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BUILDING SYNERGY OF EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE: A CONCEPTUAL STUDY OF ACCREDITATION AS A MIRROR OF THE QUALITY DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SERVICES

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Abstract

External quality assurance through BAN-PDM accreditation is often bogged down by administrative formalities that create an excessive workload (instructional crowd-out) and diminish teachers' pedagogical capacity as well as the instructional leadership of madrasah principals. On the other hand, the internal quality assurance system (Total Quality Management) in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah operates in isolation from external evaluation, creating overlapping routines and a misalignment of priorities. This conceptual study aims to formulate a framework for synergy between external and internal quality assurance as an effort to optimize the quality of services in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. Through a qualitative approach based on a literature review and analysis of policy documents, this article synthesizes the literature on administrative burden, TQM, and quality synergy. The findings indicate that accreditation, when positioned as a summative "judge," risks producing dramaturgical compliance, in which schools compile reports without making substantive changes to their teaching practices. As an alternative, this article proposes the "Developmental Mirror Synergy Framework," which repositioning accreditation from a judge to a developmental mirror that validates and sharpens internal self-evaluation practices. This framework yields four testable theoretical propositions: quality interdependence, pedagogical capacity, the mirror function, and quality resilience. Its theoretical contribution is to enrich the literature on Islamic education quality management with a coherent synergy model, while its practical contribution is to provide guidance for madrasah principals and Islamic Elementary School (MI) teachers in interpreting accreditation results as a basis for pedagogical improvement, rather than merely as archival documents.

Keywords: Accreditation; External Quality Assurance; Total Quality Management; Islamic Elementary School; Mirror for Development

Abstrak

Penjaminan mutu eksternal melalui akreditasi BAN-PDM sering kali terkendala oleh formalitas administratif yang menciptakan beban kerja berlebih (*instructional crowd-out*), sehingga mengurangi kapasitas pedagogis guru serta kepemimpinan instruksional kepala madrasah. Di sisi lain, sistem penjaminan mutu internal (*Total Quality Management*) di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah berjalan terpisah dari evaluasi eksternal, yang mengakibatkan tumpang tindih rutinitas dan ketidakselarasan prioritas. Studi konseptual ini bertujuan merumuskan kerangka kerja sinergi antara penjaminan mutu eksternal dan

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internal sebagai upaya untuk mengoptimalkan kualitas layanan di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif yang didasarkan pada tinjauan pustaka dan analisis dokumen kebijakan, artikel ini menyintesis literatur mengenai beban administratif, *Total Quality Management* (TQM), dan sinergi mutu. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa akreditasi, jika diposisikan sebagai "hakim" sumatif, berisiko menghasilkan kepatuhan yang bersifat dramatis, di mana madrasah menyusun laporan tanpa melakukan perubahan substantif pada praktik pengajaran mereka. Sebagai alternatif, artikel ini mengusulkan "Kerangka Kerja Sinergi Cermin Pengembangan" (*Developmental Mirror Synergy Framework*), yang mengubah posisi akreditasi dari sekadar "hakim" menjadi "cermin pengembangan" yang memvalidasi serta mempertajam praktik evaluasi diri internal. Kerangka kerja ini menghasilkan empat proposisi teoretis yang dapat diuji: saling ketergantungan mutu, kapasitas pedagogis, fungsi cermin, dan ketahanan mutu. Kontribusi teoretis dari studi ini adalah memperkaya literatur mengenai manajemen mutu pendidikan Islam dengan model sinergi yang koheren, sementara kontribusi praktisnya adalah memberikan panduan bagi kepala madrasah dan guru Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) dalam memaknai hasil akreditasi sebagai landasan untuk perbaikan pedagogis, bukan sekadar sebagai dokumen arsip.

Kata kunci: Akreditasi; Penjaminan Mutu Eksternal; *Total Quality Management*; Madrasah Ibtidaiyah; Cermin Pengembangan

INTRODUCTION

Basic education has a fundamental role in building the foundation of the quality of a nation's human resources. In Indonesia, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) occupies a strategic position as a basic education institution that not only transmits general knowledge, but also instills Islamic values and shapes the character of students (Republic of Indonesia, 2003). However, this strategic position is accompanied by complex structural challenges. MI is often faced with the double burden of the curriculum, limited human resources, and administrative demands that are not balanced with their managerial capacity (Hasanah, 2021). In this context, the guarantee of the quality of educational services is a non-negotiable necessity.

The government has designed an education quality assurance architecture through two main pillars: internal quality assurance and external quality assurance. External quality assurance is realized through an accreditation system implemented by the National Accreditation Board for Early Childhood, Primary Education, and Secondary Education (BAN-PDM). Accreditation functions as an instrument to assess the feasibility and performance of educational units based on predetermined criteria (BAN-PDM, 2025). Through accreditation, the state seeks to ensure that every madrasah, including MI, meets national education standards and is able to provide accountable services to the community (Chapman & Earley, 2010).

However, the effectiveness of accreditation in encouraging improvement in the quality of MI services remains a problematic issue. Studies have shown that external quality assurance systems are often mired in administrative formalities. Accreditation tends to be perceived as a "document project" that demands completeness of files, rather than as a process of continuous improvement (Van Kemenade & Hardjono, 2010). When the orientation shifts to administrative fulfillment, there is a phenomenon that experts call *dramaturgical compliance*,a condition in which schools compile reports in such a way as to satisfy external assessors, without being accompanied by substantive changes in classroom learning practices (Van Kemenade & Hardjono, 2010).

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The impact of this condition is significant. The administrative burden arising from the accreditation process has been proven to erode the time and energy of educators. Research shows that excessive administrative workload is negatively correlated with teachers' time allocation to prepare for learning and provide feedback to students, known as *instructional crowd-outs* (Kim, 2019). For madrasah principals, massive reporting demands reduce their capacity to carry out instructional leadership functions, such as conducting classroom observations and accompanying teachers (Lochmiller & Mancinelli, 2019). Therefore, instead of improving quality, poorly managed accreditation has the potential to hinder the achievement of quality basic education services.

On the other hand, the literature on Islamic education quality management shows that Madrasah Ibtidaiyah has great potential to develop an internal quality culture through the implementation of *Total Quality Management* (TQM). TQM in the context of MI focuses on a cycle of continuous improvement that includes planning, implementation, self-evaluation, and corrective actions (Putri, 2020). When these TQM principles are implemented consistently, MI can achieve improved service quality, stakeholder satisfaction, and better student learning outcomes (Bakar et al., 2024). However, the problem is that this internal quality system often runs separately (isolated) from the external quality system. MI is busy with its internal evaluations, while BAN-PDM comes with its own assessment instruments, creating routine overlap and disorientation of priorities.

Based on this exposure, there is a significant conceptual *gap* in the basic education literature. Previous studies have separately discussed the administrative burden of accreditation or the implementation of TQM in MI. There have not been many studies that have specifically formulated how these two systems, external quality assurance (accreditation) and internal quality assurance (TQM), can be synergized in a single complete conceptual framework at the MI level (Chapman & Earley, 2010). In fact, as emphasized in various literatures, external and internal quality systems should not be positioned separately, but must be *complementary*. External assessments should function as a "*developmental mirror*" that validates and sharpens internal self-evaluation practices, not as a draining audit burden (Blok et al., 2008).

Therefore, this conceptual article aims to formulate a synergy framework between external and internal quality assurance as an effort to optimize the quality of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah services. This article does not aim to test empirical data in the field, but rather critically analyze the BAN-PDM accreditation policy and synthesize it with internal quality management principles. The main question answered is: *How to design a conceptual framework that is able to transform accreditation from just an administrative burden to a developmental mirror that strengthens the internal quality culture at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah?*

The novelty of this study lies in the offering of a conceptual model of "External-Internal Quality Synergy" which is specifically contextualized on the characteristics of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. If accreditation has been positioned as the final "judge", this article offers a repositioning of accreditation as a "partner" in the cycle of continuous improvement. This article is expected to make a theoretical contribution in the form of enriching TQM literature in Islamic basic education, and a practical contribution in the form of guidance for madrasah heads and MI teachers in interpreting the results of accreditation as a basis for pedagogical improvement, not just a document archive.

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METHOD

This article uses a qualitative approach based on library *research* and policy document analysis. This approach was chosen to formulate a conceptual framework that connects external quality assurance policies with internal quality management at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. As a *conceptual paper*, this study does not aim to test hypotheses or report field data, but rather to synthesize theories and policies to produce new conceptual understandings (Snyder, 2019).

The data sources in this study consist of two main categories. First, primary policy documents that are the foundation for external quality assurance and basic education standards in Indonesia. These documents include Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, Government Regulation Number 57 of 2021 concerning National Education Standards, and the 2025 BAN-PDM Accreditation Guidelines. Second, secondary literature that includes indexed national and international journal articles, which discuss three specific areas: (1) administrative burden in elementary schools, (2) the implementation of *Total Quality Management* (TQM) in madrasas, and (3) synergy between external and internal quality assurance. The selection of literature is carried out purposively by prioritizing relevant, credible, and published sources in the last 10 to 15 years to maintain the novelty of the context.

Data analysis is carried out through three stages adapted from thematic analysis and document analysis methods. The first stage is identification and categorization, which is examining the text of policy documents and literature to find indicators related to accreditation standards, internal quality management, and administrative challenges in MI. The second stage is thematic synthesis, where findings from various sources are grouped into main themes, such as the paradox of administrative burden, the need for synergy, and the repositioning of accreditation. The third stage is the development of a conceptual framework, which is formulating a logical relationship between themes to produce a "Developmental Mirror" model as an answer to research questions.

As a conceptual study, this article has methodological limitations that need to be acknowledged. This study does not apply a strict *Systematic Literature Review* (SLR) protocol with the PRISMA diagram, because the main focus is on the exploration of ideas and the development of theoretical frameworks, not quantitative empirical evidence mapping (Snyder, 2019). The absence of field data is also a limitation, so the conceptual framework produced is propositional and requires further empirical testing in the future. Thus, the findings of this article serve as a theoretical foundation that is ready to be tested through field research at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

This section presents the results of thematic and conceptual synthesis based on the analysis of policy documents and literature reviews. In accordance with the principles of qualitative research and conceptual framework development, the results are presented in the form of a flowing analytical narrative, rather than just a summary of articles per article. The discussion is organized into four main sub-themes that represent key findings: the paradox of administrative burden, the external evaluation function, the synergy of internal quality, and the proposed conceptual framework.

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The Paradox of Administrative Burden and *Instructional Crowd-Out* in Accreditation

The first findings of the literature synthesis reveal a fundamental paradox in the implementation of external quality assurance at the primary education level. Accreditation, which is conceptually designed to improve the quality of services, in practice often creates a counterproductive administrative burden. An analysis of the literature on teacher workloads shows a phenomenon called *instructional crowd-out*, which is a condition in which massive administrative demands shift and erode teachers' time allocation for pedagogical activities (Kim, 2019). Teachers spend a significant portion of time preparing accreditation documents, which should be able to be allocated to design innovative learning and provide meaningful feedback to students.

The impact of this burden does not stop at the teacher level, but also spreads to the leadership capacity of the madrasah head. Research by Lochmiller and Mancinelli (2019) confirms that the demands of excessive reporting and evaluation reduce the time of the principal to carry out instructional leadership functions, such as conducting classroom observations, providing professional assistance to teachers, and building a collaborative learning culture. When the head of the madrasah is absorbed in administrative affairs, the direction of school development loses focus on the core of learning. Furthermore, Van Kemenade and Hardjono (2010) highlight the risk of *dramaturgical compliance*, which is a condition in which schools compile reports in such a way as to satisfy external assessors, without being accompanied by substantive changes in classroom learning practices. Thus, accreditation risks turning into just an annual "document project" that loses the essence of quality improvement.

The Function of External Evaluation: Between Accountability and Psychological Burden

The second finding reveals that external evaluation has two contradictory sides. On the one hand, accreditation serves as an instrument of public accountability and an objective provider of national standards (Chapman & Earley, 2010). The presence of BAN-PDM ensures that each madrasah, including Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, meets the minimum eligibility criteria and provides accountable services to the community. Within this framework, external evaluation acts as *a benchmarking* that allows educational units to know their relative position in the national education landscape.

However, on the other hand, the literature also notes that external evaluations often create additional psychological pressure and workload for educators (Oplatka, 2017). When accreditation is perceived as a daunting "audit", resistance and anxiety arise among teachers and madrasah heads. In fact, as Blok et al. (2008) affirm, the essence of effective external evaluation is its ability to validate and provide feedback on the school's internal self-evaluation system. External evaluation should not be positioned as the final "judge" that determines the fate of the school, but rather as a dialogical partner that helps the school see its reality more objectively. These findings indicate the need to reposition the accreditation paradigm from *a compliance* orientation to a *development orientation*.

Internal Quality Synergy (*Total Quality Management*) as a Foundation

The third finding from the literature synthesis shows that Madrasah Ibtidaiyah actually has great potential to build a strong internal quality system through the implementation of *Total Quality Management* (TQM). TQM in the context of MI focuses on a cycle of continuous improvement which includes planning, implementation, self-

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evaluation, and corrective actions (Putri, 2020). Consistent implementation of TQM has been proven to be able to encourage improved service quality, stakeholder satisfaction, and strengthening the quality culture in the madrasah environment (Bakar et al., 2024; Hidayah et al., 2025).

However, further analysis reveals that these internal quality systems often run in isolation from external quality systems. MI is preoccupied with its own internal evaluations, while BAN-PDM comes with separate assessment instruments, creating overlapping routines and disorientation of priorities. In fact, as emphasized by Idris et al. (2022), the integration between the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) and accreditation is essential to ensure that improvement efforts run systematically. The synergy between internal and external quality demands a change in the position (reposition) of accreditation, where internal evaluation (TQM) generates self-knowledge, while external evaluation tests, compares, and refines that knowledge so that it can be fed back into the improvement cycle (Blok et al., 2008). Thus, external and internal quality should not be positioned separately, but rather as two sides of the coin that reinforce each other.

Developmental *Mirror Synergy Framework*

Based on the thematic synthesis above, this article formulates a new conceptual framework that connects external and internal quality assurance in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. This framework is named **the "***Developmental Mirror Synergy Framework*". This framework rejects the fragmentary view that separates accreditation and TQM, while offering a repositioning of accreditation from a "judge" to a "*developmental mirror*". Within this framework, Accreditation (External Quality) is repositioned as a mirror that reflects the reality of MI objectively, rather than as a judge who judges unilaterally. The mirror does not judge, but rather validates and sharpens. The TQM (Internal Quality) system is positioned as a moving and improving "body", while accreditation is a "mirror" that ensures that the improvement is carried out according to national standards. This cycle of repeated feedback is at the heart of continuous improvement.

Table 1. Comparison of Old Quality Paradigm and the "Development Mirror" Framework

Concept Elements	The Old Paradigm (Mechanistic)	Development Mirror Framework (Synergy)
Accreditation Position	Summative *Judge*	Validation partners (*Formative Mirror*)
Internal-External Quality Relationship	Separate, overlapping loads	Integrated, feedback cycle
Key Focus	Fulfillment of administrative documents	Improvement of pedagogical capacity and quality culture
Impact on Teachers	Administrative burden (*crowd-out*)	Empowerment & professional development
Time Orientation	Periodic (when you want to accredit)	Continuous *Improvement*

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The "Development Mirror" framework can be visualized as a closed cycle connecting three main domains, as shown in Figure 1. The first domain is *Internal Input* (TQM), where MI conducts quality mapping, planning, and implementation of learning. The second domain is *External Validation* (BAN-PDM), where accreditation serves as a mirror to test and validate self-mapping results. The third domain is *Outcome* , where feedback from the mirror is used for continuous improvement in the classroom. The connecting arrows between domains indicate a repeated, rather than one-way cycle, where the results of external validation become input for subsequent internal evaluations.

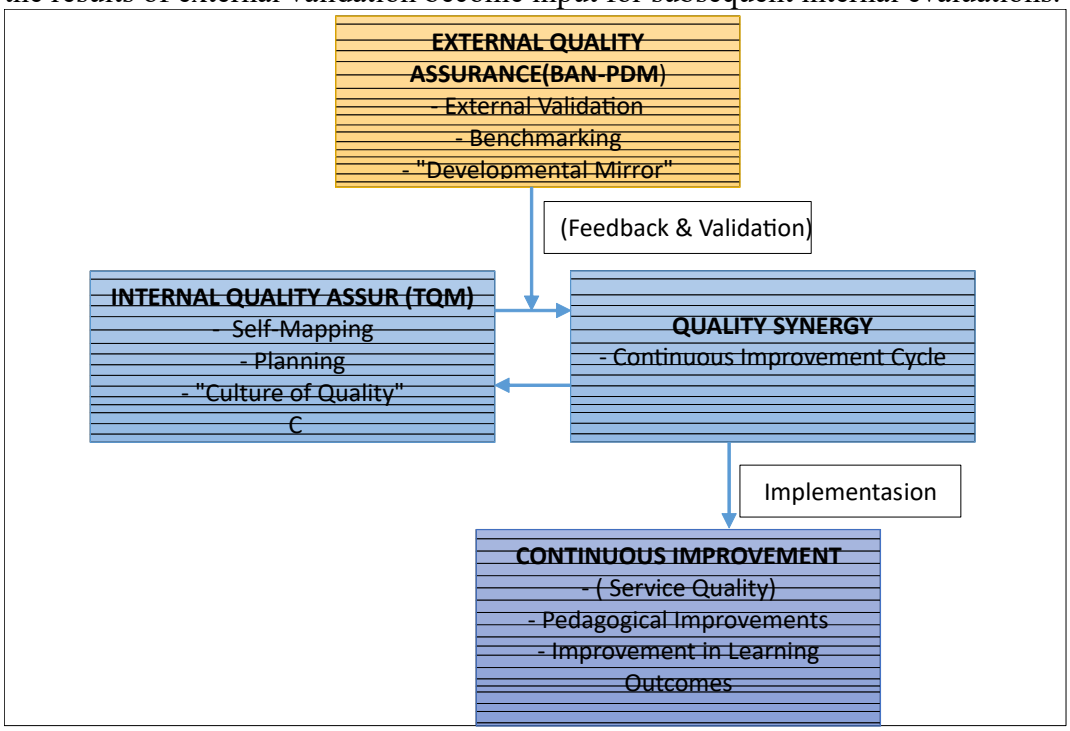


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Developmental Mirror Synergy

Formulation of Theoretical Propositions

From the framework of the "Mirror of Development" that has been formulated, several theoretical propositions can be drawn that *are falsifiable* and can be tested in future research. These propositions are the result of a logical synthesis of pre-built premises.

Proposition 1 (Interdependence): External quality assurance will not result in optimal improvement of MI services if it is not integrated into the internal quality assurance system. An external system without an internal will lead to *dramaturgical compliance* (document formality).

Proposition 2 (Pedagogical Capacity): The higher the administrative burden created by the accreditation system, the lower the pedagogical capacity of teachers and madrasah heads in carrying out instructional functions (*instructional crowd-out effect*).

Proposition 3 (Mirror Function): When accreditation is positioned as a *developmental mirror* (providing formative feedback connected to TQM), then the self-evaluation capacity of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah will increase significantly.

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Proposition 4 (Quality Resilience): Effective synergy between TQM and Accreditation will create *a resilient quality culture, where MI not only pursues the value of accreditation, but already has a culture of continuous self-improvement.*

These propositions are not intended as final conclusions, but as theoretical foundations that can be tested through empirical research in the future. Thus, the results of this study do not only stop at description, but also open up a dialogical space for the development of Islamic education quality management science, especially at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level.

DISCUSSION

This section interprets the conceptual findings of the research in relation to the existing literature, articulates the theoretical and practical contributions of the proposed framework, and acknowledges the limitations that inform future research agendas. The discussion is organized into four interrelated themes: the paradox of administrative burden, the dual function of external evaluation, the fundamental role of internal quality management, and the crystallization *of the proposed* Developmental Mirror framework.

The Paradox of Administrative Burden and Instructional Crowd-Out

The most prominent finding of this conceptual synthesis is the paradox inherent in the implementation of external quality assurance at the primary education level. Accreditation, which is conceptually designed to improve the quality of services, often results in counterproductive administrative burdens. The study expands on Kim's (2019) observation regarding *instructional crowd-outs*, which show how massive administrative demands shift the time teachers should have allocated to pedagogical preparation and meaningful feedback. These findings are reinforced by evidence that excessive administrative workload correlates with emotional burnout and decreased teacher work engagement (Shen et al., 2025). In the context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, where teachers are responsible for almost all subjects within a dual curriculum framework, this shift is particularly acute. These findings are in line with Lochmiller and Mancinelli's (2019) argument that excessive reporting requirements reduce principals' instructional leadership capacity, reducing their time for classroom observation and professional mentoring. In addition, sources of administrative stress and psychological-physiological symptoms among novice principals have also been well documented (Ling et al., 2022), suggesting that this burden is systemic.

Furthermore, this study reinforces the criticism raised by Van Kemenade and Hardjono (2010) regarding *dramaturgical compliance*, in which schools compile reports primarily to satisfy external evaluators without being accompanied by substantive changes in classroom practice. When accreditation is perceived solely as a documentation project, it loses its transformative potential. These findings challenge the prevailing assumption that administrative compliance automatically translates into educational quality. Rather, it suggests that the relationship between documentation and quality is not linear, but rather depends on how the evaluation process is designed and experienced by educators. The implications are clear: without a deliberate effort to reduce unnecessary administrative burdens, external quality assurance risks becoming a hindrance rather than a catalyst for improvement in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.

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The Dual Function of External Evaluation: Accountability and Psychological Burden

The second major finding concerns the dual function of external evaluation. On the one hand, accreditation serves as a mechanism for public accountability and objective national standard-setting, as articulated by Chapman and Earley (2010). The presence of BAN-PDM ensures that each madrasah, including MI, meets the minimum eligibility criteria and provides accountable services to the community. Within this framework, external evaluation serves as a comparative tool that allows educational institutions to understand their relative position in the national educational landscape. However, on the other hand, the literature reveals that external evaluations often create additional psychological pressures and workloads for educators, as noted by Oplatka (2017). When accreditation is perceived as a threatening audit, resistance and anxiety arise among teachers and principals.

This study argues that the root of this problem lies in the position of external evaluation as a summative judge rather than a formative partner. Blok et al. (2008) emphasize that the essence of effective external evaluation is its capacity to validate and provide feedback to the school's internal self-evaluation system. A synthesis by Wong and Li (2010) on the transition from external inspection to self-evaluation in Hong Kong kindergartens suggests that this paradigm shift is possible and beneficial. Therefore, this synthesis suggests the need to reposition the accreditation paradigm from a compliance orientation to a developmental orientation. This repositioning is not just a technical adjustment, but rather a fundamental shift in how the relationship between external evaluators and educational institutions is conceptualized. This is also in line with the findings that self-evaluation enforced in accreditation systems can be complex and time-consuming if not balanced with adequate external support (Van Kemenade & Hardjono, 2010).

The Foundational Role of Total Quality Management

The third finding underscores the fundamental role *of Total Quality Management* as an internal quality assurance system in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. This synthesis confirms that TQM, when implemented consistently, is able to encourage improved service quality, stakeholder satisfaction, and strengthening of quality culture in the madrasah environment (Putri, 2020; Bakar et al., 2024; Hidayah et al., 2025). Recent evidence from MI case studies shows that TQM operationalized through the cycle of planning, student admission, placement, guidance, monitoring, and evaluation significantly improves student quality and school improvement processes (Putri, 2020). In addition, research in madrassas shows that visionary leadership, participatory deliberation, and teacher competency development are recurring supporting conditions in the successful implementation of TQM (Hidayah et al., 2025). However, the analysis reveals that internal quality systems often operate in isolation from external quality systems. MIs are immersed in their own internal evaluations while BAN-PDMs come with separate assessment instruments, creating overlapping routines and disorientation of priorities.

These findings echo concerns raised by Idris et al. (2022) regarding the importance of integrating an internal quality assurance system with accreditation to ensure that improvement efforts are carried out systematically. The study argues that the synergy between internal and external quality demands a repositioning of accreditation. Internal evaluation generates self-knowledge, while external evaluation tests, compares, and refines that knowledge for feedback into the improvement cycle (Block et al., 2008).

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Consequently, external and internal quality should not be positioned separately but as two sides of the currency that reinforce each other. The proposed framework offers a conceptual resolution to this fragmentation by placing internal TQM as an engine of improvement and external accreditation as a mirror of its development.

The Developmental Mirror Synergy Framework

The culminating contribution of this study is a conceptual framework called *the Developmental Mirror Synergy Framework*. This framework rejects the fragmentary view that separates accreditation from TQM, while offering a repositioning of accreditation from judges to a mirror of development. In this framework, accreditation serves as a mirror that reflects the reality of the madrasah objectively rather than as a judge who evaluates unilaterally. The mirror does not punish; it validates and sharpens. The TQM system functions as a moving and improving body, while accreditation serves as a mirror that ensures these improvements are aligned with national standards. A recurring feedback loop is at the core of continuous improvement.

This framework addresses a previously identified theoretical gap: the absence of a coherent model that explicitly links the literature on administrative burden and TQM in the context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. By integrating these two domains, the study expands on the work of Blok et al. (2008) on balanced dual systems and Putri's (2020) work on TQM in madrasas, offering a more comprehensive understanding of how quality assurance can serve as an enabler rather than a burden. This framework generates four testable propositions that map out a clear agenda for empirical research. These propositions state that external quality assurance without internal integration leads to *dramaturgical compliance*, that administrative burdens reduce pedagogical capacity, that accreditation that serves as a mirror of development increases self-evaluation capacity, and that effective synergy between TQM and accreditation creates a resilient culture of quality.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The theoretical implications of this study lie in its contribution to the literature on quality management in Islamic primary education. The *Developmental Mirror framework* offers a new lens for understanding the relationship between external evaluation and internal capacity building, positioning the feedback loop as central to quality improvement rather than administrative compliance. This contribution enriches the discourse on *Total Quality Management* in the educational environment by showing how external accountability mechanisms can be designed to support rather than replace internal improvement efforts.

In practical terms, this framework provides conceptual guidance for policymakers, madrasah heads, and teachers. Principals are encouraged to view accreditation not as an annual documentation project but as a source of feedback for self-evaluation and classroom improvement. Teachers are encouraged to understand accreditation standards as a guideline for creating a better learning environment rather than as an additional burden. Policymakers may consider redesigning accreditation instruments to be more formative and less summative, emphasizing feedback and capacity building rather than documentation and compliance. Reducing unnecessary administrative burdens and strengthening school-based self-evaluations are practical recommendations that emerge directly from the findings. Evidence from MI case studies suggests that quality management strategies implemented through visionary leadership,

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participatory deliberation, teacher competency development, and active student engagement can significantly improve institutional resilience and educational quality (Hidayah et al., 2025). These findings support the practical feasibility of the proposed framework.

Limitations and Future Research Agenda

As a conceptual study, this article has limitations in that it does not test the propositions generated through empirical data. These findings are therefore analytical and propositional. To validate the *Developmental Mirror* framework, a future research agenda is needed. First, empirical studies, such as case studies in madrassas that have synergistically implemented TQM and accreditation, are needed to observe how developmental mirrors work in practice. Second, quantitative or mixed-methods research can measure the impact of external-internal quality synergy on student learning outcomes and stakeholder satisfaction. Third, comparative studies between madrassas that apply a synergy model and those that use a purely administrative approach can provide stronger evidence regarding the effectiveness of this framework. In addition, future research should consider how contextual factors such as centralized madrasah governance (Hasanah, 2021) and resource constraints in remote areas (Juharyanto et al., 2023) affect the implementation of quality synergy. The direction of this research will strengthen the evidence base for quality assurance reform in Indonesian Islamic basic education and contribute to a broader discourse on education quality management

CONCLUSION

This conceptual study has examined the paradoxical relationship between external quality assurance (accreditation) and internal quality management (Total Quality Management) in the context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. The synthesis of policy documents and literature reveals that accreditation, when positioned merely as an administrative audit, generates an instructional crowd-out effect that diminishes the pedagogical capacity of teachers and the instructional leadership of principals. Furthermore, the isolation of internal quality systems from external evaluation mechanisms creates overlapping routines and disorients institutional priorities, often leading to dramaturgical compliance rather than substantive improvement.

To address these challenges, this study proposes the Developmental Mirror Synergy Framework. This framework repositions accreditation from a summative judge into a formative mirror that validates and sharpens the internal self-evaluation practices of the madrasah. By integrating Total Quality Management as the engine of continuous improvement and accreditation as the developmental mirror, the framework establishes an iterative feedback loop that ensures external accountability supports, rather than supplants, internal capacity building. The framework yields four testable propositions that chart a clear agenda for future empirical research, emphasizing the interdependence of internal and external quality systems, the pedagogical costs of administrative burden, the formative function of accreditation, and the resilience of a synergistic quality culture.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in bridging the previously fragmented literatures on administrative burden and TQM within the specific context of Islamic basic education. Practically, the framework offers conceptual guidance for policymakers, madrasah principals, and teachers. It recommends reducing unnecessary administrative burdens, redesigning accreditation instruments to be more formative, and strengthening school-based self-evaluation. As a conceptual paper, this study acknowledges its

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limitations in the absence of empirical testing. Future research is therefore encouraged to validate the proposed framework through case studies, quantitative measures, and comparative designs across diverse madrasah contexts. Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader discourse on educational quality management by offering a coherent conceptual model that transforms quality assurance from a bureaucratic obligation into a genuine catalyst for educational improvement.

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