# Quality Improvement in Real Sense or Just a Quick Fix?

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*High quality education has always been an aspiration for an average Indian student and an area where every parent is willing to invest. Quality offered a differentiation opportunity to business schools, and a market opportunity to the numerous ranking, rating, certification, and accreditation bodies. Today there are statutory accreditations (NBA and NAAC), national rankings (Business World, Business Today, IMRB, People Matters), international rankings (FT QS), and international accreditations (SAQS, AACSB, EDUIS, EPAS, ACBSP, AMBA). While all of them claim to be different and serve different missions and objectives, a business school essentially adds it to their portfolio as a feather in the cap. Do these rankings, certifications, and accreditations really make a difference? Do they really improve quality of education? The case study documents a business school and its journey through quality and accreditations. The names and instances have been fictionalized. The case, however, captures the situation, challenges, and opportunities.*

## INTRODUCTION

World over, many Business schools are concerned about their future survival, with a substantial number of Business schools teaching the traditional two-year MBA courses reporting application numbers either flat or falling in recent years (Moules, 2017). Management education has been through some significant changes

in recent years. The marketization of higher education (Natale & Doran, 2012), globalization and technological changes, as well as sharp reduction in government/ public funding for higher educational institutions, coupled with spawning institutions in the private sector space have forced the competing Business schools think of innovative strategies that could act as differentiators. Therefore, Business schools in their effort to distinguish themselves seek the seal of external validation through the accreditation process (Zammuto, 2008).

Competition for the best students is indeed driving the accreditation market (Moules, 2017). Accreditation is a system of ensuring the quality of institutions offering business education (including short executive education courses) and MBA programmes (Financial Times, 1998). The process assures the various stakeholders such as students, parents, recruiters and society that the accredited business schools and programs meet the rigorous criteria that indicate a high and acceptable level of educational quality. Through accreditation, the business schools seek prestige and credibility from all its stakeholders. A wave of new accreditation schemes giving a measure of quality assurance may help (Zhao & Ferran, 2016). However, there are a number of accrediting agencies that are not mutually recognizable and often measure different things. Some agencies such as those of the AACSB and Equis, accredit institutions; while others, such as the Association of MBAs accredit MBA programmes. Despite this confusion and given the long process of initial accreditation and reaccreditation and the resources that are required, accreditation is no longer a luxury but a necessity.

So why do business schools initiate this voluntary process? They do so because accreditation claims to achieve certain benefits such as the ability to recruit better students and faculty, achieve higher student performance and faculty research and foster the continuous improvements. But are these perceived values and benefits real and attainable? Any business school should consider its resources, mission and the alignment between the accrediting agency's requirement and its program structure and quality level before choosing the accrediting agency, as every accreditation might not be reasonably possible for all schools (Brink & Smith, 2012). While choosing an appropriate accreditation is an important and challenging task, it is equally challenging to accomplish the process of accreditation without obstacles.

Accreditation process provides enormous opportunities for the business school to request more resources from the institutional management, hire better faculty and demand more from its existing faculty – especially in the area of scholarly research and to improve the quality of its programs. But it is expected that any change implementation process would face stiff resistance such as lack of support from institutional administrators, insufficient academically qualified faculty, resistance to change from faculty and staff, immature assurance of learning mechanisms, as well as lack of understanding and support from its business partners (Zhao & Ferran, 2016).

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