

What Is More Important: The Age and Size of a University or Its Accreditation in Gauging Which of Their Degrees Better Represents Value for Money (Quality and Recognition)?

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ABSTRACT

The size and age of the university are critical factors as they indicate history and reputation. However, accreditation provides a standardized quality measure and a tangible assessment of the program's adherence to established benchmarks and standards. In the context of which is more essential, either the age and size of a university or its accreditation, in gauging which of their degrees better represents value for money (quality and recognition), the current study assesses the role of accreditation in guaranteeing educational standards and enhancing the value of degrees, and investigate the impact of age and size on educational quality and recognition. The research paper uses a content analysis technique to review a vast range of academic literature, exploring existing studies to find answers to the problem. It was revealed that accreditation is more important than a university's size and age in gauging the value for money of its degree as it ensures that the university meets specific standards and quality recognition, assuring students regarding the credibility and value of the degree awarded.

Keywords- University, Accreditation, Higher Education.

I. INTRODUCTION

Choosing the right university for higher education is essential, as it provides a core foundation for future career prospects. Wade (2010) stated that the age and size of the university and accreditation are critical aspects when evaluating the value of a degree. Age and size of a university carry weight in assessing the quality and recognition of degrees but still require the corroboration of a comprehensive quality assurance and control adherence (accreditation) to demonstrate it holds extreme significance. According to the study by Alemu (2018) age and size of a university carries a sense of history, prestige, and tradition. Developed universities, with their long-standing presence, tend to have well-established faculty, vital infrastructure, and extensive alumni networks, as these attributes help contribute to a perceived higher-quality education. The university's size plays a crucial role. Larger institutions may have extra resources, research opportunities, and diverse offerings.

On the other hand, Aldoseri and Sharadgah (2021) discussed that accreditation is an essential objective quality measure and recognition in higher education. Accrediting bodies investigate universities and their programs against

predetermined standards to ensure that they meet the demands of rigorous academic criteria. Accreditation evaluates curriculum, faculty qualifications, student support services, and infrastructure. However, a degree from an accredited university signifies that it has met the recognized standards, assuring students and employers of the educational value it offers. Accreditation helps facilitate credit transfer, eligibility for financial help, and international recognition, which can significantly impact the value of a degree.

Moreover, demonstrating which factor, including age and size or accreditation, represents value for money requires a balanced evaluation, track record, and reputation of a university must be thoroughly researched, considering elements such as faculty expertise, industry collaboration, and alumni success. Consequently, Syahr (2019) discussed that accreditation provides a standardized quality measure and a tangible assessment of the program's adherence to established benchmarks. Additionally, it signifies that the degree meets specific criteria, ensuring students receive a quality education that eventually aligns with the industry standards and expectations. It is essential to acknowledge that the landscape of higher education is continuously evolving as the rise of alternative educational models, including online and specialized institutions, is challenging traditional emphasis on age and size. It can be stated that newer institutions may not have a larger campus or history, but more often than not, they include excellent programs personalized to meet specific industry needs. In addition, they leverage innovative teaching methodologies, cutting-edge technologies, and close industry partnerships for delivering relevant education. Such institutions provide value in terms of specialized knowledge and skills development.

The problem lies in the lack of clear consensus on the significance of the size and age versus accreditation in evaluating the value of university degrees. Ages and size do not guarantee education excellence, but these aspects imply traditional stability and resource access. Moreover, accreditation serves as an objective quality measure and does not completely capture the unique strengths and offerings of a particular institution. The problem of the current research topic also recognizes the evolving landscape of higher education with the emergence of online learning platforms, specialized institutions, and changing industry demands. Therefore, these factors complicate the decision-making process for prospective students. They need to consider not only traditional indicators of size, age, and accreditation but also the relevance and effectiveness of specialized programs and innovative teaching methodologies.

1.1 Aims and objectives

The current article aims to demonstrate the relative significance of the age and size of a university versus accreditation in investigating the value for money associated with degrees.

- To examine the role of accreditation in guaranteeing educational standards and enhancing the value of degrees.
- To investigate the impact of age and size on educational quality and recognition.
- To examine the evolving landscape of higher education, including the rise of specialized institutions and online learning platforms.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Impact of Age and Size on educational quality and Recognition

According to the study by Egert, Fukkink, and Eckhardt (2018), university age and size significantly impact the educational quality and recognition of degrees. A university's reputation and impression of outstanding performance are affected by age. Old institutions usually have a long history, well-established traditions, and an extensive alumni network. Students and businesses might believe that more reputable and reliable, increasing the value of degrees. Older schools have extensively established their academic initiatives, engaged renowned teachers, and built efficient research facilities (Nguyen, 2016); therefore, the educational process and standard of teaching are considered more effective, raising the worth of degrees altogether. Noaman et al. (2017) indicated that a university's size could affect the reputation and quality of its curriculum. Larger educational institutions usually offer more significant resources, including more courses, thorough libraries, and extensive student support services, resulting in an enhanced educational process that gives students access to an extensive range of academic possibilities. It is essential to remember that size and age are insufficient indicators of educational quality. Other factors such as faculty expertise, program relevance, research output, and industry collaborations must be considered, even if older and larger universities may have some advantages (Huggins, Prokop, and Thompson, 2020). The impact of age and size should be considered in conjunction with these criteria to regulate the degree's worth effectively.

2.2 Role of accreditation in guaranteeing educational standards and enhancing the value of degrees

Accreditation plays an essential role in maintaining educational standards and enhancing the value of degrees when comparing the importance of age and size versus accreditation in demonstrating the value for money connected with university degrees. The study by Pavlakis and Kelley (2016) argued that accreditation serves as an objective measure that assesses whether a university and its programs are meeting developed academic standards and educational excellence. In addition, it plays a critical role in ensuring the quality and recognition of degrees offered by an institution. Moreover, Kumar, Shukla, and Passey (2020) argued that accreditation helps achieve educational standards. Accreditation organizations assess a university's courses and educational possibilities to determine whether or not they satisfy student

needs, industry standards, and modern best practices. Therefore, this evaluation ensures that students obtain a challenging and timely education that equips them with the expertise and skills required to succeed in their chosen sectors. The experience and qualifications of faculty members are also examined as an aspect of accreditation. Alam (2021) stated that instructors must possess the necessary educational qualifications, professional experience, and subject-matter expertise to teach and advise students successfully. The significance of a degree is heavily affected by the quality of education that faculty members deliver. Aliyu and Joseph (2017) discussed that accreditation mainly evaluates the facilities and resources that assist with learning. It includes evaluating academic resources that improve the learning environment, including libraries and research centres. Accredited universities have the facilities to provide an in-depth education that fulfils student requirements.

2.3 Evolving landscape of higher education, including the rise of specialized institutions and online learning platforms

The study by Nodine (2016) argued that landscape higher education is characterized by the rise of specialized institutions and various online learning platforms, adding a complexity layer to the question of holding more significance in evaluating the university degrees: the university's size and age or its accreditation. One significant trend is the emergence of specialized institutions focusing on particular areas or businesses. Such organizations offer students specialized education and training that have been established to get students prepared for careers in particular professions (Chen et al. 2017). These universities provide students a competitive edge in their chosen areas by focusing on specialized skills and expertise. Consequently, the increasing popularity of learning platforms is another significant development, as they have become increasingly popular due to flexibility and accessibility. Castro et al. (2018) stated that students can obtain certificates and degrees from nationally recognized colleges. A broad range of programs and courses are available on platforms for online education, responding to a wide range of interests and career objectives. The accessibility of high-quality online education has broadened academic chances for individuals. In addition, González-González et al. (2018) discussed that the learning experience has evolved due to the inclusion of technology in higher education. Virtual learning environments, interactive multimedia tools, and online collaboration technologies have transformed how students interact with the curriculum, instructors, and classmates. Technologies for adaptive learning have also arisen, offering individualized instruction catered to each student's needs and learning preferences.

2.4 Theoretical framework

2.4.1 Institutional theory

According to institutional theory, organizations, including universities, seek legitimacy by conforming to institutional values and norms (Peters, 2022). In the context of universities, legitimacy is closely connected with history, reputation, and perceived quality. Additionally, age and size play a critical role in shaping a university's reputation and perceived legitimacy, as older and larger institutions have long track records, advanced and extensive networks, and a historical presence in the educational landscape. Bastedo and Bowman (2010) stated that institutions with a historical background and advanced network benefit from positive effects, leading to greater recognition and perceived quality of their degrees. Age and size ensure quality, and recognition of its degree drastically contributes to the perceived legitimacy of a university. In the context of accreditation, accredited universities experience severe evaluations to ensure that their curriculum, resources, faculty, and student outcome meet recognized standards. De Paor (2016) argued that accreditation acts as a standardized quality measure and provides assurance to stakeholders, such as students and faculty, above a degree's overall value. Therefore, in institutional theory, age and size hugely influence a university's reputation and perceived legitimacy. Also, accreditation holds enormous significance in demonstrating the value for money of its degree in terms of recognition and quality (Watermeyer, 2019). Moreover, it enhances the transferability of credits, increasing employability prospects and enhancing trust in educational institutions.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research mythology refers to a specific procedure and technique that helps identify, select, process, and analyze information about the current area of interest. In the context of research papers, the methodology allows the reader to evaluate a study's overall validity and reliability critically. The current research paper has adopted a secondary qualitative method, as the data is collected from previous articles, journals, and websites. Sherif (2018) discussed that the secondary qualitative method is based on existing studies, allowing the investigator to maximize data utility. It was further stated that secondary analysis differs from primary analysis and seeks to critically assess the theory, methods, and findings from previously conducted research. The secondary analysis includes multiple qualitative data sets, as the researchers use the approach as they re-use their data or use by another analyst using previously qualitative data sets. Ruggiano and Perry (2019) stated that a critical advantage of secondary qualitative is using in-depth data from existing studies. Additionally, obtaining data from the sources is much easier, faster, and cheaper than primary analysis.

As the study aims to demonstrate the relative significance of age and size of a university versus accreditation in investigating the value for money associated with degrees, the researcher's papers rely upon secondary sources as the investigator explores existing articles related to the current topic. Existing studies allowed us to examine the role of accreditation in guaranteeing educational standards and enhancing the value of degrees and the evolving landscape of

higher education, including the rise of specialized institutions and online learning platforms. Data collected through previous sources is analyzed through content analysis; as Renz, Carrington, and Badger (2018) stated, content analysis is a research technique demonstrating certain words, themes, and concepts within the gathered qualitative data. Content analysis allows for quantifying and analyzing the presence of specific themes and concepts. Therefore, content analysis is appropriate when data is collected through existing studies. It quantifies qualitative information by sorting and comparing various pieces to summarise it into helpful information.

IV. ANALYSIS

4.1 Impact of Age and Size on educational quality and Recognition

According to the study by Egert, Fukkink, and Eckhardt (2018), age and size are crucial factors as they indicate its reputation and history. A university with more extensive resources could not guarantee the delivery of high-quality education, as the focus must be on the educational experience and the opportunities available to students. Consequently, (Nguyen, 2016) stated that new or small education institutions provide unique advantages, including personalized attention, innovative teaching method, and specialized programs. However, such institutions do not have the same historical and reputational level, accreditation status, and dedication to quality, making their degrees much more valuable and recognizable in relevant fields. Furthermore, Noaman et al. (2017) discussed that the cognitive abilities of students of young students, along with their adaptability, are at their peak in the early stages, which enhances the overall educational experience. Educational recognition is affected by the university's size. Large institutions provide advanced resources, consist of faculty expertise, and provide diverse academic programs. In addition, such institutions have developed reputations that increase recognition of degrees and certifications. (Huggins, Prokop, and Thompson, 2020) discussed that larger institutions have robust networks and alumni connections, providing better post-graduate prospects and job opportunities. A larger institution attracts skilled faculty members and researchers, leading to high-quality teaching, and a larger student body can foster a vibrant intellectual community facilitating peer learning and collaboration. Therefore, it can be stated that older universities with well-developed reputations in the sector enjoy colossal recognition, and their degrees are referred to in high regard by employers and educational institutions.

4.2 Role of accreditation in guaranteeing educational standards and enhancing the value of degrees

According to the study by Makhoul (2019), accreditation reviews where educational institutions are evaluated. If an institution is accredited, it is credible, can provide quality education, and meets a specific set of strict and recognized operational standards. Universities are accredited through external verification by educational experts, usually by an accreditation agency or body. Such that these accrediting agencies outline evaluation criteria and expected standards to which they believe that every university must adhere. In addition, they also create associations for carrying out accreditation programs that universities enter into voluntarily. Chang et al. (2016) discussed that accrediting conducts peer evaluations, reviews the university's curriculum, and assesses whether the expected standards are met, and in case they do, institutions get accredited.

Moreover, Kumar et al. (2020) argued that accreditation has various impacts across different aspects of higher education, including enrolment, internationalization, academic reputation, and the quality of employability and teaching. González-González et al. (2018) discussed that an accreditation form is based upon diplomas and degrees; an institution can access an accredited degree based on its program and plans for offering students and the resources it tends to apply to training and teaching. The author further stated that accreditation plays a pivotal role in guaranteeing educational standards and enhancing the value of a degree, as the importance of a degree is heavily influenced by the education's quality that faculty members deliver.

4.3 Evolving landscape of higher education, including the rise of specialized institutions and online learning platforms

According to the study by Castro et al. (2018), the landscape has been evolving rapidly, with considerable changes such as specialized institutions and online learning platforms. The author further stated that such development had brought innovations and changes in the context of education. In this case, a key trend is the emergence of specialized institutions, as traditional universities have been providing a wide range of academic programs. Nodine (2016) argued that specialized institutions focus on specific fields and educational institutions and offer in-depth education. The author further stated that specialized institutions more often collaborate closely with partners in the industry, offering students valuable connections and training.

González-González et al. (2018) evaluated that, in recent times, a significant transformation has been the emergence of online learning platforms, as the advancement of technology and internet connectivity has made education easier in the form of online education, making it much more feasible and convenient. It can be stated that online learning platforms have been offering a range of courses and other degree programs that are being accessed remotely and allowing students to gain knowledge and learn from wherever accessible. Therefore, such flexibility has provided various opportunities for long-last learning and professional development. Ferri, Grifoni, and Guzzo's (2020) study argued that online learning has also promoted inclusivity by providing education to students who may not have access to traditional educational institutions due to geographical or financial limitations. On the other hand, the emergence of specialized

institutions and online platforms has also presented challenges; with the increasing number of options available, students must navigate the diverse educational landscape to evaluate the quality and recognition of different institutions and academic programs.

V. DISCUSSION

Considering the size and age of a university, it can significantly impact educational quality and recognition of degrees. Egert, Fukkink, and Eckhardt (2018) stated that a university's reputation and impression of outstanding performance are affected by its historical reputation. Older educational institutions have developed their reputation, involve teachers, and hold advanced research facilities. Larger educational institutions have been providing more significant resources, including a wide range of sources, thorough libraries, and extensive student support services, resulting in an enhanced educational process that gives students access to an extensive range of academic possibilities. Huggins, Prokop, and Thompson (2020) argued that other factors need to be considered, including faculty members' expertise, the program's relevance, and industry collaboration of the institutions other than age and size. It can be stated that the age and size of a university significantly impact quality and recognition, summarising the above theme.

Moreover, accreditation plays a critical role in ensuring educational standards and increasing the value of degrees. In this context, Pavlakis and Kelley (2016) stated that accreditation is a core measure that assesses whether a university and its programs meet developed academic standards and educational excellence. However, a degree's relevance hugely depends on the quality of education offered by the institution and faculty members. Aliyu and Joseph (2017) discussed that accreditation helps facilitate resources that assist with learning, such as libraries and research centres. Therefore, it can be stated that accreditation plays a pivotal role in guaranteeing educational standards and enhancing the value of a degree, as the importance of a degree is heavily influenced by the education's quality that faculty members deliver. The higher education landscape has evolved daily as various learning platforms emerged. Nodine (2016) stated that different online learning platforms characterize evolving higher education landscape. The accessibility of high-quality online education has widened academic chances for individuals, and it is also helping students for enhanced interaction with the curriculum through interactive multimedia tools.

VI. CONCLUSION

Accreditation is more important than a university's size and age in gauging the value for money of its degree as it ensures that the university meets specific standards and quality recognition, assuring students regarding the credibility and value of the degree awarded. The research paper concluded that accrediting bodies investigate universities and their predetermined programs to ensure that they meet standards of rigorous academic criteria. In addition, Accreditation provides a standardized measure of quality, offers a tangible assessment of the program's adherence to established benchmarks, and implies that the degree meets specific criteria, ensuring students receive a quality education that eventually aligns with the industry standards and expectations. Moreover, the research also highlighted accreditation's role in maintaining educational standards and increasing the value of a degree, as it was discovered that accreditation has several impacts across different characteristics of higher education, including enrolment, internationalization, academic reputation, and the quality of employability and teaching. The papers used institutional theory, as it was found that age and size hugely influence a university's reputation and perceived legitimacy. Also, accreditation holds colossal significance in demonstrating the value for money of its degree in terms of recognition and quality.

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