

A Study on Quality Assurance in Higher Education focused on Accreditation

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A B S T R A C T

In many countries, accreditation is one of the most significant issues related to quality assurance and greater accountability in higher education. Burke (2005) notes that accreditation has played an essential role in higher education in the U.S. with regard to improving quality assurance as well as accountability (p. 78). Apart from the U.S., some European countries using quality assurance agencies for the purpose of promoting accountability also have focused on accreditation over the last few decades. Accreditation has played a central role in many countries, although standards, processes, and purposes varied from country to country; however, there is no question that the primary goal of accreditation is to promote accountability and quality in higher education. The main purpose of this paper is to discuss : quality assurance issues in higher education based on accreditation; its roles, goals, and key characteristics in select countries; and to draw implications for the further development and use of accreditation in South Korea.

Keywords: accreditation, quality assurance, accountability, higher education

I. Introduction

Quality assurance and university evaluation are not only significant but also complex issues in Korea due to intense arguments about various evaluation criteria and the use of evaluation results.

Education quality has always been a concern in education; however, quality assurance is regarded as one of the representative instruments of ensuring accountability in higher education. Dill (2007) explains, “The term quality

assurance in higher education is increasingly used to denote the practices whereby academic standards, i.e., the level of academic achievement attained by higher education graduates, are maintained and improved” (p. 1).

To increase accountability in higher education, the Korean government passed the Higher Education Act of 2008, which mentions “accreditation” of HEIs. Before 2008, Korean higher education had very weak legislative requirements with regard to accreditation. Since 2011, the Korean Council for University Education (KCUE) has begun to conduct accreditation of HEIs through an affiliated agency, the Korean University Accreditation Institute.

Globalization calls for quality assurance and accreditation services as an international guarantee of merit, and a number of accreditation agencies outside of Korea have played an important role in assuring higher education

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quality. In sum, there have been several requests for quality assurance of higher education internationally, and this global trend requires quality assurance agencies for accreditation.

The purpose of this study is to discuss quality assurance in higher education focused on advanced countries where they use accreditation system by quality assurance agencies for a long time. Wilger (1997) defines quality as follows:

Quality assurance focuses on process; it seeks to convince both internal and external constituents that an institution has processes that produce high quality outcomes. Quality assurance makes explicit accountability for quality at various points within an institution. Quality is the responsibility of everyone in the organization. Quality assurance is a continuous, active, and responsive process, which includes strong evaluation and feedback loops (p. 3).

Until now, there have been very few studies regarding quality assurance in higher education in Korea. For this reason, this study will explore the overall accreditation system by choosing three advanced countries: the U.S., the U.K., and Australia. These three countries have well-designed accreditation systems, thereby maintaining the quality of their higher education programs.

According to the OECD, "Quality assurance agencies often have the formal or effective power to confer or

deny the authority that is necessary for an academic programme to be offered or to be successful" (2010, p. 3). There are several quality assurance agencies throughout the world, and they have different histories, purposes and goals.

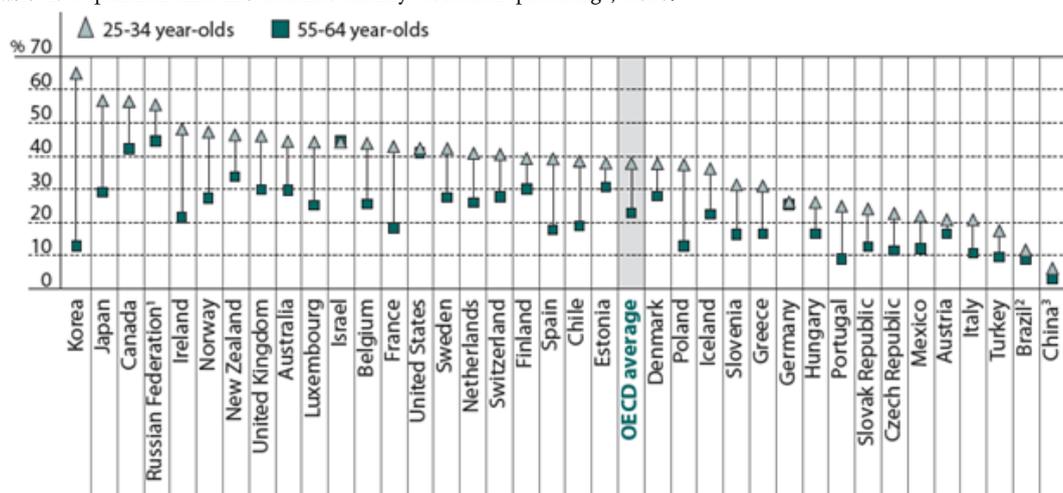
Demands for HEIs have continued to increase as governments and the public have focused more on higher education quality and its accountability. We live in a "knowledge-based society." UNESCO mentions that "a knowledge-based society is a society that is nurtured by its diversity and its capacities" (UNESCO, 2005, p. 17). Our current society requires people to continue their education and to find more effective ways to do so.

Many factors have facilitated higher education over the world, and most of them are closely related to market-forces and economic development and/or improvement in many countries. These societal influences have increased enrollment in higher education from both high school graduates and non-traditional students. Table 1 shows the number of people that have attained higher education in 2010 in OECD.

Quality assurance cannot be defined in a single word; rather it contains multiple, complicated meanings that reflect a variety of stakeholders' interests in higher education. Accreditation is one way to ensure quality assurance in higher education, and it is closely related to the assessment of higher education.

Skolnik (2010) explains, "Accreditation is a variant

Table 1. Population that has attained tertiary education percentage, 2010.



Source: OECD 2012, "Higher Education", in Education Today 2013: The OECD Perspectives, p.59. Retrieved from [http://www.oecd.library.org/education/higher education today 2013](http://www.oecd.library.org/education/higher%20education%20today%202013)

of quality assessment in which an external, non-governmental body determines whether an institution or programme meets pre-determined minimum quality standards”(p. 5). That means that accreditation focuses on quality assessment of HEIs and aims at examining quality standards to see if HEIs meet the minimum requirements.

It may differ according to countries; however, in general, most countries that use accreditation have at least one accreditation agency or quality assurance agency within the country. Similarly, Eaton (2012) explains, “Accreditation is a process of external quality review created and used by higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities and programs for quality assurance and quality improvement”(p.1). In general, there are two types of accreditation: institutional and programmatic. Institutional accreditation generally applies to an entire institution. In other words, an entire higher education institution is accredited. On the other hand, programmatic accreditation applies to the evaluation of specific programs such as engineering, medicine, nursing which usually are parts of other higher education institutions.

In summary, accreditation is an external assessment evaluating HEIs performed by external quality assurance agencies in order to guarantee HEIs’ fundamental qualifications in serving the needs of stakeholders and the public. The purpose of this research is to examine accreditation in the USA, UK, and Australia and to draw some implications for the development of accreditation in Korea.

II. Accreditation in the USA

Interest in accreditation has already grown around the world; many countries now use accreditation as a measurement for quality of HEIs. However, each country has a different length of accreditation history since each had adopted accreditation at a different period.

1. History of Accreditation and Quality Assurance

The U.S.A. has the longest history of accreditation. The Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (2010) explains the history of accreditation in

higher education:

Higher education accreditation in the U.S. was initiated to serve the public interest, and its process and purposes have been developed and revised over the years. Major events that affected accreditation in the U.S. include World War II and the GI Bill. After World War II and the passage of the GI Bill, the number of professional and more specialized accreditation agencies had been established across the country. Accreditation agencies had played a key role in supporting and collaborating with the higher education (ACICS, 2010).

Burke (2005) explains, “Voluntary accreditation and the standards grew in strength and complexity, especially after World War II and passage of the GI Bill, followed by Title IV of the Higher Education Act”(p. 81). The GI Bill enabled returning World War II veterans to attend HEIs with benefits such as cash payments for tuition and living expenses. There is some disagreement about whether the GI Bill had a significant impact on the increase in the number of returning veterans attending HEIs; however, much of the literature argues that the GI Bill at least encouraged many returning veterans to pursue higher education, including vocational education.

Batten (2011) points out that “during the post-war period, veterans accounted for as many as 49 percent of enrolled students at colleges and universities, and a total of 51 percent of veterans took advantage of the education benefits in some form. ACICS (2010) also explains, “In 1965, Congress enacted the Higher Education Act, which regulates accreditation in the United States. The Higher Education Act is periodically reviewed by Congress, and most recently Congress revised and passed the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008”(ACICS, 2010). Among the changes resulting from the reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act over the years, more accreditation agencies were established both regionally and nationally.

Additionally, some U.S. accreditation agencies have merged or been renamed over the last few decades to deal with higher education issues more effectively. An example of such a change is the National Commission on Accrediting (NCA) and the Federation of Regional Accrediting Commissions of Higher Education (FRACHE), previously the National Committee of Regional Accrediting Agencies (NRCAA). They merged in 1975 to create a

national accreditation agency: the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA). Finally, in 1996 COPA was replaced by the Council for Higher Education (CHEA) to deal with higher education issues and challenges more effectively (ACICS, 2010).

Private and public quality assurance agencies are responsible for quality assurance and accountability of HEIs in many countries. As mentioned earlier, some quality assurance agencies have slightly different goals according to their main purpose and background. According to El-Khawas (2007), “More than 80 agencies in over 50 countries have developed formal ties as members of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), a coordination network designed to help members carry out these new responsibilities” (p. 23).

Accreditation is one of the most important responsibilities of quality assurance agencies, and it requires multiple and complicated processes. Zemsky (2011) stresses that a multilayered system of accreditation in the U.S. allows higher education to assess and accredit itself (p. 160). El-Khawas (2007) defines accreditation as a “multi-step process that gives public recognition for an academic institution that meets certain standards, based on a self-assessment and some form of external review” (p. 24). As previously stated, accreditation has a long history in the U.S. Over the last few decades, accreditation has played a significant role in many states in the U.S. by providing HEI quality information based on external standards. Accreditation has been used to describe the federal government’s approval or licensing of HEIs (El-Khawas, p.25).

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) is one of the representative accreditation agencies in the United States. CHEA was established in 1996, as a nongovernmental institutional membership organization to provide national coordination of accreditation.

2. The Types of Accreditation Agencies

The U.S. accreditation system was and is currently operated by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). Accreditation agencies in the U.S. have operated through three types of accrediting organizations: national, regional, and specialized or programmatic. Among these

accrediting organizations, regional accreditation was established in six regions (Burke, 2005, p.82). Programmatic or specialized accreditation agencies accredit specific or professional programs, commonly law, medicine, health, and engineering.

2.1 Key Characteristics of Accreditation

2.1.1 Self-review and peer assessment

Burke (2005) mentions that self-review and peer assessment are the oldest and most well-known tools regarding external accountability and quality assurance in the U.S. (p. 82). Accreditation in higher education includes a peer review process done by members of an institution and accreditation commissions. The primary goal is to ensure provision of education and to see if an institution meets basic requirements of quality of education (American Council on Education (ACE), 2013).

USDE and CHEA both officially recognize accrediting bodies, and the accreditation process is then controlled by both regional and national accrediting agencies that are accountable to the USDE. These agencies develop evaluation criteria and conduct peer evaluations to determine if these criteria are met (ACE, 2013). Accreditation of institutions and/or programs takes place in cycles ranging from every few years up to ten years. Burke (2005) explains that reviews focus on “finances, governance, faculty-staff relations, institutional achievements, student services, and student learning outcomes” (Burke, 2005, p. 82). In terms of peer review process, CHEA (2012) notes that “peer-review is conducted by faculty and administrative peers in the profession. These colleagues review the self-study and serve on visiting teams that review institutions and programs after the self-study is completed” (CHEA, 2012, p. 4).

2.1.2 The Triad: Federal Government, State Government and Accreditation

Figure 1 shows the relationship among federal, state, and accreditation agencies in the U.S. Unlike most other countries, accreditation in the U.S. has operated based on a “triad.” The “Triad” concept describes the nature of accreditation in the U.S. According to Burke (2005), “States have the responsibility to license institutions using minimum standards to protect against consumer fraud, the federal government to recognize accrediting agencies and ensure compliance with Title IV on financial aid, and accrediting agencies to ensure quality and effectiveness”

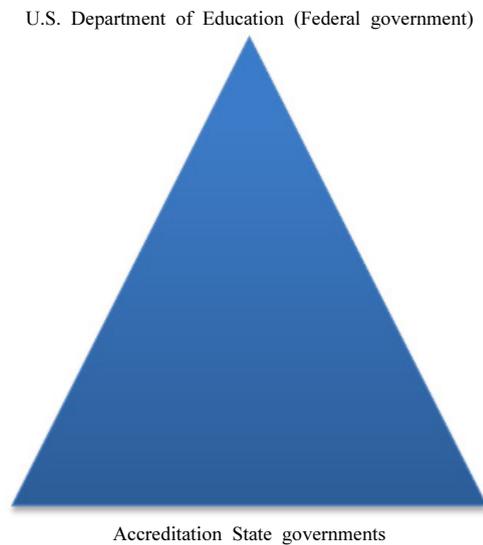


Figure 1. The Triad: Connected to One Another

(p. 83). The USDE, state government, and accreditation agencies each play significant but distinct roles in ensuring quality in higher education. The oversight process includes a system of checks and balances. These three entities are seemingly independent but also interrelated in that all three are responsible for oversight of HEIs in the U.S.

The USDE has the authority to accredit institutions of higher education. The USDE also determines if HEIs are eligible to participate in federal related programs, which includes student financial aid, and how their recognition will impact the agency's accreditation of postsecondary institutions. To put it another way, the main role of the federal government is to ensure eligibility of HEIs (with regard to financial aid and other federal programs) and to license accreditation agencies (ACICS, 2008; Burke, 2005). Next, state agencies regulate the operation of institutions and play a role in overseeing consumer protection regulations. Lastly, the primary role of accrediting agencies is to assure HEIs' meet required educational standards of both the state and the USDE. These two government offices coupled with accreditation agencies such as CHEA have played an important role in assuring HEIs meet quality standards in educational processes.

2.2 The Roles of Accreditation

CHEA is the primary national accrediting agency in

the United States. "CHEA is a national advocate and institutional voice for self-regulation of academic quality through accreditation. CHEA is an association of 3,000 degree-granting colleges and universities and recognizes 60 institutional and programmatic accrediting organizations" (CHEA, 2010, p.1).

As discussed earlier in this paper, accrediting associations are recognized by the USDE. CHEA is responsible for conducting the reviews related to accreditor self-assessments and site visits. CHEA (2012) describes the roles of accreditation below:

Accreditation carries out the following roles:

- a. Assuring quality. Accreditation is the primary means by which colleges, universities and programs assure quality to students and the public. Accredited status is a signal to students and the public that an institution or program meets at least threshold standards for, e.g., its faculty, curriculum, student services and libraries. Accredited status is conveyed only if institutions and programs provide evidence of fiscal stability.
- b. Access to federal and state funds. Accreditation is required for access to federal funds such as student aid and other federal programs. Federal student aid funds are available to students only if the institution or program they are attending is accredited by a recognized accrediting organization.
- c. Engendering private sector confidence. Accreditation status of an institution or program is important to employers when evaluating credentials of job applicants and when deciding whether to provide tuition support for current employees seeking additional education. Private individuals and foundations look for evidence of accreditation when making decisions about private giving.
- d. Easing transfer. Accreditation is important to students for smooth transfer of courses and programs among colleges and universities. Receiving institutions take note of whether or not the credits a student wishes to transfer have been earned at an accredited institution (CHEA, 2012, p.2-3).

In this respect, accreditation plays a significant role in ensuring HEI quality, requirements, and eligibility for federal financial fund programs related to student aid. The U.S. does not have a national higher education system but does have various types of HEIs. This enables the U.S. to be focused more on accreditation in comparison with other countries. Accreditation agencies are nongovernmental organizations that are voluntary and non-profit but tightly related to federal governance according to “the triad” system. Accreditation agencies in the U.S. conduct accreditation reviews of HEIs as external entities with independence from the federal government. There is little doubt that a decentralized accreditation system allows HEIs in the U.S. to have high autonomy, which may have a positive impact on producing HEIs with high global rankings. However, with the recent demand for greater accountability in higher education and due to economic demands, the U.S. federal government has paid more attention to quality assurance of higher education than ever before.

If the federal government wants to reinforce quality assurance of higher education, they may consider more strengthened governmental roles with regard to academic quality related to financial sense. Over the decades, the primary entity responsible for accreditation of U.S. HEIs has been accreditation agencies rather than the federal government. However, it is time to reconsider more enhanced roles of the federal government since call for greater accountability is one of the significant issues in U.S., similar to those faced by many other countries.

III. Accreditation in the UK

1. History of Accreditation and Quality Assurance

England is one of the four European countries where quality assurance processes started relatively early, compared to other European countries in Europe. The representative quality assurance agency in Europe is ENQA, which was established in 2004; however, England has its own quality assurance agency, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

QAA is responsible for institutional audits, supports standards, and promotes quality enhancement of HEIs,

and participates in discussions and/or consultations with a wide range of interested parties related to quality assurance in higher education (QAA Strategy 2011-2014, n.d.)

According to QAA’s strategy for 2011-2014, their major goals are to

1. Meet students' needs and be valued by them
2. Safeguard standards in an increasingly diverse UK and international context
3. Drive improvements in UK higher education
4. Improve public understanding of higher education standards and quality

Sursock (2011) explains: “With the degree of autonomy that English universities enjoy and with the subjects benchmarked by the academics themselves, it was expected that quality standards and curricula would be set by each institution” (p. 119). To ensure quality of HEIs in the UK, QAA plays a leading role in safeguarding quality and standards in the UK’s higher education sector.

Hoecht (2006) explains “Government education policy-makers and the QAA control the discourse on quality and directly and indirectly decide on the funding of universities. The quality discourse emphasizes commitment, self-improvement and reflexivity” (p. 546). As many quality assurance agencies focus on quality improvement by providing guidelines and standards for assessment of HEIs, the QAA has also emphasized assuring standards and quality. Further, the QAA focuses intensely on enterprise and entrepreneurship higher education, providing rationales based on the social demand for enterprise education.

The quality assurance system in the UK was initiated in the late 1980s and early 1990s. At that time, one of the significant characteristics of higher education was “massification”. Increases in the number of students and HEIs represented a characteristic of massification in the UK (Bernhard, 2012). Due to increased numbers of students and HEIs, there was a call for greater accountability, thus measurable outcomes and outputs also needed to be evaluated by external entities. According to Bernhard (2012), “Starting with the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992 quality assessments are regulated by law and the higher education funding bodies had to monitor the quality of their funded academic programmes through separate Quality Assessment Committees” (Bernhard, 2012, p.119).

Another important component related to quality assurance in higher education in European countries is “The Bologna process declaration and its process.” The

European Higher Education Area (EHEA, 2010) provides detailed information regarding the Bologna process. EHEA (2010) explains, “the aims of the Sorbonne Declaration were confirmed in 1999, through the Bologna Declaration, where 29-30 countries expressed their willingness to commit to enhance the competitiveness of the European Higher Education Area, emphasizing the need to further the independence and autonomy of all Higher Education Institutions” (p. 1).

The main purpose of the Bologna Declaration was to facilitate the competitiveness of higher education, and there was agreement on this among several European countries, including the UK. The Bologna process has quite a long history and it is ongoing process, so it will not be discussed in detail. EHEA (2010) notes that “The Bologna process launched with the Bologna Declaration, of 1999, is one of the main voluntary processes at European level, as it is nowadays implemented in 47 states, which define the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)”(p.1).

A secondary focus of the Bologna Declaration was to facilitate student mobility through the system with programs and degrees (EHEA, 2010). The Bologna Process significantly impacted key areas in higher education in the UK; these include quality assurance, qualification frameworks, and an advanced degree qualification related to accountability (The Cardiff University, n.d.).

2. Accreditation agencies in the UK

The UK has two accreditation agencies of higher education: 1) The British Accreditation Council; and 2) Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

2.1 The British Accreditation Council (BAC)

The BAC is an accreditation agency recognized by the British Government for international students entering the United Kingdom. The main role of the BAC is to provide accreditation to the highest standards of education offered by independent colleges in a complex sector. More specifically, they have played a role in establishing accreditation systems in private rather than public sectors. Their accreditation system has been used as an important indicator of quality in higher education. Moreover, the BAC has tried to improve the standards of “independent

further and higher educational institutions through the accreditation process” (BAC. n.d.).

According to the BAC (2012), they have several accreditation schemes: 1) college accreditation; 2) short course provider accreditation; 3) online, distance and blended learning accreditation and 4) international accreditation schemes. Each scheme has its own regulations with regard to eligibility, accreditation standards, and cycle. BAC (2012) explains that “Accreditation is based on an inspection of the full range of your institution’s provision, and we also require evidence that your management maintains acceptable standards and its legal obligations during the period of accreditation” (p. 9).

Figure 2 shows the accreditation process briefly. Once institutions submit their applications based on their own research and preparation, BAC reviews the application form, including supporting documentation. BAC then makes a plan for inspection with requested institutions to provide feedback regarding submitted documents. After that process, institutions are asked to submit their self-evaluations. BAC (2012) explains that “The inspection is conducted by a specialist inspection team and the inspection report is submitted to BAC (p. 9). Finally, based upon results of inspection documents considered by the accreditation committee, BAC will confirm or deny the accreditation to institutions (BAC, 2012).



Figure 2. Accreditation process of BAC)

2.2 Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is an independent accreditation agency funded by universities and colleges of higher education and was established in 1997.

2.2.1 The roles of QAA

QAA develops and maintains key documents, to assist higher education educators in understanding the expectations about standards and quality in the UK. One distinct characteristic, which differs from those of other countries or agencies, is that QAA provides “the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), which sets out the expectations all providers of UK higher education are required to meet” (QAA, n.d.). Bernhard (2012) maintains, “Till today QAA is the main quality assurance agency in the UK and is responsible to safeguard quality and standards in the UK’s higher education and has an international reputation for excellence” (p. 122).

QAA provides several handbooks and guidelines related to quality of higher education. These handbooks and guidelines provide information regarding development of policies, academic standards, and quality for sustaining and improving higher education (Bernhard, 2012).

2.2.2 The main characteristic of accreditation

The QAA (n.d.) explains that “The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) is used to assure the standards and quality of higher education in the United Kingdom. The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is the primary document and is complemented by additional guidance on particular topics or qualification types” (QAA, n.d.).



Figure 3. The Quality Code for UK higher education

As shown in figure 3, the quality code for HE in the UK has three parts: Information about higher education provision, academic standards, and academic quality. QAA (n.d.) describes the Quality Code as follows:

- a. Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards

“Part A of the Quality Code explains how

academic standards are set and maintained for higher education qualifications in the UK” (QAA, n.d.). The role of the “Quality Code Part A” is to represent the minimum requirements related to students’ ability to demonstrate acceptable achievement levels. Part A aims at providing information regarding “UK and European reference points for academic standards, degree-awarding bodies’ reference points for academic standards and securing academic standards and an outcomes-based approach to academic awards” (QAA, n.d., see reference page). It requires higher education providers to ensure that the minimum academic standards are met.

- b. Part B: “Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality”

Part B is related to academic quality and is connected to “how well the learning opportunities made available to students enable them to achieve their award. The Quality Code sets out expectations which higher education providers are required to meet to ensure that appropriate and effective teaching, support, assessment and learning resources are provided for students” (QAA, n.d.).

- c. Part C: Information about higher education provision

Public confidence in higher education relies on public understanding of the achievement represented by higher education qualifications. “The Quality Code sets out an expectation that higher education providers make available valid, reliable, useful and accessible information about their provision. Part C is concerned with public interest and confidence in higher education” (QAA, n.d.). In summary, Brennan & Williams (2004) explain, “Accreditation is not a widely used term in UK higher education, being mainly associated with the work of (some of) the professional bodies and (some of) the university arrangements for approving courses in non-university institutions without their own powers to award degrees” (p. 4).

HEIs in the UK have enjoyed great autonomy from the regional governments and the national government; however, as a call for greater accountability of higher education across the countries has been made, the

government of the UK also has started to consider quality of higher education more seriously. Many who work in higher education in the UK may be concerned about the quality of higher education, having a national level of quality assurance, and how the increased role of government would enhance accountability in higher education (Brennan & Williams, p. 4).

As stated above, QAA has played a significant role in providing guidelines regarding quality assurance. Although accreditation in the UK is as not widely recognized across the nation when compared to the U.S., there is little doubt that the UK at least has reliable external quality assurance agencies that have provided frameworks for higher education institutional audits and minimum standards for assuring quality higher education is available to students.

IV. Accreditation agency in Australia

1. Background of quality of higher education

The Australian government has placed great value on student learning outcomes with regard to accountability. OECD (2004) explains, "Quality assurance of cross-border higher education in Australian higher education is mainly the responsibility of the receiving country of service but does take account of the status of a provider in its home country" (OECD, 2004, p. 108). Until 2000, Australia did not have a national quality assurance framework; they instead participated in OECD assessment of higher education learning outcomes projects (Baird, 2011). Shah, Nair, and Wilson (2011) explain, "In the 1980s, with the absence of a national quality management framework, individual universities were responsible for the development, implementation and enhancement of systems and processes for quality assurance" (p. 476).

Shah, Nair, and Wilson (2011) went on to note that there have been some significant movements in Australia. One of the most significant developments in 2000 was the formation of the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) an external quality assurance agency. In addition, new policies related to quality assurance of higher education were established. In 2000, the first quality assurance national protocol for higher education was

introduced. The Commonwealth government aimed at ensuring quality education through minimum standards, financial assurance processes, and the establishment of an external quality assurance agency (Shah, Nair, and Wilson, 2011, p. 476).

2. Accreditation agency (quality assurance agency)

Baird (2011) explains that "AUQA was not only responsible for auditing universities, but also charged with auditing the State and Territory authorities responsible for implementing the protocols and administering the registration and accreditation for non-university providers" (p. 33). In 2011, AUQA transitioned into the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). TEQSA was established with the same, or at least similar, purposes of AUQA.

One of the main roles of AUQA was to stimulate trust in accountability in Australia's higher education institutions, and it was regarded as relatively successful. External commentators announced that AUQA played a key role in improving the quality of HEIs (Baird, 2011, p. 36).

The quality assurance framework, which was introduced in 2000, was the most significant guideline for quality assurance in Australian higher education. Shah, Nair, and Wilson (2011) explain, "The roles of AUQA are in undertaking five yearly cyclical audits, Commonwealth monitoring of universities performance via Institutional Assessment Framework and other data submissions, the onus on universities to ensure the development and enhancement of quality and standards, and finally, compliance to various laws, regulations and guidelines such as national protocols and national code" (p. 476).

Since AUQA's transition into the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) in 2011, TEQSA has played a significant role with regard to accreditation and quality assurance in higher education. According to Baird (2011), "TEQSA will accredit and audit all higher education providers, make recommendations on funding based on learning and teaching performance, and ensure better public information on university performance" (p. 42). As stated above, TEQSA subsumed the functions of AUQA in 2011, and now they play an important role with regard to accountability mechanisms for higher education in Australia.

2.1 The roles and functions of TEQSA

TEQSA is now the higher education regulatory and quality assurance agency in Australia. “TEQSA was established in 2011 under Section 132 of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011 (TEQSA Act) to ensure the quality of Australian higher education providers through quality assurance and nationally consistent regulation” (TEQSA, 2011).

TEQSA’s main role is to contribute to establishing a national higher education system that will meet the needs for a well-educated population as well as maintain Australia’s higher education reputation. TEQSA (2011) contends, “Regulation and quality assurance in the sector will help protect the interests of students, no matter where, what or how they study” (TEQSA, 2011).

TEQSA (2011) provides strategic guidelines, which contain their main goals, functions, values, framework, and objectives regarding quality assurance in higher education. The strategic plan 2011-2014 handbook was

approved by the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research. Unlike other countries, HEIs in Australia use a self-accreditation system. Each university has been doing self- accrediting based on its own institutional legislation related to quality of education.

This process allows each higher education institution to confer its own accreditation. For this reason, the primary role of AUQA and TEQSA is to provide information on accreditation to help HEIs check their quality of education. Although Australia’ HEIs are allowed to use a self-accrediting system, they are also subject to audit by an external quality assurance agency (2004, OECD, p.110).

2.2 TEQSA Framework regarding main objectives

TEQSA’s 'strategic plan 2011-2014' provides three main objectives along with measure of success regarding each objective.

In summary, Australia’s accreditation system mainly



Figure 6. Quality assurance framework of Australia

Source: Shah, Nair, and Wilson (2011), p. 477, Journal of Asia Pacific Review.

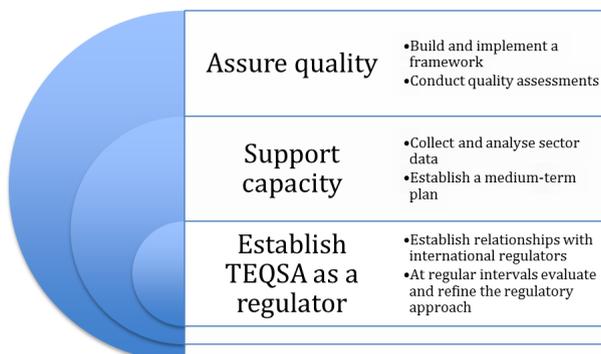


Figure 7. Three objectives of TEQSA

Source: TEQSA: Strategic plan 2-11-2014. (2011). retrieved from: <http://www.teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/TEQSAstrategicPlan2011-2014.pdf>

relies on self-accrediting rather than an external accrediting accreditation. Australia's HEIs have their own legislative regulation for accrediting, and they can review, evaluate, and confer accreditation by themselves. However, they are subject to external audits by TEQSA whose focus is to provide HEIs with sufficient information on how to evaluate if they meet the accreditation standards.

TEQSA's 'strategic plan 2011- 2014' provides three main objectives along with measure of success regarding each objective.

V. Conclusion

As the demand for greater accountability in higher education has increased over the last few decades across the world, concern about quality of higher education has become an important issue for HEIs and society. A knowledge-based economy requires HEIs to be more accountable to society, so they are expected to be more effective and efficient organizations in many countries. As examined earlier in this paper, accreditation is one of the most significant and effective tools in determining the quality of HEIs.

The history and main roles or goals of accreditation vary, depending on the countries. The U.S. has the longest history of accreditation, and accreditation plays a central role for assuring quality of HEIs by various types of accreditation agencies. These three types of accreditation are regional, national, and programmatic accreditation; this division allows some specialized or professional disciplines such as law, medicine, engineering, and pharmacy to build critical standards for assuring quality of programs. On the other hand, institutional accreditation enables HEIs to participate in federal programs designed to provide student financial aid. Regardless of the varying types of accrediting agencies, there is little doubt that accreditation in the U.S. has played a key role in assuring quality of education in a variety of ways.

Accreditation in the UK has been affected by the Bologna Declaration and its process. As a result, accreditation in the UK tends to focus on international mobility in addition to improving and maintaining HEI quality. The primary role of accrediting agencies in the UK is to provide information on accreditation and see

how well institutions meet their responsibilities, identifying best practices to help institutions develop effective systems. With relatively high autonomy, HEIs in the UK have used quality standards and guidelines provided by the QAA to determine their academic fitness. Participation is voluntary rather than mandatory; however, as stated earlier in this paper, calls for greater accountability in higher education may require that more HEIs reference quality standards from the QAA code.

Australia's quality assurance system regarding accreditation is similar to that of the UK in that both countries concentrate on providing guidelines and frameworks of accreditation to help HEIs gain information rather than accredit HEIs directly. Since both countries believe that quality of higher education is at an appropriate level, they have focused on maintaining and guaranteeing HEIs' quality for incoming international students. However, TEQSA also provides higher education providers and students with information regarding quality assurance, including accreditation based on detailed documents.

South Korea has spent a significant amount of resources to focus on higher education over the last few decades. Statistical data provided by global organizations shows that enrollment and completion rates of students in higher education in South Korea are higher as compared to other OECD countries. Such an increase in the enrollment and completion rates has advanced South Korea with regard to higher education. There is little doubt that this fact guarantees that South Korea has made an effort to improve and facilitate the development of higher education. Unfortunately, it does not necessarily mean that the quality and competitiveness of South Korean higher education is also ranked in top in the world.

Since 2011, South Korea began to use accreditation to assure quality of HEIs. It aims at improving quality of higher education but it is not certain that this has been effective, in that South Korea as it continues to struggle to assure the quality of higher education. It is no exaggeration to say that human resources are the primary resources available in South Korea. South Korea has already joined the ranks of advanced countries in terms of electronics and automotive industry; nonetheless, unlike these sectors, higher education in South Korea still lies on the border between advanced and developing countries with regard to competitiveness and global reputation.

The Korean University Accreditation Institute (KUAI) was established in 2010 and began to conduct accreditation

of HEIs in 2011. KUAI explains that “our primary goal is to promote national competitiveness through transparent and rigorous accreditation for Korean universities, which enhances university autonomy and strengthens accountability” (KUAI, n.d.) In South Korea, accreditation is not mandatory; rather it is based on voluntary participation.

The primary purpose of accreditation is to provide HEIs with guidelines, including minimum requirements and accreditation standards, so as to strengthen the quality of higher education. Consequently, accreditation plays a significant role in ensuring quality of HEIs in Korea, which will thereby positively affect competitiveness of HEIs (KUAI, n.d.). According to KUAI, the main roles of accreditation are to

1. assure quality of higher education through the external agency;
2. consider accountability based on expanded institutional autonomy;
3. meet the requests of public interest regarding quality of higher education;
- and 4. secure international mobility of higher education (KUAI, n.d.).

Figure 8 shows the basic directions and goals of accreditation, which includes four fundamental directions for accreditation. When it comes to basic directions and goals of accreditation in South Korea, KUAI (n.d.) offers the following:

- a. Consider students’ learning outcomes as an educational result of HEIs, including international student mobility; educational environmental improvement based on education quality.
- b. Facilitate each institution’s development based on its own characteristics and autonomy: Try to apply characterized or specialized standardized criteria rather than unified criteria; develop exemplary cases according to the Korean universities’ characteristics.
- c. Assure and enhance quality of HEIs: see if HEIs meet the minimum quality requirements; foster autonomous self-evaluation systems, which would be useful for HEIs’ ongoing development
- d. Establish public confidence with minimum HEI quality requirements.

Figure 8 indicates the process of accreditation briefly. Universities can apply for accreditation voluntarily. Once



Figure 8. The Basic Direction of Accreditation

KUAI reviews applications, a university will be notified regarding next steps. The university will be asked to submit a written self-evaluation report. KUAI reviews self-evaluation reports based on several types of criteria, and then they can ask a university to submit additional materials, depending upon results of self-evaluation reports. An accreditation agency conducts site visit evaluations. Based on self-evaluation reports and site visits, the accreditation agency decides whether or not to award accreditation. Once the accrediting agency makes a final decision, the university is notified of the result.

In brief, as stated above, the history of accreditation in South Korea is very short and, unlike many other countries, particularly the U.S., the UK and Australia, HEIs have been controlled by the central government and have had no autonomy. The Korean government has controlled all forms of HEIs, which could have been one of the decisive factors affecting the rapid development of higher education over the last few decades. However, the knowledge-based economy, globalization, and cross-border education require Korean higher education to be more accountable and effective

As discussed earlier, South Korea has a very short history of accreditation under legislative regulation. There is no arguing that accreditation, in particular, institutional accreditation, should be considered the most important factor to improve and foster the development of HEI quality in South Korea. By studying the role and purpose of accreditation in other advanced countries, accreditation in South Korea can be improved.

Accreditation systems should be the primary tool for defining and assuring quality in the delivery of higher education. In other words, if accrediting agencies and processes can ensure that HEIs perform well, then those agencies have an important role to play in society. To

make higher education institutions more accountable for assuring performance, accreditation in South Korea should be more consistent and transparent. Also, the accreditation system needs to focus more on outcome-based accreditation. Accrediting process should evaluate institutional effectiveness and the results need to be tied to federal funding.

Lastly, accreditation in South Korea needs to consider programmatic accreditation as a means to recognize and promote the specialized programs and departments in higher education institutes. Programmatic accreditation in U.S has been used to oversee professional areas such as law and medicine. However, programmatic accreditation may also be used to support the merit of specialized programs by reviewing the quality of curriculum and program content.

All in all, each country has different backgrounds in accreditation specific to quality assurance; national goals and purposes are also different. Nevertheless, the most important thing that South Korea should take away is that many countries are forced to demonstrate quality of higher education through quality assurance systems, now more than ever. A strengthened accrediting system should play a significant role in higher education. The accrediting system can be major vehicle to promote innovation of higher education if its standards and processes can be revised to be more open and supportive of diversity in higher education institutions.

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