
Pitfalls and Potholes of Accreditation

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Abstract

The research reviewed accreditation processes at Philippine Colleges and universities and found that accreditation systems are ineffective, making it difficult to achieve genuine quality assurance. Achieving high standards of education through Accreditation was the mission of the Philippine Government; however, most of the Philippine higher education institutions (HEIs), especially those in rural areas and/or government-funded, had a fragmented approach to evaluation, limited funds and resources, and inconsistent application of Accreditation criteria. The research examined these issues in the broader context of the country's broken multi-agency voluntary accreditation system, using archival research and selected personal observations. Additionally, analytical findings on issues surrounding sustainability, equity, and governance were included in the current structure. The conclusion was that it is time for continued reform to bring the Accreditation process closer to the institution's capabilities, enabling the long-term and significant enhancement of the quality of instruction.

Keywords: Accreditation, Philippine Higher Education, Quality Assurance, Institutional Capacity, Voluntary Evaluation, AACCUP, PAASCU, CHED

Introduction

The Philippine higher education system uses accreditation as a voluntary quality-control mechanism, with many different accrediting organizations working together to provide a comprehensive accreditation system. The various accrediting organizations involved in accreditation include the Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities–Commission on Accreditation (PACUCOA), the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools Colleges and Universities (PAASCU), the Association of Christian Schools Colleges and Universities–Accrediting Agency (ACSCU-AAI), and the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACCUP). Each operates under the umbrella of the Federation of Accrediting Agencies of the Philippines (FAAP), which shares a mission to promote and maintain quality standards across all higher education institutions in the country.

Despite their shared commitment to quality in higher education, the implementation of accreditation is still faced with many challenges, including the fragmentation of accreditation systems and procedures, a lack of uniformity in the process for accrediting institutions, large resource requirements for accreditation by the institutions involved, and unresolved questions about the long-term sustainability of accreditation. An analysis of the existing literature, policy documents, and practitioners' experiences provides insight into the structural and operational barriers to accreditation's success.

The Fragmented Landscape of Accreditation

There are many reasons for the existence of multiple accrediting bodies in the Philippines, stemming from the country's historical, faith-based, and institutional development. Numerous agencies have been created at different administrative levels according to their affiliation, but they have different philosophies and criteria for evaluating institutions and providing services to them through various evaluation methodologies and processes.

Innovative development processes that contrast with traditional ones will not only reflect the pluralistic vision of higher education but also continue to create a fragmented environment that has made it difficult to establish cohesive national quality standards across the country. UNESCO (2006) stated that "the lack of a common framework for accreditation diminishes system-wide coherence and performance comparability of institutions." In addition, Ordonez (2008) argued that the existence of different standards created ineffective quality assurance processes, thereby limiting the use of the accreditation processes for effective benchmarking and policy formulation.

The fact that accreditation is voluntary and discretionary further complicates the situation. Institutions with limited financial, administrative, and human resources for participating in the accreditation process face significant barriers to participation. Institutions in remote rural areas have the greatest difficulty. Accreditation requires significant documentation, extensive program evaluations, and compliance-based facility and instructional resource enhancements that require ongoing time, funding, and administration. Many small state colleges and universities lack institutional support to meet these requirements.

In addition to this financial barrier, many faculty and administrators at institutions often need to integrate accreditation-related responsibilities into their existing responsibilities related to teaching, research, and community engagement. The additional workload caused many personnel to become exhausted, resulting in decreased morale and fatigue, which in turn reduced the quality of instruction and operational effectiveness (Masangcay & Navarro, 2020). The lack of finances to

support necessary institutional resources often resulted in budgeting that was redirected away from what are considered fundamental academic and operational needs to cover the expenses associated with accreditation, such as documentation, compensation for evaluators, and improvements to infrastructure that were used primarily to meet compliance standards, versus being focused on long-term improvements (de Guzman & Torres, 2004).

These factors illustrate structural inequities within the accreditation system, creating issues of equity, sustainability, and capability between institutions that can provide the resources to achieve accredited status and under-resourced institutions that cannot participate.

Misalignment and Systemic Gaps

Accreditation tools are often focused on traditional academic programs, such as liberal arts, education, and business administration. Specialized or technical degrees, such as marine education, health sciences, or engineering, often struggle to meet these general standards, resulting in a fragmented quality assurance approach where programs are recognized separately and institutional accreditation is difficult (UNESCO, 2006). Faculty members are crucial to the accreditation process, but they often struggle with new technological criteria if they lack proper training and support. According to research in Southern Mindanao, teachers often lacked knowledge on how to obtain accreditation (Rementina et al., 2021). Similarly, Ordoño and Guillermo (2021) observed that a large number of faculty members, particularly in state-run provincial schools, were unaware about accreditation, which widened the gap between wealthy private institutions and those with less funding. Some institutions have begun incorporating accreditation results into their strategic planning and community engagement initiatives, aligning compliance with their institutional goals and vision. Others have implemented internal quality assurance mechanisms that maintain institutional knowledge and guarantee continuity beyond the accreditation cycle. This burden is made even more difficult by the cyclical demand for accreditation renewals, which is especially problematic for educational institutions that are undergoing major personnel turnover or leadership upheavals. According to Masangcay and Navarro's research from 2020, if an organization does not have a comprehensive internal quality assurance system, it may be difficult to maintain development once certification has been obtained.

The makeup of accreditor panels, mainly composed of volunteers, adds to the complexity. There are different standards among programs, evaluators are not always consistent, and scheduling conflicts can all lead to inconsistent evaluation results (UNESCO, 2006). The current program-based approach frequently neglects wider institutional elements, including administrative competencies, community engagement, and enduring policy consequences. This program-focused perspective engenders an imbalance, often delaying comprehensive institutional recognition and stressing compliance over essential transformation.

Broader Implications for Quality Assurance

Implementing accreditation involves substantial consequences. A primary concern is equity. Accreditation should ideally facilitate the progress of institutions. In reality, it often helps those with more resources, widening the gap between prestigious urban universities and underfunded rural colleges. The system unintentionally reinforces existing inequalities.

There are also growing concerns about policy alignment. While accreditation is formally voluntary, CHED progressively associates it with strategic advantages, like enhanced funding or regulatory leniency. This unofficial mandate penalizes institutions that, due to financial or logistical limitations, are unable to comply, hence exacerbating inequities.

Sustainability constitutes a significant concern. Instead of supporting long-term change, accreditation typically redirects its attention to compliance, focusing on passing site visits and completing checklists. When schools view accreditation as merely another bureaucratic duty, rather than a means to improve continually, they miss the opportunity for ongoing improvement. Furthermore, in a quickly evolving higher education landscape, existing evaluation frameworks are less helpful since they frequently ignore innovations that are unique to a particular subject or programs that integrate individuals from various fields. Accreditation must support creative teaching methods and adjust to local demands in order to maintain its meaning. Furthermore, in a quickly evolving higher education landscape, existing evaluation frameworks are less helpful since they frequently ignore innovations that are unique to a particular subject or programs that integrate individuals from various fields. Accreditation must support creative teaching methods and adapt to local needs to maintain its meaning.

Field Reflections: From Compliance to Commitment

Insights from regional institutions show that accreditation efforts are often reactive, driven by regulatory demands or the allure of external validation./ In

many cases, momentum is lost following changes in leadership or faculty turnover, resulting in poorer documentation systems and a decline in performance after the accreditation. Some institutions have begun incorporating accreditation results into their strategic planning and community engagement initiatives, aligning them with their institutional goals and vision. Others have implemented internal quality assurance mechanisms that maintain institutional knowledge and guarantee continuity beyond the accreditation period.

Despite its shortcomings, accreditation is very important for improving the quality of education in the Philippines. Even so, it needs to be reevaluated to reach its full potential. The system must shift from a disjointed, compliance-focused structure to one that is open, adaptable, and revolutionary. Policymakers and accrediting bodies must consider the actual capacities and situational realities of institutions, especially those on the fringes. Accreditation should be more than just a stamp of approval; it must act as an ongoing partnership for growth, innovation, and excellence in Philippine higher education.

Conclusions

This research assessed the voluntary accreditation system of higher education in the Philippines. Although the Philippine higher education sector still values accreditation as an assurance of quality, there is strong evidence that the accreditation system is constrained by fragmentation, inequity, and disconnection from the realities of institutions across the country. The fact that there are many accrediting bodies (through the Federation of Accrediting Agencies-Philippines) has provided greater diversity of institutions and representation, but has also led to a lack of uniform standards, inconsistent evaluation methods, and barriers to establishing cohesive, national benchmarks for institutions. These systemic gaps create larger barriers for state-funded, rural, or resource-constrained institutions, thereby increasing structural inequity in this sector.

The results also demonstrated that accreditation in practice is generally an obligation rather than a tool for incremental improvement of institutions. Heavy documentation, cyclical evaluations, volunteer evaluators, and program-specific evaluations all together limit the ability of accreditation to be a transformative, sustainable quality assurance tool for institutions of higher education in the Philippines. Furthermore, the changing relationship between accreditation status and incentives through regulations or funding (especially Commissions on Higher Education) has blurred the distinction between voluntary and mandatory

participation, thereby negatively impacting institutions with limited resources to participate meaningfully in the process.

In summary, the study concludes that, unless reforms are made to the current accreditation system, accreditation risks only becoming an administrative burden and will be unable to support the development of institutions of higher education within the Philippines, while at the same time continuing to create even larger gaps instead of contributing to the development of inclusive excellence within the system.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on data analysis of the current accreditation situation in the Philippines and will help strengthen the effectiveness, equity, and sustainability of accreditation.

The Establishment of a National Accreditation Framework (NAF): All accrediting bodies are encouraged to collaborate in developing a National Accreditation Framework through the development of a common set of minimum standards and indicators of performance for all institutions in order to provide greater coherence, comparability, and transparency to institutions while still allowing for contextual differences.

Developing Accreditation Pathways Based on Capacity: Accrediting bodies should develop tiered or contextualized accreditation models based on the size of the institution, the mandate of the institution, geographical location, and resource availability to allow smaller state colleges and institutions in rural areas to gain access to the benefits of accreditation without undue hardship and to eliminate barriers to equity in accreditation.

Developing Strong Internal Quality Assurance Systems: Policy, financial and capacity building support should be provided to higher education institutions to assist them in developing a quality assurance system that is embedded in the daily operations of the institution (academic and administrative) so that ongoing quality assurance is not dependent on periodic cycles of accreditation, and to promote sustainability for higher education institutions.

Continual Capacity Building for Faculty and Administration: A program for continual training in accreditation, quality assurance, and data management should be established within all institutions to address knowledge deficiencies among faculty and administration and reduce stress on faculty and administration associated with last-minute compliance.

Shifting the Balance of Accreditation Focus from Compliance to Development: Accrediting bodies should emphasize developing the institution through formative evaluation, mentoring, and feedback rather than merely checking off compliance. The purpose of site visits and reports should be to provide direction and to support the institution in improving, innovating, and impacting the community.

Providing Equitable Policy Support and Incentives: If the funding, autonomy, and regulatory incentives associated with accreditation outcomes are to continue, it is important that targeted financial and technical assistance be provided to under-resourced institutions to prevent inequities from growing.

Professionalize and Standardize Training of Accreditors: To promote consistent judgment by accreditation bodies, standardized training, common rubrics, and quality assurance mechanisms should be developed and implemented for accreditor panels to ensure fairness and reliability in assessing institutions.

Implementing these recommendations would enable higher education accreditation in the Philippines to evolve from a disjointed, compliance-based system into a collaborative, inclusive process of ongoing quality improvement. Ultimately, accreditation should be an ongoing partnership that fosters equity, innovation, and excellence across all post-secondary institutions in the Philippines, rather than merely an indicator of status.

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Conflict of Interest

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Statement of Originality

I assert that the submitted paper titled "Accreditation Experiences in Philippine Higher Education: Pitfalls, Prospects, and Policy Reflections" is my original work. This work has not been previously published and is not currently under review for publication anywhere, in whole or in part. All ideas, facts, and quotes from outside sources have been properly credited and recognized. I used Grammarly, an AI-based writing assistance tool for minor language and grammar revisions.