

The Role of Accreditation Frameworks in Improving Academic Standards of Business Schools in Pakistan: A Case Study Approach

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of business education across the globe has significantly transformed the way academic programs are designed and delivered. With the growing presence of cross-border academic collaborations and international degree offerings, there is an increasing demand for well-defined academic standards and reliable quality assurance mechanisms. In this evolving landscape, accreditation frameworks have emerged as essential tools for ensuring consistency, transparency, and academic excellence in business education. In many developed regions, particularly in Western countries, accreditation systems have long played a central role in maintaining and enhancing the quality of business schools. These systems have matured over decades, providing structured benchmarks for curriculum design, faculty qualifications, research output, and institutional governance. In contrast, developing countries, including Pakistan, have only recently begun to formalize and institutionalize such mechanisms within their higher education systems. Recognizing the importance of quality assurance in business and entrepreneurship education, the Higher Education Commission initiated reforms to strengthen accreditation practices across the country. A key milestone in this regard was the establishment of the National Business Education Accreditation Council in 2006. This body was tasked with developing standardized criteria and evaluation procedures to improve the overall quality of business education in Pakistan. Since then, many business schools have started aligning their academic practices with NBEAC guidelines in an effort to enhance institutional performance and academic credibility. Despite these developments, the accreditation landscape in Pakistan is still evolving. Only a limited number of institutions have pursued international accreditation, such as that offered by the European Quality Improvement System, which is widely recognized for its rigorous global standards. This gap raises important questions regarding the compatibility and effectiveness of local accreditation frameworks in meeting international benchmarks. Against this background, the present study adopts a case study approach to examine the role of accreditation frameworks in improving academic standards within Pakistani business schools. Specifically, it explores the extent to which national accreditation criteria align with internationally recognized standards and evaluates their potential to facilitate academic quality, institutional

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development, and global integration. A thematic analysis of accreditation frameworks and institutional practices is employed to provide deeper insights into how these mechanisms influence teaching quality, curriculum development, and overall academic performance.

Keywords: Accreditation Frameworks, Academic Standards, Business Education, Quality Assurance, Higher Education in Pakistan: Case Study Approach

Introduction

The landscape of higher education has undergone a significant transformation over the past few decades, largely driven by the forces of globalization. Universities and academic institutions are no longer confined to national boundaries; instead, they operate within an increasingly interconnected global environment. This shift has led to the growing importance of internationalization in higher education, where institutions aim to incorporate global perspectives into teaching, research, and institutional practices.

One of the most visible outcomes of this transformation is the rapid growth in student mobility across countries. Students today actively seek educational opportunities beyond their home countries in pursuit of better academic quality, global exposure, and enhanced career prospects. As a result, higher education institutions, particularly business schools, are now competing not only at the national level but also in the global academic marketplace.

This increasing mobility has created a strong demand for standardized and reliable measures of educational quality. Students, employers, and policymakers are more concerned than ever about the credibility, relevance, and quality of academic programs. In this context, accreditation frameworks have emerged as a critical mechanism for ensuring and maintaining academic standards Khan, M. S., Rahpoto, M. S., & Talpur, U. (2021). Accreditation serves as a formal process through which institutions are evaluated against predefined criteria related to curriculum design, faculty qualifications, research output, governance, and learning outcomes.

For business schools, the role of accreditation is particularly significant. The field of business education is closely linked with industry demands, global market dynamics, and evolving managerial competencies. As organizations increasingly operate across borders, business graduates are expected to possess not only technical knowledge but also global awareness, critical thinking skills, and adaptability Khan, M. S., Rahpoto, M. S., & Talpur, U. (2021). Accreditation frameworks help business schools align their programs with these expectations by promoting continuous improvement and adherence to quality benchmarks.

In many countries, including Pakistan, the expansion of higher education has raised concerns about maintaining consistent academic standards across institutions. The rapid increase in the number of universities and degree-awarding institutions has made it essential to establish robust quality assurance mechanisms. In response, national regulatory bodies have developed accreditation systems to monitor and enhance the quality of education. In Pakistan, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) and specialized bodies such as the National Business Education Accreditation Council (NBEAC) play a central role in this

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process.

Accreditation frameworks in Pakistan are designed to evaluate business schools on multiple dimensions, including academic rigor, faculty development, research culture, infrastructure, and industry linkage. These frameworks not only ensure minimum quality standards but also encourage institutions to adopt best practices in teaching and learning Pathan, M. S. K. (2021). Through periodic reviews and assessments, accreditation bodies provide feedback that helps institutions identify gaps and implement improvements.

Despite these efforts, challenges remain in fully realizing the potential of accreditation systems in Pakistan. Variations in institutional capacity, resource constraints, and differences between public and private sector universities often lead to uneven Pathan, M. S. K. (2021) implementation of quality standards. Moreover, aligning local accreditation frameworks with international benchmarks continues to be an ongoing process.

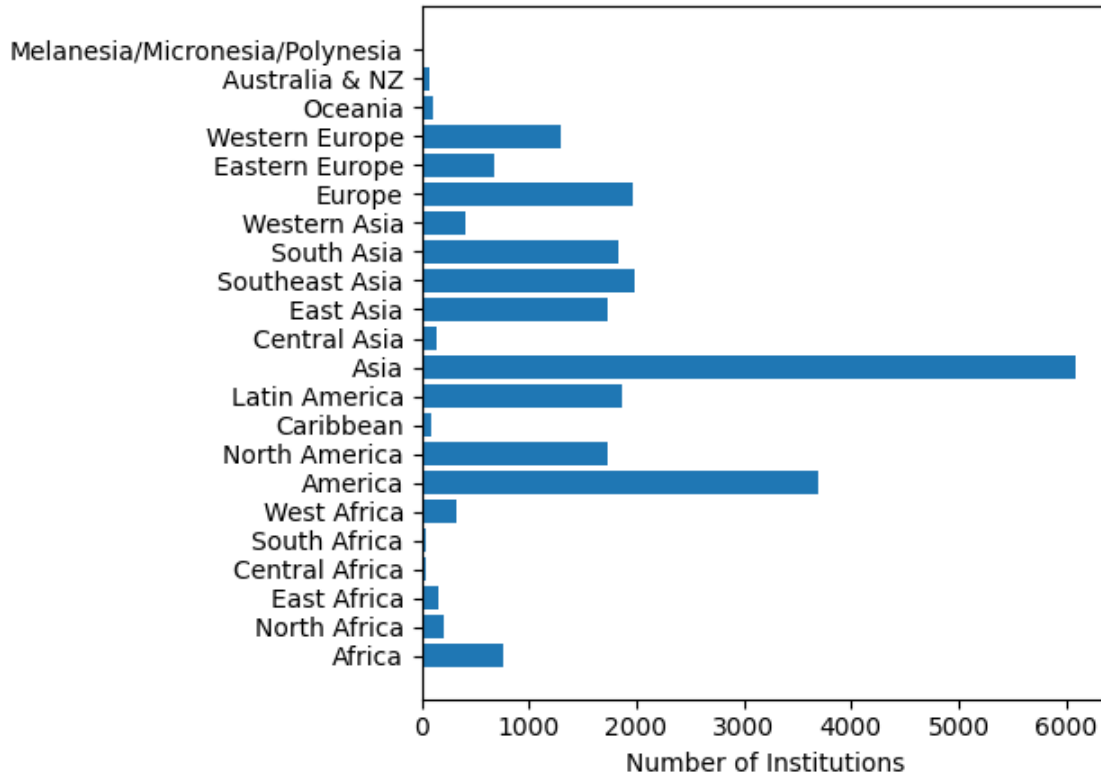
Given this context, it becomes essential to critically examine how accreditation frameworks contribute to improving academic standards in business schools Pathan, M. S. K. (2021). A case study approach provides an effective way to explore this relationship in depth, as it allows for a detailed analysis of institutional practices, challenges, and outcomes within specific contexts.

This study, therefore, aims to investigate the role of accreditation frameworks in enhancing the academic quality of business schools in Pakistan. By focusing on selected case institutions, the research seeks to understand how accreditation influences curriculum development, teaching effectiveness, research productivity, and overall institutional performance. The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for policymakers, academic leaders, and accreditation bodies in strengthening quality assurance mechanisms and promoting excellence in business education.

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Table 1: Distribution of economic institutes around the world

Global distribution of Business Schools by Region (AACSB 2010 Study)



Source: 2010 AACSB study cited by Bruner and Ianarelli (2011)

Business education has emerged as one of the most sought-after fields globally, attracting a significant proportion of students across leading education destinations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. Over the past decade, the demand for business-related programs has increased substantially, reflecting the growing importance of management, finance, and entrepreneurship in a rapidly evolving global economy. This rising demand has intensified competition among business schools worldwide Pathan, M. S. K. (2023), compelling institutions to enhance their academic quality, global recognition, and institutional credibility. One of the most prominent strategies adopted in this regard is the pursuit of accreditation from recognized national and international bodies.

Accreditation frameworks play a critical role in establishing quality benchmarks for business education. International accreditation agencies such as the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, European Quality Improvement System, and Association of MBAs have developed comprehensive standards that guide institutions in improving curriculum design Pathan, M. S. K. (2023), faculty qualifications, research output, and student learning outcomes. Among these, AACSB is widely recognized as one of the earliest and most influential accreditation

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bodies, originally established in the early twentieth century to promote excellence in business education. Over time, its scope has expanded globally, enabling institutions from different regions to align their academic practices with international standards. Similarly, AMBA focuses specifically on postgraduate management programs, while EQUIS emphasizes institutional quality, governance, and internationalization.

In recent years, many countries in Asia have increasingly recognized the importance of accreditation as a tool for quality enhancement. Universities in countries such as China, India, Japan, Malaysia, and Hong Kong have actively pursued international accreditation to strengthen their academic reputation and global competitiveness. This trend reflects a broader shift toward standardization and accountability in higher education Pathan, M. S. K. (2023), where institutions are expected to demonstrate measurable outcomes in teaching, research, and employability.

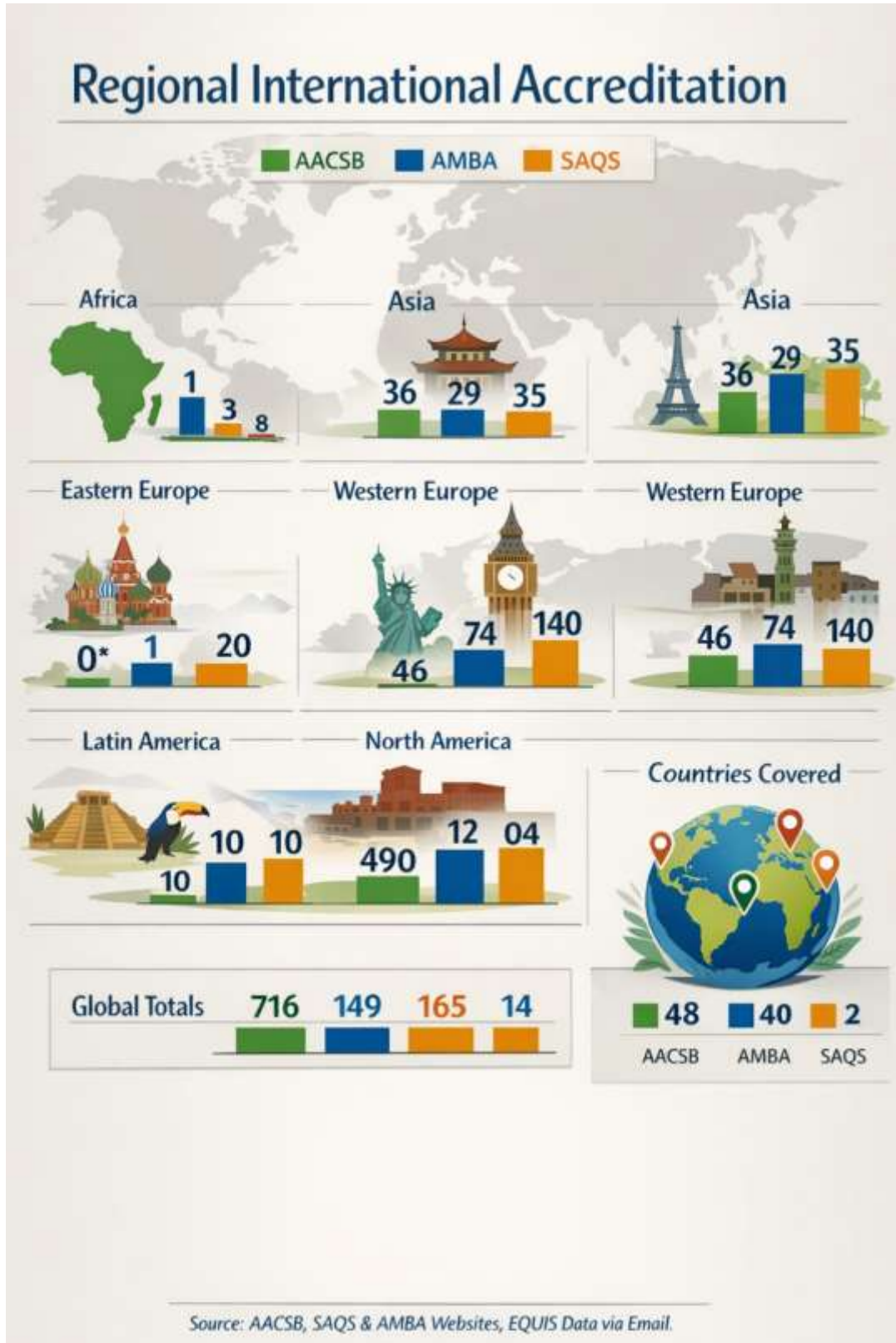
Alongside international frameworks, regional accreditation initiatives have also gained momentum. The Association of Management Development Institutions in South Asia introduced the South Asian Quality Assurance System (SAQS) Pathan, M. S. K. (2023) to support business schools within the SAARC region in achieving quality standards comparable to global benchmarks. This initiative has enabled several institutions in South Asia, including Pakistan, to improve their academic structures and align their programs with internationally accepted practices.

In the context of Pakistan, the role of accreditation has become increasingly significant, particularly after the establishment of the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. HEC has introduced various quality assurance mechanisms aimed at improving higher education standards, including the formation of accreditation councils such as the National Business Education Accreditation Council (NBEAC) Pathan, M. S. K. (2022). These efforts have contributed to enhancing the quality of business education by promoting standardized curricula, faculty development, and institutional accountability.

Despite these advancements, challenges remain in ensuring consistent academic standards across business schools in Pakistan. Historical issues such as policy inconsistency, governance limitations, and varying institutional capacities have affected the overall development of business education in the country Pathan, M. S. K. (2022). However, the growing emphasis on accreditation frameworks presents a valuable opportunity for institutions to strengthen their academic quality and global standing.

This study, therefore, examines how accreditation frameworks contribute to improving academic standards in business schools in Pakistan, using a case study approach. By analyzing institutional practices, quality assurance mechanisms, and accreditation outcomes, the research aims to provide insights into how business schools can effectively utilize accreditation as a strategic tool for academic excellence and continuous improvement.

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Business education in Pakistan has expanded significantly over the past two decades, offering a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate programs. These include Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA and BBA Honors), Master of Business Administration (MBA and Executive MBA), as well as advanced research degrees such as MPhil and PhD in Business Administration Pathan, M. S. K. (2022). Despite this growth, concerns regarding the academic quality and global competitiveness of business schools in Pakistan remain persistent.

Several structural and institutional challenges continue to affect the overall standard of business education. These include limited availability of highly trained faculty, insufficient emphasis on professional development for educators, weak linkages between academia and industry Pathan, M. S. K., 2022), and inadequate research infrastructure. Furthermore, inconsistencies in governance practices and the absence of standardized performance evaluation mechanisms have contributed to uneven academic outcomes across institutions. Collectively, these issues highlight the need for a more robust and coherent quality assurance system (Khan, M. S., 2019).

In response to these challenges, accreditation has emerged as a key instrument for improving academic standards. In Pakistan, the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan has established the National Business Education Accreditation Council to oversee the quality assurance of business education programs Khan, M. S., 2019). NBEAC has developed a comprehensive set of accreditation criteria aligned with internationally recognized standards, focusing on areas such as curriculum design, faculty qualifications, research output, governance, and institutional effectiveness.

The introduction of mandatory accreditation requirements has encouraged business schools to systematically review and improve their academic practices. Institutions are increasingly adopting structured quality assurance mechanisms, enhancing curriculum relevance, and strengthening faculty development initiatives Khan, M. S., 2019). As a result, accreditation frameworks are playing a significant role in promoting consistency, accountability, and continuous improvement within the sector.

At the same time, the growing emphasis on internationalization has motivated Pakistani business schools to seek recognition beyond national boundaries. Regional accreditation systems, such as those supported by the Association of Management Development Institutions in South Asia through its SAQS framework, have gained traction. In addition, global accreditation bodies like the European Foundation for Management Development, which administers the EQUIS accreditation system, are increasingly viewed as benchmarks for excellence in business education.

This evolving landscape raises an important question: to what extent do national accreditation frameworks, particularly those developed by NBEAC, contribute to improving academic standards and preparing institutions for international recognition? Khan, M. S. (2019) While many institutions rely on regional accreditation as a steppingstone, there is a

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growing need to assess whether national standards provide a sufficient foundation for achieving global competitiveness.

Purpose of the Study

Against this backdrop, the primary objective of this study is to examine the role of accreditation frameworks in enhancing academic standards within business schools in Pakistan. Using a case study approach, the research focuses on evaluating how national accreditation mechanisms contribute to quality improvement and institutional development.

Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Analyze the fundamental principles and structure of accreditation frameworks applied in Pakistan.
2. Assess the effectiveness of these frameworks in improving academic standards and institutional performance.
3. Explore the alignment between national accreditation practices and internationally recognized quality benchmarks.

The study emphasizes identifying areas of convergence between national and international accreditation systems, with the intention of highlighting pathways through which Pakistani business schools can strengthen their academic quality and global standing.

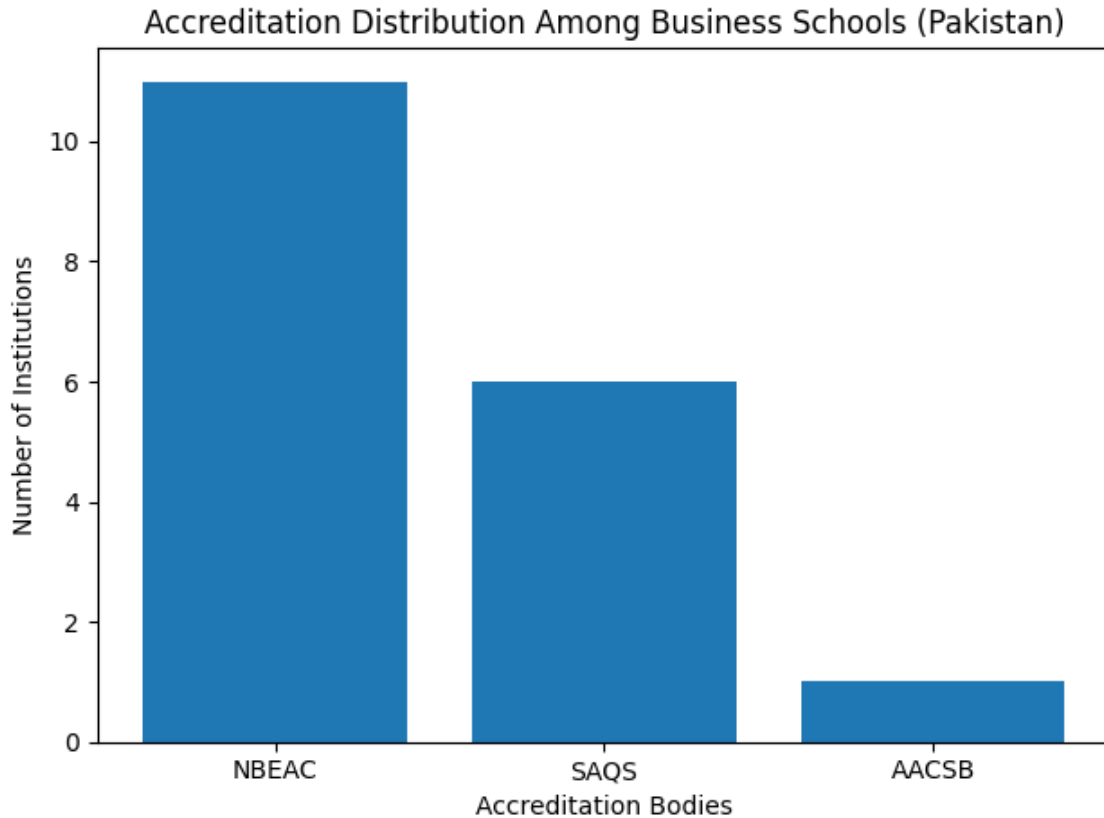
Rationale for International Benchmarking

Among international accreditation systems, the EQUIS framework, developed under the umbrella of the European Foundation for Management Development is particularly relevant for comparative analysis Muhammad, S. K. P. (2023). It is widely regarded for its comprehensive evaluation criteria, global orientation, and adaptability to diverse educational contexts. Moreover, its emphasis on research quality, corporate engagement, and internationalization aligns closely with the emerging priorities of business schools in Pakistan.

By examining the relationship between national accreditation frameworks and international standards, this study seeks to provide meaningful insights into how accreditation can catalyze academic excellence and institutional transformation in the Pakistani context.

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Table 3: List of institutions that have received or applied for international accreditation



Methodology

To accomplish the objectives of this study, key accreditation documents from the National Business Education Accreditation Council (NBEAC, 2013) and the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS, 2014) were carefully examined as primary data sources. These documents provide comprehensive guidelines and benchmarks that define quality standards for business education at both national and international levels.

A qualitative research design was adopted, utilizing **document analysis** as the central method. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of policy frameworks, standards, and procedures embedded within accreditation systems. Given the interpretive nature of qualitative inquiry, the analysis process remained flexible and iterative, enabling a deeper understanding of the underlying themes and patterns within the data.

To systematically interpret the collected information, **thematic analysis** was employed. This method facilitated the identification of Muhammad, S. K. P. (2023), organization, and interpretation of recurring ideas and concepts across the selected documents. Thematic analysis is particularly effective in examining complex qualitative data, as it enables the researcher to focus both on broad patterns and specific dimensions relevant to the research objectives.

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The data collection process involved retrieving official accreditation manuals, policy documents, and procedural guidelines from the respective institutional websites. To ensure accuracy and completeness, additional communication was made with relevant officials to confirm updated accreditation criteria, application procedures, and evaluation mechanisms (Muhammad, S. K. P., 2023). This step strengthened the reliability of the data used in the study.

A thorough and repeated reading of the documents was carried out to develop familiarity with the content. During this stage, recurring concepts, terminologies, and structural patterns were noted. These observations were then organized into initial categories, which were further refined into broader thematic areas. Ultimately, the analysis was structured around three key dimensions:

1. Accreditation Principles
2. Accreditation Standards
3. Accreditation Status and Processes

These themes provided a coherent framework for examining how accreditation systems contribute to improving academic standards in business schools.

Results and Discussion

The findings of the study are presented across three major thematic areas, reflecting the core components of accreditation frameworks. These themes offer valuable insights into how structured accreditation mechanisms influence the quality and academic standards of business education in Pakistan.

1. Principles of Accreditation

The analysis reveals a strong alignment between the foundational principles of NBEAC and EQUIS. Both accreditation bodies emphasize a systematic and transparent approach to quality assurance, focusing on continuous improvement, institutional accountability, and academic excellence (Pathan, M. S. K. (2022)).

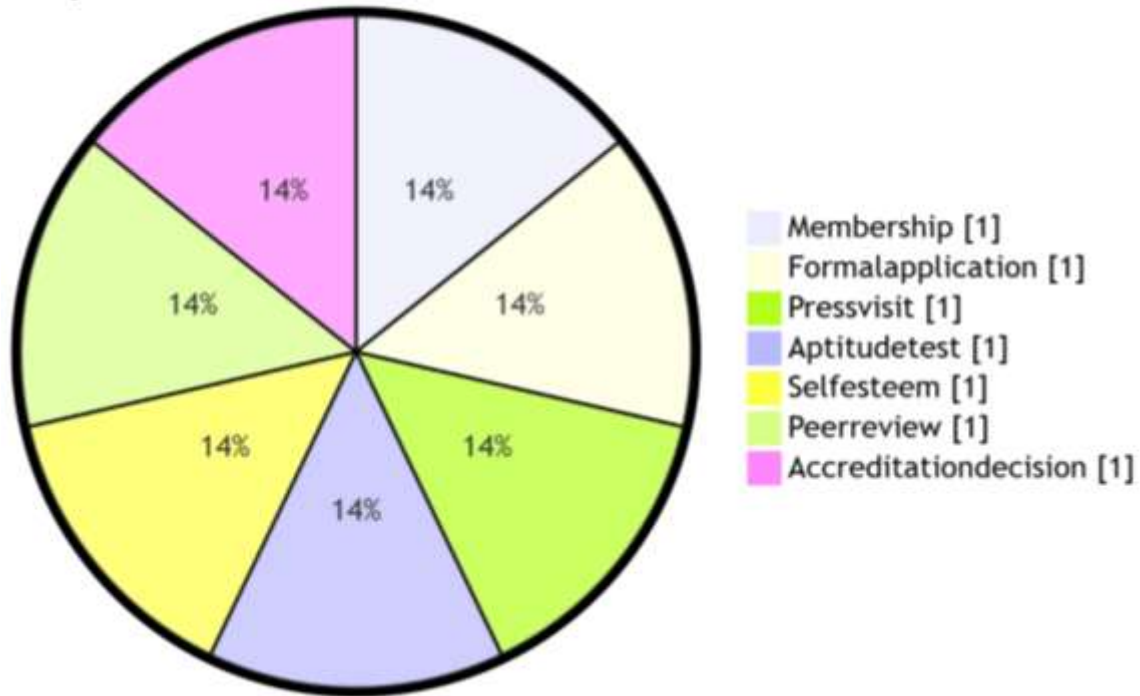
Despite operating in different contexts, both frameworks follow a similar sequence of processes, including self-assessment, external evaluation, and periodic review. This structured approach ensures that institutions not only meet predefined standards but also engage in ongoing development and refinement of their academic practices.

The convergence of these principles highlights the growing harmonization between national and international accreditation systems. It also suggests that adopting globally recognized frameworks can significantly enhance the credibility and academic standards of business schools in Pakistan.

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Table 3 Comparison of accreditation principles

Key elements in Scenario Process



Compiled for this study

Accreditation frameworks play a pivotal role in strengthening the academic standards of business schools in Pakistan by ensuring systematic quality assurance and continuous improvement. In the context of frameworks such as those developed by the National Business Education Accreditation Council (NBEAC) and EQUIS, Pathan, M. S. K. (2022), the accreditation journey is typically structured into a series of progressive stages that institutions must successfully navigate.

The process generally begins with an initial engagement phase, where the business school establishes contact with the accrediting body. During this stage, institutions are introduced to the overall accreditation framework, including procedural requirements, timelines, evaluation criteria, and associated costs Pathan, M. S. K. (2025). This step serves as an orientation, enabling institutions to understand expectations and prepare accordingly for the subsequent phases.

Following this, the institution proceeds to the formal application stage, where it submits comprehensive information about its academic and administrative structure Pathan, M. S. K., (2022). This includes details related to strategic planning, governance and leadership, faculty qualifications, student profiles, curriculum design, infrastructure, financial resources, and

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institutional support systems. This documentation forms the foundation for evaluating the institution's readiness for accreditation Pathan, M. S. K. (2025).

The next critical phase involves an eligibility or qualification assessment. At this stage, the accrediting body verifies whether the institution meets predefined baseline criteria. For NBEAC, these may include compliance with Higher Education Commission (HEC) guidelines, alignment with the Business Education Roadmap, institutional autonomy, and fulfillment of minimum academic requirements Pathan, M. S. K., 2022; Pathan, M. S. K., 2025). Institutions that do not meet these criteria are often guided through developmental support mechanisms, allowing them to address gaps before reapplying.

Similarly, EQUIS applies to its own set of eligibility benchmarks, which typically include membership with the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD), degree-awarding authority, a clearly defined institutional mission, sufficient academic autonomy, a distinct identity within the parent university, qualified faculty in management disciplines, a primary focus on business education, and a history of postgraduate program delivery. Pathan, M. S. K. (2025). Institutions that fall short of these requirements are usually allowed to improve and reapply after a defined period, often with advisory support.

Once eligibility is confirmed, the institution is required to prepare a Self-Assessment Report (SAR). This document is a comprehensive internal evaluation that critically examines the institution's strengths, weaknesses, and alignment with accreditation standards Pathan, M. S. K., 2025). The SAR for NBEAC is typically completed within a few months, whereas EQUIS allows a longer preparation period, often extending up to a year, reflecting its more extensive evaluation scope. The preparation process may involve guidance from external experts or consultants to ensure that the report meets the required standards of quality and depth.

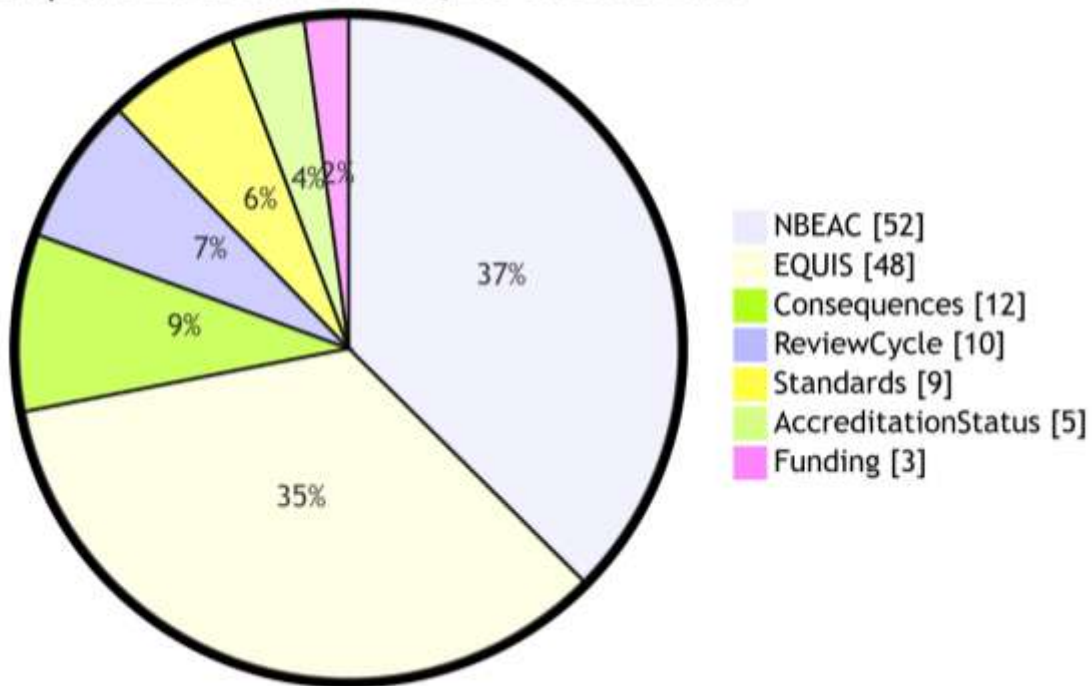
The subsequent stage is the peer review or evaluation visit. During this phase, a team of evaluators—usually comprising experienced academics and professionals- conducts an in-depth assessment of the institution. The review team interacts with key stakeholders such as faculty members, administrators, students, and alumni through interviews, meetings, and document analysis. This process helps validate the information presented in the SAR and provides an external perspective on the institution's academic quality and governance practices.

Based on the findings of the review, the accrediting body assigns a classification or status to the institution. Under NBEAC, institutions may receive different categories reflecting their level of compliance with accreditation standards, ranging from full accreditation for those meeting high-quality benchmarks, to conditional or developmental statuses for those requiring improvements, and rejection for those that fail to meet minimum criteria. Similarly, EQUIS offers three possible outcomes: full accreditation, conditional accreditation, or denial of accreditation Pathan, M. S. K.,2025). Conditional accreditation typically indicates that the institution must address specific deficiencies within a stipulated timeframe before full recognition can be granted.

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Overall, accreditation status serves as a benchmark for evaluating and comparing business schools. Both NBEAC and EQUIS emphasize rigorous self-assessment, peer review, and continuous quality enhancement. Although their specific criteria and timelines may differ, both frameworks share a common objective: to elevate academic standards, promote accountability, and foster a culture of excellence within business education institutions.

Comparison between EQUIS and NBEAC



Source: Data extracted from the NBEAC and EQUIS websites and collected for this research

Overview of Accreditation Frameworks: NBEAC and EQUIS

Accreditation frameworks play a critical role in shaping and enhancing the academic standards of business schools. In the context of Pakistan, the National Business Education Accreditation Council (NBEAC) serves as a key national body, while EQUIS (EFMD Quality Improvement System) represents an internationally recognized accreditation system. Although both frameworks share the common objective of ensuring quality assurance and continuous improvement, they differ significantly in scope, orientation, and implementation Zardari, H. A. (2023).

NBEAC operates primarily within Pakistan and is designed to align business education programs with national priorities and socio-economic needs Zardari, H. A. (2023). It is currently a voluntary accreditation system, although discussions continue regarding its potential transition toward a more formalized or mandatory status in the future. In contrast,

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EQUIS functions as an international, voluntary accreditation system that evaluates business schools globally. Its focus extends beyond program-level assessment to institutional-level excellence, emphasizing global competitiveness and international integration.

Despite these differences, both frameworks are grounded in comparable quality assurance philosophies and adopt structured evaluation processes aimed at improving institutional performance.

Comparative Dimensions of Evaluation

EQUIS assesses business schools across ten broad dimensions: institutional context and strategy, programs, student body, faculty, research and development, executive education, institutional resources and administration, internationalization, ethics and sustainability, and corporate connections Zardari, H. A. (2023). The overarching emphasis of EQUIS is on international outlook, institutional excellence, and the ability of a business school to operate effectively within a global environment. Institutions seeking EQUIS accreditation are therefore expected to demonstrate diversity, international engagement, and alignment with global academic and professional standards.

In comparison, NBEAC evaluates business programs across nine key areas: strategic management, curriculum quality, student quality, faculty quality, research and development, social responsibility, resource management, international linkages, and personal development Zardari, H. A. (2023). Unlike EQUIS, NBEAC places greater emphasis on mission alignment within the national context, ensuring that business schools contribute to local economic development while maintaining acceptable academic standards. Its framework is designed to reflect regional realities, institutional missions, and stakeholder expectations within Pakistan.

Strategic Management and Institutional Governance

Under EQUIS, strategic management is a central component that examines leadership and governance structure, and the strategic positioning of a business school. Institutions are expected to demonstrate a clear mission that reflects their identity and societal role. Decision-making autonomy is essential, and strategies must be developed through inclusive processes involving relevant stakeholders. Additionally, strategic plans should be realistic, considering institutional resources, external risks, and environmental constraints.

In contrast, NBEAC evaluates strategic management with a stronger emphasis on alignment with institutional mission and national priorities Zardari, H., & Ali, S. J. (2023). The framework requires business schools to develop their strategic plans through participatory approaches, incorporating input from faculty and other stakeholders. It also examines the institution's legal status, governance structure, and resource availability to determine whether the school is capable of effectively executing its mission. A formalized management system and clearly defined organizational structure are essential components of this evaluation, ensuring that the institution possesses sufficient autonomy and operational clarity.

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Curriculum Design and Program Quality

EQUIS places strong emphasis on systematic development and continuous improvement of academic programs. This includes processes related to planning, implementation, monitoring, and periodic review. The curriculum is expected to integrate theoretical foundations with practical applications relevant to both local and international contexts Zardari, H., & Ali, S. J. (2023). Innovative pedagogical approaches such as case-based learning, project-based assignments, and experiential learning are encouraged to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

Furthermore, EQUIS requires clear and transparent assessment mechanisms. Institutions must define explicit evaluation criteria, maintain academic integrity, and establish safeguards against misconduct such as plagiarism and examination fraud.

Similarly, NBEAC evaluates curriculum design based on its alignment with institutional mission and market relevance Zardari, H., & Ali, S. J., 2023). Programs must be developed in accordance with clearly defined objectives and supported by a robust quality assurance system. The curriculum should reflect the needs of industry and society, ensuring that graduates possess relevant knowledge and skills. Instructional methods such as lectures, group work, simulations, and case studies are expected to be incorporated. Student assessment practices must be aligned with learning outcomes, ensuring that intellectual competencies and practical skills are effectively measured.

Student Admission, Development, and Outcomes

EQUIS requires business schools to define transparent student selection criteria consistent with their target audience and institutional objectives Zardari, H., & Ali, S. J., 2023). Admissions policies should reflect both local and international considerations. Institutions are expected to provide comprehensive academic and career support services, including counseling, placement assistance, and alumni engagement. Given EQUIS's international orientation, business schools are also encouraged to promote global exposure and cross-cultural competencies among students. Graduates are expected to possess the ability to operate in diverse environments and demonstrate international managerial skills Zardari, H., & Ali, S. J., 2023).

NBEAC similarly emphasizes structured admission policies and student development mechanisms. Institutions must establish clear procedures for student selection, academic guidance, and professional development. Learning outcomes should be measurable and aligned with program objectives. Additionally, NBEAC highlights the importance of instilling ethical values and professional conduct among students, enabling them to contribute positively to national economic and social development Zardari, H., & Ali, S. J., 2023). Active alumni networks are also considered an important element, supporting institutional growth and strengthening linkages with industry and society.

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Faculty Quality and Academic Capacity

Faculty quality is a critical determinant of academic excellence under both EQUIS and NBEAC frameworks. EQUIS requires institutions to maintain a sufficient number of full-time faculty members, typically with a minimum benchmark of 25, although this may vary depending on institutional size and scope. Faculty composition should reflect diversity in terms of academic background, nationality, and areas of expertise. A balanced mix of teaching, research, and professional engagement is expected, with particular emphasis on research productivity and international collaboration Zardari, M. H. A. (2023).

EQUIS also stresses the importance of comprehensive human resource management practices, including recruitment, performance evaluation, workload allocation, and professional development. Faculty members are expected to actively engage in scholarly research, consultancy, and academic service activities.

NBEAC adopts a similar approach but places additional emphasis on contextual relevance. It evaluates faculty qualifications, research output, and involvement in academic and professional activities Zardari, M. H. A. (2023). The framework also considers faculty diversity in terms of specialization, gender representation, and institutional distribution. Institutions are required to maintain appropriate faculty-student ratios and ensure that workload distribution supports both teaching effectiveness and research engagement. Faculty development strategies are also assessed to determine how institutions enhance teaching quality and academic productivity.

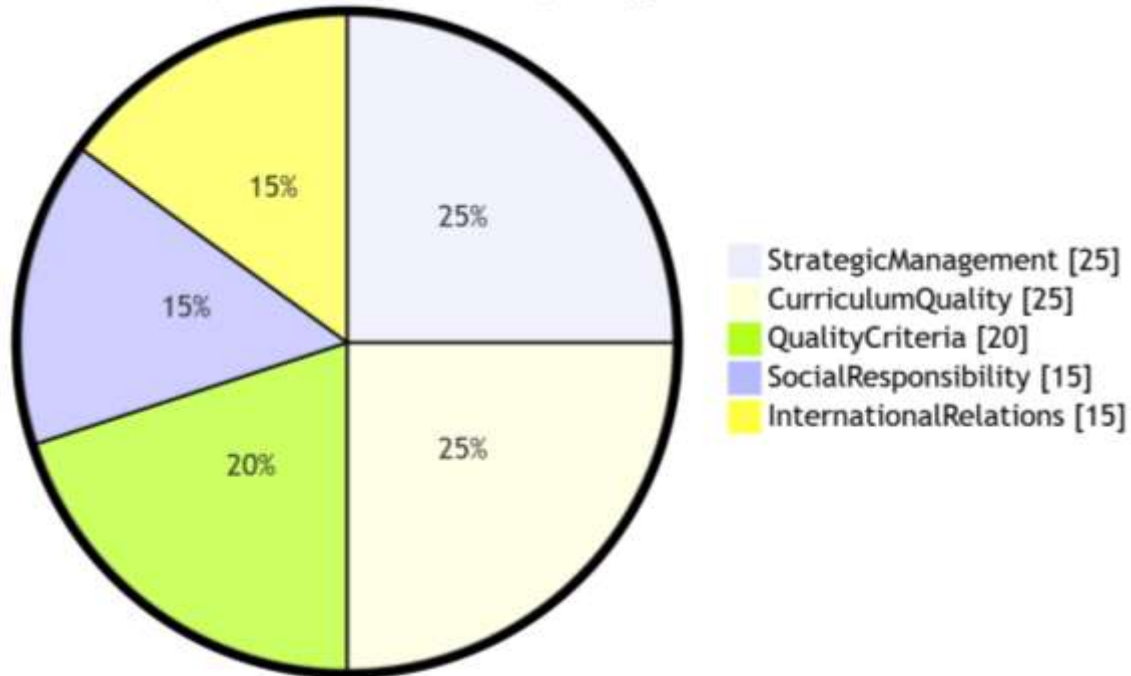
Conclusion

Both NBEAC and EQUIS contribute significantly to the enhancement of academic standards in business schools, albeit through different lenses. While EQUIS emphasizes global competitiveness, institutional excellence, and internationalization, NBEAC focuses on mission alignment, national relevance, and contextual quality assurance Zardari, M. H. A. (2023). Despite these differences, the underlying principles of both frameworks converge on key aspects such as strategic governance, curriculum quality, faculty development, and student outcomes.

From a case study perspective, the integration of such accreditation frameworks can play a transformative role in improving academic standards in Pakistan's business schools by fostering a culture of continuous improvement, accountability, and alignment with both local and global expectations.

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Table -5 Comparison of EQUIS and NBEAC Quality Standards



EQUIS and NBEAC quality standards were created for this research

Research and Development

Accreditation frameworks such as EQUIS and NBEAC place strong emphasis on the research capacity of business schools as a core indicator of academic quality Zardari, M. H. A. (2023). A central expectation is that institutions develop a robust research culture that contributes not only to academic knowledge but also to practical business applications and pedagogical innovation.

International accreditation standards encourage business schools to pursue research across three interconnected dimensions: theoretical (academic research), applied (industry-oriented research), and pedagogical (improvement in teaching methodologies). Institutions are expected to demonstrate a clear mission that prioritizes knowledge creation and dissemination through research activities Zardari, H. A., & Ali, S. J. (2023). The impact of research is typically evaluated based on its contribution to international scholarly discourse, often reflected through publications in recognized international journals.

In addition to academic contributions, research is also expected to inform teaching practices. For example, case-based teaching, applied research projects, and industry collaborations enhance classroom learning and bridge the gap between theory and practice Zardari, H. A., & Ali, S. J. (2023). Accreditation bodies further emphasize the importance of fostering an environment that supports innovation, encourages faculty engagement in research, and

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institutionalizes a culture where scholarly activities are recognized and rewarded.

Similarly, NBEAC requires business schools to maintain a structured research environment aligned with institutional mission and strategic objectives. Research policies must clearly define priorities, funding mechanisms, and faculty involvement. Institutions are also expected to allocate budgets for research support and maintain records of faculty research engagement. Furthermore, research activities should contribute to curriculum development, the introduction of new courses, and the adoption of modern teaching practices.

Resource Management

Effective resource management is another critical pillar of accreditation standards under both EQUIS and NBEAC frameworks Zardari, H. A., & Ali, S. J. (2023). Business schools are expected to ensure the availability and efficient utilization of physical, academic, and technological resources to support teaching, research, and administrative functions.

Physical infrastructure includes well-equipped classrooms, seminar rooms, libraries, access to academic journals, digital repositories, and modern computer laboratories. Adequate facilities contribute significantly to creating a conducive learning and research environment for both students and faculty. Institutions must ensure that resources are sufficient relative to student population size and academic programs offered.

Beyond physical resources, accreditation frameworks also emphasize financial sustainability and strategic resource planning. Business schools are expected to demonstrate the ability to manage risks, allocate budgets effectively, and plan for future institutional growth. Financial transparency and long-term planning are considered essential for maintaining operational stability and supporting academic excellence.

Human resource management is equally important. Institutions must establish clear HR policies for faculty recruitment, development, retention, and performance evaluation. Accreditation bodies encourage schools to adopt structured professional development programs that enhance faculty capabilities in teaching, research, and community engagement. Additionally, marketing and institutional branding strategies are considered part of resource management, as they contribute to the school's visibility and competitiveness in both national and international markets Zardari, M. A., & Zardari, M. H. A. (2023).

Internationalization and Corporate Linkages

Internationalization is a defining feature of globally recognized accreditation systems such as EQUIS. Business schools are expected to demonstrate diversity in faculty composition, student body, academic programs, and institutional partnerships Zardari, M. A., & Zardari, M. H. A. (2023). This diversity contributes to a broader learning environment and enhances cross-cultural competencies among students.

Corporate engagement is another essential aspect. Accreditation frameworks encourage

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strong linkages between business schools and industry stakeholders Zardari, M. A., & Zardari, M. H. A. (2023). Representation of corporate professionals in advisory boards or governance structures helps align academic programs with market needs. These linkages also facilitate internships, industry projects, and experiential learning opportunities for students.

NBEAC similarly promotes international exposure and corporate collaboration within Pakistani business schools. Institutions are encouraged to develop partnerships with national and international organizations, invite industry experts, and incorporate corporate feedback into curriculum design Zardari, M. A., & Zardari, M. H. A. (2023). Furthermore, the impact of such collaborations should be documented in terms of program improvement, faculty development, and student outcomes.

Ethics, Responsibility, and Sustainability

Ethical conduct, social responsibility, and sustainability are integral components of modern accreditation standards. EQUIS places significant emphasis on embedding ethical values and social responsibility into the core mission and academic programs of business schools.

Accredited institutions are expected to actively engage with their communities through seminars, conferences, consultancy services, and public outreach programs. Student participation in extracurricular activities, social initiatives, and community service is also encouraged as part of holistic education Zardari, M. A., & Zardari, M. H. A. (2023).

NBEAC also incorporates community engagement and public service within its evaluation criteria. Schools are expected to organize academic and professional events, promote knowledge dissemination, and encourage both faculty and students to participate in socially beneficial activities. These efforts contribute to developing socially responsible graduates who can contribute positively to society.

Leadership and Executive Education

Executive education, while not always a mandatory requirement under EQUIS accreditation, is considered an important strategic component for institutions that aim to extend their impact beyond traditional degree programs Zardari, H. A., & Sohu, N. (2024). Business schools offering executive education must align such programs with their institutional mission, core competencies, and competitive positioning.

These programs should be designed to meet the needs of industry professionals and organizational leaders, thereby strengthening the institution's engagement with the corporate sector Zardari, H. A., & Sohu, N. (2024). In the context of NBEAC, executive education is still an emerging area, and formalized criteria for such programs are limited. However, its inclusion in institutional strategy can enhance both academic relevance and financial sustainability.

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Comparative Discussion of Accreditation Frameworks

A comparative analysis of NBEAC and EQUIS reveals that while both frameworks share common quality indicators, EQUIS tends to adopt a more detailed, structured, and internationally oriented approach Zardari, H. A., & Sohu, N. (2024). EQUIS emphasizes formalized processes, stakeholder involvement, and clearly defined performance expectations across all domains of institutional functioning.

For instance, in strategic management, EQUIS requires a participatory approach to mission formulation, ensuring that stakeholders, including faculty, students, and industry partners, are actively involved. In contrast, NBEAC guides mission development but places relatively less emphasis on stakeholder integration and procedural depth.

Similarly, EQUIS adopts a comprehensive view of quality assurance, including explicit international benchmarks and continuous improvement mechanisms. NBEAC, while aligned in principle with these standards, often focuses more on qualitative assessment rather than clearly defined quantitative thresholds Zardari, H. A., & Sohu, N. (2024). This makes NBEAC more flexible but sometimes less explicit in terms of measurable expectations.

Despite these differences, NBEAC serves as a valuable foundational framework for Pakistani institutions. Its alignment with international standards provides a steppingstone for schools aspiring to achieve global accreditation. Strengthening NBEAC standards through increased specificity and international benchmarking could further enhance their effectiveness.

Challenges in Internationalization

Business schools in Pakistan face several challenges in transitioning from national to international accreditation systems. One of the primary challenges is adapting institutional structures, curricula, and faculty competencies to meet global standards Zardari, H. A., & Sohu, N. (2024). International accreditation requires a significant shift in mindset, processes, and resource allocation.

Another major challenge lies in faculty development and international exposure. Institutions often face constraints in attracting and retaining highly qualified faculty with international experience. Additionally, geopolitical factors, visa restrictions, and limited global mobility can hinder international collaborations and academic exchange.

Financial constraints also play a critical role Zardari, H. A., & Sohu, N. (2024). The cost associated with pursuing international accreditation can be substantial, particularly for public sector institutions. These costs include accreditation fees, faculty development programs, infrastructure upgrades, and administrative investments.

Challenges for NBEAC Internationalization

While NBEAC plays a pivotal role in national quality assurance, it also faces challenges in aligning itself with global accreditation standards Zardari, H. A., & Sohu, N. (2024). One key issue is limited international visibility and engagement. Incorporating international

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evaluators and benchmarking practices could enhance the credibility and global recognition of NBEAC.

Financial and institutional constraints further limit their expansion. As NBEAC operates under the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, its resource allocation depends largely on governmental funding. This dependency may restrict its ability to expand operations, conduct extensive evaluations, and strengthen its international networks.

Additionally, adoption at the institutional level has been gradual, as many business schools are still adapting to accreditation requirements. Increased awareness, capacity building, and stakeholder engagement are necessary to strengthen the overall impact of the accreditation system.

Conclusion

Accreditation frameworks play a crucial role in enhancing the academic standards and institutional performance of business schools. The establishment of NBEAC in Pakistan represents a significant step toward developing a structured quality assurance mechanism aligned with international practices.

The comparative analysis indicates that NBEAC standards are broadly consistent with international frameworks such as EQUIS, particularly in areas related to research, curriculum development, governance, and resource management. However, EQUIS provides a more detailed and globally oriented approach, especially in terms of internationalization, stakeholder engagement, and strategic management processes.

For business schools in Pakistan, NBEAC serves as an important foundational platform that can guide institutions toward achieving international accreditation. Strengthening NBEAC standards through greater clarity, quantitative benchmarks, and enhanced international collaboration can further bridge the gap between national and global accreditation systems.

Future research may focus on empirical case studies of institutions undergoing accreditation processes in Pakistan, as well as the development of a structured roadmap that enables institutions to transition from national to international accreditation frameworks. Comparative studies involving other global accreditation bodies, such as AACSB and AMBA, would also provide valuable insights into aligning Pakistani business education with international quality standards.

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