

THE ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF ACCREDITATION AGENCIES IN QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION (CENTRAL ASIAN CONTEXT)

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Annotatsiya

Mazkur maqolada Markaziy Osiyo mamlakatlarida oliy ta'lim sifatini ta'minlash tizimlarida davlat, xalqaro hamda nodavlat akkreditatsiya agentliklarining o'rni tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotda milliy sifatni ta'minlash organlari, mustaqil akkreditatsiya tashkilotlari va xalqaro QA tarmoqlari oliy ta'lim standartlari, boshqaruv, shaffoflik hamda xalqaro tan olinishi jarayonlariga qanday ta'sir ko'rsatishi yoritiladi. Maqola O'zbekiston, Qozog'iston va Qirg'iziston tajribalarini solishtirma tahlil qilish asosida yozilgan bo'lib, O'zbekistonda Ta'lim sifatini ta'minlash milliy agentligi (NAQAE) hamda Akkreditatsiya va reyting xalqaro agentligi (ARIA) faoliyatiga alohida e'tibor qaratilgan. Natijalar davlat nazoratining afzalliklari va cheklovlari, xalqaro mezonlar asosidagi baholashning ahamiyati hamda nodavlat akkreditatsiyaning bozor talablariga moslashuvchanligini ko'rsatadi. Maqolada sifatni ta'minlash samaradorligini oshirish uchun davlat va mustaqil akkreditatsiya tizimlarini uy'ulashtiruvchi "ikki tomonlama model" bo'yicha amaliy tavsiyalar beriladi.

Kalit so'zlar

Sifatni ta'minlash, oliy ta'lim, akkreditatsiya, davlat agentliklari, xalqaro akkreditatsiya, nodavlat tashkilotlar, Markaziy Osiyo, NAQAE, ARIA, ESG.

Аннотация

В статье проводится анализ роли государственных, международных и негосударственных аккредитационных агентств в системах обеспечения качества (ОК) высшего образования стран Центральной Азии. Рассматривается влияние национальных органов обеспечения качества, независимых аккредитационных организаций и международных сетей QA на стандарты образования, управление, прозрачность и международное признание квалификаций. Исследование основано на сравнительном анализе моделей регулирования в Узбекистане, Казахстане и Кыргызстане, с особым акцентом на узбекскую систему ОК, где Национальное агентство по обеспечению качества образования (NAQAE) функционирует параллельно с независимыми структурами, такими как

Международное агентство по аккредитации и рейтингу (ARIA). Полученные результаты демонстрируют преимущества и ограничения централизованного государственного контроля, значение международного бенчмаркинга и роль негосударственной аккредитации в повышении конкурентоспособности вузов. В заключении представлены практические рекомендации по развитию сбалансированной модели, объединяющей государственное регулирование и независимую международно ориентированную аккредитацию.

Ключевые слова

Обеспечение качества, высшее образование, аккредитация, государственные агентства, международная аккредитация, негосударственные организации, Центральная Азия, NAQAE, ARIA, ESG.

Introduction

Quality assurance (QA) has become a strategic component of higher education governance worldwide. The increasing internationalization of education, growth of cross-border programs, and rising expectations of labor markets have forced universities to demonstrate measurable quality and institutional accountability. In Central Asia, QA reforms are particularly important due to rapid expansion of higher education institutions, diversification of providers, and increased international cooperation.

The academic debate on QA increasingly emphasizes the interaction between national regulatory systems and external independent accreditation mechanisms. Harvey and Williams (2021) note that QA is evolving from control-based inspection toward improvement-based evaluation. Studies by Shin and Harman (2020) highlight the role of accreditation in strengthening public trust and competitiveness. At the same time, ESG-oriented approaches and international QA networks have become key instruments for cross-border recognition and benchmarking (ENQA, 2022).

Despite increasing interest in QA, limited research addresses how state agencies, international accreditation bodies, and non-governmental QA providers interact within Central Asian higher education systems. This gap is significant because the region is characterized by centralized governance traditions combined with emerging private-sector and international QA actors.

Problem statement.

In Central Asia, higher education QA is often shaped by centralized state control. While such models ensure policy uniformity and national oversight, they may face limitations in flexibility, responsiveness, and international credibility. At the same time, international and non-governmental accreditation agencies increasingly influence universities by introducing global standards and market-driven benchmarking.

This research relies on policy frameworks and strategic reform documents adopted in the region, including national QA regulations and modernization programs. Particular attention is given

to Uzbekistan’s institutional reforms where the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NAQAE) is responsible for national QA governance, while independent organizations such as the Accreditation and Rating International Agency (ARIA) contribute to international benchmarking and external evaluation.

The research addresses the following questions: (1) What functions do state QA agencies perform in Central Asia? (2) How do international accreditation networks influence QA practices and recognition? (3) What is the comparative advantage of non-governmental accreditation agencies in improving institutional quality?

Solution method.

The research methodology is based on comparative institutional analysis. First, regulatory and organizational models of QA systems in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan were reviewed. Second, international accreditation frameworks and QA network practices were analyzed to identify their impact on national systems. Third, the role of independent and non-governmental accreditation bodies was evaluated through case analysis of external accreditation procedures.

The study applies qualitative content analysis of policy documents, accreditation standards, and publicly available QA reports. The analytical framework distinguishes three institutional levels: (a) state agencies responsible for national QA governance, (b) international accreditation organizations supporting benchmarking and recognition, and (c) independent accreditation agencies promoting market-oriented evaluation and continuous improvement.

Results and examples.

The comparative analysis confirms that Central Asian QA systems are increasingly shaped by a multi-actor environment where state regulators, international organizations, and independent agencies operate simultaneously. Table 1 summarizes the functional differences between these actors.

Type of accreditation actor	Main functions	Strengths	Limitations
State QA agencies (e.g., NAQAE)	National standards, licensing, institutional monitoring, compliance audits	Legitimacy, national coordination, legal enforcement	Risk of bureaucracy, limited flexibility, weak international benchmarking
International accreditation bodies and networks	Cross-border recognition, benchmarking, methodological harmonization	Global credibility, ESG alignment, transparency	High cost, limited local contextualization,

			dependence on external expertise
Non-governmental / independent agencies (e.g., ARIA)	External evaluation, program/institutional accreditation, rankings, advisory support	Flexibility, innovation, stakeholder orientation, faster procedures	Requires trust-building, risk of market competition, need for strict ethics

Table 1. Comparative role of accreditation actors in Central Asian QA systems.

The findings indicate that state QA agencies play a dominant role in establishing minimum standards and ensuring legal compliance. For example, Uzbekistan’s NAQAE provides national-level coordination and monitoring of institutional performance. Such agencies ensure stability and standardization but may face challenges related to delayed response mechanisms and limited international comparability.

International accreditation bodies and QA networks contribute mainly by introducing internationally recognized criteria, improving transparency, and supporting global recognition of qualifications. Their influence is especially visible in universities seeking participation in global rankings and international academic partnerships. However, international accreditation is often resource-intensive and may not always reflect local socio-economic conditions.

Independent and non-governmental accreditation agencies, including ARIA, provide a complementary function by offering ESG-aligned external evaluation, benchmarking, and advisory support. ARIA’s approach demonstrates how an independent agency can promote continuous improvement and international comparability while remaining sensitive to regional institutional conditions. This model supports the development of a balanced QA ecosystem where state regulation ensures legitimacy and independent accreditation enhances competitiveness.

A key trend identified in Central Asia is the emergence of a “dual QA model”, where state agencies define regulatory requirements and independent agencies provide external evaluation services. This model increases transparency, reduces monopolization of QA processes, and supports stakeholder involvement, including employers and students.

Conclusion.

The study demonstrates that quality assurance in Central Asian higher education increasingly depends on interaction between three categories of accreditation actors: state agencies, international accreditation bodies, and non-governmental independent organizations. State QA agencies ensure national governance and legal compliance, while international organizations provide benchmarking

and global credibility. Independent accreditation agencies contribute flexibility, innovation, and stakeholder-oriented evaluation.

The Uzbekistan case illustrates the potential effectiveness of a dual model where NAQAE provides national coordination and policy enforcement, and ARIA supports international benchmarking through ESG-aligned accreditation methodologies. Such cooperation may strengthen transparency and institutional competitiveness.

Practical recommendations include:

- (1) strengthening cooperation mechanisms between state QA authorities and independent agencies,
- (2) adopting unified indicator systems compatible with international standards,
- (3) ensuring ethical governance and transparency of accreditation decisions, and
- (4) promoting regional recognition frameworks for cross-border mobility in Central Asia.

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