

Accreditation Benefits on Teacher Education Programs: The Case of Cebu Technological University Satellite Campuses

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ABSTRACT

In pursuit of continuing quality in higher education, institutions are responsive in submitting themselves for accreditation. In Cebu Technological University, the teacher education programs are periodically assessed by the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines to determine whether the educational institution programs are doing in accordance with the accepted standards. Utilizing the descriptive case study, this study was conducted to identify the benefits derived from the accreditation through a variety of approaches like documentary review, semi-structured interview, and focus group discussion with students and members of accreditation task force in the college of education. Thematic analysis revealed that accreditation has been beneficial in improving and enhancing the quality of the teacher education programs. Specifically, accreditation has given great advantage on the quality of education in terms of: 1) identified strengths and weaknesses in the implementation of the program and the school, 2) improved quality of classroom instruction, 3) improved school resources and facilities, 4) enhanced professional development of teachers, 5) increased involvement among faculty, staff, students, and stakeholders, 6) improved guidance and support, 7) enhanced level of preparedness for an accreditation, and (8) enhanced organization and management. Findings proved that accreditation positively affect the quality of education. It is therefore suggested that the institution's academic programs must respond to the recommendations set by the accrediting body and use the process as guide for future objectives.

Keywords: quality assurance, classroom instruction, professional development, academic programs

INTRODUCTION

Quality assurance is the expression that is new in education and has quickly become very important (Allais, 2009). This created a profound effect upon the educational landscape and has transformed the view of quality in higher education, particularly in teacher education program. The renewed interest in teacher education has been spurred by the free spirit and the new world enterprise, which seeks to create human talent pool that can adapt to new ideas, cultures and environment.

The challenges faced by teacher education institutions raise pertinent questions for both the school systems and the governments. While, the school system has to grapple with the

problems of teacher quality and the increasing student and societal expectations, governments are struggling to provide the teacher education system an environment that fosters innovation and match the requirements of the school sector. This calls for a breakthrough and bold thinking on the part of all the stakeholders. According to the United Nations educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, quality assurance can only be effective when all stakeholders understand and embrace its challenges and benefits. Developing a culture of quality requires strong, committed stewardship from global leaders in higher education (UNESCO, 2011).

The present situation of Philippine education has led to an increasing interest in the assessment of the academic program offerings, the manpower and financial capability of educational institutions, and the efficiency of their delivery systems through a system of accreditation. It is seen as a system of evaluation based on the standards of the accrediting body and considered as a means of assuring and improving the quality of education.

The rise of accrediting agencies officially started in 1957 and the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACCUP) was formally organized in 1989 (Corpus, 2003). In line with the laid out priorities, AACCUP, set out to develop quality indicators for teacher education. Using these indicators, which are introspective, the institutions can create internal quality structures for appraisal of the quality provisions of the system, which in turn would lead to continuous monitoring and improvement. The main objective in developing these indicators is to provide a tool for continuous quality improvement and to energize and sustain the institutions' quality enhancement efforts.

The growing complexity and independence of teacher education institutions in many countries has led to the need to evaluate their quality of instruction in light of the skills expected of graduates. So, the accreditation of teacher education institutions, or programs in an institution, is an important element of developing a quality assurance system. Renowned universities in the world would not have been the finest in pursuing quality without undergoing accreditation (Monterde, 2012).

The Cebu Technological University as an institution of higher learning is committed to become responsive of its academic programs through accreditation. Teacher Education Programs of the Cebu Technological University are periodically assessed by Accrediting Agency for Chartered Colleges and Universities of the Philippines (AACCUP) on the standards of excellence. AACCUP sets standards in which the academe has to follow and align itself. It remained a challenge to the teacher education program of the CTU system to sustain AACCUP accreditation and to maintain standards of excellence expected of them. This research is driven to determine the benefits of AACCUP accreditation on the quality of teacher education program of the institution as perceived by the department heads, teachers and students.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study made use of the descriptive case study design. This design was utilized since it described an intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred (Yin,

2003). The external campuses of CTU offering Teacher Education Program and of which had all previously accredited (regardless of their accreditation statuses) were the study sites (Fig.1). The participants of the study were composed of 20 fourth-year education students and the 30 members of the accreditation task force in the College of Education.

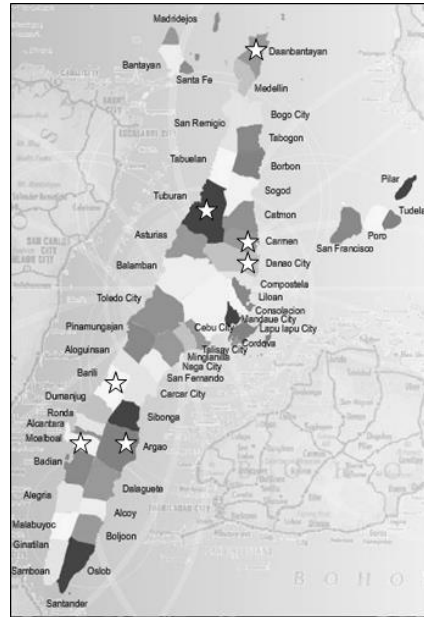


Figure1. The study sites

In case studies, data can be collected from multiple methods (Federicos and Gravoso, 2012). In this study, data collection involved a variety of approaches including documentary review, semi-structured interview and focus group discussion. In so far as documents were concerned, the accreditation reports (previous and recent) were compared. Purposive sampling was also used where only those items in the accreditation documents that provide appropriate source of data were taken to a documentary review. In the process, general descriptions of the key areas - strengths, weaknesses and recommendations were determined. In the interview, open-ended questions were directly asked by the researchers to the department heads and teachers that comprised the accreditation task force and the selected fourth year students. Lastly, the focus group discussion was designed to obtain the perceptions of the members of the accreditation task force. The responses obtained from the interviews and the focus groups were subjected to a thematic analysis using themes as framework and were then presented in narrative form. The data obtained from these three data sources are used to determine how far have the teacher education programs of the CTU external campuses have responded and took actions on the recommendations set by the accrediting body. This further determined the benefits derived from accreditation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis of the responses gathered through documentary analysis, interview and focus group discussion revealed that the respondent groups have derived the following

benefits from their participation in the accreditation of the teacher education program: (1) identified strengths and weaknesses in the implementation of the program and the school, (2) improved quality of classroom instruction, (3) improved school resources and facilities, (4) enhanced professional development of teachers, (5) increased involvement among faculty, staff, students and stakeholders, (6) improved guidance and support, (7) enhanced level of preparedness for an accreditation, and (8) enhanced organization and management.

Theme 1: Identified Strengths and Weaknesses in the Implementation of the Program and the School

Some department heads and teacher-respondents highlighted that the best contribution of the accreditation process was that it enabled their institution to recognize the strengths and weaknesses in the implementation of the programs based on standards. According to them, through the process, this impelled the top management to pay attention and reflect on the priorities of the institution and be able to attain future objectives. The respondents said that with self-evaluation and subsequent team evaluation visits identified varied areas of improvement like the mission-vision of the institution, the curriculum and instruction, teachers, students, school facilities, administration, research and extension. They as well noted that with accreditation, the top management will be guided on major decision-making highly emphasizing the needs of the institution. It provided school accountability through well-devised standards, systematic assessment and focus on on-going improvement. This confirms with the views of AACUP (2014) that one of the benefits of accreditation is to make possible for an evaluated program to know its strength and weaknesses, and in what aspects it needs to develop.

Theme 2: Improved Quality of Classroom Instruction

Accreditation prompted improvement in classroom teaching practices. Department heads stated that with the results specified by the accrediting body, the institution took actions in conducting seminar-workshops on new trends in teaching methodologies, instructional materials making and other related education topics. Evidently, some faculty members started making functional instructional materials. Teachers also said that there was an increase participation of the faculty in the in-service activities. In addition, they stressed that more avenues for professional development were provided. Student-respondents also claimed that their instructors have started shifting from conventional to student-centered teaching strategies. Teachers even indulged themselves in the use of technology in the classroom. Interactions became meaningful because lessons were well-structures based on standards. The finding confirms to the results of the Regional Accreditation and the Quality of Education Survey, NEASC (2005) stated that accreditation positively affected the quality of education and it has improved instruction. Teachers engaged in more student-centered instruction and smaller learning communities were formed.

Theme 3: Improved School Resources and Facilities

When the student-respondents were asked the after effect of accreditation, they stressed

that accreditation is important in improving the quality of their school resources and facilities. They also stressed that buildings were constructed to accommodate students and stakeholders. According to them, accreditation stimulated a positive transformation for their institution and improved school resources and facilities. The respondents reported that the accreditation process led their school to utilize resources more efficient and creative manner. One student even mentioned that accreditation greatly made changes in the improvement of school facilities. There was already an expansion of library space as well as acquisition of relevant and updated library materials. In the case of laboratories, the teacher-respondent reported that due to the recommendations set by the accrediting body, construction of separate stock room was done; laboratories were provided with more working tables; and laboratory assistant was designated to handle easy disposal and proper upkeep of laboratory supplies. The results were in line with the study done in 2007 which revealed that through accreditation, a peer review using criteria and procedures set by the accrediting agency to encourage adherence to quality and standards, SUCs had improved their programs in terms of the quality of their services and facilities (Rivera, 2007).

Theme 4: Enhanced Professional Development of Teachers

According to a teacher-respondent, prior to the accreditation there was a very minimal involvement of the faculty in research and extension activities. In fact, there were some faculty members who lack training in their field of specialization and were not sent to attend seminars and training to improve their capabilities. A number of teachers also said that they were encouraged to conduct research. In fact, during the in-service training, seminar-workshops on research proposal preparation were conducted and the institution organized a local in-house review for proposals and completed researches. Along with the recommendations of the accreditation, a task force member under research mentioned that there were immediate actions taken by the institution to improve research capabilities among teachers as well as students.

Theme 5: Increased Involvement among Faculty, Staff, Students, and Stakeholders

Some respondents mentioned that through accreditation, there was a stronger collaboration and involvement among faculty, staff, students and stakeholders. For instance, the respondents noted that in the review of the vision, mission, goals and objectives of the institution, involvement of stakeholders has been given emphasis as well as in the dissemination of information.

Theme 6: Improved Guidance and Support

Student-respondents reported that after accreditation, changes and improvements were also evident in institution's support to students. The respondents stressed that the administrative support offered scholarships and financial grants to sports and cultural organizations. In addition, the department heads reported that through accreditation, they were able to create and conduct a special orientation for transferees and returnees. Different student services were also made available to cater the needs and interests of the students.

Theme 7: Enhanced Level of Preparedness for Accreditation

Over three-fourths of the respondents claimed that another benefit of accreditation was the enhanced level of preparedness. Some said that they utilized the results of accreditation in the process of making short-term and long-term plans. They also noted that the accreditation process led them to actively respond on the recommendations set by the accrediting body. In fact, one of the task force members said that since they will be submitting again for the next level of accreditation they already started keeping documents as well as conducting activities based on the indicators set by the accrediting body.

Theme 8: Enhanced Organization and Management

A number of members in the task force noted that because of accreditation process, teamwork and collaboration has enhanced. Some claimed that it lessened the feelings of seclusion from the group. Working together led every member in the task force to interact. Others also noted that with accreditation, it gave every member of the task force chance to work collaboratively with their colleagues and it helped maintain the unity within the organization. Some members also noted that it enhanced management, since the members of the task force were already aware of the accreditation process.

CONCLUSION

Accreditation has been beneficial in improving and enhancing the quality of the teacher education programs. Specifically, accreditation has affected the quality of education in terms of: 1) identified strengths and weaknesses in the implementation of the program and the school; 2) improved quality of classroom instruction; 2) improved school resources and facilities; 3) enhanced professional development of teachers; 4) increased involvement among faculty, staff, students, and stakeholders; 5) improved guidance and support; 6) enhanced level of preparedness for an accreditation; and 7) enhanced organization and management. Findings proved that accreditation positively affect the quality of education. It is therefore recommended that institutions have to respond to the recommendations set by the accrediting body and use the process as guide for future objectives. In order to maintain the quality of education given to the clienteles, programs must be constantly submitted for accreditation.

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