

**A SCOPING REVIEW OF THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN QUALITY
ASSURANCE, ACCREDITATION AND PROGRAM EVALUATION IN HIGHER
EDUCATION**

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Abstract

Quality assurance is a term used broadly across many professions and what it encompasses varies. This scoping review studies what is known of the relationships between quality assurance (QA), program evaluation, and accreditation in the higher education literature and what gaps exist that could benefit from additional research. The results of this study suggest that accreditation can be part of QA processes, as can program evaluation, but there is a paucity of research that explicitly addresses the relationships between the three concepts. More research is required to describe the relationships between the concepts, and it is suggested that this be done relative to professions.

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Part 1: Preface to my MA Thesis by Article

My thesis was completed in article format and has three sections. Part 1 is the preface to my thesis on the relationship between quality assurance (QA), program evaluation, and accreditation in higher education. I introduce the questions that guided my research. I also present my position as a researcher and my experience in program evaluation and accreditation. In Part 2, I provide my thesis in article format. The article is entitled, *A Scoping Review: Relationships between Quality Assurance, Accreditation, and Program Evaluation in Higher Education*. It explores what is known in the literature regarding the relationships between QA, program evaluation, and accreditation in recently published works. In Part 3, I provide a summary of my lessons learned as a researcher as well as a professional in higher education.

Preface

When the topic of QA arises in the context of higher education, accreditation and program evaluation often come up. How they fit together is not always clear, however. In my professional experience, I have observed that the need to manage limited resources can lead to a blurring of lines between the activities, and even the terms being used interchangeably. It is these three concepts that I attempted to understand further and in particular, how they relate to one another. To start, I sought definitions that have been established in the literature.

In higher education, QA has varying definitions, as noted by Schindler et al. (2015). Their literature review found that there are two strategies used when defining QA, one seek to use a broad categorization by outcome, and the other defines it based on the perspective of the stakeholder. For the purposes of this study, Vlăsceanu et al. (2007) definition of quality assurance as “an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) the quality of a higher education system” (p. 48) will be used, though Schindler et al (2015) noted that there are challenges when defining QA. Classification of QA often includes differing themes, including purposeful, exceptional, transformative, and accountable (Schindler et al, 2015). Purposeful QA activities relate to products and services that conform to program mission/vision statements or specific requirements, including accreditation. Exceptional QA focuses on the goal of achieving distinction. Whereas transformative QA acts to create positive change within programs. Lastly, accountable QA aims to report to stakeholders on the efficient use of resources (Schindler et al, 2015).

Michael Scriven's (1967) original definition of evaluation, the judgment of a program's merit and worth, is often the simplest definition. He later elaborated it by relating the evaluation process to the identification of standards (i.e. the performance level associated with a particular rating on a prescribed criterion) (Scriven, 1991, p.335). However, as with QA, there are varying definitions for program evaluation as well. While they are similar, different scholars appear to highlight different aspects of quality as defined by Harvey and Green (1993). Patton's (1997) definition of evaluation addresses the use component of the evaluation as well as its ability to improve programs and inform decisions. Preskill and Torres (1999) highlight the organizational issues of program evaluation in their definition. They note the importance of context in program evaluation as well as the importance of integrating evaluation into workplace processes, engaging employees in evaluative processes, and fostering growth within organizations through evaluation.

Slatten, Guidry and Austin (2011) describe accreditation as an external review that ensures that established standards are met with respect to organizational processes and program quality. These standards are industry-specific and are intended to provide direction and benchmarks for organizations seeking accredited status. It was with these definitions of the highlighted concepts in mind that I started to develop my research questions and plan for my thesis.

Research objectives and questions

My objective was to document what is known in the literature about the nature of the relationships between QA, accreditation, and program evaluation. To achieve this, I conducted a scoping review to document what is currently available in the literature regarding these concepts. The following research questions guided this review:

1. What do we know from the literature about the relationships between QA, program evaluation, and accreditation?
2. Based on the gaps in the literature, what research is needed to further investigate the relationships between QA, program evaluation, and accreditation?

Scoping Reviews

Scoping reviews are used when looking to connect concepts and describe the nature of the literature available on the topic (Arskey & O'Malley, 2005). For my thesis, I applied a five-stage approach to summarize the nature of the relationships between the concepts of QA,

accreditation, and program evaluation, as well as identify gaps in the literature that need further research (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Scoping reviews are iterative and allow the researcher to learn from the literature (Mak & Thomas, 2022). This allowed me to become familiar with the literature published in this area, as well as provide direction on what further research may be needed to address gaps.

Positionality

My professional experience supporting programs with program accreditation processes as well as the application of internal program reviews to satisfy QA requirements in higher education both spawned my interest in this area, as well as biased my position as a researcher studying program evaluation, accreditation and quality assurance. In my opinion, there is a place for both accreditation as well as program evaluation to guide program improvements and assess the quality of programs. My experiences brought me insights, though I was careful not to rest these insights on anecdotal opinions. While challenging to put aside these insights at times, trusting in the research process was an anchor for me as I conducted this review.

Epistemology

Maggio et al's (2020) description of constructivism aligns well with scoping reviews and their iterative nature. Constructivism assumes humans construct meaning as they engage with the world around them (Crotty, 1998), and considers the social and historical contexts when making sense of the world. Researchers from a constructivist perspective seek to develop a theory or a pattern of meaning rather than starting with a theory (Creswell & Creswell 2018) and scoping reviews allow the researcher to discover a pattern through the available literature. I bring this perspective to my study as well as my professional life. Approaching this work with a constructivist view allowed for the iterative work necessary when conducting a scoping review.

Study Contributions

This study aims to articulate the relationships between QA, program evaluation, and accreditation as described by the literature currently published, and identify gaps where there is insufficient information to describe these relationships. This articulation of the differences between accreditation, program evaluation and QA is especially important for those working in higher education. While this review was not limited to higher education, my goal was to examine the relationship between QA, program evaluation, and accreditation to provide clarity on how and

when they can be applied to higher education and highlight the implications of the relationships between them for higher education.

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Part 2: A Scoping Review of Quality Assurance, Accreditation and Program Evaluation.

Introduction and Description of the Problem

Quality assurance (QA) is both necessary and expected in a variety of fields in higher education, such as in education, technology, and healthcare programs. However, while the term QA is commonly used by those in higher education, its definition and purpose are often not explicit. The exact meaning of QA varies by field, though the implication is that there is oversight on products or processes being produced or provided. Activities that are related to QA include accreditation and program evaluation. In instances where both accreditation and program evaluation are necessary the relationship between the two concepts and how they relate to QA is difficult to articulate. To date, Novak and Cañas (2006) have provided some guidance on how to articulate connections between accreditation and program evaluation but their explanations are complex and challenging to understand. Moreover, while the distinctions between accreditation and program evaluation may be clear to some individuals in their respective fields, there is often little distinction between the two concepts among program administrators in higher education, especially among those who do not actively participate in either process regularly. This lack of distinction is problematic as program administrators may then not understand or value the benefits of program evaluation when compared to other forms of audit or accreditation (Mayne, 2006). Thus, they may fail to invest the resources necessary to conduct them (Wandersman, 2009). In addition, they may view accreditation, either at the program or institutional level as adequate or at a higher priority than program evaluation.

Accreditation as a substitute for program evaluation is appealing to some individuals and their organizations, especially to program administrators within higher education. Accreditation comes with guidelines, checkboxes, and clear directives. Whereas program evaluation seeks to review all aspects of a program, and uncover what works well, and what needs improvement, regardless of whether the needs of accreditation are met. Accreditation also frequently includes a branding component, easily marketed by accredited organizations. While the public may not understand the exact meaning of accreditation, program stakeholders often view it as having merit because an external body has taken the time to assess and award accreditation status to the program and therefore it must be a quality program. In the battle for resources with accreditation, program evaluation can suffer from a lack of marketability and stakeholders may not understand

what it entails or the importance of it. Like program evaluation, accreditation activities are resource intensive, and if they are prioritized over other forms of evaluation, there is a risk that program evaluation will not take place alongside an accreditation. There is also a risk that program administrators in higher education may use accreditation as a substitute for program evaluation activities to appease external stakeholders. This substitution is problematic, as meeting accreditation requirements does not guarantee a program is effective in meeting its intended goals or in achieving its intended outcomes. Moreover, organizations substituting accreditation for program evaluation, intentionally or not, may be at risk of running programs that do not contribute to positive outcomes. Ensuring organizations understand the benefits of each accreditation and program evaluation, and the differences between them may help allocate resources for the various processes more effectively. Lastly, individual academic programs may be subject to accreditation, either voluntarily or as a requirement. Programs may also be subject to an internally driven program evaluation to meet QA guidelines and institutional policies. Where both activities are necessary, there is a need to distinguish between the two. Therefore, in this study, I conducted a scoping study to document what is currently known from the literature regarding the relationships between QA, accreditation, and program evaluation in higher education.

Study Background

In preparation for this scoping review, I defined key concepts relevant to the topic. This work prepared me to develop an appropriate search strategy when searching the existing literature.

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance encompasses many activities that serve to ensure that programs meet selected programming standards. How individuals define QA may depend on the purpose it serves and the context in which they use it (Ryan 2015). Scriven defines QA as “a type of evaluative monitoring” that has expanded beyond its original domains of manufacturing and engineering and is often administered internally and formative in nature (Scriven, 1991. P. 295). Others define QA as a “periodic process of collecting data on program performance to determine compliance with predetermined standards” (Myers, 1996, p. 129). However, a more generalized definition of QA by Vlăsceanu et al. (2007) defines it as, “an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) programmes” for

the purposes of accountability and improvement (p. 74). While these definitions may be adequate for some purposes, many definitions of QA are insufficient as the context and purpose for QA will influence the definition used (Schindler, Puls-Elvidge, Welzant, & Crawford, 2015).

In higher education, QA has varying definitions. Classification of QA often includes differing themes, including purposeful, exceptional, transformative, and accountable (Schindler et al, 2015). Purposeful QA activities relate to products and services that conform to program mission/vision statements or specific requirements, including accreditation. Exceptional QA focuses on the goal of achieving distinction. Whereas transformative QA acts to create positive change within programs. Lastly, accountable QA aims to report to stakeholders on the efficient use of resources (Schindler et al, 2015). Overall, QA commonly uses indicators to measure program performance. In the context of higher education, indicators typically fall into four categories: administrative (e.g., development of mission statement, meeting internal and external goals, procurement of resources), student supports (e.g., availability of supports and responsiveness to complaints), instructional (e.g., curriculum and competence of instructors), and student performance (e.g., increase in knowledge and skills that lead to employment; Schindler et al, 2015). Stakeholders can then use the measurement of these indicators to demonstrate that programs are supported and that programs are producing positive outputs.

Program Evaluation

Like the definitions and descriptions of QA, the definitions and descriptions of program evaluation also vary as different scholars present differing views. Michael Scriven's (1967) original definition of evaluation, the judgment of a program's merit and worth, is often the simplest definition. He later elaborated it by relating the evaluation process to the identification of standards (i.e. the performance level associated with a particular rating on a prescribed criterion) (Scriven, 1991, p.335). Notably, this reference to the creation of standards against which a program can be measured mirrors the structure of accreditation, which I describe below. Conversely, Patton's (1997) definition of evaluation addresses the use component of the evaluation as well as its ability to improve programs and inform decisions (Patton, 1997). Patton's definition is "the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs, for use by people to reduce uncertainties, improve effectiveness, and make decisions" (2008, p. 39). Preskill and Torres (1999) then highlight the organizational issues of program evaluation in their definition. They note the importance of

context in program evaluation as well as the importance of integrating evaluation into workplace processes, engaging employees in evaluative processes, and fostering growth within organizations through evaluation (Preskill & Torres, 1999).

The literature highlights similarities between QA and program evaluation. Green and Attkisson (1984) listed similarities but also differences between them. From their perspective, QA evaluates structure, process, and outcomes. In addition, Myers (1996) compared QA and program evaluation within the healthcare context by categorizing QA as input- and process-oriented and program evaluation as something that focuses on patient outcomes and the achievement of them. Such distinction is helpful, as it reinforces that outcomes are central to program evaluation, rather than the simple compliance to selected standards, which is key in accreditation.

Accreditation

Slatten, Guidry and Austin (2011) describe accreditation as an external review that ensures that established standards are met with respect to organizational processes and program quality. These standards are industry-specific and are intended to provide direction and benchmarks for organizations seeking accredited status. However, accreditation is costly. Preparation of accreditation applications, collection of evidence that programs have met the standards as well as coordinating and hosting site visits by external reviewers are resource intensive. Additionally, there are often fees associated with accreditation applications and the maintenance of them. For organizations with limited resources, these costs can be significant.

In the context of higher education, accreditation is challenged as a primary method of QA, not only due to the cost but also due to concerns over its impact (or lack thereof) on program quality (Humphreys & Gaston, 2015). Accreditation is one approach to QA (de Paor, 2016). When relating QA and accreditation, Vlăsceanu et al (2007) note that QA is a prerequisite for accreditation. If QA is equated with self-assessment, or if accreditation specifies this QA requirement, then the link between the two becomes clear. Both QA and accreditation can contribute to accountability, with accreditation often addressing specific external standards, and QA looking to broader accountability requirements, like governmental bodies and funding agencies.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this scoping review was to identify what is known from the literature about the relationships between QA, program evaluation, and accreditation. Aligning with Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework, this study focused on the extent, range and nature of the literature in this area and helped identify gaps in it (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). The following research questions guided this review:

1. What do we know from the literature about the relationships between QA, program evaluation, and accreditation?
2. Based on the gaps in the literature, what research is needed to further investigate the relationships between QA, program evaluation, and accreditation?

Methodology

To describe the relationships between quality assurance, program evaluation, and accreditation, I conducted a scoping review. I applied a five-stage approach to summarize the nature of the relationships between these concepts as well as identify gaps in the literature that need for further research (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). I will now describe each of the five steps in the context of my scoping review.

Stage I: Identifying the Research Questions

The research questions developed were broad to ensure the breadth of available literature can be included (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). As mentioned, the following questions guided my review:

1. What do we know from the literature about the relationships between QA, program evaluation, and accreditation?
2. Based on the gaps in the literature, what research is needed to further investigate the relationships between QA, program evaluation, and accreditation?

Stage II: Identifying Relevant Studies

To ensure this scoping review captured the literature pertinent to my topic, a variety of sources were included, such as journals, books, grey literature, and published literature found using electronic databases. The databases searched were Educational Resources Information Clearinghouse (ERIC) and Scopus (see Appendix A). Using these databases, search terms were applied to maximize the retrieval of relevant studies. A list of search terms included QA,

program evaluation, and accreditation (see Appendix B). I then used *Covidence*, a systematic review management software to help sort the literature and track my review.

Stage III: Study Selection

Following the initial search, the articles were screened for relevance. An online screening software, *Covidence*, facilitated this process. The inclusion and exclusion criteria ensured that consistent and replicable decision-making could be made and that only those articles which answered the research questions were marked for inclusion. Exact inclusion/exclusion criteria included those identified in Appendix C. It is important to note, however, that the inclusion criteria for this study did not consider the methodology (i.e., study design) or methodological rigour of the articles under review (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Levac et al., 2010).

Stage IV: Charting the Data

Charting is the process of interpreting the data by sifting through, documenting, and sorting material according to key issues and themes. Considering it was an iterative process, charting evolved with my growing familiarity with the study data. The data charted for this scoping review included information such as the study's authors, year of publication, study location, methodology used, study context, aims of the study, important findings, and possibilities for further study. The charting form was created in Excel. For this study, I focused on the connections between the concepts of accreditation and program evaluation.

Stage V: Collating, Summarizing and Reporting the Results

While scoping studies do not assess the quality or "weight" of evidence, nor are their findings generalizable, they do utilize a descriptive numerical analytic framework to present a narrative account of the literature (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). The descriptive numerical analysis (i.e., collating and summarizing) in this scoping study involved the presentation of the findings from Stage IV. Tables and charts were used to map the literature and to gain familiarity with the data.

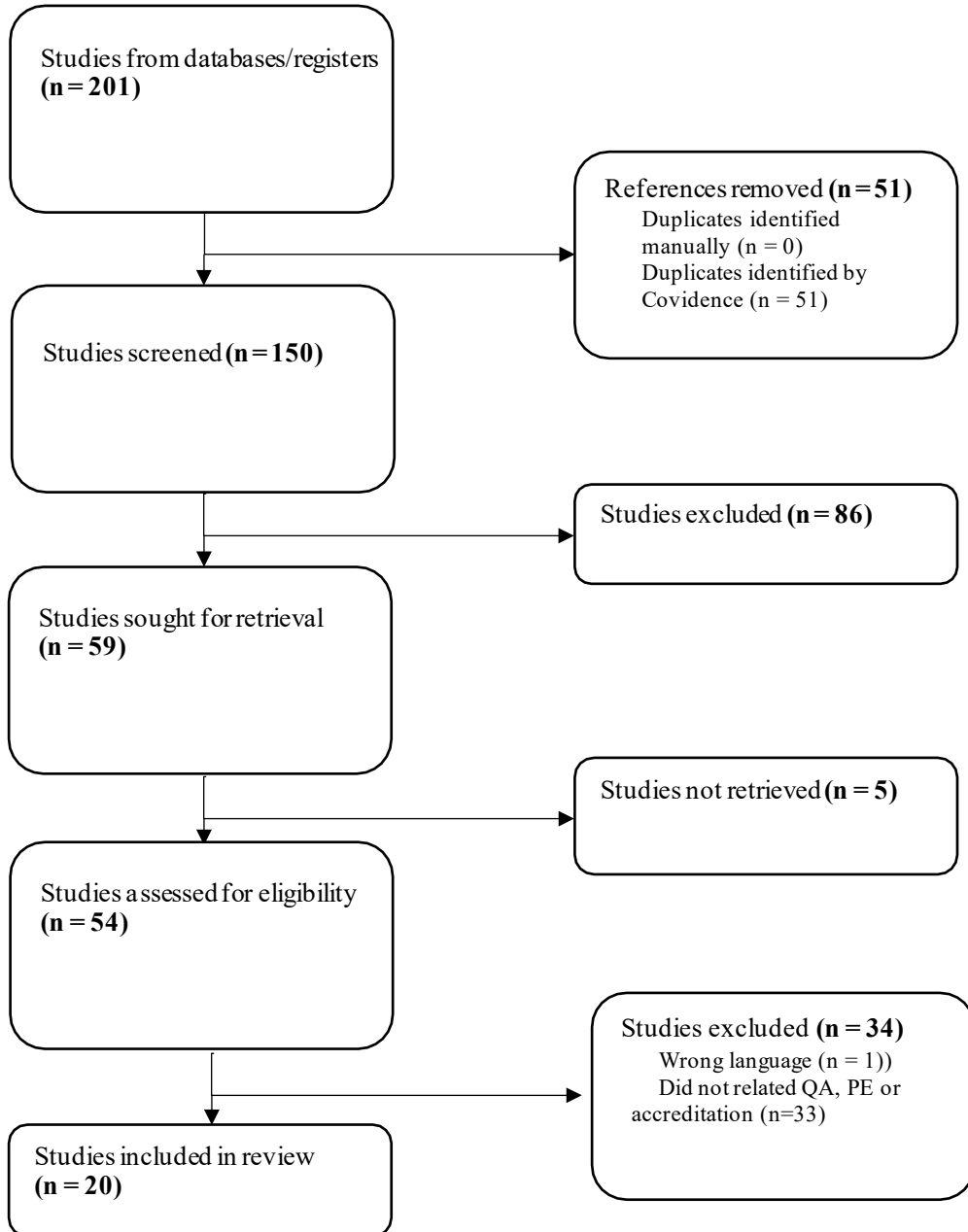
Results/Findings

Screening

My searches of ERIC and Scopus resulted in 201 articles for screening. Using *Covidence*, 51 duplicates were identified, leaving 150 articles. I screened the abstracts for 150 articles for inclusion/exclusion criteria. This screening yielded 59 articles for full-text review. Of these, 5 were omitted as I could not locate them, and 33 were excluded as they did not provide any

definitions or note any relationships between the concepts of interest, and one was excluded as it was not available in English. As a result, I included 20 articles for analysis in this review. The analysis included both numerical and descriptive summaries, which address the research questions. The articles selected for analysis provided definitions of quality assurance, accreditation, or program evaluation.

Figure 1
Screening Flow Chart



Publication year, location, and settings

The dates of publication of the articles included ranged from 2012 to 2022. Table 1 includes the locations of the studies.

Table 1

Study locations

Study Location	Number of Studies	Author, year
Europe	1	Frederiks et al, 2012
Netherlands	1	Akdemir et al, 2012
Pakistan	2	Malik & Ameen, 2020; Perveen et al, 2021
Romania	1	Bejan et al, 2018
Saudi Arabia	1	Shawer, 2013
Spain	1	Leiber et al, 2018
Turkey	2	Demirel, 2016; Staub, 2018
USA	9	Bender,2021; Davis, 2012; Hinck et al, 2018; Kromrei, 2014; Lewallen, 2015; Muhtadi, 2013; Pavlakis & Kelley, 2016; Rushton, 2016; Sylwester, 2017
Vietnam	1	Pham & Nguyen, 2021
Global	1	Frank et al, 2020
Total	20	

Eighteen of the studies took place in higher education contexts. The remaining studies were focused on professional accreditation; one in medicine, and the other studied accreditation across multiple professions. Of the studies that were held in educational settings, specific programs or faculties were the focus of the studies. Only 3 studies included multiple programs.

Publication type, study design, sources of data, and data collection methods

The types of publications analyzed were largely peer-reviewed articles, with some dissertations and one white paper included, as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Study types

Publication Type	Number of Publications	Author, year
Article	14	Akdemir et al, 2012; Malik & Ameen, 2020; Perveen et al, 2021; Bejan et al, 2018; Shower, 2013; Leiber et al, 2018; Demirel, 2016; Staub, 2018; Bender, 2021; Hinck et al, 2018; Lewallen, 2015; Pavlakis & Kelley, 2016; Pham & Nguyen, 2021 Frank et al, 2020
Dissertation	5	Davis, 2012; Kromrei, 2014; Muhtadi, 2013; Rushton, 2016; Sylwester, 2017
White paper	1	Frederiks et al, 2012
Total	20	

The study design most often used in the studies was qualitative in nature, most commonly case study (Bejan et al, 2018; Leiber et al, 2018; Staub, 2018; Pavlakis & Kelley, 2016; Frederiks et al, 2012; Kromrei, 2014; Sylwester, 2017; Bender, 2021; Rushton, 2016; Akdemir et al, 2012; Demirel, 2016). Other designs included mixed methods (Shower, 2013; Malik & Ameen, 2020; Muhtadi, 2013), Delphi (Hinck et al, 2018), literature review (Lewallen, 2015), results from a professional consortium (Frank et al, 2020) and quantitative (Davis, 2012; Perveen et al, 2021; Pham & Nguyen, 2021).

Table 3

Methodology Used

Methodology Used	Number of Publications	Author, year
Case study	9	Bejan et al, 2018; Leiber et al, 2018; Staub, 2018; Pavlakis & Kelley, 2016; Frederiks et al, 2012; Kromrei, 2014; Sylwester, 2017; Bender, 2021; Rushton, 2016
Document analysis	2	Akdemir et al, 2012; Demirel, 2016
Mixed methods	3	Shower, 2013; Malik & Ameen, 2020; Muhtadi, 2013
Delphi	1	Hinck et al, 2018
Literature review	1	Lewallen, 2015
Consortium Results	1	Frank et al, 2020
Quantitative	3	Davis, 2012; Perveen et al, 2021; Pham & Nguyen, 2021
Total	20	

Question 1: What do we know from the literature about the relationships between QA, program evaluation and accreditation?

None of the articles reviewed focused exclusively on the relationship between accreditation, program evaluation, and/or QA. The articles did not provide definitions of QA, program evaluation, or accreditation when describing their processes. Most frequently noted was the notion of accreditation as a form of QA, with 17 articles positioning accreditation as a form of QA or a framework for QA (Rushton, 2016; Shower, 2013; Pavlakis & Kelley, 2016; Demirel, 2016; Akdemir et al, 2017; Perveen et al, 2012; Sylwester, 2017; Pham, Nguyen, 2021; Malik & Ameen, 2020; Staub, 2018; Frederiks, 2012; Muhtadi, 2013; Frank et al., 2020; Hinck et al, 2018; Bejan et al,2018; Leiber et al, 2018; Bender, 2021). These 17 articles were in the context of higher education, except two, which were based in healthcare leadership (Frank et al. 2020), and multidisciplinary sectors that participate in accreditation (Pavlakis & Kelley, 2016). In two articles, accreditation was highlighted specifically as part of external quality controls or QA process (Bejan et al,2018; Leiber et al, 2018). Three articles noted program evaluation as a requirement for accreditation (Kromrei, 2014; Shower, 2013; Lewallan, 2015). Finally, in one instance accreditation was described as an alternative to program evaluation where capacity was lacking (Sylwester, 2017).

Question 2: Based on the gaps in the literature, what research is needed to further investigate the relationships between QA, program evaluation, and accreditation?

The studies analyzed highlighted various areas for future study, but none related directly to the studying of relationships between QA, program evaluation and accreditation. A summary of the opportunities for further research identified by the publications is provided below in Table 4.

Table 4

Recommended Future Research by Author

Study Author	Recommended future research
Kromrie (2014)	To compare the results of using a systematic evaluation process compared to prior processes through multiple case study designs

Study Author	Recommended future research
Pavlaklis & Kelley (2016)	To explore the impact of accreditation on programs
Perveen et al (2021)	To explore the impact of accreditation on programs
Bejan et al (2018)	To promote the use of QA instruments, reports, results
Rushton (2016)	To analyze course syllabi and content among courses to demonstrate consistency or variability between accredited programs.
Shawer (2013)	To explore the impact of program evaluation on professional development of faculty and staff, and factors that impact stakeholder attitudes towards program evaluation.
Akdemir et al (2017)	To apply the proposed framework beyond the Netherlands, to collect international perspectives on accreditation systems and report on best practices.
Sylvester (2017)	To compare assessments between accredited and non-accredited programs to explore the impacts of accreditation as a form of QA.
Pham & Nguyen (2021)	To explore the impact of accreditation through in-depth student interviews and how accreditation relates to the quality culture and quality assurance system within each university.
Bender (2021)	To document assessment strategies used by academic programs and internship evaluators.
Malik & Ameen (2020)	To develop a QA model and accreditation system for library information science education in Pakistan and highlight stakeholder involvement in that process, including national and international professional associations.
Staub (2018)	To compare English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs using accreditation as an evaluation framework to see if smaller programs benefit from using the former rather than building capacity internally to support the evaluation of their programs.
Fredericks et al (2012)	Coordination and support of external QA and accreditation requirements of joint programs recommended, and suggested such support would benefit programs undergoing review.
Muhtadi (2013)	To assess the cost of accreditation, as well as opportunities to increase the value of accreditation for stakeholders.

Study Author	Recommended future research
Frank et al. (2020)	To develop a common framework of core elements for the accreditation for health professions education (HPE).
Davis (2012)	To explore factors related to support and governance that would improve the use of institution assessment findings.
Hinck et al (2018)	To explore the application of accreditation that traditionally assessed campus programs on online programs to determine best practices.

Discussion

Through this review, I found that there are no clear relationships in the literature between QA, program evaluation, and accreditation that can be applied broadly, as it appears the relationships vary by country depending on their QA structures as well as the profession. When looking at the findings of the first question of my study, we can see that the connections between the three concepts vary. Most commonly accreditation is viewed as part of QA processes, though we also see that program evaluation can be viewed as part of QA processes as well and as part of accreditation. This finding suggests that QA is the broad term for a variety of processes and that there are various frameworks, both internal such as program evaluation and external that can be positioned under the QA umbrella (Rushton, 2016; Shower, 2013; Pavlakis & Kelley, 2016; Demirel, 2016; Akdemir et al, 2017; Perveen et al, 2012; Sylwester, 2017; Pham, Nguyen, 2021; Malik & Ameen, 2020; Staub, 2018; Frederiks, 2012; Muhtadi, 2013; Frank et al., 2020; Hinck et al, 2018; Bejan et al, 2018; Leiber et al, 2018; Bender, 2021). What can be interpreted from the literature is that QA processes are determined locally by the institution, or by governing bodies.

Accreditation appears to be favoured in instances where capacity is lacking within the program (Staub, 2018; Muhtadi, 2013), or where alignment with other programs and institutions is the goal, either due to the need to maintain a reputation (Frederiks, 2012) or to demonstrate that they meet standards that have been established for other program delivery modes (Hinck et al, 2018). The benefits of program evaluation may be overlooked in these instances, however. The benefits of program evaluation are sighted by John Mayne (2006) such as discovering why a program is not working, should be kept in mind when considering how to address the quality of their programs. Allowing program managers to access program evaluation in addition to

accreditation may bring value to their programs, though the additional cost may be prohibitive in some cases.

When reviewing the areas for further study presented by the publications, it appears that some broad suggestions are made. Some suggestions related to the impacts of program evaluation, accreditation or QA could be further investigated. Pavlakis & Kelley (2016) and Perveen et al (2021) suggested the impacts of accreditation required greater research, as did Pham & Nguyen (2021). Additional studies suggested that the frameworks or applications of those frameworks required additional studies, such as Malik & Ameen (2020) and Staub (2018). Overall, finding studies that focus on the relationships between concepts was challenging. Rather than relating QA, program evaluation and accreditation to one another, perhaps there is an opportunity to relate each concept to a common factor, either to a theoretical framework or a particular sector, providing a fixed variable against which to compare and relate concepts. This may be in the form of common industries or, how institution or programs define “quality”, as outlined by Harvey and Green (1993). Harvey and Green highlighted that quality as a concept was relative; relative to the context, to the person seeking to define it, as well as how it is “benchmarked”, whether quality is an absolute measure, or relative to a pre-determined standard (Harvey & Green, 1993). They further propose that there are five ways to view quality; exceptional, perfection, fitness for purpose, value for money and transformative (Harvey & Green, 1993). Perhaps further studies could seek first to ask how a program or institution views quality as defined by Harvey and Green, then seek to find patterns or themes on how QA, accreditation and program evaluation relate to one another when the definitions of quality at an institution aligns with a particular view.

My suggestion would be that studying the impacts of accreditation and program evaluation may provide insights into the relationship between the two, and how they relate to how QA is defined by an institution. However, it may be that how these concepts and processes related to one another will, by the program-centric nature of the processes, that broad relationships that apply in all instances will not be possible to articulate. Just as Harvey and Green (1993) noted for the definitions of quality, the relationships between accreditation, program evaluation and QA may be just as varied.

Limitations

This study was limited by the scope of articles reviewed. While a 10-year limit was applied to attempt to capture the most current literature on the subject, a greater time limit may have allowed me to capture the evolving nature of the relationships. Additionally, two databases were used but there may have been an opportunity to collect more relevant articles using more databases. The intention of my study was a pragmatic attempt to better understand the relationship between QA, program evaluation and accreditation, and while the scoping review method was selected, I did not strictly adhere to the methodology. For instance, piloting the form was limited to ensuring basic descriptive details were charted initially, with the expectation that the iterative nature of scoping reviews would allow me to make additions to my charting as I became more familiar with the data. While this did occur, I can appreciate now that a more thorough piloting of the form would have led to a stronger study. Similarly, the search strategy would have benefited from additional piloting in retrospect. Only once full text analysis was underway was the term “programme” seen, and this review would likely had greater retrieval of articles from including the use of “programme” when referring to program evaluation.. Another avenue for search terms may have been to focus on various frameworks that were referenced in the literature, including Quality Matters (QM), International Organization for Standardization (ISO), and Total Quality Management (TQM) to see if the articles retrieved would have included the relationships of those frameworks to QA, accreditation or program evaluation.

Conclusion

There is currently a paucity of research addressing the relationships between QA, accreditation, and program evaluation. When definitions of each are provided, few position the relative concepts against one another even when studying the impacts of accreditation and program evaluation. Perhaps the evolving nature of QA globally, and the variance between professions has meant more pressing issues of impact and accountability have been the focus of research. Defining best practices for QA within a profession and aligning those to frameworks of accreditation and program evaluation strategies may help programs when selecting the best practices for their needs, but there may be a place for both practices. Assigning resources for both should be considered by senior leadership to determine the benefits of each for their programs, and future studies to determine the impact of both processes on the same program,

how they differ, and conducting a gap analysis between the two resulting processes applied to a variety of professions may contribute in this area of research.

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Appendix A

Preliminary Databases and supplemental sources.

Databases	Supplemental
ERIC	Grey literature:
Scopus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="745 443 1203 506">● Government websites and documents<li data-bbox="745 512 1203 548">● Policy websites and documents

Other sources may be identified and added during Stage II.

Appendix B

Search strategy and search terms

Database searches involved combinations of search terms across 3 categories (program evaluation, accreditation, and QA).

ERIC Search

1	Quality Assurance/ or Program Evaluation/	58331
2	program evaluation.mp. or Program Evaluation/	59529
3	"Accreditation (Institutions)"/ or accreditation.mp.	10879
4	1 and 2	56305
5	3 and 4	1149
6	limit 5 to (english and yr="2012 - 2022")	150

Scopus

(TITLE-ABS-KEY ({quality assurance}) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (accreditation) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ({program evaluation} OR {program review})) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2022) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2021) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2020) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2019) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2018) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2017) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2016) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2015) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2014) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2013) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2012))

Results 51 Articles Retrieved

Appendix C

Preliminary inclusion and exclusion criteria for Stage III: Study Selection

	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Publication date	Published between 2012-2022 for all Canadian and international literature	Published before 2012
Language	The study is published in English	Study is published in a language other than English
Document Type/Study Design	Academic literature (empirical or review papers including systematic methodologies) and grey literature (publicly available reports, publications, proceedings of meetings, social and traditional media outputs)	Evaluations of programs It does not meet the document type/study design criteria
Country	The scoping review will capture all Canadian-based as well as International Literature	No country will be excluded
Population	Managers of programs subject to or responsible for quality assurance measures (both male and female)	

Level	all levels of professionals, including those still in practice	N/A
Field/Discipline	Any field or discipline	
Collaboration	All types of collaboration between professionals eligible	

Appendix D

Table 1 Data chart

Author, Year	Context	Relationships noted	Study details	Findings
Kromrei, 2014	Education; medical training	Program evaluation as a requirement for program accreditation	Case study on using impact evaluation to satisfy accreditation requirements of medical education program over 3 years in the US.	Stakeholder perceptions of anticipated benefits and realized benefits differed
Rushton, 2016	Education; Forensic Sciences	Accreditation as a form of QA	A qualitative study to evaluate how the curriculum of accredited Forensic Science programs in the US meets the accreditation requirements of the Forensic Science Education Programs Accreditation Commission (FEPAC) and the extent to which other accredited programs are consistent with one another.	Variability between programs exists while meeting accreditation requirements.
Shower, 2013	Education; Languages	Accreditation as a form of QA; program evaluation as a requirement for program accreditation	Mixed methods study to assess the impact of program evaluation on program performance and stakeholders in Saudi Arabia	Program evaluation had a positive impact, leading to program improvements and was seen as a tool for the professional development of stakeholders

Pavlaklis & Kelley, 2016	Education; Leadership	Accreditation as a form of QA	Case study that reviews program accreditation from other disciplines to identify themes that may be applied to leadership education in the US	Lack of research noted, though accreditation is viewed as having a “conservative influence” on program change, while also providing consumers with the ‘signal of program quality’ (p.81)
Demirel, 2016	Education; Distance learning	Accreditation as a form of QA	Case study to evaluate how accreditation standards can be applied to distance learning in Turkey and what program areas benefit.	Accreditation is seen as a method of elevating the reputation of distance learning, though areas are noted where adjustments may be required, such as data collection infrastructure and the assessment processes.
Akdemir et al, 2017	Education; medical training	Accreditation as a form of QA	Document analysis on the accreditation documents of medical education programs in the Netherlands over 50 years to document changing views on educational quality, and how that has impacted national accreditation systems.	The themes uncovered include greater decentralization, greater responsibility of the accreditors, residency performance, physician practice outcomes and quality improvement.
Perveen et al, 2012	Education; teacher preparation	Accreditation as a form of QA, accountability	A quantitative study to describe the impact of accreditation on teacher education	Accreditation is viewed as having a high impact on program improvement.

			programs in Pakistan.	
Sylwester, 2017	Education; Linguistics	Accreditation as a form of QA; Accreditation as a form of program evaluation	A qualitative study to assess the impact of program assessment on improvements in teaching and learning in the US	Program assessment may require multiple cycles to result in impacts, and may be applied where programs do not have professional accreditation.
Pham, Nguyen, 2021	Education;	Accreditation as a form of QA	A Qualitative study to examine the impact of program accreditation on quality improvement from the Students' perspective in Vietnam	Students observed changes in curriculum, teaching methods, assessment methods, equipment/facilities and research, but few observed changes in staff or support services.
Malik & Ameen, 2020	Education; Library Science	Accreditation as a form of QA; program evaluation as a form of assessment	A qualitative study examines the perceptions of faculty concerning the accreditation of library science programs in Pakistan	Barriers were noted to imparting a quality program, notably insufficient human and physical resources, and the lack of established procedures. The need for both internal and external QA mechanisms was noted and a recommendation to develop national guidelines for QA was highlighted.
Staub, 2018	Education; EAP	Accreditation as a QA framework	The article argues that where EAP programs lack the resources for	Accreditation can be useful for EAP programs that lack capacity.

program evaluation
or program
assessment, an
established
accreditation
framework can guide
an evaluation and act
as a QA mechanism.

Frederiks, 2012	Education	Accreditation as a form of QA	Seminar presentation to analyze the experience of joint programs across the EU in QA and to make recommendations to the ministers responsible for higher ed in Europe.	European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA) recommends a "specific European accreditation approach" be applied to joint programs that are otherwise subject to national accreditation.
Muhtadi, 2013	Education; medical training	Accreditation as a QA framework	A qualitative study to assess the value of accreditation in medical programs in the US	Benefits of accreditation were perceived to be high as a stimulus for program improvement, moderate for program quality and low benefit when it came to the quality of faculty. Overall benefits are perceived to be low to moderate
Frank et al., 2020	Education; medical training	Accreditation for QA	Summary of an international consensus consortium that invited leaders of healthcare professional accreditation to define accreditation in health professions,	Accreditation as a formal evaluation of the program, institution or system by an external body for the purposes of QA; accreditation is distinct from program evaluation or research; accreditation can

			describe the relationship between accreditation and healthcare outcomes, identify issues in current accreditation practice, propose a framework of essential components of healthcare profession accreditation	enhance health care outcomes. Ten elements are identified, and five emerging developments in accreditation are noted.
Davis, 2012	Education; language training	Program evaluation as a type of assessment	A qualitative study on the impact of accreditation on foreign language programs, and their capacity to implement.	Capacity varies between programs; internally driven inquiry leads to greater assessment use.
Hinck et al, 2018	Education; distance ed	Accreditation as a form of QA	A qualitative study to identify and prioritize aspects of QA specific to online MBA programs accredited by the Association to Advance College Schools of Business (AACSB)	Online programs should be assessed as their campus comparators.
Bejan et al, 2018	Education; engineering	Accreditation as part of External QA	Case study of impact evaluation of accreditation (or external QA) on Engineering program in Romania	The process was perceived as beneficial despite the effort and was perceived to have a positive impact on the QA of teaching and learning.

Leiber et al, 2018	Education	Accreditation as part of External QA	Case study of impact evaluation of program accreditation on university program in Spain.	The process was perceived as beneficial despite the effort, and increased teachers' awareness of QA processes and instruments.
Bender, 2021	Education; Interior Design	Accreditation as a form of QA	Qualitative study over 10 years to describe the use of internship supervisor evaluation feedback in interior design program accreditation.	Supervisor feedback was vague but largely positive. The study suggests the development of an assessment tool that would be useful for accreditors to be shared with program stakeholders to improve supervisor feedback.
Lewallan, 2015	Education; Nursing	Program evaluation as a requirement of accreditation	The article provides strategies for organizing a program evaluation for nursing education program accreditation purposes.	Suggests a program evaluation plan be implemented to ensure accreditation requirements are met. This can be done informally, or by adopting guidelines provided by the agencies. Recommendation for a program to maintain a "master schedule" to ensure evaluations are completed and address components of evaluation at regularly scheduled meetings.

Part 3: Conclusion to my MA Thesis by Article

Lessons Learned

Conducting this scoping review was a great experience, not only for what the study found, but also for the challenges I faced while conducting the review, and the lessons learned from these challenges. While the iterative nature of scoping reviews allows for great flexibility while developing a familiarity with the data (Mak & Thomas 2022) it was also challenging to remain focused on the research questions. When articles would present new ideas that strayed from the goal of the study, it was difficult not to reframe the questions to hunt for more answers. Due to time constraints, it was not feasible to expand beyond the two research questions identified at the start of this study, but my curiosity was difficult to harness during this process. Another challenge I faced while conducting this review was learning how to effectively leverage research tools such as Covidence for the tracking and charting of the data. I had decided to conduct my charting using Excel at the proposal stage of my thesis, but as my confidence with Covidence grew, I began to see how I could have used it more fully. In future scoping reviews I conduct, I would consider leveraging this tool more effectively. This of course may have been mitigated by involving the librarian more in my research. I consulted with the librarian when developing my search strategy but did not continue to consult with them once that was established. In retrospect, I feel I could have learned more from their team and wish I had further consulted with them when learning to use Covidence.

I faced several challenges and changes in both work and family life as I pursued this research, which delayed my progress. In some way, these personal challenges allowed me to focus more on the process rather than my anecdotal experiences and gave me greater objectivity when reviewing the published works. My natural inclination towards quantitative data meant that the iterative nature of scoping reviews was challenging for me. But I would regularly remind myself that, while the process is iterative, the guidelines outlined by Arksey & O'Malley (2005) provided the necessary framework to conduct this work. I also found the experience of conducting the research to be extremely beneficial to me as a researcher. Namely, the ability to follow a research process such as a scoping review to guide my work, limiting if not completely removing any biases I bring with me, to document my process and validate my findings. When my curiosity would get the better of me, trusting the research process and following the examples

of other scoping reviews brought focus to my work and allowed me to maintain the scope of my work within the original plan.

Next Steps

As there is a paucity of research in this area, I suggest that further research is required to define QA, accreditation and program evaluation relative to one another, to position them clearly within and across various industries so that key members of an industry (i.e. higher education staff, faculty and administration) can better understand the benefits and uses of each, how they overlap, and when it is appropriate to resource program evaluation in addition to other QA process or accreditation requirements. In my work, I plan to use my findings when proposing program evaluation processes be applied to address operational challenges or when seeking to document program impacts. While QA processes are applied extensively in other areas of my institution, it is not applied to internal programs related to student retention for instance. Nor are program evaluation strategies applied outside of QA auditing. Championing when program evaluation can help improve programs (both curriculum-based, or those programs aimed to support students) will positively impact operations, and meaningfully create useful reports on our activities that will lead to improvements and new support programming for students. Overall, my experience conducting my research was both gratifying and challenging for both personal and professional reasons. Conducting a scoping review in this area allowed me to validate some of my anecdotal theories based on my experience.

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