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## **A ROADMAP TOWARDS INTERNATIONAL QUALITY STANDARDS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR IN KSA**

### **Abstract:**

Globalization of education, job market and changing needs of the industry for graduates' qualities, attributes and skills sets has enhanced the importance of quality and innovation in teaching, learning and administration of higher education institutes in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). KSA's National Transformation Program realize the importance of quality in higher education for the transition of Saudi economy from an over-reliance on oil revenues to a more balanced and investment based model. Ensuring graduates' quality to meet the requirements of national and international job market and increasing private sector participation in education are two of the education strategic objectives of the National Transformation Program.

It is mandatory for the higher education institutes in KSA to obtain institutional level accreditation from the Education Evaluation Commission for Higher Education (EEC-HE) of KSA. This paper makes an attempt in understanding the national and international quality standards in a Higher education sector; investigate the commonalities of both standards and explore the opportunities for KSA's institutes to obtain international accreditation at program level by using national accreditation as a foundation. The study is based on extensive literature review and qualitative case analysis. The study found that the evidence of documented procedure and practices in compliance with national accreditation's standards and criteria are very comprehensive. Implemented standards of the national accreditation (EEC-HE) provide strong foundation and evidence to meet the requirements of international accreditation such as ACBSP. International accreditation can help institute to implement world class practices in teaching, learning and administration, enhance faculty and staff morale, increase graduates' employability and acceptance in global education and job market.

### **Keywords:**

Quality Management Systems in Higher Education. Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award for Higher Education. Accreditation Council for Collegiate Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP).

## 1. Introduction

Increasing competition in the job market and globalization of talent hunting has enhanced the importance of quality education in higher education sector. Growing trends of offering business and management online degrees by world class institutes around the world have not only opened the opportunities for students to acquire education from world class institutes but also created immense pressure and competition for local institutes. Such a trend, international universities are opening their campuses in the country in one hand and competition on another hand. In this changing environment quality of education is imperative to serve and survive. Hence a great movement in education in general and business education, in particular, has been witnessed.

Adopting quality management measures and standards result in having high performance and continues improvement in higher education sector. Governments are also trying to ensure that higher education to be more responsive in terms of (1) connecting higher education to social and economic needs as much as possible, (2) making higher education more accessible, (3) rising the number of universities and higher education institutes, therefore, decreasing the unit cost, and (4) assuring unity between the services and outputs of universities and higher education institutes (Al-shafei, et al., 2015). Therefore, there is growing trend that higher education institutes should obtain accreditations from national and international bodies. The objective of national and international accreditations is implementing the quality management system, improving the quality of teaching, learning, and administration and demonstrating the evidence of high quality in teaching, learning and acquiring a degree. Accreditation has significant benefits for institutions and programs. The mechanism initiated by the accreditation procedure confers external recognition of quality for these tertiary education representatives, a quality that is highly desirable for recognition of credits, degrees, funding, and for acquiring legitimacy in higher education system towards employers, stakeholders, students, and community (Zanten, 2010).

Saudi Arabia has not been away from the competitive world. The KSA government have been trying to ensure that higher education to be more responsive in terms of producing high quality graduates to meet the changing needs of industry and global job market; connecting higher education to social and economic needs as much as possible; making higher education more accessible; raising the number of high quality education providing universities and higher education institutes. Therefore, the Education Evaluation Commission for Higher Education (EEC-HE) has been established as an independent commission taking enough care of accreditation for the both academic institutions and programs and ensuring adopting the good practices in education.

International accreditation demonstrates the excellence of business programs of higher education at international level. Achieving international accreditation provide a competitive advantage to institute concerning students recruitment and also give leverage to the students

in getting acceptance of the degree programs in international institute across the world and professional bodies if students wish to pursue further education and acquire professional certifications. This research studies the opportunity to obtain ACBSP, international accreditation at program level by using the quality system of EEC-HE accreditation as a foundation. This study used case study research method to find the commonalities of EEC-HE and ACBSP standards and criteria and also investigate if EEC-HE achieved requirements can help in meeting the requirements of evidence for ACBSP standards and criteria for the purpose to achieve international accreditation with relatively fewer efforts.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 EEC-HE - Education Evaluation Commission for Higher Education

The National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA) has been established in the KSA with an objective of establishing standards and criteria for academic accreditation and assessment. According to the history of commission (2015 ) is “The National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment was established in 2004 with responsibility for determining standards and procedures for accreditation and quality assurance and accrediting postsecondary institutions and programs within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.”

Recently, NCAAA has been changed the name to Education Evaluation Commission for Higher Education (EEC-HE). The Commission is dedicated to a policy of encouraging, supporting and evaluating the quality assurance processes of post-secondary institutions. The idea is to ensure that quality of learning and management of institutions are equivalent to the highest international standards. These high standards and levels of achievement produce graduates that meet explicit or implicit academic standard or professional competence.

EEC-HE has clearly defined the evaluation and accreditation steps that should be undertaken in order to grant the accreditation status in Saudi Arabia. The accreditation steps are listed as the following:

- 1- Establish Quality Assurance System
- 2- Meets Institution Goals and EEC-HE Standards
- 3- Meet Eligibility Requirements
- 4- Prepare Self-Study Report (SSR)
- 5- External Review and Report
- 6- Accreditation

The commission has also developed a process that clarifies for an institution the needed procedures to get accreditation. Figure 2.1 shows EEC-HE accreditation process.

Figure 2.1 EEC-HE Accreditation flowchart

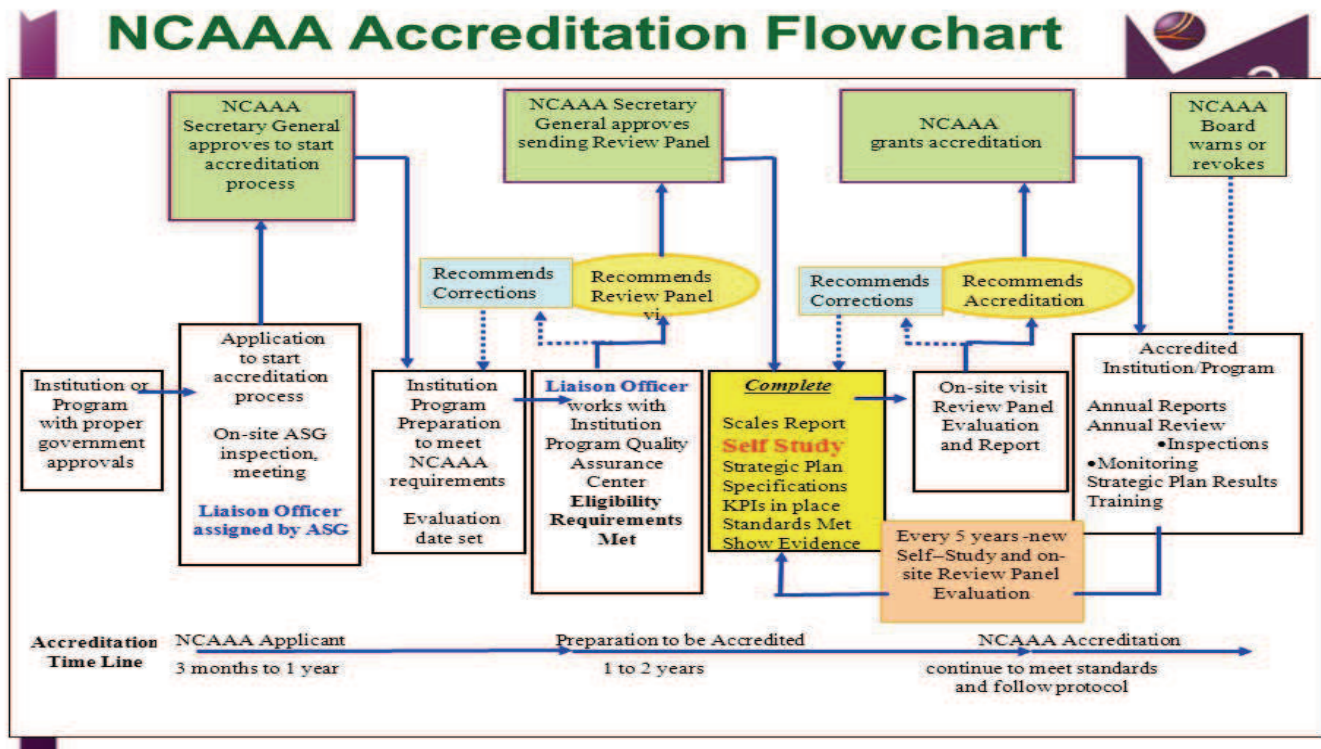


Figure 2.1 NCAAA Accreditation Flowchart. Reprinted from Slide Share, by Dr.Georg Peterson and Dr.Eqbal Darandari, 2011, Retrieved from <http://slideplayer.com/slide/4912180/>. Copyright (2011) by NCAAA.

The Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) has mentioned that "... It's mandatory for any public and private university to be accredited by EEC-HE." Therefore, many colleges and universities in Saudi Arabia must meet the EEC-HE Standards to grant the accreditation status.

Adopting quality management measures and standards result in having high performance and continues improvement in higher education sector. Quality in higher education institute has three principal dimensions; namely the structure (inputs), the process and the outcome (outputs) (Pandi, 2016). Figure 2.3 shows quality dimensions in process related to higher education institute. In higher education, quality is achieved by performing the core functions and producing the major outcomes or outputs of teaching/learning (graduates), research, and community service (Pandi, 2016).

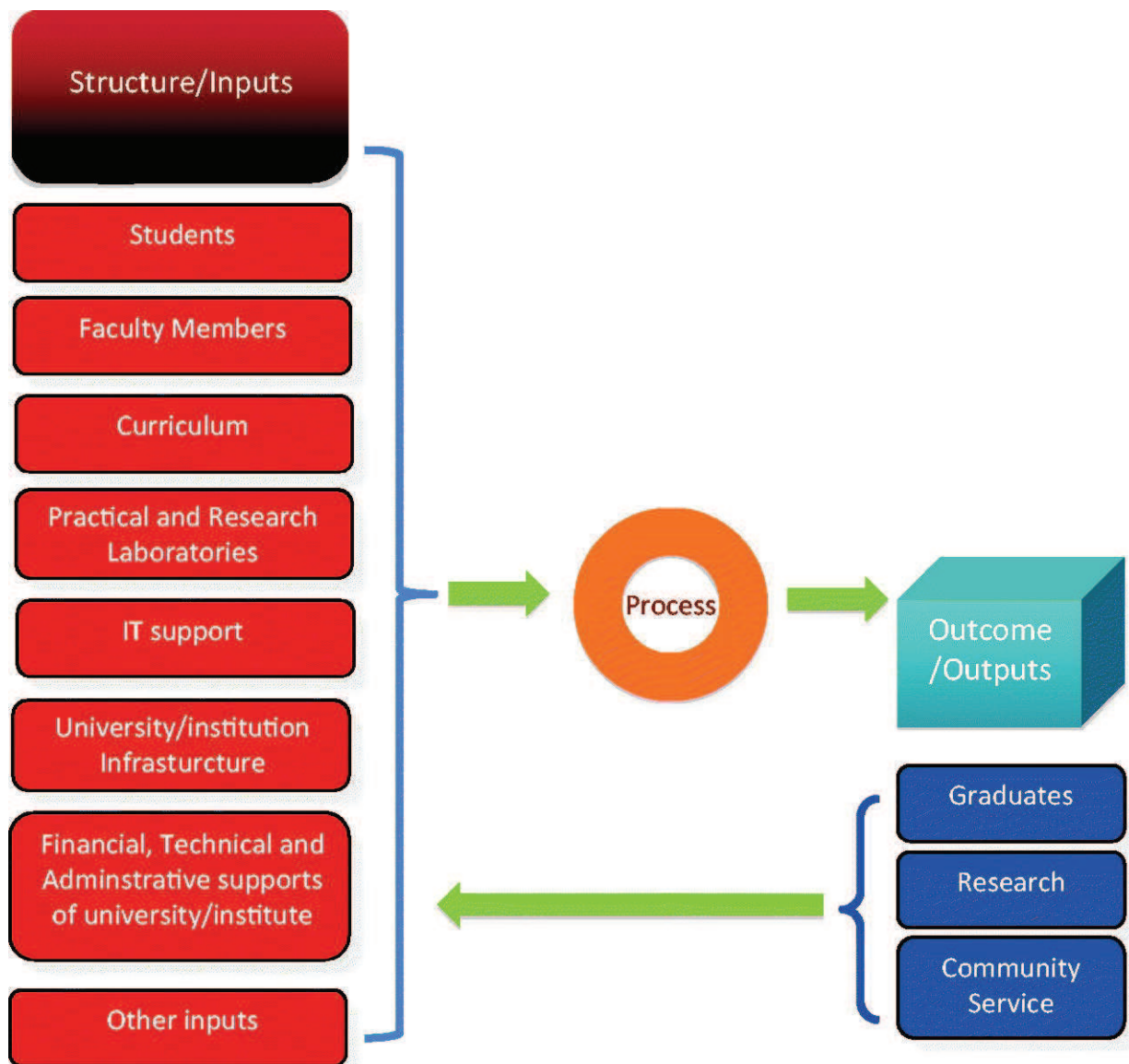


Figure 2.3 The quality dimensions in higher education. Reprinted from “Developing a generic model for total quality management in higher education in Saudi Arabia “by Al-shafei, Bin Abdulrahman, AlQumaizi, and Wl-mardi, 2015, *Medical Teacher*, Vol.(37):sup1, pages S1-S4. Reverted from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.3109/0142159X.2015.1006607?scroll=top&needAccess=true>

Accreditation bodies across the world adopt generic quality management systems (QMS) and performance measurement systems (PMS) for the establishment of organization-wide QMS. For higher education institutes MBQA criteria and standards are the appropriate and commonly adopted QMS.

## 2.2 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award

The Malcolm Baldrige Award was established in 1987 to establish criteria for evaluating business improvement efforts, identify and recognize companies as role models, and share the best practices to be a benchmark for other institutions. The quality criteria of Malcolm Baldrige are named management practices to assess the performance excellence. These management practices are designed in framework consists seven best practices of Malcolm Baldrige Award.

The Malcolm Baldrige Award Framework has Seven Categories namely leadership, strategic planning, customer focus, measurement, analysis and knowledge management, workforce focus, operations focus and results as shown in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: Malcolm Baldrige Award Framework



Figure 2.2: Flowchart of Baldrige Award Framework. Reprinted from *Managing Quality* (p. 84), by Foster. 2013, England: Pearson Education. Copyright (2013) by Pearson.

The integrated framework of the Baldrige award sets up a relationship between these management practices. Those quality management criteria are designed to achieve customer value and organizational performance (Cazzell & Ulmer, 2009).

In 2004, the ACBSP standards were consolidated into current Baldrige-based frameworks (Craven, et al. 2009). The ACBSP and MBNQP have strong relationships in term of core values and concepts as well as standards and criteria. The ACBSP is heavily drawn its core values and concepts from Malcolm Baldrige. As seen in Table 2.1, the core values of the ACBSP and the MBNQP are strikingly similar. This illustrates how both models have a strong correlation in term of core values for any organization.

**Table 2.1: Core values comparison: ACBSP and MBNQP**

<i>ACBSP</i>	<i>MBNQP</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Learning-centered education</li> <li>• Continuous improvement and organizational learning</li> <li>• Faculty/staff participation and development</li> <li>• Partnership development</li> <li>• Long-range view</li> <li>• Management by fact</li> <li>• Public responsibility &amp; citizenship</li> <li>• Results orientation</li> <li>• Design quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visionary leadership</li> <li>• Learning-centered education</li> <li>• Organizational and personal learning</li> <li>• Valuing faculty, staff and partners</li> <li>• Agility</li> <li>• Focus on the future</li> <li>• Management by fact</li> <li>• Social responsibility</li> <li>• Focus on results and creating value</li> <li>• Management for innovation</li> <li>• System perspective</li> </ul>

*Note: Reprinted from “Reaffirming accreditation through Baldrige-based criteria” by A.E. Craven, J.J. Scott and A. Kiser, 2009, International Journal of Management in Education, Vol. 3, Nos. 3/4, pp.207–219.*

Table 2.2 presents a comparison of the ACBSP business accreditation program to the MBNQP Criteria for Education.

**Table 2.2:** Standards vs. criteria: ACBSP and MBNQP

<i>ACBSP Standards</i>	<i>MBNQP Criteria</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Strategic planning</li> <li>• Student/stakeholder focus</li> <li>• Measurement/analysis of student learning and performance</li> <li>• Faculty and staff focus</li> <li>• Educational and business Process management</li> </ul> <p>Results</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• embodied in other criteria</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Strategic planning</li> <li>• Student/stakeholder focus</li> <li>• Measurement/analysis and management knowledge</li> <li>• Faculty and staff focus</li> <li>• Process management</li> </ul> <p><b>Results</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student learning outcomes</li> <li>• Student-and stakeholder-focused outcomes</li> <li>• Budgetary, financial and market outcomes</li> <li>• Workforce-focused outcomes</li> </ul>

*Note: Reprinted from “Reaffirming accreditation through Baldrige-based criteria” by A.E. Craven, J.J. Scott and A. Kiser, 2009, International Journal of Management in Education, Vol. 3, Nos. 3/4, pp.207–219.*

### 2.3 International Academic Accreditations

Accreditation is a road map of quality that develops an innovation and enhancing continuous improvement (ROMERO, 2008). Accreditation organizations can accredit educational institutions as a whole, or accredit specific programs, i.e., health, engineering, law, business, etc. Some countries use both models. According to Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) there are “19 institutional accrediting organizations accredited approximately 6300 institutions as a whole, and more than 60 programmatic accrediting organizations accredit approximately 17,500 programs.” (The President of CHEA, 2003).

The following organizations grant accreditation to institutions of higher learning located anywhere in the United States and other countries:

- **AACSB:** The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International) grants national accreditation to undergraduate and graduate business administration and accounting degree programs.
- **ACBSP:** The Accreditation Council for Collegiate Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP) accredits smaller private and public schools that offer associate's, baccalaureate, masters and doctoral-level business degrees that focus on teaching and learning. The accreditation standards are based on quality and the continuous improvement process.
- **IACBE** – The International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education. The IACBE’s website defines IACBE as” The IACBE is the global leader in mission-



driven and outcomes-based programmatic accreditation for business and management education in colleges, universities, and other higher education institutions throughout the world whose primary purpose is excellence in teaching and learning.” (IACBE, 2016)

The quality management system ensures that standards are followed and maintained in teaching and learning based on national policies and regulation of the Ministry of Higher Education in KSA. This assures that institute graduates high standard and utilized students to the labor market in KSA.

One of the international accreditation bodies for business schools or programs is the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP). ACBSP promotes quality standards in business higher education and continuous improvement and recognizes program excellence. ACBSP values (1) improved teaching methods, (2) intellectual research and participation, and (3) faculty contribution to the quality and enhanced education worldwide (ACBSP, Value Accreditation, 2016).

Recently, ACBSP has more than 13,000 member schools worldwide, and its vision is to accredit colleges of business worldwide. Moreover, Institutions with programs accredited by ACBSP are committed to continuous improvement that ensures their business program offering courses that meet contemporary business organizations and also ensure that these programs are achieving learning objectives to develop graduates' quality in terms of skills, knowledge, and application of skills and knowledge in practice; interpersonal and communicating skills as to work collaboratively with teamwork spirit in organizational environment; prepare for lifelong learning (ACBSP, 2016).

International accreditation demonstrates the excellence of business programs of higher education at international level. Achieving international accreditation provide a competitive advantage to institute concerning students recruitment and also give leverage to the students in getting acceptance of the degree programs in international institute across the world and professional bodies if students wish to pursue further education and acquire professional certifications.

## **2.4 Overview of ACBCP**

The Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP) founded in 1988 and located in Overland Park, Kansas, was created by its members to fulfill a need for specialized accreditation by institutions of higher education with business schools and programs (ACBSP, 2010). According to CHEA (2012), there are approximately 45 recognized programmatic accreditors. ACBSP is one of these. The prime mission of ACBSP is “ACBSP develops, promotes, and recognizes best practices that contribute to continuous improvement of business education and accredits qualified business programs.” (ACBSP, Accreditation: Baccalaureate-Graduate Degree Accreditation, 2010). ACBSP accredits only

business programs offered at higher education institute, and it does not accredit the institution as a whole.

Besides, there are two ways of programmatic accreditation whether chosen a specified program accreditation or accredit the entire program's process in business school. The specified program has to be in an accounting program. ACBSP accreditation covers degree programs in business and business-related fields at the associate, baccalaureate, and graduate degree levels offered by institutions with their primary, student-oriented objective as excellence in teaching as opposed to a heavy emphasis on research (ACBSP, 2010).

ACBSP (2010) emphasizes the qualities of teaching excellence and focuses on students learning about how to learn. The students are placed at the center of the assessment process, making them the vital component for the outcomes of assessment. The accreditation process helps facilitate the employment of a variety of teaching environments for the instructor to encourage the students' responsible engagement in the learning process. "ACBSP encourages faculty involvement within the contemporary business world to enhance the quality of classroom instruction and to contribute to student learning." (ACBSP, 2010)

ACBSP have guiding principles of the association that are inherent in the adoption of standards and criteria leading to teaching excellence have been a part of ACBSP from the beginning (ACBSP, 2010). Guiding principles are:

- ACBSP embraces the virtues of teaching excellence, emphasizing to students that it is essential "to learn how to learn."
- ACBSP views research as a tool to facilitate improved teaching. Institutions are strongly encouraged to pursue a reasonable, mutually beneficial balance between teaching and research.
- ACBSP emphasizes the importance of high-quality classroom performance and faculty involvement within the contemporary business world.
- ACBSP encourages creative approaches to teaching and the use of advanced technology.
- ACBSP focuses on providing leadership to develop global alliances for improving business curricula throughout the world.
- ACBSP continually pursues its quest to implement student outcomes assessment programs necessary to enhance the quality of business education further.
- ACBSP continually develops new services and activities to support the attainment of the organization's strategic vision and mission. The mission, core values, and concepts, and guiding principles are ACBSP's foundation. Nevertheless, ACBSP is dedicated to the continued revision and updating of criteria to fulfill the standards that lead to teaching excellence.

According to ACBSP (2010), standards and criteria draw heavily from the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Performance Excellence in Education Criteria. These values and concepts are the foundation for developing and integrating all requirements. These core values and concepts are:

The list below shows ACBSP standards. There are six standards in ACBSP:

1. Leadership
2. Strategic planning
3. Student/stakeholder focus
4. Measurement/analysis of student learning and performance
5. Faculty and staff focus
6. Educational and business Process management

There are many models in quality management in which a higher education institute can adopt to foster quality standards. On the other hand, there are international quality standards such as MBNQA which known as the highest level of quality practices that focus on performance excellence. In this context, based on previous literature reviews a higher education should adopt more than one model in the quality system to demonstrate continuous improvement in quality practices. Such a model, ACBSP that implements MBNQA criteria into higher education sector to assure the quality of teaching and learning in business program is more appropriate to be embraced in higher education institute.

There are four major phases of ACBSP accreditation process. These four stages are (1) Membership of the program, (2) Candidacy approach of the program, (3) Self-study report (SRR) by the program committee, and (4) Final visit and audit of the ACBSP.

### **3. The Research Methodology**

This research is based on extensive literature review system and qualitative analysis.

International accreditation can help institute to implement world class practices in teaching, learning and administration, enhance faculty and staff morale, increase graduates' employability and acceptance in global education and job market documented procedures in administration, teaching, learning, and research that provide a robust foundation for quality management system in academic institute

Objectives of the study are:

1. To understand requirements of Education Evaluation Commission for Higher Education (EEC-HE) and ACBSP.
2. To equate the standards and criteria of EEC-HE and ACBSP.
3. Explore the commonalities of standards and criteria of EEC-HE and ACBSP.

International accreditation can help institute to implement world class practices in teaching, learning and administration, enhance faculty and staff morale, increase graduates' employability and acceptance in global education and job market.

### **4. Discussion and Research Findings**

1. The Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) has mentioned that "It's mandatory for any public and private university to be accredited by EEC-HE." Therefore, many colleges and

universities in Saudi Arabia must meet the EEC-HE Standards to grant the accreditation status.

There are examples of some competitive public and private universities who have been awarded EEC-HE accreditation at institutional level. The accomplishment of being certified by EEC-HE is essential for the universities in Kingdom to provide evidence that an institute has quality management system. The quality management system ensures that standards are followed and maintained in teaching and learning based on national policies and regulation of the Ministry of Higher Education in KSA. This assures that institute graduates high standard and utilized students to the labor market in KSA.

2. The Malcolm Baldrige Award Framework has Seven Categories namely leadership, strategic planning, customer focus, measurement, analysis and knowledge management, workforce focus, operations focus and results as shown in Figure 2.1. In Table 2.1: Core values comparison: ACBSP and MBNQP are compared. In Table 2.2: Standards vs. criteria: ACBSP and MBNQP are compared.

3. However, the international accreditation adds more values to the domestic accreditation. One of the international accreditation bodies for business schools or programs is the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP). ACBSP promotes quality standards in business higher education and continuous improvement and recognizes program excellence. ACBSP values (1) improved teaching methods, (2) intellectual research and participation, and (3) faculty contribution to the quality and enhanced education worldwide (ACBSP, Value Accreditation , 2016).

4. Recently, ACBSP has more than 13,000 member schools worldwide, and its vision is to accredit colleges of business worldwide. Moreover, Institutions with programs accredited by ACBSP are committed to continuous improvement that ensures their business program offering courses that meet contemporary business organizations and also ensure that these programs are achieving learning objectives to develop graduates' quality in terms of skills, knowledge, and application of skills and knowledge in practice; interpersonal and communicating skills as to work collaboratively with teamwork spirit in organizational environment; prepare for lifelong learning (ACBSP, 2016).

5. The domestic accreditation grants a quality assurance in post-secondary education in KSA at the institutional level and meets high standards of quality assurance based on national policies which an institute can only be recognized within national borders. Whereas the acceptance and recognition of the international accreditation can exceed the national borders. International accreditation demonstrates the excellence of business programs of higher education at international level. Achieving international accreditation provide a competitive advantage to institute in terms of students recruitment and also give leverage to the students in getting acceptance of the degree programs in international institute across the world and

professional bodies if students wish to pursue further education and acquire professional certifications.

6. There are four major phases of ACBSP accreditation process. These four phases are (1) Membership of the program, (2) Candidacy approach of the program, (3) Self-study report (SRR) by the program committee, and (4) Final visit and audit of the ACBSP.

7. 80% of the requirements of ACBSP systems are evident in EEC-HE accreditation documents. If an academic institute has been already accredited by EEC-HE at the institutional level majority of the evidence can be found for the standards of (1) Leadership, (2) Strategic planning, and (3) Management and Analysis of Student Learning and Performance.

8. The accreditation of EEC-HE a university can create a culture of quality in the organization, train the staff and administration to meet quality requirements, follow the documented procedures in administration, teaching, learning, and research that provide a robust foundation for the quality management system in an academic institute. This facilitates and reduces the work effort to meet international requirements for accreditation

Since the objective of this research was to evaluate the current EEC-HE accreditation process in a case study at the academic institute. The data of EEC-HE requirements and compliance documents were analyzed by using the content analysis method as qualitative data analysis tool. The content analysis was carried out a gap analysis considering ACBSP requirements and availability of the evidence in documents of EEC-HE in the case study of the academic institute. The content analysis revealed that the themes of overall quality requirements for both accreditation bodies are same to achieve higher quality in the administration of higher education regarding teaching and learning and demonstrating good quality of research.

Based on analyses we found that on an average 80% of the requirements of ACBSP systems are evident in EEC-HE accreditation documents. This finding suggests that, if an academic institute already accredited by EEC-HE at an institutional level majority of the evidence can be found for the standards of (1) Leadership, (2) Strategic planning, and (3) Management and Analysis of Student Learning and Performance. Since these elements are strategic level so, we considered those elements in analyses purpose which match with EEC-HE institutional accreditation. We found almost or an average 80% as the evidence available in the accredited institution. Tables 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3: shows the results of content analysis of the documents and names of the documents which can be used as a shred of evidence to meet the requirements of Leadership standard of ACBSP

The findings of the study also reveal that EEC-HE accreditation provides an institute a sound basis of quality management system which can be used for achieving international accreditation.

### **Research Limitations**

This research was focused and restricted to only three elements in ACBSP criteria. The three criteria were (1) Leadership, (2) Strategic Planning, and (3) Management and Analysis of Student Learning and Performance, there are three more criteria which were not conducted in this research and they are student and stakeholder focus, faculty and staff focus, and Education and Business Process Management. The remaining three criteria is left to another researcher who might be interested in this study and find the commonalities and differences in both two remaining criteria for both ACBSP and EEC-EH

### **5. Conclusion and Recommendation**

This study concludes that EEC-HE accreditation standards and criteria are very comprehensive and wide enough to cover all processes and functions of the quality management systems of a higher education institute. Implementation of these standards develop the documented policies, procedures, performance measurement and analysis systems in the institute, which can be used as an evidence to meet the requirements of international accreditation. Achieving international accreditation an institute can achieve competitive advantage and benefit to stakeholders. International accreditation can help institute to implement world class practices in teaching, learning and administration, enhance faculty and staff morale, increase graduates' employability and acceptance in global education and job market.

It can be concluded that the implementation of these International Quality standards in higher education sector KSA can bring in a positive impact and help in achieving vision 2030.

The following recommendations have been evolved from the study.

- 1- When an academic institute is accredited by EEC-HE, it is recommended to conduct gap analysis with the current system in advance before the start of international accreditation process such as ACBSP accreditation.
- 2- EEC-HE accreditation is very comprehensive and provides very good system that can be used as a tool for the improvement of the quality of teaching, learning, and administration of higher education institute.

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