

Organizational Culture Transformation to Enhance Institutional Credibility: A Qualitative Study At Al-Ghifari University

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Abstract. This research focuses on the transformation of organizational culture at Al-Ghifari University and its role in enhancing institutional credibility. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and participant observation. The findings reveal that the cultural transformation involved reinforcing shared values, improving internal communication, promoting ethical leadership, and fostering collaborative engagement among academic and administrative staff. These changes strengthened stakeholder trust and positioned the university as a more credible and reliable institution in the eyes of the community. The study concludes that strategic cultural transformation can serve as a foundation for long-term credibility and sustainability in higher education institutions.

Keywords: *Organizational Culture, Cultural Transformation, Credibility.*

Introduction

Institutional credibility in education, particularly within higher education institutions (universities), is a strategic asset that determines the sustainability and competitiveness of educational organizations. Throughout the lifespan of an institution, maintaining and enhancing credibility is an inevitability that cannot be overlooked. Institutions must adapt and anticipate various factors that influence the level of trust from the public and stakeholders. These factors may originate from both the internal and external environments of the institution. Regarding internal factors, institutions can respond through reactive measures and planned or proactive changes to strengthen integrity, transparency, and accountability in alignment with higher education standardization policies (Hardiyansyah & Ade Firmansyah, 2017). In accordance with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Regulation No. 53 of 2023, which provides flexibility in standard formulation, simplifies accreditation processes, and reduces administrative burdens and costs (Kemendikbudristek, 2023), the 5th Edition of the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) and Curriculum Guidelines (Directorate General of Higher Education, 2023) offer implementation guidance for internal quality assurance and curriculum development relevant to stakeholder needs.

Organizational culture is not merely an identity but a strategic asset capable of enhancing institutional credibility (Juliawati, Dewi, & Arifin, 2024). A strong culture functions as an instrument for internal integration while simultaneously building public trust in the performance of higher education organizations (Putra, 2020). In this context, the concept of "culture" does not refer to ethnicity, tribe, or personal background, but rather to the emotional and psychological atmosphere that shapes the morals, attitudes, and productivity levels of organizational members. Culture is also reflected in existing symbols such as work habits, routines, daily interactions, and the meanings attached to each of these symbols (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983). The relationship between management and organizational members creates a space where culture is collectively constructed and interpreted. Cultural transformation focused on values of transparency, accountability, and integrity has been proven to be a primary driver in strengthening institutional credibility (Denison & Mishra, 2023). However, without an organizational culture that adapts to quality standards and governance in higher education, institutional credibility risks a significant decline that could result in administrative sanctions up to institutional closure. This condition represents both a threat and a challenge for universities, thus compelling them to enhance their credibility.

Based on factual conditions, several private universities have been closed by the government due to failure to meet higher education standards. According to the Acting Director General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology (Plt. Dirjen Diktiristek) and publicly reported by the media, in 2023, a total of 23 private universities had their operational permits revoked by the government due to severe violations such as data manipulation, diploma fraud, fictitious learning activities, and misuse of (KIP) College Fund. Furthermore, in 2024, as many as 84 private universities face potential closure for failing to meet the accreditation standards set by BAN-PT, reflecting serious weaknesses in institutional governance.

Research by (Aminullah, 2024; Mudhoffar & Frinaldi, 2024) indicates that organizational culture transformation is a strategic factor in strengthening institutional credibility. They emphasize that human resource development, transformational leadership, and the internalization of innovation values drive adaptive and performance-oriented behaviors. In the context of higher education, (Pangemanan, 2024) demonstrates that leadership transformation and organizational restructuring can enhance collaboration and efficiency, while (Cahyadi, 2023) shows that organizational culture mediates the influence of structural reforms on the innovation ecosystem. These findings underscore that an integrated organizational culture transformation—combined with leadership, innovation, and human capital development—is key to successfully improving the credibility of higher education institutions.

Conceptually, organizational culture can be understood as a pattern of beliefs, values, and practices formed through social interactions and transmitted among members of the organization, which ultimately influence their behavior and decision-making (Hofstede, 2011). Organizational culture consists of a set of basic assumptions developed by groups to address external adaptation and internal integration challenges, which are then passed on to new members as behavioral guidelines (Schein, 2017). More recently, (Divakaran, 2024) emphasizes that psychological safety is a crucial element in a healthy organizational culture, as a psychologically safe work environment encourages courage to express opinions, innovation, and cross-functional collaboration. In line with this, (Trochmann et al., 2023) assert that an inclusive and openness-oriented culture can improve member retention, job satisfaction, and build public trust in institutions. Thus, this study positions organizational culture not merely as an internal attribute but as a strategic instrument in building institutional credibility at University of Al-Ghifari.

This study aims to analyze and describe the process of organizational culture transformation as a strategy to enhance institutional credibility in higher education institutions, particularly within the context of governance challenges and compliance with higher education quality standards. Specifically, this study seeks to identify relevant cultural values, explore managerial practices that support cultural change, and formulate a transformation model oriented toward transparency, accountability, and integrity at University of Al-Ghifari. The findings of this research are expected to provide both conceptual and practical contributions for higher education administrators in building an adaptive and competitive organizational culture, while simultaneously preventing risks of credibility decline that may result in sanctions or institutional closure.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach. This approach allows the researcher to create a systematic, factual, and accurate depiction of the observed phenomena and to understand the relationships among these phenomena in depth. According to (Sugiyono, 2019), qualitative research is grounded in the post-positivist philosophy, studying objects in their natural conditions with the researcher as the primary instrument, utilizing triangulation techniques for data collection, and applying inductive data analysis to emphasize the meaning behind generalizations.

The study uses a case study strategy to explore empirical conditions intensively and in-depth regarding a specific program, event, or activity, at the individual, group, or organizational level. Case studies focus on actual and unique cases, utilizing multiple data sources such as observation, interviews, documentation, and artifacts, while applying triangulation to enhance the validity of findings (Rahardjo, 2020). The primary purpose of the case study is to reveal the uniqueness of the case through comprehensive and detailed explanations.

The stages followed in the case study research include theme determination, literature review, formulation of research focus and problems, data collection and refinement, data processing and analysis, interpretation and visualization, theoretical dialogue, triangulation of findings, and finally, the preparation of conclusions and presentation of the research report (Rahardjo, 2020). By using the qualitative case study method, this research is able to produce complete, in-depth, credible, and meaningful data, thereby optimally achieving the research objectives.

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This study uses a qualitative method with the researcher serving as the primary instrument (human instrument) in data collection through interviews and literature studies. The data collected consist of primary data, namely direct information from key informants and supporting informants, as well as secondary data in the form of documents, archives, and reports related to the study. Data validity is maintained through cross-checking using source, technique, and time triangulation to ensure data credibility and accuracy.

Data collection techniques are carried out participatively through direct field observations, in-depth interviews, and document studies. The data analysis process follows the interactive model by Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data presentation in an easily understandable form, and conclusion drawing that is continuously validated throughout the research process. Verification is conducted by re-questioning other informants to ensure data validity.

Data validation is an integral part of the research process through triangulation techniques that combine various data sources and collection methods simultaneously. Source and technique triangulation are used to test the consistency of the data obtained, so that the research results can be scientifically and objectively accountable.

Result and Discussion

Based on the empirical data analysis at Al-Ghifari University, the institution continues to face significant structural and academic challenges in building institutional competitiveness. The university's accreditation, which remains at level "C", reflects gaps in education quality, governance, and management of academic resources. A shortage of highly qualified teaching staff, particularly full professors and lecturers with adequate competencies, is a key factor hindering improvements in the quality of the learning process and research productivity.

The limited number of students also restricts the operational scale and optimal development potential of the institution. Inadequate facilities and infrastructure, including physical and academic support resources, along with constrained operational budgets, are critical factors weakening the effectiveness of institutional functions. Additionally, non-academic staff who are not functioning optimally contribute to low efficiency and the quality of educational services at the university.

Table 1 : Comparison of Performance Indicators of Al-Ghifari University with National and International Standards

No	Indikator	Al-Ghifari University	National Standard	International Standard
1	Lecturer-To-Student Ratio	1:25	1:20-30	1:10-20
2	Percentage Of Lecturers With Doctorate Degrees	15%	30%	>50%
3	Institutional Accreditation	C	B-A	A
4	Facilities And Infrastructure Score (Scale 100)	60	80	>90

5	Transparency And Accountability Score (Scale 5)	3.2	4.0	>4.5
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Based on the data presented in the table above, sourced from (PDDikti, 2025), Al-Ghifari University currently has a lecturer-to-student ratio of 1:25, which falls within the national standard range (1:20–30), but remains higher than the ideal international standard of 1:10 to 1:20. This ratio indicates a relatively high teaching load for lecturers, which may affect the quality of the learning process. The percentage of lecturers holding doctoral degrees at this institution is recorded at 15%, significantly below the national minimum standard of 30% and even lower than the international standard requiring over 50%. This condition highlights the need for improving the academic qualifications of lecturers to support sustainable educational quality. Regarding accreditation, Al-Ghifari University is still rated at level C, the lowest category in the national accreditation scale, indicating several aspects that must be improved to meet higher national and international standards. Furthermore, the university's facilities and infrastructure score of 60 out of 100 is below the national standard of 80 and the international benchmark exceeding 90, signaling a need to enhance the academic support facilities. In addition, the institution's transparency and accountability score of 3.2 out of 5 is also lower than the national standard (4.0) and international threshold (>4.5), demonstrating the necessity to improve institutional governance to be more transparent and accountable, thereby building greater stakeholder trust. Overall, these indicators illustrate significant challenges faced by Al-Ghifari University in meeting national and international standards, making strategic efforts to improve human resources quality, facilities, and institutional governance crucial to enhance the institution's competitiveness and credibility.

This situation underscores the urgency of organizational culture transformation as a strategic intervention to improve and strengthen the institutional credibility of Al-Ghifari University. A culture transformation focused on reinforcing values such as transparency, accountability, integrity, and innovation is expected to build a more adaptive and responsive organizational foundation to internal and external dynamics. A strong organizational culture serves as a vital instrument to enhance public trust and stakeholder confidence in the legitimacy and reputation of the institution.

With consistent and sustainable implementation of cultural transformation, Al-Ghifari University has the potential to improve its competitiveness at both national and international levels. Such comprehensive cultural change is expected not only to drive improvements in academic and managerial quality but also to strengthen the university's position as a credible and leading higher education institution capable of making significant contributions to the development of higher education in Indonesia and globally.

Organizational culture transformation is an essential strategic aspect in reinforcing institutional credibility, as explained by (Schein, 2022), who emphasized that a culture stressing transparency, accountability, and integrity is a primary driver of organizational effectiveness and public trust. In the case of Al-Ghifari University, the institution's low accreditation and limited resources indicate the need for deeper cultural change. Research by (Hartono & Nugroho, 2023) also shows that universities failing to effectively adapt their culture tend to experience credibility decline and struggle to maintain competitive advantage.

Organizational culture comprises several key dimensions, such as innovation, results orientation, and focus on human resources, which must be optimized to improve organizational performance. The limitations in qualified lecturers, inadequate facilities, and restricted student body at Al-Ghifari University clearly reflect weak implementation of these dimensions (Cameron & Quinn, 2021). This finding aligns with recent studies by (Lestari et al., 2024), which revealed that strengthening an inclusive and collaborative internal culture significantly contributes to building credibility and sustainability in higher education institutions.

A harmonious relationship between management and staff is a key factor in building a strong organizational culture (Meyer & Allen, 2023). At Al-Ghifari University, the imbalance between human resources and infrastructure remains a major obstacle in strengthening work culture and internal trust.

Therefore, implementing cultural transformation involving active participation from all organizational elements, following organizational change models (Kotter, 2022), becomes a vital strategy to enhance the university's credibility and competitiveness nationally and internationally.

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