ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF ACCREDITATION STANDARDSON QUALITY ASSURANCE AND RISK MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: FACULTY MEMBERS' PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the perceptions of faculty members at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University on the impact of accreditation standards on quality assurance (QA) and risk management within Saudi Arabia higher education institutions. 305 participants responded to an e-survey. Interviews were conducted with QA consultants. Findings revealed that faculty members perceive accreditation standards to have a positive impact on QA procedures of: (1) program management regarding handbooks, strategic planning, committees, KPIs, feedback mechanisms, (2) missions and goals relating to stakeholders' awareness and mission consistency, (3) teaching and learning concerning course portfolios, periodic reviews, quality of teaching, outcomes, and coursework plans, (4) faculty involvement in QA and research output, (5) risk management concerning resources and educational risks, (6) learning resources, facilities, and adequacy of equipment, and (7) students, with more emphasis on learning, admission policies, and involvement in assessment. Significant differences were found for gender, age, teaching experience, and academic rank.

Keywords: Accreditation Standards, Quality Assurance, Higher Education Institutions, Risk Management.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, QA in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) has become an important aspect in education in a majority of countries (Awinoand Agolla, 2008; Hou, 2011; López et al., 2015). The reasons for the heightened need for QA in education include the increasing demands for accountability, market competition, demands for better public services, rapid growth of student numbers (Becket & Brookes, 2006), advances in information technology (Awinoand & Agolla, 2008), and the need for efficient methods for review and evaluation (Jackson, 1997). Amongst most scholars, QA mechanisms tend to be perceived as a process enhancing educational institutions performance (Awinoand Agolla, 2008; Mok, 2005). It is approved that the review procedures for accreditation encourage HEIs to establish solid mechanisms for constant quality improvements (Zoqaqi, as cited in Hou et al., 2015). These improvements can be clearly seen in staff performance, students 'teach (Spowart et al., 2016), academic reputation, increased funding, improvement in public accountability (Kumar et al., 2020), missions, strategies, laying down standards, benchmarking (Kleijnen et al., 2011), improvements of resources (idayat et al., 2018), research and community engagement (Tavares et al., 2017), and increased transparency (Toprak, & Şakar, 2021).

The definition of the concept QA has been perceived differently by different stakeholders and cannot be defined in a single meaning (Oh, 2017; Tavares et al., 2017); (Harvey, 2006) refers to QA as "a process of establishing stakeholder confidence that provision (input, process and outcomes) fulfils expectations, and measures up to threshold minimum

requirements" (p. 261). CHEA as cited in (Butdisuwan, 2015) QA is "a planned and systematic review process of an institution or program to determine that acceptable standards of education, scholarship, and infrastructure are being maintained and enhanced" (p. 151). On the other side, the term accreditation can be defined as actions that provide assurance to the public and prospective students that a university meets accrediting agency stated requirements and that it will continue to meet them (Morrison & Nelson, 2007). According to Oh (ibid), "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" (p. 49).

The QA process combines either internal or external reviews to scrutinize an institution/program in relation to its ability to match minimum quality standards and needs for quality improvement (López et al., 2015). Internal QA applies to quality review processes carried out within an institution for its own purpose (Hou et al., 2018). HEIs undertake self-assessment by producing self-review portfolios and other documents for submission to an external QA agency (Shah & Jarzabkowski, 2013). However, external QA refers to a peer review of an HEI or its programs undertaken by an external authorized agency or body (e.g., accreditation agency) outside the institution, which evaluates the institutions or programs to ascertain the level of compliance against agreed standards (Tutko & Naumov, 2014).

Academics may take a position of resistance to quality recognition and support (Manatos et al., 2015). Resistance of academics to QA is frequently linked to the bureaucratic process involving complicated processes and requirements (Harvey, 2006) that steal time from the important duties such as teaching and research (Newton, 2002). However, academics generally do advocate QA (Manatos et al., 2015). Academics tend to support quality assessments, particularly its goals and purposes (Rosa, et al., 2019). (Kleijnenet al., 2011) found that academics' attitudes were positive about the quality aspects relevant to their academic work if the assessment contributes to improvement rather than control.

In Saudi Arabia, QA processes for accreditation of HEIs and academic programs started in 2003, with the introduction of the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA), the representative QA agency. The NCAAA established the accreditation standards and processes to achieve accreditation and assure quality. The NCAAA required HEIs to develop internal quality assurance reviews according to eleven standards. This process ceased in 2018 and was replaced by a lighter audit process, including: mission and goals, program management and QA, teaching and learning, students, teaching staff, learning resources, facilities, and equipment.

Questioning the effectiveness of accreditation is crucial and timely, as many universities in Saudi Arabia are conducting reforms in higher education, with special interest in QA. The review of literature exhibits numerous examples of good practices. However, the current study investigates seven key components of accreditation standards to assess QA practices in higher education. These standards were assessed using Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University (PSAU) as a case study. Hence, the major objective of this study is to examine the perceptions of faculty members at PSAU on the impact of accreditation standards on QA and risk management within Saudi Arabia HEIs, now that PSAU had undergone the first cycle of assessment for accreditation and received the full institutional accreditation for seven years (2019-2026). Considering this purpose, this study aims to answer the following questions:

RQ1: Are there any significant variations in faculty's perceptions towards the impact of   accreditation standards on QA in HEIs due to demographic variables?

RQ2: What are the faculty members' perceptions towards the impact of accreditation standards on QA in HEIs?

RQ3: What are the faculty members' perceptions towards the accreditation standards impact on risk management in HEIs?

This study is gaining its significance from PSAU's successful achievement of accreditation in May 2019. Therefore, it is worthwhile to assess the actual impact of accreditation standards on QA and risk management in HEIs. Given the central role of the academics and their involvement in QA, it is critical to understand their perceptions as they might be the most qualified actors in assessing the impact of accreditation standards on QA and risk management. Investigating evidence of QA is also significant for accreditation agency officials because such research provides them with feedback on the credibility and effectiveness of the standards for which the granting of academic accreditation to institutions is made. While the study is limited to PSAU, it nonetheless has applications to other universities of similar characteristics on the wide range.

METHOD

Participants

The sample for the present study consisted of faculty members from PSAU, Saudi Arabia. *Via* Deanship of IT and Distance Learning, an online survey was forwarded to faculty members. 305 responded. In addition, semi-structured interviews were organized with 5 experts in QA. Data was collected over two semesters between 2020-2021 from male and female faculty from different departments and colleges. The demographic information of the respondents included their gender, age, teaching experience, and academic rank. Since this paper aims to research the impact of accreditation processes on QA and risk management in HEIs, and since PSAU was granted the full institutional accreditation in May 2019, the University was purposefully chosen for this study.

Instrument

Online survey

The researcher's designed an online survey using the free online tool 'Google Forms', which was divided into two sections. The first section included the demographic information of the respondents. The second listed items on a five-level Likert-scale with choices spanning from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) related to the standards of accreditation: mission and goals, program management and QA, teaching and learning, students, teaching staff, learning resources, facilities, and equipment, in addition to risk management. The survey was aimed at gathering data on faculty's perceptions of whether the accreditation standards have led to better QA and risk management in HEIs.

Interviews

Semi-structured, in-person interviews were organized with QA consultants in the field of development and quality from the Deanship of Development and Quality at PSAU. The goal was to obtain in-depth understanding and compare with the data gathered from the online survey. The interviews took place while discussing the research results. The interviews were carried out in the form of discussions. Therefore, in addition to the predetermined questions, there were questions, not specified in advance, that were posed when necessary, with the purpose of clarifying new issues that arose. The duration of each interview was circa 30 minutes. Each interview was recorded in writing with the permission of each interviewee.

Validity and Reliability

The validity of the e-survey was determined through a group of experienced specialists working at the Deanship of Development and Quality at PSAU. They were asked to independently provide their comments for the improvement of the instrument regarding its clarity, fitness, and content suitability for the purpose of the study. In accordance with their suggestions, the survey was modified before it was put into practice. To increase validity and achieve reliability, a group of volunteering faculty (n=15) participated in a pilot study, and then excluded from the actual study. The pilot test was undertaken to calculate the reliability of the survey and to determine if any changes were needed prior to the main execution of the survey. Accordingly, the wording of one item was changed to enhance clarity. The reliability of the items was demonstrated by calculating Cornbrash's alpha. The value was found to be 0.94, indicating a high level of reliability.

Data Collection

To put the survey into practice, the authors gained ethics approval from ethics boards at PSAU. Following the approvals, the Deanship of IT and Distance Learning emailed the link to the online survey to all teaching staff through the university emails. The researchers explained to the participants that their identity would remain anonymous and confidential and that their responses would be used only for the purpose of the study and that participation was completely voluntary. There were no missing data in the submitted surveys: the electronic feature (Required) was selected to ensure the respondents did not skip an item. Therefore, all items of the survey had to be answered before submission.

In a later stage, following preliminary analysis of the survey data, in-person, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the consultants from the Deanship of Development and Quality. Several visits were made for informal discussions with the various consultants.

Data Analysis

After the administration of the survey, the quantitative data was processed using the "Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS, version 20)." The participants' perceptions on the survey items were analysed using various descriptive statistics, namely means, standard deviations, effect size, frequencies, and percentages. To compare variances of mean scores, t-test and Levene's test for equality of variances and ANOVA with the Scheffe´ post hoc test for multiple comparisons were used.

The survey responses were treated as continuous (interval) since the items were measured with a Likert-type scale of five likely alternatives to each item spanning from 1 to 5 (strongly agree=5 to strongly disagree=1) spaced by 'equal-appearing intervals. 'In like situations, the Likert-type scale items had means and variances which could be statistically analysed.

The qualitative interviews were coded and analysed manually with respect to theme and patterns so that they could be presented in an understandable manner. The entire data was first reviewed various times to look for themes related to the research questions, and then unnecessary data was taken out from the raw data. The reduced data was then broken into pieces, compiled, and displayed in an organized format to answer the research questions.

FINDINGS

Faculty members were asked to provide answers to five demographic questions about their gender, age, teaching experience, and academic rank.

Gender

Relative to gender, the means for females were higher than for males, as reported in Table

Gender	Frequency	Percentages	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Table 1 **MEANS, SDS,AND T-TEST RESULTS OF RESPONDENTS IN TERMS OF GENDER**							
Male	214	70.2	3.81	0.497	-5.201	303	0.000
Female	91	29.8	4.11	0.368			
Total	305	100.0					

Table 1 also provides the findings of the t-test analysis. They indicate that there was a statistically significant difference relative to gender in favour of female faculty (303)=-5.201, *p* =.000, d =.082, representing a moderate effect size. This indicates that the two genders perceived the impact of accreditation standards on QA and risk management in a different way.

Age

As shown in Table 2, findings revealed variations in means of the participants connected with age.

Age	Frequency	Percentages	Mean	Std. Deviation
Table 2 **MEANS, SDS, FREQUENCIES, AND PERCENTAGES OF THE RESPONDENTSRELATING TO AGE**				
Less than 30	14	4.6	3.78	.385
30-40	139	45.6	3.91	.526
41-50	117	38.4	3.96	.464
Above 50	35	11.5	3.71	.324
Total	305	100.0	3.90	.482

ANOVA test was applied to identify if statistically significant variations existed amidst means of the age categories. Table 3 shows that statistically significant differences amidst the age groups were found, $F(3, 301)=2.931$, $p =.034$, $\eta^2 =.028$, indicating a small effect size.

Table 3
ANOVA RESULTS OF THE PARTICIPANTSWITH RESPECT TO AGE

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.005	3	.668	2.931	.034
Within Groups	68.642	301	.228		
Total	70.647	304			

Scheffe´ post hoc test was then employed for multiple comparisons to determine the direction of the differences between the age categories. Results revealed a significant difference ($p\leq.05$) between faculty members aged 41-50 and those above 50. The respondents of the two age categories perceived the impact of accreditation standards on QA and risk management in different ways.

Teaching Experience

Table 4 reveals differences in means of the participants in regard to teaching experience.

Table 4
MEANS, SDS, FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGES OF FACULTY WITH REGARDS TO TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Teaching Experience	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Std. Deviation
Less than 5	39	12.8	3.84	.418
5-10	120	39.3	4.00	.558
11-15	95	31.1	3.92	.439
More than 15	51	16.7	3.70	.328
Total	305	100.0	3.90	.482

ANOVA test was applied to identify if the presence of variations amidst means of the experience categories was statistically significant. As shown in Table 5, there were statistically significant variations in years of teaching experience, $F(3, 301)=5.110$, $p =.002$, $\eta^2 =.048$, indicating a small effect size.

Table 5
ANOVA RESULTS OF THE PARTICIPANTS WITH REGARDS TO TEACHING EXPERIENCE

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.424	3	1.141	5.110	0.002
Within Groups	67.224	301	0.223		
Total	70.647	304			

Scheffe´ post hoc test was then utilized for multiple comparisons to identify the direction of the differences between categories. Results demonstrated that faculty members with 5-10 and 11-15 years of experience were significantly different from the other experience brackets ($p<.05$).

Academic Rank

Regarding academic rank, results displayed in Table 6 show variances in the mean values of faculty based on academic rank.

Table 6
MEANS, SDS, FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGES OF FACULTY BASED ON ACADEMIC RANK

	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Std. Deviation
Full Professor (Prof. Dr.)	10	3.3	4.06	.496
Associate Professor	16	5.2	3.66	.650
Assistant Professor	151	49.5	4.08	.435
Lecturer	128	42.0	3.71	.427
Total	305	100.0	3.90	.482

ANOVA test was utilized to determine if the presence of variations amidst means of the experience categories were statistically significant. As shown in Table 7, there were statistically significant variations among faculty based on academic rank, F (3, 301)=17.589, p =.000, η^2 =.149, indicating a moderate effect size.

Table 7
ANOVA RESULTS OF FACULTY BASED ON ACADEMIC RANK

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	10.537	3	3.512	17.589	.000
Within Groups	60.110	301	.200		
Total	70.647	304			

Scheffé post hoc test was then utilized for multiple comparisons to identify the direction of the differences between academic ranks. Results demonstrated that assistant professors were significantly different from the other experience brackets ($p<.05$).

Impact of Accreditation Standards on Qa and Risk Management

Regarding the faculty members' perceptions towards the impact of accreditation standards on QA and risk management in HEIs, means and standard deviations were computed. Table 8 shows results based on the categories in descending order in accordance with the values of means.

Table 8
MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF THE FACULTY MEMBERS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS THE ACCREDITATION STANDARDS IMPACT ON QA AND RISK MANAGEMENT.

Categories	Mean	Std. Deviation
Impact on:		
Program management	4.00	.477
Mission and goals	3.98	.548
Teaching and learning	3.96	.623
Teaching staff	3.89	.719
Risk management	3.83	.614
Learning resources, facilities, and equipment	3.78	.827
Students	3.72	.592

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, there was evidence of commonalities between the participants in relation to the impact of accreditation in HEIs. Nevertheless, there was even some degree of variation among them. This section presents the discussion about the perceptions of the teaching staff at PSAU about the impact of accreditation standards on QA and risk management in HEIs. The section additionally discusses the differences in perceptions held by the participating faculty members towards the impact of accreditation with respect to demographic characteristics including gender, age, teaching experience, and academic rank.

The statistical analysis of the survey revealed that faculty perceptions of the impact of accreditation standards on QA and risk management significantly differed by gender. Female faculty members were likely to rate the impact of accreditation more positively than were male respondents. Surprisingly, despite the fact that the conditions for both genders are similar, significant differences existed between males and females. This result is consistent with other research on the perceptions of the impact of QA in HEIs, demonstrating that females have a more positive perspective of QA (Cardoso et al., 2013; Manito's et al., 2015). A possible explanation

may be that "quality may be regarded by women as a means of power, equitable participation, inclusion and enhancement" (Manatos et al., 2015).

The results from the descriptive statistics also showed significant differences among faculty members aged 41-50 and those above 50. The respondents in the two age categories perceived the impact of accreditation standards on QA and risk management in different ways. Those in the age group 41-50 perceived the impact of accreditation more positively than the other age groups, while faculty above 50 were the least positive of all the other groups. It is possible that faculty members in the age group of 41-50 started their job in conjunction with the application of QA standards, so they adapted to these tasks, which became part of their routine work. In addition, this age group has developed more experience than the younger age groups and has fewer administrative responsibilities than colleagues over 50. On the other hand, those above 50 may tend to focus more on administrative responsibilities and research work than younger groups, which probably leaves them with insufficient time for quality work. Another reason is that they may be less adaptable to working on QA practices.

Furthermore, findings of the study indicated that the respondents 'perceptions of the impact of accreditation differed significantly by teaching experience in favour of faculty who had 5 to 10 and 11 to 15 years of experience. Based on the means, those two categories in the middle ranges of experience perceived the impact of accreditation to be more positive than faculty members with the least and most experience. The discussion mentioned above for faculty members in the age group 41-50 likely applies to those in the middle ranges of experience. Also, what brings the less and more experienced faculty together could be that they find the process as sheer extra workload (Cheng 2011; Shah & Jarzabkowski, 2013). This result is also in unison with academic rank, which was also statistically significant in favour of those in the middle academic rank (assistant professors) having perceived the impact of accreditation to be more positive than those in the other academic ranks, whether the lower rank (lecturer) or the higher ranks.

Hence, we can conclude that there is, to some extent, a relationship between faculty members of middle age, moderate experience, and middle academic ranks in that they perceive academic accreditation to have a positive impact on QA in HEIs. By contrast, the older or younger the age, the more or less the work experience, and the higher or lower the academic rank, the less likely they are to view QA practices positively.

Impact on Program Management

Impact on program management appeared to be the highest rated category according to the participants' responses. Most faculty members agreed that QA procedures for accreditation have led to the availability of explanatory handbooks such as student hand book, faculty handbook, program handbook, academic counselling handbook, internship manual, graduation projects manual, and more. Interviews with an academic consultant for the Deanship of Development and Quality revealed that three manuals were developed during the preparation period for accreditation, namely the QA manual, the key performance indicators (KPIs) manual, and the strategic plan manual.

Similarly, the provision of strategic planning to achieve future goals was perceived by the participants as an achievement for the university. In an interview with the head of the Strategic Plan Committee, he stated that the university had implemented the first version of the strategic plan between 2012 and 2019, and that the second version of the plan had started in 2019. For him, because of adopting sound strategic planning, the quality of all academic programs began to improve years before obtaining the institutional accreditation from the NCAAA.

The third highest rated item was the initiation of program committees. Each program had committees consisting of four to five teaching staff that are responsible for the organization of internal QA. The program committee sets and implements development plans in its field and submits a report on its accomplishments to the head of the department. (Al-Yahya & Abdel-Halim, 2012) emphasize that in order to serve the accreditation issues, several committees should be established, the most important of which is "a program quality assurance committee to establish a quality assurance system" (p. 166).

Based on faculty responses, QA procedures for accreditation have also led to developing KPIs to measure the performance of the university and programs. The academic consultant for the Deanship of Development and Quality explained that the university uses 52 KPIs to track and monitor quality. The consultant indicated that the KPIs are divided into two types: 17 mandatory indicators from the NCAAA that apply to all programs and 35 indicators prepared by the university that may apply depending on the academic program. As indicated by (Humaidi & Said, 2011), KPIs are useful in comparing the target and actual performance relating to effectiveness, efficiency, and quality.

Furthermore, the respondents strongly agreed on the positive impact of the application of surveys and feedback mechanisms with students, staff, and employers. This is consistent with previous literature reporting the effectiveness of using different types of surveys as a tool for collecting information to improve QA in HEIs (Amaral et. al., 2013; Aziz & Tille, 2018). Based on interviews, the statistical consultant for the Deanship of Development and Quality believed that surveys reveal issues that were not expected and would not have been obtained from other data sources. The consultant indicated that the university applies 23 surveys distributed in the various areas of quality standards.

Initiation of benchmarking and emphasis on accountability to stakeholders received the lowest rank by faculty, although they still held relatively high mean values (M=3.60). The development and quality consultant states that the university has established benchmarking against local HEIs, and work is underway on benchmarking with international universities. He indicates that benchmarking was vital in the processes of assessment and improvement through the comparison of practices with other institutions. This is in line with Do 2018 who believes that benchmarking has proved to be an effective QA tool in higher education. However, it appears that some respondents to the survey were dissatisfied with the level, perhaps because benchmarking is still in a very early development stage at the university. Another possible reason is that because benchmarking relies on the willingness of benchmarking partners to exchange data, and if the institution decides to do so, it then decides which data to share (Coates & Radloff, 2014). In the context of accountability to stakeholders, one-third of the respondents felt that the university does not have strong accountability to stakeholders, maybe because sources of funding depend entirely on the government, which makes the satisfaction of outside sectors less important. The other reason may be that PSAU is still a new university and needs more time to achieve greater growth in accountability to external stakeholders.

Impact on Mission and Goals

Mission and goals seemed to be the second rated category according to the participants' responses. One of the most critical impacts reported by the participants is that QA procedures for accreditation have increased awareness among teaching staff of the mission and goals. Faculty also strongly agreed that QA procedures for accreditation have improved the mission and goals of the university and programs and made them consistent with each other. Interviews with a representative from the strategic plan team revealed that in the early stages of preparing for institutional accreditation, a team of faculty members, administrators, and community stakeholders met to review the mission and goals of the university. After that, the viewpoints of

stakeholders including faculty members, students, and partners from the community were surveyed over a period of two years, during which time the mission and goals were modified twice. This finding is consistent with the existing literature which has concluded that QA procedures for accreditation lead to development of the mission (Almuhammadi, 2017; Hladchenko, 2016; Moloi & Motaung, 2014).

The development and quality consultant emphasized that the continuous evaluation and periodic review of the missions of the programs have resulted in clear, appropriate, approved, and publicized missions that are consistent with the mission of the university. He also stated that the program goals are linked to their missions, consistent with the goals of the university, and described as being realistic and measurable. He also believes that the missions and goals of the programs guide all their operations and activities such as planning, decision-making, curriculum development, and so on. The consultant assumes that the participation of faculty members in developments of the mission and goals has significantly raised their awareness of the missions and goals at the level of the university, college, and programs. However, the accreditation body has rated awareness 3 out of 5;therefore, the university currently seeks to increase the level of awareness through a program that has been prepared to spread awareness of the stakeholders of the mission and goals.

Impact on Teaching and Learning

Impact on the teaching and learning category ranked third according to the respondents. They classified as a top advantage of QA procedures the availability of portfolios for the study courses that include full information about the courses. Similarly, (Al-Alawi et al., 2009) state that one important stage in the QA procedures is the review of "course portfolios, which are prepared by the course instructors and coordinator" (p. 67). A course portfolio contains a course report, course specifications, samples of students' exam papers, score statistics, and course syllabus distribution. The availability of course portfolios benefit the course developers and the teaching staff, so reference can be made for such courses as required later (El-Sobkey & Al-Sobayel, 2011) and can be used as an evaluation tool for QA (Leslie, 2012). Giving a closer look inside reports and specifications, one can find that individual courses document teaching strategies, course content, assessment methods, verification of credibility of students' results, distribution of grades, course learning outcomes and their assessment results, students 'evaluation of the quality of course, learning resources and facilities, difficulties and challenges, course improvement plan, action plan for next semester/year.

As a second impact on teaching and learning, conducting periodic academic program reviews was perceived by the respondents as a big advantage of QA procedures for accreditation. This result is in line with the literature reporting that continuous program reviews are compulsory to ensure quality (Bryha, 2017; Gade, 2019). Interviews with the academic consultant at the Deanship of Development and Quality revealed that as part of the QA procedures, periodic program reviews are established practices at PSAU. In addition, external reviewers are involved in the process to add objectivity to the QA practices. The reviews usually include the program annual report (once at the end of the academic year), the program specifications (once every four years, unless there is a change in the program), and the self-study report (once every three years, unless there is a change in the program).

In the third place, faculty members believed that greater focus is placed on the improvement of the quality of the educational process owing to the accreditation. An academic consultant for the Deanship of Development and Quality explained that because quality of education is achieved through an outcome-based education system, a specialized committee has been established at the university to formulate and review learning outcomes. He also explained that the work on QA standards has clearly contributed to raising the culture of quality in

education, as evidenced by the quality reports. This is in harmony with the findings of (Africano et al., 2019), who state that the core gains of the implementation of internal QA system in HEIs is the progress in teaching quality, student satisfaction and confidence, and satisfaction of stakeholders. In addition, (Tavares et al., 2017; Bloch et al., 2020) believed that the implementation of internal QA for accreditation increases teaching staff awareness of teaching quality needs in their universities.

Faculty also considered the provision of measurable learning outcomes for courses and programs as a major improvement. According to Cooper, et al., (as cited in Almuhaideb & Saeed, 2020), "there is a pressure from accreditation bodies on academicians to design measurable learning outcomes for the academic programs and courses" (p. 3). Faculty members are required to develop measurable learning outcomes related to knowledge and understanding, skills, and values, and they are required to develop an array of direct and indirect assessment methods to measure whether they are met. Then faculty should demonstrate alignment of course outcomes with program outcomes, as well as with the teaching strategies and assessment methods. A similar process is described by Schoepp, et al., (2016) who state that US accreditors implement a four-step assessment process to measure learning outcomes including: (1) creating outcomes; (2) providing occasions so that students can meet the expected outcomes; (3) assessing the achievement of the outcomes; and (4) utilizing the assessments findings for improvements.

According to the participants' perspectives, QA procedures for accreditation have led to updated coursework plans for the programs. Based on interviews, a member from the committee for revising coursework plans stated that, for several years before the accreditation, they had reviewed coursework plans for the programs to make sure that they best match their educational goals, fit the major, include all of the courses to complete the degree requirements, align with the future career path, and align with the National Qualifications Framework.

Impact on Teaching Staff

The impact on teaching staff category ranked fourth according to the respondents. Most of the participants thought positively about the engagement of faculty members in the development of internal QA. This result is supported by (Tavares et al., 2017), who notice that "the higher the involvement of teaching staff in the development of internal quality assurance, the more [QA practice] impacts positively on teaching and learning, according to academics' perceptions" (p. 6). In addition, (Tavares et al., 2017) found that involvement of faculty members in QA work increases awareness of teaching quality matters and emphasis on innovation in teaching and learning, which leads to improvements in the quality of the educational process.

The second highest rated item by the faculty members was that QA procedures for accreditation have led to availability of qualified academic staff. Based on the interviews, that is due to policies adopted by the university like implementing transparent and merit-based recruitment procedures, attracting qualified academic staff, providing scholarships for qualified students to study at international universities ranked within the top 200 universities, offering funding for research activities, adopting the job performance assessment charter, which consists of a set of smart goals aimed at raising performance efficiency and improving productivity, and holding training programs for continuing professional development of the teaching staff offered by the Deanship of Development and Quality, Deanship of Human Resources, and Deanship of Research.

The respondents agreed that QA processes contributed to a significant growth in research output. According to a consultant at the Deanship of Research, the provision of funds for research was a big influencing outcome that led to accreditation. The university provides a number of programs to support research that faculty members can benefit from, including: (1) new faculty research support, (2) SABIC research grants, (3) specialized research support

program, (4) research projects with global partnership, (5) community research support program, (6) authoring and translation support program, (7) support program for humanitarian research in English (8) researcher motivation program, and (9) research leadership program. Consequently, the number of papers published in the period between 2009-2019 jumped from only14 articles indexed in Web of Science or Scopus in 2009 to 2,295 articles indexed in Web of Science and 3,149 articles indexed in Scopus over the years leading up to 2019.

Impact on Risk Management

The participants considered reducing the risks resulting from the lack of human and financial resources as a major improvement. This is in line with the risk management plan applied by PSAU to ward off human and financial risks. In the case of human resources, the university achieves the preservation of human resources through the clarity of laws regulating work, application of the system of grievances of faculty and students, measuring the level of satisfaction of stakeholders periodically and identifying and addressing weaknesses, developing a sense of responsibility, and monitoring ill-considered employment. As for the risk of lack of financial resources, the university tackles this by searching for non-governmental sources of funding, generating funding for research from the private sector, and creating profit-making academic programs. Additionally, faculty members highly approved the reduction of educational risks in line with QA practices. This is consistent with what was planned and being implemented by the university in terms of risk management. These risks involve, for example, students' dropout, reduced employment opportunities, factors affecting completion rate, below-average-level performance, poor learning outcomes, malpractice and time waste, and decline in research output.

The relationship between risk management and QA in HEIs was indicated by previous studies. For example, (Maciejczak, 2016) states that the concept of risk management is displayed in QA of HEIs in different scope and scale, "being the driving force to develop the university's quality" (p. 93). Yokoyama (2018) posits that risk management shares commonalities with QA in relation to accountability. Also, (Coffey et al., 2018) point out that quality and risk management are core elements of high quality accurate and safe practices. (Gamage et al., 2020) confirm that, during covid-19, universities that had a risk management policy can maintain their quality and accountability.

Impact on Learning Resources, Facilities, and Equipment

Faculty members were confident that the university provides adequate resources and physical facilities to support the teaching and learning process. According to (Asiyai, 2020), the physical development of HEIs to match the standard of alike institutions around the world should be a priority. The university ensures in every semester through questionnaires, reports, and visits the availability of adequate physical and digital library facilities, internet connectivity in classrooms and everywhere on campus for faculty members and students, computer laboratories, lecture rooms equipped with the latest technology, safety requirements, qualified technicians and specialists, recreational facilities, and facilities and services accessible by those with special needs. However, based on interviews with a development and quality consultant, it has been revealed that during the visits of the accreditation body to the university, the university got a rating of 3.5 out of 5 for the availability of learning resources and facilities. The accreditation body had set a number of recommendations that must be taken into consideration, including ensuring that all the regional branches of the university are equal in terms of learning resources

and facilities, providing rooms for researchers in the library, raising the qualifications of the administrative staff in the library, increasing the number of staff in the library, increasing the number of equipment for extra-curricular activities, and improving the quality of equipment in the classrooms. The consultant added that an executive plan is being worked on to make all branches of the university equal to the HQ.

Impact on Students

Faculty members believed that the QA mechanisms adopted by PSAU resulted in more emphasis on students. This finding is in line with earlier studies confirming that QA practices improve students' learning (Crawford, 2015; Kigozi, 2020). In fact, the student is the primary target of the educational process, so all that is involved in the QA processes aims to develop their performance and enable them to compete in the employment opportunities. Akinmusuru (as cited in (Asiyai, 2020) argues that the best way to assure quality in higher education is to put more emphasis on students' learning, for they are main actors in the educational system. According to (Tabaku, 2018), independent QA bodies directly express the need to place focus on students' experience as one of the assessment criteria. Tabaku believes that "the experience of the students with the university should be a key issue that performance indicators need to address" (p. 800).

It was reported from the respondents that the QA policies of PSAU have led to transparent and objective admission policies that suit program requirements. (Sharaf & Helal, 2020) stress that it is the institutions' responsibility to comply with the admission policy to secure fairness and equal opportunities "to guarantee a high level of higher education and the quality of its outputs and harmony with the labour market" (p. 152). Interviews confirmed that the accreditation body considered that among the strengths of the university was the existence of admission policies that specify the procedures of student selection and the minimum acceptance criteria, which should be fair, clear, inclusive, and widely publicized. More importantly, the university adheres to the defined admission criteria, as indicated by student records.

Furthermore, the analysis of the respondents' perspectives showed that they highly approved the involvement of students in assessment. According to (Tarkhanova, 2014), involvement of students in assessment of the educational process is connected with the search for ways of improving education quality. Similarly, (Nikanorov & Volkova, 2017) point out that the European Students' Union actively engages students in the assessment of the internal QA of institutions, for the purpose of improving the quality of education. (O'Neill et al., 2020) state that engaging students in assessment and feedback shifts emphasis from "assessment of learning towards assessment for and as learning" (p. 4). Based on interviews, PSAU applies six types of surveys with students to elicit their feedback on quality of handbooks and regulations, facilities and equipment, digital library, library and learning resources, mission of the university, and academic programs and courses.

Limitations and Future Research

The findings of this study may be liable to certain limitations that should be considered in future research. First, only faculty members' perceptions were investigated in this study. Further research could delve into other stakeholders' perspectives such students, and the results can be compared. Second, the study was confined to a sample at only one university. Therefore, conducting confirmatory studies at diverse universities is needed, thus resulting in a more representative sample of the entire population.

CONCLUSIONS

Given the importance of QA on HEIs, The National Accreditation Agency (NCAAA) was established in Saudi Arabia from the standpoint that an improvement in QA procedures would ultimately lead to improvements in academic programs and would lead to tangible gains in the quality of higher education. In this context, QA standards have been prepared, and encouraged by the universities to be implemented to make sure that the knowledge and skills that students gain from attending college are valuable, both to the student and to society. Regular visits to universities are being made by the NCAAA to scrutinize and report on their internal processes for maintaining quality, and to ensure that a program meets at least minimum standards. The main priority is to ensure that accreditation and QA would benefit stakeholders and focus more on enhancement, rather than simply be a response to a trendy practice.

This study showed that PSAU reaped clear benefits by implementing an internal QA system that led to regional accreditation from the NCAAA. The implementation of QA has acted as a catalyst for continuous improvement that helped the university to develop a permanent QA system to ensure the continuous enhancement of quality and put emphasis on improving the teaching and learning process. Academics commitment was substantial in the process for internal QA to become a continuous integral element of the university's system as a whole, which has definitely cascaded positively on the QA standards currently in place at the university.

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