

A Framework for Quality Assurance in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs): Basis for Policy Development Towards Accreditation, Internationalization and Ranking

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Abstract

Accreditation serves as a quality assurance mechanism that establishes minimum standards for higher education institutions (HEIs) through defined institutional benchmarks required for achieving accredited status. Recognizing the interconnection among accreditation, internationalization, and global university rankings, this study analyzed five sets of Institutional Standards to identify common themes and criteria that can be adopted by Philippine HEIs. The goal is to align local accreditation frameworks with international best practices to strengthen internationalization outcomes and improve global ranking performance.

Using qualitative content analysis through QCAMap and NVivo software, five Institutional Standards were examined: the ASEAN University Network (AUN, ASEAN), the Commission on Academic Accreditation (CAA, United Arab Emirates), the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA, Sultanate of Oman), the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA, United Kingdom), and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC, United States of America).

The analysis identified eight themes comprising 130 criteria, which were validated by key informants from the top three HEIs ranked in QS and THE during 2019–2024. Validation results revealed that 125 (96%) of the criteria were already *fully available* in University A, 104 (80%) in University B, and 103 (79%) in University C. Furthermore, 100% of the criteria were strongly recommended by Universities A and B, with only one criterion not endorsed by University C.

The findings confirm that the 130 identified criteria are applicable to Philippine HEIs. Aligning national accreditation systems with international best practices can therefore enhance accreditation quality, foster internationalization, and contribute to improved global university rankings. Accreditation practices were also analyzed to form the basis for policy recommendations.

Keywords: accreditation, internationalization, higher education, quality assurance, standards.

1. Introduction

A review of the top ten universities in the World University Rankings (WUR) published by three major ranking organizations—Academic Rankings of World Universities (ARWU) (2023), Quacquarelli Symmonds (QS) (2023), and Times Higher Education (THE) (2023)—revealed a consistent dominance by institutions from the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK). According to ARWU, 80% of the top ten universities were from the USA and 20% from the UK. In the QS WUR, 50% of the top ten institutions were from the USA, 40% from the UK, and 10% from Europe (Switzerland). Similarly, in the THE rankings, 70% of the top ten universities were from the USA and 30% from the UK.

In the Arab Region, a review of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Oman showed that in the ARWU rankings, three universities from the UAE were listed: Khalifa University, United Arab Emirates University, and the University of Sharjah. In the QS rankings, Sultan Qaboos University in Oman ranked at 384th. Similarly, three universities in the UAE—Khalifa University ranked 181st, United Arab Emirates University ranked 296th, and the American University in Dubai ranked 369th. All these are higher than the Philippine HEIs. Similarly, in the THE rankings, 14 universities from the UAE and five from Oman were placed higher than universities in the Philippines.

This finding is particularly noteworthy given that HEIs in Oman and the UAE were only established in the 1970s, whereas the Philippines has much older universities, such as the University of San Carlos (founded in 1935) and the University of Santo Tomas (founded in 1611)—both predating Harvard University (founded in 1636) in the United States.

In the Asian Region, a review of the WUR showed that in the ARWU rankings, the top ten HEIs were from China (including Hong Kong) (60%), Japan (20%), and Singapore (20%); in the QS rankings, the top ten HEIs were from China (including Hong Kong) (60%), Singapore (20%), Malaysia (10%), and South Korea (10%); and in the THE rankings, the top ten HEIs were from China (including Hong Kong) (70%), Singapore (20%), and Malaysia (10%).

Notably, no Philippine HEIs appeared in the top ten of any of the three 2023 WURs, and none were included in the ARWU rankings overall. These results drew attention to the academic and institutional standards adopted by HEIs in these countries.

2. Literature Review

Ulker and Bakioglu (2019) affirm that accreditation significantly influences the quality of education, as demonstrated in their study examining how the U.S. accreditation process has affected higher education quality across 96 institutions—87% from the United States and 13% from Qatar, Peru, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Colombia, Egypt, and Turkey. The study involved coordinators and program administrators who participated in their institutions' self-study processes. According to the study, the U.S. accreditation process encouraged institutions to emphasize learning outcomes not only at the course level but also at the student outcome level, thereby improving program quality. Moreover, the requirement to develop and submit an action plan, which is subsequently reviewed for follow-up on

previous recommendations, has contributed to sustaining a culture of continuous improvement. Finally, because accreditation is conducted on a regular cycle, institutions are compelled to maintain systematic documentation of processes and practices to ensure readiness for accreditation renewal.

Another study that underscores the significant role of accreditation in higher education is that of Kumar et al. (2020), who conducted a survey involving 3,219 students. The findings revealed that accreditation (84.1%) and ranking status (83.6%) were the top factors influencing students' choice of program or institution in India. These findings reinforce the view that accreditation serves as a key driver of quality assurance, institutional credibility, and continuous improvement in higher education.

A further study by Hakim and Suharto (2019) also supports the benefits of accreditation, demonstrating that in Indonesia, the quality of education has improved steadily each year as reflected in the increased attainment of the eight national education standards.

A survey conducted by Indewarati, Huang, and Sukwadi (2020) involving 26 academic leaders and lecturers in Indonesia revealed that accreditation requirements already encompass most aspects of higher education quality. However, the study identified gaps in addressing student satisfaction and sustainable development. As a result, the researchers proposed a new quality framework that integrates accreditation ranking, customer (student) satisfaction, and education for sustainable development to provide a more comprehensive approach to assessing higher education quality.

The foregoing studies affirm that accreditation plays a pivotal role in enhancing the quality of higher education as an essential quality assurance mechanism.

3. Statement of Purpose

The study was conducted for the following statement of purpose:

Purpose 1: To propose a set of Institutional Standards from the international accreditation bodies of the AUN, CAA, OAAA, QAA and SACSCOC and validate them through key informants from the top three ranking HEIs in the Philippines.

Purpose 2: To identify accreditation practices to align the Philippine accreditation with international best practices of the AUN, CAA, OAAA, QAA and SACSCOC.

4. Methodology

The research was conducted in Metro Manila from three universities that are ranked both in the QS and THE at the time of writing.

Informants of the Study

The informants of the study were university officials nominated by the institutions who have sufficient involvement and knowledge of the accreditation, internationalization, and ranking efforts of the institution. For confidentiality, the identities of the informants are not disclosed.

University A

The key informant for University A is the Executive Director for Strategic Management and Quality Assurance of a renown private university with deregulated status and ranked in the QS and THE.

University B

The key informant for University B is the Quality Assurance Manager of a renown private university with deregulated status and ranked in the QS and THE.

University C

The key informant for University C is the Vice Chancellor for Planning and Development of a reputable state university with deregulated status and ranked in the QS and THE.

Sampling Scheme

Purposive sampling scheme was used by the study. Only respondents with knowledge of QA, accreditation, internationalization, and ranking of their respective institutions were part of the study.

Research Instrument

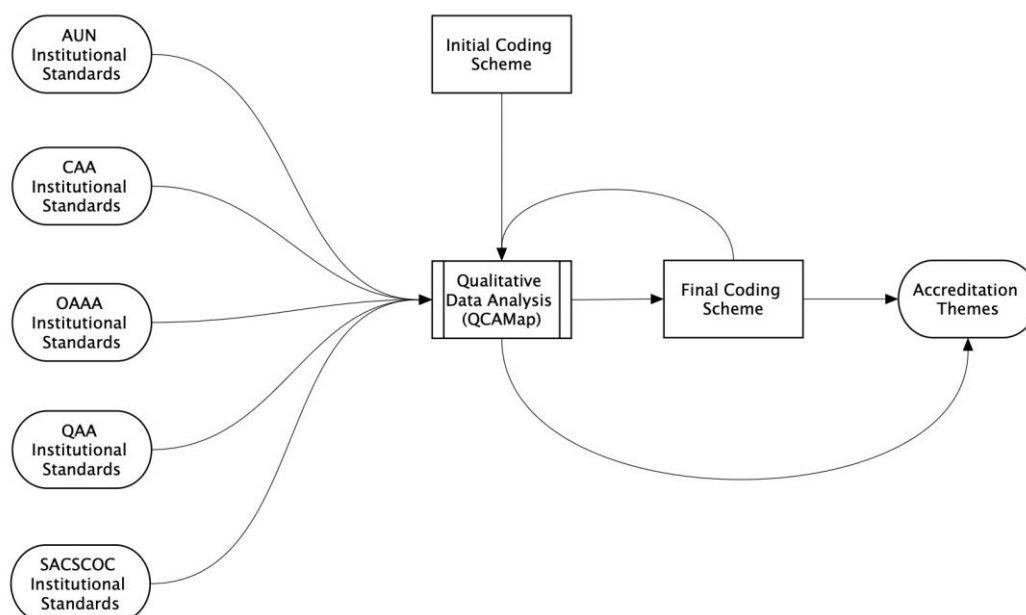
The instrument was developed from the extracted Institutional Standards of the AUN, CAA, OAAA, QAA and SACSCOC using qualitative content analysis with the aid of the QCMap and NVivo software. The development involves the following steps:

Step 1: Developing the Accreditation Themes

Figure 1 presents the process for developing the Accreditation Themes.

Figure 1:

Developing the Accreditation Themes using QCMap



Initial coding schemes were identified as the initial themes for the five Institutional Standards. Using the QCAmap, the Institutional Standards of the AUN, CAA, OAAA, QAA, and SACSCOC were mapped against the initial themes during the first order analysis. After 23% have been analyzed, the software prompts for the final coding scheme which served as the final themes during the second order analysis. There were eight final themes which are also the Accreditation Themes: (1) Continuous Improvement and Enhancement; (2) Governance and Management; (3) Resource Management; (4) Student Service and Support; (5) Community Engagement and Service; (6) Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Design; (7) Human Resource Management; and (8) Research and Scholarly Activities. The QCAmap generates three reports: Coded Passages, Coding Guide, and Document Statistics. The Coded Passages provided listings of common standards from the five Institutional Standards which were used to develop set of new standards.

Step 2: Developing Sub-Themes

The NVivo software was then used to develop sub-themes under each of the 8 themes. The new standards were then mapped under the appropriate themes and sub-themes.

Step 3: Validating the new Institutional Standards

The new Institutional Standards extracted from the five accreditation bodies were then converted into an online form which was distributed first to five respondents who are not part of the study to test for the reliability. The reliability test resulted in a **0.970** Cronbach's Alpha test which showed internal consistency of the items. The online form was then sent to the key informants after seeking the necessary permission from the institution.

5. Results

Key informants were asked to identify which of the following Institutional Standards are fully available, partly available, and not available in their institution. The responses are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Institutional Standards Extracted from the Five Accreditation Bodies

Item No.	Institutional Standards	UNIVERSITY		
		A	B	C
THEME 1: CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT				
Documentation				
1	There is an established document classification policy to safeguard privacy and confidentiality, ensuring that the information remains current and appropriate.			
2	The institution has a document classification policy which provides guidelines to protect institutional as well as individual data from unauthorized access.			

3	The published information is clear, accurate, objective and readily accessible to stakeholders.			
4	The institution publishes a comprehensive, consistent, and accurate (print or electronics) Policies and Procedures Manual.			
5	The institution publishes a comprehensive, consistent, and accurate (print or electronics) Health and Safety Manual.			
6	The institution publishes a comprehensive, consistent, and accurate (print or electronics) Employee Handbook.			
7	The institution publishes a comprehensive, consistent, and accurate (print or electronics) Program Specification (Program Catalog).			
8	The institution publishes a comprehensive, consistent, and accurate (print or electronics) Student Handbook.			
9	The institution publishes a comprehensive and integrated Academic Handbook (covering all phases of teaching and learning).			
10	The institution maintains enrolment and student records.			
11	The institution maintains a record of all employees.			
Improvement				
1	Results on the achievement of the course learning outcomes are used to form basis for course improvement.			
2	Results of the program evaluation are used as basis for improving the program.			
3	Performance is periodically monitored, and results are released to relevant stakeholders in a timely manner for improvement.			
Review and Monitoring				
1	The performance of the governance and management teams is periodically evaluated.			
2	The planning process and the accomplishments against plans are periodically reviewed to form basis for improvement.			
3	There are key performance indicators and targets that are established to measure performance at the institutional, department and individual units. The performance indicators are benchmarked to reflect international best practices.			
4	The institution has a system to oversee, direct, implement, monitor and review research activities, resources, and outputs.			
5	The institution has a mechanism to solicit information on Student Satisfaction on all services and actions taken to address their concerns are communicated in a timely manner.			

6	The institution collects, analyzes and use relevant information on the effective management of the programs including feedback from alumni, student population, student progression, success and drop-out rates, student satisfaction with programs and services, employment graduation rates, and employer satisfaction.			
Systems and Processes				
1	The institution publishes a quality management system/quality assurance mechanism.			
2	The institution has a quality assurance system or continuous quality enhancement system which covers the review and monitoring of all entities and activities that includes the collection of institutional data and statistics as basis for decision-making.			
3	The institution has a clearly established and communicated policy management system which governs policy implementation, review, approval, communication and archiving.			
4	The quality assurance system is a cyclical approach wherein the progress made on the last review is taken into consideration when preparing the next plan for continuous improvement.			
5	The institution has a system for collection, management and control of documents which include guidelines for archiving and disposal.			
6	The institution has a mechanism for monitoring and reporting health and safety incidents.			
7	The institution complies with the national requirements on health and safety.			
8	The institution has health and safety guidelines that are communicated to the students, faculty, staff, visitors and other stakeholders.			
9	The institution ensures that health and safety guidelines are provided in the use of equipment and that fire drills, earthquake drills, terrorist attacks and the likes are conducted for faculty, staff and students on periodic basis.			
THEME 2: GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT				
Leadership				
1	The institution applies the principles of integrity in all matters of its operation and adheres to the highest ethical standards in teaching, professional development and service.			
2	The institution has a clearly defined governance and			

	management structure.			
3	The governance and management structure has a clearly defined authority, responsibility and accountability matrix.			
4	The governance team exercises full responsibility for setting the strategic direction of the institution.			
5	There are clear communication channel and reporting lines.			
Mission, Vision, and Values				
1	Mission, vision and value statements have been developed in consultation with the stakeholders and are communicated through different channels such as publications, websites, catalog, etc.			
2	The mission, vision and value statements are cascaded and form the cornerstone for the development of the institution's Strategic Plan.			
Planning				
1	The institution has a comprehensive and integrated Strategic Plan.			
2	The institution has comprehensive and integrated operational plans.			
3	The institution has a comprehensive and integrated risk management plan.			
4	The institution publishes comprehensive and integrated risk registers and mitigation strategies.			
5	The institution has a comprehensive and integrated financial management plan.			
6	The institution has a comprehensive and integrated human resource management plan.			
7	The institution has a comprehensive and integrated physical resources/infrastructure management plan.			
8	The institution has a comprehensive and integrated community and industry engagement plan.			
Policies and Procedures				
1	The institution has a comprehensive and integrated community and industry engagement policies and procedures.			
2	The plans are mission driven, including goals, objectives and performance indicators.			
3	The institution has well-established policies and procedures related to succession, re-deployment, and severance that are appropriately communicated to stakeholders and consistently implemented.			
4	The institution has policies and procedures for budgetary planning and control, auditing, risk management, insurance			

	and indemnity coverage, and internal auditing.			
5	The institutional publishes an educational policies and procedures manual (covering all phases of student “life cycle” from admission to graduation).			
6	There are student grievance policies and procedures for academic related matters that is readily accessible, effectively communicated to staff and student.			
7	The institution has well-established policies and procedures for appeals, grievances and disciplinary actions that are consistently implemented.			
8	The institution has comprehensive and integrated policies related to research and scholarly activities.			
9	The institution has policies and procedures to protect and manage intellectual property such as inventions, patents, copyrights and research results.			
10	The institution that offers degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning; at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to program planning and development.			
11	The institution that offers degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning; at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to budgeting for the program.			
12	The institution that offers degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning; at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to grading system.			
13	The institution has a comprehensive and integrated community and industry engagement policies and procedures.			
THEME 3: RECOURCE MANAGEMNET				
Fiscal Resources and Budgeting				
1	The institution has an annual budget that is formally approved, effectively managed and the financial statement is externally audited.			
2	The institution has appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities that ensure adequate and appropriate learning and support resources including funds for teach-out in the event of institutional or program closure.			

3	The institutional budget is linked to the institutional plans.			
4	Where the institution has associated entities, there is a mechanism to ensure that the institution is protected against financial, legal and reputational liabilities from the entity it controls/owns.			
Resource Allocation and Management				
1	The institutions provide the necessary tools, facilities and equipment to faculty and staff to allow them to dispatch their duty.			
2	The institution provides recreational facilities and activities to foster camaraderie and collegiality.			
3	The institution maintains an appropriate number of academic, non-academic and support staff to support its mission and goals.			
THEME 4: STUDENT SERVICE AND SUPPORT				
Academic Support Services				
1	The institution supports the timely completion of degree through appropriate academic advising.			
2	The institution recognizes and supports the different needs of international students.			
3	The institution provides a learning resource center/Library.			
4	The institution provides electronic and non-electronic collections.			
5	The institution that offers degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning; at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to recognition of prior learning.			
6	An institution that offers degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning; at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to student entry standards.			
7	An institution that offers degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning; at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to General Education Courses.			
8	An institution that offers degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning; at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to student			

	recruitment and admission.			
9	An institution that offers degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning; at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to transfer credits and advanced standing.			
10	An institution that offers degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning; at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to student retention and progression.			
11	An institution that offers degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning; at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to definition of academic freedom.			
12	An institution that offers degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning; at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to credit hours.			
13	An institution that offers degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning; at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to degree audit.			
General Support Services				
1	The student grievance policy and procedure are consistently used to resolve student grievances in a manner that is fair, impartial and transparent.			
2	There is a mechanism for students to air for redress of grievances on non-academic related matters. The procedures are accessible and effectively communicated to students and staff.			
3	The students are provided with avenues to represent themselves in decisions that affect their learning experience (i.e. Student Council).			
4	The institution provides residence halls.			
5	The institution provides catering/canteen.			

6	The institution provides transportation.			
7	The institution provides sports and recreational activities.			
8	The institution takes into consideration students with special needs in the design of the curriculum and facilities management (i.e. special parking, elevators, ramps, PWD toilets. etc).			
9	The institution provides ongoing career and employment services and support students employability through various activities.			
10	The institution provides various scholarships and financial support for deserving students.			
11	The institution provides student publication and clubs.			
12	The institution provides student rights and code of conduct.			
13	The institution provides medical and counseling services.			
14	The institution provides general support services.			
15	The institution provides information technology services.			
16	The institution provides teaching and learning resources.			

THEME 5: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE

Community and Stakeholder Involvement

1	The institution has relationships with the industry and employers to provide feedback to improve programs.			
2	The institution monitors alumni employment and maintains relationships with alumni to draw on their experience for improving the program.			
3	The institution maintains external relations and networks which include business, industry, professional bodies and non-government organizations.			

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2	The institution monitors alumni employment and maintains relationships with alumni to draw on their experience for improving the program.			

THEME 6: TEACHING, LEARNING AND CURRICULUM DESIGN

Assessment and Moderation

1	An institution offering degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning; at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to assessment and moderation of exams.			
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2	An institution that offers degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning; at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to marking schemes and rubrics.			
3	An institution that offers degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to grade release and grade appeal.			
4	An institution that offers degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning; at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to examinations regulations, handling results and records.			
5	An institution that offers degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning; at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to academic security and invigilation.			
6	The institution maintains a record of all students including exam scripts and communications.			
Curriculum				
1	An institution that offers degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning; at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to curriculum development, review and approval.			
2	An institution that offers degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning; at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to alignment of the program with the appropriate Qualifications Framework.			
Graduate Attributes and Program Learning Outcomes				
1	The evaluation of the programs includes direct measures (i.e. student output) and indirect measures (i.e. feedback from employer, OJT supervisors, etc).			
2	The institution has a mechanism for periodic evaluation to determine the achievement of the course learning outcomes, program learning outcomes and graduate attributes.			

3	An institution that offers degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning; at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to Graduate Attributes.			
4	An institution that offers degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning; at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to Program Learning Outcomes.			
Teaching and Learning Activities				
1	An institution that offers degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning; at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to course delivery and program evaluation.			
2	An institution that offers degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning; at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to remedial of courses.			
3	An institution that offers degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning; at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to graduation requirements.			
4	An institution that offers degrees by coursework, by research, by correspondence, or by distance learning; at undergraduate or graduate levels, each has a well-established and published information and policies and procedures related to student study mode and load.			
THEME 7: HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT				
Performance				
1	The institution periodically evaluated faculty and staff performance and provides timely feedback including coaching and mentoring.			
2	The results of performance evaluation are communicated to the stakeholders and form a basis for rewards, recognitions, incentives, coaching and/or mentoring.			
Qualifications				
1	Faculty qualifications are aligned with the courses that he/she			

	teaches, and in accordance with the national guidance.			
2	There is a fair and transparent recruitment and selection process that is consistently applied to both part-time and full-time faculty and staff.			
3	There is proper induction provided to all faculty and staff at relevant levels within the institutions where faculty and staff are informed regarding their terms of employment and expectations in terms of roles, teaching, research, and community engagements.			
Professional Development				
1	There are opportunities for faculty and staff professional development, training, use of innovation and use of new technologies.			
2	There are opportunities for promotion, awards and recognition for faculty and staff.			
3	The institution provides support for professional development in research, scholarships and other development programs for staff.			
4	The institution clearly provides roles and expectations, and a code of conduct. key performance indicators and targets to faculty and staff for performance management.			
THEME 8: RESEARCH AND SCHOLARLY ACTIVITIES				
Funding and Financial Support				
1	The institution has a budget allocated to research and scholarly activities.			
2	The institution has a research funding scheme which include conference participation and research publications.			
Performance and Outputs				
1	The institution defines the expectations for research and scholarly activities which are in line with its mission and adheres to ethics and bio-safety standards.			
2	The institution has research collaboration and partnerships.			
3	The institution supports research, innovation, collaboration and research excellence.			
4	The institution has a comprehensive and integrated Research and Scholarly Activities.			
5	The institution has well-established guidelines for research commercialization, student involvement in research, and research-teaching nexus.			

	Fully Available
	Partly Available
	Not Available

The results show that among the 130 Institutional Standards, **University A** demonstrates full alignment with international standards in the areas of **Student Services and Support, Community Engagement and Service, Research and Scholarly Activities**, and **Human Resource Management**. However, the areas of **Continuous Improvement and Enhancement, Governance and Management, Resource Management**, and **Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum Design** are not yet fully aligned. This indicates that the University already meets international benchmarks in several key areas despite not undergoing local accreditation due to its **deregulated status**. Such alignment supports and justifies its deregulated position, as it has adopted more standards than those required by local accrediting bodies. Nonetheless, areas identified as not fully aligned present opportunities for enhancement. Strengthening these areas would further improve conformity with international standards and, consequently, advance the University's **internationalization efforts**, given the established link between accreditation and internationalization.

For **University B**, **Community Engagement** is the only area that fully aligns with international standards, based on the standards and criteria derived from AUN, CAA, OAAA, QAA, and SACSCOC. Although all other areas still require improvement, the University's **deregulated status** remains justified, as it has adopted a broader range of standards and indicators compared to what local accreditation agencies require.

In the case of **University C**, responses from key informant reveal that none of the Areas of Accreditation are “fully available” in terms of the standards and criteria drawn from the same international bodies. However, with the exception of **Research Funding and Financial Support**, which is classified as “Not Available,” all other standards and criteria are **partly available**. This suggests that while the University has not yet fully implemented these international standards, it has begun to integrate them into its institutional practices, indicating progress toward alignment with international accreditation frameworks.

On the question, “in consideration of your current World University Ranking, what do you think are the factors that contribute to that ranking?”

University A responded: “*Academic Reputation, Employer Reputation, Citations per Faculty, Faculty-Student Ratio, and International Student*”

University B responded: “*Academic Reputation, Faculty-Student Ratio, and Citation per Faculty*”

University C responded: “*Academic Reputation, Employer Reputation, and Citations per Faculty*”

None of the respondents indicated International Faculty Ratio which suggests that one of the

areas that need improvement is internationalization to get higher global ranking. This revelation supports the idea that Internationalization is an area of improvement in the three universities.

Using the same form, the key informants were asked to identify which of the Institutional Standards are highly recommended, not recommended, or not applicable.

Out of the **130 standards and criteria**, **129** were **highly recommended** by the key informants, who are recognized experts in the field. This indicates their strong belief that these standards and criteria are **relevant and beneficial** to higher education institutions (HEIs). Only **one criterion** was classified as **not applicable**—by **University C**—implying that, based on the expert's assessment, this particular criterion is **not necessary** or **does not apply** to the **Philippine context**.

Criterion 38: *The institution has appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities that ensure adequate and appropriate learning and support resources, including funds for teach-out in the event of institutional or program closure.*

This criterion was considered not applicable primarily because accreditation in the Philippines is voluntary, and the accrediting bodies do not possess the authority to close institutions or programs. However, as Hope (2021) explains, teach-out involves academic, operational, and financial responsibilities. In cases of program or institutional closure, the absence of a teach-out plan could significantly disrupt students' academic progression. Therefore, institutions should still ensure mechanisms are in place to support students through transition and allow them to complete their degrees.

The recommendations of the key informants—drawn from leading universities in the Philippines—indicate that the proposed Institutional Standards are applicable and practical for use in Philippine HEIs.

A review of the accreditation practices of five international accreditation bodies—**AUN, CAA, OAAA, QAA, and SACSCOC**—reveals notable similarities and distinctions in their approaches. In terms of **authority**, the **CAA, OAAA, QAA, and SACSCOC** operate as **regulatory bodies**, possessing the mandate to grant or deny accreditation status. A denial of accreditation from these bodies can result in **institutional closure** and **loss of funding**.

Regarding **assessor selection**, both the **CAA** and **OAAA** draw from a **mixed pool of local and international experts**. In the **UK**, assessors are typically **UK-based** professionals with expertise in quality assurance and institutional review, and the process also includes student participation. The **SACSCOC** employs a rigorous selection process for assessors. Furthermore, structured and standardized training for assessors is a key feature of the systems implemented by the **AUN, OAAA, QAA, and SACSCOC**.

Across all five bodies, **institutional and program accreditations** are conducted separately, with program-level accreditations often administered by discipline-specific accrediting agencies.

With respect to **accreditation as a status**, the granted status is time-bound, requiring periodic renewal throughout the existence of the higher education institution (HEI). Non-renewal has serious implications: in the UAE and Oman, it results in institutional closure; in the UK, it leads to loss of degree-awarding powers; and in the USA, it causes the loss of federal funding and financial aid eligibility. The results of accreditation outcomes are publicly accessible through each accreditation body's official website.

Finally, based on the responses of key informants, except for one standard all identified as highly recommended can form part of the Institutional Standards framework.

6. Conclusion

Accreditation as a quality assurance mechanism can be leveraged to improve internationalization outcomes and global ranking. This can be achieved through a rigorous accreditation process and internationally benchmarked Institutional Standards. As evident in the practices of international accreditation bodies, the level of authority of the accreditation body influences how the accreditation body can contribute to uplifting the quality of higher education, therefore government intervention is needed to align the accreditation system of the Philippines with the international norms. It is also observed that the Institutional Standards of the accreditation bodies can contribute to the quality assurance framework by stipulating criteria that covers (international) accreditation, internationalization and ranking. To roundup a robust quality assurance framework towards accreditation, internationalization and world university ranking, policy interventions are brought forward to align the Philippine system with international best practices.

7. Policy Recommendations

Results of this comparison show that to align with the existing accreditation practice, there must be national policies to support its implementation:

- To establish a regulatory body that will oversee accreditation. Currently, accreditation in the Philippines is voluntary and the process is only recognized by CHED but not directly under its purview. CHED's function may be expanded to include oversight of the accreditation or a separate independent with regulatory authority be established to ensure compliance.
- To enhance selection and training of assessors to protect the integrity of the accreditation process. For the CAA and Oman, international and local experts are engaged as assessors, while rigorous selection process is implemented in the USA. Selection of assessors should discourage quid-pro-quo to safeguard the integrity of the process. Training of the assessors is also important to establish common understanding and unified implementation of the process.
- To have the Accreditation process relevant for as long as the HEI is in operation. The mandatory renewal of the accreditation process will avoid complacency on the part of the HEI and thus must be kept in perpetuity.

- To have a separate standard for institutional and program accreditation, program accreditation may be assigned to professional accreditation bodies in the field. This is to ensure that the quality of the program is maintained. Institutional accreditation should be a pre-requisite for program accreditation.
- To have the outcome of the accreditation officially published for transparency and accountability.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The authors declare the use of ChatGPT, a free AI software, in condensing the abstract to 250 words. The authors further declare that, apart from ChatGPT, no other AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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