

Program Design and Learning Outcomes in Libyan Higher Education Accreditation Standards: Critical Quality Assurance Review

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A B S T R A C T

This study critically examines program design and learning outcomes in the Libyan Institutional Accreditation Standards for Higher Education Institutions (4th ed., 2023). Using qualitative document analysis, Using qualitative document analysis of the NCQAAETI (2023), it analyses accreditation indicators related to curriculum planning, learning outcomes, teaching, assessment, quality assurance, and continuous improvement. The findings show that the framework requires institutions to align academic programs with their missions and strategic objectives, prepare program and course specifications according to academic benchmarks, conduct program evaluations from time to time, involve stakeholders, and use evaluation data for improvement. However, the standards offer limited explicit guidance on learning outcome formulation, curriculum mapping, competency based assessment, graduate employability, and digital competencies. Compared with Outcome Based Education and international qualification frameworks, the standards emphasize institutional processes more than direct evidence of student achievement. The study concludes that while the framework is valuable for improving higher education quality in Libya, its effectiveness depends on stronger implementation of learning outcomes, assessment practices, and graduate competency measurement.

Keywords: higher education accreditation, learning outcomes, program design, quality assurance, outcome based education



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Introduction

Rapid global change, technological advancement, and growing competition in the knowledge economy have made the quality of higher education an increasing concern for governments, universities, employers, and society as a whole. Higher education institutions are no longer expected merely to impart academic knowledge; they must also equip graduates with the professional qualities, competencies, and skills demanded by a changing labor market. Consequently,

quality assurance and accreditation have become essential tools for assessing institutional performance, encouraging accountability, and facilitating ongoing quality improvement.

Accreditation frameworks enable universities to evaluate their governance, academic programs, teaching and learning methods, assessment systems, and institutional effectiveness against established quality criteria (Kayyali, 2024; Jafarov, 2024). The influence of these frameworks extends beyond external evaluation because accreditation requirements shape how institutions approve, document, review, and improve their academic programs. Requirements concerning program specifications, academic benchmarks, stakeholder participation, learning outcomes, assessment evidence, and periodic review encourage universities to connect institutional missions with curricula and graduate attributes (Almuhaideb, & Saeed, 2020). When these requirements are operationalized effectively, accreditation can promote constructive alignment among intended outcomes, course content, teaching strategies, and assessment methods. However, frameworks that emphasize documentation and institutional procedures without specifying how student achievement should be measured may produce formal compliance without sufficient evidence of learning (Royce Sadler, 2014).

In recent years, the widespread adoption of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) has significantly influenced curriculum development by shifting attention from instructional inputs to measurable student achievement. Under this approach, all components of the educational process should be aligned with clearly defined learning outcomes to ensure that graduates acquire the intended knowledge, skills, and competencies (Novrizal & Muhammad, 2025). Modern accreditation systems increasingly evaluate institutions based on the extent to which their programs demonstrate evidence of student learning and competency development.

Learning outcomes are essential to curriculum planning because they clearly outline the knowledge, abilities, and competencies students should possess upon completing a program. They also facilitate constructive alignment between curriculum content, instructional strategies, evaluation procedures, and graduate qualities. International quality assurance initiatives such as the Bologna Process and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) have established learning outcomes as the cornerstone of higher education quality by focusing on measurable student achievement rather than merely curriculum content (Barrie, 2006).

Empirical research further suggests that explicit learning outcomes improve curriculum coherence, strengthen accountability, enhance assessment quality, and contribute to better student learning experiences. Barrie (2006) found that universities differed substantially in how they understood and embedded graduate

attributes, demonstrating that formally stated attributes do not automatically become integrated curriculum outcomes. Boud and Falchikov (2006) showed that assessment focused mainly on immediate course performance may neglect students' capacity for judgment and lifelong learning, and therefore recommended aligning assessment with longer term learning outcomes. Carless (2015) similarly found that learning oriented assessment becomes more effective when assessment tasks promote productive learning, students participate actively in evaluating quality, and feedback supports their future performance.

In Libya, the National Center for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Educational and Training Institutions (NCQAAETI) has made raising the standard of higher education a national priority. To assist universities in implementing quality assurance procedures and promoting ongoing development, the Center has developed extensive institutional and program accreditation standards. The fourth edition of the *Institutional Accreditation Standards for Higher Education Institutions* (NCQAAETI, 2023) presents an integrated framework covering strategic planning, governance, academic programs, student affairs, scientific research, community engagement, quality assurance, and e-learning.

Within Standard 4 on Educational Programs, the framework requires periodic program evaluation and improvement, program and course specifications based on academic standards or benchmarks, assessment of intended learning outcomes, identification of graduate specifications, alignment with labor-market requirements, preparation of course reports, and use of evaluation findings for improvement (Indicators 4.5, 4.11, and 4.14-4.20). Standard 9 further requires stakeholder participation, self-evaluation, documented improvement plans, and use of student feedback, while Standard 10 addresses the infrastructure, content, support, and evaluation of electronic and distance learning.

Existing Libyan scholarship has therefore addressed several important dimensions of quality: systemic pressures on higher education (Tamtam et al., 2011), implementation of quality principles (Al Ghawiel, 2020), the academic effects of institutional quality assurance (Abired et al., 2024), auditors' experiences of program accreditation (Elfard et al., 2024), digital feedback systems (Burweiss & Elfallah, 2026), systemic barriers to TQM (Alriteemi et al., 2026), and the ethical and cultural foundations of accreditation (Alsunousi et al., 2026). Nevertheless, these studies have not systematically examined the complete set of relevant indicators and required evidence in the fourth edition of the NCQAAETI institutional standards to determine how they operationalize program design, intended learning outcomes, curriculum alignment, assessment, and graduate competency. Also, they did not systematically compare the operational depth of these requirements with Outcome-Based Education and international qualification and quality assurance frameworks.

The research gap is thus not that the NCQAAETI standards omit learning outcomes, graduate specifications, labor market relevance, or program improvement. These elements are explicitly present. The unresolved issue is whether the standards connect them through sufficiently detailed mechanisms for formulating and classifying outcomes, mapping program outcomes to courses, selecting direct and indirect assessment methods, establishing achievement thresholds, aggregating course level evidence, and documenting how findings lead to program improvement. Examining this distinction between the formal presence of an indicator and its operational depth differentiates the present study from previous Libyan research.

Accordingly, this study critically analyzes the treatment of program design and learning outcomes within the Libyan Institutional Accreditation Standards for Higher Education Institutions (4th ed., 2023). It examines how the standards address curriculum design, learning outcome development, teaching and assessment practices, quality assurance, and continuous improvement. Furthermore, the study evaluates the framework by comparing its provisions with internationally accepted principles of quality assurance and Outcome-Based Education.

Theoretically, the study integrates accreditation, constructive alignment, and OBE by distinguishing the existence of outcome related requirements from the mechanisms needed to demonstrate their achievement. Practically, it identifies specific areas for improving the national framework, including curriculum maps, assessment matrices, competency-based rubrics, achievement thresholds, validated stakeholder feedback systems, and documented procedures for using assessment evidence in program improvement. Through this analysis, the study seeks to contribute to the enhancement of accreditation practices and to support the development of more effective, outcome oriented academic programs in Libya and similar higher education systems.

Research Method

This study employed qualitative document analysis to examine how academic program design and learning outcomes are addressed in the Institutional Accreditation Standards for Higher Education Institutions (4th ed., 2023) issued by NCQAAETI. Document analysis was appropriate because the study examines the content and operational depth of an official regulatory framework rather than its implementation within individual universities (Bowen, 2009). The document contains 10 institutional standards and 184 indicators, together with required documents and supporting evidence.

The units of analysis were the standards, numbered indicators, required documents, and evidence related to program design, curriculum alignment, intended learning outcomes, graduate specifications, assessment, labor market relevance, quality assurance, and continuous improvement. Following Bowen (2009), the analysis involved systematic reading, coding, categorization, and interpretation. Relevant provisions were recorded in an analytical matrix containing the standard, indicator number, requirement, evidence, and thematic category. Deductive categories were derived from OBE, constructive alignment, and quality assurance literature, while inductive coding captured themes emerging from the document, including institutional planning, documentation, quality culture, and electronic learning (Schreier, 2014).

The identified themes were then critically compared with OBE principles and international quality assurance and qualification frameworks. The comparison examined outcome formulation, curriculum mapping, alignment of teaching and assessment, graduate attributes, stakeholder involvement, evidence of achievement, and use of results for improvement. Each dimension was classified as explicitly required, indirectly addressed, or not operationally specified. This procedure enabled the study to evaluate both the coverage and operational depth of the Libyan standards.

Results and Discussion

Program Design Requirements in the Accreditation Standards

Academic program design is a fundamental component of quality assurance in higher education. It defines the knowledge, skills, values, and competencies that students are expected to acquire throughout their studies. Contemporary higher education systems increasingly emphasize systematic program design based on clearly articulated goals, measurable learning outcomes, stakeholder needs, and institutional priorities (Allen, 2003). Within these accreditation frameworks, program design serves as a mechanism for aligning institutional goals with educational practice while promoting accountability, relevance, and continuous improvement. This is particularly important in countries such as Libya, where higher education reform is linked not only to academic quality but also to institutional resilience, social stability, and responsiveness to cultural and socioeconomic conditions (Alezabi et al., 2026).

The Libyan institutional accreditation standards place considerable emphasis on strategic planning as the foundation of academic program development. The standards require higher education institutions to possess an approved strategic plan aligned with the objectives of the supervising authority and responsive to developments in education, scientific research, and community service. Institutions are also expected to formulate clear visions, missions, values, and

measurable objectives and to integrate these elements into planning and operational activities. Furthermore, the standards encourage stakeholder participation in strategic planning and require institutions to establish mechanisms for collecting and analyzing data to support planning and evidence based decision making. These requirements reflect the multidimensional nature of educational quality, which extends beyond curriculum design to include governance, service quality, resource management, and institutional capacity (Firdaus et al., 2025).

The document analysis provides specific evidence for these conclusions. Under Standard 1, “Planning,” Indicator 1.1 requires an approved strategic plan that responds to developments in teaching, learning, research, and community service. Indicators 1.3 and 1.7 require a clearly stated institutional vision, mission, values, and measurable goals, while Indicator 1.8 requires stakeholder participation in preparing the strategic plan. Indicators 1.6 and 1.10 further require systematic data collection and the use of institutional mission and objectives in planning activities and operations, and Indicator 1.11 requires institutions to use evaluation results for development and continuous improvement (NCQAAETI, 2023).

These institutional requirements are translated more directly into program design under standard 4, “Educational Programs.” Indicator 4.1 requires programs to align with the institution’s mission and objectives and respond to community needs. Indicator 4.4 requires the participation of faculty members and relevant experts in program design and development, while Indicators 4.5 and 4.14 require periodic program evaluation and use of its results for improvement. Indicator 4.11 requires program and course specifications to be based on academic standards or benchmarks. The framework also requires balanced study plans (Indicator 4.13), alignment with labour market requirements (Indicator 4.15), assessment of intended learning outcomes (Indicator 4.16), defined graduate specifications (Indicator 4.17), and course reports that inform improvement (Indicators 4.19-4.20). These provisions demonstrate that program design is treated as an evidence based cycle connecting institutional direction, academic benchmarking, learning outcomes, external relevance, evaluation, and continuous improvement (NCQAAETI, 2023).

These requirements show that academic programs are components of a broader institutional system rather than isolated curricula. Effective program design begins with institutional mission and strategic direction, supporting coherence, sustainability, and responsiveness to societal needs (Harvey & Green, 1993; Stensaker, 2008). In Libyan and Islamic higher education, this alignment must also balance modern knowledge with local religious and cultural identity (Barkah et al., 2026; Krwad et al., 2026). Linking institutional objectives with

academic activities can further support employability, national development, sustainability, environmental responsibility, and community engagement (Tam, 2001; Hasan et al., 2025; Masuwd, 2024).

The standards also promote evidence based curriculum planning by requiring systematic data collection, evaluation, and use of results for improvement. These provisions can reduce reliance on individual judgement and strengthen relevance and accountability (Knight, 2001). Research similarly indicates that data informed decisions, capable academic staff, and systematic quality assurance procedures support learning quality and institutional effectiveness (Bahri & Albshkar, 2026; Samsuddin et al., 2026). From an Outcome based education perspective, measurable objectives, stakeholder participation, program evaluation, assessment of intended learning outcomes, and defined graduate specifications provide a foundation for aligning outcomes, curriculum, teaching, and assessment (Biggs, 1996; Harden, 2002).

However, the framework provides limited technical guidance on formulating program learning outcomes, mapping them across courses, establishing competency frameworks, and demonstrating constructive alignment. Although Standard 4 requires labour market alignment, learning outcome evaluation, and graduate specifications, it does not specify detailed measures of employability, professional competency achievement, or industry participation. Libyan research emphasizes the need for stronger curriculum industry alignment (Baroud, 2026), while studies of translation students' lexical, terminological, syntactic, and meaning transfer difficulties demonstrate the importance of competency based curricula connected to professional practice (Sasi et al., 2026). More explicit requirements for employer feedback, graduate tracking, assessment rubrics, and evidence of competency achievement would therefore strengthen program relevance.

The standards also give limited attention to interdisciplinary learning and the inclusion of digital competencies within graduate outcomes. Although Standard 10 addresses electronic and distance learning systems, it does not clearly require all programs to develop and assess digital literacy, innovation, critical thinking, creativity, and lifelong learning. This limitation is important as Libyan Universities face increasing pressure to modernize curricula and integrate digital learning (Yahya et al., 2025; Salem et al., 2026).

Overall, the accreditation standards provide a strong strategic foundation for academic program design by emphasizing planning, stakeholder participation, institutional alignment, and continuous improvement. Their major strength lies in promoting a systematic and quality oriented approach to educational planning. Nevertheless, the framework would benefit from more explicit guidance on

learning outcomes, employability indicators, competency-based education, curriculum mapping, and digital competencies.

Learning Outcomes and Graduate Competencies

Learning outcomes are considered a central component of academic program quality because they define what students are expected to know, understand, and demonstrate by the end of a program. In contemporary higher education, learning outcomes are not merely descriptive statements; they function as a bridge between curriculum design, teaching methods, assessment, and graduate employability (Biggs, 1996; Harden, 2002). Therefore, accreditation standards are expected to ensure that academic programs produce graduates who possess knowledge, cognitive abilities, practical skills, and professional values.

The Libyan accreditation standards address learning outcomes explicitly within Standard 4, “Educational Programs,” particularly Indicators 4.11 and 4.15-4.17. The document defines an educational program as an organized academic specialization that includes curricula, research components, and academic qualification requirements. It also defines indicators as quantitative or qualitative measures used to assess performance over time. More specifically, Indicator 4.16 requires institutions to establish a mechanism for evaluating the intended learning outcomes of all educational programs, while Indicator 4.17 requires program administrations to define graduate specifications. These requirements provide direct evidence that learning outcomes and graduate competencies form part of the accreditation framework (NCQAAETI, 2023).

Within the educational programs standard, Indicator 4.11 requires institutions to use academic standards or benchmarks when describing programs and courses. The required documents reinforce this indicator by requiring descriptions of all programs and courses and the academic or benchmarking standards on which they are based. Indicators 4.5 and 4.14 further require periodic program evaluation and use of the results for development, while Indicators 4.19-4.20 require course reports and their use in improvement (NCQAAETI, 2023). These requirements indicate that learning outcomes should not remain formal statements in course files but should guide continuous program review.

The standards also link graduate competencies with societal and labor market needs. Indicator 4.1 requires programs to respond to community needs, Indicator 4.7 requires diverse teaching and learning resources that address community and labor market needs, and Indicator 4.15 requires a mechanism for determining program alignment with labor market requirements. This direction is consistent with international qualification frameworks, which commonly connect learning outcomes to knowledge, skills, autonomy, responsibility, and professional competence. Concrete supporting evidence required by the guide includes studies

of program effectiveness and graduate evaluation (Evidence 61), evidence of improvements to teaching and learning (Evidence 62), faculty views concerning educational outcomes (Evidence 70), and studies of labor-market needs and the satisfaction of graduates and employers (Evidence 73).

Despite these strengths, the framework has several limitations. It emphasizes program description, benchmarking, evaluation, and labor market relevance but does not provide a detailed taxonomy of learning outcomes. For example, it does not clearly distinguish between knowledge outcomes, cognitive skills, practical skills, communication skills, digital competencies, and professional values. International Outcome Based Education models often require explicit mapping between program learning outcomes, course learning outcomes, teaching strategies, and assessment tools (Barrie, 2006). Without this mapping, institutions may formally comply with accreditation requirements while still facing difficulties in demonstrating that students have achieved the intended learning outcomes.

This challenge is particularly significant in the Libyan higher education context, where recent studies highlight the need to strengthen curriculum development, quality assurance practices, and the measurement of learning outcomes. Recent studies also demonstrate growing interest in student learning outcomes, curriculum industry alignment, misconception diagnosis, and sustainable educational practices. These studies support the need to move from broadly formulated requirements toward more operational outcome-based tools.

Table 1. Learning outcome requirements in NCQAAETI (2023)

Dimension	Accreditation requirement	NCQAAETI basis
Academic knowledge	Programs and courses must be described using academic standards or benchmarks.	Indicator 4.11
Outcome achievement	Intended learning outcomes must be evaluated across educational programs.	Indicator 4.16
Practical competence	Programs must respond to community and labor-market requirements.	Indicators 4.1, 4.7, and 4.15
Graduate attributes	Program administrations must define graduate specifications.	Indicator 4.17
Continuous improvement	Program evaluations and course reports must inform improvement.	Indicators 4.5, 4.14, and 4.19–4.20

Overall, the accreditation standards provide a useful foundation for developing learning outcomes through program specification, academic benchmarking, periodic evaluation, graduate specifications, direct requirements

for evaluating intended outcomes, and alignment with labor market needs. Nevertheless, the framework would be strengthened by requiring explicit learning-outcome matrices, curriculum mapping, graduate attribute profiles, assessment rubrics, achievement thresholds, and evidence of outcome achievement. Such additions would make the standards more consistent with international qualification frameworks and help institutions translate accreditation requirements into measurable graduate competencies.

Curriculum Alignment, Teaching, and Assessment

Curriculum alignment ensures that program objectives, learning outcomes, teaching strategies, and assessment methods operate coherently. Constructive alignment requires intended outcomes to determine what is taught, how it is taught, and how achievement is assessed (Biggs, 1996). A curriculum should therefore be an integrated structure in which courses contribute to graduate competencies rather than merely a list of subjects (Harden, 2002).

This principle appears in Standard 4, “Educational Programs.” Indicator 4.1 requires programs to align with institutional mission and community needs, Indicator 4.4 involves faculty and experts in program design, and Indicator 4.11 requires program and course specifications based on academic standards or benchmarks. The required documentation includes study plans, program approval and modification procedures, specifications, and benchmarks (NCQAAETI, 2023). Indicator 4.13 requires balance among courses, while Indicators 4.5 and 4.14 require periodic program evaluation and use of findings for improvement. Indicators 4.7 and 4.15 connect teaching resources and program suitability with community and labour market requirements, supporting alignment between academic content and professional expectations (Baroud, 2026; Alrumayh et al., 2025; Omran et al., 2026).

Although the standards do not prescribe particular pedagogical approaches, they encourage inclusive and context-responsive teaching. Indicator 4.7 requires diverse learning resources, Indicator 4.10 addresses academic supervision, Indicator 4.12 requires support for struggling students, high achievers, and students with special needs, and Indicator 4.18 addresses field training (NCQAAETI, 2023). These provisions are consistent with OBE, in which teaching methods reflect the targeted outcomes. Lectures may support knowledge acquisition, whereas projects, presentations, discussions, and fieldwork are more appropriate for communication, problem solving, and professional competencies (Biggs, 1996; Harden, 2002; Abraham et al., 2026).

Assessment is addressed explicitly but broadly. Indicator 4.16 requires evaluation of intended learning outcomes, and Indicators 4.19-4.20 require course reports and their use for improvement. Standard 9, Indicator 9.15 also requires student feedback to inform educational development (NCQAAETI, 2023).

Supporting Evidence 25, 27, 61-62, and 70-73 includes student work, progress records, assessment tools, program effectiveness studies, faculty feedback, and labour market evidence. However, the framework does not explicitly require assessment maps, rubrics, achievement thresholds, or program level aggregation of direct evidence.

Assessment should provide evidence of outcome achievement rather than function only as examination and grading (Biggs, 1996). Written examinations may measure knowledge but are less suitable for evaluating communication, teamwork, professional judgement, digital skills, and workplace readiness. Authentic and competency based methods including portfolios, projects, presentations, case analyses, practical tasks, simulations, and field reports allow students to demonstrate applied capabilities (Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Carless, 2015). This approach corresponds with Indicator 4.18 and the evidence requirements for student work, assessment, and labour market relevance. Libyan research likewise emphasizes stronger alignment between curricula and professional needs (Baroud, 2026), while documented lexical, terminological, syntactic, and meaning transfer difficulties demonstrate the importance of assessing applied professional competence (Mukhlis et al., 2025; Sasi et al., 2026).

Overall, the accreditation standards provide a useful foundation for curriculum alignment by linking academic programs to institutional mission, academic benchmarks, balanced study plans, program evaluation, intended learning outcome assessment, field training, course reporting, and labor market relevance. However, a major limitation is the absence of detailed operational tools for linking learning outcomes with teaching and assessment practices. Institutions should therefore prepare curriculum maps, assessment matrices, competency based rubrics, achievement thresholds, aggregated outcome reports, and improvement plans based on student performance evidence. This would move accreditation beyond documentary compliance towards an evidence based approach to learning quality and continuous improvement.

Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement of Academic Programs

Quality assurance has become a central component of higher education governance because it provides institutions with mechanisms for monitoring performance, identifying weaknesses, and improving educational quality. Contemporary quality assurance frameworks emphasize continuous improvement rather than periodic inspection and encourage institutions to develop systematic processes that support evidence based decision making and long term academic development (Harvey, 2004; Stensaker, 2011). Within this context, accreditation standards play a critical role by establishing expectations for internal quality assurance systems and institutional accountability.

The Libyan accreditation standards place significant emphasis on quality assurance and continuous improvement across institutional operations. This emphasis is explicitly established in Standard 9, “Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement,” which contains 16 indicators. Indicators 9.1-9.4 require a dedicated quality office, qualified personnel, and participation of quality management in decision making and institutional support for quality projects. Indicators 9.5-9.7 further require the dissemination of quality culture, continuous self evaluation according to NCQAAETI standards, and coordination among institutional quality units (NCQAAETI, 2023). These requirements demonstrate that quality assurance is intended to operate as a permanent institutional system rather than an activity conducted only when accreditation is sought.

The document also specifies how evaluation and stakeholder evidence should inform improvement. Indicator 9.8 requires institutions to measure the satisfaction of students, staff, and faculty members, while Indicator 9.10 requires stakeholders to provide opinions and proposals for development. Indicator 9.11 requires institutions to use staff evaluation results and stakeholder feedback, and Indicator 9.12 requires continuous improvement plans based on self evaluation findings. Furthermore, Indicators 9.13-9.14 require periodic review of implementation plans, documentation of collected data, and measurement of the effects of improvements. Indicator 9.15 specifically requires educational programs to collect students’ views about the quality of the educational process and use the results for development (NCQAAETI, 2023).

At the program level, quality assurance is closely linked to periodic review and evaluation. Under Standard 4, “Educational Programs,” Indicator 4.5 requires periodic program evaluation and use of the results for development and improvement. Indicator 4.14 reinforces the requirement to benefit from program-evaluation findings, while Indicator 4.16 requires mechanisms for evaluating intended learning outcomes. Indicators 4.19 and 4.20 also require course reports and their use in program improvement (NCQAAETI, 2023). These provisions connect institutional quality assurance with curriculum review, course level evidence, and learning outcome evaluation.

A key strength of the accreditation framework is its emphasis on performance indicators and documentary evidence. The standards define indicators as quantitative or qualitative measures used to assess performance over time. The required supporting evidence includes periodic performance indicator reports (Evidence 163), surveys of students, faculty members, graduates, and employers together with related improvement plans (Evidence 164), quality improvement plans (Evidence 165), studies evaluating programs and their outcomes (Evidence 166), comparisons with similar institutions (Evidence 167), and internal or external evaluation reports (Evidence 168). These examples show

that institutions are expected to demonstrate improvement through documented evidence rather than unsupported claims (NCQAAETI, 2023).

Stakeholder participation also represents an important dimension of quality assurance. Stakeholders include students, faculty members, graduates, employers, professional bodies, and community representatives. Their feedback helps ensure that academic programs remain relevant to societal expectations and labor market requirements (Shalghoum et al., 2025; Omran et al., 2025). This principle is reinforced by Standard 4, Indicator 4.9, which involves employers and other stakeholders in reviewing admission policies, and Indicator 4.15, which requires a mechanism for determining program alignment with labor market requirements. The required evidence also includes studies of program effectiveness, graduate evaluations, student satisfaction, and labor-market and employer satisfaction (Evidence 61 and 73).

Table 2. Quality assurance mechanisms in NCQAAETI (2023)

Mechanism	NCQAAETI basis	Main requirement	Intended contribution
Program review	Indicators 4.5, 4.14	Evaluate programs and use findings for improvement	Curriculum enhancement
Stakeholder and graduate feedback	Indicators 5.22–5.24, 9.10–9.11	Collect and use feedback from students, graduates, and employers	Program and labor market relevance
Self evaluation	Indicators 9.6, 9.12–9.13	Conduct self-evaluation and review improvement plans	Continuous quality improvement
Performance measurement	Indicator 9.14; Evidence 163	Document performance data and measure improvement effects	Evidence based decisions
Learning outcome assessment	Indicator 4.16	Evaluate intended program learning outcomes	Verification of student achievement

Overall, the accreditation standards provide a substantial foundation for quality assurance through institutional structures, self evaluation, stakeholder feedback, program review, documented evidence, and improvement planning. However, although the standards require institutions to use evaluation findings and measure the effects of improvements, they provide limited technical guidance

on performance thresholds, responsibility for corrective actions, implementation timelines, and methods for verifying that changes have improved student achievement. Greater operational detail in these areas would strengthen the connection between documented evaluation and demonstrable educational improvement.

Critical Evaluation of the Accreditation Framework

The evaluation applied six dimensions derived from OBE, constructive alignment, ESG, and EQF: strategic alignment and governance; program design and curriculum coherence; learning outcomes and graduate attributes; teaching and assessment alignment; stakeholder and labor market relevance; and evidence based continuous improvement. Each dimension was classified as explicitly required, indirectly addressed, or not operationally specified, distinguishing formal coverage from implementation guidance (Biggs, 1996; Council of the European Union, 2017).

The NCQAAETI framework is comprehensive, consisting of 10 institutional standards and 184 indicators covering planning, governance, faculty, educational programs, student affairs, learning resources, research, community service, quality assurance, and electronic learning (NCQAAETI, 2023). A major strength is strategic alignment. Standard 1 requires an approved strategic plan (Indicator 1.1), a declared mission and measurable goals (Indicators 1.3 and 1.7), stakeholder participation (Indicator 1.8), use of institutional objectives in planning (Indicator 1.10), and application of evaluation results to improvement (Indicator 1.11). These provisions connect academic activities with institutional priorities.

Governance and quality culture are also strongly represented. Standard 2 addresses transparency, participation, academic freedom, and evidence based management. Standard 9 requires a quality office and qualified personnel (Indicators 9.1-9.2), participation of quality management in decision making (Indicator 9.3), support for quality initiatives (Indicator 9.4), and dissemination of quality culture (Indicator 9.5). These requirements align with international principles concerning quality policies, stakeholder involvement, and information management (Harvey, 2004; Stensaker, 2011). However, Libyan institutions continue to face instability, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient training, and weak evaluation follow up (Alriteemi et al., 2026).

The framework further supports continuous improvement. Indicators 9.6 and 9.12 require continuous self evaluation and resulting improvement plans; Indicators 9.10-9.11 require stakeholder feedback and its use; and Indicators 9.13-9.15 address plan review, performance data, measurement of improvement effects, and student feedback. Evidence 163-168 includes performance reports, stakeholder surveys, improvement plans, benchmarking, program evaluations, and

external or internal review reports (NCQAAETI, 2023). The challenge is ensuring that this documentation produces verified educational improvement.

Learning outcomes and graduate competencies are explicitly present. Standard 4 requires benchmark based program and course specifications (Indicator 4.11), evaluation of intended learning outcomes (Indicator 4.16), graduate specifications (Indicator 4.17), and course reports used for improvement (Indicators 4.19-4.20). Nevertheless, it does not specify learning-outcome taxonomies, curriculum maps, assessment matrices, competency rubrics, achievement thresholds, or procedures for aggregating course results into program level attainment. OBE and constructive alignment require outcomes to guide curricula, teaching, and assessment (Biggs, 1996; Harden, 2002). Similarly, ESG Standards 1.2, 1.3, and 1.9 emphasize outcome based program design, student centered assessment, and periodic review, while EQF organizes outcomes around knowledge, skills, responsibility, and autonomy (ENQA et al., 2015; Council of the European Union, 2017).

Labor market relevance is addressed through Indicator 4.7 on community and employment needs, Indicator 4.15 on program suitability, and Indicators 5.22-5.24 on employer perspectives and graduate follow up. Evidence 73 and 103-108 requires labor market studies, surveys, and graduate employment records. However, common employability indicators, reporting cycles, and procedures connecting feedback to curriculum revision remain underdeveloped (Hmouma, 2025; Baroud, 2026).

Standard 10 also regulates electronic learning infrastructure, technology, content improvement, and student support. Indicators 10.5 and 10.8 and Evidence 172-174 address appropriate technology, digital content, and review of distance learning outcomes. Yet digital literacy and artificial intelligence competence are not defined as measurable graduate attributes across programs (Yahya et al., 2025; Kasheem et al., 2025).

Table 3. Comparison of NCQAAETI (2023) with international frameworks

Dimension	NCQAAETI position	International emphasis	Development priority
Planning and governance	Explicit: Standards 1, 2, and 9	ESG: policy, governance, and information management	Maintain current strength
Program design	Explicit: Indicators 4.1, 4.4, and 4.11	OBE/ESG: outcomes-led and student-centered design	Require curriculum maps
Outcome assessment	Required: Indicator 4.16	OBE/ESG: aligned assessment and	Add rubrics and thresholds

		attainment evidence	
Graduate competencies	Required: Indicator 4.17	EQF: knowledge, skills, responsibility, and autonomy	Adopt a competency taxonomy
Employability	Addressed: Indicators 4.15 and 5.22-5.24	Graduate and employer evidence	Standardize employability measures
Digital competence	Delivery addressed in Standard 10	Digital competence as a graduate outcome	Embed and assess digital attributes

As Table 3 shows, the principal difference lies not in whether the NCQAAETI framework recognizes these quality dimensions, but in the level of operational specification. The framework is comparatively strong in institutional planning and quality infrastructure, while curriculum mapping, outcome-attainment measures, graduate competency classifications, employability metrics, and digital graduate attributes require further development.

The findings also have important implications for higher education reform in Libya. As universities seek to improve educational quality, increase international recognition, and respond to national development priorities, accreditation standards can serve as a powerful instrument for institutional transformation. However, achieving these goals requires moving beyond procedural compliance toward genuine quality enhancement. Institutions should complement the existing indicators with curriculum maps, assessment matrices, competency-based rubrics, defined attainment thresholds, graduate and employer dashboards, and documented procedures for closing the improvement cycle. Equally important is strengthening connections among academic programs, labor market needs, digital transformation, and sustainable development priorities (Shalghoum et al., 2025; Almabrouk, 2026).

In conclusion, the accreditation standards provide a comprehensive and strategically oriented framework for academic program quality in Libyan higher education. Their strengths lie in planning, governance, accountability, stakeholder engagement, and continuous improvement. Their principal limitation is not the absence of outcome related requirements, but insufficient operational guidance for translating these requirements into comparable evidence of student and graduate achievement. Strengthening curriculum mapping, aligned assessment, competency measurement, employability indicators, and digital graduate attributes would improve compatibility with international frameworks while supporting the modernization of Libyan higher education.

Conclusion

This study examined the treatment of program design and learning outcomes within the Libyan institutional accreditation standards for higher education institutions by conducting a qualitative document analysis of the fourth edition NCQAAETI (2023) document, including its institutional standards, numbered indicators, required documents, and supporting evidence. The findings reveal that the accreditation framework provides a comprehensive and strategically oriented approach to academic program quality by emphasizing planning, governance, stakeholder engagement, evidence based decision making, and continuous improvement. The standards establish important foundations for curriculum development and institutional accountability while promoting a culture of quality within higher education institutions.

Furthermore, the analysis showed that the framework supports several principles associated with contemporary quality assurance systems, including strategic alignment, program evaluation, performance monitoring, and responsiveness to societal needs. However, learning outcomes are addressed through explicit requirements for academic benchmarking, evaluation of intended learning outcomes, graduate specifications, labour market alignment, and course reporting, particularly under Standard 4, Indicators 4.11 and 4.14-4.20 (NCQAAETI, 2023). Nevertheless, the document provides limited operational guidance on curriculum mapping, assessment rubrics, competency frameworks, graduate attribute measurement, achievement thresholds, and direct evidence of learning achievement. These areas are increasingly recognized as essential components of international accreditation and qualification frameworks.

A comparison with outcome based education, the European Standards and Guidelines, and the European Qualifications Framework suggests that future revisions of the accreditation standards could benefit from stronger emphasis on program to course outcome mapping, standardized employability measures, competency based assessment, and measurable digital graduate attributes. Such enhancements would strengthen the relationship between curriculum design, teaching practices, assessment methods, and graduate readiness while improving international compatibility and recognition.

Overall, the accreditation standards constitute an important instrument for advancing higher education quality in Libya. However, their long term impact will depend on whether institutions move beyond procedural compliance and use accreditation as a mechanism for continuous quality enhancement. Strengthening outcome measurement, curriculum alignment, and evidence based evaluation through assessment matrices, competency based rubrics, defined attainment thresholds, and documented improvement cycles will be critical for ensuring that academic programs produce graduates who are academically competent,

professionally prepared, and capable of contributing to national development in an increasingly knowledge based and digital world.

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