



The role of school accreditation in improving educational quality

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ABSTRACT

School accreditation has often been understood as merely an assessment and administrative fulfillment mechanism, resulting in its suboptimal contribution to improving educational quality. This situation requires implementing a quality management approach to strengthen the role of accreditation as an instrument for continuous improvement. This study aims to analyze the relationship between school accreditation and educational quality by applying Total Quality Management (TQM) principles in three A-accredited public junior high schools in Banjarmasin City. The study used a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and a review of accreditation documents. The results indicate that accreditation serves not only as an external evaluation but also encourages facility improvements, strengthens the learning process, and improves student achievement when integrated with the principles of continuous improvement and stakeholder involvement, as in TQM. However, the implementation of this integration still faces obstacles, including limited funding, resistance from some teachers, and disparities in facilities and infrastructure. Strengthening the link between accreditation and TQM could serve as a model for sustainable educational quality assurance.

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ABSTRAK

Akreditasi sekolah selama ini kerap dipahami sebatas mekanisme penilaian dan pemenuhan administrasi, sehingga kontribusinya terhadap peningkatan mutu pendidikan belum optimal. Kondisi ini menuntut penerapan pendekatan manajemen mutu yang mampu menguatkan peran akreditasi sebagai instrumen perbaikan berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis keterkaitan antara akreditasi sekolah dan mutu pendidikan melalui penerapan prinsip Total Quality Management (TQM) pada tiga SMP Negeri terakreditasi A di Kota Banjarmasin. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi, serta telaah dokumen akreditasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa akreditasi berperan tidak hanya sebagai evaluasi eksternal, tetapi juga mendorong perbaikan fasilitas, penguatan proses pembelajaran, dan peningkatan prestasi murid ketika diintegrasikan dengan prinsip perbaikan berkelanjutan dan keterlibatan seluruh pemangku kepentingan sebagaimana dalam TQM. Namun, implementasi integrasi tersebut masih menghadapi kendala berupa keterbatasan pendanaan, resistensi sebagian guru, serta ketimpangan sarana dan prasarana. Penguatan keterkaitan antara akreditasi dan TQM berpotensi menjadi model penjaminan mutu pendidikan yang berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: akreditasi sekolah; mutu pendidikan; Total Quality Management; TQM

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INTRODUCTION

The quality of education plays a crucial role in developing human resources capable of adapting and contributing optimally to national development. Educational quality serves as the cornerstone of national progress and is a key indicator of fostering outstanding, competitive, and globally competitive human resources. Efforts to improve the quality of education in Indonesia still face major challenges, including limited infrastructure, uneven distribution of teachers, and a weak system of continuous evaluation in educational institutions (Asy'ari et al., 2021).

According to an article titled "BAN-S/M Accredited 5,018 Schools in 2020" from Antara News (2020), approximately 23.4% of schools/madrasah received an A accreditation and 49.4% received a B accreditation, bringing the total proportion of schools achieving an A or B accreditation to nearly 73% that year, while the remainder were ranked lower or were not yet accredited (accessed on: <https://www.antaranews.com/berita/1908424/ban-s-m-akreditasi-sebanyak-5018-sekolah-pada-2020>). However, another article titled "Number of New Students in Private Elementary Schools Rises Sharply" from Kompas (2025) notes that the proportion of schools that have received an A accreditation is relatively low at the national level, with only about 20.7% of public elementary schools and 28.4% of private elementary schools achieving that rating (accessed on: <https://www.kompas.id/artikel/jumlah-murid-baru-di-sd-swasta-meningkat-tajam>). This situation indicates that the majority of schools in Indonesia still hold accreditation below grade A, particularly in areas with limited human resources and educational infrastructure. Accreditation serves as a form of accountability for educational institutions in the conduct of their activities (Komara & Yustikasari et al., 2025).

School accreditation serves as an external quality assurance mechanism administered by the National Accreditation Board for Schools and Madrasahs (BAN-S/M). School and madrasah accreditation serves as an important means of communicating information regarding the suitability and quality of their programs (Wahyudi et al., 2025). Accreditation also serves as a guide for quality improvement efforts and the formulation of school/madrasah development strategies (Dewi & Ali, 2020). This process evaluates the quality and effectiveness of educational programs based on national education standards. Accreditation plays a strategic role in encouraging schools to improve their governance, teaching and learning processes, and educational outcomes (Saad, 2020). However, its implementation is often merely administrative and has not yet fully addressed the substance of quality improvement on the ground (Muslihah et al., 2024).

Madrasah accreditation results are directly proportional to educational quality outcomes, particularly in the areas of school management and teacher professionalism (Susetyo & Athiyah, 2021). Schools with an average accreditation grade of A have student competency levels that are 25–30% higher than those of schools with accreditation grades B or C. This indicates that accreditation serves not only as a formal evaluation but can also act as a driver of institutional performance improvement when implemented effectively. To strengthen the quality improvement process, the Total Quality Management (TQM) approach is increasingly being adopted in the field of education. TQM emphasizes continuous improvement and the involvement of all school stakeholders in fostering a culture of quality (Rini et al., 2024). In

the context of education, students and parents are regarded as customers who are entitled to receive the best possible service. The implementation of TQM principles encourages schools to conduct regular evaluations, set performance standards, and enhance the professionalism of their teaching staff (Azizah & Witri, 2021).

The integration of accreditation and TQM is considered capable of strengthening the educational quality assurance system. Accreditation provides a formal framework and evaluation indicators, while TQM fosters a culture of quality that emphasizes collective responsibility for quality (Nabila et al., 2025). Schools that effectively implement TQM achieve higher graduation rates and student satisfaction, as reflected in improved accreditation scores (Nuzula et al., 2024). Therefore, the collaboration between these two approaches has the potential to accelerate overall improvements in educational quality.

Nevertheless, several studies still identify challenges. Most madrasahs face difficulties in meeting accreditation requirements due to limited funding and a lack of support from local governments (Asy'ari et al., 2021). This situation has created a significant quality gap between urban and rural schools. Therefore, recent research has examined the empirical relationship between accreditation and educational quality through an integrative approach that incorporates TQM principles. This approach focuses not only on meeting formal standards but also on creating a data-driven system of continuous improvement that involves the participation of all stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, and the community. Accreditation is no longer merely an administrative formality but has become a strategic tool for fostering a sustainable culture of educational quality. (Wahyudi et al., 2025).

Issues regarding the low effectiveness of the accreditation process and the suboptimal implementation of TQM principles in schools prompted the researcher to conduct this study to examine the role of school accreditation in relation to the quality of education delivery in schools. This study is expected to provide insights into how the integration of accreditation and TQM can mutually reinforce each other in improving the quality of education in junior high schools (SMP).

LITERATURE REVIEW

School Accreditation as a Quality Assurance Tool

School accreditation is a form of external quality assurance that ensures educational programs are conducted in accordance with established national standards. School accreditation is also defined as a comprehensive evaluation of the suitability and performance of educational institutions and/or programs, conducted as a form of public accountability (Yulaekah et al., 2022). Accreditation serves as a guarantee of quality because the evaluation process covers aspects of management, curriculum, facilities, and infrastructure, as well as learning services (Nabila et al., 2025). Accreditation has a significant impact on improving school governance and enhancing student learning outcomes, particularly in secondary school (Malik et al., 2025).

The importance of accreditation varies according to the needs of different stakeholders, as its overarching goal is to improve the quality of education. In the context of enhancing educational services, the implementation of accreditation has a significant impact, fostering

public trust, promoting public accountability, improving educational quality, and enhancing the competitiveness of graduates (Febrianti & Syukri, 2023). Accreditation plays a strategic role in assessing educational quality across regions, particularly in areas with resource disparities (Datuk & Arifin, 2023). The accreditation process also encourages schools to improve their documentation and learning administration systems as part of a continuous quality audit (Iskamto et al., 2022).

An upgrade in accreditation status is not always accompanied by substantive improvements such as a culture of quality, teacher professionalism, or student satisfaction (Fadhilah et al., 2024). In other words, accreditation often remains merely an administrative label rather than a tool for transformation. Therefore, the success of accreditation depends heavily on how schools follow up on the assessment results with ongoing internal improvements (Malik et al., 2025). Therefore, accreditation can serve as a tool for transforming the quality of education if it is carried out reflectively and does not stop at the formal process.

The Implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) in Education

In the context of education, TQM is a comprehensive quality management approach that emphasizes continuous improvement and stakeholder involvement. TQM focuses on continuous improvement through a cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up on quality improvement (Hasnadi, 2021). This principle is applied to create educational institutions that are adaptive, efficient, and focused on student satisfaction as their "primary customers." Therefore, the application of TQM principles in vocational education is crucial for addressing global competition and meeting the increasingly complex demands of the job market (Indadihayati & Hariyanto, 2023).

The implementation of TQM in Islamic educational institutions can improve the quality of the learning process by up to 25% compared to schools that do not implement TQM (Nawawi & La'alang, 2020). This approach is effective because it involves all members of the school community, including teachers, school staff, students, and parents, in efforts to maintain quality (Abaimuhtar & Yasin, 2024). Through the implementation of TQM, Islamic educational institutions can develop curricula aligned with industry needs, provide appropriate training for teaching staff, and facilitate the holistic development of students' potential (Sholeh et al., 2024).

In addition, TQM emphasizes the importance of a quality culture that is ingrained in the behavior of the entire school community. Institutions that integrate TQM with knowledge management are able to strengthen internal communication and expedite the accreditation process (Zuanda et al., 2024). However, the implementation of TQM in schools cannot be equated with that in industry, as the education sector involves different emotional and cultural complexities (Susanto et al., 2024). Therefore, the implementation of TQM must be context-specific, tailored to the characteristics of the institution and the culture of the educational organization.

Integrating Accreditation and TQM to Improve Educational Quality

Currently, a school can be considered high-quality if it produces high-quality graduates; if the opposite is true, the institution's enrollment rate will decline, and interest in enrolling will also be low (Munir et al., 2023). The collaboration between accreditation and TQM is viewed as an effective strategy for building a sustainable educational quality assurance system. The integration of the two can transform the accreditation process from a mere external evaluation into a systematic internal improvement initiative (Jannah & Arifin, 2025). Madrasahs that implement TQM-based self-evaluation demonstrate greater readiness for accreditation and an enhanced organizational quality culture (Janna et al., 2024).

The integration of quality assessment and TQM can enhance the competitiveness of educational institutions nationwide, particularly by strengthening internal controls and stakeholder engagement (Maulidiyah, 2025). In this context, accreditation serves as an entry point for schools to reflect on their quality management systems, while TQM provides a framework to ensure that improvement processes continue on an ongoing basis. In addition to conceptual considerations, empirical findings also underscore the relevance of this integration. Schools that implement TQM as part of their accreditation process have seen a 15% increase in their accreditation scores over two years, alongside rising levels of student and parent satisfaction (Nabila et al., 2025). The implementation of kaizen (continuous small improvements) in the accreditation system has increased school management efficiency by up to 20% (Zuanda et al., 2024).

Therefore, integrating accreditation and TQM creates a synergistic relationship: accreditation provides a formal framework for quality assurance. In contrast, TQM provides the cultural and operational mechanisms to sustain that quality over the long term (Nashar et al., 2024). Together, they complement each other in building a school that not only adheres to standards but is also adaptable to change and focused on the satisfaction of all stakeholders.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using an exploratory case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the relationship between school accreditation and educational quality through the application of TQM principles, as this approach allows researchers to explore phenomena contextually and comprehensively in real-world situations. The research was conducted at three public junior high schools in Banjarmasin City (SMPN 17, SMPN 24, and SMPN 27), which were selected purposively because they have been accredited with grade A and implement TQM elements in their quality assurance systems. Referring to the stages of qualitative case study research according to Yin in his book titled "Case Study Research and Applications," the research process was carried out systematically, encompassing the research planning stage, instrument preparation, field data collection, as well as analysis and drawing of conclusions. During the preparation stage, the researcher determined the research location and subjects, developed interview guidelines and observation instruments, and obtained research permits.

The next phase is data collection, which will be conducted in October–November 2025 through semi-structured interviews with school principals, senior teachers, and school

supervisors; participatory observations of quality evaluation processes and learning activities; and a documentary review of accreditation reports, SPMI data, student achievement scores, and other supporting documents. The validity of the findings is ensured through triangulation of sources, methods, and time, and is reinforced by member checking and peer debriefing. The entire research process is conducted in a planned and continuous manner to ensure credible results that empirically demonstrate the integration of accreditation with the application of TQM principles to improve the quality of education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of this study are presented systematically in accordance with the field research stages, which consist of three main phases: initial observation and analysis, in-depth interviews, and analysis and interpretation of the results.

Early Stages of Research: Observation and Analysis of the School Context

The first phase focused on direct observations at three sample schools in Banjarmasin: SMP Negeri 17, SMP Negeri 24, and SMP Negeri 27. The observations were conducted to identify the status of the accreditation process, the implementation of TQM principles, and the schools' readiness to foster a culture of quality.

The results of the observations indicate that the three schools differ in their implementation of the quality cycle. SMP Negeri 17 and SMP Negeri 27 have implemented a routine internal quality evaluation system each semester, while SMP Negeri 24 continues to focus on fulfilling administrative documentation requirements. In addition, the first two schools use digital systems based on Google Forms and Microsoft Excel for quality data reporting, whereas the third school still relies on manual methods.

The average scores from the latest accreditation results (2024) show a score of 93.7 for SMPN 17, 91.4 for SMPN 27, and 88.1 for SMPN 24. Observation data also show that teacher participation in quality evaluations reached 87% at SMPN 17, 82% at SMPN 27, and only 64% at SMPN 24. These figures indicate a relationship between the consistency of quality evaluation implementation, teacher participation levels, and accreditation success.

Phase Two of the Research: Interviews and In-Depth Field Data Analysis

The second phase involved in-depth interviews with three school principals, three senior teachers, and one school supervisor. The interviews focused on the schools' experiences and strategies in implementing TQM-based accreditation.

Based on the interviews, it was found that the principals at SMPN 17 and SMPN 27 use accreditation results as the basis for their annual strategic planning. They hold quality reflection meetings every semester and develop continuous improvement programs, including teacher training, learning monitoring, and student and parent satisfaction surveys. In contrast, the principal of SMPN 24 acknowledged that quality evaluation activities still

depend on the five-year accreditation schedule and have not yet become part of the organizational culture.

Teachers at two high-performing schools also reported that implementing stakeholder involvement principles had a tangible impact on improving work motivation and discipline. A total of 72% of teachers at SMPN 17 and 76% of teachers at SMPN 27 stated that their participation in quality evaluation forums helped them better understand the BAN-S/M assessment standards and improve their classroom teaching strategies.

Phase Three of the Research: Analysis and Interpretation of Results

The final stage involves analyzing and interpreting field data collected through observations, interviews, and documentation. The analysis is conducted by identifying patterns in the relationships among the implementation of accreditation, the application of TQM, and the quality of school education.

In general, the research findings reveal three main patterns: 1) Schools that have integrated TQM into their accreditation process show significant improvements in quality. SMPN 17 and SMPN 27 recorded an average increase of 12–15% in National Assessment scores over the past two years, as well as a reduction in student absenteeism of up to 25%; 2) Schools that remain administratively oriented tend to stagnate. SMPN 24 has not shown significant improvement because quality reflection activities have not been conducted systematically; 3) A culture of quality is the key differentiating factor. Schools with an open and collaborative evaluation culture demonstrate strengthened teacher performance, improved academic achievement, and increased student and parent satisfaction.

A summary of the field findings is presented in **Table 1** below.

Table 1. Research Findings

School Quality Indicators (2024)	SMPN 17	SMPN 24	SMPN 27
BAN-S/M Accreditation Rating	93,7	88,1	91,4
Improvement in National Assessment Scores (2 years)	+12%	+4%	+15%
Teacher Participation in Quality Assessment	87%	64%	82%
Student Attendance Rate	96%	88%	95%
Student and Parent Satisfaction Survey	92%	78%	90%
Internal Quality Assessment (frequency/year)	2 times	1 times	2 times

Source: Research Design, 2025

The findings in **Table 1** indicate that accreditation success is strongly influenced by the extent to which schools implement TQM principles, particularly continuous improvement and stakeholder involvement. The integration of these two approaches not only improves accreditation outcomes but also fosters a sustainable culture of quality within the school environment.

Discussion

Research findings indicate that the implementation of school accreditation makes a tangible contribution to improving the quality of education when integrated with TQM principles. These findings confirm that accreditation serves not only as an administrative evaluation tool but also as a continuous quality management system. Accreditation acts as a guarantee of educational quality because its assessment process covers all aspects of educational delivery, from governance to student learning outcomes (Nabila et al., 2025). Field findings at three public junior high schools in Banjarmasin show that schools implementing post-accreditation continuous evaluation have demonstrated significant improvements in learning facilities, teacher performance, and student achievement. This reinforces the notion that accreditation can serve as a tool for continuous improvement when accompanied by reflective actions and improvements in school management (Malik et al., 2025).

The implementation of TQM principles, which emphasize continuous improvement and stakeholder involvement, has proven to be a distinguishing factor between schools that pursue accreditation substantively and those that do so merely for administrative purposes. Schools that consistently integrate TQM, such as SMP Negeri 17 and 27, show faster improvement compared to schools that focus only on meeting documentation requirements. The application of TQM in accreditation increases student and parent satisfaction and strengthens the involvement of the entire school community in building a culture of quality (Azizah & Witri, 2021). Knowledge management based on TQM principles can accelerate improvements in quality and efficiency in the management of Islamic educational institutions (Saparina et al., 2023; Zuanda et al., 2024).

Furthermore, integrating TQM and accreditation can transform the paradigm of external evaluation into a systematic internal improvement initiative (Jannah & Arifin, 2025). In this study, schools that implemented an internal quality evaluation cycle through reflection meetings and stakeholder satisfaction surveys showed improvements in accreditation scores and student learning outcomes over the past two years. This indicates that accreditation success depends heavily on the practical application of TQM principles in the school's daily operations. TQM-based self-evaluation of madrasahs strengthens schools' readiness to meet accreditation standards and address institutional weaknesses (Janna et al., 2024).

From an educational management perspective, implementing TQM also strengthens the school's quality culture, leading to changes in the behavior and work ethic of the school community. Observations at SMP Negeri 17 and 27 reveal a shift toward a more collaborative work culture that is open to evaluation. TQM is capable of fostering a culture of quality in Islamic educational institutions through the collective involvement of all school stakeholders in continuous improvement (Nawawi & La'alang, 2020). The success of TQM implementation depends on the extent to which educational institutions are able to make quality principles an integral part of their organizational culture, rather than merely a formal policy (Hasnadi, 2021).

However, this study also identified implementation barriers, particularly regarding funding constraints, teacher resistance to change, and the digital divide. Most madrasahs have struggled to meet accreditation requirements due to a lack of resources and support from

local governments (Asy'ari et al., 2021). In addition, there is a gap between policy and implementation on the ground, which means that accreditation is often not accompanied by technical support and ongoing guidance (Huges et al., 2023). This is also evident at SMP Negeri 24, which faces challenges in synchronizing accreditation data and has low teacher participation in quality reflection activities.

Field findings indicate an improvement in student learning outcomes following the implementation of the integration of accreditation and TQM. Special Education Schools (SLB) that apply TQM principles have seen a significant increase in student satisfaction and learning outcomes (Nuzula et al., 2024). Similarly, other studies have shown that an A accreditation rating in madrasahs is correlated with increased teacher professionalism and effective school management (Susetyo & Athiyah, 2021). This fact underscores that accreditation and TQM have a mutually reinforcing functional relationship: accreditation provides a formal framework for quality assurance, while TQM establishes mechanisms for a sustainable quality culture.

This discussion confirms that the research findings are relevant and consistent with previous findings. School accreditation will not yield optimal results if implemented solely through administrative means; rather, it must be integrated with TQM principles that emphasize continuous evaluation, stakeholder participation, and a strong culture of quality. The integration of these two approaches has been shown not only to improve accreditation scores and student academic performance but also to strengthen the institution's capacity to address changes and challenges within the national education system.

CONCLUSION

Schools that view accreditation not merely as an administrative process, but as the foundation for continuous improvement through TQM principles, demonstrate significant improvements in school management, teacher participation, a culture of evaluation, student and parent satisfaction, and academic achievement. These findings confirm that accreditation effectiveness is largely determined by a school's ability to internalize assessment results and act on them through a cycle of continuous improvement. Conversely, schools that carry out accreditation minimally and focus on meeting documentation requirements tend not to experience significant progress in educational quality indicators.

This study also identified challenges in implementing the integration of accreditation and TQM, such as limited funding, technological readiness, and resistance to change among some teachers. Nevertheless, these obstacles can be minimized through strong school leadership, an open quality culture, and routine evaluations involving all stakeholders. Therefore, integrating accreditation and TQM has the potential to become a sustainable educational quality assurance model that can be implemented in other educational institutions. Further research is recommended to expand the study's scope to different levels of education and to adopt a longitudinal approach to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article. The author confirms that the data and content of the article are free from plagiarism.

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