



A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS AND PUBLIC MADRASAH IBTIDAIYAH: A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to compare the quality of education between Public Elementary Schools (SDN) and Public Islamic Elementary Schools (MIN) in Medan City based on parents' perspectives. Educational quality is understood as a multidimensional concept encompassing academic and non-academic aspects, such as teacher competence, facilities, academic achievement, character education, religious education, social skills, and the school environment. This study used a mixed methods approach with a sequential explanatory design, beginning with the collection and analysis of quantitative data through a Likert-scale questionnaire with 20 parents of grades IV–VI (10 parents from SDN and 10 parents from MIN), followed by semi-structured interviews to deepen understanding of the quantitative findings. Quantitative data analysis was conducted using comparative tests (t-test and ANOVA), while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The results showed that there were no significant differences between SDN and MIN in terms of academic quality, including teacher competence, learning methods, and student readiness to continue to the next level of education. However, there were significant differences in the aspect of facilities, where SDN was considered superior. In contrast, MIN (Min) demonstrated significant excellence in non-academic aspects, particularly character education, religious education, social skills, and the school's social environment. These findings indicate that SDN (State Elementary School) and MIN (Min) each have their own strengths that influence parents' preferences in choosing a school. This study concludes that the quality of primary education in Medan City is determined not only by academic achievement but also by character formation and a supportive social environment, and provides important implications for developing more holistic and equitable education policies.

Introduction

Basic education is a crucial foundation for developing a child's character, knowledge, and skills. In Indonesia, there are two types of government-recognized basic education

institutions: Elementary Schools (SD) under the Ministry of Education and Culture, and Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. While both provide basic education, there are significant differences in their orientation, curriculum, and emphasized values.

Medan, the capital of North Sumatra and the third-largest city in Indonesia, boasts significant social, cultural, and religious diversity. As of 2023, Medan had more than 500 elementary schools (SD) and 150 Islamic elementary schools (MI), reflecting the diverse educational preferences of its residents. The choice between SD and MI is often based on parents' expectations for the quality of education their children will receive.

SD, as public schools, focus on the national curriculum, which includes subjects such as Indonesian, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and others. On the other hand, MI, in addition to following the national curriculum, also emphasizes Islamic religious education with additional subjects such as the Quran and Hadith, Aqidah (Aqidah and Akhlak), Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence), and Islamic Cultural History. These differences reflect differing orientations: Elementary schools (SD) focus more on general knowledge and secular skills, while Islamic primary schools (MI) combine general education with Islamic values and practices. However, these differences in orientation do not necessarily determine educational quality. Educational quality is a multidimensional concept encompassing various aspects: teaching quality, learning facilities, student achievement, character development, and others. In Medan's diverse context, perceptions of educational quality can vary significantly, influenced by the community's social, economic, and cultural backgrounds.

Parents, as key stakeholders in their children's education, play a crucial role in assessing and selecting schools. They consider not only academic achievement but also factors such as character development, the social environment, and the alignment of the school's values with family values. In Medan, where Islam is the majority religion but diversity remains high, the choice between elementary schools and Islamic primary schools often reflects parents' priorities: whether they place a greater emphasis on general education or want to balance it with a strong religious education. Furthermore, Medan's socio-economic development also influences parental expectations. As the economic center of North Sumatra, Medan is experiencing rapid middle-class growth. This group tends to have high expectations for education, demanding quality that not only excels academically but also prepares children for global competition. This has encouraged both elementary and Islamic elementary schools (SD) in Medan to continuously improve their quality.

Government policies also play a role. Since the reform era, there have been efforts to improve the status and quality of Islamic education, including Islamic elementary schools (MI). National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003 affirmed the equality of MI with elementary schools (SD). In Medan, this has encouraged many MI to modernize, improve facilities, and enhance teacher quality, enabling them to compete on equal footing with elementary schools. However, the old perception that elementary schools are superior to MI still persists among some Medan residents. Some parents still view MI as a "second-class" option, especially when it comes to mastering general knowledge and preparing for higher education. Conversely, some parents feel that elementary schools are too secular and do not emphasize moral and spiritual values enough. In this context, the study "The Quality of Elementary and Islamic Elementary School Education in Two Schools in Medan City: A Parental Perspective" is highly relevant. This research will not only measure educational quality based on objective indicators but also capture parents' subjective perceptions. How do parents in Medan view the quality of education in elementary and Islamic elementary schools? Are their perceptions aligned with the reality on the ground? What factors most influence their assessments?

By comparing one elementary school (SD) and one Islamic elementary school (MI) in Medan, this study will provide an in-depth look at the dynamics of education quality in this diverse city. The results can help schools improve quality to meet parents' expectations, help parents make more informed educational choices, and provide input for policymakers in efforts to achieve equitable education quality in Medan.

Research Method

The following is the research methodology design for the study entitled "Comparative Quality of Education in Public Elementary Schools and Public Islamic Elementary Schools in Medan City from a Parental Perspective":

A. Research Type and Method

This research is a comparative study with a mixed-method approach using a sequential explanatory design quantitative followed by qualitative. The rationale is that the quantitative method is used to broadly compare parents' perceptions, followed by qualitative methods for in-depth exploration of the reasons behind those perceptions.

B. Population and Sample

1. Population: Parents of students in grades 4-6 at elementary schools (SDN) and Islamic elementary schools (MIN) in Medan City
2. Quantitative Sample:
 - a) Technique: Purposive sampling
 - b) Criteria: Parents with responses that represent common and unique themes
 - c) Sample Size: 20 parents (10 from elementary schools, 10 from Islamic elementary schools)

C. Research Instrument

This research instrument uses a questionnaire (quantitative) and an interview guide (qualitative).

1. Questionnaire (quantitative):
 - a) 5-point Likert scale (1: Strongly Disagree - 5: Strongly Agree)
 - b) Dimensions: Academic quality, character education, spirituality, social skills
 - c) Example item: "Teachers at this school are competent in their subjects."
 - d) Validation: Expert judgment and pilot test
2. Interview Guide (qualitative):
 - a) Semi-structured
 - b) Focus: Reasons for school choice, experiences, expectations, and suggestions
 - c) Example: "Why did you choose an elementary school/Islamic elementary school for your child?"

Data analysis used standard mixed methods techniques. Comparative tests such as t-tests and ANOVA will indicate whether there are significant differences in parents' perceptions between elementary schools (SDN) and Islamic elementary schools (MIN). Thematic analysis of qualitative data will reveal patterns and themes that explain why these differences exist.

This research method was designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of parents' perceptions of the quality of education at elementary schools (SDN) and Islamic elementary schools (MIN) in Medan City. The mixed-methods approach allows not only statistical comparisons but also an in-depth exploration of the reasons and context behind parents' preferences. Stratification of the sample by school type and location ensures fair representation, given the socio-economic variations in Medan.

The research instrument covers both academic and non-academic dimensions, in accordance with the research problem formulation. The questionnaire provides quantifiable data for direct comparison, while interviews allow for the disclosure of nuances and personal experiences not captured by Likert scales.

Data analysis uses standard mixed methods techniques. Comparative tests such as t-tests and ANOVA will demonstrate whether there are significant differences in parents' perceptions between elementary schools (SDN) and MIN (MIN), as well as variations based on location. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data will reveal patterns and themes that explain why these differences exist.

Research ethics and triangulation received special attention to ensure the integrity and credibility of the findings. This is crucial given the sensitivity of some issues, such as religion and socioeconomic status, in the Medan context. Overall, these methods are designed to generate rich and valid insights into how parents in Medan perceive and compare the quality of education at elementary schools (SDN) and MIN (MIN).

Results and Discussion

Public Elementary Schools (SDN) and State Islamic Elementary Schools (MIN) are comparable in many important aspects of education. This is a positive finding, indicating that both types of institutions are capable of providing quality education.

Teacher Competence and Teaching Methods: The absence of significant differences in these two aspects suggests that parents perceive the quality of teaching at SDN and MIN as fairly equal. This could indicate that teacher standards and the development of teaching methods may be sufficiently uniform across both types of schools that parents do not consider them a primary factor.

There were significant differences in facilities. Parents believed that SDN schools had superior facilities compared to MIN schools, leading to a dominant preference for SDN schools over MIN schools due to the facilities. This was due to the perceived higher budget allocation, better access to resources or donations, and differences in the priorities for using funds between SDN and MIN schools.

There were no significant differences in parents' perceptions of academic achievement and preparation for junior high school between SDN and MIN schools. Parents perceive that both types of schools are equal. Both elementary and junior high schools (SDN) are considered capable of preparing students well for the next level of education.

1. Non-Academic Quality

Table 1 Non-academic Quality Results.

Aspect	SDN	MIN	p-value
Character Education	3.7	4.5	0.001*
Religious Education	3.2	4.8	0.000*
Social Skills	3.9	4.3	0.04*
Extracurricular Activities	4.1	3.9	0.38
Social Environment	4.0	4.4	0.02*

*significant at $\alpha=0.05$ b. Non-Academic Quality (Scale 1-5)

Character Education (SDN: 3.7, MIN: 4.5, p-value: 0.001*) Implication: MIN appears to have a stronger character education program. This may be related to the integration of

religious values into their curriculum. Parents who prioritize character building may be more attracted to MIN. Religious Education (SDN: 3.2, MIN: 4.8, p-value: 0.000*) Implication: This highly significant difference indicates that MIN, as a faith-based school, does indeed have a much greater focus on religious education. This is a determining factor for parents who desire a more intensive religious education for their children.

Social Skills (SDN: 3.9, MIN: 4.3, p-value: 0.04*) Implication: MIN appears to be better at developing students' social skills. This is related to the emphasis on community values and positive social interactions within a faith-based environment.

Extracurricular Activities (SDN: 4.1, MIN: 3.9, p-value: 0.38) Implication: There is no significant difference in extracurricular activities. This suggests that both types of schools provide equal opportunities for developing talents and interests outside the core curriculum.

Social Environment (SDN: 4.0, MIN: 4.4, p-value: 0.02*) Implication: MIN has a better social environment. This may reflect a more cohesive and supportive atmosphere, possibly due to strong shared values among students and staff.

Overall Analysis:

1. MIN demonstrates excellence in aspects related to students' personal and social development, as well as religious education.
2. SDN, although lower in some aspects, still has quite good scores (above 3) in all categories.
3. The choice between SDN and MIN will likely depend heavily on family priorities, particularly regarding the importance of religious and character education.
4. Equivalence in extracurricular activities indicates that both types of schools provide equal opportunities for the development of non-academic talents.

Implications for Education Policy:

1. SDN may need to enhance their character and religious education programs to compete with MIN.
2. MIN can serve as a model for developing social skills and a positive social environment in schools.
3. Both types of schools can learn from each other and exchange best practices to improve the overall quality of education.

The results of this study indicate that in Medan City, SDN and MIN have their respective strengths. SDN excels in the quality of academic education and facilities and is seen as strong in academic preparation, while MIN is highly valued for the quality of non-academic education, such as character and spiritual development. Interestingly, there was no significant difference in academic achievement, challenging the assumption that the focus on religion in MIN reduces academic quality.

Overall, this study shows that in Medan, educational quality is not only measured by academic achievement, but also by character development and the social environment. Both institutions have the opportunity to learn from each other, creating a more holistic basic education that is responsive to the needs of modern society.

Discussion

Based on the research results above, a Synthesis of Research Findings was developed, which will be discussed in this study. The synthesis of the research findings is as follows:

- a. Academic Quality: There are no significant differences between SDN and MIN schools in most academic aspects. However, SDN schools are considered to have better facilities, especially in the city center.

- b. Character & Spiritual Education: MIN schools are significantly better rated. MIN parents emphasize the importance of religion as a foundation for character, while many SDN parents are concerned about the influence of social media on children's morals.
- c. Social Skills: MIN schools have a slight advantage, especially in empathy and politeness. Programs such as the 'buddy system' at MIN schools are appreciated. However, SDN schools are also strong in collaborative activities.
- d. Facilities vs. Environment: SDN parents pride themselves on facilities and academic achievement, while MIN parents value a more homey and supportive environment.
- e. Constructive Criticism: Some SDN parents feel the need for more character education. On the other hand, some MIN parents desire a more balanced focus between religion and modern skills.
- f. Location Factors: At MIN (Ministry of Islamic Education), the quality of facilities varies by location, with schools in the city center being superior. There was no significant difference for SDN (State Elementary Schools).

The discussion of the research findings on the comparative quality of education in State Elementary Schools and State Islamic Elementary Schools in Medan City from a Parental Perspective is as follows:

a. Quality of Academic Education

Challenging Stereotypes: Findings indicate no significant differences in parents' choices regarding academic quality between elementary schools (SDN) and Islamic elementary schools (MIN). Previously, there was a perception that MIN's focus on religious education might compromise its academic quality. However, this study aligns with Supardi (2021), who also found no significant differences in academic achievement between the two types of schools. This indicates that MIN in Medan has successfully integrated the national and religious curricula without sacrificing either. As Azra (2018) explained, MIN does have an additional curriculum for Islamic religious education, but still adheres to national standards for general subjects. This finding likely reflects the robust training and professional development provided to MIN teachers, enabling them to teach effectively in both domains.

One fundamental difference in parents' perceptions of academic quality between elementary schools (SDN) and MIN in this study was the facilities factor. The findings indicate that parents who highly prioritize facilities were more likely to choose SDN. A significant difference in academic performance was found in facilities. Parents perceived SDN as superior in terms of facilities, particularly those located in the city center. This confirms the findings of "Mapping the Quality of Elementary Education in Medan City" (2023), which acknowledged a quality gap between schools in the central and peripheral areas. This situation reflects a larger challenge in urban planning in Medan. Schools in the city center, including elementary schools (SDN), tend to receive more investment and attention. This aligns with a study by Yusuf and Sugandi (2022), which found that many elementary schools in the outskirts of Medan still struggle to integrate technology. This gap is not only an educational issue, but also a social equity issue that needs to be addressed by the city government.

b. Quality of Non-Academic Education

In this study, MIN's strength in determining parents' school choice for their children lies in the quality of non-academic education. The most significant differences emerged in aspects of character and moral education, where MIN was significantly superior. This finding aligns closely with Rahman (2020), who found that MIN students demonstrated higher levels of empathy and moral awareness. In Medan, parents highly appreciated MIN's approach to using religious values as a foundation for character. Mu'in (2021) argued that in Indonesia, religious

values can be a strong foundation for character education. The results of this study support this argument. In the digital age with its complex moral challenges, many parents in Medan view MIN's faith-based approach as a bulwark against ethical degradation. This reflects the concern expressed by Nasution (2021), that parents in Medan are increasingly emphasizing the importance of character development.

Interestingly, while parents appreciated MIN's focus on character and spirituality, some also criticized the need to better balance this with modern skills. On the other hand, elementary school parents were concerned about the lack of character education amid the influence of social media. This situation reflects the dilemma of education in the digital age. Trilling and Fadel (2019) emphasize the importance of 21st-century skills such as creativity and critical thinking. However, Lickona (2019) argues that moral education should be integral to the curriculum. In Medan, parents seem to desire both: strong character and digital skills. This finding suggests that both elementary schools (SDN) and Islamic elementary schools (MIN) in Medan need to adapt. Elementary schools can learn from MIN in integrating character education, perhaps through collaboration with religious leaders or psychologists, as Lickona suggests. MIN, on the other hand, needs to ensure that the focus on traditional values does not override the skills needed in the digital age.

Homey vs. Achievement Another interesting aspect is how parents perceive the school's social environment. MIN is perceived as having a more "homey" and supportive environment, while elementary school parents place more emphasis on achievement and facilities. Epstein (2018) emphasizes that parental involvement and a supportive environment significantly impact children's well-being. MIN's approach to creating a "family-like" atmosphere seems to align with the collectivist values that remain strong in Medan. This may contribute to higher scores in social skills and empathy, as Rahman (2020) found. On the other hand, SDN's focus on achievement reflects the competitive demands for admission to top junior high schools, as several parents stated in interviews.

Policy Implications These findings have important implications for policymakers in Medan. First, stereotypes about the academic quality of MIN schools need to be challenged; data suggests parity with SDN schools. Second, the gap in facilities between the city center and the suburbs needs to be addressed, perhaps through budget reallocation. Furthermore, there are valuable lessons for both institutions. SDN schools can adopt MIN practices in character education, while MIN schools can increase their focus on digital skills. The Medan City Education Office's 2021-2025 Strategic Plan, which aims to improve the human development index, should consider these aspects, not just academic achievement.

Limitations and Future Research: While comprehensive, this study has limitations. The focus on parents provides valuable insights, but teacher and student perceptions are also important. Future research could compare the perceptions of these three groups. Furthermore, longitudinal research could help assess the long-term impact of MIN's approach to character development. This study is also limited to public schools in Medan. Comparisons with private schools or with other cities in Indonesia could provide a broader understanding of the dynamics of SDN vs. MIN.

This study reveals that parents' perspectives on their children's school choices, particularly in Medan, demonstrate that both SDN and MIN have unique strengths that reflect contemporary values and concerns. There is no "one-size-fits-all" model; instead, both institutions can learn from each other to provide a more holistic education. In an era marked by technological change and moral challenges, these findings highlight the importance of balancing academic achievement, modern skills, and strong character development..

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that parents in Medan city's decision-making factors in choosing between elementary schools (SDN) and Islamic elementary schools (MIN) in terms of academic quality. It can be concluded that academic quality, including teacher competency and qualifications, teaching and learning methods, educational resources, student academic achievement, and student preparation for the next level of education, significantly influence parents' decision-making between elementary schools and Islamic elementary schools (MIN). The most dominant factor differing is facilities. Parents are more likely to choose elementary schools over Islamic elementary schools (MIN) in terms of facilities, with a ratio of 4.0 to 3.7, indicating a significant difference in facilities between elementary schools and Islamic elementary schools.

Furthermore, the results of the study indicate that parents in Medan city's decision-making process in choosing between elementary schools and Islamic elementary schools (SDN) in terms of non-academic quality of education show significant differences. Parents prefer Islamic elementary schools over Islamic elementary schools (SDN) in terms of character education, citing that Islamic elementary schools appear to have stronger character education programs, and parents who prioritize character development are more attracted to Islamic elementary schools. Furthermore, parents preferred MIN over SD (Islamic elementary school) in terms of religious education. This was because parents indicated that MIN, as a faith-based school, has a much greater focus on religious education. This could be a deciding factor for parents who desire a more intensive religious education for their children. Finally, social skills and the social environment were important. For both factors, MIN was the primary choice for parents in selecting a school, believing that social skills, with an emphasis on community values and positive social interactions within a faith-based environment, were fostered. MIN, in the parents' view, reflects a more cohesive and supportive atmosphere. Regarding the quality of non-academic education, only extracurricular activities differed from the parents' perspective. Parents believed that both schools provide equal opportunities to develop their children's talents and interests.

A comparison of the quality of academic education between elementary schools (SDN) and MIN (Islamic elementary schools) in Medan City, based on parents' perspectives, was dominated by SDN, while the quality of non-academic education between SDN and MIN was dominated by MIN. From this statement, SDN and MIN each have their own advantages to attract parents in choosing a school for their children.

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