

The Pathology of the execution process of the institute accreditation at the universities of medical sciences through the grounded-theory approach

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Educational accreditation was done recently as an important step in the implementation of the project entitled “change and innovation in medical sciences education” and its pathology is an important need for achieving its goals i.e. educational quality assurance and promotion. The purpose of the present research is the pathology of the institute accreditation of Medical Sciences at Guilan University. **Method:** The present research has used the qualitative method along with the Grounded Theory approach. The participants purposefully implemented the institute accreditation of Medical Sciences in Guilan University using the theoretical sampling of 30 participants. The referral to the next participant continued until the end of theoretical saturation of the findings. The data were collected through semi-structured and in-depth interviews and the data analysis was done using the emergent approach (Glaser’s approach). **Findings:** Based on the results of the qualitative research, three main damages i.e. damages of the cultural context of the university, damages of the university’s structure and damages of educational accreditation plan were identified and a prescriptive pattern was designed based on the removal of the damages. **Conclusion:** By eliminating the recognized pathologies, the suitable implementation of the institute educational accreditation is contributed and finally educational quality assurances as well as the promotion of education quality at medical sciences universities are conducted.

Keywords: Pathology, Institute Accreditation, University of Medical Sciences, Grounded Theory

Introduction

Higher education systems in the last two decades were confronted with trends due to global changes, which have affected operational processes and changed their goals to manifest the quality [1]. On this basis, the factor of competition in higher education is a mechanism for representation, improvement and promotion of the quality [2] and realizing this

aim is dependent on continual evaluation of these systems [3]. Accreditation aimed to assess the quality of the educational institutes, has been applied in different countries in the world for years [4]. Accreditation is a process for measuring whether the educational activities and plans of a higher education institute have met the minimum predetermined standards or not [5]. According to Western Association of Schools and Colleges-Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities (WASC-ACSCU), accreditation refers to the meeting of all requirements related to the institute capacity and the effectiveness of educational institutes [6]. Accreditation is the distinctiveness granted to any higher educational institute due to the fulfillment of the mentioned standards of educational quality [7].

The institute accreditation system in the universities of medical sciences of the Islamic Republic of Iran has been designed for the continual improvement of educational and research quality and the provision of services [4]. In 2013, the project entitled

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“change and innovation in medical sciences education”based on Iranian vision 2025, the comprehensive scientific map of the country, the comprehensive scientific health map and health system change plan were formulated by the Ministry of Health and Medical Education. This was one of the aims of educational accreditation plan of the institutes and educational and therapeutic centers of the universities of medical sciences in Iran. The first actions started in 2015 and the first educational accreditation course was completed in winter 2017 and spring 2017. Considering the completion of the first educational accreditation course in the Iranian universities of medical sciences, it seems completely necessary to identify accreditation damages, which is one of the assessment processes in the organization. Pathology is a systematic process of data collection aiming at effective and useful interaction to solve problems, challenges, pressures and environmental limitations in the organization [8]. Pathology is a process for systematic assessment of the current situation of the organization and finding solutions for solving special problems, increasing effectiveness of an organization and a prerequisite for organizational effort to develop other organizations. Proper and timely pathology allows managers to get informed of the current issues and problems of their organization and prevent them from being aggravated. Pathologists use special procedures for critical data collection. One of these ways is to use the grounded theory through the interviews using the grounded theory approach [9]. Considering that the quality assessment in different higher education systems is being done as internal and external assessment and accreditation plans in our country for more than one decade, there are yet quality related challenges. It seems that the present methods of quality assessment have no necessary qualifications and cause some damages which should be studied comprehensively to identify the damages of these methods. Identification of educational accreditation damages causes to specify the weaknesses of the said plan and one can help to promote educational quality of the university by reducing or removing them. On the other hand, the assessment and analysis of the assessment plans are the important ways of the quality promotion. On this basis, this study was done for pathology of educational accreditation to present suitable executive patterns.

Materials and Methods

In this research, the qualitative method with Grounded theory approach and emergent approach (Glaser) was used. The statistical population of this research in the qualitative section included all participants who had valuable experiences about the studied phenomenon. They were directly involved in the execution of the institute accreditation at Guilan University of Medical Sciences and were regarded as suitable sources for the interviews and the collection of the data in the environment. In this research, 30 participants were selected purposefully and with theoretical sampling method they were selected from among heads, deputies, faculty board members, educational experts of the university, faculties and hospitals, in a way that

they participated in in-depth and face to face interviews. Interviews lasted between 35 and 90 minutes. The data saturation principle was the criterion for the determination of the sample size and the criterion for continuing sampling was the introduction by the initial interviewees (snowball sampling). Data collection lasted 3 months. Concurrently with data selection, data analysis was also done and this continued until data classification was done with data saturation and the desired theory was elaborated gradually in detail and with accuracy.

For data analysis, the interviews were coded according to the grounded theory procedure in the emergent approach in two real and theoretical stages. The researcher also recorded his/her thoughts and interpretations in interaction with data through note taking concurrently with data collection. To measure inter rater reliability and to analyze the interviews, Intercoder reliability method (repeatability index) and Miles & Huberman methods (1994) were used and also the researcher coding at specified time intervals (stability index) was considered. To validate the findings of the research , the “fit”of the theory to the data, the “relevance”of the theory, the “work”or applicability of the theory and modifiability”of the theory were identified.

Findings

The findings showed that the three classes of cultural context damages at the university, structural damages of the university and educational accreditation plan damages were the main elements of the institute accreditation damages of Guilan University of Medical Sciences.

Table 1. Main, secondary and subclasses of The Institute Accreditation Damages

Main class	Secondary class	Subclass
University cultural context damages	Cultural damages and organizational climate about assessment	Public climate
		Assessment culture
	Individual damages	Faculty board members
		Managers
		Experts
		Staffs
Attitudinal damages	Attitude to assessment	
	Attitude to procedure	
University structural damages	Motivational damages	Lack of motivation
		Feeling of uselessness
	University structural damages	Infrastructures
Educational accreditation design damages	University structural damages	Economic structure
		Political environment
	Management and resource allocation damages	Human resources
		Financial sources
		Physical and IT sources
Plan structural damages	Standards and indices	
	Specifications of the plan	
Plan executive	Plan executive	Sanction
		Legal deficiencies
		Plan execution time

damages	Plan procedure
	Execution place
	Assessors' competency

Discussion and Conclusion

One of the identified damages in the institute accreditation of Guilan University of Medical Sciences was the university cultural context damage. Cultural climate of the organization is the best context for the acceptance or rejection of the assessment. The absence of assessment culture at the university makes the assessment ineffective in the quality promotion and reduces the expected effectiveness of the assessment process. It also does not allow the competition with other universities and the quality promotion at the university. Results of the study by Vaezi et al. showed that 80% of the staffs assessed organizational culture and the financial sources in the hospitals for starting the accreditation plan less than the medium rate ^[10] and such thought can start the failure of the accreditation plan. Some of the staffs regarded the assessment useless and believed that it was useless to be done and did not imagine promising vision for it.

The lack of assessment culture and accountability are among the damages of organizational climate and culture which lead to the failure to accept and settle accreditation at the university and in fact, these damages do not cause necessary preparedness for the settlement of accreditation in organizations. Since accreditation contains technical requirements, its implementation requires changes in the attitude of staffs, changes in organizational culture, group and continual trainings. Mohammadian et al. believed that the highest accreditation plan cost should be spent for the training of staffs to get familiar with process, strategy and the goals of accreditation ^[11].

Among the cultural damages are negative attitudes toward accreditation, lack of a transparent and accurate strategy, unawareness of personnel with its execution and lack of systematic attitude of the experts ^[12]. Sadeghi et al. believed that other factors affecting accreditation were the government and authorities' cooperation for providing sufficient sources and targeted reward for motivation among the staff members ^[13].

One of the identified damages were structural damages of the university for which the organizational structure damages and resources allocation and management damages were identified. According to the participants in the interview, there were no suitable infrastructure and structure defined for the institute accreditation in hospitals and faculties. There were no educated and experienced manpower and sufficient resources and physical equipment for the execution of the accreditation standards in faculties and hospitals and this placed double pressure on the forces involved in the plan execution.

There were also many problems for the collection of necessary documents and information. Another point is that reparation of infrastructures cost a lot for the execution of the institute accreditation standards but it was not possible to fulfill the standards particularly in the physical space, resources and equipment due to full economic dependency of the university

on the government and heavy expenses for the execution of the health change plan. Sadegh Tabrizi et al. concluded that necessary resources and infrastructures for the performance of the plan have not been procured in the country. Even in the selection of standards, some standards were excluded despite high importance and low execution, resulting from the lack of necessary equipment and infrastructures in the educational, health and therapeutic systems of our country ^[10].

Hakak et al. in their study found that one of the reasons for the weakness of accreditation is related to the traditional management, no correct understanding of accreditation and arbitrary execution in the organizations. Hardware problems, lack of strategic understanding, weakness of manpower, participation challenges, weakness of management and structure, financial problem and optimal training are among the organizational structural problems for accreditation ^[12].

Karimi et al. also believed that accreditation has not fulfilled its duties properly as it was expected and that influence and lobbyism are the important factors affecting its measurements. The structural limitations include the lack of documents, managerial stability in organization and structural problems and technical problems include the lack of suitable context and information. They also believe that the lack of balance in scoring the measures and senseless measures, shortage of resources including limited budget and physical space and lack of some equipment for documentation are among the negative factors affecting correct performance of accreditation ^[14]. Of other identified damages were the institute accreditation plan damages in two sub-classes of the plan structural damages and the plan executive damages. Results of the study by Hakak et al. showed that accreditation was a dynamic process affected by the internal and external factors, therefore, the quality of execution can yield contradictory results ^[12].

The interviewees believed that the assessment of governmental institutes with compulsory intervention of the governmental sector was not reliable. On the other hand, the governmental institutes should conform to the requirements which they were not allowed to change organizationally. Despite the compulsory and sometimes unachievable standards, all the institutes of the country should participate in this plan regardless of their access to resources, smallness, largeness, etc., and be qualified and compete under fully unequal conditions with the universities in the capital.

Another structural damage of the plan is the modeling of standards of other countries without naturalization. Documentation was also emphasized and standards were more emphasized on structure and process and less on consequences. Gaining major scores was dependent on the preparation of documents. On the other hand, the number of standards was high and some were very complex and some were beyond the specialty of the participants. Some standards could not conform to the structure and current situation.

Other problems of accreditation were non-standard measures, ambiguous and subject measures, non-standard assessment process, non-standard data collection and recording system and also inadequate training of staff and assessors.

Legal deficiencies of this plan are the absence of legal incentives for directing the universities toward the performance assessment and accountability. There was no sanction for documentation. Some documents which had been prepared based on the standards were not used at all and finally, the educational accreditation results of the faculties were so general that they did not help in the assessment of the weaknesses of the faculties.

Regarding the plan execution, the interviewees declared that the number of introductory sessions for the performance of the plan at the university was low and there was no support source for better execution of the standards. Term of the standards implementation was short and intensive. Necessary time for conforming to the accreditation standards is usually between 18 and 24 months in America and 3 and 5 years in other countries [15].

Assessment operation was the weakest chain of accreditation. Impartiality of assessors also aggravated the situation. Most assessors did not complete the minimum specialized trainings and did not have any experiences of the professional assessments. Different interpretations and definitions were sometimes presented for the measures and the assessment method of each assessor was related to himself/herself that is he/she assessed each center with one method. The content of the documents was ignored in most cases and only the form of the document was considered. In the research by Hakak et al., some damages such as the weakness of accreditation measurement tools, incompatibility of standards and the lack of a transparent and accurate strategy were identified for data collection of a standard [12].

Results of the study by Karimi et al. showed that the limitations of accreditation include documentation, lack of balance in scoring of measures and senseless measures; focus on fraudulent data accumulation and paperwork instead of focus on the goal. Technical limitations also include the expansion of the accreditation items, time limitations and failure to naturalize it [14].

Conclusion

Removal of the damages of cultural context and organizational structure of the university can contribute to the preparation for suitable institute accreditation or the removal of the plan damages can contribute to suitable execution of the plan and finally educational quality assurance and promotion in the universities of medical sciences.

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