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Accreditation Agencies and their Role in Quality Assurance in Education

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Abstract

This article explores the role of accreditation agencies in ensuring quality assurance in education. Accreditation agencies play a critical role in the evaluation and monitoring of educational institutions, programs, and services to ensure that they meet the necessary standards of quality. The article provides an overview of the accreditation process, including the criteria and standards that institutions must meet to receive accreditation. Additionally, the article examines the benefits of accreditation for educational institutions and their stakeholders including students, employers, and the broader community. The article also explores the types of accreditation and challenges faced by accreditation agencies, including the need to keep up with rapidly changing educational environments and the potential for conflicts of interest. The researcher makes use of literature review as a method to attain data related to this research topic. Documents like published journals, Books, Paper presentations, and other documents related to the said topic were reviewed. The data obtained was qualitatively analysed. The research highlights the critical role of accreditation agencies in maintaining and improving the quality of education and the need for ongoing efforts to strengthen the accreditation process. The result of this research indicate that there are a lot of efforts made by several countries to improve education through accreditation agencies but there are still challenges facing the quality of education around the world.

KEYWORDS: Accreditation, agencies, role, quality, assurance, education.

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INTRODUCTION

Accreditation agencies are organizations that are responsible for evaluating and assessing the quality of education and training programs offered by institutions, and ensuring that they meet certain standards and criteria. The primary goal of these agencies is to provide assurance to students, employers, and other stakeholders that the programs offered by the institutions are of high quality and that graduates of these programs possess the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in their chosen fields. In this article, the researcher explored the role of accreditation agencies in quality assurance in education. The research also discusses the evolution of accreditation, the different types of accreditation agencies, and the standards and criteria that they use to evaluate institutions and programs. The article furthered examine the benefits of accreditation for institutions, students, and employers, and the challenges and criticisms that accreditation faces.

Harvey, L., & Knight, P. T. (Eds.). (2018) "Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Global Perspectives" provide a comprehensive analysis of quality assurance practices in higher education institutions around the world. The book consists of 22 chapters written by leading scholars in the field of higher education from different parts of the world. The first section of the book focuses on the theoretical and conceptual foundations of quality assurance in higher education. The second section provides an overview of quality assurance systems and practices in different regions of the world, including Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America. The third section of the book examines the challenges and opportunities of quality assurance in higher education, including issues related to student engagement, social justice, and institutional autonomy. The book provides a thorough and up-to-date analysis of quality assurance practices in higher education institutions around the world, making it a valuable resource for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners in the field of higher education.



Kivinen, O., & Westerheijden, D. F. (Eds.). (2017). "Accreditation and evaluation in the European higher education area" provide a comprehensive analysis of the current state and development of quality assurance systems in European higher education institutions. The book explores the relationship between evaluation and accreditation in the context of the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The book is divided into three parts. The first part provides an introduction to quality assurance and evaluation in the EHEA. The second part focuses on the different quality assurance systems that are currently in place in various European countries. The third part of the book examines the impact of quality assurance on various aspects of higher education, including teaching and learning, research, and institutional management. The book provides a valuable resource for anyone interested in understanding the development of quality assurance systems in European higher education institutions.

According to United States Department of Education. (2020). (USDE) is a federal agency responsible for promoting educational excellence and ensuring equal access to education for all. The USDE plays a key role in regulating and overseeing the accreditation process for colleges and universities in the United States. Accreditation is a process by which an educational institution is evaluated and recognized as meeting certain quality standards. Accreditation helps to ensure that students receive a high-quality education and that the degrees they earn are respected by employers and other institutions. There are two main types of accreditation in the United States: institutional accreditation and specialized accreditation. Institutional accreditation evaluates the overall quality of an institution, while specialized accreditation evaluates specific programs or departments within an institution. Accreditation is typically conducted by private, non-governmental organizations called accrediting agencies. Accrediting agencies can also be of two kinds which are: regional accrediting agencies and national accrediting agencies. Regional accrediting agencies evaluate institutions within a specific geographic region of the United States, while national accrediting agencies evaluate institutions and programs across the country. The USDE recognizes accrediting agencies that meet certain criteria and institutions that are accredited by these agencies are eligible to receive federal funding. The USDE also provides oversight of accrediting agencies to ensure that they are operating effectively and in the best interests of students.

According to Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. (2021). (QAA) is an independent body that exists to safeguard the standards and quality of higher education in the United Kingdom. Quality Assurance Agency was established in 1997 and is funded by subscriptions from universities and colleges across the UK, as well as through income generated from consultancy services and international work. Quality Assurance Agency's core responsibilities include conducting reviews of higher education institutions and their academic programs to ensure that they meet UK quality and academic standards, as well as providing guidance

and support to institutions to help them enhance the quality of their provision. Quality Assurance Agency also provides guidance and support to students, employers, and other stakeholders on matters related to quality assurance in higher education. In addition to its work within the UK, QAA also carries out international consultancy and quality assurance work, working with governments and other organizations around the world to support the development of higher education systems and standards.

According to European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. (2020). published the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" These guidelines provide a framework for quality assurance in higher education institutions across Europe and are used as a reference by quality assurance agencies, institutions, and governments. The aim to ensure that higher education institutions meet the required standards in providing high-quality education to students. The standards are designed to be flexible, adaptable, and relevant to different higher education systems in Europe. They also promote continuous improvement and the sharing of best practices between institutions and quality assurance agencies.

RESEARCH METHOD

The researcher used qualitative research method. This involves analysing written or visual material such as books, articles, or paper presentations to identify common themes and patterns. In other words, documents related to the said topic are reviewed to get wider knowledge on the Accreditation Agencies and their Role in Quality Assurance in Education. In order to obtain more detail data on the topic, the researcher was further interview educational stakeholders like those working in the accreditation agencies and student, parent, and the general society.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Accreditation is the process of evaluating and certifying that an organization or program meets certain predetermined standards of quality. It is a formal recognition of the competence, integrity, and credibility of an organization or program by an accrediting agency. Accreditation can be granted to a variety of entities, such as educational institutions, healthcare organizations, government agencies, and certification programs. Accrediting agencies are typically independent, non-governmental organizations that establish and enforce standards of quality and performance for their respective fields. The accreditation process involves a comprehensive review of the organization or program, including its mission, governance, administration, finances, facilities, faculty/staff qualifications, curriculum, and student outcomes. The evaluation may include self-study, site visits, and peer review by experts in the field

Educational Accreditation is the process of evaluating the quality and standards of educational institutions, programs, and services by an external accrediting agency. The aim of accreditation is to ensure that educational institutions meet certain predetermined criteria and standards that reflect quality education. The accreditation process typically involves

a self-assessment by the institution, followed by an external evaluation by a team of experts appointed by the accrediting agency. The evaluation assesses the institution's performance against predetermined standards and criteria, which may include factors such as faculty qualifications, student outcomes, program curriculum, resources, and governance. Accreditation is a crucial process that ensures that educational institutions meet certain standards and criteria that reflect quality education. It helps to enhance the quality of education and services offered and provides stakeholders with a means to assess the quality of education offered by an institution.

Accreditation agencies play a critical role in ensuring quality assurance in education by setting and enforcing standards for academic programs and institutions. These agencies typically evaluate schools and programs based on a range of criteria, including the quality of faculty and staff, student outcomes, curriculum design, and administrative policies and procedures. Accreditation can be voluntary or mandatory, depending on the type of institution and the regulatory requirements of the governing body. For example, in the United States, the Department of Education recognizes several accrediting agencies that evaluate and approve schools and programs for federal financial aid eligibility. The accreditation process typically involves a comprehensive review of an institution or program by a team of experts who assess its compliance with established standards. Accreditation can also involve ongoing monitoring and review to ensure continued compliance and improvement.

TYPES OF ACCREDITATION

Accreditation is the process by which a certification body or organization evaluates and recognizes the quality and standards of an institution or program. There are various types of accreditation depending on the industry and type of organization. Here are some of the most common types of accreditation which includes institutional accreditation: This type of accreditation applies to the entire institution and evaluates its overall quality and standards. Institutional accreditation is usually granted by a regional or national accrediting agency. Programmatic accreditation: Programmatic accreditation evaluates the quality and standards of specific academic programs or departments within an institution. For example, the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) accredits engineering programs. Huang, F. L., and Hsieh, Y. H. (2021) focused on examining the relationships between accreditation, quality assurance practices, and student learning outcomes in Taiwan. It presents a study conducted in the Taiwanese higher education context to explore how accreditation and quality assurance practices impact student learning outcomes. Professional accreditation: Professional accreditation is granted to organizations or individuals who meet specific standards in a particular profession or industry. Examples include the Sierra Leone Bar Association for law schools or the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) for healthcare programs. Regional accreditation: This type of accreditation is granted by a regional accrediting agency that evaluates the quality and

standards of institutions within a specific geographic region. National accreditation: National accreditation is granted by a national accrediting agency that evaluates the quality and standards of institutions or programs across the entire country. Specialized accreditation: this is granted to organizations or programs that meet specific standards in a particular field or industry.

The primary function of educational accreditation agency is to assess the quality and standards of education institutions and determine whether they meet certain predefined criteria. Accreditation agencies ensure that educational institutions maintain high standards of quality in their programs, faculty, facilities, and overall operations. They evaluate factors such as curriculum, teaching methods, student support services, resources, and outcomes to assess the institution's overall effectiveness. They should often collaborate with educators, industry professionals, and other stakeholders to establish and refine standards for educational programs. These standards serve as benchmarks for institutions to strive for excellence in various aspects of education, including curriculum design, faculty qualifications, student assessment, and institutional governance. Accreditation agencies must conduct comprehensive evaluations of educational institutions on a regular basis. This process typically involves site visits, self-assessment reports, and documentation reviews to assess the institution's compliance with the established standards. The evaluation process helps identify areas of strength and areas that need improvement, enabling institutions to enhance their overall quality. Accreditation agencies should employ a peer review model, whereby experts from similar educational institutions assess and provide feedback on the institution being evaluated. These experts bring valuable insights and perspectives from their own experiences, helping to validate the quality of the institution's programs and operations.

There must be a public trust and accountability in the process. Accreditation is an important mechanism for ensuring public trust in educational institutions. By granting accreditation, agencies vouch for the institution's quality and credibility. Accreditation also promotes institutional accountability by holding them to established standards and ensuring they continuously strive for improvement. Eligibility for funding and recognition is also importance for an institution. Many governmental and private funding sources, as well as regulatory bodies, require educational institutions to be accredited to be eligible for financial support or to be recognized as a valid provider of education. Accreditation can also impact a student's ability to transfer credits between institutions or pursue further education in recognized programs. Accreditation agencies encourage a culture of continuous improvement within educational institutions. Through the evaluation and feedback process, institutions are provided with recommendations and suggestions for enhancing their programs and operations. This helps them stay up-to-date with changing educational practices, emerging technologies, and evolving industry needs.

It is important to note that the specific functions and processes of accreditation agencies may vary across different countries

and regions. However, their overarching goal remains the same which is to ensure that educational institutions maintain and enhance quality standards to provide students with a valuable and effective learning experience.

BENEFITS OF ACCREDITATION AGENCIES

National Centre for Education Statistics. (2021). College accreditation in the United States, (NCES) is a federal entity within the U.S. Department of Education that collects, analyses, and disseminates data related to education in the United States. The NCES website provides a wide range of information and resources related to education including statistics, surveys, and research reports. One area of focus for the NCES is college accreditation in the United States. Accreditation is a process by which colleges and universities are evaluated to determine if they meet certain standards of quality and are able to offer students a high-quality education. Accreditation is important because it ensures that students can trust the degrees they earn and that their education will be recognized by employers and other institutions. The NCES website provides a comprehensive overview of college accreditation in the United States including information on the different types of accreditation, the organizations responsible for accrediting colleges and universities, and the criteria used to evaluate institutions. The site also includes data on the number of accredited institutions in the United States, the percentage of students enrolled in accredited institutions, and the accreditation status of institutions.

Accreditation is important for a variety of reasons which including ensuring quality education. Accreditation agencies evaluate educational institutions to ensure that they provide quality education that meets or exceeds established standards. This helps to ensure that students receive an education that prepares them for success in their chosen fields. Enhancing Institutional Reputation: Accreditation is a mark of quality and excellence that can enhance an institution's reputation. Accreditation agencies assess an institution's academic programs, faculty, facilities, and other resources, which can help to build trust and confidence among students, faculty, and the wider community. Promoting Student Mobility: Accreditation agencies evaluate educational institutions to ensure that their programs and degrees are recognized by other institutions and employers. This promotes student mobility, allowing students to transfer credits and degrees from one institution to another, and to enter the workforce with degrees that are widely recognized. Protecting Consumer Interests: Accreditation agencies provide an independent evaluation of educational institutions, which helps to protect consumer interests. Accreditation agencies evaluate institutions for financial stability, ethical conduct, and compliance with regulations, which helps to ensure that students are not taken advantage of. Access to Financial Aid: Accreditation is a prerequisite for institutions to participate in federal financial aid programs. Accreditation agencies ensure that institutions meet the requirements for federal financial aid, which makes higher education more accessible to students who may not otherwise be able to afford it.

Therefore, accreditation agencies play a vital role in ensuring that educational institutions provide quality education that prepares students for success in their chosen fields. Accreditation helps to enhance an institution's reputation, promote student mobility, protect consumer interests, and make higher education more accessible to students.

World Federation for Medical Education. (2020) (WFME) is a global organization that aims to enhance the quality of medical education worldwide. In 2020, WFME published the "International Standards for Medical Education: Accreditation of Basic Medical Education Programs," which provides guidelines for the accreditation of medical education programs. These standards cover a wide range of topics, including the mission and objectives of the medical education program, the curriculum, student assessment, faculty qualifications and development, and the resources and facilities available to support the program. The standards also emphasize the importance of continuous quality improvement and the need for ongoing evaluation and feedback. Accreditation of medical education programs according to these standards can help ensure that medical graduates are well-prepared for the challenges of modern healthcare practice. Additionally, accreditation can provide assurance to students, faculty, and the public that a medical education program meets established quality standards.

CHALLENGES FACED BY ACCREDITATION AGENCIES

Jeliaskova, M., & Westerheijden, D. F. (Eds.). (2014). "Accreditation and Evaluation in the European Higher Education Area," is edited by Maria Jeliaskova and Don F. Westerheijden. It was published by Springer in 2014 as part of the Higher Education Dynamics series, specifically Volume 32. The book focuses on the topic of accreditation and evaluation in the European higher education context. It explores the various approaches and mechanisms used to assess and ensure the quality of higher education institutions and programs within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The EHEA is a collaborative framework that encompasses the European Union and other countries in the European region. As an edited volume, the book brings together contributions from different authors who provide insights and perspectives on accreditation and evaluation practices across European countries.

Since accreditation agencies are organizations that evaluate and assess the quality of educational institutions and programs, their primary goal must be ensured that institutions and programs meet certain standards of excellence despite several challenges they faced. Some of the challenges faced by accreditation agencies include keeping up with changing regulations and standards: accreditation agencies must stay up to date with the latest regulations and standards set by government bodies and professional organizations. This can be a difficult task, as regulations and standards are constantly changing. Ensuring objectivity and impartiality: Accreditation agencies must remain objective and impartial in their

evaluations, avoiding any conflicts of interest. This can be challenging, as some accreditation agencies may receive funding from the institutions they evaluate. Balancing the need for consistency with the need for flexibility: Accreditation agencies must strike a balance between maintaining consistency in their evaluation processes and allowing for flexibility in assessing the unique qualities of each institution or program. Managing resources and staff: Accreditation agencies must manage their resources and staff efficiently to ensure that evaluations are conducted in a timely and effective manner. Dealing with non-compliant institutions: Accreditation agencies must deal with institutions that do not meet the required standards. This can be a challenging and time-consuming process, as the agency must work with the institution to identify and address deficiencies. Addressing emerging issues: Accreditation agencies must be able to address emerging issues in education, such as online learning and alternative education models, and adapt their evaluation processes accordingly.

Accreditation agencies face numerous challenges in their efforts to ensure that educational institutions and programs meet high standards of quality. However, by addressing these challenges and continuously improving their evaluation processes, accreditation agencies can help ensure that students receive the best possible education.

ACCREDITATION AGENCIES EVOLVE IN RESPONDING TO CHANGING TRENDS AND NEEDS IN EDUCATION

One way that accreditation may evolve is by incorporating more flexible and innovative learning models, such as online and hybrid learning, into the evaluation process. With the growth of technology and the increasing demand for flexible learning options, accrediting agencies may need to adapt their standards to account for these changes.

Another way that accreditation may evolve is by placing a greater emphasis on outcomes-based evaluation. Rather than solely evaluating inputs such as curriculum and faculty qualifications, accrediting agencies may shift their focus to evaluating the outcomes that students achieve as a result of their education. This could include measures such as job placement rates, graduate salaries, and student satisfaction. Altbach, P. G., Reisberg, L., & Rumbley, L. E. (2019) provided an analysis of the major trends and changes in higher education around the world, including the expansion of the higher education sector, the growth of international student mobility, the rise of academic rankings and metrics, and the impact of technology on teaching and learning. Altbach, P. G., Reisberg, L., & Rumbley, L. E. (2019) also examined the challenges facing higher education in the 21st century, including issues related to funding, access, quality, and governance. Accreditation is a process of evaluating and verifying the quality of education provided by an institution or program. It ensures that the education provided meets certain standards and that students receive a valuable and recognized credential. As education continues to evolve, accreditation

processes must also evolve to keep pace with the changing trends and needs of the field.

Accrediting agencies may also need to address the increasing importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in education. This could involve evaluating institutions' efforts to create inclusive learning environments, recruit and retain a diverse student body and faculty, and provide resources and support for underrepresented groups. As the global nature of education continues to grow, accreditation may evolve to include a greater emphasis on internationalization and cross-cultural competence. This could involve evaluating institutions' efforts to provide global learning opportunities such as study abroad programs and international partnerships, as well as their efforts to promote intercultural understanding and competency. The evolution of accreditation will likely be driven by a combination of technological, societal, and educational trends. Accrediting agencies will need to be agile and responsive to these changes in order to ensure that their evaluation processes remain relevant and effective in promoting high-quality education.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, accreditation agencies play a vital role in ensuring the quality of education by providing rigorous evaluation and assessment of educational institutions and programs. The accreditation process not only helps institutions identify areas of improvement, but also assures students, employers, and the general public that they are receiving a high-quality education that meets industry standards. Although the accreditation process can be time-consuming and expensive, it ultimately benefits everyone involved in the educational process. By maintaining high standards of excellence and continuous improvement, accreditation agencies contribute to the overall advancement of education and help prepare individuals for success in their chosen careers.

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