

Chapter 22

King Abdulaziz University

Path to the Excellence: Mapping between Accreditation and Ranking Systems

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ABSTRACT

Almost all international universities focus their efforts to appear in the best positions within the different lists of Universities Academic Rankings, to be part of the World Class Universities. But universities must show, that their objective is not the ranking, but the excellence in providing students a quality education. Thus education process differs according to each region, and environment and there is a set of different factors to be considered to achieve the desired results from the institutions objectives and strategies. For that the how to select and prepare universities to fulfill these factors must converge with which is needed and necessary for the environment of the institution, being the most critical and important issue. This research work shows how KAU adapted a strategic plan, to obtain these certifications, which led it to be in the top between its academic peers in its region as in the world.

INTRODUCTION

The mission of the higher education sector is to promote the role of higher education in the world of knowledge today. Higher education is an essential element of cultural, social, economic and political development, a means of promoting endogenous capacities, human rights, sustainable development, democracy, peace and justice (Meek et al., 2009).

However, in a functional analysis of an institution's achievement of its operational objectives, we find not only differences in the assumed objectives but also a lack of consensus on the indicators of their

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achievement. For this reason, we must create an ultimate framework for defining quality (Golder et al., 2009). The realization of such a framework is possible only if we adopt a particular model, or evaluative approach, to quality in a certain time and context. Likewise, how we talk about quality in education exerts a powerful influence on political and social spheres, since individuals or groups can interpret the term “quality” differently, depending on the moment or situation (Tikly et al., 2011). From the perspective of the university as an organization whether a system of “quality” (performance) can be achieved is determined by both individual actions and the interaction of individuals with their organizational units. Thus, an analysis of institutional performance alongside organizational and environmental factors that contextualize individual potential and subsequent analysis is necessary (Ostrom et al., 2011).

However, we must accept the fact that we do not, or cannot, use a single concept of quality as the basis for an analysis of a university. The only possible criteria we can analyze from are those of the evaluative approach, from which a university’s true quality can be assessed.

Ruiz (1991) summarized five evaluative approaches of assessing a university’s quality:

- The university’s reputation
- The availability of resources
- The results of tests and other evaluations
- The content of instruction
- The added value

In considering the above evaluative approaches, proposing a conceptual approach to the quality of university education becomes a difficult task. This leads to the existence of quality measurement systems in higher education in universities. On the one hand we have those systems which evaluate the universities’ quality and accreditation, and on the other those which measure their positions in the lists of academic rankings.

This chapter is divided in several sections. First, it discusses the situation of higher education in the Arab region. After that we present the accreditations and their types and where institutions can apply and prepare themselves to obtain them. The following section catalogues most important ranking lists, and divides them according to type (objective or non-objective). Once accreditation and ranking have been identified and explained in detail, a mapping section of these classification systems is provided to show how universities’ efforts can be used to improve their quality and positions in both systems. Then, we present a case study to show the process: King Abdulaziz University (KAU), as the leading university in the Arab region, followed this framework to improve its quality of education and climbed the ranking lists to become a world-class university. The conclusion shows the weaknesses and strengths of King Abdulaziz University, as an example of the universities of the region, and what shall be planned to do to resolve them.

HIGHER EDUCATION CONCEPT: VISION AND MISSION

Historically, education has been a process of deliberate instruction or training of a human community’s members, especially its young, in order to develop their personalities and work habits and to enable them to adapt to social life. It is a process that has accompanied specific societies, such as Spain, France, etc. throughout their evolution and that, somehow, reflects the changing structures of these educational

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