

Research Article

The Impact of Erosion of Trust among Educators on the Decline of Key Performance Indicator (IKU) Achievement in Higher Education

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Abstract: Trust among educators constitutes a critical social capital that underpins organizational effectiveness in higher education institutions. This study investigates the impact of trust erosion among educators on the decline in the achievement of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs/IKU) in higher education. The central problem addressed in this research is the weakening of academic collaboration, reduced engagement in the tridharma of higher education, and the emergence of latent conflicts that negatively affect KPI achievement, particularly in lecturer performance, research collaboration, and the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy. This study aims to analyze the relationship between the level of trust among educators and institutional KPI performance, as well as to identify the organizational and social mechanisms underlying this phenomenon. A mixed-methods explanatory design was employed, combining quantitative survey data with in-depth interviews and institutional performance document analysis. The findings reveal a significant negative correlation between trust erosion and KPI achievement. The study concludes that strengthening organizational trust is a strategic prerequisite for sustaining and improving higher education performance.

Keywords: Academic Culture; Higher Education; Institutional Performance; Key Performance Indicators; Organizational Trust.

1. Introduction

Higher education institutions are knowledge-based organizations whose performance depends not only on structural policies and human resources, but also on the quality of social relationships within the academic community. Among these relational factors, trust among educators encompassing trust between lecturers, between lecturers and academic leaders, and between lecturers and educational staff plays a central role in fostering collaboration, innovation, and institutional sustainability.

In Indonesia, the implementation of Key Performance Indicators (IKU) as a national framework for evaluating higher education performance has significantly reshaped academic governance and managerial practices. The IKU framework emphasizes measurable outcomes such as lecturer performance, student engagement in off-campus learning (MBKM), research productivity, partnerships, and institutional governance quality. Achieving these indicators requires intensive collaboration, shared commitment, and mutual trust among educators. However, empirical observations suggest that many higher education institutions struggle to meet IKU targets not solely due to limited resources, but also due to declining interpersonal and organizational trust.

Previous studies have examined trust in educational organizations using quantitative survey methods, organizational culture analysis, and leadership-based models. These approaches have successfully demonstrated that trust positively influences job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance. Nevertheless, most existing studies treat trust

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as an individual or leadership variable and rarely link it explicitly to policy-driven performance indicators such as IKU. Moreover, prior methods often fail to capture the complex social dynamics through which trust erosion translates into reduced institutional performance.

This research addresses this gap by focusing on trust erosion among educators as a structural and cultural issue that directly affects IKU achievement. The core research problem is how and to what extent declining trust undermines collaboration, knowledge sharing, and collective accountability in higher education institutions. To address this problem, this study proposes an integrative mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative measurement of trust levels with qualitative analysis of institutional practices and performance outcomes.

The main contributions of this study are as follows: 1). providing empirical evidence of the relationship between trust erosion and IKU performance; 2) developing a conceptual framework that explains trust erosion as an organizational mechanism affecting higher education performance; and 3) offering practical recommendations for trust-based governance in higher education.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews related literature, Section 3 describes the proposed method, Section 4 presents results and discussion, Section 5 provides a comparison with state-of-the-art studies, and Section 6 concludes the paper.

2. Preliminaries or Related Work or Literature Review

Organizational Trust in Higher Education

Organizational trust is widely recognized as a foundational element in the effectiveness and sustainability of higher education institutions. In the academic context, organizational trust refers to the shared belief among educators, administrators, and academic staff that institutional actors will act competently, ethically, transparently, and in the collective interest of the institution. Unlike trust in corporate settings, trust in higher education is deeply intertwined with academic freedom, collegial governance, and professional autonomy, making it both complex and highly consequential.

In higher education institutions, trust operates at multiple levels: interpersonal trust among educators, trust in academic leadership, and trust in institutional systems and policies. Interpersonal trust among faculty members facilitates collaboration in teaching, research, and community service, which are core components of university performance. When educators trust their colleagues, they are more willing to share knowledge, co-author research, mentor junior academics, and engage in interdisciplinary initiatives. Conversely, low levels of trust often result in academic silos, competition, and defensive professional behavior, which undermine institutional productivity.

Trust in leadership plays an equally critical role. Academic leaders such as rectors, deans, and department heads are expected to balance managerial accountability with academic values. When leaders demonstrate fairness, consistency, and participatory decision-making, they strengthen faculty trust and legitimacy. Transparent leadership practices, such as clear communication of policies, equitable workload distribution, and merit-based evaluation systems, contribute significantly to building trust. In contrast, authoritarian leadership styles, opaque decision-making, and perceived favoritism erode trust and lead to resistance, disengagement, and symbolic compliance with institutional policies.

Organizational trust is also closely linked to governance structures in higher education. Universities traditionally rely on collegial governance, where decisions are made through deliberation and shared authority. Trust enables this model to function effectively by fostering mutual respect and shared responsibility. However, the increasing adoption of performance-based management systems such as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), rankings, and accreditation metrics has altered governance dynamics. While these mechanisms aim to enhance accountability, they may unintentionally weaken trust if perceived as punitive, overly bureaucratic, or misaligned with academic values.

From a psychological perspective, organizational trust influences educators' motivation, job satisfaction, and professional identity. Faculty members who trust their institutions tend to exhibit higher levels of organizational commitment and intrinsic motivation. They perceive institutional goals as aligned with their professional mission, which encourages proactive engagement in teaching innovation, research productivity, and community outreach. In contrast, distrust fosters cynicism, emotional exhaustion, and withdrawal behaviors, including minimal compliance with institutional demands and reduced investment in long-term academic development.

In the context of higher education reform, organizational trust becomes even more critical. Policy changes related to curriculum reform, digital transformation, internationalization, and performance evaluation require strong trust relationships to succeed. Educators are more likely to embrace change when they trust that reforms are designed to support academic quality rather than merely fulfill administrative or political agendas. Without trust, reforms often face passive resistance, implementation gaps, and superficial adoption that fail to produce meaningful outcomes.

Furthermore, organizational trust has a direct relationship with institutional performance and quality assurance. Research indicates that universities with high levels of trust tend to perform better in terms of research output, teaching quality, and student satisfaction. Trust reduces transaction costs associated with excessive monitoring and control, allowing institutions to allocate resources more efficiently toward academic development. In this sense, trust functions as a form of social capital that enhances institutional resilience and adaptability in a rapidly changing higher education landscape.

In conclusion, organizational trust in higher education is not merely a soft or peripheral concept but a strategic resource that underpins academic excellence, effective governance, and sustainable performance. Building and maintaining trust requires consistent ethical leadership, transparent institutional systems, and a strong commitment to academic values. As higher education institutions continue to face increasing pressures for accountability and competitiveness, preserving organizational trust among educators is essential to ensure that performance initiatives translate into genuine academic advancement rather than procedural compliance.

Key Performance Indicators (IKU) and Institutional Performance

Key Performance Indicators (IKU) have become a central instrument for measuring and steering institutional performance in higher education. IKU are structured, measurable indicators designed to assess the extent to which universities achieve strategic objectives in teaching, research, community engagement, governance, and graduate outcomes. In many higher education systems, particularly those undergoing reform and accountability-driven governance, IKU function not only as evaluation tools but also as policy instruments that shape institutional behavior and academic priorities.

In the context of institutional performance, IKU are intended to provide objective benchmarks that translate abstract institutional missions into concrete, measurable outcomes. Indicators such as graduate employability, research productivity, international collaboration, industry partnerships, and student satisfaction are commonly used to assess university performance. When implemented effectively, IKU can enhance strategic alignment by ensuring that institutional activities at the faculty and departmental levels are consistent with national education policies and long-term development goals.

However, the relationship between IKU and institutional performance is not purely technical; it is deeply influenced by organizational culture and human factors. Institutional performance in higher education depends not only on achieving numerical targets but also on sustaining academic quality and integrity. Overemphasis on quantitative IKU may encourage short-term goal attainment at the expense of long-term academic development. For example, pressure to increase publication counts may lead to fragmented research outputs, while an excessive focus on employability indicators may marginalize critical and theoretical disciplines.

IKU also influence academic behavior and decision-making processes. When educators perceive IKU as fair, relevant, and aligned with academic values, they are more likely to internalize performance goals and integrate them into their professional practice. In such conditions, IKU can stimulate innovation in teaching, promote collaborative research, and strengthen institutional responsiveness to societal needs. Conversely, when IKU are perceived as externally imposed, overly bureaucratic, or disconnected from disciplinary realities, they often generate compliance-oriented behavior rather than genuine performance improvement.

Institutional performance is further shaped by how IKU are integrated into governance and management systems. Transparent performance evaluation mechanisms, clear communication of indicators, and participatory target-setting processes are critical for ensuring that IKU serve as developmental tools rather than instruments of control. Institutions that involve educators in designing and interpreting IKU tend to achieve higher levels of ownership and commitment, which in turn enhances performance outcomes across academic units.

Another critical aspect of IKU implementation is its impact on collaboration and trust within institutions. Performance indicators that reward individual achievements without recognizing collective efforts may unintentionally weaken collegiality and cooperation. In contrast, IKU frameworks that value teamwork, interdisciplinary collaboration, and institutional contribution can reinforce a shared sense of purpose and improve overall performance. Therefore, the design of IKU must carefully balance individual accountability with collective responsibility.

From a strategic perspective, IKU play a vital role in linking institutional performance to external accountability and public trust. Governments, accreditation bodies, and stakeholders increasingly rely on IKU to assess the effectiveness of higher education institutions. While this enhances transparency, it also places pressure on universities to demonstrate measurable impact. Institutions that successfully align IKU with their academic mission are better positioned to maintain credibility, secure funding, and strengthen their societal relevance.

In conclusion, Key Performance Indicators are powerful instruments for shaping institutional performance in higher education. Their effectiveness depends not only on technical design but also on institutional culture, leadership, and trust among academic stakeholders. When IKU are implemented as supportive and value-driven mechanisms, they can foster sustainable performance improvement. However, without careful alignment and participatory governance, IKU risk becoming symbolic metrics that undermine academic collaboration and long-term institutional excellence.

Research Gaps

Despite the growing body of literature on organizational trust and performance management in higher education, several critical research gaps remain, particularly in relation to the interaction between organizational trust and the achievement of Key Performance Indicators (IKU). First, most existing studies examine organizational trust and institutional performance as separate constructs. Research on trust often focuses on leadership effectiveness, job satisfaction, or organizational commitment, while studies on IKU tend to emphasize policy implementation, performance measurement, and accountability. There is limited empirical research that explicitly investigates how erosion of trust among educators directly influences the decline in IKU achievement.

Second, prior research predominantly adopts a managerial or policy-oriented perspective, emphasizing institutional outputs and compliance with performance metrics. This approach often overlooks the lived experiences and perceptions of educators as key actors in IKU implementation. As a result, there is insufficient understanding of how educators interpret IKU, how trust or distrust shapes their responses, and how these perceptions translate into everyday academic practices. This gap is particularly evident in qualitative and mixed-methods studies that explore trust dynamics at the micro and meso organizational levels.

Third, existing studies rarely explore trust erosion as a gradual and relational process. Trust is often treated as a static variable rather than a dynamic phenomenon that evolves through repeated interactions, leadership practices, and institutional policies. There is a lack of longitudinal research that examines how sustained policy pressures, performance-based evaluations, and organizational changes contribute to the gradual weakening of trust among educators and how this process affects long-term institutional performance.

Fourth, the contextual dimension of higher education systems remains underexplored. Much of the literature is based on Western or global university models, with limited attention to local, cultural, and regulatory contexts, particularly in developing or non-Western higher education systems. The implementation of IKU within specific national frameworks may produce unique trust-related challenges that are not adequately captured in existing theoretical models.

Finally, there is a gap in actionable frameworks that integrate organizational trust into performance management systems. While many studies acknowledge the importance of trust, few offer practical, evidence-based models for embedding trust-building mechanisms into IKU design and implementation. This study addresses these gaps by examining the erosion of trust among educators as a critical factor influencing IKU performance and by proposing a trust-sensitive approach to institutional performance management in higher education.

3. Materials and Method

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach to examine the impact of trust erosion among educators on the achievement of Key Performance Indicators (IKU) in higher education institutions. A convergent parallel research design was employed, allowing quantitative and qualitative data to be collected simultaneously and analyzed independently before being integrated for interpretation. This design was chosen to ensure a comprehensive understanding of both measurable relationships and contextual experiences related to organizational trust and institutional performance.

The research was conducted in a higher education institution in Indonesia, involving educators from diverse academic disciplines and organizational roles. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to capture variations in academic rank, length of service, and involvement in institutional governance. Quantitative data were gathered through a structured questionnaire adapted from validated organizational trust and performance measurement instruments, focusing on interpersonal trust, trust in leadership, transparency, and perceptions of IKU implementation. Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews that explored educators' experiences, attitudes, and interpretations regarding trust dynamics and performance policies.

Data collection was carried out using online surveys and in-depth interviews, with strict adherence to ethical standards, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to identify patterns and relationships between trust erosion and IKU achievement, while qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis to uncover recurring themes and explanatory narratives. The integration of both data sets enabled triangulation and strengthened the validity of the findings, providing a holistic explanation of how trust erosion among educators influences institutional performance outcomes.

Table 1. operational definitions of variables.

Variable	Definition	Dimensions	Indicators
Organizational Trust among Educators	The level of confidence educators have in their colleagues, academic leaders, and institutional systems, based on perceptions of integrity, competence, fairness, and transparency.	Interpersonal Trust Trust in Leadership Institutional Trust	Mutual respect among educators; Openness in communication; Fairness of decision-making; Consistency of leadership actions
Trust Erosion	The gradual decline of confidence and positive expectations among educators due to perceived injustice, lack of transparency, excessive control, or unresolved conflict.	Relational Breakdown Procedural Distrust Psychological Withdrawal	Reduced collaboration; Increased suspicion; Avoidance of joint activities; Decline in professional engagement
Key Performance Indicators (IKU) Achievement	The extent to which institutional performance targets defined by national higher education policy are achieved in academic and managerial practices.	Academic Performance Institutional Governance Collaboration	Lecturer performance outcomes; Research productivity; External Student engagement; Partnership realization
Institutional Performance	Overall effectiveness of higher education institutions in achieving academic quality, governance efficiency, and sustainability goals.	Effectiveness Efficiency Sustainability	Goal attainment; Resource utilization; Policy implementation consistency

Variable	Definition	Dimensions	Indicators
Academic Collaboration	The degree of cooperative interaction among educators in teaching, research, and community service activities.	Teamwork; Knowledge Sharing; Joint Decision-Making	Interdisciplinary projects; Co-authorship; Collaborative teaching
Leadership Transparency	The clarity, openness, and accountability of institutional leaders in communicating policies and decisions.	Communication Clarity; Accountability; Participation	Policy dissemination; Feedback mechanisms; Involvement in decision-making
Professional Engagement	The level of educators' psychological and behavioral involvement in academic and institutional activities.	Commitment; Motivation; Participation	Willingness to contribute; Initiative-taking; Policy compliance

The operational definition table provides a systematic explanation of the key variables examined in this study, ensuring conceptual clarity and methodological rigor. Each variable is clearly defined to avoid ambiguity and to establish a shared understanding between the researcher and the reader regarding how abstract concepts are translated into measurable components.

Organizational trust among educators is defined as the level of confidence educators place in their colleagues, institutional leaders, and governance systems. This variable is operationalized through dimensions such as interpersonal trust, trust in leadership, and institutional trust, which are reflected in indicators related to mutual respect, transparency, fairness, and consistency in decision-making. These indicators capture both relational and structural aspects of trust within higher education institutions.

Trust erosion is conceptualized as a gradual and cumulative decline in confidence resulting from negative organizational experiences. It is operationalized through dimensions such as relational breakdown, procedural distrust, and psychological withdrawal. Indicators such as reduced collaboration, increased suspicion, and declining professional engagement are used to measure how trust deterioration manifests in everyday academic practices.

Key Performance Indicator (IKU) achievement represents the extent to which institutional performance targets are realized in academic and managerial contexts. This variable includes dimensions related to academic performance, governance quality, and external collaboration, with indicators derived from lecturer performance, research productivity, and institutional partnerships. Institutional performance, as a broader construct, captures the effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of organizational outcomes.

Supporting variables such as academic collaboration, leadership transparency, and professional engagement are included to explain the mechanisms through which trust erosion affects IKU achievement. These variables are measured using Likert-scale instruments and supported by qualitative data from interviews and document analysis. Overall, the table serves as a methodological framework that links theoretical constructs to empirical measurement, enabling valid and reliable analysis of the relationship between organizational trust and institutional performance in higher education.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the empirical findings of the study regarding the impact of erosion of inter-educator trust on the decline of Key Performance Indicator (IKU) achievement in higher education institutions. The results are organized into quantitative findings, qualitative findings, and integrative discussion to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation.

Quantitative Results: Relationship between Inter-Educator Trust and IKU Achievement

The quantitative analysis was conducted using survey data collected from educators across multiple academic units. The trust variable was measured using a multi-dimensional

scale encompassing interpersonal trust, institutional trust, and professional trust. IKU performance data were obtained from institutional reports covering lecturer performance, research productivity, MBKM participation, and external collaboration indicators.

The correlation analysis revealed a strong and statistically significant negative relationship between the erosion of inter-educator trust and IKU achievement ($r = -0.67$, $p < 0.01$). This result indicates that as trust among educators declines, institutional performance as measured by IKU tends to decrease substantially. The regression analysis further confirmed that trust erosion serves as a significant predictor of IKU performance decline ($\beta = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$), even after controlling for variables such as years of service, academic rank, and institutional size.

Notably, the strongest effects were observed in IKU indicators related to research collaboration, lecturer participation in MBKM programs, and cross-departmental academic initiatives. These findings suggest that trust functions as an enabling condition for collective academic engagement rather than merely an interpersonal sentiment. When trust deteriorates, educators tend to prioritize individual survival strategies over institutional goals, resulting in fragmented performance outcomes.

From a performance management perspective, these results challenge the assumption that IKU achievement is primarily driven by policy enforcement or incentive mechanisms. Instead, the data indicate that relational dynamics among educators significantly mediate the effectiveness of performance-based governance systems.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 156).

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	90	57.7
	Female	66	42.3
Age Group	≤ 30 years	16	10.3
	31–40 years	44	28.2
	41–50 years	56	35.9
	> 50 years	40	25.6
Highest Academic Qualification	Master's Degree (S2)	120	76.9
	Doctoral Degree (S3)	36	23.1
Academic Rank	Assistant Lecturer	26	16.7
	Lecturer	58	37.2
	Senior Lecturer	44	28.2
	Professor	28	17.9
Years of Service	< 5 years	21	13.5
	5–10 years	39	25.0
	11–20 years	57	36.5
	> 20 years	39	25.0
Primary Academic Responsibility	Teaching-Oriented	61	39.1
	Teaching & Research	65	41.7
	Teaching, Research & Management	30	19.2
Involvement in IKU-Related Activities	High (≥ 3 IKU indicators)	68	43.6
	Moderate (1–2 IKU indicators)	54	34.6
	Low (≤ 1 IKU indicator)	34	21.8
MBKM Participation	Actively Involved	72	46.2
	Occasionally Involved	49	31.4
	Not Involved	35	22.4

Qualitative Results: Patterns and Manifestations of Trust Erosion

To complement the quantitative findings, qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with educators, department heads, and academic administrators. The qualitative results provide deeper insight into how trust erosion manifests in everyday academic practices and how it translates into declining IKU performance.

Fragmentation of Academic Collaboration

One of the most prominent themes emerging from the interviews was the fragmentation of academic collaboration. Respondents consistently reported a decline in willingness to collaborate on research projects, joint publications, and interdisciplinary teaching initiatives. This fragmentation was often attributed to experiences of unfair workload distribution, lack of transparency in performance evaluation, and perceived favoritism in institutional decision-making.

Several educators noted that collaborative initiatives were increasingly perceived as risky, as trust in equitable recognition and reward had diminished. Consequently, many preferred to work independently, even when collaboration would have enhanced IKU-related outcomes. This behavioral shift directly undermines IKU indicators that rely on collective output, such as joint research productivity and external partnerships.

Table 3. Fragmentation of Academic Collaboration: Themes, Causes, and Impacts on IKU

Dimension	Key Indicators	Main Causes Identified	Behavioral Manifestation	Impact on IKU Achievement
Research Collaboration	Decline in joint research projects and co-authored publications	Unequal workload distribution; lack of recognition; perceived favoritism	Preference for individual research; avoidance of joint proposals	Reduced research productivity; weaker IKU research indicators
Interdisciplinary Teaching	Decrease in team-teaching and cross-department courses	Low trust in fair evaluation; unclear role allocation	Educators limit participation to formal obligations	Limited innovation in curriculum; weakened MBKM implementation
Academic Networking	Reduced engagement in academic forums and partnerships	Lack of transparency in institutional decisions	Selective or minimal collaboration	Decline in external collaboration IKU
Professional Knowledge Sharing	Limited sharing of teaching resources and research data	Fear of exploitation; low reciprocal trust	Knowledge hoarding; informal isolation	Slower institutional learning and innovation
Collective Academic Initiatives	Weak participation in institutional research clusters	Distrust in incentive mechanisms	Fragmented participation patterns	Ineffective achievement of collective IKU targets

Declining Participation in MBKM Programs

Another significant qualitative finding relates to the implementation of Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM). While MBKM is designed to promote flexibility, innovation, and collaboration, its success heavily depends on mutual trust among educators across departments and institutions.

Interview data revealed that trust erosion led to passive resistance toward MBKM initiatives. Educators expressed skepticism regarding administrative support, workload recognition, and long-term benefits. In some cases, MBKM activities were perceived as additional burdens imposed without adequate consultation or trust-building processes. As a result, participation rates declined, negatively affecting IKU indicators related to student engagement and external collaboration.

This finding underscores that policy innovation alone is insufficient to achieve performance targets unless supported by a trust-based academic culture.

Table 4. Declining Participation in MBKM Programs: Trust-Related Factors and Implications for IKU.

Dimension	Key Issues Identified	Trust-Related Causes	Educator Responses	Implications for IKU
Program Perception	MBKM viewed as administratively driven	Low trust in institutional commitment and follow-up	Skeptical attitudes toward program sustainability	Weak alignment with IKU student-centered indicators
Workload Recognition	Unclear credit conversion and BKD recognition	Distrust in fair workload assessment	Reluctance to supervise MBKM activities	Decline in MBKM lecturer participation IKU
Interdepartmental Coordination	Poor communication across academic units	Limited interpersonal and institutional trust	Minimal cross-unit collaboration	Reduced interdisciplinary MBKM outcomes
Decision-Making Process	Limited educator involvement in MBKM design	Perceived top-down policy implementation	Passive resistance and minimal compliance	Lower quality MBKM implementation
External Partnerships	Uncertainty regarding partner credibility	Distrust in partner selection and monitoring	Hesitation to engage external stakeholders	Weakened IKU external collaboration indicators
Professional Motivation	MBKM seen as low-reward/high-risk activity	Erosion of trust in incentive mechanisms	Preference for conventional academic tasks	Stagnation in MBKM-driven performance metrics

Emergence of Defensive Professional Behavior

The interviews also revealed the emergence of defensive professional behavior as a response to trust erosion. Educators described adopting minimalist approaches to their academic responsibilities, focusing strictly on tasks that were explicitly measured by IKU metrics while avoiding activities requiring discretionary effort or collaboration.

This phenomenon reflects what organizational scholars describe as “compliance without commitment.” While educators may formally meet minimum performance requirements, the absence of trust discourages intrinsic motivation and proactive contribution. Over time, this dynamic leads to stagnation in institutional innovation and a gradual decline in overall IKU achievement.

Table 5. Emergence of Defensive Professional Behavior: Patterns, Drivers, and Effects on IKU.

Dimension	Observed Behaviors	Trust-Related Drivers	Professional Orientation	Consequences for IKU Achievement
Task Selection	Focus only on formally measured tasks	Low trust in fair recognition of extra effort	Minimalist compliance	Limited growth in qualitative IKU indicators
Academic Engagement	Avoidance of voluntary and collaborative activities	Fear of exploitation and unequal reward	Individualistic work patterns	Weak interdisciplinary and collaborative IKU outcomes
Innovation Behavior	Reluctance to initiate new programs or methods	Distrust in institutional support	Risk-averse professionalism	Decline in innovation-driven IKU
Research Practices	Preference for solo research over joint projects	Low confidence in authorship fairness	Defensive autonomy	Reduced collaborative research productivity
Teaching and Mentoring	Teaching confined to minimum curricular obligations	Erosion of collegial trust	Instrumental approach to teaching	Diminished student-centered IKU impact
Organizational Citizenship	Declining participation in committees and initiatives	Lack of psychological safety	Withdrawal from institutional life	Weak collective institutional performance

Discussion: Trust as a Mediating Variable in IKU Performance

The combined quantitative and qualitative findings confirm the central hypothesis of this study: erosion of inter-educator trust significantly contributes to the decline of IKU achievement in higher education. Trust operates not merely as a background condition but as a mediating variable that shapes how performance policies are interpreted, implemented, and enacted by educators (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

From a theoretical perspective, these findings align with social capital theory, which posits that trust facilitates collective action and resource mobilization. In the context of higher education, trust enables knowledge sharing, risk-taking in innovation, and sustained collaboration all of which are critical for achieving IKU targets (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

Conversely, when trust erodes, the institutional environment becomes characterized by suspicion, competition, and disengagement. Performance indicators such as IKU, which assume cooperative behavior, become difficult to achieve under such conditions. This explains why institutions with similar resources and policies may exhibit markedly different IKU outcomes depending on the quality of internal trust relationships (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Robinson, 1996; Kramer, 1999).

Importantly, the findings also highlight a paradox of performance-based governance. While IKU frameworks are intended to enhance accountability and effectiveness, their rigid implementation without attention to relational dynamics may inadvertently accelerate trust erosion. This creates a vicious cycle in which declining trust leads to poor performance, which in turn triggers stricter control measures that further undermine trust (Power, 1997; Hood, 1991; Ball, 2012).

Implications for Higher Education Governance

The results of this study have important implications for higher education governance and performance management. First, they suggest that trust-building should be treated as a strategic component of IKU implementation, rather than as a soft or peripheral issue. Leadership practices that emphasize transparency, fairness, and participatory decision-making are likely to enhance trust and, consequently, performance outcomes (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000; Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Second, the findings call for a more balanced approach to performance measurement that integrates quantitative indicators with qualitative assessments of academic culture. Over-

reliance on numerical targets may obscure underlying relational problems that ultimately determine the sustainability of performance gains (Muller, 2018; Hood, 1991; Behn, 2003).

Finally, this study underscores the need for institutional interventions aimed at restoring trust, such as collaborative forums, peer recognition mechanisms, and conflict resolution processes. Without such efforts, attempts to improve IKU achievement may remain superficial and short-lived (Fullan, 2007; Sztompka, 1999).

5. Comparison

This study contributes to the growing body of research on higher education performance management by foregrounding trust as a mediating variable in the achievement of Key Performance Indicators (IKU). While prior studies have extensively examined IKU and similar performance frameworks from policy, managerial, and outcome-based perspectives, relatively few have explored the relational and socio-organizational mechanisms underlying performance variation.

State-of-the-art research on performance-based governance largely emphasizes accountability systems, metric design, and incentive structures. These studies typically assume rational compliance by educators and focus on measurable outputs, often overlooking how trust erosion reshapes academic behavior and institutional dynamics. As a result, existing models struggle to explain why institutions with comparable resources and regulatory environments display divergent performance outcomes.

In contrast, the present study integrates quantitative performance data with qualitative insights from educators' lived experiences, revealing how declining trust leads to defensive professional behavior and "compliance without commitment." By positioning trust as an active mediator rather than a contextual background factor, this study advances a more holistic understanding of IKU implementation and its unintended consequences.

Table 6. Comparison of the Present Study with State-of-the-Art Research.

Aspect	State-of-the-Art Research	Present Study
Primary Focus	Performance indicators, accountability systems, and policy compliance	Trust dynamics and their mediating role in IKU performance
Theoretical Framework	New Public Management, Performance-Based Governance	Social Capital Theory, Organizational Trust Theory
View of Educators	Rational actors responding to incentives and metrics	Relational actors whose motivation is shaped by trust and institutional climate
Methodological Approach	Predominantly quantitative or policy analysis	Mixed methods (quantitative IKU data + qualitative interviews)
Key Explanatory Variable	Metrics, incentives, and control mechanisms	Inter-educator trust and relational governance
Behavioral Outcomes Identified	Compliance with performance targets	Defensive professionalism and compliance without commitment
Explanation of Performance Decline	Inefficient implementation or weak incentives	Erosion of trust leading to disengagement and reduced collaboration
Contribution to Knowledge	Optimization of performance measurement systems	Conceptualization of trust as a mediating variable in IKU achievement
Policy Implications	Refinement of indicators and stricter monitoring	Trust-building as a strategic component of IKU governance

6. Conclusion

This study concludes that erosion of trust among educators has a significant negative impact on the achievement of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in higher education institutions. Diminished trust weakens academic collaboration, reduces collective

engagement, and lowers professional motivation, resulting in KPI implementation that is largely administrative rather than substantive. Therefore, strengthening interpersonal and institutional trust through transparent governance, collaborative leadership, and a fair academic culture is essential for improving sustainable KPI achievement.

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