

Measuring Accreditation Experience: Impact on the Quality of Education of Selected ASAS Member-Schools In Luzon and the NCR

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Abstract - The study gathered quantifiable insights on the impact accreditation experience has on the quality of education of ASAS-member schools in Luzon and the NCR. A descriptive research design was employed with the use of a standardized questionnaire modified to suit the locale. Respondents totaled 1,970 composed of administrators, teaching and non-teaching personnel and students from nine ASAS-member schools: LCC-Manila, LCC-Deparo, LCC-Caloocan, LCS-Balagtas, LCC-Mercedes, LCC-Tanauan, LCC-Valenzuela, Assumpta Academy, and LCUP-Malolos. The correlational and regression analyses revealed that accreditation experience, in terms of the following variables (1) professional development, (2) teaching-learning environment, (3) organization management and leadership, (4) faculty and staff morale, (5) quality of instruction, and (6) short-term and long-term benefits, was found to have significant combined effects on the quality of education of ASAS schools. The best accreditation experience determinant of quality of education was found to be its *Short/Long-term benefits*. This was followed by *Professional development* and *Teaching-learning environment*.

Keywords: accreditation, quality education, compliance, accreditation experience, ASAS schools

1. Introduction

Educational institutions, particularly private schools, colleges, and universities play a fundamental role in preparing a nation to gain global competitive advantage. As such, they are expected to produce graduates who possess the necessary knowledge and skills needed in the global labor market. The task is too prodigious that educational institutions have to continually and constantly check themselves against prevailing standards and keep themselves abreast of new developments. Therefore, there is an urgent need to further enhance the quality of education.

Several authors defined the quality of education in various ways (Arcelo, 2003; Harvey, 2004; Espinel et al., 2015; Griego, 2005 as cited in Hasbun and Rudolph, 2016; Harvey, 2002, as cited in Collins, 2014;). These definitions of quality must be open to change and evolution based on information, changing frameworks, and new concepts of the nature of education's challenges (Glasser, 1990 as cited in UNICEF, 2000).

It is no surprise, therefore, that 'quality as a concern has dominated the educational debates triggered and sustained by international aid and cooperation, and by the ethos of economic globalization' (Kumar, 2010). The increased concern about the quality of education provided in schools is in part driven by marketplace demands such as the heightened competition for share of the global student market which had likewise boosted the demand for quality education and school accountability. It means that the educational undertaking has been affected by global processes that are threatening the autonomy of national educational systems and also spreading significant changes in the fundamental conditions of a school system grounded on fitting into a community characterized by proximity and familiarity. (Koul, 2006 as cited in Jung et al. 2010; Burbules & Torres, 2000 as cited in Singh, 2011; Bryant, 2015)

Quality is an elusive concept (Green 1994 as cited in DAAD, 2010). There are many studies written (UNICEF, 2000; UNESCO, 2005; Generation All, 2014; Hightower, et al., 2011; Van Der Bank & Popoola, 2014) to try to define the nature of quality, specifically in education. However, there is no consensus on the concept (DAAD 2010). An objective definition of quality does not exist (DAAD, 2010) even though we all may intuitively understand what it means. This is because quality is often individually associated with some notions and outlooks held by individuals about the concept of what is good. As a result, quality seems to have many facets. According to a study by Reeves and Bednar (1994 as cited in Stensaker, 2007), quality, in general, can be defined as a value, conformance to specifications or requirements, fitness for use, loss avoidance, or meeting customer expectations.

The most influential study by Harvey and Green (1993 in Nguyen, 2012) which was often cited in the discussion on quality in higher education presented different concepts of quality as perceived by the various stakeholders in higher education. According to them, stakeholder's insights on quality could be classified based on five definitions of quality: exceptional, perfection, fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformation.

A slightly different story may be told in the case of the Philippines as the quality of some higher education institutions has deteriorated over time – as manifested in the quality of their graduates, among others. Paqueo, Orbeta, and Albert (2012, as cited in Conchada and Tiongco, 2015) pointed out that most of the higher education institutions are of low quality as evidenced in their low passing rates in the licensure exams and few accredited programs. Corpuz (2003 as cited in Conchada and Tiongco, 2015) stressed the that the level of quality of the country's educational system is inversely associated with the number of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the

Philippines, which were described as "educational opportunities." Competition between private and state universities, the influx of private low-cost, low-quality, and the absence of a centralized accrediting agency likewise affected the quality of education.

Buendia (2012) and the USAID Philippine Education Assessment Report of 2011, also reported that based on the professional board examinations (PBE) conducted by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), the performance of graduates in the different licensure and board examinations from 2000 to 2010 has been declining with overall passing rates at around 36% compared to approximately 45% between 1995 and 1999. The low passing rate might even be an overstatement of the quality of HEIs as most graduates who are not likely to pass the exams either do not bother to take the exams or are prevented from doing so by their institutions. The poorest results were shown by private non-sectarian institutions. Close to 300 HEIs have zero passing rates for some disciplines. However, in the most recent available study of CHED (2008), it found that even the top universities in the country have suffered a big drop in their passing rates (Bernardo, 2009 as cited by Buendia, 2012; USAID, 2011).

Further, in a study conducted on higher education teachers, Kemenade and Hardjono (2009, as cited in Collins, 2015) concluded that ultimately accreditation has little effect on improving the quality of education, probably the most unfavorable criticism of accreditation. The study said that accreditation created substantial administrative obligations and took up too much time. Many others regret the lack of real evidence for the success of accreditation in educational improvement (Collins, 2015). It has been claimed that improvement, in the context of accreditation, is simply something that is assumed to happen if institutions comply with the standards of the accrediting body (Harvey, 2002 as cited in Collins, 2015). As such, accreditation becomes process-dominated and tending towards what can be documented as high quality rather than quality itself (Engebretsen et al., 2012). Moreover, compliance with a set of standards promotes mere conformity rather than necessarily high-quality outcomes (Engebretsen et al., 2012).

Needless to say, it is still mainly through accreditation that educational institutions establish their reputation among their different stakeholders – students, parents, employers, other institutions, government and funding agencies. Accreditation processes are used for self-improvement and targeted planning for future institutional development. Accreditation enables schools to determine whether a credential from another institution or courses taken elsewhere are of sufficient quality to be accepted.

Accreditation is seen as one way in which colleges and universities could raise the bar of quality in teaching and learning and keep themselves in check with the set standards. This involves investing in a substantial amount of resources to enhance the competence of its faculty, increase research productivity, and improve facilities.

The study, therefore, aimed to gather quantifiable insights about the impact that accreditation experience has on the quality of education of ASAS member-schools in Luzon and NCR.

The hypothesis tested in the study was:

H₀₁ Accreditation experience has no significant impact on the quality of education of ASAS member-schools in Luzon and NCR

1.1 Problem, Scope, and Delimitation. It was the concern of this study to gather calculable insights on the accreditation experience of Association of Schools of the Augustinian Sisters (ASAS) member-schools in Luzon and NCR and the impact it has on the quality of

education based on the following indicators : (1) professional development, (2) teaching and learning environment, (3) organization management and leadership, (4) faculty and staff morale, (5) quality of instruction, and (6) short-term and long-term benefits.

The study included only nine (9) ASAS-member schools situated in Luzon and the National Capital Region (NCR) namely: La Consolacion College – Manila (LCCM), La Consolacion School – Balagtas (LCS-Balagtas), La Consolacion College – Mercedes Pasig LCC-Mercedes), La Consolacion College – Valenzuela (LC-Valenzuela), La Consolacion College – Deparo (LCC-Deparo), La Consolacion College – Caloocan (LCC-Caloocan), La Consolacion College – Tanauan (LCCT) Assumpta Academy, and La Consolacion University Philippines (LCUP) in Malolos.

The study did not include Colegio del Buen Consejo - Pasig, La Consolacion College - Laguna, and other schools in the Bicol Region namely: La Consolacion College-Iriga (LCCI), La Consolacion College, Baao (LCC-Baao), La Consolacion College – Daet (LCC-Daet), and St. Francis Parochial School – Talisay. Reasons for non-inclusion were: difficulty in contacting the school, deadlines to beat and non-proximity to researchers' place of work, therefore, chances for retrieval and follow-ups were expected to be low.

Moreover, for schools with accredited Basic Education program, only Grades 9 and 10 students were chosen as respondents, since they are considered in the right age to decipher the questions included in the survey.

1.2 Theoretical Framework. This study has its underpinnings on Dewey's theory on experience (Dewey, 1938 as cited in Hasbun & Rudolph, 2016; Schmidt, 2010), which discussed the value of experience in education and posited that experience comes from the combining of continuity and interaction. He believed that a person's past and present experiences, impact his or her future experiences (continuity) and that there are contextual influences that affect the current experience. This is relevant in this article as these ASAS schools' recent experiences with accreditation were affected by previous ones, as well as current situational factors, which will then affect future experiences with accreditation.

There is a necessary and intimate relationship between the processes of experience and education (Quay, 2003; Quay, 2013). Since not all experiences were educational, Dewey (1938 as cited in Greenberg, 2003) challenged educators to provide learners with experiences that resulted in growth and learning. He believed that these experiences would, in the future, result in growth and creativity in learners' experiences. In other words, continuity of experience states that a good experience at present would most likely impact future decisions and experiences. (Greenberg, 2003; Neill, 2005; Arstila and Kiverstern, 2014).

1.2 Self-Evaluation. Accreditation necessitates extensive preparation which involves gathering information pertinent to the required standards that are utilized to analyze how well-prepared the institution is to address whatever inquiries and issues may arise.

Said preparation can require enormous efforts on the part of a few staff members while drawing on the resources of many parts of the organization. The self-study process may bring to the fore the institution's previously unidentified weaknesses and some strengths, and can suggest remedies to address the weaknesses and sustain the strengths. It can also draw the attention of top management to the necessity for more resources, new programs, or management changes. It may likewise unearth the strengths and weaknesses of key personnel. Self-evaluation is regarded by many institutions as the most valuable of the entire accreditation process because it focuses the

attention of key and senior administrators and remains the best way to assure academic quality and accountability (American Council on Education, n.d.).

1.3 Accreditation in the Philippines. On the whole, accreditation in the Philippines is of two types, namely, government accreditation and private accreditation. CHED carries out the government accreditation process for private HEIs which includes the release of government recognition or permit to offer programs. (Biglete, 2004; Conchada and Tiongco, 2015).

The state universities and colleges (SUCs) do not secure government authority from CHED in offering programs while the CHED-Supervised Institutions (CSIs) and Local Colleges or Universities (LCUs) in some instances secure government authority when programs to be offered have no legal basis. In the case of the private HEIs, permit or recognition is granted to them upon compliance with the prescribed minimum requirements by CHED for the various programs. For this purpose, the CHED has Regional Offices in the country which are assisted by the Regional Quality Assessment Teams (RQATs) in the varied disciplines. These RQAT teams are tasked to evaluate the extent of compliance of the HEIs to the minimum standards (Biglete, 2004; Sabio and Sabio, 2012; Conchada and Tiongco, 2015).

Conversely, a private accreditation which is voluntary pertains to the accreditation done by the private accrediting bodies. Accreditation standards surpass the minimum requirements prescribed by CHED for the different programs. CHED encourages accreditation by giving HEIs incentives and greater autonomy. Accreditation is now regarded as a means of fostering educational excellence through self-regulation and peer evaluation (acics.org; Biglete, 2004) because of the recognition and benefits which CHED has been extending to HEIs with accredited programs.

The Federation of Accrediting Agencies of the Philippines (FAAP) is the umbrella organization which is authorized to certify the accredited status of programs granted by the different accrediting agencies, namely: the Association of Christian Schools and Colleges Accrediting Agency, Inc. (ACSC-AAI), the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (PAASCU), the Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation (PACU-COA), and the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities of the Philippines (AACUP) (www.pacucoa.ph).

The major steps in the accreditation process are as follows: (1) institutional self-survey or self-evaluation; (2) preliminary visit (4 to 6 months after the start of self-survey); (3) formal survey visit (a minimum of six months after preliminary visit); and (4) decision by governing board of accrediting agency. The levels of accreditation are as follows:

“Level I applicant status: for programs which have undergone a preliminary survey visit and are certified by the FAAP as being capable of acquiring an accredited status within two years;

Level II accredited status: for programs which have been granted accredited status by any of the member agencies of the FAAP and whose status is certified by the latter;

Level III accredited status: for programs which have at least been reaccredited and have met additional requirements based on criteria/guidelines set by FAAP; and

Level IV accredited status: institutions which have distinguished themselves in a broad area of academic disciplines and enjoy prestige and authority comparable to that of international universities”.

(www.pacucoa.ph; Conchada and Tiongco, 2015).

CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 1 (2005), also known as the Revised Policies and Guidelines on Voluntary Accreditation in Aid of Quality and Excellence in Higher Education, encourages "the use of voluntary non-governmental accreditation systems", which lays down a set of policies in full support of an accrediting agency's practices towards regulation. The CMO stated two accrediting bodies. On one hand, FAAP members consist of the Association of Christian Schools, Colleges and Universities Accrediting Agency, Inc. (ACSCU-AAI), the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (PAASCU), and the Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities Commission On Accreditation (PACU-COA). On the other hand, the National Network of Quality Accrediting Agencies (NNQAA) is inclusive of AACCUP and the Association of Local Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation (ALCUCOA).

All processes, policies, frameworks, and systems of accreditation created by the aforementioned bodies must be forwarded for approval to CHED (Conchada and Tiongco, 2015; CHED, 2005).

3. Materials and Methods

The study made use of the descriptive research design. A standardized instrument was used which was based on NEASC 's (New England Association of Schools and Colleges) standard questionnaire in gauging the impact of accreditation, modifying some items to suit the locale and target respondents.

The survey questionnaire, which consisted of 31 close-ended questions was administered to nine (9) selected ASAS-member schools situated in Luzon and the NCR. Respondents numbered 1,970 composed of 78 administrators, 246 faculty members, 202 non-teaching personnel and 1,444 students.

Letters of permission to administer the survey were sent to respective research heads and administrators. Point persons per member-schools were identified. Upon approval, survey questionnaires were sent through couriers in the last week of August to September 2016 and followed up with e-mails and telephone calls. Accomplished survey forms were retrieved approximately after two to three months.

Data gathered were tallied, mean results were computed and subjected to logistic regression analysis to determine which of the accreditation experience variables significantly influenced the quality of education in ASOLC schools with accredited programs.

4. Results and Discussion

The correlation and regression results of the Impact of Accreditation experience on the Quality of Education are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
 Regression Analysis of Accreditation Experience on the Quality of Education of ASAS Schools

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig
(Constant)	1.634	.851		1.920	.064
Professional Development	.463	.229	.464	2.018	.053
Teaching and Learning Environment	.319	.375	.241	.851	.402
Organizational Management and Leadership	.380	.321	.221	1.183	.246
Faculty and Staff Morale	.228	.287	.151	.796	.432
Quality Education	.196	.437	.123	.447	.658
Short/Long-term benefits	.979	.331	.742	2.958	.006

R-squared = .745
 F-value = 14.622
 p-value = .000
 alpha = 0.05

Analysis of the data revealed that the independent variables namely: *Professional Development, Teaching and Learning environment, Organizational Management and Leadership, Faculty and Staff Morale, Quality Education, and Short/Long-term Benefits* correlate with Impact on Quality of Education in varying extents as evidenced by the obtained B coefficients which are non-zero.

Results of the analysis of variance test revealed an F- ratio equal to 14.622, with an associated probability equal to .000, a value much lower than alpha at .05. The findings indicate that the null hypothesis *Accreditation experience has no significant impact on the quality of education* has to be rejected.

The B coefficients presented the amount of change in an impact that is associated with a change in one unit of the aforementioned variables of *Accreditation experience*. The magnitude of their values is relative to the means and standard deviations of the independent and dependent variables in the equation. The same results indicate that for every unit increase in the independent variables *Professional Development, Teaching and Learning environment, Organizational Management and Leadership, Faculty and Staff Morale, Quality Education, and Short/Long-term Benefits*, a corresponding increase in quality education is generated by as much as 46.4 percent, 24.1 percent, 22.1 percent, 15.1 percent, 12.3 percent, and 74.2 percent respectively.

The beta value, which is measured in units of standard deviation, measures how strongly each predictor variable under Accreditation Experience influences the criterion (dependent) variable which is Quality of Education. Therefore, a beta value of .464 indicates that a change of one standard deviation in the predictor variable Professional Development resulted in a change of .464 standard deviations in Quality of Education.

Since the beta value of Short/Long term Benefits is the highest, it could be culled that it has the greatest impact on the Quality of Education. This is followed by Professional Development

(.464), Teaching and Learning Environment (.241), Organizational Management and Leadership (.221), Faculty and Staff Morale (.151), and Quality Education (.123)

On the whole, accreditation experience has statistically significant predictive capability on quality of education as evidenced by the p-value 0.000, $\alpha = .05$. On the other hand, p values likewise tell us whether a variable has statistically significant predictive capability in the presence of the other variables.

Singly, the variable *Short/Longterm benefits* has a statistically significant predictive capability on quality of education as evinced by the p-value of .006, at $\alpha = 0.05$ while the other variables considered individually, have no statistically significant predictive capability on quality of education as indicated by p-values greater than the significance level set at alpha .05.

Researches of Collins (2015) and Engebretsen, et al., (2012) seemingly lend support to individual accreditation experience results in five out of six variables - that compliance with set standards become more of mere conformity and has little effect on improving the quality of education as perceived by the respondents.

Nevertheless, it could be inferred from the foregoing results that accreditation experience in terms of variables was found to have significant combined effects on the quality of education of ASAS schools. The best accreditation experience determinant of quality of education was found to be its *Short/Long-term benefits*.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Despite the tremendous expansion of the educational system, accreditation is still an effective scheme in distinguishing quality levels among higher educational institutions. The participatory involvement of the academic community in defining its own strengths, weaknesses as well as available opportunities and threats gives it direction in shaping what is imperative for the institution's growth and development.

Accreditation will continue to play a crucial role in improving the quality of education in ASAS-member schools, albeit there will be greater pressure to hasten the process/procedure particularly since many programs are yet to be accredited.

While accreditation is a good starting point, in response to the need for world-class education in this era of ASEAN integration, operational quality assurance activities should be in place to ensure quality of education. A better way is to combine accreditation with the certification system of ISO (International Organization for Standardization).

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