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The quest for regional accreditation of art and design education in the Arab Countries

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Abstract: In recent years, international accreditation has become an important part of quality management in higher education. However, given risks including increasing bureaucratisation, outdated systems and high costs, international accreditation remains problematic in the developing countries that might have relatively underdeveloped higher education systems and less integrated into the world system than developed countries. Focusing on the Arab countries, this paper assesses whether specialised programme-level accreditation of Art and Design programmes by international bodies such as the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) or the Council for Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA) or building a consortium similar to the Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design (AICAD), enhances the quality of practical studio-based classes in such programmes in Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as case studies. Given the importance of Art and Design for economic development, our investigations conclude that there is a need for a regional accrediting body adapting international standards, while accommodating Middle East distinct cultural aspect to regulate, and enhance quality of Art and Design Education in the Middle East.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

International accreditation is a type of quality assurance process under which services and operations of higher educational institutions are evaluated by an external international body to determine whether applicable standards are met. In the developing countries that might have relatively less developed higher education systems, international accreditation faces challenges, such as high costs, cumbersome paperwork and old systems and procedures. Focusing on two Arab countries, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, this paper attempts to answer the question: Can international accreditation of specialised programme-level of art and design contribute to quality enhancement of these programmes? The paper concludes that there is a need for a regional accrediting body adopting culturally customised international standards to regulate and enhance the quality of art and design education in the Arab world.

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1. Introduction

Art and design education has come to play a much larger role in the strategic planning of industrial and commercial firms in general than ever before, especially in their plans for innovation and development of new products in an international setting, and designers now often hold senior-level management positions in major organisations (Jalbout, 2013).

This expanding role of art and design education has increased professional demands on artists and designers, who are now required to have a global perspective on their work and to explore and articulate the principles and methodology behind their art and/or design practices through systematic research, experimentation, intellectual analysis and theoretical assumptions. The artists and designers are expected to communicate their findings and contribute to a body of knowledge that creates the basis for an emerging academic discipline of design, also their contribution will maintain improvement of the art and design education (Universit of California, 2002, p. 8).

Professionals in art and design agree that today's new designers require a new kind of education that goes beyond the traditional instruction and practice-based programmes associated with most academic design programmes in the past; this education has to be continually updated with the latest technology and knowledge and follow the latest trends in the industry (Elmansy, 2015, 2016). While many educators cited the need for multidisciplinary courses as part of art and design programmes, there are very few courses of this nature in the Middle East region (Dubai Design & Fashion Council, 2016).

In the Arab region, over the last two decades, the number of art and design programmes at research universities has significantly increased (Toutikian, 2010); however, their scope has not generally extended to meet market needs or to establish connections with international programmes or those outside the region in order to enhance quality of education through benchmarking and to introduce best practices and international scholarly standards of research and publication to faculty. It is evident from the lack of scholarly articles on art and design education in the Arabic countries that art and design lags in this regard compared with the other scholarly and scientific disciplines such as medicine and engineering, which have built more connections with the peer universities at the developed countries through the conferences, benchmarking and international accreditation practices.

Accreditation and quality in art and design education is a challenging subject to examine, largely because of the lack of literature on this topic, especially in the Arabic context. This is not to say that international accreditation bodies perfectly measure quality of education in any context, but they are certainly adequate in most developed countries as tools used by students for choosing the right institution for their own needs.

According to Shimizu (2013), accreditation in studio-based art and design programmes is not often well-researched, possibly because art and design education is misjudged as a subject that is purely dependent on practical know-how and creativity rather than conceptual knowledge. According to Florida (2002), creativity helps build economic development; therefore, countries should be concerned to attract creative individuals. Generally, culture, creativity and innovation are viewed as the basic elements of art and design education. Art and design international accreditation standards are related directly to student competencies that focus on function over method and artistic intellectual development over specification of resources. Grant (2009) also argues that art and design education is "subjective" and has no rules. For this reason, the author questions how can the art and design education be defined, and how its quality can be measured.

In many countries, accrediting bodies, such as the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) in the United States or the Association of Independent Colleges of Art, define quality standards for studio-based degrees. In the Arab countries, although we find a long history of art and design education and schools that have evolved throughout the years to adapt to the changing

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higher education and art/design environment, no regional tool or measure exists to concretely assess quality across institutions.

2. Aim and methodology

Using in-depth literature review, this paper aims to analyse whether international accreditation, as a quality management measure, truly helps art and design programmes to improve academic performance and enhance quality. It examines the international accreditation as part of the quality enhancement of art and design programmes in the Arab region by focusing on Egypt and the United Arab Emirates. These two countries were selected since they have, respectively, older or more developed art and design programmes compared to other Arab countries. Indeed, Egypt has one of the oldest art and design colleges in the Arab world, while the UAE has seen relatively recent development in its art and design programmes.

In Egypt, all institutions are degree granting and have been offering under- and postgraduate degrees for many years. In the UAE, some institutions are still offering associate degree in some design disciplines in addition to bachelor programmes. All colleges of art and design in both countries are officially licensed by national higher education licensing bodies or ministries, and some of them are accredited by national quality assurance bodies, but very few of them are accredited internationally, such as Zayed University in Abu Dhabi and the American University in Dubai in the UAE, and some use external moderation or systems for quality or conduct benchmarking with institutions outside the region.

After reviewing the current status of art and design education in the Arab countries, with focus on the two countries, we will try to identify the relevant features of the international practice of accreditation of art and design with reference to the most prestigious accreditation bodies in developed countries, shed light on the precise nature of the importance of international accreditation and examine whether international accreditation supports quality improvement of art and design education in the Arab countries**.**

3. Art and design education in Arab countries

The arts have always been a rich part of the Arab world's history and culture. Islamic art still has a noticeable impact on architecture, painting and crafts (Jalbout, 2013). In the past, the art and design education has got the benefit of this advantage to build its reputation, however if Arab countries don't give more attention to developing art and design education, they risk losing this advantage and falling behind more developed countries in preparing students for the international market and the knowledge economy.

Currently, the design sector in the Middle East and North Africa Region (MENA) is a predominantly import-oriented industry where locally produced design goods and services constitute only 35% of the total market size. In specific design sectors, such as fashion and furniture, imports cover 80% of the demand and only 20% is covered by local production. When compared with more developed countries, such as Denmark, the US, the UK and France, the MENA Design sector only contributes 1.5% to the region's GDP (1.5%). All these figures suggest room for growth and production opportunities in this sector (Dubai Design & Fashion Council, 2016).

Jalbout (2013) believes that putting resources into art education in the Arab World is indispensable "given that globalization is eroding Arab culture". Art and design education helps students to develop their skills such as creativity, imagination, communication and innovation, any country in the region that is truly aspiring to become an innovation hub in the twenty-first century should change its perspective on art and design education (Winner, Goldstein, & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013, p. 4). Design is a key driver of innovation, and the design industry plays an integral role in achieving any innovation strategy. Egypt and the UAE are both well placed to improve art and design education at present, as both countries have shown willingness in their national development strategies to reform and increase access to innovation-driven societies.

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Art and design education is one of the primary factors determining the success of the design sector in Arab countries. According to study conducted by Toutikian (2010) employers suffer from lack of well-prepared designers, and many of them conclude that the main cause of their unpreparedness for the market is the art and design education system. According to Elmansy (2015), most of the design degrees provided in the Arab countries don't equip students with the entrepreneurship skills that enable them to understand the business environment or to create their own business. Teaching digital design tools and technologies is also neglected by most of the design degrees provided in different countries due to lack of resources' allocations. Students are required to teach themselves the digital design tools that allow them to fit into the job market.

While designers may get good design-related skills during their design education, other problems and challenges in this domain can be highlighted such as, designers who may only think of their tasks without considering the whole project design; designers who may find it hard to communicate with the managers or the marketing teams and this may limit their creativity, hence the ultimate result is designers who lack technical, and basic business skills (Elmansy, 2016). Many educators have cited the need for multidisciplinary courses in the Middle East region. A study by Dubai Design and Fashion Council (2016) found that only a very few courses of this nature are available. The study concluded that embedding collaboration and multidisciplinary course offerings for learners within the future landscape of design education reflects not only a strategic imperative, but is vital to drive innovation. Enhancing the quality of art and design education could address these issues.

Art and design graduates from the Arab region's universities should be well prepared to hold jobs requiring a high degree of innovation (Jalbout, 2013). They are also needed as part of a growing talents of collaborative teams in companies that are competing in product development and marketing based on design. Art and design education must focus on providing a foundation in art and design skills, including hands-on training to give students new ways to understand their subjects, work as artists, develop and employ skills for experimentation, expression and discovery as well as foster their personal and intellectual development skills.

Based on the projections for the growth of the design sector in the MENA region, a study has estimated that the region would require at least 30,000 design graduates by 2019 to achieve the growth projections without importing skills from outside the region. This would require a nine fold increase in the number of design graduates currently being produced in certain design segments in order to ensure that the region's design growth is indigenous. This suggests a tremendous opportunity for design schools and universities across the MENA region to work closely with the design sector and draw up a workforce-planning roadmap to address the potential gap in skill sets across various segments over the next few years (Dubai Design & Fashion Council, 2016).

In this context, projected growth of art and design sectors in the Arab world over the next few years clearly represents both a challenge and an opportunity for educators to adopt long-term policies and procedures aimed at enhancing the relevance of design education to the design industry and increasing the number and diversity of art and design graduates from local institutions. This will ensure sustainable growth that fills the gap of talent within the region that if it is not filled by graduates from the region will be filled by graduates from outside (Dubai Design & Fashion Council, 2016).

Hence, if Arab countries aspire to be among the leaders of innovative and creative societies, they must value and support artists and designers as much as they value scientists and entrepreneurs (Jalbout, 2013), and encourage art and design schools to improve quality systems and apply for international accreditation to improve their own design industries and their competitiveness.

Both the UAE and Egypt have federal education systems, in which domestic accreditation bodies supervise institutions and authorise them to grant degrees; however, in both countries, quality standards are generic across all disciplines. The need to respond to this challenge is the ultimate concern of this study.

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3.1. Art and design education in the United Arab Emirates

The UAE is the most attractive education starting point in all fields for both domestic and international students in the region, and considered an education hub by both students and employers in the region. The UAE scored higher than other regional emerging education hubs for students who have needs for high-quality education, as it is a safe place with high standards of living, perceived as the most attractive part of the region to live and learn (Dubai Design & Fashion Council, 2016). Among 628 accredited programmes offered by higher education institutions across the seven emirates of the UAE, 24 are bachelors and 4 associate-level accredited degrees in art and design (Cossio et al., 2014).

In knowledge-based societies, innovation is a key engine of economic progress, and arts education fosters the skills and attitudes that innovation requires (Winner et al., 2013). In absolute numbers, the UAE and Saudi Arabia are by far the largest overall design markets in the region, respectively, totalling USD 27.6 billion and USD 21.9 billion in design revenues in 2014 (Dubai Design & Fashion Council, 2016). This imposes on universities in the UAE a particular responsibility to develop stronger linkages with international universities and apply the highest quality standards in higher education. According to Cossio et al. (2014), most institutions seek international accreditation for Business, Information Technology or Health Sciences majors, but not in art and design. This is the case despite the need to meet international standards in this particular major.

The federal regulatory body for higher education in the UAE is the Commission of Academic Accreditation (CAA) of the national Ministry of Education (MoE). The CAA is responsible for licensure of institutions of higher education and accrediting each of their academic programmes at associate, bachelor, master and doctorate levels nationally. The CAA published a new edition of the general Standards for Licensure and Accreditation for all disciplines in 2011 (CAA, 2011) and is currently updating it to ensure that newly established institutions and programmes as well as existing ones would meet basic standards of quality. The CAA standards provide measures of quality that all institutions must meet for licensure and programme accreditation, and reflect consistency with international higher education standards required to achieve continuous improvement. CAA is a member in the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), which is a global network of nearly 300 organisations active in quality assurance in higher education.

3.2. Art and design education in Egypt

Egypt is the home of some of most well-known art and design schools in the Arab world. The first School of Fine Arts in Egypt was established in 1908 in Cairo, Alexandria University (AU), is recognised in the design industry as offering high-quality programmes across different segments of design, including: Architecture, Landscape and Urban Design, Industrial and Product Design, Graphic Design and Multimedia and Visual Arts (Dubai Design & Fashion Council, 2016).

Egypt has an industry-dominated economy, which requires a significant number of artists and designers to support different sectors of industry with their creativity and innovative capability. The recent increase in universities offering art and design degrees is a response to the growth in demand for designers. Egypt is one of only two countries in the Arab world which offer degrees in product design, the other being Jordan (Dubai Design & Fashion Council, 2016). Egypt is the fourth largest market, after the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, representing, together with Qatar, around half of the Saudi market. From a growth perspective, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are the fastest growing design markets in the region, having respectively experienced a growth rate of 9 and 11% between 2010 and 2013 (Dubai Design & Fashion Council, 2016).

To meet the market's needs for more designers in terms of numbers and qualities, a study by Toutikian (2010) has shown that the main needs of art and design education in Egypt are to update curricula with the latest technologies and techniques, introduce and follow best practices in teaching studio-based programmes and improve educational quality through specialised international accreditation. We can expect international accreditation to attract more students from across Egypt

and the region to study in Egyptian art and design institutions, by offering them a high-quality education recognised worldwide. International accreditation will encourage faculty to develop their teaching skills, improve their research profiles and make them more eligible for international research funding (as well as making them more eligible for such funding).

The federal regulatory body for higher education in Egypt is the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and the Supreme Council of Universities, which are responsible for licensing institutions of higher education and accrediting their academic programmes. In addition, in 2007, the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE) was founded by the Egyptian Government; and in 2009, for the first time in a Middle Eastern or Arab country, the NAQAAE published the first edition of specific *Standards of Quality Assurance and Accreditation for Applied Arts and Design* programmes, which defines academic standards for 14 different disciplines in applied art and design education, for licensure and programme accreditation (NAQAAE, 2009). Despite developing these standards, the quality of art and design education being offered in the majority of higher education institutes in Egypt is still questionable and not meeting international standards in terms of research, students' mobility and international recognition.

4. International accreditation and quality in literature

According to Blanco-Ramírez and Berger (2014), quality practices are increasingly international in nature. Programme and institutional accreditation, along with rankings, are examples of quality practices in higher education. (Schindler, Puls-Elvidge, Welzant, & Crawford, 2015) denote that the relationship between quality assurance and accreditation in literature is blurred. Sometimes, the terms quality assurance and accreditation are used interchangeably, while, in others, these terms are considered distinct and different (Danø & Stensaker, 2007; Lamarra, 2009; Mishra, 2007; Wells, 2014). Knight (2007) discussed the importance of accreditation and quality assurance in view of the developments in cross-border education, pointing out that institutions outside of the US are seeking accreditation or other forms of quality assurance beyond their own national system in response to a variety of motivations. Particularly in developing nations where national quality assurance systems have not gained sufficient legitimacy, university leaders seek accreditation from agencies in more developed countries that have well-established and recognised quality assurance systems.

Stensaker (2011) argues that accreditations have become an important way of ensuring the quality of higher education institutions. The term "accreditation" describes a process by which an institution is endorsed to conduct educational programmes that are recognised by the state or by another authority (Nigsch & Schenker-Wicki, 2013). Accreditation may focus on a specific educational programme or an institution as a whole. In many European countries, higher education institutions need to be accredited by a national authority, while, in the US, private or non-profit agencies can award accreditations. Some of these agencies focus on excellence rather than merely providing a "right to exist" (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2005) and offer their services internationally. Achieving such an accreditation may increase a school's international reputation (Trapnell, 2007). Like other forms of quality management, the true effects of accreditations are argued in academia. Scholars consider accreditation to be a restriction on academic freedom, a rigid burden and an obstacle to creativity and innovation (Harvey, 2004; Julian & Ofori-Dankwa, 2006), neglecting the emerging need for international accreditation or its role in quality management, particularly in the Arabic context.

Due to lack of literature on accreditation of art and design, we collected evidence from the effects of accreditation on the quality of business and IT programmes. Julian and Ofori-Dankwa (2006), who focus their analysis on AACSB accreditations, argue that the accreditation process hinders a school's capability to adapt to a "discontinuous" and "turbulent" environment characterised by technical innovations and increasing competition from corporate and virtual universities. In contrast, Romero (2008) believes that accreditations encourage flexibility and creativity. Although the author admits a "lack of published, hard and systematic data" on the effects of accreditation, Miller and Cardinal (1994) argue that accreditations provide incentives for strategic development and improve

performance. Prøitz, Stensaker and Harvey (2004) suggest that institutional accreditations foster diversity rather than standardisation, and focus on improvement rather than control.

In another study at the University of Bahrain on challenges facing universities to satisfy national and international quality assurance systems, Alhamad (2008) notes that the cumbersome nature of the requirement and the immense size of data required by accreditors represent a big challenge for the institute to be accredited. The author also highlights drawbacks in the quality of the accredited programmes, where requirement by accreditors is satisfied, but not the quality. Knapp (2000) notes that international accreditation cannot guarantee quality or proficiency; however, it can promote and maintain professional standards and assist institutions to keep pace with new developments in the field and can be an effective quality improvement mechanism. Alhamad (2008) further asserts that the accreditation process cannot be relied on as a method of ensuring quality, unless the process is itself evaluated and grounded on valid methods. If not properly scrutinised, it may divert resources from more effective approaches.

Other scholars have also criticised the recent shift in focus from site-based needs assessment to imposed standards dictated by external agencies. Eaton (2011) believes that the international accreditation is not responsive to national requirements. While Eisner (2002) asserts that the curriculum guides and develops the cognitive capacities of individuals and is vital to any educational entity, art educators have problematised the use of standards and formalised curriculum audits for accreditation purposes that lead to uniform rather than diverse methods of instruction. Despite that international accreditation formalises quality and enhances reputation, Istileulova (2013) also supports the same view that internal accreditation may limit innovation and diversity of thinking to standardised and rigid processes.

In the context of increasing international competition, research performance has become a central factor influencing a higher education institution's reputation and its ability to recruit the best students and most outstanding faculty (Marginson, 2006; Teichler, 2004). Studies by Marginson (2006) and Teichler (2004) used quantitative empirical data to analyse whether international accreditations and other forms of quality management contribute to a school's research performance as measured by ranking position. International accreditations proved to be positively and significantly related to research performance. The authors also point out the high standards of a coherent strategy and the quality of faculty as well as the accreditations' branding effect (Romero, 2008).

Accreditation of academic institutions should be carried out by independent agencies, to avoid the appearance of conflict of interest. However, accreditation agencies are typically spin-offs from a parent organisation such as a government body or trade association. Thus, these are processes that may be designed, and somehow controlled, by political or professional interests. According to Shimizu (2013), accreditation in the art and design fields is completely voluntary, since it has no connection to licensure; this helps guarantee the integrity of this requirement. While licensure is mandatory and regulatory, accreditation processes are voluntary and initiated if institutions or programmes are willing to be accredited (Knapp, 2000). According to the author, all high-quality licensure, accreditation and certification programmes involve the development of standards.

Some educators, particularly in developing countries, question the need for international accreditation. Al-Lamki and Al-Lamki (2016) give reasons for this. Change is perhaps hard to accept, or it requires a lot of effort. The authors indicate three types of people who question the need for international accreditation. Those who cannot accept change, regardless of how inevitable it is, and those who, through pride, question the logic of relying on developed countries as accreditors of developing countries. They question why the developed countries themselves never seek international accreditation from each other. The third group is those who cannot see any ensuing benefits. Despite these concerns, Al-Lamki and Al-Lamki (2016) and other authors point out a number of benefits of international accreditation.

5. Benefits of international accreditation in art and design education

International accreditations serve as a quality label and a competitive advantage, increasing programmes' ability to target the best students and most outstanding researchers; they have become increasingly popular both as internal quality management approaches and as external quality assurance tools (Knapp, 2000). According to the Council of Arts Accrediting Association (CAAA, 2009), international accreditation is beneficial for institutions, students and the public. For institutions, art and design education accreditation support the internal quality review process, improves quality measures through peer-to-peer evaluation by experts from international art and design institutions, enables credit transfer from the institution to other institutions worldwide, increase opportunities for public and private financial support and serves as a marketing tool. For students, international accreditation give students the confidence that accredited programmes meet international standards and may help them find employment opportunities worldwide. International accreditation is expected to make institutions more publicly accountable in terms of the quality of the programmes offered (CAAA, 2009).

Knapp (2000) highlights the benefits of international accreditation for institutions and programmes. It encourages an international perspective on art and design and recognises programme performance and outcomes, and compliance with standards by providing a minimum set of curriculum requirements. It increases the credibility of the profession and ensures consistency of programme outcomes and promotes improvement in the institute or programme. It provides mechanisms for effective quality improvement by fostering exchange among faculty and students around the world. It also increases opportunities for scholarship and research for students and faculty and extends capacity to attract research funding from private and government agencies from all over the world by multiplying possibilities for other productive interactions between programmes and industry on a global basis (Knapp, 2000).

International accreditation can ease transferability of credits from institution to institution all over the world and students' access to scholarships, graduate studies and job opportunities that require accreditation for their programme and recognition of their degree. In addition to some benefits applying directly to students mentioned above, international accreditation ensures that students have qualified faculty and tutors continually working to improve their teaching methods and techniques. Students will also benefit from access to a comprehensive curriculum and to key practices and hands-on training through a range of activities and services.

In this section, the paper will compare a sample of quality measures used in the US and see how they can apply to art and design institutions and programmes in Egypt and the UAE, representing case studies for institutions and programmes across the Arab countries.

5.1. Accreditation as a quality measure in the US

The United States has the oldest accreditation system in the world (Reisberg, 2011) and is the largest international provider of quality assurance and accreditation (Ewell, 2008). According to Jackson, Davis, and Jackson (2010), US institutional accreditation has become a desirable indicator of international quality. It is quite common to observe universities outside the United States seeking this seal of accreditation. As of 2011, 5 of the 6 regional accrediting agencies in the United States accredited 32 institutions in 15 countries outside the US (Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA, 2012). This number expands to 67 countries when considering programme accreditation. For Ewell (2008), US accreditation is highly influential at a global level.

"Accreditation" refers to the process of external quality review created and used by higher education authorities to inspect universities, colleges and their programmes for quality assurance and improvement (Eaton, 2011). According to Areena (2011), accreditation agencies in the US have main features. The accrediting bodies should be non-governmental. The accreditation process is conducted mainly by volunteers, and depends on documentary evidence presented by the institution itself and peer evaluation by experts in the field from peer institutions. The main goals of accreditation are

quality enhancement and performance improvement as well as quality assurance. Sample of Art and Design Accreditation Bodies in the US are discussed in the following section.

5.1.1. National association of schools of art and design (NASAD)

NASAD was established in 1944 as the national accrediting agency for art and design institutions and programmes in the US. NASAD is part of the Council of Arts Accrediting Associations (CAAA, distinct from the Emirati CAA), and has over 300 member institutions; membership is voluntary but implies that accreditation standards are met (NASAD, 2016). NASAD accredit not only specialised art and design institutions, but also accredits specific art and design programmes that are part of larger college and university offerings (Shimizu, 2013). In addition to accreditation, it provides professional development, institutional research and statistics and policy studies. NASAD members contribute to art and design educational quality standards revised annually. Membership is open to degree-granting and non-degree-granting colleges, universities, independent art and design schools, two-year institutions and graduate-only institutions. Accreditation is granted for 5 years, and upon renewal, 10 years (NASAD, 2016).

In the context of accrediting educational institutions, artistic and academic quality standards have to be developed primarily by students, faculty, administrators and other stakeholders. They have to be facilitated by essential academic faculty, experts and practitioners' clear commitment towards the community and the market, clear goals and objectives and appropriate supporting physical resources and time of study. The standards must be presented consistently on the institutional and programme levels, when students or graduates achieve their projects at high levels (NASAD, 2016). The NASAD handbook outlines basic student competencies in 23 areas ranging from illustration to sculpture and glass to printmaking.

Grant (2009) argues that students should choose an institution based on the programme and curriculum and not on whether the school is accredited by NASAD. The author considers accreditation a marketing tool for some institutions. He cites two institutions in the State of Maine that offer Master of Fine Arts programmes: the Maine College of Art in Portland, which is accredited by NASAD, and Heartwood College of Art in Kennebunk, which is not. Grant's argument is based on the fact that the Maine Department of Education has already licensed Heartwood College of Art; therefore, NASAD accreditation is useless, as it does not inform prospective students much about teaching style, curriculum, graduation rates, etc. CAAA responds to this criticism by stating, "State reviews are often targeted in specific directions, or conducted for a specific purpose such as resources or programme allocation among institutions" (CAAA, 2009, p. 8). NASAD standards are developed by professional consensus and do not change from state to state or are based on external political pressures. Grant also mentions the downside to the cost and time involved in obtaining accreditation. The $500 application fee and $500 site visit fee, plus the cost of travel and accommodation for external reviewers, may be expensive for some institutions. CAAA responds to this type of criticism by stating that arts accreditation remains one of the lowest costs in comparison to other accreditations and, in comparison to the cost of running an art and design institution or programme, it is relatively minimal. CAAA (2009) argues that investment in acquiring accreditation pays off through quality development of their programmes.

Acknowledging the value of NASAD's accreditation, the art and technology programme at Zayed University, one of the most prominent public universities in the UAE, has been awarded their seal.

5.1.2. Council for interior design accreditation (CIDA)

The Council for Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA), previously the Foundation for Interior Design Education Research (FIDER), was established in 1970. The founding organisations were the Interior Design Educators Council (IDEC), the American Institute of Interior Designers (AID) and the National Society of Interior Designers (NSID). AID and NSID merged in 1975 to form the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID). The intent of the founders was to promote excellence by developing standards for interior design education and to acknowledge the increasing demands of an emerging

profession. CIDA was restructured in 1999 into a Michigan non-profit corporation, designed to maintain productive connections with all "communities of interest".

CIDA is a CHEA-recognised accrediting body. The CHEA-recognised scope of accreditation for CIDA is professional-level interior design programmes that culminate in a bachelor's or master's degree located in the United States and internationally. As standards are developed, CIDA's Accreditation Commission conducts self-study of the accreditation process and supports a programme to implement new standards that increase both the efficiency and the value of Interior Design education in the institution. CIDA focuses also on building a strong knowledge base about the future of Interior Design and collecting information about trends impacting the profession, higher education and design industry (CIDA, 2009). In recognition of the value of CIDA's accreditation, the American University in Dubai has applied for and been awarded its seal. This accreditation has enhanced the reputation of the university, making it a globally recognised educational body (Hingorani, 2016).

5.1.3. Association of independent colleges of art and design (AICAD)

Another association worth mention for our purposes is the Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design (AICAD), a non-profit association of 43 art and design schools in the US and Canada founded in 1991 by a group of college and university presidents. AICAD is not an accrediting agency and its mission is to raise public awareness of the value of art and design education and to work with its members to develop art and design programmes. Membership is open to private, non-profit, free-standing colleges and universities that offer art and design education in the US and Canada. All AICAD member institutions have a curriculum with full liberal arts and sciences requirements complementing studio work, and all are accredited.

AICAD promotes art and design education by organising regular conferences and meetings to discuss issues facing the field, disseminating information to students to help them choose an art and design school, enhancing exchange across its members and collecting and analysing data related to art and design. To qualify for AICAD membership, an art school must satisfy four criteria: be a free-standing college (not a division of a larger college or university) specialising in art or design; be a non-profit institution; and have accreditation from both the (NASAD) and the relevant academic accrediting organisation in their region. AICAD seems to recognise the importance of NASAD accreditation since it is a condition for an American School to become a member (Shimizu, 2013).

Can AICAD serve as an example for building a consortium of art and design institutes in the Arab region? And what are the benefits of building a structure as such?

6. The way forward

Although many art and design institutions exist across the Arab countries, the concept of specialised accreditation and quality measures for art and design education is not yet well spread among institutions in the Arab countries. Institutions in these countries are government-accredited, and it may seem that international accreditation is thus irrelevant; however, the pertinent government bodies are not specialised in the field and only accredit institutions as a whole. Although the NAQAAE has published the *Standards of Quality Assurance and Accreditation for Applied Arts and Design* programmes, these standards have not yet yielded the expected benefits of an improved quality of art and design programmes in Egypt. In addition, it would not seem that appropriate standards are being met by majority of art and design institutions. This has created problems for students who wish to pursue graduate studies internationally later on.

The primary purpose for all institutions should be to provide the best possible environment for education. In the case of art and design institutions, such an environment should foster an understanding of art and design. International accreditation for students, will mean that their degrees and courses will be recognised as equivalent in principle to those anywhere, allowing Arab artists and designers to pursue graduate degrees internationally, and will become an essential factor in future art and design graduate programme offerings at home also.
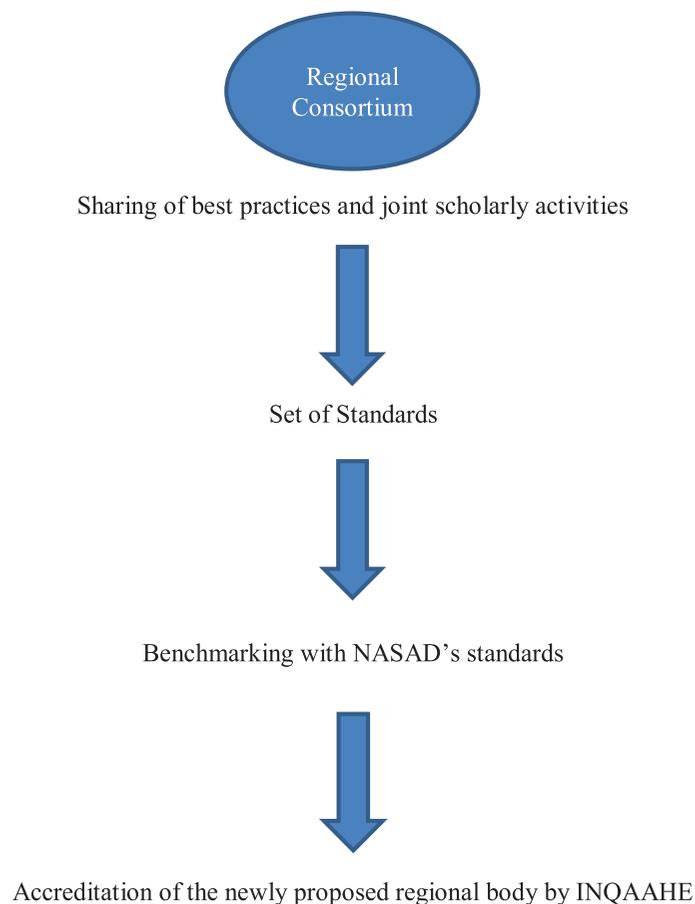
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Hence, Arab universities should explore the need to work towards meeting international standards or recognition by international quality assurance bodies, and students need to be informed what kind of degree they are getting themselves and what the implications of having such a degree will be for their future endeavours in the domestic and international contexts.

International accreditation, despite its limitation, is crucial for art and design higher education institutions, and governments, university leaders and scholars in Arab countries should collaborate to obtain international recognition and accreditation and consider it as a quality measure and indicator of excellence to assess and enhance the educational quality of their institutions and programmes, assure consistency in institutional operation, promote improvements, attract regional and international students who are looking for accredited institutions/programmes and enhance public accountability of art and design education.

Art and design institutions in the Arab countries should take into consideration how to develop and implement a benchmarking system with reference to peer institutions in developed countries in order to evaluate and update their performance and quality standards. These institutions should also raise awareness within the scholarly community about the importance of accreditation in art and design education and introduce best practices developed globally.

Arab countries need to unify their efforts and craft paths in art and design education. There is a need to establish, for the first time among Arab countries, a strong regional accrediting body to define and maintain standards of studio-based higher education in art and design areas (see Figure 1). A consortium, similar to AICAD, for art and design institutions in the Arab countries would serve as a platform for exchanging experiences, information and best practices as well as for joint research

Figure 1. Proposed process for developing a regional accrediting body.

Regional Consortium

Sharing of best practices and joint scholarly activities

Set of Standards

Benchmarking with NASAD's standards

Accreditation of the newly proposed regional body by INQAAHE

projects. This suggested body should possess specialist expertise in art and design education and focus on various quality aspects (teaching, academic programmes, resources, etc.) impacting the way in which degrees are valued. The first purpose of this body would be to grant accreditation to each institution, college and programme offering post-secondary art and design studies, reflecting their unique mandates, obligations and objectives. Members to be accredited in this regional body and institutions offering all levels of post-secondary credentials should meet the basic criteria for membership, as defined in Table 1.

#	Objectives	Guidance for self-assessment
Table 1. Criteria to be met by members to be accredited by the newly proposed regional body		
Part 1: Art and design educational status		
A. The institution/programme must meet the requirements to be authorised and must be authorised by the relevant governmental authority body as an art and design degree-granting institution/programme		
1.	The institution/programme's status shall be authorised by the relevant governmental authority body	The institution/programme's legal authority shall be stated clearly in its published materials, as identified by its charter, authority to grant degrees, structure of control, profit or non-profit status and affiliation, if any, with a parent or sibling organisation
		The institution/programme shall be licensed or chartered to operate as required by local and state/provincial legal codes
		The institution/programme shall meet all legal requirements to operate wherever it conducts its activities
		Multi-purpose institutions offering degrees in art and design along with other disciplines shall be accredited by the appropriate local accrediting agency
2.	The institution/programme shall maintain a curricular programme of education in the art and design field	The institution shall offer at least one degree programme (e.g. Bachelor of Fine Arts, Applied Arts, or design with major in art and design) or shall provide the design component of a degree programme offered in conjunction with an authorised degree-granting institution.
		The institution shall provide all coursework or educational services to support its educational programmes
		The institution/programme shall demonstrate that any cooperative or contracted coursework or educational services are provided by an outside organisation having accreditation as an entity by a nationally recognised accrediting agency
		The institution/programme demonstrates commitment to a programme of continuous self-evaluation
3.	The institution/programme shall have graduated at least one class of students who have been through a programme developed within the institution from beginning to final year, and another class shall be in readiness for examination	At least one graduate programme containing at least two students must be offered that meets all applicable standards, and evidence of continuing enrolment in programmes at all relevant levels shown
Part 2: Art and design educational policies and procedures		
A. The institution/programme must have policies and processes in place to support continuous improvement and accountability to maintain the art and design education		

(*Continued*)

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#	Objectives	Guidance for self-assessment
Table 1. (*Continued*)		
4.	The institution/programme shall have clear and published policies for entry requirements and study in offered programmes	All policies regarding admission and retention of students, as well as those related to the evaluation of the students, shall be clearly defined in the institution/programme's published documentations.
		All tuition, fees and other financial policies shall be clearly described in publicly available documents
		Policies and processes shall ensure continuous improvement and accountability related to institution/programme operations and support the intellectual contributions that influence theory, practice and teaching
Part 3: Personnel		
The faculty and staff of the institution/programme must meet the following requirements		
5.	The institution/programme shall list its faculty and academic staff in its published documentations	Faculty members shall be qualified for their specific teaching assignments by educational background and/or professional experience
		Practitioners with industry experience shall be involved in studio-based classes to share their experience with students and prepare them for market needs
6.	The administration structure must be appropriate to sustain excellence and continuous improve-ment in art and design education	The organisational structure presented in the organisational chart shall clearly characterise the institution/programme
Part 4: Physical resources		
The institution/programme must be structured to ensure proper oversight, accountability and responsibility for its operations, supported by appropriate resources, and to have policies and processes for continuous improvement		
7.	The institution/programme must demonstrate sustained availability of sufficient resources (financial, human, physical, infrastructural, etc.) to support the art and design academic programmes to fulfil their mission, strategies and expected outcomes	The institution/programme shall have classes, studios, facilities and equipment appropriate for the needs of all art and design educational activity
		The institution/programme shall have library space and resources commensurate with the needs of its art and design educational activities
		The impact of resources on institution/programme operations, outcomes (projects, graduates, research, etc.), and potential for going forward with the mission
8.	Financial relationships within the institution/programme must comply with internationally common standards	Information shall be provided on financial relationships related to the following: (1) approval of operating and capital budgets; (2) control over most of the funds available to each programme; (3) grants to the institution/programme; and (4) ownership and control of physical and financial assets
Part 5: Core values and guiding principles		
The institution/programme must encourage and support ethical behaviour by students, faculty, administrators and other staff		
9.	The institution/programme must have appropriate systems, policies and procedures that reflect support for ethical behaviour by students, faculty, administrators and professional staff in their professional and personal actions	Policies and procedures shall be in place to support legal and ethical behaviour

(*Continued*)

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#	Objectives	Guidance for self-assessment
Table 1. (*Continued*)		
2.	Systems, policies and procedures must provide appropriate mechanisms to address any breach of ethical behaviour	Programme(s) shall educate participants about ethical policies and procedures
		Systems for detecting and addressing breaches of ethical behaviours, such as honour codes and disciplinary systems, shall be in place to manage inappropriate behaviour
Part 6: Art and design educational environment		
The institution/programme must maintain an environment for art and design educational in which students, faculty, administrators, professional staff and practitioners interact and collaborate in support of learning, practices and community engagement		
1.	Art and design educational environments must be characterised by practices and studio-based learning, production approaches, and a focus on interactive learning. Institutions/programmes must provide practical, studio-based education at a level consistent with higher education standards	An overview of the degree programme(s) offered and evidence that its/their quality is at a level consistent with higher education standards shall be provided
		Documents shall be provided to show that characterise the nature of facilities and the educational environment of the institution/programme, including statement of values, faculty, physical resources and student handbooks
2.	In art and design educational environments, students, faculty, administrators, professional staff and practitioners interact as a community to support practices and interaction	Materials shall be provided that describe the environment in which students, faculty, administrators, professional staff and practitioners interact; perform activities that demonstrate the ways they interact; and show how the institution/programme supports such interactions
3.	Art and design educational environments must be characterised by faculty involvement in governance and university service	Materials shall be provided that describe the governance process and how faculty are engaged in decision-making
Part 7: Social responsibilities		
The institution/programme must demonstrate a commitment to address, engage and respond to current and emerging social responsibilities (including but not limited to sustainability, diversity, sustainability, development and globalisation of art and design activities across cultures)		
1.	Diversity of people and ideas improves the educational experience in every art and design education programme	Materials shall be provided that describe how the institution/programme defines and supports the concept of diversity in ways appropriate to its culture, historical traditions and legal and regulatory environment
2.	Diversity, continuous development, sustainability and other emerging corporate and social responsibility issues are important and require responses from stakeholders	It shall be demonstrated that institution/programme values serve different perspectives in its learning community by seeking and supporting diversity among its students and faculty
3.	The institution/programme must spread understanding of diverse perspectives among its community as a part of its current and emerging social responsibilities	The institution/programme's community shall have a role in fostering fairness and equitable opportunities for the community as well as a spirit of teamwork
4.	The institution/programme must foster respect for the social system, different religions and cultures and human rights, to prepare the students to pursue careers after graduation in a global context	The ways the institution/programme fosters respectful attitude towards others shall be indicated

The suggested body is to circulate draft standards for review and comments from the art and design community; responses should also be circulated for discussion. The proposed standards should be aligned with the standards of international accreditation bodies specialising in art and design education such as NASAD. Ultimately, the board of this proposed entity will be responsible for review, validation and approval of the final standards. More research is suggested to propose and refine the standards for art and design education that will be adopted, which must align with standards current in international associations of art and design in the US, Canada and Europe. The

proposed regional body can gain international recognition by associating itself through full membership of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).

7. Conclusion

Accreditation as a quality measure in art and design education is a challenging subject largely because of the lack of literature on this topic, especially in Arab countries. Although there are many art and design programmes across the Arab countries, very few of them are accredited from a specialised accreditation body outside its own country, and few have a system for benchmarking with peer institutions outside the region. Thus, we could gather no empirical information on the impact of international discipline-specific accreditation on the quality of art and design education in these countries. Nevertheless, we observed that art and design schools in our case sites—Egypt and the UAE—can do more to evaluate and maintain their quality of education, monitor their performance or update their standards and practices. Learning from the best practice of Zayed University in Abu Dhabi and the American University in Dubai in the UAE can help other Arab universities to explore international accreditation as a quality measure. Of course, international accreditation is not a panacea, but as a tool used by institutions to improve their performance and practices, and by students to choose the right institution and get better, more widely recognised degrees; it seems to be the best option available.

While maintaining its standards, it is important that international accreditation accommodates the distinctive features of the Arab culture. Art and design institutions in Arab countries have a long history and have evolved throughout the years, but the lack of a regional accreditation system has made it almost impossible to evaluate these institutions in relation to one another or to international institutions. There is a need, therefore, to establish a strong regional accrediting body to define and maintain standards of art and design education. A consortium for art and design institutions in the Arab countries would serve as a platform for sharing best practice and joint scholarly activities. Regardless of its status, international accreditation is a promising new research topic that should be given careful consideration in art and design education research in Arab countries.

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