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Examining Factors Influencing Superior Study Programs for Improved Education Quality: Accreditation Ratings as a Moderator

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Abstract:

This study investigates the role of superior accreditation ratings as a moderating variable in improving the quality of education in study programs within the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia. The research addresses how accreditation ratings influence program performance and enhance educational quality. Using a quantitative correlational approach, data were collected through a questionnaire distributed via Google Forms to 194 study programs, selected through simple random sampling. The data were analyzed using the SEM-PLS path model. The findings reveal that accreditation ratings positively affect study program performance, demonstrating a significant correlation between accreditation and program performance to enhance educational quality. Furthermore, accreditation ratings effectively moderate the relationship between quality standards and program performance, although accreditation alone did not significantly impact educational quality. These results suggest that superior accreditation ratings catalyze study programs implementing higher standards than the national minimum, leading to improved performance. This research provides important implications regarding the role of accreditation in improving the quality of education and can be a reference for policymakers and education managers.

Keywords: *Accreditation Ranking, Education Quality, Education Performance, Higher Education*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini mengkaji peran peringkat akreditasi unggul sebagai variabel moderasi dalam meningkatkan mutu pendidikan pada program studi di lingkungan Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami bagaimana peringkat akreditasi mempengaruhi kinerja program studi dan kontribusinya terhadap kualitas pendidikan. Menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif korelasional, data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner yang dibagikan melalui Google Forms kepada 194 program studi yang dipilih dengan teknik simple random sampling. Data yang terkumpul kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model jalur SEM-PLS. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa peringkat akreditasi memiliki pengaruh positif terhadap kinerja program studi, dengan adanya korelasi yang signifikan antara peringkat akreditasi dan kinerja program studi untuk meningkatkan mutu pendidikan Selain itu, peringkat akreditasi terbukti efektif memoderasi hubungan antara standar mutu dan kinerja program studi, meskipun peringkat akreditasi secara terpisah tidak memiliki pengaruh

signifikan terhadap mutu pendidikan. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa peringkat akreditasi unggul berfungsi sebagai pemicu bagi program studi untuk mengimplementasikan standar mutu yang lebih tinggi dari standar nasional, sehingga meningkatkan kinerja program studi. Penelitian ini memberikan implikasi penting mengenai peran akreditasi dalam perbaikan kualitas pendidikan dan dapat menjadi referensi bagi pengambil kebijakan serta pengelola pendidikan.
Kata Kunci: *Peringkat Akreditasi, Mutu Pendidikan, Kinerja Pendidikan, Pendidikan Tinggi*

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INTRODUCTION

The implementation of national education standards (Accreditation) is critical for ensuring the quality of education at every level (Acevedo-De-los-Ríos & Rondinel-Oviedo, 2022; Fernandes & Singh, 2022; Girmanová et al., 2022). At higher education institutions, adherence to these standards is fundamental for achieving positive outcomes, such as student success and the awarding of degrees. Accreditation serves as an external validation of these efforts, providing a benchmark that the public can use to assess the quality of educational programs (Amaral & Norcini, 2023; Hoare & Goad, 2022; Syme et al., 2021). Superior accreditation ratings, achieved by study programs that exceed national standards, are often viewed as indicators of academic excellence. The Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia, overseeing higher education in Islamic institutions, has emphasized the importance of maintaining high accreditation standards to ensure quality education (Nugraha et al., 2021).

The accreditation rating obtained by the study program is obtained from the results of an assessment by an external quality assurance agency, and the results are a form of information to the public about the quality of education delivery (Badrick et al., 2022; Duarte & Vardasca, 2023; Greere, 2023). Quality is an important indicator for the community to join the study program. Therefore, the study program is required to maintain its quality. Suppose the study program is already at the superior accreditation rank. In that case, it has implemented national education standards that exceed the national minimum standards with quality management procedures that have been implemented very well (Alzoubi et al., 2022; Davis et al., 2022; Fida et al., 2023). This creates a paradigm in the community that the study program concerned has excellent academic services to increase public interest in obtaining educational services in the study program.

Previous studies have examined the role of accreditation in higher education, with varying conclusions about its impact on educational outcomes. Research by Hu et al. (2024) and Okpala & Korzeniowska. (2023) and Mussawy & Rossman (2021) emphasized that while accreditation systems can guide quality improvement, they often fail to capture the actual depth of educational quality if not properly implemented. Likewise, studies by Almurayh et al. (2022) demonstrated that ongoing improvements in educational quality could influence the accreditation process itself, suggesting a cyclical relationship between quality

and accreditation. Furthermore, research by Reddy et al. (2024) indicated that the accreditation process could lead to improved curricula and institutional policies, aligning well with quality assurance goals. However, these studies highlight a gap in understanding how accreditation ratings moderate the relationship between educational standards and program performance, pointing to the need for deeper insights into this dynamic.

Despite the growing emphasis on accreditation as a determinant of educational quality, there remains a limited understanding of how superior accreditation ratings function as a moderating variable in enhancing study program performance and overall education quality.

While previous research has outlined the benefits of accreditation in terms of standardization and public trust, it remains unclear whether a superior accreditation rating directly influences improvements in educational practices or if its impact is indirect and moderated by other factors. This research addresses this gap by focusing on how accreditation ratings interact with quality standards to influence program performance. By investigating this relationship, the study aims to clarify whether superior accreditation ratings are a true catalyst for quality improvement or whether other contextual variables play a more significant role in driving educational outcomes.

The novelty of this study lies in its exploration of superior accreditation ratings as a moderating variable, offering a fresh perspective on how accreditation can profoundly influence the quality of education. While previous research has analyzed the effects of accreditation on institutional outcomes, few studies have explicitly examined its role in moderating the relationship between quality standards and performance. This research examines how accreditation can influence educational quality in a specific cultural and institutional context by focusing on study programs within the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Indonesia. Additionally, the study proposes a theoretical framework incorporating accreditation as a moderating variable, a departure from traditional views that treat accreditation as either a direct cause of quality improvement or a secondary measure of success. This research thus provides valuable new insights into the dynamics of accreditation and its role in shaping educational outcomes.

This study aims to investigate the role of superior accreditation ratings as a moderating variable in improving the quality of education in study programs within Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs. The study will examine how accreditation ratings interact with established quality standards to enhance the performance of study programs, thereby contributing to overall improvements in educational quality. The hypotheses in the study consist of H1: quality standards affect study program performance; H2: study program performance directly affects education quality; H3: quality standards directly affect education quality; and H4: accreditation rank moderates quality standards and study program performance on education quality.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research was conducted within the context of State Islamic Religious Universities (PTKIN) in Indonesia, particularly focusing on study programs that have received superior accreditation ratings from 2020 to 2024. The context was chosen due to its relevance to the issue of education quality in higher education institutions, which is critical in the Indonesian educational landscape. The study focuses on identifying the role of accreditation ratings as a moderating variable in improving educational quality, which is directly related to the national education goals of Indonesia. This research is based on a quantitative correlational research design, examining the relationship between variables such as quality standards, accreditation rank, study program performance, and education quality. This design was chosen because it allows for statistical analysis of the variables and their interrelationships (Maier et al., 2023; Paul & Barari, 2022; Santos et al., 2022), offering insights into how superior accreditation ratings influence educational outcomes, providing empirical evidence relevant to higher education policy.

Data for this study was collected using a survey method, distributing questionnaires via Google Forms to a sample of 194 study programs within PTKIN institutions with superior accreditation ratings. The data collection process utilized a simple random sampling technique, ensuring that each study program had an equal chance of being selected. This minimizes selection bias and increases the generalizability of the findings. The questionnaire included 25 statement items, divided into four variables: quality standards, accreditation ratings, study program performance, and education quality. These statements were formulated using a Likert scale, giving respondents four response options ranging from strongly agree to disagree strongly. Using Google Forms facilitated the efficient collection of data from a large sample size, ensuring ease of distribution and anonymity for respondents. By focusing on superior accreditation ratings, the study aims to capture a comprehensive view of how accreditation ratings impact educational quality.

The data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using the Smart PLS 4.0 program, a tool commonly used for structural equation modeling (SEM). The analysis followed a two-stage process, beginning with the outer model analysis, which assessed the validity and reliability of the measurement model using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value. The AVE value must be between 0.4 and 0.7 for the model to be valid and reliable. After confirming the validity and reliability of the constructs, the inner model analysis was performed to test the hypotheses using bootstrapping. This technique was chosen to assess the significance of relationships between the variables and provide robust results even with complex models (Tredennick et al., 2021; Valavi et al., 2022; Yates et al., 2023). The analysis involved examining path coefficients, p-values, and confidence intervals, ensuring the hypotheses were rigorously tested. The use of Smart PLS allowed for the evaluation of both direct and indirect effects, which were critical in understanding the role of accreditation as a moderating variable in the education quality improvement process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Analysis of the research results was carried out using the help of smart PLS, which consists of evaluating the measurement model, structural model, and goodness and fit of the model. The first stage of analysis is to measure the level of validity and reliability of each statement item, which is an indicator of each variable. A total of 25 statement items were tested to determine the level of accuracy using the outer loading test with the criteria that the item qualifies if the value is > 0.7 or the value is > 0.5. The following are the analysis results, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Outer Loading Results

Variable	Measurement Items	Outer Loading	Result
Quality Standards (X1)	X1.1	0.853	Valid
	X1.2	0.803	Valid
	X1.3	0.873	Valid
	X1.4	0.897	Valid
	X1.5	0.84	Valid
	X1.6	0.870	Valid
Accreditation Ranking (X2)	X2.1	0.727	Valid
	X2.2	0.413	Invalid
	X2.3	0.879	Valid
	X2.4	0.861	Valid
	X2.5	0.892	Valid
	X2.6	0.890	Valid
Study Program Performance (Y)	Y1	0.807	Valid
	Y2	0.869	Valid
	Y3	0.870	Valid
	Y4	0.844	Valid
	Y5	0.839	Valid
Quality of Education (Z)	Z1	0.638	Valid
	Z2	0.722	Valid
	Z3	0.729	Valid
	Z4	0.818	Valid
	Z5	0.758	Valid
	Z6	0.799	Valid
	Z7	0.811	Valid
	Z8	0.820	Valid

Table 1 shows that one measurement item on the accreditation ranking variable (X2) is invalid because the X2.2 measurement item is at a value of 0.413, so it has been decided to be removed. In comparison, one measurement item on the education quality variable (Z) on the Z1 measurement item, whose value is 0.68, is retained. Based on this, the measurement item used is 24, describing the outer loading model, as shown in Figure 1.

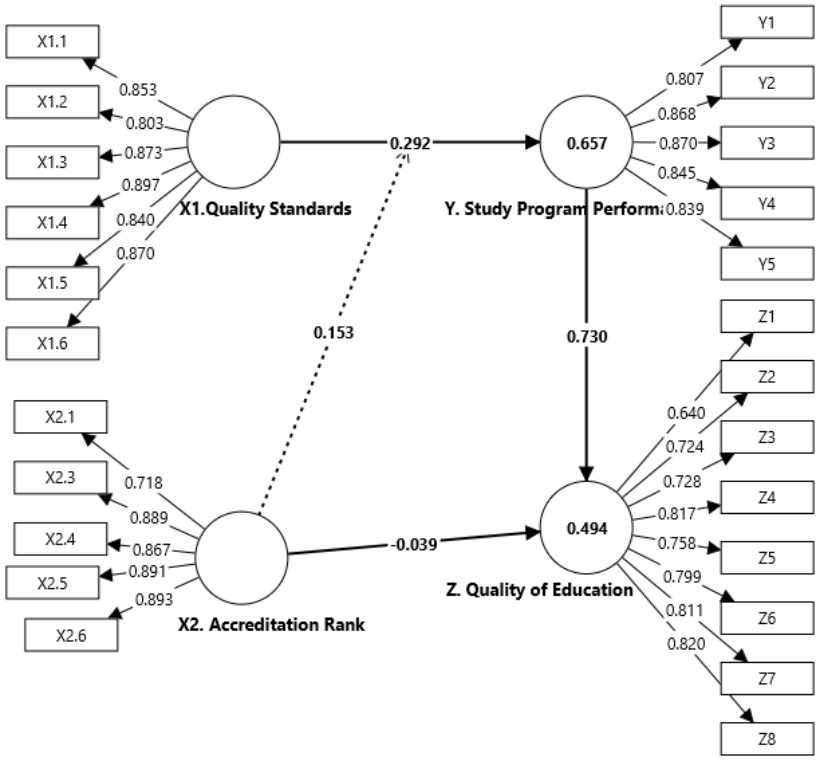

Figure 1. Outer Loading Diagram

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between quality standards, accreditation rankings, study program performance, and educational quality. The results show that quality standards significantly influence the study program's performance. In contrast, the performance of the study program contributes significantly to the quality of education. Accreditation rankings, while not directly affecting the quality of education, serve as a moderator that strengthens the relationship between quality standards and program performance. One of the indicators on the accreditation rating variable (X2.2) was removed because its outer loading value was lower than the desired standard. Other indicators have high outer loading values, indicating that the measurements are well done and reliable.

After invalid measurement items are removed, Table 2 shows the results of the outer loading test, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and AVE value for each variable based on the outer loading.

Table 2. Evaluation of the Measurement Model

Variables	Measurement Item	Indicator	Outer Loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Quality Standard (X1)	X1.1	Quality of education processes and outcomes	0.853	0.929	0.959	0.733
	X1.2	Continuous quality assurance	0.803			
	X1.3	Adaptation to change and innovation	0.873			
	X1.4	Accountability and transparency	0.897			
	X1.5	Customer satisfaction	0.840			
	X1.6	Operational efficiency	0.870			
Accreditati	X2.1	Reputation of the study program	0.718	0.906	0.914	0.730

Variables	Measurement Item	Indicator	Outer Loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
on Rating (X2)	X2.3	International student achievement	0.889			
	X2.4	International-level lecturer achievements	0.867			
	X2.5	Implementation of international cooperation	0.891			
	X2.6	Alumnus absorption in national-level institutions/agencies	0.893			
Study Program Performance (Y)	Y1	Quality standard-based work program	0.807	0.901	0.915	0.716
	Y2	Competency development of lecturers and staff	0.868			
	Y3	Student activity coaching	0.870			
	Y4	Alumnus working for less than 3 months and no more than 12 months	0.845			
	Y5	Collaboration with partners and graduate users	0.839			
Quality of Education (Z)	Z1	Implementation of AMI, RTM, and RTL	0.640	0.900	0.925	0.584
	Z2	Implementation of monev RTL	0.724			
	Z3	Implementation of Monev tri dharma of higher education	0.728			
	Z4	Implementation of partner satisfaction surveys, graduate users, and sustainability of cooperation	0.817			
	Z5	Implementation of lecturer and student satisfaction surveys	0.758			
	Z6	Education services by quality guidelines	0.799			
	Z7	The quality assurance unit provides survey instruments	0.811			
	Z8	Quality assurance unit provides tri dharma monev instruments	0.820			

The measurement model evaluation test results, based on Table 2, state that all variables measured by 24 statement items are declared valid and reliable. The quality standard variable (X1) has a convergent validity AVE value of 0.733 > 0.5 with 6 measurement items with a strong correlation, especially in the accountability and transparency indicator 0.897. The variable reliability level is acceptable because Cronbach's alpha value is 0.929 > 0.7, and the composite reliability value is 0.959 > 0.7. The accreditation ranking variable (X2) has an AVE convergent validity value of 0.730 > 0.5 with 5 measurement items with a strong correlation, especially in the indicator of alum absorption in national-level institutions/agencies of 0.893. The study program performance variable (Y) has a convergent validity AVE value of 0.716 > 0.5 with 5 measurement items, which strongly correlate, especially in fostering student activities of 0.870. The education quality variable has an AVE convergent validity value of 0.584 > 0.5 with 8 measurement items that have a strong correlation, especially in the quality assurance unit indicator providing tri-dharma money instruments and survey instruments with an outer loading value on each indicator of 0.820 > 0.7 and 0.811

> 0.7. Fulfilling the validity and reliability prerequisite tests is the first step to evaluating the structural model or research hypothesis testing.

Before testing the hypothesis, the collinearity statistic (VIF) test is carried out to determine whether or not there is multicollinearity between variables. The results of the inner VIF test are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Inner VIF Test

	VIF
X1. Quality Standard -> Y. Prodi Performance	1.525
X2. Accreditation Rating -> Y. Prodi Performance	1.144
X2. Accreditation Rating -> Z. Education Quality	2.038
Y. Prodi Performance -> Z. Education Quality	2.038
X2. Accreditation Rating x X1. Quality Standard -> Y. Prodi Performance	1.458

The estimation test results in Table 3 show that the inner VIF value is <5, so the level of multicollinearity between variables is low. These results indicate that the VIF estimation results are robust or unbiased (Kalnins & Praitis Hill, 2023). so hypothesis testing can be continued. The following diagram of the hypothesis test results is shown in Figure 2.

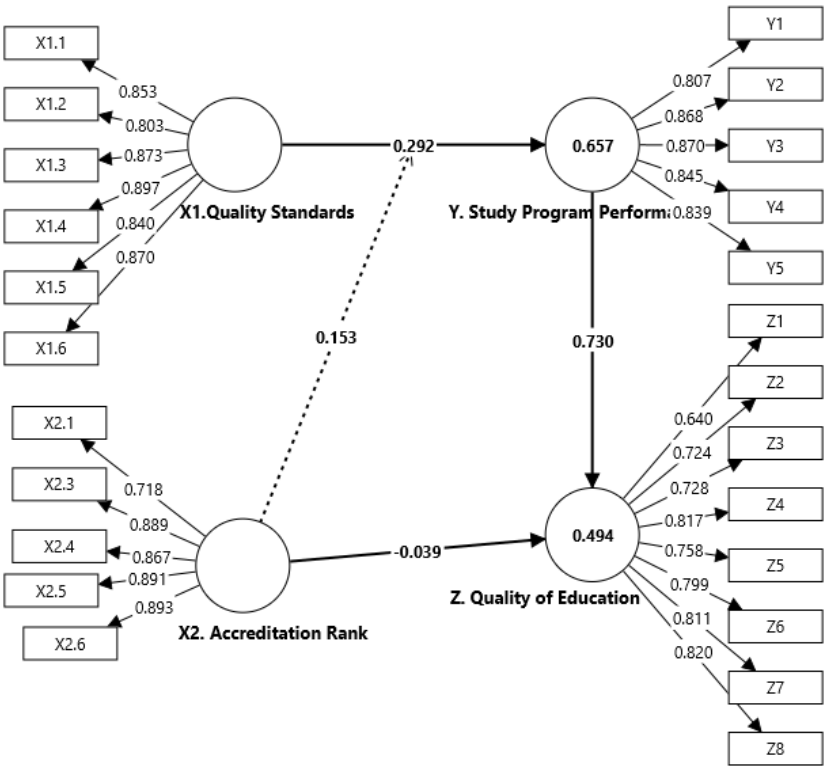

Figure 2. Path Coefficient Diagram and Hypothesis Test P-Value

Based on the diagram in Figure 2, the hypothesis test results show the path coefficient values, p-values, and confidence intervals for each hypothesis tested. These results provide an overview of the significance of the relationship between the variables studied, which is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Hypothesis Test Results

Hypothesis	Hypothesis Statement	Path Coefficients	P-value	95% Confidence Interval Path Coefficient		F-Square	Results
				Upper Limit	Lower Limit		
H1	X1. Quality Standard -> Y. Prodi Performance	0.292	0.000	0.200	0.400	0.163	Accepted
H2	X2. Accreditation Rating -> Y. Prodi Performance	0.661	0.000	0.569	0.741	1.114	Accepted
H3	X2. Accreditation Rating -> Z. Education Quality	-0.039	0.673	-0.213	0.149	0.001	Not accepted
H4	Y. Prodi Performance -> Z. Education Quality	0.73	0.000	0.556	0.898	0.517	Accepted
H5	X2. Accreditation Rating x X1. Quality Standard -> Y. Prodi Performance	0.153	0.000	0.064	0.238	0.043	Accepted

The results of hypothesis testing in Table 4 show that the first hypothesis (H1) is accepted because quality standards have a positive and significant effect on the performance of study programs with path coefficients (0.292) and p-value (0.000 < 0.005). Any change in quality standards will affect the performance level of the study program. At the 95% confidence interval, the effect of quality standards in improving study program performance lies between 0.200 and 0.400. Quality standards moderately influence the performance of study programs, with F2 of 0.163 < 0.35.

The second hypothesis (H2) is accepted because the significance value of the p-value (0.000 < 0.005) states that the accreditation rank has a positive and high effect on the performance of the study program with a path coefficient value (0.661) and F2 of 1.114 > 0.35. Accreditation ratings can influence the performance level of the study program when the 95% confidence interval value lies between 0.569 and 0.741.

The third hypothesis (H3) is not accepted because of the significance p-value (0.0673 > 0.005). The accreditation rating has an adverse and low effect on the quality of education because of the path coefficient value (-0.039) and F2 (0.001). At the 95% confidence interval, the accreditation rating has an adverse effect if it is -0.213 to 0.149.

The fourth hypothesis (H4) is accepted because the p-value of study program performance on education quality is at a value of (0.000 < 0.005). The performance of the study program has a positive and high effect on the quality of education with a path coefficient value (0.73) and F2 of 0.517 > 0.35. The influence of study program performance in improving the quality of education lies between 0.556 and 0.898 at the 95% confidence interval.

The fifth hypothesis (H5) is accepted so that it can be stated that accreditation rank can positively moderate and highly the relationship between quality standards and study program performance because the p-value (0.000 <

0.005) with path coefficients (0.153) and F2 of 0.043 > 0.025. At the 95% confidence interval, accreditation rank can moderate the relationship between quality standards and study program performance more strongly if the path coefficient is 0.064 to 0.238.

The next test stage is evaluating the model's goodness and fit. The results of the R-square and Q-square tests are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. R-square and Q-square Test Results

	R-Square	Q-Square
Y. Study Program Performance	0.657	0.451
Z. Quality of Education	0.494	0.251

The results of the R-square test in Table 5 state that quality standards and accreditation ratings have a moderate to high effect on the performance of study programs by 65.7% < 66%, while other factors influence 34.3%. Study program performance and accreditation ratings have a moderate effect (moderate) on the quality of education by 49.4% > 0.33%, while other factors influence 50.6%. The Q-square test results state that quality standards and accreditation ratings can predict well (moderate to high) study program performance because of the Q-square value (0.451 < 0.50). In contrast, study program performance and accreditation ratings can only moderately predict the quality of education because the Q-square value is 0.251. The analysis results between variables generally show that the quality standard model and accreditation ranking have good predictive quality for study program performance. In contrast, the study program performance model and accreditation ranking are sufficient to predict the quality of education, so for the quality of education, a revision of the model or addition and reduction of variables is needed so it can predict the quality of education well.

Discussion

The results found that quality standards positively affect study program performance. Study programs whose activities are based on quality standards have an impact on building a common understanding so that it is easy to mobilize the academic community in achieving the graduate profile, facilitating the process of assessing the achievement of standards, opening opportunities for international collaboration, improving learning outcomes; and implementing continuous improvement (Lepore et al., 2021; Shelton & Eakin, 2022; Sjögren Forss et al., 2021). This condition motivates study programs to carry out activities according to quality standards.

Quality standards affect the performance of study programs because they have an impact on increasing customer satisfaction (students, graduate users, and partners); improving the quality of educational processes and outcomes (input: high quality resources, lecturers, and facilities, process: optimal learning methodology, classroom management, and learning assessment, output: learning outcomes and graduate competencies meet customer expectations); accountability and transparency (responsible and open to providing feedback on customer needs); adaptation to change and innovation that adapts to global developments and competencies needed in the work industry; improving operational efficiency

(reducing waste, maximizing resources, and ensuring every element in the education process runs according to purpose); and continuous quality assurance (quality standards that have been achieved are improved and quality standards that have not been achieved are controlled) so that it needs to be constantly controlled and supervised by the quality assurance unit. In addition, quality standards affect the quality of graduates. Therefore, study programs must set quality standards based on national standards and standards set by universities according to the needs of study programs (Darling-Hammond, 2021). The main emphasis of quality standards is on learning activities and curriculum development, so additional standards are needed to support the implementation of educational quality standards.

The results found that the study program's performance significantly affects the quality of education. The determining factor for achieving the quality of education is external parties. Suppose they show satisfaction with the work program implemented by the study program. In that case, they will significantly improve the quality of learning, provide educational funding assistance for underprivileged and outstanding students, and provide learning facilities and infrastructure (Alzahrani et al., 2021). The dissatisfaction shown by external and internal parties is a form of control for quality assurance and study programs always to carry out continuous improvement (Shelton & Eakin, 2022). The commitment to carry out continuous improvement as a form of study programs to improve the quality of education.

The results found that the accreditation rating does not affect the quality of education; on the contrary, the quality of education that the study program has achieved impacts the accreditation rating. Accreditation is a continuous improvement process because the procedure is in the form of control carried out by external parties to ensure that the quality standards set by the university have been implemented (Jasti et al., 2022). Study programs that have implemented quality standards well through the PPEPP mechanism certainly have implications for the quality of their educational services because a quality culture has been formed (Antony et al., 2023). Implementing the accreditation process that is carried out appropriately and by procedures has a positive impact on improving and sustaining the quality of study program education so that the quality of education and learning services provided has an impact on increasing the satisfaction of graduate users and partners.

The results found that the study program's performance positively affects the quality of education. Implementing quality management systems has proven to play an important role in improving the performance and quality of education in educational institutions. Research conducted by Reddy et al. (2024) found that administrative processes such as student admissions, examinations, and job placement significantly impact the quality of education in higher education institutions. Implementing quality standards in these processes is proven to improve the overall quality of education. The study results show that the implementation of quality systems not only improves the internal quality of education but also has a positive impact on society and stakeholders. Thus, study program performance based on achieving quality standards can improve the

quality of education by creating sustainable change within educational institutions.

The results found that accreditation ratings can moderate the relationship between quality standards and study program performance. The superior accreditation rating that the study program has obtained impacts its performance. Therefore, the habituation of quality culture in the institution must continually be improved. Study programs that are always committed to improving their performance indicate that they have the readiness to be audited by external parties. The findings align with research conducted at universities in Saudi Arabia, which found that the accreditation process focusing on educational quality and institutional improvement impacts increasing the Grade Point Average (GPA) and achieving learning objectives. The accreditation rating obtained by the study program can create a quality culture environment that is structured and conducive to improving the quality of higher education (Maier et al., 2023). Stakeholders, including faculty, students, and graduate users, generally perceive accreditation ratings as a valuable tool to ensure the relevance and quality of educational programs.

This study contributes significantly to the higher education literature by identifying the role of superior accreditation rankings as a moderation variable that affects the relationship between quality standards and program performance. These findings enrich our understanding of how accreditation, while not directly impacting the quality of education, can drive quality improvement by implementing higher standards. This research also adds a new perspective by showing that accreditation functions more as an internal driver for quality management rather than just an external assessment. In addition, this study proposes a new approach to managing higher education quality by utilizing accreditation ratings as a tool for continuous improvement. Thus, this research expands the discourse on accreditation and provides relevant insights for education managers to improve education quality standards in various study programs.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of superior accreditation ratings as a moderating variable in enhancing the quality of education in Indonesian higher education study programs. The findings indicate that while accreditation ratings do not directly influence the quality of education, they significantly enhance the relationship between quality standards and program performance. Accreditation ratings act as a catalyst for study programs, encouraging the implementation of higher standards and fostering continuous improvement. This has important implications for education managers, who should view accreditation as a benchmark of achievement and a tool for maintaining high educational standards. Further research could explore how similar accreditation frameworks perform in different educational contexts, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of accreditation's role in improving educational quality. The study's insights can guide policymakers in refining accreditation processes to better support continuous educational improvements.

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