

BESSH -15**Accreditation of Study Programmes and its Problem in New Emerging Countries**Margareth Gfrerer^{1*}, Pheni Chalid², Putriesti Mandasari³^{1,2,3}*The Faculty of Economic and Business, The State Islamic University, Jakarta, Indonesia*

Abstract

Academic accreditation is widely understood as a premium criteria of a study programme. At national level, study programme are normally evaluated based on nationally standardized benchmark by the national ministry for higher education. In general, degree of accreditation determined by a set of standards to acknowledge qualified faculty members, well function of support system, availability of university infra-structure, graduation and ratio between student and lecturer. American and European universities have launched a long practiced accreditation standards to qualify university and study programme. Accreditation leads mainly for performance of study programme started with the self-evaluation assessment of the study programme by the university itself and followed by a peer-review by assessors under the accreditation authority, which will focus on the documentation, the self-evaluation, interviews with lecturers, staff and students, field checking of the facilities available, and lecturing activity. Practically the accreditation approach in Western countries has been recognized and adopted by emerging countries, like Indonesia. But, there is a wide gap on teaching philosophy, learning culture, and academic atmosphere. The questions are how can emerging countries cope with the requirements of accreditation process? What is message given by the accreditation result? The paper will refer to the current discussion about accreditation at the global level to frame the ongoing research project. Then, a brief description of the methodology applied will demonstrate an insight to the resources and their evaluation. Finally, presenting the discussion about the overall values, expected outcomes/output of accreditation, an outlook how accreditation of academic programmes might be evolving in the future.

© 2015 The Authors. Published by Academic Fora. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

Peer-review under responsibility of the Scientific & Review committee of BESSH- 2015.

Keywords— Accreditation, Self-Evaluation, Accreditation

Introduction

In the University World News from Oct. 11, 2015 Yojana Sharma elaborates the topic on “The higher education access dilemma - more or better?” by referring the economic success of a nation to its educated population and linking the higher education sector with the national demand-led economic growth. National governments respond on that economic growth and its demand on graduates by accepting private institutions, establishing foreign branch campuses or just increasing the numbers of courses and students at the public universities.

With reference to the Dzulkifli Abdul Razak from the International Association of Universities (IAU) who is highlighting that the access to universities will increase the level of education among the population. However, Dzulkifli Abdul Razak is seeing the increasing number of enrolled students critically. It is widely understood that the number of graduates among the citizens is an indicator for an educated society and the economic growth. The increased number of students enrolled at higher education institutions cannot automatically guarantee that the graduate ratio among the citizens will grow to the same extend. Therefore Dzulkifli Abdul Razak recommends rather to work on the drop-out rates in order to improve the chances of enrolled students to be successful than on the number of enrolments.

For many years the accreditation of study programme/universities has been understood as a guarantee for quality programme, therefore it comes as a surprise that recently in the United States, two senators (Michael Bennet and Marco Rubio) have heavily criticized the accreditation system, which has been compared to “*an obscure network of the higher education busybodies ... cartel*”, which is in favor of the accredited colleges and universities by using the power of the accreditation process to block innovations.

The main idea behind this discussion is the exclusive access of accredited colleges and universities to federal financial aid. Accredited institutions have the access-card to federal financial aid and are considered as eligible, whereas non-accredited institutions don't have this access card and are therefore considered as ineligible. The

*All correspondence related to this article should be directed to Margareth Gfrerer, The Faculty of Economic and Business, The State Islamic University, Jakarta, Indonesia

Email: margareth.gfrerer@uinjkt.ac.id

© 2015 The Authors. Published by Academic Fora. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license

(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

Peer-review under responsibility of the Scientific & Review committee of BESSH-2015.

senators highlight the consequences of students from not-accredited colleges and universities by referring to the current situation in the United States, where students at non-accredited institutions have to take loans to manage their higher education and at the end - even with the best outcomes - they have fewer perspectives to get a job, because their graduation certificate comes from an institution, which is not listed in the exclusive club of the accredited institutions.

Subsequently these graduates are left with the burden of their loans. The main criticism from Senator Rubio refers to the accreditation system in the USA, which is understood as a costly service from the accreditation agency that is mirroring the inputs (hardware) as well as the processes and hindering innovations in study programme, consuming a considerable share of higher education institutions' budgets without improving educational outcomes. Senator Bennet quotes Senator Rubio "we must end the status quo accreditation cartel that stifles competition, encourages soaring tuition costs and limits opportunities for non-traditional students ... that leaves too many people with tons of student loan debt and without degrees that lead to good paying jobs."

In European Union in contrary an accreditation of a study programme or a university is considered as "sufficient evidence for the quality of a qualification, as this provides the link to the levels of the national education systems and/or to the levels and learning outcomes of the national qualifications framework". The accreditation is not a precondition to receive the decree from the ministry to open and manage a study programme.

Methodology

This research is primarily a literature review on the accreditation of higher education institutions in European Union and United States, linked with university experts involved in the accreditation process in Indonesia and Europe. The conclusion will be drawn from the different inputs and will present the basis for discussions in the field of accreditation of study programme among lecturers, administrative staff and students from the State Islamic University Jakarta as well as accreditation experts and enterprises as stakeholders.

Findings

In defining the term "accreditation" this research will refer to the definitions of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) in the United States and to that one applied in the European Union by the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA). The CHEA sees accreditation as "the primary means of assuring and improving the quality of higher education institutions and programs in the United States. ... [T]his private voluntary system of self-examination and peer review has been central to the creation of a U.S. higher education enterprise that is outstanding in many respects." CHEA is listing the following ten arguments for the accreditation of higher education programmes and institutions:

- The primary public symbol of legitimate higher education for over 100 years
- The primary *reliable authority* for federal and state government funding for higher education
- The primary reliable authority for private sector financial support for higher education
- A major source of protection against fraud and abuse for students and consumers
- Successful in encouraging major innovation while maintaining quality over the years
- Cost-efficient in the use of resource to achieve its goals
- Central to states carrying out licensure of the professions
- Essential to international mobility
- Responsive to current climate of accountability
- Vital to maintaining key features of higher education that have contributed to the enterprise as among the best of the world

CHEA recognizes accreditation organizations in the United States but sees itself as the guard of the quality of higher education in the accredited programme/institutions and compare universities/programmes against the standards a peer group has developed.

The ECA defines the term accreditation as "a formal and independent decision, indicating that an institution of higher education and/or programme offered meet certain standards. Accreditation is a multi-step process (self-evaluation/documentation submitted by the unit undergoing accreditation; external assessment by independent experts; the accreditation decision). The accreditation decision depends upon a quality assessment based on international accepted quality standards." The final result is not expressed in grades but just "in a 'yes' or 'no' judgement with a limited validity The present concept of accreditation in the area of higher education serves to assure and develop quality".

Accreditation in the United States as well as in European Union is transnationally recognized. The impact whereas are different. In the United States the accreditation is the key to get government funding as institution or as

student at the accredited university or college. In European Union Member States and further Bologna signatories recognize “the accreditation decisions in all member states where an underlying agreement on common guidelines, practices and standards exists between the accreditation organizations. ... [A]ccreditation decisions should be incorporated into the national recognition procedures of degrees and qualifications in the domain of higher education.

Accreditation should be an essential part of the recognition of private higher education institutions and of their programme. It should be equally essential for mainly privately financed programme of public higher education institutions. Accreditation organizations should extend their activities both to public as well as to private post-secondary educational institutions/programmes. They should be flexible and willing to adapt their procedures to new developments in academic teaching.”

With reference to the organizations conducting the accreditation process in the United States as well as in Europe literature sources scrutinized for this research are emphasizing that accreditation entities are non-governmental organizations. In the United States the organization’s accreditation are accredited by the government. In the Europe Union the accreditation organizations have to become members of the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA), which means that the ECA Code of Good Practice becomes imperative and outlines (1) the minimum criteria an accreditation organization has to fulfil, (2) the minimum accreditation procedures have to cover and (3) the minimum accreditation standards.

The application of the accreditation system at the individual European Union Member State has its own implications. In Germany e.g. there is a two layer system in place. On one side there is the Accreditation Council, which defines standards, procedures and criteria for the accreditation and in the lower layer there are the individual accreditation agencies, which conduct the accreditation in higher education institutions. On the other side there are the individual accreditation agencies accredited by the Accreditation Council. The approval to every new degree programmes including study and examination regulations is reserved to the responsible State Ministry.

	Germany	United States	Indonesia
Accreditation Institution	Accreditation Council	Council for Higher Education Accreditation	National Accreditation Body
Legal Status	Foundation	National organisation	Autonomous body of the Ministry of Research and Technology
Composition	17-person board composed of 4 representatives from higher education institutions, 4 representative of the Laender, 5 practitioners, 2 international experts and 2 students	20-person board of college and university presidents, institutional representatives and public members	5-persons steering committee (senior professors)
Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accrediting individual agencies • Monitoring of accreditation agencies • Awarding the quality seal • Managing the central database • Establishing of comparable quality standards for bachelor’s and master’s degree courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizing accreditation organizations • Managing databases and directories • Monitoring of accreditation agencies • Assuring and improving education quality • Assisting institutions and programme using a set of standards developed by peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Composing teams of assessors • Documenting the result of the accreditation process and result
Accreditation Agencies / Team	Accredited private, non-profit organisations	Recognised private, non-profit organisations	-
Accreditation Process	On request	On request	Mandatory (every 4 or 5 years conducted)

Fees for Accreditation	Fixed charge	Charges negotiable	No charges
Final result of the Accreditation Process	“yes”, “no”, “yes under certain condition”	“accredited status”	Grading: A/B/C

The Accreditation Council has the legal entity of a foundation and is composed of representatives from higher education institutions, ministries, companies/trade unions/public authorities, students and accreditation agencies. The individual agencies have the legal entity of profit or not-for-profit organizations.

The accreditation is conducted in three steps as described:

- The application for accreditation to an agency with the agency’s response as the offer for the service;
- The agreement of the offer followed by the accreditation process;
- The presentation of the result to the accreditation commission, which will decide whether there is a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ or a ‘yes under conditions’.

All accredited study programme, which are awarded with the quality seal of the Accreditation Council after completed accreditation are published in the central database of the Accreditation Council. In general the costs for the accreditation procedure is born by the higher education institution and are between 10,000 and 15,000 Euro per study programme. However, the accreditation is a voluntary approach and is used as a quality criteria for the study programme or the higher education institution.

Comparing the Indonesian accreditation approach as one of an emerging country with that from Germany and from the United States shows the following picture:

Besides the national accreditation programme there are the international or cross-border accreditation programme, often offered to specific study programme in order to receive a “seal” for promotion purpose. These international or cross-border accreditation seals are additional. The costs are additional costs. EQUIS EFMD accreditation seal for example offers on its website the seal for a 5 years period of 42,250 Euro and for a 3 years period of 35,750 Euro.

Discussion

The driving question seems to be: Does accreditation improve the quality of education and teaching of higher education institutions in emerging countries? - This question needs to be understood from two sides. Firstly from the side of the higher education institution as such and secondly from the quality of education and teaching.

Starting with the *higher education institution as such*: Through the accreditation process a kind of quality assessment will be introduced, which refers primarily to the facilities, number of professors, administrative processes in a higher education institution as well as to the placements of the graduates. Since the accreditation processes are adopted from Western countries, the focus on the higher education institution and the quality of education are similar. Different answers are mainly through the different understanding of the question and the different patterns used as benchmark. Therefore it might happen that study programme or institutions in emerging countries, get a ‘yes’, while in Western countries, the same institution would get a ‘no’.

The accreditation by an international accreditation institution such as EFMD would not make a real change, because those getting aware of the existence of market-led accreditation institutions, are concerned about their reputation and the international standing of their universities and the respective study programme. The seals of the market-led accreditation institutions are understood as an investment to get the entrance card for an exclusive club, where European institutions would pay around 3 times the fee of the accreditation recognized by the respective governments for becoming members.

However, accreditation is seen as benchmarking study programme and higher education institutions. The accreditation process conducted by market-led or recognized accreditation agencies follows similar processes but also similar interests. Both organizations don’t have their main concern in getting rid of low performers, but in accommodating as many institutions as possible in their networks. The private accreditation agencies have a commercial interest in having as many higher education institutions and study programme as their clients/customers and to sell as many services to them as possible. The accredited/recognized accreditation agencies will try to have as many clients as possible in order to communicate the general academic potentials in a country towards the respective Ministries of Higher Education and to guide the national higher education institutions towards harmonization.

Private and public accreditation agencies push themselves in the corner as mentors for the higher education institutions and study programmes by helping their costumers to perform at the level that the accreditation seal could be brought to their customers. Since the accreditation offered by accreditation agencies in the USA and EU-Member States is a service, customers have to pay. This concept would also allow outsourcing the quality management of higher education institutions from the accreditation agencies to entities, which work closely with the accreditation agencies that they could be assured that all efforts are in line with the accreditation requirements and the continuous use of the seal will not be jeopardized. Fact is that the accreditation process is a costly process and the higher education institutions want to see a guarantee that their objectives will be achieved.

The higher education sector in emerging countries and in many Western countries has turned education into “a tradable good and service. Knowledge itself is marketed as commercial goods. ... The autonomy and independence gained by the privatization policy has made universities and HEIs [Higher Education Institutions] the key actors in the determining the direction of higher education policy and development in each country.” This leads to the discussion that has been raised by the International University Association (IUA) as mentioned in the introduction of this paper that the strategy in higher education in emerging countries goes rather for the number of enrolments than for the quality of education (reduced drop-out rate).

Due to the fact that higher education is linked with economic growth, higher education institutions get the justification in selling study placements in the same way as commodities. If rigorous entrance criteria are in place, the sales numbers of commodities would be limited. Market participants, who are already well established and those who would not fear the competition could follow that concept.

Since many private higher education institutions have entered and continue to enter the market, degrees get inflated. It is in the interest of the higher education institutions to go for an accreditation process that the education commodity could be sold as an acknowledged quality product with a quality certificate. This approach seems to be different from the Western approach in the accreditation, where accreditation is defined as “a collegial process based on self- and peer assessment for public accountability and improvement of academic quality”.

In regard to the *quality of education* it needs to highlight, that an accreditation system in place is understood as guarantee of the quality of the higher education institution or the study programme. But exactly this approach is heavily discussed. The main questions are: what is measured by the accreditation process and who is doing the accreditation and from where the certificate will come. So far the focus is on the facilities (lecture rooms, library etc.) available, number of professors, publications in rated journals, the ratio students to professors, the placements of the alumni as well as talks with the staff (lecturers and administration staff) and students. In technical terms it can be said the hardware has been monitored/evaluated. The software, which refers to the lecturers teaching skills, their approaches to work with students, student’s success in student competitions, etc. is not considered. In other words the human resource performance is not criteria of the accreditation criteria. The accreditation is a static process picturing the historic situation.

Overall, the accreditation works on the harmonization of study programmes, universities and colleges in specific countries or in a specific association of study programme. The result achievable is a “yes”, a “no”, an “accredited”, an “A” or a “B”. It does not show a weighing or a ranking. It just shows that the benchmark set by the Accreditation Council/Body has been achieved or has not been achieved.

Countries with high ranks in the Corruption Perception Index will not be able to provide trustworthy national accreditation certificates to national stakeholders nor to international partner universities. In these countries universities have to work individually on their reputation in the field of academia and research in order to convince international university partners and students about their performance in the study programme and in research.

Once a certain international reputation has been achieved the individual study programme or the institutions itself could consider to join an international/cross-boarder accreditation programme.

The main problem of the accreditation of study programme/higher education institution is the value of the accreditation itself. As long as country’s public administration is attached with the slightest glimpse of corruption a national accreditation decree has no value at the international level. - All quality efforts of universities are automatically inked with the performance of the public administration with the corruption perception index.

References

- Sharma Yojana: The higher education access dilemma – more or better? University World News on 09 October, 2015; Issue No:385; <http://www.universityworldnews.com>; Last retrieved on Oct. 15, 2015

- The Wall Street Journal: Opinion / Review & Outlook: Trust Busting Higher Ed Oct. 4, 2015 Retrieved from: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/trust-busting-higher-education-1443997741> on Oct 12, 2015
- Bennet, M. (2015): Bennet, Rubio Propose Alternative to Accreditation that Shifts Focus to Student Success, <http://www.bennet.senate.gov/?p=release&id=3468>; Last retrieved on Oct. 12, 2015
- European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions; p.27; <http://www.eurorecognition.eu>; Last retrieved on Oct. 12, 2015
- Council for Higher Education Accreditation (2013): Accreditation, Students and Society; <http://www.chea.org>; Last retrieved on October 12, 2015
- European Consortium for Accreditation (2005): Accreditation in the European Higher Education Area - In preparation for the Conference of European Ministers for Education in Bergen, p.4; <http://ecahe.eu>; Last retrieved Oct. 12, 2015
- Council of Europe: Higher Education and Research; http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/EHEA2010/BolognaPedestrians_en.asp#P15_226; Last retrieved Oct. 15, 2015
- Council of Europe: Higher Education and Research; http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/EHEA2010/BolognaPedestrians_en.asp#P15_226; Last retrieved Oct. 15, 2015
- European Consortium for Accreditation (2005): Accreditation in the European Higher Education Area - In preparation for the Conference of European Ministers for Education in Bergen, p.6; <http://ecahe.eu>; Last retrieved Oct. 12, 2015
- <http://www.akkreditierungsrat.de>; Last retrieved Oct. 12, 2015
- <http://www.studi-info.de/studium/hochschulen/akkreditierung>; Last retrieved on Oct 20, 2015
- <https://www.efmd.org/accreditation-main/equis/equis-fee-structure>; Last retrieved on Oct 20, 2015
- <https://www.efmd.org/accreditation-main/equis/equis-fee-structure>; Last retrieved on Oct 20, 2015
- SEAMEO RIHED (2008): Harmonization of Higher Education - Lessons Learned from the Bologna Process, Number 1, Feb. 2008, p. 94; [http:// www.rihed.seameo.org](http://www.rihed.seameo.org); Last retrieved: October 12, 2015
- Council for Higher Education Accreditation (2010): Recognition of Accrediting Organizations - Policy and Procedures, p. 17; <http://www.chea.org>; Last retrieved: October 12, 2015