

## Exploring ISO Standardization as a Quality Assurance Mechanism in Sri Lankan Higher Educational Sector

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### Abstract

Higher education is a critical economic sector that has eventually been followed by all other major economic sectors such as financial services, healthcare, telecommunication, aviation, transportation etc. Today, higher educational institutions all over the world operate in a fast-dynamic environment with high competition for reputation, talent acquisition, and student attraction. Following the basis of the high competition is leading to a significant focus on quality. It is not easy to define the quality in terms of higher education owing to the complex relationships of higher education to students and the different roles of a student in the higher education process. Addressing the issue, ISO has recently published a new quality framework for higher educational institutions; ISO 21001:2018 Educational Organisations Management System and most of the institutions adopted ISO 9001 standard series until the publication of the new ISO standard for higher education. This study employs an evidence-based approach and critically evaluates the existing literature on ISO Quality Management Systems (QMS) implementation in higher education institutions in different countries to elaborate on the necessity of adopting it in the Sri Lankan context. Further, it attempts to summarize the key benefits, challenges, and critical success factors of ISO implementation in Sri Lanka. According to the findings, the key benefits of ISO adoption to higher education institutions are cost reduction, consistent customer satisfaction, risk management, international recognition, adopting rapid changes, attracting grants/ funds, and strengthening international linkages and relationships. In addition, the challenges and critical success factors are also elaborated for easy implication.

**Keywords:** *Higher education, ISO 9001:2015, ISO 21001:2018, Quality, QMS*