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Quality Evaluation of Postgraduate Programs from the Perspective of Students (Faculty of Education, Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University (IAU), KSA)

Mohammed Sarhan AL-Mekhlafi*

Abstract

This study is an attempt to determine the implementation level of quality standards in graduate programs at the college of Education, IAU in the light of the National Center for Academic Accreditation and Evaluation standards from the viewpoints of students. Data were collected from a randomly selected sample of 86 graduate students. To achieve the study goals, respondents were requested to answer a five-point scale questionnaire comprised of 69 items related to eight quality standards. The result shows an average degree of overall implementation. At the standards level, findings revealed a higher average for implementing quality standards related to teaching staff and quality learning. On the other hand, lower averages of implementation were found for the quality standards of Scientific Research and Projects, Students, Learning Resources, Facilities and Equipment, Curricula, Mission and Goals, and Graduate Qualities and Learning Outcomes. A statistically significant difference ($P < 0.05$) was found between males and females on the teaching staff standard favoring female students and non-significant differences were found on the implementation of quality standards according to their graduate specialization. The study concluded with recommendations directed for decision makers and higher administration to monitor the implementation of quality assurance within graduate programs.

Keywords: Quality standards, graduate programs, accreditation, National Center for Academic Accreditation and Evaluation (NCAAA)

1. Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that human capital and skills are the mainstay of economic wealth and social happiness in the twenty-first century. Prosperity necessitates countries to retain their competitive superiority by evolving and supporting a capable labor force, upholding a universal competitive research groundwork, and advance enhancing the diffusion of knowledge for the advantage of society in general.

Education is one of the basic requirements for human growth to get rid of poverty; it is essential for nationwide growth and a thriving society (Sivakumar & Sarvalingam, 2010, p. 20). Education, particularly Higher Education (HE), is recognized today as the main vehicle for social and economic progress (Altbach, 2014; Benneworth & Cunha, 2015; Velasco, 2014); it is a tool for the promotion of a sustainable future (Axelsson, Sonesson, & Wikenberg, 2008). In this framework, HE characterizes an energetic aspect in invention and human capital progress and performs a fundamental role in the accomplishment and sustainability of the knowledge economy (Altbach & Van Vught, 2010). In fact, HE is progressively viewed as a primary engine of economic prosperity (Altbach, Reisberg, Rumbley, 2009: p. iii), hence, it has become progressively significant on nationwide agendas and has

* Prof., Dr. Mohammed Sarhan Al-mekhlafi, University of IAU, Saudi Arabia
Corresponding Email: msalmekhlafi@iau.edu.sa,

commenced thoughtful metamorphoses and global reforms over the past decades (Tremblay, Lalancette, Roseveare, 2012, p.16). In this context, a university is one of the most important sources of science and knowledge and developing the needed life skills of generations. Thus, a HE institute is the most significant changing tool for comprehensive development and transformation of a society: political, economic, cultural and social scopes. This change is through HE advanced knowledge, expertise and diverse skills that contribute to build its members and qualify them for the requirements of the era. Mishra & Kushwaha, (2016, p.61) stress that HE is of fundamental importance to any country, as it is a substantial tool for building a knowledge-based society in the twenty-first century.

Focusing on HE, it is recognized by many scholars and critics that an academic revolt has occurred in HE in the past half century manifested by fundamental changes incomparable in extent and variety (Altbach et al, 2009, p. iii; Dino, Nelson, & Devardhi, 2012, p. 68; Grion, 2016, p. 361).

Friend-Pereira, Lutz & Heerens (2018, p.11) claim that organizations that track excellence in the delivery of their educational facilities are anticipated to stimulate and thrive, so the interest of HE quality and the application of its standards have become an increasingly significant matter in the last few years for all universities due to the growing demands for outstanding quality in HE by graduates and society, and this can be implied that HE institutions (HEI's) now experience similar compressions that the commerce sector has been fronting for years.

As HEIs have a dynamic role in the evolution and expansion of scientific, educational and human resources, HE stakeholders should assess HE programmes to detect their strengths and weaknesses in order to address educational needs at nationwide and international levels, in addition to continuously improving the quality of educational methods and programmes (Yarmohammadian, Mozaffary and Esfahani, 2011; Akareem & Hossain, 2016a; b).

1.1. Problem Statement

A number of researches on graduate programs in Saudi universities indicated low quality of such programs in terms of their objectives, policies, management, educational services and institutional support (Alasmar, 2008, p. 675), low rates of graduates, low rate of internal efficiency of the HE sectors, low Quantity of postgraduate programs, and low fulfillment of these programs to the quantitative and qualitative needs of the HE sectors (Al-Subaie, 2007).

According to Abou El Naga (2011), the results of several researches have also shown that postgraduate studies in general have become incapable of performing their role in promoting the quality of programs and scientific research, which is reflected negatively on the society.

1.2. Research Questions

The researcher believes that the evaluation of the graduate programs in the college of education, Imam Bin Abdulrahman university is a vital subject and worthy of study. It is not enough for the competent authorities to increase admissions and introduce new postgraduate programs and bear additional expenditures without diagnosing the quality of the current programs.

For this purpose, this study aimed to evaluate postgraduate programs at the college of Education in the IAU from the graduates' perspectives, by identifying the degree of academic standards achievement necessary for these programs in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of these programs and to suggest some solutions.

Based on the foregoing, the research questions can be identified in the following two main concerns:

1. What is the degree of quality standards implementation to graduate programs at the college of education as perceived by graduate students?

2. Are there any significant differences at the level of statistical significance between the average responses of the sample members on the degree of implementation of quality standards of graduate educational programs attributed to gender and specializations?

2. Literature Review

In any academic debate about quality and quality assurance in HE studies or programs, it is obviously vital to commence by identifying the terms and expressions that are going to be used in this research.

2.1. Quality

Quality is an ambiguous term for which there is a comprehensive reading contingent upon the perspectives of various explanations and stakeholders (Harvey & Green, 1993). Schindler, Puls-Elvidge, Welzant, & Crawford (2015) documented four wide perceptions of quality in HE: it is a "purposeful, transformative, exceptional, and accountable" phenomenon (p.8). There still is extensive argument and variance as to what makes up quality in HE (Tam, 2001; McCowan, 2018). Kahsay (2012: 29) mentions that there is existing lack of clearness and ambiguity in the concept of quality in HE. While there might be no sole and commonly accepted meaning, numerous authors have endeavored to explain and systematize the conception of quality in HE.

According to Central European University in Hungary (2016, p. 14), quality is viewed as excellence, worth for money, appropriateness for purpose, change, perfection or consistency. Emilia, & Al-Tarawneh, (2018: 87) pointed out that existence of quality assurance services in HE means excellence, quality of graduates and quality of faculty members, as well as quality of scientific research, therefore, the building of accredited quality standards qualifies a university to gain society and beneficiaries' satisfaction, and this obliges the university to align its programs with the requirements of quality standards. Friend-Pereira et al. (2018, p. 7) define quality in HE as "an ongoing process ensuring the delivery of agreed standards. These agreed standards should ensure *that every educational institution where quality is assured has the potential to achieve a high quality of content and results*". According to Article 11 of the World Declaration on HE (UNESCO, 1998), "quality in higher education is a multidimensional concept, which should embrace all its functions, and activities: teaching and academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, facilities, equipment, services to the community and the academic environment" (p. 8). Quality of HE programs is related to any of the varied roles of a HE institution, including its research and public involvement actions (McCowan, 2018, p.129).

2.2. Accreditation: Quality assurance

According to EUA (2015), quality assurance would secure a learning setting in which the content of programmes, knowledge opportunities and services are fit for purpose. Friend-Pereira *et al.* (2018) define quality assurance *as "the means by which an institution can assure with confidence and certainty, that the standards and quality of its educational provision are being maintained and enhanced" p.7).* Quality assurance is tightly linked with accreditation procedures and sustainable development (Ryan, 2015, p.3).

According to Alharbi (2015, p. 227), the concept of quality and quality assurance as approved upon at the UNESCO Education Conference which held in Paris, 1998, has multi instructions that must encompass the entire education system, such as infrastructure, scientific research, self-education, educational programs, curricula, students, serving community, and regulate a worldwide recognized quality standard. In fact, the quality assurance is viewed as the most significant instrument for evolving

education. It is a sort of acknowledgement that a program or institution accomplishes definite quality standards (Friend-Pereira et al., 2018, p.7).

Prisacariu (2015) and Alexandru Petru (2015) claim that quality assurance in HE institutions has become one of the greatest significant measures to ascertain and emphasize the quality of university programs in regard to content, patterns and methods of instruction, teaching and the educational environment, meeting the needs of the market and the public, being able to compete and demonstrate their presents in the international arena; preparing a university student for lifetime as an energetic citizen in democratic civilizations, for sustainable employment and becoming a well-deserved member of the work environment, as well as actively interacting with it.

In this research, quality is recognized as 'suitability for purpose' and quality assurance is defined as 'those systems, measures, procedures and activities prearranged to lead to the attainment, maintenance, scrutinizing and improvement of quality' (Woodhouse, 1998, p. 258).

2.3. Quality standards & accreditation

Quality standards have become a highly reliable global trend in achieving quality assurance for HE programs. Methods to assess standards are the cornerstones of HE quality assessment and achievement methods across the world (Dino et al., 2012).

Many current studies (Akareem & Hossain, 2016a; b; Ashraf, Ibrahim, & Joarder, 2009) have been conducted for identifying the dimensions of quality standards of HE programs. They pointed out some dimensions, such as organizational support, quality of students, academic structures, and faculty credentials. Some other researchers, such as Ginns, Prosser, & Barrie (2007) concentrate on students' assessment of different courses or the assessments of specific teachers to evaluate the quality of education. Furthermore, the study of Akareem and Hossain (2016b) recognized that students' traits, for instance, recent status and socioeconomic experience, enable to get an insight in HE quality. Harvey (1995) proposed that quality criteria could be classified into several groups: academic criteria (for instance, students satisfying the obligations of the course); criteria of capability (such as the accomplishment of vital abilities); and provision criteria (such as, student grants). Even so, " the perception of quality assurance is very multi-dimensional and contextual and… a gap exists in the view between professionals in quality assurance and academic staff and students"(Smidt, 2015, p.626).

Consequently, accreditation professional associations have developed accreditation standards and procedures which define whether an institution or educational program attains the minimum standards for the quality of education during a certain period. Friend-Pereira et al. (2012) stress that standards "define levels of fulfilment against which performance may be measured. Achievement of a standard usually infers a degree of appropriateness for a definite purpose" (p.7).

Hegji, (2017, p.1) points out that the U.S. Department of Education (ED) defines the practice of accreditation as "a means of conducting nongovernmental, peer evaluation of educational institutions and programs" and lists some of the purposes of accreditation, such as to assess the quality of academic programs at HE institutions, to generate a culture of sustainable enhancement of academic quality at HE institutions, and to engage the academic staff extensively in institutional assessment and planning.

Al-Hilali, (2009, p.68) claims that the quality and accreditation of postgraduate programs is one of the most prominent challenges facing colleges of educations, due to low academic standards as a result of massive expansion of HE. Furthermore, Wise and Leibbrand, (2000, p.618) as well as Erickson and Wentworth (2010) pointed out that academic programs in the 21st century colleges of education will undergo a serious evaluation process. By devoting these standards to the adoption and recognition of HE institutions' programs, such standards will focus on the idea of performance in a way unprecedented in the

20th century. Whatever the situation is, Brunhaver, Korte, Barley and Sheppard (2018) claim that a better understanding of quality standards and quality practice is obligatory to improve students' preparedness to work in the grounds, and this claim has received substantial empirical support.

It could be concluded that the accreditation of HE academic programs is vital, since it aims to dynamically ascertain the relevance level of a HE institution and ensure that it works to achieve high levels of academic and professional performance in the programs that are provided. This will strengthen its ability and effectiveness in achieving its mission and educational goals, also accreditation of HE academic programs will enhance competitiveness among HE institutions in relation to the development process based on programs' accreditation criteria.

2.4. Types of academic accreditation

There are various types of academic accreditation. A number of authors and researchers such as Mujahid (2016), as well as Harvey and Mason (1995) have pointed out that academic accreditation is divided into the following types:

- Institutional accreditation: This type of academic accreditation is achieved through the accreditation of the institution as a whole at a college or university level.
- Specialized or program accreditation: This type of accreditation is based on specific criteria for academic programs offered by the university or the college after the adoption of a specific course of study. This is an accreditation granted to specialized academic programs after the educational institution has obtained an original or general accreditation, one year after the graduation of the first batch of the program. Program accreditation includes specialized standards to ensure the quality of the programs, their academic status and the ability to prepare qualified graduates so as to practice their profession in the field of specialization.
- Professional accreditation: This type of accreditation focuses on specific criteria for the professional employment of HE graduates. It is the recognition of the competences to practice a particular profession in light of standards issued by specialized professional bodies such as professional unions and associations. This type of accreditation is limited to the schools of Administration, Engineering, Law, Education, and health professions.

These kinds of accreditations exist at regional or state or international level, some are centralized, while others are decentralized.

2.5. The National Model for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in KSA

Quality in HE is a multidimensional notion, models for evaluating quality of HE institutions have been recognized in most of the world. Some of the mostly used models include: (a) Baldrige Criteria, (b) ISO 900:2000, (c) Capability Maturity Model, (d) Six Sigma, (d) Total Quality Management, (e) Towards Total Quality Care (Mishra, 2006), as well as European Excellence Model EFQM.

Although these models cover numerous key diminutions of quality in HE institutions including excellence, value, consistency, and meeting needs and expectations; yet no quality assurance model can report all elements of quality, therefore, selections are made about what types of quality are considered for evaluation (Harvey, 2020). In connection with this, there is skepticism on the efficiency of any single quality assurance model (Asif, Raouf & Searcy, 2012). This skepticism may be due to variety of approaches from one quality assurance organization to another.

In fact, quality standards for HE programs differ between accrediting bodies and states (Radhi, 2016, p. 90), for example, in Egypt, the authority determines standards to ensure quality education accreditation: students, academic standards, educational programs, teaching and learning, physical learning facilities, faculty members, scientific research, continuous evaluation and effectiveness. In Jordan they include program specifications, program content, education and learning, evaluation, student progress

and achievements, academic support, educational resources, student extracurricular support, infrastructure and services, alumni follow-up and communication with Local community, and quality management and promotion . However, all accrediting organizations have comparable processes and performances: a self-review by the institution or program against the accreditation standards (Eaton, 2011; 2012).

The purpose of this research is not to cover the concept of quality models worldwide, nor to put up an original concept of quality model, it is to make a brief statement of the technique utilized in HE institutions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

KSA is putting substantial prominence on the key role of HE institutions in national evolution, as demonstrated by the Saudi Arabia Vision 2030 (2018) document, which gives a great importance to scientific innovation and high-level skills. Most recently, the Council of Ministers issued a Resolution No. (94) of 7/11/2016 which approved the establishment of The National Center for Academic Accreditation and Evaluation (NCAAA). The NCAAA (2019) is responsible for academic accreditation and quality assurance in HE institutions, in order to promote the quality of HE, whether governmental or private institutions. More specifically, the center aims to contribute to the promotion of quality and excellence in HE institutions and programs through academic assessment and accreditation processes. To make the accreditation process and procedures effective, one of the strategic initiatives under the Centre's responsibility in the entity's plan which embraces improving and streamlining the accreditation process, including, inter alia, identifying the steps and procedures of the audit process and making it easier and smoother.

In 2018, the NCAAA adopted a new model for quality assessment that combined quality assessment and accreditation for HE programs. The programmatic quality standards are now in effect (NCAAA, 2019) rather than old ones.

The NCAAA has applied a range of measures to pledge quality assurance processes to be in place at every HE institution and requires of all HE institutes to comply with new quality standards. The standards for postgraduate programs include six major standards covering the main activities of a program and, under each of these standards, a number of criteria reflecting its level of quality are included: mission and objectives of a program (with 6 sub-standards); program management and quality assurance (with 19 sub-standards), program quality assurance (with 5 sub-standards), teaching and learning: graduate attributes and learning outcomes (with 4 sub-standards), curriculum (with 13 sub-standards), quality of teaching and students' assessment (with 8 sub-standards); students (with 16 sub-standards); faculty members (with 12 sub-standards); learning resources, facilities and equipment (with 13 sub-standards); and scientific research and projects (with 18 sub-standards).

3. Related Studies

Ahmed (2018) conducted a study aimed to reveal the extent the responsiveness of HE programs to the needs of the labor market from the point of view of students in Jordanian universities. He applied the analytical descriptive methodology, the sample study was 230 graduate students. The study reached the conclusion that the response of the programs to the labor market was too weak due to programs' content which are unrelated with the society needs, where program goals are deadlocked and many courses are separated from development problems in the society.

The study of Daradkah, Al Osimi & Hamadin (2018) intended to specify the score of implementations of the quality standards of the colleges of education at the HE institutions of Taif and the Middle East in view of the quality criteria of National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). The samples comprised 93 faculty staff representing 50% of teaching staff of the HE institutions. The study outcomes revealed average quality achievement of the academies of education at the

Universities of Taif and the Middle East. Also, the study results showed no significant variances according to gender differentiations at the level of significant pf<0.05%.

The study of Alsyid (2017) aimed to evaluate the programs of graduate studies in the Department of Comparative Education in the College of Education at Umm Al-Qura HE institutions from the graduates' perspectives. The study applied the descriptive method through a questionnaire addressed to all graduates of the department in addition to a personal interview with some of them. The sample size reached 126 male and female students. The study obtained many results, the most significant of which is that the courses offered by the College of Education at the postgraduate level achieved the quality and academic accreditation standards to a high degree and achieved the learning outcomes at an average level.

Al-Hayasat and Bani Amer (2016) study intended to evaluate the postgraduate programs in the college of Sharia at Qassim University. The study used the descriptive analytical method, and a questionnaire was used as a tool for the study after verifying its validity and stability. The study included 29 faculty members from the graduate studies and 55 students enrolled in the graduate programs. The study concluded that the quality and academic accreditation standards are achieved to a great extent from the perspectives of the faculty members, and to an average extent from the perspectives of the students.

The objective of Radhi (2016) study was to recognize the level of effectiveness of postgraduate programs in Al-Azhar and Islamic universities in Palestine from the perspective of graduates by knowing the extent of commitment of the two universities to implement the quality standards of program management, ensuring the quality of the program, teaching staff, learning and teaching methods, as well as scientific research. The study applied descriptive analytical method, the size of the research sample consisted of 342 graduates and the results show that the quality standards of program accreditation were achieved at a high level and that the Islamic University surpasses Al-Azhar University in the level of effectiveness quality academic programs

Al Safran (2015) study intended to evaluate the programs of graduate studies at the College Education, King Khalid University in the light of the quality standards and academic accreditation. The study applied the analytical descriptive method and a questionnaire was developed to collect field data. The study included 50 faculty members and 279 postgraduate students. It received a number of results, including that most quality standards were achieved at medium degree and only two areas of study achieved a high degree from the viewpoint of faculty members; and all quality standards were achieved at a medium degree from the perspective of graduate students.

Al-Qarni (2012) study intended to detect the level of availability of academic accreditation standards of graduate programs specializing in educational administration in Saudi universities. The researcher used academic accreditation and evaluation issued from the National Authority and used the descriptive and analytical method for collecting field data from all faculty members (130) involved in the postgraduate programs in educational departments at the Saudi Universities. The findings reveal that the level of availability of quality standards in postgraduate programmed was ranged from moderate to low .

A study of AAl Foheid (2012), meant to identify the level of availability of quality accreditation criteria in the educational postgraduate programs at the Imam Mohammad Bin Saud Islamic University. He employed the descriptive research technique, using the questionnaire as a tool to achieve the study goals, the sample consisted of 32 faculty members and 210 graduates. It revealed that the standards of academic accreditation of educational postgraduate programs are available to a moderate degree from the point of view of students as well as faculty members.

In the light of the results of the reviewed researches, it is clear that there is a variation in these results of studies in Arab and some other countries in the region concerning the application of quality standards for HE programs. The outcomes of the reviewed studies show that the program quality according to different criteria has been assessed differently, from good to poor.

Based on the analyzed studies, the researcher identified the research subject and problem, formed an appropriate research methodology, created the framework of the research, and chose a suitable statistical test for securing validity and consistency of the research instruments.

The given study is distinguished from the previous studies in some characteristics: identifying different perspectives according to different variables in evaluating the quality of HE programs, such as gender, specialization. None of the previous studies have discussed these variables. The study argues that previous studies failed to achieve a comprehensive assessment of the quality of HE. Therefore, this study can serve a starting point for forthcoming research and studies in the same field in diverse programs and universities.

4. Method

4.1. Research Design

Based on the nature of the study and its objectives that it seeks to achieve, the researcher used the analytical descriptive method to detect the level of application of quality standards and accreditation of HE programs in the light of NCAAA standard as perceived by graduate students.

4.2 Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of all graduate students who have completed all courses in graduate programs in the semester of the academic year 2018/2019 (n=135) students. The study sample consisted of 86 male and female students, representing 64% of the total study population, who were randomly chosen of the total study population, which makes the study quite representative. Table 1 illustrates the distribution of the sample by gender and specialization of the students.

Table 1. Distribution of the sample participants by students' gender and program (specialization) variables

Personal data	**Category**	**No.**	**%**
Gender	Male	47	54.7
	Female	39	45.3
	Total	86	100.0
Specialization	Educational Administration & Leadership	37	43.0
	Curriculum and Teaching Methods	19	22.1
	Psychology	18	20.9
	Education Foundation	12	14.0
General Total		86	100

4.3. Research Instruments

4.3.1. The psychometric properties of the instrument

In order to accomplish the study aims, the instrument was created, taking into consideration the NCAAA quality standards. It consisted of 67 items, distributed by the succeeding criteria:

- The first criteria: mission and goals (5 items).
- The second criteria: graduate qualities and learning outcomes (5 items).
- The third criterion: curriculum (5 items).
- The forth criteria: quality of teaching and student assessment (10 items).
- The fifth criteria: students (13 items).
- The sixth criteria: teaching staff (4 items).
- The seventh criteria: learning resources, facilities, and equipment (8 items).
- The eighth criteria: scientific research and projects (17 items).

The items of the instrument were distributed on a graded answer scale from (1 to 5) degrees, in accordance with Likert five-point grading scale. The degrees were as follows: very high (5), high (4), medium (3), low (2), too low (1).

4.3.2. Validity of the Instrument

After the instrument was initially constructed, the researcher verified its validity in two ways:

Content validity: the instrument was validated by seven arbitrators, who are faculty members, specialized in educational administration and curricula and methods of teaching. The observations of the arbitrators were considered, and the instrument was subsequently developed in its final form.

Validity of internal consistency: The internal consistency of the Instrument has been validated in two ways:

Correlational Validity: Internal consistency was calculated by the Pearson correlation coefficients between the paragraph and the overall degree of the domain that belongs. The result was that all correlation coefficients were statistically significant at the significant level of 0.001 and therefore it was concluded that the instrument of the Study measures what has been set for to measure.

Construct Validity: Also, the researcher calculated correlation coefficients between overall degree of each domain and total degree of the instrument. The result of calculation shows that all criteria (quality standards) for program quality and accreditation were highly correlated at the significant 0.01 level with the general degree of the instrument. Table 2 shows this result.

Table 2. Correlation coefficients between overall grade of each quality standard /domain and total grade of the instrument.

No.	Criteria (Standards)for program accreditation (Domain)	Number of items	**Coefficient of correlation**
	Mission and goals	5	0.821**

	Graduate qualities and learning outcomes	5	0.839**
	Curricula	5	0.845**
	Quality of teaching & assessment	10	0.911**
	Students	13	0.869**
	Teaching staff	4	0.712**
	Learning resources, facilities, and equipment	8	0.785**
	Scientific research and projects	17	0.855**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Index-validating: The apparent consistency was also verified by the index-validating. The self-validity index, which is equal to the square root of the stability coefficient, was calculated, noting that the stability of the test was 93% and thus the square root. √ 0.93 = .96%, which is a high value confirming the validity of the tool.

Stability using the formula Alpha Cronbach: reliability of instruments

The researcher used formula Cronbach's Alfa coefficient (Cronbach, 1951) to calculate the reliability of the instrument. Cronbach's alpha has been described by Cortina (1993) as "one of the most important and pervasive statistics in investigation concerning test construction and use" (p.98). The results of the calculation showed a high reliability degrees of the instrument (0.89).

Table 3. Alpha Cronbach's stability coefficients for the study's dimensions and themes

Quality Standards/Dimensions of the study (Axes)	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Mission and goals	.944**
Graduate qualities and learning outcomes	.941**
Curricula	.941**
Quality of teaching & assessment	.936**
Students	.940**
Teaching staff	.948**
Learning resources, facilities, and equipment	.946**
Scientific research and projects	.941**
Total score	.932**

**it is significant at the 0.01 level

Table 3 shows that the correlation coefficients are statistically significant coefficients and highly meet the purposes of the study.

5. Data Analysis Techniques

In order to answer the first question of the study, athematic average (mean), standard deviation, and rank order were used. For answering the second question, the researcher used t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Results of the First Question

The question stated: What is the degree of quality standard implementations to graduate programs at the college of education as perceived by the graduate students?

This question was answered by means of calculating of mean, standard deviation, degree of application and the rank of the responses of the sample as a total to items of each quality standard in the instrument. The results are shown in the table 4.

Table 4. Means and standard deviation on the application of quality standard to the programs by gender, in descending order

NO	Descriptive Statistics (n= 86)						
	Quality standards	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Degree of Application	Rank
1	Teaching staff	1.00	5.00	3.97	.88	high	1
2	Quality of teaching & assessment	1.30	5.00	3.44	1.05	high	2
3	Scientific research and projects	1.00	5.00	3.30	0.93	medium	3
4	Students	1.15	5.00	3.27	1.18	medium	4
5	Learning resources, facilities, and equipment	1.00	5.00	3.20	1.04	medium	5
6	Curricula	1.20	5.00	3.18	0.97	medium	6
7	Mission and goals	1.00	5.00	3.00	0.97	medium	7
8	Graduate qualities and learning outcomes	1.00	5.00	2.90	.082	medium	8
General mean				3.30	0.83	medium	

Table 4 shows that the general mean and standard deviation of the sample's responses as a total to the quality standards and the degree of application were average with a mean of 3.31 and standard deviation of 0.83.

The level of implementations of quality standards of teaching staff was high with a mean of 3.97 and standard deviation of 0.88 and ranked first (average). The researcher attributed this to the fact that that the graduate programs have sufficient numbers of qualified faculty members with the necessary competence and expertise to carry out their teaching responsibilities properly, especially taking into consideration that a large number of the faculty members are associate and full professors. The performance of the teaching staff is regularly assessed by the students according to specific and stated criteria, and feedback is provided to them. The results are used to improve the performance.

The standard of quality of teaching & assessment ranked second on in the rank order (high) with average of 3.44 and standard deviation of 1.05.

The researcher attributes this result to the availability of very qualified professionals. They are experienced in teaching at higher education institutions, since they have profound & appropriate training in teaching and students assessment.

The quality standard of scientific research and projects ranked third (average) with the mean of 3.30 and standard deviation of 0.93.This result could be attributed to some extent of some drawback in the graduate programs, such as unclear instructions and guidelines for preparation and evaluation of research, scientific theses and/or students' graduate projects, undefined research priorities to the students. The programs may not fully apply specific mechanisms to ensure the follow-up and efficiency of scientific supervision of theses, scientific research and graduate projects. The programs do not completely monitor the fairness, objectivity and credibility of students' research evaluation and discussion of scientific theses and their approval.

The quality standard of students ranked forth (average) with a mean of 3.27 and standard deviation of 1.18. The researcher attributes this result to the fact that the criteria and conditions for students' acceptance are not clear enough, unpublicized and not applied fairly enough. The program may not fully provide students with effective services to guide their studies, evaluate the quality of all the services and activities offered to their students, improve them and follow up on their graduates.

The quality standards of resources, learning facilities, and equipment ranked fifth (average) with a mean of 3.20 and a standard deviation of 1.04. This result means that the learning resources, facilities and equipment are inadequate to meet the needs, curriculums, courses, activities and research projects of the programs and are not fully available to all beneficiaries.

The quality standard of curricula ranked sixth (average) with a mean of 3.18 and standard deviation of 0.97. This result could be interpreted to some attributes, such as the curriculum which does not entirely take into consideration the objectives of the programs, their educational outputs and the scientific, technical and professional developments in the area of specializations, and periodical reviews. Also, the result could be attributed to the fact that learning, learning strategies, and assessment methods are not fully in line with targeted learning outcomes at the programs and course levels and learning outcomes in research courses and activities are not properly linked to the learning outcomes of the programs.

Also, table 4 shows that the replies of the study participants on the level of implementation of the quality of mission and goals of the graduate programs ranked seventh (average) with a mean of 3.00 and a standard deviation of 0.97. The researcher attributes this result to the fact that the HE programs at faculty of education do not have fully clear, appropriate and consistent goals and mission with the goals and mission of the college and related departments. It may be that the mission and goals of the programs are not well specified to the students.

The other quality standard was the graduate qualities and learning outcomes which ranked eighth (average) with a mean of 2.90 and a standard deviation of 0.082 and represented the last rank order among all other quality standards. The researcher attributes this result to many shortcomings of the graduate programs. For instance, the programs do not clearly determine the characteristics of the graduates, the intended learning outcomes and are not sufficiently consistent with their mission, and the programs are not in line with the level of master's degree qualification. It may be that the identification of program learning outcomes does not consider the development of competencies and competitiveness that reflect excellence, creativity and innovation among graduates. Also, it might be that the graduate programs do not have appropriate mechanisms and tools to measure and verify the learning outcomes based on specific students' performance levels and assessment, so this is why students evaluated this standard at medium level of application.

The study results are corresponding to the results of some other studies related to the issue, such as studies of Ahmed (2018), Al-Qarni (2012), and AAl Foheid (2012), where the level of performance of quality of graduate programs ranged from average to low, but the results of this study differed from the results of studies of Alsyid (2017), Al-Hayasat and Bani Amer (2016), Radhi (2016), and Al Safran (2015), since the assessments of the attainments of quality criteria in higher graduate programs according to these researches are 'very high' and 'high'.

The Second Question

The question stated: Are there any significant differences at the level of statistical significance between the average responses of the sample members on the degree of implementations of quality standards of graduate educational programs attributed to gender and specializations?

To answer this question, the researcher used T-test and One-Way ANOVA analyses in order to identify whether the differences between the sample members' responses

on the level of performance of quality standards implementations to HE programs at college of education according to gender and specialization were significant. Table 5 and table 6 show the result.

Table 5. Means, standard deviations, and t-test for differences on the implantation viewpoints of quality standard according to student gender

Quality standard	Gender				T- Test
	Male, n= 47		Female, n= 39		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Mission and goals	3.11	1.29	2.86	1.33	0.87
Graduate qualities and learning Outcomes	3.08	1.19	2.89	0.94	0.78
Curricula	3.26	1.03	3.09	0.90	0.77
Quality learning	3.37	1.05	3.53	0.95	-0.72
Students	3.23	1.35	3.44	0.95	0.30
Teaching staff	3.70	0.98	4.29	0.59	-3.33 *
Learning resources, facilities, and equipment	3.13	1.20	3.33	0.84	-0.90
Scientific research and projects	3.18	0.87	3.51	0.97	-0.90
Overall	3.26	0.92	3.37	0.73	-0.63

* sig < .05

The above table displays that there is a significant difference at the level of significance ($\alpha \leq 0.05$)in the means of the participants' responses on the level of quality implementations of teaching staff criteria according to gender variable (male, female). The

difference was in favor of the female students, with a mean of 4.29. The researcher attributes this result to the fact that the female students are more satisfied with their faculty members in teaching and evaluation. They appreciate the competence and experience to carry out their responsibilities much more than male students do. The female students may think that the faculty members are well aware of academic, research and professional developments in their specialties, and actively participate in scientific research and community service, program development, evaluate their performance according to specific criteria.

The result may be attributed to the fact that that the female faculty members teach female students much more courses due to single-gender education and they are much more dedicated than the male faculty members in applying the quality standards related to faculty members to the best possible level. This difference between female and male students reflects much more care and attention of female faculty members for teaching and supporting the female students than what do male faculty members do with their male and female students.

On the other hand, the above table displays that there is no significant difference at the level of significance (P ≤0.05) among the means of the participants' responses on the level of quality implementations of the other quality standards according to gender.

Table (6) displays that there is no significant difference at the level of significance (P ≤0.05) among the mathematics means of the participants' responses on the level of quality implementations of quality standards in the graduate programs according to students specializations.

Table 6. One-way analysis of variance for differences on the implantation viewpoints of quality standard according to student specialization

Quality standards	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Mission and goals	Between groups	1.00	3	0.33	0.19	.90
	Within groups	144.32	82	1.76		
	Total	145.32	85			
Graduate qualities and learning outcomes	Between groups	0.65	3	0.22	0.18	.91
	Within groups	98.91	82	1.21		
	Total	99.56	85			
Curricula	Between groups	0.80	3	0.27	0.28	.84
	Within groups	79.66	82	.97		
	Total	80.46	85			
Quality learning	Between groups	1.09	3	0.36	0.35	.79
	Within groups	84.93	82	1.04		
	Total	86.01	85			

Students	Between groups	0.81	3	0.27	0.19	.90
	Within groups	117.91	82	1.44		
	Total	118.72	85			
Teaching staff	Between groups	3.62	3	1.21	1.61	.19
	Within groups	61.60	82	0.75		
	Total	65.23	85			
Learning resources, facilities, and equipment	Between groups	4.19	3	1.40	1.28	.29
	Within groups	89.48	82	1.09		
	Total	93.68	85			
Scientific research and projects	Between groups	2.96	3	0.99	1.16	.33
	Within groups	69.81	82	0.85		
	Total	72.78	85			
Overall	Between groups	0.58	3	0.20	0.27	.85
	Within groups	59.08	82	0.72		
	Total	59.66	85			

The researcher attributes this result to the fact that the Ministry of Education in K.S A requires all universities, colleges and programs to get program accreditation by applying the quality standards that are issued by the National Center for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA, 2018), accordingly, all academic programs seek to implement these standards to the extent possible.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the degree of application of all the quality standards of graduate programs at faculty of education, Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal in K.S.A, in the light of the quality standards for graduate programs accreditation issued by NCAAA (2018) was moderate. The result of this study is consistent with the results of the studies conducted by Daradkah, Al Osimi and Hamadin (2018) as well as by AAl Fohied (2012): the degree of application of quality standards for graduate studies programs is achieved at a moderate degree. On the other hand, the results are different from those of the study conducted by Ahmed (2018), according to which the application of quality standards of graduate programs in Jordanian universities was too weak. On the other hand, the study results of Radhi (2016) indicated that the availability of quality program implementation was better than the degree available in the college of education at IAF.

All studies imply that, on the one hand, the application of quality standards to graduate programs is a sort of a guarantee of acceptable quality, but, on the other hand, in the majority of cases, more efforts are needed to reach the optimum quality of

education. There was no statistically important difference (P ≤ 0.05) between the means of the sample members 'estimation in degree application of quality standards in the graduate programs according to students' specializations, on the other hand, there was statistically significant difference (P ≤ 0.05) among the average responses of the sample members on the degree application of quality of teaching staff criteria by gender variable (male, female), and the difference was in favor of the female students, with a mean of 4.29.

Gender has an effect on the assessment of the level of applications of quality standards on HE programs at Faculty of Education, Imam Bin Abdulrahman University. The applications of quality standard to HE programs is not reached to the desired goal. The perception of HE quality assurance in allocation of quality standards to HE academic program accreditation is very multi-dimensional and contextual. Henceforth, there is a need and association to evaluate together the applications of accreditation criteria of graduate programs and the criteria of accreditation of HE institutions. So, when the administration rewards the applications of quality standards of HE programs, then the two types of quality criteria are rewarded, since they are interrelated.

The perception of HE quality assurance in allocation of quality standards to HE academic program accreditation is very multi-dimensional and contextual.

7. Recommendations

In the light of the research results, the researcher recommends the following (the recommendations are addressed to the Deanship of Graduate Studies, University of Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University K.S.A., however, they may be applicable to many other HE institutions):

1. It is necessary to lay the quality foundations and models to upgrade the existing graduate studies programs at the Faculty of Education, and also for constructing new proposed programs according to high quality standards. It should provide academic, technical and administrative capabilities to the academic departments, to carry out the required graduate programs development that make them eligible to keep pace with the developments in knowledge and to contribute to the enrichment of society in scientific terms.
2. The graduate programs should be led by an effective academician who is dynamic in implementing the quality standards and plans of the program. He / she also should be efficient enough to monitor and stimulate others in achieving the goals through continuous development.
3. College deans and his / her assistants, academic department heads, programs coordinators and faculty members, should work together as a team in order to obtain the academic accreditation for the current graduate programs in the college.
4. Faculty members of the college should also conduct further studies to assess the quality of HE programs including some different variables., such as quality of teaching staff, quality of teaching process, quality of students, quality of educational facilities, quality of educational services, etc.
5. Students are the main focus of higher education institutions who invest time and money in the system, hence, involving them in the process of higher education quality assessment could improve QA process.

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