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EDUCATION POLICY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Controlling higher education from a distance: using foucault's governmentality to better understand accreditation

Michael H. Romanowski^{1*}

Abstract: The Internationalization of Higher Education (IHE) has expanded significantly in quantity, scope, and complexity over the past two decades, advancing into a complex system able to influence and control numerous aspects of higher education. IHE has led to international ranking and university reputation concerns, increasing interest in accreditation among non-US universities. For many non-US universities, acquiring academic accreditation for programs is a top priority. However, accreditation as a top-down mandate creates close supervision from outside higher education. This non-empirical essay draws upon Foucault's concept of governmentality to identify the mechanisms used by accreditation to control higher education institutions and programs and explains how these mechanisms monitor, influence, and maintain control of academic programs. The discussion illustrates how accreditation under the facade of quality assurance and improvement uses standardization and accountability coupled with various mechanisms to wield control over higher education institutions and programs.

Subjects: Finance; Corporate Finance; Corporate Governance

Keywords: higher education; accreditation; Foucault; governmentality; quality assurance; standardization; accountability

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, the Internationalization of Higher Education (IHE) has expanded significantly in quantity, scope, and complexity (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Zou et al. (2019) contend that IHE has greatly influenced universities worldwide. Specifically, non-US universities concerned about their international ranking, reputation, and competitiveness (Cattaneo et al., 2016; Midraj & Harold, 2016), seek US accreditation for their institutions and programs (Hursh & Wall, 2011). The belief is that attaining accreditation validates program quality and provides local legitimacy

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Over the past two decades, the Internationalization of Higher Education (IHE) has greatly influenced and controlled numerous aspects of higher education. IHE has guided universities to be concerned about international rankings and reputation, leading to an interest in US accreditation among non-US universities. For many non-US universities, acquiring academic accreditation for programs is a top priority. Still, accreditation as a top-down mandate creates close supervision from outside higher education institutions. This essay uses the concept of governmentality developed by French philosopher Paul-Michel Foucault to identify the tools used by the accreditation process to control higher education institutions and programs. It explains how these monitor, influence, and maintain control of academic programs. The discussion explains how accreditation posing as a form of quality assurance and improvement, uses standardization, accountability, and various tools to control higher education institutions and programs.

(Cattaneo et al., 2016; Eldridge & Dada, 2016; Midraj & Harold, 2016). Even though academia has skepticisms about accreditation effectiveness, US and non-US universities have placed acquiring academic accreditation as a top priority (Shafi et al., 2019).

Outside US borders, US accrediting agencies are assessing academic programs. For example, 882 business institutions in 57 countries and territories have earned accreditation from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), with 189 institutions earning a supplemental AACSB Accreditation for accounting programs (AACSB, n.d.). The Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) has accredited “4,307 programs at 846 colleges and universities in 41 countries” (2021a).

Whether in the US or abroad, the process utilizes accreditation and professional standards (e.g., the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) for teacher education) to prescribe what is essential in preparing students with predictable content for every university seeking a particular accreditation. Accreditation systems shape and control numerous aspects of higher education institutions. For example, these include organizational elements of the university, such as structures, policies, and procedures (Romanowski, 2021; Qiang, 2003), curriculum through the development of conceptual frameworks, and the alignment of programs, courses, syllabi, and assessments to standards (Romanowski, 2021; Colburn et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2005; Lewis, 2016; Midraj & Harold, 2016) and university financing (Romanowski, 2020; Johnson et al., 2005; Wheelan & Elgart, 2015).

More precisely, universities seeking accreditation outside the US face various challenges that may differ from higher education institutions in the US. For example, non-US higher education programs face the influences of educational neocolonialism that engraves value systems, ideologies, and ways of thinking based on the reality of American higher education (Romanowski, 2020; Ashcroft et al., 2000; P. G. Altbach, 2003; Saltman, 2010). Concerning accreditation standards, Eldridge and Dada (2016), discussing accreditation for teacher education, argue that accreditation standards are “culturally bound” to the US (p. 30). Others have suggested that non-US universities and programs are compelled to convert existing curricula and practices to accord with US standards and approaches, challenging and perhaps replacing existing indigenous educational systems, theories, and practices resulting in epistemological conflicts (Altbach, 2003; Romanowski, 2013; Engebretsen et al., 2012). Overall, the accreditation process gradually internationalizes non-US programs that resemble US administrative structures based on a Western educational paradigm (Al Barwani & Bailey, 2016; Romanowski, 2021; 2020).

With that in mind, this essay aims to enhance the discussion regarding accreditation by centering on how accreditation controls academic programs. Therefore, this non-empirical essay centers on two objectives. These are to identify the mechanisms used by accreditation to control higher education institutions and programs and explain how these mechanisms wield control. To accomplish this, Foucault’s concept of governmentality is evoked as a framework to analyze how accreditation agencies’ surveillance mechanisms of standards and assessment direct academic programs to achieve desired outcomes, in turn, controlling programs from a distance. At this point, it is essential to note that our argument contends that both US and non-US academic programs are controlled by accreditation. However, our focus here is on non-US universities. In what follows, an overview of the US accreditation process is provided, followed by placing the accreditation system into an international context. Next, Foucault’s concept of governmentality is developed as the framework discussing it against the backdrop of accreditation and how accreditation uses standardization and accountability coupled with various control mechanisms to wield control over higher education institutions and programs.

2. The accreditation system

Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA, 2002) states that accreditation is “a process of external quality review used by higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities, and

educational programs for quality assurance and quality improvement” (p. 1). Accreditation’s purpose is accountability, quality assurance, and improvement, requiring universities, colleges, or programs to demonstrate effective student learning outcomes for internal and external constituencies (Lubinescu et al., 2001).

There are two types of accreditations, institutional and program accreditation. Institutional accreditation involves evaluating the institution and program accreditation grant accreditation to its programs (Sywelem & Witte, 2009). Program accreditation focuses on professional programs such as business, engineering, and teacher education, assessing faculty qualifications, funding, learning facilities, and teaching, among other features (Mutereko, 2018).

Most accreditation agencies follow a similar process, whether in the US or abroad. The Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) claims that the accreditation process for programs located outside the US is identical to the accreditation process for programs within the US (ABET, 2021a). For example, according to the ABET website, Colleges of Engineering need to be prepared one year before the visit. This preparation includes a self-report, including samples of syllabi, textbooks, student work, sample assignments, and a Ready Review submission to ensure the program is ready for the accreditation review process (ABET, 2021b). This is followed by scheduling an on-site visit and conducting and submitting a self-report before the visit. The visit lasts roughly three days and includes an exit meeting with the visiting team. Upon the completion of the visit, the college can submit corrections. Within two or three months, the college receives a draft statement about the team’s findings. It has 30 days to respond to any identified shortcomings, followed by the ABET commissions meeting to discuss and determine the decision for accreditation. Finally, the institution is notified about the final decision.

Generally, accreditation is based on the overall program educational objectives, program and student learning outcomes, continuous improvement, mapping of course objectives with program outcome, faculty and facilities, and any other feature decided by the accrediting agency (CIAC Accreditation for Educational Institutional, 2019). Historically, accreditation has been criticized for being focused on inputs. Still, there has been a significant change to outputs in recent years or providing evidence of student learning and achievement (Inside Higher Ed, 2013). Accreditation uses various mechanisms to gather evidence to grant, renew or reject accredited status (Harvey, 2004). These include different direct and indirect assessment methods, such as summative and formative data analysis, rubrics, exit exams, self-assessments, faculty surveys, peer visits, student satisfaction surveys, and alumni and employer surveys (Harvey, 2004; Shafi et al., 2019; Stensaker, 2003).

Guiding these assessment tools are the accreditation standards and professional standards for the academic discipline. For example, the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) uses standards developed by CAEP that serve as the basis for any accreditor’s review. Also, CAEP uses professional standards for individual programs. Programs are evaluated on CAEP and the Educational Leadership Constituent Council Standards (ELCC) for educational leadership. The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) standards focus on “mission, strategic management, and innovation; support for learners, faculty, and staff; and thought leadership and societal impact” (AACSB, n.d.a). Also, AACSB uses supplemental accounting accreditation standards specific to accounting to accredit accounting programs.

3. Conceptualizing accreditation in a non-US context

Accreditation impacts institutional and academic priorities based on its ideals of what a university “should be” and what ‘quality’ is (Benítez, 2019, p. 11). This has led scholars to criticize the accreditation of non-US universities and programs as a form of neocolonialism (Romanowski, 2020; Altbach, 2003; Nguyen et al., 2009; Altbach, 1995). The argument is that US accreditation agencies impose US understandings of teaching, assessment, and the specific academic discipline under accreditation’s scrutiny instead of developing a quality assurance system established in the

national culture and history (Phillips & Kinser, 2018). Altbach (2003) termed this process “a form of intellectual hubris,” where non-US universities and programs are pressured to transform existing curricula and practices to coincide with US standards and approaches. This questions indigenous knowledge, and more importantly, accreditation prevents opposing or diverse possibilities demanding a homogeneity that suppresses innovation and diversity (Romanowski, 2020; Phillips & Kinser, 2018)

Doney et al. (2015) assert that accreditation agencies generally ignore culture’s influence on accountability and its outcomes in a real-world context. This limits a country’s ability to establish its educational policies and cultural priorities and develop a new body of knowledge (Anwaruddin, 2014). This is particularly true for academic disciplines such as law, business, and education, for example, saturated in national culture and context rather than science and technology, which are likely to be less culturally embedded (Phillips & Kinser, 2018). The essence of accreditation is its power and authority to control universities’ programs. The authority of accreditation agencies is established on an unspecified and an unexamined set of “taken-for-granted” (Harvey, 2004) that awards power and legitimizes accreditation as a valuable institution that provides quality assurance for higher education.

4. Governmentality and accreditation

Higher education’s internationalization has led to an increase in nations establishing some form of a government-sanctioned system of quality assurance for higher education (Salmi, 2015). This has opened the door for non-governmental actors such as accreditation agencies to become pseudo-government entities with authority to control higher education and play a dominant role in shaping what is taught in academic disciplines, and the education students receive. By using various mechanisms designed to monitor, direct, and control programs in the name of quality assurance, accreditation agencies can establish and govern the knowledge and ways of understanding a particular academic field. This governing occurs not by rules and laws but through a subtle form of governance that depends on the governed engaging in self-governing through internalized habits that guide mentality and action (Foucault, 1991) or what Foucault termed governmentality.

The concept of governmentality was developed in the 1970s by Foucault during his examination of political power (Rose et al., 2006). Merlingen (2003) suggests that Foucault thought there was very little interest in discussions about applying power in general. Instead of governing by the rule of law and lawmaking, Foucault understood governmentality as correlated with the indirect and restrained forms of governing that rely on individuals’ internalized practices that guide thinking and action (O’Brien, 2018). Fejes (2009) reminds us that this brand of governing demands that “the freedom of each citizen is a necessary starting point for regulating and governing behaviour” (p. 8). Gordon (1991) writes governmentality is “thinking about the nature of the practice of government ... capable of making some form of that activity thinkable and practicable both to its practitioners and to those upon whom it is practiced” (p. 3). In this sense, governmentality centers on how peoples’ conduct is governed not by a dominant force that directly controls individuals’ behavior; instead, governing tries to determine the conditions where individuals can freely conduct themselves (Hamann, 2009). Foucault focused on the complex configurations of the instruments, procedures, and techniques in which power manifests itself and works to direct human behavior (Hindess, 2001). Governmentality focuses on the complex intertwining of shared understandings and practices that govern conduct (Colebatch, 2002).

Engelbrechtsen et al. (2012) observe that modern institutions employ compliance and self-control as governmentality tools to accomplish desired outcomes necessary for governing practices. Governmentality helps bring attention to the exercise of power that enables accreditation agencies to control education, mentalities, or rationalities (Merlingen, 2003). Merlingen (2003) points out that this control of mentalities or rationalities is not neutral but discursive formations intimately linked to power structures that produce “truth” about specific fields. Regarding accreditation, the

Table 1. The governmentality of accreditation

Quality Assurance and Improvement	Methods of Control	Control Mechanisms
Standardization	Controls Knowledge and Content	Professional Standards; Student Learning Outcomes
Accountability	Controls Through Evidence of Performance	Assessment Tools, i.e., Rubrics

process contains ideologies that legitimize versions of academic disciplines and approaches to education that are imposed on educators and students. In the case of accreditation, standardization and accountability are methods of control that regulate and shape international academic systems by conveying US educational theories and pedagogies to non-US institutions, theoretically challenging and weakening indigenous intellect and epistemological formations (Romanowski & Alkhatib, 2020). The accreditation process places these versions and understandings beyond question, avoiding oppositional positions from being inserted into the discussion (Romanowski et al., 2020). Accreditation then uses surveillance mechanisms like, for example, professional standards to gather information and monitor the behavior of the governed. The main argument is summarized in Table 1.

Accreditation uses various quality assurance or supervisory mechanisms (Mutereko, 2018), such as standards, performance indicators, self-assessments, and site visits (Harvey, 2004). The mechanisms decentralize power and govern “through motivation and stimulation and by making people work together for a goal and maximize their potential” (Engebretsen et al., 2012, p. 404). In accreditation, this emerges where faculty work to improve the quality of their programs. In this case, faculty are “producing the ends of government by fulfilling themselves rather than being merely obedient ... by being free in specific ways” (Rose et al., 2006, p. 89). From a governmentality perspective, freedom is not the opposite of government but one of its most important resources (Rose, 1999). For accreditation, the “governor and governed are two aspects of the one actor” (Dean, 2009, p. 19). Accreditation is a way of getting people and organizations “to practice self-control and self-management. It is a way of governing at a distance through technologies that are both autonomizing and responsabilizing (Rose et al., 2006, p. 91).

The basic assumption embedded in accreditation is that educational institutions are accountable for the quality of their programs. Although institutions are responsible for their programs’ quality, accreditation defines quality through professional standards and assessed criteria external to where the formation of quality occurs. Harvey (2004) contends that accreditation illustrates a control on those who provide the education and represents a shift of power from educators to bureaucrats” (p. 207) who control universities and programs as addressed above. Engebretsen et al. (2012) suggest that the central base for accreditation’s power is the concepts standards and criteria that function as a control mechanism. In what follows, the discussion of how accreditation uses standardization and accountability coupled with various mechanisms to wield control over higher education institutions and programs.

5. Standardization and mechanisms of control

Standardization places an “emphasis on certainty, objectivity, the ‘scientific-method’ of measurement, efficiency, and control, and these are transferred to understandings about education and teaching” (Tuinamuana, 2011, p. 74), resulting in a curriculum controlled and driven by external and performance assessments (Romanowski & Alkhatib et al., 2020). Specifically for accreditation, standardization results in the extensive use of accreditation and professional standards.

The purpose of using professional standards is to standardize quality and develop high standards of practice, providing efficiency and effectiveness (Romanowski & Alkhatib et al., 2020;

Ingvarson & Semple, 2006). Professional standards serve as the foundation of the accreditation process and are the dominant mechanism of governmentality used to guide and control conduct. O'Brien (2018) examined Australia's teaching and school leadership standards and reports that professional standards have a plurality of power forms that optimize their forces and capacities to regulate professionals, programs, and professional performance. The ability to guide and control is gained by normalizing the knowledge and practices those professionals should possess, establishing a disciplinary structure of quality against which professionals are measured (Bourke et al., 2015). This knowledge not only assumes the authority of the truth but has the power to make itself true (Romanowski, 2013). Professional standards as a governmentality domain use regulation and standardization to direct toward specific ends (O'Brien, 2018), enabling accreditation to guide the possibilities of action and conduct, inserting an order to outcomes.

Standards regulate "by bringing together diverse and disparate aspects of professional practice into a single space of comparison, calculation, and standardization" (O'Brien, 2015, p. 842). This creates a situation where free individuals establish a consensus where they find themselves within a particular network of practices or power and constraining institutions (Foucault, 2002). Linking this to accreditation, seeking accreditation is a free voluntary act. After the decision to devote to accreditation is made, universities and faculty find themselves entangled in a set of practices that change the culture and practices of the workplace and give accreditation permission and power of governance.

How do accreditation and professional standards act as a mechanism of governmentality and control? Universities and programs comply with accreditation requirements by linking all dimensions of programs to professional standards. Whether by design or default, accreditation as an agent of governmentality using "common" institutional practices establishes and perpetuates a culture of compliance based on the evaluator's power relations over those evaluated. Accreditation cannot rely on sovereignty but uses disciplinary power to establish compliance that educators are not necessarily aware of (Lawson et al., 2004). Compliance or adherence to standards and criteria are justified as self-improvement of programs that result in what Burns and Green (2017) say is an oppressive culture of compliance. They state that mechanisms of governmentality develop "a docile self-auditing subjectivity through banal bureaucratic disciplinary processes can render teachers and education professors complicit, perhaps unwittingly, in perpetuating an oppressive culture of compliance" (p. 18). However, as Gorman (2012) suggests, the use of compliance alone, standards, and assessment practices are oversimplified and become a bureaucratic exercise, producing little evidence of student learning and program effectiveness.

Accreditation uses professional standards to deliver epistemological frameworks (Triantafyllou, 2012) that prescribe what is indispensable in preparing graduates in a particular academic discipline. Colleges develop conceptual frameworks, and faculty must align the program and courses to the accreditation standards. The program's Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) and objectives are aligned with the accreditation standards, followed by assessments used to assess if the SLOs are achieved. Programs are required to be "aligned" and "mapped" to the standards and must be monitored with assessment data, and frequent comprehensive reports linked to the professional standards must be written (Delandshere & Arens, 2004). This requires professors to modify course syllabi and assignments by aligning these to professional standards (Johnson et al., 2005). This dramatically changes academic programs. Alsharari (2018) suggests that programs that are successful locally are often modified to match the criteria for international accreditation. Although there is space for how these standards are used, professional standards work on and through professionals to optimize their forces and capacities to control (O'Brien, 2018) by restricting educators to ways of thinking. However, autonomy and freedom are limited by the framework constructed by standards. All this is a form of control and surveillance where universities operate under the watchful eye of accreditation (Mutereko, 2018).

Specifically for non-US academic programs, professional standards as a tool of governmentality have unique educational and cultural consequences. Eldridge and Dada (2016), discussing

CAEP professional standards, contend that professional standards are “culturally-bound” to the US (p. 30). As previously mentioned, accreditation as an agent of governmentality employs compliance and self-control, which for non-US programs means compliance with professional standards that shape the thinking of the indigenous people by privileging and disseminating a Western perspective of academic knowledge, teaching, learning, and assessment (Romanowski, 2020; Romanowski & Alkhatib et al., 2020). For example, Al-Dabbagh and Assaad (2010), addressing leadership programs and professional standards, contend that a significant challenge for non-US universities is “the tension between dominant ‘Western’ perspectives on leadership and ‘local’ needs and realities” (p. 11). A democratic leadership approach might work well in a US setting but transported to a context with a more centralized form of government, it could present “cultural transformations and exchanges that challenge traditional values and norms” (Suarez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004, p. 12). This challenge is not limited to educational leadership but also plagues other academic disciplines. Guttenplan (2011), quoting the dean of Grenoble’s School of Management in France about accreditation, states that the “American model of a business school inside a research university may not be appropriate for other cultures” (para. 6). These are examples of the visible forms of governmentality, the norms, and realities that are baked into the professional standards and reflect the value of a US academic system and control mentalities. This compliance or adherence to standards is a form of control justified by self and program improvement, an essential governmentality element.

6. Accountability and mechanisms of control

Quality assurance in modern higher education includes an accountability-oriented view of education and a technical method that provides accountability of performance and control (Yingqiang & Yongjian, 2016). Maroy (2012) suggests that accountability translates into standardization of academic results. As an agent of governmentality, accreditation not only controls the content of programs with professional standards but maintains this control by externally evaluating and monitoring programs based on these standards (Bondi, 2011). Accreditation evaluates standards by assessing student outcomes requiring institutions to establish a well-developed assessment plan (Gorman, 2012). Programs use assessment tools and approaches such as capstone projects, student portfolios, and administering standardized knowledge tests (Gorman, 2012) to provide evidence for accreditation. As a form of governmentality, universities’ and programs’ assessment plans and tools require universities and individuals to govern themselves (Jankowski & Provezis, 2014). Assessment tools are regulated through centralized performance indicators (Clegg & Smith, 2010) aligned with accreditation standards and criteria. Engebretsen et al. (2012) raise an important point stating that although educational institutions are responsible for their programs’ quality, quality is defined by exterior criteria established far from where the assessment of value occurs.

Considering assessment, Jankowski and Provezis (2014) suggest that assessment is not a governmentality mechanism, but how it is used becomes part of governmentality and its structure. Raaper (2016) indicates that the relationship between the actors in assessment is transformed as governmentality shapes institutions and individuals, suggesting that assessment tools are often constructed from the policymakers’ perspectives instead of the faculty who utilize them. This means that “the conduct of the action is directed from above, and this directive is given in terms of absolute directive, leaving no room for academic discretion or judgment; the staff will comply” (Evans, 2011, p. 218).

Regarding regulation, Raaper (2016) argues that being regulated and regulating oneself is a method of governmentality where devices of “domination and the self-meet: on the one hand, academics’ and students’ behaviour in assessment is highly regulated and controlled by policy mechanisms and performance indicators; on the other hand, these techniques make them also govern their actions” (p. 74–75). As Boud (2007) contends, “assessment frames what students do” (p. 21) as well as what faculty do (Johnson et al., 2005; Lewis, 2016; Hail et al., 2019) by evaluating

and monitoring programs against accreditation's standards and criteria (Bondi, 2011). More importantly, what is being evaluated is whether universities are employing effective educational practices, once again defined by accreditation.

Accreditation posits that these assessment practices are designed to generate data to determine if accreditation standards are being met, and findings can also guide ongoing program improvement. As part of the assessment, plans are the dominant use of rubrics, which has become an essential part of the accreditation and control tool. The argument for rubrics as a controlling mechanism of governmentality is twofold. First, rubrics control the knowledge that is taught and assessed. The use of rubrics "focus on specific criteria, to the exclusion of other criteria, limits or constrains creativity which makes the assignment and feedback inflexible" (Schoepp et al., 2018, p. 1). More importantly, the specific criteria are defined by accreditation and usually "culturally bound" to the US, advancing a Western learning and assessment model.

Bullough (2014), discussing teacher education accreditation, argues agencies have consolidated control over programs resulting in educators' losing control of programs, content, and their role as professors. For programs seeking accreditation, rubrics attempt to operationalize the standards and evaluations of student progress and are mechanisms to promote standardization. How does the rubric control faculty? Johnson et al. (2005) contend that rubrics significantly affect what is taught and appropriate responses, all within the context of standards and aligned criteria. Kohn (2006) suggests that rubric control teaches thinking by standardizing how instructors think about student assignments. The essence of rubrics is that instructors understand the standards that become the basis for instruction and assessment controlling the content and how students interact with that content. This pedagogy of assessment is oppressive and limits the freedom of thought by instructors and students (Johnson et al., 2005). Students' performance is monitored and tracked student and findings are adopted and used in the program as self-reflection, self-measurement, and self-evaluation against the standards (Edwards & Nicoll, 2006, p. 128) and the appropriateness of performance justified according to what is deemed necessary by accreditation. Evans (2011) states that "the assessment procedure illustrates that university assessment is an administrative procedure with rules that disempower the individual academic, removing as significant the effect of the exercise of their judgment, so that student assessment is governed by administrative procedures" (Evans, 2011, p. 219). Overall, this type of assessment has developed into a "technique and procedure designed to direct the conduct of men" (Foucault, 1982, as cited in Jankowski & Provezis, 2014, p. 479).

7. Conclusion

This essay uses Foucault's governmentality notion to better understand how accreditation controls higher education institutions and programs. Using the available empirical and non-empirical research literature on accreditation, the essay argues how standardization and accountability and various tools of accreditation control institutions, programs, and faculty. However, the essay raises several important considerations. Those involved in the accreditation process must begin to consider the issue of control and accreditation and critically analyze the benefits or drawbacks of the process. Administrators and faculty need to consider if the benefits of accreditation outweigh the possible costs for faculty and students. Discussions regarding this issue would benefit higher education institutions and the accreditation process itself.

More specifically, with accreditation controlling higher education programs, institutions should consider if accreditation provides improvement and change for the institution and its specific programs. As we know, accreditation is a costly endeavor that requires financial investment and hours of labor. However, one question that needs further research and discussion is, do accredited institutions produce "better" graduates than institutions that do not participate in the accreditation process? For example, regarding accreditation for teacher education, scholars argue that there is a dearth of substantial empirical research that supports those preservice teachers graduating from accredited programs are better prepared than those graduating from non-accredited

schools (see, e.g., Romanowski & Alkhatib et al., 2020; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Johnson et al., 2005; Tamir & Wilson, 2005). This raises a concern about research on accreditation.

This essay is limited because it is a non-empirical discussion about the accreditation process and its control over higher education institutions and programs. This argument raises the need for empirical research studies that investigate from the perspectives of administrators, faculty, and students regarding the control of accreditation to support and refute features of this discussion. Furthermore, studies comparing administrators', faculty's, and students' perspectives in US universities with non-US universities would be worthwhile. Finally, it would be valuable for researchers to conduct studies to determine the effectiveness of the accreditation process on programs and the preparation of students.

Notes on contributors

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correction

This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

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