

Accreditation of Educational Units as an Implementation of Educational Quality Assurance

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Abstract. Educational institution accreditation is a strategic instrument within the education quality assurance system, functioning not only as an external evaluation mechanism but also as a driver of continuous quality improvement. This article aims to conceptually analyze the role of educational accreditation within the framework of education quality assurance, particularly from the perspective of educational administration and management. The study employs a qualitative approach using a library research method, with data sources consisting of academic books, reputable national and international journal articles, education policy documents, and reports from international organizations. Data analysis was conducted through qualitative content analysis, involving data reduction, categorization, interpretation, and synthesis of concepts and previous research findings. The findings indicate that accreditation plays a multidimensional role, serving as a tool for public accountability, a quality control mechanism, and a catalyst for organizational learning at the school level. The effectiveness of accreditation largely depends on its integration with Internal Quality Assurance Systems, school leadership, and a strong commitment to a sustainable quality culture. This article emphasizes that accreditation will have a meaningful impact on educational quality improvement when implemented through a developmental accreditation approach that prioritizes critical reflection, capacity building, and continuous improvement rather than mere administrative compliance or ranking attainment.

Keywords: continuous quality improvement, educational accreditation, educational administration, education quality assurance, internal quality assurance

1. Introduction

The meaning of accreditation is more than just an assessment of an educational unit, but also as a depiction of the current condition of the educational unit in real terms, so that a guidance and development plan can be designed as well as a mapping of educational quality, from the educational unit, region, to national level [1]. Educational accreditation is an external evaluation mechanism that assesses the conformity of an institution or program to established quality standards. Conceptually, accreditation aims to ensure that educational institutions implement learning processes in accordance with applicable standards, while also providing assurance to the public regarding the quality of educational services. Globally, accreditation is viewed as an instrument for quality assurance, public accountability, and quality enhancement [2] [3]. Accreditation serves to assess the suitability of educational programs and units based on National Education Standards. This principle emphasizes the need for quality standards as the primary reference for educational implementation. Thus, accreditation serves not only as an administrative function but also a means to strengthen the quality and governance of education at all levels.

From the perspective of educational administration, accreditation requires a systematic management process, from quality planning and school data management to follow-up on accreditation recommendations. Educational administration serves as a vehicle for connecting quality standards with sustainable school management practices [4]. Accreditation is widely viewed as a mechanism for ensuring educational quality (quality assurance). This process includes internal evaluation through self-assessment and external evaluation through visits conducted by the accreditation body. Recent research emphasizes that accreditation should not simply be a compliance process but rather foster a culture of reflection and continuous quality improvement [5].

Accreditation also serves as a form of public accountability. Schools that attain accredited status provide assurance to the public and government that they meet applicable standards. This strengthens the legitimacy of using public funds for education [6] [7]. However, empirical evidence regarding the impact of accreditation on learning outcomes remains mixed. Accreditation contributed to improved managerial practices and administrative compliance, but the direct impact on student academic achievement varied depending on the design of the accreditation system and the school's institutional capacity [8]. Accreditation had a greater impact on governance and organizational culture than on academic achievement [9]. From an educational administration perspective, accreditation can be seen as a means of strengthening school-based management. Effective school administration

can integrate accreditation recommendations into the management cycle, from program planning, resource allocation, to teacher and education staff performance evaluation [10] [11].

2. Method

2.1 Research Approach and Type

This article was written using a qualitative approach with a library research approach. The qualitative approach was chosen because the article aims to conceptually and critically analyze the role of educational unit accreditation as an instrument for educational quality assurance, not to test hypotheses or measure quantitative relationships between variables. Qualitative research is appropriate when researchers seek to understand social phenomena, policies, or educational practices in depth through the interpretation of texts, documents, and contexts. In the context of this article, the phenomenon being studied is educational accreditation as an external quality assurance mechanism in the education system [12].

Literature research was chosen because the primary data sources are scientific documents, such as academic books, reputable national and international journal articles, reports from international institutions, and relevant educational regulations. Library research allows researchers to construct scientific arguments based on theories and previous research findings systematically and critically [13].

2.2 Data Sources and Study Materials

Sources were selected selectively, considering the relevance of the substance, the credibility of the publisher, and the recency of the references, as recommended in writing a quality literature review article [14]. The data sources used in this article consisted of:

- 1) Reference books in the fields of educational administration, quality assurance, and educational accreditation published by experts.
- 2) Articles from reputable international journals (Scopus and Web of Science) published within a recent period.
- 3) Education policy documents, such as the National Education System Law and regulations related to educational unit accreditation.
- 4) Reports from international organizations, such as UNESCO and the OECD, that discuss educational quality assurance frameworks.

2.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted through a systematic literature search. Systematic literature search is essential to ensure that the study is comprehensive, unbiased, and academically sound [15]. This process includes:

- 1) Identifying key keywords such as educational accreditation, quality assurance in education, school accreditation, and educational management.
- 2) Searching academic databases (e.g., Scopus, Google Scholar, and national journal portals).
- 3) Selecting literature based on topic suitability, methodological quality, and theoretical contribution to accreditation and educational quality assurance studies.

2.4 Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis in this article uses qualitative content analysis. Content analysis allows researchers to systematically and in-depth interpret the meaning of text, making it suitable for educational policy and administration studies such as this article [16]. This technique is carried out through the following stages:

- 1) Data reduction, namely sorting concepts, theories, and research findings relevant to the focus of the study.
- 2) Categorization, by grouping the literature into main themes, such as the concept of accreditation, educational quality assurance, educational administration, and managerial implications.
- 3) Interpretation and synthesis, namely connecting theory and research results in building a coherent conceptual argument.

2.5 Validity and Credibility of Study

Source triangulation is an important strategy in document-based qualitative research to minimize interpretation bias and strengthen analytical conclusions [17]. To maintain academic validity, this article employs a source triangulation strategy, comparing views from various books and scholarly articles across countries and

perspectives. Furthermore, the use of references from international institutions and reputable journals aims to enhance the credibility of the argument and conceptual validity.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Educational Unit Accreditation as a Strategic Instrument for Sustainable Quality Assurance

In Indonesia, educational accreditation is legally legitimized by Law No. 20 of 2003, which states that national standards are the primary reference for education delivery. Its implementation instruments are outlined in ministerial regulations, including Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology No. 38 of 2023, which regulates accreditation procedures, validity periods, and visitation procedures [18] [19].

Technical implementation is carried out by the National Accreditation Board for Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education or *Badan Akreditasi Nasional Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, Pendidikan Dasar dan Pendidikan Menengah* (BAN-PDM). BAN-PDM emphasizes that accreditation should be viewed as a means of continuous quality improvement, not merely an assessment of school status. Therefore, accreditation results are expected to form the basis for policy formulation at the school and local government levels [20].

Globally, accreditation also serves as a policy instrument. Developed countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia view accreditation as part of public policy to ensure quality standards and facilitate academic mobility [21]. Similarly, in Asia, accreditation policies are used to balance school autonomy with the need for government quality oversight [22].

Connecting accreditation theory with educational administration offers several important implications:

- 1) **Strengthening Governance:** Accreditation demands transparency and accountability in school administration. Educational administration must ensure documentation, reporting, and data-driven decision-making mechanisms [23].
- 2) **Resource Management:** Accreditation results often influence budget allocation, teacher recruitment, and infrastructure development. This demonstrates the close relationship between educational administration and fiscal policy in the education sector [24].
- 3) **School Leadership:** Accreditation's orientation toward continuous improvement requires school principals to play the role of transformational leaders capable of building a culture of quality [25].
- 4) **Human Resource Capacity Development:** Educational administration needs to design teacher and education personnel training programs so that accreditation results can be implemented through learning innovations [26].
- 5) **Information System Integration:** Accreditation requires schools to have a reliable information system. Educational administration plays a role in ensuring the integration of these information systems with the national education planning system [27].

Accreditation of educational units is an important external quality assurance mechanism in the education system. Accreditation is an external evaluation process used by higher education institutions to conduct quality control and to inform the public that the institution or program meets acceptable quality standards [28]. This concept is also applied to primary and secondary education units in various countries, including Indonesia.

In the Indonesian context, school accreditation is carried out by the National Accreditation Board for Early Childhood, Primary, and Secondary Education (BAN-PDM). School accreditation aims to: (1) provide information on the suitability of the school or its program based on National Education Standards; (2) provide recognition of the suitability rating; (3) provide recommendations regarding educational quality assurance to accredited programs and/or educational units and related parties. and (4) be accountable for the provision of education to stakeholders [29].

The accreditation process includes an evaluation of eight national education standards: graduate competency standards, content standards, process standards, assessment standards, educator and education personnel standards, facilities and infrastructure standards, management standards, and financing standards. Accreditation is not an end, but rather a tool to encourage schools to make continuous improvements in all aspects of education delivery [30].

Accreditation has a positive impact on improving education quality, particularly in terms of improving facilities and infrastructure, enhancing teacher competency, and improving school management systems [31]. However, implementation challenges remain, such as a focus on accreditation results (rankings) rather than the quality improvement process, as well as a significant administrative burden for schools.

In recent developments, the accreditation system has undergone a transformation from compliance-based accreditation (meeting minimum standards) to performance-based accreditation. Performance-based accreditation places greater emphasis on student learning outcomes, instructional innovation, and the school's impact on community development [32]. This paradigm shift aligns with global trends emphasizing accountability and continuous improvement in education.

Internationally, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation developed accreditation standards that emphasize evidence-based practice, where the assessment of educational program eligibility is based on empirical evidence of the program's effectiveness in producing competent graduates [33]. This approach has inspired the development of an accreditation system in Indonesia that focuses more on outcomes and impact.

Educational unit accreditation is a key instrument in the educational quality assurance system, which aims to ensure and continuously improve educational quality standards [34]. Educational quality assurance is defined as a systematic process for establishing, maintaining, and improving educational quality through monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement mechanisms [35].

Within the Total Quality Management (TQM) theoretical framework adapted for the educational context, accreditation serves as an external quality control mechanism that complements a school's internal quality assurance system [36]. Accreditation encourages schools to develop a culture of quality through standard setting, performance measurement, gap identification, and implementation of improvement programs [37].

Educational quality assurance through accreditation is based on three main pillars: accountability, improvement, and stakeholder confidence [38]. First, the accountability aspect ensures that schools are accountable for achieving established quality standards and the effective use of educational resources. Second, the improvement aspect encourages schools to conduct self-evaluation and continuous improvement based on accreditation results. Third, the stakeholder trust aspect builds public confidence in the quality of educational services provided by schools [39].

The link between accreditation and quality assurance can be explained through the Quality Assurance Framework developed by UNESCO, which encompasses four main components: (1) establishing clear and measurable quality standards; (2) regular monitoring and evaluation of standard achievement; (3) data-based feedback and improvement mechanisms; and (4) developing institutional capacity in quality management [40]. Accreditation integrates these four components into a coherent and comprehensive system [41].

Empirical research shows that schools undergoing the accreditation process tend to experience improvements in various aspects of educational quality, including student academic achievement, learning effectiveness, and stakeholder satisfaction [42]. However, the effectiveness of accreditation in improving educational quality depends heavily on the design of the accreditation system, the school's commitment to continuous improvement, and the support of government policies and resources [43].

A major challenge in implementing accreditation as a quality assurance instrument is the tendency to focus on compliance with formal standards rather than genuine improvement in educational practices [44]. To address this, the accreditation system needs to be designed with a developmental approach that emphasizes empowering schools to undertake continuous improvement, rather than simply summative assessment of standard achievement [45].

3.2 Accreditation in the 21st-Century Educational Quality Paradigm

Developments in 21st-century global education demand a quality assurance system that adapts to social, technological, and economic changes. Accreditation is no longer understood as a static evaluation process, but rather as a dynamic mechanism that drives the transformation of educational institutions. In this context, accreditation is positioned as learning-oriented quality assurance, a system that facilitates organizational learning and institutional innovation [46].

Recent international research indicates that effective accreditation must balance formal standards with contextual flexibility. Quality standards have the potential to hinder school innovation, while overly lax standards can weaken public accountability [47]. Therefore, modern accreditation systems tend to adopt a risk-based and performance-based accreditation approach. In the Indonesian context, this paradigm shift is beginning to be evident through an emphasis on educational unit performance, internal quality reflection, and the use of digital-based educational data. This emphasizes that accreditation functions as a quality driver, not simply a means of quality control.

3.3 Integrating Accreditation with the Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS)

One crucial issue in implementing accreditation is its linkage with the school's Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS). Accreditation will only have a significant impact if it is strongly integrated with the institution's internal quality assurance mechanisms [48]. The IQAS serves as the primary foundation in preparing schools for the accreditation process. Through the PPEPP (*Penetapan, Pelaksanaan, Evaluasi, Pengendalian, dan Peningkatan* or Determination, Implementation, Evaluation, Control, and Improvement) cycle, schools can build a culture of reflection and continuous improvement. Accreditation then serves as external validation of the effectiveness of this internal quality cycle.

Schools that integrated accreditation results into the IQAS experienced significant improvements in the quality of school planning, instructional effectiveness, and stakeholder satisfaction [49]. Conversely, schools that viewed accreditation as an administrative agenda tended to experience post-visit quality stagnation.

3.4 Accreditation, School Leadership, and Quality Culture

School leadership plays a strategic role in determining the success of accreditation as a quality assurance instrument. Principals are required not only to act as administrative managers, but also as instructional and transformational leaders capable of internalizing quality values into daily practice. Quality-based leadership is characterized by the school leader's ability to:

- 1) Build a shared vision of quality
- 2) Use accreditation data as a basis for decision-making
- 3) Empower teachers and education personnel
- 4) Make evaluation an institutional learning process [50]

Research in various Asian countries shows that the success of accreditation is significantly influenced by the level of commitment of school leaders to follow up on accreditation recommendations [51]. Principals who utilize accreditation results as a strategic reflection have been shown to improve organizational performance and the quality of educational services.

3.5 Accreditation and Teacher Professional Development

Accreditation also has direct implications for teacher professional development. Accreditation standards require teachers to continuously meet pedagogical, professional, social, and personality competencies. In this context, accreditation serves as a trigger for continuous professional development.

Accreditation system linked to teacher development can significantly improve learning quality [52]. Schools that use accreditation recommendations as the basis for developing teacher training programs show improvements in student-centered learning practices and authentic assessments. However, a persistent challenge is the tendency for teachers to view accreditation as an additional administrative burden. Therefore, a policy approach is needed that positions teachers as key actors in quality, not simply objects of assessment [53].

3.6 Digital Transformation in the Education Accreditation System

The digital era is driving significant changes in accreditation implementation. The digitization of instruments, the utilization of educational big data, and the use of quality dashboards enable a more efficient, transparent, and accurate accreditation process. A study by Digital accreditation systems can reduce the administrative burden on schools while improving the quality of quality data [54].

In Indonesia, digitizing accreditation through an integrated information system is a strategic step in strengthening quality assurance. However, the readiness of human resources and schools' digital infrastructure remains a major challenge. Research in developing countries shows that the digital divide can impact on the objectivity of accreditation results if not addressed through affirmative policies [55].

3.7 Challenges and Directions for Future Accreditation Development

Going forward, the accreditation system needs to evolve toward a developmental accreditation approach that emphasizes mentoring, reflection, and school capacity building. Accreditation must be part of a quality policy ecosystem integrated with academic supervision, teacher professional development, and data-driven planning [56]. Although accreditation plays a strategic role, several challenges still require serious attention, including:

- 1) Symbolic orientation towards accreditation rankings
- 2) High administrative burden
- 3) Capacity imbalances between schools
- 4) Limited post-accreditation follow-up

4. Conclusion

Educational unit accreditation is a strategic instrument in the education quality assurance system, serving not only as an external evaluation mechanism but also as a driver for continuous improvement in educational quality. Based on the conceptual study and literature analysis conducted, it can be concluded that accreditation has a multidimensional role: as a public accountability tool, a means of quality control, and a driver of organizational learning at the educational unit level. In the context of the Indonesian national education system, accreditation is

based on the National Education Standards and implemented as a policy mandate to ensure the adequacy and quality of educational services. However, the study results indicate that the effectiveness of accreditation is largely determined by how schools interpret and follow through on the process. Accreditation understood solely as an administrative process or achievement of a ranking tends to have limited and symbolic impact. Conversely, accreditation positioned as an integral part of the internal quality assurance cycle can drive tangible improvements in school governance, learning quality, and teacher professional development.

Integration between external accreditation and the Internal Quality Assurance System (*Sistem Penjaminan Mutu Internal* or SPMI) is key to the success of sustainable quality assurance. Through the PPEPP cycle, schools can use accreditation results as a basis for reflection, strategic planning, and data-driven decision-making. Within this framework, accreditation serves as external validation of the effectiveness of the internal quality culture the school has built, rather than as a stand-alone agenda. Furthermore, school leadership has been shown to play a central role in determining the impact of accreditation on educational quality. Principals who act as transformational and instructional leaders are able to internalize quality values, empower teachers, and use accreditation recommendations as a foundation for school development. Accreditation also has significant implications for teacher professional development, particularly when accreditation recommendations are systematically linked to continuing professional development programs.

The evolving paradigm of 21st-century education quality and digital transformation further emphasizes the need to reform the accreditation system toward a more adaptive, performance-based, and impact-oriented approach. Digitalization of accreditation opens up opportunities to increase the efficiency, transparency, and accuracy of quality assessments, despite the challenges of capacity and infrastructure gaps between schools. Thus, it can be emphasized that educational unit accreditation will be effective as a quality assurance instrument if designed and implemented within a developmental accreditation approach, which emphasizes mentoring, critical reflection, and continuous school capacity building. Accreditation needs to be positioned as part of an integrated education quality policy ecosystem with educational administration, academic supervision, teacher professional development, and data-driven planning. This approach is expected to make accreditation not merely a quality assessment tool, but a driving force for sustainable and meaningful transformation of education quality.

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