

**Academics and Managers' Perception and Experience of the Accreditation Process of  
Educational Programs: a Case of one Kazakhstani University**

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## ABSTRACT

### **Academics and Managers' Perception and Experience of the Accreditation Process of Educational Programs: a Case of one Kazakhstani University**

In recent decades, Kazakhstani higher education has witnessed considerable transformations in quality assurance, with accreditation emerging as the foremost external quality assurance mechanism. Notwithstanding the abundance of global research on accreditation, studies focusing on Kazakhstan and other Central Asian nations remain scant. This research seeks to investigate the participation of managerial and academic staff in the accreditation process at a Kazakhstani university, as well as their perceptions of continuous improvement. To provide valuable insights for Kazakhstani universities striving to refine their quality assurance mechanisms in alignment with international accreditation standards, this study employs both Cultural Theory and Institutional Isomorphism theory. Employing a case study design and purposeful sampling, the research found through interviews that the accreditation process had fostered a shift in organizational culture towards continuous improvement, reflecting the university's quality culture. However, several challenges were uncovered, such as limited international experience, suboptimal expert selection, Soviet-era legacies, language barriers, disputes concerning curriculum design approaches, and an emphasis on maintaining control standards over enhancing quality. Despite these obstacles, foreign accrediting agencies were perceived to exert a lasting influence on the quality of academic programs and the university's overall development. The most formidable challenge pertained to the transformation of the university's structure, academic policies, strategic planning, and operational processes during the accreditation preparation phase. The study's findings enrich the understanding of accreditation practices in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries, offering valuable insights for policymakers and researchers in the region. By shedding light on the involvement of managerial and academic staff in the accreditation process and elucidating their

perceptions of continuous improvement, this research contributes to the development of more effective quality assurance mechanisms that align with international accreditation standards.

*Keywords:* external and internal quality assurance, accreditation, perception, academic and managerial staff, Cultural Theory, Institutional Isomorphism theory, quality culture, continuous improvement.



## Аңдатпа

### **Оқытушы және басқарушы персоналдың білім беру бағдарламаларын аккредиттеу процесін тәжірибесі мен қабылдауы: бір қазақстандық университеттің мысалында**

Қазақстандық жоғары білім соңғы онжылдықтарда сапаны қамтамасыз ету саласында елеулі өзгерістерден өтті, әрі аккредиттеудің өзі сапаны сыртқы бақылаудың негізгі тетігіне айналды. Аккредиттеу саласындағы жаһандық зерттеулердің көптігіне қарамастан, Қазақстанға және Орталық Азияның басқа елдеріне бағытталған зерттеулердің жүргізілуі өте сирек. Бұл зерттеу қазақстандық университетте аккредиттеу процесіне қазақстандық ЖОО-ның басқарушы және академиялық персоналының қатысуын зерделеуге, сондай-ақ олардың үздіксіз жетілдіруді («continuous improvement») қабылдауын талдауға бағытталған. Кейс-стади әдісі мен мақсатқа бағытталған іріктеуді пайдалана отырып, сұхбат арқылы жасалған зерттеу аккредиттеу процесі университеттің сапа мәдениетін көрсете отырып, ұйымдық мәдениеттің үздіксіз жетілдіру бағытына («continuous improvement») ауысуына ықпал еткенін анықтады. Алайда, зерттеу барысында халықаралық/аймақтық тәжірибенің жеткіліксіздігі, сарапшылардың тиімсіз таңдалуы, өткен кеңестік кезең, тілдік кедергі, оқу бағдарламаларын әзірлеу тәсілдеріндегі келіспеушіліктер және сапаны жақсарту тәсіліне қарағанда бақылау стандарттарын сақтау тәсілінің үстемдігі сияқты мәселелер анықталды. Аталған қиындықтарға қарамастан, шетелдік аккредиттеу агенттіктері академиялық бағдарламалардың сапасына және университеттің жалпы дамуына ұзақмерзімді әсер етуші ретінде қабылданған. Университет құрылымын, академиялық саясатты, стратегиялық жоспарлауды және операциялық процестерді өзгерту аккредиттеуге дайындық кезеңіндегі ең маңызды сынақ болды. Зерттеу нәтижелері Қазақстанда және Орталық Азияның басқа елдерінде аккредиттеу тәжірибесінің

түсінігін кеңейтеді, саяси шешім қабылдаушылар мен аймақтағы зерттеушілер үшін құнды ұсыныстар ұсынады. Басқарушы және академиялық персоналдың аккредиттеу процесіне қатысуын жария ете отырып, олардың үздіксіз жетілдіруді («continuous improvement») қабылдауын нақтылай отырып, бұл зерттеу халықаралық аккредиттеу стандарттарына сәйкес келетін сапаны қамтамасыз етудің неғұрлым тиімді тетіктерін әзірлеуге ықпал етеді.

*Түйінді сөздер:* сапаны қамтамасыз етудің сыртқы және ішкі жүйелері, аккредиттеу, қабылдау, академиялық және басқару персоналы, мәдениеттану теориясы, институционалдық изоморфизм теориясы, сапа мәдениеті, үздіксіз жетілдіру

## Аннотация

### **Опыт и восприятие процесса аккредитации образовательных программ преподавательским и управленческим персоналом: на примере одного Казахстанского университета**

Казахстанское высшее образование в последние десятилетия прошло значительные преобразования в области обеспечения качества, и аккредитация стала основным механизмом внешнего контроля качества. Несмотря на изобилие глобальных исследований в области аккредитации, исследования, фокусирующиеся на Казахстане и других странах Центральной Азии, остаются крайне редкими. Данное исследование направлено на изучение участия управленческого и академического персонала казахстанского вуза в процессе аккредитации в казахстанском университете, а также анализ их восприятия непрерывного совершенствования («continuous improvement»). Используя метод кейс-стади и целенаправленную выборку, исследование посредством интервью выявило, что процесс аккредитации способствовал сдвигу организационной культуры в направлении непрерывного совершенствования («continuous improvement»), отражая культуру качества университета. Однако в ходе исследования было обнаружено такие проблемы как недостаточный международный/региональный опыт, неоптимальный выбор экспертов, наследие советского прошлого, языковой барьер, разногласия в подходах к разработке учебных программ и доминирование подхода поддержания стандартов контроля над подходом по улучшению качества. Несмотря на указанные трудности, иностранные аккредитационные агентства воспринимались как оказывающие долгосрочное влияние на качество академических программ и общее развитие университета. Наиболее значительным вызовом было преобразование структуры университета, академических политик, стратегического планирования и операционных процессов на этапе подготовки к аккредитации. Результаты

исследования расширяют понимание практики аккредитации в Казахстане и других странах Центральной Азии, предлагая ценные рекомендации для лиц, принимающих политические решения, и исследователей в регионе. Освещая участие управленческого и академического персонала в процессе аккредитации и проясняя их восприятие непрерывного совершенствования («continuous improvement»), данное исследование способствует разработке более эффективных механизмов обеспечения качества, соответствующих международным стандартам аккредитации.

*Ключевые слова:* внешние и внутренние системы обеспечения качества, аккредитация, восприятие, академический и управленческий персонал, культурологическая теория, теория институционального изоморфизма, культура качества, непрерывное совершенствование.

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## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Background Information**

Quality assurance is essential to higher education as it ensures that students receive education that meets high standards and prepares them for success in their future careers. In the case of Kazakhstan, the country has undergone significant changes in quality assurance in higher education over the past few decades. Prior to gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, higher education in Kazakhstan was heavily influenced by the Soviet system, which placed a strong emphasis on centralization and conformity (Bischof, 2018). However, since gaining independence, the Kazakhstani government has implemented a series of educational reforms to modernize and improve the quality of higher education in the country.

### **1.2 Problem Statement**

One of the significant changes that occurred after independence was the establishment of a national system of quality assurance for higher education in 1993. This system included the creation of an independent accreditation agency called the National Accreditation Centre (NAC), which is responsible for evaluating and accrediting higher education institutions in Kazakhstan (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2015). Over the years, the Kazakhstani government has implemented various policies aimed at improving the quality assurance of higher education process through the standards of higher education establishment, design and adaptation of national qualifications frameworks based on competency-based education (Kerimkulova & Kuzhabekova, 2017). Moreover, Kazakhstan joined the Bologna Process in 2010 (European Higher Education Area and Bologna Process, n.d.), which aims to create a common framework for higher education across Europe. Since joining the process, Kazakhstan has implemented various reforms in line with the Bologna Process, including the adoption of a three-cycle degree structure (bachelor's, master's, and doctoral), the implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

(ECTS), and the promotion of internationalization in higher education (Country Report on the Implementation of the Parameters of the Bologna Process at HEIs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2020). Those reforms forced higher education institutions (HEI) to transform their internal quality policy and management toward the demands of the job market, economy, and student-oriented processes (Law on Education, 2017). The most considerable change was in 2017 when HEIs got the freedom to choose an independent accreditation instead of a previously established state attestation, which affected the more active involvement of the universities in accreditation (Kalanova, 2016). The national quality assurance system is the topic of research in different countries with particular attention to its effectiveness; quality is a serious, complex, and complicated matter which is now part of the university management system.

Accreditation is a crucial component of quality assurance in higher education. It involves a formal evaluation process to determine if an educational program meets specific standards and criteria an accrediting agency sets (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2015). Accreditation can assure students, employers, and other stakeholders that the program meets high standards and prepares students for success in their chosen fields (Sanyal & Martin, 2007). It can benefit educational institutions, including increased credibility, recognition, and funding opportunities. Additionally, it can help institutions identify improvement areas and promote a continuous improvement culture (Dixon & Soltys, 2013).

By implementing accreditation standards, universities publicly announce their commitment to external evaluation and continuous improvement as a guiding norm (Perryer & Egan, 2015). However, there is difficulty in abandoning the former centralized control systems because universities could be unprepared or need help understanding how to change the internal management structure and introduce quality assurance mechanisms. Some HEIs

conclude accreditation as a formal process similar to the state licensing procedure (Kerimkulova & Kuzhabekova, 2017).

Nevertheless, Kazakhstan has moved considerably ahead in implementing accreditation mechanisms compared to other Central Asia countries (Manarbek & Seyfried, 2022). Two significant changes were made in national legislation; the first, based on OECD recommendations and the European Standards and Guidelines (OECD, 2007), when the government included the independent accreditation as a requirement in the State Program on Education Development for 2011-2020 (SPED 2011-2020, 2010). From that moment, the accrediting agencies got independent status from the state and started to provide accreditation procedures independently. The second change in 2011 led to the National Register of Accrediting Bodies' assertion (Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2016); the main distinguished feature of that step was that Kazakhstan opened its education market to foreign accrediting agencies. Moreover, HEIs are not limited in their choice and could choose either national or international accrediting agencies (Kalanova, 2016). Currently, there are twelve approved accrediting bodies in the Register of recognized accreditation bodies, where six of them (with national or international status) are located in Kazakhstan (hereinafter – local accrediting agencies), and the other six are in foreign countries (the USA, Belgium, and Germany (hereinafter - foreign accrediting agencies) (see Appendix A). By 2020, more than 90% of Kazakhstani universities had passed institutional and program accreditation (ENIC-KAZAKHSTAN, 2020). However, most of the programs were accredited by local agencies; for instance, Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating (IAAR) and Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (IQAA) accredited 46% and 31% of the total number of programs, respectively.

Kazakhstani and European accreditation agencies based their methodology on the European Standards and Guidelines (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher

Education, 2021); however, there are differences in their approaches. For example, Kazakhstani agencies include indicators according to local legislation in their methodology, such as a minimal number of teaching staff with doctoral (candidate of sciences) degrees (IQAA, 2020) that could be seen as the features of state control rather than accreditation. Moreover, there is the issue of awareness of the importance of accreditation processes by the faculty, administrative staff, and students (Davis & Ringsted, 2006). For instance, academics and managers are critical in the accreditation process. Their perceptions and experience can influence the quality of the evaluation process and the overall effectiveness of accreditation in improving the quality of higher education programs.

A considerable amount of research addresses the significant role and impact of evaluation of accreditation on the quality of education in the Western context (Harvey & Williams, 2010; Bendixen & Jacobsen, 2020; Rahnema, 2020; Komotar, 2021), as well as comparative studies regarding the national or institutional context of accreditation systems including accreditation process actors approach (Harvey, 2004; Stensaker et al., 2011; Suchanek et al., 2012; Huong, 2018; Ulker & Bakioglu, 2019). For example, according to Harvey (2004), in the case of European, Canadian, and USA HEIs with a long accreditation history, there is a tendency for “a shift of power from educators to managers and bureaucrats” when accreditation is more about control than enhancement (p. 209). South Eastern countries, such as Taiwan and Vietnam, were later adopters of accreditation, where state regulation, similar to Kazakhstan, played a vital role in the quality assurance system's reform (Merrill, 2019). Studies in that region concentrated on investigating the development and effects of those reforms on the higher education system (Mussawy & Rossman, 2018).

In addition, most studies show that academics and managers generally perceive the accreditation process as essential for enhancing the quality of higher education programs and strengthening the faculty's continuous improvement culture (Germaine & Spencer, 2016;

Mussawy & Rossman, 2018; Seyfried & Pohlenz, 2018; Leiber et al., 2018; Staub, 2019; Alaskar et al., 2019; Wilson-Hail et al., 2019; Khojah & Shousha, 2020). However, they also identified challenges in the accreditation process, such as the need for more support and resources for educational institutions to prepare for accreditation, increased workload, and stress. Moreover, Leiber et al. (2018) emphasized the limited improvement of teaching and learning. According to Stensaker et al. (2011), HEI administration staff are better informed and more engaged in accreditation than students and faculty staff. As a result, HEI leadership is more optimistic about accreditation's impact than other groups.

Studies on the Kazakhstani quality assurance system are not so numerous. Most of the research papers address the development of the National Quality Assurance system since the Bologna process implementation, changes in legal frameworks, issues of academic autonomy, and state control (Sarinzhipov et al., 2012; Hartley et al., 2016; Kerimkulova & Kuzhabekova, 2017; Anafinova, 2020; Nadirova, 2022). Thus, through the case study, Istileulova (2013) and Perryer and Egan (2015) explored the experience and institutional changes effects of accreditation on Kazakhstani business schools, highlighting the importance of accreditation in enhancing the reputation and quality of business education in developing countries. Merrill (2019) found the divergence between the number of Kazakhstani and Kyrgyzstani academic programs that passed international accreditation (645 and 9 programs, respectively), explaining the differences by Kazakhstani governmental incentives and membership in the Bologna process. However, few empirical studies are focused on the students' or employers' views (Assylbekova & Kalanova, 2015) and academic and managerial staff (Manarbek & Seyfried, 2022; Bokayev et al., 2022), who are supposed to be more essential participants in the accreditation process as their opinion and experience determine the quality assurance.

Therefore, this research aims to narrow the gap in the current studies relating to faculty and administration's experience of the accreditation process within the Kazakhstani context. There is a belief that a better understanding of the perception of the accreditation process by academic and managerial staff who are directly involved in it may become a reason for low accreditation efficiency and program improvement. There is a need for further study of the influence of awareness of accreditation goals and mechanisms on behalf of the faculty and academic managers as the participants of the quality assurance culture propaganda.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the present qualitative case study is to identify the involvement of two groups of primary stakeholders (managerial and academic staff) in the accreditation process at one Kazakhstani university and to find out how their perceptions correspond to the concept of continuous improvement by conducting an extensive analysis of separate semi-structured interviews. This study sets the following objectives:

- 1) To identify the requirements of the accreditation process at the Kazakhstani education system.
- 2) To find out the effectiveness of the accreditation process of the HEI on organizational productivity and long-term planning from managerial and academic staff's perspectives.
- 3) To investigate the effectiveness of the accreditation process in terms of the educational program and curriculum design from managerial and academic staff's perspectives.
- 4) To identify the differences between local and foreign accrediting agencies comparing administrative and academic staff experiences.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

This research highlights the alleged understanding of accreditation process effectiveness from managerial and academic staff perspectives and provides recommendations for further improvement. The research is based on semi-structured interviews with the main stakeholders involved in the accreditation process. Therefore, this qualitative study is guided by the following research questions:

- What are administrators' and faculty members' views on the value of the accreditation process in their institution?
- How do administrators and faculty members perceive the influence of the accreditation process on the HEI?
- How do administrators and faculty members perceive the role of the accreditation process in the educational program and curriculum design?
- What are administrative and academic staff's experiences with the accreditation process provided by local and foreign accrediting agencies?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The research on academics' and managers' perceptions and experience of the accreditation process of educational programs in Kazakhstan is significant for several reasons. Firstly, the accreditation process plays a crucial role in ensuring the quality and relevance of educational programs. Understanding how academics and managers perceive and experience the accreditation process can provide insights into the effectiveness of the process motivating the main stakeholders to participate in the accreditation processes more actively and consciously and identify areas for improvement in HEI all over Kazakhstan. Secondly, the research can inform policymakers, accrediting bodies, and accreditation process actors to improve their understanding of the accreditation procedures and possibly develop quality assurance in other Kazakhstani HEIs. Understanding the perceptions and experiences of academics and managers can inform the Ministry of Science and Higher



Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan on improving the quality and relevance of the implemented external quality assurance policies. Thirdly, the research can contribute to the broader literature on quality assurance and accreditation in higher education in other regions of Kazakhstan. While there has been extensive research on accreditation in other countries, there is a need for more research on accreditation in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries. Finally, the research can strengthen the HEI culture of continuous development of Kazakhstan's higher education system.

### **1.6 Outline of the Thesis**

This thesis consists of six chapters. The introductory chapter represents the research background, problem statement, research questions, purpose, and significance of the study. Chapter 2 illustrates the topics of quality and quality assurance, accreditation, academic quality culture, and administrative' and faculty's perceptions of the accreditations process in the Kazakhstani and international literature. It also discusses the theoretical frameworks of the research. Chapter 3 depicts research design, methodology, sampling and data collection procedures, limitations, and ethical issues. Chapter 4 reports the findings of the study according to the research questions. The study results are discussed and interpreted in Chapter 5 taking into account the studied literature. Chapter 6 summarizes the findings referring to the research questions, providing study limitations and implications for further research.

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter pursues presenting the overview of the research topic through critical analysis, synthesis, comparison, and summary of previously conducted research and studies regarding the research topic. The current study centers on quality and quality assurance in higher education and accreditation processes in the international and Kazakhstani context. The chapter begins with a general overview and background of quality assurance in higher education and its mechanisms in the accreditation process. Then it proceeds to focus on the role of administration and faculty staff in the accreditation process and development of the culture of academic quality. Finally, it brings insight into the institutional theory of isomorphism as the study's theoretical framework.

### **2.2 Implementation of Quality and Quality Assurance**

Quality and quality assurance have been major concerns of organizations and industries throughout history. In recent years, the development of quality management systems (hereinafter QMS) has gained significant importance and has become a critical factor in the success of organizations across various sectors (Oakland, 2014). This literature review explores the background of quality and quality assurance, tracing its evolution from ancient times to modern-day practices.

The concept of quality dates to ancient civilizations such as the Egyptians and the Greeks (Oakland, 2014). During the industrial revolution, the focus shifted towards mass production and efficiency, often compromising on the quality of the products. However, in the early 20th century, pioneers like Walter Shewhart and W. Edwards Deming developed statistical quality control methods to improve the quality of products in the manufacturing sector (as cited in Shewhart, 1931, p. 38; Deming, 1986).

In the 1960s, quality assurance practices were developed in response to the need for standardized quality management practices in the aerospace and defense industries (Oakland, 2014). The ISO 9000 standards were introduced in 1987, providing a framework for QMS implementation and certification (ISO, 2015, p. 2). The Modern-Day Quality Assurance concept has evolved from focusing on inspection and testing to a more comprehensive approach that includes continuous improvement, customer satisfaction, and risk management (Oakland, 2014, p. 13). Quality assurance has expanded beyond manufacturing and is now practiced in various sectors, including education.

Quality and quality assurance have been essential concepts in management literature for many years, and they continue to be relevant in today's business environment. According to Garvin (2000), quality can be defined in several ways, including meeting customer needs and expectations, conforming to product specifications, and achieving high levels of reliability and performance. The author also emphasized the importance of a comprehensive approach to quality that includes product design, process control, and continuous improvement (p. 10). Similarly, Juran (2000) defined quality as "fitness for use" and highlighted the importance of a proactive approach to quality assurance that focuses on preventing defects rather than detecting and correcting them after they occur (p. 31). He also argued that quality improvement should involve all employees, from top management to frontline workers, and that a culture of continuous improvement is essential for sustained success (p. 44).

Another critical concept in quality management is Six Sigma, a data-driven approach that seeks to minimize variation and improve process performance (Pande et al., 2000). According to the authors, companies such as Motorola and General Electric have widely adopted Six Sigma. It has proven to be an effective tool for improving quality, reducing costs, and increasing customer satisfaction (p. 2). These authors' views demonstrate the importance

of a customer-focused approach, employee involvement, and a culture of continuous improvement in achieving high levels of quality in products, services, and processes. Quality management systems such as ISO 9001 also emphasize the importance of a process-oriented approach to quality assurance and the need for continuous improvement (International Organization for Standardization, 2000).

### **2.3 Quality Assurance of Higher education: European Background**

Quality assurance is critical to higher education, ensuring that educational programs and institutions meet the needs of students, society, and other stakeholders. According to the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG) (2015), quality assurance in higher education is a systematic process of evaluating and improving the quality of educational programs, ensuring that they meet the needs of students, society, and other stakeholders.

The history of quality assurance in higher education in Europe can be traced back to the early 1990s. During this time, many European countries recognized the growing importance of higher education in the knowledge-based economy and the need for more systematic approaches to ensure the quality of educational programs and institutions (Volkwein, 2010). One of the earliest examples of quality assurance in higher education in Europe was the establishment of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in 1992, which was responsible for providing funding to higher education institutions in England and ensuring these institutions complied with the specific quality standards (Harvey, 2004). Other European countries soon followed suit, developing their systems for quality assurance in higher education (Dill, 2007). The Association of Nordic Universities (ANU) established a quality assurance network for universities in the Nordic countries in 1995 to promote the sharing of best practices and to develop common approaches to quality assurance across the region (Association of Nordic Universities, 1997, p. 1-34).

Such close collaboration gave birth to the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (further ENQA) establishment in 1998, aimed to merge quality assurance agencies from across Europe with a mission to promote the development and use of effective quality assurance practices in higher education and to provide a platform for sharing knowledge and expertise in the field (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, n.d.).

In recent years, quality assurance in higher education has become an increasingly important topic in the European context. One of the key developments in this field was the adoption of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) in 2005, which provides a common framework for quality assurance in higher education across Europe countries and was widely adopted by institutions throughout the region (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2021).

One of the primary goals of quality assurance in higher education is to ensure that educational programs and institutions meet the needs of students, society, and other stakeholders. This is achieved through various mechanisms, including accreditation, program evaluations, and institutional reviews. These mechanisms identify improvement areas and encourage continuous improvement and innovation in higher education (Harvey, 2004).

Accreditation is one of the essential components of quality assurance in higher education. Accrediting agencies evaluate the quality of educational programs and institutions and grant them a seal of approval. Accreditation assures students and other stakeholders that an educational program or institution meets specific quality standards and is recognized by the academic community (Salmi, 2009). In addition to accreditation, there has been a growing emphasis on internationalization and developing international quality frameworks in the European context. For example, the UNESCO-OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in

Cross-Border Higher Education provide a framework for ensuring that educational programs and institutions meet specific quality standards, regardless of location (Knight, 2006).

#### **2.4 Mechanisms of the European Accreditation Process**

Accreditation is a critical component of quality assurance in higher education; it plays a vital role in ensuring that educational programs and institutions meet certain standards of quality (The European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education, n.d.). That means that it is a process by which external organizations evaluate the quality of educational programs and institutions and grant them a seal of approval. This process typically involves a comprehensive review of the educational program or institution, which includes an examination of its mission, goals, and objectives and assessing its resources, faculty, curriculum, and student outcomes (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2021).

However, some controversial opinions about the accreditation mechanisms and their effectiveness exist. One of the criticisms of the accreditation process is using a quantitative evaluative framework. This has led to concerns about the interpretation of the quantitative data; moreover, it puts the emphasis on compliance with accreditation standards and conformist behavior, which can stifle innovation and creativity in educational programs and institutions (Martin & Stella, 2007). For that reason, accreditation agency should build the framework that considers not only international standards but local context too; moreover, it has to be selective to the expert team's credibility, objectivity, and professionalism (p. 92). Another concern is the tendency for "a shift of power from educators to managers and bureaucrats" when accreditation is more about control than enhancement (Harvey, 2004, p.222). Thus, some HEIs perceive that accreditation disregards institutional autonomy (Van Damme, 2004; Huong, 2018). Moreover, Leiber et al. (2018) emphasized the limited improvement of teaching and learning. According to Ulker and Bakioglu (2019),

accreditation effectiveness during re-accreditation is lower than during initial accreditation. There exists a strong association between the accreditation status of established and recently established institutions. Empirical evidence indicates that institutions with a history of 40 or more years tend to exhibit lower levels of effectiveness.

In addition, Van Damme (2004) and Huong (2018) have criticized the cost and complexity of the accreditation process, which can create a burden for smaller educational programs and institutions. They also insisted that the process of accreditation can be time-consuming and expensive, requiring significant resources from the educational program or institution (Harvey, 2004). There are also concerns that the accreditation process can lead to a "one size fits all" approach to quality assurance; accreditation standards can be difficult to apply in a way that recognizes the unique strengths and challenges of different educational programs and institutions (Scheele, 2004; Mussawy & Rossman, 2018). This can create a situation where all educational programs and institutions are expected to conform to the same set of standards, regardless of their individual circumstances (Martin & Stella, 2007). There have also been efforts to address some of the concerns about the accreditation process. For example, there has been a growing interest in alternative forms of accreditation that focus on outcomes rather than inputs and processes. The Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualifications Profile is one example of an alternative form of accreditation that focuses on learning outcomes (Lumina Foundation, n.d.).

Despite these criticisms, accreditation remains an important tool for quality assurance in higher education as it provides a level of assurance to students and other stakeholders that an educational program or institution satisfy certain standards of quality. For example, Salmi (2009), in the paper "The Challenge of establishing world-class Universities" supported by the World Bank, insists that accreditation can also provide a framework for continuous improvement and innovation in educational programs and institutions.

There are several modern views on accreditation as one of the most important components of quality assurance in higher education. One perspective is that accreditation should be seen as a collaborative process between educational programs and institutions and accrediting agencies. In this view, accreditation should be used as an opportunity for educational programs and institutions to engage in a dialogue with accrediting agencies about their goals, strengths, and areas for improvement (Rahnuma, 2020). That means that by working collaboratively, educational programs and institutions can use the accreditation process to identify areas for improvement and develop plans for continuous improvement (Germaine & Spencer, 2016). Another aspect is that accreditation should be more flexible and adaptable to the unique needs of different educational programs and institutions. In this view, accreditation standards and criteria should be designed to be adaptable to the context of different educational programs and institutions rather than imposing a "one-size-fits-all" approach to quality assurance (Martin & Stella, 2007). This approach can help to ensure that accreditation is relevant and meaningful to the specific needs of different educational programs and institutions.

The principles of accreditation generally involve ensuring that educational institutions, programs, or services meet specific standards for quality and effectiveness. Some of the key principles of accreditation include the following (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2015):

- Establishing clear standards: Accreditation organizations must establish clear and specific standards that educational institutions, programs, or services must meet to receive accreditation. These standards should be objective and measurable and reflect the relevant field's best practices.

- Encouraging continuous improvement: Accreditation should promote continuous improvement by encouraging educational institutions, programs, or services to regularly



assess their performance and make necessary changes to improve the quality of their offerings.

- Promoting stakeholder involvement: Accreditation organizations should involve a broad range of stakeholders, including students, faculty, employers, and the community, in the accreditation process to ensure that the needs of all stakeholders are met.

- Ensuring transparency and accountability: Accreditation organizations should be transparent and accountable in their decision-making processes and should provide clear and accurate information about the accreditation process and the performance of accredited entities.

- Supporting diversity and inclusivity: Accreditation should support diversity and inclusivity by recognizing and valuing the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of all stakeholders.

- Ensuring adherence to ethical and legal standards: Accreditation organizations must ensure that educational institutions, programs, or services adhere to ethical and legal standards in their operations and practices.

- Providing effective oversight and evaluation: Accreditation organizations must provide effective oversight and evaluation of educational institutions, programs, or services seeking accreditation to ensure that they meet the established (pp.17-21). By adhering to these principles, accreditation organizations can help to ensure that students receive a high-quality education and that employers and the community have confidence in the value of that education. standards (Harvey & Williams, 2010, p. 9).

Accreditation frameworks play a critical role in the process of accreditation and in ensuring quality assurance in higher education. These frameworks provide a set of standards and criteria against which educational programs and institutions are evaluated, helping to ensure that they meet certain quality benchmarks. For instance, in the United States, there are

six regional accrediting agencies that are recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, as well as numerous specialized accrediting agencies that focus on specific fields of study or types of educational institutions (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, n.d.). Each of these accrediting agencies has its own set of standards and criteria, which are used to evaluate educational programs and institutions. In addition, the ENQA provides a framework for the external review of educational programs and institutions, which includes the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (ENQA, 2015). European agencies typically operate at the national level, and they are responsible for ensuring that educational programs and institutions meet certain standards of quality. For example, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in the United Kingdom is responsible for reviewing and accrediting educational programs and institutions in the UK and uses a set of standards and criteria to evaluate the quality of these programs and institutions. The QAA (n.d) also works with other national and international accreditation agencies to ensure that educational programs and institutions in the UK meet the highest standards of quality.

Another example of a European accreditation agency is the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria) which works to ensure that these programs and institutions meet certain standards of quality (ENQA, 2023). German accreditation agency FIBAA (Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation) specializes in the accreditation of programs in business, management, economics, law, and social sciences. FIBAA uses a set of quality standards that are based on the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG). These standards cover a wide range of areas, such as program design, faculty qualifications, student support services, and institutional governance. FIBAA's accreditation process involves a self-assessment by the educational program or institution, followed by an external

review by a panel of experts appointed by FIBAA to ensure that educational programs and institutions meet certain benchmarks for quality and are committed to continuous improvement. FIBAA's accreditation standards are regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that they are relevant and up to date with the changing needs of students and society (FIBAA, n.d.). All these agencies follow equal standards and norms prescribed by the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2015) and include:

- Institutional or organizational mission, goals, and objectives;
- Governance and leadership;
- Curriculum and instruction;
- Faculty or staff qualifications, development, and support;
- Student or customer support services;
- Facilities and resources;
- Assessment and continuous improvement (p.25).

This process typically involves a self-assessment by the entity seeking accreditation, followed by an external evaluation by a team of experts in the relevant field. The external evaluation team will review the entity's performance against the accreditation standards and make a recommendation to the accrediting organization regarding the entity's accreditation status (Harvey & Newton, 2004).

Thus, while there are some controversial opinions about the mechanisms of accreditation as a component of quality assurance in higher education, it remains an important tool for ensuring quality and continuous improvement.

## **2.5 The Role of Administration and Faculty Staff in the Accreditation Process**

Accreditation involves a self-assessment process, evaluation by an external peer review team, and subsequent improvement initiatives. The participation of both managerial and faculty members is critical to the success of the accreditation process. When both groups

are actively involved, it promotes a culture of quality improvement, which can lead to enhanced program quality. Roeleejanto et al. (2015) claim that effective leadership is crucial for successful participation in the accreditation process. It creates a shared vision and commitment to quality improvement, which is essential for accreditation (p. 17).

Leadership is vital for successful accreditation as influential leaders can create a culture of quality improvement and innovation (Onisimus et al., 2021). The investigation also revealed that it is crucial for the leadership to have a comprehensive grasp of the accreditation standards and criteria and to steer the organization towards fulfilling these prerequisites. Furthermore, adherence to the accreditation standards is essential for sustaining and enhancing program quality, and institutions must possess the appropriate resources, infrastructure, policies, and procedures to bolster their programs (Martin & Stella, 2007). Additionally, effective communication is imperative for successful accreditation within the institution and with external stakeholders (Rahnuma, 2020).

Faculty involvement in accreditation is essential to maintaining academic standards and program quality. Faculty members provide valuable input on the content and structure of programs, ensuring they meet the needs of students and are aligned with industry standards (Altbach & Engberg, 2017, p. 297). Additionally, faculty members ensure compliance with accreditation standards, including assessing student learning outcomes (Ulker & Bakioglu, 2019, p. 1511). Faculty members are critical in developing and implementing assessment plans that meet accreditation requirements; they are also involved in self-study processes, providing input on the strengths and weaknesses of the programs and helping to develop strategies for improvement (Calegari et al., 2015, p.33).

Pomey et al. (2010) revealed that faculty participation positively correlates with program quality. This study suggests that faculty involvement enhances the quality of the self-assessment process which is critical to accreditation (p. 9). However, there may be

resistance to the involvement of both managerial and faculty members in the accreditation process. For instance, Altbach's (2017) study found that there needed to be more resistance to the involvement of external stakeholders, including accrediting agencies, in higher education institutions (p. 307). The author suggests that this resistance stems from concerns about losing institutional autonomy and academic freedom. On the other hand, Kadir et al. (2016) found resistance to the accreditation process among faculty members. The authors suggest that faculty members may perceive the process as burdensome and time-consuming, leading to resistance to their involvement (p.131).

Faculty and managerial perceptions of the accreditation process can also influence their participation. Sandmann et al. (2009) found that faculty engagement in the accreditation process was positively associated with the perceived value of accreditation. The authors suggest that faculty involvement promotes a sense of ownership and investment in the accreditation process, promoting positive perceptions of the process (p. 21). Similarly, Kumar et al. (2020) found that perceived benefits of accreditation, such as increased program quality and institutional prestige, were positively associated with both managerial and faculty participation in the accreditation process. Thus, the effective participation of both managerial and faculty members in the accreditation process is crucial for its success. Resistance to participation may stem from concerns regarding institutional autonomy and the perceived burden of the accreditation process. However, positive perceptions of the accreditation process, including perceived benefits and value, can promote effective participation of both managerial and faculty members. To promote effective participation, institutions need to provide adequate resources, clear communication, training to both managerial and faculty members in the accreditation process, and implementation of strategies for encouraging faculty engagement and participation (e.g., Kotter's eight-step model of organizational change) in accreditation activities.

## **2.6 Academic Quality Culture and Administrative and Faculty's Perceptions of the Process**

The importance of quality culture is evident in the context of academic accreditation. Many accrediting bodies require institutions to demonstrate their commitment to quality by implementing quality assurance processes and fostering a culture of continuous improvement (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, n.d.). Institutions with a strong quality culture are better equipped to meet these requirements and are more likely to maintain their accreditation status (Thomson, 2012).

### ***2.6.1 Quality Culture in the Academic Process***

In the context of higher education, quality culture involves promoting a culture of excellence, continuous improvement, and accountability in teaching, research, and service (Barnett & Coate, 2005). A strong quality culture is vital for ensuring that academic institutions are effective in meeting the needs of their stakeholders, including students, administrative staff, faculty, and the broader community. According to Bowen and Rudenstine (1992), the quality culture in higher education is critical for promoting academic excellence, fostering innovation, and driving institutional change. Institutions that prioritize a culture of quality are more likely to be successful in achieving their goals, including attracting and retaining high-quality students and faculty, improving the quality of teaching and research, and enhancing their reputation (as cited in Njiro, 2016). Furthermore, a strong quality culture can also contribute to the institution's financial sustainability, as it can lead to increased funding opportunities, higher enrollment, and more significant community support (Zakaria et al., 2021).

As previously mentioned, creating a quality culture that promotes shared values and collective responsibility among staff and students in HEIs is a slow process that needs to be

explicitly encouraged. According to the European University Association (EUA), discussions about the concept of quality culture have led to a specific definition:

Quality culture is a set of shared values, beliefs, attitudes, and practices that prioritize and promote continuous improvement, excellence, and customer satisfaction. It involves a commitment from all levels of the organization to maintain high standards and a willingness to identify and address any shortcomings in their products, services, or processes (ESG, 2006, p. 16).

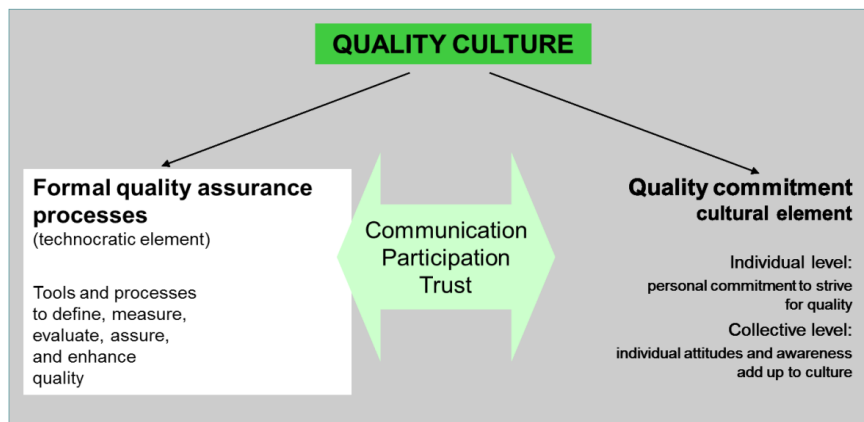
That means that in a quality culture, employees are encouraged to take ownership of their work, collaborate with others, and continuously learn and improve. The organization emphasizes the importance of meeting customer needs and expectations and measuring and monitoring performance to identify areas for improvement. Moreover, quality culture is an essential element of an institution's success, helping to ensure that the organization operates efficiently and effectively, delivers high-quality products and services, and fosters a positive working environment (d'Egmont, 2006).

A quality culture focuses on prevention rather than correction, a willingness to take calculated risks, and a commitment to transparency and accountability. It requires leadership that sets a positive example and empowers employees to participate in the improvement process for all members of an institution rather than a tool for management and control.

To establish a culture of quality within an institution, it is essential to prioritize communication, participation, and trust among all stakeholders. This EUA approach, illustrated in Figure 1, empowers individuals at every level, including students, teachers, administrators, and management, to take ownership of quality development within their respective domains (Huson, 2018). By emphasizing these factors, institutions can foster a sense of responsibility and accountability that will drive continuous improvement and ensure the delivery of high-quality services.

**Figure 1**

*The concept of Quality Culture of the European University Association*



*Note.* From Huson, N. (2018)

Harvey (2004) describes the quality of culture as a process where responsibility for quality is shared not by controlling units but by every member of the organization. European Universities Association (d'Egmont, 2006) defines a quality culture as a type of organizational culture characterized by two fundamental components. The first element, which is cultural/psychological in nature, comprises shared values, beliefs, expectations, and a strong dedication to ensuring quality. The second element is structural/managerial in nature and includes well-defined processes that promote quality enhancement and facilitate the coordination of individual efforts. Overall, a quality culture is an organizational culture that cultivates an unwavering commitment to ongoing quality enhancement and encompasses both cultural and structural aspects. In addition, Kottman et al. (2016) highlight four types of organizational quality cultures: responsive, reactive, regenerative, and reproductive (p. 37). Responsive quality culture makes an evaluation of own policies according to the external standards and puts into improvement strategies; reactive quality culture prioritizes on minimizing external threats and concentrates on specific aspects of quality. Regenerative quality culture is more characteristic of educational institutions where quality is systematically implemented in all operations, whereas in reproductive quality culture changes



cause resistance inside the organization. Such classification helps to identify the current quality culture in HEI and possible ways of changing it (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008). This could mean faculty members can contribute to quality culture by engaging in shared governance processes. Shared governance involves multiple stakeholders, including faculty members, students, and administrative staff (Dellana & Hauser, 1999). This approach can help to build trust and transparency and ensure that the input informs decisions from multiple perspectives.

### ***2.6.2 Faculty and Administration's Perceptions of Quality Culture in the Accreditation Process***

In the accreditation process, faculty and administration play a vital role in ensuring that their institutions meet the standards and criteria set by accrediting agencies. Several studies have examined the perceptions of faculty and administration on the importance of quality culture in the accreditation process. For example, a study by Csizmadia, Enders, and Westerheijden (2008) in Hungary found that faculty and administration considered quality culture essential for achieving accreditation. The study indicated that the faculty considered the development of a quality culture to be a long-term process that required cooperation and continuous improvement. Similarly, a study by Radun (2020) in Serbia found that faculty and administration believed that quality culture was a critical component of the accreditation process and required all stakeholders' involvement in the educational process. Another study by Almutairi et al. (2021) in Saudi Arabia explored the perceptions of faculty and administration on the quality culture in the accreditation process. The study found that faculty and administration considered quality culture to be essential for achieving accreditation and promoting excellence in education. The study also highlighted the importance of a collaborative approach in implementing a quality culture that meets accreditation standards (p. 18).

### ***2.6.3 The Role of Mutual Cooperation in Quality Culture and Accreditation and Responsibilities***

The success of the accreditation process depends on the cooperation between faculty and administration. Cooperation refers to the collaborative efforts of faculty and administration in establishing and implementing a quality culture that aligns with the accreditation standards. This cooperation is essential in meeting the accreditation demands, as it involves working together to identify and address challenges and promote continuous improvement.

Several studies have investigated the role of cooperation in quality culture and accreditation. For example, a study by Oliver and Hyun (2011) in Spain found that cooperation between faculty and administration was essential for achieving accreditation. The study emphasized the importance of collaborative teamwork in addressing the challenges of accreditation and promoting continuous improvement. Similarly, a study by Alshehri (2019) in Saudi Arabia found that mutual cooperation between faculty and administration was necessary to implement a quality culture and pass accreditation successfully. The study emphasized the importance of communication, shared vision, and joint planning in accreditation.

Both groups have specific responsibilities in ensuring that their institutions meet the standards of accreditation. Faculty play a critical role in curriculum development and implementation that aligns with the accreditation standards and promotes continuous improvement. They are also responsible for providing evidence of student learning outcomes, research activities, and professional development. That could mean the faculty should be involved in assessing their programs and participate in the self-evaluation process to meet accreditation standards. On the other hand, the administration is responsible for providing adequate resources, such as facilities, technology, and personnel that support the educational

programs and meet the accreditation standards. They are also responsible for ensuring that the institution's governance and administration align with the accreditation standards.

Additionally, they must communicate and cooperate with faculty to ensure they have the resources and support necessary to meet the accreditation requirements (Csizmadia, Enders, & Westerheijden, 2008).

A study by Alshehri (2019) in Saudi Arabia examined the responsibilities of administration in quality culture and accreditation. The study found that the administration's responsibilities included providing financial, human, and physical resources necessary for accreditation. Additionally, the administration was responsible for establishing policies, procedures, and structures supporting the quality culture and meeting accreditation standards.

Overall, the findings suggest that promoting a culture of continuous improvement that values collaboration, communication, and shared goals is essential in meeting the accreditation standards. Establishing effective communication channels and collaborative mechanisms between faculty and administration can also help address issues and challenges related to the accreditation process. By understanding their perceptions and responsibilities, educational institutions can establish effective strategies to meet the standards of accreditation and promote a culture of continuous improvement that enhances the quality of education.

## **2.7 Accreditation Process in Kazakhstan: Background and Challenges**

The development of the accreditation process in Kazakhstan is closely linked to the country's political, social, and economic history. Kazakhstan gained independence in 1991 and has undergone significant changes in its educational system since then. The accreditation process is crucial to ensuring the quality of education in Kazakhstan, particularly given the country's transition from a Soviet-style education system to a market-oriented one (Sagintayeva, 2013; Bischof, 2018).

### ***2.7.1 The Role of the National Quality Assurance System in the Formation of the Accreditation Process***

One of Kazakhstan's earliest references to accreditation is in the Law on Education, passed in 1992. This legislation acknowledged the importance of accreditation in guaranteeing the quality of education, a particularly critical aspect given the country's shift from a Soviet-style educational framework to a market-oriented system. Additionally, the Law led to the establishment of the Ministry of Education, which was tasked with creating an accreditation system for educational programs and institutions (Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan «On Education», 1992).

In 1996, the government of Kazakhstan created the National Accreditation Center (NAC), the first national agency responsible for accrediting higher education institutions and programs. This establishment was a significant milestone in the history of accreditation in Kazakhstan as it marked the first step towards developing a systematic approach to quality assurance in higher education (Kerimkulova & Kuzhabekova, 2017). The establishment of the NAC aimed to develop an accreditation system that could guarantee quality in higher education while fostering openness and responsibility. The agency was also tasked with developing accreditation standards that would be recognized nationally and internationally. Since its creation, the NAC has actively accredited HEIs and programs in Kazakhstan. The agency has accredited over 400 programs in more than 60 universities nationwide (Kurakbayev, 2016).

Having joined the Bologna process in 2010, Kazakhstan became the first Central Asian country accepted as a full member of the European Higher Education Area (Sagintayeva, 2013). This involvement provided significant reforms launching independent accreditation of HEIs according to the ESG standards as the alternative to the state attestation and establishment of the national quality assurance agencies (NAR, IQAA) (Bischof, 2018).

The NAR and IQAA became a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), which allowed it to participate in international quality assurance processes. This membership was a significant achievement for the national agencies, demonstrating the agency's commitment to promoting and maintaining high-quality standards in higher education.

Licensing, attestation, accreditation, ranking, and external assessment of students' academic performance (EASAP) became the tools of total state control (Silova & Niyozov, 2020). The MHES Committee for Supervision and Attestation carries out state attestation of Higher Education Institutions every five years to evaluate their effectiveness and adequacy and to determine whether they meet state compulsory education standards. This type of state control was more comprehensive than licensing as it assessed inputs and outputs and the actual mechanics of the educational process.

For educational organizations that implement educational programs of technical and vocational, post-secondary education, as well as higher and postgraduate education in the Academy of Justice, military, and special educational institutions, state attestation is carried out by specialties or fields of study. Based on the results of state attestation, one of the following conclusions is issued: (1) "attested", if the educational activity of the educational organization fully complies with the requirements of state compulsory education standards; (2) "not attested", if the educational activity of the educational organization does not comply with the requirements of state compulsory education standards (The attestation decision is based on the HEIs' self-assessment and the findings of the attestation commission, and can be either "attested" or "not attested." (Kerimkulova & Kuzhabekova, 2017, p. 88; Law on the Adoption of the Rules for State Attestation of Educational Organizations, 2007).

### ***2.7.2 The Role of the National Accreditation Center in the Formation of the Accreditation Process***

In 2012, the Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan adopted a new amendment to the Law on education, further strengthening the role of accreditation in higher education. HEIs received the opportunity to replace state attestation control (for five years) on the condition of getting institutional and specialized accreditation. Thus, accreditation status allowed HEIs to escape from state control. Consequently, it results in the rapid growth of accreditations nationwide (Anafinova, 2020).

The Law declares accreditation of educational organizations to be carried out on a voluntary basis, and it also established the National Accreditation Commission (hereinafter the NAC) to oversee the accreditation process (Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan «On education», 2012). The creation of the NAC marked a significant step toward the standardization and institutionalization of the accreditation process in Kazakhstan (Kerimkulova & Kuzhabekova, 2017). The NAC became responsible for the development of accreditation standards, the coordination of accreditation activities, and the issuance of accreditation certificates. Establishing the NAC has helped streamline the accreditation process and made it more transparent and accountable (Kerimkulova, 2020). The authority of NAC ensures that accreditation standards are regularly reviewed and updated to reflect changes in the educational system.

According to the amendments to the Law on Education (2012), the educational organization is independent in choosing an accreditation body, and accreditation is at the expense of the educational organization. Educational organizations have the right to undergo institutional and/or specialized accreditation in accreditation bodies included in the National Register of recognized accreditation bodies (see Appendix A).

The accreditation process is voluntary for Kazakhstani HEI; however, the lack of accreditation status substantially limits their activity; without accreditation status, universities

cannot issue diplomas and have access to state student scholarships. Therefore, accreditation has turned into an unavoidable voluntary-compulsory mechanism for HEIs.

Moreover, EASAP has been canceled recently as HEIs had never used it to improve educational programs quality. There were also changes in the Regulations of Educational Activities Licensing towards simplifying and decreasing the number of licensing criteria (Approval of the Rules for the provision of state service "Licensing of educational activities," 2021). Such policy considerably minimized the possible corruption risks and led to universities' freedom to launch new academic programs (Zhumagulova, 2022). Unfortunately, in 2022 the Ministry returned to the obligatory state attestation norm in the form of preventive monitoring, which allows it to check any university once in five years regardless of HEI accreditation status (Bokayev et al., 2022).

Thus, accreditation has several significant benefits for educational programs and institutions. It provides assurance to students and other stakeholders that the educational program or institution meets certain standards of quality and is recognized by the academic community. Accreditation can also help to attract students and faculty as well as funding and other resources. In addition, accreditation can provide a framework for continuous improvement and innovation in educational programs and institutions (Salmi, 2009). Despite the progress made in the development of the accreditation process in Kazakhstan, there are still challenges that need to be addressed.

## **2.8 Challenges of the Accreditation Process in Kazakhstan**

Now both internal and external quality assurance is the vital part of Kazakhstani universities' quality assurance systems; however, quality assurance system developing has been challenging due to several factors, including bureaucratic or formal procedures caused by inadequate legal frameworks, corruption caused by the lack of resources, and transparency in the accreditation process; inconsistency in the accreditation process caused by the

establishment of multiple accreditation agencies operating independently and dictating their high costs; poor involvement of the stakeholders or resistance caused by misunderstanding the role and procedures of educational process and competence of the accrediting agency review team; and lack of autonomy caused by the total governmental control (Reisberg, 2010).

Firstly, a significant challenge that hinders the accreditation process in Kazakhstan is the lack autonomy of HEIs. For instance, Yessentemirova et al. (2018), refers to the lack of freedom of HEIs in governing and financial issues that lead to a lack of confidence in the accreditation system, with many institutions failing to meet international standards. According to Barabanova (2016), for educational institutions is essential 'its autonomy, which covers academic freedoms and independence in the field of financial and economic activities, scientific research, and the formation of self-government bodies' (as cited in Yessentemirova et al., 2018, p.2928). The best solution is the finding an autonomy counterbalance to the state control (Yessentemirova et al., 2018; Bokayev et al., 2022). This ambiguity leads to inconsistency in the accreditation process, with some institutions receiving accreditation despite failing to meet the required standards. Moreover, the report on "Higher Education in Kazakhstan," published by the OECD and World bank (2007), provides a detailed analysis of the quality assurance system in Kazakhstan, and offers recommendations for improvement. The authors note that the current system needs more consistency, clarity, transparency, and rigorous evaluation criteria. They also suggest that the accreditation process should be more closely tied to the needs of the labor market and that there should be greater involvement of stakeholders in the process. The report concludes by recommending several policy reforms to improve the quality of higher education in Kazakhstan (OECD & World bank, 2007). This means that even though the NAC has helped to make the process



more transparent and accountable, there is still a need to ensure that the accreditation process is rigorous and comprehensive.

Secondly, corruption is a significant challenge that affects the accreditation process. Reports show that some institutions bribe accreditation officials to obtain favorable accreditation results. Research analysis revealed that corruption among accreditation agencies and higher education institutions prevailed a decade ago (Heyneman et al., 2008). This has led to a need for more trust in the accreditation process, with many institutions resorting to bribes to ensure their accreditation status (Kerimkulova & Kuzhabekova, 2017). This practice undermines the credibility of the accreditation process and results in poor-quality education being provided to students.

Another challenge that hinders the accreditation process in Kazakhstan is the need for more resources. For example, Kerimkulova (2020) revealed that insufficient funding and a shortage of qualified staff had hindered the accreditation process. Moreover, language barriers have also been a challenge in the accreditation process. According to a study by Aliyev and Kurmanov (2015), the language of instruction in Kazakhstan is mainly Kazakh or Russian. It has led to difficulties for international accreditation bodies to assess the quality of education these institutions provide. This fact has resulted in many institutions need to understand international accreditation standards, making it challenging to meet the required quality standards and avoid stakeholders' involvement in the accreditation process.

Thus, Merrill (2020) found limited faculty involvement and business partners, such as employers and students, in the accreditation process because of the language barrier. However, the language barrier issue can be addressed by providing language training for accreditation assessors and increasing the availability of accreditation materials in English. The shortage of skilled personnel means some institutions receive accreditation without proper scrutiny.

Another cause of this challenge is the need for more access to modern technology and equipment, which is essential for meeting the quality standards set by international accreditation bodies. Furthermore, the accreditation process in Kazakhstan is heavily focused on inputs rather than outputs. According to a study by Yeleussov et al. (2015), the accreditation process primarily focuses on inputs such as facilities and equipment rather than outputs such as student learning outcomes and employability. It can lead to a need for more emphasis on the quality of education institutions provide. Finally, the accreditation process in Kazakhstan is time-consuming and resource intensive. The accreditation process can take up to two years to complete and requires significant financial, human, and technical resources. For example, many institutions need more resources to invest in facilities, equipment, and qualified personnel to provide quality education. This lack of investment ultimately affects the quality of education provided, making it difficult for institutions to meet the required accreditation standards. In addition, many institutions in Kazakhstan still need a formal quality assurance system in place, and they need to be more aware of the importance of quality improvement. It can make it challenging for institutions to meet the quality standards required for accreditation (Kerimkulva & Kuzhabekova, 2017, p. 107).

Furthermore, the accreditation process in Kazakhstan needs to be more cohesive, with accreditation agencies operating independently with their requirements and procedures and dictating their high costs (Jumakulov & Ashirbekov, 2016, p. 42). For instance, 87% of accredited educational programs (3899 programs in total, ENIC, 2022) have specialized accreditation from domestic accreditation bodies; that choice is explained by the high costs of accreditation from foreign agencies, which is too expensive for most of Kazakhstani universities. It can lead to inconsistency in the accreditation process, making it challenging for institutions to meet the required quality standards of foreign accreditation agencies. Although accreditation has a voluntary character, without accreditation the HEI cannot issue

the diploma and receive state tuition grants, which makes that requirement mandatory. Bologna's context and strong governmental financial and legislative support resulted in that by 2020, more than 90% of Kazakhstani universities had passed institutional and program accreditation (ENIC-KAZAKHSTAN, 2020). In comparison, there is a significant difference in the number of international program accreditation in Kazakhstan (645) and Kyrgyzstan (9), where the latter one is not a member of the Bologna process and international accreditation does not bring notable benefits as in case of Kazakhstani universities (Merrill, 2020). In addition, Sarsenbayva (2012) claim that the criteria for accreditation are private in most cases. It means the decision-making process is not transparent, leading to suspicions of favoritism and bias.

In conclusion, the accreditation process in Kazakhstan faces significant challenges, including a lack of resources, corruption, inadequate legal frameworks, and language barriers. Addressing these challenges is critical for improving the quality of higher education in Kazakhstan and ensuring that the accreditation process is reliable and consistent.

## **2.9 Theoretical Framework**

Researching academics' and managers' perceptions and experiences of accreditation processes of educational programs could be drawn on several relevant theories and concepts from the fields of education and management: institutional theory of isomorphism and theory of organizational culture.

### ***2.9.1 The Theory of Institutional Isomorphism***

The theory of institutional isomorphism has gained increasing attention in the context of quality assurance of HEIs. The accreditation process, which involves the evaluation of quality assurance in HEIs, is considered a powerful mechanism to improve the quality of education, ensure accountability, and enhance public trust. However, accreditation also poses

challenges to HEIs, particularly in complying with the standards and criteria set by the accrediting agency.

Institutional isomorphism theory is rooted in the sociological perspective that organizations tend to become more similar to each other as they adapt to external pressures and norms (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 153). The researcher proposed three types of institutional isomorphism: coercive, mimetic, and normative. Coercive isomorphism refers to the pressure exerted on organizations by external factors, such as regulatory agencies or professional associations, to comply with their rules and standards. Mimetic isomorphism refers to the tendency of organizations to imitate successful models, particularly in situations of uncertainty or ambiguity. Normative isomorphism refers to internalizing professional norms and values and the desire to be recognized as legitimate by peers and stakeholders.

The application of institutional isomorphism theory in evaluating quality assurance during the accreditation process has mainly focused on coercive and normative isomorphism. Coercive isomorphism is reflected in the pressure exerted by accreditation agencies on HEIs to meet their standards and requirements. On the other hand, normative isomorphism refers to the internalization of quality assurance norms and values by HEIs, which is driven by their desire to be recognized as legitimate and trustworthy by stakeholders.

For this purpose, conceptualizing normative isomorphism helps understand how accreditation agencies have brought universities to implement quality assurance systems. However, the perception of administrative and academic staff may differ from an institutional perspective. Thus, academic staff and managers may see accreditation as an extra workload distracting them from their usual responsibilities; for example, they have to participate in program review and report writing (Hasan, 2010). The reasons for resistant behavior are the fear of judging their performance, skepticism about changes and transformation of current academic processes, and misunderstanding the quality assurance mechanisms (White et al.,

2013). For example, faculty staff is not involved in the administrative processes and academic self-governing at the same level as managerial staff. Therefore, they could follow coercive or mimetic isomorphism mechanisms. Understanding connections and disconnections between the organizational groups could help to understand how to enhance accreditation and program improvement effectiveness.

Finally, most studies examine Kazakhstani quality assurance topics from the students' or employers' points of view; relatively few studies offer empirical evidence and focus on managers' and academics' perspectives. Thus, the institutional theory will allow studying organizational changes in Kazakhstani HEI management and internal quality assurance (Manarbek et al., 2020). Moreover, European researchers have a similar approach to that issue (Harvey & Newton, 2004, p. 159).

### ***2.9.2 Organizational Culture Theory***

The theory of organizational culture can offer insight into the influence that it has on how academics and managers perceive and experience the process of accreditation. For example, if an educational institution upholds a culture that prioritizes constant progress and a strong dedication to quality, the accreditation process may be perceived as a chance for advancement and enrichment. In contrast, if an institution places emphasis on conformity and adhering to minimum standards, the accreditation process may be regarded as a cumbersome and bureaucratic ordeal. In this case, the concept of cultural theory (Douglas, 1982; Thompson et al., 1990; Harvey, 2004) will be used to focus on the purposes of accreditation, and faculty staff experience in the accreditation process, especially in the part of the long-term impact on programs.

Accreditation aims to ensure that HEI meets the accreditation standards and is determined to continue quality improvement (Alshehri et al., 2013). Supporting a culture of quality in educational institutions will lead to sustainable quality improvement preventing

formal or mechanical procedures. According to Ehlers (2009), quality management in education should emphasize “on change more than control, development rather than assurance and innovation more than compliance” (p.344).

While quality assurance procedures have a lot of attention, there is an issue of low activity and involvement of faculty staff and students in those processes (Newton, 2000; Vidal, 2003). The cultural theory explains the involvement of individual members of an organizational group in social practices through two categories: if individual behavior is under group control or if it is under external regulations. Considering these dimensions, four ideal types of organizational quality cultures (mentioned above): responsive, reactive, regenerative, and reproductive, could be distinguished. This theory benefits in simplifying the connection of principles, beliefs, and actions in one framework (Maassen, 1996, p. 77); moreover, it takes account of the political or normative aspects that are associated with quality assurance (Hood, 1998; Newton, 2000; Henkel, 2005). It also captures the quality dynamic and the ways of its interpreting (Harvey & Knight, 1996; Stensaker, 1998).

Quality culture frameworks can assist in determining the congruence between structure and culture regarding quality assurance, taking into account social structures and institutional practices of QA (Newton, 2000; Henkel, 2005), as well as establishing links to teaching practices. For example, Harvey (2004) highlights that the concept of 'quality culture' can be used to conduct diagnostic evaluations of organizational performance, including the identification of stakeholders, assessment of relationships, and recognition of potential challenges. By drawing on these and other relevant theories and concepts, researchers can develop a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding academics' and managers' perceptions and experiences of the accreditation processes of educational programs.

## **2.10 Summary**

This chapter includes the historical background of quality assurance and its development globally and in Kazakhstan. Furthermore, the prior studies mentioned in this chapter provide information regarding Kazakhstan's accreditation mechanism. The analysis discusses the importance of quality and quality assurance in higher education and accreditation processes, particularly in the international and Kazakhstani context. The text discusses the importance of accreditation in ensuring quality assurance in higher education, with external organizations evaluating educational programs and institutions to grant them a seal of approval. However, some criticisms of the accreditation process exist, including the focus on inputs and processes rather than outcomes, the cost and complexity of the process, and concerns about a "one size fit all" approach to quality assurance.

The principles of accreditation involve establishing explicit standards and norms prescribed by the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2015), encouraging continuous improvement, promoting stakeholder involvement, ensuring transparency and accountability, supporting diversity and inclusivity, ensuring adherence to ethical and legal standards, and providing effective oversight and evaluation. The chapter concludes by introducing the institutional theory of isomorphism and organizational culture theory as the study's theoretical framework.

The sources reviewed in this chapter suggest the need for more research in the field of accreditation and quality assurance culture in Kazakhstan. However, this gap will be covered by the direct involvement of the participants of the mentioned market in the current research (employers in the field); thus, the focus is shifted toward the respondents and their experience with hopes of helping to promote research in the context of the Kazakhstani accreditation market.

## **Chapter 3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the methodological framework, methods, and analytical processes employed to investigate the research questions of the current study. The chapter describes the reasons for selecting a qualitative case study research design and outlines the sampling procedures, data analysis techniques, ethical considerations, and the study's limitations to examine the perceptions and experiences of both managerial and faculty members regarding the requirements of the accreditation process.

### **3.2 Research design**

Implementing an appropriate research design is essential to adequate conduct of the research. The research design shall be chosen under its ability to respond to the research questions as comprehensively as possible and address the set purpose and objectives of the study (Cohen et al., 2018). Considering the research purpose and questions “what” and “how”, a qualitative approach was selected for this study. The qualitative approach helped to answer the research questions of this study as it enabled to understand the administration and faculty members' perceptions of accreditation processes and attitudes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) and the influence of multiple perceptions of subjective experience on their behavior (Maxwell, 1996). As Merriam and Tisdell (2015) point out, qualitative methodology allows to “understand the meaning people have constructed” (p. 15). Moreover, Maxwell (1996) highlights that one of the goals of qualitative research is to understand the processes, which lead to the outcomes and identify causal explanations. Applying qualitative research design will allow discovering the role of the accreditation process in HEI development through the multiple detailed managerial and academic staff perspectives. Thus, qualitative research is the most applicable in the research context. The extent to which the administration and faculty members' perceptions of accreditation processes influence the quality of the educational



process was explored by applying the case study design since the research entails interaction with relevant stakeholders (university administrative staff and faculty). A case study has become a viable methodological instrument for exploring and comprehending complex real-world issues (Harrison et al., 2017, p. 1).

According to Yin (2014), a case study is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" (p. 13). Furthermore, according to Flyvbjerg (2006), the positive side of implementing the case study design is that "it can "close in" on real-life situations and test views directly concerning phenomena as they unfold in practice" (p. 235). Cope (2015) reiterates that despite its intensity, a case study is often used in social studies due to its pliable and flexible nature (as cited in Krusenvik, 2016, p. 1), which the current study implies. The case study design was chosen for this investigation because the central phenomenon of the study is situated within a single university and requires an in-depth exploration (Creswell, 2012). This design is particularly appropriate for the present study as it aims to capture the experiences of both administrative and faculty members within a Kazakhstani university in regard to the accreditation process (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 253) and intends to reveal "the interplay between a phenomenon and its contextual setting" (Gray, 2004, p. 124).

### **3.3 Participants of the Study**

The current study focuses on a specific case of the stakeholders' involvement in the accreditation process in a given university. This implies that the research requires participants with certain qualities or backgrounds (Bryman, 2012, p. 416). Hence, the research participants cannot be selected randomly; therefore, non-probability purposive sampling has been chosen to focus on and select a relevant group of people (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 115). In addition, Tongco (2007) describes the purposive sampling technique as "the deliberate choice of an informant due to the qualities the informant possesses." (p. 147). Moreover, purposive

sampling can be applied with various research techniques and methods and is often paired with interviews (Bryman, 2012, p. 416). It does not aim to generalize the obtained information. However, it allows for gaining more significant detailed insights from the participants, which are relevant in the context of the present study. Thus, using the non-probability purposive sampling, this study recruited ten administration representatives and six active faculty members from various departments and schools. The list of possible participants was taken from the official self-assessment reports (Local, 2022; Foreign, 2022) and accreditation agencies' on-site visit programs of the university (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Demographic and professional characteristics of participants*

#	Participant	age	sex	Current position	Overall experience	Managerial experience	Teaching experience	Experience in accreditation
1	participant 1	42	Female	Senior management	20	10	20	L, F
2	participant 2	46	Female	Senior management	20	10	15	L, F
3	participant 3	41	Female	Middle management	20	12	20	L, F
4	participant 4	42	Female	Teaching staff	18	11	18	L, F
5	participant 5	31	Male	Middle management	8	3	5	L, F
6	participant 6	46	Female	Middle management	24	20	23	L, F
7	participant 7	40	Female	Middle management	13	5	13	L, F
8	participant 8	42	Female	Middle management	18	10	20	L, F
9	participant 9	44	Female	Teaching staff	20	2	20	L, F
10	participant 10	35	Female	Middle management	12	5	12	L, F
11	participant 11	30	Female	Teaching staff	6	3	6	L, F
12	participant 12	29	Female	Teaching staff	6	2	6	L, F
13	participant 13	35	Female	Teaching staff	13	3	13	L, F
14	participant 14	44	Male	Teaching staff	20	5	20	L, F
15	participant 15	43	Male	Senior management	26	13	22	L, F
16	participant 16	60	Female	Middle management	38	29	9	L, F

*Note.* Name of accreditation agency is coded, where L -is local agency and F – is foreign agency.

The purpose of such selection assumes that most managerial personnel are responsible for preparing the self-assessment reports and are aware of accreditation standards and procedures. In contrast, teaching staff works according to the university's internal academic policies and regulations and needs to be made aware of international accreditations policies. Therefore, it will allow getting a more comprehensive picture of participants' understanding of accreditation processes and internal mechanisms of university quality assurance.

The multiple-stakeholder approach ensures that the issue is explored comprehensively. Faculty representatives and managerial staff were identified as the primary stakeholders. The stakeholders include academic staff among faculty and administration with various duties, including developing, revising, supervising, training, and monitoring the academic processes. The reason behind this selection is to understand all levels of stakeholder involvement within the faculty. This selection was also based on their engagement in the accreditation and reaccreditation process in 2017, 2021, and 2022.

The university was selected due to its high national rankings. According to the Atameken National Chamber of Entrepreneurs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, in 2021 and 2022, the university ranked leading positions among Kazakhstani universities, showcasing 77.67% of student employment. The next crucial factor is the experience of the university in international and local accreditation and reaccreditation processes. In 2021 and 2022, the university passed institutional international (Foreign agency) and national accreditations (Local agency) together with programs. Thus, the main factors in selecting this university as a research site were the leading position and the existence of the certificates of successful accreditation of international and local agencies confirming the high quality of educational programs and their compliance with international standards.

### 3.4 Research Methods

This research aims to gain more insightful information about the stated issue; therefore, semi-structured interviews were chosen to address the research questions and objectives. Compared to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews provide a certain amount of adjustability and allow the interview flow to be more flexible to follow the course of the dialogue with the respondent (Adams, 2015). In addition, semi-structured interviews allow for more specific and detailed information from the respondent and avoid misunderstanding by clarifying any uncertainties in the answers (Wilson et al., 2016, p. 1550), which is what is required in the context of the current research. Adams (2015) further reiterates that semi-structured interviews are well suited when there are groups of participants (in the case of this research, administrative staff and faculty) and "to conduct a formative accreditation process evaluation" (p. 494).

Thus, the decision to implement semi-structured interviews was supported by the fact that the study aims to gain insight from two stakeholders and then conduct an analysis and juxtaposition of their responses to answer the central question of how the administration and faculty members' perceptions of accreditation processes influence the quality of the educational process and to highlight the recommendations based on the responses obtained. As in other types of interviews, a bottleneck in semi-structured interviews is identifying the number of interviews to conduct to achieve saturation when new information is no longer incoming. Kuzel (1992) recommended conducting twelve to twenty interviews "when looking for disconfirming evidence or trying to achieve maximum variation" (p. 41). In their analysis of sample sizes for purposive sampling, Guest et al. (2006) argue that twelve interviews are sufficient for reaching saturation and addressing the research objectives (p. 73). Therefore, conducting sixteen interviews is effective enough to get the context.

As has been established earlier, semi-structured interviews assume having a few predetermined questions while the interviewer can ask supplementary questions during the dialogue (Adams, 2015, p. 493). The semi-structured interviews with the participants included twelve predetermined open-ended questions with additional questions asked during the interview for clarification or to get additional information. Sixteen semi-structured interviews with twelve open-ended questions were conducted with six faculty and ten managerial participants. Additional questions were asked during interviews when necessary.

### **3.5 Data collection and data analysis**

The semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded via the Zoom video conference platform. Six interviews with managerial staff were conducted in person and recorded with the Voice Memos app on iPhone 11. To avoid discomfort in sharing participants' experiences during interviews, the interviews were conducted at places convenient for participants. All interviews were protocolled (see Appendix D, Appendix E) and promptly transcribed using Rev and Sonix. The analysis was facilitated by QSR NVivo12 data management software; the responses were then organized into tables and coded.

In qualitative research, coding is a method of organizing and categorizing raw text to establish a thematic framework within the text (Gibbs, 2007). The coded results of the semi-structured interviews were analyzed to compare and juxtapose them to summarize the practical recommendations that might help improve quality assurance culture and further planning at the site university and possibly other Kazakhstani higher education institutions.

### **3.6 Ethical Issues**

Qualitative research establishes a specific relationship between participant and researcher that requires respect for privacy, evading misinterpretation of data gathered, and constructing an open and honest interaction (Warusznski, 2002, p. 152). Richards and

Schwartz (2002) identify several key ethical points when conducting qualitative research: confidentiality, privacy, consent, and anonymity (p. 135).

This research was done with the permission of the NUGSE Research and Ethics Committee following ethical principles to avoid conflict of parties (affiliation in the text, as well as providing results on the selected topic). Participation in the research was strictly voluntary. Before the interviews, the participants received all the necessary details, such as research topic, questions, purpose, significance, and alleged benefits and risks (see Appendix B). The topic of research is not personal. Nonetheless, the consent form was distributed before the interviews with details regarding the research. It warrants the confidentiality of the interviewees and stipulates their right to refuse to answer any of the questions or to stop the interview entirely at any point (see Appendix C). To protect the confidentiality of the participating university the names of the accreditation agencies will not be revealed and will be coded as “local” and “foreign”. All the information received during the interview was used solely for this research. Research-related materials with the participants' information in electronic format are kept on a password-protected laptop; hard copies are kept in a locked drawer until they are digitized for research; hard copies are promptly destroyed. Only the researcher and the research supervisor, and the research supervisor had access to the collected data. Any information or any implications that could reveal the participants' personal details are removed from the final version of the paper.

### **3.7 Limitations**

Like any other research design, a case study possesses certain limitations. Thus, Garger (2013) states that employing a case study in research is criticized due to possible issues with bias since the researcher emerges in the process and becomes a part thereof. There is also an outstanding issue of generalizing and summarizing the collected information,

namely ensuring that what applies to one may be applied to a few other cases (Jacobsen, 2002; Yin, 2009).

This study aimed to explore the perception and experience of the accreditation process of educational programs in one Kazakhstani university from the managerial and academic staff perspectives. Case study design may have limitations, such as generalizability (Wellington, 2015) or subjectivity and bias (Cohen et al., 2018). Some limitations may affect the results of the research. Data collection would only be limited to one university's case, so similar investigative work at other universities could have different findings. Future research could select larger-scale samples from several higher education institutions.

### **3.8 Summary**

This chapter provided detailed information on the methodological aspect of the present study describing the research design, sampling procedures, research methods, data analysis, and ethical implications of the research, and included the rationale behind selecting them. In addition, it included the details and procedures concerning data collection and analysis. To address the posed limitations of possible bias, this study includes several stakeholders with several representatives for the issue of generalization and summarizing; the current study never embarked upon generalizing the findings or identifying a universal solution but instead highlighted possible existing issues and uprooting recommendations for their improvement based on the information gained from the stakeholders. This study contained minimal risks such as the loss of time in the interviews that was uncomfortable for participants.

## **Chapter 4. Findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings of the current study based on the analysis of two sets of semi-structured interviews. Over three weeks, sixteen semi-structured interviews were conducted: six interviews with the academic staff and ten interviews with the managerial staff. The interviews included representatives of the administration and faculty directly involved in foreign and local accreditation processes. The chapter has six major sections. The introductory section presents an outline of the chapter. The second section depicts involvement and motivation to be involved in the accreditation process. In the third section, the interviews were conducted to reveal the administrators' and faculty members' views on the value of the accreditation process in their institution and their understanding of the process was analyzed. The following sections establish the analysis of a detailed breakdown of the responses on how managerial and academic staff perceive the influence of the accreditation process on the HEI staff and reveal how managerial and academic staff perceive the role of the accreditation process in the educational program and curriculum design. The final section will reveal the challenges and benefits of the local and foreign accreditation process based on the interviewees' experiences.

### **4.2 Administrators and Faculty Members' Involvement in Accreditation Process and Motivation to Participate in Accreditation**

In this section, interviewees were asked about their involvement in different steps of the accreditation process for HEI or educational programs. In addition, the faculty's motivation to participate in accreditation and the balance between different roles a faculty/administration member may assume in an HEI accreditation were investigated.



#### ***4.2.1 Administrators and Faculty Members' Roles and Responsibilities in the Accreditation Process***

The process of HEI institutional or specialized accreditation consists of several steps:

- 1) Applying for accreditation;
- 2) HEI self-assessment report writing according to the agency standards and regulations (in case of institutional accreditation) or separate educational programs (in case of specialized accreditation);
- 3) Onsite assessment includes accrediting agencies' expert teams visit and interviews with administration, teaching staff, students, and employees;
- 4) Accrediting agency's final decision and recommendations.

Interviewees performed different roles and responsibilities depending on the type (institutional/specialized, initial accreditation/reaccreditation) and stage of the accreditation process, as well as on current job position (see Table 2). Table 2 presents a general overview of their responsibilities during the accreditation process. The managerial staff might be either a teaching or managerial staff representative. The managerial staff may have both administrative and teaching responsibilities. Faculty staff mostly participated in panel interviews with experts; however, they also might be involved in self-assessment report writing or in assisting with organizational support.

All 16 participants had an experience of being a member of experts' panel interviews as a representative of teaching staff, specific administrative units, program coordinators, or in the case of senior management as group leaders (representing the university/school/group of the program). Two out of six faculty members were involved in self-assessment report writing; however, their significant involvement was concerned with interview panels. Moreover, all six-faculty staff claimed that it did not much influence their usual job duties and took little time for preparation.

**Table 2***Interview participants' roles and responsibilities in the accreditation process*

#	Participant	Current position	Role and responsibilities in the accreditation process
1	Participant 1	senior management	Participating in interview Group leader
2	Participant 2	senior management	Participating in interview Group leader Program Coordinator
3	Participant 3	middle management	Participating in interview Providing or collecting data for the self-assessment report Organizational support Self-assessment report writing Institutional memory carrier
4	Participant 4	teaching staff	Participating in interview Bringing the academic policies in line with actual business processes
5	Participant 5	middle management	Participating in interview Providing or collecting data for the self-assessment report Self-assessment report writing Bringing the academic policies in line with actual business processes
6	Participant 6	middle management	Participating in interview Providing or collecting data for the self-assessment report Self-assessment report writing
7	Participant 7	middle management	Participating in interview Providing or collecting data for the self-assessment report Translator
8	Participant 8	middle management	Participating in interview Providing or collecting data for the self-assessment report Self-assessment report writing Translator
9	Participant 9	teaching staff	Participating in interview
10	Participant 10	middle management	Participating in interview Providing or collecting data for the self-assessment report Self-assessment report writing Program Coordinator Translator
11	Participant 11	teaching staff	Participating in interview Self-assessment report writing
12	Participant 12	teaching staff	Participating in interview Self-assessment report writing Organizational support
13	Participant 13	teaching staff	Participating in interview
14	Participant 14	teaching staff	Participating in interview
15	Participant 15	senior management	Participating in interview Group leader Program Coordinator
16	Participant 16	middle management	Participating in interview Providing or collecting data for the self-assessment report

*Note.* Roles and responsibilities of the participants in the accreditation process are presented

without differentiation by time or type of accreditation.

Administration staff had a more comprehensive range of performing functions that, apart from participating in interviews, included preparing and collecting data for the self-assessment report, organizational support, bringing the academic policies in line with fundamental operational processes, and writing self-assessment reports. Moreover, almost all faculties wrote self-assessment reports in Russian during the first international accreditation and then sent them for translation. For that reason, some participants perform translating functions. In addition, Participant 3 acted as an institutional memory carrier and explained to new team members the logic of decisions made in the past, so they could reflect in self-assessment reports descriptions of how specific indicators were achieved and explanations of program design or development strategy changes.

#### ***4.2.2 Motivation to Participate in Accreditation***

The analysis of the interview data showed that the driving factors for participating in accreditation were linked to job responsibilities, personal and professional development, and a willingness to support the university. Personal motives were the leading factor for teaching staff, with many interviewees expressing a desire to represent their program as qualified and experienced individuals. Participant 13 underlined "the possibility or even responsibility to contribute and support my program or university, to make my program high quality," while Participant 14 mentioned wanting "to share and discuss my achievements and to see some reactions to my experience." In contrast, the administrative staff's primary motivation for participating in accreditation was to perform their job duties and obtain program or university approval while striving for continuous improvement. For instance, Participant 2 viewed it as an "opportunity to develop professional competencies to understand better the processes that were important for professional and academic purposes." In addition, Participant 10 described her motivation as follows:

First, not to improve, but to approve my program's reputation. To make them competitive, it is tricky to measure the quality of the programs in general. Moreover, accreditation is quite a bigger picture because it helps you investigate various areas of the program or management. We often do not see it because of our daily routine. So, my motivation was to approve the quality and improve the programs' reputation.

Both teaching and managerial groups characterized their motivation as a new exciting experience and the possibility of professional development, an opportunity to gain new knowledge about internal academic policies and administrative procedures, and accreditation as a process (Participant 2; Participant 3, Participant 7; Participant 8, Participant 11). For example:

For me, it was a very new experience. I learned a lot, not only about our program but about standards and policies. I also developed my analytical skills. So for personal development. And then, later, I could also put that into my CV. It is excellent if you have this experience of working with accreditation (Participant 11).

### **4.3 Administrators and Faculty Members' Views on the Value of the Institution's Accreditation Process in Their Institution**

In this section, interviewees were asked about their awareness of the value of the accreditation process for HEI or educational programs. In addition, the faculty's motivation to participate in accreditation and the balance between different roles a faculty/administration member may assume in an HEI accreditation were investigated together with what they met during accreditation.

#### ***4.3.1 Drivers of providing the External Quality Assurance (EQA) and Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) procedures***

According to the first theoretical framework of the institutional isomorphism theory, there are three drivers of accreditation - copying other HEI, following normative standards,

and following Quality Management (QM) networks. Participants were asked which mechanism of providing external and internal quality assurance drives their HEI. The answers have varied; however, among the three mechanisms – the most mentioned was following the normative standards and QM networks.

#### ***4.3.1.1 Following the normative standards (local legislation)***

As per the institutional theory, adhering to local legislation or state requirements falls under the coercive isomorphism mechanism. Ten of the sixteen interviewees cited the primary motivation for providing external quality assurance as the need to comply with the requirements set forth by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of Kazakhstan. While accreditation is a voluntary process for Kazakhstani HEIs, the need for accreditation status significantly restricts their activities. Consequently, accreditation has become an unavoidable mechanism that is both voluntary and compulsory for HEIs. Participants noted that with accreditation, universities are able to issue diplomas or access state student scholarships. Additionally, they need help accessing specific state scientific projects or, for instance, may not be able to continue the work of the Dissertation Council (Participant 4). Participant 15 presented a strong argument for accelerating the accreditation process in Kazakhstan for the last decade:

When did the accreditation renaissance happen? When the alternative to HEI state attestation was implemented in the Law on Education (in 2012, author's note). The accreditation institution experienced rapid growth and demand as soon as this happened. State attestation is an extra reason for the authorized controlling body to come to the university with the inspection. That is what it was because the issue of state attestation and the risk of losing the license is the paramount issue: the university's existence.

Therefore, from 2012 accreditation status was an opportunity for HEI to escape from state control (educational program has been excused from state attestation control for five years on condition of getting institutional and specialized accreditation). Unfortunately, in 2022 the Ministry returned to the obligatory state attestation norm in the form of preventive monitoring, which allows it to check any university once in five years regardless of HEI accreditation status.

#### ***4.3.1.2 Following the standards of professional networks***

As per the interviewees, the impetus for obtaining accreditation was primarily driven by the need to adhere to international standards and align with the Bologna process. Of the sixteen participants, thirteen emphasized the significance of gaining access to the European Higher Education Area and suggested that accreditation status demonstrates a commitment to upholding global educational standards. This, in turn, provides a strong indication to international partners about the quality of educational services. Participant 3 drew a comparison between accreditation and a litmus test, noting that it highlights the specific set of standards that are in place at the university and that such transparency makes the Kazakhstani educational market more transparent and understandable to international partners. For example, Participant 14 described the accreditation process as belonging to the professional network, which was extremely close to the normative isomorphism definition:

It demonstrates that our university, curriculum, and approaches are internationally recognized. This means we follow all the basic rules important in the international, global academic world. Our institution must know that we do not exist in isolation. When you participate in this accreditation process and interact with professionals from accreditation agencies, you understand that you are a part of this extensive education system or big network of educational organizations. We feel this connection over this

network with this global framework of education; of course, this makes our university more competitive.

#### ***4.3.1.3 Copying other universities***

Participant 4 provided an example of copying other universities, which belongs to the mimetic isomorphism type; it mainly concerned the preparation period and choosing the international accrediting agency when the university started actively looking for an international experience, learning the standards of other advanced universities, and applying them to improve the quality of internal processes if it was relevant. Participants 3 and 15 noted that several people from the staff who possess previous relevant experience in another university consulted them in the process of preparing for accreditation by an foreign agency.

#### ***4.3.1.4 Rationale for choosing local or foreign agency***

Understanding the drivers of providing external quality assurance helps to identify the patterns of selecting the type of agency. It is important to stress that legal requirements for accreditation are associated with the National Register of accrediting agencies approved by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (see Appendix A); therefore, either local or foreign agencies could be chosen by universities from that list.

In 2013, the local accrediting agency granted the first accreditation to a university that underwent institutional accreditation, followed by passing several programmatic accreditations from both local and foreign accrediting agencies. According to some interviewees, the university chose a local agency for a reason to comply with the local requirements. In contrast, the foreign accrediting agency was chosen to be recognized by the international academic society: “If we have local accreditation, it means that it has all the standards in place in our country. Moreover, if it is international accreditation, it means we have international quality education.” (Participant 12).

It is necessary to note that participants associated international accreditation with foreign agencies only, no matter whether the local agency has international status or not. Therefore, describing the second driver of EQA interviewees (following the standards of professional QM networks) consciously or unconsciously equated international standards with foreign agencies rather than local ones.

#### ***4.3.2 Accreditation process awareness and value of accreditation***

The analysis of interviews revealed that the participant's understanding of the value of the accreditation process is exceptionally comparable despite the level of involvement in accreditation. The overwhelming majority of the interviewees agree that accreditation improves the quality of academic programs and the constant development of the university's internal processes. In addition, the interview of the participants revealed that the rationale for providing the accreditation for HEI was recognition/positioning, increased competitiveness, and employability, following the international standards and state requirements.

In the last part, participants described the main drivers of HEI accreditations; their understanding of the value of accreditation for educational programs and universities somehow overlapped with the first and second drivers, namely following the normative standards and the professional QM networks. Following the local regulations was mentioned by three participants, who noted the compulsory character of having accreditation status to issue the diploma and launch some scientific or other projects: "We cannot issue the diploma without accreditation status, most universities, and this is the main reason to go through accreditation" (Participant 11).

In comparison, following international standards was mainly mentioned in the context of competitiveness, international recognition, high-quality standards, and other signals for stakeholders of the educational process: "International accreditation means a good



positioning of the diplomas and the employability of the program graduates worldwide. One of the critical quality assurance factors here is our students' employability" (Participant 8).

*Internationalization.* Internationalization is another aspect of obtaining accreditation status; Participants 12 and 13 remarked that due to implementing the ECTS system, their students had expanded opportunities to join the academic mobility and double degree diploma programs. On the other hand, according to Participant 11: "For international students, it is also essential to see that the program is not just a program but is assessed, evaluated, and accredited. So, it gives this a status of quality assurance and high standard."

As a first step, the internationalization initiative was included in the University's strategic plan, then realized in practice. Participants 2 and 3 highlighted the decision to change the language of instruction in some of the programs from Kazakh and Russian to English, which benefit more international students and activate the academic mobility programs in their schools. Moreover, an English language entry test was provided, and language requirements for the staff were established.

*Competitiveness and increased student admission.* Three participants noted that students and their parents pay attention to the university's accreditation status during entry. Furthermore, accreditation was a key driver of increased student admission and competitiveness in Kazakhstani and international markets. Participant 6 pointed out that successfully passing the reaccreditation significantly raised access to her educational program. Therefore, the university benefits from the accreditation status that distinguishes it from other HEIs. Moreover, the seal of quality from a foreign agency is more valuable than from a local one because it is more difficult to obtain. Six participants remarked accreditation as a feature of the competitiveness of their academic programs and university in Kazakhstani and international markets: "Because you are coping with other universities, your main competitors, and signaling them. Well, you are also there of the top achievers" (Participant

2). "We want our programs to be competitive, in high demand, to be up to date, to meet the frequent changes, and to implement them" (Participant 11).

*Recognition, acceptance, image.* The value of accreditation was also seen as extending beyond the university's internal processes. Most interviewees highlighted the value of accreditation because of the university's recognition, acceptance, and vision in local and international markets. Participant 8, as well as many other interviewees, commented that due to accreditation, their university diplomas are accepted everywhere. Participant 6 underlined that obtaining a certain status and image is necessary to establish trust in the outside market, so the accrediting agency should be chosen responsibly.

*Assuring the quality and recommendations for further improvement.* Based on the interviews, it was clear that interviewees felt similarly: accreditation represented the quality of their programs. Participants also referenced the accreditation to maintain standards within the programs and optimize administrative processes, and that point strongly interfered with the idea of continuous improvement. That means university staff shares a quality culture and does not perceive accreditation as a form of control but as a constant work on its development: "The accreditation still needs to be done as an achievement or just some label on the website. However, it is the thing to prove that we work right and do things to improve, to enhance human resources, business processes, and education processes. It is essential to mention that the accreditation process helps in this aspect" (Participant 12).

Additionally, the interviews indicated that accreditation is not perceived by the participants as a form of control but rather to continuously work on developing and improving the university's internal processes. This reflects the quality culture shared among university staff and their desire to maintain standards within their programs. Participant 5 emphasized that "the accreditation process helps in this aspect."

The participants also recognized the challenges of obtaining accreditation, particularly during the initial accreditation process, which is a way to confirm the quality of academic circles. Participant 16 noted, "accreditation, especially the initial accreditation, is a challenge for any university." However, the participants also recognized the importance of reflecting on weaknesses to achieve positive changes. As Participant 12 stated, "reflecting on your weaknesses is the best way to achieve positive changes."

Overall, the participant's understanding of the value of accreditation was found to be exceptionally comparable across all levels of involvement. The value of certification was seen in improving the quality of academic processes and the university's internal processes, following international standards and state requirements, increasing competitiveness and employability, internationalization, and rising student admission. However, the most critical value of accreditation was quality assurance and continuous improvement.

#### ***4.3.3 Challenges of the Accreditation Process for Teaching and Managerial Staff***

This section discusses the challenges faced by faculty and administration staff during the accreditation process by local and foreign accrediting agencies. The participants faced increased workload, stressfulness, lack of knowledge and experience of accreditation, initial and secondary accreditation peculiarities, lack of data for self-assessment reports, and language difficulties. Initial accreditation was found to be more challenging than reaccreditation due to program coordinators' lack of experience in international accreditation procedures. Data collection for the self-assessment report was a major challenge, as most participants complained about the lack of centralized data sources. The cost of accreditation was mentioned by some participants, with Kazakhstani HEIs preferring local agencies due to their lower costs. Language difficulties arose during the first accreditation process due to the requirement for self-reports and document translation and interpretation during interviews. Disagreement with the experts' recommendations, lack of recommendations or their

insignificance, and the importance of a written report were also identified as challenges. The complexity of the accreditation process was found to increase with the educational level of the program.

*Increased workload and stressfulness.* According to the participants, program coordinators and the management representatives responsible for self-assessment report writing claimed the heavy workload and high-stress level, especially during initial accreditation, because of tight deadlines, the amount of work, and the pressure of group or individual responsibility (Participant 1, Participant 6). Some interviewees also recalled the pressure of responsibility to higher management and complained about the lack of assistance during the self-report writing or poor roles allocation (Participant 4, Participant 8). Moreover, there were situations of ethical issues with the expert team members when they behaved rudely or disrespectfully. Another source of stress was the fear of underrepresenting the program and that the experts will not understand the program and curricula design (Participant 9).

*Initial accreditation vs. reaccreditation.* The interview data analysis demonstrates that initial accreditation was more challenging than reaccreditation because it was the first experience for program coordinators, and they were not sure how experts would evaluate their program and needed to be fully aware of accreditation mechanisms and procedures (Participant 3). During reaccreditation, there is a previous report and previous recommendations of the accrediting agency, so the task is narrowed to support the self-report by evidence of improvement of the program. Consequently, it was less time- and resource-consuming (Participant 2, Participant 7). Initial accreditation by a foreign agency was the most stressful because preparation for accreditation transformed the whole university structure, academic policy, and strategic and operational plans.

*Prevailing of the university staff's old approach to the accreditation and period of transformation.* According to the participants, the preparation period for initial accreditation by the foreign agency was the most challenging and productive period for the whole university because it was a period of transformation (Participant 9, Participant 12).

*Collecting data for the self-assessment report.* Most participants in self-assessment report writing complained about complications with data collection from other departments or a lack of centralized data sources (Participant 5, Participant 8).

*Cost of accreditation.* Two participants mentioned the high cost of foreign accrediting agencies' services, noting that making money could be one of the goals of that kind of agency, but not as their priority (Participant 10, Participant 15).

*Language difficulties.* In the case of foreign agency, the working language was English. It caused a severe problem during the first accreditation, such as translating self-reports and all additional documentation and interpreting the university staff during the interview panels. Later, due to turning over the staff to English-speaking persons, that problem was almost solved. However, it keeps a place in the case of academic programs with Kazakh/Russian medium of instruction (Participant 11, Participant 14).

*Disagreement with the experts' recommendations.* Some participants showed their doubts or disagreement with the experts' recommendations, and others complained about the lack of recommendations or their insignificance. In addition, university staff, other than senior managers and program coordinators, are not always informed about experts' recommendations (Participant 13, Participant 16).

*Challenges with accrediting expert teams.* The most discussed challenge concerns interactions with accrediting expert team members. Participants' opinions about experts were generally positive; however, there were claims about their subjectivity and some negative personal attitudes, bringing their biases and judging without looking at the context. There

were remarks about imbalanced expert panels that needed more specialists from the professional area to match the accrediting program. Interviewees noted that foreign expert team members compared to local agency experts, were more open and friendly and gave recommendations and feedback rather than direct instructions and negative comments. Participant 1 mentioned some stressful moments of misunderstanding the terminology when experts had utterly different beliefs or did not want to recognize local specific context. Some interviewees noted that the foreign accrediting team focused more on research and did not look at a program from the program manager position.

The first place of challenging factors was the subjectivity of the experts, and it was valid for both agencies. Teaching and management staff involved in the interview said: "It could be challenging because any assessment is always subjective. Moreover, it is always the background of specific people; their personal experience might be too significant" (Participant 2). Apart from the subjectivity, some interviewees complained about cases with experts' attitudes toward the university staff, for example, rude comments or behavior. In both local and foreign experts' teams, experts from other Kazakhstani universities competed with the university they accredited; for that reason, participants questioned their independence and lack of prejudice. They stated that local experts should be chosen from universities with the same or higher academic freedom and standards or at least selected from private universities, not from the state HEI. Another problem with local experts was that they misunderstood the accreditation aims, used a state attestation approach, and were document-oriented. For instance, Participant 2 described her experience as a local member of an international expert team that had accredited another Kazakhstani university. She noted the poor quality of written self-assessment reports and low university compliance with accreditation standards. Moreover, she said international experts' expectations regarding Kazakhstani universities are sometimes low, which is not very reassuring.

However, despite some negative moments mentioned above, participants remarked overall positive experience. They found the experts' helpful feedback and constructive: "They asked some interesting questions about our experience, how we are doing our work, and so on. Moreover, they were interviewing many students, and I understood they were interested in the real experiences of faculty, students, and administration. That is why I changed my attitude completely. So, I stopped being afraid of them. I started to respect them more for what they were doing" (Participant 13).

*Importance of written report.* Participant 2 noted the importance of written reports because their content will be available publicly, although she does not believe that stakeholders read those reports. In addition, as a member of the foreign agency expert team, she criticized the quality of the Kazakhstani HEI reports (Participant 2).

*Influence of the educational level on the complexity of the report.* One of the participants pointed to an increase in the complexity of the accreditation with the educational level. For example, "Ph.D. has different requirements than for undergraduates, which is more challenging. Also, of course, the questions themselves are more complex. They require more reflection; they are challenging to answer. So, you need time to understand and think it over" (Participant 17).

#### **4.4 Managerial and academic staff' perceptions on the influence of the accreditation process on the HEI organizational effectiveness and long-term planning**

Accreditation standards often require institutions to have well-defined and standardized internal processes. This means that the institution must clearly define the policies, procedures, and guidelines that govern various aspects of its operations, such as academic programs, student services, human resources, financial management, and governance. The institution must also consistently follow these processes across different departments and functions. All the participants indicated positive long-term outcomes of

accreditation, such as building the self-development culture; improvement based on the external recommendations; setting strategic goals; development of the IQA instruments; transfer to horizontal management; internationalization; stakeholders' involvement.

Interview data analysis demonstrates the significant influence of accreditation by a foreign agency on the organizational effectiveness of the university. Interviewees clarified that initial local accreditation primarily involved standards close to the state attestation procedures. In contrast, initial foreign accreditation affected all aspects of the university's academic and management processes and services.

The preparation process for the first foreign accreditation was the most challenging and time-consuming. Participants characterized it as an extensive transformation of internal processes, policies, and procedures, which resulted in changes to the approach to accreditation. For example, Participant 3 emphasized that the first step to accreditation was analyzing the current university and separate schools' positions, determining the ways of development, and, based on that - building the strategy. Therefore, accreditation was part of the strategy, and at the same time, strategic plans coincided with accreditation standards. She provided an example of when changes in particular program positioning were implemented. Analysis of the job market showed a need for more local graduates employed in the corporate sector and international organizations; therefore, school strategic goals were reorganized toward preparing specialists for the corporate sector, and the language of study was changed to English.

The next step was the preparation process, which included transforming the university structure and reorganizing business processes toward optimization and rationalizing financial, human resource, government, and academic processes. Participant 16 stated that the transformation period allowed prevailing old state control approaches and brought the understanding of what accreditation is actually for. Participant 2 highlighted:



The most crucial thing universities should take away from the accreditation process is that you must understand your goals. These goals ideally should be strategic and should be something that generalizes the whole university or processes at the universities. And it becomes very clear during accreditation whether the university has such a goal and whether it follows it or simply does it because have to do that.

According to participant 15, having a clear university strategy is especially visible during institutional accreditation. Programmatic accreditation is more concerned with the academic and specific program point of view. While institutional accreditation has its own logic built on the whole university goal's attainability, experts must be convinced that: 1) HEI sets the goals correctly and appropriately to available resources; 2) HEI can achieve them in the described ways. The difficulty is that there are some grey areas where experts could interpret your statements in ways you could not predict. For example, the last accreditation question was if an increased admission number of graduate students is planned, university should justify it with a financial plan and available facilities and explain how the university will manage the financial gap between tuition-fee payments and state scholarship amounts (which are really low and did not change for a long time). Thus, during the first accreditation foreign accrediting expert team accepted academic quality principles declared by the university because retention statistics supported it. For them, it was evidence of a transparent assessment policy and that the university's priority is academic quality rather than financial benefits.

Apart from the long-term planning, academic policies were changed. Policies were rewritten to be more transparent and standardized and adjusted to the new reorganized structures and processes, where necessary. Participant 4 noted detailed instructions on every separate procedure before accreditation. While preparing for accreditation, a relatively large set of rules was included in unified relevant policies. For example, instructions for

invigilators, state exams, and current examinations, where every step was specified, were canceled, and general examinations and assessment rules were included in Assessment Policy. At the same time, it gave more freedom to schools to independently make decisions on exams' organization and assessment. Participant 5 underlined the importance of the newly-created Quality Assurance Policy, which explains the mechanisms and the whole university quality assurance system. The main academic document of the university - Academic Policy – combines multiple regulations and instructions of academic procedures in a systemized way but with amendments to transformed processes and practices. That made academic process regulation clearer for students and faculty staff. Altogether withdrawing unnecessary documents influenced the whole university process, making them less paper-oriented and more organized.

Participants highlighted that external experts' recommendations and opinions are excellent assistance in revealing the weak and strong sides of the university's internal processes. "It is some personal reflection, self-evaluation, and audit, and particularly beneficial is that during and after the accreditation process, we found some blind spots, which we ignored before" (Participant 1). Participant 11 expressed an additional point of view:

This is extremely important because that is the external body, especially recognized international accreditation, with no space for corruption or other academic breaches. Some recommendations were helpful in part strengthening the practical component of the programs or equipping them with software.

Participants valued the experts' recommendations as an opportunity to significantly boost the program's quality and HEI development.

During the interview, participants showed their understanding of the idea of continuous development, which is aligned with the self-development culture: "We need to understand that accreditation is an ongoing process. It would help if you had done this

accreditation and remembered that. It should be an ongoing process of improvement" (Participant 2); or "I have been noticing positive changes throughout the six years of working here, and it's not only because of accreditation; we have them to reflect on our weaknesses" (Participant 12). Moreover, Participant 5 noted that if something is not going according to the Academic Policy, the situation is discussed, and the policy is revised to make it right. All processes are constantly reconsidered and revised through the lens of international and national standards. The strategic goals are aligned with the accreditation standards. Therefore, working according to the strategic and operational plans leads to accomplishing the accreditation aims. Participant 9 recalled when during the initial accreditation the experts asked her if students had access to purified drinking water. She did not know how to answer it and was unsure if the university must provide this facility. By the time of reaccreditation, the university had reconsidered facilities and infrastructure issues. Thus, many processes became more student-oriented; for example, online course registration was launched, the library literature was expanded, and new zones for students' self-learning were opened.

Moreover, the university created an environment for students with special needs; upon the initiative of the faculty staff Inclusive Education Policy was introduced. In addition, Participant 15 stated that the most positive effect of transforming was that people's mindsets changed; the whole university community shared the values reflected in the Academic Policy and the Code of Conduct. It changed their approaches and perspectives on academic processes, interpersonal and interdepartmental communications, and management structure. That community will prevent its members from breaking ethical and academic integrity principles. Moreover, they will show their disagreement if the administration violates or interferes with procedures not in its zone of responsibility.

The main idea is that the university staff perceives self-development as a working environment, not a formal procedure:

It turned into good practice. Everything we are experiencing now in academic issues, how the students are taught, and how the university runs its general functions. We see that everything is being transformed, and this is for the sake of the university's well-being rather than for reports or doing reports (Participant 9).

Significant structural changes accompanied the preparation for the accreditation and the period after the accreditation. New structural entities, which did not exist before, had been launched: Quality Assurance Committees, QA Office, Research and Ethics Committees, Business Councils, and Career Development Centers. In addition, participants emphasized the importance of structural changes, such as the transfer from vertical (administrative) to horizontal (divisional) management that made the decision-making mechanisms transparent for students and teaching staff: "Within the university, we clearly understand the decision-making hierarchy at the school and university levels and how it works. Decisions are made through the prism of strategic goals laid down through accreditation" (Participant 3).

The revolutionary change was delegating authority from the Deans' Offices to collegial bodies such as Academic Quality Committees or Research and Ethics Committees. Most of the applications and the claims of students and faculty are considered by QA committees, where decision-makers are faculty members and students. Administration interference in their activity met strong resistance. Business councils' work has been reloaded towards establishing partnerships with different organizations. At business council meetings, academic programs are analyzed, and changes are introduced according to the market reality. Career and development centers have full-time managers' positions; before that, their functions included an additional teaching workload. Altogether, it significantly raised graduates' employability rating.

Launching a Quality Assurance office was an evolutionary step. All schools have their own quality assurance committees, but the universal body has been missing for a long time.

During initial accreditation, there was a manager for quality assurance, but the university staff hardly understood his exact function. Firstly, the QA office is accountable to the Board of Chair. Therefore, it could make data analysis and recommendations based on that analysis independently from the school or other departments. Secondly, the QA office accumulates data from the whole university, creating institutional analytics, while the school's resources are limited. It is statistics about course evaluation, admission details, course content, students' previous and current academic accomplishments, etc. QA managers create visual dashboards where schools and departments can select information by general or particular parameters. Based on that statistics, schools can make reasoned, objective decisions and correct strategies. Thirdly, QA managers' analytical reports help the school to organize their operational work more effectively (for example, indicate if the content is loaded to LMS, if all the courses are closed, etc.) and monitor current processes. Participant 16 believes the QA office position must be strengthened and given more functions. It has to be responsible to the Board of Directors, higher than the Chair of the Board. That will make it work independently from Provost and schools. Participant 7 pointed out that the QA office analytics make internal processes more transparent and enables institutional research.

Two participants mentioned the strategic decision to switch some of the programs from Kazakh and Russian to the English language of instruction, which increased the number of international students and boosted the academic mobility programs. "For example, at our school level, it became clear that we must internationalize. Furthermore, after that, we deliberately switched to English as the language of instruction, so smoothly. For me, internationalization was the main achievement of that first accreditation" (Participant 2). Consequently, it caused changes in the student Admission Policy where the English language entry test was included. The language policy of staff hiring had also been changed.

The last accreditation by both agencies had been passed much faster than the previous one. Schools and supporting departments already know what kind of data will be requested, what kind of challenges will be met, and know the peculiarities of accreditation by each agency. In addition, a centralized database including statistics for the previous 5-10 years was also formed. However, some teaching participants expressed that accreditation did not make dramatic changes in teaching and learning because, in their opinion, all the transforming processes were introduced before accreditation. It is contradictory to other participants' perspectives, who, in contrast with them, were involved in both initial and secondary accreditations by both agencies. It is unclear whether further accreditation will be as helpful as previous accreditation and will not be some formal procedure or routine.

The interviews revealed that institutional accreditation standards require institutions to establish well-defined and standardized internal processes. This includes clearly defining policies, procedures, and guidelines governing various operations such as academic programs, student services, human resources, financial management, and governance. The institution must also follow these processes consistently across different departments and functions. The study analyzed interview data to determine the influence of accreditation by a foreign agency on the organizational effectiveness of the university. Participants clarified that initial local accreditation mainly involved standards similar to state attestation procedures, while initial foreign accreditation affected all aspects of the university's academic and management processes and services. The study found that the preparation process for the first foreign accreditation was the most challenging and time-consuming, resulting in changes to the approach to accreditation. The study found that external experts' recommendations and opinions are excellent assistance in revealing the weak and strong sides of the university's internal processes. Participants valued the experts' recommendations as an opportunity to significantly boost the program's quality and HEI development. The study concludes that

accreditation is an ongoing improvement process aligned with the self-development culture of continuous development.

#### **4.5 Managerial and academic staff's perceptions of the role of the accreditation process in the educational program and curriculum design**

Interviewees were asked about their experience with the development of the program and new courses. Additionally, they were asked whether QA instruments required by accreditation standards helped to improve the teaching and learning process. The interview analysis demonstrates that accreditation profoundly changed educational programs and curriculum design. Educational program development and approval policy were adopted, program coordinators' positions were strengthened, QA instruments started working more effectively, and the role of the Quality Assurance Committees and Business councils increased. The primary influence was from the accreditation by the foreign agency.

Most participants emphasized that the accreditation process was crucial in developing educational programs. It helped to build an ongoing program development strategy as the foundation of future success and quality:

The second accreditation played a significant role. Firstly, everyone recognized what kind of program we have. We managed to show the program, our strong graduates, and how we work with stakeholders, and that was recognition. We did not have a single negative comment. After that, the number of program applicants increased (Participant 7).

Moreover, Participant 1 agrees that accreditation significantly influenced the increased rate of internationalization and graduates' employability.

Before accreditation, little attention was paid to the learning outcomes, and program content could depend on which subjects were taught by hired teaching staff. Program coordinator positions were introduced during the first accreditation, but Deans or

Vice-Deans still administered programs' design and development. By the time of the second accreditation, program leaders' functions were expanded, and their position was strengthened. The program coordinators became vital figures who organized cooperation with stakeholders, changing the program's content based on Business Council recommendations" (Participant 11).

Participant 4 added:

We learned new business processes that might not have been there before. For example, the Educational Programs Approval Policy was developed. Before that, the process was quite chaotic. It is now a simplified organizational procedure identifying the order of program development and approval and the roles of people involved in it. The program is designed to focus on the skills and learning outcomes our students gain after graduation.

All the teaching staff confirmed their direct involvement at the initial stage of the development of the program. They described their experience participating in working groups where program aims, learning outcomes, and curriculum were discussed. After, the program was sent for approval by the school Quality Assurance Committee and then to the University Academic Council. Moreover, they were aware of the opportunity to initiate or suggest curriculum changes, such as including some new courses. In addition, some of them were members of the Quality Assurance Committee.

Transferring to the international requirements often demanded abandoning old local standards; nevertheless, it changed instructor-centered learning to student-oriented learning:

Before, you had to write and keep multivolume folders called UMKD (educational and methodological complex of the discipline). They were like siblings because of the enormity. Moreover, the syllabus was about 20 pages because they duplicated each



other. These documents were not for the students but for demonstrating to the state-controlling commissions. After accreditation, UMKD was canceled, and we started writing our syllabi for students. We started applying rubrics for assessment. So, it also became more straightforward for students and teachers (Participant 10).

Participants provided examples of how accreditation experts' team recommendations positively affected the program's curriculum. Participant 8 noted that the local agency's recommendations on the practical component of the curriculum were to organize the internship in a different form; moreover, it was suggested to develop a dual program in the future. In addition, Participant 11 provided an example of when a foreign agency insisted on including some disciplines required by international practice in the educational plan. Another positive effect is the better interconnection between the general and specific disciplines within the program: "One professor during the interview panel asked me what I teach in my course and how it can be helpful for students of this particular program. That made the program leader and me reconsider some parts of my syllabus" (Participant 3).

The accreditation process influenced the university's internal quality assurance system. The Quality Assurance Policy explains the mechanisms and the whole system of quality assurance. The Academic and Research Council on the university level and QA committees on the school level represent current quality assurance units. QA Office, an independent department not included in the school and university units, had been launched. There is a set of documents that the university and the schools should follow. This includes academic policy, academic integrity guide, and inclusive policy.

Moreover, currently, the university focuses on integrating and unifying some aspects of the school's work at the university level towards further optimization of the processes. There are many internal QA processes inside the university, such as the revision of educational programs, the revision and review of the courses inside LMS, and annual surveys

and satisfaction surveys of stakeholders - students, teachers, and others (Participant 5). All those tools became increasingly understood by the administration, teaching staff, and students.

In addition, participants mentioned improvement in teaching, learning, and assessment methods because of the data from the Course Management Form, Course Evaluation Surveys, and Student Experience Survey:

Course management forms were first introduced when the university applied for foreign accreditation. One case is the students once told that they were overloaded with all these subjects and in-class and out-of-class activities. Furthermore, our Academic Quality committee asked teachers to differentiate the type of assignments and the weeks on which those assignments took place. It also flattens the workload of the students (Participant 12).

In the Course Management form, teaching staff evaluates the extent to which the learning outcomes have been achieved and describes how they achieved it or why not. Quality Assurance Committees analyze Course management forms on the problems within the courses and how the faculty, school administration, or Committee members could tackle them. Recommendations of the QA Committees should be considered in the syllabus design. That process is helpful for program quality improvement, for example, to reveal any content duplications or if the academic staff should provide changes in teaching methods. Based on the final grades analysis, Committee could recommend increasing entry requirements to the Admission Office or paying more attention to students' individual learning track to Adviser Office. While administrative staff found that instrument highly useful, some teaching staff representatives felt that the Course Management form was a redundant and time-consuming activity, even if they knew the goal of that monitoring.

Participants distinguished the importance of the student satisfaction survey. Students evaluate course content and how courses are taught; it is their instrument to reach the administration and the faculty members. Students understand that their opinions are considered in academic and non-academic issues. Results of such survey influence teaching staff ranking and salary. "This is something universities can learn from the accreditation process to ask your students, what do you guys want? What would you think? How do you guys feel? I believe this is what we hear at our university pretty well" (Participant 2). The teaching staff considers it valuable to know the students' reactions to them and their courses, making them more attentive to their audience and the teaching methods used. The drawback is that feedbacks sometimes are subjective or not constructive; overall results help make inferences.

#### **4.6 Administrative and academic staff's experiences with the accreditation process provided by local and foreign accrediting agencies**

The research question about administrative and academic staff's experiences with the accreditations process provided by local and foreign accrediting agencies has caused the participants a great response and active discussion. They compared each accrediting agency's approaches, their benefits, and the challenges they have met.

##### ***4.6.1 Local accrediting agency***

The local accrediting agency was one of Kazakhstan's first national accrediting agencies and recently changed its status from national to international. It works according to ESG standards and has passed accreditations to be a member of several European Quality Assurance Associations. Analysis of the interviews revealed the following challenges with the accreditation process by the local agency: low recognition, lack of international experience, poor choice of experts, experts' attitude, soviet legacy, and controlling standards

rather than improving quality. The benefits of the accreditations were knowledge of the Kazakhstani context, local standards, and some helpful recommendations on curriculum.

#### ***4.6.1.1 Challenges with the local accrediting agency***

The usual practice of the local accrediting agency is when the expert team consists of local members and at least one foreign expert is invited. Participants stated that some international expertise and experience would be helpful to local experts. Participant 15 states that most local experts do not speak English or do not understand the international academic context, and some have never even gone foreign for training or study. Therefore, accepting the academic process built on different values is hard for them. That is why experts compare everything only with local legislation or with the practices in their university, their mode of delivering academic processes.

Most participants were concerned about local experts' biases, thinking that some clash of interests existed because experts were from the competing Kazakhstani HEI. However, interviewees agreed that it is an unavoidable situation on the local level. Nevertheless, participants insisted that experts should be selected from universities with the same academic freedom, integrity, and academic principles as accredited universities. Participant 11 said that it seemed that they were speaking in different languages; sometimes, it felt like experts did not understand some processes that we have at our university because, at their university, it works differently. If something differed from their university approach – they concluded that it was done wrong. Some experts are from the old school and do not accept new trends or ideas.

Moreover, the concern about the organizational form of HEI that experts represented could explain why the local experts would not welcome more academic freedom appears:

They came from national and state universities to accredit a private university. The way they are treated, even by the Ministry of Education, is different. So private

universities as we have more freedom. And actually, freedom is the same today for everyone. But how we treat this freedom and how they treat it are entirely different. We do not have state budgeting as they are, we earn our money on our own, but our benefit is that we have the freedom to spend it. If you are always given something, your motivation to use freedom is not that big (Participant 10).

Participant 12 noted that one of the difficulties during the accreditation process is that most universities in Kazakhstan have a credit system but do not work according to ECTS. They still calculate student and teachers' workloads in working hours. Some experts then ask how the salary could be calculated based on academic credits (ECTS).

Participants considered that the accrediting agency should focus more on better expert selection. Several participants expressed their doubts about the experts' quality:

Accreditation would be much better if they had better experts. Experts always come with personal experiences and biases because it's human nature. And when people are outdated, less knowledgeable, and just less professional, this changes the picture entirely. So, I believe this is just because of the quality of the experts. (Participant 2)

Some interviewees commented that experts did not look very attentively at self-assessment reports. There were examples of an unbalanced expert panel combining programs from distant professional areas. In addition, Participant 14 mentioned the interview panel where only one person (chair of the experts' team) asked questions while other members remained silent. Moreover, he was embarrassed by how the interview proceeded because the expert gave her opinions, comments, and perspectives before asking the questions. He interpreted such an attitude as highly unprofessional. At the same time, Participant 5 described a situation when an expert gave wrong information to students about the obligation to pass the pedagogical state qualification exam. She insisted that they would not graduate without that qualification. Indeed, there is such an examination in Kazakhstan. Still, it is

optional for non-pedagogical majors and could be passed if non-pedagogical graduates want to teach in middle school. As a result, the program coordinator had to organize a meeting with students and explain that the pedagogic examination is not compulsory for them.

The way of conducting the accreditation by the local agency was the most debated issue and caused vivid comments from participants. According to them, owing to the Soviet legacy, it had controlling and inspecting character close to state attestation or licensing procedures even though the standards are written according to international principles. In addition, experts do not understand the goal of accreditation. In this regard, accrediting agency administration should organize more training for experts or change the approach to expert selection.

Most of the expert team had the Soviet educational system background. Experts behaved like the inspectors of such an old-fashioned way of state attestation. They check the university against the local standards; if some indicator is not within the standards – it is marked as a mistake that should be fixed. Even experts' recommendations had direct and command characters. Participants' perception was that experts did not trust them and tried to catch a lie. Participant 6 remembered one of the first accreditation interview panels when experts and faculty staff were set against each other, and the interview looked like a criminal interrogation. The interviewees expressed their opinions and recommendations on areas of improvement:

Local experts, who are selected from national and regional state universities, have a punitive approach. I don't know how to overcome it, but in their understanding, you go to a university to identify shortcomings and indicate this as an achievement. No, accreditation has an entirely different emphasis. You don't look for flaws to stop there. You may find flaws. But your main task is to understand whether there are real intentions to change to bring accreditation standards closer (Participant 15).

In addition, Participant 11 believed that it is more important for the local accreditation agency to fill in formal reports rather than gaining an authentic experience of faculty members or actual administration experience. Most participants shared that opinion and agreed that local agency is strictly document oriented: “It is the people who do this accreditation and the way they used to work. They believe that papers matter more. No one reads the paper, but they believe that. A lot of paperwork, more paperwork than people interaction.”

Participant 12 commented that the questions to students at interview panels were not about the university’s support or how their problem is tackled. They were trying to check their knowledge rather than asking about the program. Moreover, participant 13 expressed her opinion that local agencies take advantage of the condition of compulsory accreditation and behave themselves as a controlling body that grants access to the academic market in Kazakhstan.

According to the participants, experts’ determination to find some flaws reflected in the general atmosphere of the accreditation process. Sometimes experts’ attitudes surprised or shocked teaching and management staff. For example, one of the experts gave her opinion before asking questions, expressed her judgments, did not give the opportunity to speak, and criticized students and teaching staff behavior. That was quite an exceptional episode; however, the general attitude of the local experts was arrogance and superiority.

In participant’s 15 opinion, an expert should position himself not as an inspector but as *Amicus Curiae* (from Latin – a friend of the court):

As an expert who came to help in the area of expertise that the judge himself does not understand. If that expert found that some indicator is not achieved or absent, he would note it but also ask – there are different ways to achieve it; which ones do you use? While local agency experts would instead put ticks on their checklist whether a

particular indicator is present or absent, does it correspond or not, and no other options are given. The inspecting approach psychologically immediately puts you in subordination. Experts' commission is bosses; you are all subordinates and are obliged to dance, jump, carry documents, and make excuses. That is the most unpleasant aftertaste (Participant 15).

There are two specific characteristics in the accreditation process conducted by local accrediting agencies. The first concerns the local accrediting agency's methodology, which combines international standards and, simultaneously, requirements of the local legislation system. The second relates to the experts who bring their personal attitudes and previous professional experience. Foreign agency considers the local context and law requirements, but it is not their priority; they are concentrated on how the HEI or program goals are achieved. For example, according to the local standards, there is a compulsory condition to have a minimal ratio of teaching staff with Ph.D. degrees (doctor nauk, candidate nauk). Foreign agencies will ask how many faculty staff are professionally qualified (PQ) and academically qualified (AQ) depending on whether the program is professionally or academically oriented. They will accept the faculty member without a degree but with 20 years of practical experience or an international professional certificate, whereas the local accreditation agency standards required no less than the exact ratio of Ph.D. holders with the relevant working experience, publications, and exact educational background. Breaking that ratio means violating the state qualification requirements, which could cost the university the license withdrawal:

No matter if I need professionally qualified translators and interpreters who can teach the real-life skills of translating and interpreting to my future professionals. I will prefer them to Ph.D. holders who do not have such experience. But it is in contradiction with local requirements (Participant 10).



Nevertheless, even if accrediting agencies put that requirement compulsory and experts have no choice but to obey them, why the experts' behavior and attitude are so much different from foreign experts. Some participants noted that experts could have a Soviet education background and working experience:

They were probably members of some inspections organized by state-controlling bodies and were unaware of how the academic process is built according to international standards. They work in state universities and are accustomed to national law requirements in everyday work. All that factors could prevent them from understanding the goal of the accreditation. For them being an expert is to check for national legislation. Because of the Soviet heritage, he fears that somebody will check after him and demand documental proof. Controlling bodies have power; those who are under control – are subordinates (Participant 15).

The agency could increase the number of foreign experts, recruit local experts with foreign educational backgrounds and experience, or increase the number of appropriate training for the existing pool of experts. However, participants noted that the quality of experts and the accreditation agency changed positively. That local agency passed several international accreditations required for membership in the European Association of accrediting agencies. Moreover, on a regular basis, it provides seminars and conferences for all Kazakhstani HEIs.

The one aspect mentioned by Participant 16 that should not be avoided is that everything from abroad is perceived as something better and more progressive than in Kazakhstan. Therefore, we should be more critical of ourselves and admit that some of the local agency recommendations were useful even when we initially took them negatively.

Participant 1 found making reports in three languages the most challenging because it was time-consuming, while experts used reports and conducted interviews in one language.

Whether it was local legislation requirements or the agency's demand was unclear. However, their official website includes only the Russian self-report version; the Kazakh and English versions are absent.

Some participants expressed their concerns about the local agency because:

1) Doubts about the recognition of that agency outside of Kazakhstan, even if there is an international status in the title of the agency.

2) Easiness to obtain the accreditation.

Participants thought it was faster and cheaper, and the results were more predictable (almost guaranteed). "At the same time, it is not about the intention to change and improve; it is a task to be done because you were forced to do that, or you paid for that and just waiting for results".

#### ***4.6.1.2 Benefits of Accreditation by the local agency***

Participants noted that the requirements for self-report writing concerned international standards. They found them very much reasonable and sensible. Participant 3 claimed it was easy to prepare the self-assessment report based on the report template from accreditation by a foreign agency, except for some paragraphs. The undeniable advantage of the agency was the knowledge of local context, regional peculiarities, and national standards.

Participants 15 and 16 emphasized that even if unsatisfied with the experts' quality, the agency transformation impressed them significantly. The agency organizes plenty of training and conferences for Kazakhstani HEIs and invites foreign speakers. It has expanded networking abroad; it is the only local agency with good representation in Europe. Participant 2 also mentioned she noticed some changes; the agency selects experts more responsibly, experts' attitudes are more positive, and they express its opinion more accurately and reasonably. Participant 3 pointed out one of the benefits of accreditation by a local agency – returning the university back to Kazakhstan reality:

Our university tends to focus on international standards; however, if we want our graduates to find jobs in the local market, we should follow all the state requirements. Accreditation by a local agency helped to reconsider educational programs from the angle of the local normative. While preparing for the accreditation, documents were arranged in the expectation that experts would evaluate through the local standards prism. Therefore, even if we consider some documentation redundant if the agency requests it, it is necessary for some segments of the Kazakhstani academic market.

#### ***4.6.2 Foreign accrediting agency***

Foreign accreditation agency was an international accrediting agency included in the list of twelve accrediting bodies approved by the Ministry of Higher Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The challenges mentioned by interviewees were prevailing the old approach to the accreditation by university staff, experts' lack of knowledge of the local context, and disagreement on the approach to curriculum design, language, and terminology differences. Participants named plenty of benefits of the accreditation by the foreign agency. The main benefits were setting strategic goals, and structural changes, transforming most business processes and academic policies, and having a consultative character aimed at university improvement.

##### ***4.6.2.1 Challenges with the foreign accrediting agency***

Interview analysis showed that the decision to have international accreditation by a foreign agency was perceived as exceptionally ambitious and challenging because it was the first international accreditation experience (at that time, it was the programmatic accreditation). The whole university staff was unfamiliar with international accreditation procedures and felt a great responsibility for successful accreditation. Moreover, it provides for restructuring many internal business processes and transforming academic policies. For instance, Participant 6 explained that the university had no difficulties passing accreditation

by the local agency, which occurred right before international accreditation. The university worked by QMS 9000 standards for several years, and most of the documentation matched local agency standards. Participant 16, on the other hand, confirmed that local accreditation at that time had some requirements similar to state attestation norms, making the accreditation procedure more transparent and more understandable.

While international accreditation goals and approaches could have been more transparent for the whole staff, there were just several people who had the experience of being members of an expert team and helped to prepare for accreditation. Participants commented that it was difficult for them to accept it as the visit of people who would come not to check on them but who would come to assess and evaluate their work, give recommendations, and tell them the ways of improvement instead of punishment and university license withdrawal. They did not fully understand what accreditation is:

Everything there was a problem, absolutely everything; first, people did not understand why we needed this. Why we took such a challenge when there is a well-established practice of passing all these controls? Why did we abandon the old paper-centric approach, which was clear to everyone? (Participant 15)

It took a lot of resources on printing the reports and other papers (in color) for that first accreditation. University staff was surprised that experts almost did not touch that massive pile of papers. It was hard to understand that experts may consider anything not written in documents and that there are interview analyses and other methods which can reveal what is declared and what is done in reality. Experts probably concluded that there are no problems with document production in Kazakhstan. Nevertheless, we understand this is our point of growth in that context. Moreover, experts had seen that some new structures or processes were created recently and were not in practice yet; even so, they identified our readiness to change.

Participant 16 noted that the proper understanding of accreditation came in the preparation process when almost 50% of the university structure was reorganized and business processes were revised toward optimization, rationalization, and reduction of some unnecessary time-, cost, and labor-consuming processes. “Only then we realized what accreditation is actually for, that we need it to improve the quality of our services. The transformation of people’s mindsets was the most considerable value of accreditation”.

During the first foreign accreditation, half of the staff was not proficient in English; consequently, most of the reports were written in Russian and then translated. Participants had concerns about the quality of self-reports and that the translation was understandable enough for the expert team. However, it did not negatively influence the final accreditation decision since experts received that situation with understanding. For now, that problem is almost solved because most educational programs have an English medium of instruction, and most of the staff are also English-speaking. However, program coordinators and teaching staff still face difficulties in the case of majors with Kazakh/Russian media of instruction.

Usually, the foreign accrediting expert team consists of foreign members; however, to explain or understand the local context, one Kazakhstani expert is included. Participant 13 remembered the interview panel when the local expert demonstrated her subjectivity and unprofessionalism. The expert was from a university with the same competitive program, and she intentionally asked biased questions that could undermine the program’s quality. Moreover, judging by her questions, she did not read the self-report properly or understand the issue. As a result, her colleagues persuaded her that she misunderstood something. Nevertheless, they were surprised and shocked by her questions and attitudes.

During interview panels, participants had met several situations when experts would not like to recognize the local specific context. They insisted on focusing on research or on

including some specific disciplines. It was hard to explain to them that program design was oriented on practical components according to employers and market demand.

Some of the experts - international ones - were researchers. And, of course, they were limited to research and needed help understanding many things required for producing a future professional. That people needed to be more connected to the employment issue (Participant 10).

Two case examples could support that issue. Experts were strictly urging on including research focus in major in Finance, probably based on the suggestion that there is more demand for financial research analysts on an international level. But the reality of Kazakhstan is the lack of good research and researchers in finance; moreover, a limited number of work placements are available. Therefore, the program in Finance was designed based on a pragmatic approach like professional accreditations, which differs from the academic approach. In addition, it was the demand of the local market and graduates who would like to employ immediately after graduation.

In the case of the International Relations program, two different approaches exist - classical, European, and modern, American. The second one with a mix of economics was chosen. However, one of the experts absolutely disagreed and urged to increase the diplomacy and political sciences courses module. Some confusing elements made it a bit stressful when the expert couldn't understand the whole idea of the program, and there was some misunderstanding. Participant 6 described the difficulties in understanding the peculiarities of the Kazakhstani legal system by foreign experts; for example, they did not see the differences between Jurisprudence and Law Enforcement majors, and both programs sounded like majors in Law. Therefore, in the case of major in Law Enforcement, experts commented on the lack of international students. Only after explanations that only Kazakhstani citizens have the right to work in law enforcement that condition was removed.

Some participants faced difficulties justifying the noncompliance with the previous report because there were changes in the strategic development plans of some programs in accordance with changes in external circumstances. For example, differences in understanding the terminology took time and some stress to explain. Misunderstanding of dual programs and double degree programs definitions emerged during the specialized accreditation. In Europe, the dual degree is graduating with two diplomas (two separate degrees) in two different specializations and a double degree – receiving one degree with two specializations. In Kazakhstan, the definition of double-degree programs includes both dual and double-degree programs described above. Dual programs (not dual degrees) are forms of apprenticeships or internships when students learn theoretical disciplines at university and a practical component at job placement.

Participant 7 noted she would like recommendations on the part she was responsible for. However, she was unaware if the experts did not give any recommendations or university administration did not inform her. Usually, senior management and program coordinators are involved in communication with the agency and expert team. After accreditation, the rest of the university staff received an announcement about the final decision. Meeting with teaching and management personnel involved in accreditation and discussing the results would improve internal communication.

Usually, accrediting agency forms an expert team with members representing professional areas close to accredited programs. However, it was the case when none of the experts were from the legal profession while law programs were accredited. Even so, that was the only case.

Due to the pandemic, the last accreditation by a foreign agency was provided online; several participants claimed that university facilities would make a better impression on

expert team members offline. Personal meetings could differ when they have more opportunities to discuss issues with experts and show their emotions.

#### ***4.6.2.2 Benefits of accreditation by a foreign agency***

The most valuable benefit of accreditation by a foreign agency was transforming all the university processes, including long-term planning, structural changes, shifting to horizontal decision-making, and transforming the people mindset (see the previous section). All those changes provide to forming continuous development culture. Participant 4 noted that the foreign agency emphasizes HEI internal processes, the attitudes of teachers and students to the academic process, and how they are involved in the teaching and learning process, ethical issues, the climate between staff and, students and teachers.

Participant 2 noted that the interview panel was mostly balanced in a way to cover all the areas at least by one expert. They were more advanced, much more educated, more like westernized, modern minded people. Participant 14 stated that all the experts took part in interview, each of them had their own questions, very well qualified. “And it was clear that they had enough knowledge of what they were talking about. All questions were connected with the methodology agency introduced us with, it was all concerning the self-report we prepared”.

Participant 6 mentioned that the organizational part was clear and well-defined. There were specific deadlines and clear procedures of who should or should not participate in interviews from different categories. The interviews have a more consultative character. If experts see some drawbacks, they do not tell it accusingly; they do not concentrate on drawbacks but more on the positive sides and opportunities to improve. The interview atmosphere was quite welcoming, and participants did not feel any pressure

Participant 11 pointed out that the recommendations of the international accreditation agency were quite specific. For example, to include the particular course or to update the



literature. The recommendations were relatively straightforward, simple, and easy to implement. Participant 15 emphasizes that “if you are sure of the adequacy and professionalism of an accreditation expert, it stimulates you to change. You really understand that your efforts will be rewarded and that your efforts will not go unnoticed”.

#### **4.7 Summary**

The present study has revealed that the management and faculty staff possess a strong comprehension of the significance of accreditation in the university and program development and exhibit a solid personal motivation for involvement in the accreditation process. However, they encounter various challenges such as increased workload and stress, the subjective nature of expert team members, and bureaucratic procedures.

The participants provided comparative characteristics of local and foreign accrediting agencies, and all interviewees acknowledged that accreditation by the foreign agency was more esteemed and dependable. Conversely, local accreditation was seen as being closely tied to the requirements of the Ministry of Education.

Moreover, all the participants were in agreement regarding the positive long-term outcomes of accreditation by the foreign agency. This process has fostered the development of a self-development culture, improvement based on external recommendations, and the creation of strategic planning and IQA instruments, which in turn has led to beneficial structural changes.

To conclude, this study has highlighted the importance of accreditation in university and program development, and the challenges that arise during the accreditation process. The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the comparative characteristics of local and international accrediting agencies. The implications of this study may be used to inform future accreditation processes, improve the experiences of those involved, and enhance the overall quality of the university and its programs.

## **Chapter 5. Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This study aimed to explore the perception and experience of the accreditation process in one Kazakhstani university from the perspectives of managerial and academic staff and how those perceptions correspond to the concept of continuous improvement. The study research questions were: 1) What are administrators' and faculty members' views on the value of the accreditation process in their institution? 2) How do administrators and faculty members perceive the influence of the accreditation process on the HEI? 3) How do administrators and faculty members perceive the accreditation process's role in the educational program and curriculum design? 4) What are administrative and academic staff's experiences with the accreditations process provided by local and foreign accrediting agencies?

The chapter consists of five sections starting with an introductory part describing the research questions and findings summary. The second and third sections discuss findings according to the theoretical frameworks of the institutional theory of isomorphism and organizational culture theory. The fourth chapter presents a comparison of the two accrediting agencies' approaches.

### **5.2 Building self-development culture**

This section will describe the perceived value of accreditation and the experience of participating in the accreditation process within the Cultural Theory framework. As was mentioned in the literature review, the participation of faculty and administrative staff, especially the leadership, is crucial for the successful accreditation of HEI (Bendermacher et al., 2017). The results of this study show that allocating roles in the accreditation process with the involvement of both faculty and managerial staff determines implementing one of the accreditation principles of promoting stakeholder involvement (European Association for

Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2021). These findings are consistent with that of Roeleejanto et al. (2015), who reported that senior leadership creates a background for a shared vision and culture of self-improvement, as well as with Altbach and Engberg (2017), who suggest that teaching staff influence the program quality and self-assessment reports.

Findings show efficient roles of distribution of staff in the accreditation process by leadership as participants had their zone responsibility in preparing self-reports, infrastructure, and policies. Besides, participants felt willingness to invest their time and resources. This finding is consistent with that of Onisimus et al. (2021), who emphasized that senior management guide the institution to meet the requirements of the accreditation standards. Moreover, the main themes that emerged through the interviews regarding the value of accreditation were improving the quality of academic programs and constant development of the university's internal processes, recognition/positioning, increased competitiveness, employability, internationalization, and following the international standards and state requirements. That finding is consistent with Sandmann et al. (2009), who claim a positive association of the accreditation process with the perceived value of accreditation.

Participants highlight the positive structural changes shifting from vertical to shared governance; moreover, they are aware of decision-making mechanisms and have an opportunity to influence them. This approach can help to build trust and transparency and ensure that the input informs decisions from multiple perspectives (Dellana & Hauser, 1999). Participants also referenced the accreditation to maintain standards within the programs and optimize administrative processes, and that point strongly interfered with the idea of continuous improvement. That means university staff shares a quality culture and does not perceive accreditation as a form of control but as a constant work on its development.

According to Harvey (2004), the quality of culture is a process where responsibility for quality is shared not by controlling units but by every organization member. Harvey and Stensaker (2008) identified four ideal forms of quality culture. The selected university could be considered a mix of responsive and regenerative quality cultures. Reproductive and reactive types of quality culture are not the case because there is no resistance from the university staff, and the changes do not possess a sporadic character. Findings demonstrate self-development and continuous improvement based on external recommendations and constant internal revising of the strategic and operational plans within the institution. That confirms regenerative quality culture when quality is systematically implemented in all operations. However, it considered the development toward international standards, which concerned accreditation by foreign agencies. In the case of local agency's accreditation, the organization has elements of responsive quality culture because the university, under external pressure, must comply with local legislation and must consider the local context.

Nevertheless, considering challenges met by academic and managers' staff during accreditation, such as increased workload and stressfulness, and challenges with the expert team could be the reason for low motivation during the following accreditations.

### **5.3 Isomorphic processes**

This section identifies two isomorphic processes that motivate universities to pursue accreditation. Coercive and normative isomorphism are distinguished as crucial drivers based on the isomorphic institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and considering the perceived value of accreditation by university staff. Coercive isomorphism entails adhering to normative standards required by local legislation and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of Kazakhstan. Participants highlighted that Higher Education Institutions are constrained in their ability to issue diplomas and secure funding opportunities without accreditation status. The second driver is a normative isomorphism, which involves following

professional quality management (QM) networks in the context of internationalization, competitiveness, international recognition, high-quality standards, and other signals for stakeholders of the educational process. The primary benefit of accreditation is ensuring quality and receiving recommendations for further improvement.

While White et al. (2013) observed that organizational members' attitudes may differ from the institutional perspective, this study did not reveal such cases. Understanding the drivers of external quality assurance facilitates identifying patterns in selecting the type of agency. According to the study participants, obtaining approval from a local accrediting agency is less costly and easier to acquire; however, universities should opt for an overseas agency to promote improvement and transformation.

#### **5.4 Challenges and benefits of local and foreign accrediting agencies**

The results of the study indicate multiple advantages and challenges associated with the accreditation process through both local and foreign agencies. Study participants highlighted the local agency experts' familiarity with the Kazakhstani context and local standards. However, they also disclosed several disadvantages, including low recognition, lack of international experience, inadequate selection of experts, experts' attitudes, Soviet-era legacy, and prioritizing controlling standards over improving quality. These findings align with those of Kerimkulova (2020), who identified issues related to the lack of national experts in the database of international accrediting agencies, the absence of specialized training for national experts in the areas of quality assurance and accreditation, and the focus of accreditation on quantitative approaches (p. 62).

The analysis of data revealed a two-fold issue with the local expert team. Firstly, local accrediting agencies rely on ESG standards, including mandatory local quantitative measures such as the academic qualifications of teaching staff or the number of publications (IQAA, 2020). Consequently, experts verify whether the self-assessment reports comply with a

predetermined indicator, even if it does not affect the program's quality. Secondly, experts acted as inspection agents since they perceived accreditation as state attestation. This approach can be attributed to the Soviet compliance culture mentality and oppressive traditions of state attestation (Kerimkulova, 2020). Furthermore, the study findings are consistent with Bishimbayev and Nurasheva (2011), which revealed a lack of positive attitudes and constructive recommendations from the local experts.

Regarding accrediting agencies abroad, the prevailing challenges were the university staff's adherence to the old approach to accreditation, the experts' need for knowledge regarding the local context, disagreements on curriculum design approaches, and language differences. However, the advantages of accrediting agencies abroad were more extensive compared to local agencies, and they were perceived to have a long-term impact on academic program quality and overall university development. The primary benefits of accrediting agencies abroad were setting strategic goals, implementing structural changes, transforming most business processes and academic policies, and taking a consultative approach to enhance university operations.

This study aligns with Myrkalykov and Yefimova's (2013) research, which demonstrated the impact of academic program accreditation by international agencies on HEIs' internal quality assurance systems. Furthermore, the results are in agreement with Ulker and Bakioglu's (2019) findings that initial accreditation is the most effective. Participants indicated that initial accreditation was a crucial milestone for the university's transformation and departure from the old system. However, Leiber et al. (2018) found a limited influence of accreditation on improving teaching and learning. Kerimkulova (2020) noted a need for knowledge of the impact of accreditation on education quality in the Kazakhstani context. This study, in contrast, found that the academic process has become more student-oriented, with changes to syllabi and program content.

The sampling approach for this study was based on the assumption that administration staff is more informed and engaged in accreditation than academic staff, as noted by Stensaker et al. (2011). However, during the interview phase, it was discovered that all of the teaching staff representatives had recent administrative experience (though they were in teaching positions during the interview). As a result, it took much work to distinguish their managerial experience and make separate conclusions. Therefore, the general feature of the participants was that they were directly involved in local and foreign accreditations.

In both local and foreign accrediting agency cases, participants faced challenges such as increased workload and stress and difficulties with expert team subjectivity or a different approach to academic program design during accreditation. These findings agree with Martin and Stella's (2007) emphasis on accrediting agencies being selective about the objectivity and professionalism of expert teams and providing relevant training before accreditation.

One challenge relevant to HEIs across the country was the cost of accreditation, which "leads to monopoly in accreditation" (Kerimkulova, 2020, p. 63). Local accrediting agencies accredit over 70% of academic programs in Kazakhstan due to low costs. Participants perceived these agencies as controlling state standards, calling for a focus on expert team quality. Meanwhile, accreditation by foreign accrediting agencies was recognized as the most influential in university transformation and strengthening of the internal quality assurance system.

## **5.5 Summary**

This chapter discussed the study's findings within the Cultural Theory framework and the Institutional Isomorphism theory. A sense of ownership and investment in the accreditation process as well as shared values and beliefs demonstrate the quality culture of the university. Moreover, constant revising of all the processes and continuous improvements gave evidence of the responsive and regenerative types of a quality culture of the university.

Two isomorphic processes were revealed explaining the reasons for choosing accreditation and accrediting agency. University chooses the local agency to confirm the local legislation. Still, a foreign accrediting agency is selected to improve the programs and institution quality and obtain prestige and acceptance in the local and international market.



## **Chapter 6. Conclusion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In the present chapter, a summary of the research results will be provided to address the research questions that were explored in this study. The research aimed to investigate the perceptions and experiences of managerial and academic staff regarding the accreditation process in a Kazakhstani university, and how these perceptions align with the concept of continuous improvement. Specifically, the following research questions were addressed: 1) What is the perspective of administrators and faculty members on the value of the accreditation process in their institution? 2) How do administrators and faculty members perceive the impact of the accreditation process on the higher education institution (HEI)? 3) How do administrators and faculty members perceive the role of the accreditation process in the educational program and curriculum design? 4) What are administrative and academic staff's experiences with the accreditation process provided by local and foreign accrediting agencies?

### **6.2 Major findings**

The study's findings were presented within the framework of Cultural Theory and the Institutional Isomorphism theory, providing a comprehensive understanding of the accreditation process in a Kazakhstani university. The study revealed that the university staff's sense of ownership and investment in the accreditation process, as well as shared values and beliefs, demonstrate the quality culture of the university. Moreover, the constant revising of processes and continuous improvements are evidence of the university's responsive and regenerative types of quality culture. The study also revealed two isomorphic processes explaining the reasons for choosing accreditation and accrediting agencies. Two processes are identified: coercive isomorphism, which involves adhering to normative standards required by local legislation and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of

Kazakhstan, and normative isomorphism, which involves following professional quality management networks.

The study's findings indicated that the university staff shared the values of the accreditation process and perceived it as a long-term influence on academic programs' quality and overall university development. They noted changes in organizational culture towards continuous improvement, demonstrating the quality culture of the university. However, the study revealed several challenges associated with accreditation through both local and foreign agencies: lack of international experience, inadequate selection of experts, Soviet-era legacy, language differences, disagreements on curriculum design approaches and prioritizing controlling standards over improving quality. The study also found that local expert teams faced issues with adhering to ESG standards, including mandatory quantitative measures that do not necessarily impact program quality. Additionally, participants faced increased workload and stress during the accreditation process. The cost of accreditation was also a challenge, with local agencies being perceived as controlling state standards due to their monopoly on accreditation.

However, foreign accrediting agencies were seen as having a long-term impact on academic program quality and overall university development. The most challenging issue was transforming the university structure, academic policies, strategic planning, and operational processes in the preparation period for the accreditation because of difficulties in prevailing the internal old state attestation approach and unawareness of the international standards.

### **6.3 Limitations**

The study's outcomes may be used to inform future accreditation processes, enhance the quality of educational programs and curricula, and improve the experiences of staff

involved in the accreditation process. However, the case study design has some limitations, such as generalizability or subjectivity and bias.

Study's small sample size may limit the generalizability of the findings to other universities and contexts. The data collection is limited to the case of one university only, so a similar investigative work at other universities could have different findings. Moreover, the study focused only on the experiences of university in Kazakhstan, and the findings may not be applicable to other countries with different educational systems and cultural backgrounds. The study did not compare the effectiveness of different accrediting agencies in promoting quality assurance in higher education, which could be a useful avenue for future research.

#### **6.4 Implications**

The results of this research are significant since they offer insights into the viewpoints of key stakeholders on the accreditation process within a Kazakhstani university. These outcomes could be utilized to enhance the quality of educational programs and curricula, improve the experiences of staff participating in the accreditation process, and inform future accreditation processes. Additionally, the study may encourage reflection on quality culture and university environment among participants. Furthermore, top university management, policymakers, and educational authorities may use the findings to consider stakeholders' opinions concerning quality culture, accreditation procedures, and challenges faced during the process. Ultimately, this research has made a valuable contribution to the field of higher education accreditation and continuous improvement.

#### **6.5 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to universities regarding the accreditation process of educational programs:

- 1) **Enhance Communication:** Universities should establish effective communication channels and systems to ensure that all stakeholders involved in the accreditation process are

aware of the process's requirements and expectations. It is important to keep stakeholders informed throughout the entire process, from preparation to the accreditation visit, and afterwards. This can help to reduce the stress and workload associated with the process and ensure that all stakeholders understand their roles and responsibilities.

2) **Develop a Continuous Improvement Culture:** Universities should develop a culture of continuous improvement by regularly reviewing and revising their educational programs and curricula to ensure they meet the changing needs of students, employers, and society. This can be achieved by establishing a systematic process for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of educational programs and curricula and regularly soliciting feedback from stakeholders.

3) **Train and Develop Staff:** Universities should provide training and development opportunities for academic and managerial staff involved in the accreditation process. This can help to ensure that staff members have the necessary skills and knowledge to prepare for and participate in the accreditation process effectively. Staff should also be trained to use best practices in curriculum design and program evaluation to ensure that their programs meet international standards.

4) **Seek External Expertise:** Universities should seek external expertise when necessary to provide an objective and unbiased evaluation of their educational programs and curricula. External experts can provide valuable insights and recommendations for improvement that may not be readily apparent to internal stakeholders. The study suggests that universities should consider overseas accrediting agencies for improvement and transformation, despite the cost and ease of obtaining local accreditation. Understanding the drivers of external quality assurance can help universities identify patterns in selecting the type of agency.

5) Foster Collaboration: Universities should foster collaboration and cooperation between academic and managerial staff to ensure the successful implementation of the accreditation process. This can be achieved by establishing cross-functional teams to work together on the accreditation process and by creating a shared vision and values for the university.

6) Establish International Partnerships: Universities should establish partnerships with international universities and accrediting agencies to stay up to date with the latest trends and best practices in educational program accreditation. This can provide valuable opportunities for knowledge sharing and collaboration that can benefit the university and its educational programs.

Recommendations for accrediting agencies: administration should be more selective in experts team's credibility and objectivity while choosing them, as well as organizing more training for experts to make them understand local context and international standards.

## **6.6 Directions for Future Research**

Beyond the completion of this research, future research could focus on the other stakeholder's involvement, such as students and employers, to understand their perspectives on the accreditation process. Moreover, a study that compares public and private HEIs could also provide valuable insights into the accreditation process's perception and experience in different settings. Finally, it would be beneficial to study the perspective of members of the accrediting agency's expert team, either local or foreign members, or to compare different agencies and their approaches to understand the accreditation process's dynamics fully.

## **6.7 Personal Reflection**

Reflecting on the study, I appreciate the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the accreditation process in the Kazakhstani higher education system. As a researcher, I have acquired new knowledge about the challenges and advantages of local and foreign accrediting agencies and the isomorphic processes that motivate universities to seek accreditation. By

conducting interviews with key stakeholders, I have come to understand the intricacies of the accreditation process and the significance of stakeholder involvement in ensuring quality education.

Moreover, this study has allowed me to reflect on my personal experiences as a student and an educator and how the accreditation process can influence the overall quality of education and institutional development. I have developed a greater appreciation for the efforts of the university to improve and ensure that students receive top-notch education continuously.

Going forward, I hope that the study's results inform future accreditation processes and contribute to enhancing educational programs and curricula. As a researcher, I am motivated to continue exploring ways to improve the quality of higher education and assist universities in providing students with the best possible learning experiences.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### National register of recognized accrediting bodies

#	Name of the accrediting agency
1	IQAA - Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (Kazakhstan)
2	IAAR - Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating (Kazakhstan)
3	KAZSEE - Kazakhstan Association for Modern (Elite) Education (Kazakhstan)
4	ARQA - Independent Accreditation and Education Quality Assessment Agency (Kazakhstan)
5	ECAQA - Eurasian Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Health Care (Kazakhstan)
6	Independent Kazakhstan Center of Accreditation (Kazakhstan)
7	ASIIN - Accreditation Agency for Degree Programs in Engineering, Computer Science, Science and Mathematics (Germany)
8	MusiQuE - Music Quality Enhancement (Belgium)
9	ACQUIN - Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (Germany)
10	ACBSP - The Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (USA)
11	ABET - Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (USA)
12	FIBAA - Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (Germany)

*Note.* From Register of recognized accreditation bodies. National Center for Higher

Education Development of MSHE RK. Retrieved from <https://enic->

[kazakhstan.edu.kz/ru/accreditation/documents](https://enic-kazakhstan.edu.kz/ru/accreditation/documents)

## Appendix B

### Interview recruitment letter

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Zhamilya Bopurova, I am a master student of GSE program at Nazarbayev University.

I am conducting interviews as part of a research study on exploring the perception and experience of accreditation process of educational programs from the managerial and academics staff perspectives.

You have been chosen because you have experience with accreditation that was undertaken at your faculty. You are in an ideal position to provide valuable first-hand information from your own perspective. The interview takes around 45-60 minutes. Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Each interview will be assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and write up of findings.

Your participation will be a valuable addition to the research and findings could lead to identifying the linkage between accreditation procedures and development of the internal quality assurance of the university and may serve as a foundation for further research in the field.

The main benefit for you will be the opportunity to share your experience, views and challenges of accreditation and internal quality assurance.

Your participation in this study will not have any impact or negative implications for your further performance at the university. All data will be de-identified.

The consent form is attached below. If you are willing to participate, please suggest a day and time that suits you and I'll do my best to be available. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

Thank you in advance.

Kind regards,  
Zhamilya Bopurova  
GSE Leadership in Education  
Master's Student

## Сұхбатқа шақыру хаты

Құрметті \_\_\_\_\_ ,

Менің атым Бопурова Жамиля, мен Назарбаев Университеті Жоғары білім беру мектебінің «Білім берудегі көшбасшылық» бағдарламасының магистранты болып табыламын. Мен оқытушылық және академиялық басқару персоналы тұрғысынан білім беру бағдарламаларын аккредиттеу процесінің тәжірибесі мен қабылдауын зерттеу бойынша сұхбат жүргіземін.

Жоғары мектепте аккредиттеу тәжірибеңіз болғандықтан Сіз сұхбаттасу үшін таңдалдыңыз, себебі Сіз құнды және өзекті ақпарат бере алатын, сондай-ақ аккредиттеу процесі туралы өз пікіріңізбен бөлісе алатын тамаша үміткерсіз. Сұхбат 45-60 минуттан аспайды. Сіз берген деректер құпия сақталады. Сұхбаттың әрбір қатысушысына нәтижелерді талдау және жазу барысында жеке деректердің ашылмауын қамтамасыз ету үшін сандық код беріледі.

Сіздің қатысуыңыз зерттеуге құнды қосымша бола алады, оның нәтижелері аккредиттеу рәсімі мен университеттің ішкі сапа кепілдігі жүйесін дамыту арасындағы болуы мүмкін байланысты анықтай алады. Осылайша, бұл осы саладағы қосымша зерттеулерге негіз бола алады. Мұндай зерттеуге қатысудың жағымды сипаты – аккредиттеу процесіне және жоғары оқу орнындағы ішкі сапаны қамтамасыз етуге қатысты өз тәжірибесімен және пікірімен бөлісу, сондай-ақ аккредиттеу жолында тұрған ықтимал қиындықтарды айту мүмкіндігі.

Сіздің осы зерттеуге қатысуыңыз университеттегі мансабыңызға еш әсер етпейді. Оның жағымсыз салдары да болмайды. Барлық деректер иесіздендіріледі.

Келісім үлгісі төменде қоса беріледі. Егер сіз қатысуға дайын болсаңыз, өзіңізге ыңғайлы келетін күн мен уақытты көрсетіңіз, Мен барынша сізге ыңғайлы уақытта сұхбат алуға тырысамын. Егер сұрақтар туындаса, хабарласыңыз, мен қуана жауап беремін.

Алдын ала рақмет,  
Құрметпен,  
Бопурова Жамиля  
Назарбаев Университеті  
Жоғары білім беру мектебінің магистранты

### Письмо-приглашение на интервью

Уважаемый(-ая) \_\_\_\_\_,

Меня зовут Бопурова Жамиля, и я являюсь магистрантом программы «Лидерство в образовании» Высшей школы образования Назарбаев Университета. Я провожу интервью в рамках исследования по изучению опыта и восприятия процесса аккредитации образовательных программ с точки зрения преподавательского и академического управленческого персонала.

Вы были выбраны для прохождения интервью, так как у вас есть опыт прохождения аккредитации в Вашей Высшей школе, за счет чего Вы являетесь идеальной кандидатурой, которая может предоставить ценную и актуальную информацию, а также поделиться своим мнением о процедуре аккредитации. Интервью займет у Вас не более 45-60 минут. Предоставленные Вами данные будут носить конфиденциальный характер. Каждому участнику интервью будет присвоен числовой код, чтобы гарантировать, что никакие личные данные не будут раскрыты в ходе анализа и записи результатов.

Ваше участие послужит ценным дополнением к исследованию, результаты которого могут выявить потенциальную связь между процедурами аккредитации и развитием внутренней системы обеспечения качества университета. Таким образом, оно вполне может стать основой для дальнейших исследований в этой области. Положительная сторона участия в подобного рода исследовании заключается в возможности поделиться своим опытом и мнением относительно процесса аккредитации и внутреннего обеспечения качества в вузе, а также озвучить возможные трудности, стоящие на пути к аккредитации.

Ваше участие в данном исследовании никак не скажется на Вашей карьере в университете. Негативных последствий за ним не последует. Все данные будут обезличены.

Форма согласия прилагается ниже. Если Вы готовы принять участие, пожалуйста, укажите подходящие Вам дату и время, и я сделаю все возможное, чтобы провести интервью в удобное для Вас время. Если у вас есть какие-либо вопросы, обращайтесь, буду рада ответить.

Заранее благодарю Вас,  
с уважением,  
Жамиля Бопурова  
Магистрант Высшей школы образования,  
Назарбаев Университет



## Appendix C

### Informed Consent Forms

#### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

##### **Academics' and managers' perception and experience of accreditation process of educational programs: a case of one Kazakhstani University**

**DESCRIPTION:** This study explores the perception and experience of accreditation process of educational programs from the managerial and academics staff perspectives in Kazakhstani University.

The study is undertaken by Zhamilya Bopurova, a master student of GSE program at Nazarbayev University.

You are kindly invited to take part in an interview, which is absolutely on a voluntary basis. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your personal experience, views and challenges of accreditation and internal quality assurance processes. Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Our interviews will be conducted individually, and you may use English, Kazakh or Russian. Interviews will be audio recorded with your permission. The recording will not be shared with anyone and store in secure place. The collected data will be destroyed after three years after master thesis submission.

**TIME INVOLVEMENT:** Your participation will take approximately 45-60 minutes.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** The risks associated with this study are no more than minimal. The data will be saved on my laptop with the secure password. The participants' names, the name of the university, name of the schools and departments will be kept confidential by coding it as Participant 1, Participant 2, etc. The information will not be shared with anyone apart from the researcher herself and her supervisors.

The benefits which may reasonably be expected to result from this study are that this study may improve the understanding of the linkage between accreditation procedures and development of the internal quality assurance in Kazakhstani HEI. Participants could share their views on accreditation and internal QA and challenges they met during accreditation process, for example, how the accreditation influences the long term planning and program and curricula design. Administrative staff will be able to find ways of faculty motivation to participate in accreditation processes more actively and consciously. Policy makers, accrediting bodies, and accreditation processes actors will get the information how to strengthen the HEI culture of self-development and internal quality assurance.

Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your personal life or your employment.

**PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS:** If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The alternative is not to participate. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals.

**Compensation.** No tangible compensation will be given. A copy of the research results will be available at the conclusion of the study via email request ([zhamilya.bopurova@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zhamilya.bopurova@nu.edu.kz)).

**Confidentiality & Privacy.** Any information that is obtained during this study will be kept confidential to the full extent possible. All efforts, within reason, will be made to keep your personal information in your research record confidential but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

The information will not be shared with anyone apart from the researcher herself and her supervisors.

Signed consent forms will be kept in a safe place, and other digital materials such as audio recordings and transcribed files will be kept on the personal computer with limited (password) access. All interview related materials will be deleted after three years of thesis submission.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study.** Participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and if agreement to participation is given, it can be withdrawn at any time without prejudice.

**Points of Contact.** It is understood that should any questions or comments arise regarding this project, or a research related injury is received, the Principal Investigator, Assistant Professor Zumrad Kataeva, +7 (7192) 704967, [zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz) should be contacted. Any other questions or concerns may be addressed to the Nazarbayev University Institutional Research Ethics Committee, [resethics@nu.edu.kz](mailto:resethics@nu.edu.kz).

**Statement of Consent.**

Please sign this consent form if you agree to participate in this study.

I have carefully read the information provided;

- I have been given full information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study;
- I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason;
- With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The extra copy of this signed and dated consent form is for you to keep.

## **АҚПАРАТТЫҚ КЕЛІСІМ ТҮРІ**

### **Білім беру бағдарламаларын аккредиттеу процесін оқытушы және басқарушы персоналдың тәжірибесі мен қабылдауы: бір қазақстандық университет мысалында**

**СИПАТТАМА:** Бұл зерттеу Қазақстан университетіндегі басқарушы және оқытушы персонал тұрғысынан білім беру бағдарламаларын аккредиттеу процесінің тәжірибесі мен қабылдауын зерттеуге бағытталған.

Зерттеуді Назарбаев Университетіндегі GSE бағдарламасының магистранты Ж.Т.Бопуровамен жүргізуде.

Сіз ерікті түрде өткізілетін сұхбатқа қатысуға шақырыласыз. Сұхбат барысында Сізге жеке тәжірибеңіз, пікірлеріңіз және аккредиттеу мен ішкі сапа процестеріне қатысты мәселелер туралы сұрақтар қойылады. Сұрақтарға берілген жауаптарыңыз құпия болып қалады. Біздің сұхбаттарымыз жеке-дара жүргізіледі, әрі сіз ағылшын, қазақ немесе орыс тілдерінде жауап бере аласыз. Сұхбаттар сіздің рұқсатыңызбен аудиоға жазылады. Жазба ешкімге берілмейді және қауіпсіз жерде сақталады. Жиналған деректер магистрлік диссертацияны қорғағаннан кейін үш жылдан кейін жойылады.

**ҚАТЫСУ УАҚЫТЫ:** сіздің қатысуыңыз шамамен 45-60 минут болады.

**ТӘУЕКЕЛДЕР МЕН ПАЙДАСЫ:** бұл зерттеуге байланысты тәуекелдер (қауіптер) жоқтың қасы. Деректер менің ноутбугымда қауіпсіз құпиясөзбен сақталады. Қатысушылардың есімдері, университеттің атауы, мектептер мен факультеттердің атаулары оларды «1-қатысушы», «2-қатысушы» және т.б. ретінде кодтау арқылы құпия сақталады. Ақпарат зерттеушінің өзінен және оның басшыларынан басқа ешкімге берілмейді.

Осы зерттеу нәтижесіндегі көңілге қонымды пайдасы – бұл зерттеу аккредиттеу рәсімдері мен қазақстандық жоғары оқу орындарында ішкі сапаны қамтамасыз етуді дамыту арасындағы байланысты түсінуді жақсарту алады. Қатысушылар аккредиттеу және ішкі сапаны қамтамасыз ету туралы, сондай-ақ аккредиттеу процесінде кездесетін қиындықтар туралы, мысалы, аккредиттеу ұзақмерзімді жоспарлау мен бағдарламалар мен оқу жоспарларына қалай әсер ететіндігі туралы пікірлерімен бөлісе алады. Әкімшілік персонал профессорлық-оқытушылық құрамды аккредиттеу процестеріне неғұрлым белсенді және саналы түрде қатысуға ынталандыру жолдарын таба алады. Саясатты әзірлеушілер, аккредиттеу органдары және аккредиттеу процесіне қатысушылар ЖОО-ның өзін-өзі дамыту және ішкі сапаны қамтамасыз ету мәдениетін қалай нығайту керектігі туралы ақпарат алады.

Бұл зерттеуге қатысу немесе қатыспау туралы шешіміңіз сіздің жеке өміріңізге немесе жұмысыңызға әсер етпейді.

**ҚАТЫСУШЫ ҚҰҚЫҚТАРЫ:** егер сіз осы үлгіні оқып, осы жобаға қатысуды шешсеңіз, сіздің қатысуыңыз ерікті екенін түсінуіңіз керек және сіздің өз келісіміңізді қайтарып алуға немесе кез келген уақытта айыппұлсыз қатысуды тоқтатуға құқығыңыз бар. Балама ұсыныс ретінде зерттеуге қатыспауға да болады.

Сондай-ақ, сіз қандай да бір сұрақтарға жауап бермеуге құқығыңыз бар. Осы зерттеудің нәтижелері ғылыми немесе кәсіби мақсаттарда ұсынылуы немесе жариялануы мүмкін.

**ӨТЕМАҚЫ.** Материалдық өтемақы қарастырылмаған. Зерттеу аяқталғаннан кейін Сіздің сұранысыңыз бойынша электрондық пошта арқылы ([zhamilya.bopurova@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zhamilya.bopurova@nu.edu.kz)) сізге зерттеу нәтижелерінің көшірмесі берілуі мүмкін.

**ҚҰПИЯЛЫЛЫҚ.** Осы зерттеу барысында алынған кез келген ақпарат мүмкіндігінше құпия болады. Зерттеу құжаттамасында жеке ақпаратыңыздың құпиялылығын сақтау үшін (көңілге қонымды деңгейде) барлық күш-жігер жұмсалады, бірақ толық құпиялылыққа кепілдік берілмейді. Ақпарат зерттеушінің өзінен және оның басшыларынан басқа ешкімге берілмейді. Қол қойылған келісімдер қауіпсіз жерде сақталады, ал аудиожазбалар мен шифрланған файлдар сияқты басқа сандық материалдар шектеулі (құпия сөзбен) қолжетімді дербес компьютерде сақталады. Сұхбатқа қатысты барлық материалдар диссертация тапсырылғаннан кейін үш жылдан кейін жойылады.

**ҚАТЫСУ ЕРІКТІЛІГІ:** егер Сіз осы үлгіні оқып, осы зерттеуге қатысуды шешсеңіз, Сіздің қатысуыңыз ерікті екенін және Сіздің келісіміңізді қайтарып алуға немесе кез келген уақытта қатысуды тоқтатуға құқығыңыз бар екенін түсінуіңіз керек.

**БАЙЛАНЫС АҚПАРАТЫ:** егер Сізде осы зерттеуге, оны жүргізу рәсімі, тәуекелдер мен пайдасына қатысты сұрақтарыңыз, ескертулеріңіз немесе шағымдарыңыз болса, магистрлік жұмыс жетекшісімен Assistant Professor Зумрад Катаевамен байланыса аласыз (+7 (7192) 704967, [zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz))

Сондай-ақ, Назарбаев Университетінің Жоғары білім беру мектебінің зерттеу комитетімен электрондық поштасына хат жіберу арқылы хабарласа аласыз [resethics@nu.edu.kz](mailto:resethics@nu.edu.kz).

Егер сіз зерттеуге қатысуға келіссеңіз, осы үлгіге қол қойыңыз.

- Мен ұсынылған ақпаратты мұқият қарап шықтым;
- Маған Зерттеудің мақсаты мен тәртібі туралы толық ақпарат берілді;
- Мен жиналған деректердің қалай пайдаланылатынын және кез келген құпия ақпаратқа тек зерттеуші қол жеткізе алатынын түсінемін;
- Мен кез келген уақытта себебін түсіндірместен осы зерттеуге қатысудан бас тартуға құқылы екенімді түсінемін;
- Жоғарыда айтылғандардың барлығын толық түсініп, мен зерттеуге өз еркіммен қатысуға келісемін

Қолы: \_\_\_\_\_ Күні: \_\_\_\_\_

Осы үлгінің көшірмесі сіздің қолыңызбен және сұхбат күнімен бірге сақталады.

## ФОРМА ИНФОРМАЦИОННОГО СОГЛАСИЯ

### **Опыт и восприятие преподавательским и управленческим персоналом процесса аккредитации образовательных программ: на примере одного Казахстанского университета**

**ОПИСАНИЕ:** Это исследование направлено на изучение опыта и восприятия процесса аккредитации образовательных программ с точки зрения управленческого и преподавательского персонала в казахстанском университете. Исследование проводится Бопуровой Жамилей, магистрантом программы GSE в Назарбаев Университете.

Вы приглашены принять участие в интервью, которое проводится абсолютно на добровольной основе. Во время собеседования вам будут заданы вопросы о вашем личном опыте, мнениях и проблемах, связанных с аккредитацией и внутренними процессами обеспечения качества. Ваши ответы на вопросы останутся конфиденциальными. Наши интервью будут проводиться индивидуально, и вы можете использовать английский, казахский или русский язык. Интервью будут записываться на аудио с вашего разрешения. Запись никому не будет передана и будет храниться в надежном месте. Собранные данные будут уничтожены через три года после защиты магистерской диссертации.

**ВРЕМЯ УЧАСТИЯ:** Ваше участие займет около 45-60 минут.

**РИСКИ И ПРЕИМУЩЕСТВА:** Риски, связанные с этим исследованием, не более чем минимальны. Данные будут сохранены на моем ноутбуке с безопасным паролем. Имена участников, название университета, названия школ и факультетов будут храниться в тайне путем кодирования их как «Участник 1», «Участник 2» и т. д. Информация не будет передана никому, кроме самого исследователя и ее руководителей.

Преимущества, которые можно разумно ожидать в результате этого исследования, заключаются в том, что это исследование может улучшить понимание связи между процедурами аккредитации и развитием внутреннего обеспечения качества в казахстанских вузах. Участники могут поделиться своим мнением об аккредитации и внутреннем обеспечении качества, а также о проблемах, с которыми они столкнулись в процессе аккредитации, например, о том, как аккредитация влияет на долгосрочное планирование и разработку программ и учебных планов. Административный персонал сможет найти способы мотивации профессорско-преподавательского состава к более активному и осознанному участию в процессах аккредитации. Разработчики политики, органы по аккредитации и участники процесса аккредитации получают информацию о том, как укрепить культуру саморазвития вуза и внутреннего обеспечения качества. Ваше решение, участвовать или нет в этом исследовании, не повлияет на вашу личную жизнь или работу.

**ПРАВА УЧАСТНИКА:** Если вы прочитали эту форму и решили участвовать в этом проекте, Вы должны понимать, что ваше участие является добровольным, и вы имеете право отозвать свое согласие или прекратить участие в любое время без каких-либо штрафных санкций. В качестве альтернативы можно не участвовать в исследовании. Также Вы имеете право не отвечать на какие-либо вопросы. Результаты данного

исследования могут быть представлены или опубликованы в научных или профессиональных целях.

**КОМПЕНСАЦИЯ.** Материальная компенсация не предусмотрена. По завершении исследования по вашему запросу по электронной почте ([zhamilya.bopurova@kazguu.kz](mailto:zhamilya.bopurova@kazguu.kz)) вам может быть предоставлена копия результатов исследования.

**КОНФИДЕНЦИАЛЬНОСТЬ.** Любая информация, полученная в ходе этого исследования, будет максимально конфиденциальной. Будут предприняты все усилия, в разумных пределах, для сохранения конфиденциальности вашей личной информации в вашей исследовательской документации, но полная конфиденциальность не может быть гарантирована. Информация не будет передана никому, кроме самого исследователя и его руководителей. Подписанные формы согласия будут храниться в надежном месте, а другие цифровые материалы, такие как аудиозаписи и расшифрованные файлы, будут храниться на персональном компьютере с ограниченным (парольным) доступом. Все материалы, связанные с интервью, будут удалены через три года после подачи диссертации.

**ДОБРОВОЛЬНОСТЬ УЧАСТИЯ:** Если Вы прочитали данную форму и решили принять участие в данном исследовании, Вы должны понимать, что Ваше участие является добровольным и что у Вас есть право отозвать свое согласие или прекратить участие в любое время.

**КОНТАКТНАЯ ИНФОРМАЦИЯ:** Если у Вас есть вопросы, замечания или жалобы по поводу данного исследования, процедуры его проведения, рисков и преимуществ, Вы можете связаться с руководителем магистерской работы Assistant Professor Зумрад Катаевой (+7 (7192) 704967, [zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz))

Также вы можете связаться с Комитетом Исследований Высшей Школы Образования Назарбаев Университета, отправив письмо на электронный адрес [resethics@nu.edu.kz](mailto:resethics@nu.edu.kz).

Пожалуйста, подпишите данную форму, если Вы согласны участвовать в исследовании.

- Я внимательно изучил представленную информацию;
- Мне предоставили полную информацию о целях и процедуре исследования;
- Я понимаю, как будут использованы собранные данные, и что доступ к любой конфиденциальной информации будет иметь только исследователь;
- Я понимаю, что вправе в любой момент отказаться от участия в данном исследовании без объяснения причин;
- С полным осознанием всего вышеизложенного я согласен принять участие в исследовании по собственной воле

Подпись: \_\_\_\_\_ Дата: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix D**  
**INTERVIEW PROTOCOL 1**  
 For teaching staff

**Academics' and managers' perception and experience of accreditation process of educational programs: a case of one Kazakhstani University**

I am Zhamilya Bopurova, a master's student of Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education. Thank you for taking time to participate in the study.

The purpose of the study is to explore the perception and experience of accreditation process of educational programs in one Kazakhstani university from the managerial and academics staff perspectives.

The interview will last about 45-60 minutes and will be recorded by audio recorder with your permission. Before we start the interview, I will ask you to sign the informed consent form.

Date:

Time:

Place:

Interviewee:

Job position/title:

Years of working experience:

Years of teaching experience:

**Questions**

Could you please tell about your job position and work experience?	Background Questions
How many times have you been involved in accreditation processes? (Name them)	
With which accrediting bodies have you been involved?	
Describe your involvement in program/curriculum development	
How important do you think it is for program /university to be accredited? Why?	Understanding accreditation process
What was your role in the accreditation process? (accreditation/ reaccreditation, on-site visit, self-assessment, self-assessment report writing). Could you please describe your experience?	Involvement into accreditation process
What was your motivation to participate in accreditation? (Please, describe)	
What kind of challenges did you face during preparation and accreditation period?	

How did it influence/distract your usual job duties? (How many hours per week did you spend on the preparation process?) Please, describe	
How do you think accreditation have changed organizational practices and processes inside the university? (positively/negatively/examples) What changes have you noticed?	Perception and experience
How do you think accreditation have changed organizational practices and processes with regard to the program / curriculum design? (positively/negatively/examples) What changes have you noticed?	
Could these changes be characterized as short-term or long-term effect? Why?	
Have you experienced any improvement in teaching, learning and assessment methods because of the Course Management Form, Course Evaluation Survey (CES) or Student Experience Survey (SES) or other surveys, which are required for accreditation?	
Have you seen any differences in abroad and local agencies' approach to accreditation process? (self-assessment report writing, interview, on-site visit analysis, recommendations) If so, could you please describe it?	Abroad and local accrediting agencies: approaches
In your opinion, was the accreditation mainly aimed at controlling standards or at improving the quality?	
Did you feel that the team members were sufficiently qualified or in a good position to assess the curriculum and make suggestions?	
What are your positive and negative perceptions before accreditation?	
What are your positive and negative perceptions after accreditation?	
Have you any additional comments I did not ask or any questions to me?	



## №1 СҰХБАТ ХАТТАМАСЫ

Оқытушылық құрам үшін

**Білім беру бағдарламаларын аккредиттеу процесін оқытушы және басқарушы персоналдың тәжірибесі мен қабылдауы: бір қазақстандық университет мысалында**

Менің атым Бопурова Жамиля, мен Назарбаев университеті Жоғары білім беру мектебі «Білім берудегі көшбасшылық» бағдарламасының магистрантымын. Сұхбатқа қатысуға келіскеніңіз үшін рақмет.

Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты қазақстандық ЖОО-дағы басқарушы және оқытушы персонал тұрғысынан білім беру бағдарламаларын аккредиттеу процесінің тәжірибесі мен қабылдауын зерделеу болып табылады.

Сұхбат шамамен 45-60 минуттай болады және Сіздің келісіміңізбен диктофонға жазылады. Сұхбатқа кіріспес бұрын сізден ақпараттық келісім үлгісіне қол қоюыңызды сұраймын.

Мерзімі:

Уақыты:

Орны:

Сұхбат беруші:

Лауазымы:

Еңбек өтілі:

Оқытушылық қызмет өтілі:

### Сұрақтар

Сіз өзіңіздің лауазымыңыз бен жұмыс тәжірибеңіз туралы қысқаша айта аласыз ба?	Жалпы сұрақтар
Сіз аккредиттеу процестеріне қанша рет қатыстыңыз? (санап өтсеңіз)	
Аккредиттеуді қандай аккредиттеу агенттіктері жүргізді? (атап берсеңіз)	
Білім беру бағдарламаларын/оқу курстарын әзірлеуге қаншалықты қатысасыз?	
Сіздің ойыңызша, білім беру бағдарламасы/университет үшін аккредиттеу мәртебесі қаншалықты маңызды?	Аккредиттеу процесін түсіну
Сіз қандай да бір аккредиттеу процестеріне қалай қатыстыңыз? (аккредиттеу / қайта аккредиттеу, аккредиттеу агенттіктерінің делегациялық сапары, өзін-өзі талдау, өзін-өзі талдау туралы есеп жазу). (тәжірибеңізді сипаттаңыз)	Аккредиттеу процесіне тарту
Аккредиттеуге қатысуға Сізге не түрткі болды? (сипаттап берсеңіз)	
Өзін-өзі талдау мен аккредиттеу кезеңінде Сіз қандай қиындықтарға тап болдыңыз?	

Бұл Сіздің күнделікті жұмыстағы міндеттеріңізге әсер етті ме? (Сіз аккредиттеу сапарына дайындалу үшін аптасына қанша сағат жұмсадыңыз?) (сипаттап берсеңіз)	
Сіздің ойыңызша, аккредиттеу ұйымдастырушылық процестер мен оларды университет ішінде жүзеге асыру әдістерін қалай өзгертті? (жағымды/ жағымсыз мысалдар) Сіз қандай өзгерістерді байқадыңыз?	Қабылдау және тәжірибе
Сіздің ойыңызша, аккредиттеу бағдарламаны/курсты әзірлеуге қатысты ұйымдастырушылық процестер мен оларды жүзеге асыру әдістерін қалай өзгертті? (жағымды/ жағымсыз мысалдар). Сіз қандай өзгерістерді байқадыңыз?	
Бұл өзгерістер қысқамерзімді, әлде ұзақмерзімді әсер ете ме? Неліктен?	
Курсты басқару нысаны, курсты бағалау сауалнамасы немесе студенттік сауалнама немесе аккредиттеу үшін қажет басқа сауалнамалар арқылы оқыту, оқыту және бағалау әдістерінде қандай да бір жақсартуларды сезіндіңіз бе?	
Сіз қазақстандық және шетелдік аккредиттеу агенттігі жүргізетін аккредиттеу тәсілінде қандай да бір айырмашылықтарды байқадыңыз ба (аккредиттеу агенттіктері делегациясының сапары кезінде, сұхбат жүргізу, ұсыныстар алу)? Иә, болса, оларды сипаттай аласыз ба?	Қазақстандық және шетелдік аккредиттеу агенттіктері: тәсілдері
Сіздің ойыңызша, аккредиттеу негізінен стандарттарды бақылауға немесе сапаны жақсартуға бағытталған ба?	
Комиссия мүшелері оқу/білім беру бағдарламасын бағалауға және ұсыныстар енгізуге жеткілікті деңгейде білікті немесе құзыретті болып көрінді ме?	
Аккредиттеуге дейінгі жағымды және жағымсыз әсерлеріңізді сипаттаңыз?	
Аккредиттеуден кейінгі жағымды және жағымсыз әсерлеріңізді сипаттаңыз?	
Сізге маған қоятын сұрақтарыңыз немесе қосымша пікірлеріңіз бар ма?	

## ПРОТОКОЛ ИНТЕРВЬЮ №1

Для преподавательского состава

### **Опыт и восприятие преподавательским и управленческим персоналом процесса аккредитации образовательных программ: на примере одного Казахстанского университета**

Меня зовут Бопурова Жамиля, я магистрант программы «Лидерство в образовании», Высшей школы образования, Назарбаев Университета. Благодарю вас за согласие принять участие в интервью.

Целью данного исследования является изучение опыта и восприятия процесса аккредитации образовательных программ с точки зрения управленческого и преподавательского персонала в казахстанском вузе.

Интервью займет около 45-60 минут и будет записано на диктофон с Вашего согласия. Перед тем как мы перейдем к интервью прошу Вас подписать форму информационного согласия.

Дата:  
 Время:  
 Место:  
 Интервьюируемый:  
 Должность:  
 Стаж работы:  
 Стаж преподавательской деятельности:

#### **Вопросы**

Не могли бы Вы вкратце рассказать о своей должности и опыте работы?	Общие вопросы
Сколько раз Вы участвовали в процессах аккредитации? (перечислите, пожалуйста)	
Какие аккредитационные агентства проводили аккредитацию? (назовите, пожалуйста)	
Каково Ваше участие в разработке образовательных программ/учебных курсов?	
Как Вы думаете, насколько важен для образовательной программы/университета статус аккредитации?	Понимание процесса аккредитации
Как Вы были вовлечены в какие-либо процессы аккредитации? (аккредитация/переаккредитация, визит делегации аккред. агентства, самоанализ, написание отчета по самоанализу). (опишите ваш опыт)	Вовлечение в процесс аккредитации
Что мотивировало Вас на участие в аккредитации? (опишите, пожалуйста)	

С какими трудностями Вы столкнулись в период самоанализа и аккредитации?	
Повлияло ли это на Ваши повседневные рабочие обязанности? (Сколько часов в неделю Вы тратили на подготовку к аккредитационному визиту?) (опишите, пожалуйста)	
Как, по Вашему мнению, аккредитация изменила организационные процессы и методы их осуществления внутри университета? (положительно/отрицательно/примеры) Какие изменения вы заметили?	Восприятие и опыт
Как, по Вашему мнению, аккредитация изменила организационные процессы и методы их осуществления по отношению разработки программы/курса? (положительно/отрицательно/примеры) Какие изменения вы заметили?	
Данные изменения носят краткосрочный или долгосрочный эффект? Почему?	
Ощутили ли Вы какие-либо улучшения в методах преподавания, обучения и оценки благодаря Форме управления курсом, Опросу по оценке курса или Опросу студентов или другими опросами, которые требуются для аккредитации?	
Заметили ли Вы какие-либо различия в подходе к аккредитации, проводимой казахстанским и зарубежным аккредитационным агентством (в период визита делегации аккред. агентства, проведения интервью, получения рекомендаций)? Если да, то не могли бы ли Вы их описать?	
На Ваш взгляд, была ли аккредитация направлена преимущественно на контроль стандартов или на повышение качества?	
Показалось ли Вам, что члены комиссии в достаточной степени квалифицированы или же компетентны для оценивания учебной/образовательной программы и внесения предложений?	
Опишите ваши положительные и отрицательные впечатления до начала аккредитации?	
Опишите ваши положительные и отрицательные впечатления после проведения аккредитации?	
Есть ли у Вас ко мне вопросы или дополнительные комментарии, которых я не озвучила?	

## Appendix E

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL 2

For management staff

#### **Academics' and managers' perception and experience of accreditation process of educational programs: a case of one Kazakhstani University**

I am Zhamilya Bopurova, a master's student of Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education. Thank you for taking time to participate in the study.

The purpose of the study is to explore the perception and experience of accreditation process of educational programs in one Kazakhstani university from the managerial and academics staff perspectives.

The interview will last about 45-60 minutes and will be recorded by audio recorder with your permission. Before we start the interview, I will ask you to sign the informed consent form.

Date:

Time:

Place:

Interviewee:

Job position/title:

Years of working experience:

Years of teaching experience:

#### **Questions**

Could you please tell about your job position and work experience?	Background Questions
How many times have you been involved in accreditation processes? (Name them)	
With which accrediting bodies have you been involved?	
How important do you think it is for program /university to be accredited? Why?	Understanding accreditation process
In your opinion, what was the driver of providing the EQA and IQA? (copying other HEI, following normative standards, following QM networks)	Involvement into accreditation process
What was your role in the accreditation process? (accreditation/ reaccreditation, on-site visit, self-assessment, self-assessment report writing). Could you please describe your experience?	
What was your motivation to participate in accreditation? (Please, describe)	

How did it influence/distract your usual job duties? (How many hours per week did you spend on the preparation process?) Please, describe	
What kind of challenges did you face during preparation and accreditation period?	
What significant organizational changes have you noticed after initial accreditation and re-accreditation period? (If participant had that kind of experience) Please, provide the examples	Perception and experience
How do you think accreditation have changed organizational practices and processes inside the university? (positively/negatively/examples) What changes have you noticed?	
Could these changes be characterized as short-term or long-term effect? Why?	
How do you think accreditation have changed organizational practices and processes with regard to the program design? (positively/negatively/examples) What changes have you noticed?	
Which instruments of QA were improved?	
Have you seen any differences in abroad and local agencies' approach to accreditation process? (self-assessment report writing, interview, on-site visit analysis, recommendations) If so, could you please describe it?	
In your opinion, was the accreditation mainly aimed at controlling standards or at improving the quality?	
Did you feel that the team members were sufficiently qualified or in a good position to assess the curriculum and make suggestions?	
What are your positive and negative perceptions before accreditation?	
What are your positive and negative perceptions after accreditation?	
Have you any additional comments I did not ask or any questions to me?	

## №2 СҰХБАТ ХАТТАМАСЫ

Басқарушылық құрам үшін

**Білім беру бағдарламаларын аккредиттеу процесін оқытушы және басқарушы персоналдың тәжірибесі мен қабылдауы: бір қазақстандық университет мысалында**

Менің атым Бопурова Жамиля, мен Назарбаев университеті Жоғары білім беру мектебі «Білім берудегі көшбасшылық» бағдарламасының магистрантымын. Сұхбатқа қатысуға келіскеніңіз үшін рақмет.

Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты қазақстандық ЖОО-дағы басқарушы және оқытушы персонал тұрғысынан білім беру бағдарламаларын аккредиттеу процесінің тәжірибесі мен қабылдауын зерделеу болып табылады.

Сұхбат шамамен 45-60 минуттай болады және Сіздің келісіміңізбен диктофонға жазылады. Сұхбатқа кіріспес бұрын сізден ақпараттық келісім үлгісіне қол қоюыңызды сұраймын.

Мерзімі:  
Уақыты:  
Орны:  
Сұхбат беруші:  
Лауазымы:  
Еңбек өтілі:  
Оқытушылық қызмет өтілі:

### Сұрақтар

Сіз өзіңіздің лауазымыңыз бен жұмыс тәжірибеңіз туралы қысқаша айта аласыз ба?	Жалпы сұрақтар
Сіз аккредиттеу процестеріне қанша рет қатыстыңыз? (санап өтсеңіз)	
Аккредиттеуді қандай аккредиттеу агенттіктері жүргізді? (атап берсеңіз)	
Сіздің ойыңызша, білім беру бағдарламасы/университет үшін аккредиттеу мәртебесі қаншалықты маңызды? Неліктен?	Аккредиттеу процесін түсіну
Сіздің ойыңызша, сапаны сыртқы және ішкі бағалау тетіктерін енгізуге не себеп болды? (басқа жоғары оқу орындарының үлгісін ұстану, нормативтік стандарттарды сақтау, кәсіби қауымдастықтардың стандарттарын ұстану)?	
Сіз қандай да бір аккредиттеу процестеріне қалай қатыстыңыз? (аккредиттеу / қайта аккредиттеу, аккредиттеу агенттіктерінің делегациялық сапары, өзін-өзі талдау, өзін-өзі талдау туралы есеп жазу). (тәжірибеңізді сипаттаңыз)	Аккредиттеу процесіне тарту
Аккредиттеуге қатысуға Сізге не түрткі болды? (сипаттап берсеңіз)	
Өзін-өзі талдау мен аккредиттеу кезеңінде Сіз қандай қиындықтарға тап болдыңыз?	

Бұл Сіздің күнделікті жұмыстағы міндеттеріңізге әсер етті ме? (Сіз аккредиттеу сапарына дайындалу үшін аптасына қанша сағат жұмсадыңыз?) (сипаттап берсеңіз)	
Бастапқы аккредиттеу мен қайта аккредиттеуден кейін сіз байқаған ең маңызды өзгерістер қандай (егер қатысушының бастапқы және қайта аккредиттеу тәжірибесі болса)? (мысалдар келтірсеңіз)	Қабылдау және тәжірибе
Сіздің ойыңызша, аккредиттеу ұйымдастырушылық процестер мен оларды университет ішінде жүзеге асыру әдістерін қалай өзгертті? (жағымды/ жағымсыз мысалдар) Сіз қандай өзгерістерді байқадыңыз?	
Сіздің ойыңызша, аккредиттеу бағдарламаны/курсты әзірлеуге қатысты ұйымдастырушылық процестер мен оларды жүзеге асыру әдістерін қалай өзгертті? (жағымды/ жағымсыз мысалдар). Сіз қандай өзгерістерді байқадыңыз?	
Бұл өзгерістер қысқамерзімді, әлде ұзақмерзімді әсер ете ме? Неліктен?	
Сапаны бағалаудың қандай амалдары жақсарды?	Қазақстандық және шетелдік аккредиттеу агенттіктері: тәсілдері
Сіз қазақстандық және шетелдік аккредиттеу агенттігі жүргізетін аккредиттеу тәсілінде қандай да бір айырмашылықтарды байқадыңыз ба (аккредиттеу агенттіктері делегациясының сапары кезінде, сұхбат жүргізу, ұсыныстар алу)? Иә, болса, оларды сипаттай аласыз ба?	
Сіздің ойыңызша, аккредиттеу негізінен стандарттарды бақылауға немесе сапаны жақсартуға бағытталған ба?	
Комиссия мүшелері оқу/білім беру бағдарламасын бағалауға және ұсыныстар енгізуге жеткілікті деңгейде білікті немесе құзыретті болып көрінді ме?	
Аккредиттеуге дейінгі жағымды және жағымсыз әсерлеріңізді сипаттаңыз?	
Аккредиттеуден кейінгі жағымды және жағымсыз әсерлеріңізді сипаттаңыз?	
Сізде маған қоятын сұрақтарыңыз немесе қосымша пікірлеріңіз бар ма ?	



## ПРОТОКОЛ ИНТЕРВЬЮ №2

Для управленческого состава

### **Опыт и восприятие процесса аккредитации образовательных программ преподавательским и управленческим персоналом: на примере одного Казахстанского университета**

Меня зовут Бопурова Жамиля, я магистрант программы «Лидерство в образовании», Высшей школы образования, Назарбаев Университета. Благодарю Вас за согласие принять участие в интервью.

Целью данного исследования является изучение опыта и восприятия процесса аккредитации образовательных программ с точки зрения управленческого и преподавательского персонала в казахстанском вузе.

Интервью займет около 45-60 минут и, с вашего согласия, будет записано на диктофон. Перед тем как мы перейдем к интервью прошу Вас подписать форму информированного согласия.

Дата:

Время:

Место:

Интервьюируемый:

Должность:

Стаж работы:

Стаж преподавательской деятельности:

### **Вопросы**

Не могли бы Вы вкратце рассказать о своей должности и опыте работы?	Общие вопросы
Сколько раз Вы участвовали в процессах аккредитации? (перечислите, пожалуйста)	
Какие аккредитационные агентства проводили аккредитацию? (назовите, пожалуйста)	
Как Вы думаете, насколько важен для образовательной программы/университета статус аккредитации? Почему?	Понимание процесса аккредитации
По Вашему мнению, что послужило причиной введения механизмов внешней и внутренней оценки качества? (следование примеру других вузов, соблюдение нормативных стандартов, следование стандартам проф. сообществ)?	
Как Вы были вовлечены в какие-либо процессы аккредитации? (аккредитация/переаккредитация, визит делегации аккред. агентства, самоанализ, написание отчета по самоанализу). (опишите ваш опыт)	Вовлечение в процесс аккредитации

Что мотивировало Вас на участие в аккредитации? (опишите, пожалуйста)	
С какими трудностями Вы столкнулись в период подготовки и аккредитации?	
Повлияло ли это на Ваши повседневные рабочие обязанности? (Сколько часов в неделю Вы тратили на подготовку к аккредитационному визиту?) (опишите, пожалуйста)	
Какие наиболее значимые изменения вы заметили после первичной аккредитации и реаккредитации (если у участника есть опыт участия в первичной и повторной аккредитации)? (пожалуйста, приведите примеры)	Восприятие и опыт
Как, по Вашему мнению, аккредитация изменила организационные процессы и методы их осуществления внутри университета? (положительно/отрицательно/примеры) Какие изменения вы заметили?	
Как, по Вашему мнению, аккредитация изменила организационные процессы и методы их осуществления по отношению разработки программы/курса? (положительно/отрицательно/примеры) Какие изменения вы заметили?	
Данные изменения носят краткосрочный или долгосрочный эффект? Почему?	
Какие инструменты оценки качества были улучшены?	
Заметили ли Вы какие-либо различия в подходе к аккредитации, проводимой казахстанским и зарубежным аккредитационным агентством (в период визита делегации аккред. агентства, проведения интервью, получения рекомендаций)? Если да, то не могли бы ли Вы их описать?	Казахстанские и зарубежные аккредитационные агентства: подходы
На Ваш взгляд, была ли аккредитация направлена преимущественно на контроль стандартов или на повышение качества?	
Показалось ли Вам, что члены комиссии в достаточной степени квалифицированы или же компетентны для оценивания учебной/образовательной программы и внесения предложений?	
Опишите ваши положительные и отрицательные впечатления до начала аккредитации?	
Опишите ваши положительные и отрицательные впечатления после проведения аккредитации?	
Есть ли у Вас ко мне вопросы или дополнительные комментарии, которых я не озвучила?	