

## **PROGRESSING TOWARDS REVOLUTIONIZED QUALITY OF EDUCATION THROUGH ACCREDITATION: A CASE OF ST. DOMINIC COLLEGE OF ASIA, BACOR CITY, PHILIPPINES**

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### **Abstract**

Quality of education is usually tested by accreditation. Higher education institutions in the Philippines are in the context of unspoken competition. Every HEI claims it is the best in this town, province, region, or even in the Philippines. Everyone can do that but when validity and reliability of that claim is questioned, proofs need to come out. This is where accreditation comes in. This paper utilized the mixed method, embedded design. The quantitative part used the descriptive design, survey method in which the researcher used stratified random sampling to recruit participants that represent the administration, faculty, staff and students to answer the survey questionnaires and out of these 100 participants as representative sample, eight participants were purposively chosen for the structured, in-depth interview. Narratives from the series of interviews were analyzed for common patterns, resulting to platforms or themes discussed. Observation and existing records were also used to triangulate the results of the interview. Four themes emerged in this study, namely; Standardizing brand of excellence, Empowering Continuously to Achieve Excellent Quality of Education, Facilitating Sustainability for the Future and Challenging for Higher Level of Quality of Education.

**Key words:** *Quality of education; excellent education; accreditation; case study; models.*

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## Introduction

The Dakar Framework for Action (2000) declared that access to quality education is a fundamental right of every child in this planet. However, to qualify what is really meant by quality education is not an easy task and it would take time to understand this construct. Grima (2008), citing the document *Tomorrow's Schools* (1995) qualified the construct by noting that quality education is one that is meaningful, worthwhile, and responsive to individuals and social needs.

The United Nations International Children's Educational Fund [1] comprehensively described quality education which includes: (1) learners, who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities; (2) environments that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities; (3) content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy, and skills for life, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace; (4) processes through which trained teachers use child-centered teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skillful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities; and (5) outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society

The Education for All: Global Monitoring Report 2005—The Quality Imperative (EFA: GMR) presented two principles that characterize definition of quality education: the first identifies learners' cognitive development as the major explicit objective of all education systems. The second emphasizes education's role in promoting values and attitudes of responsible citizenship and in nurturing creative and emotional development. In 1990, the World Declaration on Education for All emphasized the need to improve quality of education and even recommended that education be made both universally available and more relevant. The declaration also identified quality as a prerequisite for achieving the fundamental goal of equity. [2] Quality according to the declaration is not only achieved by expanding access but more on an increased children's cognitive development by improving the quality of their education.

Goal 6 of the Dakar Framework for Action vividly states that improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all to achieve recognized and measurable learning outcomes especially in literacy, numeracy, and life skills. There are six policy issues which directly impact teaching and learning: relevant aims, subject balance, good use of time, pedagogic approaches for better learning, language policy, and learning from assessment.[2]

*Quality Education and Accreditation*

Quality education is not only a privilege of all people but it is foremost a right. That is why schools, may they be basic or higher education institutions aspire for this cause. The best way to ensure that quality education is achieved is through accreditation. Accreditation is the process in education to ensure that schools, postsecondary institutions, and other education providers meet, and maintain, minimum standards of quality and integrity regarding academics, administration, and related services. It is a voluntary process based on the principle of academic self-governance. Further, it is a system of evaluation based on the standards of an accrediting agency, and means of assuring and improving the quality of education.[3]

The entities which conduct accreditation are associations comprised of institutions and academic specialists in specific subjects, who establish and enforce standards of membership and procedures for conducting the accreditation process (United States Network for Education Information, USNEI, 2007). Moreover, it is a process in which certification of competency, authority, or credibility is presented (USDA ISO Guide 65 program Accreditation for Certification Bodies, 2007). Specifically, educational accreditation is a type of quality assurance process under which services and operations of educational institutions or programs are evaluated by an external body to determine if applicable standards are met. If standards are met, accredited status is granted by the appropriate agency. In most countries, the function of educational accreditation is conducted by a government organization, such as a ministry of education. In the United States, however, quality assurance process exists that is independent of government and performed by private non-profit organizations [4]

#### *Accreditation in the Philippines*

Accreditation in the Philippines officially started 46 years ago in 1957 with the establishment of the first accrediting agency, the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities. Accreditation started from a context of structural reorganization and rapid growth of privately-owned educational institutions, in which many of these were even considered as “diploma mills.” The Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities-Commission on Accreditation (PACUCOA) emerged in 1973 followed closely by the Association of Christian Schools and Colleges-Accrediting Agency (ACSC-AA) in 1976. These three (3) agencies organized themselves into the Federation of Accrediting Agencies in the Philippines (FAAP) in 1977. The Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACCU), in 1995 became the fourth member of the FAAP.[3]

PACUCOA accredits educational institutions as guided by the following basic principles of accreditation: (1) Accreditation is based on accepted standards; (2) accreditation is concerned with the

teacher-learner relationship; (3) accreditation provides opportunities for institutional growth through self-study and evaluation and self-regulation; (4) accreditation admits periodic review, criticism and readjustment of its criteria, policies, and procedures to changes in education. PACUCOA's accreditation process characterizes by accreditation's sense of volunteerism; emphasis on empowerment of people to accomplish the business of the school/program in an excellent manner; strong tradition of self-regulation; reliance on comprehensive evaluative techniques; primary concern and passion for quality assurance and continuous improvement; and cultivation of a culture founded on organized orderliness, and adherence to greater efficiency, effectiveness and productivity. [5]

It is therefore the purpose of this study to describe how SDCA community sees the impact and influence of PACUCOA accreditation to all areas of SDCA educational system. Further, this study also answers how the accreditation affect the operationalization of SDCA of its tagline, "Revolutionizing Education" and how the community sees the future of SDCA looking through the lens of quality education vis a vis accreditation.

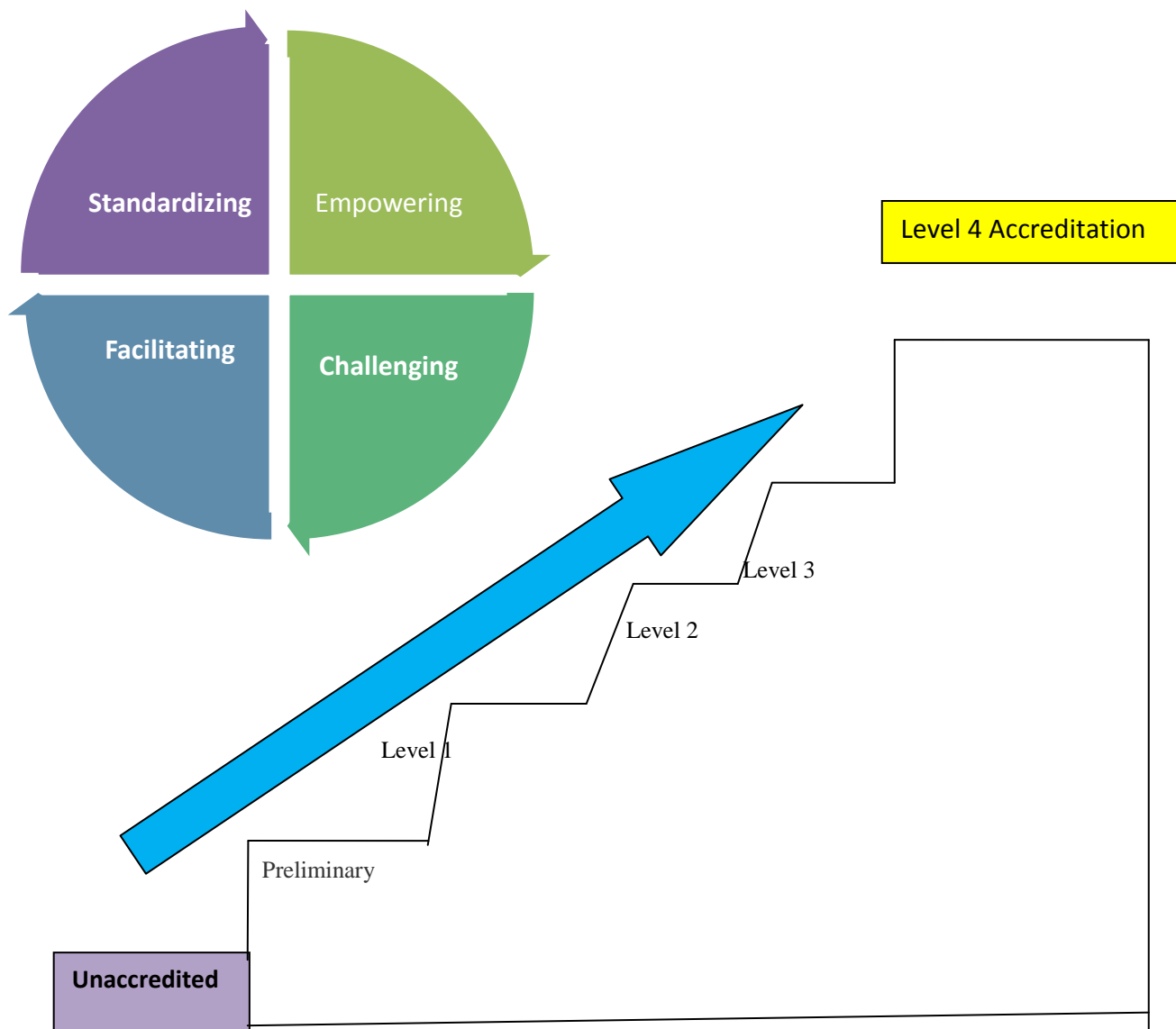
## **Methodology**

This paper utilized the mixed method, embedded design. The quantitative part used the descriptive design, survey method in which the researcher used stratified random sampling to recruit 100 participants that represent the administration, faculty, staff and students to answer the survey questionnaires. They answered the *Accreditation Feedback Questionnaire* ( $\alpha=.931$ ), a researcher-made questionnaire based on more observable eight areas out of the nine areas of accreditation. and out of these original participants, eight participants were purposively chosen for the structured, in-depth interview. Narratives from the series of interviews were analyzed for common patterns, resulting to platforms or themes discussed. Observation and existing records were also used to triangulate the results of the interview. The interviews were conducted to two SDCA administrators, two faculty members, two members of the staff and two students. Embedded in the discussion of themes are the results of the survey, observation and data from existing records. An attempt of formulating a model was done for this research.

## **Results and Discussion**

Four themes emerged in this study: *Standardizing brand of excellence; Empowering towards excellence; Facilitating sustainability; and Challenging for excellence.* These themes were used to come up with the model of accreditation process as in the case of St. Dominic College of Asia (see

Figure 1). The emergent model (Figure 1 below) called the FECS Model of Accreditation embodies PACUCOA’s accreditation in St. Dominic College of Asia. FECS stands for Facilitating, Empowering, Challenging, and Standardizing, the first words of the themes that emerged from the case study conducted. The model shows the different levels of accreditation from unaccredited to the highest level of accreditation which is level 4. The stairs or ladder represent these levels that an institution needs to pass through as it submits itself for accreditation. It is supposed to be unidirectional from lowest to highest and should never be a backward thing, as the arrow suggests. However, as an institution submits itself for accreditation, several interdependent processes take place within the institution that accreditation exposed the institution into: *Empowering Continuously to Achieve Excellent Quality Education; Empowering Continuously to Achieve Excellent Quality Education; Facilitating Sustainability for the Future and Challenging for Higher Level of Quality of Education.*



### Figure 1. FECS Model of Accreditation

#### Standardizing Brand of Academic Excellence

From the two accreditation processes experienced by the academic community of the institution, the theme “standardizing brand of academic excellence” emerged and encompasses the very purpose of any accreditation agency here and abroad. This standardization is reflected in what one participant asserted that quality education is academic excellence of graduates in all areas. Academic excellence means competencies are met and there is acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitude necessary for graduates to have most specifically after graduation. The standard brand of excellence is only seen when graduates of an HEI are capable of applying what has been learned from college. Academic excellence is truly seen when the job suits the education offered by an HEI. Mismatch of education and industry needs signifies that the education offered is mediocre and irrelevant. What makes an excellent quality of education is when education leads to greater opportunities for graduates, as they are honed to be more competitive locally and globally in any industry they are into.

Moreover, one participant noted that indeed there is no substitute for standard leading towards excellence in education but having a system that constantly reminds the academic community where they are and if they are doing well. One observable system can be seen in the documentation. One participant engagingly shared: *“After accreditation we were able to put a system to our documents because before we just verbalize things but after PACUCOA accreditation we were made conscious that is if it is not written it is nothing. So, everything should be documented properly; not just for display but we have that system so that nothing would go wrong.”*

Quality education and academic excellence should also be quantitative. This means there should be tangible results for one institution to be called excellent as one participant argued. The results of board examinations need to be emphasized and given priority quoting the Scriptures when it says, “we will know the tree by its fruit.” This is achievable if the institution adheres to the standards of accreditation, in which according to participants boils down to choice of faculty and improved facilities. This is emphatically shared by the participants that if we need to improve our instruction, as accreditation suggests, we need to hire good mentors. These are mentors who are not only good at transmitting knowledge from the books to the notebooks of students but most importantly teach the students how to learn for life through research. This is even made clear when one participant noted the primacy of research as a standard of an excellent institution providing revolutionized quality of education.

However, it was also agreed that research is the most difficult thing to do even after accreditation. According to one participant, research is not yet accepted like the concept of pre-need insurance because Filipinos have the tendency to say, *“Pwede na yan”* (that is enough) without realizing that teachers cannot move on and develop oneself without doing research. If one cannot find new trails, if one cannot innovate one will never improve. Research can be more enticing these days

because of the advancement of technology. Doing research is getting easier each day when technology continually evolves and data and sources of data can be easily accessed because they are just a click away. Academic excellence is imbibing the culture of research. Like insurance, research should not scare teachers off because of fear of hard work, tiredness and sleepless nights because like insurance it gives security and pleasant future. Research secures teachers of a brighter future because of new knowledge and greater education. A paradigm shift is of paramount importance, needless to say, a drastic 180 degrees spin is needed in educators' worldview about research.

Furthermore, two aspects were also aligned to standards through the accreditation—the facilities and laboratories. Participants compared the situation before and after the accreditation. One instance is the use of multimedia facilities in classrooms. Unlike before, 80% of classrooms in SDCA have now built in DLP/LCD projectors, with the concentration to those most frequently used classrooms in the basement, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh floors of the main building. There might be sometimes technical glitches, which are natural because we are dealing with machines and things which have limitations, but this is quite an improvement than what the institution had before, when everyone were still groping and struggling to make things aligned to perceived standards of quality education.

Laboratories are refurbished and new laboratories were opened purposively for the needs of the growing population of the institution not only for display but to align with the established standards set by PACUCOA. Additional classrooms and canteens were opened for the academic community. Services particularly the maintenance had improved since accreditation period. The rest rooms have improved a lot when it comes to cleanliness. In the study conducted by Bachelor of Medical Laboratory Science (BMLS) students recently, it was found out that majority of rest rooms handheld surfaces like door knobs, faucets, doors, cover of toilet bowls have no significant bacterial growth, particularly *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Escherichia coli* when compared to acceptable standards with the exception of the rest room in the seventh floor which is understandable due to heavy use of the male and female toilets as they are the most accessible rest rooms to students holding classes on the seventh floor, varsity players, visiting players due to sports competitions, and visitors from outside due to programs and events on the seventh floor (Alvarez, Bumagat, Calles, De Luzon, and Luis, 2014). Another study of isolating the same common bacteria in the air-conditioners by the BMLS students yielded no significant bacterial growth in air-conditioners from the basement to the seventh floor (Aguilar, Campos, Kalon, Vergara, and Villanueva, 2014). These imply that the maintenance group is doing their job well despite some isolated complaints that are insignificant if compared to the entire population of SDCA.

Likewise, as one participant underscored, one of the determining factors pointing to standardizing effects of accreditation is the policies that are now checked and scrutinized. From the academic and administrative manuals, everything are checked vis a vis actual operations of the institution. For an eleven-year-old institution, policies are sometimes naturally indecisive because the

institution is still in the process of trial and error. However, the accreditation helped a lot for administrators to evaluate the existing policies geared towards making students' stay in SDCA productive, meaningful and even safe.

Wrapping standardizing influence of accreditation is the delivery of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), in which according to one of the participants, an avenue in which the skills and talents of the students are honed and fully maximized to become competitive professionals both locally and globally. It was hard to align previous syllabi, policies, procedures and activities of the institution to the world of OBE but it was worth it, because according to one of the participants, there is now emphasis on student-centered learning. Students are now the main performers of their own education, as teachers now take the back seat but never lose guidance and supervision since teachers are still accountable to what the students learn and unlearn in the teaching and learning process.

These findings from qualitative aspect of this research is triangulated and corroborated by observation and data from records. As an executive chair for instruction in the past two accreditations, the researcher saw how SDCA metamorphosed into institution that can brandish its quality of education validated by the PACUCOA accreditation. This might be bias as the researcher was directly involved in the accreditation, however, statistics shows the same observation. The survey shows that majority of the respondents 83% (83 out of 100) are very much agreeable to accreditation, while 15% (15 out of 100) agree with accreditation to some extent, and 2% (2 out of 100) did not answer the question whether they agree with the accreditation. Further, Table 1 below shows how the academic community rates the improvement in several aspects of education in SDCA after the PACUCOA accreditation.

**Table 1.** Summary of How SDCA Community Rate the Improvement of SDCA Post-Accreditation (n=100)

PACUCOA Accreditation improved :	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Q.I.
1. Instruction or the teaching and learning process in SDCA.	2.29	.46	MI
2. The selection of faculty in SDCA.	2.32	.60	MI
3. The research culture in SDCA.	2.39	.50	MI
4. The community extension services of SDCA.	2.42	.50	MI
5. The laboratories in SDCA.	2.35	.55	MI
6. The physical facilities of SDCA.	2.25	.58	MI
7. The students' services in SDCA, which includes activities, security, health, and other student affairs.	2.32	.54	MI
8. leadership and management in SDCA.	2.32	.54	MI
OVERALL	2.33	.48	MI

Legend:

1-1.59 : Nothing improved (NI)

1.6-2.19 : There is improvement (I)

2.20-3.0 : There is so much improvement (MI)

QI-Qualitative Interpretation



It can be gleaned from the table that there is so much improvement, as experienced by the SDCA community after PACUCOA accreditation ( $\chi=2.33$ ,  $S=.48$ ). The participants recruited for this study are students, staff, faculty and administrators who have been here since academic year 2011-2012, even before the preliminary visit of PACUCOA. These people knew what SDCA is before and after PACUCOA accreditation. However, despite the highest rate for accreditation feedback, there are still many rooms for improvement, much more that SDCA is not only aiming for a perfect score of 5 in every area of the accreditation but also the satisfaction of the entire SDCA community.

Going to the details of Table 1, it is demonstrated that the three highest improved areas are community outreach and extension services ( $\chi=2.42$ ,  $S=.50$ ), research ( $\chi=2.39$ ,  $S=.50$ ), and laboratory ( $\chi=2.35$ ,  $S=.55$ ). Among the areas, the three lowest are physical facilities ( $\chi=2.25$ ,  $S=.58$ ), instruction ( $\chi=2.29$ ,  $S=.46$ ), and faculty, students' services and leader and management ( $\chi=2.32$ ,  $S=.60$ ,  $.54$ ,  $.54$ ) respectively. Community outreach and extension services are formerly a part of the student services and it was then integrated in the NSTP and even a part of the course students are enrolled into. Therefore, if students do not have NSTP and the courses have no outreaches as part of the syllabus, then nobody volunteers to render community services. The faculty and staff were not then involved in any community outreaches if they are not NSTP and course teachers. This scenario changed a lot after the accreditation as the office was really institutionalized and given importance. Come to think of it, community outreach with research and instruction are the trifocal functions of SDCA. With publications of students and faculty journals, integration of elements of research in every course syllabus, and the offering of research seminars and now research congress for faculty and students, research continues to improve and this is validated by the feedback of SDCA community.

Moreover, laboratories are now improved when the administration opened new laboratories and purchased state of the art apparatus. This was greatly noticed by the community. One of the things that can be improved is the physical facilities. Space is the number one problem of SDCA when it comes to facilities. However, SDCA treated this as a challenge when it built another building for the students of both basic and higher education. More canteens were opened for the community. However, SDCA could still improve so much in this area. Alongside with instruction, most specifically that there was a shift from the old approach to Outcomes Based Education. Birth pains are apparent in the case of instruction and these were not hidden from the community. The changes made in the syllabi, the Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) tests and examinations, and the fast turn-over of faculty who did not meet the requirements and for the sake of vertical articulation and alignment, everything was never concealed and padded. Students' services as the lowest came as a surprise because the Department of Student Affairs and Services is very much active in carrying out its duties and responsibilities. However, still this is a challenge that the department needs to look into.

Empowering Continuously to Achieve Excellent Quality Education

To empower is to authorize, to allow, or to sanction ([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)). Empowering in this context would mean many things although everything boils down to this conceptual definition. First, as

one participant puts it, the accreditation was a wakeup call of SDCA to do something if it wants to achieve what it envisions in the future. We allow accreditation to have its influence voluntarily as this is one of the principles of accreditation. Therefore, it jolted SDCA academic community to accept that the things it had been doing before the accreditation, according to one participant, are not in line with the standards of excellence. For instance in the area of student services, the ratio of employees to students was firmly instituted and maintained, as compared to before. Accreditation shook yet empowered SDCA to find within itself what it takes to be done to respond significantly.

Second, empowerment may mean and could result to continuous change and improvement in all aspects. One participant puts it, quality education is not an overnight thing; it is a long process. It is not a 100 meter sprint but a 400, 800, 1500 meters run, or even a multi-kilometer marathon. For an instance, we are continuously improving in the area of instruction as SDCA continuously hire good mentors, though a rapid turn over is largely observed by participants. Time changes, faculty change, students change, therefore there is no one big change that would fit all changes that happen and continuously happen in the future. Change is the only constant in this world. What is best today may not be best tomorrow. Empowerment fuels the wheel of continuous change and improvement for the better if not the best.

Thirdly, empowerment may mean putting meaning to what an institution has been doing. In the area of student services and community outreaches, activities are now becoming more meaningful. Through the accreditation the academic community was able to conduct activities and events not only for the sake of doing activities but to do activities that will reinforce learning of students. SDCA now understood the difference between co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. SDCA knows very much the activities even before PACUCOA came, however, accreditation guided and empowered SDCA to boost the learning of students through added activities attuned to the needs of the students physically, emotionally, socially, psychologically, and spiritually thus producing well-rounded individuals. SDCA does not want to produce intellectual giants but emotional and spiritual pygmies because there are plenty of them in the government, academe, and various industries.

Community extension and outreach has now more meaning to students, faculty and staff, as they now understand the contrast between structured and non-structured community activities. Community service is now more than donating of slippers and participating in charitable events but SDCA wants to see a community grow, develop and self-sustaining through the services rendered by the school. Community outreach now is more than giving fish to those who are hungry but to teach them how to catch fish.

Despite the innate struggle of the faculty and staff to do research, research now has a meaning to people in the academic community more than just a requirement of the next level of accreditation. As one participant rightfully asserted, “we need to look for a new trail for us not to be lost in the dark.” Metaphorical but that is the truth nowadays in which competition and survival of the fittest in the academe operates. Organizations that excel are those which are research oriented. Although ranking of

universities is not a reliable indicator of how an HEI performs, however, there is always a grain of truth in it. According to the report of UNESCO during the just-concluded SEAMEO Congress 2014 in Bangkok, Thailand, to which the researcher fortunately attended, Singapore and Malaysia are the top two ranking nations in Southeast Asia primarily because of research outputs, with Indonesia coming in third. With the impending ASEAN 2015 integration, how can the Philippines go with the flow if teachers and those in the academe do not do research? Research does not only discover “new trails” but it prepares educators to be globally competitive and satiable. The implications of ASEAN 2015 are hard to ignore. Faculty who excel in their field and do research can teach everywhere in Southeast Asia. How will Filipinos respond to this kind of challenge if they are not into research?

Moreover, empowerment would also mean that the accreditation gave the community something to be proud of, which could also lead to confidence. One participant disclosed by saying, “I am proud to teach in an accredited school!” The participant continues when she shared that when a faculty and even student are confident of one’s school, great things happen. One participant posited that this confidence is like a form of adrenaline rush that gives extra strength to a weary individual, and do things beyond one’s capacity. A student participant verbalized saying, “Accreditation has been helping students to be empowered, be dynamic, and proactive through the OBE”, which is advocated by PACUCOA. One participant corroborated this observation citing that OBE promotes student-centered education.

Lastly, empowerment can also be a guidance and even a liberating key for SDCA to be truthful to what it professes in its tagline that serves also as its battle cry—“Revolutionizing Education.” One participant aptly shared this sentiment when he said that accreditation empowers us to operationalize our tagline, revolutionizing education.” A student participant shared the same thought but in different aspect of this profound phrase. According to her, accreditation helps us to fight for education. Revolutionizing for her is a fight and not just innovations and changes. At first the researcher found her interpretation unorthodox when compared to pervasive interpretation of innovation and change. However, on second thought, she is perfectly right. With the accreditation in our belt, we can fight out the education we are offering in SDCA. The world institutions like SDCA is into are in the battlefield against mediocrity, pretensions, and materialism. These are the ruthless nemesis of education that could shackle every academic institution if they flourish. SDCA can successfully get out and fight through accreditation.

#### *Facilitating Sustainability for the Future*

This is shortest theme when it comes to discussion but this cannot be ignored in this study because of its importance to every institution. Schools are established primarily to generate income. Even in schools which profess themselves as charitable, income generation has always been a centerpiece of every business meeting and report because may it be for the poor and rich students, a school could never operate without money. Sustainability has been a favorite topic in every industry and even in education.

According to one participant, “*Accreditation influences the number of students. It has an impact to the number of enrollees in our institution.*” Indeed, accreditation does not only offer qualitative promises but it also delivers quantitative results. This participant also added by saying, “*Look at big universities such as La Salle, UST, and Ateneo. They do not need to advertise their school because their name is an advertisement itself. Students go to these universities because of their prestige. They achieved the highest accolades, the highest accreditation when compared to other [private] schools. These entice students, of course with the compelling powers of their parents, to enroll with them.*” One participant somewhat supported this when she noted that we might not feel the impact for now but in due time, may be two to three years, the institution will reap the harvest of its rigors. With SDCA’s young age, one participant shared that it has a good and big future that waits. Good and big future for this participant means sustaining the existence of SDCA as Higher Education Institute. He continued that it is not whether SDCA is a university nor a college nor a professional institute, still students will flock to SDCA because of its seal of excellence. “*We can be a university or a college*”, he shared, “*but if we do not have the necessary accreditation, nobody will root for us.*”

#### *Challenging for Higher Level of Quality of Education*

SDCA has been standardized, empowered, and facilitated and like in every motivational speech and homily, there is always a challenge for listeners to do. Accreditation leaves a challenge for SDCA to respond positively. The researcher maintains that no educational institution has a perfect system despite the praises and commendations it receives. For instance, Oxford University has always been ranked higher but only lower than Harvard University but since 2010, Oxford has never recovered its place as it placed fifth and below. Even Harvard has been experiencing setbacks in the rankings as it placed second for many occasions after Cambridge or even MIT. Harvard might be good in law for many years but Yale has already overtaken it from the university standings. The point of this comparison is there are still several rooms for improvement even in the most “perfect” situation, much more an institution is very young and there is so much to learn from experience. SDCA is eleven years old but it has gained level 1 accreditation. It is easy to romanticize that SDCA is a perfect institution, but it is not—we are not. One participant was emphatic on this when she said, “SDCA is still growing...progressing towards higher level.” Having said this, there are challenging areas that the institution needs to address according to the participants, after accreditation.

One participant revealed that if SDCA wants to achieve a higher level of accreditation it needs to have focus. Without this, wastage increases. For instance, documents’ format perpetually changes every now and then. This is understandable to an institution who wants the best through proper documentation but wastage can be controlled if there is focus. One participant shared that if there is focus, documents’ templates and formats are finalized first before they are disseminated and cascaded to the community, then there will be no wastage of bond papers and ink because faculty and staff do not need to repeat doing the same document for several times. One participant suggested allowing use of things built or remodeled for at least a year before changing it or building another and this is

possible if in the first place there is accurate and proper planning. As shared, there should be proper allocation of logistics. Relevant to this, as one participant conveyed, is accurate information dissemination. Inaccurate information dissemination leads to wastage of resources. In one instance in a department, there are more than 200 pages used for printing but they were never used and displayed because of inaccurate information. SDCA has learned from this yet this is still a challenge for the community who aspires for excellence. Somehow, as an old adage puts it, “quality education is expensive.” What is more expensive is doing nothing with the resources ready for us to use because we are not only wasting, as one Harvard University once said to this effect that education is indeed expensive but ignorance is quite more expensive.

One challenge to reckon with is the fast turnover of faculty members. This was shared by almost all the participants of the study. The participants shared to the researcher their burden that the management should see why there is a fast turnover of faculty members. There were two problems concocted by the participants, one is in the recruitment process and one is the retention. Basically this is a “textbook” answer to the problem of fast turnover but this needs to be proven by empirical studies. To start with, the researcher asked the participants about the problem on the side of retention, and one of the participants pointed to time as the culprit. According to him, the faculty has no more time to do extra work in school because of the teaching preparations and time with their family. The participant who is single even shared that for him, time is not a problem because he is single, to which the researcher agreed with but for faculty members who have family to attend to, time really matters to them. With the bulk of work to do in SDCA because of accreditation process, one participant shared, time management is not enough to find time. Therefore, they better leave their job and look for another teaching job that only requires them of their teaching hours and not more than that. Salary is not a problem for them because SDCA’s salary is very competitive but time is the problem. One participant shared that fast turnover of faculty has an impact to a growing institution because faculty are the frontlines during accreditation. We can achieve higher things with the right people on the bus (Singe, 2001) but sometimes the right people alight the bus. In any organization, we need to guard closely the back doors, as much as we widely open the front doors. But to do this, deeper studies need to be done to address this issue.

Another challenge that accreditation left us is on the financial aspect. Compliance to the accreditation’s suggestions entails using of resources. Building new laboratories and other facilities are the results of PACUCOA accreditation. If SDCA wants to uphold the highest standards of excellence, it should abide by what standards dictate not only PACUCOA’s suggestions and comments. Indeed, quality education is expensive. The purchase of very expensive laboratory apparatus particularly in the area of physical therapy, radiologic technology, pharmacy, biology, chemistry and medical laboratory science are not within PACUCOA’s suggestions because the programs that primarily use them are not yet for accreditation at least for the next few years but this signifies that SDCA has already imbibed the

standards of excellence imparted by PACUCOA and it is challenged to apply what it learned not to impress PACUCOA but to be truthful to what it aspires for—excellent quality of education.

Moreover, the challenge of collaboration versus individualism is apparent according to the participants. This surfaced after the PACUCOA accreditation as true attitudes surfaced. Team players could be singled out from those who are deeply engrossed with themselves, on how they can shine or how can they be commended for their job well-done. One participant mentioned that quality education is all about partnership and collaboration. He mentioned that it is the partnership between administration and teachers, teachers and students, SDCA and parents and other stakeholders. However, we can still see people who are uncooperative and it is natural in a growing institution—people who are individualistic and only think of themselves than the institution. These people think only of what they can get from the institution and not of what they can give the institution. Quality education is a concerted effort and not just a showcase of an individual's best. However, it is a delight to hear from the participants that what they did during the accreditation; the sleepless nights, headaches, high blood pressures, and stress were offered to SDCA. They were labors of love as they love SDCA. They are beautiful individuals and these individuals are not individualistic.

Faculty and instruction are considered strong points of SDCA. However, these has also some challenges because not all faculty members are performing very well or live according to the set standards. Passivity and lackluster performance of some in the community including the faculty were mentioned to be challenges for SDCA to hurdle. The “right people in the bus” principle operates in this issue. This might explain the fast turnover but this is an issue that needs to be addressed squarely because as SDCA goes higher in the levels of accreditation, more requirements are to be fulfilled, as one participant said: *“Achieving higher level of accreditation is not only possible but is necessary. The higher we go, the more requirements to fulfill, the more tasks to do, the better services we provide our students and community but we need to give proper pacing and interval so we should not be always in a hurry.”*

Adapting to the nature of modern technology is another challenge that accreditation gave us. In a research prepared by the researcher and presented in the SEAMEO Congress 2014, titled, *“Preparedness and Attitude of College Students About ICT-Based Education in a Selected HEI in Bacoor City, Philippines”*, it was revealed that college students are very much prepared for ICT-Based education and they have positive attitude towards it. Therefore, in that same paper, the researcher recommended for the school to invest largely on ICTs to make education in SDCA more meaningful and attuned to the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learners, making them globally competitive. Again, ICT – Based is part of the “classroom of the future” idea but to have the infrastructure is so expensive. Indeed, it is a challenge.

Ultimately, the challenge of our vision. In the first place, it is not PACUCOA which gave SDCA its vision. It already exists before PACUCOA. PACUCOA just underscored how important it is to be aligned with SDCA's vision and mission. The trifocal vision of instruction, research, and

community service excellence is a hard thing to do without the guidance of accreditation but it is harder to comply with the standards set by accreditation for SDCA to fulfill its vision and mission. Therefore, it will be a continuous challenge for SDCA to bear and to enjoy. One participant eloquently puts it: “As an accredited institution, I don’t see SDCA only as an educational institution but it has a mission. God puts us in a very strategic position to provide our students the highest standard of education today and in the near future and that becomes our responsibility. We have a big role primarily that in the near future as the president envisions, our number will increase as we acquire new lot for a new building.” He added, “if we will not waiver and change with our self-given task, nothing will go wrong and with God’s help the future of SDCA is very clear. We may not become a university or any of the typology does not matter if our population is big. We will just keep our focus, as we give the best to our students.”

### Conclusions and Implications

This study shows that the PACUCOA accreditation has a great impact for the quality of education in St. Dominic College of Asia to improve. The accreditation did not only standardize the brand of excellence in SDCA, but also it empowers the SDCA community to continuously uphold a culture of excellence validated through accreditation. Quantitatively the accreditation has an impact to the number to the number of students in SDCA, despite the fact that the effect is long-term one but still the academic community is hopeful SDCA will be filled with students in the near future. Moreover, the accreditation challenged SDCA not to settle for less but excellence in the areas identified to be weak and continue to excel in areas of strength. It is hard but it is possible for SDCA to achieve greater heights in accreditation with love, sense of partnership and support, dedication, focus, proper planning, and being mindful of its vision and mission. Indeed, “Revolutionizing education” is to look for innovations in education but most importantly, education is a battlefield of our fight against mediocrity, pretensions, and utter materialism.

It is implied through this research for SDCA to continue what it started and aspire higher because it is capable of doing so. However, it should always set its mind to the standards set for guidance, empowerment, and even challenge for a brighter future ahead of it.

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