

Quality Assurance and Academic Accreditation: Institutional steps towards better and more competitive higher education

*Phd student Boutabet Besma **

*University 8 Mai 1945_ Guelma, (Algeria)
Research Laboratory in Social Sciences -
Skikda, E. LARFS 1090800*

Boutabet.besma@univ-guelma.dz

Professor Machtar Hocine

University 8 Mai 1945_ Guelma, (Algeria)

Machtar.hocine@univ-guelma.dz

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Abstract:

Amid the rapid transformations occurring worldwide in the fields of technology, economy, and society, improving the quality of higher education has become an urgent necessity to achieve academic and professional excellence. Quality assurance and academic accreditation are among the effective tools that contribute to raising the standards of higher education by ensuring that educational institutions adhere to internationally recognized academic and administrative standards. This study aims to highlight the importance of quality and academic accreditation as a strategy adopted by higher education institutions to ensure the improvement of their outcomes. However, in addition to the challenges institutions may face in applying these standards sustainably and in alignment with local conditions.

Keywords:

Quality assurance, Academic, Accreditation, Higher education.

1.Introduction:

Higher education is one of the fundamental pillars contributing to the development of societies and advancing progress in various fields. Amid the growing challenges and rapid changes the world is witnessing, improving the quality of higher education has become imperative to ensure that educational institutions meet global standards. Quality assurance and academic accreditation serve as effective tools to achieve this goal, as they help enhance

* Boutabet besma

educational outcomes and improve the academic and administrative performance of educational institutions.

Quality assurance and accreditation are integral components of the strategy to enhance higher education, aiming to ensure that institutions adhere to recognized academic and administrative standards. This guarantees the provision of distinguished education that meets the needs of students and the labor market. However, quality standards can vary from one institution to another and from one country to another, raising questions about the consistency of these standards with local contexts and global requirements.

In many cases, the focus is placed on formal aspects of assurance, such as reports, documentation, and institutional audits, which may be insufficient to impact the improvement of education itself. Quality assurance often necessitates fundamental changes in teaching methodologies and the development of faculty and administrative skills, requiring significant investment in training and development. Academic accreditation is a vital tool for the continuous evaluation of education quality, fostering innovation and improving teaching methods in a comprehensive manner that combines the development of academic standards with investment in infrastructure and the continuous training of faculty members. It also considers the needs of students and the academic community as a whole. Thus, quality assurance and academic accreditation are part of a comprehensive strategy aimed at sustainably improving higher education outcomes.

The significance of this research lies in addressing the lack of local studies on the topic of quality assurance and academic accreditation. Given its importance in enhancing higher education in universities, this research adopts an analytical theoretical approach to offer proposals that could contribute to the development of quality assurance and accreditation systems in universities. This research also aims to improve the quality of higher education by applying quality assurance and academic accreditation standards, which enhances the efficiency of academic programs and leads to high-quality educational outcomes.

Additionally, the research seeks to establish foundations for improving the educational system in higher education institutions through evaluating and developing institutional performance. It provides scientific insights to guide the development of suitable strategies for improving higher education levels and ensuring alignment with international standards. The study highlights the objectives of understanding and clarifying the nature of quality assurance and academic accreditation in higher education and their impact on educational institutions. It explores how quality assurance contributes to enhancing the efficiency of higher education, improving educational outcomes, and positively influencing the global image of universities and educational institutions. Furthermore, it proposes practical solutions and recommendations for improving the implementation of quality assurance and academic accreditation in higher education institutions.

Key questions the research seeks to address include:

_ What are the main criteria upon which quality assurance and academic accreditation in higher education are based?

_ How can the academic accreditation process influence the evaluation of students' academic performance and the quality of education in institutions?

_ How can accreditation mechanisms be improved to ensure their effectiveness and sustainability in enhancing quality over the long term?

_ What challenges do educational institutions face in implementing quality assurance and academic accreditation standards?

2. Quality Assurance:

2.1 Definition of Quality Assurance:

The concept of quality can be identified through the definitions provided by quality pioneers according to their perspectives as follows:

_ Armand Feigenbaum (1956): "Quality is the complete satisfaction of the customer."

_ Philip Crosby (1979): "Quality means conformity to requirements and specifications, and freedom from defects."

_ Edward Deming (1986): "Quality is the degree of consistency and dependability that suits the market at a low cost."

_ Joseph Juran (1989): "Quality is the fitness of the product for use according to the consumer's view."

_ Gablonsky: "Quality is those distinctive attributes of a product or service that determine its value to the beneficiary."

_ Ishikawa: "Quality means designing a product economically and more beneficially, always satisfying the customer."

_ Taguchi: "Quality is the prevention of loss caused by the product after it is delivered to the customer."

From these definitions, we notice the variation in defining the concept of quality, whether it is conformity to standards, freedom from defects, or customer expectations.¹

In the field of education, quality is considered a continuous administrative strategy aimed at creating an effective educational environment that allows collaboration among teachers, staff, parents, government officials, and employers to provide the resources needed by learners to face academic and social challenges and meet labor market demands.²

It is also defined as the quality of the educational process components, including the student, faculty member, the quality of educational materials such as programs, books, and teaching methods, the quality of the learning environment, and the structures, funding, and marketing tools within the institution, as well as the quality of evaluation that meets labor market needs.³

These definitions reflect a diversity of intellectual and practical perspectives, highlighting the comprehensiveness and broad applicability of the concept of quality. It covers various aspects, including customer satisfaction, conformity to standards, consistency, usability, and added value. As we see, the concept of quality evolves from being just a production standard to becoming a comprehensive strategic tool for achieving excellence across various sectors. This development reflects changes in societal and market needs. Quality today is viewed as a competitive advantage, not just a requirement. In education, quality is not only a goal but a continuous process that demands innovation and adaptation to changes.

2.2 Steps for Implementing Quality:

There are several steps for applying quality in education, but it is important to note that certain requirements are necessary for implementing these steps. This is achieved by forming a quality team and councils as follows:

2.2.1 Quality Management Board: This is the highest leadership level for decision-making and granting the necessary authority to direct and support the quality management process. It is part of the educational institution and is headed by the institution's director. One of the key responsibilities of this board is to develop plans to nurture a quality culture and lead the overall planning process, providing the necessary financial and human resources for implementation, monitoring quality department activities, setting annual goals, and establishing and directing the activities of other quality leadership teams.

2.2.2 Quality Design and Development Team: This team works under the leadership of the quality board, and its primary task is to develop the quality management system strategy. Its responsibilities include studying the concepts of quality management and its applications, identifying internal and external customer requirements, improving quality within the educational institution, designing training programs for quality leaders and teams, and proposing an initial plan for the institution's work, including its core steps and required facilities.

2.2.3 Quality Steering Committee: This is the center of the quality management process, and its main responsibilities include developing plans to advance the quality program, eliminating fear, spreading excellence, and documenting lessons learned within the educational institution. It also ensures communication between the institution and other organizations.

2.2.4 Quality Measurement and Presentation Committee: This committee is responsible for evaluating the quality program in the institution and ensuring that the institution's goals align with customer needs, using scientific methods for implementation.⁴

Several necessary requirements exist for applying quality in educational institutions, including creating a suitable work environment for gradually implementing educational quality, focusing on the importance of pre-work and on-the-job training, utilizing available human resources, forming work teams, applying motivation principles, and focusing on guidance processes for all staff in the educational sector. Furthermore, creating an information base and statistical data within the institution, coordinating between educational entities and others as an integrated system, and focusing on assessment criteria before, during, and after the work performance in the educational sector are essential. The work should be based on well-established research and taking advantage of others' experiences in a way that fits the reality.⁵

By detailing the different roles and requirements for success, a practical model for implementing quality in education emerges. It can be stated that the success of this model depends on the integration of roles, leadership commitment, and investment in human and informational resources. The focus on motivation and training emphasizes the importance of comprehensive development, not just achieving immediate results. This model requires continuous support from educational leadership and effective cooperation between all stakeholders to achieve sustainable quality that meets market requirements and learners' needs.

2. 3 Principles of Quality Assurance:

The principles of quality assurance include focusing on people, emphasizing customer satisfaction and meeting their requirements and expectations, preventing and avoiding errors in the institution's operations, continuous improvement without settling at a certain level, and including all elements of the institution's systems, processes, tools, resources, and human forces. There is also a focus on work systems and systematic thinking to achieve the desired outcomes, as well as leadership and management as essential factors for institutional success, focusing on customer satisfaction, fostering social relationships that encourage cooperation, and ensuring transparency in leadership. Additionally, leadership should be focused on continuous development of staff through training and support, decision-making based on facts, and involving everyone in decision-making at all stages. The implementation of collaboration and effective communication within the institution is also crucial.⁶

Furthermore, additional principles and foundations for quality assurance in higher education include awareness of the concept of quality at all administrative and academic levels, clear and specific goals involving all staff members, effective leadership that can promote a culture of quality, the adoption of a philosophy of error prevention rather than just detection, and focusing on correcting processes rather than blaming individuals. Objectivity and honesty in presenting data, overcoming obstacles through problem-solving approaches, designing educational programs that meet societal requirements, and adopting new methods of work are also essential aspects of ensuring quality in higher education institutions.⁷

The core principles of quality assurance in institutions, particularly in higher education, reflect a comprehensive vision for achieving quality as a strategic goal, focusing on human, organizational, and technological aspects. Quality assurance principles highlight the necessity of integrating human elements, administrative processes, and technological innovation. Quality is not a final goal but a continuous journey that requires commitment to both personal and institutional development. The successful application of these principles depends on institutional awareness of quality, the availability of effective leadership, and the institution's flexibility in adapting to changes and adopting new practices. If these principles are taken into account, they will contribute to achieving a high-quality educational system that meets the demands of the times and serves the needs of society.

2. 4 The importance of ensuring quality in higher education:

Quality education is essential in higher education for the following reasons:

- _ It helps in identifying aspects of quality in education and intellectual and material capacities
- _ It contributes to improving the quality of other services, increasing productivity, and fostering commitment at all levels of university administration.
- _ It assists in making work-related decisions through participation, proposing suitable solutions, and presenting possible alternatives.
- _ It reviews the educational product, represented by the student, as a result of educational shortcomings characterized by investment without returns, where outcomes fail to meet effective demand in the labor market.
- _ It supports the development of education by evaluating the educational system and diagnosing deficiencies in inputs, processes, and outputs.⁸

The importance of ensuring quality in higher education, as a vital factor for improving the educational and administrative performance of university institutions, highlights that quality education is not limited to meeting academic standards but extends to improving all aspects related to education, such as intellectual and material capacities and supportive services. It also contributes to enhancing commitment and responsibility across various levels of university administration, supporting decision-making based on participation and the presentation of effective alternatives. Moreover, the importance of reviewing the educational product, represented by the student, emerges to address the shortcomings of the educational system that may lead to a mismatch between educational outcomes and labor market demands. Additionally, it serves as a developmental tool to evaluate the educational system, diagnose deficiencies in its inputs, processes, and outputs, and thus promote continuous improvement and development in higher education institutions.

3. Academic Accreditation:

3. 1 Definition of Academic Accreditation:

Academic accreditation is the symbol of quality in higher education, carried out by bodies or councils from prestigious universities with expertise and knowledge in evaluating the mission, objectives, administrative and financial performance, teaching methods, and support services of any academic institution. It is an academic rank or scientific status granted to an institution or academic program for meeting international standards and conditions set by educational evaluation and accreditation bodies. Accreditation is a fundamental step toward excellence, aligning with defined standards and facilitating recognition by international academic communities, enabling competition with peer universities.⁹ Academic accreditation in higher education institutions is defined as a set of procedures and processes conducted by the accrediting body to ensure that the university has met the quality standards set by evaluation bodies, and that its programs align with the established and approved criteria.¹⁰

It is clear that academic accreditation is a strategic process aimed at ensuring the quality of higher education and enhancing confidence in its institutions. Both the first and second definitions agree that it is a means of evaluation based on specific standards set by expert bodies. This process is a step toward excellence and global competitiveness through unified quality standards and international recognition. The third definition highlights the procedural aspect of accreditation, emphasizing the verification of compliance with declared quality standards, reflecting the importance of transparency and adherence in this context. We can conclude that academic accreditation is not merely an academic rank granted, but a comprehensive process that involves continuous evaluation of the mission, performance, and programs to improve educational quality and confirm the institution's position in the academic field.

3. 2 Types of Academic Accreditation: Academic accreditation is divided into:

3. 2. 1 Institutional Accreditation: This refers to the accreditation of the institution according to specific standards regarding the adequacy of facilities and resources, including staff, academic and student services, curricula, student achievement levels, and the academic staff.¹¹

3. 2. 2 Program Accreditation: Also known as specialized accreditation, this refers to the evaluation of programs at an institution to ensure the quality of their offerings and their alignment with the level of the degree awarded.

3. 2. 3 Professional Accreditation: This is an integrated system of procedures aimed at ensuring the quality of an individual's preparation, performance, and continuous professional development through passing specific study programs at a level that meets the requirements for licensing and renewal of professional practice.¹²

Academic accreditation includes three main types, all aimed at achieving and ensuring quality but differing in their scope and objectives. This diversity in types of accreditation highlights the importance of a comprehensive system to ensure the quality of education and its direct impact on educational outcomes and the labor market.

3. 3 Quality Assurance Standards and Academic Accreditation in Higher Education:

There are four basic measures for higher education quality and academic accreditation:

3. 3. 1 Input Quality: It includes:

_ **Students:** Can be evaluated through various indicators, such as student selection, interactions with faculty and administrators, student capacity to absorb course content, their motivation and readiness to learn, and the academic and professional level of university graduates.

_ **Faculty:** Can be evaluated based on the number of faculty members, their coverage of all specializations, teaching competence, contributions to community service and scientific production, and their academic training.

_ **Curricula:** Can be evaluated based on how well the curriculum aligns with the external environment and technological changes, its focus on developing students' ability to identify and solve problems, and its ability to foster creativity, innovation, and critical thinking in students, as well as its relevance to community needs.

_ **University Administration:** Can be evaluated based on the commitment of the university's senior leadership to quality, its application of quality philosophy, emphasis on research that addresses community issues, staff training, and communication channels with other universities, as well as the reputation of its graduates.

_ **Material Resources:** Can be evaluated through the adequacy of the university building in accommodating students, its ability to provide learning resources, laboratory facilities, and the availability of financial resources allocated to research.

3. 3. 2 Output Quality:

It refers to the characteristics of graduates, their success, scientific publications, and the budget. Output quality is associated with traditional concepts such as learning standards, skills, and cognitive development. One reason for defining a specific concept of quality education through output is the perceived ability to measure such outputs. The image of the university and its educational quality are largely defined by outputs, with prestigious universities typically showing

low failure rates, high graduate success rates, high graduate enrollment in postgraduate programs, and job success.¹³

Academic standards include curriculum, teaching, and learning, and assessing how they achieve high levels of quality and performance. They include:

_ **Research and Innovation Standards:** Assessing research activities and contributions to knowledge and development.

_ **Infrastructure Standards:** Assessing the institution's effective infrastructure, including facilities, equipment, and financial resources.

_ **Administrative Standards:** Assessing the efficiency of management practices in achieving the institution's goals.

_ **Student Service Standards:** Evaluating the provision of additional services to students, including academic support, advising, and guidance.

_ **Evaluation and Continuous Improvement Standards:** Encouraging performance assessment and continuous improvement.

There are multiple standards that represent the foundational pillars for ensuring the quality of higher education and achieving academic accreditation, focusing on input quality, output quality, and academic and administrative standards. These standards highlight the importance of integrating human resources, infrastructure, curricula, and administration to achieve high-quality education. It is clear that ensuring quality in higher education requires a multi-faceted commitment involving inputs, processes, and outputs, with an emphasis on continuity and development. The success of universities depends on their ability to integrate these elements, allowing them to achieve academic excellence and compete both locally and internationally. These standards are not only tools for performance evaluation but are strategies for sustainable educational system improvement.

3. 4 Standards of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education Programs:

The standards of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education Programs have undergone several changes, the most important of which are:

_ Curriculum-based standards that prevailed from 1987 to 1999.

_ Performance-based standards that focus on the learner through student-centered teaching. These standards emphasize regular assessment of outcomes and performance-based learning.¹⁴

This development in standards reflects a shift from a traditional curriculum-based model to a more modern and flexible model focused on performance and outcomes. The shift demonstrates an increasing understanding of the importance of interaction between the learner, content, and educational environment in achieving quality education. The focus on continuous assessment and performance-based learning promotes the ability of educational institutions to meet labor market needs and sustainable development requirements. This

makes these standards an effective tool for improving the quality of teacher preparation programs and ensuring their excellence in facing modern challenges.

3. 5 Stages of Obtaining Academic Accreditation:

These stages are based on the quality requirements outlined in the guidelines of national bodies or regional or international professional institutions specialized in quality assurance, which include ensuring the institution's high performance level. These stages are as follows:

3. 5. 1 Licensing: The decision to establish a government educational institution by the Ministry of Education is considered a license and permission to operate after obtaining initial institutional accreditation from the competent authority for quality assurance in higher education. For private or foreign institutions, they must apply for a license from the responsible authority in the Ministry of Education. This license is granted to higher education institutions based on the report of the initial institutional accreditation, which allows students to study according to the institution's capacity in the programs specified in the initial accreditation report.

3. 5. 2 Initial Institutional Accreditation: This serves as a guarantee for the institution's capabilities and effectiveness in providing education that meets the approved quality standards. This accreditation is granted for two years in most countries, during which the institution must obtain initial program accreditation for the programs it offers.

3. 5. 3 Initial Program Accreditation: This accreditation confirms that the institution has addressed the observations made by the team auditing the initial institutional accreditation and that it has met the requirements of this accreditation. It also ensures that the institution's programs have the necessary educational resources to meet needs and evaluate their effectiveness according to the approved quality standards.

3. 5. 4 Final Institutional Accreditation: This guarantees that the institution has addressed the observations of the initial institutional and program accreditation audit teams and has met the requirements of this accreditation. It is granted for a period based on the results of the evaluation.

3. 5. 5 Final Program Accreditation: This guarantees that the institution has addressed the observations of the final institutional accreditation audit team and has met the requirements of this accreditation in accordance with the announced standards and regulations. This accreditation confirms that the programs offered by the institution meet the approved quality standards, such as curriculum consistency, appropriate teaching methods, a stimulating educational environment, qualified faculty, effective educational support services, and a functional system to ensure and improve the quality of programs.

3. 5. 6 Quality Assurance: This ensures the institution's compliance with procedures through regular reviews of the standards and regulations met, in addition to ensuring the institution

addresses the observations and recommendations of audit teams throughout the validity period of the accreditation.¹⁵

Thus, the stages of obtaining academic accreditation, based on the quality standards set by national, regional, and international bodies, ensure the performance of higher education institutions. The process begins with licensing, which grants the institution permission to operate based on the initial institutional accreditation report. This is followed by the stages of initial institutional and program accreditation, which focus on assessing the institution's capabilities and the alignment of its programs with quality standards. Afterward, the final institutional and program accreditations confirm that the institution has addressed previous feedback and complies with the announced standards. Finally, quality assurance is emphasized through regular reviews and addressing observations to ensure continuous improvement and the achievement of the required performance standards.

4. Algerian Experience in Quality Assurance and Academic Accreditation in Higher Education:

The Algerian experience in the field of quality assurance in higher education is relatively recent, as interest in quality within university institutions began with the Higher Education Orientation Law of February 13, 2008. This law first introduced the possibility of establishing private higher education institutions and emphasized the need for their monitoring and evaluation by creating the "National Evaluation Committee (CNE)" and preparing the establishment of other committees concerned with licensing and academic accreditation. The National Evaluation Committee was entrusted with the task of evaluating all functions of higher education institutions in relation to the goals set by them to improve quality and establish a set of conditions to be respected. In case of non-compliance, the Minister of Higher Education has the authority to revoke the license. A series of steps were established to implement quality in higher education institutions, which include:

_ Convincing stakeholders of the importance of implementing a quality system in higher education institutions.

_ Establishing a quality culture through the creation of quality units within each higher education institution.

Additionally, the members of the National Committee were trained through a program led by international experts, which culminated in field visits to some European countries. On January 26, 2014, the "National Committee for the Implementation of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (CIAQES)" announced the completion of a quality reference framework suitable for the specificities of Algerian higher education institutions and the national context. This framework is based on the Quality Reference System (UMED-AQI) and consists of seven areas: the Training Area (23 criteria), the Research Area (17 criteria), the Governance Area (27 criteria), the Student Life in University Area (15 criteria), the Infrastructure and Facilities

Area (17 criteria), the International Cooperation Area (11 criteria), and the Socio-Economic Relations Area (6 criteria).¹⁶

5. Conclusion

In light of the rapid changes the world is experiencing, focusing on quality assurance and academic accreditation is essential to enhancing the competitiveness of educational institutions globally. Adhering to international standards contributes to building sustainable educational institutions that enable individuals to develop their skills and achieve their aspirations, benefiting society as a whole. Achieving this goal requires continuous evaluation, improvement, and the adoption of best global practices, making quality and academic accreditation the foundation for building a bright educational future. It can be said that quality assurance and academic accreditation are essential pillars for improving higher education and achieving academic excellence. By applying quality and accreditation standards, educational institutions can enhance their ability to provide high-quality education that aligns with global and local needs. Furthermore, academic accreditation improves institutional performance, research, and strengthens societal trust in educational outcomes. To ensure sustainability and continuous development in this field, quality assurance must be an ongoing process characterized by flexibility and transparency, with a strong commitment from all stakeholders to ensure the best educational experience for students and achieve academic excellence at all levels.

6. Margins:

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