

Faculty Members' Perceptions toward Accreditation Process at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Indonesia: A Research Agenda

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Abstract: This paper reviews current research on perceptions of faculty members toward an accreditation process at public university in Riau Province, Indonesia. This issue has been widely addressed by among academics and scholars in higher education sector since their perceptions toward an accreditation process intimately involved in the implementation of educational policies and informs the public whether the institution has met the standards established by national accrediting agency or not. Then, the aim of this paper is to develop a research agenda for the emergence of faculty members' perceptions on an accreditation process in public universities in Indonesia Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This is done by reviewing research and relevant literature on perceptions of faculty members, policies on accreditation model, top management strategies and challenges, and its benefits for institutional and government as well. The paper shows that there are a number of key debates in the general literature on the perceptions of faculty members to an accreditation process. However, this claim is still in early stage and needs to be investigated empirically. Limitation of this study in term of the source of data for literature review is based on secondary rather than primary sources. Obviously, this paper proposes a research agenda from the empirical findings and theory building to academics, accrediting agency and government.

Keywords: Perceptions, accreditation, faculty members, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), research agenda

Introduction

For a developing country such as Indonesia, there is a need to create a breakthrough for enhancing higher education development, one of the efforts made is through accreditation for quality assurance to higher institution. As governments in most parts of the world have considered their agenda for higher education over the last few decades, issues of quality assurance and quality enhancement have been a major focus of attention (Khawas, 1998). Hou et al. (2013) argue that all Asian countries have developed their own quality assurance systems by setting up national accreditors whose principal role is to accredit local higher education institutions. The quality of higher education can be controlled through internal and external control of academic programs, government regulations, market mechanisms, and accreditation. Indonesian Regulation Number 12 in 2012 (Act No.12, 2012) has become the main principle for the internal and external quality assurance system for higher education institutions (HEIs).

Quality assurance can be defined as all kind of deliberate and systematic activities having capacity to assure to maintain and develop standards, science and quality at higher education (Peterson, 1997). Both public and private universities have autonomy to control their internal and external quality assurance in assuring the quality of teaching-learning, academic research program, administrative staff, services to community and graduates. This academic control is stressed by Brodjonegoro (2002) that the five pillars of Indonesian higher education management, i.e., quality, autonomy, accountability, accreditation, and evaluation would help institutions in carrying their tasks to provide qualified manpower and produce knowledge. Accreditation is a kind of “quality control” for higher education because it informs the public whether the institution has met the standards established by the particular accrediting body (Brittingham, 2008; Eaton, 2003, 2010).

The regulation has officially declared to university to conduct an external control for quality assurance through accreditation process done by a national accrediting agency. Chaiyaphumthanachoka et al. (2016) assert that many institutions of higher education seek institutional accreditation through either a regional or national accrediting agency. The National Accreditation Agency for Higher Education (NAA-HE) is the official agency to conduct an accreditation both for institutional and program level (NAA-HE, 2017). This is done to ensure that all standard, criteria and qualification have met as stipulated in the applied regulation and all study programs will be accredited regularly by the agency. According to Eaton (2003, 2010), one of the roles of accrediting agencies is the continuous review of programs, and Lewis (2016), it communicates to prospective students and parents the quality of the institution, and Brittingham (2008), accreditation has the most power and influence because it is considered the quality control of higher education. Evidently, accreditation was highly focused on non-secular, religious institutions as establishing HEIs became a trend among religious congregations (Conchada et al., 2015).

This study is important for higher education practitioners, academics, policy makers whose institutions are going through accreditation and enhancement processes. Several studies have explored the impact of accreditation on program quality (Suanders, 2007 in Alamoud, 2017). However, only a few studies have explored faculty perceptions of accreditation purposes and processes in higher education systems (Provezis, 2010; Tsevelragchaa, 2012). It is apparent that faculty members’ perspectives in accreditation are essential as they are intimately involved in the implementation of educational policies (Tully, 2015).

In summary, this paper proposes a research agenda that draws from the perceptions of faculty members toward an accreditation process, top management strategies and challenges, and its benefits for institutional and government. To obtain the intended result of this study, a review of research is presented to introduce the main ideas, relevant literature, and research based results on those issues. From this study, it is expected to yield significant benefits and contributions for academics, educational practitioners and government as well.

Faculty Members’ Perception To Accreditation Processes

Perception is the set of processes whereby an individual becomes more aware of certain environment. Each individual, then, interprets that awareness through certain unique processes (Griffin & Pustay, 2009). It is, hence, a sensory information mode related to abstract or concrete objectives in the external world, and it is a social and psychological phenomenon, which can be controlled and directed with external intervention (Inceoglu, 2000). The primary element of perception is attention and comment (Yelkikalan et al., 2006). In addition, faculty perceptions is defined as the results from a process or set of processes by which faculty members give meanings to institutional activities and initiatives within their institutions (Saks & Johns, 2011). Pham (2014) concluded that “the positive impact of the process on staff’s awareness of quality assurance, and the perception to accreditation is a catalyst for improvements” (p.74).

Saunders (2007) indicated that research is needed to explore internal stakeholders’ (e.g., faculty, administrators, and quality representative) perceptions on accountability practices such as in the accreditation process. Regarding to this view, Haywood et al. (2011) notes that the faculty can make improvements in curriculum, instruction, and student support services with the support of institutional decision makers who place emphasis on assessment as a core concept of scholarly practice. Institutions’ representatives who experienced in the successful accreditation process and its implementation as cited by faculty involvement as a key factor of this success (Ford, Covino, Robinson, & Seaman, 2014). Connell and Klem (2000) stated that the successfulness of any change or improvement initiative depends, to a higher degree, on how significant stakeholders (e.g., faculty) perceive the initiative’s plausibility, possibility, relevance, and meaningfulness. Faculty with different degrees of involvement in accreditation processes often hold different views, values, and assumption regarding these processes (Calma, 2014). Haywood et al. (2012) that “faculty involvement in assessment work may enhance their awareness and knowledge of institutional assessment initiatives” (p.12).

Accreditation Model To Academic Study Program

Depending on the accreditation model, the evaluation criteria considered will not be the same. However, all of the models studied are related to the achievements of university degree programs in different aspects (students, faculty members, infrastructure, society, etc.). For this reason, Pinedo et al. (2012) confirmed that a university can

obtain accreditation of its university degree programs using different models or accreditation of one program using more than one model referring to the institution's strategy objectives and its mission, vision and values, as well as the national legislation in force and the context in which it operates. Therefore, Alain (2015) emphasized that many academic institutions started the process of accreditation from an independent organization either nationally or internationally to declare openly quality assurance.

Indeed, accreditation contributes to achieve the institutions goals, meeting the needs of different stakeholders i.e., students, faculty, employers, society and other constituents (Romero, 2008). Moreover, accreditation has an added value to the faculties and staffs of accredited schools by attracting good quality of students, providing challenging research atmosphere, besides to global recognition. In the same token, Nguyen and Ta (2018) reported their study that accreditation influences most of the university's management activities, including programs, teaching activities, lecturers, supporting staff, learners and facilities. They, then, strengthened an argument on the influence of accreditation which contributes significantly to enhancing the university's quality of teaching, learning, research and management. Most importantly, NAA-HE (2017, p.2) emphasizes that accreditation has been widely used as the main requirements and media to conduct the students and staff mobility, recognitions, quality assurance systems, curriculum, certificate of program completion, degree, and standard competences.

The development of quality assurance system has long been initiated in Indonesia since 1996. Ahza (2012) has also noted that a new paradigm of HEIs' management, focusing on quality, was used to promote various models of study programs or academic unit's development programs according to the maturity level of each study program or the relevant academic unit. The new paradigm HEIs management consists of quality, autonomy, accountability, evaluation, and accreditation which subsequently became the main pillars of the long-term development programs for Indonesian HEIs. Standards and accreditation are closely linked in the sense that accreditation is an assessment against the criteria established according to the national higher education standards. Moreover, in reference to Act No. 2 year 2012, it is clearly noticed that there have been seven new criteria or standards of the accreditation must be fulfilled by institution and program of study. They are (1) Vision, Mission, Objectives and Strategy; (2) Governance, Leadership, Management and, Quality Assurance System; (3) Students (including students' affairs) and Graduates; (4) Human Resources Management (Faculty and staff members); (5) Curriculum, Learning Approach and processes, and Academic Atmosphere; (6) Finance, Facilities & Infrastructures, and Information/ICT Management; and (7) Research, Community services and Collaborations (NAA-HE, 2017). In addition, study programs which are set up after the system accreditation or have already been subject to internal quality assurance in accordance with the requirements of the accredited system, are therefore accredited. Most importantly, Sheridan (2010) affirmed that an accreditation models tend to put more emphasis on the use of assessment criteria and making judgments about whether or not the assessment resulted in positive outcomes such as awarding accreditation or registration.

Management for Study Program Accreditation at HEIs

Management for accreditation at certain faculty or university may involve some strategic plans, challenges and policies, and benefits of the accreditation as well. Tastimur et al. (2016) state that the quality assessment in higher education is a tradition which has evolved as societal expectations and demands placed upon higher education institutions have changed. In addition, Sagenmüller (2018) affirmed that a well-prepared strategic plan can be the key for your university's accreditation, because this will deliver the tools, variables and leading vision that are needed to exhibit the required evidence to prove that a higher education institution is actually achieving the goals that have been defined in its mission and vision, using the paths, process and principles that they stand for. He, then, notes that at least there are five strategic plans for a better accreditation program such as mission statements, values, visions, goa and objectives, and implementation plan.

Yüksel (2013, p.63) strengthens that "the accreditation project covered a wide variety of programs and higher education institutions". This is because the accreditation will bring about the impact and challenges to both program and institution. The importance of the accreditation both for institution and program will affect also to national education challenges and competitiveness. According to Zetner et al. (2007) in Alamoud (2017) content that accreditation is an important distinction of education quality in the realm of colleges and universities. Besides, Conchada (2015) firmly argues that the higher education institutions (HEIs) play a vital role in preparing a country to be globally competitive through the skilled human capital resources it produces. This is so vital to take a note that an accreditation is one way that HEIs keep themselves in check with the standards. Regarding to the process of program accreditation at university, Gilbert (2010) assert that the accreditation process provides an opportunity for faculty to review program data and program design and advocate for meaningful practices. Moreover, Pinedo et al. (2012) argues that the accreditation of university degree programs is a continuous process that seeks to offer a high degree of reliability that an accredited university degree program fulfills the quality requirements of the different stakeholder groups. Ard et al. (2017) also notes to the benefit of an accreditation, "it promotes professional and educational mobility for the graduates from an accredited program" (p. 86).

Moreover, by Law, accreditation is compulsory, and accreditation will become a license to open a study program. Unaccredited programs are not allowed to produce certificate for their graduates and their graduates will

not be recognized by Directorate General of Higher Education, Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education, Indonesia (NAA-HE, 2017). Indeed, accreditation is road map of quality that develops innovation and enhancing continuous improvement (Romero, 2008). Those are sometimes enforcing top management of faculty and university to set up, take wise decision and policies and apply all capabilities to yield an excellent accreditation for program of study and institution.

Opportunities For Future Investigation

Accreditation should be a priority for an institution because it can ensure the success of the university in multiple areas (Alstete, 2004). Managements for accreditation both at program and institutional level have been a very vital issue to academics, scholars and educational practitioners to conduct scientific research on how accreditation done by internal and external agency could impact and contribute toward betterments of programs and university as a whole besides fulfilling standards governed by implemented regulations. This is of course in line with the quality assurance system that all programs have to meet as required standards and accredited by authorized accreditation agency. Nyuyen (2016) stressed that “quality assurance has been a recent phenomenon and extensive effort and resources have been invested mainly into accreditation as an important educational reform at the national level” (p.6). Overall, countries with improvement driven systems tend to place more emphasis on the operation of internal quality systems and self-reviews, and there is considerable common ground with external reviews. However, Sheridan (2010, p.33) notes that the improvement-oriented systems tend to report the results of external reviews in terms of recommendations and suggestions for improvement.

In responding this issue, there have been some studies in terms of an accreditation e.g Lewis (2016), perceptions of university faculty regarding accreditation; Yuksel (2013), graduate students’ perceptions of standards and accreditation in Higher Education; Chaiyaphumthanachok et al. (2016), indicators’ development for accreditation of teacher education program; Alain (2015), evaluating process of accreditation for accounting program: issues and challenge; and Silva et al. (2017), higher education policy: a case study on quality assessment towards a model of university management. However, conducting another scientific research in these relevant areas, but in different perspectives is still very important. Thus, there are some opportunities for future investigation in areas of accreditation including:

1. To explore the faculty member’s perspectives regarding to the process of accreditation for study programs.
2. To investigate the strategies and policies applied by faculty in terms of accreditation process for the study programs.
3. To find out the challenges and benefits of the accreditation for faculty and university.

By reviewing those relevant literatures, paying a great attention to some crucial phenomena in public universities in Indonesia and possibilities to do a scientific research, public and private universities in Riau Province, Indonesia will be determined as location of this study in coming future.

Implication Of Perceptions To Accreditation Process

Several studies have explored the impact of accreditation on program quality (Saunders, 2007). The impact of an accreditation has on the perception of the institution, programs, and the connection to program review is invaluable (Alsete, 2004; Dressel, 197; Hendrick et al. 2010; Jackson et al. 2010). After receiving accreditation, institutions then need to adjust their focus either in academic areas, university management, human resources, or teaching facilities. For institutions that have been accredited previously, the emphasis is often on maintaining the accreditation (Jackson et al., 2010). Moreover, another scholar gives view on prominent aims of the accreditation such a Jacobs (2005), has reported from this study that “the essential purpose of the accreditation process is to provide a professional judgment as to the quality of the educational institution or program offered and to encourage continual improvement thereof” (p.8).

Moreover, the professional and regional accreditation agencies have typically been the standard arbiter of academic quality for programs and institutions (Rhodes, 2012). Impacts toward the study program’s accreditation as Lewis (2016) stressed that, it is not surprisingly, based on the research and the importance of accreditation, faculty at an accredited business school have a lower teaching load compared with those at a non-accredited program. Faganel et al. (2010) affirmed that “students’ perceptions thus provide important information for lecturers if learners’ needs are to be fulfilled. An assessment of the quality of teaching programs comes at a time when the concern for quality in higher education is probably at an all-time high” (pp.245-246). Hendrick et al. (2010) asserted that there may also be a difference in the type of faculty at accredited versus non-accredited institutions. Any difference as resulted from and related to accreditation system is still remaining in similar purposes that is meeting predetermined standards and/or required criteria and improvements to quality of programs.

Thus, this research is expected to give significant contributions related stakeholders especially for an accreditation process to faculty members who intimately involved in a study program accreditation. Therefore, this study will be contributing to some areas, as follows:

1. Academics
A scientific study on this field could promote the academics to have better perceptions on accreditation particularly for the purposes of proactive involvements, arranging applicable strategic plans, facing academic challenges and obtaining its long benefits.
2. Accrediting Agency
Accreditation is not only seen as to fulfill the required standards but also will contribute to the improvement of higher education program and policies, and upgrading professional human resources as a whole.
3. Government
Government plays a pivotal role to ensure that academic program, professional human resources, teaching facilities and managements for higher education are running on right track as ruled by regulations by means of an assessment and accreditation to program of study and institutional level.

Conclusion

This paper has presented number of the review of research and relevant literature on the perceptions of faculty members to accreditation process at HEIs in Indonesia. Many investigations and opportunities for future studies could be done related in this study. Thus, result of this paper provided the framework of perceptions toward an accreditation, strategic plans, challenges and policies, and benefits of accreditation which it will be become a research agenda. Then, there is strong preliminary evidence that perceptions of faculty members toward an accreditation process can bring major benefits for the improvement of quality assurance. In addition, proposed theoretical framework underpinning this study that authors review above provide a useful first step in defining the general approaches, capabilities and research agendas of this scientific work.

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