

Article

Addressing challenges, approaches, and outcomes of university accreditation: Faculty and administrative insights from a college of dental medicine

Ensanya A. Abou Neel^{1,2,*}, William C. Frick^{3,*}¹ Department of Restorative Dentistry, College of Dental Medicine, University of Sharjah, Sharjah 27272, United Arab Emirates² Biomaterials & Tissue Engineering Division, UCL Eastman Dental Institute, Royal Free Hospital, London NW32QG, United Kingdom³ College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, Institute of Leadership in Higher Education, University of Sharjah, Sharjah 27272, United Arab Emirates* **Corresponding authors:** Ensanya A. Abou Neel, eabouneel@sharjah.ac.ae; William C. Frick, wfrick@sharjah.ac.ae

CITATION

Abou Neel EA, Frick WC. (2024). Addressing challenges, approaches, and outcomes of university accreditation: Faculty and administrative insights from a college of dental medicine. *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development*. 8(8): 5677. <https://doi.org/10.24294/jipd.v8i8.5677>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 5 April 2024

Accepted: 20 May 2024

Available online: 15 August 2024

COPYRIGHT



Copyright © 2024 by author(s).

Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development is published by EnPress Publisher, LLC. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Abstract: Regardless of the importance of accreditation and the role faculty play in a such process, not much attention was given to those in dental colleges This study aimed to explore faculty perceptions of accreditation in the College of Dental Medicine and its impact, the challenges that hinder their involvement in accreditation, and countermeasures to mitigate these barriers using a convergent mixed methods approach. The interviewees were faculty who hold administrative positions (purposeful sample). The remaining faculty were invited for the survey using convenience sampling. Quantitative data were analyzed by Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis tests at 0.05 significance. A consensus was achieved on the positive impact of accreditation with an emphasis on the collective responsibility of faculty for the entire process. Yet their involvement was not duly recognized in teaching load, promotion, and incentives. Quality Improvement and Sustainability Tools and Benchmarking were identified as common themes for the value of accreditation to institutions and faculty. Global ranking and credibility as well as seamless service were key themes for institutional accreditation, while education tools and guidance or unifying tools were central themes for faculty. Regarding the challenges, five themes were recognized: Lack of Resources, Rigorous Process, Communication Lapse, Overwhelming Workload, and Leadership Style and Working Environment. To mitigate these challenges, Providing Enough Resources and Leadership Style and Working Environment were the identified themes. This research endeavors to achieve a better understanding of faculty perceptions to ease a process that requires commitment, resources, and readiness to change.

Keywords: higher education; accreditation; perception; challenges; and mixed method research

1. Introduction

Higher education is an integral part of a highly dynamic, rapidly changing world. Coping with societal and institutional changes requires a thorough understanding of emerging phenomena such as the knowledge economy (Zapp, 2022), digital transformation (Büyükbaykal, 2015), and globalization (Varghese, 2013). These phenomena reflect how modern societies value education, research, and innovation to scientize the policy-making process for an integrated world economy (Zapp, 2022). This entails setting up academic quality standards and assessment processes for the development of high-quality education (Harvey, 2022). In this respect, accreditation has an invaluable impact on the quality assurance of higher education (Acevedo-De los-Ríos and Rondinel-Oviedo, 2021). It is “a quality stamp, which ensures that an

accredited institution or program has undergone a rigorous process of external peer evaluation based on predefined standards and complies with the minimum requirements” (Kumar et al., 2021). In healthcare, accreditation significantly improves the structure and organization facilities and hence the quality of provided care (Alkhenizan and Shaw, 2011). However, accreditation is a very complex, endless process (Keil and Haughton, 2007) that requires a concerted effort of highly qualified faculty members and administrators. A “long-lasting love-hate relationship” was observed between faculty and accreditation; this relationship varies according to the way faculty perceive accreditation (Eaton, 2010). This perception might activate specific behaviors or stereotypes (Chartrand et al., 2006) and then compliance with a specific task (Peat, 2021). Therefore, to understand the employees’ behavior, managers should understand their perceptual interpretation (Abou Elnaga, 2012).

Regardless of the importance of accreditation and the role faculty play in a such process, only a few studies investigated the perceptions of faculty about accreditation and their willingness to participate in such a demanding process (Bravo et al., 2020; Graves, 2021). These studies investigated the perception of faculty about accreditation and how it is affected by their level of involvement in the accreditation, the impact of accreditation on curriculum and resources, or challenges confronting the accreditation process. However, up to the authors’ knowledge, there is no published study investigating the perception of dental faculty, to accreditation. Furthermore, one of the University of Sharjah’s strategic objectives is to achieve international accreditation for its graduate programs. Therefore, the College of Dental Medicine is currently applying for joint accreditation of its BDS program, final accreditation for five Master of Dental Surgery (MDS) programs, and initial accreditation of a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Dental Sciences program. The overall process of accreditation, however, is overwhelming and time-consuming and faculty members play a pivotal role in executing the daily operations required to generate the necessary verification for achieving accreditation. In disciplines such as Dental Medicine, this represents an extra obligation assigned to faculty members who are consistently engaged in teaching, clinical training, community service, and research. Understanding the impact of accreditation on the success and sustainability of the institution is very important and it will be reflected in compliance with accreditation requirements. This study aims to explore the faculty and administrative insights from the College of Dental Medicine, University of Sharjah (UoS) to challenges, approaches, and outcomes of accreditation. Research Question(s) are: RQ1. How do faculty perceive accreditation and its impact on them and the institution? RQ2. What are the challenges faculty face during the accreditation process? RQ3. How can we overcome challenges to actively engage faculty in the accreditation process?

The findings of this study will be disseminated to the administrators of the university and college to (a) facilitate faculty participation in internalizing such process, (b) establish a quality culture wherein all stakeholders own the accreditation process and its outcomes, and (c) guide other colleges and universities going through accreditation.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Ethics

The proposed study was approved by the University Research Ethics Committee (REC no# REC-23-10-10-01-PG). The purpose, benefits, and risks of the study were clarified at the beginning of the study. The participation was completely voluntary, and the participants had the right to withdraw at any time. The responses were kept anonymous and presented without sharing any personal impression from the investigator. Any personal information was kept confidential and the agreement to participate in this study was considered as consent given by participants.

2.2. Research design and context

This study employed a mixed-method convergent design for a better understanding of the issue under exploration (Mertens and Hesse-Biber, 2012). Qualitative and quantitative data were collected through interviews and survey responses respectively, and the findings were integrated into the discussion to address the research questions (Mussawy and Rossman, 2018).

2.3. Participants

The participants for the interviews include vice deans, department heads, and committee heads who were involved in the accreditation process (purposeful sample). A total of 14 faculty members who met the criteria (faculty with full-time affiliation with the College of Dental Medicine, holding administrative positions, and were involved in the accreditation process at the department, college, or university level) were interviewed. Most interviewees were females (64.3%) and full professors (57.1%). The head of committees represented the highest group (35.7%), and the majority (28.6%) worked for 1–5 years in the UoS. Furthermore, all interviewees were involved in the accreditation process mainly for the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) followed by Australian Dental Council International (ADCI), and then Accreditation Canada. Their roles mainly involved the on-site visit (38.5%), followed by planning for the accreditation visit (34.6%) and writing a self-study (26.9%). Their level of involvement was described as moderate (50%), high (35.7%), and very high (14.3%)—**Table 1**. The participants for the survey were full-time faculty with different levels of experience as novice, mid-career, and senior. After taking a purposeful sample for the qualitative phase, the remaining faculty were invited to the quantitative phase using convenience sampling. The survey link was emailed to 40 faculty and a total of 30 surveys were returned for analysis. The participants are equally divided between females and males; the majority are lecturers (50%), from Restorative Dentistry Department (60%) and worked for 1–5 Y at the UoS. Furthermore, 66.7% of participants were involved in the accreditation process. Their roles were mainly writing a self-study (34.6%), being members of the accreditation association (23.1%), and participating in the on-site visit (23.1%). They spent from 1–15 hrs/week in the accreditation—**Table 1**.

Table 1. Demographic data of the interviewees and survey participants.

Variable Name	Groups	Interview Proportion of Responses	Survey Proportion of Responses
1. Gender	Male	5/14	15/30
	Female	9/14	15/30
2. Rank	Professor	8/14	2/30
	Associate professor	3/14	4/30
	Assistant professor	1/14	9/30
	Lecturer	2/14	15/30
3. Position	Dean		
	Vice/Assistant Dean	2/14	
	Head of Department	3/14	
	Head of Committee	5/14	
	Program/Hospital Director	4/14	
4. Number of years in the UoS	1–5 Y	4/14	18/30
	5–10 Y	3/14	4/30
	10–15 Y	3/14	8/30
	15–20 Y	3/14	0
	20–25 Y	1/14	0
5. Involvement in accreditation	Yes	14/14	20/30
	No	0	10/30
6. Accrediting bodies	Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA)	14/32	17/47
	Australian Dental Council International (ADCI)	11/32	15/47
	Commission of Dental Accreditation (CODA)	0/0	2/47
	Accreditation Canada	7/32	12/47
	Others	0	1/47
7. Role(s) during accreditation	Member of any accreditation association	0	6/26
	Member of any accreditation visit team	0	3/26
	Planning for an accreditation visit	9/26	2/26
	Writing a self-study	7/26	9/26
	Participation in an on-site visit	10/26	6/26
8. Level (time) of involvement in accreditation	Very low (1–5 hrs/week)	0	9/20
	Low (5–10 hrs/week)	0	7/20
	Moderate (10–15 hrs/week)	7/14	4/20
	High (15–20 hrs/week)	5/14	0
	Very high (20–25 hrs/week)	2/14	0

2.4. Instrumentation

Both interviews and surveys were conducted in English—**Figure 1**. The selected faculty were invited to qualitative in-depth semi-structured individual interviews at the college; some questions used to lead the interviews were modified from other studies (Hail et al., 2019; Lewis, 2016). The survey was designed using Google Forms; some questions were modified from other studies (Graves, 2021; Hail et al., 2019). The interview guide and survey questionnaire were pre-tested by 4 faculty and modified according to their feedback (Mussawy and Rossman, 2018). The survey was launched online on 18 December 2023, and reminder emails were sent on 8th and 15th January 2024. **Figure 1** shows the alignment of the research questions with both the interview and survey questionnaires.

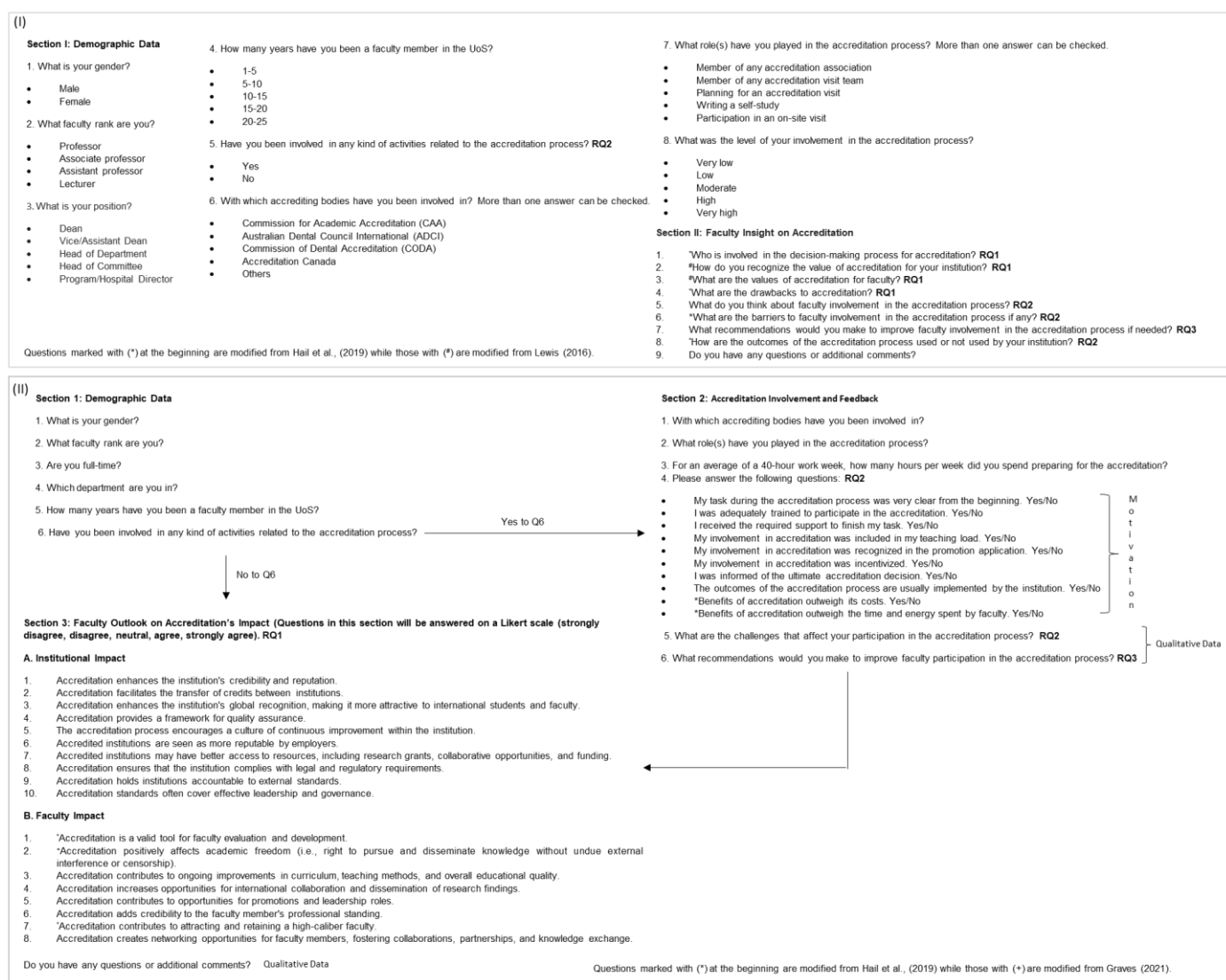


Figure 1. Alignment of research questions and interview (I) or survey instruments (II).

RQ: Research question.

2.5. Data collection procedure

Data collection for both interviews and surveys was carried out simultaneously. The quantitative data was collected from a larger convenience sample to pragmatically

create enough knowledge to address faculty perception of accreditation (Kelly and Cordeiro, 2020).

2.6. Data analysis procedure

Qualitative (interviews) data were recorded and transcribed using Microsoft Teams and then were color-coded for quotes that were transferred into an Excel sheet. Those with the same meaning were aggregated into “analytical codes” that were combined into “major categories or themes”. The code reliability was carried out by a second researcher who independently analyzed the texts. The use of pre-set codes and categories was avoided (Mussawy and Rossman, 2018).

Quantitative (survey) data were derived by assigning a numeric score to each Likert-scale response option for each question and analyzed using SPSS IBM, version 24. The normality of data was checked using Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. Since the data were skewed, Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis tests followed by pairwise comparison were used at 0.05 significance. The dependent variable was the perception of faculty to accreditation; the independent variables were gender, rank, department, years of practice, involvement in accreditation, and level (time) of involvement in accreditation. Descriptive statistics were used, and the responses were summarized and presented.

3. Results

Data were analyzed in response to each research question. Both sets of data were drawn from different populations to confirm or disconfirm the findings obtained from both.

Interview Analysis: Section II: Faculty Insight on Accreditation. This section covers 9 open-ended questions, and the following is the analysis of the participant responses to each research question.

Concerning the initial inquiry about the individuals participating in the decision-making process for accreditation, the dean and the accreditation committee at the college or university level represented the highest responses. As highlighted by one participant “The decision-making process for accreditation should be in the hands of Chancellor, Provost, CEO, or Director of the University as they must know what is the mission and vision of that institution, what is that institution for, for whom, for which sector of society, and what is its impact on the economy?”

Regarding the second question about the impact of accreditation on the institution, all participants described the accreditation as “important, essential, extremely valuable, and a must”. According to their responses, four different themes were identified: (1) Global Ranking and Credibility, (2) Quality Improvement and Sustainability Tools, (3) Benchmarking, and (4) Seamless Service. For the Global Ranking theme, a participant described the value of accreditation as follows: “I think the accreditation is very important nowadays... and seeking accreditation from different accrediting bodies, I think it is also important to increase the visibility of our institution...this will be very important in ranking the institution, whether using QS ranking or Shanghai or the Time institution.” Furthermore, as highlighted by the participants, accreditation (a) improves the recognition of the institution, its programs, and its graduates; this

enhances its credibility, and its global ranking, (b) provides a formal framework to identify gaps in various aspects of the college or curricula for continuous improvement according to international standards, (c) gives an idea on how the college can compete internationally and spend the minimum to get the maximum gain, (d) enables the college to benchmark its performance against other institutions for better employability of its graduates, (e) ensures the continuation of the education programs according to international standards, and this is a part of the challenges for success, and (f) secures funding and potential increases in tuition fees to impact the academics, supporting staff and students.

For the Quality Improvement and Sustainability Tools theme, one participant mentioned that “Accreditation is extremely valuable...because it highlighted areas in which we had a significant deficiency when it comes to patient safety and the quality improvement, and we are in the process of continuous improvement of these measures.”

About the third inquiry, exploring the accreditation’s impact on faculty, only 2 participants believed that accreditation does not contribute any value to their profession. From the analysis of the other responses, four themes emerged: (1) Quality Improvement and Sustainability Tool, (2) Benchmarking, (3) Education Tool, and (4) Guidance or Unifying Tool. It has been emphasized that accreditation (a) helps identify gaps in academic activities and health-care system for effective planning, (b) serves as a valuable tool for self-development, self-learning, and enhancement of faculty standards and values, and (c) improves the working environment and faculty awareness to universal best practice. Furthermore, it is a very powerful education tool for faculty as described by a participant “So basically, accreditation can be part of looking at training the trainers’ activity”. According to their responses, accreditation can be used to (i) gauge their ability to teach, (ii) familiarize themselves with the program, (iii) look at different aspects of their teaching activities, or syllabi, (iv) know their rights and responsibilities, (v) get experience in the accreditation process itself, (vi) look at how much they achieved in impacting their knowledge, skills, and characters to students, (vii) assess whether they achieved the products the university wants to show to the world, and (viii) provides directions for faculty members to adhere to, aligns them towards a template that centers on the college as well as individual faculty. This amalgamation fosters a sense of teamwork among all faculty members.

For the Guidance or Unifying Tool theme, a participant mentioned “I think we will be all unified towards a template that focuses on the college as a whole and the faculty as individuals.” Another one highlighted that “Accreditation serves as a guidance for faculty to see where they are in their courses”.

About the fourth query exploring the drawbacks of accreditation, five themes were identified: (1) Information Gap, (2) Rigorous Process, (3) Unrealistic Targets and Standards, (4) Communication and Grievance Lapse, and (5) Overwhelming Workload and Workflow Interruption. It has been emphasized that faculty lack information regarding accreditation and types of curricula which makes it very challenging to comprehend. Furthermore, when describing the drawbacks of accreditation, one participant revealed that “Accreditation is another big job; we are becoming like expensive clerks... the accreditation team never knows how to talk with other professors and there is no a reporting mechanism...Nobody can check if this

accreditation committee is objective... the accreditation is a kind of horror icon in the school, a punishing mechanism, a nightmare for the university". Additionally, (a) institutions often set targets and objectives that surpass feasible action, (b) the majority of accreditors come from developed nations with values that might not be relevant, and they evaluate the performance according to unified standards without considering the contextual differences or whether the institution "fit for purpose" or not and they provide "robotic and unrealistic recommendations", (c) the accreditation is an exhaustive process or extra burden that poses challenges for faculty, especially when prompt actions are required.

Regarding the fifth question concerning the faculty involvement in the accreditation process, it was described as "very important, a must, or crucial". According to their responses, all faculty should be actively involved and assume responsibility for the entire process as (a) they are the key players in such process and the best person to do this activity, (b) it is a part of their duties or responsibilities, (c) it improves the sense of belonging and their performance, (d) it brings everyone on-line, and (e) accreditation committee cannot do this job alone without faculty involvement. The participants also set the conditions for faculty involvement as follows: (a) they should be involved according to their experience, (b) their involvement should not cause too much trauma, (c) they should be prepared and provided with the necessary documents to perform their tasks, (d) they should be encouraged to make the necessary changes, (e) transparency is required and (f) decisions should not be monopolized by the college council or accreditation committee. Finally, the participants revealed that they are actively engaged and have significant contributions to the accreditation process.

Delving into the barriers associated with engagement in the accreditation process, as per the sixth question, five themes were identified: (1) Lack of Resources, (2) Rigorous Process, (3) Communication Lapse, (4) Overwhelming Workload, and (5) Leadership Style and Working Environment. The first four themes coincide with the drawbacks of accreditation. It has been highlighted that faculty lack (a) proper training to get involved in such a tedious process, (b) essential information (e.g., flow and accreditation procedures, how to address inquiries), so they exhibit varying degrees of comprehension and participation in this process, (c) explicit guidelines to adhere to throughout the accreditation process, and (d) time to deal with it. Also, it has been highlighted that the accreditation recommendations are not always shared with all faculty, therefore, bringing all members together is a barrier, and faculty are overwhelmed with their teaching, community service, and research. When describing the barriers to accreditation, one participant mentioned that "we could not clone ourselves". They also pointed out that (a) some leaders prefer to limit the accreditation to some trusted faculty, (b) no rewards for the accreditation, (c) the working environment is very stressful, (d) they have back-to-back meetings, and (e) the college applies to get accreditation for so many programs.

About the seventh query addressing strategies to improve faculty involvement in accreditation, two themes were identified (1) Providing Enough Resources, and (2) Leadership Style and Working Environment. These resources include information, training, support, and time allocation. This training could be courses, workshops, or orientation sessions that clearly define the accreditation objectives, elucidate

expectations from faculty, clarify the accreditor's criteria and standards, provide guidance on addressing accreditation inquiries, etc. These training sessions should be offered regularly by experienced faculty. Moreover, faculty members should receive ample time to deal with the accreditation process. Additionally, dedicated support staff should be available to assist faculty in accomplishing their tasks. They also recommended the following: (a) loyalty to college, (b) focusing on one accreditation, (c) good planning ahead of time for accreditation, (d) having the accreditation activity as one entity and a norm or culture, (e) a policy to involve faculty and break barriers to their involvement, (f) a system where all the activities are recorded, (g) a checklist with the timeline, (h) a consensus about the decisions, (i) rewarding system, (j) involving faculty in every single step of accreditation, (k) let them sit together and share their responses, (l) view them as one unit, not as departments or streams, (m) give them ownership of the accreditation process and responsibility for making the required changes, (n) motivate them by periodic meetings, (o) listen to their recommendations, (p) transparency among faculty and accreditation bodies, (q) fewer and less time-consuming meetings, and (r) always remind faculty that the benefit is two-sided.

About the eighth query regarding the utilization of the accreditation process outcome by the institution, it was emphasized that the institution usually complies with the accreditation team's feedback and outcomes are shared by the dean and head of departments, so faculty address the raised issues within the required period. The institution normally implements the necessary changes and this increases the demand for its programs beyond its capacity. Three themes were identified: (1) Indications for Executing Accreditation Outcomes, (2) Reasons for Executing Accreditation Outcomes, and (3) Unfavorable Consequences. According to the participant responses, executing accreditation outcomes was justified as follows: (a) for the program to get accredited and recognized (b) to inform the public that our programs follow international standards, (c) to have the license from the Ministry of Health for marketing our clinical training programs, (d) for attraction of potential students, (e) to point out some challenges to be addressed, (f) for improvement and benchmarking, (g) you're at risk if you don't drive the development and the upgrading of the level of programs, and (h) for future planning.

Exploring participants' queries or comments in the ninth question, three different themes were identified: (1) Overview of Accreditation Benefits, (2) Overview of Necessary Support, and (3) Leadership Core Responsibilities. The following has been revealed "Accreditation is one of the key roles for professional development and a very positive activity for individuals and institutions. It may be a tiring process; however, its benefits are too much valued. No way to escape it". However, it requires (a) a fully committed committee, (b) experts from the central accreditation committee to raise the awareness of faculty members, (c) admin staff to help in this process, and (d) time. It also requires leadership that ensures (a) proper planning, (b) involvement of all faculty, (c) direct communication with the accreditation body, (d) keeping people well-informed, (e) a more friendly accreditation team, (f) controlling the accreditation team, (g) application for one accreditation body that does not necessarily be external, and (h) listening to faculty feedback.

Survey Analysis: The survey involves both quantitative and qualitative data.

Faculty who did not participate in accreditation were exempted from answering Section II.

Section II: Faculty Involvement and Feedback. Only 20 participants responded to this section. Regarding the fourth question, which is related to the feedback about accreditation, most respondents (70%) agreed that the accreditation process was very clear from the beginning, and they received the required training (60%) and support (85%) to accomplish their tasks. Yet, their involvement was not acknowledged in teaching load, promotions, or incentives. Regarding sharing the accreditation decision, and implementing the accreditation recommendations, 85% of participants answered “Yes”. Regarding whether the benefits of accreditation outweigh the cost, time, and energy spent, 85% of participants answered “Yes”—**Table 2**.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of faculty involvement and feedback section.

Variable	Groups	Proportion of Responses	Mean	Std. Deviation	
Involvement in Accreditation	Hours/week	1–5 hrs	9/20		
	Scoring:	5–10 hrs	7/20		
	1 = 1–5 hours	10–15 hrs	4/20	1.75	
	2 = 5–10 hours	15–20 hrs	0	0.79	
	3 = 10–15 hours	20–25 hrs	0		
	4 = 15–20 hours				
Feedback on Involvement in Accreditation (Motivation) 10 items Scoring: No: 1 Yes: 2	My task during the accreditation process was very clear from the beginning.	Yes	14/20	1.70	0.47
		No	6/20		
	I was adequately trained to participate in the accreditation.	Yes	12/20	1.60	0.50
		No	8/20		
	I received the required support to finish my task.	Yes	17/20	1.85	0.37
		No	3/20		
	My involvement in accreditation was included in my teaching load.	Yes	5/20	1.20	0.41
		No	15/20		
	My involvement in accreditation was recognized in the promotion application.	Yes	6/20	1.25	0.44
		No	14/20		
	My involvement in accreditation was incentivized.	Yes	3/20	1.05	0.22
		No	17/20		
	I was informed of the ultimate accreditation decision.	Yes	17/20	1.75	0.44
		No	3/20		
The outcomes of the accreditation process are usually implemented by the institution.	Yes	17/20	1.75	0.44	
	No	3/20			
*Benefits of accreditation outweigh its costs.	Yes	17/20	1.75	0.44	
	No	3/20			
*Benefits of accreditation outweigh the time and energy spent by faculty.	Yes	17/20	1.75	0.44	
	No	3/20			

Regarding the fifth and sixth questions, which are related to the challenges affecting faculty participation in the accreditation process and recommendations for enhancing their engagement in the accreditation process, like the interview, the same themes were also identified as explained above.

Table 3. Summary of faculty outlook on accreditation (proportion of responses).

Variable	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree + Strongly Agree	
A. Institution Impact	1. Accreditation enhances the institution’s credibility and reputation.	2/30	-	-	7/30	21/30	28/30
	2. Accreditation facilitates the transfer of credits between institutions.	2/30	1/30	3/30	8/30	16/30	24/30
	3. Accreditation enhances the institution's global recognition, making it more attractive to international students and faculty.	2/30	-	-	9/30	19/30	28/30
	4. Accreditation provides a framework for quality assurance.	2/30	-	-	9/30	19/30	28/30
	5. The accreditation process encourages a culture of continuous improvement within the institution.	2/30	-	-	9/30	19/30	28/30
	6. Accredited institutions are seen as more reputable by employers.	2/30	-	1/30	11/30	16/30	27/30
	7. Accredited institutions may have better access to resources, including research grants, collaborative opportunities, and funding.	2/30	-	4/30	11/30	13/30	24/30
	8. Accreditation ensures that the institution complies with legal and regulatory requirements.	2/30	-	-	9/30	19/30	28/30
	9. Accreditation holds institutions accountable to external standards.	2/30	-	-	9/30	19/30	28/30
	10. Accreditation standards often cover effective leadership and governance.	2/30	1/30	1/30	10/30	16/30	26/30
B. Faculty Impact	1. *Accreditation is a valid tool for faculty evaluation and development.	2/30	-	9/30	7/30	12/30	19/30
	2. +Accreditation positively affects academic freedom (i.e., right to pursue and disseminate knowledge without undue external interference or censorship).	2/30	3/30	5/30	11/30	9/30	20/30
	3. Accreditation contributes to ongoing improvements in curriculum, teaching methods, and overall educational quality.	2/30	-	2/30	10/30	16/30	26/30
	4. Accreditation increases opportunities for international collaboration and dissemination of research findings.	2/30	-	3/30	12/30	13/30	25/30
	5. Accreditation contributes to opportunities for promotions and leadership roles.	2/30	-	8/30	10/30	9/30	19/30
	6. Accreditation adds credibility to the faculty member’s professional standing.	2/30	-	9/30	10/30	9/30	19/30
	7. *Accreditation contributes to attracting and retaining a high-caliber faculty.	2/30	-	5/30	13/30	10/30	23/30
	8. Accreditation creates networking opportunities for faculty members, fostering collaborations, partnerships, and knowledge exchange.	2/30	-	4/30	14/30	10/30	24/30

a. Significant level is 0.05. b. Asymptomatic significance is displayed. c. Exact significance is displayed for this test.

Section III: Faculty Outlook on Accreditation’s Impact. Thirty participants contributed to this section. Regarding the Institutional Impact, 80%–93.3% agree and

strongly agree with all statements. Looking at the Faculty Impact, the sum of % Agree and Strongly Agree responses for statements no # 1, 2, 5, and 6 were 63.3%, 66.7%, 63.3%, and 66.3% respectively. For statements no # 3, 4, 7, and 8, the sum of % Agree and Strongly Agree responses were 86.7%, 83.3%, 76.7%, and 80% respectively—**Table 3**. Concerning the question about whether the faculty has additional comments, the following were emphasized: “The work involved is very stressful and not duly acknowledged, and the contribution of faculty should be minimal by allocating more specialized members”.

Independent Samples Mann-Whitney U test was carried out to test the difference in perception between males and females while the Independent Samples Kruskal Wallis Test was used to test the perception as a function of rank, department, years of experience, involvement in accreditation, and level of involvement in accreditation—**Tables 4 and 5**. When a significant difference was observed, the pairwise comparison was carried out to show which groups were different. As observed, gender, department, number of years in the UoS, and involvement in accreditation have no statistically significant effect ($p > 0.05$) on the perception of faculty while the rank has a significant effect ($p < 0.05$) on the perception of faculty to global recognition, reputation by employers, access to resources, compliance with legal and regulatory requirements, faculty evaluation, academic freedom, international collaboration, promotion, and leadership style, professional standing, and high caliber faculty. According to the pairwise comparison, the lecturers showed a more positive perception of accreditation than professors, associate professors, and assistant professors. **Table 6** summarizes the responses obtained from the interviews and surveys to each research question.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics to show the difference in perception as a function of gender and rank.

Dependent Variables	Gender		Sig. ^{a,b}	Rank					Sig. ^{a,b}
	Male Mean/SD	Female Mean/SD		Professor Mean/SD	Associate Professor Mean/SD	Assistant Professor Mean/SD	Lecturer Mean/SD		
Scoring: 1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree									
A. Institutional Impact	Credibility and Reputation	4.5/1.1	4.5/1.1	0.78 ^c	3/2.8	4.3/0.5	4.3/1.3	4.9/0.4	0.11
	Credit Transfer	3.9/1.2	4.4/1.1	0.22 ^c	3/2.8	3.5/1.3	3.9/1.3	4.7/0.6	0.12
	Global Recognition	4.4/1.06	4.5/1.1	0.78 ^c	3/2.8	4/0	4.2/1.3	4.9/0.4	0.02
	Quality Assurance	4.4/1.1	4.5/1.1	0.78 ^c	3/2.8	4.5/0.6	4.1/1.3	4.8/0.4	0.25
	Continuous Improvement	4.4/1.1	4.5/1.1	0.78 ^c	3/2.8	4.5/0.6	4.1/1.3	4.8/0.4	0.25
	Reputation by Employers	4.1/1.1	4.5/1.1	0.22 ^c	2.5/2.1	4/0.8	4/1.2	4.8/0.4	0.02
	Access to Resources	4.1/1.1	4.1/1.1	0.81 ^c	2.5/2.1	3.5/0.6	3.7/1.2	4.7/0.5	0
	Compliance with Legal Requirements	4.4/1.1	4.5/1.1	0.78 ^c	3/2.8	4/0	4.2/1.3	4.9/0.4	0.02
	Accountability to External Standards	4.4/1.1	4.5/1.1	0.78 ^c	3/2.8	4.3/0.5	4.1/1.3	4.9/0.4	0.06
	Effective Leadership	4.1/1.2	4.4/1.1	0.44 ^c	3/2.8	3.5/1	4.1/1.3	4.7/0.6	0.08

Table 4. (Continued).

Dependent Variables	Gender			Rank					
	Male Mean/SD	Female Mean/SD	Sig. ^{a,b}	Professor Mean/SD	Associate Professor Mean/SD	Assistant Professor Mean/SD	Lecturer Mean/SD	Sig. ^{a,b}	
Scoring: 1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree									
Faculty Evaluation	4/1.1	3.8/1.2	0.62 ^c	3/2.8	3.3/0.5	3.4/1.2	4.5/0.7	0.05	
Academic Freedom	3.7/1.2	3.8/1.2	0.78 ^c	3/2.8	3/0.8	3.1/1.3	4.4/0.6	0.02	
Curriculum Improvement	4.3/1.1	4.2/1.2	0.81 ^c	3/2.8	4.3/0.5	3.9/1.4	4.7/0.5	0.33	
International Collaboration	4/1	4.3/1.2	0.27 ^c	3/2.8	4.3/0.5	3.3/1	4.7/0.5	0	
B. Faculty Impact Promotion and Leadership Style	3.7/1.3	3.8/1.2	0.90 ^c	3/2.8	2.8/1.3	3.3/1	4.3/0.8	0.04	
Professional Standing	3.7/1	3.9/1.2	0.71 ^c	3/2.8	3.3/0.5	3.2/1	4.4/0.7	0.02	
High Caliber Faculty	3.9/1	4/1.1	0.78 ^c	3/2.8	3.8/0.5	3.3/1.1	4.5/0.5	0.02	
Knowledge Exchange	4.1/1	3.9/1.1	0.71 ^c	3/2.8	3.8/0.5	3.6/1.1	4.5/0.6	0.09	

a. Significant level is 0.05. b. Asymptomatic significance is displayed. c. Exact significance is displayed for this test.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics to show the difference in perception as a function of department, number of years in the UoS, and involvement in accreditation.

Dependent Variables	Department			Number of years in the UoS				Involvement in Accreditation				
	Restorative Dentistry Mean/SD	Orthodontic, Pediatric, and Community Dentistry Mean/SD	Oral and Craniofacial Health Sciences Mean/SD	Sig. ^{a,b}	1-5 Years Mean/SD	5-10 Years Mean/SD	10-15 Years Mean/SD	Sig. ^{a,b}	No Mean/SD	Yes Mean/SD	Sig. ^{a,b}	
Scoring: 1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree												
A. Institutional Impact	Credibility and Reputation	4.5/1	5/0	4.3/1.4	0.38	4.4/1.3	4.8/0.5	4.6/0.5	0.92	4.4/1.3	4.6/0.9	0.93
	Credit Transfer	4.2/1.2	4.3/1	4/1.3	0.77	4.1/1.4	4.3/1	4.4/0.7	0.99	4.4/1.3	4.1/1.2	0.23
	Global Recognition	4.5/1	4.8/0.5	4.1/1.4	0.59	4.3/1.3	4.8/0.5	4.6/0.5	0.82	4.4/1.3	4.5/0.9	0.70
	Quality Assurance	4.4/1	4.8/0.5	4.3/1.4	0.85	4.3/1.3	4.5/0.6	4.8/0.5	0.66	4.3/1.3	4.5/0.9	0.74
	Continuous Improvement	4.4/1	4.8/0.5	4.3/1.4	0.85	4.3/1.3	4.5/0.6	4.8/0.5	0.66	4.3/1.3	4.5/0.9	0.74
	Reputation by Employers	4.3/1	4.8/0.5	4/1.3	0.451	4.11	4.3/1	4.8/0.5	0.31	4.2/1.3	4.4/0.9	0.90
	Access to Resources	4.1/1	4.8/0.5	3.8/1.4	0.303	3.83	4.8/0.5	4.4/0.7	0.22	4.4/1.3	4/1	0.07
	Compliance with Legal Requirements	4.5/1	4.8/0.5	4.1/1.4	0.59	4.28	4.8/0.5	4.6/0.5	0.82	4.4/1.3	4.5/0.9	0.70
	Accountability to External Standards	4.4/1	4.8/0.5	4.3/1.4	0.84	4.3/1.3	4.5/0.6	4.6/0.5	0.91	4.3/1.3	4.5/0.9	0.74
Effective Leadership	4.4/1	4.3/1	3.9/1.6	0.80	4.2/1.4	4/0.8	4.5/0.5	0.54	4.3/1.3	4.2/1.1	0.63	

Table 5. (Continued).

Dependent Variables Scoring: 1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree	Department			Number of years in the UoS			Involvement in Accreditation				
	Restorative Dentistry Mean/SD	Orthodontic, Pediatric, and Community Dentistry Mean/SD	Oral and Craniofacial Health Sciences Mean/SD	Sig. ^{a,b}	1-5 Years Mean/SD	5-10 Years Mean/SD	10-15 Years Mean/SD	Sig. ^{a,b}	No Mean/SD	Yes Mean/SD	Sig. ^{a,b}
Faculty Evaluation	3.9/1.2	3.8/1	3.9/1.4	0.86	3.8/1.4	3.8/0.5	4.3/0.9	0.61	3.9/1.4	3.9/1.1	
Academic Freedom	3.9/1.2	3.5/1.3	3.4/1.3	0.45	3.7/1.4	3.5/1	4/0.8	0.72	3.8/1.5	3.7/1.1	0.82
Curriculum Improvement	4.4/1	3.8/1	4.1/1.4	0.25	4.1/1.3	4.3/0.5	4.6/0.5	0.58	4.2/1.3	4.3/1	0.57
International Collaboration	4.3/1	3.8/1	3.9/1.3	0.24	3.9/1.3	4/0	4.8/0.5	0.08	4/1.3	4.2/1	0.85
B. Faculty Impact											
Promotion and Leadership Style	3.8/1.3	3.5/1	3.8/1.3	0.69	3.6/1.4	3.5/0.6	4.1/0.8	0.52	4/1.3	3.6/1.1	0.91
Professional Standing	3.9/1.1	3.5/1	3.6/1.2	0.53	3.7/1.3	3.8/0.5	4.1/0.8	0.68	4/1.3	3.7/1	0.25
High Caliber Faculty	4.1/1	3.8/1	3.9/1.3	0.69	3.8/1.3	4/0	4.4/0.5	0.53	4/1.3	4/1	0.28
Knowledge Exchange	4.0/1	4/0.8	4/1.3	0.90	3.9/1.3	4/0	4.3/0.7	0.79	4.1/1.3	4/1	0.57

a. Significant level is 0.05. b. Asymptomatic significance is displayed. c. Exact significance is displayed for this test.

Table 6. Comparison of the results obtained from the interview and survey in relation to each research question.

Research Question	Interview Questions	Survey Questions
Q1. How do faculty perceive accreditation and its impact on them and the institution?	Q1. *Who is involved in the decision-making process for accreditation? Mainly dean and accreditation committee	Section III: Faculty Outlook on Accreditation’s Impact 80%–93.3% agreed and strongly agreed with the positive impact of accreditation on the institution and faculty.
	Q2. #How do you recognize the value of accreditation for your institution? All participants (14) agreed that the accreditation has a positive impact on the institution. Themes: (1) Global Ranking and Credibility (2) Quality Improvement and Sustainability Tool (3) Benchmarking (4) Seamless Service	
	Q3. #What are the values of accreditation for faculty? 12 participants agreed that the accreditation has a positive impact on faculty, but 2 participants believed that accreditation does not add any value to their profession. Themes: (1) Quality Improvement and Sustainability Tool (2) Benchmarking (3) Education Tool (4) Guidance or Unifying Tool	
	Q4. *What are the drawbacks to accreditation? Themes: (1) Information Gap (2) Rigorous Process (3) Unrealistic Targets and Standards (4) Communication and Grievance Lapse (5) Overwhelming Workload and Workflow Interruption	

Table 6. (Continued).

Research Question	Interview Questions	Survey Questions
	<p>Q5. What do you think about faculty involvement in the accreditation process? All faculty should be actively involved at every level of the accreditation process, and they should assume responsibility for the whole process.</p>	<p>Section II: Accreditation Involvement and Feedback - Q4.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 70% agreed that the accreditation process was clear. 60% agreed that they received the required training. 85% agreed that they received the required support. 75% agreed that their involvement was not acknowledged in their teaching load. 60% agreed that their involvement was not acknowledged in their promotion. 85% agreed that their involvement was not incentivized. 85% agreed that the benefits of accreditation outweigh its cost. 85% agreed that the benefits of accreditation outweigh the effort and energy spent.
<p>Q2. What are the challenges faculty face during the accreditation process?</p>	<p>Q6. *What are the barriers to faculty involvement in the accreditation process if any? Themes: (1) Lack of Resources (2) Rigorous Process (3) Communication Lapse (4) Overwhelming Workload (5) Leadership Style and Working Environment</p> <p>Q8. *How are the outcomes of the accreditation process used or not used by your institution? Thirteen participants agreed that the institution employs the accreditation recommendations while one participant did not know.</p>	<p>Section II- Q5. What are the challenges that affect your participation in the accreditation process? Themes: (1) Lack of Resources (2) Rigorous Process (3) Communication Lapse (4) Overwhelming Workload (5) Leadership Style and Working Environment</p> <p>Section II: Accreditation Involvement and Feedback - Q4.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 85% agreed that the institution shares the accreditation decision. 85% agreed that the institution implements the accreditation recommendations.
<p>Q3. How can we overcome challenges to actively engage faculty in the accreditation process?</p>	<p>Q7. What recommendations would you make to improve faculty involvement in the accreditation process if needed? Themes: (1) Providing Enough Resources (2) Leadership Style and Working Environment</p> <p>Q9. Do you have any questions or additional comments? Themes: (1) Overview of Accreditation Benefits (2) Overview of Necessary Support (3) Leadership Core Responsibilities</p>	<p>Section II-Q6. What recommendations would you make to improve faculty participation in the accreditation process? Themes: (1) Providing Enough Resources (2) Leadership Style and Working Environment.</p> <p>Section III-Q. Do you have any additional comments?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledgment of their involvement in accreditation Allocating more specialized members to reduce the load on faculty - More collaboration with other dental institutes in the UAE for benchmarking

4. Discussion

Accreditation is an overwhelming process but a valid tool for assessing the quality of education that needs authentic commitment and belief in its inherent value (Addas, 2020). It investigates the interplay between the institution and its faculty (Obilor and Ikpa, 2022). It is crucial to evaluate faculty perspective on accreditation as this will influence their performance and hence the overall success of the institution (Mircioiu, 2020). This mixed-method convergent study aimed to explore the perception of faculty in the College of Dental Medicine of accreditation, an area where no prior research has been conducted. The qualitative data offered detailed

perspectives from participants, while the quantitative data yielded overarching trends and relationships. Merging both types of data proved valuable, presenting a holistic view of the issue being explored, encompassing both breadth and depth (Creswell, 2015). The following sections discuss the responses obtained from both the interview and survey to each research question.

Research Question No. 1: How Do Faculty Perceive Accreditation and Its Impact on them and the Institution? As observed from the interview and survey, consensus was achieved on the positive impact of accreditation on the institution and faculty indicating that administrators and faculty shared their insight on accreditation. The positive perception of accreditation was also observed in a previous study (Ignacio-Flores, 2022). As observed, faculty ranking was the only factor that influenced their perception with the lecturers showing a more positive perception than higher-ranked faculty. It was expected that higher-ranked faculty with more professional development and involvement in the accreditation process are more likely to have a more positive perception of accreditation than lower-ranked faculty. However, this is not the case in this research, and this could be related to the fact that the primary focus of lecturers is on professional development opportunities, and positive accreditation outcomes can offer them valuable recognition for their contributions to teaching excellence, enhance their resumes, and support their career advancement. Understanding this dynamic is highly crucial for institutional leaders to foster a more unified and positive attitude toward accreditation across all faculty ranks. Concerning the value of accreditation to both institution and faculty, both Benchmarking and Quality Improvement and Sustainability themes were common.

With the increased demands for accountability, higher education institutions (HEIs) experience tremendous changes that require benchmarking through which, they learn from the experience of others. This however necessitates defining the scope, identifying exemplary organizations, selecting, and disseminating the relevant best practices. Benchmarking improves academic excellence and transformation (Tasopoulou and Tsiotras, 2017) and positions the institution in the emerging competitive market (Al-Khalifa, 2015). Therefore, accreditation has a positive impact on education programs (Perveen et al., 2021), but *per se* may not improve the performance of HEIs unless linked to a culture of quality by efficient adherence to accreditation standards (Iqbal et al., 2023), working closely with pertinent accrediting agencies to guarantee a streamlined accreditation process, and considering the accreditation requirements and course specifications when initiating new courses (Duarte and Vardasca, 2023).

Furthermore, leaders must integrate valued and dynamic resources, and cultivate a culture of quality (Iqbal et al., 2023). It was observed that management support and staff training have a constructive influence on the effectiveness of the quality enhancement cells (QECs), that are responsible for overseeing and improving the quality of education within HEIs (Iqbal et al., 2023). Also, accreditation establishes public trust and accountability and ensures mutual of recognition of qualifications and mobility of academic personnel (Al-Haj Ibrahim, 2014). It is also used to educate educators by fostering effective information transfer, mutual understanding among colleagues, and the overall well-being of employees within HEIs (Reigas and Šimanskienė, 2023). Successful accreditation outcomes require fully dedicated faculty

members who willingly work together as a team (Morse and Santiago, 2000). Gaining a deeper insight into the intricate role of faculty and authentic assessment leads to the creation of a reliable system to support the planning decisions, leading to positive change and a more defined vision for the future (Monroe-Baillargeon, 2010).

As a Guidance or Unifying Tool, this theme was also observed in a previous study that concluded that accreditation contributes to the unity of the professions by bringing administrators, faculty, staff, and students together in a joint endeavor to enhance professional practices. Yet, prioritizing the preparation documents and crafting well-written policies and procedures over assuring academic quality poses a risk (Al-Haj Ibrahim, 2014).

Exploring the drawbacks of accreditation, three themes: Rigorous Process, Communication Lapse, Overwhelming Workload or Process are shared with the response to RQ2, and therefore, they will be discussed later. Concerning the Unrealistic Targets and Standards, as emphasized by the participants the institution often sets targets that surpass feasible action and sometimes are not aligned with its mission and vision. Furthermore, accreditors use unified standards for evaluating the performance of the institution regardless of the contextual differences and they do not assess whether the institution “fits for purpose” and their feedback involves “robotic” and unrealistic recommendations. It has been observed that there is no single set of best practices, but sets of different approaches appropriate to local contexts. A “fit for purpose” framework emerged and aligned with evolving models of education and international development advocating decentralization. This framework ensures that a system or program is crafted and implemented to optimally suit the local political, social, and economic context and needs (Taber et al., 2020). This will further ensure “robust, contextually appropriate global accreditation practices” (Cartmill et al., 2024).

Research question No. 2: What are the challenges faculty face during the accreditation process? A consensus among interviewees indicated agreement that active involvement of all faculty at every stage of the accreditation process is a must, with an emphasis on assuming collective responsibility for the entire process. Reviewing the survey responses for those who were engaged in the accreditation process, varying levels of agreement (60%–85%) were observed regarding the clarity of the entire process as well as receiving the required training and support. Nevertheless, 85% of the participants agreed that the benefit of accreditation outweighed the associated cost and efforts, but their involvement was not duly recognized in terms of teaching load, promotion, and incentives. In terms of the challenges or barriers to involvement in the accreditation, five themes were recognized from both interview and survey responses: Lack of Resources, Rigorous Process, Communication Lapse, Overwhelming Workload, and Leadership Style and Working Environment. These findings indicate a shared insight into these challenges as observed in a previous study (Ignacio-Flores, 2022).

Regarding the theme addressing the Lack of Resources, this aligns with the literature (Addas, 2020; Vali et al., 2020; Wafik and Tharwat, 2019) where lack of understanding, awareness, clarity of the accreditation concept, resources, personnel, and training have been identified as challenges faced during the accreditation. As emphasized by the participants of this study, accreditation is a rigorous process, and an overwhelming workload. As highlighted in the literatures, several psychosocial

risks (Alshamsi et al., 2020; Reigas and Šimanskienė, 2023), including increased work demands, working hours, working pace, time constraints, and conflicting information prevail during such process. Such risks would negatively influence the health of faculty members, their families, and patients' care. Therefore, an appropriate supporting system, that encourages teamwork and cooperative assistance, should be a priority when planning for accreditation to mitigate these demands (Alshamsi et al., 2020). Furthermore, management needs to pay attention to assigning tasks, predicting stages, and communicating new process developments with faculty members (Reigas and Šimanskienė, 2023). As highlighted by the participants in this study, lack of communication of the accreditation decisions with all faculty members has been considered as barrier to accreditation.

Delving into the intricacies of the Leadership Style and Working Environment theme, it has been emphasized that the leadership usually set unrealistic objectives and the faculty involvement in the accreditation process was not acknowledged. In literature, it has been emphasized that leadership, competence, and motivation have a positive impact on performance improvement and hence institutional accreditation. While leadership has a negative effect, both competence and motivation have a positive impact on institution accreditation (Rahardja et al., 2017). Regarding the institution utilization of the accreditation outcomes, 92% of interviewees and 85% of the survey respondents confirmed that they were considered and implemented.

Research question No. 3: How can we overcome challenges to actively engage faculty in the accreditation process? Two themes, Including Providing Enough Resources and Leadership Style and Working Environment, were identified from the responses for both interviews and surveys. These findings also indicate that the administrators and faculty member shared their insight on how to overcome these challenges as observed by Ignacio-Flores (2022). The first theme of the current study aligns seamlessly with the results of a prior study that emphasized the importance of providing comprehensive training for faculty members to optimize the effectiveness of academic accreditation. Such training is crucial for enhancing their knowledge and raising their awareness about the entire process. This training may take the form of courses or modules that encompass learning outcomes, teaching strategies, assessment methods as well as the significance of accreditation (Obilor and Ikpa, 2022). Prioritizing these challenges and employing innovative approaches to overcome them is highly essential for continuous improvement, maintaining educational quality, and attaining accreditation (Ignacio-Flores, 2022). These challenges require policy changes and transforming the evaluation and accreditation processes to enhance the quality of higher education programs (Vali et al., 2020; Wafik and Tharwat, 2019).

In terms of the additional comments question, the interviewees focused on three themes: Overview of Accreditation Benefits, Overview of Necessary Support, and Leadership Core Responsibilities while the participants of the survey focused on acknowledgment of their involvement in accreditation, allocating more specialized members to reduce the load on faculty, and more collaboration with other dental institutes in the UAE for benchmarking. As evident from these themes, administrators directed their attention toward leadership style, while faculty members were primarily concerned with their workload.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, consensus was achieved on the positive impact of accreditation on the institution and its faculty members with Benchmarking and Quality Improvement, and Sustainability identified as the common themes. The participants also affirmed that the institution communicates the accreditation decision and puts into practice all recommendations. Furthermore, active involvement of all faculty at every stage of the accreditation process is a must, with an emphasis on assuming collective responsibility for the entire process. Yet their involvement in the accreditation process was not duly recognized in terms of teaching load, promotion, and incentives as emphasized by faculty members. Both administrators and faculty member shared their insight on the challenges faced during the accreditation and how to mitigate them. These challenges were represented by five themes including Lack of Resources, Rigorous Process, Communication Lapse, Overwhelming Workload, and Leadership Style and Working Environment. Mitigating these challenges has been summarized in two themes, including Providing Enough Resources and Leadership Style and Working Environment. Only the faculty rank has a statistically significant effect on their perception. However, gender, department, years of service, and involvement in accreditation have no statistically significant effect on the perception of faculty.

This research sets out the following recommendations to ease the accreditation process:

- a) Involvement of all faculty members according to their experience
- b) Regular courses, workshops, or orientation sessions with clear accreditation objectives, accreditor's standards, guidance on addressing accreditors' inquiries, etc.
- c) Enough time to deal with the accreditation process
- d) A dedicated support staff to assist in administrative tasks
- e) Applying for one accreditation with good planning ahead of time
- f) Accreditation becomes a norm after developing a policy to mitigate challenges
- g) Reward system for active participation in accreditation
- h) An oversight mechanism to manage the accreditation team and a grievance system for addressing any concerns

To our knowledge, this study was the first to examine both administrative and faculty members' perspectives towards accreditation in a dental college. It employed both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a holistic view of the issue being explored, encompassing both breadth and depth. Furthermore, it covered both challenges to accreditation and solutions to mitigate them.

The main limitations of the study were the small sample size, the skewing of findings towards a positive direction, as faculty who are disengaged or negative about accreditation might not complete the survey (Germaine and Spencer, 2016), and the inability to generalize the findings to other populations or UAE regions (Seraidi et al., 2021; Yüksel, 2013). Regarding the sample size, the total number of faculty in the College of Dental Medicine is 59. The number of teaching staff who are only involved in clinical teaching is 22, but nearly 98% of them are working on a part-time basis. The number of the administrative team is 3. In this research, the number of interviewees was 14 and the number of participants in the survey was 30. The

participants of both the interview and survey were 44 out of 59 faculty (i.e., ~75% of all faculty). The clinical teaching staff was excluded from this study as they are working on a part-time basis. Therefore, the sample contributed to this study can be considered a good representation of the College of Dental Medicine. Given the study's small number of interviewees or participants, the intention was not to generalize the findings but to seek a better understanding of a context to (a) create a reliable system that supports the planning decisions for more defined vision for the future by prioritizing the challenges that require policy changes and innovative approaches, (b) develop the appropriate supporting system that encourages teamwork and cooperative assistance and, (c) help the management to pay attention to assign tasks, predict stages, and communicate new process developments with faculty members. More so, there could be transferability of ideas/implications of the findings to other contexts. Furthermore, the small sample size (less than 20) in research-based interviews, which delves into the dynamic aspects of a situation rather than the proportional relationships among its elements, will foster a strong rapport between the researcher and interviewees, strengthening the credibility of the in-depth investigation but holding minimal relevance to the research's fundamental framework (Crouch and McKenzie, 2006).

Future research will focus on conducting a similar study to the same population from different dental colleges in different Emirates while considering both larger sample size, and non-accredited dental colleges to assess the differences in perceptions towards accreditation.

Author contributions: Conceptualization, EAAN and WCF; methodology, EAAN; validation, EAAN and WCF; formal analysis, EAAN; investigation, EAAN; resources, EAAN; data curation, EAAN; writing—original draft preparation, EAAN; writing—review and editing, WCF; visualization, EAAN and WCF; supervision, WCF; project administration, EAAN. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Acknowledgments: The authors thank Semiyu A. Aderibigbe and Mehmet S. Bellibas for their support.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

- Abou Elnaga, A. (2012). The Impact of perception on work behavior. *Kuwait Chapter of Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review*, 2, 56–71.
- Acevedo-De-los-Ríos, A., & Rondinel-Oviedo, D. R. (2021). Impact, added value and relevance of an accreditation process on quality assurance in architectural higher education. *Quality in Higher Education*, 28(2), 186–204. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2021.1977482>
- Addas, A. (2020). Challenges in Implementing Academic Accreditation in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia. *Journal of King Abdulaziz University*, 12, 101–116. <https://doi.org/10.4197/env.12-5>
- Al-Haj Ibrahim H. (2014). Quality assurance and accreditation in education. *Open Journal of Education*, 2, 106. <https://doi.org/10.12966/oje.06.06.2014>
- Al-Khalifa, L. A. (2015). Benchmarking as a means to gauge and improve academic standards in higher education within the Arab Region. *The Business and Management Review*, 6(5), 151–150.

- Alkhenizan, A., & Shaw, C. (2011). Impact of Accreditation on the Quality of Healthcare Services: A Systematic Review of the Literature. *Annals of Saudi Medicine*, 31(4), 407–416. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0256-4947.83204>
- Alshamsi, A. I, Thomson, L., & Santos, A. (2020). What Impact Does Accreditation Have on Workplaces? A Qualitative Study to Explore the Perceptions of Healthcare Professionals About the Process of Accreditation. *Front Psychol*, 11(1614). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01614>
- Büyükbaykal, C. I. (2015). Communication Technologies and Education in the Information Age. *Procedia—Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 174, 636–640. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.01.594>
- Cartmill, C., Rashid, M. A., & Whitehead, C. R. (2023). Fit for purpose: Ensuring robust, contextually appropriate global accreditation practices. *Medical Education*, 58(2), 180–182. <https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.15238>
- Chartrand, T. L., Maddux, W. W., & Lakin, J. L. (2006). Beyond the perception-behavior link: The ubiquitous utility and motivational moderators of nonconscious mimicry. In: *The New Unconscious*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195307696.003.0014>
- Creswell, J. W. (2015). *A concise introduction to mixed methods research*. US: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Crouch, M., & McKenzie, H. (2006). The logic of small samples in interview-based qualitative research. *Social Science Information*, 45(4), 483–499. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0539018406069584>
- Duarte, N., & Vardasca, R. (2023). Literature Review of Accreditation Systems in Higher Education. *Education Sciences*, 13(6), 582. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13060582>
- Eaton, J. S. (2010). Accreditation and the federal future of higher education. *Academe*, 96(5), 35–37.
- Germaine, R. W., & Spencer, L. R. (2016). Faculty perceptions of a seven-year accreditation process. *Journal of Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness*, 6, 67–98. <https://doi.org/10.5325/jasseinsteffe.6.1.0067>
- Graves, L. B. (2021). Faculty perceptions of accreditation in the field of educator preparation Theses and Dissertations-Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation. Available online: https://uknowledge.uky.edu/epe_etds/77 (accessed on 20 February 2024).
- González-Bravo, L., Stanciu, D., Nistor, N., et al. (2020). Perceptions about accreditation and quality management in Higher Education. Development of a Spanish-language questionnaire with a sample of academics from a private university. *Calidad en la Educación*, 53, 321–363. <https://doi.org/10.31619/caledu.n53.860>
- Hail, C., Hurst, B., Chang, C.-W., & Cooper, W. (2019). Accreditation in education: One institution’s examination of faculty perceptions. *Critical Questions in Education*, 10(1), 17–28.
- Harvey, L. (2022). Critical social research: Re-examining quality. *Quality in Higher Education*, 28(2), 145–152. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2022.2037762>
- Ignacio-Flores, B. (2022). Challenges confronting Educators in Accrediting the programs of Bachelor of Special Needs Education, Bachelor of Elementary Education, and Bachelor of Secondary Education: Engendering the Organizational Analysis Framework. *Specialusis Ugdymas/Special Education*, 2(43), 2799–2810.
- Iqbal, S., Moosa, K., & Taib, C. A. B. (2023). Optimizing quality enhancement cells in higher education institutions: Analyzing management support, quality infrastructure and staff training. *International Journal of Quality & Reliability Management*.
- Iqbal, S., Taib, C. A. B., & Razalli, Mohd. R. (2023). The effect of accreditation on higher education performance through quality culture mediation: The perceptions of administrative and quality managers. *The TQM Journal*, 36(2), 572–592. <https://doi.org/10.1108/tqm-11-2022-0322>
- Keil, V. L., & Haughton, N. A. (2007). Accreditation data collection requirements versus faculty loads: One college’s use of self—Study to balance these two realities. *The Teacher Educator*, 42(3), 209–223. doi: 10.1080/08878730709555403 <https://doi.org/10.1080/08878730709555403>
- Kelly, L. M., & Cordeiro, M. (2020). Three principles of pragmatism for research on organizational processes. *Methodological Innovations*, 13(2), 2059799120937242. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2059799120937242>
- Kumar, P., Shukla, B., & Passey, D. (2021). Impact of accreditation on quality and excellence of higher education institutions. *Investigacion Operacional*, 41, 151–167.
- Lewis, S. (2016). Perceptions of university faculty regarding accreditation in a college of Education. Available online: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/etd/6300> (accessed on 15 March 2024).
- Mertens, D. M., & Hesse-Biber, S. (2012). Triangulation and Mixed Methods Research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 6(2), 75–79. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689812437100>

- Mircioiu, A. (2020). Perception in the workplace: Psychology hacks to boost your professional image. Available online: <https://risepeople.com/blog/perception-in-the-workplace-psychology-hacks-for-professional-image/#:~:text=Perception%20can%20affect%20collaboration%20and,then%20affect%20engagement%20and%20productivity> (accessed on 20 February 2024).
- Monroe-Baillargeon, A. (2010). Chapter 2 Educating the educators: Accreditation as a teaching and learning tool. In: L. B. Erickson, L. B., Wentworth, N. (Editors). *Tensions in Teacher Preparation: Accountability, Assessment, and Accreditation*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited. Volume 12. pp. 11–33. [https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-3687\(2010\)0000012005](https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-3687(2010)0000012005)
- Morse, J. A., & Santiago, G. (2000). Accreditation and Faculty: Working Together. *Academe*, 86(1), 30. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40252333>
- Mussawy, S. A. J., & Rossman, G. B. (2018). Faculty Members' Perceptions of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Afghanistan. *Higher Learning Research Communications*, 8(2), 9–34. <https://doi.org/10.18870/hlrc.v8i2.411>
- Obilor, E. I., & Ikpa, A. I. (2022). Review of the Process and Challenges in the Implementation of Academic Accreditation in Higher Educational Institutions in Nigeria. *International Journal of Scholarly and Educational Research in Africa*, 13(5), 88–105
- Peat, D. (2021). Perception and Process: Towards a Behavioral Theory of Compliance. *Journal of International Dispute Settlement*, 13(2), 179–209. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jnlids/idab030>
- Perveen, U., Idris, M. I., & Zaman, A. Z. (2021). The Impact of Accreditation on the Improvement of Teacher Education Programs/Institutions in Pakistan. *Journal of Education and Educational Development*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.22555/joeeed.v8i1.518>
- Rahardja, U., Moeins, A., & Lutfiani, N. (2017). Leadership, Competency, Working motivation and Performance of High Private Education Lecturer with Institution Accreditation B: Area Kopertis IV Banten Province. *Man in India*, 97, 179–192.
- Reigas, V., & Šimanskienė, L. (2023). Accreditation Process and Employee Well-Being in Healthcare Organizations. *Sustainability*, 15(12), 9254. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15129254>
- Seraidi, S. T. A. A., Adam, S., & Shivappa, P. (2021). Perceptions on the Implementation of Accreditation Requirements and Standards in the Primary Healthcare Centres, Ras Al Khaimah, UAE. *Journal of Health Management*, 23(3), 368–379. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09720634211035245>
- Taber, S., Akdemir, N., Gorman, L., et al. (2020). A “fit for purpose” framework for medical education accreditation system design. *BMC Medical Education*, 20(S1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-020-02122-4>
- Tasopoulou, K., & Tsiotras, G. (2017). Benchmarking towards excellence in higher education. *Benchmarking: An International Journal*, 24(3), 617–634. <https://doi.org/10.1108/bij-03-2016-0036>
- Vali, L., Mehrolhasani, M. H., Mirzaei, S., & Oroomiei, N. (2020). Challenges of implementing the accreditation model in military and university hospitals in Iran: a qualitative study. *BMC Health Services Research (Springer Science and Business Media LLC)*, 20(1), 698. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-020-05536-4>
- Varghese, N. V. (2013). Globalization and higher education: Changing trends in cross border education. *Analytical Reports in International Education*; 5 (1), 7–20.
- Wafik, D., Tharwat, A. (2019). Challenges of Business Schools to Implement Accreditation Standards: Case Study. In: Mateev, M., Poutziouris, P. (editors). *Creative Business and Social Innovations for a Sustainable Future*, proceedings of the 1st American University in the Emirates International Research Conference; 15–16 November 2017; Dubai, UAE. Springer. pp. 47–54. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-01662-3_7
- Yüksel, İ. (2013). Graduate Students' Perception of Standards and Accreditation in Higher Education in Turkey: A Qualitative Analysis. *Qualitative Report*, 18. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2013.1464>
- Zapp, M. (2022). Revisiting the Global Knowledge Economy: The Worldwide Expansion of Research and Development Personnel, 1980–2015. *Minerva*, 60(2), 181–208. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11024-021-09455-4>