

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1: Introduction

This chapter discusses various perspectives and definitions of quality assurance and the kinds of accreditation in higher education in some countries. Numerous references were reviewed to examine innovative developments of quality assurance system worldwide. The review also sought to make international comparisons on the purposes of internal and external quality assurance in higher education, within the purview of national quality assurance framework of some relevant countries in order to see its commonality or diversity. Discussion also focuses on the concept of multiple accreditations to meet the challenges of quality assurance, particularly for a newly developing country such as Oman.

2.2: Perspectives and Conceptions of Quality Assurance in Higher Education

There are various conceptions and perceptions of what is meant by quality in higher education (Giertz, 2000, p.118). The varying definitions reflect that there is no common agreement or consensus regarding the term ‘quality assurance’ and its standard meaning worldwide. However, based on various readings, the term

“quality assurance” refers to all policies and processes directed at ensuring the maintenance and enhancement of quality in the most comprehensive sense of an organisation.

The concept of quality and the concern for assuring and enhancing it was developed in the business sector in Japan, U.S.A, and European countries, where commercial success is said to be dependent on it in the past few decades. The total quality movement surged into prominence in the early 1970’s in the U.S.A. and Japan. The need to maximize profit in a competitive environment requires that costs be reduced, sales be increased, and profits be constantly enlarged. It has been suggested that an important way to increase sales is to have a product or service that is in demand and should be of high quality at an affordable price (Lim, 2001, p.78).

The most widely accepted criterion of quality in higher education is probably “fitness for purpose” (Ball, 1985). The phrase, however, induces different images to different people. It has been argued with different perspectives and orientations, according to persons, measures applied, and the context within which it is being considered. However, the fitness-for-purpose criterion started to change in western societies in the late 1980’s. This is because education, including higher education, no longer remained the preserve of the rich, and more and more students from more diverse backgrounds entered university campuses to pursue professional and semi-professional education and training. At the same time, funding for higher education became harder to obtain as public funds become scarce, partly as the result of the ideological move from

the government-subsidy mentality to the user-pays principle, and partly as the result of the greater demand for funds from the ever enlarging government bureaucracy (Lim, 2001, p.92).

Quality assurance in higher education can be grouped into five possible operational definitions (Harvey and Knight, 1996).

1. Quality in higher education can be understood as being “exceptional”, with three associated notions: being distinctive in character, or exceeding very high standards, or passing a set of required standards, each of which can be subjected to debate.

2. Quality assurance in higher education can be defined in terms of “consistency”, especially of the processes involved through specifications to be achieved through the zero-defects approach and the quality culture. But this is problematic and it can be argued with regard to whether there is a consistent conformity to standards in higher education, especially given the fact that such standards of conformance are needed to be achieved by the students.

3. The third view to quality assurance is in relation to the “purpose of the product/ service” (Crawford, 1991), which again, raises three issues: fitting the customer specification, mission-based fitness for purpose, and customer satisfaction”, each can be subjected to debate.

4. The fourth view of quality is in terms of “value for money through efficiency and effectiveness” (Schrock and Lefever, 1988, p.43), which is clearly linked to notion of accountability and the emphasis on performance indicators. But, here again, this very emphasis on performance indicators is debatable.

5. The final perspective of quality assurance is its “transformative” character, which can refer to a qualitative change of form or process, which can include individuals’ cognitive development due to the fact that education is an ongoing process of transformation of the mind, apart from empowerment and enhancement of the customers.

Literature review in the area suggests also that quality assurance has been the central concern and attention of governments and institutions in the field of higher education in the 1990’s. With varying intensity, pace, thoroughness and success, most countries in the world have established systems and procedures of quality assurance in higher education, comparable to the same movement in business, industry, and government pervading in the decade of 1980’s. At the end of the 1990’s, quality assurance has been somewhat institutionalised in higher education due to the insistence of government policy-makers who wanted to seek the goals of public accountability, excellent reputation, and relevancy of higher education in relation to graduate employability and international standing.

The traditional, informal academic self-regulation, which for centuries was held to be sufficient in guaranteeing quality has been replaced by explicit quality

assurance mechanisms and related reporting and external accountability procedures. There is a wide variety of Quality Assurance Agencies (QAA) worldwide. There is currently, however, little uniformity or harmonization of quality assurance agencies and their procedures. Indeed many countries, regions and cultures are developing their own approaches to academic quality assurance. Some agencies are state-driven; others are private, with many intermediate forms. Some agencies are embedded in the higher education sector, but many are imposed on the higher education sector by governments, professional bodies, or other kinds of bodies. Some agencies are working as real accreditors of programs or institutions, others organise merely quality assurance procedures with no clear standards, benchmarking or final statement. Although there is some convergence towards a global quality model, there still is a great divergence in methodologies, protocols, assessment techniques and outcomes. The consequences of evaluation can be of many folds, and therefore all the functions of quality assurance and accreditation differ to a high degree.

In the United States, the idea of quality assurance of higher education institutions and accreditation dates back to the formation of accrediting bodies. The oldest regional accrediting associations were established in the late nineteenth century, and all of them were voluntary, non governmental, non profit bodies. Although these associations were non-governmental, their decisions regarding the accreditation of institutions had affected eligibility for federal funding (including student financial aid). Those regional associations still oversee the accreditation of institutions. However, today there are dozens of other specialized and professional accrediting associations that accredit programs in

particular fields, e.g., the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology. The certification in the professional fields is also a function of state licensing bodies. Thus, quality assurance in the United States began as a self-regulatory activity organized by non- governmental associations (Rhoades & Barbara, 2002)

Many of the current quality related practices of colleges and universities in the United States can be traced to the practices of the accrediting bodies discussed before. One of the standard features of an accreditation review is institutional self-study. Normally, a team of external visitors will spend a couple of days at the institution to conduct a review. Subsequently, the team will make a report to which the institution can respond before the final evaluation is provided. A final report will then be drafted and shared with the central administration and the academic unit (Rhoades& Barbara, 2002)

. These practices continue today, and have been adapted to internal program review of academic units within universities. It is common for universities to have a system of rolling reviews for academic programmes every so many years (generally between 5-10 years).

Perhaps, the clearest and widely cited example of state initiatives in quality assurance is the performance-based funding model introduced in Tennessee in 1979 (Banta et. al., 1996). Resources are allocated according to quality performance measures. The model has been revised and refined at least four times in studies that were commissioned in Tennessee in 1975, and it focused on accountability and improvement. However, throughout the 1980's and

1990's, state bodies have raised and discussed the issue of student learning and program quality measures in the context of resource allocation cycles. For the most part, this has been more a matter of rising consideration and identifying measures that must appear in annual reports than of linking performance on specific criteria to particular dollar increments in appropriating state monies. Nevertheless, institutions have had to demonstrate their accountability in the use of funds (Leslie et al. 1999).

In the 1980's, quality assurance began to be introduced and implemented in distinctive ways in the United States' higher education institutions. At the state level, state boards and legislatures began to emphasize and to connect assessment and accountability. At the institutional level, quality review processes began to take on new meanings and to be exercised through different mechanisms and processes in the context of strategic management efforts in order to refocus institutions (Rhoades& Barbara, 2002).

Quality management pervaded the United States' higher education in 1991 in the form of various applications of Total Quality Management (Marchese, 1997). In fact, an article in the November 1991 Bulletin of the American Association of Higher Education was entitled "TQM Reaches the Academy" (Marchase, 1991). A 1995 American Council on Education survey found that 65% of campuses reported TQM activity (Marchese, 1997). In addition, El-Khawas (1998) found that from 1988 to1995 the proportion of institutions involved in quality assessment rose from 55 to 94%.

The emphasis on quality has influenced and been evident in strategic management and restructuring efforts on campuses. In part, this has meant developing new forms of quality assurance in terms of who is doing assessment; evaluation of academic work increasingly being done by non-academic professionals, that is, the so-called managerial professionals, a category of employee in the United States that is growing far more rapidly than faculty (Amaral, 1998). In part, the new development has involved giving new teeth and meaning to old forms of quality assurance, i.e. peer review. For example, most universities have undertaken program evaluation processes, with the result of peer reviews (internal as well as external) being a factor affecting resource allocation and for the process of prioritizing programs (Al-Bulushi, 2003).

In Europe, too, the emergence and practice of quality assurance practices and accreditation are intertwined, but it is rather a recent phenomenon. Quality assurance was introduced in policy discussions and institutional practices in some European countries, well before it bloomed in Germany and Austria in the 1990's. As early as the mid-1980's, quality control mechanisms like independent quality audit standards and units were being created in the United Kingdom and in the Netherlands (Cave et. al. 1997). Across the two countries, discussions on quality assurance were related to the limitation of public expenditures and demands for greater accountability in higher education. It was related also to governmental policies introducing more self-regulation into higher education. The aim was to enlarge institutional autonomy and improve institutional performance. Strategic planning and management emerged as mechanisms by

which institutions could engage in self-assessment and program review to assure quality through the system (Rashdi et al, 2006, p.95).

Before the formal introduction of quality assurance in higher education in the United Kingdom, the pre-1992 universities had a latent quasi-quality assurance system in place through the operation of the traditional university committee system and external examiner system. Under the university committee system, ideally courses and subjects within them would be developed through committees at the department, faculty and university levels, with input from external parties, and reviews of them undertaken regularly. The views of current and past students on the effectiveness of the learning experience and the relevance of the courses would be sought, as would the views of employers on the relevance of the courses and quality of the graduates (Greenwood & Guant, 1994, pp:136-137).

In recent years there has been increasing demands by the so-called “stakeholders” in higher education for institutions to be made more accountable. The demands have come primarily from governments which argue that the public investment in higher education justifies closer scrutiny of the outcomes achieved by publicly funded institutions and from students who expect to receive good quality teaching and sufficient learning resources to meet their needs. Such demands are also driven by fears that the expansion of higher education is threatening quality (Walden, 1996). As public funding declines, resulting in the deterioration of student-staff ratios, and as the participation rate increases, it is not unreasonable to ask the question: How can the public be reassured that the

quality of higher education is being maintained following these changes? (David and Vaneeta, 2001).

In response to the polemic of quality assurance in the United Kingdom, there has been a considerable growth of quality-management processes both internally, normally through ‘quality’ or ‘standards’ office within institutions, and externally through first, the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC, 1993-1997), and then the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The external processes have included departmental subject review, institutional audit, benchmarking, program specification and performance indicators (Armstrong, 2000).

External quality assurance in the United Kingdom’s higher education, other than that undertaken by professional or regulatory bodies, is currently conducted through two processes carried out by the QAA: ‘subject review’ process and ‘institutional audit’ process. Subject review involves academic peers reviewing six aspects of provision-curriculum design, teaching learning and assessment, student progression and achievement, learning support, learning resources and quality management and enhancement. The process normally involves a four-day visit during which teaching is observed, student work is examined and documentation, of both the subject area and institutional quality assurance practices, is reviewed. The result is a numerical score for each aspect of provision on a four point scale. A report of the outcomes of each institutional subject review is published and made available for public scrutiny.

From the mid-1980's, quality assurance discussions emerged in other European countries, such as Belgium, Denmark, Finland, and Norway. Given this pattern in Europe, quality assurance emerged as the dominant topic in several conferences. It took a few years for the focus on quality assurance and strategic management to move from topics discussed in professional meetings to formal policies and practices implemented not only within particular countries but across the landscape of European higher education. For example, the European Commission (EC) promoted the extension of external assessment of academic work at the level of the subject or discipline (Rhoades & Barbara, 2002).

In the absence of systematic evaluation procedures across the continent, the European Pilot Project for Evaluating Quality in Higher Education was established in 1991 to enhance the awareness for evaluation, to enrich procedures, to transfer experience and to impart a European dimension to evaluation of higher education institutions. Between November 1994 and June 1995, the project involved 17 countries and 46 institutions. It concentrated on the evaluation of teaching and learning in two areas: engineering and communications or art design. In many countries the project triggered discussion about evaluation. Subsequently, several countries asked for a follow-up of the project (Sallis, 2001, p.119).

Quality assurance agencies and recognition bodies in Europe are at present characterized mainly by their great variety. This is especially marked in quality assurance agencies, most of which have been set up to meet local needs and reflect local higher education and political agendas. This has led to a number

of differences of types, methods, focuses and organizational structures of evaluation. So far as the recognition bodies are concerned, the structures are similarly diffused, with some closely linked to ministries of education and others operating more independently. Progress in the area of mutual understanding and effective recognition in new areas of academic activity would benefit greatly from the interaction of quality assurance agencies across Europe (Ahmed et al, 2002).

Many of the Asian countries have already established their national quality assurance agencies, including China, India, Japan, Malaysia, Thailand, and Korea. The other countries are in different stages of establishing such bodies. The Asian region is the fastest growing economies in the world and is making plans to protect its economic interests by assuring world-class education through its institutions of higher education (UNESCO, 2006).

In Malaysia, the government established a national quality assurance and accreditation agency for private higher education, as it perceived that the liberalization of the education system would bring with the rapid development of the private higher education industry (Ministry of Education, 2002). All registered private providers including the transnational providers are subjected to the quality assurance system set by this body. There have, however, been difficulties in subjecting providers offering courses electronically to this quality assurance and accreditation for courses of study at certificate, diploma and degree levels. The accreditation agency makes recommendations for course approval, minimum standards, confers accreditation status and sets procedures for

evaluation. With regard to professional courses, evaluations for accreditation are carried out by and together with professional bodies. The outcome of the evaluation process is used to determine the accreditation status of the program by the concerned professional board. The public is informed of accredited courses via various media, but the report is only made available to the providers who operate outside Malaysia which offer courses to students electronically (Zita, 2006).

In India, the outcomes of assessment and accreditation process are used for the benefit of the stakeholders—governments, parents, students, employers and the institutions themselves. Incentives for institutions linked to the accreditation status include access to a grant funding for public institutions (making accreditation mandatory for public institutions), greater autonomy and opportunity to be an international provider of education, freedom to charge higher tuition and other fees, and further diversification of programs of studies. Many in-country private providers, which do not depend on funding from government, have undergone the assessment for accreditation voluntarily because of the non-monitory advantages, and to attract students to their institutions. Assessment for accreditation is undertaken only with the established institutions that have been in place at least for five years or sent out at least two batches of students (Robbianne, 2003).

2.3: Modes of Quality Assurance

There are three primary modes of quality assurance globally, namely assessment, audit and accreditation (Tammamaro, 2005). The modes are not sharply defined and when used concurrently, their functions sometimes overlap within a national system. Further, within these modes, additional quality assurance activities are practiced such as ranking, the use of performance indicators and testing/examinations. Among some private institutions throughout Asia, it is a marketing trend to undergo the ISO 9000 quality review which, because it was designed for application in industry, assists in measuring the educational “inputs” and “process” of an institution. However, there is no known quality assurance system in Asia which incorporates ISO 9000 in its own national process. Assessment, audit and accreditation are each operative to some extent in the region of East Asia and the Pacific:

Figure 2.1 below shows the three modes of quality assurance.

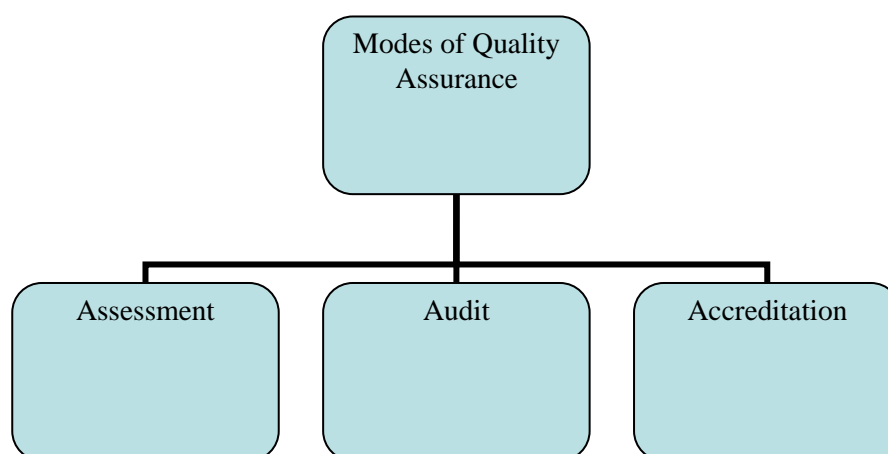


Figure 2.1: Modes of Quality Assurance

(Tammamaro, 2005)

• **Mode 1: Assessment**

Assessment is an evaluation which results in a grade, whether numeric (e.g., a percentage or a shorter scale of, for example, 1 through 4); literal (e.g., A to F) or descriptive (excellent, good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory). Assessment asks “how good are your outputs?” Assessment in and of itself typically does not include the dual purpose of quality improvement, which is necessary in a developing context. Further, assessment has a tendency to be more dependent on quantitative rather than qualitative measurement (e.g. it may ask how many books are in the library rather than finding out whether these books are current, relevant to the curriculum, and sought by the students and teaching staff). In India and China, assessment is a form of grading Indian institutions, or grading the performance of Chinese teachers in combination with the process of accreditation (Young, 1996).

• **Mode 2: Audit**

An audit is a check on what an institution explicitly or implicitly claims about itself. The institution claims what it will do and a quality audit checks the extent to which the institution is achieving its own objectives. Audit asks “how well are you doing what you say you are doing?” Governments are more likely to prefer accreditation over audit, for the auditing process is now found most typically in well-established higher education systems with strong traditions of self-evaluation internal to the institutions (Csizmadia, 2006)

- **Mode 3: Accreditation**

Accreditation is an evaluation of whether an institution qualifies for a certain status and is the primary choice of government agencies in placing institutions in ordinal ranking in the national system of quality assurance. This status may have implications for the institution itself especially in terms of the permission to operate or eligibility for external funding, and in terms of students' benefits such as eligibility for a grant or a professional degree (Al-Bulushi, 2003). Accreditation asks "are you good enough to be approved and to confer degrees?" Accreditation has a dual purpose: (1) quality assessment and (2) quality improvement, and it should take into consideration inputs (e.g., how many volumes are in the library) but not without outcomes (e.g., how many titles are in the library and are they current, relevant and used?).

Generally speaking, a higher education institution and its programmes which have received accreditation are found to:

- Have educationally appropriate objectives as defined over time by the higher education community;
- Have the financial, human and physical resources needed to achieve their objectives;
- Have demonstrated that it is achieving the objectives; and
- Have provided sufficient evidence to support the belief that it will continue to achieve its objectives for some reasonable time in the future (Leathreman, 1995).

Of the three modes discussed before, the most widely used regionally and globally and the most beneficial for the purposes of development and capacity building is accreditation.

2.4: Accreditation in Higher Education

By its very functions, accreditation may be considered a typical American phenomenon, having its origins at the beginning of the twentieth century. During its evolution, accreditation crystallised as a system of recognition of educational institutions and of their curricula, implying a certain level of achievement and quality which would guarantee prestige and the trust both of the educational community and of the public.

In the U.S.A, accreditation is a voluntary process. It accords a major role to self- regulation and self-evaluation while promoting improvements in the quality and the effectiveness of education. Accreditation is more than 100 years old in the U.S.A and now involves 80 recognized accrediting organizations. The reach of accreditation is extensive, with more than 6,400 institutions and 18,700 programs holding accredited status in 2002 (Al-Bulushi, 2003).

Institutional accreditors (regional or national) review entire colleges and universities. These operations may be for-profit or non-profit, degree granting or non degree-granting. Programmatic (specialized) accreditors review programs in specific fields such as law, medicine, or business.

During the last 10 to 15 years accreditation matters became extremely complex, and the process itself has become very dynamic. Nowadays there is tendency in the evaluation of educational processes to focus on results. From a systemic point of view, the traditional input-process model has been placed by the input-process-outcome model (Watty, 2004). This tendency is also present in the accreditation process. The education process is represented to a large extent by the relation between means and consequences. Examples of educational means include faculties, libraries, and laboratories).

The consequences of the education process are defined so as to satisfy external needs, to put into practice the concepts of educational management, to represent elements of comparison in the evaluation of institutions, and to make possible the use of new technologies in data processing (Sims & Sims, 2001, p.164). Certain institutions, however, have reservations about accreditation which is based on outcomes. These reservations can be explained by the long time frames and the high cost required for the design and implementation of effective self-evaluation programs based on outcomes (Al-aani et. al., 2002, pp.201-203). These institutions attempt to justify their position with following arguments:

- It is difficult, if not impossible, to assess the outcomes of the education process;
- Many of the consequences of the educational process can only be felt after long periods;
- The outcomes of the professor-student-education-means interaction, characteristic of the educational process, are unpredictable.

These objections will nevertheless not stop the new, objective accreditation orientation based on outcomes. However, traditional studies have not been completely eliminated. Thus, while the traditional principles of evaluation continue to be observed, other aspects are developing (Rabehy, 2004). These include:

- The conversion of specific data into educationally measurable outcomes;
- The development of systemic methods for measuring efficiency which take outcomes into consideration;
- The use of computers for the collection, storage, and processing of data on educational outcomes;
- The use of results of evaluation in reaching decisions as to the organization, the planning, and the allocation of resources. Institutions should be able to prove their efficiency by citing the outcomes which they had in view.

Accreditation bodies should adapt themselves to this trend by elaborating adequate work methodologies. Doing so requires a new set of evaluation procedures and criteria which emphasize the role of the consequences of educational process and the efficiency of the institution. Thus, efficiency of the educational process is added to the quality based accreditation model. In European countries and elsewhere, where accreditation (Vik, 2006) has not followed a similar path of development, interest in accreditation matters is growing.

The International Conference HKCAA on “Quality Assurance in Higher Education” (15-17 July 1991, Hong Kong) paid attention to the diversified activities related to accreditation which have been organized in several countries in recent years, as the accreditation process is aimed at maintaining and improving both the quality and the effectiveness of higher education. The HKCAA (1991) proposes that institutional accreditation ought to focus on the institution as a whole, paying attention not only to the overall educational program but to such areas as:

- Mission
- Governance
- Effective Management
- Academic Program
- Teaching Staff
- Learning Resources (library, laboratories, and educational technology)
- Students Selection and Admission
- Student Services
- Physical Facilities
- Financial Resources

The standards relate to the achievement of the institutional mission and objectives. The criteria are broad, and are demanded by the focus on the whole institutions of widely different purposes and scopes (e.g. universities, colleges, polytechnics, community colleges). The criteria also provide encouragement to

institutions to try innovative curricula and procedures and adopt them when proven successful (Chung, 2002).

Apart from comprehensive accreditation, there is another form of accreditation, that is, programmatic accreditation, which focuses on a degree granting programme within an institution of higher education which typically prepares professionals or special distinctive definitions of eligibility, criteria or standards for accreditation. These are most effective when they are developed through the cooperation of educators and current practitioners as well as other interested parties such as employers and public agencies. Sought after are reasonable conditions for achieving the objectives of satisfactory quality. The crucial dimension of quality in a program is that it must relate to professional expectations in a field (e.g., medical education leading to becoming a physician). During the external review process, the reviewers may review the relationship of the program maintenance and development (Al-Bulushi, 2003).

Vital to both institutional and programmatic accreditation is the institution of higher education being able to ascertain where it is in order that it can move to where it needs to go. Quality standards and criteria can take many forms, but they generally follow a generic set of questions that can be posed for this purpose (Sufean, 2003).

- What are the institution's/ program's purposes and goals?
- Are they known to the members of the academic community?
- What do you know about changes in the environment which could affect the goals?

- Is it possible to improve the links between stakeholders' needs and the goals?
- Do the purposes and goals provide an adequate framework for institutional/ programmatic evaluation?
- Where do you want to go?
- What is necessary to get there?
- What are the possible alternatives for action?
- Is the institution able to cover those costs?

Steps of Accreditation

"Accreditation means awarding a hallmark that indicates certain quality standards have been satisfied" (Eaton, 2006). Accreditation is the formal recognition of a program based on a decision of an independent quality assurance agency, which verifies whether this program meets the pre-determined minimal quality requirements. Figure 2.2 next page shows the steps in accreditation followed by the Ministry of Higher Education of Oman.

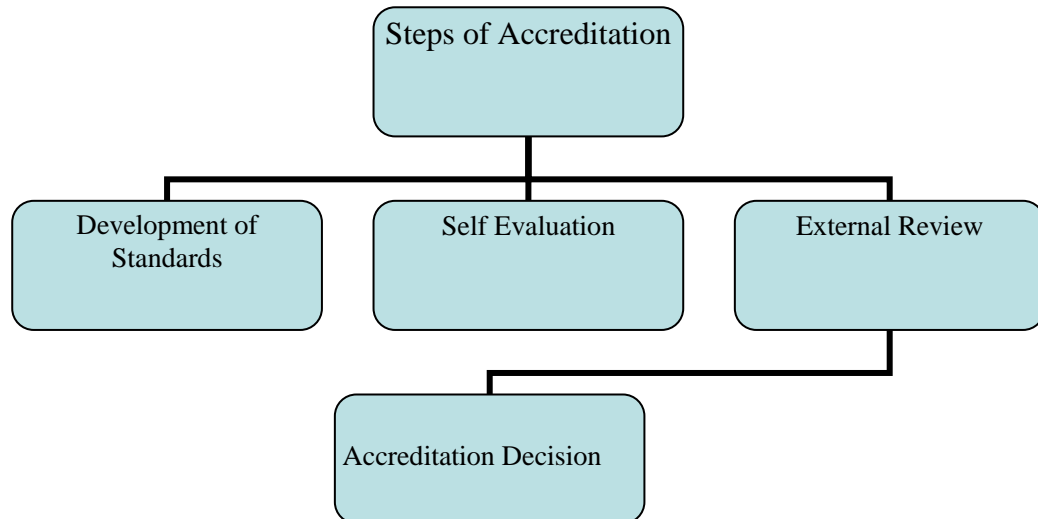


Figure 2.2: Steps in Accreditation

Sims (2001) suggests that global practice in accreditation typically follows four steps, which Oman Accreditation Board follows:

1. Development of Standards

Fundamental to the process of accreditation is the agreement on a set of standards sponsored by a national accrediting body, which are applied evenly to all institutions of higher education or their programs in the country. These standards, either institutional or programmatic accreditation, generally follow the component list for institutional accreditation as above. Again, the standards for programmatic accreditation are more discreet given their specialization.

2. Self- Evaluation

The institution or program undergoing the process is asked to respond to the standards in a written report. It is typical that several months are followed for this process to assure that the self-evaluation includes as much of the community as possible (e.g., administrative and teaching staff, students, employers, etc.).

3. External Review

A team of experts, representative of the national higher education community (and professional community in the case of programmatic accreditation) review the self- evaluation report prepared by the institution as compared to the standards for accreditation and visit the institution/ program for purposes of evaluating the extent to which the institution/program is doing what it says it is doing.

4. Accreditation Decision

Based on the self-evaluation results and the feedback of the external reviews, a decision can be made by the national accreditation body as to whether the institution or program is accredited, or not accredited, or put on probation for a certain period of time during which improvements have to be made. An institution or program which is denied accreditation can be

subjected to the cessation of public or private funding; can cause its graduates being unqualified to enter a profession; and can result in the loss of status in the national higher education community.

2.5: The Malaysian National Quality Assurance

Malaysia's quality assurance model is a synthesis of several models from the U.S.A. and European countries, and it is being used in this study—in relation to Oman's QA model also—as the basis to draw up the conceptual framework and to guide the data collection process. In this regard, therefore, a brief discussion of the Malaysian case is deemed necessary in this section.

Malaysia has an accreditation board founded in 1997 and it is called the Lembaga Akreditasi Negara (LAN) (or the National Accreditation Board). It was established within the context of rapid economic growth, triggering a demand for highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce, and making Malaysia a regional hub for excellence in higher education as stipulated by the Education Act of 1996 (Kanji, 2000). Concurrently passed was the Private Higher Education Act which sought to control the establishment and management of private higher education institutions so as to provide a quality higher education environment for students, while the LAN was to make certain that all course studies and training programs would achieve a standard acceptable to the norms and conventions of higher education (Marjorie, 2004).

In recent years, Malaysia has experienced a rapid development in education in both public and private sectors. In the public sector, 15 universities have been established, excluding polytechnics and teacher training colleges. Enrolment at the public universities exceeds 150,000 students. In the private sector, 500 institutions of higher education emerged with an enrolment totalling more than 100,000 students. Whereas the Ministry of Education has regulations which have influence on the organization and quality of public institutions, none such mechanism existed for the growing private sector until LAN was established. Because Malaysia wishes to increase the capability of students to remain in Malaysia for their tertiary education, it is assumed that the private sector will continue growing (Zita, 2006).

LAN is a statutory but “autonomous” body. Members of the LAN were officially appointed in May, 1997, the majority derived from the academia (although it is unknown whether this is the public and/or private sector) and some representatives of the public (such as from the Federation of Consultants from Islamic Countries). Headed by the Chairman/ Chief Executive with nine others as members, LAN formulates policies, procedures, standards and other matters pertaining to the quality of courses of study being offered and will be offered by private institutions of higher education. It does not concern itself with institutional accreditation per se (Marjorie, 2004).

Specifically, LAN’s functions are to:

- . Formulate policies on the standard and quality control of:
 - Courses of study; and
 - Certificates, diplomas and degrees

- . Set, monitor, review and oversee the standard and quality:
 - Of courses of study; and
 - For accreditation of certificates, diplomas and degrees
- . Determine the level of achievement for the national language and the compulsory subjects specified in the Private Higher Education Institutions Act 1996 (including religion) as prerequisites to the award of certificates, diplomas and degrees; and
- . Advise and make recommendations to the Minister for his approval of courses of study to be conducted by private higher education institutions with regard to:
- . The suitability of arrangements related to the educational facilities and relevant to the courses of study; and
- . The standard and quality assurance of the courses of study.

The LAN is supported by staff exceeding 100 persons and a panel of assessors which undergo training before reviewing an institution's programs. LAN's budget is derived from application fees from the institutions undergoing review. As of the end of 2002, 184 courses (degrees) at 48 private institutions had successfully undergone the LAN accrediting process. There are 5 sets of materials against which a private institution of higher education is to be evaluated (Marjorie, 2004).

1. Criteria for Standards and Quality of Courses: (Includes minimum standards of courses of study, procedures of continuous assessment, and

policies related to twinning programs with international institutions of higher education).

2. Approval and Accreditation of Courses of Study: These materials depict the responsibilities of the private higher education institutions in how to conduct study courses, assess minimum standards and achieve accreditation, including information on courses of study, teachers, physical facilities, management system and rational for conducting the course study.
3. Syllabus for National Language and Compulsory Subject: These materials offer mandatory detailed syllabus for the National Language (Bahasa Kebangsaan) and compulsory subject such as Malaysian Studies, Islamic Studies and Moral Education.
4. Criteria and Quality Control Standards for Distance Education Courses: These include standards for courses plus requirements for qualified teaching staff at every level of the course, curriculum standard and assessment standards.
5. Guidelines for post- graduate courses: These guidelines provide approaches by and requirements of private higher education institutions in applying for approval to conduct courses at the post-graduate level (Masters or Ph.D.).

To quote LAN, “preparing documents to be sent to LAN is quite a complex process.” Accordingly, LAN provides daily consultation services, weekly familiarization clinics and a mobile document preparation seminar to assist institutions in preparing their application materials. In the materials provided in

English, there was not reference to the duration of accreditation but there was a general statement, “ Under Section 42 of the LAN Act of 1996, ‘the Lembaga shall have the power to reassess, from time to time, certificates, diplomas and degrees in respect of which Certificates of Accreditation have been granted.’ Finally LAN approved institutions must submit their annual report (from the website: lan.gov.my).

2.6: Quality Assurance and Accreditation in the Sultanate of Oman

The application of quality assurance (QA) in the sphere of higher education, while having the same base objectives of defining and recognizing quality, is somewhat complicated by the important socio-economic role that education plays in developing local, national and global societies (Al-Rabbey,2006). Quality is the distinguishing characteristic guiding students and higher education institutions when receiving and providing higher education. The integration of QA principles into higher education have become an Oman’s national issue since the need for a clear QA and Accreditation system was laid out as one of the aims of international conference on “University of the Twenty- First Century” (organized in Oman in cooperation with UNESCO). Quality was one of the overriding themes of the conference and an important outcome was the recommendation that an Accreditation Board be established for the Sultanate as part of a new system of Quality Assurance. Accordingly, the Accreditation Board

was established in June 2001 by the Royal Decree 74 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2004)

The Accreditation Board establishes in away that makes it responsible for the process of accrediting higher education institutions, also programs of higher education and approving them and realizing quality level (Oman Accreditation Board, 2006)

The roles of the Accreditation Board are as follows:

1. Preparing the necessary studies and researches needed for requirement and accreditation criterion of higher education institutions and accrediting the designed programs, adding bases for this accreditation on the light of the policies that are set by higher education council.
2. Accrediting higher education institutions.
3. Accrediting the programs provided by higher education institution.
4. Rectifying the requirement of the needed skills to practice the professions and ensure the compliance of the academic programs at higher education institutions for these requirements.
5. Collecting information and data that are set by higher education institutions and preparing reports regarding the quality of this programs and send them into higher education council.
6. Setting the necessary procedures for rectifying and institution the performance of higher education institution.

7. Reviewing the modifications related to the national framework for equalizing the qualifications that are granted by higher education institutions in the Sultanate.

2.7: Criterion and Stages of Accrediting Higher Education Institutions in Oman

The policy of accreditation of higher education institutions in the Sultanate of Oman is based on the concern that colleges and universities in the country must be of international standard and they should be accountable to the public in terms of the quality of their study programmes and degrees offered. However, the policy requires official accreditation by a competent authority which follows closely the required terms and conditions for accreditation stipulated by the government. Quality of academic programmes, quality of teaching, quality of academic support services, and quality of research must be recognized and approved by the Oman government, and eventually by certain international bodies (Oman Accreditation Board, 2006).

The first and most important level of responsibility for quality lies with the individual higher education institutions. They are expected to establish rigorous procedures to ensure that quality is maintained and improved, in comparison with standards of quality in respected institutions in the Sultanate and abroad. Internal Quality Assurance procedures, along with mechanisms for independent external verification, are necessary to meet the requirements of public credibility in the Sultanate and abroad.

The approval for new higher education institutions to operate in the Sultanate involves five stages:

1. **The First Stage:** This stage includes the development of a comprehensive proposal and feasibility study. The proposal may be submitted by a government ministry for a government institution, or by a private person or group for a private institution. The proposal for a private institution should be made to the ministry of higher education, where it will be studied and a report prepared for the Accreditation Board and Council of Higher Education.

Before a proposal for a new government institution is submitted to the ministry of higher education, the requesting ministry involved should consult the ministry of higher education for guidance. In the case of both government and private proposal, the report to the Accreditation Board will include comment on consistency with regulation, adequacy of resources and financial viability, as well as the adequacy of the proposed academic provision, including staffing and program quality. Attention is paid particularly to the need for the new institution, including potential impact on other provision, and mechanisms for Quality Assurance.

2. **The Second Stage:** This stage involves consideration of the proposal by the Accreditation Board, taking into the account the report provided by the Ministry of Higher Education. If the Board is satisfied with the proposal, initial approval will be granted, subject to approval by the Council of Higher Education. It should be noted that this approval of the Council of Higher Education is termed

“conditional” because it is subjected to provisional accreditation within one year of operation.

3. **The Third Stage:** This involves a conditional approval or rejection by the Council of Higher Education. If approval by the Council of Higher Education is granted, the Minister of Higher Education grants the institution a license to commence operations for a period of 12 months after completion of facilities and full mobilization of all required resources. This is followed in the fourth stage by supervision by the Ministry of Higher Education in the case of private institutions, and by the relevant Ministry in the case of public institutions.

4. **The Fourth Stage:** This stage occurs during the first year of operation and involves application to the Accreditation Board for provisional accreditation of both the institution and its programs. A self-evaluation with a full report and external audit are required and must be provided within a maximum of 12 months after commencement of operations. The results of the self study and external audit are evaluated by the Accreditation Board, with advice from special panels appointed by the Board.

If provisional accreditation is granted on the basis of the performance of the institution during its first year of operation and its plans for the next years, official notification is given to the Minister for Higher Education who then renews the license, enabling the institution to continue operating for another four years. During this time, the institution is monitored by the Accreditation Board in

order to ensure that commitments have been met and the programs are delivered as proposed.

5. **The Fifth Stage:** This involves full accreditation and occurs before the end of the first five years period of operation. If the Accreditation Board is satisfied as a result of the second self study and external review that commitments have been met and quality is being maintained as proposed, the provisional designation is removed, and the institution is considered to be fully accredited. (Oman's Accreditation Board, 2006).

2.8: Comments and Summary

Quality assurance movement and its tangential motivation for accreditation seem to lack a theoretical backing. Quality assurance for accreditation appears to be so much concerned with business pragmatism which is oriented towards customer satisfaction, institutional status, professional acknowledgement, graduate employability, and management efficiency. An institution or program which is verified as not practising quality assurance or is denied accreditation can experience a cut of public or private funding, its graduates being unqualified for the job market, and a loss of good status in the education system. Here lies the pushing power of QA movement on higher education institutions, whether at the national level or international level. Higher education institutions seem scared of being ostracised by not following the movement, and thereby facing the

eventuality of closing down. Hence, autonomy of higher education institutions in terms of determining their development pace and resources is being sidelined. This is the common dilemma of higher education institutions, particularly new universities and colleges. The government, professional associations, and accreditation bodies become the watchdogs of QA.

A question of interest then: Is there any university or college that is outstanding, high status, and highly acknowledged but not in the bandwagon of QA movement and remain aloof of accreditation? The answer is yes. There are high class universities or colleges, public and private, that remain unperturbed by QA and accreditation, and they are typically called the trend setters that set the highest standard or benchmark for other universities and colleges to follow. The high class universities and colleges have their long standing tradition, ethos, and culture which are well-respected at the national and international levels. They have full autonomy and liberalism in the pursuit of excellence; even the power of the government shy away from injecting policies having the intention of controlling and monitoring them. So, here lies the exception of QA and accreditation.

Besides that, there are numerous models of QA and accreditation in existence worldwide. The fundamental question, however, is: which theory of management seems suitable to explain the global phenomena of QA movement and the drive for accreditation? If a university or college is considered as individual, then the appropriate theory is Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, which proposes that the highest level of need is self-actualization. Here, after

some levels of needs are being fulfilled, individuals seek for self-actualisation in order to make themselves important and recognised by people (Owen, 1998). This is possible even though it is simplistic.

Another theory is Senge's learning organisation theory, an adaptation of biological system theory, which proposes that an organisation, like an organism, interacts with its internal and external environments and learns to modify its behaviour in tandem with the demands and expectations of the environments. The interactive learning process ensures the survival of the organisation in a challenging situation (Senge, 2002).

Senge's learning organisation theory, however, can be added onto Fullan's theory of systemic change, which proposes that an educational organisation such as a university or college must continuously make innovations for the purpose of self-improvement, and thus making it relevant to be at the frontline of change and competition. Change should be made incrementally but system wide (Fullan, 2004).

Actually, there is nothing new about Senge's or Fullan's theory, because prior to them there is already the organisation development theory posited by French and Bell (1990) which argues that an organisation is required to always self-evaluate its strengths and weaknesses by the concept of teamwork in order to remain effective and efficient and, consequently, remain profitable, sustainable, and excellent. In this context, then, transformative leadership is required (Yukl, 2006).