

The Role of Academic Accreditation in the Development and Improvement of Academic Programs in the United Arab Emirates

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Abstract

The private sector, all over the globe, has started to invest in public education ranging from kindergartens to colleges and universities. This trend is driven either by pure financial motives, a mixture of financial and educational motives, or, in few cases, pure educational motives (e.g. charitable institutions). For this reason, governments and civil agencies call for state laws and policies to monitor such institutions and guard the public interest. The United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) is not an exception. The country has witnessed an increase in the establishment of private institutions of higher education. This pushes the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, hereafter referred to as (the Ministry), to subject private institutions to licensure and their academic programs to accreditation. The Ministry, represented by the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA), has established rigorous standards and criteria to ensure quality education, guarantee the achievement of high learning outcomes, and maintain the public trust.

This paper investigates the accreditation movement in the U.A.E. and its role in the development and improvement of: (1) programs' theoretical components, (2) programs' practical processes, (3) faculty's professional skills and status, (4) teaching and learning resources, and (5) programs' learning outcomes in private institutions of higher education. The findings indicate that the accreditation process plays a significant role in the development and improvement of certain areas of academic programs but plays a moderate role in other areas.

1.Introduction

The private sector plays an important role in the development of any society. It establishes corporations, founds companies, builds factories, and invests in all domains of the society. In recent years, the private sector has started to invest in public education ranging from nursery schools to higher education institutions. This trend is motivated by various motives: financial, educational, or a mixture of both. In other words, there are some private educational institutions, at one end of the spectrum, that look for financial gains regardless of the quality of education they provide. At the other end, there are others that look for providing quality education regardless of the profits they make. Some other institutions are in between. This makes it incumbent upon the government of the U.A.E to subject such institutions to licensure and accreditation.

Licensure and accreditation are two separate but interrelated processes of external evaluation to guarantee quality education and assure the public that licensed institutions and accredited programs are in line with the international standards. Licensure is an official recognition statement given to a specific institution that meets the standards and requirements set by the licensing agency, whereas, accreditation is a status issued to a given program by an accreditation agency when it meets or exceeds the established standards of quality education. Licensure has to do with the institution as a whole but accreditation is

specifically related to individual programs at one particular institution. In this sense, accreditation is a subsequent process to licensure (see Basheer, 2002; Teimaa and AL-Bandari, 2004; Hijazi et. al., 2005 for more information about the two terms).

Licensure and accreditation are on-going processes. After five years from the initial licensure and accreditation, institutions and academic programs have to go through the process of licensure renewal and academic program re-accreditation (see 2005, 2007 Standards for Licensure and Accreditation, CAA, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, hereafter referred to as "Ministry Standards"). This is done to ensure that licensed institutions and accredited programs continue to adhere to the standards and requirements set by the CAA and to prove that their outcomes meet such standards.

According to the 2007 Standards, "any institution located in the U.A.E. that provides regular, theoretical, practical, or applied curricula of one academic year or longer beyond the U.A.E. Secondary School Certification (or the equivalent) and that leads to an academic degree, certificate, or diploma, must be licensed and have its programs accredited in order to be officially recognized by the Ministry (2007 Ministry Standards: 4). The Ministry does not only require private institutions to adhere to high standards of quality education and academic performance, but also to show continuous improvement and provide evidence of quality education outcomes.

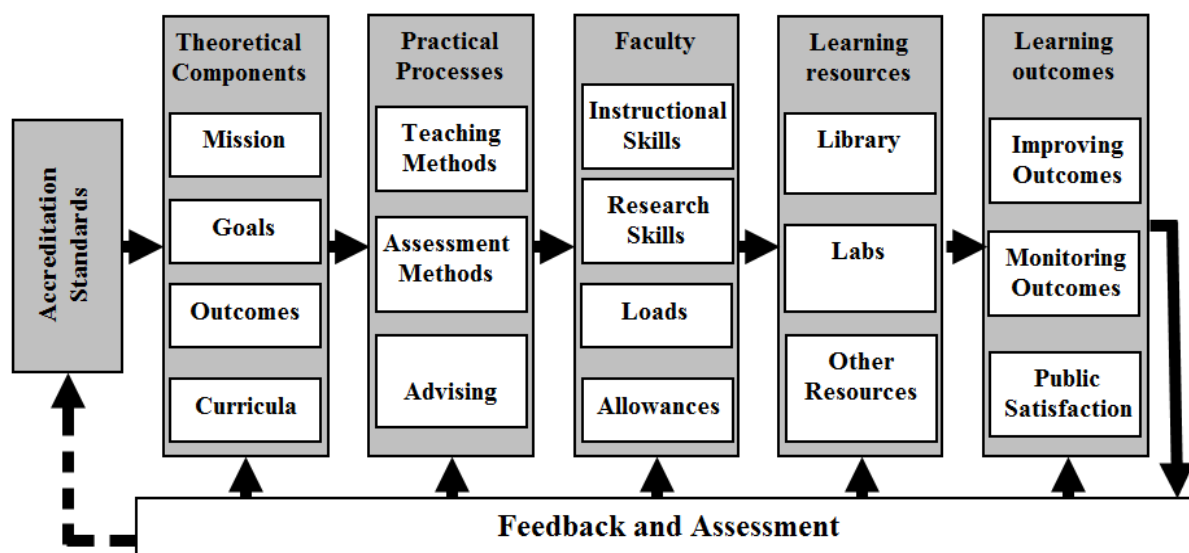
Despite all the tightened rules and regulations specified by the accreditation agencies, the hidden and, sometimes, public tension between the outside (i.e. the accreditation agencies) and the inside (i.e. the educational institutions) is undeniable, even though, in most cases, it is shown in a scholarly manner. Moreover, there could always be a gap between the ideal and the real and between what is needed and what is actually done or can be done. In other words, not all that is required by the accreditation agency can always be fulfilled by educational institutions (Glidden, 1996; Suspitsin and Suspitsyna, 2007). For this reason, the purpose of the current study is to probe into the role of the accreditation process in the U.A.E. in the actual practices of academic programs at private institutions of higher education. In particular, the study will investigate the role of accreditation in the development and improvement of academic programs in terms of their: (1) theoretical components, (2) practical processes, (3) faculty, (4) teaching and learning resources, and (5) learning outcomes.

2. The Conceptual Framework of the Study

Academic programs are required to go through a meticulous process and painstaking compilation of data necessary to show their merits and characteristics that make them eligible for accreditation or re-accreditation. The real question, then, is whether

this process is an indicator of actual development and real improvement in the programs' instructional practices and learning outcomes. The answer to this question represents the main objective of the current study. The researcher follows the conceptual framework below as a guide to the endeavor of answering this question. The hypothesis is that if the accreditation process has a positive role in the development of academic programs, the participants will rate high each of the following factors: (1) *the theoretical components* that refer to the written statements that characterize any given academic program such as its mission, goals, objectives, outcomes, curricula, and study plan; (2) *the practical processes* that refer to all pedagogical practices related to teaching methods, evaluation, advising, and students' experiences; (3) *the professional skills of faculty*; (4) *teaching/learning resources*; and (5) *learning outcomes*. The researcher sets 70% as the benchmark in the statistical analysis. Therefore, the role of accreditation in any of the above factors will be considered significant, if that particular factor achieves 70% or more agreement rate among the participants. This benchmark (70%) is chosen for two reasons. First, it is used by most programs as a benchmark of the achievement of program learning outcomes. Second, it could be an indicator of quality assurance and quality education.

The Conceptual Framework of the Study (Adapted form Volkwein et. al., 2007)



3. Significance of the Study

Licensure and accreditation practices exist, almost, in all countries that look at education as one of the powers of the society. However, there is a big difference between making decorative and superficial changes here and there to please the accreditation agency and doing substantial changes to meet the established standards and obtain high learning outcomes. Very little systematic research has been

done on the impact of accreditation on the actual improvement and development of private institutions of higher education and their academic programs. Such research is almost non-existent in the U.A.E. and the region, apart from, anecdotal evidence, testimonials from faculty and students, and data provided by the academic programs for accreditation purposes. Much of what has been written (Basheer, 2002; Teimaa and AL-Bandari, 2004; EL-Amine, 2005;

Hijazi, et. al. 2005) is a descriptive account of licensure and accreditation processes, details of the established standards and requirements of accreditation, a comparison of the accreditation process in some Arab countries, or a historical account of accreditation.

Despite the rigorous procedures and standards imposed by the accreditation agencies, there may still be gaps between the theoretical and the actual status of accredited programs and between what is recommended and what is actually done or can be done. Claims continue to be claims unless verified in actual deeds. One way to make sure that claims turn into strategic plans with substantial concrete evidence to ensure the actual effect of licensure and accreditation could be by seeking the viewpoints of faculty, administrators, personnel, students, parents, stakeholders, etc. The current is an endeavor to reach the real and the actual based on the perceptions and beliefs of the people directly involved with academic programs. The current study is one of the few studies that address the role of accreditation in the actual development of academic programs from the view point of people directly involved in such programs. The study, therefore, constitutes the first step in the right direction since it investigates what lies on the ground behind all the practices, procedures, and endeavors carried out by academic programs to satisfy the accreditation agencies.

4. Objectives of the Study

This study aims at investigating the extent to which the accreditation process play a role in developing and improving:

1. The theoretical components of academic programs.
2. The practical processes of academic programs.
3. The professional skills and status of faculty.
4. Programs' learning resources.
5. Programs' learning outcomes.

Data related to each of the above component may shed some light on the actual role of the accreditation process in developing or improving the actual practices of academic programs. The results might stimulate future research and draw the awareness of the accreditation agencies and educational institutions to areas that need special attention to reach optimal results.

5. Private Higher Education and Accreditation in the United Arab Emirates

5.1 Private Institutions and Accreditation Movement

According to AL-Sheheen (1997), there were around thirty two private institutions prior to 1992. They were classified into three categories: six licensed institutions offering higher education, eight non-licensed institutions but offering higher education, and eighteen institutions seeking licensure and not yet offering higher education. This number has

reached fifty five licensed universities, colleges, and institutes with three hundred fifteen accredited programs in 2008 as listed in the Ministry's official Website (<http://www.caa.ae/>). The need for higher education increases as the number of secondary school graduates increases. Not all secondary school graduates can be admitted into state institutions of higher education in the U.A.E., especially expatriate students. Therefore, the establishment of private institutions for higher education becomes a necessity and a logical response to the rapid growth in the country's growing economy and the rapid increase in the number of secondary school graduates in the past few years.

The increase in the number of private institutions of higher education together with the absence of academic standards that guide and monitor the performance of such institutions cause some institutions to diverge from the right track of quality education. The government, therefore, established the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in 1992 as a guarantor of quality assurance and quality education. After that, the Ministry issued a decree in 1993 revoking all licensures and accreditations prior to that date and required interested institutions to reapply for new licensure and accreditation. The Ministry, afterwards, formed the CAA to carry out responsibilities related to licensure and accreditation (AL-Shaheen, 1997). Two official documents of "Standards for Licensure and Accreditation" have been separately published in 2005 and 2007 (see the Ministry's official website at <http://www.caa.ae/>). Almost all the leading private institutions of higher education are licensed and the majority of their programs are accredited and listed in the above mentioned Website.

Through licensure, the Ministry admits licensed institutions officially into the legal organization of a specific profession. The status of licensed institutions becomes higher, and their accredited programs acquire the power to award state approved degrees (2005 and 2007 Ministry Standards). Similarly, accredited programs acquire reputation, power, and recognition. Obtaining accreditation has an impact on the ability of the programs to admit students. Both licensure and accreditation have become a culture. The first thing students and parents ask about is whether or not an academic program is accredited before they seek admission to it. This indicates the public awareness of the significance of licensure and accreditation.

Accreditation in the U.A.E. is interwoven with the accreditation movement in other parts of the world. There is a mutual interaction between the CAA in the U.A.E. with other accreditation agencies via expert exchanges and mutual visits. This is manifested through the development in the accreditation standards and the mutual interaction between educational institutions in the U.A.E. and other leading

institutions all over the world. One testimony to this is the recent universal trend among accreditation agencies all over the globe to refocus their standards and criteria. As mentioned in Volkwein et. al. (2003 cited in Volkwein et. al. 2007; Volkwein, 2005), accreditation agencies have started to focus on program effectiveness and measurable learning outcomes as criteria for programs' inputs, learning/teaching processes, and human and non human resources. This trend is clearly reflected in the document of the 2007 Standards for Licensure and Accreditation specified by the CAA at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in the U.A.E. (see the Ministry Website at <http://www.caa.ae/>). The focus of the ten standards delineated in the CAA document published in the above website and their interpreting criteria is on the effectiveness and accountability of institutions and their academic programs. The assessment processes and their impact on institutional services and academic programs' outcomes are given optimal momentum in the 2007 Standards. Program learning outcomes are looked at as an essential dimension of program effectiveness. This echoes voices that say "Students, parents, and the public ... want to know what the learning gained in these [academic] programs will mean in the marketplace of employment and in their lives as citizens and community members" (CHEA 2003:4, cited in Volkwein et. al. 2007).

The CAA requires institutions and programs to conduct self-assessment and prove program effectiveness as a condition for re-accreditation. Programs are also required to show systematic and continuous improvement in all program components (2007 Standards). Any academic program has to have a clear mission, specific goals, clear and measurable learning outcomes, and scientific measures to demonstrate how well these outcomes are being achieved (Prados, 1995, cited in Volkwein et. al. 2007).

5.2 The Purposes of Accreditation

The purposes of accreditation have been documented by several researchers (Wiley and Zald, 1968; Trivett, 1976; Selden and Porter, 1977; Basheer, 2002; Teimaa and AL-Bandari, 2004; Pokholkov, et. al 2004). The first and foremost purpose is to ensure that institutions and academic programs have the essential characteristics needed to achieve a level of excellence in learning outcomes and to ensure that they continue to show improvements.

Through the ten standards of excellence delineated in the 2007 Standards and their criteria, the CAA in the U.A.E. intends to assure students, their families, and stakeholders of the kind of education students would receive at licensed institutions and accredited programs. Such institutions and their programs acquire broader recognition in the academic community if they are accredited. The students them-

selves benefit from accreditation in getting better administration services, more effective instructions, and better resources (Wiley and Zald, 1968; Selden and Porter, 1977). Moreover, employers and stakeholders are assured that graduates of accredited programs are fully qualified to assume responsibilities. Students also guarantee credit transfer of the courses they have studied at an accredited institution and intend to carry to another institution. One of the requirements in all U.A.E. state and private higher education institutions is that only courses taken in an accredited institution can be considered for transfer. Courses that have been taken at non-accredited colleges and universities can not be considered.

In some countries, such as USA (Batalden et. al. 2002; Lattuca, et. al. 2006), Britain (EL-Amine, 2005), and Russia (Pokholkov, et. al 2004; Suspitsin and Suspitsyna, 2007) among other countries, accredited educational institutions are financially affected by the status of their accreditation. Accredited institutions are eligible for federal funds and students enrolled in accredited institutions can get federal financial aids (Glidden, 1996, Batalden et. al. 2002; Lattuca et. al. 2006; Suspitsin and Suspitsyna, 2007).

5.3 The Impact of Accreditation

Very little systematic research is carried out on the impact of accreditation on the actual improvement and development of private institutions of higher education and their academic programs. Such research is almost non-existent in the Arab World. This makes the need very high to investigate the impact of licensure and accreditation on the accountability, control, compliance, and improvement of academic programs.

Some studies have been conducted in other parts of the world on the impact of accreditation on academic programs (e.g. Peterson and Augustine, 2000; Volkwein et. al. 2007; Suspitsin and Suspitsyna, 2007). Peterson and Augustine (2000), for instance, investigate the external influences and institutional dynamics on institutional approaches to student assessment. They find out that state influences are minor, the accreditation influences are mixed, and the institutional dynamics are substantial. The researchers also report evidence from other research (Ewell, 1993) that the requirements imposed by accreditation agencies only incite the institutional practices and promote assessment initiatives but the institutional responses are neither rapid (Gill, 1993) nor comprehensive (Gentemann and Rogers, 1987).

Volkwein et. al. (2007) traces the impact of changes in the standards of professional accreditation on engineering student experiences and learning outcomes at 40 different institutions that were reviewed in different years. In this wide scale study, the researchers collect the data using various sources, students, alumni, faculty, heads of departments, and deans of colleges. Contrary to Peterson and August-

tine (2000), the findings reveal that engineering programs have changed substantially due to the implementation of new accreditation changes. Engineering programs increase their emphasis on curriculum topics, active learning strategies, professional development activities, and assessment activities. Consequently, students are engaged in more collaborative learning activities in the classroom, more interaction with the faculty, and are more active involvement in co-curricular activities more than students graduated a decade ago.

Suspitsin and Suspitsyna (2007) probe into the strategies used by Russian private institutions of higher education to cope with the normative state pressures of the accreditation agency. The researchers delineate three different strategies namely: *conformity*, in which institutions comply with the state legislation and standards; *manipulation or backdoor strategies*, in which institutions provide the accreditation agency with inaccurate information in internal program reviews or use of government connections as an avoidance strategy; and *challenging the accreditation acquisition*, in which small institutions challenge the accreditation agency as a strategy of getting away from abiding by the established standards (p.67). Suspitsin and Suspitsyna (2007) give a good account of the tension between accreditation agencies and the private educational institutions. In spite of the apparent tension between some private institutions of higher education and the accreditation agencies, "state involvement in the development of private institutions is not only to stay but is also likely to increase" (Suspitsin and Suspitsyna, 2007:78)

6. Research Methodology

6.1 Data Collection

A 36 item closed questionnaire was designed. It was first drafted and then handed to two heads of departments whose programs have just been re-accredited, and four experts in English language,

educational research, and measurement and evaluation to ensure face and content validity. Based on their comments, a final draft in Arabic was created and then distributed. An English version for non-native speakers of Arabic was also translated and distributed. A total number of 150 copies were distributed to the faculty of eight academic programs of which 77 copies were collected registering 51.33% return rate.

Items 1-7 investigate the participants' perceptions of the role of accreditation in the development of the theoretical components of academic programs, items 8-11 are related to the role of accreditation in the development of the practical processes of academic programs, items 12-18 investigate the role of accreditation in the improvement of the teaching/learning resources, items 19-30 probe into the role of accreditation in the development of the professional skills and status of faculty, and items 31-36 investigate the role of accreditation in the improvement of program learning outcomes. The researcher uses a five-point Likert Scale with the following variables (strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree).

6.2 Participants

The participants of the study are deans, heads of departments, and staff members of eight accredited programs in five colleges of one private institution of higher education in the U.A.E. The population of the study varies between lecturers (M.A. holders), assistant professors, associate professors, and professors (all Ph.D. holders). The participants also differ in terms of their qualifications, years of experience in higher education, and leadership positions as shown in Table 1. They are directly related to the programs and their responses represent hard data since they have first hand knowledge of what actually goes on in such programs.

Table 1: Description of the Participants

	Masters	Doctorate			Total
1. Degree	24	53			77
	Lecturer	Assistant Prof	Associate Prof	Professor	
2. Rank	24	25	18	10	77
	Dean	Head of Dept	Head of Unit	Staff	
3. Position	5	8	7	57	77

6.3 Limitations of the Study

This is a small scale study in terms of scope and participants. It has been conducted on the faculty of eight academic programs in one particular private institution of higher education. Thus, the findings could not be generalized to other accredited programs and institutions. However, the study would inspire other research activities in other institutions for further findings and conclusions. Still the findings of the

current study have shown that the accreditation process has played a significant role in the development and improvement of many facets of academic programs with the ultimate purpose of providing the society with the quality of education it deserves. This study constitutes a building block in the structure of quality education and quality assurance of higher

education at private institution and could be used as a guide for further research.

7. Results and Discussion of the Findings

The Theoretical Components: *To what extent does the accreditation process play a role in developing and improving the theoretical components of academic programs?*

Seven items (1-7) were designed to collect data related to the role of accreditation in the development of the theoretical components of academic programs.

Table 2 shows the participants' agreement with each of the seven items. The overall average percentage indicates that about 91.27% of the participants agree or strongly agree that accreditation has a role in the development of the theoretical components of academic programs. This entails that accreditation plays a significant role in the clarity of the mission, the precision, comprehensibility, and measurability of the objectives and outcomes, and the comprehensibility and sufficiency of the curriculum.

Table 2: The Participants' Rating of the Role of Accreditation in the Theoretical Components

The accreditation process plays an actual role in developing academic programs in the following areas:		Agreement rate
1.	All the components of academic programs	97.4%
2.	The mission of academic programs	93.5%
3.	The clarity, precision, and measurability of program objectives	92.2%
4.	The clarity, precision, and measurability of program outcomes	89.6%
5.	The study plans (clarity-number of credits-the courses)	94.8%
6.	Comprehensiveness of study plans	88.6%
7.	Sufficiency of the curriculum	81.8%
Average Percentage		91.27%

It is worth noting here that the disagreement rate in this section varies between 1.3% and 7.8% which can be an indicator of almost a common consensus among the participants regarding the significant role of accreditation on program development with a particular reference to this component. The theoretical components of any given academic program legally bind together the institution, its candidates, and the accreditation agency as mediator and guarantor. Consequently, accreditation agencies give this part a prime importance. Any given program is "required to include a detailed statement of the goals and intended outcomes of the new program.... (and) demonstrate institutional effectiveness by describing improvements made in meeting program goals and outcomes. It shows how those improvements are a consequence of institutional planning and how that planning has used the results of institutional research" (2007 Standards: 33). Through an on going cyclical frame-

work of planning, practicing, and evaluating heavily focused on in the 2007 Standards, academic programs ought to show their evolution of development. Academic programs seem to take such guidance seriously as the findings indicate.

Practical Processes: *To what extent does the accreditation process play a role in developing and improving the practical processes of academic programs?*

Items 8 to 11 were intended to answer this question. Most participants (78.9%) agree or strongly agree that accreditation plays a role in the development of the programs' practical processes such as instructional practices, learning experiences, evaluation of program outcomes, and student academic advising. The highest disagreement rate does not exceed 11.7% (items 9 and 11) and goes as low as 2.6% (item 8).

Table 3: The Participants' Rating of the Role of Accreditation in the Practical Processes

The accreditation process plays an actual role in the development of:		Agreement rate
8.	All the teaching/learning processes	85.7%
9.	The used teaching methods	74.0%
10.	The evaluation of program outcomes	84.4%
11.	Students academic advising	71.4%
Average Percentage		78.9%

The 2007 standards give special attention to evaluation, instructional practices, and student counseling. It is apparent that the influence of accreditation on teaching and learning processes in its general sense (item 8) receives the highest score (85.7%). Both the overall average percentage and the percent-

age of each individual item indicate that accreditation plays a significant role in the development and improvement of programs' practical processes.

Teaching/Learning Resources: *To what extent does the accreditation process play a role in developing and improving learning resources?*

It is apparent from Table 4 below that the accreditation process has a considerable role in the improvement and development of teaching and learning resources. The overall rate (80.6%) indicates that most participants acknowledge the role of accredita-

tion in improving teaching/learning resources. Labs, library books, journals, classrooms, and technical resources are all important factors in the achievement of program outcomes.

Table 4: The Participants' Rating of the Role of Accreditation in the Improvement of Teaching/Learning Resources

The accreditation process plays an actual role in:		Agreement rate
12.	Improving the teaching/learning resources	89.7%
13.	Developing the quality of the library resources	88.4%
14.	Adding recent publications to the library	84.4%
15.	Providing the library with international journals in your major	78.0%
16.	Connecting the library with other international libraries	70.2%
17.	Connecting the library with the World Wide Web	71.5%
18.	Improving and updating labs	81.9%
Average Percentile		80.6%

Academic programs need up-to-date learning resources in order to provide their clientele with effective learning experiences. Based on the participants' responses, it can be concluded that private institutions of higher education endeavor to please the accreditation agency and satisfy the interest of their candidates by supporting the teaching/learning processes with appropriate learning resources. However, there will always be a need for more up to date learning resources. These findings are substantiated by a research done by New England Association of Schools & Colleges (NEASC) in which "75% of the respondents indicated that the accreditation process was important for improving the quality of their resources, including library, multimedia, and technology resources" (NEASC, 2006:11). Academic program coordinators use the accreditation or re-accreditation process as a means of additional pressure to press for and justify the funding towards buying more learning resources. Academic programs are not only required to support the practical processes with the appropriate teaching/learning resources but they are also required to evaluate the instructional practices and available learning resources (2007 Ministry Standards).

The Faculty: To what extent does the accreditation process play a role in developing and improving the professional skills and status of faculty?

Twelve items were designed to collect data related to the participants' perceptions of the role of accreditation in the development and improvement of faculty's professional skills, teaching and non-teaching load, financial rewards, and inclusion in academic decisions. Only about 54.7% of the participants indicate that the accreditation process plays a role in developing and improving the conditions and skills of faculty. Yet, about 45% of the participants do not attest to this perception with over 23% disagree or strongly disagree and about 22% undecided. Item analysis shows that all items except items 19 and 23 obtain below 70% agreement rate as shown in Table 5. This agreement rate (54.7%) indicates that the accreditation process plays a less significant role in developing and improving faculty's academic skills, specifying their non-teaching loads, including them in academic decisions, or improving their financial rewards. Some parts of these findings are substantiated by similar findings in a study done by Volkwein et. al. (2007) in which about half of the respondents did not see the impact of the accreditation on their institution's reward system. Despite all of this, the role of accreditation is evidently significant in specifying the faculty's teaching load (84.5% item 23) and appointing qualified staff members (70.2% item 19).

Table 5: The Participants' Rating of the Role of Accreditation in the Improvement of Faculty Skills and Status

The accreditation process plays an actual role in:		Agreement rate
19.	Appointing qualified staff members	70.2%
20.	Developing staff members' skills	58.5%
21.	Supporting staff members' academic level	49.4%
22.	Improving staff members' research role	55.9%
23.	Specifying staff members' teaching loads	84.5%
24.	Specifying staff members' non-teaching loads	48.1%
25.	Raising staff members' salary	48.1%
26.	Raising staff members' other allowances	37.7%
27.	Improving staff members' teaching performance	53.3%
28.	Improving staff members' teaching skills	50.7%
29.	Improving staff members' technological skills	57.2%
30.	Including staff members in academic decisions	42.9%
Average Percentile		54.7%

The 2007 standards look at professional development as an integral part of the development of academic programs. Without the professional development of faculty, program development will not be as successful as it ought to be. The staff members are the turning wheel that pushes program development forwards. Their role in program development is significant and heavily stressed in the 2007 Standard. Therefore, academic programs are required to provide information regarding the effectiveness of faculty development and workload assignments. Similar recommendations are found in Volkwein et. al. (2007). They point out that academic programs need to show that staff members are engaged in research activities, curriculum revision, self-improvement, and outcomes assessment. They also need to enjoy reasonable academic and non-academic load and get satisfying financial rewards.

Learning Outcomes: To what extent does

the accreditation process play a role in ensuring quality learning outcomes of academic programs?

Six items (31-36) were designed to collect data to answer this question. 80.1% of the participants indicate that accreditation plays a major role in improving the quality of programs' learning outcomes. Table 6 shows the calculated percentages for each item. It is worth noting that the public trust in the academic institutions (item 36) obtains the highest rate (93.5%). The agreement rates in Table 6 show that accreditation plays a significant role in improving, monitoring, and ensuring quality learning outcomes. The disagreement rate reaches 10.4% (items 31 and 34) and goes as low as 1.3% (item 36). Reliability of learning outcomes (item 34) obtains an agreement rate (66.3%) below the set significant rate (i.e. 70%). The 66.3% indicates that the role of accreditation in the reliability of learning outcomes is less significant. One reason for this low rate could be the vagueness of the item itself.

Table 6: The Participants ' Rating of the Role of Accreditation in the Improvement of Learning Outcomes

The accreditation process plays an actual role in:		Agreement rate
31.	Improving learning outcomes	80.5%
32.	Monitoring learning outcomes	76.6%
33.	Ensuring quality of learning outcomes	76.6%
34.	Reliability of learning outcomes	66.3%
35.	Increasing the level of public trust in academic programs	87.0%
36.	Increasing the level of public trust in the academic institutions	93.5%
Average Percentile		80.1%

Improving and achieving high learning outcomes that meet international standards is the optimal objective of academic programs and accreditation agencies. The task of the accreditation process is to ensure that academic programs provide the society with individuals capable to excel in the profession they are prepared for. The CAA does not only require academic program to be clear about their goals and outcomes, but also require them to provide "evidence of the ways in which students meet the outcomes of the program and *substantiate* (italicized in the original source) the ways in which other program goals are met{and prove}. institutional effectiveness by describing improvements made in meeting program goals and outcomes" (2007 Ministry Standards:30). The findings of this section indicate that the role of accreditation is evident in monitoring, improving, and ensuring quality learning outcomes and increasing the level of public trust in both licensed institutions and academic programs.

8. Recommendations

Accreditation plays a significant role in the development and improvement of academic programs as the findings of this study show. However, a fact-finding process is an on going process. Therefore, to verify such evidence, more studies of this sort, but at a large scale that would include various institutions or

investigate both graduates and stakeholders, are needed. It is also recommended that accreditation agencies need to continue watching closely the accredited institutions and programs to maintain continuous academic performance that meets the accreditation standards. More pressure is needed so that private institutions invest more on professional development. They have to organize academic workshops within the institutions or in cooperation with other institutions. They also have to allow, encourage and support staff members to attend local and international conferences. More importantly, more workshops are needed on accreditation and its importance so that all members of such institutions would be more acquainted with the rewards such institutions, the staff members, the students and the whole society would gain. Furthermore, the accreditation agencies need to exercise further pressure on private institutions to convince them to provide their staff members with adequate financial rewards comparable or close to those given at government institutions.

9. Conclusion

Accreditation of higher education (state or private) is an essential practice for more than one reason. First, it guarantees quality education that is paramount in a time like ours where competition becomes very high and the job market becomes very

selective. Second, accreditation is a protecting force against any unethical practices directed towards the public or even the faculty. Third, accreditation helps to establish uniformity within the realm of each academia. In other words, the accreditation process, through the establishment of high standards and the reinforcement of such standards ought to create homogeneity among academic programs to provide the society with individuals with similar competencies that make them eligible to assume responsibilities corresponding to their field of specialization. The

findings of the current study show that the accreditation process plays a significant role in the development and improvement of various facets of the academic programs. Nonetheless, the degree of this role varies from one facet to another which might require the accreditation agencies to exercise equal pressure to reach desirable outcomes in all program components. In short, the study sheds some light on the strong and weak points of accreditation and hopes to stimulate future research on those facets that might affect quality education.

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دور الاعتماد الأكاديمي في تطوير وتحسين البرامج الأكاديمية في مؤسسات التعليم العالي الخاصة في الإمارات العربية المتحدة أمين عبد الله محمد المخلافي

الملخص:

يقوم القطاع الخاص، في جميع أنحاء المعمورة، بعملية الاستثمار في قطاع التعليم العام، ابتداءً من مرحلة الروضة وانتهاءً بالكليات والجامعات، وغالبًا ما يكون هذا التوجه مدفوعًا إما بدوافع مالية بحتة، أو خليط من الدوافع المالية والتعليمية، وفي بعض الحالات النادرة بدوافع تعليمية صرفة، كحال مؤسسات التعليم غير الربحية. ومن هذا المنطلق دعت الحكومات ومنظمات المجتمع المدني إلى سن القوانين والأنظمة لمراقبة مثل هذه المؤسسات وذلك للحفاظ على المصلحة العامة. ودولة الإمارات العربية ليست استثناءً في هذا الباب، حيث شهدت الدولة في الآونة الأخيرة توسعًا وازديادًا ملحوظين في عدد مؤسسات التعليم العالي الخاصة، وهذا التوسع دفع وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي إلى إخضاع مثل هذه المؤسسات إلى الترخيص ابتداءً وإخضاع برامجها الأكاديمية لعملية الاعتماد الأكاديمي، وقامت الوزارة ممثلة بلجنة الاعتماد الأكاديمي بإرساء معايير وقواعد صارمة كي تضمن تعليمًا متميزًا، وتحافظ على مخرجات تعليمية ذات جودة عالية، وفي الوقت نفسه تراعي المصلحة العامة.

ولذلك فالهدف من هذه الدراسة هو تفصي حركة الاعتماد الأكاديمي في دولة الإمارات العربية ومحاولة

معرفة أثرها في تطوير وتحسين:

1. المكونات النظرية للبرامج.
 2. العمليات التطبيقية (في التدريس، والتقييم والإرشاد).
 3. مهارات وأوضاع أعضاء هيئة التدريس.
 4. مصادر التعليم والتعلم.
 5. مخرجات البرامج الأكاديمية في مؤسسات التعليم العالي الخاصة.
- وأشارت النتائج إلى أن عملية الاعتماد الأكاديمي تلعب دورًا رئيسًا في تطوير وتحسين عدد من مكونات البرامج الأكاديمية، غير أنها تلعب دورًا ذا أثر متوسط في بعض النواحي الأخرى.