International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research
Vol. 24, No. 6, pp. 497-522, June 2025
https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.24.6.23
Received Apr 6, 2025; Revised May 20, 2025; Accepted May 26, 2025

Exploring Digital and Documentation Issues in State University–LGU Collaborative Programs for Sustainable Quality Education

Engr. Feliciana P. Jacoba
Professor, Vice President for Academic Affairs
Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology, Philippines

Analyn M. Gamit
Associate Professor, Director, Quality Assurance Office
Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology, Philippines

Angelo R. Santos*
Professor, Head, Local and International Accreditation Unit
Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology

Sarah C. Alvarez
Professor, Dean, College of Management & Business Technology
Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology, Philippines

Jo Neil T. Peria
Associate Professor, Dean, College of Education
Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology, Philippines

Atty. Eric G. Claudio
Professor, Director, Southern Nueva Ecija Off-Campus
Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology, Philippines

Abstract. State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in the Philippines collaborate with Local Government Units (LGUs) so more students can access higher education, even if not on the main campus. They implement off-campus programs. These collaborations use formal agreements called Memoranda of Agreement. SUCs handle academic matters, while LGUs provide administrative support. However, a major issue arises during accreditation. It is difficult to meet the standards, especially now that digital documentation and a quality assurance system are required. This qualitative–descriptive study examines the challenges faced by the Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology (NEUST) in preparing

*Corresponding author: *Angelo R. Santos, 15angelosantos@gmail.com*

for the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines' accreditation of its off-campus programs. Data were gathered through focus group discussions, interviews, and review of preliminary survey visit accreditation results. A total of 32 participants were purposively selected, including faculty members, administrative staff, and LGU personnel from the Papaya and San Antonio off-campus programs. Key challenges include insufficient digital resources, disorganized record-keeping, and the absence of a centralized documentation system. The study recommends enhancing digital literacy through training, improving coordination between SUCs and LGUs, and investing in information and communication technology infrastructure. The aim is to align institutional processes with quality assurance standards and support Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 – quality education.

Keywords: Accreditation; Digital Literacy; Higher Education; Information and Communication Technology Infrastructure; Local Government Units; Quality Assurance; State Universities

1. Introduction

State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in the Philippines have long partnered with Local Government Units (LGUs) to extend access to higher education in underserved communities through off-campus programs. These partnerships, formalized through Memoranda of Agreements, aim to localize tertiary education by integrating academic management from the SUCs and administrative support from the LGUs. However, despite the collaborative structure of the SUC–LGU arrangement, many LGU academic partners still face significant gaps in understanding and implementing the documentation and digital processes required for accreditation, especially during the shift to digital protocols set by the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACCUP).

Preliminary survey visits conducted in 2024 across NEUST's off-campus programs highlighted both institutional strengths and operational weaknesses in accreditation readiness. While these programs meet accreditation thresholds in core areas like administration and curriculum, they often encounter deficiencies in research, extension and community involvement, documentation, and digital compliance. These shortcomings are further compounded by inconsistent access to digital infrastructure, limited information and communication technology (ICT) training, a lack of permanent quality assurance personnel, and fragmented coordination between SUCs and their LGU counterparts.

This study discusses the challenges faced by the SUC–LGU collaboration in preparing for accreditation and quality assurance, particularly for AACCUP. It examines digital and documentation issues experienced by faculty and administrative staff in two off-campus programs as they prepare for a major accreditation evaluation. This study aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (quality education) by providing evidence-based strategies to bridge the digital

divide, enhance records management, and strengthen quality assurance compliance in collaborative SUC–LGU programs.

AACCUP evaluates institutional performance using 10 accreditation areas: (1) vision, mission, goals and objectives; (2) faculty; (3) curriculum and instruction; (4) support to students; (5) research; (6) extension and community involvement; (7) library; (8) physical plant and facilities; (9) laboratories; and (10) administration. Each area requires specific forms of documentation and compliance evidence. The current study uses these categories as a framework to assess NEUST's off-campus accreditation readiness and digital documentation practices.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

This study discusses how TAM (Technology Acceptance Model) and TQM (Total Quality Management) provide key insights into why NEUST is experiencing challenges in using digital systems for accreditation. TAM, developed by Davis in 1989, explains how people are more likely to use technology when they perceive it as useful and easy to use (Eriksson et al., 2005). In NEUST, this is a major factor. If teachers, coordinators, and administrative staff believe digital tools are helpful and simple, they are more likely to adopt them. For accreditation, this perception is crucial because the system only works if users believe it makes their tasks faster and more manageable.

However, the data reveals a significant issue: many staff members have not received sufficient training and lack digital proficiency, particularly those in LGU-supported off-campus programs. These staff members struggle to use digital tools effectively. Although no study focuses solely on NEUST, other research confirms that low digital skills significantly hinder technology adoption (Madanian et al., 2023). That is why training efforts must specifically target this group. The findings of Eriksson et al. (2005) highlight an important point: a tool being easy to use does not directly cause higher usage, but it does lead users to perceive the tool as useful. That perception, in turn, encourages actual use.

Therefore, training must not only teach the technical how-to but also help staff feel, "Yes, this tool benefits me." Furthermore, if a digital tool helps streamline and organize documentation, it can support NEUST in building strong habits for quality assurance. Zeebroeck et al. (2023) emphasize that institutions need to align their technology plans with quality goals. But if basic requirements like internet access, hardware, or funding are missing, even the best digital plans will fail (Widnall et al., 2020). Therefore, NEUST must apply both the TAM and TQM frameworks. This approach encourages digital tool adoption, improves effective use, and strengthens the institution's readiness for accreditation.

Together with the TAM, the TQM gives strong support to schools. TQM pushes for continuous improvement, and all departments must work as one to reach a high quality. It focuses on people working together, keeping proper documentation, and having a feedback system, all important to pass and maintain accreditation. In colleges and universities, TQM helps make things more

organized, supports continuous improvement, and strengthens quality checking. By learning how TAM and TQM work together, this study looks at how school culture, digital skills, and teamwork affect quality results in the SUC–LGU partnership. For example, Coss-Mandiola et al. (2022) say accreditation needs a change in school culture—how people think and act. This mindset change affects how staff behave and participate in the quality process. Everyone must be serious and active during accreditation, because the process is not easy. Khan et al. (2021) also states that schools must plan well, manage the process properly, and achieve results that match their learning goals.

This agrees with TQM's ideas—clear systems, complete documentation, and feedback from people to help schools improve. Dwaikat (2020) adds that schools face more pressure because of strong competition. TQM helps schools improve, not only internally, but also in how they respond to external demands. Lastly, Ullah et al. (2023) believe that currently, technology is very important and that digital tools help in document creation, communication with partners, building stronger teams and encouraging new ideas in education.

2. Literature Review

Today, digital systems and tools in higher education have become essential, especially for quality assurance and managing extensive documentation, such as during accreditation. Studies show that the digital skills of teachers and staff are a key factor in ensuring the success of quality assurance processes. However, the work of Das (2023), which focuses more on students using Google Classroom through the TAM model, does not directly support the discussion about staff digital skills or quality assurance. Therefore, it is not a strong match for this context. In setups where many people work together, such as in SUC–LGU partnerships, problems arise when ICT skill levels are uneven. Some individuals are tech-savvy, while others are not. This gap makes it difficult to maintain consistent quality standards.

In addition, since many staff members are contractual or temporary, institutional knowledge is often lost; what previous staff members knew, new ones may not know. If new staff do not receive proper training, they may not follow the correct systems or procedures, which leads to disorganization. The most effective solution is to establish a strong training program focused on enhancing digital skills. This empowers individual staff members and helps build a culture of continuous improvement and accountability. In turn, this allows the institution to deliver better education and comply more effectively with accreditation requirements.

For schools like NEUST, especially off-campus programs, it is very important to keep good records of how programs perform in all areas for accreditation. Accreditation bodies say that delays or mistakes in submission mostly happen because digital files are not handled well, campuses do not communicate clearly, and document rules are unclear (Antwi et al., 2021). This gets harder on off-campus sites. Many support staff there have no access to digital storage and no training in writing reports. These gaps hurt quality and can lead to the school not

passing accreditation. Studies suggest schools need a strong digital system and a clear step-by-step process for handling documents. This helps communication and maintains quality throughout the accreditation process. Semerci et al. (2021) say accreditation ensures schools reach required standards, and a good documentation system is a large part of that. Also, Legowo et al. (2019) states that when schools use digital tools to monitor quality, the whole accreditation process becomes faster and smoother. TQM can help schools create standard rules for making and keeping documents. This helps all teachers, other staff, and support teams follow the same process. However, if a school has no clear policy and staff have different ICT skill levels, teamwork becomes difficult. That is why digital skills training, and a strong communication system are critical (Hu & Cao, 2023).

Collaborative programs, such as partnerships between SUCs and LGUs, often face challenges related to role clarity. This creates complications in quality assurance. When administrative and academic responsibilities are divided between groups, it becomes unclear who oversees specific tasks. This can lead to delays, repeated checks, and difficulty retrieving required documents (Camargo et al., 2018). Camargo et al. (2018) present a case from a hospital and nursing school partnership where responsibilities were not clearly defined, and quality monitoring became slow and ineffective. This highlights the importance of having a clear workflow and strong communication among all stakeholders in the accreditation process.

Hou et al. (2020) further emphasize that, in international academic programs, quality assurance only functions effectively when both the host and partner institutions collaborate from the beginning, through the planning and teaching phases. If roles are not clearly assigned, institutions risk submitting incomplete or substandard reports, which can lead to accreditation failure. Akintobi et al. (2023) argue that for community-based projects to succeed, all partners must be accountable and engage in open dialogue. Feedback and transparency are essential in resolving issues within collaborative efforts. Therefore, for SUC–LGU programs, institutions need to reevaluate their systems. There must be clearly defined workflows, accessible documentation, and integrated teamwork within the quality assurance process.

This approach aligns with the recommendations of Elbadiansyah and Masyni (2022). LGU-hired personnel in NEUST's off-campus programs include lecturers on an hourly basis, job orders, contractual administrative staff, and temporary faculty funded through municipal or provincial budgets. These roles vary in terms of employment security, training access, and integration into the SUC's formal academic system. Such variation often results in inconsistent engagement in accreditation tasks and highlights the need for policy alignment between SUC and LGU hiring practices.

2.1 Context of SUC–LGU Program Delivery and Accreditation

When SUCs and LGUs collaborate to offer off-campus programs in the Philippines, more students gain access to higher education, which is a positive outcome. However, this kind of joint setup also presents challenges in quality

assurance. SUCs manage teaching and curriculum, while LGUs handle facilities, supplies, and local staff. Because of this division of responsibilities, the quality assurance process can become misaligned. Ormilla and Dupra (2023) note that the Center for Higher Education Development advocates an outcome-based quality system. This means that every participating group must clearly understand their role. When roles are unclear, confusion arises, and institutions may fail to comply with standards or maintain consistent quality, especially when multiple organizations are involved in delivering the same program.

In addition, LGU staff members sometimes do not receive the same training or may not share the same focus on quality standards as SUC staff. This disparity makes quality monitoring more difficult. When campuses fail to communicate effectively or do not update each other promptly, problems occur, such as delayed reports or inaccurate data. To ensure that off-campus collaborations meet quality goals, institutions must define roles clearly, establish strong communication channels, and implement integrated workflows. When everyone understands their responsibilities and communication flows smoothly, the entire team can move in the same direction and achieve educational goals more effectively.

At the NEUST, several off-campus programs underwent the AACCUP preliminary survey visit in October 2024. While the campuses in San Antonio and General Tinio exceeded the minimum grand mean scores for compliance, significant issues were noted in research, extension, and documentation. Stakeholders cited persistent challenges, including inadequate digital readiness, delayed inter-office communication, and fragmented access to essential records, which hindered timely documentation for accreditation.

To address issues in digital documentation and help stakeholders better understand AACCUP standards, NEUST's quality assurance office-initiated training programs. These sessions are designed for both school faculty and LGU staff, aiming to strengthen quality assurance practices in off-campus programs. However, several challenges remain unresolved. ICT tools are still insufficient, staff require further training, and there is no shared digital storage system in place. These issues continue to slow down the progress of otherwise well-planned initiatives. Studies show that similar problems occur in other institutions. When individuals do not use digital storage systems effectively, documentation and information sharing become difficult.

Cheung et al. (2022) highlight that although storing research data digitally is important, many researchers fail to do so due to limited skills or lack of access to appropriate tools. Joo and Peters (2019) also emphasize that when schools and teachers fail to use institutional or third-party digital storage systems, it reflects deeper systemic issues beyond technology access. In SUC–LGU partnerships, more problems arise when the workflow is not clear, and job roles are not well defined. Akintobi et al. (2023) say that if nobody knows who is in charge, accountability disappears. This causes delays, confusion, and weak quality assurance. To fix this, NEUST needs to focus on three main things: (1) provide enough ICT tools, (2) train staff properly, and (3) create a shared digital storage

system that everyone can use. If the university does these, the school will be more ready for accreditation and can provide better quality education, even in the SUC–LGU partnership setup.

3. Research Objectives and Methodology

3.1 Research Objectives

This study investigates problems with digital tools and document handling in SUC–LGU off-campus programs during accreditation preparation. The main goal is to find common issues in documentation and check if the school is digitally ready, based on the AACCUP preliminary survey visit across 10 areas. The study also gathers stories and insights from teachers, admin staff, and task force members who help prepare for accreditation. It focuses on how they handle digital documents, whether the training they receive is enough, and how well offices communicate and work together. More than just finding problems, the study also gives suggestions and strategies to strengthen documentation and improve quality assurance.

It points out major issues like a lack of digital tools, weak digital skills, and poor coordination between offices. This research hopes to help schools be more ready for accreditation and provide better education in the SUC–LGU partnership setup. At the same time, it aims to align NEUST's accreditation process with global standards and support the goal of SDG 4 to provide inclusive, high-quality education for all.

3.2 Research Methodology

3.2.1 Research design

This study uses a qualitative–descriptive research design, supported by secondary data. The researchers reviewed preliminary survey visit accreditation results and conducted focus group discussions and interviews with selected faculty members, administrative staff, and task force members. To guide data collection and analysis, the study used AACCUP instruments for Level I and Level II accreditation. These tools helped structure the data and identify common themes during the analysis process.

3.2.2 Participants and sampling technique

A total of 32 participants were purposively selected from two off-campus programs of NEUST—17 from Papaya and 15 from San Antonio. These include both SUC-hired and LGU-supported personnel: full-time and part-time faculty members, program chairs, quality assurance focal persons, and LGU personnel. The inclusion of LGU staff was intentional, given their substantial role in administrative support and documentation in the off-campus programs. SUC faculty and coordinators were also well represented, particularly those directly involved in accreditation tasks and quality assurance planning. Selection was based on their active involvement in Level I accreditation preparations, participation in quality assurance activities, and availability during interviews or focus group discussion sessions. This purposive sampling ensured insights were gathered from those directly engaged in documentation and accreditation processes.

3.2.3 Instruments

The study used the following data gathering tools:

- Accreditation result sheets from AACCUP's preliminary survey visit conducted in October 2024, which provided quantitative data per program and area.
- Semi-structured interview guides aligned with AACCUP's 10 accreditation areas, including specific probes on digital file preparation, evidence gathering, and coordination.
- Focus group discussion guide with open-ended questions on institutional support, digital tools used, documentation practices, and accreditation task force roles.
- Specifically, 32 participants contributed through focus group discussions and interviews, 17 from Papaya and 15 from San Antonio. All participants were involved in the accreditation process and responded to questions aligned with the 10 AACCUP areas.

3.2.4 Data gathering procedure

The researchers obtained administrative approval and coordinated with quality assurance focal persons to facilitate access to documentation and participants. Preliminary survey visit results were obtained from NEUST's quality assurance office. Focus group discussions were held onsite and conducted in person or via video conferencing, depending on participant availability and campus conditions. Interview and focus group discussion sessions lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and were guided by semi-structured protocols based on AACCUP benchmarks. All sessions were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed, and reviewed for accuracy. Ethical considerations, including voluntary participation and confidentiality, were strictly observed in accordance with RA 10173 (Data Privacy Act).

3.3 Data analysis

A thematic analysis approach was used to process qualitative data. Transcripts from interviews and focus group discussions were coded according to recurring issues across the 10 AACCUP areas. Emerging themes were categorized into clusters: (1) digital literacy and ICT access, (2) documentation issues and processes, (3) coordination and administrative bottlenecks, and (4) policy and compliance readiness. Quantitative preliminary survey visit data were tabulated and interpreted per area, serving as supporting evidence for triangulation with qualitative findings.

To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation was applied by cross-validating qualitative data from focus group discussions and interviews with quantitative preliminary survey visit scores. Peer debriefing and audit trails were also used to support consistency in data coding and interpretation. Member checking was employed by allowing selected participants to review summaries of their input for accuracy and contextual validation.

3.4 Ethical considerations

This study adhered to ethical standards for research involving human subjects. Participants signed informed consent forms, and all data were anonymized. No personal identifiers were collected. Approval was obtained from the university's research and development office. Data collection complied with the Philippine Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 10173), ensuring confidentiality and secure data handling.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Accreditation Readiness Based on Preliminary Survey Visit Results

The October 2024 preliminary survey visit conducted by the AACCUP provided valuable insights into the institutional performance of NEUST's off-campus programs located in General Tinio and San Antonio. A total of six programs were evaluated, and all passed the accreditation. Each program received a score higher than the minimum required score of 1.00, with results ranging from 3.57 to 4.21.

These outcomes demonstrate NEUST's strong commitment to providing quality education and aligning with the goals of SDG 4: Quality education. While the quantitative program ratings were derived from official preliminary survey visit results conducted in October 2024, the qualitative insights discussed in subsequent sections were obtained from focus group discussions and interviews with off-campus personnel during the same academic year.

Table 3.1: Grand Mean Scores of NEUST Off-Campus Programs

Program	Campus	Grand Mean
Bachelor of Secondary Education (English)	General Tinio, Papaya	3.97
Bachelor of Science in Business Administration – Marketing Management	General Tinio, Papaya	3.57
Bachelor of Science in Information Technology – Web System Technology	General Tinio, Papaya	4.14
Bachelor of Elementary Education	General Tinio, Papaya	3.95
Bachelor of Elementary Education	San Antonio	4.17
Bachelor of Science in Entrepreneurship	San Antonio	4.21

Results from the October 2024 preliminary survey visit by AACCUP show strong performance from six programs in NEUST off-campus sites—General Tinio, Papaya, and San Antonio. All programs passed the required grand mean, with scores ranging from 3.57 to 4.21. The highest score went to the Bachelor of Science Entrepreneurship in San Antonio, with 4.21. Next was Bachelor of Elementary Education in San Antonio, with 4.17, followed by Bachelor of Science in Information Technology in General Tinio, with 4.14. These high scores reflect NEUST's adherence to accreditation standards and its commitment to support SDG 4, ensuring inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all.

Programs generally performed best in areas such as administration, curriculum and instruction, student support, and laboratories, indicating robust leadership, student services, and physical infrastructure. For example, the administration area across nearly all programs scored above 4.00, with one program even reaching 4.65. Likewise, student support in the BSEd English program scored 4.55,

suggesting student services are responsive and adequately structured. On the other hand, consistent weaknesses emerged in research, extension and community involvement, and library, particularly in programs under the General Tinio Campus. The Bachelor of Science in Business Administration in Marketing Management posted one of the lowest area scores at 3.00 in research and extension and community involvement. These ratings raise concerns about limited scholarly engagement, weak documentation practices, and inadequate tracking of community initiatives. The BSEd program in General Tinio, for instance, scored 3.06 in research and 3.64 in library, reflecting a gap in updated learning materials and research culture.

During focus group discussions, participants echoed on these quantitative trends. Several faculty and coordinators noted that preparations were often delayed due to the absence of centralized digital repositories and limited understanding of documentation protocols.
One faculty member stated,

> *"We could have scored even higher if we had a shared drive early on. All documents were rushed last minute due to scattered files."*

Another participant explained that

> *"Our LGU-hired faculty weren't trained on the documentation process at all,"*

which likely contributed to underperformance in research and extension and community involvement metrics. Moreover, digital limitations—such as low internet connectivity, poor file organization, and inadequate ICT resources—hindered effective evidence preparation, especially in remote LGU-partnered campuses.

The data reflects a generally positive accreditation readiness across NEUST's off-campus programs, indicating that the foundational systems for quality assurance are in place. However, the recurring underperformance in key areas such as research, extension and community involvement, and library reveals underlying structural and operational constraints. The disparity in scores between San Antonio and General Tinio campuses may also suggest varying levels of local government support, faculty capacity, or administrative coordination. These findings are aligned with the broader challenges observed in SUC–LGU collaborations, particularly in digital documentation and faculty development.

The results underscore the need for targeted capacity-building, especially among part-time or LGU-hired faculty, who often lack tenure, training, and digital proficiency. Also, the lack of a central document system, no shared digital storage, and no full-time Quality Assurance (QA) staff make the work slower and more disorganized. Moving forward, the university needs to not only continue performing well in strong areas but also invest in long-term digital tools, support more research, and build an inclusive accreditation culture with LGU partners. Only with these system changes can the university continue to succeed in the next levels of accreditation and truly follow the goal of quality education for all.

Findings from the preliminary survey visit show that NEUST meets the main accreditation standards, especially in the areas of administration and curriculum and instruction. However, there are still weak spots, such as research, extension and community involvement, and library. Most of these problems were observed on the General Tinio Campus. These areas need fast and smart action. Feedback shows issues like a lack of teacher training, low digital skills, and disorganized document handling. The absence of shared digital storage and a weak ICT system makes things worse. Because of this, reports are rushed, and documents are not of high quality (Hussain et al., 2020). Also, performance is not consistent across all campuses; some perform better, while others are still behind. While some perform well, others lag behind.

A major contributing factor is the presence of part-time instructors from LGUs who may not be fully prepared or adequately trained for accreditation-related tasks (Rafiq et al., 2024). If NEUST aims to attain and sustain Level I accreditation, it must improve digital documentation practices, provide enhanced training for faculty and staff, and ensure that resources are readily accessible. The most effective approach is to establish a unified and robust QA system, leveraging digital tools and comprehensive training to promote institutional growth, accountability, and sustained educational quality (Quraishi et al., 2024).

4.2 Qualitative Themes from Stakeholder Perspectives

While getting ready for Level I accreditation, NEUST's off-campus programs faced many system and operational problems. These issues arose during in-depth discussions in focus groups and interviews with teachers, coordinators, and administration staff working on accreditation. From their stories, major barriers were identified as matters that NEUST must address if it wants to meet the more challenging rules and requirements of Level I accreditation. AACCUP requires extensive documentation as evidence of compliance, so the institution must be fully prepared with organized, comprehensive, and reliable records.

4.2.1 Digital literacy and ICT limitations

The effectiveness of digital documentation preparation, a critical requirement in accreditation, is heavily influenced by the digital literacy of personnel and the availability of appropriate ICT resources. Based on qualitative responses from NEUST off-campus accreditation participants, significant constraints were identified in both areas.

Low digital competency among faculty and staff: Faculty members hired on a part-time or job-order basis, particularly those from LGU appointments, were observed to have limited experience with basic digital tools. Tasks such as file scanning, conversion to PDF, and structuring electronic folders were described as difficult and unfamiliar. "*Some of us don't know how to scan properly. Files are often saved as JPEG instead of PDF,*" admitted one part-time faculty member during the focus group discussions. Others echoed similar sentiments, noting that they struggled with compressing file sizes, inserting digital signatures, and ensuring that outputs complied with the technical standards of AACCUP digital submissions.

Unreliable and disorganized file storage practices: Without a centralized cloud-based platform, such as Google Drive or an institutional Learning Management System, off-campus task forces resorted to fragmented file storage practices. Documents were stored in personal USB drives, private email threads, or across uncoordinated laptops, raising serious risks for data loss, redundancy, or inconsistency. *"Our files are all over the place – some in USBs, some in personal emails. One virus attack and we could lose everything,"* shared a staff assistant involved in Area IX documentation. In one case, a faculty member reported losing an entire folder of scanned class records when the laptop being used for storage was accidentally reformatted.

Internet connectivity issues and online submission delays: Internet access varied across NEUST's off-campus sites, with some relying on mobile hotspots or intermittent connections that disrupted the uploading of scanned documents. Accreditation tasks such as video file uploads, updating digital repositories, and live consultation sessions were often delayed or postponed due to poor connectivity. *"The connection was so bad we had to wait until after office hours to upload folders. Even then, some files failed to go through,"* narrated a documentation lead. These connectivity issues particularly affected campuses in remote locations, where even basic browser access to shared drives was inconsistent.

Insufficient ICT equipment and shared resource bottlenecks: Many of the campuses lacked functional ICT tools to support bulk scanning, printing, or editing of documents. Scanners were often outdated or shared among multiple teams, causing long queues and mechanical issues. *"We took turns using one scanner, and it was often jammed,"* said one area coordinator. Printers lacked toner or paper, and the few desktop computers available were either slow, outdated, or missing software essential for documentation preparation.

Low digital skills among teachers and staff, along with weak ICT tools, pose major challenges to NEUST's accreditation work. Heavy reliance on personal USBs, lack of cloud storage, and frequent technical delays result in rushed, messy, and low-quality submissions. To fix this, the school needs more than a one-time training. NEUST must establish a clear digital workflow system across all campuses, provide each site with its own ICT support team, and create simple, easy-to-follow templates and guides that align with AACCUP digital standards. It is also very important to provide focused digital training to LGU-hired instructors. If NEUST wants to maintain high quality in its off-campus programs in the long term, the school must invest in a strong digital system and build a structure that truly supports quality assurance.

4.2.2 Documentation gaps and evidence issues

Moving from the preliminary survey visit to Level I accreditation, off-campus programs need to submit more documents—and not just more, but also clearer and aligned with benchmarks. However, based on what NEUST teachers, coordinators, and administration staff shared, the way documents are handled on

off-campus sites is still messy, inconsistent, and often reactive rather than planned.

Scattered files and unstructured evidence: One major recurring issue was the lack of a clear system for storing accreditation documents. Files were sometimes saved on personal USB drives, scattered across multiple laptops, or placed in folders without proper naming conventions or labels for specific areas. *"We had photos with no captions or dates. Some were even unsigned—how can you submit that?"* said a faculty member assigned to documentation. This disorganization extended to scanned files that were blurry, incomplete, or saved in the wrong format (e.g., JPEG instead of PDF), thereby compromising the quality and acceptability of submissions.

Last-minute consolidation and incomplete submissions: Owing to time constraints and lack of planning, many campuses resorted to consolidating documents at the last minute. This reactive behavior led to inconsistencies, missing attachments, and incomplete compliance with AACCUP benchmarks. Participants admitted that accreditation reports were submitted with placeholders instead of actual evidence, or worse, without crucial annexes. *"We were rushing a week before the PSV [preliminary survey visit] —just compiling everything in folders, even if some were incomplete,"* shared an area chair during the group interview.

Delayed and non-responsive offices: Significant delays in documentation occurred because it was difficult to obtain school records from the main campus offices. Even when teachers and coordinators send letters of formal request, they often receive no response, experience long waiting times, or receive unclear and incomplete information. *"We submitted a request letter, but some offices took weeks to respond—or never responded at all,"* lamented one faculty coordinator. Because offices did not respond promptly, task force members experienced delays preparing accreditation folders. This also led to stress and frustration, as they worked under tight deadlines.

Data privacy restrictions and withheld documents: Some participants shared that they were unable to obtain important documents for accreditation because certain offices claimed the files were private or confidential. Even after explaining that the documents were needed for the AACCUP evaluation, the offices still refused to cooperate or provide the required materials. *"We were told the files were for internal use only—even if we clarified that it was for accreditation,"* recalled an academic coordinator. This kind of resistance obstructed access to critical evidence such as signed minutes, monitoring forms, or communications with stakeholders, leading to narrative gaps and weaker compliance.

Absence of a centralized digital repository: Another critical issue raised was the absence of an institutional digital system or shared drive where area chairs and coordinators could access, store, and update their files collaboratively. Most campuses relied on personal storage devices or ad-hoc solutions, which proved unreliable.

> *"We had to pass USBs from one person to another. Some files got corrupted or lost along the way,* shared a faculty member.

The lack of a structured, backed-up cloud system made cross-validation and document standardization nearly impossible, especially when preparing for multi-area reviews.

The accreditation documentation process at NEUST's off-campus programs remains vulnerable to multiple threat disorganization, communication breakdowns, technical limitations, and procedural lapses. Without structured workflows, centralized repositories, and stronger accountability from institutional offices, efforts to comply with AACCUP Level I standards risk being undermined by avoidable documentation failures.

To mitigate these concerns, NEUST must institutionalize a documentation lifecycle model that includes training on digital evidence packaging, timely validation of outputs, and clear guidelines on acceptable formats and content. More importantly, stronger support from the main campus offices is essential in ensuring timely access to core institutional records, especially for geographically remote off-campus sites.

4.2.3 Inter-office coordination barriers

This theme highlights the operational disconnect between off-campus units and the NEUST main campus, which significantly impeded the timely preparation and consolidation of accreditation documents. During the focus group discussions, both faculty members and coordinators emphasized how poor communication structures, undefined workflows, and a lack of response from responsible offices created unnecessary barriers to meeting accreditation timelines.

Delayed and vague inter-office responses: A persistent concern among off-campus personnel was the slow turnaround time in receiving responses to official document requests. Despite submitting formal request letters for required records such as meeting minutes, accomplishment reports, or signed memos, many participants reported week-long delays or incomplete replies. *"We send the request letter, but the response comes after a week. We often rely on personal contacts just to get one document signed,* shared an LGU-side academic head. This lack of urgency and accountability disrupted the sequencing of accreditation tasks and increased pressure on already limited personnel.

Absence of clear focal people for each area: Offices involved in accreditation lacked designated contact persons or focal individuals for each AACCUP area. Without assigned point persons, LGU-based coordinators were left unsure about whom to follow up with, causing confusion, repetition of requests, and communication breakdowns across departments. "*Sometimes, we don't even know who handles the files we need. It's like going to office to office, hoping someone takes responsibility,*" mentioned a documentation staff member from one off-campus site. This absence of defined roles contributed to overlapping responsibilities,

delays in document validation, and inconsistencies in formatting or evidence packaging.

Physical travel and logistical burdens: Owing to the absence of a strong digital system and the frequent lack of response to document requests, teachers and staff often have to go in person to the university's main campus in Sumacab. They make these trips just to follow up on requests, scan documents, or obtain signatures, tasks that could be handled more efficiently if the university had a centralized digital platform for all campuses. "*Some days, we end up waiting in the main campus hallways just to follow up in person, since online requests often go unanswered,*" lamented one off-campus staff member. This not only drained time and resources but also intensified stress levels among teams already handling multiple roles due to staffing constraints.

Lack of digital workflow and real-time tracking: Another reason coordination failed was the lack of a digital tool to track and update request statuses in real time. There was no shared storage or centralized request system. As a result, staff relied solely on verbal follow-ups or text messages, methods which lack formality, leave no official record, and provide no way to trace the progress or outcome of requests. "*If we had a system that tells us which documents are pending and who's working on them, we wouldn't be wasting so much time guessing*", added an academic coordinator. This reflected the urgent need for institutionalizing digital requests and monitoring platforms aligned with quality assurance workflows.

Accreditation preparation faces major challenges due to poor communication, unclear office roles, and excessive reliance on manual document handling. Off-campus staff carry a heavy burden, even for simple tasks like securing signatures or scanning documents. This reflects a deeper issue in system design and administrative support. If the university wants better results in the next accreditation cycle, it must address these coordination problems.

Clear communication protocols need to be established, area coordinators should be designated, and a digital system for document management must be implemented. Relying solely on personal effort or in-person visits to the main campus should no longer be the norm. Providing off-campus teams with stronger support and well-defined workflows will ensure that processes move faster, run more smoothly, and fully comply with accreditation requirements.

4.2.4 Structural and policy challenges

This theme encapsulates the underlying systemic issues related to policy, employment structure, and accreditation compliance capacity that emerged during the focus group discussions. The responses of faculty and administrators revealed four key issues affecting accreditation performance and documentation quality.

Lack of full-time and tenured faculty members: One of the most recurrent issues raised was the absence of permanent and full-time faculty across off-campus programs. Most instructors engaged by the LGU were hired on a part-time or job-

order basis, leading to limited institutional involvement and unstable commitment to quality assurance initiatives. These employment conditions hindered long-term engagement in core accreditation activities such as research, extension and community involvement, and documentation. "*Some of us only teach for a few hours a week—we're not even informed about the accreditation requirements*", shared one faculty member during the focus group. This limited presence and involvement compromised the consistency and depth of faculty contributions to the self-survey process, narrative reports, and performance metrics required in AACCUP's instruments.

Absence of professional development tracking systems: A recurring challenge was the lack of centralized tracking systems for faculty development, seminar attendance, research, or extension and community involvement. Without proper monitoring mechanisms, it was difficult to present credible and verifiable evidence of faculty engagement in training and scholarly work, an essential part of faculty profiling under Area II. "*We couldn't track who attended seminars. There's no list, no output, no proof*", said a faculty coordinator assigned in Area II: Faculty. This absence of documentation significantly undermined NEUST's ability to validate compliance with accreditation benchmarks related to human resource development.

Poor implementation and understanding of outcome-based education (OBE): Even though OBE was required in state universities, many instructors did not follow a consistent approach. Some part-time faculty members, especially those from the DepEd or the private sector, were not familiar with how OBE is implemented at the university. As a result, their teaching did not align with the expected learning outcomes, which weakened the report for curriculum and instruction (Area III) and created misalignment with accreditation standards. "*We teach based on our experience or what DepEd requires, but we're not oriented on NEUST's OBE system*", admitted one part-time instructor. This problem in teaching approaches not only affects student learning but also makes it difficult to accurately write and report learning outcomes. Since this aspect is crucial in accreditation, particularly in aligning curriculum with expected outcomes, the issue poses a significant challenge.

Inadequate student affairs and support structures: Another major issue was the absence of full-time staff dedicated to handling student services such as guidance, student affairs, and co-curricular activities. This problem was more pronounced in remote campuses, where job-order staff or faculty members took on additional roles without clear responsibilities or proper training. Owing to the lack of dedicated personnel, student records, feedback systems, and support services were often weak. These elements are critical in accreditation, particularly in the areas of support of students (Area IV) and administration (Area X). Campuses also struggled to provide sufficient documentation for requirements such as student satisfaction surveys, alumni tracer studies, and wellness programs—key indicators of effective student services.

Institutional gaps in research, extension, and monitoring: The off-campus policy was also ineffective in research and extension and community involvement.

Teachers said they had little access to journals, whether from the university or local sources. Many campuses had no fixed budget for research, and there was no reward or recognition for teachers who published their work. Community extension programs existed, but there was no system to check if these programs had a long-term impact. There was no way to know if a project truly helped the community or if it was just a one-time activity with no follow-up.
One teacher even said,

> "*Our extension score dropped because we had no tracking of project outcomes or sustainability. Worse, no record of faculty involvement exists.*"

This shows that the university needs to improve how it plans, documents, and assesses activities so that research (Area V) and extension and community involvement (Area VI) work align with the accreditation standards.

All these problems across different areas contribute to major system issues within the university, i.e., weak school policies, insufficient teacher training, and a broken or scattered quality assurance system. Participants shared that preparing for accreditation feels like being in "panic mode", highly stressful, poorly organized, and lacking a clear system to manage documents or properly follow the required processes. Other major issues include the absence of full-time trained staff, outdated or broken equipment, slow or no internet access, and the lack of a proper file storage system. All these factors make the accreditation process even harder and slower.
As one documentation officer put it,

> "*Preparation starts too late. We cram everything in the last two weeks.*"

Files are frequently improperly scanned, inaccurately labelled, and stored without a standardized system.

In addition, a cultural gap in accountability was observed:

> "*Some staff say accreditation isn't their job. They just wait for instructions or do the bare minimum*", noted one administrator.

These operational problems, along with people being unsure of their roles in the accreditation process, put the university at risk during the Level I evaluation. If NEUST wants to move forward and maintain a high quality, the school needs to fix the system. Important steps include regularizing faculty and providing training, assigning a QA focal person on every off-campus site, upgrading ICT tools, improving coordination between offices, and establishing a shared digital storage system like a QA data bank. If these basic problems are not addressed, accreditation will continue to face delays, errors, and a high chance of a revisit.
As one participant said,

> *"We're trying our best, but the system needs fixing. Accreditation isn't just paperwork, its teamwork, planning, and clear direction.*

This study shows that NEUST's off-campus programs still face major challenges in structure, technology, and administration while working toward Level I accreditation. Even if preliminary survey visits scores appear strong, the next

level of accreditation reveals deeper problems, such as a lack of digital tools, weak coordination between offices, and disorganized document systems. One major issue is the absence of central file storage. Because there is no standard QA system, teachers and staff rely on personal USBs or phones and mostly depend on text messages or word of mouth. This slows down work and puts data at risk. In addition, most faculty members are job-order or part-time. Many of them have not received orientation on OBE or have a clear understanding of how the QA process really works.

As a result, it is difficult to maintain consistency in teaching and meet evidence-based accreditation requirements. These problems are further compounded by slow internet connections, outdated ICT equipment, and the absence of designated QA officers on campus. While NEUST has demonstrated effort, truly preparing for the next level of accreditation will require a systemic transformation. The university must establish a centralized QA data bank, revise its policies on faculty hiring and document handling, and professionalize QA implementation across all units and campuses.

NEUST's preparation for accreditation faces multiple challenges occurring simultaneously. First, limited digital skills and inadequate ICT tools significantly slow the process. Teachers and staff are unable to fully use digital platforms to meet accreditation requirements (Santoso & Istiqomah, 2023). Second, the document management system is disorganized. Files are not properly structured, causing delays and making it difficult for the institution to comply with accreditation standards (Zulfikri, 2021). Third, there is poor coordination among offices. Without a shared system like a QA data bank, departments struggle to communicate effectively or share information promptly. This lack of integration slows the process and prevents the institution from maintaining a reliable record or institutional memory of previous accreditation efforts.

In addition, there is a shortage of trained personnel dedicated to quality assurance. The absence of proper staffing and training makes it difficult to maintain consistency (Kyriakeli, 2025). Without full-time QA officers, many view accreditation as a mere formality rather than a meaningful part of the university's continuous improvement and quality development process. Institutionalizing digital workflows and professionalizing accreditation roles are crucial steps for NEUST to not only meet Level I standards but also foster a sustainable culture of quality and accountability across its campuses.

4.3 Emerging Accreditation Realities and Institutional Insights

The convergence of quantitative accreditation ratings and qualitative feedback from NEUST's off-campus stakeholders reveals a nuanced picture of progress and persistent gaps. While the outcomes of the preliminary survey visits clearly indicate that institutional systems are in place and capable of meeting AACCUP's minimum quality benchmarks, the underlying processes still face multiple structural and operational constraints. The following thematic realities capture the broader context shaping NEUST's accreditation readiness.

4.3.1 Institutional potential is evident

All academic programs evaluated during the preliminary survey visit exceeded the minimum grand mean requirement, with some programs reaching above 4.00 in areas such as administration, curriculum and instruction, and support of students. These results signal a foundational alignment with quality assurance expectations and underscore NEUST's ability to implement academic standards even in geographically distributed settings. Identifying the operational and digital bottlenecks that hinder quality assurance in off-campus programs, this study contributes directly to SDG 4, particularly Target 4.c, which emphasizes improving the quality of education through enhanced teacher training and institutional support. The implementation of a QA data bank, digital skills training, and structured QA workflows can help ensure that even remote campuses maintain consistent, equitable, and high-quality educational delivery aligned with national and international standards.

4.3.2 Digital capacity is a strategic weakness

Despite favorable mean scores, digital documentation efforts remain highly vulnerable due to the lack of structured digital systems, inconsistent file management practices, and the limited digital proficiency of faculty and staff—especially those engaged on a part-time or job-order basis. Scanned files were often blurry, oversized, or saved in incompatible formats, and shared drives were either non-existent or poorly maintained. This digital gap threatens the sustainability and credibility of future accreditation submissions.

4.3.3 Communication and coordination are fragmented

Coordination lapses between off-campus units and the main campus slow document acquisition, response time, and inter-departmental collaboration. Faculty and coordinators reported relying on personal contacts or physically visiting the Sumacab Campus just to follow up on signatures or retrieve documents. This lack of clear communication protocols and designated QA point people delays accreditation timelines and increases workload pressures.

4.3.4 Staffing and policy gaps complicate quality assurance work

Institutional reliance on temporary, untrained, or externally hired personnel, particularly LGU-based instructors, limits the depth and continuity of quality assurance work. Many of these faculty members are not fully oriented to NEUST's accreditation framework, especially in critical areas like research, extension, and OBE-aligned instruction. The absence of permanent staff in student services, QA, and digital documentation further compounds the workload on coordinators and area chairs.

4.3.5 Documentation standards remain inconsistent

Participants highlighted recurring problems such as unsigned reports, undated photos, misfiled documents, and folders with no logical structure. These lapses diminish the strength of accreditation narratives and reduce the clarity of evidence presented during evaluations. The inconsistency also suggests the absence of an institutional standard or template for digital and physical documentation practices.

4.3.6 Capacity-building interventions have a positive early impact
This feedback was gathered directly from participants during the focus group discussions conducted as part of this study. It provided clarity on documentation requirements, fostered collaboration among off-campus teams, and introduced basic tools and strategies for more efficient preparation. However, many emphasized the need for sustained follow-through. *"It would really help to have at least one QA focal person per campus—even if contractual—just to manage documentation consistently,"* recommended one campus administrator.

The convergence of accreditation data and stakeholder feedback indicates that while NEUST demonstrates readiness for the preliminary survey visit, various vulnerabilities challenge its long-term sustainability at higher accreditation levels. Core strengths are evident; however, significant issues related to the absence of digital systems, fragmented communication, and reliance on part-time, undertrained faculty severely undermine quality assurance initiatives. The issues noted are common in various accreditation cases, suggesting systemic barriers to achieving higher standards (Kennedy et al., 2021).

Recent capacity-building efforts, such as the QA-Active Workshop, highlight institutional willingness to address these challenges but are insufficient without persistent enhancements in staffing and digital infrastructure (Vinall et al., 2021). The need for standardized QA protocols is crucial as NEUST seeks to move beyond isolated compliance efforts to adopt a holistic, system-based approach. This kind of systemic change is essential to ensure continuity, transparency, and alignment with accreditation requirements (Lang et al., 2023). If the university does not act promptly, its off-campus programs risk falling behind. Therefore, immediate action is necessary—implementing digital tools and providing comprehensive training to all individuals involved in the accreditation process (Crenshaw et al., 2024).

4.4 Strategic Implications for Institutional Policy and Operational Practice
Based on both the accreditation scores and the experiences shared by participants, it is clear that the university must address systemic issues with a strong and strategic response. While the preliminary survey visit results appear promising, pursuing higher levels of accreditation requires more than temporary solutions. The university must shift from reactive problem solving to building a sustainable and institutionalized QA system that ensures long-term effectiveness and continuous improvement.

4.4.1 Institutionalization of digital workflows
One major step NEUST needs to take is to make the digital documentation system standard and official. Currently, using personal USBs or saving files randomly is risky and can lead to lost or disorganized accreditation documents. The university should adopt a single system, such as a university-wide Learning Management System or shared cloud drive, with access control and backup protocols. This will improve document management, especially for campuses in different locations.

4.4.2 Formalization of quality assurance roles
The establishment of designated QA personnel at each off-campus site is essential. Their roles, whether regular or contract, must have clear responsibilities. They should manage documents, assist in coordination between offices, and support training or capacity-building efforts. If the school assigns a focal person for each AACCUP area, it will help ensure continuous progress, prevent late submissions, and strengthen accountability.

4.4.3 Structured capacity development for LGU-hired personnel
Since NEUST relies heavily on part-time, job-order, or LGU-funded teachers, it is very important to provide regular training and coaching. The focus must be on OBE, accreditation standards, and proper handling of digital documents. This should not be limited to one-time workshops—it must include follow-up mentoring, performance monitoring, and skills assessment. If these teachers understand NEUST's QA system, they can teach more effectively, manage documents properly, and represent the university well during accreditation.

4.4.4 Policy reforms in SUC–LGU collaboration
To resolve long-standing coordination problems, NEUST needs to review and improve the policies governing its work with LGUs. This includes: (1) setting deadlines for document requests, (2) creating clear steps for sharing information between the main campus and LGU sites, and (3) agreeing on hiring policies that align with accreditation requirements. Miscommunication, late responses, and unclear points of contact can be addressed through written agreements such as MOUs, which clearly define roles, responsibilities, and timelines.

4.4.5 Investment in ICT infrastructure and human capital
Policy changes must be supported by real tools. The university needs to allocate a budget for scanners, reliable internet, better computers, and ongoing staff training. Digital literacy and documentation skills must be part of the university's regular planning. In addition, funding for research, extension and community programs, and service for students should be reviewed to ensure alignment with AACCUP standards.

NEUST's goal to reach higher-level accreditation requires a major shift from simply doing things to pass to building a real QA system that becomes part of the university's daily operations. Strengthening digital workflows is essential to make documentation faster and improve team coordination (Efogo, 2020). Assigning a QA focal person on every campus will help support this shift and ensure someone is directly responsible for meeting accreditation standards. At the same time, the university must invest in ICT, such as reliable internet, updated computers, and an organized data system to make the digital process smooth and efficient (Axhami & Axhami, 2023).

In addition, teachers, especially those hired by LGUs, must receive continuous training on OBE and accreditation standards. This will enhance teaching quality and ensure the school consistently meets accreditation requirements (Kurniasih, 2023; Santoso & Istiqomah, 2023). Policy reform is also needed. SUCs and LGUs

must establish clear rules and timelines for collaboration. This will help the university be more prepared and less confused when accreditation season arrives. More support should also be directed toward research, extension and community programs, and student services. These areas strengthen the institution's overall quality and help advance SDG 4—providing fair, strong, and inclusive education (Winkler et al., 2021).

4.5 Institutional Proposal: Establishment of a QA Data Bank

Because many accreditation-related problems stem from disorganized files, lost data, and the absence of a central system, it is recommended that NEUST develop a digital storage platform called the QA data bank. The QA data bank will serve as both a centralized digital archive and a working platform for all accreditation documents. It will store templates, scanned files, narrative reports, and benchmark documents—organized by program and campus. This system will be cloud-based, with role-based access for QA coordinators, area chairs, and admin personnel. With this system in place, NEUST can prevent issues such as missing files, incorrect formats, and duplicate submissions.

Also, the QA data bank will help ensure continuity of work even when staff changes occur. New personnel can easily access past submissions, checklists, and approved documents. This addresses the issue of accreditation work relying too much on one person or being handled informally through flash drives or chat messages. Creating the QA data bank also aligns with the principles of the TQM, helping the university become more efficient, transparent, and consistently prepared for long-term accreditation goals. It also reinforces the university's digital transformation agenda and its commitment to delivering inclusive, high-quality education under Sustainable Development Goal 4. In future accreditation cycles, this data bank will not only streamline the documentation process but also allow for faster internal evaluations, enhanced coordination across campuses, and more credible narratives in support of institutional excellence.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to assess the documentation and digital readiness of NEUST's off-campus SUC–LGU programs in preparation for accreditation under AACCUP standards. Based on the findings, (1) NEUST's off-campus programs demonstrate significant institutional readiness for accreditation, with programs in areas such as administration, curriculum and instruction, and support to students exceeding accreditation benchmarks. However, challenges remain, particularly in areas like research, extension and community involvement, and libraries, where improvements are needed for higher-level accreditation; (2) Digital infrastructure issues, including inadequate ICT resources and limited digital literacy among faculties, hinder the effectiveness of accreditation preparation efforts.

These limitations result in disorganized documentation and delays in accreditation submissions, particularly in remote campuses that lack reliable internet connectivity and centralized file storage systems; (3) Faculty, particularly those hired by LGUs, face challenges related to insufficient training on accreditation requirements and OBE. This results in inconsistencies in curriculum

delivery and weak documentation for key accreditation areas such as research and extension; (4) Fragmented communication and coordination between off-campus units and the main campus further complicate the accreditation process. Delays in retrieving documents, miscommunication, and lack of centralized workflows contribute to inefficiencies and hinder timely accreditation submissions; (5) The implementation of capacity-building initiatives, such as the QA-Active Workshop, shows promise in addressing some of the digital and coordination challenges. However, continued investment in ICT infrastructure, faculty training, and inter-departmental collaboration is crucial to ensure the sustainability of accreditation efforts.

6. Recommendations

The following suggestions are made based on the findings of the study: (1) NEUST should prioritize the establishment of a centralized digital system, such as a cloud-based repository, to streamline documentation management across campuses and improve coordination for accreditation purposes; (2) faculty development programs should be enhanced, particularly for LGU-hired faculty, to improve digital literacy, understanding of accreditation requirements, and implementation of OBE principles; (3) training for teachers should be ongoing—not just a one-time event. It must include practical guidance on how to use digital tools for accreditation work; (4) communication between offices needs improvement. NEUST should assign QA personnel to every off-campus site to ensure accountability and coordination.

The university must also establish clear protocols and workflows to avoid delays and slow responses; (5) NEUST should invest in ICT by purchasing updated computers, providing reliable internet, and offering tech support across all campuses. This will speed up digital documentation and make accreditation preparation more efficient; (6) the university must continue offering training and mentoring, especially to build digital and quality assurance skills. These programs should help develop a strong QA culture in all campuses; (7) NEUST needs to strengthen its research, extension, and monitoring efforts. It must track research outputs, measure the impact of extension programs, and monitor teacher involvement.

All activities should be well-documented to meet accreditation requirements; (8) NEUST should review and improve policies with LGU partners. Roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined so everyone understands their duties. This will reduce confusion, improve coordination, and support compliance with accreditation standards; (9) lastly, the university must build and implement a comprehensive QA management plan—one that uses digital tools, follows a clear workflow, and supports long-term goals. This will help NEUST continuously improve and stay prepared for future accreditation.

This study was limited to two off-campus programs of NEUST and may not fully capture the diversity of SUC–LGU collaborations across the Philippines. The findings are context-specific and may vary in institutions with different administrative capacities or digital infrastructures. In addition, the study relied

on self-reported qualitative data, which may introduce subjectivity or recall bias. Future research should explore longitudinal effects of digital interventions in quality assurance, assess the impact of full-time QA staffing, and evaluate how centralized documentation platforms influence accreditation outcomes. Comparative studies across different SUCs or regions could also provide broader insights into best practices in collaborative QA systems.

7. References

Akintobi, T. H., Barrett, R., Hoffman, L. F., Scott, S. D., Davis, K., Jones, T., De Veauuse Brown, N., Fraire, M., Fraire, R., Garner, J., Gruner, A., Hill, J., Meckel, R., Obi, C., Omunga, P., Parham, Q., Rice, T., Samples, O., & Terrill, T. (2023). The community engagement course and action network: Strengthening community and academic research partnerships to advance health equity. *Frontiers in Public Health, 11*, 1114868. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2023.1114868

Antwi, J., Arkoh, A. A., Choge, J. K., Dibo, T. W., Mahmud, A., Vankhuu, E., Wanyama, E., & McKinley, D. W. (2021). Global accreditation practices for accelerated medically trained clinicians: A view of five countries. *Human Resources for Health, 19*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12960-021-00646-4

Axhami, L. Z., & Axhami, M. (2023). Use of information and communication technologies as a medium for education in Albania. *International Journal of Information and Education Technology, 13*(12), 1932-1938. https://doi.org/10.18178/ijiet.2023.13.12.2007

Camargo, F. C., Iwamoto, H. H., Galvão, C. M., & Monteiro, D. A. T. (2018). Modelos para a implementação da prática baseada em evidências na enfermagem hospitalar: Revisão narrativa. *Texto & Contexto - Enfermagem, 26*(4). https://doi.org/10.1590/0104-07072017002070017

Cheung, M., Cooper, A., Dearborn, D., Hill, E., Johnson, E., Mitchell, M., & Thompson, K. (2022). Practices before policy: Research data management behaviours in Canada. *Partnership the Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research, 17*(1), Jan-80. https://doi.org/10.21083/partnership.v17i1.6779

Coss-Mandiola, J., Vanegas López, J., Rojas, A., Carrasco, R., Pablo, D., & Campillay-Campillay, M. (2022). Characterization of communes with quality accredited primary healthcare centers in Chile. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 19*(15), 9189. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19159189

Crenshaw, A. H., Allen, P., Fifolt, M., Lang, B., Thomas, A. B., Erwin, P., & Brownson, R. (2024). Challenges and supports for implementing health equity during national accreditation among small local health departments in the United States. *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice, 31*(2), 196-203. https://doi.org/10.1097/phh.0000000000002096

Dwaikat, N. Y. (2020). A comprehensive model for assessing the quality in higher education institutions. *The TQM Journal, 33*(4), 841-855. https://doi.org/10.1108/tqm-06-2020-0133

Efogo, F. O. (2020). Does trade in services improve African participation in global value chains? *African Development Review, 32*(4), 758-772. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8268.12476

Elbadiansyah, E., & Masyni, M. (2022). Evaluation model of internal quality assurance system in universities. *Al-Ishlah Jurnal Pendidikan, 14*(2), 1157-1172. https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v14i2.1968

Eriksson, K., Kerem, K., & Nilsson, D. (2005). Customer acceptance of internet banking in Estonia. *The International Journal of Bank Marketing, 23*(2), 200-216. https://doi.org/10.1108/02652320510584412

Hou, A. Y. C., Chan, S. J., Lin, L., & Hu, Z. (2020). Student learning venture overseas in the transnational research partnership – a Taiwan and US PIRE case study. *Higher Education Evaluation and Development, 14*(1). https://doi.org/10.1108/heed-01-2020-0001

Hu, W., & Cao, Y. (2023). Advancement of pharmacy accreditation in the field of Chinese higher education. *Pharmacology & Pharmacy, 14*(9), 376-387. https://doi.org/10.4236/pp.2023.149024

Hussain, W., Spady, W. G., Naqash, M. T., Khan, S. Z., Khawaja, B. A., & Conner, L. (2020). ABET accreditation during and after COVID-19: Navigating the digital age. *IEEE Access, 8*, 218997-219046. https://doi.org/10.1109/access.2020.3041736

Joo, S., & Peters, C. (2019). User needs assessment for research data services in a research university. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science, 52*(3), 633-646. https://doi.org/10.1177/0961000619856073

Kennedy, M., Heffernan, M., Gonick, S. A., & Siegfried, A. (2021). Exploring the linkage between accreditation outcomes and public health emergency preparedness and response. *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice, 28*(1), E80-E84. https://doi.org/10.1097/phh.0000000000001329

Khan, F. Q., Buhari, S. M., Tsaramirsis, G., & Rasheed, S. (2021). A study of faculty retention factors in educational institutes in context with ABET. *Frontiers in Education, 6*, 678018. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2021.678018

Kurniasih, N. (2023). Digital literacy: Education for safe internet usage. Engagement *Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat, 7*(1), 139-150. https://doi.org/10.29062/engagement.v7i1.1534

Kyriakeli, G. (2025). The impact of ISO certification procedures on patient safety culture in public hospital departments. *Healthcare, 13*(6), 661. https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare13060661

Lang, B., Kronstadt, J., & Rich, N. (2023). Equity work among accredited health departments in the United States, 2015-2021. *Public Health Reports, 139*(1_suppl), 106S-112S. https://doi.org/10.1177/00333549231210033

Legowo, M. B., Indiarto, B., & Prayitno, D. (2019). Implementation of Scrum work framework in the development of quality assurance information system. *Jurnal Penelitian Pos Dan Informatika, 9*(2), 125-139. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338239076_Implementation_of_Scrum_Work_Framework_in_the_Development_of_Quality_Assurance_Information_System

Lochan Das, R. (2023). Students' adoption of Google Classroom investigated by Technology Acceptance Model. *Mier Journal of Educational Studies Trends & Practices, 13*(1), 98-113. https://doi.org/10.52634/mier/2023/v13/i1/2337

Madanian, S., Nakarada-Kordic, I., Reay, S., & Chetty, T. (2023). Patients' perspectives on digital health tools. *PEC Innovation, 2*, 100171. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pecinn.2023.100171

Ormilla, R. C. G., & Dupra, E. B. (2023). Readiness of higher education institutions for horizontal typology, institutional sustainability and quality assurance. *European Journal of Educational Research, 12*(2), 881-890. https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.12.2.881

Quraishi, T., Ulusi, H., Muhid, A., Hakimi, M., & Olusi, M. R. (2024). Empowering students through digital literacy: A case study of successful integration in a higher education curriculum. *Journal of Digital Learning and Distance Education, 2*(8), 667-681. https://doi.org/10.56778/jdlde.v2i8.208

Rafiq, S., Kamran, F., & Afzal, A. (2024). Investigating the benefits and challenges of interdisciplinary education in higher education settings. *Journal of Social Research Development (JSRD), 5*(1), 87-100. https://doi.org/10.53664/jsrd/05-01-2024-08-87-100

Santoso, H. A., & Istiqomah, N. R. (2023). Using Canva to create visual materials in mathematics education. *Journal of Mathematics Pedagogy (JoMP), 3*(2), 114-120. https://doi.org/10.26740/jomp.v3n2.p114-120

Semerci, Ç., Semerci, N., Ünal, F., & Yılmaz, E. (2021). Akademisyenlerin akreditasyon algıları üzerine bir inceleme. *Asya Öğretim Dergisi, 9*(1), 14-Jan. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/366697956_What_does_Accreditation_Mean_for_Academics_A_Qualitative_Research_on_Quality_in_Higher_Education

Ullah, H., Arshad, S., Akram, M., & Mahmood, W. (2023). Factors influencing quality assurance through semester system at university level. *Voyage Journal of Educational Studies, 3*(2), 17-30. https://doi.org/10.58622/vjes.v3i2.48

Van Zeebroeck, N., Kretschmer, T., & Bughin, J. (2023). Digital "is" strategy: The role of digital technology adoption in strategy renewal. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management, 70*(9), 3183-3197. https://doi.org/10.1109/tem.2021.3079347

Vinall, R. L., Malhotra, A., & Puglisi, J. L. (2021). Use of team-based learning pedagogy to prepare for a pharmacy school accreditation self-study. *Pharmacy, 9*(3), 148. https://doi.org/10.3390/pharmacy9030148

Widnall, E., Grant, C., Wang, T., Cross, L., & Velupillai, S. (2020). User perspectives of mood-monitoring apps available to young people: Qualitative content analysis. *JMIR Mhealth and Uhealth, 8*, e18140. https://doi.org/10.2196/18140

Winkler, K. J., Bennett, E. M., & Chestnutt, H. (2021). Mapping social structures for sustainability transformation at McGill University, Canada. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education, 23*(6), 1209-1228. https://doi.org/10.1108/ijshe-04-2021-0164

Zulfikri, F. (2021). Analysis of digital literacy competencies of economics teachers in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Economica, 9*(1), 229-241. https://doi.org/10.22202/economica.2020.v9.i2.4523