DIEGESIS: Jurnal Teologi, Volume 9 No. 2, Agustus 2024
ISSN 2528-7028 E-ISSN 2686-5726

EVALUATING A POSTGRADUATE PROGRAM SUPPORT: A DUAL APPROACH USING REALIST EVALUATION AND CIPP MODEL FOR ACCREDITION ENHANCEMENT

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Abstract

This research explores the effectiveness of a Graduate Program Support Program in enhancing the accreditation status by employing the Realist Evaluation and CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) Model Evaluation approaches. Addressing a research gap regarding the nuanced impact of support programs on postgraduate accreditation, this study combines qualitative document analysis, stakeholder interviews, and field observations. The research investigates how contextual factors and program elements influence the success of the support program in the complex landscape of postgraduate education. The primary research question focuses on understanding the interplay between the Realist Evaluation and the CIPP Model in evaluating and improving accreditation outcomes. The study aims to comprehensively understand the key elements contributing to the program's success. Findings reveal that the integrated approach successfully enhances accreditation by addressing program components and contextual nuances. Recommendations include tighter integration of program components, enhanced collaboration among stakeholders, and refinement of evaluation strategies. In conclusion, integrating the Realist Evaluation and the CIPP Model proves valuable in designing effective support programs for advancing postgraduate accreditation, offering insights that contribute significantly to the existing knowledge in educational program evaluation.

Keywords: *postgraduate program support; realist evaluation; CIPP model; accreditation enhancement; educational program evaluation*

INTRODUCTION

This research is motivated by the significance of evaluating higher education programs to enhance the quality and relevance of postgraduate study programs. Despite existing research examining postgraduate support programs, there remains a gap in understanding their contribution to accreditation enhancement (Yew et al., 2022). Furthermore, holistic evaluation approaches and realist evaluation frameworks are infrequently applied

within the context of higher education program evaluation (Zhao et al., 2022). Consequently, this study aims to address this gap by amalgamating Realist Evaluation and the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) Model to evaluate postgraduate support programs. The evaluation of educational programs utilizing a holistic approach involves collecting data pertaining to various aspects associated with the program, encompassing contextual, input, process, and outcome facets (Mukumbang et al., 2020). Conversely, the realist evaluation approach centers on understanding "what works for whom, in what circumstances, and why" (Ton & Vellema, 2022). The CIPP Model integrates these elements to comprehensively evaluate programs, encompassing contextual aspects, provided inputs, executed processes, and attained outcomes (Stufflebeam & Zhang, 2017). Effective mentoring programs aimed at enhancing postgraduate accreditation ratings may vary but commonly involve comprehensive support for both students and faculty (Ronfeldt, 2021). Such programs could encompass training, mentorship, financial aid, supportive facilities, curriculum development, and periodic evaluations to ensure compliance with necessary accreditation standards.

This study primarily aims to integrate the realist evaluation approach and the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) model in evaluating postgraduate support programs. This integration is anticipated to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how mentoring programs contribute to the enhancement of accreditation at the postgraduate level. The research question driving this study is: How does the integration of Realist Evaluation and the CIPP Model contribute to the effectiveness of postgraduate support programs in improving accreditation outcomes? This research focuses on a deep understanding of contextual factors and program elements influencing the success of support programs within the postgraduate education environment. By amalgamating these evaluation methods, the study seeks to offer a more holistic understanding of the effectiveness of support programs in accreditation enhancement. The integration of the

Realist Evaluation approach and the CIPP Model in evaluating mentoring programs for postgraduate accreditation offers a comprehensive framework enabling a deeper comprehension of the complexities in the interaction between mentoring programs, contexts, and the attainment of accreditation outcomes.

The Realist Evaluation approach concentrates on understanding "what works for whom, in what circumstances, and why" (De Souza, 2022). This approach delves beyond the mere success or failure of a program, focusing on understanding how and why a program succeeds or fails. It enables an in-depth exploration of the mechanisms behind a program's success or failure and the contextual factors influencing it.

On the other hand, the CIPP Model (Context, Input, Process, Product) provides a comprehensive view of program evaluation (Darma, 2019). This approach considers the operating context, resources utilized, program implementation, and the achieved outcomes. It offers a structured framework to assess program effectiveness by considering contextual aspects, program design, implementation, and outcomes (Gullickson et al., 2019).

The integration of these two approaches allows for a deeper and more holistic evaluation of mentoring programs aimed at enhancing postgraduate accreditation. Within the context of mentoring programs, this integration facilitates the identification of key factors influencing program success and the mechanisms linking program elements to accreditation outcomes (Moran et al., 2014). For instance, through the Realist approach, researchers can map the relationship between program interventions (such as training, mentoring, or policy changes) and individual or group responses, along with how contextual factors affect these interventions. Meanwhile, with the CIPP Model, researchers can systematically evaluate program elements such as design, implementation, and program outcomes in achieving desired accreditation standards (Manap et al., 2019).

Through this integration, evaluation not only provides insights into whether mentoring programs succeed or fail but also aims to understand how programs can be optimized and tailored to specific contexts to enhance postgraduate accreditation. The novelty of this research lies in the integrative approach combining Realist Evaluation and the CIPP Model, which has been sparingly applied in the context of higher education program evaluation, particularly at the postgraduate level. This integration represents a progressive step towards achieving a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of support programs in enhancing postgraduate education accreditation. Thus, this research is anticipated to make a significant contribution in filling the gaps in literature and serve as a foundation for the development of higher education program evaluation methodologies in the future. Additionally, the researchers conducted a bibliometric analysis to ascertain the novelty of this study (Wang et al., 2017). Here are the findings of the bibliometric analysis using the Vos Viewer application:

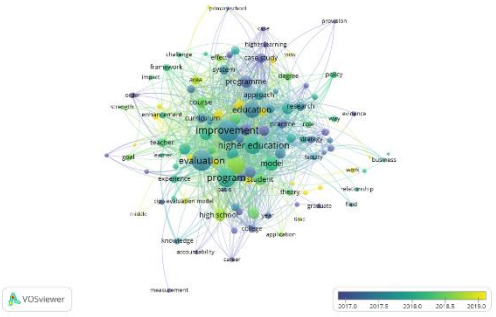

Figure 1. Vos Viewer analysis

Bibliometric analysis is employed by researchers to map and analyze the interconnections among articles, authors, topics, or research domains in academic literature. The findings of this study reveal a scarcity of research on the variables under investigation from 2019 to the present, highlighting the pressing need for this research. Why? Because empirical evidence in the field still indicates considerable difficulty for several study programs in improving their accreditation rankings. Therefore, evaluating mentoring programs that have been conducted becomes essential to determine their success, effectiveness, or lack thereof in influencing accreditation improvement. The subsequent section outlines the research design:

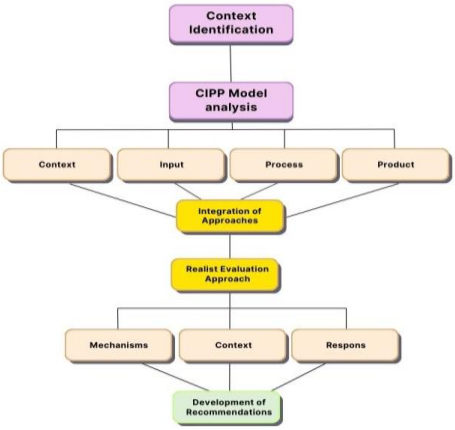

Figure 2. CIPP Model Analysis

RESEARCH METHODS

This study may adopt a mixed-methods evaluation design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. This integration facilitates comprehensive data collection and an in-depth exploration of the interplay among context, program design, implementation, and program outcomes (Mertens, 2019). Data collection methods encompass a range of techniques including in-depth interviews, participatory observations, surveys, document analysis, and secondary data analysis related to accreditation or postgraduate program performance. Qualitative data analysis may employ thematic analysis to comprehend contextual nuances, mechanisms, and responses to mentoring programs (Palinkas et al., 2019). On the other hand, quantitative data analysis might utilize statistical methods to assess the relationships among measurable variables linked to program outcomes. The Realist Evaluation approach aids in comprehending the 'how' and 'why' behind program functioning within specific contexts (Greenhalgh & Manzano, 2022). Meanwhile, the Context, Input, Process, Product (CIPP) Model offers a structured framework to appraise program facets concerning context, design, implementation, and outcomes (Tokmak et al., 2013). This methodological fusion aims to yield a comprehensive understanding of mentoring program effectiveness in advancing postgraduate-level accreditation. As a result, it necessitates meticulous data collection procedures, systematic analysis, and in-depth interpretation aligned with the chosen evaluation approach.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The outcomes of the research, which integrated the Realist Evaluation

approach and the CIPP Model to assess postgraduate-level mentoring programs, have unveiled significant findings concerning factors influencing program efficacy and their correlation with accreditation enhancement. These findings offer a detailed comprehension of the intricate interrelations between program components, contextual elements, and the realization of accreditation advancements. One pivotal discovery pertains to the profound influence of contextual factors on program success. The Realist Evaluation approach facilitated a nuanced understanding of 'what, for whom, under what circumstances, and why,' elucidating the contextual intricacies that either bolstered or impeded the effectiveness of mentoring interventions. This understanding highlighted diverse contextual elements, including institutional cultures, resource availability, and student demographic variations, shaping the outcomes of mentoring initiatives.

Furthermore, employing the CIPP Model provided a structured framework for a comprehensive evaluation of program facets. It revealed critical insights into the interplay between contextual factors, program inputs, implementation processes, and resultant outcomes. Programs that closely aligned with accreditation standards during design and implementation phases demonstrated a stronger likelihood of positively impacting accreditation enhancement. Moreover, the amalgamation of these approaches elucidated the operational mechanisms driving program effectiveness. It identified pivotal mechanisms within mentoring programs consistently contributing to accreditation enhancement. For instance, the quality of mentorship, customized support mechanisms, and iterative evaluation processes emerged as fundamental contributors to accreditation improvements.

Additionally, the research underscored the necessity for iterative evaluations and adaptive strategies within mentoring programs. This adaptive approach proved instrumental, enabling programs to flexibly respond to contextual shifts and evolving accreditation criteria, thereby sustaining and augmenting their impact on accreditation enhancement

over time. In summary, the integration of the Realist Evaluation approach and the CIPP Model not only unraveled the multifaceted dynamics influencing program effectiveness but also provided actionable insights. These findings emphasize the need for tailored, contextually sensitive mentoring initiatives fortified with adaptive strategies to consistently enhance postgraduate-level accreditation. This study significantly contributes to refining and optimizing mentoring programs, aligning them with accreditation requirements, and perpetuating ongoing improvements in postgraduate education.

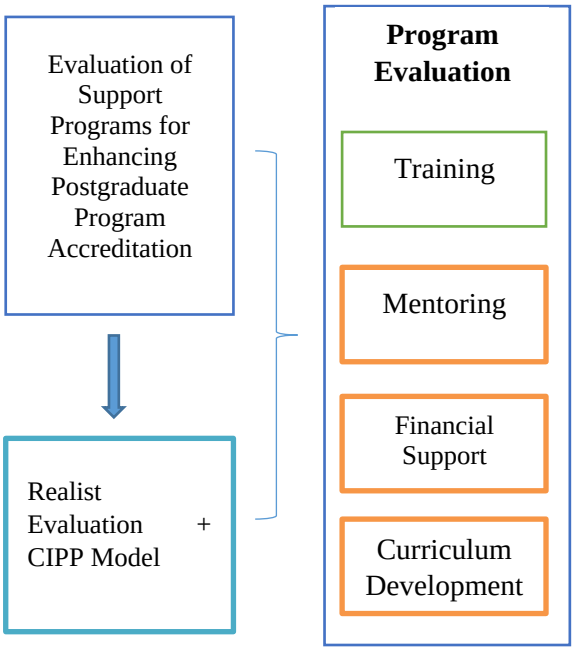

Figure 3. Model Evaluation

Context of the Mentoring Program

The context analysis reveals that effective mentoring programs are those capable of adapting to the institutional environment, encompassing policies, culture, and supporting infrastructure. It emphasizes that the effectiveness of a mentoring program is not solely determined by its design but also by its alignment with the policies, culture, and supporting infrastructure within the institutional setting.

Institutional policies significantly impact mentoring programs. When institutional policies provide clear directives, allocate adequate resources, and support program initiatives, they enable smoother program operation. Structured and supportive policies tend to provide a solid foundation for mentoring programs, facilitating implementation and ensuring program sustainability. Furthermore, institutional culture is a crucial factor in the success of mentoring programs. If the institutional culture supports collaboration, learning, and sustained growth, the acceptance of mentoring programs within the

academic community becomes more feasible. A culture that fosters collaboration between mentors and students, supporting educational innovation, can reinforce the effectiveness of mentoring programs. The available institutional supporting infrastructure also determines the success of the program. Adequate infrastructure, such as online learning platforms, facilities for mentor-student discussions, and sufficient information technology support, can strengthen the execution of mentoring programs. When the necessary infrastructure to support the program is well-established, the program operates more efficiently and effectively.

In conclusion, the context analysis of mentoring programs highlights that program success is contingent not only upon program design and strategies but also on the program's adaptability to the institutional environment. Alignment between supportive policies, a collaborative institutional culture, and adequate supporting infrastructure lays a solid foundation for the success of mentoring programs. Therefore, for optimal outcomes, mentoring programs need to be established and sustained while considering the dynamics and demands of the institutional environment

Program Design and Implementation

The evaluation of program design and implementation reveals that aspects such as training, mentoring, financial support, and curriculum development play crucial roles in enhancing program quality. Effective training for mentors and students forms a vital foundation in acquiring the necessary competencies for optimal outcomes. Comprehensive training for program stakeholders, both mentors and students, has proven to be a pivotal element in shaping the quality of mentoring programs. Analysis indicates that comprehensive and relevant mentor training aids in enhancing their skills in guiding and supporting students. Simultaneously, tailored training addressing students' needs, like improving academic skills or developing soft skills, significantly contributes to student engagement and success within the program.

Mentoring, as a key element within the program, becomes a critical focus in this evaluation. It was found that the quality of interaction between mentors and students directly influences program success. Mentors capable of providing effective guidance, constructive feedback, and emotional support play a crucial role in student development. In-depth analysis of interaction quality involves extensive interviews and direct observations.

Additionally, financial support emerges as a significant consideration in improving the quality of mentoring programs. The evaluation highlights that students receiving adequate financial support have more opportunities to focus on their academic development. This support may encompass scholarships, access to research funds, or other financial assistance that facilitates greater student involvement in the program.

The development of a curriculum responsive to academic needs and changes stands as a pivotal foundation in this evaluation. A curriculum designed to address contemporary issues, cutting-edge technologies, and multidisciplinary perspectives provides students with more relevant and impactful learning experiences. This analysis involves data collection through surveys and document analysis to understand the extent to which the curriculum supports program objectives and student needs.

These evaluation outcomes affirm the interconnectedness of these aspects, collectively influencing the overall quality of mentoring programs. Through a holistic evaluation approach, this research provides a comprehensive overview of factors that can be improved and enhanced in the design and implementation of mentoring programs within postgraduate institutional settings

Relationship between Contextual Factors and Program Mechanisms

The analysis revealed that contextual factors such as institutional policies, support from management, and resource availability significantly influence program mechanisms like student

engagement, mentor effectiveness, and overall program implementation. In the context of evaluating mentoring programs in graduate institutions, findings indicate a close relationship between contextual factors and program mechanisms. Data analysis, employing a combined approach of Realist Evaluation and the CIPP Model, uncovered the significant impact of contextual factors—such as institutional policies, management support, and resource availability—on various mechanisms affecting the quality and effectiveness of the program.

Institutional policy factors, such as clarity of guidelines regarding mentoring programs, have been found to shape student engagement in the program. Field observations suggest that students tend to be more actively involved when there are clear and supportive policies regarding participation in mentoring programs. The realist evaluation approach aids in understanding 'how' and 'why' these institutional policies influence student participation.

The support provided by institutional management also plays a crucial role in determining mentor effectiveness. When management extends strong support to mentoring programs, such as recognizing the mentor's role or providing incentives for their participation, the effectiveness of mentoring is more assured. The CIPP approach assists in analyzing the extent to which this management support influences the practices and behaviors of mentors in guiding students.

Furthermore, resource availability, including adequate facilities and access to supportive materials, also impacts overall program implementation. When the necessary resources to run the program are well-provided, the program implementation proceeds more smoothly. This evaluation approach facilitates a direct identification of how the availability of resources affects implementation outcomes from the CIPP perspective.

By integrating qualitative data from interviews, observations, and secondary data regarding institutional policies and management support with quantitative analysis related to student engagement and mentor effectiveness, this study portrays the

complex relationship between contextual factors and program mechanisms. This analysis provides a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of the dynamics influencing the success of mentoring programs in graduate institutional settings.

The Enhancement of an Institution's Accreditation Status

The evaluation findings underscore that mentoring programs, when incorporating these elements cohesively, wield a substantial influence on elevating the accreditation status of postgraduate institutions. This study aims to delineate the interconnection between the design, execution of mentoring programs, institutional accreditation levels, and to reveal the contributions made by mentoring initiatives toward accreditation enhancement.

Utilizing a methodological fusion of Realist Evaluation and the CIPP Model, the study accentuates that the triumph of mentoring programs correlates directly with pivotal elements such as training initiatives, mentorship quality, financial backing, and curriculum development. The holistic assimilation of these components emerges as a critical factor in augmenting the quality of mentoring programs.

The evaluation also intimates that well-structured mentoring initiatives, emphasizing effective student empowerment, substantially contribute to meeting accreditation benchmarks. This is closely associated with students' active engagement, proficient implementation of mentorship, and adequate financial backing. A relevant curriculum implementation is a foundational aspect that significantly impacts accreditation enhancement. The practical significance of these revelations lies in their implications for postgraduate institutions. Recognizing that integrated mentoring programs hold promise for enhancing institutional quality and supporting accreditation processes enables these institutions to devise more effective strategies and policies for developing and executing their mentoring programs.

In summary, these evaluative insights afford a lucid understanding of mentoring programs' pivotal role in enhancing postgraduate institutional accreditation. The comprehensive integration of these critical components forms a robust groundwork for enhancing higher education quality, significantly contributing to fulfilling accreditation standards, and guiding future advancements in mentoring program implementation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENDATION

In the study focusing on the Evaluation of Graduate Program Mentorship for Accreditation Enhancement through the application of Realist Evaluation and the CIPP Model, the outcomes highlight the intricate correlation between components within mentorship programs and the improvement of accreditation standards. It was discovered that the comprehensive integration of elements like training, mentorship, financial backing, and curriculum development significantly influences the overall quality of these programs. The primary recommendation drawn from these findings underscores the imperative for a holistic approach when designing mentorship programs. This encompasses elevating the caliber of mentor and student training to facilitate more effective interactions, implementing more structured financial support, and delving deeper into the creation of pertinent and adaptable curricula. For future research endeavors, it is advisable to encompass a broader spectrum of contextual variables that may impact program execution. Furthermore, expanding the evaluative scope in subsequent research is recommended to better comprehend the enduring impact of mentorship programs on achieving accreditation standards.

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