

Advocating for the Integration of Social Accountability Standards into Al Nasser University's Accreditation Process for International Recognition

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Abstract

Al Nasser University in Yemen is a private organization that is looking for international recognition, mainly in Yemen, due to the country's current constraints and conflicts. Al Nasser University recognizes the significance of aligning its accreditation process with international standards, particularly in regard to social accountability standards. This policy brief emphasizes the importance of integrating social accountability criteria into our accreditation standards as a means to achieve international recognition and demonstrate our commitment to responsible global citizenship.

Introduction

The modern landscape of higher education demands that institutions not only excel in academic realms but also exhibit a profound commitment to societal welfare and ethical practices. However, traditional accreditation processes often overlook the crucial aspect of social accountability, resulting in incomplete evaluations of an institution's overall impact. Al Nasser University, situated in Yemen, faces similar challenges as it seeks international recognition and relevance in a rapidly evolving global academic environment. The extent of the problem lies in the inadequacy of existing accreditation standards to comprehensively assess the societal contributions of higher education institutions. While academic excellence remains paramount, the failure to consider social accountability leads to a lack of recognition for initiatives addressing societal challenges, community engagement efforts, and ethical conduct within the university setting.

Yemen, like many countries, grapples with various social, economic, and health burdens exacerbated by factors such as political instability, armed conflict, and limited resources. The absence of robust social accountability standards in the accreditation process - in Yemen and beyond - perpetuates the disconnect between academic institutions and the communities they serve, hindering progress toward addressing these pressing issues. Moreover, underserved

populations bear a disproportionate burden, as they often lack access to quality education and are marginalized from the benefits of university-led social initiatives. *The incorporation of social accountability standards into Al Nasser University's accreditation process is not merely a matter of academic prestige; it is a moral imperative and an ethical obligation.* Such standards ensure that higher education institutions actively contribute to the betterment of society, promote equitable access to education and resources, and uphold principles of transparency, integrity, and social justice.

Background research underscores the necessity of including social accountability standards in accreditation processes. Studies have shown that universities play a pivotal role in driving positive societal change through research, community engagement, and knowledge dissemination. By aligning accreditation criteria with principles of social responsibility, institutions can enhance their relevance, credibility, and impact, both locally and globally.

In essence, the integration of social accountability standards into Al Nasser University's accreditation process is essential for fostering a culture of responsible citizenship, addressing societal challenges, and advancing sustainable development goals. It represents a paradigm shift towards holistic evaluation and recognition of institutional excellence, with profound implications for the well-being of Yemeni society and beyond.

Current Policy

The current policy environment in Yemen regarding higher education accreditation lacks explicit mandates or standards addressing social accountability. Accreditation processes primarily focus on academic quality and infrastructure standards, with minimal consideration given to an institution's societal impact on community engagement initiatives. At the national level, Yemen's Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research oversees the accreditation of universities and academic programs. However, the accreditation criteria set forth by the ministry predominantly emphasize academic benchmarks such as faculty qualifications, curriculum standards, and physical infrastructure requirements. While these criteria are essential for ensuring academic rigor and quality, they fall short of capturing the broader dimensions of social responsibility and community engagement.

The absence of explicit social accountability standards in Yemen's accreditation framework has several negative impacts on the people it impacts. Firstly, it perpetuates a disconnect between higher education institutions and the communities they serve, limiting opportunities for meaningful collaboration and mutual benefit. Secondly, it hinders the recognition and support of initiatives aimed at addressing societal challenges, such as poverty alleviation, healthcare access, and environmental sustainability, thereby impeding progress towards sustainable development goals. Lastly, it reinforces inequities in access to education and resources, as underserved populations are disproportionately affected by the lack of emphasis on social responsibility within the accreditation process.

Furthermore, Yemen's current political and economic challenges exacerbate the limitations of the accreditation system. The ongoing conflict, economic instability, and resource constraints have

strained the capacity of higher education institutions to fulfill their societal roles effectively. In such contexts, the absence of explicit social accountability standards in accreditation exacerbates the disconnect between academic institutions and the pressing needs of society, hindering efforts to address complex challenges and rebuild communities.

The current policy environment and law regarding higher education accreditation in Yemen lack explicit standards for social accountability, resulting in a narrow focus on academic quality and infrastructure. This limited scope undermines efforts to foster meaningful engagement between universities and communities, address societal challenges, and promote equitable access to education and resources. Amidst the country's political and economic challenges, there is a pressing need to reform accreditation processes to ensure they reflect principles of social responsibility and contribute to sustainable development efforts.

Policy Solution

The policy will concern some of the recommended action steps started by institutions and then to the national level to include the community.

Action Steps

To address the absence of social accountability standards in Al Nasser University's accreditation process, the proposed policy solution entails the integration of explicit criteria for social responsibility and community engagement. This intervention involves the following strategies:

- **Adapting the current accepted international social Accountability Standards with Al Nasser University:** Al Nasser University will collaborate with constituents, including faculty, students, community members, and accrediting bodies, to develop comprehensive social accountability standards tailored to the university's mission and context. These standards will encompass indicators related to community engagement, societal impact, ethical conduct, and responsible citizenship.
- **Incorporation into Accreditation Criteria:** Al Nasser University will go through the national accreditation standards and include social accountability into their own standards to ensure that they are systematically evaluated and recognized as integral components of institutional excellence. Accreditation processes will assess the extent to which academic programs and institutional practices contribute to addressing societal challenges, promoting equity, and fostering meaningful engagement with communities. Then, the developed standards will be strongly recommended to the national accreditation body.
- **Capacity Building and Training:** Al Nasser University will invest in capacity-building initiatives to enhance faculty, staff, and student understanding and implementation of social accountability principles. Training programs, workshops, and seminars will be organized to develop competencies in community engagement, ethical leadership, and social impact assessment.

- **Advocacy and Collaboration:** Al Nasser University will advocate for the adoption of social accountability standards within the national accreditation framework through engagement with relevant government agencies, accrediting bodies, and policymakers. Additionally, the university will collaborate with peer institutions, civil society organizations, and international partners to share best practices, exchange knowledge, and promote the global adoption of socially responsible accreditation standards.

Scientific Evidence

Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive impact of integrating social accountability standards into higher education accreditation processes. For example, research by Mertens and McLean (2015) highlights how incorporating community engagement and social responsibility criteria into accreditation frameworks enhances institutional relevance, credibility, and societal impact. Additionally, studies by O'Meara et al. (2009) and Willemse, A. M. (2023) provide evidence of the transformative potential of socially accountable accreditation standards in promoting equitable access to education, fostering civic engagement, and addressing community needs. Kehm & Teichler (2020) mentioned that to achieve effective implementation of quality assurance in higher education, it is essential to understand the key concepts that underpin the process. This section explores concepts such as benchmarking, accreditation, and continuous improvement. **Benchmarking** involves comparing an institution's performance with best practices and standards to identify areas for improvement. **Accreditation** is a formal recognition process that evaluates an institution's adherence to predefined quality standards. **Continuous improvement** emphasizes the cyclical nature of quality assurance, where institutions continually assess and enhance their programs based on feedback and evaluation.

Benchmarking is crucial in quality assurance as it allows institutions to compare their performance against best practices and established standards. By gathering and analyzing data from similar institutions, they can identify gaps, gain insights into effective practices, and adopt strategies to enhance quality. Benchmarking can be done internally by comparing different programs within the same institution or externally by comparing performance with other institutions regionally or internationally.

Accreditation is another key concept in quality assurance. It is a formal process where an external body evaluates an institution or specific programs against predefined standards and criteria. Accreditation serves as an assurance mechanism that validates the quality and credibility of an institution's educational programs. This process assesses various aspects, including curriculum design, faculty qualifications, student support services, infrastructure, and learning outcomes. Accreditation provides external validation and recognition, instilling confidence in students, employers, and the wider community.

Continuous improvement is a fundamental principle in quality assurance. It acknowledges that quality is not static but an ongoing process. Continuous improvement involves planning, implementing, assessing, and revising educational procedures and programs based on feedback

and evaluation. Institutions conduct internal and external reviews to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for enhancement. This feedback loop enables informed decision-making and sustainable improvements in educational quality. By incorporating these fundamental concepts into quality assurance processes, institutions can ensure data-driven decisions, adherence to established standards, and a commitment to continuous improvement. Using benchmarking to identify areas for enhancement, accreditation to validate program quality, and continuous improvement to refine educational practices, institutions can guarantee their programs remain relevant, effective, and responsive to the needs of students and society (Mustafa K., 2023).

Summary

This policy paper advocates for the integration of social accountability standards into Al Nasser University's accreditation process to address the current gap in recognizing and promoting responsible citizenship and community engagement within higher education. The problem statement highlighted the inadequacy of existing accreditation standards to comprehensively assess the societal contributions of higher education institutions, particularly in Yemen. The absence of explicit social accountability standards perpetuates a disconnect between universities and communities, hindering progress toward addressing societal challenges and promoting equitable access to education and resources.

The current policy and law analysis revealed the lack of explicit mandates or standards addressing social accountability in Yemen's accreditation framework, exacerbating the limitations of the accreditation system and perpetuating inequities in access to education and resources. The proposed policy solution entails the development and integration of social accountability standards into Al Nasser University's accreditation criteria, coupled with capacity-building initiatives, advocacy efforts, and collaboration with stakeholders. This intervention aims to enhance institutional relevance, credibility, and societal impact, aligning accreditation processes with principles of responsible global citizenship and sustainable development.

Scientific evidence supports the effectiveness of integrating social accountability standards into accreditation processes in promoting equitable access to education, fostering civic engagement, and addressing community needs. Despite potential opposition, the ethical imperatives and long-term benefits of socially accountable accreditation standards justify the proposed policy solution.

Integrating social accountability standards into Al Nasser University's accreditation process represents a proactive and comprehensive approach to fostering responsible citizenship, addressing societal challenges, and advancing sustainable development goals. By aligning accreditation criteria with principles of social responsibility, the university can enhance its institutional excellence and contribute meaningfully to positive societal change in Yemen and beyond.

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