

# Navigating ISO 21001:2018 Accreditation: A case study of the Admission and Records Center

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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## Abstract

This article catalogues the ISO 21001:2018 certification procedure that was carried out by the Admission and Records Center (ARC) of the University of Baguio. This study aims to critically examine the ISO 21001:2018 accreditation experience of the Admission and Records Center Office, with the intent of analyzing its processes, identifying the challenges and opportunities encountered, and evaluating its overall impact on the operational efficiency and quality of service delivery within the Registrar's Office. In this study, the essential activities, obstacles, and institutional alterations connected with the accreditation journey are identified using qualitative theme analysis of participant responses. There were six participants in the study. The respondents were directly involved in the accreditation process. The highlights of the study are: Getting ISO 2100:2018 accreditation enabled the change in the processes in ARC's institutional positioning, professional practices, and organizational procedures. ARC was able to build its credibility both inside and beyond the organization by using standardization, adaptive tactics, and feedback-driven improvements in its daily operation. The ISO accreditation resulted in creating a culture of quality awareness that linked compliance with ongoing progress. This added to the operational excellence that was in line with the university's overall mission and long-term goals. Furthermore, as an outcome of the certification process, there were improvements in documentation procedures, service quality and increased satisfaction among stakeholders. Despite resource limitations and resistance to change, these were achieved during the accreditation process. The office should maintain ongoing improvement practices by making them a standard part of its operations. In the same vein, the office ought to allocate resources for capacity building for the remaining staff who were not part of the earlier initiative. Lastly, ISO 21001 should not be viewed as a separate initiative; instead, it should be fully integrated into the university's strategic management system to further enhance the credibility and competitiveness of the institution.

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## INTRODUCTION

The University of Baguio (UB) which was established in 1948 is one of the premier institutions of higher education in Northern Luzon. Its primary vision is to deliver quality education and in doing so the university actively pursues external accreditation of its academic programs through accrediting bodies such as Philippine

Association of Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation (PACUCOA). In 2024, the university was recognized by the World University Rankings for Innovation (WURI) for its excellence in the following areas: Support and Engagement, Leadership, and Funding. Adding to this recognition and up holding educational quality and institutional growth, it was recently becoming the first in the City of Baguio to

receive International Organization for Standardization [ISO] 21001:2018 certification from TUV Rheinland Philippines. This achievement affirms the university's commitment to educational excellence, effective quality management, and continuous institutional advancement. According to Meyer and Rowan (2011), from the perspective of Institutional Theory, these motivations indicate a pursuit of organizational legitimacy within the higher education sector: the adoption of a recognized global standard acts as a signal that the university complies with externally validated norms. Formal accreditation may serve as a "myth" that organizations adopt to acquire legitimacy, resources, and stability.

With the world accreditation in the educational arena, learners and stakeholders are ensured to receive inclusive, efficient, and learner-centered services which are essentials to quality and operational excellence in educational institutions. Part of this excellence is robust document management, which ensures that academic records, policies, and communications are accurately maintained, readily accessible, and securely preserved. Effective documentation results in transparency, streamlines service delivery, supports institutional memory, and legitimizes trust among the stakeholders such as the students, parents, and regulatory bodies both private and public. Systematic document management should be practiced since it can result in the institutions risk inefficiencies, inconsistencies, and eventually the loss of stakeholder's confidence. Hence, it can be said that managing documents is not merely an administrative task – it is a core pillar of service excellence.

In the study of Cardona et al. (2020), it emphasized that for universities to establish quality frameworks, coercive pressures such as government or regulatory expectations and pressures related to professional standards are encountered. With this, even if ISO 21001 was not legally required, universities were compelled to adhere to the developing standard of international quality assurance. ISO 21001:2018 is a management system that is particularly designed for educational institutions. It offers methodical frameworks that improves an organization's capacity to consistently provide the needs of learners and stakeholders. According to this standard, to guarantee high-quality educational service provision, the institution should

have documented processes, ongoing enhancement, stakeholder engagement, and data-informed decision-making. According to Abu Bakat et al. (2014), ISO 21001:2018 is an international standard used for educational institutions, that promotes the enhancement of processes that eventually improves learner satisfaction and institutional efficacy. Part of the institutional efficacy is the involvement of the Registrar's Office that plays an important role in making sure of the integrity of academic records and learner services. These functions foster transparency, operational consistency, and stakeholder trust - which is central to quality educational management (ISO, 2018).

According to the Commission on Higher Education (CHED, 2023), the mandate for ISO 21001 implementation by numerous institutions in the Philippines to improve educational quality, the documentation of implementation activities, particularly in administrative units like admissions and records offices, remains inconsistent. The CHED mandates that autonomous and deregulated institutions adopt ISO 21001, signifying a planned transition towards standardized quality assurance frameworks in higher education. There were challenges that persist in complying with the corporate documentation practices with the standards of the ISO, like stakeholder involvement and operational procedures. Identifying these challenges became part of the growing literature that explores the practical application of ISO 21001 in educational administration system. This article describes the experiences of UB's Admission and Records Center (ARC) journey of acquiring ISO 21001:2018 certification and it focuses on the changes, challenges, and outcomes experienced during the accreditation process. It will outline how strategic enhancements in managing documents and service procedures facilitated the achievement of operational excellence and satisfaction among its stakeholders.

### **Literature Review**

Alauddin and Yamada (2019) emphasize the importance of Deming's criteria on Total Quality Management (TQM) frameworks in education. As observed by Asif et al. (2013), TQM is becoming a norm within organizational practice. He said that initial implementations in U.S. and U.K. colleges throughout the 1980s emphasized three principal areas for TQM:

the curriculum, administrative services, and academic administration. Recent research that deals on the understanding of TQM in higher education systems from different angles. Jasti et al. (2022) have outlined the evolution of TQM implementation in universities. Teixeira-Quiros et al. (2022) experimentally demonstrate that essential TQM dimensions—specifically teacher empowerment, leadership commitment, and continuous improvement—significantly predict organizational performance when integrated with innovation and internationalization programs. A case study by Susilowati (2025) demonstrates the effective implementation of TQM at an Indonesian university, facilitated by leadership support, community involvement, technological integration, and the utilization of the PDCA cycle within a formal quality assurance framework.

Expanding on this, ISO 21001:2018 is an international standard developed to manage and improve educational organizations' processes and systems. Karakhanyan and Stensaker (2020) highlight how quality assurance frameworks, including ISO standards—can professionalize administrative functions in higher education institutions and align them with strategic goals.

Southeast Asian academic institutions have gotten interested in the implementation of ISO 21001:2018 which they believed to be the global standard for Educational Organization Management Systems (EOMS) that endeavors to synchronize quality management systems with learner-centered outcomes. Empirical studies from Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines outline both the advantages and obstacles in the implementation of ISO 21001:2018 in high education settings. For example, Syahrullah et al. (2022) outlines the gap analysis between the current quality assurance systems in higher education to the standards set by ISO 21001. The findings emphasized that there were significant deficiencies in documentation and systematic process mapping even though there was leadership commitment and policy frameworks were in place. Syahrullah et al. stressed that "documentation and human resource capacity remain the most significant obstacles in aligning higher education quality assurance systems with ISO 21001 standards" (p. 72). Focused training and organized remediation strategies should be

employed during the implementation of the said standard according to this study.

The impact of the standard to higher education systems have triggered the conduct of research in Vietnam. According to Thuy and Quyen (2023), the use of ISO 21001 in Vietnamese colleges and universities have resulted in the standardization of processes and improvement in the way institutions give and receive student feedback. Furthermore, the authors mentioned that "ISO 21001 promotes not only process clarity but also stakeholder communication, thereby advancing a more student-centered orientation" (p. 4). This emphasizes that incorporating ISO terminology and practices as a norm in the local culture. Also, the vital need of a good technological infrastructure and an information system that will serve as the foundation for documentation, record maintenance, and performance evaluation.

In the Philippines, there are not many peer – reviewed articles yet, however, there are evidences coming from case studies and conferences. The work of Santos and Amon (2021) on the journey of the Maritime Academy of Asia and Pacific from ISO 9001:2015 to ISO 21001:2018, noted that since there was a previous ISO certification which somehow eased the transition, there were still substantial modifications that were required to reorient processes towards educational outcomes. Santos and Amon described the implementation of ISO 21001 initially increased administrative workload due to re-documentation of processes, however it also enhanced the school's ability to articulate learner – focused quality objectives. The findings underscore the opportunities and transitional challenges encountered by higher education institutions, especially in administrative and support services like registrar and admissions offices.

These studies show that ISO 21001:2018 promotes process standardization, stakeholder engagement, and a more student-centered approach to higher education in Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines. However, institutions often face difficulties such as insufficient staff capacity, heightened short-term administrative demands, and the necessity for contextual adaptation of the standard's requirements. Enough resources for staff development and information systems must be in place

to help with documentation and monitoring should be initiated by committed leaders of the institution for the accreditation to be successful. These findings are encouraging, however, additional cross-institutional and longitudinal studies in the Philippine context are needed to evaluate further the impacts of ISO 21001 on service quality and learner satisfaction.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of the Study**

This study is grounded in two complementary theories, namely Total Quality Management (TQM) Theory by W. Edwards Deming and Institutional Theory by Meyer and Rowan (1977), DiMaggio and Powell (1983).

According to W. Edwards Deming, a key figure in the quality movement, TQM is a management approach that promotes awareness of quality in all organizational processes. The key principles by Deming (1986) are: (1) Eliminate dependence on inspection and focusing instead on building quality into the process; (2) 14 Points for Management which is a roadmap for improving quality and productivity; and (3) Continuous Improvement (PDCA Cycle) – Plan, Do, Check, Act cycle which make the enhancement on processes to be continuous. In 1994, Deming added (4) System of Profound Knowledge that encompasses the understanding of systems, variation, knowledge theory, and psychology; and (5) Customer-centered focus which highlights quality as defined by customer satisfaction. The sixth (6) Quality is everyone's responsibility which emphasizes that TQM is for total employee involvement and cross-functional collaboration was added by Goetsch & Davis (2016).

Furthermore, it was Deming who laid the foundation for modern quality systems such as ISO 9001 and Six Sigma. These philosophies have continually influenced global standards and organizational excellence practices especially in manufacturing and services (Goetsch & Davis, 2016).

The study employed another theory - the Institutional Theory. This theory talks about how organizations conform to norms, rules, and expectations in their own institutional environments to gain legitimacy and ensure their existence within industry. Instead of institutions focusing only on efficiency or competition, this theory

highlights how social, cultural, and political forces influences organizational behavior and structure.

Based on Meyer and Rowan (1977), organizations adopt formal structures and practices because they need to conform to widely accepted beliefs and rules in the industry they are in and for technical efficiency as well. These formal structures help the organization to be legitimate in the eyes of its stakeholders such as the clients they serve, regulators both private and public, investors and the general public. Similarly, they have introduced the idea of decoupling which enables the organization to symbolically adopts formal policies and procedures to meet external expectations but are not necessarily implemented in practice within. This allows the organization to maintain internal flexibility and external legitimacy.

DiMaggio and Powell (1983), added on institutional theory by categorizing the mechanisms through which organizations becoming increasingly similar over time or isomorphic. The three types of institutional isomorphism are: *Coercive isomorphism* which is an outcome from formal and informal pressures given by organizations by other organizations or by public expectations (e.g. regulations coming from the government); *Mimetic isomorphism* which is the tendency of organizations to copy others, especially in times of uncertainty in order for them to appear successful or legitimate; and Normative isomorphism where members of an industry or profession adopt shared standards and norms.

Furthermore, DiMaggio and Powell (1983), emphasizes that forces that lead to a homogenization of organization practices makes the organization legitimate or it is expected in the field rather than thinking that it will make it most efficient. The following are the key implications of institutional theory: Organizations prioritize legality over efficiency especially in environments that are highly institutionalized. Also, in gaining resources or support, symbolism and conformity are better than actual performance. Change and innovation can be constrained by institutional norms and expectations. Understanding institutional pressures is very crucial in industries where legitimacy and compliance matter such as public administration, education, nonprofit sectors and healthcare.

### Schematic Illustration of the Study

The study is guided by the Input – Process – Output (IPO) model, informed by the Total Quality Management and Institutional theories.

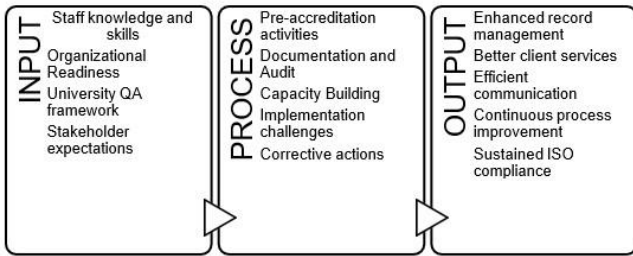


Figure 1: Schematic Illustration of the Study

The input includes the staff knowledge and skills, organizational readiness, university Quality Assurance Framework, and stakeholder expectations. The process refers to the different processes that were undertaken in preparation for the accreditation such as, documentation and audit, capacity building, gap assessment, and corrective actions. Finally, the output highlights the results from the accreditation process such as improvements in service quality, compliance, stakeholder satisfaction, and continuous process improvement. This framework illustrates how the UB’s internal readiness and external demands (input) were addressed through the accreditation process (process) to give way to improvements in organizational performance and stakeholder satisfaction (output).

### Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study was to narrate and analyze the ISO 21001:2018 accreditation experience of the Admission and Records Center (ARC) office. It focused on analyzing its processes, knowing the different challenges as well as the opportunities encountered, and looking at the impact of the process to the operational efficiency as well as the service delivery within ARC. Specifically, it sought to:

1. identify the major activities and processes undertaken by the Admission and Records Center Office during the ISO 21001:2018 accreditation process.
2. explore the challenges and opportunities that emerged during the accreditation journey.

3. assess the influence of the accreditation on the operational and service delivery quality of the Registrar’s Office.

## METHODOLOGY

### Study Design

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore the transformation of the Admission and Records Center Office during the ISO 21001:2018 certification. A one-on-one interview with selected staff members—including the University Registrar, ISO focal persons, and administrative assistants—was conducted to capture individual experiences, perceptions, and narratives regarding the accreditation process. A Focus Group Discussion is a type of in-depth interview accomplished in a group, whose meetings present characteristics defined to facilitate collective reflection and dialogue among personnel who were directly involved in different stages of accreditation.

Each objective of the study was aligned with a specific data collection strategy to come up with the needed data.

- The first objective was addressed by going through internal documentation such as the ISO training manuals and audit logs. In addition to this, staff interviews were conducted regarding pre-accreditation preparations.
- The second objective was investigated through interviews and focused group discussions. The data collection was focused on real-time experiences, encountered challenges, and opportunities for learning and growth by the different participants.
- Objective 3 was attained using FGD insights and service performance documentation.

The Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) model was used to frame the phases of implementation and to assess the effectiveness of strategies.

### Population of the Study

The primary respondents were five staff members who were the core members of the team and the Registrar who spearheaded the committee. The participants were

selected based on their participation in the ISO 21001:2018 accreditation for stages 1 and 2 last September and October 2024. The participants were all employees of the UB Admissions and Records Center, who occupied diverse roles, including supervisor, records management, and liaison duties, and possessed considerable experience ranging from 7 to 25 years. This tenure offered valuable insights into the ISO 21001:2018 accreditation process.

### **Data Gathering Tools**

The main research tool was an interview guide with four sections which were aligned to the specific phase of accreditation process: The first section - Background Information brought about the role of the participants, their length of service, and involvement in the ARC office. The second section 2 – Pre-Accreditation Phase, contains the different preparatory activities and processes undertaken by the participant prior to the accreditation. It includes the respondent’s participation in the different orientation sessions, training workshops, group meetings on the ISO requirements. It also includes document gap assessments, review of existing policies, and benchmarking activities. These items were instrumental in assessing the readiness of the staff, as well as the establishment of concrete actions and structure initiatives that prepared ARC for the accreditation journey. The third section– Accreditation Implementation Phase covered the different tasks, challenges encountered, and perspectives on communication and leadership during the implementation by the respondents. The items were designed to uncover the different barriers and enablers that of the accreditation process. The questions in the last section – Post-Accreditation Phase: Questions were aimed to assess perceived changes in work processes, service delivery, and organizational improvements following the successful accreditation. The items mentioned in this section directly addresses the research objective concerning the impact of ISO certification.

Additionally, the questionnaire includes a Consent Section, where the participants were informed about the purpose of the interview, the confidentiality of the responses, and the rights of the respondents. The structure of the interview guide allowed the interviewer to ask follow-up questions or seek clarification thereby ensuring a nuanced understanding of the respondent’s

experiences while assuring consistency across interviews.

### **Data Gathering Procedures**

The data collection transpired after approval from the university’s research and ethics committee and tool validator. Once cleared, the participants for the interviews and focus group discussions were notified based on their involvement in the accreditation process. There was a one-hour and half in-person session for focused group discussion. All sessions were audio-recorded (with approval) for transcription purposes.

### **Treatment of Data**

The data gathered through interviews and focus group discussions were subjected to a systematic process of organization, analysis, and interpretation to ensure both validity and reliability. The analysis followed these procedures:

1. **Qualitative Data Analysis (Open-Ended Responses):** All audio recordings from interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim to capture participants’ perspectives accurately. Interview responses and transcriptions were organized into categorized folders and coded with unique participant identifiers to maintain confidentiality and facilitate efficient retrieval.
2. **Coding and Thematic Analysis:** An initial round of open coding was conducted by the researcher. It was further refined with the help of a software to identify recurring keywords, significant phrases, and emerging concepts within the dataset. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the coding process, peer debriefing was employed as part of the condign and interpretation process. Following the initial coding of interview transcripts and documentary data, the researcher has engaged a colleague familiar with qualitative research and higher education management to review the coding framework, emerging themes, and interpretive decisions. These codes were refined and grouped into broader categories or overarching themes that align with the study’s objectives. A thematic matrix was utilized to systematically map data sources (e.g., interviews, documents) to core themes such as “preparation,” “challenges,” and “service quality.”
3. **Triangulation of Data:** To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, methodological

triangulation was employed. It employed a qualitative approach to attain a more holistic comprehension of ISO 21001:2018 implementation. The interviews and focused group discussion with administrative workers yielded qualitative insights into the experiences of staff engaged in the accreditation process. Document analysis, conversely, provided an objective framework for evaluating formal compliance and policy alignment. The combination of both methodologies makes it possible to look at the same thing from distinct points of view—narrative perspectives and documentary evidence—making the analysis deeper, more credible, and more open to interpretation.

4. Interpretation: The interpreted data were contextualized within the study’s theoretical framework, primarily drawing from Total Quality Management (TQM) and Institutional Theory. Emergent patterns, insights, and narratives were synthesized to comprehensively address the research objectives. Where applicable, direct quotations from participants were incorporated to substantiate the analysis and highlight key findings.

**Ethical Considerations**

This study adhered to ethical standards in educational research to safeguard the rights, dignity, and welfare of all participants. Participants were adequately informed regarding the nature, purpose, and scope of the study. Prior to data collection, participants received an informed consent form detailing a) the voluntary nature of participation; b) the right to refuse or withdraw at any time without penalty; c) the confidentiality of responses; and d) the option to decline recording during interviews or focus groups. Prior to participation, written consent was obtained. No participant was coerced or obligated to take part in the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, allowing individuals to withdraw at any point without the necessity of providing justification for their decision. All collected information was maintained in a confidential manner. Names and personal identifiers were substituted with codes to maintain anonymity. Results will be presented with direct quotes, ensuring participant anonymity. Data collected, including audio recordings, transcriptions, and notes, was securely stored in password-protected digital folders. Access to these materials was restricted to the researcher and authorized personnel only. The research entails no

physical risks or invasive methods. Participants were informed that they could omit any question they deemed uncomfortable or sensitive. An application for ethical clearance was submitted to the university’s research ethics committee via Research Innovation Extension and Community Outreach (RIECO) before the study was conducted. The research began only after receiving approval.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The use of thematic analysis identified common viewpoints regarding the implementation of ISO 21001:2018 in the Admission and Records Center Office, the challenges faced, and the subsequent changes that occurred. The results are organized by themes and analyzed through the frameworks of Total Quality Management (TQM) and Institutional Theory for an in-depth discussion. Figure 2 shows the thematic map that was used in the study.

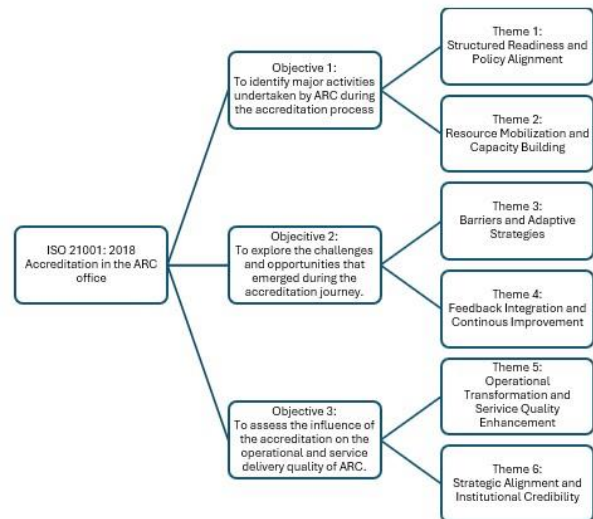


Figure 2: Thematic Map of the Study

**Structured Readiness and Policy Alignment**

The initial step in obtaining accreditation was to ensure that all policies and procedures complied with ISO 21001 standards. Interviewed respondents often discussed "modifying forms to comply with ISO standards" and "realigning workflows and documentation." This process was not merely administrative; it signified a shift towards intentionality and standardization. To ensure uniformity throughout all units, committees were established, responsibilities were delineated, and documentation

templates were utilized. A staff member stated, "We needed to review our policies to ensure compliance with the ISO clauses." "We effectively refined our operating rationale." An exemplary instance is the enhancement of the Policies and Guidelines for Enrollment. The office implemented an enhancement to comply with ISO standards by assigning numbers to each form utilized within the workplace.

These actions closely resemble the current occurrences in the region. Syahrullah et al. (2022) conducted a gap analysis of the quality assurance systems in Indonesian higher education concerning ISO 21001, highlighting the necessity of aligning internal policies and documentation with ISO clauses for readiness and compliance. Thuy and Quyen (2023) stated that in Vietnam, explicit policy alignment, standardized templates, and process reengineering contributed to the formalization of internal governance to attain student-centered outcomes.

The data indicate that the ARC's initial actions involved altering structures, ensuring policy alignment, and establishing record-keeping regulations. These actions pertain directly to the provisions of ISO 21001 on the establishment and maintenance of an Educational Organization Management System (EOMS) (Clause 4.4.1), documented information (Clause 7.5), and policy formulation (Clause 5.2.1). The establishment of committees and the utilization of ISO-aligned templates demonstrate the process-oriented approach emphasized in Annex B.4. (ISO, 2018).

### **Resource Mobilization and Capacity Building**

The ARC utilized both internal and external resources to maintain the accrediting initiative. Personnel participated in specialized training courses on ISO documentation, internal audits, and the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle. The institution organized workshops and employed consultants to oversee the process. "We were instructed not merely to adhere," one respondent asserted, "but to comprehend the underlying philosophy of ISO." Internal auditors were designated to certain offices, promoting a culture of mutual accountability and collaborative learning. Despite being constrained by personnel, the ARC exhibited flexibility in redistributing time and resources to fulfill certification requirements. This mirrors

findings by Trisnawati and Rosiawan (2022), who reported that effective ISO 21001 adoption in Indonesia was anchored on staff-focused training, audit preparedness, and strong leadership involvement. Similarly, in the Indonesian case study by Umam and Rhaman (2025), senior management, documentation standards, and audit mechanisms were vital to bridging compliance with continuous improvement.

Training sessions, consultant involvement, and internal audit tasks were crucial to ARC's capacity-building plan. These initiatives conform to ISO's stipulations for resource provision (Clause 7.1), personnel competency (Clause 7.2), and leadership accountability for resource distribution (Clause 5.1.1e). Activity planning also aligns with Clause 6.2.2 on the attainment of educational objectives.

### **Barriers to Implementation and Adaptive Strategies**

The journey encountered its share of challenges. Time constraints, documentation fatigue, and competing responsibilities surfaced as ongoing challenges. Several staff members indicated that "the turnaround time for feedback was slow due to everyone managing multiple roles." Resistance to change emerged, especially in adjusting to new documentation protocols. Nevertheless, these obstacles were addressed through adaptive strategies: delegating tasks, providing leadership support, and optimizing workflows. The ARC's capacity to adapt and find solutions became a defining feature of its accreditation strength. Challenges like time constraints, documentation fatigue, and resistance to change were addressed through adaptive delegation and leadership support. The responses align with ISO's risk-based thinking (Clause 6.1), corrective action protocols (Clause 10.1), and the focus on continual improvement (Clause 5.1.1i and Annex B.5). Such findings resonate with Bakar et al. (2024), in their systematic review on ISO 21001 in higher education, identify "resource constraints, resistance to change, and ongoing capacity building" as common implementation barriers and highlight strong leadership and organizational culture as critical enablers to overcome them. The ARC Office successfully incorporated the ISO requirements into routine operations, avoiding their superficial implementation. Initially, resistance transitioned to acceptance as staff recognized the tangible benefits of the new system,

which will be described subsequently. The proactive management of barriers in this instance illustrates how an organization can prevent decoupling by actively engaging with the reform, thereby attaining both ceremonial conformity for legitimacy and technical enhancement for operational efficiency (Meyer and Rowan, 2011).

### **Feedback Integration and Continuous Improvement**

The accreditation process faced numerous ongoing problems, notably time limitations, paperwork exhaustion, and conflicting obligations. One staff member noted “the turnaround time for feedback was slow due to everyone managing multiple roles.” Staff exhibited resistance to change as they adapted to new documentation requirements. Nevertheless, the ARC adeptly addressed these issues by strategic delegating, evident leadership support, and workflow enhancement, converting limitations into prospects for operational flexibility.

These results correspond with quantitative study conducted in the Philippines. Aguenza (2024) examined ISO 9001:2015 preparedness in a local higher education institution and discovered resistance to change and deficiencies in organizational structure as moderating factors influencing successful implementation. The study emphasized the vital importance of leadership in sustaining transformation momentum and enhancing change acceptance within administrative units. The evidence emphasizes that surmounting implementation fatigue and resistance to change relies on adaptive strategies—role delegation, supportive leadership, and strategic process realignment—aligned with ISO 21001’s (ISO, 2018) risk-based thinking (Clause 6.1), corrective actions (Clause 10.1), and continuous improvement principles (Clause 5.1.1i; Annex B.5) (Syahrullah et al., 2022); Thuy & Quyen, 2023).

### **Operational Transformation and Service Quality Enhancement**

After getting accredited, the ARC showed that process consistency, turnaround time, and service accuracy had all improved in measurable ways. Improved communication channels made it easier to manage documents and cut down on mistakes, thanks to better institutional processes. One employee said, “We

now have a consistent way to handle requests, and our clients can see the difference.” This change from reactive to proactive service is a good example of how accreditation may improve operations. As Syahrullah et al. (2022) found that using ISO 21001 in Indonesian higher education led to better process alignment and fewer administrative bottlenecks. Similarly, Thuy and Quyen (2023) discovered enhanced delivery control and uniform service performance in Vietnam after the implementation of ISO-based systems. Acurio Masabanda et al. (2022) also presents that following ISO 21001 at Ecuadorian technical institutes was linked to better operational efficiency and success in becoming accredited. Maulana (2025) observed that ongoing surveillance audits at Nurul Jadid University augmented quality assurance and refined service methods over time. These results confirm that the ARC has made improvements to its operations and are in line with ISO standards for operational planning (Clause 8.1), delivery control (Clause 8.5.1), performance evaluation (Clause 9.1.5), and the focus on quality assurance tools in Annex E. (ISO, 2018).

### **Strategic Alignment and Institutional Credibility**

In addition to operational benefits, accreditation strengthened the ARC’s connection to the university’s Vision, Mission, Objectives, and Strategies (VMOS). Staff expressed a revitalized sense of purpose and institutional pride. A respondent shared, “ISO provided us with a language to discuss quality,” emphasizing that accreditation “established us as a credible, globally competitive office.” The process established a foundation for future automation and digital transformation, with ISO documentation acting as a guide for organizing registrar functions. These developments align with ISO’s clauses regarding the understanding of organizational context (Clause 4.1), leadership alignment (Clause 5.1.1b), and educational objectives (Clause 6.2.1). Additionally, Annexes B.2 and B.8 highlight the significance of visionary leadership and social responsibility in enhancing institutional credibility (ISO, 2018).

Studies that underwent peer review from various contexts support these findings. In Indonesia, Umam and Rahman (2025) demonstrate that the integration of ISO 21001 promoted strategic coherence within institutional quality systems, which in turn strengthened

mission alignment and improved organizational identity. Research conducted in Ecuador by Acurio Masabanda et al. (2022) emphasizes that the alignment of ISO 21001 with national accreditation frameworks has notably enhanced institutional credibility and stakeholder trust, especially by concentrating on a shared educational purpose. Furthermore, Vasilevskiy (2019) presents the implementation of ISO 21001 as fundamentally mission-driven—asserting that these standards formally integrate quality into the core goals of an institution, thereby ensuring that educational policies consistently align with the university's vision and objectives.

The results show that getting ISO 21001:2018 accreditation was not just a formality; it was a process that changed the ARC's institutional positioning, professional practices, and organizational procedures. By using standardization, adaptive tactics, and feedback-driven improvement in its daily work, the ARC built its credibility both inside and beyond the organization. Accreditation also helped create a culture of quality awareness that linked compliance with ongoing progress. This made sure that operational excellence was in line with the university's overall mission and long-term goals.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The ISO 21001:2018 accreditation of the Admission and Records Center Office resulted in significant modifications to internal processes, identified challenges and opportunities for innovation, and enhanced service quality markedly. The findings corroborate recent studies that identify ISO 21001 as a transformative framework in educational administration. The accreditation process, informed by TQM and Institutional Theory, improved operational effectiveness while simultaneously strengthening the office's legitimacy and strategic alignment. Future research could broaden this inquiry by incorporating comparative analyses with additional administrative units or post-accreditation metrics.

The office should maintain ongoing improvement practices by making them a standard part of its operations. In the same vein, the office ought to allocate resources for capacity building for the remaining staff who were not part of the earlier initiative.

Lastly, ISO 21001 should not be viewed as a separate initiative; instead, it should be fully integrated into the university's strategic management system to further enhance the credibility and competitiveness of the institution.

## Declaration of Generative AI use in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work, the author utilized Quillbot to assist with refining structure, checking grammar, or enhancing clarity as well as plagiarism checker. Also, ChatGpt was used to generate the initial thematic analysis. The content generated by the tool was carefully reviewed, edited, and validated by the author. The author accepts full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the final manuscript.

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