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Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation: Its impact on the Quality of Higher Education Program

Pedro T. Cagape,* Nenita I. Prado

For affiliations and correspondence, see the last page.

Abstract

PACUCOA accreditation shapes the quality of education in the Philippines, focusing on its role in boosting institutional performance and meeting the needs of students, faculty, and other stakeholders. This study was conducted to determine the impact of accreditation on the quality of programs in a Higher Education Institution. The study involved 365 participants who represented various colleges of the university. Descriptive Correlational and causal research designs were employed in the study. Students and faculty are highly satisfied with the qualifications of educators, fair admission standards, and the training programs for staff all of which were seen as closely aligned with the institution's goals. Accreditation is widely recognized as valuable and significantly enhances students' learning experiences, improves faculty performance, and boosts the university's reputation. However, challenges like increased workloads and time demands are noted. Key factors like infrastructure and institutional support emerged as critical for ensuring high-quality education, with resources and school culture playing a vital role. The study highlights the importance of PACUCOA accreditation as a tool for raising the standards and global competitiveness of Higher Education Institutions. To achieve even better results, it is suggested that resource allocation, upgrading digital infrastructure, and strengthening institutional support be given priority.

Keywords: *institutional support, resource allocation, upgrading digital infrastructure, increased workloads, time demands*

Introduction

Academic programs from higher education institutions must ensure that graduates can face global workforce challenges as qualified professionals. The Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation in the Philippines provides a venue for accreditation that assures that an institution meets specific quality standards.

PACUCOA is one of the respected accrediting bodies that evaluates and grants accreditation to several academic programs offered by many different private Philippine schools. It aids in setting up criteria as part of the accreditation process, such as infrastructures, student support services, faculty qualification, curriculum relevance, and learning outcomes. For 36 years in service, PACUCOA has 236 members of HEIs nationwide and has accredited 2,052 programs. Prado (2020) states that tertiary education is essential for competitiveness and political and economic growth in an increasingly globalized knowledge society (Prado, 2020). However, to be very highly competitive, an accrediting body should gauge its competency.

The requirement for accreditation has become indispensable to maintain the competitive and quality edge of HEIs. According to Pineda (Pineda, 2023), managers, faculty alums, and student stakeholders recognize an accreditation process with a positive dimension, resulting in curricular, institutional, and societal benefits accruing. However, this has been overridden by (Adanza, 2016), who found that the primary role of accreditation is to set excellence standards and continuously empower the institutions towards higher levels and Quality thresholds, the influence of CHED certification goes beyond the technical boundaries of the academic program to affect the institution's overall performance. In a study conducted by (Appiah, 2021), levels of accreditation consider the quality of a nursing education program in the Philippines as heavily influenced, having noted that there is improved administrative practice, faculty development, and services that reach out to the students. (Miranda & Reyes-Chua, 2021). Further, it is noted that best practice in quality assurance, as guided by the accreditation standard, strengthens the efficiency and effectiveness of the HEIs.

This is further supported by Nguyen and Ta (2018), who opined that accreditation improves the quality of universities' teaching, learning, research, and management activities. Also, some other recent research works have related to the role of technology in accreditation procedures. For instance, Cenezen (2023) recently covered an online accreditation portal of North Luzon Philippines State College and, during the pandemic period of COVID-19, used the tool when accrediting institutions to make the process continuous, efficient, and effective.

One of these factors mediated by accreditation is the culture of quality within institutions—an element that Iqbal et al. (2023) demonstrated by creating a quality culture. Accreditation can directly and indirectly enhance higher education performance (Iqbal et al., 2023). Finally, the influence of certification in institutional change and development is overwhelming. Campos and Campos (2023) noted that student support services are constantly being improved for the sake of accreditation standards, which in turn enhances general institutional development.

In the Philippines, Accreditation is a formality and a powerful tool to promote educational excellence. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) actively supports HEIs' initiatives to undergo voluntary accreditation, thereby promoting self-regulation and peer

evaluation. This support is not just in words but in action, as CHED offers incentives and greater autonomy to accredited institutions, as noted by Dotong et al. (2015). This encouragement from the highest levels of the education system inspires HEIs to strive for excellence and continuous improvement.

However, PACUCOA accreditation is a tool to help the institution become better and compete for standards internationally. The chairman's report and guidelines for its program include suggestions and recommendations, which typically focus on areas for improvement and best practices. The administrators are now responsible for implementing these accreditors' recommendations, often involving changing the institution's policies, procedures, and practices.

Further, continuous efforts are required to address issues to ensure that accreditation procedures remain inclusive, flexible, and in line with the changing demands of higher education in private institutions. What accounts for this accreditation the most is the ability of the accredited program or institution to sustain its status by adhering to the standards and requirements.

The study was conducted to find answers and assess the impact of PACUCOA accreditation on the institution's ability to help achieve its mission by giving its stakeholders quality education. Closing the knowledge gap can generate positive social change in HEIs in the PACUCOA accreditation process and increase their persuasiveness to other HEIs.

Research Objectives

This study aims to critically evaluate the impact of PACUCOA accreditation on the overall quality of higher education programs, focusing on its influence on faculty qualifications, student learning outcomes, and institutional reputation. It seeks to analyze the role of key institutional factors, including infrastructure, resource allocation, and administrative support, in maintaining and enhancing educational standards. Additionally, the study examines faculty, staff, and student perceptions of the accreditation process, identifying both its benefits and challenges. By exploring the correlation between accreditation and program quality, particularly in terms of faculty performance and student satisfaction, the research aims to provide empirical insights into its effectiveness. Furthermore, it intends to propose evidence-based strategies for optimizing accreditation benefits through enhanced digital infrastructure, improved resource management, and strengthened institutional policies, ultimately fostering continuous quality improvement in higher education institutions.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a combination of descriptive-correlational, causal design, to explore the relationships between quality of higher education programs, and education qualification, attitude towards accreditation, and school factors. The descriptive-correlational design is utilized to describe and analyze the natural relationships among variables, while the causal design investigates cause and effect relationships between variables.

Liceo de Cagayan University is known for its commitment to academic excellence, ensuring its graduates are well-prepared for their professional careers. Through ongoing accreditation and quality assurance efforts, the university continues to uphold high educational standards, driving both institutional growth and professional development in the region.

Respondents

The study participants were faculty, staff, administrators, third-year, and fourth-year students of accredited higher education programs during the second semester of the academic year 2023-2024, with a total population of 6,927. From this population of students, a sample size of 365 was determined using the Raosoft sample size calculator.

Instrument

The research utilized a comprehensive questionnaire of one hundred sixteen (116) items rated from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree," corresponding to scores of 5 to 1 to evaluate various students, faculty, staff, and administrators. The questionnaire was divided into three main sections. The first section focused on Educational Qualification, which focuses on the overall quality, institutional performance, and long-term academic success of students.

The second section examined Attitude towards accreditation. Items in this section were adapted from Prado (2020), which focuses on how researchers can assess attitudes towards accreditation influence institutional commitment, policy decisions, and overall educational quality.

The third section examined School Factors. Items were adapted from Prado (2020). Analyzing these factors helps determine their collective role in enhancing educational effectiveness and institutional success.

To ensure the clarity and relevance of the questionnaire, a pilot test was conducted with 30 students. Feedback from this test led to refinements, enhancing the instrument's validity and reliability. The final version was then administered to 365 students, faculty, staff, and administrators across Liceo de Cagayan University.

Procedure

The researcher conducted the study according to university regulations. The planned inquiry was submitted for approval in a letter to the Vice President for Research, Extension, Planning, and Innovation and to the Deans of HEIs program accredited to PACUCOA, which include the offices of support services. Following submission of the proposal and acceptance of the study by the Office of the Vice President for Research, Extension, Planning, and Innovation, panelists, and the Dean of the School of Business, Management, and Accountancy, the investigator must adhere to all ethical research forms.

Face-to-face classroom orientation was done. To effectively follow instructions, including how to properly complete the questionnaires, participants must be in a classroom designed just for them. The investigator quickly and carefully reviewed the collected data. After that, the data were examined and evaluated using the proper statistical software.

Data Analysis

To analyze and interpret the collected data, various statistical tools were employed. For addressing research problems 1 through 4, descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to summarize data and assess the level of educational qualification, attitude towards accreditation, and school factors.

For problem 5, which examined the relationship between the quality of higher education programs and the specified variables, Pearson product-moment correlation was utilized. This method assessed the strength and direction of the associations between quality of higher education and variables such as educational qualification, attitude towards accreditation, and school factors.

In addressing problem 6, multiple regression analysis was applied to determine which variables, either independently or in combination, most significantly impacted the quality of higher education programs. This technique facilitated the development of a predictive model to examine the causal relationships among the variables.

Results and Discussion

With due procedure, the research was able to move forward. Here are the prominent findings of the study:

The study explored the impact on surrounding educational qualifications, student admission standards, staff training programs, and accreditation, revealing both strengths and areas for improvement. Faculty qualifications were rated highly, particularly regarding the possession of required degrees ($M=4.57$, $SD=.628$) and relevance to courses taught ($M=4.56$, $SD=.634$), with an overall very high mean ($M=4.44$, $SD=.69$). Student admission standards were viewed favorably, especially for clearly defined requirements ($M=4.23$, $SD=.779$) and fair selection processes ($M=4.20$, $SD=.861$), though the rigor of criteria ensuring student qualifications scored lower ($M=4.03$, $SD=.954$). Similarly, staff training programs received positive feedback for enhancing educational quality ($M=4.30$, $SD=.788$) and encouraging professional growth ($M=4.28$, $SD=.751$), leading to a very high overall mean ($M=4.19$, $SD=.78$). These results highlight strong perceptions of quality but indicate the need for improvements in areas such as doctoral qualifications, stricter admission criteria, and expanded training resources.

Regarding accreditation, participants acknowledged substantial benefits, particularly its impact on student learning outcomes ($M=4.41$, $SD=.734$) and faculty performance ($M=4.40$, $SD=.729$), resulting in a very high mean ($M=4.37$, $SD=.74$). However, slightly lower scores for resource allocation ($M=4.33$, $SD=.757$) and professional development ($M=4.34$, $SD=.752$) suggest opportunities for further improvement. Challenges were moderately acknowledged, with increased workload ($M=3.71$, $SD=1.02$) and time demands ($M=3.70$, $SD=.977$) as primary concerns. The applicability of standards ($M=3.41$, $SD=1.07$) and institutional support ($M=3.44$, $SD=1.08$) received lower ratings, with an overall mean ($M=3.54$, $SD=1.04$) reflecting variability in perceptions. Awareness of accreditation processes was satisfactory overall ($M=4.07$, $SD=.83$), with high ratings for their role in school improvement ($M=4.25$, $SD=.778$) and teaching enhancement ($M=4.22$, $SD=.773$), but lower familiarity with process details ($M=3.77$, $SD=.996$) and maintenance steps ($M=3.86$, $SD=.991$). These findings suggest that while perceptions are broadly positive, targeted efforts to enhance awareness, institutional support, and alignment of standards with institutional needs are critical for optimizing accreditation outcomes.

The investigation into attitudes toward accreditation uncovered generally positive perceptions, with participants highlighting notable benefits, moderate challenges, and strong awareness. Perceived benefits were rated very high, with the highest scores attributed to accreditation's impact on student learning outcomes ($M=4.41$, $SD=0.734$) and faculty performance ($M=4.40$, $SD=0.729$). However, participants rated resource allocation improvements ($M=4.33$, $SD=0.757$) and professional development enhancements ($M=4.34$, $SD=0.752$) slightly lower. The overall mean ($M=4.37$, $SD=0.74$) reflects a strong agreement on accreditation's benefits, though responses varied somewhat.

Challenges were moderately agreed upon, with increased workload ($M=3.71$, $SD=1.02$) and time demands ($M=3.70$, $SD=0.977$) seen as significant concerns. Lower scores for challenges related to institutional support ($M=3.44$, $SD=1.08$) and the applicability of standards to unique needs ($M=3.41$, $SD=1.07$) highlight areas needing attention. The overall mean ($M=3.54$, $SD=1.04$) indicates moderate agreement on challenges, with substantial variability among responses.

Awareness of accreditation processes was strong overall ($M=4.07$, $SD=0.83$), with high ratings for its contributions to school

improvement ($M=4.25$, $SD=0.778$) and enhanced teaching and learning ($M=4.22$, $SD=0.773$). Familiarity with specific accreditation processes ($M=3.77$, $SD=0.996$) and steps for maintaining accreditation ($M=3.86$, $SD=0.991$) scored lower, suggesting a need for greater institutional focus on process transparency. These findings emphasize accreditation's value in fostering educational excellence while highlighting the importance of addressing workload concerns and enhancing understanding of procedural details.

The analysis of school factors, including infrastructure, the importance of accreditation, resources, and institutional support, revealed generally positive perceptions with some variability. Regarding infrastructure, participants rated the campus's support for student well-being ($M=4.10$, $SD=0.958$) and the adequacy of ventilation, lighting, and seating in learning spaces ($M=4.07$, $SD=0.962$) most highly. Conversely, lower scores were observed for Wi-Fi availability ($M=3.70$, $SD=1.18$) and the sufficiency of physical infrastructure for learning ($M=3.81$, $SD=1.13$). The overall mean score of $M=3.95$ ($SD=1.00$) reflects a satisfactory level of agreement, albeit with notable response variability.

The importance of accreditation was strongly affirmed, with participants particularly agreeing on its role in enhancing institutional reputation ($M=4.34$, $SD=0.708$) and maintaining high educational standards ($M=4.33$, $SD=0.727$). Indicators related to stakeholder trust ($M=4.25$, $SD=0.765$) and institutional accountability ($M=4.27$, $SD=0.741$) received slightly lower scores. An overall mean of $M=4.30$ ($SD=0.74$) indicates strong agreement with the value of accreditation, though responses showed some dispersion.

For resources, the institution's ability to meet academic and operational needs ($M=4.98$, $SD=0.917$) and the adequacy of laboratory resources ($M=3.97$, $SD=0.911$) were rated highest. However, indicators related to academic support services ($M=3.76$, $SD=1.09$) and financial resources for student activities ($M=3.79$, $SD=1.09$) scored lower. The overall mean of $M=3.91$ ($SD=0.97$) suggests a satisfactory perception of resource adequacy with significant response variability.

These findings suggest that while the school is perceived positively in key areas, targeted improvements in digital infrastructure, financial and academic support, and transparency in resource allocation could enhance overall institutional effectiveness.

The assessment of institutional support highlighted strong satisfaction levels, with the highest ratings for faculty professional development and research support ($M=4.21$, $SD=0.763$) and encouragement of collaboration among faculty, staff, and administration ($M=4.12$, $SD=0.824$). Lower ratings were observed for the clarity of communication channels between students, faculty, and administration ($M=3.88$, $SD=1.00$) and support for students facing academic or personal challenges ($M=3.99$, $SD=0.895$). The overall mean of $M=4.05$ ($SD=0.87$) indicates a positive perception of institutional support, albeit with some variability.

These findings suggest that while institutional support is generally robust, addressing areas such as communication channels, Wi-Fi access, and financial resources for student activities could further strengthen institutional effectiveness and enhance the overall educational experience.

The investigation into the quality of higher education programs revealed a generally very high perception, with an overall mean score of $M=4.05$ ($SD=0.85$). The institution's support for faculty professional development and research activities ($M=4.32$, $SD=0.732$) was the highest-rated aspect, followed by its establishment of partnerships and collaborations with other institutions ($M=4.19$, $SD=0.764$) and the promotion of critical, enriching discussions among faculty and students ($M=4.18$, $SD=0.816$).

In contrast, lower ratings were given to indicators such as student grade point averages ($M=3.81$, $SD=0.967$), graduate employment rates ($M=3.90$, $SD=0.946$), and the availability of computers and internet services ($M=3.91$, $SD=0.973$). The relatively high standard deviation ($SD=0.85$) across indicators suggests considerable variability in participants' perceptions.

These findings emphasize the institution's strengths in fostering faculty growth, building collaborative networks, and promoting critical academic engagement while identifying opportunities to enhance student academic outcomes, employability, and access to essential technological resources.

The findings of relationships between educational qualifications, attitudes towards accreditation, school factors, and the quality of higher education programs revealed significant insights. While challenges exhibited a small positive relationship with program quality ($p<.05$, $r=.150$), indicating limited impact, other factors demonstrated stronger associations. Faculty qualifications ($p<.05$, $r=.447$), student admission standards ($p<.05$, $r=.479$), and perceived benefits ($p<.05$, $r=.494$) had moderate positive relationships, suggesting that improvements in these areas can moderately enhance program quality.

The strongest correlations were found with factors such as resources ($p<.05$, $r=.640$), institutional support ($p<.05$, $r=.712$), school factors ($p<.05$, $r=.706$), staff training programs ($p<.05$, $r=.544$), educational qualifications ($p<.05$, $r=.559$), and awareness ($p<.05$, $r=.569$). Additionally, infrastructure ($p<.05$, $r=.510$), the importance of accreditation ($p<.05$, $r=.531$), and attitudes towards accreditation ($p<.05$, $r=.514$) exhibited large positive relationships, highlighting these as pivotal contributors to enhancing education quality.

Overall, these findings emphasize that while challenges have minimal impact, significant improvements in resources, institutional support, and broader school factors are critical drivers of higher education program quality, warranting focused attention to these domains.

The analysis of the impact of quality in higher education programs revealed a significant and strong positive relationship with key

independent variables, as demonstrated by an R value of 0.760. The R^2 value of 0.578 indicates that 57.8% of the variability in program quality is attributable to awareness, infrastructure, institutional support, and school factors ($p < .05$). These variables emerged as substantial predictors, highlighting their critical influence on educational quality.

The F-value of 40.98 ($p = 0.00$) further confirms the statistical significance of the relationship, reinforcing the importance of these factors in shaping program outcomes. Enhancing awareness, improving infrastructure, strengthening institutional support, and optimizing school-related elements are pivotal strategies for advancing the quality of higher education programs. These findings underline the need for a focused approach to addressing these areas to achieve sustained improvements in educational excellence.

Conclusions

The level of faculty qualifications is high. Their academic credentials are relevant to the courses they teach. However, the number of faculty with doctoral qualifications remains insufficient, and expertise does not always align with specialized subjects.

Attitude towards accreditation is highly positive. student learning outcomes and faculty performance, but it also increases workload and time demands. Institutional support for accreditation remains inconsistent, making the process challenging for faculty and staff.

School factors: infrastructure, resources, and institutional support generally receive positive feedback. However, digital infrastructure remains underdeveloped, financial resources for student activities are limited, and communication gaps between students, faculty, and administration persist.

The quality of higher education programs is high, though inconsistencies in student outcomes exist. Faculty research support and institutional collaborations remain strong, but access to technology and career readiness programs require improvement.

There is a significant relationship between program quality and faculty qualifications, student admission standards, and accreditation benefits, resources, institutional support, school factors, and staff training programs. This implies that the more the institution is compliant with the aforementioned factors, the higher the level of quality of its programs.

Key Predictors of Higher Education Quality. The study predicts that awareness, infrastructure, institutional support, and school factors will be the key drivers of higher education quality. Strengthening institutional support through faculty development, student services, and administrative backing will have the most significant impact. School factors, including learning environments and resource availability, will shape student experiences and academic success.

These recommendations are crafted in direct response to the study's findings and conclusions, aiming to provide valuable guidance and support. They are intended to assist the Commission on Higher Education, policymakers, administrators, faculty, staff, students, and future researchers in making informed decisions and improvements. By considering these insights, stakeholders can enhance policies, academic standards, and institutional practices. The following recommendations are presented to help drive positive change in higher education.

Commission on Higher Education. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) is encouraged to provide clear guidelines, increased funding, and capacity-building initiatives to support institutional compliance with accreditation standards.

Policymakers. National standards for admission criteria might be established to ensure consistency, fairness, and rigor, with HEIs required to report compliance regularly. Institutional support systems might include mandated counseling and academic support programs, alongside improved communication channels to bridge gaps between faculty, students, and administrators.

Administrators may prioritize improving infrastructure, expanding training resources, enhancing communication channels, and addressing gaps in digital access and financial support for student activities.

Faculty and Staff are encouraged to prioritize professional growth, accreditation engagement, and resource optimization. Addressing workload concerns through streamlined workflows and aligning professional development with accreditation goals will further improve institutional performance.

Students are suggested to familiarize themselves with admission and academic standards, participating in preparatory programs to meet high expectations. Utilizing institutional support systems like counseling, mentorship, and communication channels will help address both academic and personal challenges. Participating in training, collaborating with faculty and peers, and joining extracurricular activities may foster both academic and professional growth.

Future Researchers may continue to conduct this study to continuously monitor and assess the quality of educational programs in the institution to maintain its quality and relevance.

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Affiliations and Corresponding Information

Pedro T. Cagape

Liceo de Cagayan University – Philippines

Dr. Nenita I. Prado

Liceo de Cagayan University – Philippines