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Bridging the Gap: Assessing Readiness and Overcoming Barriers for Criminology Program Accreditation

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Abstract

Aim: This study aimed to assess the program accreditation readiness of higher education institutions in Bulacan offering BS Criminology.

Methodology: A descriptive qualitative research design was employed, with data gathered from 15 purposively selected informants—faculty members, administrators, non-teaching personnel, and students—through semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes.

Results: Four themes emerged: the importance of faculty qualifications, curriculum alignment, and administrative support; persistent barriers such as inadequate laboratories, facilities, and funding; ongoing improvement efforts including faculty training and policy updates; and the value of stakeholder engagement and strategic quality assurance measures.

Conclusion: The study concluded that while institutions demonstrated readiness through internal motivation and improvement initiatives, systemic challenges in infrastructure, coordination, and resource allocation remain.

Keywords: Accreditation readiness, criminology education, institutional barriers, thematic analysis, quality assurance, higher education, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Accreditation serves as a vital mechanism for ensuring and promoting quality assurance in higher education (Makhoul, 2019). In the Philippines, although accreditation is voluntary, it is widely regarded as a benchmark of institutional credibility and program excellence. The Federation of Accrediting Agencies of the Philippines (FAAP), recognized by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), grants formal recognition to three major accrediting bodies: the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges, and Universities (PAASCU), the Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation (PACUCOA), and the Association of Christian Schools, Colleges and Universities–Accrediting Agency, Inc. (ACSCU-AAI) (Arcelo, 2003; Ching, 2013). These bodies set standards that evaluate program objectives, curriculum, faculty qualifications, student services, facilities, and linkages, ensuring alignment with both national and international benchmarks.

Accreditation in the Philippines plays a dual role. As Ordonez and Ordonez (2009) emphasized, it safeguards academic standards while also serving as a developmental tool that fosters continuous institutional improvement. Similarly, Ching (2013) and Janušauskienė and Dvorak (2021) noted that accreditation encourages evidence-based management and strategic quality assurance (QA) practices. This perspective resonates with global views that position accreditation as a driver of accountability, competitiveness, and international relevance in higher education (Dugarova et al., 2016). Recent studies also highlight that accreditation processes cultivate reflective practices among educators, which directly contribute to sustainable teaching and learning improvements (Bontuyan, 2025).

The relevance of accreditation is particularly pronounced in professional programs such as Criminology. Criminology education integrates theory and practice to prepare graduates for careers in law enforcement, corrections, forensic science, and community safety. According to CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 5, s. 2018, the Bachelor of Science in Criminology program must deliver not only strong academic instruction but also hands-on



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training through laboratories, simulation facilities, and linkages with justice institutions (CHED, 2018). Accreditation validates whether these expectations are met in areas such as curriculum delivery, faculty development, research productivity, and infrastructure (Shawer, 2013). This mirrors global calls for future-proofing teacher and professional education programs through systematic curriculum reframing to align with accreditation standards (Carvajal et al., 2025).

However, research highlights persistent challenges faced by many Criminology programs in achieving accreditation standards. Cruz et al. (2024) reported that shortcomings in research engagement, facilities, and faculty qualifications remain common obstacles. Benter (2020) further pointed out the inadequacy of forensic laboratories and crime simulation facilities in several institutions, which limits the applied competencies of students. Accreditation reviews consistently flag these deficiencies as barriers to achieving higher recognition levels (PAASCU, 2022). Thus, accreditation functions not only as a compliance measure but also as a developmental tool for raising professional and educational standards in Criminology.

Among the most critical areas identified for accreditation readiness is faculty development. Accreditation agencies place a high premium on faculty qualifications, including postgraduate education, licensure, research output, and professional training (Phillips & Kinser, 2018). Makhoul (2019) observed that institutions investing in faculty training and advanced degrees achieved stronger accreditation outcomes. In the Philippine context, however, the shortage of licensed criminologists and faculty with graduate-level qualifications has slowed accreditation progress (Cruz et al., 2024). Scholars such as Bihag and Allanic (2025) stress that mentorship, faculty retention policies, and systematic development programs are essential for sustaining quality. Similarly, Al-Worafi (2024) emphasized that building faculty capacity is crucial not only for accreditation but also for producing graduates who are well-prepared for licensure examinations and professional practice. This argument echoes the findings of Pangilinan (2025), who demonstrated that teacher commitment and sustained professional growth strongly determine institutional quality and readiness for accreditation.

Infrastructure and learning resources are another cornerstone of accreditation. Criminology programs are expected to provide specialized facilities such as forensic laboratories, firing ranges, and crime scene investigation kits. Yet, many institutions cite financial constraints as barriers to maintaining these standards (Ching, 2013). Accreditation reviews frequently identify inadequate equipment, limited library holdings, and outdated simulation facilities as areas requiring urgent improvement (PAASCU, 2022). International research supports this link, showing that institutions with well-equipped facilities consistently achieve better student outcomes and stronger accreditation ratings (Bihag & Allanic, 2025). This underscores the necessity of sustained investments in resources to strengthen accreditation readiness.

Beyond faculty and facilities, accreditation emphasizes institutional quality assurance (QA) mechanisms. These include program reviews, student feedback loops, and mock accreditation audits (Kaggwa et al., 2023). Institutions that embed QA practices into their governance systems demonstrate greater preparedness and adaptability (Jafarov, 2024; Singh et al., 2025). Joshua (2025) and Păunescu et al. (2012) further argue that QA must be institutionalized as a shared responsibility, not merely a compliance exercise. Accreditation is inherently participatory, requiring collaboration among administrators, faculty, staff, and students (Bohlens, 2025). Arcelo (2003) reinforced that collective responsibility fosters a culture of excellence, while PAASCU (2022) emphasized that student-centered approaches—such as remedial instruction, academic advising, and integrated board exam review classes—directly strengthen program outcomes and accreditation results.

Finally, stakeholder engagement and collective ownership emerge as critical success factors. Lagrosen (2017) argued that accreditation outcomes are strengthened when institutions ensure broad participation in decision-making and evaluation processes. For Criminology programs, partnerships with law enforcement agencies, forensic laboratories, and community organizations not only increase program relevance but also align academic standards with real-world professional expectations. Thus, accreditation is not simply an evaluative process but a collaborative journey toward building a culture of continuous quality improvement.

Despite the importance of accreditation in higher education, limited research has focused on the specific readiness and barriers faced by criminology programs in the Philippines. This gap highlights the need for an in-depth examination of how institutions can strengthen faculty development, facilities, and QA practices to meet accreditation standards. The present study is significant as it addresses this research gap by providing a focused examination of criminology programs, offering insights that are both contextually grounded and globally informed. Unlike existing studies, which often adopt a generalized or single-framework approach, this research integrates global accreditation principles with local accreditation standards. In response, this study aims to assess the readiness and challenges



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faced by criminology programs in pursuing accreditation, with the goal of offering actionable insights for quality assurance and institutional development.

Objectives

The general aim of the study was to assess the program accreditation readiness of higher education institutions in the province of Bulacan offering BS Criminology. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Examine how informants assessed their Criminology program's readiness for accreditation;
2. Identify the significant barriers perceived by informants that prevented their Criminology program from achieving accreditation;
3. Determine the specific actions that had been taken, or were still needed, to address gaps in the accreditation process; and
4. Analyze the factors that informants believed would support the Criminology program in achieving accreditation.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design, which was most appropriate for capturing the perspectives, experiences, and insights of participants in their natural context. A descriptive qualitative design was chosen to allow for a comprehensive and detailed understanding of informants' views regarding their Criminology program's readiness for accreditation, the barriers that hinder the process, the actions undertaken or required to address gaps, and the enabling factors that could facilitate accreditation. Through this approach, the study did not attempt to test hypotheses or quantify relationships but rather to generate rich, descriptive accounts that illuminate the lived realities and contextual factors influencing accreditation readiness. The use of a descriptive qualitative design also ensured that participants' voices were central to the analysis, thereby providing authentic and nuanced insights that can inform program development, accreditation preparation, and policy considerations (Bontuyan, 2025; Sanchez, 2023).

Population and Sampling

The study employed purposive sampling to identify participants who could provide rich, diverse, and contextually relevant insights in relation to the objectives of the research. This sampling approach was deemed appropriate because it allowed the researcher to deliberately select informants who were directly involved in, or knowledgeable about, the Criminology program and its accreditation readiness. A total of fifteen (15) informants participated in the study, drawn equally from three non-accredited higher education institutions in the province of Bulacan, in consideration of the principle of data saturation in qualitative research. Within each institution, the composition of participants was designed to represent multiple stakeholders in the Criminology program. Specifically, the group included one Criminology administrator—either a dean, program head, or coordinator—two faculty members, one staff member, and one student. The institutions involved in the study were located in the municipalities of Sta. Maria, Pulilan, and Baliwag, which provided varied institutional contexts while maintaining a consistent regional focus. This deliberate inclusion of administrators, faculty, staff, and students ensured that the study reflected a comprehensive view of accreditation readiness, barriers, and enabling factors (Amihan et al., 2023).

Instrument

The primary instrument of this study was the researcher, who served as the key facilitator in gathering and interpreting the data. In addition, a semi-structured interview guide was employed to ensure consistency and focus during the data collection process. This guide was carefully developed to align with the study's objectives and consisted of broad, open-ended topics that encouraged informants to share their experiences, perceptions, and insights regarding their Criminology program's readiness for accreditation. Rather than following a rigid sequence of questions, the interview guide served as a flexible framework that encouraged dialogue. Follow-up questions were asked based on the actual responses of the informants to probe deeper into emerging themes, clarify meanings, and capture nuanced perspectives. The interview guide was validated by two experts in Criminology education and one expert in qualitative research methodology, ensuring alignment with accreditation standards and methodological rigor. This flexible approach allowed the researcher to explore issues that arose spontaneously during the interviews while ensuring that the discussions remained focused on the study's aims. The use of a semi-structured interview

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guide was deemed appropriate for this qualitative descriptive study because it balanced consistency across interviews with the ability to adapt to the unique viewpoints of each informant. This ensured that the data collected was both systematic and reflective of the diverse voices of administrators, faculty, staff, and students (Colasito, 2025).

Data Collection

Data were gathered primarily through semi-structured interview sessions with the informants using an interview guide to provide direction, while flexibility was allowed so that probing questions could be asked when deeper clarification or elaboration was needed. Each interview session was conducted in a natural and non-coercive conversational manner, allowing participants to freely express their thoughts and feelings while ensuring that the core research questions were addressed. All interviews were audio-recorded, with the consent of the participants, to guarantee accuracy in transcription and analysis. Field notes were also taken to capture non-verbal cues and contextual details. Each session lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted at a time and place convenient and comfortable for the participants.

Treatment of Data

This study was guided by qualitative research principles, specifically the use of bracketing and intuiting, to ensure that the perceptions, experiences, and insights of the informants were explored with authenticity and depth. Bracketing was observed at the onset of the study, wherein the researcher consciously set aside personal biases, preconceived notions, and prior knowledge about the phenomenon under investigation—accreditation. A reflective journal was maintained to document the researcher's assumptions and potential influences, ensuring that these did not interfere with the process of understanding the participants' perspectives. Next, intuiting was applied during the interaction with informants, wherein the researcher immersed in the accounts with openness and receptivity. This allowed the researcher to focus entirely on the meaning of the participants' narratives, capturing the essence of their perceptions, experiences, and insights without imposing external interpretations.

The study employed thematic analysis to systematically examine and interpret the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews. This method was chosen as it provides a flexible yet rigorous approach in identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data. The analysis began with familiarization, wherein the researcher transcribed the recorded interviews verbatim and repeatedly read the transcripts while listening to the recordings to ensure accuracy and immersion in the data. Field notes and memos were also reviewed to deepen the contextual understanding of the participants' narratives. Afterward, line-by-line and segment-by-segment coding was conducted. Codes were generated inductively, staying close to the participants' words to capture the essence of their experiences. During this stage, the researcher engaged in reflexive bracketing to minimize the intrusion of personal assumptions. Once the initial coding was completed, the codes were examined for similarities, differences, and patterns, and related codes were clustered into potential categories that served as the foundation for emerging themes.

The preliminary themes were then reviewed against the entire dataset to ensure coherence, consistency, and distinctiveness. Weak or irrelevant themes were discarded, overlapping ones were merged, and refinements were made to ensure each theme authentically represented the participants' perspectives. Each finalized theme was then defined and described, highlighting its central organizing concept. Sub-themes were also identified when necessary to provide a more nuanced understanding of the data. The final stage involved weaving together the themes into a coherent narrative. Verbatim quotations from the participants were integrated into the analysis to substantiate the findings and preserve the authenticity of their lived experiences. Throughout the process, the researcher engaged in intuiting—remaining open and receptive to the meanings conveyed by the participants—and maintained a reflexive journal to ensure transparency and rigor in the interpretation of the data (Carvajal et al., 2023).

Ethical Considerations

The research adhered strictly to ethical standards by obtaining process consent from all respondents, with clear guidelines that emphasized confidentiality and voluntary participation. The consent form provided a comprehensive summary of the study's goals, procedures, possible risks, and anticipated benefits, ensuring that participants fully understood the extent of their engagement and their right to withdraw at any point without consequences. Anticipated concerns were directly addressed to foster trust and transparency. Throughout the process, integrity was upheld by maintaining strict confidentiality of data, ensuring that only truthful findings were reported, and strictly avoiding plagiarism. Ethical research practices were further demonstrated through honest



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reporting, respect for publishing standards, and the researcher's commitment to safeguarding the rights and dignity of the participants. Although formal ethics board approval was not required, ethical protocols consistent with CHED and institutional guidelines were followed (Sanchez, 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theme 1: From Roots to Recognition

This theme illustrates the evolving journey of institutions as they strengthen foundational capacities and engage in structured quality assurance (QA) practices. Accreditation readiness is presented as both a goal and a process, requiring alignment between internal strengths and external benchmarks. Participants acknowledged the growing momentum toward readiness, anchored in administrative commitment, curriculum alignment, and stakeholder optimism, but tempered by faculty inexperience and infrastructure gaps. These findings support Magri and Martin's (2021) argument that readiness entails both compliance and self-assessment, while affirming Iqbal et al.'s (2024) position that accreditation functions as a developmental tool fostering continuous improvement.

Participants consistently described their institutions as only partially ready for accreditation, reflecting a mix of optimism and pragmatism. One admitted, "For me if I score it from 1 to 10... probably it will be range 6 to 7" (Participant 1), while another expressed confidence, "I think we will be ready... we are implementing OBE" (Participant 4). These responses suggest that frameworks such as Outcome-Based Education (OBE) have been adopted to align with accreditation standards, though implementation remains incomplete. Administrative leadership emerged as a consistent strength: "We are ready in terms of the administration, especially our Dean who is already qualified" (Participant 1). Yet, capacity constraints among faculty highlighted a readiness gap: "Most of the faculty members are fresh graduates and have just recently passed the board exam" (Participant 2). Such accounts diverge from Hénard and Roseveare's (2012) notion of readiness as linear progression, instead portraying an uneven pathway where institutional enthusiasm collides with human and structural limitations.

Facility limitations also emerged as significant barriers, reinforcing Padua and Dizon's (2020) findings on the critical role of infrastructure in achieving accreditation. For instance, participants emphasized: "Our laboratory is not complete" (Participant 5) and "There is one thing that hinders it... lack of classrooms" (Participant 13). Nevertheless, optimism persisted, with one affirming, "If it's from 1 to 10, I'll say 10/10... I can really say everything is good" (Participant 14). This duality—acknowledging barriers while maintaining hope—mirrors Hénard and Roseveare's (2012) description of institutions "in transition," balancing present realities against aspirational goals.

Institutional strengths, described as "capital," were recognized as crucial to shaping readiness. Faculty qualifications were repeatedly highlighted: "All of us, aside from being licensed, are eligible to teach... one of the strengths of the institution" (Participant 3) and "The program is aligned with the current curriculum and also the faculty are engaged and qualified to teach" (Participant 14). These accounts reinforce Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley's (2009) view that faculty competence underpins institutional reputation. Leadership quality also surfaced as a key factor: "It's the administration... we have qualified dean" (Participant 2). Beyond faculty, student quality and licensure performance reinforced credibility: "The number of students and the passing percentage in the board exam" (Participant 11). Institutions further leveraged longevity and partnerships: "Being founded in 1993... the experience we have gathered throughout the years enabled the department to formulate programs that could help the accreditation process" (Participant 6), as well as linkages with PNP, BJMP, and BFP (Participants 10, 13, 14). These insights align with Middlehurst's (2001) observation that leadership and external collaborations foster a quality culture. The mention of affordability—"Our tuition fee is low" (Participant 5)—underscores the role of accessibility in shaping institutional value (Salazar-Clemeña & Almonte-Acosta, 2007).

Participants also reframed accreditation as more than compliance, portraying it as a transformative process that enhances reputation, elevates standards, and drives improvement. As one noted, "It plays a crucial role in enhancing quality of education. It sets a benchmark" (Participant 1), while another emphasized, "Accreditation... check and balance all areas—curriculum, facilities, research, administration" (Participant 2). Accreditation was also explicitly linked to student success: "It would be difficult to send students out if they are not ready... accreditation really plays a big part" (Participant 3), supporting Harvey and Green's (1993) assertion that quality assurance enhances student readiness. Faculty credibility was tied to institutional reputation: "Having qualified teachers allows us to produce excellent students" (Participant 9). Beyond local improvements, participants highlighted reputation-building and global competitiveness: "Once accredited... the school will become more recognized" (Participant 11) and "So that it's not just nationwide but also globalized" (Participant 10), echoing van Damme's (2001) view of accreditation as a driver of global competitiveness. Accreditation was further seen as fueling innovation: "It develops

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improvements, it suggests things to rectify" (Participant 7), reinforcing Venkatraman's (2007) assertion of accreditation as cyclical institutional development.

Overall, this theme demonstrates that readiness is dynamic and multi-layered, shaped by leadership, faculty competence, partnerships, and stakeholder optimism, yet constrained by infrastructure and faculty inexperience. Readiness emerges not as a fixed state but as an ongoing journey that requires sustained investment in human, physical, and organizational resources. For criminology programs, this underscores the need for strategic balancing of current capacities with aspirational goals.

Theme 2: Gaps, Grinds, and Growing Pains

This theme captures the operational and systemic challenges shaping institutions' journeys toward accreditation readiness. While participants expressed strong aspirations for quality improvement, they were candid about persistent deficiencies in infrastructure, financial resources, and institutional coordination. These findings suggest that readiness is not only about aligning curricula and policies but also about ensuring robust systems and resources. This aligns with Gawor et al. (2021) and Kayyali (2024), who emphasize that readiness requires a balanced integration of facilities, financial planning, and stakeholder collaboration.

Participants frequently cited inadequate laboratories, outdated instructional equipment, and limited classroom space as pressing barriers. For example: "The possible barrier... is the laboratory... it really needs to be fixed" (Participant 1); "There are really many deficiencies in the laboratory" (Participant 5); and "The equipment is lacking... students cannot properly accomplish what they need" (Participant 9). These findings reinforce Salas and Cordova's (2020) view that facilities are central to accreditation. The high costs of upgrades—"Regarding the laboratory, the equipment is very expensive" (Participant 4)—highlight the financial strain of sustaining industry-aligned facilities in resource-limited contexts. Classroom shortages further constrained program delivery: "The number of rooms available... the students are increasing... we are experiencing problems with room assignments" (Participant 13). Unlike prior studies focused mainly on administrative systems, these accounts underscore how physical deficits directly hinder teaching and learning.

Research productivity and digital support also surfaced as barriers. One participant admitted, "Every program has limited research output... accrediting bodies really focus on scholarly contributions" (Participant 2), supporting Salas and Cordova's (2020) view of research as a quality benchmark. Weak IT systems also emerged: "School services are somewhat lacking... compliance requires internet... IT support is slow" (Participant 10). This highlights digital infrastructure as a new determinant of readiness in post-pandemic higher education.

Financial constraints were another dominant theme. One participant explained, "If financial support is available and sufficient, we could add more classrooms" (Participant 13), while another noted, "There are financial constraints... the intention is to go beyond the minimum requirements" (Participant 6). These perspectives align with Ruiz and Junio-Sabio's (2012) findings that budgetary limitations are systemic impediments in Philippine higher education.

Institutional coordination—or its absence—was also a challenge. One participant lamented, "There is a lack of teamwork... two or three people are the only ones doing accreditation" (Participant 2), supporting Martin and Stella's (2007) assertion that collective institutional responsibility is essential. Administrative bottlenecks were another frustration: "The registrar's office is still lacking... we need to line up for a very long time because there are only two payment counters" (Participant 8). Others, however, noted supportive administration: "They are very much willing... purchasing of equipment... training... seminars" (Participant 10). This divergence indicates that leadership willingness requires consistent institutional coordination to translate into progress.

Participants highlighted how deficiencies ripple down to students, affecting engagement and preparedness. For example: "Laboratory... it affects the students when it comes to inadequate facilities" (Participant 1) and "Sometimes it's crowded... maximum of 40 per classroom... that's where the problem starts" (Participant 11). These findings align with Archambault et al. (2022) and Rapanta et al. (2020), who emphasize that learning environments shape teaching quality and student outcomes. Shortages of textbooks ("We are not up to date with current issues and knowledge"—Participant 2), challenges in hybrid modalities ("Teaching time is divided... students cannot focus"—Participant 13), and socioeconomic barriers such as transport costs (Participant 10) further highlight how systemic inequities intersect with accreditation readiness.

In summary, Theme 2 underscores that readiness is tempered by operational and systemic challenges. Facilities, finances, and coordinated institutional effort remain indispensable, while emerging issues such as digital infrastructure and modality disruptions add new layers of complexity. Readiness, therefore, requires strategic resource investments, cohesive collaboration, and institutional culture shifts toward inclusivity and planning.



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Theme 3: Paving the Path

This theme reflects institutions' forward momentum through deliberate—but sometimes uneven—efforts to meet accreditation requirements. Participants emphasized actions such as faculty development, curriculum revision, facility upgrades, and administrative reforms. One explained, "We are slowly sending instructors to various training programs" (Participant 1), while another shared, "The school is undergoing renovations... laboratory concerns are being addressed" (Participant 1). These findings suggest that institutions are actively bridging gaps, though progress remains inconsistent, aligning with Lal et al. (2024), who stress that faculty competence, curriculum relevance, and infrastructure coherence are critical to accreditation.

Faculty development consistently emerged as a pillar of readiness. As participants stated: "Teachers are improving... they are pursuing master's degrees" (Participant 7) and "Every semestral break, faculty development activities are conducted... supported by the school" (Participant 10). These insights support Asmare's (2025) view that continuous professional development enhances accreditation preparedness. Yet, curriculum revision appeared less robust, with participants noting only minor updates (Participants 8, 10). This divergence suggests that while faculty investment is prioritized, curriculum modernization lags behind industry standards.

Facility upgrades were more visible. Participants described renovations and improved classroom conditions (Participants 1, 14). Perceptions of effectiveness varied: some affirmed positive impacts (Participant 10), while others noted the absence of systematic evaluation (Participant 2). This reflects Lal et al.'s (2024) warning that progress without assessment risks fragmented improvements.

Strategic investments also reinforced momentum. Faculty support included scholarships and funding for advanced degrees (Participants 3, 6). Infrastructure efforts included constructing additional classrooms and dedicating campuses to criminology programs (Participants 2, 6). Smart classrooms and laboratory upgrades demonstrated responsiveness to accreditation requirements (Participant 14). These findings align with Barrett et al. (2019) and Kayyali (2024), who emphasize that financial commitment signals institutional seriousness.

Administrative reforms, including OBE integration (Participant 6), faculty credentialing policies (Participant 4), ISO-inspired systems (Participant 7), and accreditation committees (Participant 13), showed institutionalizing of QA mechanisms. These measures align with CHED's CMO No. 46 (2012) and Vorobyova et al. (2022), which stress embedding compliance frameworks into institutional culture. Yet, gaps remained—such as the absence of a retention policy (Participant 1)—suggesting reforms are still partial.

Theme 3 highlights a trajectory of intentional yet uneven progress. Faculty development and infrastructure demonstrate commitment, while policy reforms suggest a systemic shift. However, curriculum lags and limited evaluation mechanisms constrain coherence. Accreditation readiness, therefore, remains evolving, requiring integration across faculty, facilities, curriculum, and quality assurance to sustain long-term success.

Theme 4: Systems that Work

This theme reflects a strategic shift toward system-building that emphasizes planning, collaboration, and performance-driven practices as the foundation of accreditation readiness. Participants consistently viewed accreditation not as mere compliance but as an opportunity to institutionalize quality. This supports Cagape and Prado (2025), who stress that resource allocation and systemic coordination drive readiness, and resonates with Maqhubela's (2025) argument that stakeholder collaboration ensures responsiveness to industry and accreditation demands.

Financial investment was widely regarded as essential. One administrator emphasized, "Financial support is really the best thing the institution can provide" (Participant 4), while another noted, "The administration is very willing" (Participant 7). This finding converges with Gaston's (2023) view that financial capacity, physical resources, and faculty competence form the triad of accreditation success. Modernized facilities (Participants 5, 12) and external partnerships (Participant 2) reinforced responsiveness to stakeholder needs, aligning with Adewolu Ogwo's (2024) conclusion that linkages strengthen credibility and employability.

The integration of licensure-style practices was another systemic approach. Institutions implemented mock board exams (Participants 4, 6) and curriculum-integrated reviews. These initiatives support Santangelo et al. (2021), who emphasize early exam exposure as boosting performance and competitiveness. Experiential strategies, such as industry consultants and community engagement (Participants 2, 3), deepened relevance and mirrored Mohzana et al.'s (2024) view that mock audits and documentation sustain readiness.

Collaboration was also highlighted: "Everyone truly needs to be involved" (Participant 2). This echoes Kayyali (2024), who emphasizes shared ownership. Collaboration extended to facility maintenance (Participant 1),



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faculty seminars (Participant 4), student feedback systems (Participant 13), and scholarship support. Calls for a dedicated research department (Participant 11) illustrated aspirations for sustained innovation.

While some expressed satisfaction with current efforts (Participant 5), others highlighted systemic gaps in scaling collaboration and coordination. This reflects Ahmad's (2021) assertion that discipline-specific facilities and structured accountability are indispensable for quality outcomes.

In sum, Theme 4 demonstrates that readiness is best advanced through systemic strategies combining financial investment, faculty support, linkages, and collaboration. While progress remains uneven, institutions that sustain systemic coordination, foster stakeholder ownership, and institutionalize performance-oriented practices are more likely to achieve accreditation success aligned with both local standards and global expectations.

Conclusion

This study advances the discourse on quality assurance in higher education by presenting a contextually grounded framework for accreditation readiness in provincial criminology programs in the Philippines. Rather than viewing readiness as a static checklist, the findings reframe it as a dynamic, systems-oriented process requiring the integration of institutional vision, strategic resource allocation, capacity-building for faculty and students, and proactive stakeholder engagement. By bridging local realities with global quality assurance imperatives, this study offers a practical and adaptable model for institutions seeking to strengthen their accreditation trajectory.

Addressing the research gap on the limited scholarship surrounding criminology program accreditation in Bulacan and similar provincial contexts, the study captures the nuanced experiences, challenges, and strategies of stakeholders. These localized, discipline-specific insights enrich the broader body of literature, which has largely overlooked such perspectives. The framework developed highlights that readiness is iterative and developmental, requiring sustained alignment of infrastructure, governance, and instructional quality with established standards. This supports contemporary scholarship, which emphasizes that accreditation success is less about episodic compliance and more about fostering a culture of collaboration, accountability, and continuous improvement.

Moreover, the study demonstrates that progress toward accreditation is most sustainable when administrators, faculty, staff, students, and external partners are engaged in collective and coordinated efforts. For policymakers, accrediting agencies, and institutional leaders, the findings provide evidence-based guidance for shaping capacity-building strategies and policy interventions that address the unique operational and resource constraints of provincial institutions. Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader scholarship on educational quality and institutional resilience, underscoring how localized, discipline-specific models can transform accreditation from a compliance exercise into a strategic driver of institutional excellence and global competitiveness.

Recommendations

Grounded in the four emergent themes of this study, the following recommendations highlight the need for a holistic, systems-based approach to strengthening accreditation readiness in provincial criminology programs:

1. **Strategic Infrastructure and Resource Development.** Institutions must prioritize investments in classrooms, laboratories, and technology resources to eliminate persistent barriers to readiness. Modernized facilities directly support effective teaching, research, and student engagement.
2. **Institutionalization of Quality Assurance Practices.** Administrators should strengthen internal systems through regular documentation audits, peer evaluations, and mock accreditation visits. Such measures cultivate a culture of accountability, preparedness, and continuous improvement.
3. **Collaborative Governance and Stakeholder Engagement.** Decision-making processes should actively involve faculty, students, and external partners to foster shared ownership of accreditation goals and collective responsibility for institutional success.
4. **Faculty Development and Instructional Quality.** Continuous professional development—through advanced studies, specialized training, and industry-linked workshops—should be encouraged to ensure curriculum relevance and teaching competence. Peer mentoring systems can further enhance instructional quality, while faculty should also integrate licensure-driven and experiential strategies, including mock board exams, industry immersion, and community engagement.
5. **Strengthening Research Productivity.** Institutions must provide incentives and foster industry partnerships to encourage faculty and student research. Increased scholarly output will not only raise the program's academic profile but also reinforce its credibility during accreditation evaluations.
6. **Policy and Accrediting Agency Support.** Policymakers and accrediting bodies should provide targeted funding, scholarships, and technology support to bridge resource disparities in provincial institutions.



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Accrediting agencies can further aid readiness by delivering capacity-building programs that promote evidence-based quality assurance practices.

7. Academia-Industry Linkages. Stronger collaborations with industry should be fostered through research partnerships, internships, and graduate employability programs, ensuring criminology curricula remain responsive to evolving labor market and societal demands.

Collectively, these recommendations underscore that accreditation readiness is best achieved through sustained investments, collaborative governance, and shared commitment among stakeholders, supported by enabling policies and responsive accrediting practices.

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