

Research Article

SUSTAINING THE CULTURE OF QUALITY IN TEACHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

Educational institutions are accountable to the stakeholders in ensuring quality. Valuable stakeholder feedback will serve as a check and balance in quality assurance framework. The goal of this qualitative descriptive design is to present a descriptive summary of the stakeholders' feedback of the accreditation process in Teacher Education institutions. Data saturation was guided by what constitutes the sample size. The 106 participants, selected by purposive sampling, were stakeholders from eight (8) teacher education institutions accredited by three (3) accrediting bodies. The participants come from three categories of stakeholders from each institution, namely: administrators, faculty and students. A semi-structured interview guide was utilized during the focus group discussion (FGD) composed of five to seven participants. Following the Procedural Spiral Approach (Creswel, 2013), thematic analysis was done by developing and applying a coding system to logically organize themes that emerged from the data. Derived themes are: benefits of accreditation, challenges of accreditation and proposals for future accreditation. The benefits include: continuous improvement, graduate employability and stakeholder satisfaction. The challenges are: time constraints and tedious preparation of the documents; varied interpretation; limited accreditation time. Proposals include: organized and efficient process in preparation of evidences; rigorous selection and training of accreditors; and implementation of accreditation recommendations. Therefore, accreditation has its benefits and challenges. The benefits of accreditation affirm the necessity of accreditation while the challenges and proposals need to be responded to sustain the culture of quality in Teacher Education institutions.

Keywords: Teacher Education Institutions, Accreditation, Culture of Quality

Introduction

The dynamic nature of the educational system is parallel to the rapidly changing societal demands. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are facing changing realities spurred by globalization and internalization. The demand for competent and globally competitive graduates has increased. With this, a spot in the nationwide and world university rankings, as well as the accreditation status of institutions have become indicators of the quality of an institution. Thus, educational institutions seek accreditation to ensure quality. CHED (Commission of Higher Education) supports the development of HEIs into mature institutions by engaging

them in the process of promoting a culture of quality (CHED, 2012). Furthermore, CHED demands responsibility and accountability from federations/ networks for their certification of the quality of education offered in accredited programs /institutions (CHED, 2005). Therefore, government supports efforts in achieving quality education, through quality assurance, as it is an impetus for economic development and nation building.

The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE as cited in Hou, et al., 2020) has defined quality assurance as “a process of establishing stakeholder confidence that provision (input, process and outcomes) fulfils expectations or measures up to thresh-old minimum requirements”. Thus, to meet the fixed standards or specifications and the customers’ or stakeholders’ expectations, there is a need for quality assurance. Assuring quality in higher education through accreditation is based on the expectations of the stakeholders (Berry, 2015). The institutions are accountable to the stakeholders in sustaining educational quality to satisfy the constantly changing needs and quality expectations of the stakeholders.

The quality of implementation of standards and administrative practices adopted in various institutions needs care and consideration (Neelaveni & Manimaran, 2015). The stakeholders are the implementers of the quality standards set by the accrediting bodies. Thus, it is appropriate that the comments and feedbacks of the stakeholders with regards to accreditation are considered. Valuable stakeholder feedback will serve as a check and balance in quality assurance framework. A feedback-friendly culture is necessary in maintaining the quality of an organization (Baker et al., 2013). Stakeholders can bring different perspectives, expectations and requirements to bear on quality work on higher education institutions (Westerheijden et al., 2013).

There is a gargantuan of quantitative research on quality assurance and accreditation. However, there is a dearth of qualitative research on the stakeholders’ feedback on accreditation in Teacher Education institutions. The program of Teacher Education in various stages requires a thorough reconstruction in its input, process and output in order to make the system quality oriented (Mukhopadhyay, 2014). In this study, the research objective is to analyze the stakeholders’ feedback on the quality of the accreditation process of Teacher Education institutions. It is envisioned that the result of the study will provide insights on the quality of the accreditation process of Teacher Education institutions with the stakeholders’ perspective given great consideration and consequently sustain the quality of education.

Methodology

The researcher utilized descriptive qualitative research design. Descriptive research is defined as a research method used to describe the existing phenomena as accurately as possible (Atmowardoyo, 2018). Descriptive studies look at the characteristics of a population; identify the problems that exist within a unit, organization or population; or look at variations in characteristics or practices in organizations or even countries (Siedlecki, 2020). The event under study in this research is the accreditation of Teacher Education institutions.

To substantiate the data, the FGD (Focus Group Discussion) was conducted in eight (8) accredited Teacher Education institutions. The FGD, which comprised 5 to 7 participants, lasted for 45 to 60 minutes. For each institution, three sets of FGDs were conducted, one with the administrators, one with teachers and

one with students. The participants were selected by purposive sampling on the basis of their experience with accreditation. All participants met the following inclusion criteria: stakeholder of an accredited Teacher Education Institution and able to narrate and describe their experiences with regards the conduct or process of accreditation in their institution.

The research methodology underwent committee review. The first part of the interview sought the written consent of the participants in accordance with the ethical considerations in conducting research. The main question for the interview was “What is your feedback of the accreditation process in your institution?” Further prompts or probes to elicit further descriptions of their experiences were made when deemed needed.

Rigors of research are ensured following the Trustworthiness Framework (Lincoln & Guba cited in Cope, 2014; Nassaji, 2020), namely: credibility (truth), dependability (consistency), transferability (applicability), and confirmability (neutrality). Credibility was established using data triangulation by having different sources of data. Different sources of data were sought from three (3) different types of stakeholders and from institutions accredited by three major accrediting bodies. Furthermore, to establish credibility, the researcher ensured that researcher the understanding of the research participants, context, and processes are as accurate and complete as possible. Dependability was ensured through a peer review of the research findings. Transferability was ensured by describing in sufficient detail the narratives or feedback of the participants as regards the accreditation process. To establish confirmability, the researcher employed audit trail strategies in such a way that the data can be confirmed by other. Each of the one hundred six (106) participants is assigned a participant number. (Example: P1 for participant 1)

Data saturation was guided by what constitutes the sample size (Burmeister & Aitken as cited in Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation was obtained by having FGD participants from three categories of stakeholders from eight (8) institutions accredited by three (3) accrediting bodies. Thus, data saturation was achieved from the varied perspectives presented by the participants. Following the Procedural Spiral approach in thematic analysis (Creswel as cited in Peel, 2020), data were organized and simplified into meaningful and manageable codes, categories and themes.

Results and Discussion

A feedback friendly culture is necessary in maintaining the quality of an organization. According to Baker et al. (2013), this concept refers to the organizational practices and interventions that emphasize the importance of feedback in the organization. The stakeholders’ feedback on accreditation process revealed the central themes: benefits, challenges and relevant proposals. Presented below are the theme clusters and sub-theme, followed by sample significant statements of the research participants.

Theme Cluster 1: Benefits of Accreditation

The benefits derived from accreditation affirms the relevance and necessity of accreditation. In the study of Duman (2020), the stakeholders in teacher education institutions identified the following as reasons for engaging in accreditation: enhancing the quality of education, transparency and accountability of education programs, increasing the competitiveness in education. In addition, the following were identified as benefits in teacher education institutions: ensuring continuous assessment of teacher education, increasing the mobility between programs, improving the recognition of institutions.

In this study, the stakeholders' feedback revealed the following benefits of accreditation: continuous improvement of the institution, employability of graduates and the satisfaction of the stakeholders.

1. Accreditation results to continuous improvement of the institution

Sample Significant Statements:

There is trial and error to achieve the quality of something(P58). It entails improvement (P4, 6, 23, 29, 38, 67) in all aspects (P4). There are concrete and observable change or improvement in things, system or behavior (P57). Continuous improvement affects the quality of education (P85). It will help the school improve in terms of facilities, teaching strategies, administrative function and safety of the school - based on the feedback of the accreditors (P8). Because of accreditation, the facilities, teachers and administrators improve (P9) Accreditation improves weaknesses and figure out what we should improve (21).

Formulated meaning:

Accreditors evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the school or university. The school is affirmed of its best practices and the points for improvement are seen. Through the recommendations there is improvement in the facilities, services, instruction, research and all other policies and practices of the school. Without accreditation, the university becomes complacent. But with the accreditation, requests for repairs are immediately responded and improvement of facilities are expedited.

2. Employability of graduates

Sample Significant Statements:

The graduates have edge over the other applicants (P73, 93,100, 102, 106). The applicants are prioritized (P70). It can be used by the graduates when they apply for a job (P104). One of the requirements is the accreditation status of the school(P106). Applicants are expected to be knowledgeable and smart (P59). The accreditation status will influence the decision of the employer when hiring applicants (P46).

Formulated Meaning:

Accreditation results to the employability of graduates. The accreditation level of the school where the applicant graduated influences the decision of the employers in hiring. Applicants from schools with high accreditation status will have an edge over the other applicants. They will be prioritized. There are high expectations from the graduates of accredited schools. They are expected to be competent and productive.

3. Satisfaction of the stakeholders

Sample Significant Statement:

It is a confirmation of the quality and standard of the school (P17, 22, 26, 60). It means it has met the parameters and the standards set (P47, 67). The community has high regard (P67) of the accredited schools. The label of the school is important (P56). It means there is satisfaction of the stakeholders (P59).

Quality will satisfy the stakeholders (P30,44). We have to satisfy the stakeholders to achieve quality (P33, 75). We need to improve (P68). Stakeholders are satisfied when their needs (P12, 24, 31, 68) expectations (P75) and standards are met (P65, 70, 73).

Formulated Meaning:

Accreditation leads to the satisfaction of the stakeholders. Quality needs to be achieved through accreditation to satisfy the stakeholders and quality is achieved if the stakeholders are satisfied.

Theme Cluster 2: Challenges of Accreditation

Although the stakeholders pointed out the benefits of accreditation, there are challenges encountered in accreditation. Challenges include accreditation standards and criteria, as well as implementation (Nguyen et al., 2017).

1. Time constraints and tedious preparation

Sample Significant Statements:

Gathering of evidences is very tedious (P33, 35). Teachers cramp because of regular teachers work, thus the data gathered for accreditation lacks validity. That is one limitation of the accreditation (P51). We had difficulty complying for the documents (P64). Especially on big departments it is difficult to gather documents (P53).

Formulated Meaning:

Preparation of documents is tedious and time is very limited since accreditation work is done on top of the regular work load.

2. Interpretation of the instruments

Sample Significant Statements:

There is a tendency to be subjective in the analysis. Orientation is needed (P52). Sometimes the teachers thought that the evidences are okay, but it is not yet okay with the accreditors (P98). There should be consistency of the standard of the accreditors (P84).

Formulated Meaning:

There is varied interpretation of the documents. There is a tendency to be subjective in the analysis. The accreditors and teachers have different interpretations of the instruments as to the needed documents or evidences.

3. Perusal of documents and verification process

Sample Significant Statements:

Scheduling of accreditors is one area that has to be looked into (P19). Accreditors are assigned to one or two areas. Accreditors must skim properly (P66). Limited verification process. That is to our

advantage. The limited time they have, the less questions and less strict they are. They have no choice but to let us pass. If they have enough time, like they visit for 3 days, that is scary because they discover everything, all the weakness and strengths and all the things that are lacking (P18). The triangulation or verification process is done through observation and interviews of the different groups of stakeholders (P30). On the part of the accreditor longer visit is better for better perusal of documents (P75).

Formulated Meaning:

There is limited time in the perusal of documents and other verification process. Verification process was done through interviews and observations. However, due to time constraints there is a possibility that some of the documents were not properly scrutinized and the verification through observation and interviews was limited. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage. It is an advantage because the accreditors will have less opportunity to see the weaknesses of the program being accredited and it gives greater chance for the college to pass the accreditation. It is a disadvantage because the documents are not well evaluated, the weaknesses are not seen and it will be carried over to the next accreditation period

Theme Cluster 3: Proposals

The purpose of quality assurance is to ensure accountability and improvement. Thus, as designated gate keepers of quality, the accreditors have great responsibility and are highly accountable of the quality of the program or institution that they accredit. The stakeholders can give valuable feedback since they are the ones directly involved in the process. In the study of Duman (2020), it was stated that more training on accreditation should be organized, and cooperation with other institutions regarding the accreditation process should be increased. Furthermore, in the study of Siddiqua and Khan (2015), the stakeholders have highlighted some weaknesses of the accreditation process and tools and shared some valuable suggestions for the improvement.

Presented below are proposals for effective and efficient accreditation process.

1. Required documents

Sample Significant Statements

There should be specific descriptors of the evidences required (P1, 8). There should be no overlapping of evidences to lessen preparation (P1). There should be consistency of requirements for evidences (P5). Perhaps, they need to identify the documents that are common in the areas(P19). The descriptors and evidences are so subjective. It depends from one accreditor to the next. The list of documents should be specific (P82, 83).

Formulated Meaning:

There should be consistent, practical, organized and efficient process in the preparation and presentation of required evidence.

2. Accreditors

Sample Significant Statements

The accreditors should know what they are doing. They should understand what they are doing. They should understand the criteria (P63). They should ask the appropriate questions (P63). They cannot

anymore observe classes because each accreditor has more than one area to analyze (P17). The accreditors should be experts in their field/ the areas they are assigned. So that, they will not only be evaluating us but they will also be giving advice to us (P20). Accreditors are always reminded that they should have these standard of treating the teachers (P30). Part of training for accreditors is training for attitude because some are demanding (P60, 68). There should be annual training of the teachers and the accreditors to have the same interpretations of the instruments (P98).

Formulated Meaning:

There should be a rigorous selection and training of the accreditors. Training should include: competence and sufficient knowledge on the area being accredited; understanding of the criteria and parameters of the instrument; and proper attitude when doing accreditation.

3. Administrative support

Sample Significant Statements

There should be one accreditor in an accredited school. To help the faculty in the accreditation preparation (P19). The administrators must ensure to meet the standards that are asked to be changed by the accrediting bodies (P58). Schools should have QA office; should be centralized to organize everything. All faculty will forward all documents and we will just cull the documents during the accreditation (P66). During accreditation period, one load of the teacher is accreditation preparation (P67). There must be maximum utilization of the result of the accreditation(P68)

Formulated Meaning:

There must be administrative support to the teachers through accreditation-related facilities, policies and procedures; and implementation of accreditation recommendations.

Discussion

Accreditation is considered as a quality stamp that an institution has undergone a rigorous process of external peer evaluation based on predefined standards and complies with the minimum requirements (Kumar et al., 2020). Accreditation derives its value from two principles: 1) In this world, there is no standing still. An institution is either improving or declining; and 2) the only effective agent to assure the quality of the institution is the institution itself (Manning, 2018). Hence, it is important for the institution to have the capacity and the will to produce quality. The capacity and will to produce quality are largely dependent on the stakeholders themselves. Thus, the voluntary nature of accreditation. With this in mind, it is of great importance that the perspectives of the stakeholders of the accredited institution be considered when determining ways to sustain the culture of quality in Teacher Education institutions. Three themes emerged from the data gathered in this study. The participants' feedback delved on the benefits and challenges of accreditation as well as the proposals to improve accreditation.

The stakeholders/research participants identified the following as benefits of accreditation: continuous improvement, employability of graduates and satisfaction of stakeholders. This shows that the stakeholders are satisfied with the outcomes of accreditation. Accreditation has benefited the institutions

in sustaining quality. The quality of the program being accredited and the quality of the university is seen in its outcome or benefits. This finding concurs with the study of Siddiqua and Khan (2015) which identified other benefits of accreditation in teacher education institutions, namely: significant impacts on the performance of institutions as well as the academic and professional competencies of the prospective teachers.

Accreditation is one way that HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) keep themselves in check with the standards (Conchada & Tiongco, 2015). Thus, continuous improvement is necessary to ensure that quality standards are met. Maintaining quality in a system is dynamic, responsive and adaptable to the changing needs of the clients and the changing trends of time. It must be relevant to the changing context of society and international standards. Furthermore, continuous improvement engages multiple problem-solving to discover, implement, and spread evidenced-based changes. It involves a culture of collaboration and experimentation (Grunow & Hough, 2018). These continuous improvement practices facilitate learning in the organization (Kovach & Fredendall, 2014). The research participants/stakeholders have seen and are engaged in these incremental changes or improvements in their institutions. The participants asserted that because of the recommendations of the accreditors, there are improvement in the facilities, services, instruction, research and other policies and practices of the university. Thus, accreditation process contributes to the continuous improvement of the institution and is beneficial to the institution

Accreditation ensures quality outcomes. Producing quality graduates is an expected outcome of any quality-oriented accredited educational institution. Accreditation sets the standards of graduate attributes. In the study of Oraison et al. (2019), it was found out that there was a clear alignment between the university's graduate attributes and the standards articulated by accreditation bodies for psychology, nursing and education. According to the research participants' feedback, quality graduates are highly employable. Thus, employability is one of the benefits of accreditation. According to the research participants, applicants from schools with high accreditation status will have an edge over the other applicants. They will be prioritized. There are high expectations from the graduates of accredited schools. They are expected to be competent and productive. The accreditation level of the school where the applicant graduated and the graduate attributes influences the decision of the employers in hiring.

Stakeholder expectations change year to year, so it is vitally important to communicate with them (Freeman et al. as cited in Hickman & Akdere, 2017). Thus, to meet the changing needs of the stakeholders, accreditation is necessary. The stakeholders of HEIs are the administrators, faculty, non-teaching staff, students, parents and institutional partners. The future employers of the graduates and the society as a whole are also stakeholders of TEIs as the graduates will eventually become part of the workforce or human resource of the country. The research participants, representing the diverse group of higher education stakeholders, asserted that accreditation leads to the satisfaction of the stakeholders; and that quality needs to be achieved through accreditation to satisfy the stakeholders. In other words, quality education is measured by the extent of satisfaction of the needs and expectations of the stakeholders and that stakeholder satisfaction is a benefit of accreditation.

Varied expectations and experiences of stakeholders can contribute to a more effective and comprehensive quality assurance system (Beerken & Udam, 2017). Thus, it apt to also take note of the stakeholders' feedback on the challenges and proposals on accreditation. According to the participants, the challenges encountered were the limited time and tedious preparation of documents; the varied interpretation of documents; and limited time in the perusal of documents and other verification process. The participants considered accreditation work as tedious due to the voluminous documents needed. Preparation of documents by the teachers is done on top of their regular teaching load. Variation in interpretation of the instrument between the teachers and the accreditors posed a problem during the gathering and presentation of evidences. One factor mentioned for the limited time for the accreditors is the assigning of two areas to one accreditor or having the same set of accreditors for the accreditation of two programs. In summary, the challenges revolved on the concept of time constraints experienced by both the stakeholders during the preparation and by the accreditors during the actual accreditation.

The proposals for improvement by the stakeholders signify that a high-level internal quality assurance mechanism in the accreditation process is not yet achieved. The sub-themes for proposal for improvement are: required documents, accreditors, administrative support. The participants proposed that there should be consistent, practical, organized and efficient process in the preparation and presentation of required evidences; there should be a rigorous selection and training of the accreditors; and administrative support in the preparation and the implementation of accreditation recommendations. The proposals dwell on the needed improvements during accreditation preparation, during the actual visit and the institutional implementation of the accreditation recommendations after the accreditation. As part of the continuous improvement process, it is best that the administrators of the different institutions as well as the accrediting bodies give these proposals sufficient consideration. Highlighted in the proposals are improvements on the quality assurance mechanisms of the institutions and the quality of the accreditation process.

Considering the challenges encountered and the proposals presented by the stakeholders of Teacher Education institutions, there is a need to evaluate the quality assurance standards (Cao & Li, 2014) as well as the accreditation process of Teacher Education institutions. The feedback of the stakeholders on accreditation challenges as well as the proposals provide a lens at ways to evaluate the quality assurance framework of institutions as well as the quality of accreditation process. Thus, a collaboration of all the stakeholders of the accredited institutions and the accrediting bodies in the improvement of the accreditation process will have a great impact in the accreditation quality of the Teacher Education institutions. With this, the actual influence of stakeholders can be further optimized in higher education institutions (Westerheijden, 2013). Allowing greater stakeholder voice and inclusion in improvement processes will help to ensure higher education institutions provide real value for our students, faculty, communities, and society (Hickman & Akdere, 2017). Thus, based on the stakeholders' feedback, quality planning, control and improvement of accreditation can be implemented and achieved to sustain the culture of quality in Teacher Education institutions.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Therefore, the feedback of the stakeholders on the accreditation process provides valuable insights to the quality of accreditation process in the Teacher Education institutions. Accreditation has its benefits and challenges. The identified benefits of accreditation affirm the necessity of accreditation while the challenges and proposals need to be responded to sustain the culture of quality as well as the quality of the accreditation process in Teacher Education institutions.

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