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Effectiveness of Accreditation in Assuring the Quality of Teacher Education Programs: Exploring the Case of an Underdeveloped Country

Abstract

This study examined the effectiveness of an accreditation mechanism for teacher education exclusively with a fragile higher education system in Pakistan. A quantitative research method was employed. Using the stratified technique, 614 participants from 24 higher education institutions were selected. Questionnaires were used to collect data from participants. The findings revealed that the standards of national accreditation council for teacher education (NACTE) cannot win wide acceptability and support of educators. The accreditation mechanism in Pakistan has emerged less effective in meeting standards of imparting modern, relevant and quality teacher education in the country. A comparative perspective to explore the factors affecting the effectiveness of accreditation in assuring quality teacher education in an academically underdeveloped country Pakistan is discussed at the end of this article. This study provides essentialities of accreditation in teacher education programs. It carries the value of graduate attributes that is a brand image in the quality of teacher education program development.

Key Words: Teacher Education, Program Quality, Accreditation, NACTE, Higher Education

Introduction

Higher education regulates its system under certain premises belongs to quality programs. In the last two decades, the quality of teacher education has become an essential contributor in large scale development of any country (Malaluan, 2017). Today, the thrust of higher education institutions is to influence students' attributes, social changes, and quality transformation. It is manifested tertiary education missioned to produce competitive and professional graduates. In this shifted paradigm, this graduateness is the underlying insight into quality education. In a recent plan, quality assurance agencies are responsible to employ threshold quality education. The quality assurance mechanism works through the internal and external quality monitoring system. The internal quality assurance system runs within the institute globally (Sahito & Vaisanen, 2017). The external quality assurance mechanism depends upon third-party peer-review evaluation. In external quality monitoring, "accreditation" provides trust for stakeholders that an accredited institute meets the quality standards. Concerning the teacher education, development of initial teacher is important. This investment benefits the other educational disciplines to sustain quality in higher education (Darling-Hammond, 2020). The quality of the overall education system depends on the quality of future teachers. Burning arguments have been placed by the researchers about assuring the quality of educators. This discussion fruitful under the umbrella of policies and practices of accreditation (Cheng, 2016; Corbett & Gereluk, 2020; Ingvarson, 2006). Within the context of the significant role of accreditation, the main purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of accreditation in teacher education. The mainstream satisfaction of participants towards the quality of teacher education integrates knowledge, skills, and values.

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Review of Literature

Teacher Education

Teacher education has become a major concern in tertiary education. Teacher education becomes a key point to strengthen the education system of any country (Sahito & Vaisanen, 2017). The teacher education program is intensified and lengthy experiences between in-service and preservice teachers. Educators practice transforming their teaching extent during teacher education programs. In developed countries, higher education institutions envisioned an aligned, student centre, and standard-based teacher education (Orland-Barak & Wang, 2020). The foundations of teacher education lead human capital to serve various disciplines in higher education. The prior goal of higher education institutions is to produce competent future teachers through teacher education programs. The transformation of knowledge, skills, and values in students can be achieved through effective teaching. The teachers affected higher education system larger than that of any other factor of institutions. Teachers are the main agents to present and shift the quality of higher education to students. The rapid growth of teacher education institutions increased the importance of quality of education (Darmody & Smyth, 2016). Howbeit, the widespread concerns of teacher education programs bring complications about quality (McCowan, 2018). In Pakistan, Government Colleges for Elementary Teacher, Education, University Departments of Education, University of Education, Government Colleges of Education, and institutes of education and research produce thousands of teachers annually. These institutes offer B.Ed, M.Ed, M.Phil, MS, and Ph.D. in education. Numerous academicians, educationists, researchers, and education providers have criticism on low-quality teacher education. There are several challenges to sustain the quality of teacher education. Many initiatives have been taken by Higher education commission (HEC) to raise the quality of teacher education. In collaboration with HEC, the National Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (NACTE) has been established to assure the quality of teacher education in Pakistan (Abiodullah, Shakoor & Farrukh, 2017). NACTE is an independent and active body to assure and improve the teacher education programs in Pakistan since 2007. The institutions that offer teacher education in Pakistan get through the process of accreditation by itself, or by the third-party review, and sustain the threshold quality standards set by NACTE (Bourke, Ryan, & Lloyd, 2016).

Program Quality

There is a considerable debate to define “quality” in the educational context. It has different perspectives in different fields. There is no agreed and unidimensional definition of program quality. In this study, it is not targeted to cover multifaced debates on program quality but its association with accreditation and client satisfaction (McCowan, 2018). Besides this, the term “quality of higher education” possess multifaced. The effectiveness, efficiency, excellencies, and perfection have been used synonymously for the quality of higher education (Darling-Hammond, 2020). There is considerable debate on how to constitute quality in higher education due to its multidimensional nature (McCowan, 2018; Prisacariu & Shah, 2016). In present, educational outcomes comparison, rankings, university autonomy, and accountability became integral parts to retain the quality of education (Seyfried & Pohlenz, 2018). The large-scale activities accompanied by the quality assurance organizations provide services to improve and assure the quality of teacher education programs. Several quality assurance models used to measure the quality of programs and institutions. The major plausible models such as, quality audit, accreditation, performance funding, and performance budgeting, performance reporting, and surveys that are utilized globally (Sahito & Vaisanen, 2017). Performance-based models are frequently used in developed countries like the United States, and the United Kingdom. In contrast, under developing countries use performance-based quality assurance model mixed with quality indicators as, curriculum, faculty, infrastructure, and support services. These indicators may qualitative and quantitative, based on some intrinsic assumptions. These indicators do not guarantee excellent quality of education, but absence predicts the likelihood of poor education. In this regard, accreditation

is one of the most popular and effective among performance-based models. Accreditation was designed to assure quality, accountability of institutions, encourage continuous quality improvement, and endorse the relationship between the state and higher education institutions (HEIs).

Accreditation

Accreditation is a widely used and popular performance-based model. It relates to the “process of evaluation and peer review”. Usually, an accreditation system assures that our desired program or institution meets minimum predefined standards. Accreditation evaluates HEIs and programs whether they meet predefined standards or not through third party peer review process (Darling-Hammond, 2020). It is beneficial and fruitful that foster program development, educational change, and innovation. In America and Europe, it is one of the frequently use accountability models around the world. This third-party review system explicitly encourages program diversity and promotes continuous quality improvement (Cheng, 2016; Corbett & Gereluk, 2020; Halstead, 2020). Through accreditation, an environment of competitiveness, and check and balance at higher education institutions has been developed (Chaiyaphumthanachok, Tangdhanakanond, & Sujiva, 2016). Multiple indicators are used to accredit program as pre-determined objectives of program, feedback, environment, services that support students to achieve objectives, students’ engagement inside an institution, contents of programs, employers feedback, students’ satisfaction, assessment, research, communication, teaching proficiency, and outcomes of programs that identify accreditation’s paradigms (Sahito & Vaisanen, 2017). Despite all usefulness, researchers criticise this model of assessment. They believe that accreditation standards lag behind the innovative practices due to adjustment and implementation (Haider et al., 2015).

The Present Study

Pakistan has grown quality assurance remarkably in terms of program accreditation in tertiary education. It perceived as to assure the stakeholders including teachers, students, public, HEIs, and employers that the quality of the program meets predefined standards (Jalal et al., 2017; Sin, Tavares, & Amaral, 2017). HEIs (public and private) offer B.Ed., M.Ed., MA, M.Phil., MS, and Ph.D. programs in education. These institutions produce thousands of teachers annually. As the educational environment in underdeveloped regions is different from that of developed countries. The quandary of higher education demonstrates with poor infrastructure, overloaded intakes, untrained teachers, irrelevant curricula, and weak production of skilful graduates in underdeveloped countries (McCowan, 2018). This situation dissatisfied the stakeholders including students, parents, and employers (Oketch, 2016). Despite all, many questions are raised on teacher education program accreditation (McCowan, 2018). The present study was designed to explore the extent of teachers’ satisfaction with NACTE’s standards and process, TE program quality, and students’ perception about their program quality in comparison to accredit and non-accredit program, and the effect of accreditation to improve teacher education. The researchers formulated the following research questions:

1. What perceptions university teachers have regarding accreditation standards, process and their contribution to improve teacher education quality?
2. Does the satisfaction of participants about teacher education quality vary regarding accredited and non-accredited programs?
3. To what extent does the accreditation influence the quality of teacher education in Pakistan?

Methodology

The main research approach adopted to conduct this study was quantitative. The researchers adopted a survey study design to gather data from the participants. The researchers randomly selected participants and gathered data through questionnaires.

Participants

The target sample was all the teachers and students associated with teacher education programs in 135 teacher education institutes (114 public & 21 are private) (Sahito & Vaisanen, 2017). Only two programs Master of Education (M.A.) and Master in Education (M.Ed.) programs were purposively selected for this study. Using the stratified sampling technique, the researchers divided the teacher education programs into two based on accreditation status. There were two strata accredit and non-accredit teacher education (TE) programs. Sixty-eight teachers (50% male & 50% female) and 546 students (10.5% male & 89.5% female) enrolled in 24 public and private universities were randomly selected. Only those faculty teachers were included who have awareness regarding accreditation. There were two strata accredit and non-accredit teacher education (TE) programs. Thirty-three teachers (48.52 %) and 235 students (43.04%) were selected from 6 accredit MA/M.Ed. While 35 teachers (51.47 %) and 311 students (56.95%) were associated with 6 non-accredit MA/M.Ed.

Instrument

The researchers used a questionnaire to gather data from participants. The questionnaire was comprised of 48 items and 9 indicators related to program quality as program course (3 items), program assessment (4 items), teaching quality (12 items), support services (6 items), learning community (4 items), communication skills (4 items), problem-solving skills (8 items), subject knowledge (4 items), and ethics (3 items) in teacher education. The same questionnaire was used for teachers with additional indicators; standards (5 items), and process NACTE (4 items). An average congruency percentage (ACP) approach by Popham (1978) was adopted to measure the validity of each questionnaire. The average value of items exceeded 60 % was acceptable. The questionnaire used for the teachers and students was accepted at the Cronbach alpha value of .803 and .826 respectively.

Data analysis

The data were gathered on a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree (Rensis Likert, 1932). The data were analysed through the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS-20). The range of between -1.96 to +1.96 (skewness) and -2 and +2 kurtosis is accepted for the normality of data (Pallant, 2005). The mean was calculated on variables wise as each variable has a different number of items. The sum of scores of the respondents calculated and divided by the total number of respondents to have mean on each variable. Inferential statistics were used to compare means of respondents through techniques of independent *t*-tests.

Findings

Importantly, results demonstrate that teachers' and students' satisfaction is greatly influenced by program quality. An image of predefined standards and meeting those standards lead the dimensions of significant predictors of educators' quality. This study used comprehensive measures about accreditation (NACTE) standards and process, and quality transformation. The findings of the current study demonstrate worthwhile aspects of quality indicators that play a requisite role in shaping students' behaviors.

Table 1. comparison of participants' satisfaction about the accreditation process and quality indicators of teacher education programs with reference to associated to accredited and non-accredited programs.

Indicators	Status	M	SD	M.D.	<i>t</i> *
Standards of NACTE	Accredited	2.74	.508	.488	3.882
	Non-accredited	2.25	.529		
NACTE process	Accredited	3.81	.674	.750	4.614
	Non-accredited	3.06	.666		
Program courses	Accredited	4.23	.432	.294	2.085

Program Assessment	Non-accredited	3.93	.700		
	Accredited	4.27	.345	.250	2.314
Teaching quality	Non-accredited	3.94	.527		
	Accredited	4.03	.310	.083	.823
Support Services	Non-accredited	3.94	.503		
	Accredited	4.09	.585	.755	4.250
Learning Community	Non-accredited	3.33	.855		
	Accredited	3.62	.938	-.551	-2.894
Communication Skill	Non-accredited	4.17	.596		
	Accredited	3.10	.774	-.154	-.814
Problem-Solving skill	Non-accredited	3.26	.789		
	Accredited	3.34	.688	-.688	-5.054
Subject Knowledge	Non-accredited	4.03	.395		
	Accredited	4.23	.396	-.243	-2.080
Ethics	Non-accredited	4.47	.553		
	Accredited	3.59	.551	.461	2.664
	Non-accredited	3.13	.845		

* < .05

Table 1 displays the results of independent t-test employed to know the differences about teachers' perception accreditation and program quality. The researchers found clear patterns of similarities and significant differences across the perception of participants about TE program quality. There are significant differences in mean scores of teachers' responses from accredited and non-accredited TE programs (Table 1). Both groups are less satisfied with standards of accreditation for TE programs at the mean value of accredited 2.74, and non-accredited 2.25 that are less than cut point average value 3.40. The teachers from the accredited program (M = 3.81) were more satisfied than the teachers from a non-accredited program (M = 3.06) on the accreditation process. The results showed that the mean scores of teachers' responses from accredited programs were slightly higher on the indicators of program courses (M = 4.23), program assessment (M = 4.27), teaching quality (M = 4.03), support services (M = 4.09), and ethics (M = 3.59) than the teachers' mean scores from the non-accredited program. The teachers of the non-accredited program exhibited more satisfaction on the indicators of learning community (M = 4.17), problem-solving skills (M = 3.26), communication skills (M = 4.03), and subject knowledge (M = 4.47). Higher mean differences are found on the indicators of accreditation process (MD = .750), support services (MD = .755), learning community (MD = -.551), and problem-solving skill development (MD = -.688). It can be stated that the teachers associated to accredited teacher education program are more complacent than that of teachers associated to non-accredited teacher education program.

Table 2. Mean Differences of students' perception about program quality satisfaction with reference to accredited and non-accredited teacher education programs

Factors	Status	Mean	SD	M.D.	t*
Program courses	Accredited	3.84	.692	.639	
	Non-accredited	3.20	.979		8.661
Program Assessment	Accredited	3.92	.608	1.023	
	Non-accredited	2.89	.787		16.754
Teaching quality	Accredited	3.99	.432	1.015	
	Non-accredited	2.98	.792		18.122
Support Services	Accredited	3.51	.655	.717	
	Non-accredited	2.79	.771		11.589
Learning Community	Accredited	3.18	.844	-.178	
	Non-accredited	3.36	.897		-2.377
Communication skill	Accredited	2.96	.936	.185	
	Non-accredited	2.78	.922		2.320
Problem-Solving skill	Accredited	2.79	.736	-.295	
	Non-accredited	3.08	.820		-4.389

Subject Knowledge	Accredited	2.93	.887	.336	4.539
	Non-accredited	2.60	.838		
Ethics	Accredited	2.45	.893	-.274	-3.367
	Non-accredited	2.73	.991		

* $p < .05$

Table 2 exhibits that an independent t-test is applied to analyse the mean differences regarding students' perceptions about teacher education program quality. Significant statistical mean score differences are calculated about students' responses about program quality based on accredited and non-accredited teacher education programs. The students from the accrediting TE program were more satisfied with their program quality than that of students from non-accredited TE program. The mean scores of students perception on program course (M = 3.84), program assessment (M = 3.92), teaching-quality (M = 3.99), support services (M = 3.51), and subject knowledge (M = 2.93) are higher than the mean scores of students' perception from non-accredited TE program. While, the mean score of students' opinion from the non-accredited program are higher on the learning community (M = 3.18), and problem-solving skill development (M = 3.08). It can be noticed that the mean scores of both groups (accredited and non-accredited) are less than the average value on a five-point Likert rating (M = 3.40). In this sense, the students of both accredited and non-accredited TE programs were less satisfied about their communication skill development (accredited M = 2.96, non-accredited M = 2.78), subject knowledge (accredited M = 2.93, non-accredited M = 2.60), and ethics (accredited M = 2.45, non-accredited M = 2.73) in teacher education. The mean differences between perception of students of accredited and non-accredited TE programs were greater on program assessment (MD = 1.023), and teaching quality (MD = 1.015). The students of accredited program were more confident about their TE program quality than that of students associated to non-accredited TE program.

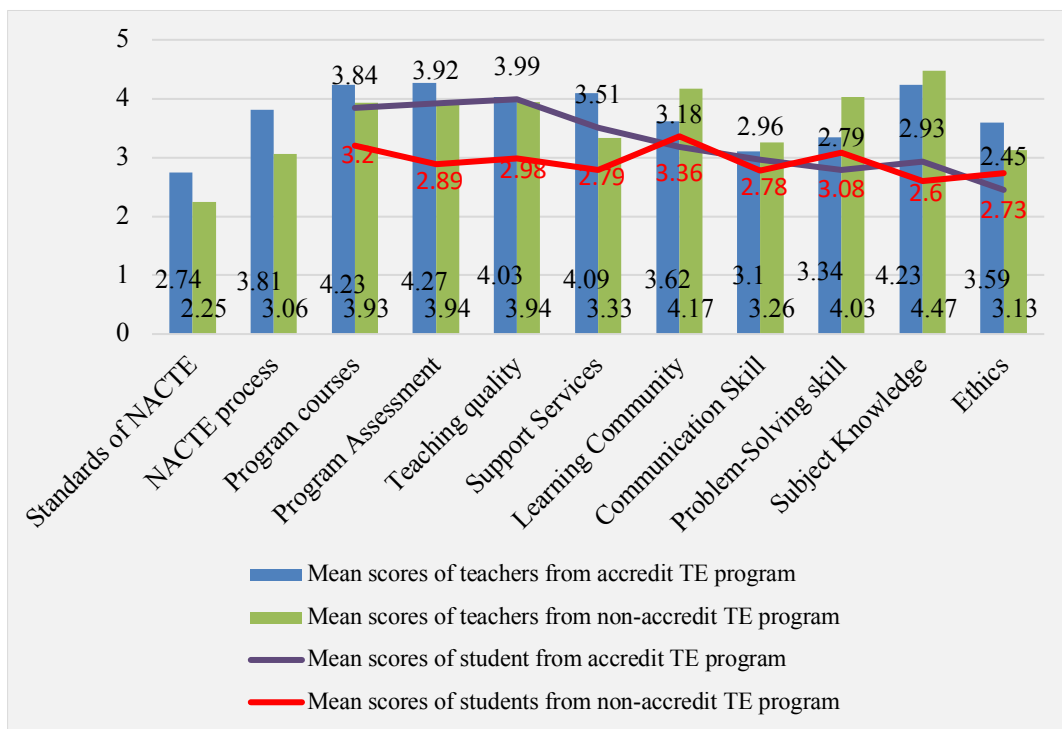


Figure 1. Overall mean differences of participants' perception about accreditation and program quality with respect to accredit and non-accredit programs.

The substantial mean differences were found between the perceptions of a teacher (accredit and non-accredit) and students (accredit and non-accredit) about the program quality (Figure 1). The teachers of both groups (accredit and non-accredit) were more satisfied with their program quality, yet less complacency is shown regarding accreditation standards and process. The differences in mean scores of teachers and students' opinions were higher on the indicators of subject knowledge (MD = 1.30), and ethics (MD = 1.14) associated to accredit TE programs. The mean differences regarding teachers and students' perception about non-accredit TE programs quality were higher on program assessment (MD = 1.05), teaching quality (MD = .96), problem-solving skill development (MD = .95), and subject knowledge (MD = 1.87). It can be concluded that the participants from accredited TE programs are more confident and satisfied with program quality (Attributes, services, teaching quality) in comparison to the participants associated with non-accredited TE programs. Teachers (accredited and non-accredited) TE programs believe that NACTE should revise their standards.

Discussion

Accreditation is one of the most effective mechanisms that voluntarily evaluates educational programs and sustain quality in higher education. With all the enormous challenges of the accreditation council, it plays the role of a nucleus to improve the quality of TE programs (Jalal et al., 2017). In Pakistan, to some extent accreditation affects the teacher education program progressively (Jalal et al., 2017; Mirza, 2015). The efforts to put vogue of accreditation to assure the program quality and established trustworthiness among stakeholders. The accreditation council formed the benchmarking system through its threshold standards for teacher education programs. In tertiary education, public and private institutions credited with a vague concept of accredited programs to sustain quality and gained prestige among stakeholders. Accreditation standards are the continuation of effective program quality. The standards of accreditation aligned with common practices and modernization in teacher education. The standards of accreditation should be uniformed rather than encourage laxly (Debono et al., 2017; Gunn, 2016; Hegji, 2017; Jalal et al., 2017; Seyfried & Pohlenz, 2018). In this study, we found that the teachers (accredit and non-accredit) are less satisfied with the standards of accreditation to improve teacher education programs. Yet, there is a gap between institutions with non-accredit status and accreditation council (Mirza, 2015). In the current study, we obtained significant results that the teachers associated with non-accredit teacher education programs exhibited less complacent regarding the procedure of program accreditation. The missing linkage that brought the policymakers, accreditors, teachers, higher education providers, ministry of education, accreditation council, and standard developers on one page to promote TE program quality (Mirza, 2015; Theobald, Gardner, & Long, 2017; Williams, Morton, Braun, Longo, & Baker, 2017). Hegji (2017) and Jalal et al. (2017) stated the same perspective that accreditation organizations should transparent in the procedure, applicant friendly, and well-structured to gain the trust of the community. The results related to the students' and teachers' satisfaction with the quality of TE programs explored that the students and teachers of accredited programs were more satisfied than that of teachers associated with non-accredit TE programs on the indicators of program course, program assessment, teaching quality, and support services. Such as, Sabatayeva et al. (2017) discussed that the overall students were satisfied with the facilities provided in higher education. Ashraf, Muhammad Azeem, and Hafiza Iqra Ismat (2016) concluded that the outdated curriculum decreased educational quality. The teachers are the main source to transmit the quality of any program and deliver prestigious knowledge to the students. The weak teaching quality also affects the process to improve the program quality (Sahito & Vaisanen, 2017). The teachers of accredited programs were less satisfied than that of teachers associated with non-accredit TE programs about communication skills. The students of both accredit and non-accredit TE programs were less satisfied with communication skills, subject knowledge, and ethics. The students and teachers of accredited programs were less satisfied than that of students and teachers associated with non-accredit TE programs about learning community, problem-solving skills, subject knowledge, ethics in teacher education. This finding supports the study of Buzdar, Jalal, and Mohsin (2018) that the students have

high expectations than their acquisition during accredit TE programs. The indicator of program quality as the development of problem-solving skills, communication skills, subject knowledge, and ethics in teacher education associated with the report of HEC by (Grant Thornton Consulting (Pvt.) Limited, 2016). The study of Shahbaz (2016) revealed that the development of communication skills, critical thinking, adaptability, ethics, and management were the major areas to pay attention to in higher education. despite all positive effects on program quality, there are some execution problems in accreditation. As, the accreditation council focused more on quantitative measures than the qualitative orientations that evolve students to develop graduate attributes (Naveed, 2017). The current study investigated that the participants from an accredited or non-accredited TE program, both were not satisfied with their subject knowledge, communication, problem-solving, and ethics development. Through outcome-based accreditation of TE programs, enough proportion of initial teachers served the working world as per international standards. As an integrated approach with quantitative and qualitative program assessment would lead the TE program quality effectively.

Conclusion

Accreditation became a tipping point in which accreditation standards in association with teacher education programs required reforms. The participants denounced accreditation standards and process unmatched with the local environment, a costly, intrusive, unfocused mechanism for educators' attributes, conflict-of-interest, and stifling system of higher education. The participants have viewed that accreditation does not serve as per teacher education. The present study examined the effectiveness of accreditation to assure the teacher education programs in higher education institutions as perceived by the participants. The current study analysed dissimilarities between the satisfaction of participants regarding accredit and non-accredit teacher education programs. The primary subject of accreditation is to assure the quality of programs to stakeholders who are the consumers of tertiary education. Higher education institutions paid much attention to what students are being taught and how much they are going to learn. The outcome-based program accreditation became a major concern in higher education. In this study, we examined some similarities and heterogeneity in the context of our selected participants about accreditation and program quality. Accreditation model of quality assurance implemented to work as a gatekeeper to control quality in teacher education. National accreditation council for teacher education eligible programs on its specified criteria and standards to assure the quality of the educational programs imparted by higher education institutions. The accreditation mechanism is a worthwhile and potent tool to sustain and improve the quality of higher education. The condition of Pakistan is different to implement the accreditation model as it is. The main purpose of accreditation for teacher education programs in Pakistan is to: organize these programs in recurrent manners; awarding and licensed the accreditation status based on objective, process, and procedures; provision of suggestion to contribute more in teacher education and facilitate tertiary education institution for self-assessment.

The teachers perceived that the standards of accreditation are not being practiced and realistic enough to contribute to teacher education program quality improvement. The accreditation standards for teacher education programs cannot win wide acceptability and support of participants in this study. The teachers from non-accredit programs presented a lack of satisfaction in the accreditation process. The accreditation mechanism (NACTE) has emerged less effective in meeting standards of imparting modern, relevant and quality teacher education in the country. A comparative perspective of overall participants explored numerous factors of program quality that demonstrated that the accreditation process is limited in effectiveness in Pakistan in terms of teachers' and students' satisfaction. To summarize this study, the researchers investigated in general that participants accredited teacher education programs were less satisfied with the development of learning community, problem-solving skills, communication skills, subject knowledge, and ethics in teacher education. The participants from the accredited teacher education program encountered more satisfied with the service quality of programs as program courses, program assessment, teaching quality, and support services. Yet, the

students were collectively less satisfied with their attribute development (Communication skill, Problem-Solving skill, Subject Knowledge, & Ethics) through teacher education programs whether accredit or non-accredit. Significantly, clear differences are found in the complacency level of participants. The difference among participants from accredited teacher education programs was lesser than the participants from non-accredit programs. The gaps are found among the teachers and students on both programs (accredit and non-accredit) at every indicator of program quality. A close difference is found on communication skill development, learning community, and ethics. The pattern of the curved level of participants' satisfaction programs discloses the limited essence of teacher education quality improvement. Moreover, students associated with accredited teacher education programs are much admired for service quality than attribute development. Therefore, the accreditation agency for teacher education improvement should focus on outcome-based assessment to analyses what is being taught to the initial teachers and what they learn from an accredited program. As the global market expects the educators along with exposure to knowledge, disposition, and value.

Recommendations

This study employed participants' satisfaction with program quality that influences educators' transformation. Participants demonstrate their less satisfaction with accreditation standards. It is suggested that an accreditation agency may conduct awareness about practicality of the accreditation standards in extension to documentation. This greater amount of communication may increase the trust level of (teaching community) and envisioned threshold standards of teacher education. The researchers also recommended that accreditation agencies should pay attention to revise the standards for program accreditation as per the context of Pakistan. The formation of accreditation standards and the process should be designed and disseminated with the consultation and needs of stakeholders. Although, participants associated with the accredited programs are much satisfied with services quality, yet higher education institutions may also focus on generic skill development in students according to the contemporary needs of students and the working world. Healthy communication, favourable environment, and ethical consideration should establish for the better development of students. A broader range of participants, more factorization, different locations, and different research settings should be adopted by other researchers to investigate the similarity in results particularly in terms of knowledge and skill development through educational programs.

Future studies are encouraged on comparative studies based on the accreditation status of W, X, Y, and Z regarding perceived values of accreditation effectiveness. There is a consideration of an in-depth study on quality transformation in students with a greater amount of sample.

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