

(Original Article)

## The Principal's Strategy for Improving Accreditation Scores at State Junior High School 4 Dadahup Kuala Kapuas

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**Abstract :** *School accreditation serves as a national quality assurance mechanism to evaluate institutional compliance with the Indonesian National Education Standards (SNP). In 2018, SMPN 4 Dadahup Kuala Kapuas received a C accreditation (score 73), with low performance in Graduate Competency Standards, Educator and Education Personnel Standards, and Facilities and Infrastructure Standards. This study aims to analyze the principal's strategic management in improving accreditation scores, identify institutional constraints, and examine improvement efforts undertaken. The research employs a qualitative post-positivist approach using purposive sampling. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation and analyzed through triangulation involving data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the principal adopted administrative compliance-oriented strategies, including formation of an accreditation team, instrument identification, evidence fulfillment, task distribution, and school self-evaluation. Improvement efforts focused on infrastructure procurement, optimization of facilities maintenance, addition of teaching staff, and fulfillment of documentation requirements. However, structural limitations such as limited human resources, inadequate infrastructure, and geographical constraints significantly influenced implementation effectiveness. The study concludes that while strategic compliance strengthened administrative readiness, sustainable accreditation improvement requires structural capacity building beyond document fulfillment.*

**Keywords:** *Principal Strategy; School Accreditation; Educational Leadership, Quality Assurance; Indonesia*

### 1. Introduction

Educational quality is a strategic issue in the development of human capital and national competitiveness. In an era characterised by globalisation and rapid technological advancement, the quality of education has become a crucial determinant of a nation's capacity to produce competent and adaptive human resources. Nevertheless, various international indicators suggest that educational quality in Indonesia continues to face substantial challenges. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 report revealed that Indonesia's reading literacy score remained below the OECD average, with a score of 359 compared to the OECD

average of 476 (OECD, 2023). This finding indicates a persistent gap between national education quality policies and their implementation at the school level.

To systematically improve educational quality, the Indonesian Government established eight National Education Standards (Standar Nasional Pendidikan—SNP) through Government Regulation No. 19 of 2005, subsequently revised by Government Regulation No. 57 of 2021. These standards encompass Content Standards, Process Standards, Graduate Competency Standards, Educator and Educational Personnel Standards, Facilities and Infrastructure Standards, Management Standards, Financing Standards, and Educational Assessment Standards. To ensure compliance with these standards, the Government introduced an external quality assurance mechanism through the accreditation system administered by the National Accreditation Board for Schools Madrasah (Badan Akreditasi Nasional Sekolah Madrasah—BAN-SM).

Conceptually, accreditation represents a form of external quality assurance designed to ensure that educational institutions meet established quality standards and provide quality educational services to the public (Harvey & Green, 1993). From a quality management perspective, accreditation serves not merely as an evaluation mechanism but also as an instrument for quality control and continuous improvement. However, previous studies indicate that accreditation practices frequently focus on administrative compliance and document fulfilment rather than substantive improvements in teaching and learning quality (Stensaker, 2018). This phenomenon reflects a tendency towards compliance-oriented behaviour driven by external regulatory pressures.

Within this context, school leadership plays a pivotal role. Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) argue that school leadership is the second most influential factor affecting student achievement after classroom instruction. Similarly, Hallinger (2011) emphasises the importance of strategic leadership and instructional leadership in driving systemic school improvement. School principals are therefore required not only to perform administrative functions but also to act as change agents capable of integrating organisational vision, resources, and strategies in response to external demands.

From a public management perspective, strategy is understood as a pattern of decisions that integrates organisational goals with practical actions within complex and resource-constrained environments (Bryson, 2018). Consequently, school principals must be capable of prioritising programmes, mobilising available resources, and adapting to policy pressures, including accreditation requirements. Accordingly, strategies for improving accreditation outcomes extend beyond technical and administrative matters, encompassing broader managerial and contextual dimensions.

The significance of this issue becomes particularly evident in the case of SMPN 4 Dadahup Kuala Kapuas. Based on the 2018 accreditation results, the school obtained a score of 73 and was awarded a Grade C accreditation status. The lowest scores were recorded in the Graduate Competency Standard (63), Educator and Educational Personnel Standard (61), and Facilities and Infrastructure Standard (61). These results suggest that the school continues to face substantial challenges in meeting national educational quality standards.

Internal school data reveal significant structural constraints affecting quality improvement efforts. Of the nine teaching staff members, six are honorary teachers, and two possess only senior secondary school qualifications. Furthermore, the school lacks permanent administrative personnel, its science laboratory is damaged and inadequately equipped, the library contains limited reference materials, and internet access remains restricted due to geographical challenges. In addition, the number of student groups falls below the ideal standard stipulated in Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 22 of 2016. These limitations demonstrate that efforts to improve educational quality and accreditation performance cannot be separated from the school's resource capacity.

Such circumstances place the principal in a complex strategic position. On the one hand, the school is required to meet National Education Standards as a form of public accountability and compliance with national policy. On the other hand, limitations in human resources, infrastructure, and geographical accessibility constitute significant barriers to quality improvement. Consequently, the issue is not merely how accreditation scores can be enhanced, but rather how leadership strategies are formulated and implemented under conditions of resource scarcity.

Several previous studies have examined school strategies in responding to accreditation requirements. Novita Lailatul (2021) found that accreditation preparation at MAN 1 Semarang was supported by the establishment of dedicated teams and systematic management of accreditation instruments. Riskawati (2017) demonstrated that effective planning significantly contributed to accreditation improvement at SMA Negeri 10 Makassar. Likewise, Mas'ud Alifah Putri (2017) highlighted the importance of school principals' supervisory and evaluative functions in maintaining educational quality. Nevertheless, these studies were generally conducted in schools with relatively adequate resources and did not specifically explore leadership strategies within contexts characterised by structural and geographical constraints.

Therefore, a research gap exists concerning how school principals formulate and implement strategies to improve accreditation outcomes in schools facing resource limitations and restricted access. Studies focusing on leadership strategies in under-resourced educational settings remain limited, despite the prevalence of such conditions across many regions of Indonesia. Addressing this gap is important for developing a more

comprehensive understanding of how school leaders manage constraints while responding to the demands of external quality assurance systems.

This study aims to analyse the strategies employed by the principal of SMPN 4 Dadahup Kuala Kapuas to improve accreditation outcomes, identify the challenges encountered during the accreditation improvement process, and describe the efforts undertaken to overcome these challenges. By doing so, the study seeks to contribute both theoretically to the literature on educational leadership and school quality management and practically to the development of effective strategies for schools operating under conditions of limited resources and structural constraints.

## 2. Method

This study employed a qualitative approach grounded in the post-positivist paradigm, which positions the researcher as the primary instrument for understanding social phenomena within their natural settings. The qualitative approach was selected to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the principal's strategic practices in improving school accreditation outcomes and to capture the complexity of the phenomenon within its real-life context.

The research was conducted at SMPN 4 Dadahup Kuala Kapuas, Central Kalimantan Province, Indonesia, with a particular focus on the strategies employed by the school principal to enhance the school's accreditation rating. Research participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance to and direct involvement in the accreditation process. The participants included the principal, teachers, and educational support staff who possessed substantial knowledge and experience regarding accreditation-related activities.

The study utilised both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were obtained through direct interaction with participants, whilst secondary data were collected from school documents, accreditation reports, records of teaching and administrative personnel, and other administrative documents related to the eight National Education Standards. These data sources provided comprehensive information regarding both the accreditation process and the organisational context of the school.

Data collection was carried out through observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observation enabled the researcher to gain direct insight into school practices and organisational dynamics. In-depth interviews facilitated a detailed understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and strategic actions related to accreditation improvement. Document analysis was undertaken to examine institutional records and supporting evidence relevant to the accreditation process.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, data validity was established through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and time triangulation. These procedures were employed to verify the consistency and credibility of the information obtained from different participants, methods, and periods of data collection.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model of qualitative analysis, consisting of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This analytical process enabled the systematic interpretation of leadership strategies, organisational challenges, and accreditation improvement dynamics within the studied school. The approach was considered particularly appropriate for capturing the contextual realities of strategic leadership practices in educational institutions operating under conditions of limited resources and structural constraints.

### 3. Results And Discussion

The findings reveal that the principal's strategy for improving the accreditation score at SMPN 4 Dadahup Kuala Kapuas was implemented through a systematic approach centred on fulfilling accreditation instruments and providing the required documentary and physical evidence. The strategy involved the establishment of an accreditation team, the identification of weaknesses across the eight National Education Standards, the allocation of responsibilities according to each standard, the collection of supporting documentation, and the preparation of the School Self-Evaluation (*Evaluasi Diri Sekolah*—EDS). Structurally, these measures demonstrate a managerial awareness of the importance of coordination, organisational planning, and the distribution of responsibilities within the school.

A deeper analysis, however, indicates that the strategy was predominantly oriented towards administrative compliance rather than pedagogical transformation. The primary emphasis was placed on document completion, physical evidence preparation, and readiness for external assessment. This finding is consistent with Stensaker et al. (2020), who argue that within external quality assurance systems, organisations frequently adjust their practices to meet formal evaluation indicators in order to secure institutional legitimacy. In this regard, the principal's strategy can be characterised as a response to regulatory pressures rather than a proactive effort to foster substantial improvements in teaching and learning processes.

This orientation cannot be separated from the structural constraints faced by the school. The data indicate that the school employed only nine teachers, the majority of whom were honorary staff, while two teachers possessed only upper-secondary qualifications. Furthermore, the school lacked permanent administrative personnel, the science laboratory was damaged and inadequately equipped, and the library contained limited

reference materials. From the perspective of strategic public management, organisations operating under conditions of resource scarcity tend to adopt pragmatic strategies that prioritise short-term objectives and immediate organisational needs (Bryson, 2018). Within this context, the principal sought to optimise available resources by focusing on accreditation indicators considered most influential in determining accreditation outcomes.

Viewed through the lens of strategic leadership theory, the principal's actions reflect characteristics of adaptive leadership. Harris and Jones (2020) argue that leaders operating in highly challenging environments frequently develop strategies based on internal mobilisation, collaboration, and collective responsibility in order to maintain organisational sustainability. The formation of an accreditation team and the delegation of responsibilities therefore represent forms of distributed leadership designed to engage various members of the school community in quality improvement efforts.

Nevertheless, the dimension of instructional leadership was not strongly evident in the findings. Previous studies have consistently emphasised that sustainable school improvement requires a focus on teaching quality, curriculum implementation, and teacher professional development (Hallinger, 2019; Leithwood et al., 2020). In the present study, identified strategies largely revolved around administrative requirements, including curriculum documentation, evidence of programme implementation, and facility management. Interventions specifically aimed at enhancing pedagogical practices and strengthening teachers' professional competencies were not identified as primary strategic priorities.

This finding suggests the existence of systemic pressures generated by accreditation mechanisms that rely heavily on formal indicators. From the perspective of institutional theory, organisations tend to adopt practices perceived as legitimate within the prevailing regulatory framework in order to maintain legitimacy and secure recognition (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The strategies implemented by the principal of SMPN 4 Dadahup can therefore be understood as adaptive responses to such regulatory pressures. The school prioritised compliance with measurable and documentable standards because these aspects directly influenced accreditation outcomes.

On the other hand, efforts to improve facilities and infrastructure through annual procurement planning, maintenance optimisation, and attempts to increase the number of teaching personnel demonstrate an awareness of the importance of strengthening the school's structural capacity. These initiatives are consistent with the findings of Grissom et al. (2021), who contend that effective leadership in resource-constrained environments is characterised by the ability to allocate limited resources strategically towards areas with the greatest impact on organisational performance.

Despite these efforts, geographical isolation and inadequate external infrastructure, including limited road access and internet connectivity, remained significant obstacles beyond the direct control of the school principal. These findings reinforce the argument that accreditation improvement cannot be attributed solely to managerial competence at the school level. Rather, it requires broader policy support and structural interventions from local and regional government authorities to address contextual barriers that impede educational development.

Analytically, the findings suggest that the principal's strategy occupies a position between a compliance strategy and a capacity-building strategy. On the one hand, compliance-oriented actions were necessary to satisfy the requirements of the external quality assurance system. On the other hand, efforts to strengthen organisational capacity were also evident, although constrained by limited resources and infrastructural challenges. The tension between these two strategic orientations emerged as the central dynamic shaping the accreditation improvement process.

Consequently, improvements in accreditation performance at SMPN 4 Dadahup should not be interpreted solely as an administrative achievement. Rather, they represent an organisational adaptation process in response to regulatory pressures under conditions of structural limitation. This study extends current understanding of school leadership in resource-constrained settings by demonstrating that leadership strategies tend to be pragmatic and defensive in nature, focusing on immediate institutional survival and compliance requirements. Nevertheless, the findings also indicate the potential for a transition towards more transformative approaches if supported by enhanced internal capacity, professional development opportunities, and stronger external policy support. Such support would enable school leaders not only to meet accreditation requirements but also to pursue meaningful and sustainable improvements in educational quality.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that the principal's strategy for improving the accreditation score at SMPN 4 Dadahup Kuala Kapuas was systematic in nature but predominantly oriented towards fulfilling administrative requirements. The principal implemented a series of measures, including the establishment of an accreditation team, the mapping of accreditation instruments according to the eight National Education Standards, the delegation of responsibilities, and the collection of documentary and physical evidence required for accreditation assessment. These strategies proved effective in enhancing the school's preparedness for external evaluation; however, they did not fully facilitate substantive improvements in teaching and learning quality.

The findings further indicate that, within the context of limited human resources and inadequate educational facilities, leadership strategies tend to be adaptive and pragmatic. The principal prioritised aspects that directly

influenced accreditation outcomes, particularly document completeness and administrative readiness. This pattern reflects a response to the pressures imposed by external quality assurance mechanisms, which encourage organisational compliance with formal evaluation criteria. Nevertheless, efforts to strengthen institutional capacity were also evident through initiatives aimed at optimising existing facilities and increasing the number of teaching personnel, despite significant structural constraints.

Consequently, accreditation improvement at SMPN 4 Dadahup should not be viewed solely as evidence of enhanced educational quality. Rather, it represents a combination of administrative compliance strategies and gradual efforts towards institutional capacity building. The study highlights that accreditation success in schools located in geographically isolated and resource-constrained areas cannot be understood independently of the broader structural context in which these institutions operate.

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be proposed. First, school principals and educational administrators should shift accreditation improvement strategies from a predominantly administrative focus towards a stronger emphasis on pedagogical development. Enhancing teacher competencies, promoting data-informed instructional practices, and implementing continuous professional development programmes should become integral components of school quality improvement efforts. Second, local governments and policymakers need to provide more substantial structural support, particularly through the provision of qualified teaching personnel, the improvement of educational facilities and infrastructure, and the expansion of digital connectivity. Without such systemic interventions, leadership strategies are likely to remain confined to compliance-oriented approaches. Third, quality assurance agencies should refine accreditation mechanisms so that they assess not only documentary completeness but also teaching practices, learning outcomes, and institutional capacity development in a more substantive manner. A more reflective and context-sensitive evaluation framework would encourage schools to pursue continuous improvement rather than focusing primarily on accreditation scores. Finally, future research should develop context-based models of strategic educational leadership for schools in remote and disadvantaged regions. Such studies would contribute to the creation of a more adaptive and equitable national quality assurance system capable of accommodating variations in school capacity across diverse geographical and socio-economic contexts.

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