



# Students' Level of Awareness of Accreditation Process: A Case of University College of Bahrain

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**Abstract:** Accreditation has become an essential element in educational sector especially when it comes to higher education level. One of the key success measures of the accreditation process is the involvement of all stakeholders in the process. To be involved in the process, the stakeholders must be aware of the importance of accreditation. One of the key stakeholders in the university is the student. The purpose of this study is to measure the level of University College of Bahrain (UCB) students' awareness of the importance of accreditation process taken place at the University. A survey questionnaire was used as the research instrument of this study. The questionnaire was distributed to 150 UCB students using convenience sampling technique. All of them filled up the questionnaire giving 100 percent response rate. The survey results reveal that UCB students are generally aware of the importance of accreditation as shown by their agreement to all statements in the questionnaire. Among the importance of accreditation process that obtained an elevated level of awareness are "Accredited Universities give their graduates a better opportunity to get a job after graduation," "Accredited universities give their graduates a better opportunity to succeed in their workplace" and "Accreditation strengthens the university's image." The study is expected to benefit UCB management as an input to make strategic decisions for a success accreditation process. This is because students perceive accreditation process as very important. In addition, this study can also be used by Higher Education Council (HEC) of Ministry of Education in Bahrain as an input for them in making policies with regards to the awareness campaign of its accreditation process. Since the study is the first study conducted in Bahrain in this aspect to the best knowledge of the researchers, the results of this study can be used as a reference for further studies in the Kingdom and other studies worldwide.

**Keywords:** Accreditation, Students' Awareness, University College of Bahrain.

## 1. Introduction

Accreditation has become an important element in educational sector especially when it comes to higher education level. Accreditation can be defined as a validation process in which universities, colleges and other higher learning institutions are evaluated by a peer review board using standards set by an accreditation agency or higher education authority in which those institutions are operating. Accreditation

is also currently being used by students and parents as one of the deciding factors when they want to choose a college or a university (ASPA, 2013). As a result, it is important for each college and university around the world to be accredited. The same situation applies to all colleges, and universities in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The Higher Education Council (HEC), and the Ministry of Education in the Kingdom of Bahrain has recently initiated accreditation process for all higher learning



institutions operating in the Kingdom. In 2015, the HEC signed an agreement with British Accreditation Council (BAC) in which the BAC will help the HEC in developing accreditation documentation, training the HEC staff for all the accreditation aspects and supervising private and public institutions in this regards.

In general, there are eight areas required by the HEC for universities or colleges applying for accreditation in Bahrain at the institutional level namely (1) Governance, Strategy and Financial Management; (2) Academic Management and Administration; (3) Teaching, Learning and Assessment; (4) Research and Innovation; (5) Economy and Society Impact; (6) Student Recruitment, Support, Guidance and Progression; (7) Premises, Facilities and Learning Resources; and (8) Quality Management, Assurance and Enhancement (HEC, 2015). Those areas are required by most accreditation agencies across the world (NEASC, 2013). Once an institution is accredited, its status provides the potential students and their parents with an assurance that the institution follows with the quality requirements set by the HEC. Currently, most universities in Bahrain including University College of Bahrain (UCB) are in the process of applying for the HEC accreditation. UCB Management is vastly aware of the importance of accreditation for the University. Therefore, all staffs at the University are involved in the preparation for the accreditation process. UCB also wants to make sure that all its stakeholders including students are aware of the ongoing accreditation process. Awareness is crucial since awareness has been empirically found to have a positive relationship with market preference. Therefore, it is important to measure the level of students' awareness towards the accreditation process which is currently taking place in UCB.

Given the importance of the accreditation and awareness to the success of higher learning institution including UCB, this study aims to measure the level of UCB students' awareness towards the accreditation process taken place at the University. The study is expected to benefit UCB Management as an input for them to set

up a necessary strategy to enhance the level of the students' and other stakeholders' awareness levels towards the accreditation process. In addition, this study can also be used by Higher Education Council (HEC) of the Ministry of Education in Bahrain as an input for them in making policies with regards to the awareness campaign of its accreditation process. Since to the best knowledge of researchers this study is the first study conducted in Bahrain in this aspect, the results of this study can be used as a reference for further studies in the Kingdom and other studies worldwide.

This study consists of five sections. Section 2 discusses the relevant literature related to the study. Section 3 explains the research methodology applied in the study. Section 4 comes out with the findings of the study and their discussion. Section 5 concludes the study and comes out with several recommendations to improve the students' awareness based on the findings of the study.

## 2. Literature Review

This section discusses some available previous studies in the area of accreditation and students' awareness of accreditation process. Review of the available literature exhibits that there are significant numbers of studies that discuss the impact of accreditation on Higher Education Institutions (HEI). However, there is a limited number of studies that discuss the students' awareness of the accreditation process. This section is divided into two parts namely the impact of accreditation on the HEI and the students' awareness of the accreditation process.

### 2.1 *The Impact of Accreditation on the Higher Education Institutions*

In the highly competitive environment, accreditation is a process to reveal the quality of higher education institutions (HEI), strengthen their ranking in the market, and innovate. Accreditation has become the backbone of HEI to survive in the globalization era and in encountering the changes in the Higher Education sector. The accreditation standards can facilitate the HEI "organizations' development" leading to



a “higher social impact” (Cooper et. al., 2014), a commitment to higher quality (Cornuel, 2007) and higher financial performance (Chow-Chua et. al., 2003). AACSB’s<sup>1</sup> new mission is “to foster engagement, accelerate innovation, and amplify impact in business education, with a renewed focus on transforming business education for global prosperity” translates the importance of accreditation (AACSB, 2016). Similarly, the accreditation associations favor measurable outcomes and practices derived from continuous sustainability. Regnier et al. (2005) imply that the standards and the information flow between organizations and the accrediting commissions play a crucial role in the change process. Furthermore, the number of accredited universities is increasing every year. For example, as per the AACSB (2016), currently, “761 business schools in 52 countries and territories including the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) that have earned AACSB Accreditation” as compared to 672 in 2013. In April 2016, the University of Bahrain has been the first University in the Kingdom of Bahrain to be accredited by AACSB, which demonstrates the interest of the GCC with the accreditation process.

The New England Association of Schools & Colleges NEASC<sup>2</sup> conducted a survey in 2005 that analyzed the results of the regional accreditation on the quality of education. The findings focused on qualitative and quantitative aspects affecting the quality of accredited universities in both the short-run and the long-run: “97 % of higher education survey

1. AACSB: The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) connects educators, students, and business to achieve a common goal: to create the next generation of great leaders. Synonymous with the highest standards of excellence since 1916, AACSB provides quality assurance, business education intelligence, and professional development services to over 1,600 member organizations and nearly 800 accredited business schools worldwide.

2. Founded in 1885, the New England Association of Schools & Colleges, Inc. (NEASC), is the nation’s oldest regional accrediting association whose mission is the establishment and maintenance of high standards for all levels of education, from pre-K to the doctoral level.

respondents agree that accreditation fulfilled the function of promoting quality at their institutions.” (Alam, 2006). However, in the Kingdom of Bahrain, few studies examined the importance of accreditation and more precisely no study was conducted on the student’s awareness towards accreditation. An article published by a local newspaper, which entitles “Books Could Replace Oil,” interviewed Prof. Riyadh Hamza, the Secretary General of Higher Education Council (HEC) of Ministry of Education, Kingdom of Bahrain. Prof. Hamza views the Kingdom has a potential to be an educational hub in 10 years in the GCC, and he also states that “the introduction of accreditation will give confidence to students in the region, and will help the HEI in the Kingdom to implement a continuous improvement program such as focusing on teaching quality and student skills” (Dt. Network, 2015”1-3).

## 2.2 Students’ Awareness toward Accreditation Process

During the last decade, in response to the internationalization and multicultural of HEI potential students’ perspectives about education have changed. They are more concerned about accreditation and quality levels to guarantee a promising job opportunity and meet the expectations of the employers in the global economy (Eaton, 2012). The urgent need for advocacy in HEI is inducing the accreditation as a route to sustainability and higher performance. Potential students often distinguish the numerous choices for universities by considering accredited HEI. This sheds the light that the accreditation process is a crucial factor for all the university stakeholders including the students. “From a prospective student’s point of view, such validation is particularly important to help the student in identifying reputable institutions and provide assurance that the institutions will maintain and update resources on a regular basis” (Kourik et. al., 2011). A study that targeted the Lebanese students’ views about accreditation in 2009 stated that “with respect to the true meaning of business program accreditation, the majority of accredited Business professors and students



interpreted the process in the right way and linked it to quality assurance and continuous improvement" (Menassa et.al., 2009).

From another angle, accreditation facilitates the student financial needs. Gaston (2013) highlighted that as per "The Higher Education Act of 1965" only students admitted to accredited universities will be eligible for the "Federal financial aid." Moreover, being interlinked to a higher quality of learning outcomes, accreditation demonstrates the significance of higher tuition fees of accredited Universities (Dicks & Taylor, 2005). Accordingly, students are more aware of accreditation and are willing to pay higher tuition fees if the university is accredited. A quantitative study gathered data through a questionnaire from 235 Lebanese students' at different universities then analyzed the relations of the data factors statistically by SPSS software derived the students' views about accreditation. First 77.4% of Lebanese students have heard about accreditation, second 67% agree or strongly agree that they are willing to pay higher tuition fees if the university was accredited, third 63% strongly agree that accreditation is valuable for their profession success, fourth 74.5 % agreed or strongly agreed that accreditation eases transfer between HEI (Al-Khoury et. al., 2014).

Based on the above studies, accreditation is vital and beneficial for the HEI all over the world. In addition, all the HEI's stakeholders including students must be aware of the accreditation process. However, referring to the available previous studies, no study evaluates the level of students' awareness of the accreditation process in any HEI in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Given the importance of the subject, this study aims to fill the gap by measuring the level of students' awareness of the accreditation process using University College of Bahrain (UCB) as a case study. UCB is one of the private universities in the Kingdom which offers three undergraduate programs and one master program. The Three undergraduate programs are Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, Bachelor of Science in Information Technology and Bachelor of Art

in Multimedia and Communication.<sup>3</sup> All the programs at UCB are currently in the process of being accredited by the HEC of Ministry of Education, Kingdom of Bahrain. To ensure the success of the accreditation process, all UCB's stakeholders including its students must be aware of the process. Therefore, this study plays an important role giving input to the management in term of the level of students' awareness of accreditation process at the college.

### 3. Methodology

This section describes the quantitative methodology followed to measure the student's awareness towards the accreditation process at UCB.

#### 3.1 Data Gathering

The data collection relied on using survey questionnaires. The study is targeting student's awareness of the importance of accreditation at University College of Bahrain (UCB). Thus, the sample compromised 150 UCB students who were selected using convenience sampling method, which is a kind of non-probability sampling technique. All 150 respondents filled up the questionnaire giving 100 percent response rate.

The questionnaire was composed of two sections. The first section collects data about the demographic profile of the students: gender, financial category, program, academic year, and their GPA. The second group consists of ten statements to examine the student's level of awareness in the accreditation process and its impact.

#### 3.2 Data Treatment

The study used SPSS software to analyze the gathered data statistically. The research employed the descriptive analysis to identify the weighted mean and the frequency distribution percentage of the responses following two equations:

The percentage of each score was computed with the use of this formula:

<sup>3</sup><http://www.ucb.edu.bh/academics>. Accessed on 18/07/2016



$$\% \text{ Distribution} = \frac{F}{N} \times 100$$

Where:

F= frequency of an item or response

N = total number of items or responses

Weighted Mean - The arithmetical average when all the scores are added and divided by the number of items obtained with the use of this formula:

$$M = \frac{\sum X}{N}$$

Where:

M = mean

$\sum X$  = Sum of the scores / measures in the Series

N = Number of cases

The above formula has been used by similar studies using a survey questionnaire as its research instrument (Hidayat and Al-Hur, 2016; Hidayat and Al-Hadrami, 2015; Hidayat et. al, 2017).

#### 4. Results and analysis

##### 4.1 Demographic of the Students

The distribution of the demographic characteristics of the sample represents: 59.1 percent female and 40.9 percent male as shown in Fig.1. Thus, the results indicate that gender distribution was normal and unbiased towards one gender.



Figure 1. Gender Distribution

Fig.2 illustrates the distribution of the collected data by programs the majorities are enrolled in the Business Administration Department (80%) since the Business Administration Department includes 51 percent of the total number of enrolled students at the University.

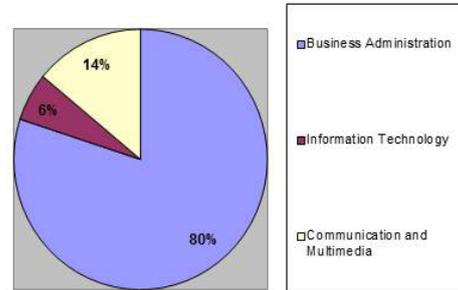


Figure 2. Programs Distribution

In addition, most of the students were senior students with 33 % as reflected in Fig.3.

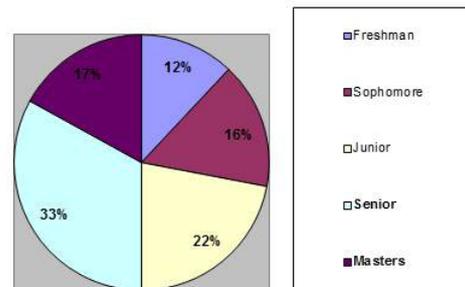


Figure 3. Academic Year Distribution

The researchers tackled another important demographic characteristic the financial category of the students. To get a clear idea of the different financial categories of students, 72 % of the students are self-sponsored compared to 11% benefit from the Financial Aid offered by the University and 17 % are granted a full scholarship (Fig. 4).

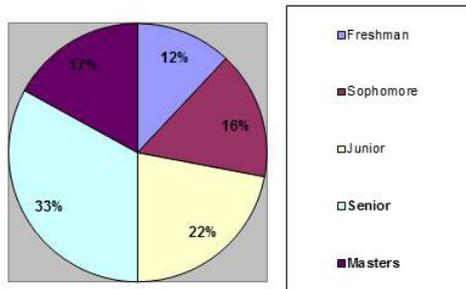


Figure 4. Financial Category Distribution

Fig. 5 illustrates the grade average point (GPA) was evenly distributed among the three categories (2-2.5, 2.5-3, 3-4) hence the results were not biased toward one academic standard.

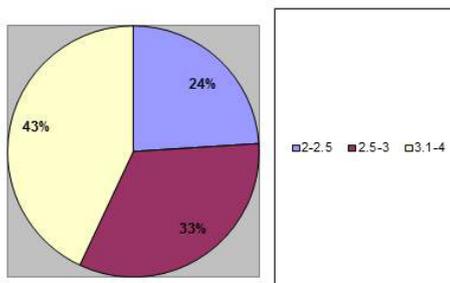


Figure 5. Grade Average point (GPA) Distribution

From the above demographic characteristics of the sample, it can be concluded that this survey involved all categories of UCB students. It means each category has its representative as the respondents in the survey.

#### 4.2 Analysis of Student's Awareness of Accreditation Process

In the second part of the questionnaire which was composed of ten statements used to measure the student's awareness of the accreditation process in different areas. The researchers used a five-value Likert-Scale ranging from 1 to 5. The scales used considered (1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neutral (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree. Table 1 below illustrates an average mean of 3.94 for the ten statements based on the students' responses. Considering the high average mean scores, this

can be interpreted as "agree." It can be observed that UCB students good level of awareness of the accreditation process and its impact on various levels such as improving the overall image of the University and providing them with a better opportunity in the workplace after graduation.

Table (1) Questionnaire Statement

Statements	N	Mean
X1- Accreditation Strengths the University's image	115	4.04
X2-Accreditation Processes measures efficiently the student's learning outcomes	115	3.93
X3 -- Accredited universities give their graduates a better opportunity to succeed in the workplace	115	4.10
X4-Accredited Universities give their graduates a better opportunity after graduation to find a job	115	4.13
X5-Accreditation leads to continuous improvements of resources	115	3.95
X6-Accreditation improves faculty competencies	115	3.90
X7- Enrolled at accredited programs facilitates students mobility among universities	115	3.91
X8-Being accredited by an international western agency or regional agency adds more credibility to the University	115	3.94
X9-Accreditation has value for money for universities	115	3.65
X10-Accreditation generates an awareness of self-development	115	3.86

From the ten statements, statement X4 "Accredited Universities give their graduates a better opportunity after graduation to find a job" and statement X3 "Accredited universities give their graduates a better opportunity to succeed in the workplace" were the two highest statements as compared to the mean score for other dimension impacts as reflected by Table 1 above.

In addition, Table 2 and Table 3 below reveal that 72% of the respondents answered that they either strongly agree or agree on that accreditation is important to find better opportunity after graduation to get a job and 77 % of them either strongly agree or agree that it



will give them a better opportunity to succeed in the workplace.

**Table (2) Frequency Analysis of X3: Accredited Universities Give their Graduate a better opportunity to succeed in the workplace**

<i>Lickert Scale</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly Disagree	1	0.9
Disagree	7	6.1
Neutral	23	20.0
Agree	32	27.8
Strongly Agree	52	45.2
Total	115	100

**Table (3) Frequency Analysis of X4: Accreditation Gives a Better Opportunity after Graduation to get a job**

<i>Lickert Scale</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly Disagree	4	3.5
Disagree	4	3.5
Neutral	19	16.5
Agree	34	29.6
Strongly Agree	54	47.0
Total	115	100

Another notable result can be shown by the frequency analysis in Table 4. It indicated that 31.3 % answered that they are neutral that accreditation has value for money for universities which implies that the respondents are more aware of the impact of accreditation on the quality of services related directly to them not to those related to the overall efficiency of the University.

**Table (4) Frequency Analysis of X9: Accreditation has value for money for universities**

<i>Lickert Scale</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly Disagree	7	6.1
Disagree	7	6.1
Neutral	36	31.3
Agree	34	29.6
Strongly Agree	31	27
Total	115	100

Previous studies showed that accreditation has a positive impact on the mobility of students between Universities. A study targeted Lebanese student found that 74.5 % of students agreed with this statement (Al Khoury et al., 2014). The result of our study showed in Table 5 that 67.8 % either agrees or strongly agree. The result of our study is in line with the results of Al-Khoury et. al. (2014). In addition, 74.8 % of the respondents either agreed or strongly agree that accreditation helps University to maintain and improve their overall image in various aspects as seen in Table 6. (Wolff, 1993, Roller et. al, 2003, Kourik, 2011)

**Table (5) Frequency Analysis of X7: Enrolled at accredited programs facilitates students mobility among universities**

<i>Lickert Scale</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly Disagree	1	0.9
Disagree	9	7.8
Neutral	27	23.5
Agree	40	34.8
Strongly Agree	38	33.0
Total	115	100

**Table (6) Frequency Analysis of X1 Accreditation Strengths the University's image**

<i>Lickert Scale</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly Disagree	2	1.7
Disagree	8	7.0
Neutral	19	16.5
Agree	40	34.8
Strongly Agree	46	40.0
Total	115	100

The study highlighted the positive impact of accreditation on different aspects of the University: the resources, the learning outcomes, the competency of its faculty members, self-development of its students. Table 7 through Table 10 illustrated that: 72.1 % of the respondents either agree or strongly agree that accreditation leads to continuous improvement of resources, 67.9 % either



agree or strongly agree that improves faculty competences, 72.2 %, 64.3% and 68.7 % respectively either strongly agree or agree that accreditation measures efficiently the self-learning of students, it generates awareness of self-development, and adds more credibility to the University.

**Table (7) Frequency Analysis of X5-Accreditation leads to continuous improvements of resources**

<i>Lickert Scale</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly Disagree	3	2.6
Disagree	8	7.0
Neutral	21	18.3
Agree	48	41.7
Strongly Agree	35	30.4
Total	115	100

**Table (8) Frequency Analysis of X6-Accreditation improves faculty competencies**

<i>Lickert Scale</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly Disagree	1	0.9
Disagree	11	9.6
Neutral	25	21.7
Agree	34	29.6
Strongly Agree	44	38.3
Total	115	100

**Table (9) Frequency Analysis of X2-Accreditation Processes measures efficiently the student's learning outcomes**

<i>Lickert Scale</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly Disagree	1	0.9
Disagree	10	8.7
Neutral	21	18.3
Agree	47	40.9
Strongly Agree	36	31.3
Total	115	100

**Table (5) Frequency Analysis of X10 Accreditation generates an awareness of self-development**

<i>Lickert Scale</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly Disagree	4	3.5
Disagree	9	7.8
Neutral	28	24.3
Agree	32	27.8
Strongly Agree	42	36.5
Total	115	100

**Table (10) Frequency Analysis of X8-Being accredited by an international western agency or regional agency adds more credibility to the University**

<i>Lickert Scale</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly Disagree	2	1.7
Disagree	9	7.8
Neutral	25	21.7
Agree	37	32.2
Strongly Agree	42	36.5
Total	115	100

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Using a descriptive analysis approach, the researchers found that University College of Bahrain (UCB)'s students, in general, have a high level of awareness towards the importance of accreditation, and its impacts on the overall aspects of the university. It means, generally they are aware of the importance of accreditation for the university and themselves as the students. Therefore, the finding of this paper should be used as an input for UCB's Management to speed up the accreditation process taken by the university both at the national and international levels in order to maintain the university's competitive position in the market. The result of this study can also be used by the Higher Education Council (HEC) of Ministry of Education, the Kingdom of Bahrain as an input for them to improve the accreditation process in the country since it is viewed as very important by the students.



Similar to other studies, this study has some limitations that can be filled by future studies. First, this study was only conducted at one university and targeted only one segment of the university's stakeholders which is the student. Second, the study is only conducted in UCB, so, the results of the study cannot be used as a general conclusion for the level of awareness of university students in Bahrain. Moreover, this paper only used a descriptive analysis to assess the awareness of students in accreditation. Therefore, future studies might consider other aspects that may affect the student awareness such as the student's cultural background. Additionally, future studies can also target other stakeholders such as the faculty members, alumni and the administrative staff.

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