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:: EQUIPO DE PRODUCCIÓN

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Enrique Ravelo	José Antonio Vargas
Sara Maneiro	Yara Bastidas
Zulay Gómez	José Quintero
Yeritza Rodríguez	

:: CORRECCIÓN DE ESTILO

Annette Insanally

:: DIAGRAMACIÓN

Pedro Juzgado A.

:: TRADUCCIÓN

Yara Bastidas

Apartado Postal N^a 68.394
Caracas 1062-A, Venezuela
Teléfono: +58 - 212 - 2861020
E-mail: ess@unesco.org.ve / esosa@unesco.org.ve

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FOREWORD

Annette Insanally

Caribbean universities, largely operating in small island states (small-scale economies, populations, and political structures) represent catalysts for national and regional development. In this context, some have been more successful than others in responding to social demands, characterized by their degree of success in developing a critical mass of expertise, maintaining professional and intellectual legitimacy, their efficient use of resources while maintaining qualitative objectives and establishing external links. At the operational level, creating evaluation mechanisms, networks, regional centers, the use of new information technologies and delivery systems, advances in science and technology. (See OECD Publishing, **Beyond GDP: Measuring What Counts for Economic and Social Performance - Country-experiences with using well-being indicators to steer policies**, November 27, 2018).

An important consideration for Caribbean higher education institutions (HEIs) is how to ensure that they are not left behind in the global thrust for resilience and survival amidst a multiplicity of man-made and natural disasters. In this context, the institutions' focus on continuous quality improvement can be a worthy mechanism if a multi-pronged, institution-wide approach is taken for a rational response to the inherent challenges.

Increasingly, Caribbean institutions are recognizing that a value-added mechanism could be transformational partnerships to cultivate global dialogue and expand the capacity of each institution for educating students, conducting research and serving communities. This calls for complementary regional action, whereby the combined strengths of the network of institutions can be harnessed and weaknesses mitigated, strategic action and best practice can be shared and emulated and challenges and failures analyzed. Of merit would be the production of a regional database informing on successful activities and new ideas of higher education practitioners working on solving global problems through innovative international collaboration. This would set the agenda and establish partnerships for future initiatives in key development areas: Priorities for LAC countries; Strategy and Policy; Research Collaboration; Student Mobility (including short-term, project-based and practical professional experiences); Faculty Mobility and Collaboration; Collaboration with the Productive Sector to Address Global Challenges; Innovative Use of Technology for

International Collaboration; Resource Mobilization and Partnership Building for Sustainable Development; Transformative agendas; Curriculum revitalization and cross-cutting themes; Teaching and Learning Effectiveness and implementation of Quality Policy.

An important point of departure is the fact that 2019 is a milestone year for the Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030). It includes the first comprehensive review of progress on the entire 2030 Agenda since implementation began in 2016. This review will be held as the 74th Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) kicks off in September 2019. Twenty-one (21) of the SDGs'169 targets will mature in 2020, and with 12 of them focused on biodiversity, they are essential for the success of the SDGs and the Paris Agreement on climate change. The Caribbean has a critical window of opportunity for clear and coherent action by Member States to address the future of these targets.

In January 2019, The University of the West Indies (The UWI) was selected by the International Association of Universities (IAU) as its global leader in the mobilization of research and advocacy for the achievement of a climate-smart world. The UWI has already selected a global cluster of universities from Europe, Africa, Asia, the Americas and Oceania to assist in the task of achieving SDG 13 having recognised decades ago that climate change, rising sea levels and ocean temperatures, were an existential threat to the Caribbean, small island states, and the world, and to this end provided a body of scientific knowledge to prove and promote the case. The UWI's commitment to supporting the Caribbean region in the development of a culture of resilience and resilience planning as part of its Triple A Strategic Plan 2017-2022 is evidenced through a number of initiatives with global impact. In August 2018, The UWI was selected by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank, and Virgin United to host the launch of the Caribbean Climate-Smart Accelerator, a ground-breaking initiative to support the Caribbean becoming the world's first 'climate-smart zone'. (Sir Hilary Beckles, www.uwi.edu)

Caribbean HEIs would do well to participate in Forums which provide a unique interface for them to share their experiences and strategies for advancing the sustainable development agenda. The Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI), a partnership between UN-DESA, UNESCO, UNEP, UN Global Compact's Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) initiative, UNU and UN-Habitat, is one of the key implementation partners of the Global Action Program on Education for Sustainable Development (GAP)¹ and is a forum for dialogue and for sharing how universities are integrating the SDGs into sustainability strategies in the form of research, teaching, pedagogy, and campus

¹ GAP, which was launched in 2014 in the follow-up of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) (2005-2014), seeks to generate and scale-up Education for Sustainable Development and accelerate progress towards sustainable development. All higher education institutions may join the network freely.

practices. Students could join, and be actively engaged in national and international student organizations, to ensure their voice is heard and receive the necessary support.

UNESCO-ISEALC has an integral role to play in this and is galvanizing the endorsement by regional HEIs of a consistent and coherent plan of action (CRES 2018 Plan of Action) and so guarantee their commitment to joint action for the sake of the region's sustainable development and to ensure that the region is not left out of global efforts and achievements. It is envisaged that regional networks will contribute to the creation of a Regional Common Knowledge Space intended to harness the productive good of regional HEIs and be conducive to the creation of harmonized accreditation systems, increased facilitation of joint programmes and increased accessibility to the regional HEI product. An important partner would be the Caribbean Nucleus of the Regional Center for Cooperation in Higher Education (CRECES) with which the Universities Caribbean Association has a Cooperation Agreement.

Current strategies and practices at Caribbean HEIs are trending towards a value-creating use of knowledge resources for innovation and entrepreneurship. This stems from an increasing awareness that to effectively support entrepreneurship and innovation, HEIs themselves need to be entrepreneurial and innovative in how they organise education, research and engagement with business and the wider world. Several HEIs have taken a proactive approach and piloted new ways of integrating new teaching methods into their curricula, developing activities to stimulate the entrepreneurial mindset, supporting start-ups, strengthening collaboration with business and the wider world, and taking a more international approach to their activities.

The Youth Progress Index is one of the first ever concepts for measuring the quality of life of young people independently of economic indicators. This framework can be a significant contribution to the policy debate, including for advocacy, as well as scholarly research, on measuring performance of societies related to youth matters, and defining progress beyond economic achievements. Young people from around the globe must be encouraged to take advantage of opportunities to discuss, understand, share, find solutions to and develop strategies on Caribbean and global issues pertaining to ocean conservation and preservation, marine pollution, climate change-related impacts on the oceans, sustainable blue economy, coral reefs and fisheries, among others. Young people are directly affected by these problems, and actively engaging youth on sustaining and improving the health of our oceans is imperative if we want to successfully implement the SDGs, especially Goal 14 (life under water). (POLICY TOOLKIT Youth Entrepreneurship for the Green and Blue Economies, published by The Commonwealth Secretariat, 2018). Linguistic differences must not constitute a barrier to integrated action for development.

Science and technology is generally considered key to the future of all developing countries and an important solution to inequality in our societies. Caribbean HEIs must participate in inter-related local and global action to encourage our children to think as innovators; increase the number of science academies in our communities; increase access to education using internet technology to greater numbers of our population and mobilize policy support for development and capacity.

The articles in this edition address these issues of human capital management and development and provide us with important information for a better understanding of the challenges facing our higher education sector.

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Topic 3:

The transformative role of Caribbean Higher Education

- **L'ignorance commune, obstacle à la construction caribéenne**
Dr Fred Reno, Professeur de science politique,
Université des Antilles, Pole Martinique
- **Transatlantic intellectual networks in the General Studies university reform movement: the role of Puerto Rico**
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- **Les représentations des dirigeants des écoles supérieures et universités haïtiennes du rôle des professeurs dans le développement la recherche en Haïti.**
Jean-Michel CHARLES
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- **An analysis of a framework of internal influential factors affecting the progress and outcomes of accreditation processes at the University of Curaçao**
Sharine A. Isabella
University of Curaçao Dr. Moises da Costa Gomez

An analysis of a framework of internal influential factors affecting the progress and outcomes of accreditation processes at the University of Curaçao

Sharine A. Isabella

:: ABSTRACT

As of the beginning of this century, the University of Curaçao (UoC) started to implement preliminary activities to attain the accredited status for its programs by the Netherlands-Flemish Accreditation Organisation (NVAO). These exercises were highly successful since in its first attempt the UoC obtained the accredited status for the great majority of its programs. Based on a case study approach, in this paper the result of an analysis of these accreditation processes are presented to illustrate how the UoC has managed the great challenges encountered and to

identify the internal factors that had an impact on the progress and outcomes of these processes. This study, which was as part of a PhD process, led to the design of a heuristic framework comprising of enablers and barriers affecting accreditation processes. This framework can generically be used as a descriptive, prescriptive and analytical instrument for the design, implementation and monitoring of accreditation processes, particularly in small universities.

Keywords: accreditation process, academic programs.

Analyse d'un ensemble de facteurs d'influence internes influant sur les progrès et les résultats des processus d'accréditation à l'Université de Curaçao

Sharine A. Isabella

:: RÉSUMÉ

Dès le début du siècle, l'Université de Curaçao (UoC) a mis en œuvre des activités préliminaires ayant pour objectif l'accréditation de ses programmes par l'Organisation d'accréditation néerlandaise-flamande (NVAO). Ces activités se sont révélées très réussies car à la première tentative l'UoC a obtenu le statut d'établissement agréé pour la grande majorité de ses programmes. Fondé sur une approche d'études qualitatives, ce document présente le résultat d'une analyse de ces processus d'accréditation afin d'illustrer comment l'UoC a fait face aux grands défis rencontrés et d'identifier les facteurs internes qui ont

influencé le progrès et les résultats de ces processus. Ces études, qui faisaient partie d'une thèse de doctorat, ont abouti à la conception d'un cadre heuristique comprenant des facilitateurs et des obstacles affectant les processus d'accréditation. Ce cadre peut généralement être utilisé comme un instrument descriptif, normatif et analytique pour la conception, la mise en œuvre et le suivi de processus d'accréditation, notamment dans les petites universités.

Mots-clés: processus d'accréditation, programmes académiques.

Un análisis del marco de factores internos influyentes que afectan el progreso y los resultados de los procesos de acreditación en la Universidad de Curaçao

Sharine A. Isabella

:: RESUMEN

A comienzos de este siglo, la Universidad de Curazao (UoC) inició la implementación de actividades preliminares para obtener el estado acreditado para sus programas por la Organización de Acreditación Neerlandés Flamenca (the Netherlands-Flemish Accreditation Organisation) (NVAO). Estas actividades fueron extremadamente exitosas, ya que en este primer esfuerzo la Universidad de Curazao obtuvo el estado acreditado para la gran mayoría de sus programas.

Basado en un enfoque de estudio de caso (case study), en este artículo se presenta el resultado de un análisis de estos procesos de acreditación, para mostrar cómo la UoC ha manejado los grandes desafíos encon-

trados y para identificar los factores internos que tenían un efecto en el progreso y los resultados de los procesos en cuestión. Este estudio, que formaba parte de un proceso de doctorado (PhD), condujo al diseño de un marco heurístico que comprende habilitadores y barreras que afectan los procesos de acreditación. Este marco se puede utilizar genéricamente como un instrumento descriptivo, prescriptivo y analítico para el diseño, implementación y monitoreo de los procesos de acreditación, particularmente en universidades pequeñas.

Palabras clave: proceso de acreditación, programas académicos.

Uma análise de um quadro de fatores internos influentes que afetam o progresso e os resultados dos processos de acreditação na Universidade de Curaçao

Sharine A. Isabella

:: RESUMO

No início deste século, a Universidade de Curaçao (UOC) começou a implementar atividades preliminares para os programas credenciados pelo Flamengo Organização Holandesa de Acreditação (Organização Credenciamento Netherlands-Flamengo) (NVAO) estudo. Essas atividades foram extremamente bem-sucedidas, já que nesse primeiro esforço a Universidade de Curaçao obteve o status de credenciada para a grande maioria de seus programas.

Com base em uma abordagem de estudo de caso, este artigo apresenta os resultados de uma análise desses processos de acreditação, para mostrar como a UoC tem lidado com os

grandes desafios encontrados e identificar os fatores internos que surtem efeito nos progressos e resultados dos processos em questão. Este estudo, que fez parte de um processo de doutorado (PhD), levou ao desenho de uma estrutura heurística que inclui capacitadores e barreiras que afetam os processos de acreditação. Esta estrutura pode ser usada genericamente como um instrumento descritivo, prescritivo e analítico para o desenho, implementação e monitoramento de processos de acreditação, particularmente em pequenas universidades.

Palavras-chave: processo de acreditação, programas acadêmicos.

:: Introduction

The University of Curaçao Dr. Moises da Costa Gomez (UoC) is a small Dutch-Caribbean university located in the southern Caribbean region. The UoC has five faculties offering 30 programs at undergraduate or graduate level to about 1600 students. Responding to both international and local demands, UoC wishes to remain abreast of (inter)national developments in the higher education field, while ensuring to deliver qualified graduates equipped with the necessary competences to contribute to the sustainable socio-economic development of the young country Curaçao.

At the beginning of this century the accreditation process of its programs was initiated in order to obtain the accredited status by the Netherlands-Flemish Accreditation Organization (NVAO), following upon the Bologna Declaration in 1999 (Departement van Onderwijs, 2001). The Bologna process is a voluntary harmonization process of the participating European countries, including the Netherlands, aiming to create a European higher education area by introducing a two cycle higher education system (bachelor and master or PhD) and promoting convergence to improve compatibility, comparability and transparency at this educational level (Bologna Declaration, 1999; European University Association, 2001). Being part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands UoC in her role as the national university of the country Curaçao was expected to follow these European higher education developments as well (Commissie Hoger Onderwijs, 2002). In order to do so, the UoC gradually began with the improvement of several organizational and educational aspects and the implementation of various quality mechanisms in order to meet the NVAO accreditation requirements (UNA 2001, 2005, 2006).

A detailed analysis of the accreditation processes in UoC was one of the five case studies conducted during a PhD study (Isabella, 2014). The study aimed to identify internal encouraging (enablers) and hindering (barriers) factors affecting the progress and outcomes of accreditation processes, in particular in small countries located in less developed regions. Finally, a heuristic framework has been developed to facilitate future accreditation attempts.

There can be little dispute that currently obtaining an accredited status has become of great importance for programs offered in large as well as in small higher education institutions (HEI), regardless of their scale, location on this globe and developmental status. However, there are barely any studies on this topic in small universities. This paper presents the UoC case study as part of the conducted PhD study. This study led to insights in how even universities

like the UoC with limited resources can develop valuable quality assurance (QA) systems in order to overcome challenges of the globalized environment and meet international accreditation requirements. In this paper, after the theoretical framework, the applied research methodology, the concluding findings and the conceptualized heuristic framework consisting of internal influential factors are presented.

After analysing the accreditation processes in UoC the internal factors that have proven to be influential on the progress of accreditation processes and eventually on their outcomes will be presented in a practical heuristic framework to be used to design, implement and monitor future accreditation attempts in similar small universities, while aiming to obtain the highly coveted accredited status. This framework contributes to face the encountered challenges of this type of universities while they are aiming to tie down global quality demands to their local possibilities. The research question to be addressed in this paper is: *Which were the enabling and hindering factors encountered during the first accreditation period in UoC and how can these factors be controlled to guarantee future positive accreditation results?*

:: Theoretical framework

Accreditation is a public statement that a certain minimum level of quality has been achieved or surpassed by the institution or program assessed (Douma, 2004; Harvey and Newton, 2004, Westerheijden, 2001). To become accredited HEIs or their programs are expected to meet the standards set by the external accreditation organization. According to the Salamanca Convention of the European University Association:

The basic idea of accreditation (of which there are different interpretations) is that it is a formal, published statement on the quality of a programme or institution, following an evaluation based on agreed standards. Accreditation is a process and a status: a process in that it gives the opportunity and incentive for improvement and a status in that it provides public certification of acceptable quality. European University Association (2001, p.6).

Accreditation is hence considered an (inter)national instrument for external QA, mostly linked to an internal QA system within the HEI being reviewed (Westerheijden 2001). Governments tend to implement such a quality tool in order to guarantee that the graduates are indeed highly qualified and equipped

to contribute to the nation's sustainable development. This is also the case with the government of Curaçao and its accreditation mandate for UoC, even though this directive was never labelled as a legal requirement (Commissie Hoger Onderwijs, 2002; Isabella, 2011).

There is an emerging uniformity in the methodology of external QA, mostly linked to accreditation in the higher education sector (Lomas, 204; Isabella, 2014). Usually, three key steps are undertaken: self-evaluation resulting in a self-study report, followed by external peer review by selected peers, including site visit, resulting in the external review report. Eventually, based on the review report the accreditation organization decides to grant the accredited status, or provide conditional accreditation with an improvement period followed by reassessment or completely withhold the accredited status. Accreditation is awarded when the institution complies with the agreed quality standards. The NVAO also follows this accreditation approach (NVAO, 2003, 2011).

HEIs are expected to connect contemporary global quality demands to their local possibilities in order to attain accreditation. These institutions are considered as changing organisations. The global competitive environment and focus on 'knowledge society' and 'knowledge economy' require these institutions to be highly adaptive to the evolving competitive world. They are facing a period of unprecedented change as they struggle to respond to more external pressure (international and national) and also internal modifications affecting their internal organisational functioning and outcomes (Baer et al., 2008; Carnoy, 2005; van Ameijde et al., 2009).

Accreditation processes are considered as one of the reasons for diversified organizational change processes in HEIs. In this study three organizational theories were explored in order to identify internal organizational factors that may affect the progress and outcomes of organizational change processes and on the long run also influencing the progress of accreditation processes.

Organizations can be considered as open systems in interaction with their environment (Carnoy, 2005; Hooiberg and Choi, 2001). *Open-system organizations* are characterized by their interdependency and connections within subsystems in- and outside the organization and clustering at different levels. The contingency theory holds that organizations adapt their structures in order to maintain a fit with changing contextual factors, so as to attain high performance (Donaldson, 2001, 2008). Consequently, contingency theorists claim that it is important to identify the contingency factors that are relevant in the environment in which an organization operates. They further assert that there is no

single best way to organize an organization, to lead a company or to make decisions. Leadership and decision-making styles that are effective in one situation may not be successful in other situations; it depends upon various internal and external contingency factors. Dill (1999) and Giesecke and McNeil (2004) assert that the success rate of an organization is also highly dependent of its ability to function as a *learning organisation*. The review of definitions illustrates three basic elements of learning organizations: an organisation skilled at acquiring new knowledge, transferring this new knowledge across the organisation and modifying the way it operates according to the acquired knowledge. Accordingly, organisations need to be learning and consequently modifying themselves in order to meet continuous internal and external developments. Summarizing it can be stated that organisations can thus be analysed as open systems, in interaction with their environment, and they can function as learning entities acquiring, sharing and developing (new) knowledge. This illustrates the connection between open-system theory, contingency theory and the theory on learning organizations, all three organisational theories claiming to analyse the impact of organisational developments. From these three organizational theories, five internal factors potentially affecting change processes such as accreditation processes were derived (Isabella, 2014):

Organizational structure

Mintzberg (2001) indicates that HEIs are usually considered as professional bureaucracies due to their organizational structure. The responsibilities are granted based on professionalism. According to Donaldson (2001) the most effective organizational design is where the structure fits the contingencies. The division of the tasks, authorities and responsibilities are expected to be in accordance with the delineated roles and accountabilities lines set by the organizational structure. And according to Mintzberg (2001) these are organized in line with a professional bureaucracy.

Leadership and management style

As described by Baer et al. (2008) and Van Ameijde et al. (2009), leaders and managers are expected to ensure that plans are executed, encourage ownership of plans of action by all stakeholders so they take their responsibility. Leadership in academic settings involves the development of a vision on QA and accreditation, promoting this vision, encouraging its implementation and ensuring that this institutional vision is seen and used as an opportunity for continuous quality improvement. Accreditation is considered as a shift of power from educators to managers, infiltrating the professional autonomy at the operating level.

Accordingly managers at the different levels of HEIs ought to play a prominent role as steering officers in quality management and implementation of internal quality policies and hence in accreditation processes.

Quality culture

The existence of a quality culture within an organization refers to the commitment of all involved to responsible, long-term goal oriented work, meeting and exceeding pre-set quality standards and to be reflective about that, thereby creating a ‘culture of evidence’ at all organizational levels (Harvey and Stensaker, 2008; Lomas, 2004; Sursock, 2011). Accordingly, developing a quality culture is expected to have a positive impact on accreditation processes.

Available resources

Baer et al. (2008) state that the quality and quantity of the available financial, human and facilities resources also have an impact on the progress of accreditation processes (). Insufficient availability of resources can obstruct the implementation of quality control and quality improvement actions and therefore hold back the accreditation process.

Internal quality assurance policy

Although the previous potential influential factors have been described as stand-alone variables, they can all be addressed as part of the internal QA policy (Douma, 2004; Harvey and Newton, 2004; Lomas, 2004). This policy takes the organizational structure as a starting point and is expected to take due account of the leadership and management capabilities, the (non-)existence of a quality culture and the availability of resources. This policy plan outlines, among other things, the internal QA system and the lines of authorities and responsibilities among the involved stakeholders and is usually arranged in such a way to comply with the quality standards of the involved external quality agency, illustrating the link between internal and external QA.

From this literature exploration, quality as a transformation process and hence, the concept of quality as a result of change, is most relevant for this study. The emphasis in the transformation view on quality is on improvement and change rather than stakeholder or product focused (Douma, 2004; Harvey and Newton, 2004). Harvey and Newton (2004) and Westerheijden (2013) claim that in line with the perspective of quality as part of a transformation process, a link between QA and quality improvement is evident. Furthermore, Harvey and

Newton (2004) state that there should be an improvement function connected to quality monitoring mechanisms and procedures to encourage institutions to reflect upon their practices and to further develop. This approach to QA, directed to continuous quality improvement is known as the Plan, Do, Check and Act (PDCA) cycle, advocated by Deming in the industrial sector in the 1950s and later adopted in all other sectors (Douma, 2004; Isabella, 2014; Parri, 2006).

Considering more authors in the field of QA and quality improvement in higher education, Lomas (2004) asserts that QA activities give HEIs a means by which they can find out whether their academic programs and performances are comparable with those of other institutions, meeting national expectations and international demands. Martin and Stella (2007) state that if a HEI wants to become part of this highly competitive world it has to prove it meets international quality standards. So, it must be 'accredited'.

Hence, accreditation has become one prime external QA vehicle that HEIs use to prove that the quality of their educational programs complies with quality standards on an international level. Over the years there has been an evolution of external QA, moving towards a system that is legally managed by the national government, externally driven, making use of internationally recognized external quality agencies, and resulting in public reports based on summative judgments (Douma, 2004; Westerheijden, 2013). But in many cases both the internal and external functions of QA (improvement and accountability) are served (Isabella, 2014).

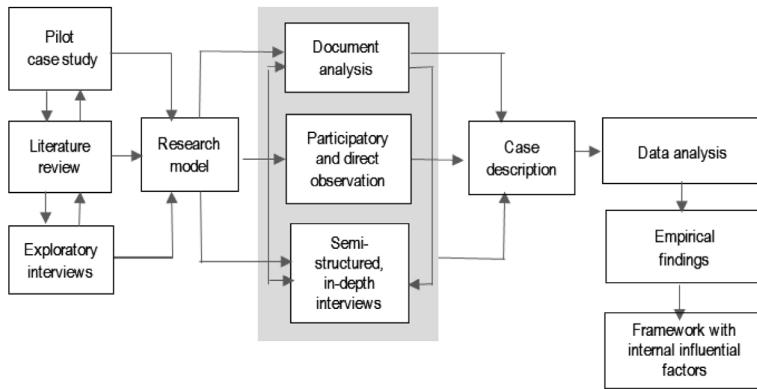
:: Research methodology

This study can be characterized as a combination of an exploratory and an explanatory qualitative case study research. Following on what Yin (2009) and Gerring (2007) indicate, conducting a case study allowed thorough investigation of a particular, contemporary phenomenon (accreditation process) in a well-defined context (national university). Only by looking at details of accreditation processes, will it become evident if the selected variables can be actually identified as encouraging or countervailing factors during such processes.

A pilot case study was done in an *exploratory way*, applying the research method of 'organizational self-ethnography' (Hamdan, 2012). In addition, ten exploratory interviews were conducted with staff members of NQA, QANU and NVAO, three of the evaluation agencies involved in the accreditation processes in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Together with the literature review, they contributed to the conceptualization of a research model.

Answering the research question entails the explanatory part of this study. The answer explains the variables which actually had an impact on the progress of such processes and their effect on the results. Figure 1 outlines the research process.

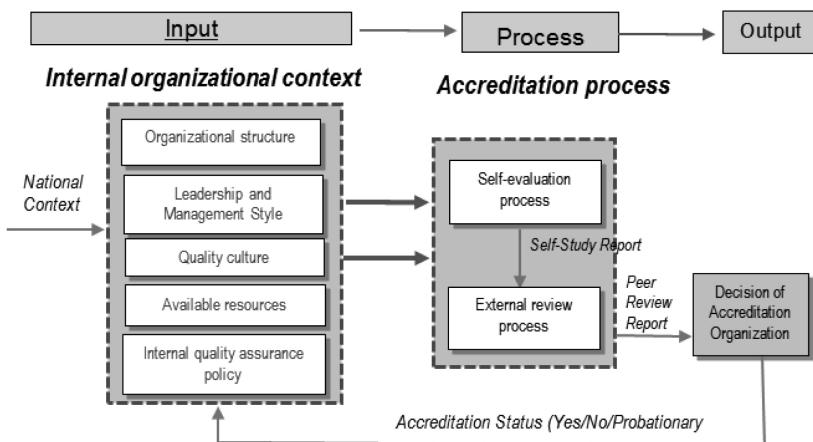
Figure 1. Outlines the research process



Based on Isabella, 2014, p.33

Figure 2 presents the research model. Five independent variables (internal organizational factors) may have an encouraging or hindering effect on the progress towards accreditation and eventually on the achieved outcomes (dependent variables).

Figure 2. The Research Model



Based on Isabella, 2014, p. 114

Participatory observation, document analysis and ten in-depth semi-structured interviews with staff members of the university were the three sources of data collection in order to obtain extensive information of the UoC case during accreditation processes. Combining these three sources supplied data acquisition from a variety of respondents and also provided more in-depth information from different perspectives, which contributed to enhance the study's validity. In addition, following on Eisenhardt (1989) to confirm the validity of the research process triangulation of the generated data took place, thereby increasing the ability to interpret the findings.

Moving throughout the challenging endeavour towards attainment of an accredited status and consistently working to maintain this status assume that the identified potential internal influential factors are predominantly present as enablers. In this study, each independent variable was operationalized in indicators with measurable components, as presented in figure 1. On the basis of high or positive values of most of its indicators an independent variable *was expected* to have a positive influence on the process of accreditation, so to be identified as a *potential* enabler (+) or in case of negative impact as a *potential* barrier (-). Whether it *actually* had the expected impact depended on the results of the analysis. In case an indicator did not act as a barrier even though not all positive conditions were present to call it an enabler, it was marked as neutral (0).

:: Case description

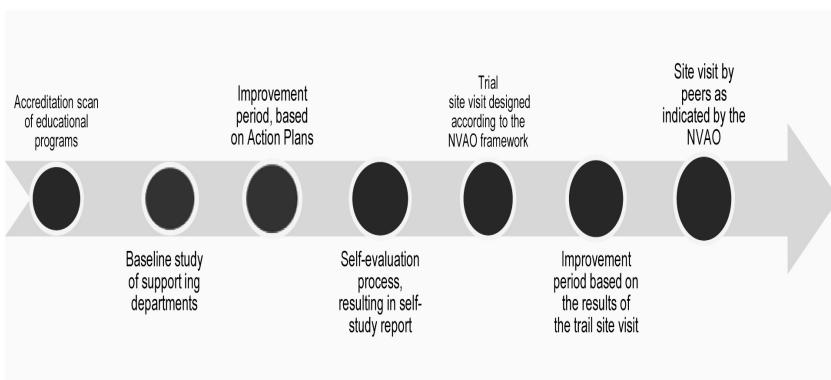
The UoC was established in 1979 as a national university for the former Netherlands Antilles . With the establishment of this university the government aimed to institutionalize a national instrument for local capacity building so to promote further sustainable socio-economic development of the Antillean society, while at the same time addressing the phenomenon of brain drain (Isabella, 2013; Narain, 2004). Too many students left to study abroad after their secondary school, never returning back to their home country. Considering the achieved quantitative and qualitative output of UoC since its establishment, this university has demonstrated considerable progress in achieving the original goal of becoming a national capacity builder with its graduates occupying important positions in the private sector and in public organizations as well (Isabella, 2013).

The year 2000 can be considered as the year of a great turnaround for the UoC. In that year the university started an improvement process intended to face the various organizational challenges and consequently to improve the quality of its programs, with the aim to eventually achieve an accredited status for its programs (Commissie Totalbeeld UNA-problematiek, 2000).

For the UoC attaining and maintaining the accredited status for its programs serves several purposes (UNA 2001, 2005, 2006, 2011b; UoC, 2013). According to its strategic ambitions, obtaining the accredited status for all its programs not only contributes to the UoC to deliver highly qualified graduates to the local community, but it also enhance the possibilities for the university to secure a more competitive position on the international higher education market. Additionally, accreditation is considered as a key element in assuring that UoC complies with the agreements made during the 3rd tripartite meeting of ministers of education in the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 2001. During this ministers' meeting it was agreed that nationally funded HEIs located in the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba would have to meet the same quality standards set by the NVAO for their counterparts in the Netherlands (Departement van Onderwijs, 2001). Finally, accreditation has also emerged as an important instrument to provide accountability to funding agencies, including the national government.

Figure 3 portraits the steps undertaken during the accreditation processes of UoC bachelor and master programs, according to NVAO requirements (UNA, 2008, 2009).

Figure 3.
Steps undertaken during accreditation processes at UoC



The UoC has faced major challenges in order to meet the quality standards for higher education programs set by the NVAO (Isabella, 2011). However, after years of thorough preparation 84% of the submitted programs succeeded

in their first attempt to obtain the accredited status by the NVAO; of the 16% that received conditional accreditation, 50% still did not meet the accreditation requirements after the granted two year period for improvement and are in the process of being phased out. Table 1 provide an overview of the achieved accreditation results by the UoC programs.

Table 1. Overview accreditation results UoC

		Bachelor programmes					Master programmes					
		total	a	b	c	x.	y	a	b	c	x	y
20010 - 2012	N=25	60%	8%	0	n.a.	n.a.	24%	8%	0	n.a.	n.a.	

a: accredited; b: conditional accreditation; c: non-accreditation; x: being phased out; y: to be accredited; n.a.: not applicable

:: Analysis of the accreditation processes

While looking back at the accreditation experiences of the University, the faced concerns were related to international influences due to ongoing global developments, national issues originating from the local context and internal institutional challenges (Isabella, 2014; UoC, 2011a). All these factors had an impact on the internal QA and quality improvement processes and on the long on the accreditation endeavour, yet only the internal organizational factors can be swayed by this university. In order to facilitate future accreditation attempts it will be an asset if this university could strengthen the encountered positive internal influential factors (enablers) while weakening those factors that could negatively influence (barriers) the progress and outcomes of its accreditation processes. It is within this context that identifying the enablers and barriers during accreditation processes at UoC became a valuable exercise.

Gathering information by the three data collection methods, the actual influence of each indicator on the accreditation processes in the UoC was assessed. The mechanisms underlying the functioning of the indicators were unravelled and finally the actual enabling factors were identified. The impact of the five independent variables on the progress of the accreditation processes in the UoC were as follows.

Organizational structure

Although according to its legal regulations UoC ought to be centralized, in its daily practice a decentralized organizational structure (indicator) could be detected, with the Council of Deans demanding great involvement in the decision making. This practically decentralized decision-making structure (indicator) has led to great differences among many other indicators across the faculties. However, these two indicators had barely any effect on the progress of the accreditation processes.

Leadership and management style

All institutional leaders and deans at UoC were interested in attaining the accreditation goal. Across the several institutional leaders (indicator) during the research period the pattern was to delegate in an indirect manner (not written on paper) large responsibilities to the institutional quality manager to direct the accreditation processes at her own pace and based on her professional expertise and experience; the institutional leaders were committed, but contributed from a distance. For sure they cannot be labelled as barrier, but also neither as enabler. No managerial pattern matching could be derived at faculty level. Of the deans (indicator) 60% can be labelled as steering officers, the others allowed the institutional quality manager to lead his/her accreditation processes; they were merely participants. In any case, the institutional leader had no impact on the progress of the accreditation processes. It was largely thanks to the commitment of the deans, the institutional quality manager and other staff involved that the pursuit for accreditation of UoC's programs ensued in positive results.

Quality culture

At UoC no general quality culture could be perceived; quite some differences existed regarding the evolving stage of a quality culture in the different faculties and several organizational cultures co-exist within UoC. The focus of the managers at all levels was mainly concentrated on reaching the accredited status instead of embedding a structural approach of continuous quality improvement and encouraging the development of a quality culture. Care for quality (indicator), shared responsibility and ownership (indicator), norms, values traditions (indicator) and communication and interaction among the internal stakeholders (indicator) could not be perceived and had a delaying influence on the progress of the accreditation processes. The absence of an embedded

and perceptible quality culture caused some years of delay in the scheduled accreditation processes. Most indicators actually did not encourage the progress of the accreditation processes, yet acted mostly as barriers; only the indicator 'Commitment of internal stakeholders' was substantially present.

Available resources

UoC can be categorized as a small, resource-poor university, with insufficient human (indicator) and financial (indicator) resources. In the beginning lack of financial resources affected the progress of the accreditation processes. The regular annual budget could not serve the accreditation goal as well; additional funds were only granted for the first two years of accreditation processes. Lack of the required financial resources also had repercussions on the availability of other resources. Quality improvement activities were constantly held against the availability of funds compared to other daily routines. In any case, the NVAO's quality standards have facilitated the allocation of the limited funds primarily to related quality improvement activities. Accordingly, the lack of financial and human resources actually hampered the progress of accreditation processes. The available facilities (indicator) had no impact on the accreditation processes.

Internal quality assurance policy

An institutional internal QA policy document (indicator) was available. However, the content of this policy plan was not carried out in practice. A fairly decentralized quality structure (indicator) was detected, providing the faculties only with guidelines based on the 'unity in diversity' principle, allowing each faculty to develop its own internal QA system (indicator). However, great similarities could be detected in the 'who, what and how' of these systems since they all aim to meet the NVAO's quality standards in this matter. Even though there were countless complaints by the academic staff regarding their increased work load due to the accreditation efforts, most of them were still highly committed and involved (indicator) so as to reach the accreditation goal. Additionally, a large number of external experts (indicator) were hired to assist to direct the course of the accreditation processes, so encouraging their progress. Hence, most indicators did not score well; only the involvement of stakeholders and external experts acted as enablers. A summary of all study findings are presented in table 2.

Table 2. Summary of the study findings

Variable	Indicators	Operationalization	Findings	Impact
Organizational structure	Organizational chart	Centralized Decentralized	Centralized	0
	Decision-making structure	Formalized Non-formalized	Not formalized	0
Leadership and management style	Role of institutional leader	Committed, involved and supportive At a distance	At a distance	0
	Management at faculty level	Steering office Merely participant	Diversified	+
Quality Culture	Care for quality	Existent Non-existent	Diversified	-
	Shared responsibility, ownership, cooperation and collaboration	High Low	Low	-
	Commitment of internal stakeholders	High Low	High	+
	Norms, values, traditions, customs, people behaviour	Present Not present	Not present	-
	Communication channels and interaction among internal stakeholders	Regulated Sketchy	Sketchy	-
Available Resources	Human resources	Sufficient Insufficient	Insufficient	-
	Financial resources	Sufficient Insufficient	Insufficient	-
	Facilities	Adequate Inadequate	Adequate	0
Internal Quality Assurance Policy	Document on Internal Quality Assurance Policy	Available Not available	Available	0

	Internal Quality Assurance System	Specified and implemented Not outlined	Not outlined	0
	Quality structure	In place Non existent	In progress	0
	Involvement of stakeholders	Structured Not structured	Not structured, but high	+
	Involvement of external experts	Extensive No involvement	Extensive	+

Based on Isabella 2014, p. 357.

Reflecting on the research findings shows that 24% of the indicators had an encouraging effect on the progress of accreditation processes in UoC, while 35% obstructed this progress, causing significant delays. Nevertheless, the accreditation goal was obtained for 84% of the programs. This study demonstrates that the actual enablers, i.e. management at faculty level fortified by the high commitment and involvement of (internal) stakeholders and the extensive involvement of external experts, were by far more dominant than the force of the encountered hindering factors. The data analysis also reveals that none of the indicators of organizational structure did have any effect on the accreditation processes. However, while studying the other indicators evidently the decision making structure has an indirect effect on them. So, disregarding this indicator in future accreditation attempts is not recommended. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that even though the institutional leaders acted from a distance, the fact that the institutional quality manager received delegated mandate to direct, control and push the accreditation processes, together with the high involvement and commitment of the deans played a determinant role, underpinning the overall enabling effect of both indicators of the variable 'leadership and management style' during accreditation processes.

):: Conclusion

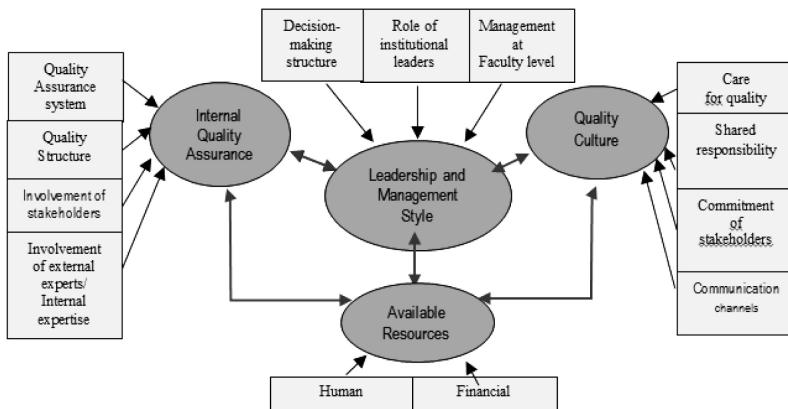
Based on the literature reviewed, each independent variable was assumed to have significant influence on the progress and outcomes of the studied accreditation processes at the UoC. The analysis uncovered the impact of each variable and the research findings contradict this preliminary, simple assumption of indispensability of each independent variable. At the end, it was evident that a compensatory relationship among the independent variables is more realistic than an additive one. It certainly became clear that a strict distinction between the variables was not realistic. In practice, the variables are highly connected

and greatly interrelated to each other; none of them can really operate independently.

The variable 'Leadership and Management style' appeared to be of eminent importance during accreditation processes. The driving force of institutional leaders and deans acting as steering officers will enable the development of a quality culture, manage in an effective and efficient way the available resources and also implement successfully the internal QA policy so to meet the accreditation requirements. Looking back at the analysis, the answer to the first part of the research question is that most of the enablers of the progress and outcomes of the accreditation processes in UoC were the indicators related to the 'human factor'.

At the end a complicated and complex picture emerges to illustrate how accreditation processes are affected. After excluding and regrouping the indicators, in figure 4 a framework based on the evidence of the UoC case study is delineated, representing a comprehensive overview of the potential internal influential independent variables operationalized into indicators. This framework can be used as a model for future research so as to facilitate the design, implementation and monitoring of the progress of the accreditation processes to enhance the success rate. It can generically be used by small universities, in particular those located in less developed global regions. It may be used not only as a descriptive and prescriptive instrument, but also as an analytical tool for the design, implementation and monitoring of accreditation processes. As such, it facilitates their progress and hence makes the achievement of a successful result more feasible. This provides the answer to the second part of the research question.

Figure 4. Framework of potential influential variables



Based on Isabella, (2014), p. 367.

The actual impact of each variable, even of each indicator, is on the one hand dependent on external and internal contingency factors and the ability of the HEI to operate as a learning organization, and also on the degree of interdependency from one variable on the others and from one indicator on others. Pulling on an indicator sets various other indicators in motion too. In any case, this framework can be used as guidance for decision makers in HEIs to determine on which variables and/or indicators their focus should be. Yet, it is no 'one-on-one' additive model: for instance, one cup extra of financial resources does not always lead to two additional cups of human resources, nor always results in a spoonful of progress towards accredited status. In addition, this framework can form the basis for the starting up of the accreditation process, illustrating its descriptive and exploratory functions. It can be used to conduct a baseline study at the beginning of an accreditation process to identify those indicators that could have a negative impact on its progress if not addressed adequately and promptly so to turn their effect in a positive direction. Conversely, those indicators primarily identified as potential enablers could be strengthened to facilitate the achievement of the aspired accredited status. This exemplifies its analytical function. So, to conclude, the progress of the accreditation process is reliant on the force of the enablers to neutralize the impact of the barriers.

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BIOGRAPHY NOTE

:: Sharine Isabella

After her Master of Science study “Interdisciplinary Educational Science”, she obtained her Ph.D. degree, where she did research into the internal influencing factors during accreditation processes in higher education. Both degrees she obtained at universities in the Netherlands.

After gaining work experience in the Netherlands, she held various positions in Curaçao at the Ministry of Education, including policy secretary of the Minister of Education.

She has been working at the University of Curaçao (UoC) since 2002 and holds the position of manager of the Department of Quality Assurance (DQA), who is responsible for the development, support and supervision of internal and external quality assurance processes.

In addition to supervising the UoC programs during their accreditation processes, during the past two decades Mrs. Isabella has also assisted the University of Aruba, the University of St. Martin and the Anton de Kom University of Suriname in their accreditation efforts.

She provides training courses in the field of education and with regard to quality assurance at local, regional and international institutions for higher education as well. Mrs. Isabella is also a certified internal auditor. She acts as an external auditor for the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization, NVAO, and also for the accreditation organization NOVA in Suriname. She was also vice-president of the Accreditation Agency Curaçao, a private accreditation body on Curacao.