ADOPTION OF NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARDS AND BUSINESS EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN: MOTIVATION AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

One of the widely acclaimed tools to assure quality in business education is accreditation. For this purpose, business program accreditation council was established by Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan. However, it is found that decision to seek accreditation is dependent upon the perception of institutions about the advantages and disadvantages of accreditation. This paper then aims to study motivation of Deans of business education institutions in Pakistan towards NBEAC accreditation. Interviews of Deans of business schools in Pakistan were conducted and the findings were illustrated using Simple Case x Theme Matrix (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and evaluated on the basis of institutional theory, information asymmetry and bandwagon theory. The results highlighted that decision to seek accreditation in lieu of institution theory was based on normative pressure i.e. standardization, continuous improvement, assurance of quality. As well as strong bandwagon effect was also found.

Keywords: Business Education, Accreditation, Pakistan, NBEAC, Institutional Theory.

JEL Classification: M00

Introduction

In early 2006, the adoption of a business education accreditation began with the establishment of National Business Education Accreditation Council (NBEAC) in Pakistan. NBEAC is still the only quality standards in business education in the country. According to 2018, out of 207 business education providers, 140 are members of NBEAC. Peer review visit was completed for 93 institutions and re-accreditation was granted to 21 business schools. Previous research from

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Nadeem, Abbas and Javed (2014), found that NBEAC standards are compatible with the international quality standards of business education i.e Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), Association of MBAs (AMBA), European Quality Improvement system (EQUIS) and South Asian Quality Standards (SAQS) standards and can serve as a cornerstone for the internationalization of business schools (Nadeem, Abbas, & Javed, 2015). However, there is a lack of research on the motivation of business schools towards accreditation. Therefore, this research attempts to fill the gap in the context of the decision of the deans of the business schools and the motivation to adopt these quality standards of NBEAC. On the basis of institutional theory, this study will discuss the strengths that interfere with the adoption of NBEAC quality standards by business schools.

To achieve the research objective, this paper is divided into three main sections, the second section will discuss the historical growth of business education in Pakistan, followed by the third section, which explains the relationship between accreditation and institutional theory; the fourth section discusses the methodology while the fifth section concludes the research by highlighting the main findings and the direction of future research.

**Business Education in Pakistan**

For the first time, the importance of business education was introduced into the National Education Commission in 1959 (Khan, Shah & Azzam, 2011). However, thanks to the establishment of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) in 2000, business education become more competitive (Kaleem, 2005; Khan et al., 2011). Currently, there are 166 degree grant institutions, according to the Higher Education Commission, which offers business education in Pakistan.

Even apart from growth, educational institutions faced many problems. Quality assurance has been identified as a key issue within the framework of HEMTF 2005-2010. To address this problem, HEC has established standards that meet the International Standards for institutions and program evaluation (HEMTF, 2005-10). Enhancing faculty quality, infrastructure and research was seen as one of the key dimensions and a critical factor was the reliance on HEMTF 10-15 (Batool & Qureshi, 2007). For the purpose of retention, the NBEAC was established on August 15, 2006. NBEAC is not only limited to the business education program but has a broader umbrella and has the authority to ensure the quality of public administration and commerce programs too. However, currently its only limited to the accreditation of BBA and MBA program.

The call of accreditation was not very well responded by the stakeholders i.e. institutions. Initially the response was very slow are only eleven institutions seek accreditation from NBEAC by 2012. However the process gain recognition as time lapse and in 2016 the number of accredited institutions raise to 34. Whereas seventy four institutions were in the process of accreditation. by 2018 the figures further raise and add to 140 institutions as the member of NBEAC. These figures highlight-
ed the need to examine the motivation of deans to obtain NBEAC accreditation. The following section will discuss the literature on motivation for accreditation and will attempt to create link between institutional theory and motivation of deans toward accreditation.

Isomorphism and Accreditation in Pakistan

Social structures and behaviors along with normative and cultural cognitive forces are major focus of institutional theory (Hodge, 2010). Further to this notion, the theory mainly focuses on the concept of institutional isomorphism, presented by DiMaggio and Powell in 1983. It is highlighted that because of external pressure, organizations in the same environment adopt the same process and structure. There are three types of isomorphism i.e. Coercive, memetic and normative standard that drive internationalization (Hodge, 2010). Coercive pressure resulted in need to attain legitimacy in the society due to pressure attained by policies and laws of the country. Furthermore, demand from the society towards certain norms and cultural shift do played as a coercive force to attain isomorphism. Mimetic isomorphism occurs on purpose, and the organization adapts best practices of other organizations in response to some uncertainty. As per DiMaggio and Powell 1983 and Hodge 2010; the organizations that are more successful and prospects are more imitated by the other organizations. This resulted in bandwagon effect that leads towards mimetic isomorphism. Normative isomorphism is a result of values and indirect adoption of standards across the organization through professional networks and formal education. The standard hyperlink is related to professionalism. To make a change in the organization, this three symmetry mechanism may operate independently or synchronously (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983)

Various providers of legitimacy were typified by Antunes and Thomas (2007) including image and reputation, research, citations, global performance rankings and international accreditation bodies (Antunes & Thomas, 2007).

The reason of isomorphism were studied by Durand and Dameron (2013) and Wilson and McKiernan (2011); and it revealed that North American models of business school were mimicked by business school around the world. These studies found out that strategic convergence was as a result to pressure to have good ranking internationally. Thus, a platform was developed due to accreditation to signal their quality internationally and domestically to gain world visibility and legitimacy.

Mimetic isomorphism is also referred to bandwagon effect. It is defined as when an innovation organization adopts the process due to diffusion rather than because it evaluates the returns of that innovation. The bandwagon effect is an unseen pressure exerted by existernec of large number of organization adopting an new innovation (Abrahamson & Rosenkopf, 1993; Hodge, 2010; Tolbert & Zucker, 1994). The influence of the bandwagon effects increases as the number of adopters increases, putting pressure on non-adopters to adopt innovations (Tolbert & Zucker, 1994), thus creating a positive feedback loop (Rosenkopf & Abrahamson, 1999). In addition, in cases where the benefits of
innovation can not be determined in an easy way, the bandwagon effect is quiet evident (Hodge, 2010; Tolbert & Zucker, 1994). In term of adoption of NBEAC quality standards in Pakistan this scenario is almost the same. At present, there is a scarcity of data that has caused information inconsistencies and there is no information regarding the benefits of NBEAC accreditation. Therefore, there is dire need to study the phenomena in Pakistan.

*Link Between Information Asymmetry and Accreditation in the Context to Pakistan*

The concept of information asymmetry explains the relationship between the buyer of the seller and the seller involved in the transaction. The transaction and the user, as provided by Arrow in 1967. The buyer has less information about the product being sold to him, as the seller usually has more information about its product being sold to the buyer. This information asymmetry causes the Agency problem. In the variance scenario in higher education information, you work in two ways. There are two types of relationship that operate in the framework of asymmetric information in the context of tertiary education. First, there is a link between the institution of awarding grades and potential students. There is a wide range of programs available to choose when a potential student decides to obtain a business degree, so the student has incomplete information about the program most suited to aspects of his career in the future. In this case, accreditation is established as a signal device on the market, through which the quality and status of a specific program is indicated. The second type of relationship involves the employee and the institution. Generally, the organization has partial information about the candidate's advantages, so the candidate may also have incomplete information about the benefits of the organization.

*The above Discussion Points Towards two Scenarios*

1) Coercive, normative and mimetic pressures are necessary and lead institutions towards isomorphism. In order to be accredited by NBEAC, these three mechanisms may play a key role. For all businesses to be accredited by the NBEAC, HEC has been made mandatory in its 2012-2015 medium framework. Institutions must rely to demonstrate their legitimacy in the market, indicating the existence of coercive similarities. Furthermore, a mimetic pressure is also evident through joint degree programs and foreign grants, enrollment-based institutional funding, and environmental uncertainties such as inconsistent government policies on tertiary education. Some factors may force organizations to inadvertently adopt the standards and culture of other organizations, including TTS, internships, training programs, and staff training. The outcome of these activities can be standardized. Under such pressure, the deans of Pakistani business education institutions are forced to achieve external and internal benefits by adopting NBEAC quality standards.

2) The chances for the presence of Bandwagon effect are enhanced due to the absence of research that can identify the potential benefits of NBEAC accreditations. Hence, both screening and
signaling may be used by business education institutions in Pakistan in this situation.

**Methodology**

Exploratory study is identified to be the most appropriate whilst keeping in view the research objectives under consideration. Business education accreditation is a new phenomena in Pakistan therefore, there is no prior research in the field that highlighting the motivation of deans towards NBEAC accreditation. Therefore, it is much needed that the factor associated with accreditation and motivation of deans must operationalized in Pakistan.

To meet the objective of the study Interviews with the deans of business schools were conducted. Based on the assertion that dean is the administrative head of the institution and responsible for the strategic decision making for the institution, such as to seek or not to seek accreditation. Further to this notion, NBEAC by-laws also consider dean responsible for accreditation process.

Interviews were conducted from the deans of the business schools. On the basis of their response towards the call of accreditation they are identified as; 1) Early movers: Institutions seek NBEAC accreditation during initial phase in 2012 labeled as ‘A’; 2) Followers: institutions in the process of accreditation labeled as ‘B’ and; 3) Institutions still not applied for accreditation are categorized as Laggards are labeled as ‘C’.

The deans of all business schools were contacted; however keeping in view convenience of time, cost and accessibility the priority was given to the location of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The skype session were suggested to the deans of other location but the idea didn’t go well.

**Data Collection**

A cover letter was provided to the deans along with the interview questions. The cover letter basically stated the purpose of the study, assurance of confidentiality and estimated interview time. There were almost same questions for early mover and followers institutions; however in the interview question for followers institution includes question regarding their late response towards the call of accreditation and what are the constraints or reasons for the delay in applying for NBEAC accreditation. the interview questions for laggard’s institutions were completely different from the prior two sets of interview question for early movers and followers. The interview session was mainly focused on the problems encountered in order to seek NBEAC accreditation by laggard’s institution.

A digital voice recorder was used to record interviews and then they were transcribed by the researcher. The interviews were transcribed exact word to word. As per interview protocols all the interviews were transcribed within the two days of interview to avoid any sort of misinterpretation. Many scholars associate with qualitative research such as Bergstrom 2010; Dilley
2004; Kyale 2006 and Roulston 2010; uncovered some controversies while transcribing the oral content to written text. According to them its is a re-construction rather than rewriting exact information. To avoid this bias the data transcription was done as earlier as possible. Furthermore, the transcribed document was resend to respondents to check the true essence of the response as stated by the key informants.

Data Analysis

The responses of business deans have been compared to the similarities and differences in the motives for seeking accreditation, the difference in actual benefits and the desired benefits, as well as the problems faced by institutions to obtain accreditation. Initially, a narrative methodology was used to evaluate the responses of all three classified samples. The "Simple Case-X Theme Matrix" by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used to compare themes that were selected in interview transcription. Meta-Matrix is a sort of Matrix that defines and systematically compares the data (Maurer, 2007).

Findings

This section will discuss the findings of the data on the basis of themes generated during interviews.

Factors Affecting the Decision of Seeking NBEAC Accreditation

The Deans identified several factors for their followers and laggards institutions that helped explain their slow response to the adoption of NBEAC and their decision to apply for accreditation. Groups showed some similarities and immediate differences.

The main concerns of this group were found to be knowledge about NBEAC accreditation as well as uncertainty about its future. Follower Institutions group did not show any impediments to resource shortfalls or funding, although they wanted to take time before applying for NBEAC. They want to assess whether they are just a passing mantle or whether they will become a norm. The findings and perception of followers institutions regarding the future of NBEAC is also evident from the interviews data of lagard’s institutions. As two Deans from our sample out of Three were not aware about NBEAC and its quality standards. According to them it is not their decision rather may be top management have some awareness about NBEAC.

The decision to seek NBEAC is highly dependent upon top management commitment as identified by laggards and followers group. Further to this notion, lack of resources to improve infra structure and quality of faculty are also one of the major barriers.
Motivation

Similarities were seen between early movers and motivation to obtain accreditation across groups of followers. Ensuring the quality of business education and standardization was the constant message given by the deans of these institutions.

In order to gain a competitive edge and ensure market survival, deans of early movers seek NBEAC accreditation. Furthermore, they see NBEAC accreditation as an that can enhance internal quality of processes and system. This can be result in satisfying external and internal stakeholders and can give recognition and visibility in term of quality in the higher education service provider’s. All these factors are also drivers for followers institution towards seeking NBEAC accreditation.

Perceived Benefits Versus Actual Benefits

Three groups of deans perceived several resource based and process based benefits. The deans of the institutions of early movers perceived that internal processes can be improved and the quality of their program can be assured due to accreditation and all this can result in increased student enrollment and development or the faculty. On the other hand, deans from followers institutions believed that the major benefit they can exercise will be student and faculty development, satisfaction and also, enhancing the reputation of the institution. Deans of laggard’s institution perceived that accreditation as a source to improve their faculty infrastructure and increase their funding as well.

Student and faculty satisfaction and learning will improve due to NBEAC accreditation was the consistent message cited by the deans of followers and laggards institution. However, once the institution being accredited, the scenario was much different. As per deans of early movers institutions, the rigorous exercise towards attainment of NBEAC accreditation due help them to improve their internal process and procedures. The processes are now more towards quality attainment. However, no major benefit has been exercised in term of increase in student enrollment. Furthermore, there is no change in the faculty recruitment has been exercised since last four years as an accredited institution. However, visibility of the program and institution does increase and an incremental upwards trend has been exercised in graduate program admissions, as identified by one of the early mover institution.

Conclusion

The responses of deans of institutions are summarized in Table-1. To operate in a professional manner is identified as the basic motivation of the deans towards accreditation as per comparison of responses given by the three groups of deans as identified earlier as early mover; followers and laggards. from the comparison results. Thus, from the research findings, normative pressure was very evident. However, if by law the accreditation will be mandatory, the institutions top management will not have any choice but to opt for accreditation as per pointed out by the deans of laggards institution.
The presence of indirect bandwagon effect is the second theme that is identified. Before going towards accreditation the institutions did not conduct any formal analysis. Also, their strength is further strengthened as per due to the absence of data highlighting the benefits if NBEAC accreditation. Hence this supports our assumption that bandwagon pressure and information asymmetry has their strong presence and interplay an important role towards the response of deans to the call of accreditation. the increasing number of NBEAC registration and response of institutions towards attaining NBEAC accreditation does support that in the absence of any research on NBEAC and its outcomes for institutions. This is bandwagon effects that pressing institutions to seek accreditation.

Also, accreditation is seen as tool to signal the quality of the program by the institutions. Since the number of business schools are growing in Pakistan, NBEAC accreditation can easily used to market position one institution as the best and quality business education provider. As accreditation is seen as the distinctive mark of quality (Lejeune 2011, Scherer et al., 2005, Hodge 2010), by adopting accreditation standards institutions can easily signal the quality of their program in the market.

Table 1

Table Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision of Apply for NBEAC Accreditation</th>
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<td>A1</td>
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### Factors that motivates Deans to attain NBEAC accreditation

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<th>Antecedents</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Moderaotors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Quality Assurance (Normative pressures)</td>
<td>To attain Competitive advantage (Normative pressures)</td>
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<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Quality Assurance (Normative pressures)</td>
<td>Improvement in infrastructure (Normative pressures)</td>
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<td>B1</td>
<td>Teaching Quality (Normative pressures)</td>
<td>improving program (Normative pressures)</td>
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<td>B2</td>
<td>Standardization (Normative pressures)</td>
<td>Stakeholders satisfaction (Signaling)</td>
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<td>B3</td>
<td>Standardization (Normative pressures)</td>
<td>Quality Assurance (Normative pressures)</td>
<td>Improvement of internal process(Normative pressures)</td>
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<td>B4</td>
<td>Visibility and Recognition of institution (Signaling)</td>
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### Perceived Benefits

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<th>Antecedents</th>
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<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Improvement in internal process (Normative pressures)</td>
<td>Quality Assurance (Normative pressures)</td>
<td>Development of faculty (Normative pressures)</td>
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<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Hiring and development of faculty (Signaling)</td>
<td>Improvement in Research and publications</td>
<td>Increase in student enrollment (Signaling)</td>
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<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Quality of program, hiring and retaining of quality faculty (Signaling)</td>
<td>Internationalization (Signaling)</td>
<td>Quality Assurance of student, Student satisfaction and retention (Signaling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Transparency (Normative pressures)</td>
<td>Faculty learning and development Student learning (Normative pressures)</td>
<td>Improvement in research and publication (Signaling)</td>
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<tr>
<td>B3</td>
<td>Quality Assurance (NOR)</td>
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<tr>
<td>B4</td>
<td>Increase in student enrollment (Signaling)</td>
<td>Enhance reputation of the institution (Screening)</td>
<td>Visibility for the institution (Signaling)</td>
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(Table Continued...)
The findings of this research also revealed that institutions seek accreditation to gain visibility in the market and recognition. Previous researches in the context of international accreditation (Hodge 2010; Hou 2013; Roller et al., 2003; Elliot 2013) support this stance. Previous literature on international accreditation identified top management commitment as one of the important barrier in adopting international accreditation standards (Scherer et al., 2005). In this study the findings rea some how consistent that top management commitment is important aspect however due to infancy age of NBEAC in the current scenario, awareness about NBEAC, ambiguity about the future of NBEAC and lack of funding to improve infrastructure and faculty is found as important and most impeding factors.

The decision for international accreditation is affected due to the lack of pressure on stakeholders as per identified by Roller et al. (2003). Pressure on stakeholders has been identified as one of the antecedents of internalization by Hodge (2010). Stakeholder’s awareness and pressure can strengthen the process of accreditation as per identified by the Deans of laggards institutions. Slow rate of response towards the call for accreditation resulted due to the absence of coercive isomorphism in terms of mandatory status of NBEAC and awareness of stakeholders about NBEAC. In addition, lack of commitment in top management has its effect over the decision of seeking accreditation and thus considering them as a important factor. From the research findings signaling and screening are both evident. Attainment of good faculty and students by accreditation was a common perception by B-schools. Also, to enhance better job opportunities, it is essential to enhance the reputation of the program. On the basis of findings, the model for accreditation in Pakistan is illustrated in Figure-1

Further, this research concluded that the factor related to the motivation of Deans to seek accreditation are continuous improvement in the process of standardization and the assurance of good quality. Furthermore, the outcomes of accreditation are perceived as faculty hiring, retention and student retention as well. An issue was raised by Deans, that the major stakeholders of higher educa-

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<td>C1</td>
<td>To seek funds (Normative pressures)</td>
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<td>C2</td>
<td>Don’t Have any information regarding the benefits.</td>
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<tr>
<td>C3</td>
<td>Internationalization (Signaling)</td>
<td>Good quality of student (Signaling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Quality Assurance</td>
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<td>A2</td>
<td>Development of faculty</td>
<td>Development of research policy</td>
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NOR: Normative pressures; SIG: Signaling; SCR: Screening
tion faculty and students are not aware of accreditation. Therefore, they are not in a position to question institutions regarding accreditation and quality standards.

In the context of business education accreditation in Pakistan these findings provoked several questions in light to the mentioned context. Such as 1) what is the perception of internal stakeholders on the process of accreditation? 2) What is the impact of accreditation on the performance of institution?

The below model concludes that this research can be generalized by using quantitative research in future studies.

![Model showing Antecedents, Outcomes and Moderators of Accreditation in Pakistan]

Figure 1: Model showing Antecedents, Outcomes and Moderators of Accreditation in Pakistan

References


Factors Affecting the Decision of Seeking NBEAC Accreditation

Introduction

Business Education in Pakistan

Initially the response was very slow and only eleven institutions seek accreditation from NBEAC by 2012. These figures highlight the importance and need for accreditation in business education. For the first time, the importance of business education was introduced into the National Curriculum by the National Curriculum Commission in 1998. In 2000, the Pakistan Business Schools Accreditation Council (NBEAC) was established by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) to set standards and criteria for business education. The council was established to ensure the quality and relevance of business education in Pakistan. The main purpose of NBEAC is to provide a framework for business schools to improve their educational programs and meet international standards. The council has set high standards and criteria for business education in Pakistan, which has led to an increase in the number of institutions seeking accreditation. The figures further raise and add to 140 institutions as the member of NBEAC. These figures highlight the growth and development of business education in Pakistan.

The below model concludes that this research can be generalized by using quantitative and qualitative research methods. The data was collected through interviews and surveys. The interviews were conducted from the deans of the business schools. On the basis of their responses, the research was categorized into early movers and followers institutions. Further to this notion, NBEAC by-laws also consider dean responsible for accreditation process. Interviews were conducted from the deans of the business schools. On the basis of their responses, the research was categorized into early movers and followers institutions. The responses of business deans have been compared to the similarities and differences in their decision making. The factors affecting the decision making of the deans have been compared and categorized into four factors: institutional theory, funding, and environmental uncertainties such as inconsistent government policies on tertiary education. These factors are also drivers for followers institution towards seeking NBEAC accreditation.

The findings of the this research also revealed that institution seek accreditation get visibility and funding, and environmental uncertainties such as inconsistent government policies on tertiary education. There were almost same questions for early mover and followers institutions; however in the case of early movers institution, the scenario was much different. As per deans of early movers institutions, the rigorous exercise towards attainment of NBEAC accreditation due help them to improve their funding and visibility. In order to gain a competitive edge and ensure market survival, deans of early movers seek institutionalized accreditation standards institutions can easily signal the quality of their program in the market. The decision for international accreditation is affected due to the lack of pressure on stakeholders. The major stakeholders of higher education institutions are the government, students, and employers. The major concern of all stakeholders is the quality of education. The findings of the this research also revealed that institution seek accreditation get visibility and reputation.

To meet the objective of the study Interviews with the deans of business schools were not opinionated in Pakistan. Pakistan therefore, there is no prior research in the field that highlighting the motivation of deans and stakeholders towards seeking NBEAC accreditation. Hence, this study is the first attempt to highlight the motivation of deans and stakeholders towards seeking NBEAC accreditation. Exploratory study is identified to be the most appropriate whilst keeping in view the nature of the study. The data was transcribed as early as possible. Furthermore, the data was analyzed to determine the themes and patterns. The Matrix” by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used to compare themes that were selected in interview and survey. The responses of business deans have been compared to the similarities and differences in their decision making. To avoid this bias the data transcription was done as earlier as possible. Furthermore, the data was analyzed to determine the themes and patterns. The Matrix” by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used to compare themes that were selected in interview and survey.

Conclusion

The findings of the this research also revealed that institution seek accreditation get visibility and reputation. The major concerns of this group were found to be knowledge about NBEAC accreditation as well. An issue was raised by Deans, that the major stakeholders of higher education institutions are the government, students, and employers. The major concern of all stakeholders is the quality of education. The findings of the this research also revealed that institution seek accreditation get visibility and reputation. Bell & Howell, University Press of America.


complexity and individualism. Sage.