

# The Influence of Audit Procedures, Audit Fees, Time Budget Pressure, and Auditor Skepticism on Audit Quality: A Case Study during the Covid - 19 Pandemic in Public Service Management

<sup>a</sup> R. Ricky Agusiady; <sup>b</sup> Muhammad Taofik Ismail; <sup>c</sup> R. Rita Avianty

<sup>a b c</sup> Universitas Sangga Buana

## ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menyelidiki pengaruh proses audit, biaya audit, tekanan anggaran waktu, dan skeptisisme auditor terhadap kualitas audit dalam konteks administrasi pelayanan publik selama pandemi Covid-19. Menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif asosiatif, penelitian ini memanfaatkan kuesioner sebagai alat pengumpulan data utama, didukung oleh analisis jalur sebagai metode statistik. Sumber data meliputi data primer dari respons survei dan data sekunder dari buku, jurnal, dan sumber ilmiah lainnya. Penelitian ini berfokus pada 41 Kantor Akuntan Publik (KAP) di wilayah Greater Bandung, dengan ukuran sampel 37 responden sebagai unit analisis. Hasil analisis akan diinterpretasikan melalui analisis jalur. Penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa situasi audit selama pandemi Covid-19 berfungsi sebagai variabel penghubung antara variabel independen (proses audit, biaya audit, tekanan anggaran waktu, dan skeptisisme auditor) dengan kualitas audit. Penelitian ini menekankan peran krusial profesionalisme dan skeptisisme auditor dalam menjaga keandalan hasil audit di bawah kondisi krisis. Dengan meningkatkan pemahaman tentang dinamika audit selama pandemi dan memperkuat kemampuan auditor untuk mengelola tekanan eksternal, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan transparansi dan akuntabilitas di sektor pelayanan publik.

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effects of audit processes, audit fees, time budget pressure, and auditor skepticism on audit quality in the context of public service administration during the COVID-19 pandemic. Employing a descriptive associative approach, this research uses a questionnaire for primary data collection, complemented by path analysis as the statistical method. Data sources include primary data from survey responses and secondary data from books, journals, and other scholarly sources. The study focuses on 41 Public Accounting Firms (KAP) in Bandung area, with a sample of 37 respondents as the unit of analysis. Results will be interpreted through path analysis. The research reveals that the audit situation during the COVID-19 pandemic acts as a linking variable between the independent variables (audit processes, audit fees, time budget pressure, and auditor skepticism) and audit quality. This study emphasizes the critical role of auditor professionalism and skepticism in maintaining the reliability of audit results under crisis conditions. By enhancing understanding of audit dynamics during the pandemic and strengthening auditor capabilities to manage external pressures, this study aims to improve transparency and accountability in the public service sector.

## INTRODUCTION

The world is full of reports from the World Health Organization (WHO) China Country Office where cases of Pneumonia with an unknown etiology were found in Wuhan, China, dated December 31, 2019. China identified this Pneumonia on January 7, 2020, as a new breed of Pneumonia that is Corona Virus Disease-19 (COVID-19) (Susilo, 2020), which is thought to be transmitted from animals to humans and then spreads, attacking the respiratory tract with early symptoms of flu to causing severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). The

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implementation of the Large-Scale Social Restrictions Policy (PSBB) in regions such as Bogor District has been a significant measure to curb the spread of COVID-19, highlighting the need for strict public health interventions in high-mobility areas. (Tuti et al., 2020) highlighted the challenges faced by local governments in implementing the PSBB due to limited authority and resources. They emphasized the need for improved coordination between central and regional governments, as well as the involvement of the private sector to enhance policy effectiveness. According to their findings, effective implementation of the PSBB required substantial human, financial, and equipment resources, along with clear communication and authority from the central government.

High audit quality in public service management is critical as it ensures that financial and operational reports presented by public institutions are accurate, transparent, and free from fraud or error. High-quality audits increase the accountability of public officials, assist in the detection and prevention of misuse of funds, and ensure that resources are used efficiently and effectively. In addition, reliable audits build public trust in government and public institutions, as the public can see that there is rigorous oversight and effective control mechanisms. The transparency that results from high-quality audits also plays a role in strengthening good governance, thereby creating a more stable and reliable environment for investment and social development.

The auditor's role in maintaining accountability is crucial, as the auditor acts as an independent party that ensures that the organization's financial and operational reports are presented correctly and by applicable standards. Auditors conduct a thorough examination of financial records, procedures, and internal control systems to detect any errors or irregularities. In this context, auditors become the last line of defense against financial statement fraud and error by identifying and reporting their findings to management and stakeholders. The presence of auditors helps prevent and reveal unethical practices, thereby ensuring that organizations operate with integrity and transparency.

The increased complexity of business issues during the pandemic has heightened the likelihood of misinterpretation and errors in financial account presentation. When evaluating the quality of financial statements, entities must rely on the Independent Auditor's Report (IAI) on audited financial statements to ensure their accuracy and quality. Audited financial statements by public accountants are considered more reliable than unaudited ones. Consequently, the public accounting profession plays a crucial role in enhancing the trustworthiness of financial accounts.

The conditions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic have led to significant changes in audit engagement patterns compared to those before the pandemic. Public accountants are now required to consistently issue audit opinions on high-quality financial statements. According to the Professional Standards of Public Accountants (IAPF, 2013), audit quality is determined by adherence to auditing criteria. These criteria include the professional qualifications and independence of auditors, as well as the factors they consider when conducting audits, writing audit reports, and providing audit opinions. Therefore, a public accountant can deliver a high-quality audit opinion if they conduct their work professionally, in line with applicable auditing standards, and guided by the Professional Standards of Public Accountants (SPAP) in fulfilling their responsibilities.

The varying monetary value received by auditors in each audit work they carry out based on the results of negotiations during the Covid-19 pandemic does not rule out the possibility that it will affect audit quality. Aside from the cost (fee audit), the pressure to complete audits on time also has an impact on the audit quality given. The projected audit completion time is

divided into: Auditors' performance is also influenced by time constraints on their budget. According to Oceania (2011), Auditors must be able to carry out their duties while minimizing time costs. There is pressure on audit completion time during the pandemic. The need for efficiency has become more critical as auditors face tight deadlines, often leading to shortcuts and potential compromises in audit quality (Tuti et al., 2020). Conversely, the pressure of audit completion time might lead to deviant behavior from an auditor, as auditors are often driven to accomplish their job. The negative impact of rushing the audit completion time is that the auditor intentionally omits many stages of the audit or audit procedures due to time restrictions, resulting in a worse quality audit. Because of the significant time constraint in performing audits, auditors raise their auditing efficiency even more, such that audits are frequently implemented without following processes and planning by applicable legislation. Auditors conducting audits must be able to accomplish their work on time, as agreed with the customer.

Regional governance and collaboration, particularly in Southeast Asia, have been pivotal in managing the distribution and administration of COVID-19 vaccines, showcasing the importance of coordinated efforts in public health crises (Indahsari & Raharja, 2020). "The efforts to access vaccine candidates involved international cooperation with organizations such as the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), Global Alliance for Vaccine and Immunization (GAVI), and COVAX Facility"(Indahsari & Raharja, 2020). It seeks to understand how the pandemic-induced changes and challenges influence the audit process and the quality of its outcomes. The research is expected to offer valuable insights for auditors, public managers, and policymakers, aiding them in enhancing and adapting audit practices to bolster accountability and transparency in public services, particularly during crises like a pandemic.

## **Literature Review**

### **Audit Procedure**

According to Sawyer et al. (2005), audit procedures are defined as "the techniques that the auditor applies to determine whether operating objectives have been achieved." Boynton and Johnson (2005) describe audit procedures as a series of actions or steps performed by an auditor to gather and evaluate audit evidence, assessing the reliability of an entity's financial information. These procedures include reviewing documents, interviewing management and key personnel, directly observing operations, and performing substantive testing of account balances and transactions. The primary objectives of audit procedures are to identify material risks, assess the effectiveness of internal controls, and determine whether the entity's statements are fairly and accurately presented according to the applicable financial reporting framework. Thus, audit procedures are essential for ensuring that audits are conducted with integrity and independence, producing quality and reliable audit results.

### **E-Audit Procedure**

According to (A. Arens et al., 2020) computer-aided auditing techniques (*e-audit*) are as follows: "The use of computer programs used by auditors to track data, data manipulation, and reporting capabilities is specifically oriented to the auditor's needs." There are several definitions of e-Audit According to (Olasanmi, 2013) states that: "The e-Audit system is not a new inspection system. Examination using information technology has been used in the private sector in various countries. In this sector, the term e-audit is known as *Computer Assisted Audit Techniques* (CAATs). With the use of CAATs will be able to overcome risks of *fraud* and can detect potential activities *fraud*."

### **Audit Fee**

According to (Sukrisno, 2012) *Fee audit* is: "Monetary or in-kind or other forms of service fees provided to or received by a client or other party to obtain an engagement from a client or other party." IAPI issued a decree on July 2, 2008, on how to determine audit fee number KEP.024/IAPI/VII/2008. This regulation regulates the determination of audit fees paid to KAP for the professional services it provides. The decree states that when setting audit fees, public accountants shall consider the following: 1. Client requirements; 2. Statutory obligations and responsibilities; 3. Independence; 4. The level of competence and responsibility inherent in the work performed, as well as the level of complexity; 5. The amount of time required for the public accountant and his staff to properly accomplish the work; and 6. The agreed-upon price determination basis.

### **Pressure Audit Time Pressure**

Time Pressure which has been created so that your Pressure will lead to diminished efficiency, audit effectiveness, audit quality, work satisfaction, and stress levels (Sucahyo & MSc, 2001). According to (Liantih, 2010) time pressure conditions or *Time Pressure* namely: "Conditions under which the auditor is under pressure from the Public Accounting Firm (KAP) where he works to perform the audit within a certain time and budget."

Time pressure consists of two primary components: time budget pressure and deadline pressure (Raghunatan 1991, as cited in Ulum, 2005). Deadline pressure occurs when an auditor is required to complete the audit within a specified timeframe (Herningsih, 2001).

When auditors are faced with time budget pressures, they need to manage time resources efficiently, often by prioritizing the most important tasks and optimizing the audit process. This can include tight scheduling, selecting the most effective audit techniques, and increasing efficiency in the collection and analysis of audit evidence. However, time budget pressures can also pose risks, such as increasing the opportunity to overlook important audit steps or cutting corners in evaluating information.

### **Auditor Skepticism**

Public Accountant Professional Standards / SPAP (IAPI, 2013) states that professional auditor skepticism is a mindset that involves constantly questioning and critically evaluating audit data. Shaub and Lawrence (Shaub & Lawrence, 1996a) Interpret the auditor's Professional skepticism as a decision to meet the professional auditor's duty to prevent, lessen, or hurt the repercussions of another person's behavior. Professional skepticism is incorporated into the professional literature, requiring auditors to assess the possibility of material fraud. Furthermore, it can be understood as an alternative to completing its professional audit tasks to prevent and mitigate the repercussions of others' harm and behavior. Kee and Knox (Kee & Knox, 1970a) in the model "Professional Scepticism of Auditors" states that the professional skepticism of auditors is influenced by several factors: 1. Factors of ethical inclination, 2. Factors of the situation, 3. Experience

About this skepticism, research was conducted (Kee & Knox, 1970b), which depicts it as a result of ethical inclinations, experiences, and situational variables. Michael K. Shaub and Janice E. Lawrence (Shaub & Lawrence, 1996b) indicate that auditors who master situational ethics are more or less tied to professional ethics and can practice

professional skepticism. Situational circumstances play a crucial role in practicing professional auditor skepticism.

### Audit Quality

Rendal J. Elder, etc in Amir Abadi (Arens et al., 2007), KAP utilizes precise audit quality control methods to ensure that generally accepted auditing standards are followed in each audit. This helps meet those criteria consistently at each successor.

*Webster's New International Dictionary* in Mulyadi (Mulyadi, 2014) explains that: "A standard is something determined by the ruler, as a rule, to measure quality, extent, value or quality. If applied in auditing. Auditing standards are a measure of action implementation that is a general guideline for auditors in carrying out audits. Auditing standards also contain the understanding as a standard measure of the quality of auditing services."

### Audit Situation

An audit situation is a situation where there is an audit assignment; the auditor is faced with a situation that contains low-risk (*regularities*) and high-risk circumstances (*irregularities*). *Irregularity* is a situation where there is irregularity or fraud done intentionally. This fraud can involve two things, namely the pressure or encouragement to commit fraud or an opportunity to carry out the fraud. According to research conducted by Rita Anugerah and M. Rasuli (Aritof et al., 2015) on the Effect of Audit Situations, Ethics, Experience, and Expertise on Professional Skepticism Auditors describe audit situation theory as follows: 1. Types of audit situations, 2. Irregularity situations, 3. Audit risk components.

## RESEARCH METHODS

Data gathering strategies for this study included distributing questionnaires to the research sample. The questionnaire distributed consists of a set of statements about problems relating to the object under consideration. The questionnaire is distributed to auditors registered at a public accounting firm based in Bandung Raya. The instruments used in this study are questionnaire instruments for variables X, Y, and Z. This study uses a trial model by using questionnaires as research instruments, so if the results of the instrument trials carried out are valid and reliable, the questionnaire instrument is reused as a research instrument. The *Likert* scale approach is used to measure the variables X, Y, and Z. The variables to be monitored are converted into variable indicators, which are then utilized as processing points to compile instrument items, which can take the form of questions or statements.

Path analysis is used in research data analysis with the following assumptions: 1). The link between the variables to be examined is linear, additive, and casual. 2). The residual variables do not correlate with the variables that came before them, nor with other variables. 3. The variable relationship model can only take a casual or causal path in the same direction. 4. Each variable studied has interval data that comes from the same source.

Analysis of this study the form of the path equation used is as follows:

Model Equation I:  $Y = \rho_1 X_1 + \rho_2 X_2 + \rho_3 X_3 + \rho_4 X_4 + \epsilon_1$

Model Equation II:  $Z = \rho_1 X_1 + \rho_2 X_2 + \rho_3 X_3 + \rho_4 X_4 + \epsilon_1$

Model Equation III:  $Z = \rho Y + \epsilon_1$

Where:  $Y$  = Audit Quality,  $Z$  = Audit Situation (*Covid-19 Pandemic*),  $X_1$  = Application of Audit Procedures,  $X_2$  = Audit Fee,  $X_3$  = *Time Budget Pressure*,  $X_4$  = Auditor Skepticism,  $\rho_{1,2,3,4}$  = Regression Coefficient of each independent variable,  $\epsilon_1$  = Error

From this equation, we will reduce the value of  $Z$  if the values of the independent variable ( $X$ ) and the intervening variable ( $Y$ ) are known.

The t-statistical test is used to determine, namely audit quality through intervening variables, namely the *COVID-19* pandemic situation partially / individually by assuming other factors are constant. The t-test can be done in two ways, namely by comparing with and by looking at the sig value on each variable in the  $t_{count}t_{table}$  Coefficients output table that the SPSS program generates. To determine the level of significance that is by using t-test statistics. In this study, the level of significance used was 0.05 (5%).

In this study, the author uses the second way, namely by looking at the value of sig. in the ANOVA output table generated by the SPSS program. If the value of sig. < 0.05, the conclusion is that both variables together affect the dependent variable, and vice versa.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### The Effect of Audit Procedures on Audit Quality in the *Audit Situation*

The test results reveal that the direct effect of the procedure variable on the audit situation is valued at 0.446 with a significance level of 0.020. Additionally, direct testing between audit procedures and audit quality indicates a value of 0.542 with a significance level of 0.003. This positive and significant direct effect suggests that better-implemented audit procedures lead to higher audit quality. This implies that applying robust audit procedures can enhance audit quality, supporting the attainment of high audit quality standards and boosting the credibility of the audit results. Such credibility is crucial for stakeholders making critical decisions during the *COVID-19* pandemic, which has impacted the economic climate and the operations of various industries and businesses.

The findings of this study align with Eko Darmawan Suwandi's research (Suwandi, 2021), which highlights audit issues influenced by the *Covid-19* pandemic. Analytical processes are employed during audit preparation, fieldwork, completion, evaluation, and reporting (Messier Jr. et al., 2013). Furthermore, this study supports Wan et al.'s (2017) research, which suggests that audit procedures mediate the factors affecting audit quality, indicating that auditors must follow excellent audit processes to achieve high-quality audit results. Although Wan et al.'s study was conducted before the *Covid-19* pandemic; it aimed to provide an overview of how to evaluate audit processes as a mediator of audit quality, emphasizing the importance of following audit procedures to produce results of quality audit.

The influence of audit procedures on audit quality becomes even more critical. A rigorous audit process is essential to ensuring the integrity of financial statements amid the uncertainty caused by the pandemic. Auditors must adapt their methods to address new challenges, such as adjustments to substantive testing procedures and the use of technology to overcome limitations on physical access to client documents and locations. Additionally, changes in business conditions and organizational operating environments necessitate that auditors enhance their understanding of the risks faced by their clients, allowing them to adjust their audit strategies accordingly. Thus, appropriate and effective audit procedures not only ensure compliance with audit standards but also play a vital role in maintaining the quality and reliability of audit results in the dynamically changing conditions during the *COVID-19* pandemic.

### **The Effect of *Audit Fees* on Audit Quality in *Audit Situation***

The test results indicate that the value of the audit fee variable on the audit situation is 0.115 with a significance level of 0.457. The direct test results between audit fees and audit quality show a value of 0.007 with a significance level greater than 0.960, suggesting that while the direct effect is positive, it is not significant. This indicates that the amount of audit fees cannot be used as a benchmark to determine audit quality during the Covid-19 pandemic. Audit procedures remain the most influential factor in determining audit quality during this period. Regardless of the audit fee amount, if the audit procedures are not followed correctly, the audit results will be substandard.

This finding aligns with Damayanti (2019), who concluded that audit fees do not affect audit quality. Audit quality is primarily determined by auditor professionalism, impartiality, and adherence to audit norms and laws. However, this study contrasts with Munidewi et al. (2021), that audit fees had a positive impact on audit quality. Additionally, it contradicts Muslim et al. (2020), who discovered that audit fees have a negative and minor impact on audit quality. This is because high audit fees can lead auditors to feel dependent on their clients, making them hesitant to challenge client opinions, even if they contradict public accountant examination requirements. The hypothesis test results also show that the risk of audit has a negative and insignificant effect on the quality of audit due to the increased risk of audit errors, which lowers audit quality. This can occur due to material errors in the audit process when the integrity of client management is difficult to assess, especially when management has specific objectives that they wish to achieve through inaccurate financial statements. The amount of audit fees does not necessarily impact audit quality, as numerous factors must be considered when performing an audit, such as the time required and unexpected complications.

The role of audit fees on the quality of audits is a significant concern. While audit fees may influence the resources available for audits, ensuring high audit quality remains a top priority. The financial challenges faced by organizations during the pandemic may put additional pressure on auditors to complete their work quickly and efficiently. However, the emphasis on efficiency must be balanced with ensuring that audits are thorough. In this challenging environment, maintaining audit integrity and independence, along with focusing on high audit quality, remains crucial to ensuring the reliability of financial information amid the uncertainty caused by COVID-19.

### **The Effect of *Time Budget Pressure* on Audit Quality in the *Covid-19 Pandemic Audit Situation***

The test results show that the direct effect value of the time budget pressure variable on the COVID-19 pandemic audit situation is 0.010 with a significance value of 0.963. Direct testing shows a value of 0.028 with a significance of 0.880, which means that this direct effect is positive but not significant. The test results explain that time budget pressure in the context of audits during the COVID-19 pandemic aims to reduce audit costs, where the faster the audit completion time, the smaller the audit implementation costs. Time budget pressure in the Covid-19 pandemic audit situation affects audit quality both directly and indirectly, but the effect is not considerable because time pressure forces auditors to complete work as soon as feasible according to the established time budget.

This study's conclusions differ from those of (Munidewi et al., 2021) who discovered that time budget pressure had a detrimental influence on quality. According to the study, time constraints do not have an impact on the quality of audit outbreak at a Bali-based audit firm.

This demonstrates that during the COVID-19 pandemic, auditors face time constraints in their responsibilities. Despite the heavy demand, audit quality was not compromised.

Time-budget pressure has become a critical factor affecting audit quality. The pandemic has accelerated changes in the business environment and operational practices of organizations, resulting in the need to complete audits quickly without sacrificing quality. Time budget pressure can force auditors to speed up the audit process, increasing the risk of overlooking important or in-depth audit steps. In addition, difficulties in accessing relevant data and documents due to physical restrictions during the pandemic may put additional pressure on auditors to complete audit work within set time limits. Therefore, it is important for auditors to ensure that time budget pressures do not compromise the integrity and accuracy of the audit and to still prioritize the application of rigorous and comprehensive audit procedures. In this challenging situation, efficient time management and a balance between efficiency and quality are key in ensuring that audits remain effective and relevant in providing reliable information amidst the uncertainty caused pandemic.

### **The Effect of Auditor Skepticism on Audit Quality in the *Covid-19 Pandemic Audit Situation***

The test results indicated that the direct influence of the auditor skepticism variable on the COVID-19 pandemic audit situation was 0.382, with a significance value of 0.018. Direct testing between auditors' skepticism and audit quality showed a value of 0.063, with a significance value of 0.659. Although this direct influence was positive, it was not significant. The results suggest that auditor skepticism is crucial for obtaining accurate information or audit evidence, thereby improving the quality of audit conclusions. Despite the insignificant test results, the calculation of the correlation of determination indicated that auditor skepticism had a positive effect. The relatively minor impact was due to remote audit procedures necessitated by compliance with Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) and work-from-home regulations during the pandemic.

Rahmat Zuhdi (2013) supports this by stating that audit quality is not significantly affected by auditors' professional skepticism. However, the findings of this study differ from those of Anugerah & Akbar (2014), Sudrajat et al. (2015), Mufidah (2015), and Afriyani et al. (2014), who found that auditors' professional skepticism significantly impacts audit quality. Professional skepticism is essential during audit assignments, enabling auditors to continuously question and critically evaluate the audit evidence obtained. Auditors who apply professional skepticism can produce higher-quality audit results, suggesting that auditors' professional skepticism considerably impacts audit quality.

Auditor skepticism plays a vital role in ensuring audit quality. The pandemic presents new challenges, including increased risks of financial statement manipulation or fraud due to economic pressures. A skeptical auditor will critically evaluate the evidence obtained, seek sufficient evidence, and ask relevant questions of the client to ensure the validity and reliability of the financial information. High auditor skepticism can also lead to more thorough examinations of high-risk areas and consideration of the implications of changes in business and operational conditions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, skeptical auditors not only play a crucial role in detecting potential fraud or material errors but also in ensuring that audits are conducted comprehensively and accurately amidst the uncertainty caused by the pandemic. Therefore, maintaining an appropriate level of skepticism and performing audits with integrity and independence remains essential for ensuring the reliability of financial information during times of crisis.



### **The Effect of *the Covid-19 Pandemic Audit Situation* on Audit Quality**

The test results suggest that the pandemic audit circumstance variable has a direct effect value of 0.321 on audit quality, with a significance level of 0.040. These findings indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic audit environment acts as an intervening variable between independent factors and the dependent variable. This immediate effect is positive and significant. The statistical value demonstrates that as the audit situation variable improves, so does audit quality. The results explain that the audit situation impacts audit engagements, requiring auditors to continue performing audit procedures, setting audit fees, budgeting time, and maintaining skepticism according to audit standards, ensuring high-quality results while adhering to regulations to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Government regulations must be followed by auditors and auditees, but this situation creates limitations in performing audit procedures, particularly since auditors cannot visit clients in person to collect audit evidence. Consequently, remote auditing becomes necessary, utilizing computer-assisted audits and online methods through advanced information technology to obtain audit evidence.

This is corroborated by Eko Darmawan Suwandi and Akrimi (2021), who found that the impact of COVID-19 on the quality of audits from the auditor's perspective is substantial. Their findings highlight significant effects on audit expenses, activities, business continuity planning, human resources, and staff compensation. As a result, the pandemic has significantly influenced audit quality.

Research by Reyes et al. (2021) using a study also concludes that COVID-19 necessitates regulatory improvements (in terms of time and cost) and solutions to auditors' problems (related to experience, routines, and clients). They assert that the quality of the audit is not solely based on the audit report as a product but also on the long-term involvement of the report's output. The new normal lifestyle, characterized by working from home (WFH), wearing masks, hand washing, and social distancing (known as 3M in Indonesia), has had little impact on audit activities. Adjustments in fees, time, regulations, clients, routines, and experience are important for maintaining audit quality in this context.

The impact of the pandemic audit situation on the quality of audits is a critical concern in contemporary audit practice. The pandemic has significantly altered the business landscape, introducing new challenges that affect organizational operations and auditing practices. Amid economic uncertainty and rapid changes in the operating environment, auditors face additional pressure to adapt their methods. This situation may influence their ability and willingness to identify relevant risks, gather sufficient evidence, and thoroughly evaluate financial information. Therefore, auditors need to adapt their approaches to the unique conditions of the pandemic while maintaining high standards of audit integrity, independence, and quality.

### **The Effect of Audit Procedures, Audit Fees, *Time Budget Pressure*, and Auditor Skepticism Together on Audit Quality during the *Covid-19 Pandemic Audit Period***

The test findings demonstrate that the combined effect of the independent variables (simultaneous test / F test) on the intervening variable is 13.763, with a significance level of 0.000. This indicates that the audit condition acts as a link between the independent variables and the dependent variable. Further testing shows that the direct influence of the independent and intervening variables on audit quality is also 13.763, with a significance level of 0.000.

The situation during the pandemic introduces new complexities to audit practices, presenting auditors with unprecedented challenges. In this context, it is crucial for auditors to comprehensively consider how these factors interact and affect overall audit quality. A rigorous and proactive audit process, supported by adequate audit fees and effective time management, will help mitigate the impact of the pressures of the time budget and enhance the auditor's ability to maintain an appropriate level of skepticism. Therefore, the close cooperation of all these elements can positively impact audit quality.

## CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion of this study emphasizes the significance of various factors influencing audit quality within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in public service management. The research identifies that audit procedures, audit fees, time budget pressures, and auditor skepticism exert significant influences on audit quality. The simultaneous testing reveals that the audit condition during the pandemic acts as an intervening that links these independent factors to audit quality. The pandemic necessitates auditors to adjust their methods and techniques, and these adaptations directly influence the quality of audit outcomes. Adhering strictly to audit procedures, even under constraints of time and budget, proves crucial in upholding audit integrity and precision.

Furthermore, this study shows that although audit fees and time-budget pressures have an influence, audit quality is highly dependent on auditor professionalism and skepticism. Auditors who maintain their professional skepticism and follow strict audit procedures can produce high-quality audits despite the challenges of the pandemic. This conclusion emphasizes the need for auditors to stick to professional standards and continuously adapt to changing conditions, especially during a crisis such as a pandemic. Public service management needs to ensure that audits remain an effective tool to maintain transparency and accountability.

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