

A Critical Evaluation of Accreditation Frameworks and their Influence on Competency-Based Module Development in Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract: This study critically evaluates accreditation frameworks and their influence on competency-based module development in higher education institutions. Accreditation systems have become central instruments in global higher education governance, ensuring quality assurance, institutional accountability, and standardisation of academic programmes. At the same time, higher education has increasingly shifted towards competency-based education (CBE), which prioritises measurable learning outcomes, skills acquisition, and graduate employability. This convergence has created a complex relationship between external regulatory requirements and internal curriculum design processes, particularly at the module development level. The study is grounded in Quality Assurance Theory, Competency-Based Education Theory, and Curriculum Alignment Theory, which collectively provide an analytical lens for understanding how accreditation frameworks shape curriculum structure, learning outcomes, teaching strategies, and assessment design. It examines the extent to which accreditation requirements support or constrain innovation in module development, with particular attention to pedagogical flexibility, academic autonomy, and contextual relevance in curriculum design.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative interpretive approach based on critical document analysis of accreditation policies, curriculum frameworks, and scholarly literature on module development practices. The findings indicate that accreditation frameworks significantly enhance standardisation, transparency, and quality assurance in higher education. However, they also introduce bureaucratic pressures that may limit innovation and flexibility in competency-based module design. The study concludes that accreditation frameworks play a dual role in higher education: they strengthen quality assurance and outcome alignment while simultaneously creating tensions between compliance requirements and pedagogical innovation. It recommends the adoption of more flexible, outcome-oriented accreditation models that balance regulatory control with academic creativity, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of competency-based module development in higher education institutions.

Keywords: Accreditation frameworks; competency-based education; module development and quality assurance.

Introduction

Higher education institutions across the world are increasingly operating within structured quality assurance systems where accreditation frameworks serve as central mechanisms for regulating academic standards, institutional accountability, and curriculum coherence. Accreditation refers to a formal evaluative process through which external bodies assess whether an institution or academic programme meets predefined standards of quality, relevance, and effectiveness¹. These standards are typically developed by national quality assurance agencies, professional councils, or international accrediting organisations, and they function as benchmarks for ensuring that higher education provision remains credible, comparable, and globally competitive². In contemporary higher education systems, accreditation has evolved beyond a compliance exercise to become a powerful instrument that directly shapes curriculum design, teaching methodologies, assessment practices, and overall educational philosophy.

One of the most significant developments in modern higher education is the shift towards competency-based education (CBE),

which has fundamentally redefined how curricula and academic modules are designed and delivered. Competency-based education emphasizes the demonstration of clearly defined skills, knowledge, and attitudes that learners must acquire to progress academically and professionally³. Unlike traditional education models that focus primarily on content coverage and time-based progression, CBE prioritizes measurable learning outcomes and real-world applicability. In this regard, module development becomes a structured process of aligning learning outcomes, instructional activities, and assessment methods to ensure that students achieve specific competencies relevant to their field of study and future employability.

The integration of accreditation frameworks with competency-based module development introduces both opportunities and challenges for higher education institutions. On one hand, accreditation requirements promote standardization, quality assurance, and accountability by compelling institutions to clearly define learning outcomes, assessment criteria, and programme objectives⁴. This alignment supports transparency and ensures that academic programmes meet minimum quality thresholds that are recognized both nationally and internationally. In many cases,

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accreditation frameworks explicitly encourage outcome-based education models, thereby reinforcing the principles of competency-based learning and enhancing curricular clarity. On the other hand, there is growing concern within academic literature that accreditation frameworks may inadvertently restrict pedagogical innovation and curricular flexibility. Critics argue that excessive focus on compliance and documentation can lead to bureaucratization of curriculum design processes, where academic staff prioritize meeting accreditation checklists over meaningful pedagogical transformation⁵. This may result in standardized module structures that limit creativity, reduce contextual responsiveness, and constrain lecturers' ability to adapt content to emerging societal and industry needs. In such cases, accreditation may shift from being a quality enhancement tool to a compliance-driven mechanism that undermines academic autonomy.

The tension between regulatory compliance and educational innovation is particularly evident in module development processes. Module development refers to the systematic design of academic units that include learning outcomes, content structure, teaching strategies, learning resources, and assessment methods. In competency-based systems, modules are expected to demonstrate clear alignment between intended outcomes and demonstrable student competencies. However, when accreditation requirements become overly prescriptive, they may reduce the flexibility required for lecturers to incorporate innovative teaching approaches such as experiential learning, problem-based learning, and interdisciplinary integration⁶. This creates a structural tension between standardization and innovation within curriculum design processes. Furthermore, globalization has intensified the influence of accreditation frameworks on higher education systems worldwide. International accreditation standards increasingly shape national curriculum policies, leading to convergence in module design practices across different institutions and countries⁷. While this promotes global comparability of qualifications and facilitates student mobility, it may also lead to homogenization of curricula, where local knowledge systems, cultural contexts, and developmental priorities are underrepresented in module content. This raises important questions about the balance between global standards and local relevance in competency-based education.

From a theoretical perspective, this study is anchored in three key frameworks. Quality assurance theory provides the foundation for understanding how external regulatory mechanisms influence institutional practices and ensure compliance with academic standards. Competency-based education theory explains how learning is structured around measurable outcomes and skill acquisition rather than traditional content delivery approaches. Curriculum alignment theory emphasizes the importance of coherence between learning outcomes, instructional strategies, and assessment methods, ensuring that all components of module design are systematically integrated⁸. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive analytical lens for examining the interaction between accreditation frameworks and module development processes. Despite the widespread implementation of accreditation systems in higher education, there remains limited critical analysis of their direct impact on competency-based module development. Much of the existing literature focuses either on quality assurance outcomes or curriculum design independently, without fully exploring how accreditation requirements shape the actual structure, flexibility, and innovation of academic modules. This creates a significant gap in understanding the extent to which

accreditation frameworks support or constrain pedagogical transformation in higher education institutions.

In response to this gap, the present study critically evaluates the influence of accreditation frameworks on competency-based module development in higher education institutions. It seeks to examine how accreditation requirements shape curriculum design decisions, influence teaching and learning strategies, and impact the alignment between educational outcomes and labour market needs. By doing so, the study contributes to ongoing debates on curriculum reform, quality assurance, and educational innovation in contemporary higher education systems. Ultimately, this research is significant for curriculum developers, academic leaders, policy makers, and quality assurance agencies who are responsible for ensuring that higher education systems remain both globally competitive and locally responsive. A deeper understanding of the relationship between accreditation and module development is essential for designing educational frameworks that balance regulatory compliance with pedagogical creativity, ensuring that competency-based education achieves its intended goal of producing skilled, adaptable, and employable graduates.

Literature Review

The literature on accreditation frameworks and competency-based module development in higher education is extensive, multidimensional, and deeply rooted in the intersecting fields of quality assurance, curriculum theory, educational governance, and instructional design. Across these fields, scholars consistently highlight the central role of accreditation as a regulatory mechanism that shapes not only institutional accountability but also the internal architecture of curriculum development, particularly at the module level. However, the literature also reflects significant tension between standardization and innovation, compliance and autonomy, as well as global benchmarks and local educational relevance.

1. Quality Assurance and the Evolution of Accreditation Systems

Quality assurance in higher education has evolved significantly over the past decades, shifting from informal institutional self-regulation to highly structured external accreditation systems. Harvey¹ conceptualizes quality assurance as a continuous process of maintaining and improving educational standards through systematic evaluation and feedback mechanisms. In this framework, accreditation becomes a formalized expression of quality assurance, designed to ensure that institutions meet minimum acceptable standards in teaching, learning, and institutional governance. Stensaker² further develops this argument by showing that accreditation systems have transitioned from developmental support mechanisms into regulatory instruments with strong compliance expectations. This shift has resulted in increased institutional accountability but has also introduced administrative complexity. Institutions are now required to demonstrate evidence of quality across multiple dimensions, including curriculum design, assessment practices, staff qualifications, and learning outcomes. Consequently, accreditation has become a powerful driver of institutional behaviour, influencing how modules are designed, structured, and evaluated. Dill³ adds that accreditation systems increasingly function as mechanisms of policy convergence, where national higher education systems adopt similar standards and benchmarks to align with global quality expectations. This convergence has led to

increased standardization of curriculum structures, including module design templates, learning outcome frameworks, and assessment rubrics. While this enhances comparability across institutions, it also raises concerns about the erosion of institutional uniqueness and contextual responsiveness.

2. Curriculum Theory and Module Development Structures

Curriculum development theory provides a foundational framework for understanding how accreditation influences module design. Tyler⁴ presents one of the most influential models of curriculum development, emphasizing four key questions: educational objectives, learning experiences, organization of instruction, and evaluation. This linear and objectives-based model has heavily influenced modern module development practices, particularly in systems governed by accreditation requirements. In contemporary higher education, Biggs and Tang⁵ expand this perspective through the concept of constructive alignment. Their theory argues that effective teaching and learning occur when learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessment tasks are systematically aligned. Accreditation frameworks reinforce this alignment by requiring institutions to clearly articulate measurable learning outcomes and demonstrate how these outcomes are assessed. As a result, module development becomes a structured and compliance-oriented process aimed at ensuring internal coherence and external accountability. However, Barnett⁶ challenges overly structured curriculum models by introducing the concept of “supercomplexity” in higher education. He argues that modern educational environments are characterized by uncertainty, unpredictability, and rapid change, which cannot be fully captured through rigid curriculum structures. According to Barnett, excessive standardization in module development may limit intellectual openness and reduce opportunities for critical thinking and transformative learning.

3. Competency-Based Education and Outcome-Oriented Module Design

Competency-based education (CBE) has become a dominant paradigm in contemporary curriculum reform. Spady⁷ defines competency-based education as an approach that focuses on demonstrable mastery of knowledge, skills, and attitudes rather than time-based progression. Within this framework, module development shifts from content delivery to outcome achievement, requiring clear articulation of competencies that students must demonstrate upon completion. Biggs and Tang⁵ reinforce this view by emphasizing that learning outcomes must be observable, measurable, and aligned with assessment strategies. Accreditation frameworks strongly support this approach by requiring institutions to specify graduate attributes, programme learning outcomes, and module-level competencies. This alignment ensures transparency and accountability in curriculum design, making it easier for external bodies to evaluate educational quality. However, critics argue that competency-based approaches may lead to overly instrumentalized education, where learning is reduced to measurable outputs at the expense of deeper intellectual engagement. This concern is particularly relevant in disciplines that require critical thinking, creativity, and interpretive analysis, where competencies are not always easily measurable.

4. Accreditation as a Driver of Curriculum Standardization and Control

Accreditation frameworks play a dual role as both enablers and regulators of curriculum development. On one hand, they provide

structured guidelines that help institutions design coherent and quality-assured modules. On the other hand, they impose standardized requirements that may limit pedagogical flexibility. Dill³ argues that accreditation systems function as mechanisms of external control, ensuring that institutions adhere to predefined standards of curriculum design. This includes specifying credit structures, defining learning outcomes, and enforcing assessment consistency. While this improves comparability and quality assurance, it may also lead to homogenization of curriculum structures across institutions. Stensaker² notes that the increasing emphasis on documentation and evidence-based compliance has resulted in what he describes as “audit cultures” in higher education. In such environments, academic staff may prioritize meeting accreditation requirements over experimenting with innovative teaching methods. This bureaucratization of curriculum development can reduce academic autonomy and limit responsiveness to emerging societal and industry needs.

5. Pedagogical Innovation and Constraints in Module Development

One of the most debated issues in the literature is the impact of accreditation on pedagogical innovation. Biggs and Tang⁵ argue that while accreditation promotes alignment and structure, it may also inadvertently constrain innovative teaching approaches such as experiential learning, problem-based learning, and interdisciplinary integration. Barnett⁶ further contends that rigid curriculum frameworks may discourage educators from engaging in transformative pedagogies that encourage critical reflection and intellectual risk-taking. In highly regulated environments, lecturers may focus on compliance rather than creativity, leading to standardized module designs that lack contextual adaptability. This tension is particularly evident in competency-based module development, where institutions are expected to balance measurable outcomes with flexible and responsive teaching strategies. The challenge lies in maintaining academic rigor while allowing space for innovation and contextual adaptation.

6. Globalization and Convergence of Accreditation Systems

Globalization has significantly influenced the development and harmonization of accreditation frameworks. UNESCO⁸ highlights that international quality assurance systems are increasingly aligned to facilitate student mobility, institutional cooperation, and global recognition of qualifications. This has led to the convergence of curriculum standards across countries, particularly in higher education. Stensaker² observes that this convergence has resulted in the widespread adoption of similar module structures, learning outcome frameworks, and assessment models. While this enhances global comparability, it may also reduce curriculum diversity and limit the incorporation of local knowledge systems and cultural contexts. In developing countries, this tension is particularly pronounced, as institutions are often required to adopt international accreditation standards that may not fully reflect local educational priorities or labour market needs.

7. Synthesis and Conceptual Gaps

Overall, the literature demonstrates that accreditation frameworks play a central role in shaping competency-based module development in higher education institutions. They enhance quality assurance, promote accountability, and ensure curriculum alignment. However, they also introduce structural constraints that may limit innovation, reduce flexibility, and promote standardization. A key conceptual gap in the literature is the limited

integration of accreditation studies with empirical analyses of module development practices. Most studies focus either on accreditation systems or curriculum design independently, without critically examining how accreditation requirements directly influence day-to-day module development decisions at institutional level. There is also limited research on how institutions negotiate the tension between compliance and innovation in competency-based education contexts. This study addresses these gaps by critically evaluating how accreditation frameworks shape competency-based module development, with a focus on balancing regulatory compliance with pedagogical flexibility and innovation.

Theoretical Framework

This study on “A Critical Evaluation of Accreditation Frameworks and Their Influence on Competency-Based Module Development in Higher Education Institutions” is anchored in three interrelated theoretical perspectives: Quality Assurance Theory, Competency-Based Education Theory, and Curriculum Alignment Theory. These theories collectively provide a structured lens for understanding how external regulatory systems influence internal curriculum design processes, particularly at the module level.

1. Quality Assurance Theory

Quality Assurance (QA) Theory provides the foundational framework for understanding how higher education institutions maintain, monitor, and improve academic standards through structured evaluation systems. In this theory, quality is not assumed but systematically demonstrated through evidence-based processes, external review mechanisms, and continuous improvement cycles¹.

In higher education, accreditation is considered the operational expression of quality assurance. It functions as an external control mechanism that evaluates institutional compliance with predefined academic standards, including curriculum design, teaching effectiveness, assessment integrity, and learning outcomes. Harvey² explains that quality assurance is both a regulatory and developmental process, meaning it ensures minimum standards while also encouraging institutional improvement.

Within this study, Quality Assurance Theory explains how accreditation frameworks shape module development by imposing structured requirements such as clearly defined learning outcomes, standardized assessment criteria, documented curriculum mapping, and evidence-based teaching strategies. However, Stensaker³ argues that excessive reliance on audit-based quality assurance may lead to a compliance culture, where institutions focus more on meeting accreditation requirements than improving pedagogical innovation. This theoretical tension is central to understanding the influence of accreditation on competency-based module development.

2. Competency-Based Education Theory

Competency-Based Education (CBE) Theory forms the second pillar of this study. It is grounded in the principle that learning should be measured by the demonstration of clearly defined competencies rather than time spent in instruction or content coverage⁴.

Spady⁵ explains that competency-based education requires a fundamental restructuring of curriculum design, where modules are built around explicit learning outcomes, performance indicators, and mastery criteria. This approach shifts education from input-

based systems to output-based systems focused on demonstrable learner achievement.

Biggs and Tang⁶ further strengthen this theory through constructive alignment, which requires that learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessments are systematically aligned. In module development, this means every component must directly contribute to the achievement of defined competencies.

Within this study, Competency-Based Education Theory explains why accreditation frameworks emphasize measurable learning outcomes, how module structures are designed around competencies, why assessment systems must demonstrate observable performance, and how employability skills are integrated into curriculum design. However, the theory also raises concerns that over-standardization of competencies may reduce deeper intellectual engagement in disciplines requiring critical thinking and creativity.

3. Curriculum Alignment Theory

Curriculum Alignment Theory provides the third theoretical foundation for this study. It emphasizes the internal coherence between learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and assessment methods. Tyler⁷ originally conceptualized curriculum design as a systematic process involving the selection of objectives, learning experiences, organization of instruction, and evaluation. This model remains highly influential in modern module development practices, particularly within accreditation-driven systems.

Curriculum Alignment: Learning Outcomes \rightarrow Teaching Activities \rightarrow Assessment Methods

Biggs⁶ expands this framework through constructive alignment, arguing that effective teaching occurs when all curriculum components are intentionally aligned toward achieving intended learning outcomes. Accreditation frameworks reinforce this alignment by requiring institutions to demonstrate coherence between modules, programme objectives, and assessment strategies.

Within this study, Curriculum Alignment Theory explains how accreditation frameworks enforce structured module design, why learning outcomes must be explicitly stated in modules, how assessment methods are standardized for quality assurance, and how internal curriculum coherence is achieved across programmes. However, critics argue that strict alignment requirements may reduce flexibility in curriculum design and limit lecturers' ability to adapt teaching strategies to diverse learner needs.

4. Integrated Theoretical Perspective

When combined, these three theories provide a comprehensive framework for analysing the relationship between accreditation and competency-based module development. Quality Assurance Theory explains the external regulatory pressure exerted by accreditation bodies, Competency-Based Education Theory explains the outcome-focused structure of modern module design, and Curriculum Alignment Theory explains the internal coherence required within modules to satisfy both pedagogical and accreditation demands.

Together, these theories demonstrate that module development in higher education is not a purely academic process but a regulated, outcome-driven, and structurally aligned system influenced by both internal educational goals and external accreditation requirements.

5. Conceptual Implication for the Study

The integration of these theories leads to a key conceptual understanding: accreditation frameworks shape competency-based module development by enforcing quality assurance standards that require explicit alignment of learning outcomes, teaching strategies, and assessment methods. However, this influence produces a dual effect, strengthening standardization and accountability while potentially constraining pedagogical innovation and flexibility.

This theoretical framework therefore provides the analytical foundation for critically evaluating whether accreditation systems primarily enhance or limit effective competency-based module development in higher education institutions.

Discussion

This study critically evaluated the influence of accreditation frameworks on competency-based module development in higher education institutions, and the findings reveal a complex interaction between regulatory control, curriculum design processes, and pedagogical innovation. The discussion highlights that accreditation frameworks are not neutral mechanisms; rather, they actively shape how academic modules are conceptualised, structured, and implemented within higher education systems. One of the key insights emerging from the analysis is that accreditation frameworks significantly enhance curriculum standardisation and quality assurance. By requiring institutions to clearly define learning outcomes, assessment criteria, and programme objectives, accreditation bodies ensure a baseline level of academic consistency across institutions. This has contributed to improved transparency, comparability of qualifications, and institutional accountability. In competency-based module development, this requirement strengthens constructive alignment by ensuring that learning outcomes are explicitly linked to teaching activities and assessment strategies.

However, while standardisation enhances quality control, it also introduces structural rigidity into module development processes. The study shows that institutions often prioritise compliance with accreditation requirements over pedagogical experimentation. This compliance-driven culture can result in module designs that are overly prescriptive, documentation-heavy, and less responsive to emerging educational needs. In such cases, accreditation shifts from being a quality enhancement tool to a bureaucratic mechanism that shapes curriculum design behaviour. Another major finding is that accreditation frameworks strongly reinforce the principles of competency-based education, particularly through their emphasis on measurable learning outcomes. This alignment has contributed positively to the shift from content-based to outcome-based education systems. Modules are increasingly designed around clearly defined competencies, ensuring that graduates acquire skills that are relevant to labour market demands. This has strengthened the employability orientation of higher education programmes.

Despite this positive contribution, the study also reveals a critical limitation: the risk of reducing education to a purely measurable and technical process. When competency frameworks are interpreted too rigidly, there is a tendency to focus on quantifiable outcomes at the expense of deeper intellectual development, critical thinking, and creativity. This suggests that while accreditation supports competency-based education structurally, it

may unintentionally narrow the broader educational purpose of higher education. The discussion also highlights a persistent tension between regulation and academic autonomy. Accreditation frameworks are designed to ensure accountability and consistency, yet they often limit the discretion of lecturers in designing and delivering modules. Academic staff may feel constrained by strict guidelines on learning outcomes, assessment formats, and documentation requirements. This can reduce opportunities for innovation in teaching methods such as experiential learning, problem-based learning, and interdisciplinary approaches. Furthermore, the study identifies that accreditation frameworks influence module development through the promotion of audit culture practices. Institutions are increasingly required to produce evidence of compliance, including detailed curriculum maps, assessment matrices, and learning outcome reports. While these practices improve traceability and accountability, they also increase administrative workload and may shift academic focus from teaching quality to documentation compliance.

The analysis also indicates that the impact of accreditation frameworks is not uniform across all institutional contexts. In well-resourced universities, accreditation requirements may be used as tools for continuous improvement and curriculum enhancement. In contrast, in under-resourced institutions, the same requirements may be perceived as burdensome and restrictive, limiting their capacity to innovate in module development. This suggests that institutional capacity plays a significant role in determining how accreditation frameworks influence curriculum design outcomes. Another important dimension of the discussion is the role of globalisation in shaping accreditation-driven curriculum convergence. International accreditation standards have encouraged harmonisation of module structures across institutions and countries, promoting global comparability of qualifications. However, this convergence may also lead to curriculum homogenisation, where local knowledge systems, cultural contexts, and developmental priorities are marginalised in favour of global benchmarks. From a theoretical standpoint, the integration of Quality Assurance Theory, Competency-Based Education Theory, and Curriculum Alignment Theory helps to explain the dual effects observed in this study. Quality Assurance Theory accounts for the regulatory pressure and compliance mechanisms introduced by accreditation systems. Competency-Based Education Theory explains the shift toward measurable outcomes and skill-based learning. Curriculum Alignment Theory clarifies how internal consistency between learning outcomes, teaching strategies, and assessment is enforced within module design. Together, these theories illustrate that accreditation frameworks operate as both enabling and constraining forces within higher education curriculum development.

Overall, the findings suggest that accreditation frameworks play a paradoxical role in competency-based module development. On one hand, they enhance structure, accountability, and outcome clarity. On the other hand, they may limit flexibility, creativity, and pedagogical responsiveness. The challenge for higher education institutions is therefore not to reject accreditation, but to interpret and implement it in ways that balance compliance with innovation. In conclusion, the discussion demonstrates that effective module development in higher education requires a balanced approach in which accreditation standards are used as guiding frameworks rather than rigid prescriptions. This balance is essential for ensuring that competency-based education achieves its intended goal of producing graduates who are not only skilled and

employable but also critically engaged and adaptable to complex real-world challenges.

Research Gaps

1. A major gap in the existing literature is the limited empirical investigation into how accreditation frameworks directly influence day-to-day module development practices within higher education institutions. While many studies discuss accreditation as a broad quality assurance mechanism, fewer studies critically examine how lecturers and curriculum developers translate accreditation requirements into actual module structures, content selection, and assessment design. This leaves a gap between policy-level accreditation discourse and classroom-level curriculum implementation.

2. Another significant gap is the lack of integrated studies that simultaneously examine accreditation frameworks, competency-based education, and module development within a single analytical model. Most existing research treats these areas separately, focusing either on quality assurance systems, curriculum theory, or competency-based education in isolation. This fragmentation limits a comprehensive understanding of how these three dimensions interact to shape module design outcomes in higher education institutions.

3. The literature also shows a gap in understanding the tension between compliance and innovation in module development. Although accreditation frameworks are widely recognized as tools for ensuring standardization and accountability, there is limited research exploring how institutions manage the trade-off between meeting accreditation requirements and maintaining pedagogical creativity. This is particularly important in competency-based education environments where flexibility is essential for developing relevant and adaptive learning experiences.

4. There is also insufficient research on the contextual differences between institutions, particularly across developing and developed higher education systems. Most studies on accreditation and module development are based on Western or highly resourced institutional contexts. As a result, there is limited understanding of how accreditation frameworks function in resource-constrained environments, where staffing limitations, infrastructure challenges, and policy constraints may significantly affect module development processes.

5. Another gap relates to the implementation of competency-based education within accredited systems. While competency-based education is widely promoted as an outcome-oriented approach, there is limited evidence on how effectively accreditation frameworks support or hinder its practical implementation at module level. In some cases, accreditation requirements may align with competency-based principles, but in others, they may impose rigid structures that contradict the flexibility required for competency mastery.

6. The literature further reveals a gap in the analysis of academic staff experiences and perceptions regarding accreditation-driven module development. Most existing studies focus on institutional or policy perspectives, with limited attention given to how lecturers perceive accreditation requirements, how they experience workload implications, and how they adapt their teaching practices in response to external quality demands.

7. There is also limited research on the long-term impact of accreditation frameworks on curriculum innovation and transformation. Existing studies tend to focus on short-term compliance outcomes, such as documentation quality or curriculum alignment, without assessing whether accreditation leads to sustained improvements in teaching quality, student competencies, or graduate employability over time.

8. Finally, there is a gap in the literature concerning the balance between global accreditation standards and local educational relevance. While global accreditation frameworks promote harmonization and comparability of qualifications, there is limited research on how institutions maintain cultural, contextual, and national relevance in module development while still complying with international standards. Overall, the literature demonstrates that while accreditation frameworks and competency-based module development have been widely studied independently, there remains a clear need for more integrated, context-sensitive, and empirically grounded research that examines how these systems interact in practice. Addressing these gaps would provide a deeper understanding of how higher education institutions can balance quality assurance, regulatory compliance, and pedagogical innovation in module development.

Recommendations

1. Higher education institutions should adopt a more balanced approach to accreditation compliance and pedagogical innovation. While accreditation requirements must be met to ensure quality assurance, institutions should also create internal academic spaces that allow lecturers to experiment with innovative teaching methods such as problem-based learning, experiential learning, and interdisciplinary module design. This balance will ensure that compliance does not suppress creativity in competency-based module development.

2. Accreditation bodies should consider developing more flexible and adaptive accreditation frameworks that focus on outcomes rather than rigid procedural requirements. Instead of emphasizing documentation-heavy compliance processes, accreditation systems should prioritize evidence of student competencies, graduate attributes, and learning effectiveness. This would allow institutions greater autonomy in designing modules that reflect their unique contexts while still maintaining quality standards.

3. Institutions should strengthen capacity-building programmes for academic staff involved in module development. Lecturers should be trained not only in curriculum design and constructive alignment but also in interpreting accreditation standards in ways that support innovation rather than constrain it. Continuous professional development will improve their ability to design competency-based modules that meet both academic and regulatory expectations.

4. There is a need for the establishment of institutional curriculum design support units that assist lecturers in aligning modules with accreditation requirements without overburdening them with administrative tasks. Such units can provide technical support in curriculum mapping, assessment design, and learning outcome formulation, thereby improving efficiency and consistency in module development processes.

5. Higher education institutions should promote stakeholder engagement in module development, including industry partners, employers, students, and alumni. This will ensure that competency-

based modules remain relevant to labour market demands and societal needs. Accreditation frameworks should also encourage institutions to demonstrate how stakeholder feedback is integrated into curriculum improvement processes.

6. Policymakers and accreditation agencies should encourage context-sensitive accreditation models, particularly for developing countries. These models should allow flexibility for institutions operating under resource constraints while still maintaining minimum quality standards. This would help reduce the risk of curriculum homogenisation and ensure that local educational needs are adequately addressed.

7. Institutions should invest in digital curriculum management systems that support efficient module development, documentation, and alignment with accreditation standards. Such systems can reduce administrative burden while improving transparency and traceability in curriculum design processes, enabling lecturers to focus more on teaching quality and innovation.

8. There is a need to promote continuous curriculum review mechanisms that go beyond accreditation cycles. Instead of viewing accreditation as a periodic compliance exercise, institutions should embed continuous improvement practices into module development processes. This will ensure that competency-based modules remain dynamic, responsive, and aligned with evolving industry and societal needs.

9. Finally, both institutions and accreditation bodies should work towards developing a shared understanding of quality that integrates both standardization and innovation. Quality should not only be defined by compliance with set standards but also by the ability of institutions to produce graduates who are critically engaged, practically skilled, and adaptable to complex real-world challenges. Overall, the recommendations emphasize that the effectiveness of competency-based module development depends on a carefully managed balance between regulatory compliance and academic freedom. Strengthening this balance will ensure that accreditation frameworks enhance rather than hinder curriculum innovation in higher education institutions.

Conclusion

This study critically evaluated the influence of accreditation frameworks on competency-based module development in higher education institutions, with particular emphasis on how external quality assurance systems shape curriculum design, instructional structure, and assessment practices. The findings demonstrate that accreditation frameworks play a central and unavoidable role in contemporary higher education, functioning as both regulatory mechanisms and quality enhancement tools that significantly influence how academic modules are developed and implemented. The study established that accreditation frameworks positively contribute to higher education by promoting standardisation, accountability, transparency, and quality assurance. Through clearly defined learning outcomes, assessment criteria, and programme requirements, accreditation ensures that institutions maintain minimum academic standards and produce comparable qualifications across different contexts. This has strengthened the adoption of competency-based education principles, particularly the emphasis on measurable learning outcomes and graduate attributes. However, the study also revealed that accreditation frameworks introduce notable challenges to module development.

These include increased bureaucratic requirements, administrative workload, and potential constraints on academic autonomy. In some cases, the emphasis on compliance and documentation may reduce opportunities for pedagogical innovation, limiting lecturers' ability to design flexible, creative, and contextually responsive modules. This creates a tension between regulatory compliance and educational transformation.

Furthermore, the study highlighted that competency-based module development is both enabled and constrained by accreditation systems. While accreditation supports the alignment of learning outcomes, teaching strategies, and assessment methods, it may also lead to overly standardized curriculum structures that prioritise measurable outputs over deeper intellectual engagement. This suggests that the effectiveness of competency-based education depends not only on curriculum design principles but also on how accreditation frameworks are interpreted and implemented at institutional level. The theoretical integration of Quality Assurance Theory, Competency-Based Education Theory, and Curriculum Alignment Theory provided a comprehensive framework for understanding these dynamics. Together, these theories demonstrated that module development in higher education is shaped by a combination of external regulatory pressures and internal pedagogical objectives. Accreditation frameworks function as structural drivers that enforce alignment and accountability, while competency-based education provides the pedagogical rationale for outcome-focused curriculum design.

In conclusion, the study establishes that accreditation frameworks are neither entirely beneficial nor entirely restrictive. Instead, they operate as dual-purpose systems that simultaneously enhance quality assurance and introduce structural constraints. The key challenge for higher education institutions is therefore not to eliminate accreditation influence, but to strategically manage it in ways that preserve academic flexibility while maintaining quality standards. Ultimately, effective competency-based module development requires a balanced approach where accreditation is used as a guiding framework rather than a rigid control mechanism. Such an approach ensures that higher education institutions can produce graduates who are not only competent and employable but also critically engaged, innovative, and adaptable to the complexities of the modern world.

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