, necessitates an education system that is oriented toward

technology and expertise development. This categorizes tourism education as a type of vocational education. Vocational education aims to prepare students with the knowledge, technical skills, and behavioral competencies to become experts in a particular field and be ready for a specific type of work (Moodie, 2002).

As a type of vocational education, the emphasis in teaching tourism, especially in hospitality and travel vocational education, is on practice and direct application of knowledge in simulated situations to realities on the ground (Sutono, 2024). This is not easy to achieve, however, when adapting to education remotely. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how tourism education can adapt to the restrictions imposed by post-COVID-19 teaching policies (Syauqi et al., 2020). Furthermore, the study of adjustments to tourism vocational education in the new standard era is also more advanced and needs more attention because the context is different.

In responding to the limitations that must be faced during this period of readjustment, fundamental values in tourism education must be essential and deeply absorbed. Important values such as hospitality should be deeply instilled in each student so that a quality culture is formed that makes students resilient and adaptive in all situations. Especially with dynamic and uncertain conditions, maintaining a higher education institution's quality is highly complex, so the emergence of the quality culture theorem is expected to fill the void in these needs through a social system automatically formed within educated students. Culture creates value and quality for each thing mastered (Dziminska et al., 2018).

To create a higher education institution that can form students oriented toward quality culture, Sutono (2024), by adopting Tallinn's (2014) model, describes the stages starting from the lowest level, where quality is still regarded as a symbol only, up to the highest level. Moreover, the ideal is one where quality can be made as a culture. The following is a visualization of the model:

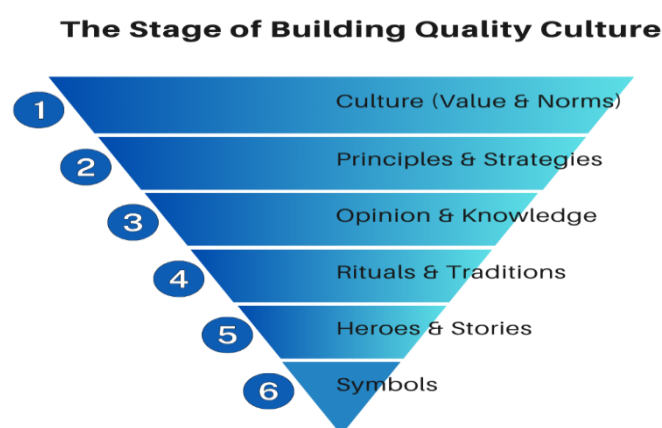


Figure 1: The Stage of Building Quality Culture

Source: Sutono (2024)

This figure is a model for mapping the position of a tourism polytechnic institution in implementing the principles of quality culture in the context of sustainable understanding. The model takes the form of sequential levels, where the sixth stage (top) is the stage with the lowest level of implementation of the principles. On the other hand, the lowest stage (first stage) is an ideal stage, which is the desired condition where the implementation of a culture of quality for the entire academic community has become entrenched in the institution and cannot possibly be lost/reduced.

At the lowest level, an institution usually considers quality culture only as a symbol. The achievement of the quality of the academic community is only a sign that they have achieved success in achieving targets or winning specific competitions. In the next stage, there is a need to transform this achievement into a "success story" in which the institution's leader socializes and tells all elements of the educational institution to inspire acceptable values. Furthermore, the practice or example of success stories in a higher education institution will be formed into a tradition/particular way of working that hopes to repeat the same success.

At a more advanced stage, a system that has considered the existence of quality through achievement will bring forth efforts to invite every academic community to think about and share the opinions and perspectives of each individual regarding understanding so as to achieve that quality itself. The second step is to produce specific strategies/principles that are considered the best steps in achieving an achievement/quality. In the final stage, when members of higher education institutions are no longer encouraged to do something to achieve the expected quality/ achievement, this has been embedded in the minds of each individual and will be carried out automatically and systematically. It is at this stage that the quality culture has been achieved.

2.1 The Need for Tourism Vocational Education

The previous section explained why tourism needs support in terms of education and why vocational education should be the choice. Tourism, a sector that prioritizes excellent service for all the needs of tourists as consumers, requires the availability of skilled human resources to meet tourist needs, especially in providing tourist amenities.

Quoting Sutono (2020), several things make a study of how well the quality of tourism vocational education significantly influences the success of organizing tourism activities in a destination important. First, vocational education is the answer for a region/country's developing economy and tourism. Tourism vocational education will become a critical conduit that directly connects the availability of human resources and industry needs. Vocational education is the most strategic link between industries that need a workforce ready for work and the workforce itself.

Second, fulfilling the quality of tourism vocational education will be the key to increasing tourism competitiveness. As a sector currently in the global spotlight

and experiencing intense competition, a destination's excellence through high tourism competitiveness is a critical priority matter. The concept of tourism competitiveness itself is the ability of a tourist destination to create tourism products that meet national and global criteria/standards and have implications for revenue through maximum and sustainable product sales.

In meeting the demands of competitive vocational human resources, the Global Human Capital Report 2017 by the World Economic Forum emphasizes that there are at least four elements that are indicators of human capital, namely capacity (worker capacity based on literacy and education), deployment (labor participation rate and unemployment rate), development (level of education and educational participation), and know-how (level of knowledge and ability of workers and availability of resources) In the next section, strategies will be described for achieving the capacity of vocational tourism human resources in the context of a new standard situation approach.

2.2 Developing Tourism Vocational Education through National Challenges, Global Competitiveness and Capabilities Transformation

In formulating the need for a tourism vocational education development strategy in sustainable tourism, it is necessary to know in depth how the challenges need to be faced and answered. The main challenge in implementing tourism vocational education is how to sustainably improve tourism quality and actualize standardization and certification of all lines of its sub-sectors. Meanwhile, looking into the Indonesian context, a separate national challenge exists: improving the community's quality of life through tourism activities and contributing to post-pandemic community recovery.

On the other hand, adapting the tourism sector to sustainable development principles has implications for adopting a massive system and technology. The use of technology in organizing tourism activities has become widespread in almost all tourist destinations. This is progress despite the negative impact of some tourism activity development. However, even though stimulated technological progress occurs, there are still possibilities for failure in the use of technology. Therefore, a new approach emerges that becomes a capability namely, transformation in digital maturity.

From the paradigm above, Sutono (2020) compiled a framework that summarizes the what, who, and how of implementing adaptive tourism vocational education in the following figure:

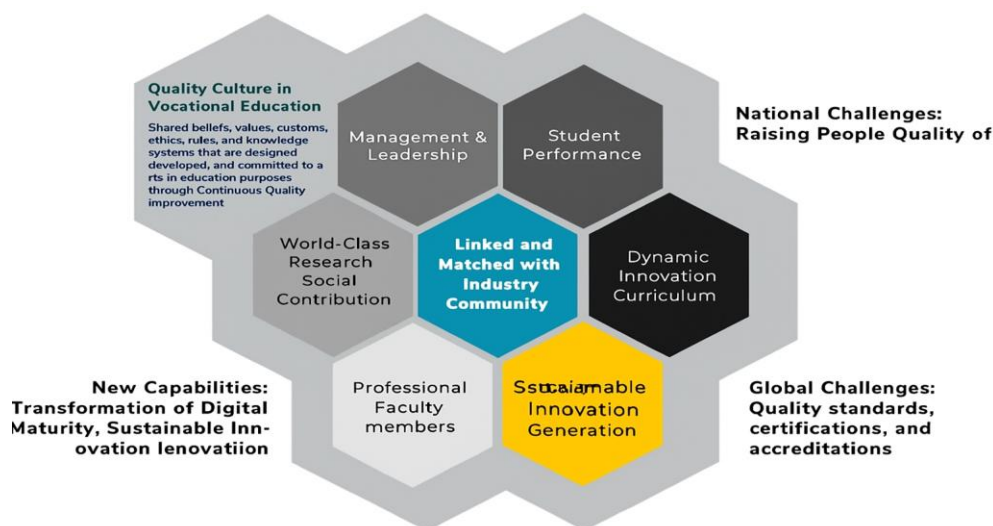


Figure 2: Tourism Vocational Education Development Framework

Source: Sutono (2024)

The illustrated framework presents a holistic approach to implementing quality culture in tourism vocational education. It positions quality culture not merely as a policy or procedure but as a core institutional value system—consisting of shared beliefs, ethics, practices, and knowledge systems that are consistently applied through continuous quality improvement. The framework integrates three strategic external challenges—national, global, and transformational capabilities—with seven interdependent internal quality indicators essential to building and sustaining educational excellence.

2.2.1 National Challenges: Enhancing the Quality of Life

At the national level, vocational education must respond to the fundamental challenge of raising the quality of life. In a developing context like Indonesia, this involves increasing the employability, adaptability, and civic engagement of graduates who are equipped to contribute meaningfully to their communities. Tourism education institutions are, therefore, responsible not only for producing skilled workers but also for cultivating professionals who can enhance community welfare, support sustainable local development, and elevate national tourism standards. This aligns with the broader agenda of inclusive economic growth and human capital investment.

2.2.2 Global Challenges: Meeting International Quality Standards

In the global arena, tourism vocational education faces mounting pressure to align with internationally recognized standards, certifications, and accreditations. The global tourism industry is increasingly competitive and interconnected, requiring institutions to produce graduates who are globally capable of meeting diverse stakeholder expectations. This includes adherence to international quality frameworks (such as UNWTO's TedQual), participation in global accreditation schemes, and demonstration of quality in both academic outcomes and graduate competencies. By achieving global recognition, institutions gain legitimacy, improve graduate mobility, and strengthen their international partnerships.

2.2.3 New Capabilities: Navigating Digital Maturity and Green Innovation

The third dimension of this framework is the emergence of new capabilities, particularly the transformation toward digital maturity and the shift to a green innovative generation lifestyle. As digitalization and environmental sustainability reshape global tourism, educational institutions must equip students with future-proof skills. This includes proficiency in digital platforms, online service systems, and green tourism practices such as zero-waste operations, eco-friendly design, and climate-responsive planning. The ability to integrate digital tools and sustainability values into the curriculum and campus culture marks a critical shift in how vocational tourism education adapts to 21st-century demands.

Furthermore, to operationalize this strategic vision, the framework emphasizes seven internal dimensions that together form the pillars of a resilient, competitive, and future-oriented institution:

1. Student Performance

This dimension focuses on evaluating how well students internalize and demonstrate quality culture values in both academic and practical settings. It includes their engagement with sustainable practices, critical thinking, and consistent achievement across academic, technical, and soft skills. A robust assessment system that goes beyond grades – measuring attitudes, integrity, and innovation – is vital in nurturing holistic student development.

2. Dynamic-Innovative Curriculum

An effective tourism polytechnic institution must have a flexible and forward-looking curriculum. This involves not only aligning with national competency frameworks (such as Indonesian National Qualifications Framework) but also embedding innovation, sustainability, and digital competencies into course content. The curriculum must evolve with industry trends and foster creativity, entrepreneurship, and cross-disciplinary integration among students and faculty.

3. Teaching and Learning Experience

Beyond curriculum design, the pedagogical delivery of tourism education is crucial. Institutions must provide engaging, student-centered learning environments that blend theory with hands-on practice. The use of adaptive learning technologies, simulation tools, hybrid learning models, and experiential activities ensures students receive meaningful, real-world learning that enhances both competence and confidence.

4. Professional Faculty Members

Quality vocational education relies heavily on the expertise, professionalism, and industry engagement of its faculty. Educators must possess not only academic qualifications but also substantial industry experience and pedagogical skills. Institutions should invest in continuous faculty development, exposure to international practices, and recruitment systems that balance academic and practitioner backgrounds, especially in tourism, where applied knowledge is essential.

5. World-Class Research and Social Contribution

A vibrant vocational education system contributes to knowledge production and community engagement. Institutions must create ecosystems that support research collaboration (especially with international and industry partners), publication in reputable journals, and community service programs that translate tourism knowledge into social impact. This also strengthens institutional visibility and credibility at the global level.

6. Management and Leadership

Strong institutional governance underpins all quality initiatives. Effective leadership fosters a vision-driven, transparent, and accountable culture that enables strategic planning, resource optimization, and responsive decision-making. Tourism institutions must be managed with the same level of professionalism and agility as competitive hospitality organizations, with leaders who champion innovation, partnerships, and performance-based outcomes.

7. Linked and Matched with Industry Community

At the central to this framework lies industry alignment. The central hexagon – “Linked and Matched with Industry Community” – symbolizes the core role of connectivity between education and the tourism sector. Institutions must establish and maintain strong partnerships with industry actors to ensure curriculum relevance, provide internships and apprenticeships, facilitate real-time feedback, and enhance graduate employability. The synergy between academia and industry ensures that tourism education remains market-responsive and sustainable. Once these seven indicators are met, the implementation of tourism vocational education in an institution can run well, be adaptive and resilient, and grow global competitiveness to create an institution with implications for academic and practical goals.

3. Materials and Methods

A case study test was carried out on a tourism polytechnic institution to actualize the concept formulated in the previous section. Case studies are needed to get an accurate picture of the implementation of the conceptualization of quality culture in a tourism vocational education institution and how they consider aspects of national challenges, global competitiveness, and transformation capabilities as determining factors for the success of implementing quality culture as a critical element in sustainable tourism development from the perspective of tourism education/human resource development.

The case study was conducted in several tourism vocational colleges, namely six tourism polytechnics under the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy. The selection was based on the fact that this institution is the oldest tourism education institution in Indonesia and has also achieved the second highest accreditation rating (very good/B) (National Accreditation Agency for Higher Education, 2023). This provides an assumption that, in the implementation of learning activities, there is a high probability that there will be indications of the application of a quality culture perspective.

3.1 Measurement

This research prioritizes the discipline of qualitative research with an exploratory research approach. Exploratory qualitative research is used to obtain data and findings from exploring new ideas put forward in this research, namely the study of quality culture in tourism vocational education institutions, under the principles of exploratory research methods proposed by Abdussamad (2021). Through this method, the research results will take the form of a detailed explanation regarding the actual conditions resulting from the framework implementation study, plus findings outside the framework that strengthen or weaken the framework's effectiveness.

The research was conducted for two weeks, prioritizing primary data from in-depth and structured participant interviews. Relevant literature and policy studies also strengthen this primary data. The sampling system uses snowball sampling, where participants' determination starts from one key informant. Then, from this crucial informant, other relevant participants will be recommended. Specifically, the snowball sampling technique used in this research is an exponential discriminative snowball sampling technique. Of all the recommended and eligible potential participants, only the most relevant and available participants were selected (Abdussamad, 2021), considering the time and energy limitations.

Furthermore, in processing the results of field data collection in this research, a three-stage approach was used following what was proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which consists of the following:

- A. Data reduction
- B. Presentation of data
- C. Concluding/verifying data

3.2 Participants

Through a sampling process according to the exponential discriminatory snowball sampling technique, six participants were interviewed regarding the implementation of a quality culture-based learning process in several samples of tourism vocational colleges in Indonesia. The six participants include:

Table 1: List of Participants

No	Participant	Code
1.	The Representative of NHI Bandung Tourism Polytechnic	A
2.	The Representative of Bali Tourism Polytechnic	B
3.	The Representative of Medan Tourism Polytechnic	C
4.	The Representative of Makassar Tourism Polytechnic	D
5.	The Representative of Lombok Tourism Polytechnic	E
6.	The Representative of Palembang Tourism Polytechnic	F

Source: Internal Data (2024)

Six interview transcripts were obtained from the six participants, which became the main material in processing primary data. These data go through a coding and data triangulation process until a complex set of descriptive data is obtained that is mature and can be processed in the discussion and deliberation stages.

3.3 Operationalization of Research Variables

In operating the concepts described in the Literature Review section, a variable operationalization matrix has been formulated, which contains the characteristics and indicators of the dimensions in the concept of Stages in Building a Quality Culture as parameters for mapping at which stages an institution builds a quality culture. Based on an understanding of sustainable tourism and the concept of the Tourism Vocational Education Framework itself, research instruments can ultimately be created from the following operationalization matrix, and data collection can be carried out.

Table 2: Variable Operationalization Matrix

Concept	Dimension	Indicator	Data Type	Source
Building Quality Culture Stages	Symbols	The institution considers quality culture only as a symbol. The achievement of the quality of the academic community is only a sign that they have achieved success in achieving targets or winning certain competitions.	Primary	Interview
	Heroes & Stories	Practice the achievement into a "success story" in which the leader of the institution socializes and tells all elements of the educational institution to inspire acceptable values.	Primary	Interview
	Rituals & Traditions	The practice or example of success stories in a higher education institution will be formed into a traditional/ unique way of working, which hopes to repeat the same success.	Primary	Interview
	Opinions & Knowledge	A system that has considered the existence of quality through achievement will bring forth efforts to invite every academic community to think about and share the opinions and perspectives of everyone regarding understanding to achieve that quality itself.	Primary	Interview
	Principles & Strategies	Produce specific strategies/principles that are considered to be the best steps in achieving an achievement/quality.	Primary	Interview
	Culture	When members of higher education institutions are no longer	Primary	Interview

		encouraged to do something to achieve the expected quality/achievement, this has been embedded in the minds of each individual and will be carried out automatically and systematically.		
Tourism Vocational Education Development Framework	Student Performance	Assessing the extent to which students are given an understanding of quality culture and awareness of sustainable work patterns that are applicable to vocational fields, according to the curriculum implemented.	Primary	Interview
	Dynamic Innovative Culture	The cultural conditions of educational institutions support positive changes internally and externally, as well as the emergence of creativity and innovation from every element of the academic community.	Primary	Interview
	Teaching & Learning Experiences	Organizing lecture activities that are not only oriented toward fulfilling syllabus targets but also provide quality experiences for students through optimizing adaptive learning devices/media.	Primary	Interview
	Professional Faculty Member	Availability of professional and competent lecturers, instructors, teaching staff, and administrative staff for each vocational education program held.	Primary	Interview
	World-Class Research & Social Submission	Developing an ecosystem that supports each educator and student to conduct research with international partners, publish international scientific papers, and implement community service programs through tourism vocational skills.	Primary	Interview
	Management Leadership	The institution is supported by a leadership pattern that is quality-oriented and prioritizes managerial aspects at the level of a bona fide company.	Primary	Interview
	Linked & Matched with Industry	Interconnectivity between institutions and relevant and well-established business/industry units to create highly competitive graduates.	Primary	Interview

Source: Internal Data (2024)

From the six elements of variable indicators of building a quality culture and the seven elements of variable indicators of the tourism vocational education

framework, a starting line can be obtained for subsequent implementation in a tourism vocational education institution. This implementation will be able to assess the extent to which educational institutions are involved in building a culture of quality in the context of sustainable tourism as the core value of the institution and aligning themselves with the global tourism development program to create a world tourism industry that is more sustainable and future oriented.

3.4 Results

3.4.1 Overview

The growth of Indonesian tourism started when Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 1969 was issued concerning Guidelines for the Development of National Tourism. Following Article 4 of the instruction, efforts include establishing state tourism colleges in Indonesia, which is carried out by the Ministry of Tourism. Higher education institutions in tourism are based on vocational knowledge of hospitality and travel services management. This aligns with the needs of the national and global tourism industry, which requires superior and competitive tourism vocational resources.

Tourism polytechnic institutions in Indonesia began with the establishment of the National Tourism Academy, now the NHI Bandung Tourism Polytechnic (Tourism Polytechnic et al.), in 1962. NHI Bandung Tourism Polytechnic is the oldest tourism school and a model for many other tourism schools in Indonesia and the Asia Pacific. Next, in 1978, the Bali Hospitality and Tourism Education Center, abbreviated as P4B, was established and is currently known as the Bali Tourism Polytechnic.

In 1991, two new institutions were inaugurated, the Tourism Education and Training Center (BPLP) in Medan City and Makassar City, which have now changed their names to Medan Tourism Polytechnic and Makassar Tourism Polytechnic, respectively. Finally, in 2016, two new tourism polytechnics were established: Lombok Tourism Polytechnic and Palembang Tourism Polytechnic.

To create the best quality human resources evenly, the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy has six tourism polytechnics in Indonesia as the main means of formal vocational learning, which are spread across several parts of the country. For example, on the island of Sumatra, Medan Tourism Polytechnic covers the northern part of Sumatra, and Palembang Tourism Polytechnic covers the southern part. Meanwhile, for the Java region, there is NHI Bandung Tourism Polytechnic, which is located on the west and north sides of Java Island. Next, there are Makassar Tourism Polytechnic in South Sulawesi, Bali Tourism Polytechnic, and Lombok Tourism Polytechnic to cover the central part of Indonesia.

3.4.2 Analysis

After collecting primary data and supporting it with the collection of secondary data, several key findings emerged, aligned with the variable operationalization matrix. Regarding the variable of building a quality culture, its actualization in several samples of tourism vocational colleges in Indonesia is as follows:

Table 3: Building Quality Culture Variable Data Findings

Variables	Dimensions	Participants					
		A	B	C	D	E	F
Building Quality Culture Stages	Symbols	The symbolization of student achievement is the starting point in building the perception that superior quality human resources need to be made a habit.	Students are encouraged to always balance academic and non-academic achievements.	Student achievement is a measure of personal quality that will become a positive characteristic.	Academic and non-academic excellence of students will always be encouraged and endeavored to be cultivated.	Students who excel will be given appreciation	Student achievements will be appreciated and considered as a symbol of learning success.
	Heroes & Stories	The successes and achievements of our predecessors are always told, often inviting those concerned to come and provide motivation.	The achievements that have been obtained will be displayed as a step to motivate others. In addition, alumni also often visit to share about the importance of equipping themselves with academic and practical skills.	Alumni who excel often become guest lecturers and provide motivation, as well as being expert practitioners.	Stories about the success of academicians are simultaneously told by lecturers to stimulate students to be creative and innovative.	At the new campus, efforts to instill a quality-based culture are emphasized on national tourism figures who have been successful and whose positive values need to be taken.	At the new campus, efforts to instill a quality-based culture are emphasized on national tourism figures who have been successful and whose positive values need to be taken.
	Rituals & Traditions	There is a tradition to maintain the quality of hospitality by instilling the values of the "five golden rules" as the basis for the behavior of tourism personnel.	Efforts to encourage students to maintain their quality are indoctrinated since the new student acceptance period in a structured manner.	There is a system that has been built regarding a culture of quality that is always upheld in the campus environment, especially in the context of hospitality and professionalism.	There is a system that has been built regarding a culture of quality that is always upheld in the campus environment, especially in the context of hospitality and professionalism.	Even though it is a new polytechnic, it has started to create a system to ground the main values in the tourism sector, namely hospitality, excellent service, and professionalism.	Even though it is a new polytechnic, it has started to create a system to ground the main values in the tourism sector, namely hospitality, excellent service, and professionalism.

	Opinions & Knowledges	Students are encouraged to understand character building based on superior qualities that will become capital in pursuing a career and becoming respected graduates.	There is a special system that encourages students to apply the principle of excellent service to anyone, anywhere, thereby demonstrating their integrity as tourism professionals.	x	x	x	x
	Principles & Strategies	There is a clearance card system that ensures that each student reaches a certain quality standard before taking the mid-semester and final semester exams, which include academic quality, attitude, appearance, and integrity of attendance.	x	x	x	x	x
	Cultures	x	x	x	x	x	x

Source: Processing Result (2024)

From the description of the triangulation results of the data in Table 4, it can be concluded that the six tourism vocational colleges in Indonesia that have been sampled have yet to be able to reach the stage of quality culture. Efforts to build a quality culture are still at the stage of socializing the meaning and value that quality culture is a necessity amid the increasingly competitive global tourism industry conditions that require added value from tourism school graduates, and to become graduates with enhanced competitiveness.

College A, which is the oldest college studied, has reached the highest level where efforts to build quality are at the principles and strategies stage. They have developed specific strategies and policies to maximize the potential of each student. At the next lower stage, is college B where knowledge and awareness of the importance of maintaining quality and self-integrity have emerged in each student.

Finally, the remaining four colleges are at the same level, namely rituals and traditions. The four younger colleges are still trying to instill awareness of work professionalism, encouragement to achieve academic and non-academic achievements, and efforts to add self-value through the tradition of recognizing alumni's success and the importance of working with an orientation toward quality in the real world of work.

1. Student performance

In general, students from the six tourism vocational colleges in Indonesia have understood that building self-quality is a must to encourage the creation of competitiveness not only personally but also for their alma mater. Building quality through achieving academic and non-academic achievements has been carried out by students with various achievements, such as enthusiasm in participating in competitions such as the Indonesian Tourism Competition, which is held every year.

In addition, students from the six vocational colleges are also active in participating in regional tourism ambassador events and other ambassador events. If you look at the social media posts and websites of each college, we can see that, almost every month, there are posts of appreciation for students who excel. This shows that students, in general, are actively seeking achievements, and on the other hand, the campus also appreciates the achievements of its students.

2. Dynamic-innovative curriculum

In terms of curriculum, almost all tourism vocational schools (including the six vocational colleges studied) in Indonesia have comprehensively compiled their curriculum based on skills standardized by the KKNi (Indonesian National Qualification Framework), which is a form of integration of education with national industry needs. Not only that, as an effort to pursue global competitiveness, almost all tourism vocational schools in Indonesia have also been certified by TEDQUAL by UNWTO.

Finally, to synchronize the learning achievements of graduates with the industry and ensure that the standards of achievement are high enough, some tourism vocational schools in Indonesia also equip their educational institutions with certification institutions for tourism sector skills that are adjusted to the requirements of BNSP (National Professional Certification Agency). The entire system makes the tourism vocational education environment in Indonesia guarantee the quality of its graduates and a guarantee to be vital in competing both nationally and globally.

3. Teaching & Learning experiences

From the results of direct observation in the six sample universities, it was found that the teaching and learning process has adopted technology well. The lecture system of the six universities has been based on an online web system, starting from attendance, distribution of lecture materials, exams, assessments, and other academic administration. In addition, the curriculum applied has greatly reflected vocational education, where the lecture weight is 40% theory and 60% practice.

This will ensure that the lecture experience obtained by students is comprehensive and strategic and that there is continuity between scientific competence and physical skills.

4. Professional faculty/school members

Regarding teaching staff, all vocational colleges studied have provided data on the fulfillment of teaching staff. In accordance with the standards set by the Directorate General of Higher Education, Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, the minimum number of lecturers follows a ratio of 1:30, namely one lecturer for 30 students for vocational science, and a minimum of 90% of lecturers in one study program are permanent lecturers. However, because some of the samples are from new universities, the fulfillment of these standards has yet to be optimally realized.

Moreover, with the status of the six study programs that are state universities, the recruitment system for new lecturers must follow the state civil service selection system simultaneously. Several problems arise because the recruitment system for lecturers with civil servant status is closed every year, and the rigorous selection process means that the need for lecturer formations is not necessarily met. This still needs to be fixed. With the condition of vocational colleges that are oriented toward practice, the need for professional teaching staff is much greater and more urgent.

5. World-class research and social submissions

The positive findings of this study are that each polytechnic studied has a particular institution that handles research and development affairs, thus ensuring that the pillars of higher education in Indonesia, namely Education, Research, and Community Service, are carried out correctly. In addition, each polytechnic manages journals in the tourism sector, and some of them have been nationally accredited (SINTA). Finally, each polytechnic has also carried out collaborative research with foreign universities or international institutions. This ensures that most tourism vocational universities in Indonesia also pay close attention to the progress of their research and social service fields.

6. Management and leadership

As explained in the professional faculty member section, almost all educational staff in the six universities studied are civil servants under the Ministry of Tourism. This has a side effect where mutations and shifts of human resources occur massively. This also means managerial strength and strategic positions need to be improved due to the changes that always occur. This needs to be noted, considering that changes that always occur in the managerial structure of a polytechnics have quite negative indications because the programs and policies issued will always change, and tend to be inconsistent, and unsustainable.

7. Linked and matched with the industry and scholar community

Finally, talking about connectivity between tourism education with industry and scholar communities is very urgent for tourism education. This concerns the absorption of graduates as well as the academic credibility of the vocational

tourism education themselves. As explained in the previous sections, all six vocational tourism education that were sampled have an excellent reputation for maintaining their pillars of education, research, and community service.

All of them have valid and accredited tourism research journals, a track record of research collaboration, and supporting cross-sectoral research grants. On the other hand, all sample representatives also stated that the absorption of graduates in the national and global tourism industry is very high. However, while the figures vary quite a bit, all guarantee that the absorption rate in the relevant industry is above 90%. This represents a significant outcome.

3.5 Research Implication

In connection with several indicators that have not been identified in the research data findings, the next step is the technical implications of the research. Among things that need special attention are the determinant elements that form the framework. A tourism higher education must answer the national challenges of tourism education institutions, namely how the existence of the institution can improve the quality of life of the wider community.

Apart from that, the institution also needs to pursue global competitiveness, namely efforts to fulfill certification and standardization of international tourism human resources. This is necessary to answer global industrial challenges and gain acceptance. Finally, the capability to transform is paramount in improving the quality culture at tourism higher education institutions. The transformation in question is an adaptation to global educational developments, where there must be adjustments through data literacy and technology literacy.

As an implication of the findings of the actual conditions of implementation of the tourism vocational education model at six Indonesian tourism vocational schools, and to generalize the results of these findings so that they can be widely implemented, a general description of the tourism vocational education framework post-implementation assessment of this case study is formulated as follows:

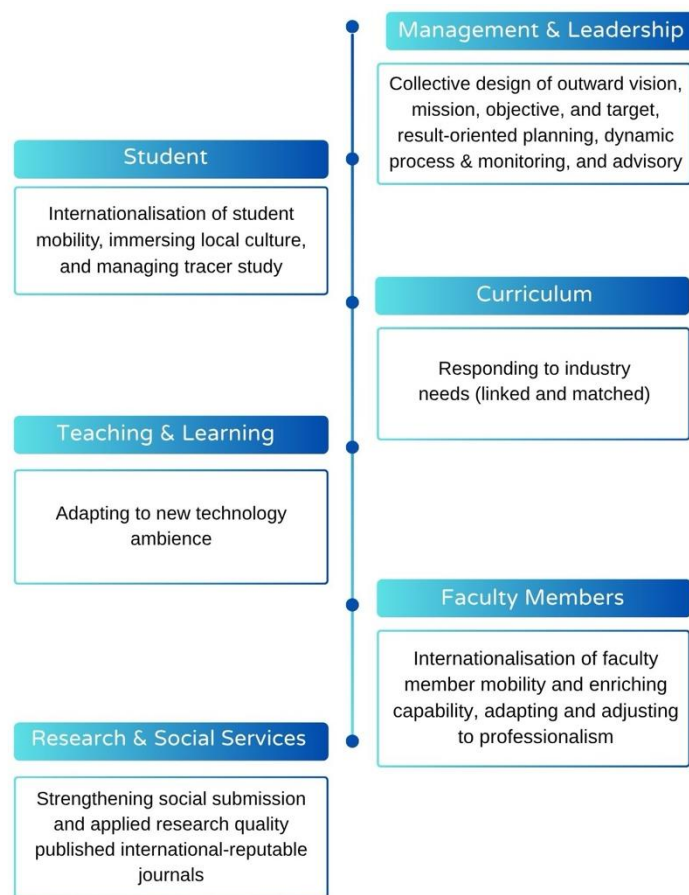


Figure 3.: The Strategy of Implementing Tourism Vocational Education Framework
Source: Internal Data (2024)

4. Conclusion

This study has explored the strategic importance of developing a quality culture within Indonesia's tourism vocational education system, using empirical insights from six state tourism polytechnics. In the context of post-pandemic recovery and the growing demand for sustainable and digitally competent tourism professionals, the research underscores that vocational education must evolve beyond its traditional role of skills training toward fostering a values-driven and adaptable workforce.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a disruptive force, revealing structural weaknesses in tourism education globally. In Indonesia, this disruption provided a critical opportunity to re-evaluate how vocational institutions prepare students for an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) tourism industry. This paper has argued that building a strong and sustainable quality culture is a key driver for achieving both national development goals and global competitiveness. Quality culture, defined here as the institutionalization of shared beliefs, values, and continuous improvement practices, is not an abstract aspiration—it is a strategic necessity.

At the national level, tourism education plays a central role in addressing human development challenges. Indonesia's tourism polytechnics have a responsibility to enhance people's quality of life by producing graduates who are employable, ethical, and capable of contributing to local and regional development. At the global level, institutions must meet international expectations around quality assurance, curriculum innovation, and graduate competencies, which are increasingly benchmarked through accreditation systems and global partnerships. Moreover, in response to technological and environmental shifts, tourism education must now embed new capabilities—including digital literacy, sustainability values, and sustainable innovation mindsets—into all aspects of curriculum design, institutional leadership, and industry engagement.

The empirical findings of this study, based on qualitative interviews and institutional analysis, reveal that Indonesia's tourism polytechnics are at varying stages of developing a quality culture. More mature institutions like NHI Bandung Tourism Polytechnic demonstrate relatively advanced internal systems, including curriculum dynamism, student-centered learning environments, and robust industry linkages. Meanwhile, newer polytechnics face challenges such as limited faculty resources, less institutional stability, and bureaucratic constraints in recruitment and program development. Despite these disparities, all institutions studied display strong commitment and enthusiasm toward adopting quality-oriented practices.

Seven indicators were identified as critical to the successful implementation of tourism vocational education with embedded quality culture: student performance, dynamic-innovative curriculum, meaningful teaching and learning experiences, professional faculty members, world-class research and social contributions, effective management and leadership, and strong linkages with industry communities. These dimensions, when developed holistically and interdependently, position an institution not only to meet accreditation benchmarks but also to contribute to a more adaptive, resilient, and globally relevant tourism education system.

The study concludes that fostering quality culture is both an outcome and a continuous process. Institutions must not only adopt quality standards but also embed them into everyday operations, governance structures, and academic behavior. This requires a shift in mindset from reactive compliance to proactive excellence, supported by effective leadership, stakeholder collaboration, and systemic support from national education and tourism authorities.

In sum, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on tourism education reform by providing a practical, evidence-based framework for strengthening institutional quality through culturally and contextually grounded strategies. For developing countries like Indonesia, where tourism is both an economic driver and a social platform, the stakes are high. Institutions that successfully institutionalize quality culture will be better positioned to produce the kinds of graduates the future tourism industry demands: skilled, ethical, innovative, and ready to contribute locally and compete globally.

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