

A Comparative Review of National and International Practices in Teacher Education Accreditation

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Abstract: In recent years, there has been a pressing need for high-quality teachers in schools. Therefore, greater attention must be paid to all those factors that ensure the highest quality of teacher preparation. Teachers have a critical role to play in our skill-based and technologically enhanced economy where academic underperformers are perceived to be left behind. There is a growing understanding that the surest path to better schools is better teachers, yet when we look around, we find that ensuring high teaching quality is a global challenge. The main goal of Accreditation is to verify that all students are competent teachers and capable. This comparative study reviews the teacher education accreditation processes of four different countries (Scotland, USA, Australia, and Pakistan) and identifies the strengths and weaknesses of each model in their respective contexts.

Keywords: Comparative Review National International Education Accreditation.

INTRODUCTION

There is growing evidence that the quality of teachers is the most important educational resource in our schools, therefore greater attention must be given to the factors that shape that quality. Teachers have engaged themselves on a major role than ever in our technologically enhanced and skill-based economy where academic underperformers are perceived to be left behind [1]. Teacher quality translates directly into students' learning. A well-prepared teacher impacts student assessment more than any other background aspects of student like minority status, language and poverty [2]. Teacher Education (TE) providers should have the capacity and ability to first attract students with high academic potential and then work with them well to meet the ever-evolving demands of learning and teaching in the 21st century. Achieving such capacity in TE providers is a collective responsibility of the nation, university, and the profession.

Internationally, educational practitioners and policymakers have been taking a deep interest in developing adequate accountability and quality assurance procedures for teacher education. Many countries have already accredited their TE programs to ensure better teachers and high quality of instruction in classrooms [3]. Following this global trend, Pakistan's Ministry of Education formed an accrediting agency called the National Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (NACTE), authorized to work under the umbrella of the Higher Education Commission (HEC).

NACTE's primary responsibility is to accredit teacher education programs offered by public and private sector universities all over Pakistan. This paper reviews NACTE's accreditation criteria and procedures in reference to three international models [23]. This study has a two-fold purpose:

- To determine to what extent NACTE's quality assurance procedures and mechanisms are at par with international standards
- To learn certain lessons from successful international accreditation practices and propose improvements for NACTE, if needed

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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The foremost function of teacher accreditation is to assure the public (in general) that graduates from the specific TE program are professionally qualified and competent to teach. Accreditation determines whether or not any particular TE program justifies to be called a 'School of Education'. This paper follows a comparative approach in inquiring how four different countries, for their respective culture and needs, have developed detailed structures to comprehensively determine whether or not to accredit any given TE program. This review is based on detailed literature analysis and takes into account the national differences and priorities, legal and traditional structures, financial resources and the nature and status of accreditation being offered.

Purpose of Accreditation

Accreditation, essentially, is both a 'process' and a 'status'. The 'process' reports for the current evaluation and development of educational quality with the improvement and validation of standards while the 'status' offers guarantee to the community that the TE institutions offers the accepted program(s) [4]. Accrediting bodies produce and use certain criteria both to ensure TE programs meet the maximum expectations of quality and also to confirm that they progress over the passage of time. Accreditation standards address fundamental areas such as student support services, budget and resources, literature databases, student learning activities, curricula and faculty. The outcome of the successful accreditation procedure is the grant of "accreditation status".

'Accreditation Status' parallels to the point that students or the community at large can assume that the TE programs will live up to its assurance of producing high quality teachers. With no accreditation status, it is difficult to observe and streamline the working of TE programs. School employers would certainly not be sure whether or not the graduates of unaccredited TE program(s) acquire the right level of teaching proficiency [5]. Few major benefits of accreditation, as identified by NACTE, are:

- Identification of strengths and weaknesses of the program(s) that need to be addressed for further improvement
- Facilitation of individuals in exploring specific program/institution of high quality/standard seeking quality education
- Budgetary provisions and funding for improvement
- Information to prospective funding agencies about what to support and how much to support
- Comparative data for different teacher education institutions
- Development of short and long-term plans for program/institution improvement
- Information to the foreign universities regarding the accreditation status of program attended by Pakistani students seeking admission to their universities

Mostly, in the developed world, accreditation goes hand-in-hand with teacher registration and certification. Pakistan, as of today, doesn't have any authorized body for teacher certification.

REVIEW PROCESS

To review teacher education accreditation practices, both nationally and internationally, we collected and analyzed relevant documents, mainly policy reports and research publications. The accreditation bodies reviewed in this paper include General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)[24], and National Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (NACTE) for Scotland, USA, Australia, and Pakistan respectively.

Each accreditation model has been examined using the following ten parameters:

1. Overview and Rationale
2. Operational Status
3. Goals
4. Eligibility and Qualification Standards
5. Acknowledgement and Acceptance among Stakeholders
6. Criterion for Assessment
7. Operational Cost
8. Procedures for Conducting the Accreditation Process
9. Duration
10. Complimentary Quality Assessments

A detailed account of all four accreditation models against the ten parameters is given below:

Table-1: Overview and Rationale

Scotland	The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) was one of the first teaching councils in the world when it was set up in 1965. In 2012, legislation passed by the Scottish Parliament made it the world's first independent, self-regulating body for teaching. The Council recommends the approval of initial teacher education courses/programs to the Scottish Ministers [15].
The USA	Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), a national accreditation agency, has evolved significantly over time. First accrediting body for Teacher Education in the USA whose roots go back to the 1900s was the AACTE. Then, established in 1954 was NCATE and established in 1997 was TEAC, in their independent capacities took the responsibility for teacher education Accreditation. However, on July 1, 2013, both NCATE and TEAC merged into CAEP [12].
Australia	The AITSL was established in January 2010. While AITSL is government funded, it is not at all a department of the government. AITSL, instead, is a firm limited by guarantee, administered by an impartial Board of Directors [8].
Pakistan	Higher Education Commission (HEC), a federal body responsible for quality assurance of higher education, established National Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (NACTE) in December 2006. The programs conducted by public and private sector colleges and universities, NACTE are authorized to assess and evaluate the quality of teacher education. While HEC accredits all higher education institutions in Pakistan, NACTE's responsibility is to accredit the teacher education programs only [9].

Table 1 show that all four accreditation bodies have a common purpose of assessing, inspecting and evaluating the quality of teacher education programs in their respective countries. All four accreditation bodies enjoy a good legal standing and authorization and therefore are well recognized among the respective TE providers.

Table-2: Operational Status

Scotland	GTCS has always been financially independent, being funded by teachers rather than from the public purse. On April 2, 2012, the Order conferred independent status on GTC Scotland, together with enhanced powers and greater flexibility of operation [6].
USA	CAEP is a nongovernmental, which is run by volunteers committed to the efficient preparation of teachers [7].
Australia	AITSL is a national, yet independent, a body founded to endorse and work with quality in teaching and school leadership [8].
Pakistan	HEC created NACTE for the quality assurance of teacher education programs. NACTE functions as a federal body under the umbrella of HEC [9].

According to Table 2, accreditation bodies for Pakistan and Australia operate nationally and represent the government/nation while both USA and Scotland have non-governmental and privately-administered models. However, it is important to note that all four accreditation bodies, irrespective of their representation (government or private), operate independently to promote excellence in teacher education.

Table-3: Goals

Scotland	GTCS strategic objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Act in the public interest to ensure confidence in our teacher education (TE) institutions/teachers ▪ Set standards and promote high-quality professional learning for teachers at all stages of their careers ▪ Strengthen our role in enhancing professionalism in education ▪ Continue to improve our organizational effectiveness and capability[10].
USA	CAEP goals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To raise the bar for educator preparation ▪ To promote continuous improvement ▪ To advance research and innovation ▪ To increase accreditation's value ▪ To be a model accrediting body ▪ To be a model learning organization[11]
Australia	AITSL has two key objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improvement of teachers' quality through continuous development of teacher education ▪ Accountability of contributors for the delivering of excellent teacher education programs that are transparent and of rigorous standards and accreditation processes[8]
Pakistan	NACTE's mission is to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure high quality teacher education programs as an integral part of higher education through a sustained professional internal academic audit and external accreditation <p>Specific goals or objectives have not been outlined by NACTE[9].</p>

Table 3 exemplifies the sheer dedication and commitment all four accreditation bodies have for facilitating and ensuring highest standards of teaching and learning mechanisms in their respective countries.

Table-4: Eligibility and Qualification Standards

Scotland	TE programs must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ have effective partnership arrangements ▪ have an appropriate balance of professional studies, subject studies and relevant school educational placement experience ▪ contain clear arrangements for updating in line with national developments and new perspectives arising from educational research ▪ meet the QAA (Quality Assurance Agency) Benchmarks which are within the Standard for Initial Teacher Education ▪ allow student teachers to meet the Standard for Initial Teacher Education[10]
USA	To be eligible for CAEP accreditation, the TE institution must be accredited by an accrediting body which is recognised by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council on Higher Education Accreditation [12].
Australia	Accreditation is a pre-condition for any TE institution to work [3].
Pakistan	TE programs offered at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ institutions chartered by the Federal or the provincial government ▪ institutions affiliated with the chartered or degree-awarding institutions ▪ institutions offering degree programs under affiliation/collaboration with foreign universities under the approval of HEC[13]

Eligibility and Qualification Standards outlined in Table 4 for Scotland, USA, Pakistan, and Australia are in harmony and synchronization with each other. All four require TE programs to be offered by the nationally and provincially accredited institutions. Australia clearly stands out among the four as 100% of its TE programs have an acceptable accreditation status.

Table-5: Acknowledgement and Acceptance

Scotland	‘All courses must be acceptable to the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) as leading to registration as a primary or secondary teacher.’ This was the part of Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education Courses in Scotland [14] stated by Scottish Executive Education Department [15]
USA	Accreditation provides feedback for the development and update of professional teaching standards in the majority of US states [11].
Australia	Accreditation helps in improving professional position and determination to better quality within the pre-service teacher-education sector [3].
Pakistan	Teacher Education Institutions primarily pursue the accreditation process due to its MANDATORY nature.

Table 5 suggests that the accreditation status carries significant weight in Scotland, USA, and Australia. Here, the accreditation status functions as a stepping-stone for high quality teaching and school leadership. Therefore, the graduates of accredited TE program are given preference in teaching jobs. In Pakistan, accreditation status only reflects the quality of the offered program(s) through the ranking given. Prospective teachers who graduate from the accredited TE program do not enjoy any real-time advantage over the prospective teachers who graduate from the non-accredited TE program.

Table-6: Criterion for Assessment

Scotland	The Standard describes the knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected of graduates of accredited TE programs in the form of ‘Benchmarks’: Benchmark 1: Professional values and personal commitment Benchmark 2: Professional skills and abilities Benchmark 3: Professional knowledge and understanding[6]
USA	CAEP has five standards as follows: Standard 1: Content and Pedagogical Knowledge Standard 2: Clinical Partnerships and Practice Standard 3: Candidate Quality, Recruitment, and Selectivity Standard 4: Program Impact Standard 5: Provide Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement[7]

Australia	AITSL sets out the Program Standards that an initial teacher education program MUST meet for accreditation: Standard 1: Outcomes of the Program Standard 2: Development of the Program Standard 3: Entrants of the Program Standard 4: Content and Structure of the Program Standard 5: School Partnerships Standard 6: Resourcing and Delivery of the Program Standard 7: Information and Evaluation of the Program[8]
Pakistan	NACTE has recognized the following seven standards to serve as the foundation for assessment of TE programs: Standard 1: Curriculum and Instruction Standard 2: Assessment and Evaluation System Standard 3: Physical Infrastructure, Academic and Learning Resources Standard 4: Human Resources Standard 5: Finance and Management Standard 6: Research and Scholarship Standard 7: Community Links and Outreach[16]

The criterion for Assessment in Table 6 outlines the rigorous and detailed benchmarks and standards as quality assurance measures. All four TE accreditation models are at par with this parameter.

Table-7: Operational Cost

Scotland	GTCS is fully funded by registered teachers.
USA	CAEP is mainly financed through fee paid by recognized organisations.
Australia	AITSL is financed by the government of Australia.
Pakistan	NACTE is primarily funded through the fees paid by the TE institutions pursuing accreditation. It is believed that since NACTE is a federal body, it may also receive some additional financial support from HEC.

According to Table 7, the accreditation bodies of Pakistan, Scotland, and the USA are financially independent and have sustainable financial models. Australia, on the other hand, is publically funded.

Table-8: Accreditation Process

Scotland	In the case of a program being accredited for the first time, there are normally four stages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Expression of Interest ▪ University Approval/Validation ▪ Accreditation ▪ Approval of Scottish Ministers[10]
USA	The accreditation process includes the following steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The initial self- evaluation ▪ On-site visit by the team of peer evaluators ▪ Ongoing review ▪ The final decision[17]
Australia	The main steps of the accreditation process are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Institution submits an application for accreditation of the program or reaccreditation ▪ AITSL Panel assesses program application and puts up a draft report for accreditation ▪ Institution goes through the draft report and gives the feedback ▪ Panel completes the report, taking into account the institution's feedback ▪ AITSL publishes decision and status of the program accredited[8]
Pakistan	The key steps include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Preparation of Accreditation documents, including self-evaluation report ▪ Visit by External Evaluators ▪ The Final Decision ▪ The Decision Review, if required[18]

All four accreditation processes given in Table 8 resonate well with each other. All have a 4-step review process that begins with the self-evaluation or internal review and completes with the awarding of 'accreditation statuses.

Table-9: Duration

Scotland	Accreditation status valid for Six Years
USA	Accreditation status valid for Five Years
Australia	Accreditation status valid for Five Years
Pakistan	Accreditation status valid for Three Years

Table 9 reflects that Pakistan must take measures to increase the validation period for accreditation. The review of this parameter proposes that Pakistan should also make accreditation status valid for at least five years, making it more in line with International practices.

Table-10: Complimentary Quality Assessment

Scotland	When a person successfully completes a teacher education program at a Scottish university, he/she must receive a teaching qualification (TQ). By law, a teacher must register with the GTCS before he/she can be employed as a teacher in a Scottish education authority nursery, primary, secondary or special school [15].
USA	Each state in the USA demands from every teacher-candidate to get a teaching license first before entering the profession. For that, the teacher must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have at least a bachelor's degree ▪ Complete an approved, accredited education program ▪ The subject they plan to teach, should have a major in it ▪ Pass a state licensure test[19]
Australia	Licensing of Teachers in Australia: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Entrance Examination/Test ▪ Probationary Period ▪ Licensure Renewal/Sustaining ▪ Granted full registration after one year of teaching service to meet the professional standards of the Board. ▪ Evaluation and Rewards[20]
Pakistan	NACTE does not enjoy any complimentary support in assuring high teacher quality from any other national level body. To this date, there exists no teacher registration or certification agency either at provincial or national level.

Table 10 outlines the benefits that the prospective teachers from the accredited TE programs enjoy in Scotland, USA, and Australia. Here, the accreditation status functions as a stepping-stone for teacher registration and certification. Pakistan, on the other hand, does not have any teacher registration or certification agency either at provincial or national level.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The procedure to award the 'accreditation' status to TE providers is parallel to a great extent amongst the countries discussed here. All four accreditation bodies (GTCS, CAEP, AITSL, and NACTE) determine the eligibility and appropriateness of the institution or the program which generally begins with a self-study from the institution or the program. This internal evaluation is followed by the site visit of review team who examines the teacher education program(s) against the self-study report as well as predefined parameters and standards, and finally, the accreditation decision is issued.

Despite reasonably similar accreditation methodology, there exist considerable differences in operation and ideology among the four accreditation models discussed in this paper. This diversity in approach allows a constructive policy and practice borrowing between the countries to facilitate the effective improvement of teacher education quality.

GTCS, the Scottish teacher education accreditation body, operates under non-federal jurisdiction where the accreditation processes are closely linked to teacher registration and the school system generally. This allows an extraordinary advantage of keeping teacher education courses well-aligned with the needs and requirements of school teachers. This close-knit arrangement prepares pre-service teachers more realistically and efficiently for their future roles as teachers.

As a federal accreditation body, NACTE has more in common with CAEP than with AITSL. Pakistan and USA have more teacher education institutions in comparison to Australia. Australia has about 35 institutions offering the teacher education courses while the USA has approximately 1500 TE programs [21]. In Pakistan, NACTE has engaged with about 237 institutions country-wide and accredited almost 151 teacher education programs [22].

Another feature that both NACTE and CAEP have in common is the alignment of teacher education accreditation models with well developed, agreed upon professional teaching standards in their respective contexts. NACTE developed a set of seven standards and a conceptual framework named as the National Standards for Accreditation of Teacher Education Programs (NSATEP). These standards were created in alignment with National Professional Standards for Teachers in Pakistan (NPSTP). Australia has also been advancing in aligning the AITSL standards for teacher education with the current National Framework for Teaching Standards [3].

GTCS, CAEP, and AITSL are well supported by rigorous teacher certification and registration mechanisms, enhancing the impact of accreditation status. Accreditation status of TE program, in many cases, functions as an endorsement for the teacher candidate to get the teaching license or certificate. This facilitates a two-way filtration, accountability, and monitoring in teacher preparation process, first when teacher candidates are pursuing the teacher education programs and second when they are seeking a teaching position upon graduation. Pakistan can learn a great deal from these models and should work on establishing an independent body for teacher certification. This would mark a significant improvement in teaching and learning in Pakistan.

Pakistan may also learn in terms of how GTCS and CAEP operate as voluntary accreditation bodies and do not force TE providers to engage in accreditation process against their wills. Both invite the voluntary participation of TE programs and therefore focus on fewer teacher education programs targeting the higher level of quality through in-depth involvement and thorough follow-ups. NACTE, on the other hand, has the policy of mandatory accreditation for all teacher education programs across the country. While this mandatory participation may pull teacher education programs into the mainstream, it can also be problematic. NACTE must ensure that they develop the capacity (infrastructure, human resource, and funds) to meet the increasing workload without compromising on the quality of accreditation process.

Through this review, it has become more evident that NACTE's qualifications and standards to accredit teacher education programs in Pakistan are largely on par with the international teacher education models. However, in terms of implementation, NACTE must improve the following key areas: make accreditation purpose and practices more transparent to all TE providers; advocate accreditation mechanism as an inclusive process rather than exclusive; extend the accreditation duration to at least five years; establish regional teacher-accreditation teams to thoroughly engage with TE providers both pre and post accreditation; communicate accreditation results with real-time recommendations for the improvement; follow-through on recommended actions on annual basis; argue for the credible teacher registration and certification bodies at provincial and national level; and encourage the synchronization of accreditation standards with the provincial frameworks of in-service teacher education.

It is the time that policymakers and educationists in Pakistan recognize the inherent value of quality education for its society and citizens. All stakeholders of teacher education must facilitate NACTE in ensuring the supply of competent and productive teachers. NACTE must benefit from the exemplary policies and practices of teacher education accreditation across the globe to strengthen the education system in Pakistan.

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