A Suggested Institutional Accreditation Standard in Higher Education

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Abstract—Accreditation in the Republic of Sudan is a means to assure and improve higher educational quality, assisting institutions and programs using a set of standards developed by peers. An organization or program that has successfully completed an accreditation process has in place the needed instructional, student support and other necessary serviced to help the students to achieve their educational goals and objectives. Accreditation has helped the institution and society as a whole to provide the conditions necessary for Sudan to develop diverse, flexible, robust and often admired higher education. Accreditation is either a process or a status. It is the process of reviewing educational institutions (schools, colleges, universities, institutions and programs) to judge their educational quality and how well they serve the students and society. The results of the process, if successful are provided with the award of accredited status. This paper stating the importance of accreditation in educational sector so as to improve the educational quality.

Keywords—Accreditation, Quality, Education, Quality Assurance.

I. INTRODUCTION

The education system in the country needs serious reforms to make the higher education accessible to students from all areas of the society. Even though they are having the desire and skills, more than 1000 of students in the country were not able to pursue higher education. Only 10-15 % of the students in the country have access to higher education. This critical and unanticipated situation should change. The government should work on it to make the higher education accessible to all, instead of providing the chances to those who secured high marks in the present education system. Current research focuses on the urgency of improving the quality of higher educations through the measurement of the quality of higher educations through ranking. There is no evidence of research conducted in this area on how to plan for an integral quality improvement initiative for the higher education as a whole, which is the main objective of this study.

As the education getting worse so the people wants change, but they didn’t think how can we able to make these changes. The parents always aware of our education system, but may never take responsibilities to make the changes. The problem arises only when we are having more than enough schools/colleges in small towns that too without proper quality education system. They didn’t provide practical knowledge.

The government should take action to cease such institutions those who are not providing sufficient facilities for the students- education wise and practical knowledge wise. Most of the schools and colleges in the town don’t have even fundamental facilities needed to run.

Quality learning standards are the fundamental aspects of every educational program. In the early education system, these standards established what each child can and should learn, including academic, social and emotional skills. The higher education of a country had mirrored the different phases of economic and social changes in that country. The nature of country’s economy and its historic inadequacies were reflected in the planning of higher education. The various institutions intended to be service institutions rather than leading edge proponents to technical and technological changes.

Successive governments had considered higher education as a burden and expense despite their protestation to the opposite. Proper planning deficiency and the tendency for courses with low cost expansion added to the sufferings of the economy, which leads to propagate the “Diploma Diseases”. In addition to, the existence of a prominent number of graduates without proper and sufficient job opportunities meant an accumulation of over educated civil workers in government sectors with nothing to do with their qualifications. Other issues like institutions those who provide vocational graduate qualifications were upgraded to university status without proper planning and consideration of resource allocation and implications, the real needs. And in most of the cases the up gradation meant nothing more than the conferment of some titles to the staff members and modifications of the degree titles.

Accreditation is carried out through non-governmental, non-profit organizations created in a whole or in part by the higher educational organizations. Some of the accreditation agencies review the colleges and universities and some other review the programs offered by these educational institutions. At present none of the Sudanese educational institution has an accreditation. All accrediting organizations create and use pre-defined standards to assure that institutions and programs meet threshold expectations of quality and to assure that they improve over time. These accreditation standards address key areas such as faculty, student, student support services, financial facilities, curriculum and the outcomes of student learning.

All accredited institutions use some or the other way common practices, including a self assessment by the institution or program against the standards and practices, an on-site visit by the evaluation committee and a subsequent review procedure and decision by the accreditation body about the accreditation status. The review procedure is to be repeated every three to five years if the institution or program is to sustain its accreditation status. These accreditation agencies themselves are usually subjected to an external review- a process is called “recognition”. This means a periodic examination of the organizations based on a set of predefined standards. The system for quality assurance and accreditation is designed to support continuing quality improvement and to publically recognized programs and institutions which meets.
required quality standards. The objective is to ensure good international standards in all post secondary Sudan institutions and in all programs offered in the Republic of Sudan. This paper focuses on the higher education accreditation, audits, institutional academic reviews and other quality assurance activities in the organization and at the programs offered by the institutions. It represents a first effort to map, explore and assess accreditation and audits in higher educational institutions in Sudan as a whole and also to focus on several case studies that are illustrative of the process. The data on accreditation and audits in much of Sudan are limited. On the other hand, there is a great deal more going on in quality assurance than had been expected. The information presented here, the assessments, and recommendations are intended to inform and assist those interested in quality assurance in general and suggest approaches and strategies for those contemplating university accreditation, audits, and academic reviews.

II. INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

The development and utilization of effective mechanisms for quality assurance and improvement are critical to successful higher education everywhere. Every nation and its university graduates are competing in an environment shaped by its own local and national needs as well as international expectations and standards. The impact of the latter are increasing. As a result, the success and competitiveness of graduates in tertiary institutions will be affected by those standards and expectations. Educators, policy makers, and faculty members would be well advised to assess their own tertiary systems in that context and strive to set appropriate standards of their own which also draw on and reflect the unique history, needs, and expectations of the nation.

The means of accredited status is that the students and the public can expect that an institution of a program lives up to their expectations and promises. It means that a student can have the confidence that a degree or credential has its value. Accreditation signals that the public can have confidence in the worth of an institution or program. Following are some of the aspects of accreditation.

- Encourages confidence that the educational activities of an accredited institution or program have been found to be satisfactory.
- Assists with student mobility
- Signals to prospective employers that a student’s educational program has met widely accepted standards, with the graduation from an accredited program.
- Provides access to federal and sometimes state financial aids, available to the qualified students who attend institutions accredited by the recognized accredited agencies.

To the public, the accreditation provides value not only in quality but assuring reliable information about the institutions and programs offered by them also. For the public, accreditation means

- The educational program, student services and graduate accomplishments are fair and accurate
- There is a compliance with general expectations in higher education or a professional field as reflected in the accreditation standards.
- Identifies institutions and programs that have voluntarily undertaken explicit activities directed at improving the quality of the institution.

III. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is the value of accreditation?
   a. Encourages confidence that an institution’s program’s presentation of the education it provides is fair and accurate.
   b. An external party (Accreditation Agency) review the quality of education provided by the institution and has found to be satisfactory.
   c. Confirms that the institutions and programs has possess places in to meet the changes and challenges.
   d. Provides for eligible students to have access to federal financial help from the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE).
   e. Assists with transfer of credits among institutions or admissions to graduate school (student’s mobility)
   f. Signals prospective employers that an educational program has met widely accepted educational standards

2. Why is the Accredited Status of an Institution or Program to Students?

   Accredited status is a reliable indication of the value and quality of educational institutions and programs to students and the public. It is hard to be sure about the quality of the education or to be confident that an institution or program can deliver on its promises without accreditation status. At the same time, employers or graduate programs cannot be confident that graduates of an unaccredited institution or program will be appropriately prepared.

3. What does the fact that the institution or program is accredited mean to students?

   It means that the students can be confident in an institution or its programs because those who went before has access to a quality education. Through accreditation, the experts have reviewed the quality of the education provided, the processes by which students are educated and the process that the institution or program uses to maintain an acceptable level of quality over time.

4. How do students know that an accredited institution or program will keep in word in providing the education described in its public materials?

   As part of the accreditation activity, institutions and programs must demonstrate that they meet the accreditation standards requiring that they provide quality education and they have to demonstrate truth in advertising- that the information presented or provided about the education they offer is accurate and fair.

5. Can every accreditor be trusted?

   Not all accreditations are the same. Recognition of an accreditation or the Council of Higher Education means that the accreditor has been reviewed by an outside organization to determine that the accreditor is trustworthy. Both the organizations provide periodic external reviews of accrediting organizations and have high standards, checking etc.

IV. PROPOSED ACCREDITATION BODY

Accreditation is a fertilizing experience for participating institutions, since they benefit from the transformative power of the process. Genuine self-evaluation of an institutions’ vision, mission, goals, policies, strategies, priorities, leadership, programs and resources against a set of standards and related indicators that are unparalleled in its ability to
uncover and bring into sharp focus on special challenges and opportunities that, when handled often lead to significant improvement. There are many similarities between accountability and accreditation.

1. Both systems have colleges and higher education’s as their primary units of focus.
2. Both requires the development and implementation of plans
3. Both put a premium on transparency, accessibility and use of information and data.
4. To encourage effectiveness, both employ some level of external monitoring of improvement plan implementation.

Our country is also having an accreditation criterion but unfortunately could not able to extract any information for the quality improvement in our educational organizations. EVAC (EValuation and Accreditation Commission) was found by a ministerial decree in the year 2003 as a coordinating technical organ within the framework of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. Intends to excel as a premier commission, leader and driver of quality assurance project in higher education, by following a systematic, fair and transparent approach and adopting robust quality assurance system is the vision of EVAC. The activities of EVAC in the period 2003-2009 are as follows:-

- Dissemination of culture of quality across higher education institutions in the country
- Organizing events such as seminars and workshops on QA related issues
- Training and capacity enhancement of HEI’s staff
- Developed the National Standard Guide for QA in HE
- Assisting HEI’s establishing their QA units
- Maintaining up-to-date literature and information on quality assurance, standards and benchmarks.

Once if any researcher search the internet for the information of EVAC (www.evac.edu.sd), can find the following window (Figure-1) which does not provide any valuable information, which is a drawback since neither information nor quality improvement can be extracted from the above mentioned site. The same can be found in http://www.mohe.gov.sd (figure-2). In both the sites, no information can be found for the accreditation and validation criteria for higher educations.

In the educational context, quality is not new, but in the past quality was considered as an internal entity in the institutions, yet there are growing concerns for accountability and the need for quality, efficiency and effectiveness. According to Bologna Declarations, 1999, quality is crucial to remain competitive and for the sustainability of a higher educational system. The higher educational quality is measured, considering different criteria to assess several facets of universities and its ability to produce graduates, research output and technology transfer. The above quality measures can be attributed to three complementary sets of factors that can be found in world class universities, and they are (a) a high concentration of talent; (b) abundant resources and (c) favorable governance.

From the two sets of criteria: ABET and SACS and three models: ISO 9000, Baldrige and Six Sigma mentioned in the literature review section made the researcher to introduce a proposed criterion ABS (Accreditation Board of Sudan). And it can be used as a reference for the initial parts of planning for the quality process whereas the elements of the three models have been used as a reference for the later part of the research. (Figure 3)

The quality management methodology will be developed on the basis of the meta-methodology; the methodology to be developed will be a tool which will transform an input into output. This methodology is a guide and is to be used as a road map for the implementation of quality plan in the higher educational institutions. The seven steps mentioned in the above figure can be correlated with the System Development Life Cycle (SDLC): Initial Investigation, feasibility study, analysis, design, implementation, post implementation and maintenance.
With reference to ISO 9001:2008 “Design and Development”, it is necessary to have the input for the design of the methodology. For each process stream, there need the main input elements, in terms of functionality requirements, performance requirements, legal and regulatory requirements, information from other similar designs, and any other requirements needed for the design and development. Inputs are developed on the basis of the existing ABET, SACS and proposed ABS Criteria and the three models: ISO, Baldrige and Six Sigma are as follows:-

- Producing graduates and post graduates,
  - Undergraduate Education
  - Post graduate Education
  - Graduate and undergraduate education
- Generation of research and
- Teamwork.

Based on the facts introduced in the literature review and the technical approach, the research would like to introduce a quality management development methodology

Using the meta-methodology seven steps- the quality management methodology is designed. It includes the methodology in phases and in each phase, it includes a purpose, description, key activities, deliverables and tools. The proposed methodology is called IAAPA-Accreditation Board of Sudan (IAAPA-ABS) Figure 4

V. FINDINGS

The proposed accreditation system (ABS), with the objective of assurance of quality and relevant education, especially in higher education disciplines through the seven Meta methodologies for accreditation of programs offered by higher educations. The broad objective is to have a new accreditation process which could assure that the graduates of undergraduate and graduate programs accredited by ABS have sound knowledge of fundamentals of science and mathematics, skills for solving engineering problems and the readiness for continuous learning among others. Below is the example of how to use the methodology in a simplified situation and it explains the quality management plan of the university that has applied the methodology step by step. This research document on Institutional accreditation/Re-accreditation/Re-assessment is presented in two sections.

![IAAPA-ABS (Proposed Methodology)](image)

VI. CONCLUSIONS

This proposed quality management plan is meant to bring progress and development in the higher educational institutions that implement it. It helps to better align the efforts with the institution’s vision, mission and address the stakeholder’s expectations in a timely manner. The proposed system does not dictate a miracle to transform straightaway a university into a world class organization. The proposed quality management methodology is measured to focus on the education and research functions of the higher educational institutions. In this research, the domain of service is not included, which can be included in the institution’s mission by expanding the quality dimensions of the service domains. This proposed methodology framework can be used as the fundamental to develop quality management methodology for other industries also.

VII. FUTURE PROPOSED RESEARCH

After verifying all the problems with the existing quality management methodology (if any), a conclusion can be made; that the proposed methodology can be used for future work which is aimed at helping the potential research efforts which would further enhance the quality and application of the proposed methodology system.

- Apply the proposed methodological system to more departments/units then to universities to measure the actual and expected changes in quality.
- Refresh the quality dimension measure list and determine whether new quality dimensions should be added to, with more feedback from multiple universities or departments.
- Conduct a lengthy wise review for the use of the proposed methodology system for quality management planning and execution at the higher educational institution to evaluate its quality over time.
- If there is a correlation for the use of the proposed system, separate subject universities into different types by its resource levels, vision, mission, objectives, teaching and research emphasis.
- Adjust the proposed methodology system to focus its use on the improvement efforts for accreditation such as ABET, SACS or EVAC which usually focus on an evaluation of the university that meets its minimum quality improvement requirements.
- Design and develop templates that will help for the comparison on quality levels reached, quality indicators and performance indicators that will serve as the fundamental for comparison and future research on the successful improvement initiatives.
- Concentrate the application of the proposed methodology system at the department level in the college/ college level in the university.
- Elaborate the scope of analysis including various services provided by the higher learning institutions such as continuous education initiatives, e-learning services, consultancy services etc. The services mentioned about are not included in this research, however inclusion of the missing components will support the quality management plans for the universities. To do so, additional quality measurements needed to be updated to the methodology.
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IX. REFERENCES