

ACCREDITATION OF INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING IN A GLOBAL ERA: PROSPECTS, CHALLENGES, AND IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

Accreditation is a process through which institutions of higher learning are certified for meeting standards comparable to other institutions of similar category worldwide. In a global context, institutions of higher learning, and the program they offer are compared to international standards for meeting criteria set to train personnel to boost the world economy, promote multicultural society and serve in a global world political arena. The individual learner faces a challenging context of comparing his or her identity with the national, regional and global ones, abilities, values, cultures, and lifestyles. To meet this challenge educational systems around the world have to shift from traditional teaching strategies, and impress transform to digital methods encompassing the ever increasing developmental strategies. Thus, this study aims at addressing accreditation of institutions of higher learn in a global era its prospects, challenges, and implications. The methodology used in this study was descriptive narrative in which ideas in the literature reviewed from books, journals, and internet sources were internalized and interpreted. The two fold purposes of the study were: firstly to buttress the challenges emanating from the accreditation of institutions of higher learning and their programs embodied in the fact that while globalization agenda seeks to harmonize the standards across the board, institutions seek to advance their diversified visions, missions and philosophies and what happens to the institutional identity is of paramount importance to reckon with; secondly, the global arena encourages the virtual universities and virtual libraries with less physical facilities including lecture halls and libraries. Therefore, it remains a challenge of what would the accreditation process anchor on and uphold when there are no comparable facilities of virtual learning to traditional institutions of higher learning and their demonstration of quality teaching in observable, verifiable and quantified environment. Results reveal that as the world plans to operate a global economy, global political arena, and global cultural values across borders, the eminent development of global education to inculcate the global world view is paramount. This behooves international processes of accrediting institutions offering higher education and their programs for international recognition and fitness to job markets. Fundamental to this is the paradigm shift from institutional and organizational vision mission and philosophy of education to the global ones; and it is recommended that organizations and institutions running higher education need to fully understand and review the facets they stand for and compare and contrast them with accreditation criteria and make decisions to either live or die for; and to put up structures in the organizations and institutions which review their roles based on their vision, mission and philosophy for which they were established and continue operating in a global setting.

Key words: Accreditation, Education, Global Education, Globalization, Institutions of Higher learning, Quality Assurance.

Introduction

Accreditation is a process whereby accrediting agencies including ministries of education in various countries verify the quality of institutions of learning in conformity to the institutional and national vision, mission, philosophy and standards. Its purpose is to ensure the public that programs offered by institutions meet the purpose for which the offering institution and

nation stand for. It also ensure that institution keep on improving their programs and services to meet market demands of the skills needed in the 21st Century when countries have recognized their interdependency in aspects of global economy, technology, political governance, and cultural value orientations. In such a scenario it has become imperative for every country and region to establish accrediting agencies to ensure that products of institutions of higher learning are in



the process of acquiring the desired knowledge, skills, values and technology relevant serve in various institutions in the global society. The purpose of this study therefore was to explain the interplay of accreditation of institutions of higher learning as they impact on the enhancement of global economy, global political cooperation, and global cultural integration. The study used a descriptive narrative method in which the reviewed literature was the source of information.

Understanding the role of accreditation of institutions of higher learning in the era of globalization explains the need for human and material resources needed to energize the worldwide movement towards economic, financial, trade, and communications integration that need stable political institutions and compatible cultural values. This is because globalization implies the opening of local and nationalistic perspectives to a broader outlook of an interconnected and interdependent world with free transfer of capital, goods, and services across national frontiers.

Accreditation

The Meaning and Implications of Accreditation

The term “accreditation” is difficult to define because different countries use it in different ways. According to the American usage, accreditation is the process of identifying and assuring of quality. It is a process by which an educational institution (or an academic department) provides information to an outside body that independently evaluates its worth or quality performance. It publicly attests to the worth of an educational institution and its academic programs (El-Khawas, 2001; Martin & Stella, 2007; Brittingham, et al., 2010).

According to the Kenyan usage, “Accreditation is the process by which a government or a quality Assurance agency evaluates the quality of a higher educational institution as a whole or specific educational program in order to formally recognize it as having met certain pre-determined criteria or standards. The result of this process is usually the awarding of status of recognition, and sometimes awarding a license to operate within a time limited validity.” (Commission for Higher Education, August 2008).

Accreditation is a self-regulatory mechanism of the education community and plays a significant role in fostering confidence in the educational enterprise. Accreditation is based on the “self-evaluation process and

the actual observation of experts of its vision, mission, philosophy, functions, operations, resources and plans to maintain minimum standards, enhance institutional effectiveness, and provide inter-institutional recognition” (AAA Handbook, 2005, p. ii).

Purpose of Accreditation

Merriam-Webster’s *Dictionary*, describes the purpose of accreditation to be the certification of the recognition of an educational institution to have maintained and conformed to standards that qualify its graduates for admission to higher or more specialized institutions or for professional practice (Webster’s Dictionary, 1983). Accreditation also serves as an evaluation process that assists the institutions of higher learning to improve on the quality of education offered in order to meet global demands. The Accreditation of an institution signifies that the institution has a purpose appropriate to supply educational needs of those in its constituency and has the resources, programs, and services sufficient to accomplish the institution’s goals (AAA handbook, 2005; Brittingham, et al., 2010).

Apart from checking the maintenance of standards and quality, Ezell (2005) noted that “accreditation also establishes a benchmark, which eases the transition or move from one accredited school to another and the acceptance of academic records from each. It also provides a legitimate base for graduates to enter the workforce” (p. 1).

Types of Accreditations

There are two major types of accreditation offered to institutions, namely institutional and program accreditation.

(a) Institutional Accreditation. Institutional accreditation is recognition given to an institutional to meet minimum standards of offering quality Education of a given level. These standards include, vision, mission, philosophy, strategic plans, governance, personnel, financial resources, infrastructure, physical facilities including library, lecturer rooms, laboratories, offices, and technology (Fonthal, 2015; Brittingham, et al., 2010). Institutional accreditation is usually done by national accrediting agencies such as ministry of education or commissions dealing with quality assurance. There are regional and international

accrediting agencies which could accredit institutional that need recognition at higher levels.

in accordance with educational standards.

(b) Program accreditation. Brittingham et al. (2010) explain that program accreditation is a process of checking on the quality and credibility of individual academic programs offered by an institution. Generally program accreditation is done by professionally oriented experts and accrediting bodies. The purpose of program accreditation is to allow professionals in a given field to check and make a judgment about the educational quality. The whole program of an institution or part of it can be accredited. For example, programs such as health sciences, nutrition, teaching, and accounting are usually accredited by their own specialized councils or agencies possessing institutional accreditation. Program accreditation is also called specialized accreditation.

Benefits of Accreditation

The accreditation process described above, according to Brittingham et al. (2010, p.2), has the following significant benefits to institutions of learning:

1. Accreditation buildings and encourages confidence in the clients that an institution and its program offerings are fair and accurate based on the evaluation of experts and as endorsed by government agencies.
2. Assures that a neutral, external party has reviewed the quality of education provided and has found it to be satisfactory, based upon appropriate peer expertise based on clearly defined criteria.
3. Confirms that institutions and programs have processes in place to meet changes in thinking within the academia and in the public's expectations;
4. Assists with transfer of credits among institutions or admission to graduate school, with student mobility more likely to be successful among accredited institutions as compared to unaccredited institutions.
5. Aids with entrance to a profession, when a particular field may require certification to have obtained from an accredited program and/or institution.
6. Signals prospective employers that an educational program has met widely accepted

Globalization

Definition of Globalization

Globalization implies the opening of local and internationalistic perspectives to a broader outlook of an interconnected and interdependent world with free transfer of capital, goods, and services across national frontiers. It seeks to fulfill the purpose of the worldwide movement towards integration of global economic, financial, trade, political cooperation and human resource exchange with mutual benefits through the give and take process (Al-Rodhan, 2006).

Global Education

Global education is central to economic, social and political cooperation that could lead to nations pulling to towards the reduction of poverty, inequality, social mobility and political integration. Higher education system is a process through which the youth are socialised into the desired global village (Lauder et al., 2006).

In some colleges, it was found out that global forces, such as international economies, international political struggles and their consequences, and global communication systems, do affect these institutions. These forces are influential in altering college behaviors, including changes to institutional mission and institutional structures. That is why colleges are increasingly oriented to the marketplace, more responsive to public demands and preferences (Levin, 1999).

Global Economy

According to IMF (2009), global economic is the increasing economic integration and interdependence of national, regional and local economies across the world through a rapid increase in cross-border movement of goods, service, technology and capital.

Economic globalization comprises the globalization of production, markets, competition, technology, and corporations and industries. Current globalization trends can be largely accounted for by developed economies integrating with less developed economies by means of foreign direct investment, the reduction of trade barriers as well as other economic reforms and, in many cases, immigration (IMF, 2009).



Culture and Globalization

Culture refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving. Culture is learned in a group and is transmitted from one generation to the next through adaptive and social heritage (Tulio, 2000).

School systems do connect local knowledge, skills and experience to a wider increasing knowledge, skills and technology that bring local and international realities together to create integrated global networks of relationships to impact values, morals, skills and competencies that transcend national boundaries and economies (Suarez-Irozco et al., 2004).

Advancements in information technology and the mass privatization of higher education across the world are working together to create a culturally diverse international student population. New programs are being designed and delivered to satisfy local and international needs worldwide. New certifications are being conferred to the institutions of higher learning through a process of accreditation. Educational providers and students are moving across borders benchmarking, communicating essential elements of teaching and learning, and joining the work force in the global environment (Rovai et al., 2008).

According to Ghosh (2011) and UNESCO 2002 cultural exchange is becoming more frequent from nations of East Asia, Africa and South America but Western countries are still the main exporters of cross-cultural goods, and knowledge to the regions and the rest of the world.

Higher education derivatives of material and non-material culture are western oriented, and are driven globally by the process of accreditation as a quality control measure. This phenomenon of increasing worldwide interconnectedness that combines economic, cultural and social changes as transmitted through higher education programs and socialization processes train the highly skilled workforce and contributes to the research base and innovation capacity that increasingly determines competitiveness in the knowledge-based global economy that is skewed to western beliefs, morals, values and lifestyle (Rovai et al., 2008; Global Policy Forum, 2012).

Higher education with its central role in cross-cultural encounters fosters grounds for mutual under-

standing between countries and building global networks for future cooperation. At the same time, cross-border flows of ideas, students, faculty and financing, coupled with developments in information infrastructure and communication technology, are changing the environment for higher education. This implies that both increased collaboration and competition between countries and institutions are rapidly growing at a global scale for cultural values, norm and identity as promoted by higher education (Global Policy Forum, 2012).

Political Globalization

Traditionally, politics has been undertaken within national political systems. National governments have been ultimately responsible for maintaining the security and economic welfare of their citizens, as well as the protection of human rights and the environment within their borders. With the introduction of mass global higher education, socio-ecological changes, integrated global economy, and other global trends, political activities are increasingly taking place at the global level starting from student clubs and student governments in Colleges and Universities to graduates of higher education joining the national, regional and global organizations and governments that influence political structures and their operations (Global Policy Forum, 2012; Suarez-Irozco et al., 2004).

Political globalization refers to an increasing trend toward multilateralism (in which the United Nations plays a key role), toward an emerging 'transnational state apparatus' and toward the emergence of national and international nongovernmental organizations that act as watchdogs over governments that keep increasing their activities and influence worldwide (Moghadam, 2005).

Under political globalization, politics take place above the state through integration of schemes including East African Community, Common Market for Southern African Countries, and European Union and through intergovernmental organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization. Political activities do transcend national borders through global movements and organizations. Civil society organizations act globally by forming alliances through elite groups in various countries, using global communication systems, and lobbying international or-

ganizations and other actors directly, instead of working through their national governments (Suarez-Irozco, et al., 2004).

According to Scholte (2005), globalization may ultimately reduce the importance of nation states. supranational institutions such as the European Union and the International Criminal Court replacing and/or extending national functions to facilitate international agreements.

Some observers attribute the relative decline in US power to globalization, particularly due to the country's high trade deficit. This led to a global power shift towards Asian states, particularly China, which unleashed market forces and achieved tremendous growth rates. As of 2011, the Chinese economy was on track to overtake the United States by 2025. Increasingly, non-governmental organizations influence public policy across national boundaries, including humanitarian aid and developmental efforts (PawelZaleski,2006, Suarez-Irozco et al., 2004).

Accreditation of institutions of higher education inculcates aspects of national and international political unity by promoting all inclusive student government and student participation right from the classroom to the student affairs and academic affairs. Students are taught to make decisions and serve as active participants in instilling positive change as an initiation process to involvement in promotion of global politics and economy (Suarez-Irozco, et al 2004, Globalization and the market in higher education, 2002).

Globalization and Accreditation

According to the Ministry of Education Task Force (2010), education should training people for Socioeconomic, Technology and Industry development by preparing the youth to play an effective and productive role in the life of a nation, through providing learners with the necessary skills and attitudes for industrial and technological changes that are taking place especially in the developed world. Kenya can only be part to this development, if the educational system deliberately focuses on knowledge, skills and attitudes that will prepare the youth for these changing global trends. Therefore, education is supposed to instill the aspect of international consciousness and positive attitudes towards other nations, as Kenya is part of the complicated and interdependent network of peoples and nations. Education should therefore lead the youth of the country to accept memberships in this

international community with all the obligations and responsibilities, rights and benefits that this membership entails.

Accreditation is a system of academics in the world whose fundamental purpose is the assurance of quality and improvement in education to the local, regional and internal standards. It is aimed at training human resources that could compete in the workforce in any part of the world regardless of the nation in which one is educated and trained. It is a process of self-regulation through peer and professional reviews at local and global levels (Eaton, 2010; Driscoll & Noriega, 2006).

It seeks to fulfill the purpose of the worldwide movement towards integration of global economic, financial, trade, and communications. Globalization implies the opening of local and internationalistic perspectives to a broader outlook of an interconnected and interdependent world with free transfer of capital, goods, and services across national frontiers (Al-Rodhan, 2006). The global view is to have people who are integrated in global education, global economy, global politics and global culture.

Challenges of Accreditation and Globalization

Globalization has brought to the education field new concerns not considered a few years ago, which are the ingress and export of higher education as well as their relationships with quality assurance. On one hand, accreditation and certification, are the common practices by which institutions guarantee quality and obtain recognition in their communities and overseas employing bodies. On the other hand, accreditation and certification are a means by which institutions differentiate themselves from the crowd of "diploma mills" that are mushrooming everywhere in recent times, when higher education has become another commodity in the market of global economy (Fonthal,,n.d.; El-Khawas, 2001).

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Moreover, the accreditation of distance learning and virtual educational programs pose certain, noticeable significant challenges. Blended learning programs, a combination of face-to-face course delivery and web enhanced teaching, using strategies such as computer-facilitated or literature-based environments, are less problematic because of the opportunity to focus on the face-to-face element of the program. Distance learning and virtual program highlight the concerns about curriculum quality in the absence of an internationally certified mechanism for comparing different programs (WHO, 2013).

Accreditation reflects three core values of higher education, all essential to academic quality: institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and peer and professional review (Driscoll & Noriega, 2006; Eaton, 2010). Another challenge of accreditation brought about by globalization is “the erosion of academic freedom and the loss of appropriate authority and responsibility for the key academic decisions that have defined the faculty role for centuries—that is, judgments about curriculum, academic standards, and general education” (Eaton, 2010, p. 1). Currently, as globalization expands, the core institutional academic values, missions, visions, and philosophies in which the institutions invest, and procedures on which accreditation are built are at risk of being eroded and/or completely abandoned.

Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Summary

It has been discovered through this study that accreditation as a process through which governments, organizations and professional bodies foster and monitor the quality worth institutions and organizations offering higher education based on the pre-determined criteria or standards. Upon going through the process and found meeting the minimum requirements an institution is awarded a Certificate of recognition to operate the level of education sought for and offer programs that are equally certified. The status is periodically reviewed to ensure that standards are maintained and upheld. This process buildings confidence in the institution and society the quality environment, quality programs offered and quality of graduates in the job

market.

As the world plans to operate a global economy, political arena, and global cultural values across boarders, the eminent development of global education to inculcate the global world view is paramount. This behooves international processes of accrediting institutions offering higher education and their programs for international recognition and fitness to job markets. Fundamental to this is the paradigm shift from institutional and organizational vision mission and philosophy of education to the global ones.

This scenario seeks to fulfill the purpose of the worldwide movement towards integration of global economic, financial, trade, and communications. Globalization implies the opening of local and internationalistic perspectives to a broader outlook of an interconnected and interdependent world with free transfer of capital, goods, and services across national frontiers.

Challenges of globalization are that while its proponents seek to impose processes emanating from the accreditation of institutions of higher learning and their programs embodied in the fact that globalization agenda seeks to harmonize the standards across accord the board, institutions seek to advance their diversified visions, missions and philosophies that seem to polarize education towards the global agenda leaving institutions in a melancholic mood. Equally, the global arena encourages the virtual universities, virtual libraries, virtual students, and virtual lecturers with less physical facilities including lecture halls and libraries. What would then the global accreditation process anchor on and uphold when there are no comparable facilities of virtual learning to traditional institutions of learning and their demonstration of quality teaching in observable, verifiable and quantified environment?

Finally, one of the most significant challenges accreditation brought about by globalization is the probability of eminent erosion of academic freedom and the loss of appropriate authority and responsibility for the key academic decisions that have defined the faculty role for centuries—that is, judgments about curriculum, academic standards, and general education. Currently, as globalization expands, the core institutional academic values, missions, visions, and philosophies in which the institutions invest, and procedures on which accreditation are built are at risk of being eroded and/or completely abandoned.

Conclusion

Accreditation is a vehicle through which globalization paves its way in the world of academia to create a society that meets world plans to establish a global economy, political arena, and global cultural values across boarders fostered through global education to inculcate the global world view.

Internalizing the fact that accreditation plays a significant role in the process of preparing the elite for globalization to assist organizations and institutions running higher education to get prepared to adjust to the current trends, offer relevant programs and meet the needs of the world, but get ready to either compromise or give up all together on some significant aspects of the vision, mission and philosophical facets they stand for, that may seem contrary to the vision, mission and philosophy of the global society. Accreditation is the channel through which such parameters are sieved out.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings and conclusions it is recommended that organizations and institutions running higher education need to seek:

1. To fully understand and review the facets they stand for and compare and contrast them with accreditation criteria and make a decision to either live by or die for.
2. To put up structures in the organizations and institutions which review the harmony between their roles and practices based on their vision, mission and philosophy for which they were established and continue operating in a global setting.
3. To formulate strategic plans covering five, twenty, fifty to a thousand years time-frames to express ways through which they can continue operating in a changing world without losing focus of their original vision.

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