

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of The Problem

In the context of globalization, higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly operating within a highly competitive international environment where institutional reputation has become a strategic resource for long-term development and sustainability. Universities are no longer evaluated solely through traditional academic functions such as teaching and knowledge transmission; instead, they are assessed according to broader indicators, including research productivity, international collaboration, innovation capacity, graduate outcomes, governance effectiveness, and contributions to society. The expansion of global university rankings, international accreditation systems, and cross-border academic networks has transformed institutional reputation into a critical determinant of competitiveness. Universities with stronger global reputations are better positioned to attract talented students and faculty members, obtain international research funding, establish strategic partnerships, and increase their influence within the global knowledge economy (Hou & Jacob, 2021; Pusser & Marginson, 2022). Recent studies emphasize that reputation is not merely a symbolic status but an accumulated outcome of institutional quality, academic performance, visibility, and stakeholder trust developed through continuous improvement strategies (Hazelkorn, 2022; Marini & Reale, 2023).

The growing influence of global university rankings, such as the QS World University Rankings, Times Higher Education World University Rankings, and Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), has further intensified competition among universities worldwide. Although rankings remain subject to methodological debates, they significantly shape perceptions of institutional excellence by emphasizing measurable indicators such as research impact, citations, international reputation, academic reputation, and global engagement. Consequently, universities increasingly develop strategic policies to improve their ranking performance by strengthening research capacity, enhancing academic

quality, expanding international partnerships, and improving institutional governance systems. However, recent higher education scholarship argues that sustainable competitiveness cannot be achieved through ranking-oriented strategies alone; rather, universities must develop comprehensive internal systems that continuously enhance institutional performance and academic quality (Sarrico, 2022; Dill & Beerkens, 2023).

Within this competitive environment, internationalization has become a fundamental dimension of university reputation building. International partnerships, global research collaboration, international student mobility, English-medium programs, and participation in global academic networks are increasingly recognized as important mechanisms for strengthening institutional visibility and reputation. However, internationalization effectiveness depends heavily on the internal capacity of universities to maintain academic standards, ensure quality consistency, and demonstrate institutional reliability to global stakeholders. Recent research highlights that internationalization is no longer simply an expansion strategy but a comprehensive institutional transformation process requiring alignment between academic quality, governance structures, and strategic objectives (de Wit & Altbach, 2021; Kapfudzaruwa, 2024).

Therefore, achieving a globally competitive university reputation requires more than improving external visibility; it requires the establishment of strong internal governance mechanisms capable of ensuring continuous quality enhancement. Institutional Internal Quality Assurance Systems (IIQAS) have increasingly been recognized as a strategic foundation that enables universities to monitor performance, evaluate academic processes, identify institutional weaknesses, and implement evidence-based improvements. Effective internal quality assurance allows universities to move beyond compliance-oriented evaluation toward a sustainable quality culture that integrates teaching excellence, research development, stakeholder participation, and strategic institutional planning. Consequently, IIQAS has become a central mechanism through which universities transform internal quality improvements into external reputation advantages in the global higher education arena (Bardakcı et al., 2023; Nugraha et al., 2023).

An Internal Institutional Quality Assurance System (IIQAS) refers to a comprehensive set of institutional policies, structures, procedures, and continuous improvement mechanisms established by higher education institutions to monitor, evaluate, maintain, and enhance the quality of academic and administrative performance. Unlike external quality assurance mechanisms that primarily focus on accountability, accreditation, and regulatory compliance, IIQAS emphasizes internal responsibility, institutional reflection, evidence-based decision-making, and sustainable quality enhancement. Through IIQAS, universities develop systematic processes for defining quality standards, implementing academic and managerial activities, collecting performance evidence, evaluating outcomes, and applying corrective actions to achieve institutional goals. Therefore, IIQAS functions not only as an evaluation instrument but also as a strategic governance mechanism that connects institutional mission, operational practices, and long-term competitiveness (Nugraha et al., 2023; Javed & Alenezi, 2023).

The development of contemporary quality assurance in higher education demonstrates a significant transition from a compliance-based evaluation approach toward a continuous improvement and quality culture approach. Traditional quality assurance practices were often dominated by external inspections, standardized assessments, and regulatory requirements, which encouraged universities to focus on documentation and procedural conformity rather than substantive improvement. However, recent higher education research emphasizes that effective quality assurance should become embedded within institutional culture, where academic staff, administrators, students, and other stakeholders actively participate in identifying problems, evaluating performance, and improving educational processes. A mature IIQAS therefore transforms quality assurance from an administrative obligation into an organizational learning process that promotes innovation, accountability, and institutional effectiveness (Hsu, 2023; Umbase, 2023).

The concept of quality culture has become central to understanding the strategic role of IIQAS. Quality culture represents the collective commitment of university members to continuously improve academic standards and institutional performance through shared values, transparent communication, data-informed

decision-making, and collaborative responsibility. Recent studies indicate that universities with stronger internal quality cultures are more capable of translating evaluation results into meaningful institutional improvements because quality assurance processes become integrated into everyday academic practices rather than remaining isolated activities managed by quality offices. Consequently, IIQAS contributes to institutional sustainability by strengthening organizational learning, enhancing stakeholder engagement, and supporting continuous adaptation to changing expectations in global higher education (Hsu, 2023; Herminingsih & Saputra, 2025).

At the international level, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) provide an influential reference framework emphasizing that internal quality assurance should be institutionally owned, transparent, systematic, and oriented toward continuous enhancement. The ESG framework highlights several fundamental principles, including student-centered learning, reliable information management, stakeholder participation, periodic monitoring, and evidence-based improvement. These principles demonstrate that successful IIQAS requires integration between institutional strategy and quality management practices rather than isolated assessment activities. For universities seeking global competitiveness, alignment with international quality assurance principles provides an important foundation for strengthening credibility, international recognition, and institutional reputation (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education [ENQA], 2021; Javed & Alenezi, 2023).

Furthermore, the Plan–Do–Check–Act (PDCA) cycle provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding how IIQAS operates as a continuous improvement system. In the planning stage (Plan), universities establish quality objectives, performance indicators, and strategic improvement priorities based on institutional missions and stakeholder expectations. The implementation stage (Do) focuses on executing academic and administrative improvement programs. The evaluation stage (Check) involves monitoring outcomes, conducting audits, and analyzing evidence to determine effectiveness. Finally, the improvement stage (Act) requires institutions to implement corrective

actions and redesign processes to achieve higher levels of quality. Within higher education management, PDCA enables universities to transform quality assurance from a reactive evaluation process into a proactive strategic management approach that supports institutional effectiveness and competitiveness (Javed & Alenezi, 2023; Sugesti, 2023).

From the perspective of institutional effectiveness, IIQAS serves as a bridge between internal improvement processes and external indicators of university success, including reputation, accreditation outcomes, research performance, and international competitiveness. Universities that implement effective IIQAS are better able to identify performance gaps, allocate resources strategically, enhance teaching and research quality, and demonstrate accountability to national and international stakeholders. Therefore, IIQAS should be understood not merely as a mechanism for maintaining minimum standards but as a strategic capability that enables universities to achieve sustainable excellence and strengthen their position within the global higher education landscape (Oktarina et al., 2023; Nugraha et al., 2023).

Although Internal Institutional Quality Assurance Systems (IIQAS) have become an essential mechanism for improving higher education quality and institutional competitiveness, their implementation remains challenging across universities worldwide. One of the most persistent challenges is the fragmentation of quality assurance practices within institutional structures. In many higher education institutions, quality assurance activities are still managed separately by different faculties, departments, administrative units, or quality offices, resulting in limited coordination and weak integration between institutional strategies and operational processes. Instead of functioning as a comprehensive university-wide improvement system, quality assurance often becomes a collection of disconnected evaluation activities focused on reporting requirements, accreditation preparation, or compliance documentation. Recent studies indicate that the effectiveness of IIQAS depends not only on the existence of formal procedures but also on the alignment between institutional goals, organizational structures, and improvement processes. Without systemic integration, quality assurance mechanisms may fail to generate meaningful changes in teaching

quality, research performance, and institutional governance (Cardoso et al., 2021; van Kemenade & Hardjono, 2022; Rebora & Turri, 2024).

A second major challenge concerns the development of a genuine quality culture within universities. Although many institutions have established internal quality assurance frameworks, quality activities are frequently perceived by academic staff as administrative burdens rather than collective responsibilities for institutional improvement. This situation occurs when quality assurance systems emphasize monitoring, reporting, and compliance indicators without sufficiently promoting reflection, learning, and innovation among university members. A strong quality culture requires shared understanding among leaders, lecturers, administrative staff, and students that quality improvement is an ongoing institutional responsibility rather than a task delegated only to quality assurance units. Recent research demonstrates that universities often struggle to transform formal quality assurance structures into embedded organizational cultures because existing practices may remain dominated by managerial control, external accountability pressures, and bureaucratic procedures (Hsu, 2023; Savickienė & Pilkienė, 2026).

Limited stakeholder involvement represents another critical barrier to effective IIQAS implementation. Contemporary quality assurance approaches emphasize that sustainable improvement requires active participation from multiple stakeholders, including academic staff, students, university administrators, employers, professional organizations, and external partners. However, in many higher education contexts, decision-making processes remain highly centralized, with quality policies designed primarily by institutional leaders or government agencies while frontline academic communities have limited influence on implementation. Such top-down approaches may reduce ownership, weaken commitment, and create a gap between formal quality policies and actual academic practices. International evidence shows that stakeholder participation is particularly important because students and academic staff provide essential perspectives regarding teaching effectiveness, learning experiences, curriculum relevance, and institutional performance (Berkat, 2025; Dewi et al., 2021).

Another emerging challenge in IIQAS implementation is the capacity of universities to establish effective data-driven quality governance. Modern universities increasingly rely on institutional data, performance indicators, learning analytics, research metrics, and digital management systems to support evidence-based decision-making. However, many institutions face difficulties related to inconsistent data collection procedures, fragmented information systems, limited analytical capacity, and weak connections between quality data and strategic planning. Data may be collected extensively for accreditation and reporting purposes but not fully utilized to identify institutional weaknesses or guide improvement strategies. Therefore, the challenge is not merely collecting institutional data but developing governance capabilities that enable universities to transform data into actionable knowledge for continuous improvement. Recent higher education studies emphasize that effective quality assurance requires integrated information management systems, analytical capabilities, and leadership commitment to evidence-based decision-making (Javed & Alenezi, 2023; Sarrico, 2022).

International experiences demonstrate that these challenges occur across different higher education systems, although their forms vary according to national governance contexts. European higher education systems, guided by the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), have increasingly emphasized institutional autonomy, student participation, transparency, and continuous enhancement. Nevertheless, European universities also face challenges in balancing accountability requirements with the need to maintain academic creativity and institutional flexibility. Similarly, universities in developing higher education systems have struggled with limited resources, insufficient quality expertise, and difficulties establishing sustainable internal quality cultures. Comparative studies suggest that successful IIQAS implementation requires adaptation to institutional context rather than simple adoption of external quality models. Universities must develop internally meaningful systems that combine international quality principles with local organizational realities (ENQA, 2021; Berkat, 2025).

In the Asian higher education context, including China, these challenges are particularly significant because universities operate within environments characterized by strong government regulation, rapid expansion, and increasing pressure to achieve international competitiveness. While national evaluation systems have strengthened accountability and standardization, scholars argue that many universities continue to face difficulties moving from externally driven evaluation toward internally motivated quality enhancement. The central challenge is creating a balance between institutional accountability and organizational autonomy, where universities can use quality assurance systems not only to satisfy regulatory expectations but also to support innovation, strategic development, and reputation building. Therefore, strengthening IIQAS requires universities to overcome fragmentation, cultivate quality-oriented organizational cultures, increase stakeholder participation, and develop effective data governance capabilities. These challenges provide an important foundation for examining how specialized universities such as Northeast Petroleum University can enhance their internal quality assurance systems to achieve stronger global competitiveness.

Over the past four decades, China has experienced a profound transformation of its higher education system, shifting from an elite-oriented model toward a mass higher education system with increasing global ambitions. Since the reform and opening-up period, Chinese higher education has undergone significant expansion, decentralization, internationalization, and market-oriented reforms, resulting in substantial growth in institutional capacity, student enrollment, research output, and global academic engagement. This rapid expansion has strengthened China's position as one of the world's largest higher education systems while simultaneously creating new challenges related to maintaining academic quality, improving governance effectiveness, and ensuring sustainable institutional development. Recent analyses of Chinese higher education reform indicate that the transition from expansion-driven development toward quality-oriented development has become a central policy priority, requiring universities to establish stronger internal governance mechanisms and quality management systems capable of supporting long-term competitiveness (Xiong et al., 2022).

A significant milestone in China's pursuit of international higher education competitiveness was the introduction of the Double First-Class Initiative (世界一流大学和一流学科建设) in 2015. This national strategy represents a shift from previous excellence initiatives, such as Project 985 and Project 211, toward a more dynamic approach emphasizing the development of world-class universities and world-class disciplines. The initiative aims to enhance Chinese universities' global influence through improvements in academic quality, scientific innovation, talent development, international collaboration, and institutional governance. Unlike previous programs that focused primarily on a selected group of elite institutions, the Double First-Class framework encourages universities to strengthen distinctive disciplinary advantages and improve their competitiveness according to international standards. Consequently, Chinese universities are under increasing pressure to demonstrate measurable improvements in research performance, educational quality, governance capacity, and international reputation (Wang, 2021; Chen & Chen, 2021).

The implementation of the Double First-Class strategy has significantly influenced how Chinese universities conceptualize institutional development and competitiveness. Universities are increasingly expected to move beyond traditional administrative management toward modern governance models characterized by strategic planning, evidence-based decision-making, academic autonomy, and continuous quality improvement. Research examining governance reforms within Double First-Class universities highlights that achieving world-class status requires not only increased resources and research investment but also improvements in internal organizational structures, decision-making processes, and institutional management capabilities. Effective governance has therefore become an essential condition for universities seeking to translate policy support into sustainable academic excellence and international recognition (Gao et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022).

Within this reform context, quality governance has become increasingly important because Chinese universities are evaluated according to multiple dimensions, including teaching effectiveness, graduate quality, research productivity, innovation capacity, and international engagement. The expansion of global university rankings and international benchmarking systems has further intensified competition among Chinese universities, encouraging institutions to strengthen their internal mechanisms for monitoring performance and improving outcomes. Studies on scientific research competitiveness under the Double First-Class initiative demonstrate that international competitiveness is closely associated with research resources, academic talent, innovation capacity, and institutional support systems. These findings suggest that universities cannot rely solely on external policy support; rather, they must develop internal quality management capabilities that enable continuous improvement and strategic adaptation (Chen & Chen, 2021).

However, the rapid development of Chinese higher education has also generated significant challenges for quality assurance and institutional governance. While national evaluation systems have played an important role in establishing accountability and improving minimum quality standards, scholars have argued that many universities continue to face difficulties in transforming evaluation requirements into sustainable internal improvement processes. Some institutions remain strongly influenced by administrative control and performance-based evaluation practices, which may encourage compliance behavior rather than genuine quality enhancement. Therefore, the current reform agenda in Chinese higher education requires universities to strengthen internal quality assurance systems that integrate institutional strategy, academic development, stakeholder participation, and continuous improvement mechanisms (Xiong et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021).

For universities seeking greater international recognition, including specialized public universities such as Northeast Petroleum University (NEPU), the challenge is not only achieving compliance with national educational standards but also developing institutional capabilities that support global competitiveness. The Double First-Class strategy has increased expectations for

universities to demonstrate excellence through internationally comparable indicators while maintaining their unique disciplinary strengths and regional contributions. In this environment, an effective Internal Institutional Quality Assurance System (IIQAS) becomes increasingly important because it provides the organizational foundation for monitoring institutional performance, coordinating improvement efforts, strengthening academic governance, and ensuring that strategic objectives are translated into measurable outcomes. Thus, China's higher education reform context provides a strong rationale for examining how IIQAS contributes to institutional reputation development and competitiveness within universities undergoing transformation toward global engagement (Gao et al., 2022; Chen & Chen, 2021).

Although China has established a comprehensive higher education quality assurance framework through national evaluation policies, accreditation mechanisms, and institutional monitoring systems, the implementation of effective Internal Institutional Quality Assurance Systems (IIQAS) continues to face significant challenges. One of the central issues is the tension between centralized quality control and institutional autonomy. Historically, Chinese higher education governance has been characterized by strong government coordination, where national authorities define evaluation standards, performance indicators, and accountability requirements for universities. This centralized approach has contributed to the expansion of access, standardization of educational quality, and alignment between higher education development and national strategies. However, excessive dependence on external evaluation mechanisms may limit universities' ability to develop autonomous quality improvement strategies that reflect their unique missions, disciplinary characteristics, and institutional contexts. Recent studies argue that achieving world-class university status requires a more balanced governance model in which external accountability is combined with greater institutional responsibility for self-evaluation and continuous improvement.

A major consequence of centralized evaluation approaches is the persistence of a compliance-oriented quality assurance culture within some Chinese universities. While quality evaluations have encouraged institutions to

establish formal quality management structures, they may also create situations where universities prioritize meeting external assessment requirements rather than using quality assurance processes as tools for organizational learning and transformation. In such contexts, quality assurance activities can become focused on documentation preparation, indicator achievement, and administrative reporting, while deeper questions regarding teaching effectiveness, research quality, student experience, and institutional development receive less attention. Research on Chinese higher education governance indicates that administrative practices and evaluation pressures can sometimes produce a “performative” approach to quality assurance, where institutions demonstrate compliance externally without fully embedding continuous improvement principles internally.

Another challenge relates to the limited development of a sustainable institutional quality culture. Effective quality assurance requires that quality improvement becomes a shared responsibility among university leaders, academic staff, administrative personnel, and students. However, in some Chinese universities, quality assurance remains primarily associated with specialized administrative offices rather than being integrated into everyday academic practices. Faculty members may perceive evaluation activities as managerial requirements rather than opportunities for academic reflection and innovation, reducing their engagement with internal improvement processes. Recent research on internal quality assurance frameworks in Chinese universities emphasizes that successful quality enhancement requires a transformation from externally imposed evaluation toward internally motivated improvement, where academic communities actively participate in defining standards, interpreting evidence, and implementing changes.

Stakeholder participation represents another important area requiring improvement. Contemporary international quality assurance frameworks emphasize that students, academic staff, employers, and external partners should contribute to institutional evaluation and improvement processes. However, within highly centralized governance systems, stakeholder involvement may remain limited because decision-making authority is often concentrated among administrative structures. As a result, quality assurance processes may not fully

capture diverse perspectives regarding curriculum relevance, learning experiences, graduate employability, and societal expectations. Recent studies of Chinese quality assurance practices suggest that strengthening stakeholder engagement is essential for moving from government-driven accountability toward a more comprehensive and participatory quality enhancement model.

Furthermore, Chinese universities face challenges in integrating quality assurance data into strategic institutional decision-making. Although universities increasingly collect large amounts of information related to teaching performance, research productivity, student outcomes, and administrative effectiveness, the availability of data does not automatically guarantee effective quality governance. Many institutions still experience difficulties in connecting evaluation results with strategic planning, resource allocation, curriculum reform, and organizational improvement. A mature IIQAS requires not only data collection but also institutional capacity to analyze evidence, identify performance gaps, and implement timely corrective actions through systematic improvement cycles. Therefore, the development of digital quality management systems and evidence-based governance capabilities has become increasingly important for Chinese universities seeking stronger global competitiveness.

These challenges demonstrate that the future development of quality assurance in Chinese higher education depends on the transformation of IIQAS from a regulatory mechanism into a strategic institutional capability. Universities need to move beyond fragmented evaluation practices and establish integrated systems that connect strategic planning, academic management, performance monitoring, stakeholder participation, and continuous improvement. In particular, universities pursuing international competitiveness must develop internal quality assurance mechanisms that are flexible enough to support innovation while maintaining accountability to national and global standards. For specialized universities such as Northeast Petroleum University (NEPU), strengthening an integrated PDCA-based IIQAS is therefore essential to bridge the gap between existing quality management practices and the requirements of a globally competitive university reputation.

Northeast Petroleum University (NEPU), located in Daqing City, Heilongjiang Province, China, provides a significant case for examining how a specialized university develops institutional capacity in response to changing national priorities and global higher education competition. NEPU was established in 1960 as the Northeast Petroleum Institute to support China's strategic demand for petroleum professionals and technological expertise during the early stage of national energy development. From its establishment, the university was closely connected with the petroleum industry and focused primarily on cultivating engineers, researchers, and technical specialists required for the exploration, production, and management of petroleum resources. This historical foundation shaped NEPU's institutional identity as an applied research-oriented university with strong disciplinary advantages in petroleum engineering and energy-related fields (Northeast Petroleum University [NEPU], 2024).

Over more than six decades of development, NEPU has undergone a significant institutional transformation from a specialized petroleum institute into a comprehensive university with broader academic functions. The university experienced several important historical transitions, including its development from the Northeast Petroleum Institute, its subsequent establishment as Daqing Petroleum Institute, and its official transition to Northeast Petroleum University in 2010. These transformations reflected broader reforms in Chinese higher education, where many discipline-oriented institutions expanded their academic missions, strengthened research capacity, and developed multidisciplinary structures to respond to emerging social, economic, and technological challenges (NEPU, 2024). This evolution represents a common pattern among Chinese universities seeking to balance historical disciplinary strengths with the requirements of comprehensive development and international competitiveness (Xiong et al., 2022).

The expansion of academic disciplines has been a central component of NEPU's institutional development. While petroleum engineering and energy sciences remain the university's traditional strengths, NEPU has gradually established programs across engineering, natural sciences, management, economics, humanities, education, and other fields. Such disciplinary

diversification reflects an institutional adaptation process in which universities expand their knowledge base, improve research capacity, and increase their ability to address complex interdisciplinary challenges. Research on university transformation emphasizes that comprehensive development requires not only the expansion of academic programs but also improvements in governance structures, resource allocation, academic management, and internal quality mechanisms to ensure sustainable institutional growth (Wang & Liu, 2022).

NEPU's development has also been closely associated with China's national strategies for technological innovation, energy security, and higher education modernization. As a university with strong connections to China's petroleum industry, NEPU has maintained collaborative relationships with major energy enterprises and research organizations, supporting industry-oriented research, technological innovation, and professional talent cultivation. University-industry collaboration has contributed to NEPU's academic development by strengthening applied research capacity and improving alignment between educational outcomes and national economic priorities. However, within the current global higher education environment, institutional competitiveness requires universities not only to possess disciplinary advantages but also to demonstrate effective governance, international visibility, research influence, and sustainable quality improvement systems (Hazelkorn, 2022).

In response to increasing globalization, NEPU has implemented internationalization strategies aimed at enhancing academic cooperation, research collaboration, and global engagement. The university has established partnerships with overseas universities and research institutions, promoted international academic exchanges, supported collaborative research projects, and developed opportunities for international student and faculty mobility (NEPU, 2024). Internationalization has become an important pathway for universities to improve reputation and competitiveness because global partnerships, international research networks, and cross-border academic activities contribute to institutional visibility and knowledge exchange (de Wit & Altbach, 2021). However, internationalization outcomes depend significantly on institutional capacity, academic quality assurance, and governance effectiveness, as universities must

demonstrate reliable quality standards to gain recognition from international stakeholders.

Despite NEPU's historical achievements, disciplinary strengths, and international cooperation initiatives, the university continues to face the challenge of transforming institutional development efforts into stronger global reputation and competitiveness. Previous studies indicate that universities seeking international recognition require more than external partnerships or research expansion; they need integrated internal systems that connect strategic planning, academic quality management, performance evaluation, and continuous improvement (Sarrico, 2022). Therefore, NEPU represents a valuable case for investigating how an Internal Institutional Quality Assurance System (IIQAS) contributes to institutional reputation development. Examining NEPU's quality assurance practices through the perspective of the PDCA continuous improvement framework provides an opportunity to understand how specialized universities in China can strengthen governance capacity, improve institutional effectiveness, and enhance their position within the global higher education landscape.

As part of its institutional development and alignment with national higher education quality reforms, Northeast Petroleum University (NEPU) has established a range of internal quality assurance practices designed to monitor and improve teaching, academic management, research activities, and institutional performance. These practices reflect the broader transformation of Chinese higher education from externally driven evaluation toward more systematic internal quality governance. In accordance with national requirements for undergraduate education quality improvement and institutional accountability, Chinese universities have increasingly developed internal mechanisms that integrate academic evaluation, performance monitoring, feedback systems, and continuous improvement processes. Within this context, NEPU's quality assurance practices can be understood as institutional efforts to ensure that academic activities remain consistent with university development goals, national higher education standards, and expectations for improving educational quality (Northeast Petroleum University [NEPU], 2024; Xiong et al., 2022).

One important component of NEPU's internal quality assurance system is teaching evaluation, which functions as a mechanism for monitoring instructional effectiveness and supporting improvement in teaching practices. Like many Chinese universities, NEPU implements teaching quality monitoring processes involving classroom observation, teaching assessments, academic supervision, and periodic evaluation of instructional performance. These mechanisms are intended to provide evidence regarding teaching implementation, learning outcomes, and the effectiveness of academic delivery. However, within a modern internal quality assurance framework, teaching evaluation should not be viewed solely as an assessment activity but as part of a continuous improvement cycle that encourages reflection, professional development, and enhancement of educational practices (NEPU, 2024). Research on higher education quality management emphasizes that effective teaching evaluation systems require meaningful feedback processes and institutional support to ensure that evaluation results contribute to actual improvement rather than becoming administrative procedures for compliance purposes (Sarrico, 2022).

Another important element of NEPU's quality assurance practices is curriculum monitoring and academic program evaluation. Curriculum quality assurance involves reviewing program structures, learning objectives, course content, teaching methods, and graduate competencies to ensure alignment with disciplinary development, industry needs, and national educational priorities. As a university with strong connections to petroleum engineering and applied sciences, NEPU must continuously adapt its curriculum to respond to technological development, industrial transformation, and emerging interdisciplinary demands. Curriculum monitoring provides a foundation for identifying areas requiring adjustment and ensuring that academic programs maintain relevance and competitiveness. Contemporary higher education research highlights that curriculum quality assurance is most effective when institutions establish systematic review processes supported by stakeholder input, learning outcome assessment, and evidence-based curriculum improvement strategies (Huisman & Naidoo, 2022).

Faculty evaluation and academic staff development represent another significant dimension of NEPU's internal quality assurance practices. Faculty members play a central role in determining teaching quality, research productivity, innovation capacity, and institutional reputation. Therefore, universities increasingly employ academic evaluation systems that consider multiple dimensions, including teaching performance, research achievements, academic service, and professional development. At NEPU, faculty evaluation mechanisms are part of broader institutional efforts to strengthen academic capacity and support the university's development objectives. However, international research suggests that faculty evaluation systems must maintain a balance between accountability and academic motivation, ensuring that performance assessment supports professional growth rather than encouraging narrow performance-oriented behaviors (Shen et al., 2021). Effective internal quality assurance requires universities to connect faculty evaluation outcomes with opportunities for training, career development, and institutional improvement.

Student participation and feedback mechanisms also constitute an important component of contemporary quality assurance systems. Students provide essential information regarding teaching effectiveness, learning experiences, curriculum relevance, academic services, and institutional support. Accordingly, universities increasingly incorporate student evaluations, surveys, and feedback channels into quality monitoring processes. At NEPU, student feedback mechanisms represent part of the broader institutional effort to understand educational experiences and improve academic services. Nevertheless, international quality assurance literature emphasizes that student feedback should be integrated with other forms of evidence and interpreted within broader institutional contexts because student evaluation alone cannot fully represent educational quality (Harvey & Williams, 2022). Therefore, effective quality assurance requires universities to combine student perspectives with academic evaluation, learning outcome assessment, and institutional performance indicators.

Beyond individual teaching and academic processes, NEPU also implements broader institutional assessment mechanisms to monitor overall

university performance and support strategic decision-making. Institutional assessment includes the collection and analysis of information related to academic development, research performance, educational outcomes, resource utilization, and administrative effectiveness. Such mechanisms are increasingly important as universities face greater expectations for transparency, accountability, and evidence-based governance. However, the effectiveness of institutional assessment depends not only on data collection but also on the ability of universities to use assessment results for strategic improvement. Recent studies indicate that many higher education institutions continue to face challenges in transforming evaluation data into meaningful institutional learning due to fragmented information systems, limited analytical capacity, and insufficient integration between assessment and decision-making processes (Javed & Alenezi, 2023).

Overall, NEPU's existing quality assurance practices demonstrate institutional efforts to establish systematic mechanisms for monitoring teaching quality, curriculum effectiveness, faculty performance, student experiences, and organizational development. However, these practices should be understood as part of the university's ongoing quality governance development rather than as evidence of research findings regarding their effectiveness. The current study therefore examines how these mechanisms operate within a broader Internal Institutional Quality Assurance System (IIQAS), particularly through the PDCA perspective, to understand the extent to which quality assurance processes are integrated, continuously improved, and strategically connected with the goal of achieving a globally competitive university reputation. This contextual examination provides the foundation for analyzing potential gaps between existing quality assurance structures and the requirements of a comprehensive, internationally oriented quality governance system.

Although Northeast Petroleum University (NEPU) has established various internal quality assurance practices related to teaching evaluation, curriculum monitoring, faculty assessment, student feedback, and institutional review, the existence of quality assurance mechanisms does not automatically guarantee the achievement of a globally competitive university reputation. International

experience demonstrates that universities may possess formal quality assurance structures while still facing difficulties in translating these systems into sustainable improvements in academic reputation, research influence, international visibility, and institutional competitiveness. The effectiveness of Internal Institutional Quality Assurance Systems (IIQAS) depends not only on the availability of procedures and evaluation instruments but also on the extent to which quality assurance is strategically integrated into institutional governance and decision-making processes (Sarrico, 2022; Javed & Alenezi, 2023).

One major challenge concerns the fragmented implementation of quality assurance practices. In many higher education institutions, quality assurance activities are distributed among different departments, faculties, and administrative units, resulting in limited coordination and inconsistent implementation. When quality assurance operates mainly at the operational or departmental level, evaluation outcomes may not effectively contribute to university-wide strategic improvement. Research on higher education governance indicates that fragmented quality systems often reduce institutional capacity to identify systemic problems, coordinate improvement priorities, and align academic processes with long-term development goals (Cardoso et al., 2021; Rebora & Turri, 2024). For universities seeking international competitiveness, quality assurance must therefore move beyond isolated evaluation activities toward an integrated institutional system connecting academic, administrative, and strategic dimensions.

A second issue relates to the weak integration between quality assurance results and institutional decision-making. Although universities increasingly collect extensive information regarding teaching performance, research productivity, student outcomes, and administrative effectiveness, the strategic utilization of quality data remains a significant challenge. In some institutions, quality data are primarily generated for accreditation, reporting, or accountability purposes rather than being systematically used to support evidence-based planning, resource allocation, and organizational improvement. Recent studies emphasize that data-driven quality governance requires not only information collection but also institutional capacity to interpret evidence, identify

improvement priorities, and implement corrective actions through continuous improvement cycles (Javed & Alenezi, 2023; Sarrico, 2022).

Furthermore, limited stakeholder participation represents another factor that may weaken the relationship between quality assurance and institutional reputation development. Contemporary quality assurance frameworks emphasize that students, faculty members, administrators, employers, and external partners should actively participate in evaluating and improving institutional performance. However, in highly centralized higher education systems, quality assurance processes may remain primarily administrative activities led by institutional authorities, limiting opportunities for broader engagement and shared ownership. Previous research suggests that universities with stronger stakeholder involvement are more capable of developing sustainable quality cultures because improvement processes become embedded within institutional communities rather than controlled exclusively through administrative structures (Hsu, 2023; Berkat, 2025).

Therefore, the fundamental empirical problem is not the absence of quality assurance mechanisms at NEPU, but rather the potential gap between existing quality assurance implementation and the characteristics of a strategically integrated IIQAS required for achieving global competitiveness. A university reputation is shaped by multiple interconnected dimensions, including academic quality, research performance, international collaboration, governance effectiveness, and continuous institutional improvement. Consequently, understanding how NEPU's quality assurance system functions, how improvement processes are managed, and how quality outcomes are translated into institutional reputation development represents an important research problem within higher education governance.

Previous research on higher education quality assurance has generated substantial knowledge regarding accreditation systems, external evaluation frameworks, policy implementation, and teaching quality monitoring. Many studies have examined how universities comply with national quality standards, respond to external accreditation requirements, or improve specific academic processes such as curriculum evaluation and teaching effectiveness. While these

studies provide valuable insights into quality management practices, they often focus on evaluation mechanisms as regulatory instruments rather than examining how Internal Institutional Quality Assurance Systems (IIQAS) function as strategic governance capabilities that contribute to institutional transformation and reputation building (Harvey & Williams, 2022; Dill & Beerkens, 2023).

A significant proportion of existing literature also concentrates on elite research universities or institutions participating in global excellence initiatives, particularly universities with substantial research resources and international visibility. These studies have contributed to understanding world-class university development, ranking strategies, and international competitiveness. However, less attention has been given to specialized public universities that are undergoing transformation from discipline-focused institutions into comprehensive universities seeking stronger global recognition. Such institutions often possess distinctive disciplinary strengths but face different governance challenges related to resource allocation, quality integration, institutional identity, and international positioning (Xiong et al., 2022).

Furthermore, limited research has explored how IIQAS operates strategically within universities rather than simply describing the existence of quality assurance procedures. Previous studies have insufficiently examined how internal quality assurance mechanisms connect strategic planning, implementation processes, monitoring systems, corrective actions, and institutional reputation outcomes. In particular, there remains limited empirical understanding of how the PDCA (Plan–Do–Check–Act) cycle functions as a continuous improvement mechanism within higher education institutions and how it contributes to strengthening institutional effectiveness and global competitiveness (Javed & Alenezi, 2023).

Within the Chinese higher education context, this research gap is particularly important because many universities have developed formal quality assurance systems in response to national evaluation requirements, yet questions remain regarding their ability to generate sustainable quality cultures and strategic institutional improvements. Therefore, examining NEPU as a case study contributes to addressing this gap by investigating how a specialized Chinese

public university develops and implements IIQAS, how PDCA principles are embedded in quality governance, and how these mechanisms support the pursuit of a globally competitive university reputation.

This study adopts the Plan–Do–Check–Act (PDCA) cycle as the theoretical foundation for analyzing the operation of NEPU’s Internal Institutional Quality Assurance System (IIQAS). Originally developed within quality management theory, PDCA represents a continuous improvement framework that enables organizations to systematically identify objectives, implement actions, evaluate outcomes, and introduce improvements. In higher education, PDCA provides a useful analytical framework because universities operate as complex organizations requiring continuous adaptation, evidence-based decision-making, and systematic improvement of academic and administrative processes (Deming, 1986; Javed & Alenezi, 2023).

The Plan stage represents the establishment of strategic quality objectives, standards, indicators, and improvement priorities aligned with institutional missions and external expectations. Within universities, this stage involves defining educational goals, developing quality policies, establishing performance indicators, and ensuring that quality objectives support institutional development strategies. For NEPU, the planning dimension relates to how quality assurance objectives are connected with the university’s aspirations for academic excellence, internationalization, and global reputation enhancement.

The Do stage refers to the implementation of planned quality improvement activities through academic programs, teaching processes, research management, administrative services, and institutional initiatives. Effective implementation requires coordination among university leaders, faculties, academic staff, and administrative units. Without strong implementation mechanisms, quality strategies may remain formal documents without meaningful influence on institutional practices.

The Check stage emphasizes systematic monitoring, evaluation, and analysis of institutional performance. Through quality indicators, internal evaluations, stakeholder feedback, and institutional data analysis, universities can

identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas requiring improvement. This stage is particularly important because evidence-based evaluation enables universities to understand whether implemented strategies produce desired outcomes.

The Act stage focuses on corrective actions, institutional learning, and continuous improvement. Based on evaluation results, universities revise policies, improve processes, allocate resources differently, and redesign strategies to achieve higher levels of quality. Through repeated PDCA cycles, quality assurance becomes an ongoing institutional learning process rather than a one-time evaluation activity.

Applying PDCA to IIQAS provides a theoretical explanation of how internal quality mechanisms can contribute to institutional reputation. Universities with effective PDCA-based quality systems are better positioned to demonstrate consistent improvement, strengthen academic performance, enhance stakeholder confidence, and improve international competitiveness. Therefore, PDCA offers an appropriate framework for examining how NEPU transforms quality assurance practices into strategic institutional development.

The investigation of NEPU's Internal Institutional Quality Assurance System is highly significant because universities worldwide are increasingly required to demonstrate sustainable quality improvement, institutional accountability, and international competitiveness. In the context of global higher education competition, institutional reputation depends not only on historical achievements or disciplinary strengths but also on the ability to establish effective governance systems that continuously enhance academic performance and organizational effectiveness (Hazelkorn, 2022). For NEPU, strengthening IIQAS represents an important pathway for transforming existing academic advantages into broader institutional recognition and global visibility.

The urgency of this research is also connected to China's ongoing higher education reform agenda, particularly the national ambition to develop internationally competitive universities. As Chinese universities experience increasing pressure to improve research influence, educational quality, and global engagement, effective internal quality governance becomes essential. Research examining Chinese higher education reforms emphasizes that sustainable

institutional development requires universities to move beyond compliance-oriented evaluation toward internally driven improvement cultures supported by evidence-based governance (Xiong et al., 2022).

Furthermore, understanding NEPU's IIQAS provides practical value because it may reveal how specialized public universities can strengthen quality culture, improve stakeholder participation, and integrate quality data into strategic decision-making. The findings may assist institutional leaders in identifying weaknesses, improving governance structures, and developing more effective approaches for achieving sustainable competitiveness. Thus, this study responds to both institutional needs and broader debates regarding quality assurance reform in higher education.

This study is expected to contribute to higher education research and practice in several important ways. Theoretically, the study contributes to the development of higher education quality assurance theory by examining IIQAS not merely as an accountability mechanism but as a strategic institutional capability that supports reputation development and organizational transformation. By integrating quality assurance theory with the PDCA framework, this research provides deeper understanding of how continuous improvement processes operate within complex university environments.

From the perspective of university governance research, this study contributes empirical evidence regarding how institutional structures, stakeholder participation, data governance, and strategic management interact in shaping quality outcomes. Previous research has often focused on national policy or external evaluation systems; therefore, this study expands understanding of internal governance processes within a specialized Chinese university context.

Methodologically and conceptually, the study contributes to the application of the PDCA framework in higher education institutions. While PDCA has been widely used in industrial quality management, its application in analyzing university quality governance remains insufficiently explored, particularly regarding its relationship with institutional reputation and global competitiveness.

Practically, the findings provide recommendations for NEPU and similar universities seeking to strengthen internal quality assurance systems. The study may support university leaders, policymakers, and higher education practitioners in designing integrated quality management approaches that enhance academic quality, strengthen quality culture, improve governance effectiveness, and support sustainable institutional development.

B. Research Focus (Mixed Methods)

This study focuses on examining the role of Northeast Petroleum University's Internal Institutional Quality Assurance System (IIQAS) in enhancing global competitiveness, using the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) framework. The research concentrates on two main areas:

1. Effectiveness of IIQAS in Enhancing Institutional Quality and Global Competitiveness
 - Analyzing how NEPU's IIQAS functions across the PDCA cycle to improve teaching quality, research performance, administrative effectiveness, and international visibility.
 - Evaluating the extent to which NEPU's IIQAS aligns with international quality standards, accreditation requirements, and global best practices.
2. Challenges and Strategic Improvement of IIQAS
 - Identifying barriers within each PDCA stage (planning, implementation, evaluation, and improvement) that hinder effective IIQAS implementation at NEPU.
 - Proposing PDCA-based strategies to strengthen IIQAS and support NEPU's goal of achieving a globally competitive reputation.

In essence, the research seeks to understand both the current impact of IIQAS on NEPU's global positioning and the ways it can be strengthened to maximize institutional quality and international recognition.

C. Problem Formulation

Based on the research focus and PDCA theory, this study addresses the following central research question:

“How does the Internal Institutional Quality Assurance System (IIQAS) at Northeast Petroleum University, viewed through the PDCA framework, influence its ability to achieve a globally competitive university reputation, and what strategies can enhance its effectiveness?”

1. Effectiveness of IIQAS (PDCA Perspective)

- How are planning (Plan), implementation (Do), evaluation (Check), and improvement (Act) processes conducted within NEPU's IIQAS?
- To what extent do these processes contribute to improvements in academic quality, research output, administrative efficiency, and international reputation?

2. Challenges and Improvement Strategies

- What institutional, cultural, and structural barriers hinder effective PDCA-based quality assurance at NEPU?
- What PDCA-oriented strategies can be developed to strengthen IIQAS and enhance NEPU's global competitiveness?

D. Research purposes

The main purpose of this study is to analyze the effectiveness of Northeast Petroleum University's Internal Institutional Quality Assurance System (IIQAS) in achieving a globally competitive university reputation using the PDCA framework. Specifically, this study aims to:

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of NEPU's IIQAS

- Examine how PDCA-based quality assurance mechanisms contribute to improvements in teaching, research, governance, and international standing.
- Assess the alignment of NEPU's IIQAS with international quality standards and accreditation practices.

2. Identify challenges and propose improvement strategies

- Investigate barriers that limit effective PDCA implementation within NEPU's IIQAS.
- Develop evidence-based recommendations to strengthen internal quality assurance and support NEPU's strategic aspirations for global competitiveness.

E. Research Techniques and Data Analysis

To ensure methodological rigor and the credibility of findings, this study employs systematic techniques for data collection, data verification, and data analysis. These techniques are aligned with qualitative case study research and are designed to capture an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the Internal Institutional Quality Assurance System (IIQAS) at Northeast Petroleum University (NEPU) within a PDCA framework.

1. Data Collection Techniques

This study utilizes multiple data collection techniques to obtain comprehensive and triangulated evidence regarding IIQAS implementation at NEPU.

1.1. Observation

Observation is conducted to capture real-time practices related to internal quality assurance processes within academic and administrative units. This includes observing quality assurance meetings, teaching evaluation activities, and institutional quality monitoring processes. Through non-participant observation, the researcher gains direct insight into how PDCA cycles—planning, implementation, evaluation, and improvement—are enacted in practice, beyond formal policy statements.

1.2. Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are carried out with key stakeholders, including university leaders, quality assurance officers, faculty members, and administrative staff. Interviews allow for an in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions, experiences, and challenges related to IIQAS implementation. This technique is essential for understanding institutional culture, decision-making processes, and stakeholder engagement within each stage of the PDCA cycle.

1.3. Document Review

Document review involves the systematic examination of institutional policies, quality assurance manuals, strategic plans, accreditation reports, evaluation guidelines, meeting minutes, and performance data. These documents provide formal evidence of IIQAS structures, objectives, and outcomes, enabling the researcher to analyze alignment between stated quality policies (Plan), implementation procedures (Do), evaluation mechanisms (Check), and improvement actions (Act).

2. Data Verification Techniques

To ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of qualitative findings, this study applies established data verification criteria adapted from qualitative research standards.

2.1. Credibility

Credibility is ensured through data triangulation across observations, interviews, and document analysis. Member checking is also employed by sharing preliminary findings with selected participants to confirm accuracy and interpretation. This process strengthens confidence that the findings accurately represent NEPU's IIQAS practices and stakeholder perspectives.

2.2. Transferability

Transferability is addressed by providing rich, thick descriptions of NEPU's institutional context, quality assurance structures, and implementation processes. Detailed contextualization enables readers and policymakers to assess the applicability of findings to other higher education institutions with similar characteristics, particularly within China and comparable systems.

2.3. Dependability

Dependability is achieved by maintaining a clear and systematic audit trail of the research process, including data collection procedures, interview protocols, coding decisions, and analytical steps. This transparency allows the research process to be examined for consistency and methodological soundness.

2.4. Confirmability

Confirmability is ensured by minimizing researcher bias through reflexive analysis and the use of documented evidence to support interpretations. The integration of multiple data sources and systematic documentation ensures that findings are grounded in empirical data rather than subjective assumptions.

3. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this study follows an iterative qualitative approach that aligns with the PDCA framework and institutional quality assurance objectives.

3.1. Data Reduction

Data reduction involves selecting, focusing, simplifying, and organizing raw qualitative data obtained from observations, interviews, and documents. Relevant data are coded and categorized according to PDCA components (Plan, Do, Check, Act), IIQAS functions, and global competitiveness indicators, enabling the researcher to manage complex datasets systematically.

3.2. Data Display

Data display is conducted through matrices, thematic tables, and conceptual models that visually represent relationships among quality assurance processes, institutional outcomes, and PDCA stages. These displays facilitate pattern recognition, comparison across data sources, and deeper analytical insight into IIQAS effectiveness.

3.3. Data Interpretation

Data interpretation involves synthesizing reduced and displayed data to draw meaningful conclusions regarding the effectiveness, challenges, and strategic potential of NEPU's IIQAS. Interpretation is guided by PDCA theory and international quality assurance frameworks, enabling the study to link empirical findings to theoretical implications and practical recommendations for enhancing global competitiveness.

F. State of the Art

Internal Quality Assurance Systems (IIQAS) have emerged as essential mechanisms in higher education for monitoring, evaluating, and enhancing the quality of teaching, research, and administrative processes. Globally, IIQAS is recognized as a strategic tool that enables universities to achieve academic excellence, institutional accountability, and international competitiveness (Harvey & Green, 1993; European University Association, 2005). UNESCO (2020) emphasizes that effective internal quality assurance integrates strategic planning, continuous monitoring, and stakeholder engagement, ensuring that institutional performance aligns with both national priorities and international standards.

In the global higher education landscape, universities are increasingly evaluated through international rankings, accreditation processes, and performance indicators that prioritize quality outcomes. Studies indicate that institutions with well-established IIQAS are more likely to secure international accreditation, attract research funding, and enhance their global visibility (Hazelkorn, 2015; QAA, 2018). Conversely, universities with fragmented or weak internal quality assurance mechanisms often face inconsistent academic standards, ineffective governance, and limited global recognition, demonstrating the critical importance of robust internal QA systems.

China's higher education system, the largest in the world, has undergone rapid expansion alongside significant quality reforms. Policies such as the Double First Class Initiative and national quality assurance guidelines highlight the country's commitment to developing world-class universities (Yang, 2020;

Ministry of Education, PRC, 2018). However, research has shown that implementation challenges persist, particularly in specialized or regional universities. Many institutions face fragmented departmental QA practices, limited stakeholder engagement, and difficulties aligning internal mechanisms with global standards (Liu & Li, 2017; Zhang, 2019). These challenges underscore the urgent need for a systematic approach to internal quality assurance that goes beyond compliance and actively drives institutional improvement.

Northeast Petroleum University (NEPU), a specialized university focusing on petroleum engineering and related disciplines, represents a relevant case for studying IIQAS in practice. NEPU has implemented mechanisms to monitor teaching quality, research output, and administrative processes, alongside fostering international cooperation with over 30 universities worldwide. Despite these efforts, NEPU's global ranking and international reputation remain moderate, suggesting that the current IIQAS may not fully optimize the university's potential for global competitiveness (EduRank, 2025; NEPU Annual Report, 2024). Challenges such as incomplete integration of QA mechanisms, inconsistent stakeholder participation, and limited benchmarking against global standards have been identified, reflecting a broader issue faced by similar universities in China.

While literature on quality assurance in higher education is extensive, there is a notable gap in research that directly examines the relationship between IIQAS implementation and global competitiveness in specialized universities like NEPU. Most existing studies focus on national policy frameworks or general institutional QA structures, leaving limited insight into how internal quality assurance practices translate into enhanced international reputation, research impact, and academic performance. Addressing this gap, the present study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of NEPU's IIQAS, identify its implementation challenges, and propose strategies to strengthen internal quality assurance in alignment with global best practices.

By bridging this gap, the study contributes to both theoretical understanding and practical applications of IIQAS. It provides evidence-based recommendations that can enhance NEPU's institutional quality and global

positioning while offering insights applicable to other Chinese universities seeking to improve internal quality assurance and international competitiveness. Ultimately, a well-functioning IIQAS is not merely a tool for compliance but a strategic instrument that can elevate institutional standards and support universities in the pursuit of global recognition and academic excellence

Table 1.1 State of Art

No.	Research Theme	Author(s) & Year	Key Findings	Relevance to Current Study / Gaps
1	Concept of Internal Quality Assurance	Harvey & Green (1993)	Defined quality in higher education and emphasized QA as a systematic process involving planning, assessment, and improvement.	Provides theoretical foundation for IIQAS; lacks application to specialized universities like NEPU.
2	IIQAS as Strategic Tool	European University Association (2005)	Emphasizes institutional QA integration with governance and strategic planning to achieve excellence.	Supports focus on linking IIQAS with institutional competitiveness; gap in empirical case studies.
3	QA and Global Competitiveness	Hazelkorn (2015)	Universities with robust QA systems achieve better rankings, international visibility, and research impact.	Supports studying NEPU's IIQAS in relation to global positioning.
4	QA in Chinese Higher Education	Yang (2020)	National policies promote world-class universities, but implementation of internal QA varies widely; some universities have fragmented QA structures.	Highlights urgency for NEPU to strengthen IIQAS; gap in practical alignment with global standards.
5	Challenges in Chinese HE QA	Liu & Li (2017)	Identified barriers including departmental silos, inconsistent QA practices, and limited faculty engagement.	Indicates obstacles NEPU may face; gap in comprehensive institutional-level evaluation.
6	International QA Practices	Dill & Soo (2005)	Effective QA aligns with accreditation, benchmarking, and stakeholder involvement; directly impacts institutional reputation.	Provides global perspective for NEPU; gap in applying these principles to specialized universities in China.
7	NEPU QA Efforts	NEPU Annual Report (2024); EduRank (2025)	NEPU conducts internal monitoring of teaching, research, and administrative processes; international collaborations exist; global ranking is moderate	Establishes baseline for case study; gap in evaluating how IIQAS influences global competitiveness.

No.	Research Theme	Author(s) & Year	Key Findings	Relevance to Current Study / Gaps
			(~#2405).	
8	Strategies for Strengthening IIQAS	Zhang (2019); UNESCO (2020)	Recommends integrated QA systems, continuous improvement, data-driven assessment, and stakeholder engagement to enhance global positioning.	Directly informs research purpose to identify improvement strategies; gap in case-based application for NEPU.

