

Exploring The Controversy Over School Accreditation Standards In Shaping Public Perceptions Of National Education Quality

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the controversy of school accreditation standards in shaping public perceptions of the quality of national education at SMA Al-Hikmah Muncar Banyuwangi. This research uses qualitative methods, with data collection through observation, interviews and documentation. Data analysis used three model analysis techniques. The results show that there is a diversity of community perceptions of accreditation, which is influenced by various factors such as personal experience, socio-economic background and information obtained. In addition, three points emerged relating to the accreditation process at Al-Hikmah Muncar Banyuwangi High School, namely a too narrow focus on administrative aspects, lack of transparency, and limited stakeholder involvement. To improve the quality of education, this study suggests the need for a more comprehensive evaluation of the accreditation system.

INTRODUCTION

The quality of national education is not only influenced by accreditation standards, but also by public perception of the relevance and effectiveness of these standards in improving the quality of education as a whole. This is because accreditation standards only cover formal aspects such as infrastructure, curriculum, and school administration., (Fernandes & Singh, 2022;Williams, 2021; Akomolafe &

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Adesua, 2020; Alam, 2020). In addition, public perception of the quality of education also plays a very important role, if the public is not sure that accreditation standards reflect good quality of education, then its relevance and effectiveness will be questioned. (Aisyah et al., 2021 ;Arshad & Khurram, 2020;Robinson, 2020,Purwanto et al., 2020). Currently, many people doubt the ability of accredited schools to excel in producing competent graduates. (Alshrbaji et al., 2022; Budiharso & Tarman, 2020;Komalasari et al., 2020;Lapuenta & Van de Walle, 2020). This distrust has the potential to reduce public support and participation in efforts to improve education. Therefore, it is important to conduct a more comprehensive evaluation, which not only focuses on accreditation standards, but also pays attention to the views of the public and the quality of the learning process as a whole.

Research on school accreditation standards and public perceptions of educational quality reveals several challenges. Studies show a lack of public understanding regarding the quality of education and accreditation in Indonesia. In Pakistan, faculty members in education departments demonstrated limited awareness and preparedness for the accreditation process, highlighting the need for training and awareness programs. (Chan & Chen, 2022; Khurram et al., 2020;Prikshat et al., 2020). While Indonesian high schools generally meet national education standards, certain areas require further improvement. (Prasetyono et al., 2021; Kawuryan et al., 2021;Suryadi et al., 2020;Pambudi & Harjanto, 2020). To address this, recommendations include focusing accreditation instruments on institutional performance, innovation, and accountability, as well as adopting participative leadership and building a culture of standards compliance. (Gray et al., 2022; Mussawy & Rossman, 2021;Suryadi et al., 2020,Nazaruddin et al., 2020).

The latest research on the quality of national education lies in an approach that integrates public perceptions with accreditation standards. This research highlights that although formal accreditation is important, educational quality cannot be measured solely from administrative and infrastructure aspects. The aim of this research is to analyze the controversy that has arisen around school accreditation standards and their impact on public perceptions regarding the quality of national education. Thus, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of education quality and provides new directions for improving the education system as a whole.

School accreditation standards are often considered a formal benchmark for assessing the quality of education, but controversy arises because many doubt its relevance and effectiveness in reflecting the overall quality of national education. This gives rise to skepticism among the public who feel that schools with high accreditation do not necessarily provide better education than schools with low accreditation. This argument strengthens the view that formal accreditation needs to be re-evaluated and

adapted to local needs and educational realities in the field to be more relevant to substantially improving the quality of education.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research was located at SMA Al-Hikmah Muncar Banyuwangi which has been accredited as superior by the national accreditation body. Al-Hikmah Muncar Banyuwangi High School is one of the educational units under the auspices of the Minhajut Thullab Muncar Banyuwangi Islamic Boarding School Foundation. This research uses a qualitative approach aimed at analyzing how accreditation is perceived in general and in depth, as well as to explore the motives and reasons behind this perception. The research design is in the form of a case study. Sources of information include interviews with students, parents/guardians, and teachers, as well as direct observations in the school environment, and supporting documents such as accreditation reports.

Data collection was carried out through interviews where informants gave their views openly. Participatory observation was also carried out to capture interactions and dynamics in the classroom. The data analysis used in this research is based on Miles and Huberman's data analysis which has three stages in data analysis, including data reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawing and verification. (Herman, 2024) Where findings emerging from interviews are identified and analyzed to gain deeper insight into stakeholder opinions. Data triangulation will be used to ensure the validity of the findings by comparing results from various sources. (Tracy, 2024; Karolemeas et al., 2021; Alyavina et al., 2020)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

1. Perceptual Variability

Based on the results of an interview with an English subject teacher as well as a curriculum waka, Mr. Ahmad Sakif, S.Pd, he stated that school accreditation is one of the benchmarks in assessing the quality of education of an institution. However, public perceptions of the quality of education vary widely. This not only reflects the individual attitude of the guardians, but is also influenced by several factors including socio-economic background, education level, and information accessibility. Thus, understanding the variability of perceptions of school accreditation is essential for designing education policies that are more inclusive and responsive to the needs of diverse communities.

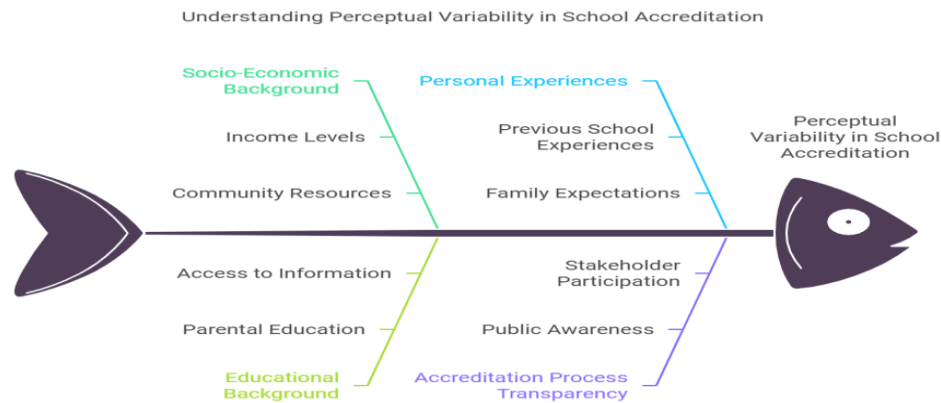
The results of an interview with one of the Islamic boarding school guardians, Idh, revealed that the superior accreditation of his child's school is directly proportional to the quality of the education provided. This school provides more benefits for its children both in terms of academics and personal development.

However, there are still several aspects that have not been covered by the accreditation process. Following are the results of the interview:

“Yes, we often discuss this in community meetings. Some parents are satisfied with the excellent accreditation achieved by the school and believe it means their children are receiving a good, quality education.”

If we look at the narrative above, researchers see that there is significant variability in perceptions among parents regarding school accreditation. This view is influenced by educational, social, economic background, personal experience, and expectations regarding the quality of education. Parents with a higher educational background tend to be more critical of the accreditation system. This reflects how education and life experiences can influence a person's views on educational policy. (Iqbal et al., 2024;Adiyaman & Özmantar, 2023;Fernandes & Singh, 2022;Díez et al., 2020). Transparency and participation in the accreditation process are important highlights that education stakeholders must pay attention to in order to improve the quality of national education and adjust the accreditation process to be more responsive to real needs in the field. (Gaston, 2023;Syahri & Abidin, 2023;Manatos & Huisman, 2020;Al-Amri et al., 2020).

Figure 1. Perceptual Variability In School Accreditation



2. Criticism of the Accreditation Process

Research data shows that the school accreditation process is often considered an important step in ensuring the quality of education. However, some frequently voiced criticisms include lack of clarity in assessment criteria, lack of participation from stakeholders, and potential conflicts of interest in evaluations. In addition, there is an opinion that accreditation tends to focus on administrative and documentation aspects only, while the quality of interactions and learning experiences in the classroom are often overlooked. In this context, it is important to understand that accreditation

should not just be a label, but also an effective tool to encourage continuous improvement in education. By exploring these criticisms, we can look for ways to improve the accreditation process to make it more relevant, inclusive, and oriented towards improving the overall quality of education.

Figure 2. Percentage of Criticism of the Accreditation Process



Based on the picture above, it can be seen that the largest portion of criticism, 40%, comes from dissatisfaction with the criteria which focus more on administration, only referring to documents rather than direct experience in the classroom. Meanwhile, 35% is related to the lack of stakeholder participation, this shows that the involvement of parents and students is considered very lacking, indicating their importance in educational evaluation, not only the school, namely the principal, teacher council and school staff concerned. Meanwhile, 25% regarding proposed improvements, although slightly lower, there is still great hope for changes and improvements in the accreditation process, namely by involving direct student observation, feedback from students and parents, as well as increasing transparency and inclusion.

Overall, both data from observations and interviews indicate strong criticism of the school accreditation process. Both reflect the urgent need to improve the accreditation system to make it more inclusive, transparent and able to reflect the true reality of education. Improvements in the accreditation process can not only increase stakeholder trust, but can also contribute to the development of better quality education that is relevant to student needs. (Gaston, 2023; Hermawan et al., 2020; Fahrudin, 2020; Kumar et al., 2020; Almuhaideb & Saeed, 2020). Open and collaborative dialogue among schools, parents and students is an important step to achieving this goal. (Theoharis, 2024; Driscoll & De Noriega, 2023; Masrullah & Ghuftron, 2020).

3. Perception of Education Quality

Perception of educational quality is a complex concept that includes various individual and group views and assessments of the quality of education received by students. However, perceptions of the quality of education are not always in line with established formal standards, such as accreditation or curriculum. Various factors, namely personal experience, socio-economic background, and access to educational resources, can influence how a person assesses the quality of education. In an effort to improve the quality of national education, it is important to understand the various perceptions that exist in society. In this way, we can design policies and programs that are more responsive to the needs and expectations of all stakeholders, including students, parents and educators. Factors that influence perceptions of educational quality based on researchers' findings are presented in (Table 1).

Table 1. Factors That Influence Perceptions of Education Quality

Aspect	Description
Variability in Education Quality	The quality of education varies between primary and secondary schools: educational experiences are not uniform.
Teacher Quality	The quality of teaching is very important: teachers in primary schools are more involved than in secondary schools.
Skepticism towards Accreditation	Accreditation is considered to provide an overview of quality, but does not reflect actual experience at school.
Parental Involvement	Hope for more parental involvement in school activities to improve the quality of education.
Satisfaction and Concern	A mix of satisfaction and concern among parents regarding academic pressure and teacher attention.
Personal experience	Parents' experiences influence views about the quality of education: the challenges children face can shape perceptions.
Communication and Collaboration	Parental involvement is considered key to improving the quality of education: good communication channels between schools and parents are needed.

Seven aspects were found to influence the perception of the quality of education in this school, including variability in education quality, teacher quality, scepticism towards accreditation, parental involvement, satisfaction and concerns, personal experience, and communication and collaboration. Criticism of accreditation suggests that parents are increasingly realizing that formal recognition does not always reflect actual educational experiences. (Romanowski, 2022, Dickerson & Trodd, 2022, Boyd-Swan & Herbst, 2020, Manimala et al., 2020). To improve the quality of education, it is important for schools to build better communication and involve parents and students in the learning process. There is a strong awareness among parents of the importance of communication and collaboration in creating a supportive educational environment. (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020, Mahoney et al., 2021, Thomas et al., 2020, Twum-Antwi et al., 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

School accreditation standards serve as a formal benchmark for education quality, yet criticism remains regarding their relevance and effectiveness. At Al-Hikmah Muncar High School Banyuwangi, public perception of accreditation varies, influenced by socio-economic background, teacher quality, and personal experience. Some parents view superior accreditation as a reflection of educational quality, while others believe the process focuses more on administrative aspects than learning outcomes. Parent involvement and transparency in the accreditation process are key to building trust and improving education quality. This research contributes a holistic approach that combines accreditation standards and public perception, emphasizing the need for inclusive, transparent, and responsive evaluations that address local needs. It offers insights for policymakers to develop participatory policies involving parents, teachers, and students. However, further research with a broader scope and diverse methods is needed for more comprehensive findings.

This paper contributes to scholarship by updating perspectives on school accreditation standards, integrating analysis between formal accreditation and public perceptions of education quality. The holistic methodological approach used, combining administrative data and public perception variables, such as socio-economic background, teaching quality and parental experience, offers new insights into educational evaluation. The emphasis on parental involvement and transparency in the accreditation process leads to an understanding that accreditation should be more inclusive and responsive to local needs. In addition, the research raises questions about the relevance of accreditation standards in local contexts, paving the way for more adaptive education evaluation. Overall, this research contribution enriches education evaluation methodologies and offers a broader perspective on education quality that is more thorough and relevant.

The limitations of this study include several aspects, such as the limited focus on one case at Al-Hikmah Muncar High School Banyuwangi, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. The study is also limited to a particular geographical location, so the results may not reflect the dynamics of education in other areas with different characteristics. In addition, the study did not consider variations in gender and age of participants, which may affect perceptions of education quality. The method used is also limited to a qualitative approach which may not fully cover all relevant aspects in objectively assessing education quality. Therefore, this study requires further development with a wider scope, considering other factors such as gender, age and variations in methods to produce more comprehensive findings.

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Sutriani et al.,

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