

Special Focus: Quality Assurance

enrollments, and academically prestigious. Consequently, university giants mushroomed through mergers. In particular, it was thought that medical universities were essential to first-class universities and should be incorporated into the new comprehensive universities. Almost all would-be first-rate universities were vying for medical universities to incorporate, with the result that the best medical universities were quickly absorbed and consolidated. Many ambitious universities are still seeking a medical university or, less advisedly, trying to set up medical schools of their own to avoid being perceived as inferior in the competition for resources and status in the hierarchy of higher education.

In fact, the trend toward merging large and prestigious universities has been criticized, even though it has been promoted and supported by government during the whole process. Critics have said, “bigger is not always better,” and have pointed out that just having a wide range of study fields and programs does not ensure they will be of world-class quality. However, such voices did not immediately

impede the drive toward mergers. Now, however, the consolidation of higher education institutions seems to have come to an end, in response, again, to a change in policies of the central government.

Out of the whole process, a number of lessons have been learned. One concerns the role played by government. Chinese higher education reforms have been dominated by the government, but with little attention paid to the university’s role. Consequently, institutions that were forced or were at least reluctant to undergo consolidation might well react with dampened enthusiasm as they confront the work of actually implementing the mergers. In retrospect, mergers between larger and stronger universities tend to encounter difficulties caused by the fusion of campuses with disparate cultures and the pressure of managing large-scale universities. By contrast, the annexation of smaller and weaker institutions by bigger and stronger universities is relatively easy to carry out because the institutions being incorporated have limited power.

Establishing a Quality Assurance System in Indonesia

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Indonesia at present is experiencing a serious economic crisis, resulting in less funding for education. While it has become difficult to improve and expand education programs in Indonesia, the societal demand for higher quality output is increasing. In the current situation, Indonesia is trying to maintain the progress thus far achieved. The areas of reform that have been suggested for Indonesia—and other countries—include encouraging differentiation among institutions, providing incentives for public institutions to diversify sources of funding, redefining the role of government in higher education, and introducing policies explicitly designed to give priority to quality and equity objectives.

In operational terms this means that universities should have autonomy and practice internal quality control, while external quality control is performed by accreditation agencies. I will focus here primarily on the quality assurance of universities, especially the Indonesian experience in establishing a quality assurance system.

A New Paradigm

The quality of higher education can be controlled through internal control of academic programs, government regulations, market mechanisms, and accreditation. The quality of an institution of higher education is determined by the resources (human and material), the learning-teaching

process, and the quality of its products (graduates, research, and service). Basically, accreditation of an institution involves the evaluation of these three aspects.

At present, higher education policy in Indonesia is aimed at improving quality by focusing on relevance, academic atmosphere, institutional management, sustainability, and efficiency. Known by its acronym, RAISE, this policy was aided by a new paradigm in higher education management—one aimed at quality enhancement through increasing autonomy, improving accountability, periodic self-evaluation, and accreditation.

As part of the implementation of the new paradigm, a 20-member National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (NAB) was established in 1994 to evaluate study programs in higher education. At first, board members acted also as the reviewer; however, since 1999 reviews take place through peer review, while the board acts only as policymaker and supervisor. In the beginning, the board was a unit operating under the director general of higher education (DGHE), but since 1998 the board has functioned as an independent unit directly under the minister of national education. Because of government regulations, the budget still goes through the DGHE. A proposal to corporatize the board is still under review by the government.

The accreditation system is based on program accreditation. Due to technical difficulties the first round of accreditation involved primarily the evaluation of human and

material resources and not all programs were visited. In the future, in line with the new paradigm in education, which is oriented to student learning processes and outcomes, more weight will be placed on outcomes and learning processes than on resources; since 1999, all programs have been visited. The management of the accreditation agency was also changed to provide an emphasis on peer review, transparency, accountability, and cooperation with other national and international accreditation agencies and professional organizations. The new policy was applied first to graduate programs. Under the new system, instead of being required to fill out forms and submit requested materials, programs are asked to compile portfolios in which they are free to report what they consider to be the important and necessary aspects, including documentation. At the end, site visits will verify the portfolios submitted.

Establishing accreditation in developing countries is difficult, but in a time of economic crisis the role of accreditation is even more critical to sustain the progress thus far achieved and to make universities a credible moral force in the nation.

Challenges for Quality Assurance

Quality assurance and accreditation are new concepts for many in academia in Indonesia. The concept that the professor knows best and should be in control prevailed. For its part, the public is also not much concerned with issues of quality. Most people just want to get a degree and hopefully a good job, preferably in the bureaucracy. This means that market mechanisms for quality control in higher education do not work in Indonesia. People are not looking for the best programs, but rather for programs that will allow them to obtain a degree quickly. When accreditation was introduced in Indonesia, many state universities—especially the older ones—believed they had no need for accreditation as they were already good institutions, maybe the best in the country. Furthermore, students at universities that did not pass their accreditation reviews protested, saying that accreditation stopped them from getting a degree. It was in this atmosphere that the NAB began its work.

The first challenge for establishing an accreditation body in Indonesia was to establish a team of professionals in accreditation work. The number of qualified reviewers was limited, and those who were qualified were already overburdened with other duties. The second challenge has been to develop a system and the instruments for accreditation. Due to the constraints encountered and inadequate fund-

ing, it was decided to do accreditation of study programs instead of institutions. In Indonesia there are almost 10,000 study programs—of which 25 percent are diploma programs, 67 percent undergraduate programs, 4 percent master's programs, 2 percent doctoral programs, and 2 percent graduate diploma or specialist programs. Because of the huge number of programs, priority was given to undergraduate programs. In 1998 accreditation of master's programs started, and 366 programs were reviewed. Accreditation of some diploma and of doctoral programs will start in 2001.

After the system and instruments were developed, invitations for accreditation were sent out. However, only 1,357 study programs submitted the required forms. In fiscal year 1997/1998 another batch of 1,469 study programs responded. This means that in the first four years only 2,826 or about 30 percent of all registered programs were reviewed, all of which were undergraduate programs. Because of the shortage of funds, site visits could not be conducted properly. Only those programs that had an A or B rating in the desk evaluation phase were visited. In fiscal year 1999, due to financial difficulties only 38 programs could be reviewed. Since late 1999 the universities have been asked to contribute a nominal accreditation fee. This contribution and the budget obtained from the government made it possible to do site visits to all institutions, so that in 2000 the number of programs reviewed rose to 1,964. By the end of 2000 a total of 4,925 undergraduate programs had been reviewed—of which 9.1 percent got an A (excellent) rating, 44.8 percent a B (good), 38.9 percent a C (satisfactory), and 7.2 percent a D or failing. Of the 366 master's programs reviewed, 70.2 percent got an excellent rating, 26.8 percent satisfactory, and 0.3 percent (1 program) failed.

Because of difficulties in funding, the duration of site visits had to be shortened, causing some inaccuracies and distortion of the results. The weighting in scoring also caused some distortion, because of an overemphasis on inputs over outcomes and process. However, accreditation is considered the right way to promote quality control in education, as it pushes the universities to establish internal quality control mechanisms to attain a better quality in education.

Future Plans

As a new and foreign concept, accreditation was at first received critically, not only within higher education circles but also among students, as it was perceived as something that hampered their progress. With the new emphasis on quality through improvements in relevance and efficiency, the emphasis will also be changed from input to outcomes and processes. The paradigm of accreditation management will also change to professionalism, transparency, accountability, and cooperation with other national and international accreditation agencies and professional organizations, for better quality assurance and accuracy.

Indonesia is a large archipelago, as large as the continental United States, with 17,000 islands. We believe that the present accreditation system is too costly to maintain. Thus, plans are being made to change to institutional accreditation for selected institutions, by giving those institutions a “self-accrediting” status. These institutions will do internal accreditation of their own programs. The selection will be based on the quality of the existing programs and the existence of a good internal quality assurance system. This will decrease the burden on program accreditation performed by the NAB, without jeopardizing quality assurance.

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Chile’s New Program for Quality Improvement

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The objective of the Higher Education Quality Improvement Program (MECESUP) is to improve the performance of Chile’s higher education system—in quality, coherence, efficiency, and relevance. The program has three main areas of focus: development and implementation of a national accreditation system; enhanced links with national development and qualitative improvement in educational services at the technical, undergraduate, and postgraduate levels; and improvement in the administration of the higher education system. MECESUP has U.S.\$245 million in funding for a period of five years from the Government of Chile and a loan from the World Bank (4404-CH). The program is one of the new generation of World Bank efforts to contribute to global development by increasing the capacity of higher education institutions to innovate and to educate.

Quality Assurance

MECESUP is supporting the development of a quality assurance system for higher education services that includes the consolidation of the national system for institutional licensing of new private institutions (at the Higher Education Council), the implementation of a higher

education quality awareness campaign, and the establishment of an accreditation framework for study programs and institutions (in technical training and undergraduate and postgraduate educational services).

For this purpose, two national accreditation commissions have been set up, at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, to define program quality standards, implement a voluntary accreditation system, and propose a definite legal framework. At the undergraduate level, accreditation work has started with 27 programs in medicine, agronomy, veterinary medicine, biochemistry, architecture, and psychology at traditional universities that are members of the Council of Rectors of Chilean Universities, and 3 programs at new private institutions. At the graduate level, a second accreditation cycle for 65 Ph.D. programs was completed in 2000, and a new cycle for 100 master’s programs is currently under way. The accreditation system is based on autoevaluation, external peer review, and academic audit (experimental, for master’s programs). Institutional assessment and audits are also required for an institution to be eligible to receive student aid from government.

Educational Quality Improvement

MECESUP has started the operation of a “competitive fund” to promote quality and relevance in the higher education subsector, through the provision of grants to beneficiaries (presently, universities of the Council of Rectors of Chilean Universities and national technical training centers) for undergraduate programs in fields of institutional and national priority; for graduate programs, with emphasis on doctoral programs and master’s programs in the arts, humanities, social sciences, and education; for technical training programs in fields of high demand from the productive sectors; and for the improvement of the facilities, equipment, and human resources in institutions, as required to implement the programs referred to above.

The competitive fund started operation in 1999 with a first competition, in which 57 projects were selected; these are now under way (41 in support of undergraduate and 16 of graduate programs). The second round of selection, in 2000, ended with the approval of 70 new proposals. Eligible expenditures for the projects are human resources improvement (scholarships for postgraduate work in Chile and abroad, visiting scholars, short visits abroad for professors and Ph.D. students doing thesis work, and postdoctoral visitors in Chile), goods (laboratory and scientific equipment, access to information and its technologies, and new teaching-learning tools and processes), and buildings (academic space improvement). Just recently, in April 2001, a new competition has been opened, that will allocate U.S.\$52 million to institutions with relevant proposals. Project ideas are selected by the institutions, based on institutional strategic planning and priorities and national guidelines, with results and