

UNIVERSITY OF TAMPERE
School of Management
Higher Education Administration

**INSTITUTIONALISATION OF QUALITY
ASSURANCE IN AN ETHIOPIAN PUBLIC
UNIVERSITY**

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Abstract

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Quality assurance in the Ethiopian higher education has for long been external i.e. the evaluation of higher education institutions by HERQA. Since 2009 however necessary legal provisions requiring every higher education institution to set up institutional quality enhancement came into effect. Based on this development, the study investigated how quality assurance has been institutionalised in public universities. The study used a qualitative case study design. Data was collected from an anonymous case university through in-depth interviews, focus group discussion, document analysis, and non-participant observation. The data was analysed using an inductive analysis method.

The findings of the study showed that the IQE centre of the case university carries out several activities targeted at assuring and enhancing academic quality. These include carrying out internal quality audit; monitoring and supervision of quality assurance; conducting program and course audits; curriculum review; developing instruments for quality assurance; giving trainings for academic staff; ensuring fair distribution of courses; liaising with HERQA; and celebrating educational quality day. In general, the IQE directorate strove to lead and assist the continual development and improvement of academic quality and relevance in the university. On the other hand, the study analysed the state of essential elements necessary for institutionalising quality assurance in the IQE centre of the case university. Accordingly, findings indicated that there are appropriate policies and structural establishments whereas leadership, resources, and information and communication are inadequate. Conversely, the status of capacity building, core values and rewarding quality has been low. Finally, the study revealed that the institutional quality enhancement of the case university vacillated between the experiential and early expansion phases of institutionalisation. Therefore, institutional support to the IQE centre should be strengthened if internal quality assurance is to further institutionalise and expand throughout the entire university.

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Table of Contents

Abstract-----	i
Acknowledgements-----	ii
List of Tables and Figures-----	vi
Abbreviations-----	vii

Chapter One - Introduction

1.1. Background-----	1
1.2. Statement of research problem-----	3
1.2.1. Research gap-----	3
1.2.2. Research question-----	4
1.3. Scope of the study-----	5
1.4. Significance of the study-----	5
1.5. Research methodology-----	6
1.5.1. Study design-----	6
1.5.2. Case university selection-----	6
1.5.3. Data collection-----	7
1.5.4. Method of data analysis-----	9
1.5.5. Validity and reliability-----	10
1.5.6. Ethical consideration-----	11
1.6. Structure of the thesis-----	12

Chapter Two - Analytical Framework: Institutionalisation of Quality Assurance

2.1. Rationale-----	13
2.2. The essential elements for institutionalising quality assurance-----	15
2.3. Phases of institutionalisation-----	19

Chapter Three - The Concept of Quality and Quality Assurance

3.1. The debate: What really is quality? -----	23
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3.1.1. Harvey and Green: Five Conceptions-----	24
3.1.2. Cheng and Tam: Seven Models-----	26
3.1.3. Adams: Six Common Views-----	29
3.1.4. Garvin: Eight Competing Dimensions-----	30
3.1.5. Gibbs: Three Dimensions-----	33
3.2. Quality assurance versus quality enhancement-----	36
3.2.1. Quality assurance-----	37
3.2.2. Quality enhancement-----	38
3.2.3. What links exist? -----	39
3.3. Mechanisms of quality assurance-----	41
3.2.1. Approaches-----	41
3.2.2. Major actors-----	42
3.2.3. Methods-----	42
3.2.4. Data gathering instruments-----	43
3.4. Changing trends in quality assurance-----	44

Chapter Four - Quality in the Ethiopian Higher Education Context

4.1. History of Ethiopian higher education-----	47
4.2. Existing concerns on quality-----	54
4.3. Adoption of quality assurance practice in Ethiopia-----	59
4.3.1. Legal Underpinnings: Policy and proclamations-----	59
4.3.2. HERQA: A quality controller-----	61

Chapter Five - Result and Discussion

5.1. The Anonymous case university-----	64
5.1.1. General profile-----	64
5.1.2. Institutional quality enhancement (IQE) office-----	65
5.2. The quality assurance activities of the IQE centre-----	66
5.3. The state of essential elements-----	73

5.3.1. An internal enabling environment-----	73
5.3.2. Organising for quality: Structure-----	78
5.3.3. Support functions-----	79
5.4. The phase of institutionalisation -----	84
 Chapter Six - Conclusion and Implications	
6.1. Revisiting the research questions-----	91
6.2. Conclusion-----	94
6.3. Implications for future studies-----	95
6.4. Limitations of the study-----	96
 References-----	 98
Appendix-1: Interview guide-----	109
Appendix-2: Focus group discussion guide-----	110

List of Tables and Figures

List of Tables

Table-1: Outline of essential elements for institutionalising quality assurance-----	17
Table-2: Disciplinary background of the IQE centre staff-----	80
Table-3: Institutionalisation phase characteristics-----	85

List of Figures

Figure-1: Institutionalisation of quality assurance-----	19
Figure-2: The phases of institutionalising quality assurance-----	20
Figure-3: Multiple definitions of quality-----	35

Abbreviations

ASQAC	Academic Standard and Quality Assurance Committee
EQT	Educational Quality Taskforce
ERC	Exam Review Committees
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
GTP	Growth and Transformation Plan
IQE	Institutional Quality Enhancement
HDP	Higher Diploma Program
HERQA	Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency
HESC	Higher Education Strategy Centre
MoE	Ministry of Education
OFSSG	One-to-Five Student Study Group
QA	Quality Assurance
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
QAC	Quality Assurance Committee
QAT	Quality Audit Team
QE	Quality Enhancement
SFG	Student Feedback Group
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Chapter One - Introduction

1.1. Background

The study of quality has been an important topic of discussion in higher education studies for a long time. Though the exact meaning of the concept has been widely debated, it undoubtedly constitutes a highly pertinent issue in the arena of higher education scholarship and practice. For Tight (2003), issues such as course evaluation, grading and outcomes, national monitoring and system standards are topics fitting the category of quality studies in higher education research. Another systematisation of thematic areas of higher education research made by Teichler (2005) puts the study of quality within the longstanding thematic focus of the higher education discipline in knowledge and subject related aspects. Despite the illusiveness of the concept and the way scholars provided competing theme systematisation, assuring and enhancing quality has undeniably remained a task to which huge amount of resources are committed in various higher education systems around the world.

Ethiopia, a landlocked nation on the Horn of Africa, possesses a 1,700-year tradition of elite education linked to the Orthodox Church (Saint, 2004). However, secular higher education was initiated only in 1950 with the inauguration of the University College of Addis Ababa. Since the last decade, however, Ethiopia has aggressively expanded its higher education triggered by an educational system reform in the 1990's with a stated goal of massification as a way to reduce poverty and develop the nation. Accordingly, the number of public universities climbed from less than 5 to 35 while a similar radical proliferation also took place in the private sector. Enrolment, as a result, improved from being extremely low to a level at least within the grasp of a larger fraction of the population. According to Gulliksen and Audensen (2013), the mere 2.4% attendance of the appropriate age cohort reported by World Bank in 2008 has witnessed an enrolment increase by approximately 120% afterwards. This rapid increase in the size of the country's higher education within less than a decade is only expected to continue over the coming years.

However, such massive expansion brought about acute concern on educational quality among other things. The enlargement of the sector put considerable strain on funding, academic staff, governance and leadership, physical resources, infrastructure and facilities, employability of graduates and other aspects (Ashcroft, 2010). The combination of these challenges has made the concern over quality of education more ardent. The perception of a declining quality thus has become a common understanding among different internal and external stakeholders. Similarly, Kahsay (2012, p.160) clearly indicated that “public universities are threatened with problems related to quality of educational input, processes and outputs that influence quality of the core educational processes.” With this regard, Ethiopia has been faced with a tricky task of improving the quality of the teaching and research that occurs within institutions as well as expanding access for disadvantaged groups within society.

In response to this, Ethiopia introduced the practice of quality assurance to its higher education both at national and institutional levels with the help major proclamations. At national level, the Higher Education Proclamation (No.351/2003) made provisions for the establishment of Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) which allowed the autonomous body to exercise the mandate of safeguarding and enhancing the quality and relevance of higher education in the country (FDRE, 2003, article 78-85). This was an attempt to ensure that higher education and training offered at any institutions are in line with economic, social and other appropriate policies of the country. Over the last decade, the agency has been handling accreditation permits, evaluation of performance reports, supervising standards of institutions, and gathering and disseminating information on the status of quality.

The most important legal framework that laid ground for institutional quality enhancement was the 2009 Higher Education Proclamation (No.650/2009). It required the setting up of a continuously improving and reliable internal system for quality enhancement at every institution (FDRE, 2009, Article 22). This was facilitated by the understanding that many higher education institutions of the country have lagged

behind in developing quality assurance strategies and establishing efficient structures that promote a culture of continuous quality improvement at institutional level. Complementary to the commendable efforts of HERQA, institutions of higher learning now are in the process of taking the responsibility of assuring the quality of various aspects including professional development of academic staff, course contents, teaching-learning processes, student evaluation, assessment and grading systems. Public universities have already worked towards adopting structures particularly working on institutional quality enhancement since 2009. This is a monumental step in the history of quality assurance in the Ethiopian higher education as it brought an internal quality maintenance practice in addition to the predominantly external one. Investigating this process of institutionalisation of quality assurance systems at higher education institutions hence becomes essential to understanding how the provisions of the proclamation has been adopted and translated in to action by universities.

1.2. Statement of research problem

1.2.1. Research gap

As far as Ethiopia is concerned, existing studies on the issue of quality have focused on examining the concept (Rayner, 2006; and Ashcroft, 2004), methods and procedures of carrying out quality evaluation (Weldemariam, 2008; and Adamu & Addamu, 2012), the organisation and practices of assuring education quality (Seyoum, 2011; Ashcroft & Rayner, 2012; Kahsay, 2012; and Regassa et al., 2013), accreditation of private higher education institutions (Bekele, 2009), stakeholder perception on quality (Lodesso, 2012), role of quality education for meeting development needs, and other related themes. However, little is researched about the institutionalisation process of internal quality assurance in public universities. In fact, none of the existing studies were dedicated exclusively to investigating the course of institutions towards assuming and discharging the responsibility of maintaining the standards of their own education quality. The adaptation of internal quality assurance as opposed to previous dependence on external quality control by HERQA thus largely remained unaddressed.

Not enough knowledge exists about the institutionalisation of quality assurance in higher education unlike in other contexts (see chapter two). There is also lack of information on the status of essential elements necessary for the process and the phase at which current institutional quality assurance practice have reached. This study therefore is dedicated to filling this research gap.

1.2.2. Research question

The main research question of the study is *how quality assurance has been institutionalised in the context of an Ethiopian public university?*

The main research question, as an overarching line of inquiry, is broken down into the following sub-questions:

1. *What are the quality assurance activities carried out by the institutional quality enhancement (IQE) centre of the case university?*
2. *What is the state of essential elements necessary for institutionalising quality assurance at the case university?*
3. *At which phase of institutionalisation is the current institutional quality assurance practice of the case university found?*

In this study, institutionalisation in the context of quality assurance is defined as the condition:

“When QA [quality assurance] activities are formally and functionally incorporated into the structure of an institution (or organization), consistently implemented, and supported by a culture of quality, as reflected in organizational values and policies that advocate quality care”
(Silimperi et al., 2002, p. 5)

The institutionalisation process results in embedding of certain structures, activities, and values within the integral part of an organisation.

The definition was provided by a team of experts in healthcare. Although it was in the context of health work that the definition was formulated, its application in this study is entirely related to the context of higher education.

1.3. Scope of the study

The study focuses on investigating the institutionalisation of quality assurance in an Ethiopian public university. Therefore, it is confined to explaining: the quality assurance activities carried out by the institutional quality enhancement (IQE) centre of the case university; the state of essential elements necessary for institutionalisation of quality assurance; and the phase at which the case university's current institutionalisation of quality assurance has reached. The focus thus remains with investigating the IQE centre of the case university rather than the university *per se*. The study also does not cover institutions of private higher education and Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

1.4. Significance of the study

The study intends to serve academic, empirical and practical significance. The different aspects of quality assurance and the institutionalisation of quality assurance in topics other than higher education (see chapter two) have been frequently researched, thus the study seeks to fill this academic gap by explaining the key process of institutionalisation of quality assurance in the context of higher education. On the other hand, ample empirical evidence exists in the study of higher education quality assurance in Europe and the US. A study set in Ethiopia, thus, could provide an insight into the situation of institutional quality assurance from a geographic context where little is known about. In addition, studying the institutionalisation of quality assurance could generate vital information into understanding the key internal quality assurance practices, the extent to which essential elements necessary for institutionalising quality assurance are in place, and the phase at which the existing institutionalisation of quality assurance endeavour has reached. Such information could have practical implication for institutional quality enhancement effort, decision making and policy advocacy. In this

regard, the study could indicate where existing internal quality assurance is found, to which direction it should develop, and how it can be better supported by institutions.

1.5. Research methodology

1.5.1. Study design

The study uses a qualitative research method since studying the institutionalisation of quality assurance in the context of an Ethiopian public higher education institution requires relying on the views of participants, asking broad and general questions, collecting data consisting of mainly verbal explanation from participants, describing and analysing these words for themes, and conducting the inquiry. The qualitative design provides a suitable method to generate adequate in-depth information on quality assurance practices, essential elements necessary for institutionalising quality assurance, and phases of institutionalisation. As Creswell (2005), and Silverman and Marvasti (2008) also indicated the appropriateness of such a research design in dealing primarily with processes. After the required data is collected on the previously mentioned inquiries, the study seeks to depict the general picture and the extent of institutionalisation of quality assurance at the case university. This is done through inductively reasoning from the detail to the general. Yet, some numerical data may be used only in the form of simple tabulations to provide description and comparison on different features. However, it does not pursue further to making statistical inferences.

1.5.2. Case university selection

The study uses one case institution from a total of 35 public universities in the country. This is to maintain decent manageability of the scope of the study. In addition to this, shortage of time and other resources justify the need for studying a smaller research population.

In this study, the unique aspect of choosing the case institution is maintaining anonymity or confidentiality of its identity. Although the case institution belongs to the category of *Senior* universities of the country (see chapter four), information with

potential risk of allowing the tracing of its exact identity is safeguarded. Yet, general profile of the institution is presented. The central argument behind maintaining confidentiality is to ease challenges in data collection. The researcher believes that the significance of concealing institutional identity is crucial in enhancing the possibility of cooperation and obtaining willingness of respondents for interviews. With this regard, the procedure could considerably maintain the comfort and confidence of respondents while disclosing sensitive information about institutional quality care practice. Besides, anonymity of the university could help objectify the findings of the study without prejudice to the particular identity of the institution. Considering that it could have been conducted at any public university of the country, therefore, the results of the study could offer a broad reflection on the situation of institutionalisation of quality assurance in Ethiopian public higher education. Removing the name tag of the case university hence could augment this advantage.

1.5.3. Data collection

The study maintains a manageable scope in that it takes one case university as an example. Even more, the study is further confined to examining the operation of the university's institutional quality enhancement directorate/office. The office formally has only eight staff members which sufficiently underscore the small size of the study target group. This avoids the risk of having an unmanageable research population from which taking representative sample would have been considerably challenging.

The selection of study sample employs purposive sampling technique to include respondents who are believed to have a better knowledge of and involvement with the operation of the institutional quality enhancement office of the case university. Therefore, the main respondents of the study include department quality assurance committee members, an academic unit head, the director and campus coordinators of the institutional quality enhancement (IQE) office.

The study collects detailed first-hand information from these respondents through in-depth interviews and focus group discussion. The respondents of in-depth interviews consist of:

- Director of the case university's institutional quality enhancement office. Campus institutional quality enhancement coordinator for College of Business and Economics, and College of Social Sciences and Humanities.
- Campus institutional quality enhancement coordinator for College of Agriculture.
- An academic unit head and a secretary of the department's quality assurance task force.

In addition to interviews, the data collection also conducts a focus group discussion with a department quality assurance committee that contains four members. Besides, recording the audio of all the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions for later transcription and analysis embraces the full consent of respondents.

The instrument of data collection is primarily an interview and discussion guide which consists of list of questions to be discussed. In practice, the guide for in-depth interviews is broader and contains extensive list of questions compared to the agenda for the focus group discussion. In certain occasions, although not many, some questions that are not originally included in the guide may also be asked on follow ups to the responses of respondents.

On the other hand, collecting secondary data involves analysing national higher education policies, proclamations, strategic plans, and official documents of the office including senate legislation, institutional academic quality assurance policy, institutional plans, performance reports, official communications, meeting minutes and other documents. Moreover, the study employs non-participant observation to cross-check information obtained through interviews and focus group discussion.

1.5.4. Method of data analysis

The collected data is subject to a qualitative inductive analysis as the key data analysing strategy. The method is adopted from the works of Thomas (2006). According to the author, the inductive analysis involves rigorously reading and interpreting the raw data in order to develop concepts and themes. He summarises three purposes for using this method:

“ (a) to condense raw textual data into a brief summary format; (b) establish clear links between the evaluation or research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data; and (c) develop a framework of the underlying structure of experiences or processes that are evident in the raw data.” (Thomas, 2006, p. 238).

Analysing the data involves reducing large amount of raw data into a summary format by creating and developing code categories or themes. The general and specific research questions of the study consistently provide the required focus through the process. The framework for the institutionalisation of quality assurance applied in the study also helps to frame these leading inquiries and identify relevant categories and themes based on which the coding of the raw data takes place. In other words, the code categories are consistent with the contents of the framework. In general, the steps in the coding process are also based on the illustrations by the same author: initial reading of text data; identify specific text segments related to research objectives; label the segments of text to create coding categories; reduce overlap and redundancy among the categories; and create a model incorporating most important categories (Ibid).

In spite of these objective methods, the experience and subjective judgement of the researcher is important while conducting repeated interpretation and coding of the raw interview transcript. The researcher decides on the relative importance of each raw data and the specific coding theme under which it should be included.

1.5.5. Validity and reliability

The idea of strictly maintaining validity and reliability issues is often subjected to academic disagreements as most social science researchers consider these principles to be of not a paramount importance to social researches as opposed to researchers in physical sciences. Yet, they are central issues in all measurements. Both principles are important in establishing the trustfulness, credibility, or believability of findings. The study hence attempts to incorporate both principles in carrying out its scientific inquiry.

Validity: As literature suggests (Neuman, 2007; Babbie, 1999; Silverman and Marvasti, 2008; and Walliman, 2011), qualitative researchers should strive to show an honest and candid account of respondents' social life. Based on this principle, the study emphasizes on giving fair and balanced account of the institutionalisation of quality assurance process from an unbiased stance. It therefore concentrates on capturing an authentic insider view and provides a detailed account of how respondents feel about and understand the process. As the core principle of validity is to be trustful, the study at its best attempts to avoid false or distorted accounts. By doing so, therefore, it tries to create a tight fit between respondents' accounts, ideas and statements, and what is actually occurring in the practical reality. Through appropriately conceptualising institutionalisation of quality assurance, the study uses relevant questions that are believed to be capable of properly addressing the conceptually defined subject in in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. The study thus strives to achieve strong fit between the reality and the constructs that the study design set to describe, theorise, or analyse. Accordingly, it carefully deals with the challenge of how well the reality could be measured through the methods of the study.

Reliability: Throughout scrutinising the leading inquiries, the study endeavours to maintain consistency and dependability. It draws on variety of techniques such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, document analysis, and non-participant observation to collect data consistently in a coherent form. It is however highly challenging to achieve consistency at all times while studying an ongoing process that is

hardly stable overtime (Balnaves & Caputi, 2001; Walker, 2011; Bryman & Burgess, 1994; and Neuman, 2007). Thus, the study recognises a changing or evolving interaction between its inquiries and subject matter. Hence, it acknowledges the inevitable fact that different researchers or the same researcher using alternative measures may probably obtain different results. This is because researchers may operate in an evolving setting where the context dictates using a unique mix of measures that can hardly be repeated. In the meantime, the researcher uses consistent questions in data collection to help improve reliability. By doing this, the study attempts its best to become dependable such that its method of conducting the inquiry or its findings can be better reproduced or replicated by other researchers.

1.5.6. Ethical consideration

The researcher intends to obtain the necessary legal approval from the IQE office of the case university with the help of a formal letter of cooperation from the researcher's home institution.

With respect to obtaining the full consent of respondents, the researcher makes initial communication through email on the intended purpose of the study. As part of the briefing, the researcher also informs respondents that they could withdraw at any time during the study. Based on this, respondents participate in the study voluntarily. On the other hand, the recording of audio during interviews and focus group discussion takes place after participants expressed their consent to do so.

In addition, it is highly critical to maintain confidentiality of the identity of the case university and information collected from respondents. Finally, the researcher distributes the research report to respondents of the study to acknowledge their cooperation and enable share the findings with them.

1.6. Structure of the study

The study contains six chapters. The first chapter introduces what the study is all about. It explains the key research questions in the context of the problem statement. It discusses the research methodology and also highlights some significance that the study could serve in theory and practice. The second chapter exclusively deals with describing the analytical framework used to analyse the institutionalisation of quality assurance. It presents arguments targeted at justifying the rationale behind using the framework. It also describes the phases of institutionalisation and essential elements necessary for institutionalising quality assurance. The third chapter contains a review of literature on the concept of quality and quality assurance. It presents a discussion of competing understandings of quality. It compares quality assurance and quality enhancement in the context of higher education. The discussion also includes summarizing the common mechanisms of conducting quality assurance. The section also highlights the changing trends in quality assurance. The fourth chapter describes quality in the Ethiopian higher education context. It begins with discussing the history of Ethiopian higher education. It also includes a section that explains the existing concerns on quality of education. It also reflects on the adoption of quality assurance practice in Ethiopia through describing relevant legal frameworks and the national quality controlling agency. The fifth chapter presents the result and discussion of the study. It starts with describing the general profile of the case university and its IQE centre. The succeeding sub-chapters cover the three sub-questions of the study: quality assurance activities carried out by the institutional quality enhancement centre of the case university; the state of essential elements necessary for institutionalising quality assurance at the case university; and the phase at which the overall quality assurance effort of the case university is found. Finally, chapter six revisits the research questions, makes a concluding remark, highlights implication to future studies, and discusses the limitations of the study.

Chapter Two - Analytical Framework: Institutionalisation of Quality Assurance

2.1. Rationale

Theoretical and analytical tools are highly crucial instruments that help to analyse and make sense of, otherwise, scattered empirical evidences in any scientific research. Cognisant of this, researchers today give due attention while choosing and effectively integrating analytical tools in their studies. With this regard, the study uses an analytical framework for the institutionalisation of quality assurance adopted from the discipline of healthcare in order to carry out its main inquiry.

Although borrowing a framework from health care science is rather unorthodox, the framework suitably fits the theme of this study. Most higher education researchers are accustomed to working with instruments and models from sociology, economics, management, psychology, development studies and other less-distant disciplines. As far as this study is considered, justification can be made for slightly deviating from the common trend.

- ✚ First, it is relatively the sole well-defined and comprehensive framework available on analysing the institutionalisation of quality assurance. Unlike others rudimentary frameworks, it has superior relevance with regard to its capacity in monitoring and evaluating developmental progress in the institutionalisation of quality assurance. Two examples of such rudimentary frameworks can be found in the literature: 1) Colyvas & Powell (2006) attempted to develop set of indicators that breakdown the road to institutionalisation into phases namely institutionalisation, legitimacy, and taken-for-grantedness which are in turn defined at low, medium and high levels. 2) Piper (2007) formulated a simplistic framework for measuring institutionalisation which explains the institutionalisation process in terms of sequential stages namely not ready, preparing to institutionalise, institutionalising, business as usual, and fully institutionalised. Furthermore, there is vast literature dealing with the

institutionalisation of different issues, for instance, institutionalisation of spatial planning (Waterhout, 2008), institutionalisation of systems development in telecom (Butler & Fitzgerald, 1999), institutionalisation of political parties (Salih, 2003), institutionalisation of identity (Lustick, Miodownik, & Philbrick, 2000), institutionalisation of organisational learning (Wiseman, 2007), imitation and process of institutionalisation (Sieweke, 2014), institutionalisation of institutional theory (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996), unlocking the institutionalisation process (Machado-da-Silva, da Fonseca, & Crubellate, 2005), and institutionalisation process within organisations (Farashahi, 2003) among others. In these academic works, the concept of institutionalisation however was mainly used for a little more than its vocabulary value. Neither the processes, or phases nor the essential elements in the process of institutionalisation of the respective subjects of discussion are thoroughly elaborated. At most, some basic definitions of institutionalisation are sporadically made.

- ✚ Second, the analytical framework was developed from ample scientific evidence collected through a series of studies. The mode was developed during the early 2000s by a group of researchers through a decade of successive 'Quality Assurance Projects'. The team also introduced the framework in the study of the healthcare system of nearly a dozen of countries in Africa and Latin America including Malawi, Niger, Zambia, South Africa, Mexico, Chile, Ecuador, and Malaysia. The evidence gathered through these studies was used to compose the contents of framework which strongly underscores its credibility as a valid tool of analysis. Even more, Silimperi et al (2002) underlined the basis of the framework in theory and practice. It was reported that literature on issues related to quality management and organisational development was used in combination with practical experience from retrospective analysis of quality assurance projects and endeavour in assisting the development of quality assurance programs for the health system of several developing countries over the years. Reiterating the fact that the framework comprises this distinctive mix

of conceptual model and operational process, the team of researchers that developed the model argue its stronger prominence in effectively evaluating an institutionalisation of quality assurance at organisational, or macro system level as well as in settings other than health work.

- ✚ Third, higher education research allows for inter-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary exchange of knowledge. As discussed in chapter three, it is evident that the task of conceptualising quality and quality assurance is not exclusive to higher education instead it is a combined effort of various disciplines of which healthcare science is one. Higher education research has a long-standing legacy of being an interdisciplinary field of inquiry which has contributed to the evolution of its themes, methods and levels of analysis (Teichler, 2005; CHER, 2012; and Macfarlane & Grant, 2012). Literature also strongly indicates that the historical development of higher education research has been, by and large, the product of such cross-disciplinary studies that fall within the interest of the higher education realm. Working on this unique sphere thus benefits the study by borrowing what is missing from the knowledge repertoire of higher education studies.

The analytical model for the institutionalisation of quality assurance incorporates two major elements: essential elements for institutionalisation of quality assurance and phases of institutionalisation (Askov et al., 2000; Franco et al., 2002; and Silimperi et al., 2002).

2.2. The essential elements for institutionalising quality assurance

The first part of the analytical framework makes a comprehensive list of elements that should exist in order for a successful institutionalisation of quality assurance to take place. These are argued to be the building blocks necessary in the process of developing, implementing and sustaining quality assurance activities. The elements are broadly categorised into three: internal enabling environment, organisation for quality assurance, and supporting functions.

A. Internal enabling environment

Certain elements within an internal environment of an organisation that support the initiation, expansion and development of a quality assurance practice are necessary. These include policy, leadership, resources, and core values. Meanwhile, Askov et al (2000) emphasised that each element supports one another and also remain important individually.

Policy: Policies or alternative legal frameworks that explicitly guide, support and reinforce an organisation towards taking necessary measures in addressing quality matters is highly pivotal. It provides legitimacy to quality assurance activities through laying a written commanding legal foundation imperative to launching such large scale tasks.

Leadership: An effective leadership with required capacity enables mobilising staff and required resources towards quality activities. Leaders who are involved in openly setting priorities towards quality improvement and promoting quality culture are critical to implementing and sustaining quality assurance. It requires managers to take the leading role in implementing policy provisions on quality management. This provides strong impetus to the institutionalisation process.

Core values: Institutionalisation of quality assurance requires the existence of organisational core values that appreciate and recognise the merits of improved performance and quality culture. Organisational contexts of such nature enable quality care to become part of the mind-set of members which then fuel its promotion and practice.

Resources: The allocation of necessary resources is instrumental in launching a functioning quality assurance program. It is imperative to mobilise sufficient amount of physical and human resources for such endeavour.

Table-1: Outline of essential elements for institutionalising quality assurance

Essential Elements for Institutionalising Quality Assurance		
<i>Internal Enabling Environment</i>	<i>Organising for Quality</i>	<i>Support Functions</i>
Policy Leadership Core Values Resources	Structure	Capacity Building Information & Communication Rewarding Quality

Source: (Askov et al., 2000)

Even though each element plays key role in strengthening and sustaining quality assurance, Franco et al (2002) maintained that it is only through the combined effect of all four elements that the maximum impact of internal enabling environment is attained.

B. Organising for quality: Structure

In the meantime, the institutionalisation of quality assurance necessitates a structure or other form of organisation to which clear roles and responsibilities are bestowed for carrying out quality care programs. With this regard, many organisations set up quality assurance departments or directorates. Yet, Askov et al (2000) argued that the form of such structures may vary a cross organisations. In addition, the authors also highlighted that the structure for quality may evolve as the quality assurance program gradually develops. They also underlined that any form of structure for quality, even though not particularly a quality assurance unit, can be made accountable for the task of quality care. In any case, some sort of mechanism or structure for monitoring, decision making, implementing, supporting and coordinating quality assurance activities is decisive.

C. Support function

Finally, an effective institutionalisation of quality assurance demands the existence of certain ongoing support processes. These include capacity building, information and communication, and rewarding quality.

Capacity building: Organisations need to strive to build the knowledge and skill of their staff, for instance, by giving appropriate trainings on quality assurance. All staff involved in quality assurance endeavour need to be trained and assisted so that they can continuously upgrade their skills. In other words, it is crucial to set up mechanisms for training, supervising and coaching the quality assurance unit workforce.

Information and communication: A well-integrated system of multi-directional communication is also crucial. Information about organisational quality assurance activities need to be disseminated to different departments throughout an organisation and to external stakeholders such as customers and policy makers. This enhances peer learning and the sharing of best practice experience among staff. Communicating the activities of the quality assurance unit to stakeholders also aids decision making and obtaining necessary resources. Silimperi et al (2002) summarised three purposes of information and communication: a) documenting achievements, b) spreading the achievement and how it was attained, and c) utilising the achievement to promote for favourable policy changes and securing resource.

Rewarding quality: There needs to be a system of incentives targeted at rewarding high performance. The means of motivating staff to practicing quality assurance may include monetary and non-monetary methods. Incentivising team and individual effort can also take a form of appreciation and giving recognition to hard working workforces.

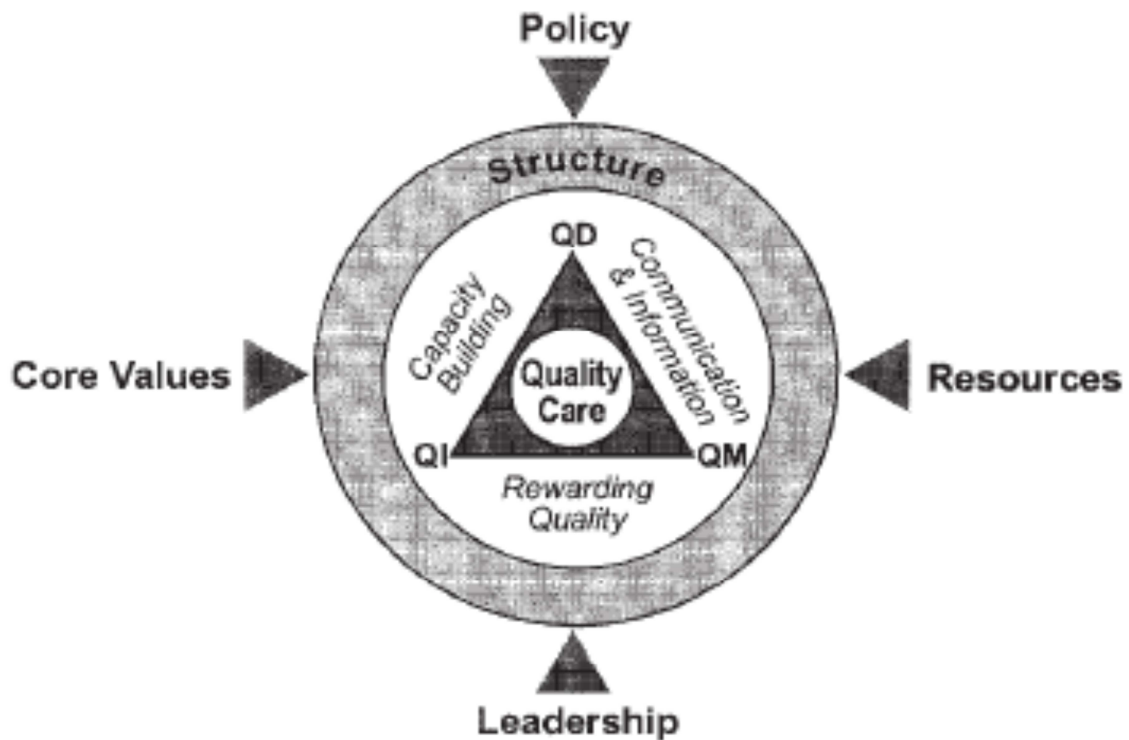


Figure-1: Institutionalisation of quality assurance

(Source: Askov et al., 2000, p. 8)

2.3. Phases of institutionalisation

The other part of the analytical framework deals with explaining the roadmap for the process of institutionalisation. This covers the stages through which the entire process passes. Accordingly the main phases include awareness, experiential, expansion, and consolidation. In reality, the passage through these phases occurs in between an initial state of pre-awareness of quality assurance and ends in a state of maturity. In other words, a state of pre-awareness precedes any formal awareness phase while a state of maturity comes after the consolidation phase has reached its full impact. It should therefore be clear that pre-awareness and maturity are states not phases. The team of experts who developed the framework pointed out that the process should not be considered as a linear route such that, in practice, the right sequential order of the stages may not be followed. Organisations may progress, regress or stagnate along the

course. It is also possible that organisations may operate between more than one phases at the same time.

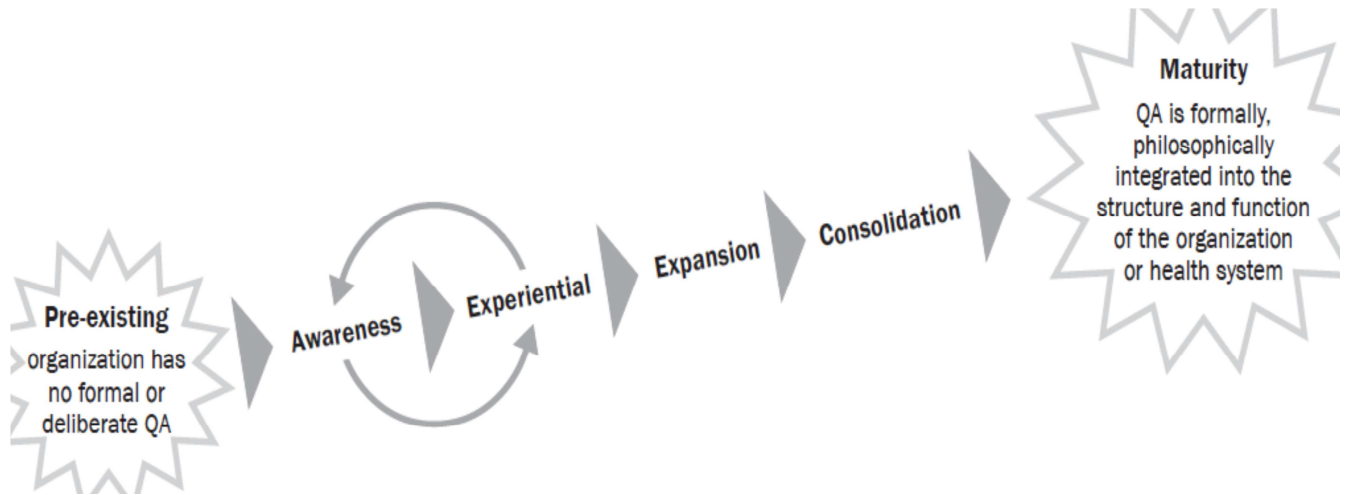


Figure-2: The phases of institutionalising quality assurance

Source: (Franco et al., 2002, p. 3)

The *pre-awareness* state indicates the situation before organisations formally engage in any quality assurance endeavour. Though individual and informal efforts might take place in an unorganised manner, deliberate organisation-wide implementation of quality care intervention is yet to be launched.

Awareness: During the phase of awareness, organisations duly recognise the concern on the deterioration of quality. Such formal awareness about organisational discontent with existing state of quality and the deliberate need to taking measures to score improvement may originate from discussion and meetings as well as results of performance reviews and surveys. In addition, pressure from managers, policy makers, community, quality assurance agencies, employers and other internal and external stakeholders play vital role in developing the awareness. At the end of this phase, organisations take unprecedented step in making formal decision to explore quality assurance mechanisms.

Experiential: At the experiential phase, organisations launch a small scale quality assurance activity. The implementation of quality assurance also takes a form of

experimenting with different mechanisms to identify the type of approach appropriate for the organisation. Organisations also provide administrative support and other form of assistance to the quality assuring endeavour. It is also expected that the organisation generates data indicating any improvement achieved with the help of the new quality care effort. At the end of this phase, organisations thus develop articulated strategy for quality assurance and show interest to further expand the scope of quality care.

Expansion: This is a phase where organisations carry out checks to examine if the small scale endeavour of quality assurance has indeed brought about improvements in the level of organisational performance. Taking lesson from the experiential phase, organisations hence engage in strategic expansion of the scale, scope and magnitude of their quality assurance activities. Decisions makers also work on developing a precise strategy for expanding organisational quality improvement. Thus the scale of quality assurance implementation may broaden geographically, in terms of the extent of organisational units involved or in the variety of quality assurance activities. Communication and coordination among involved organisational actors also improves along with growing overall organisational capacity towards employing quality care.

Consolidation: At this final phase of the institutionalisation, organisations engage in strengthening the implementation as well as anchoring quality culture in the organisation while at the same time checking for missing elements in the system. Appropriate strategies are translated into action in order to bridge these gaps. It also indicates the active participation of everyone in the effort of maintaining and improving quality. The defining characteristics of this phase centres at the development and incorporation of quality assurance into the operation of the organisation.

At last, a state of *maturity* follows upon the completion of the consolidation phase. Beyond operational integration, the state of maturity brings quality assurance into the heart of an organisation's formal and philosophical environment. Quality becomes truly valued and practiced at all levels.

Although the framework facilitates the analysis of institutionalisation of quality assurance, the team of experts who formulated the framework noted that all essential elements may not necessarily equally improve within the same phase or between phases. By the same token, all eight essential elements may not necessarily exist in the same phase; instead, each develops at different speed simultaneously determining whether the organisation advances along the institutionalisation phases. It is therefore crucial to examine the advancement of each essential element separately (Franco et al., 2002; and Silimperi et al., 2002).

In conclusion, the framework provides the right analytical tool to study the institutionalisation of quality assurance in settings other than health work such as in the context of higher education elsewhere in the world including Ethiopian public universities.

Chapter Three - The Concept of Quality and Quality Assurance

This section of the theses presents the discussion of theoretical views on quality and quality assurance. It begins with reviewing literature on competing definitions surrounding the concept of quality. The principles of the two important methods of dealing with quality—quality assurance and quality enhancement—are compared and contrasted. It also describes quality assurance mechanisms including approaches, key actors, method, and data gathering instruments of quality assurance. Finally, it reviews what has changed in quality assurance over the past couple of decades and what the future looks like.

3.1. The debate: What really is quality?

Scholars in the field of education and business management have developed concern for quality and standards since the mid-1980s alongside the increasing demand for greater accountability (Frazer, 1992) and efficiency. Though this concern has surfaced for long time, literature on the concept clearly explains the existence of poor understanding of what quality means unequivocally. The lack of comprehensive understanding of quality has constrained success in achieving desired state of whatever is considered as of a 'superior quality'. Cheng and Tam (1997) went even further claiming this is the reason behind the repeated failure of policies and strategies targeted at bringing about reforms on improving educational quality.

Meanwhile, quality is an elusive concept to define. Many have asked 'what the hell is quality?' Adams (1993) and UNICEF (2002) also pointed out that there has been inconsistency in the education literature when it comes to using terms quality, equity, effectiveness, and efficiency. Besides this tradition, the term quality has proved to remain a complex and challenging 'thing' to confidently define. It is an ardently debated term.

Against this background, however, a number of works by higher education scholars (Harvey & Green, 1993; Cheng & Tam, 1997; Green 1994; Burrows, Harvey, & Green,

1992; Adams 1993; Garvin, 1987; Garvin, 1988; and Gibbs, 2010) have made attempts to provide frameworks which are comprehensive in conceptualising and understanding quality in education. These models have often tried to incorporate various perspectives on how to define and therefore indicate the proper way to conduct the management of quality. Significant similarities and differences can be noticed on respective approaches applied by the scholars. Below is a discussion of how some of these works have attempted to clarify the vague term.

3.1.1. Harvey and Green: Five Conceptions

Looking through the education literature, it is fair to consider the work of Harvey and Green (1993) as one of the most influential publications done on understanding the concept of quality. The entire work is guided by the notion that quality is a relative concept; both to any standards or thresholds against which quality is examined, and to the user of the term as well as the context it is brought to discussion. On the basis of this view, the two scholars systematised five famous conceptions of term in education: exceptional; consistency or perfection; fitness for purpose; value for money; and transformation.

Quality as exceptional: This conception of quality is discussed in terms of three related but different notions. The first sees quality as distinctive, exceptional or something special. It stresses that the concept is exclusive in nature while providing no tangible means of measurement for gauging it. The second view defines quality as excellence which implies exceeding very high standards. Even though it is possible to identify what counts as excellence in this sense, it is also elitist in that the achievability its standards are limited to few institutions that excel in input and output. The last view approaches quality as anything that meets or passes certain set of minimum standards. Unlike the first two ones, this notion implies that quality is attainable to many with a crucial role of institutional quality control and evaluation.

Quality as perfection or consistency: Quality is also seen as consistency. The focus of such conception lies at process rather than input or output. What constitutes quality is hence a flawless process which perfectly fulfils set of specifications in a consistent manner. The principle of 'zero defects' and 'getting things right the first time' are central to this definition. Harvey and Green also pointed out that this principle emphasises on making sure that no faults take place throughout the entire process first instead of conducting a final quality inspection on output. This goes in line with the idea of quality culture whereby every element in an organisation assumes responsibility and becomes an active participant in making sure that each stage of the process is without defects. Every element can achieve this by delivering its output according to the required input features or standards of other elements with which it collaboratively functions within an organisation.

Quality as fitness for purpose: This understanding of quality is strongly related to purpose of a service or product in question. The underpinning basic assumption revolves around the idea that quality is best understood when a product or service is examined against its purposes rather than set of absolute standards. Therefore, a product or service is considered as having a good quality if it functionally proves the purpose for which it is produced to accomplish. In fact, questions of who specifies the purpose and how it should be evaluated are points can be deceiving. With this regard, description of the purpose may come from customers and mission statements of institutions themselves. Accordingly, quality can be defined as the extent to which a product or service meets certain specifications of customers of an organisation or, alternatively, as the extent to which an organisation effectively and consistently realises its own organisational objectives. The practice of quality assurance plays a vital role in the context of the latter.

Quality as value for money: The understanding of quality relates to the cost and economic price of a product or service. Schrock and Lefevre (as cited in Harvey & Green, 1993) explained that a quality product or service is one that meets high standard

specification and, at the same, available to customers at affordable price. A product that meets high standards but which is unfairly expensive cannot be considered as a quality product. This conception of quality partly emanates from the view that institutions should be accountable to the general public, tax payers and customers. The demand for greater institutional efficiency with regard to utilisation of public fund and financial assistance from governments justifies the tendency of attaching quality to the cost of an institution and the price at which its service or product is handed over to consumers.

Quality as transformation: The transformative view sees quality as a course involving considerable change on participants of the learning process which can be explained in qualitatively rather than quantitatively. Harvey and Green discussed two aspects of this transformation. First, quality education is one that enhances participants' knowledge, skills, and cognitive capabilities thereby effecting significant value addedness. The other aspect of transformative education lies on its capacity to empower participants so that they can take ownership of their own learning process, for instance, by actively participating in shaping the model of delivery of learning and the decision making process it involves. The transformative understanding quality is somehow the most abstract as it takes the analysis of quality from cross-checking set of standards, meeting specified purposes, or value for money to measuring the extent of added value to conceptual capacity of participants of a learning process.

3.1.2. Cheng and Tam: Seven Models

Another effort towards providing a comprehensive framework to the conceptualisation of quality came with a cross-disciplinary characteristic. Such works are not unorthodox as higher education research has a long-standing legacy of being an interdisciplinary field of inquiry which has contributed to the evolution of its themes, methods and levels of analysis (Teichler, 2005; CHER, 2012; and Macfarlane & Grant, 2012). Literature also strongly indicates that the historical development of higher education research has been, by and large, the product of such cross-disciplinary studies that fall within the interest of the higher education realm. Operating within such tradition, Cheng and Tam

(1997) contributed a model for quality which defines the concept using seven different but related models by way of adopting theories from management into the field of education. The models include goal and specification; resource-input; process; satisfaction; legitimacy; absence of problems; and organisational learning.

The goal and specification model: This model explains educational quality in terms of the achievement of set of objectives and goals. The basic assumption behind is that educational institutions have clearly stated and commonly accepted goals or mission statements towards which they strive to achieve. Therefore, this notion confers the status of good educational quality to any institution that succeeds in realising its program specifications and institutional goals.

The resource-input model: This model of educational quality puts exclusive focus on the quality of input and other fundamental resources of educational institutions. This notion explains that institutions are said to have good educational quality if they are able to secure high quality inputs such as high calibre students, qualified professors and administrative staff, better infrastructure and facilities, high fund and financial assistance, and other necessary resources. The resource-input model bases its argument on the assumption that educational quality comes naturally if an institution manages to acquire high standard resources and inputs into the learning process.

The process model: The view on educational quality, in this sense, deals with the extent to which learning experiences and internal processes go smoothly. Instead of focusing on goals or inputs, the process model assumes that educational quality is achieved if internal functioning and learning processes of an institution run in a healthy manner. Cheng and Tam (1997) also stated, “leadership, communication channels, participation, co-ordination, adaptability, planning, decision making, social interactions, social climate, teaching methods, classroom management, learning strategies, and learning experiences” (p. 25) can be used as pointers of educational quality.

The satisfaction model: The satisfaction model defines educational quality in terms of the extent to which the expectations and needs of 'strategic constituencies' – a term Cheng and Tam used to refer to internal and external stakeholders – are satisfied and met by the performance of an educational institution. This model becomes less useful under circumstances where diverse and sometimes conflicting expectations are held by students, professor, management, parents, alumni, industry, and governmental departments responsible for steering educational activities. Therefore, an institution that satisfies these stakeholder specifications is considered as having good educational quality.

The legitimacy model: Educational quality in legitimacy model is explained from the perspective of the need for successfully ensuring legitimacy so as to secure institutional survival and earn the status of good quality. The argument behind this notion is states that the recent rapid changes in the education environment, economy, market, technology and other important aspects put pressure on educational institutions to constantly secure their legitimacy if they are to attain scarce resources for survival. Institutions are said to have good educational quality if they remain accountable to the public, secure support from community, respect value for money, and succeed in achieving a pleasant public image.

The absence of problems model: According to this model, the non-existence of any defects, problems, discontinuities, and weaknesses in the operation of an institution indicates the existence of good educational quality. The model assumes that the existence of flaws and defects are signs of unhealthy functioning which challenges the achievement of respectable quality. However, this model lacks clarity regarding whether institutions should emphasise on keeping their inputs, or process, or output, or the entire institutional operation without defects.

The organisational learning model: This model perceives educational quality as improvement and continuous development that a learning process brings to

participants, methods and practices, and outcomes. The improvement that educational processes create on their participants such as students also provides an opportunity for a significant organisational learning experience of the institution itself. The model also states that institutions which are flexible enough to continuously adapt to changing circumstances of external environment are considered as having highly regarded status of quality.

3.1.3. Adams: Six Common Views

Conscious of the enduring debate and discussion among researchers, practitioners and policy makers on the operationalization of educational quality, Adams (1993) also attempted to deliver six common views on quality. His framework mainly included the understanding of quality as reputation; resources and inputs; process; content; outputs and outcomes; and “value added”.

Quality as reputation: An institution which is assumed or believed by most people to be among the ‘best’ educational institutions is considered as a quality institution. Reputation of most excellent institutions rests in the minds of people who regard them as such.

Quality as resources and other inputs: The quality of an educational program is best understood as the extent to which it excels in the standards of its inputs and resources such as students, faculty, financial resources, and facilities. Securing high standard inputs ensures the production of high standard outputs.

Quality as a process: Educational quality is seen in relation to the healthiness of a learning process. Rather than using the standards of inputs or outputs as proxies, it is pertinent to investigate the intra-organisational interaction of those involved in the learning process. Accordingly, a program’s ‘quality of life’ and the enthusiasm of learning interaction signals whether or not quality is achieved.

Quality as content: Adams failed to provide a thorough explanation of what he meant by the conception of quality as content. The view however revolves around perceiving educational quality as having an educational content that confirms with internationally and regionally recognised core curriculum. It also implies institutions that deliver relevant and high standard knowledge, skill, and information to its students.

Quality as outputs or outcomes: A popular definition with policy makers implies understanding quality according to “achievement in cognitive skills, entrance ratios to next levels of education, income, and occupational status” (Adams, 1993, p. 8). Quality is also seen in terms of how well an educational program equips students with skill and attitude crucial for modern market-oriented society.

Quality as value added: This perception of educational quality interprets the concept in terms of the extent to which an educational program or institution influences, effects, or impacts students’ capabilities and potentials. The assessment of student improvement is indicated in the direct contribution of an educational program to enhancing the attitude, behaviour, knowledge and reasoning of students. Such notion implies the value added aspect of quality.

3.1.4. Garvin: Eight Competing Dimensions

The operationalization of quality has challenged managers of business firms as much as policy makers and practitioners in education. The long-standing interdisciplinary legacy of higher education allows the field to benefit from intellectual advances in other disciplines. In 1987, Garvin also suggested an interesting conception of quality consisting of eight competing dimensions: performance; features; reliability; conformance; durability; serviceability; aesthetics, and perceived quality. The framework has its basis in market studies targeted at putting together a strategic analysis of quality management.

Performance: The understanding of quality as performance directly relates to the fundamental operating characteristics of a product or service. A quality product or service is one that meets its functional requirements. Though the specifications of performance requirements vary across products, high performance indicates the existence of high quality.

Features: Quality is also understood in terms of the standards of any characteristics that supplement a product's or service's basic functioning. While Garvin put features as secondary to performance, he also recognised the difficulty involved in distinguishing the two aspects. For a higher education institution, for instance, performance may refer to the calibre of faculty and students; standards of teaching, research and community service; efficiency of management; status of accreditation; and quality of campus facilities. On the other hand, features may include the location of campus; variety of fields of courses; entrance criteria; mode of delivery using technology; and availability of student financial aids.

Reliability: Another dimension of quality is explained as the probability that a product or service encounters malfunctioning, often within some specified period of time. This conception of quality however is more relevance to assessing the quality of durable goods rather than services or products that are consumed instantly. Reliability becomes even more crucial under circumstances where maintenance cost is expensive for customers.

Conformance: The common notion of conformance perceives quality as the extent to which the functional characteristics of a product or service perfectly meets specification set to check whether it properly conforms to standards. High degree of conformance to target specifications indicates the existence of high quality.

Durability: The durability view of quality deals with the measure of a product life. While durability can have technical and economic aspects, it refers to the level of use a

customer of a product or service enjoys before it encounters break downs. Garvin also argued that replacing such products is preferable to undergoing repeated repair. Reliability and durability conception of quality hence are closely linked.

Serviceability: The serviceability dimension views quality in terms of the conditions related to handling customer complaints and the degree to which a firm or institution demonstrates standards of its professional behaviour. The degree of importance a firm attaches to its serviceability can be witnessed from the courtesy, speed and competence in dealing with customer complains which strongly affects the institution's reputation for quality. The meaning of quality stretches from the concern for protecting customers from annoyance to making effort to pleasing them.

Aesthetics: Garvin (1987) defined aesthetics as "how a product looks, feels, sounds, tastes, or smells" (p. 107). A product or service that scores high in these aspects qualifies to the class of respectable quality. It should however be noted that such evaluations are often a matter of individual preference and reflections of personal judgement on the part of customers. In the context of educational institutions, this aspect may include among others the location and tidiness of campus; architecture of buildings; attractiveness of academic certificates issued; dressing code of staff and availability of green area.

Perceived quality: Another subjective dimension of quality approaches the concept from the perspective of reputation. The argument claims that reputation is the primary indicator of perceived quality which rests on brand names, advertising, images that constitutes customers' mind set towards an institution. Customers' perception regarding the status of quality arises from both intangible and tangible characteristics of a product or service.

3.1.5. Gibbs: Three Dimensions

Building up on the continuous debate on how best to operationalise the concept of quality, in 2010, Gibbs also suggested an understanding of quality consisting of three dimensions. The so-called “3P” definition provided higher education practitioners and policy makers with set of potential indicators which can be applied to evaluate the contexts before students actually start learning; what goes on as students are in the process of learn; and circumstances of the outcomes of the learning. Accordingly, Gibbs developed variables that help in assessing states of quality at three phases namely; presage, process, and product.

Presage variables: These variables address the circumstances of a university context covering the time frame before students start the actual process of learning. It includes those aspects related with resources, screening students, quality and qualification of faculty, quality of students as well as the general condition of an educational institution. Gibbs also argued staff-student ratio, quality of teaching staff, funding and quality of students as dimensions appropriate to assess the state quality in the presage phase. Despite this, he recognised that presage variables only frame but cannot directly determine what the actual education process is going to look like. In nutshell, the presage variables imply those educational institutions that have high quality teaching staff and students; optimal staff-student ration; and sufficient and dependable fund are regarded as having respectable quality.

Process variables: The process variables of educational quality deal with the conditions of what is actually going on during the teaching and learning process. These variables also help to explain the nature of quality and quantity of students’ engagement in learning. It shows what institutions are doing to achieve best results given the resources at their disposal. Accordingly, Gibbs suggested set of dimensions relevant to gauge the process phase of quality include class size; class contact hours, independent study hours and total hours; the quality of teaching (experience and training; research record; and judged by students; the effects of the research environment; the level of intellectual

challenge (level of the curriculum; depth of approach to studying; and student engagement); formative assessment and feedback; reputation; peer quality ratings; student support; and quality enhancement processes. Therefore, those institutions that score high in these dimensions are considered as having good educational quality.

Product variables: Process variables signal the state of quality coinciding with the final outcomes of an educational process. Concepts of student performance and educational gain are central to product variables that assist in capturing both the tangible and intangible impacts a learning process on students. The respective dimensions that indicate the status of product quality include student performance and degree classifications; student retention and persistence; and employability and graduate destinations. Although it is difficult to clearly measure, improvement in students' cognitive capacity is also another element of the product variables. The existence of such features among graduates of an educational institution elevates its status of quality against its counterparts that fail to achieve likewise.

From the discussion of the above five pieces of works on the definition of quality, it is possible to provide a concluding remark as follows:

- ✚ Quality is still a vague and controversial term to define. It is notoriously elusive and challenging to come by a universal definition. Mishra (2007) noted the existence of contending 'relativist' and 'objectivist' extremes on the understanding of quality. While some thought that we know what it is though it is difficult to define the term others suggested we should just give up worrying on such efforts.
- ✚ Quality has multiple meaning and there seems to be no consensus regarding which conceptualisation is the best. It is obvious that different scholars gave competing views even though these views highly correlate. Quality does not mean one thing only. Even more, the way the concept is understood considerably varies across different stakeholders. There is difference in how policy makers

define quality from the notion held by students, or parents, or quality assurance agencies, or employers.

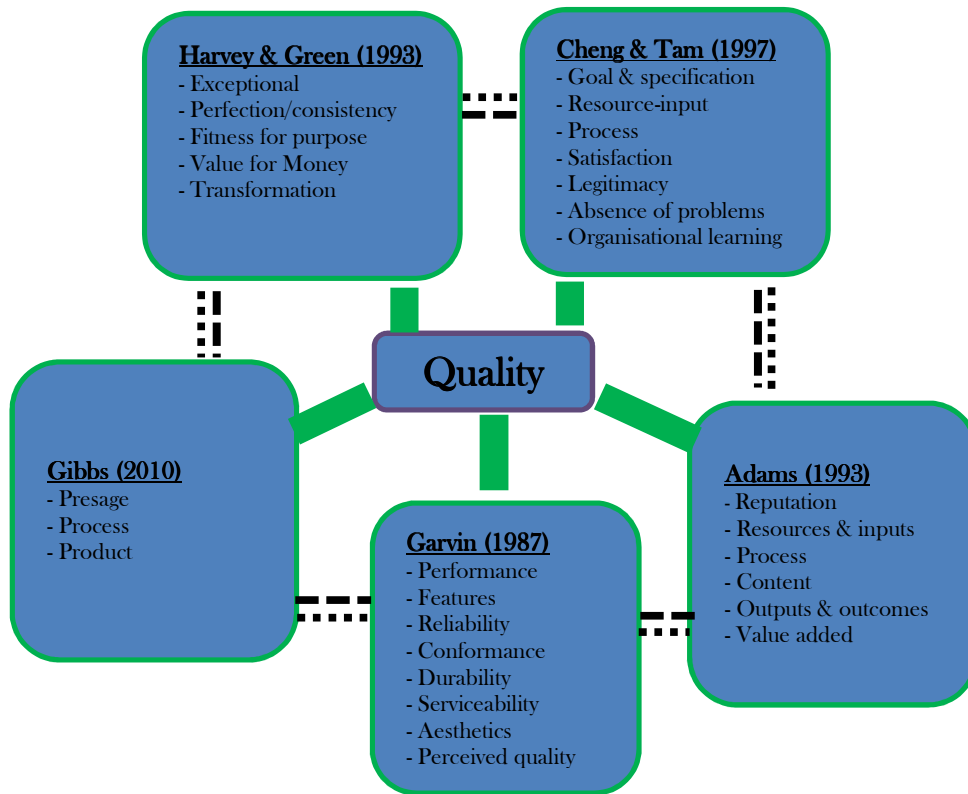


Figure-3: Multiple definitions of quality

- ✚ The existence of several meanings however does not necessarily mean some groups are right and others are wrong. It is therefore very important to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of each framework's and definition as their applicability is limited to certain contexts. Understanding the context thus provides the vital clue not to easily be misled and hence to properly comprehend the interpretation of a particular definition. The underlying purpose and context of any sort of definition should be considered as part of the analysis.
- ✚ Some of the different conceptions of quality mutually reinforce while some do not. The notion of quality as excellence and value for money, for instance,

contain aspects that contradict each other while the understandings of the term as high standard input and outcome go hand-in-hand. Adams (1993) also noted, “Goals of quality may conflict with efficiency, equity or other goals” (p. 14). As a result, it is therefore possible for a product or service to be ranked low on some dimensions of quality and high others.

- ✚ The understanding of quality may reflect a matter of individual interpretations and set of values. It is also clear that the meanings of the term has basis in key social settings such as tradition, value, expectation, and culture. Hence, it is arguable that some conceptualisations are relative to others disciplinary background, context, personality, geographical location, academic qualification, and experience.
- ✚ No single aspect defines quality comprehensively. “Educational quality is a multi-dimensional concept and cannot be easily assessed by only one indicator” (Cheng & Tam, 1997, p. 23). No single definition of quality is all-inclusive. Likewise, Gibbs (2010) also stressed the importance of multivariate analysis, “To understand what is going on and draw valid conclusions, it is necessary to have measure of a range of dimensions of quality at the same time” (p. 5). It is imperative to combine both the quantitative and qualitative measures of quality if a comprehensive understanding of the concept is to be achieved.
- ✚ Quality also has a dynamic nature. The task of defining the term is contextual and evolving. This makes defining the quality challenging. Its meaning considerably alters depending on time and circumstances. It should therefore be clear that defining quality does not come to a stopping point instead it progresses along the debate and discussion among interest groups and stakeholders.

3.2. Quality assurance versus quality enhancement

The practice of external evaluations of universities has developed for over few decades. The tradition has its roots from the US as back as the late 19th century (Van Damme,

2002). It then made its way to different higher education systems of the world. Most European countries have adopted the system a decade ago. Currently, the number of countries that have not yet developed any scheme of national quality assurance is very small (Reisberg, 2010).

In the meantime, quality assurance and quality enhancement are at the centre of approaches to managing quality in higher education. Though highly intertwined, the two approaches focus on different aspects. The section below discusses the meaning and procedures as well as the link between the two approaches.

3.2.1. Quality assurance

The practice of quality assurance is at the heart of quality management strategies and activities. It has become a valuable approach to dealing with the challenging task of assuring and improving the status of quality. Yet, it is important to review how quality assurance has been understood across the literature. Harvey and Green (1993) provided a definition which implies the achievability of a desired level of quality provided that certain mechanisms are put in place guiding strategic effort towards this goal:

Quality assurance is not about specifying the standards or specifications against which to measure or control quality. Quality assurance is about ensuring that there are mechanisms, procedures and processes in place to ensure that the desired quality, however defined and measured, is delivered. (p. 19)

Compared to the above explanation, the significance of standards and set of criteria were reflected in another definition provided by Mishra in 2007. He stated, "Quality assurance refers to the process of maintaining standards reliably and consistently by applying criteria of success in a course, program or institution." (p. 88). On the other hand, Frazer (1992) emphasised components which, according to his implied notion of quality culture, help capture the meaning of quality assurance. These components portray a systemic view of an institution whereby all its members share the

responsibility for enhancing, and maintaining the quality of products and services which calls for members to properly play their roles in the overall quality assurance endeavour and the management for regularly checking the validity of systems set up for such purposes.

Generally, quality assurance involves setting up processes, policies, and line of actions. It also includes developing certain minimum threshold requirements to check performance. Most importantly, quality assurance involves establishing basic quantitative and qualitative criteria that, for instance, applies to objectives of the entire institution or its program. The development of these indicators is accompanied by reviewing performance as well. Such efforts relate to good management practice and can help establish stakeholder confidence. In nutshell, quality assurance deals with systematically evaluating and monitoring quality. It rests on the mechanisms set to assure the standards of core university functions: teaching and learning, research and community service. The results of self-assessments and external quality audits, in turn, go beyond simply assuring to indicating directions for future quality enhancement and improvement.

3.2.2. Quality enhancement

Quality enhancement is another highly instrumental aspect of quality management. It is however a challenging term to give a common definition compared to quality assurance. This is because institutions understand the concept subjectively in a manner which fits their contexts (The Higher Education Academy, 2008). Despite this precaution, the QAA's 'Handbook for Institutional Audit' published in 2006 explained, "quality enhancement is defined as the process of taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of learning opportunities" (para. 46). Putting the focus on institutions' capability to properly capturing opportunities for development accompanied by deliberate strategic initiatives and small actions, the document further clarified, "Quality enhancement is therefore seen as an aspect of institutional management that is designed to secure, in the context of the constraints within which

individual institutions operated, steady, reliable and demonstrable improvements in the quality of learning opportunities” (para. 47).

Newton (2012) outlined the sequential process involved in quality enhancement as evaluation of a current situation; creating conditions for change; implementing change; and evaluating whether change has brought improvement. The process implies achieving a system of structured continuous improvements with respect to student experience, academic practice, and program and institutional processes and procedures. The process is not limited to improving things by effecting certain changes. These changes also provide an opportunity for organisational and personal learning which becomes a subject of innovative or good practice dissemination. To achieve so however requires the institution to be effective in collecting, analysing and using important from sources both internal and external.

3.2.3. What links exist?

Quality assurance and quality enhancement are separate but inextricably linked processes within a system of quality management. They are linked though cycles of reviews and improvements while at the same time being explicitly separate. Yet, the relationship between the two is complex. It is therefore highly crucial for higher education institutions, external quality assurance structures and other stakeholders to understand the interplay between these two approaches in order to successfully deal with quality concerns.

Quality assurance is the driver for quality enhancement. This means while the former is the bedrock, the latter is the progressive extension (Newton, 2012). They are the two sides of the same coin. In an analogy with an iceberg, assurance is the tip whereas enhancement is the bottom. Quality assurance provides evidence without which institutions hardly advance to practice and improve their teaching and learning. Beyond serving an accountability domain, quality assurance policies and tools can be used developmentally. Practitioners involved in quality assurance also work a

developmental way enabling the advancement of thinking and practice. Therefore, quality enhancement represents a move from an actual status of quality to desired one. In this sense, “it would appear that assurance and enhancement are concepts with distinctive meanings, with enhancement promising more than assurance” (Filippakou & Tapper, 2008, p. 92).

On balance, quality assurance is the risk which quality assurance mitigates. Quality assurance has been criticised for its exclusive focus on judgement and monitoring which leaves little room for professional development—an aspect best addressed with quality enhancement approach. Compliance to certain set of predetermined standards is evaluated by quality assurance while quality enhancement sets process in motions that enable improvement of performance towards achieving quality standards. The rigidity associated with quality assurance can be another source of risk that is dealt with by the flexible nature of quality enhancement. An environment with more space for context-sensitive interpretation is the advantage intrinsic to quality enhancement compared to the often less bounded quality assurance. This also helps avoid the compromise of institutional autonomy whose performance undergoes quality assurance checks. Besides, the task of managing quality becomes a shared responsibility rather than an assignment of few pervasive in quality assurance practices. On top of this, quality assurance contains a defensive aspect reflected in its insistence on inspection whereas quality enhancement guides the emphasis on proactive measures that duly emphasising on prevention aspects.

In the meantime, the global trend indicates a move away from quality assurance to quality enhancement. The Higher Education Academy (2008) explained this change of focus as a shift from “a coercive or policing approach to updated arrangements that support and encourage change among staff rather than give the appearance of attempting to police or restrict them” (p. 19). Higher education literature suggests a growing interest in quality assurance, even more so in the political arena (Newton, 2012; Jackson, 2008; and Filippakou & Tapper, 2008).

3.3. Mechanisms of quality assurance

This section presents the main components of the current quality assurance practice. This includes a brief discussion of its approaches, participants, methods, data gathering instruments and some aspects of its outcomes.

3.3.1. Approaches

Quality assurance strives to maintain quality mainly through approaches such as accreditation, evaluation, and audit. These approaches are widely practiced to measure quality and ensure whether conformance to standards is ensured. They are also different and convergent processes at the same time.

Accreditation: It is an evaluation process which indicates whether institutions or programs meet certain threshold standards and are eligible for formal operation. This external review process can be conducted for a specific program or an entire institution against a set of standards. According to Chemay (as cited in Frazer, 1992, p. 11), accreditation helps assure stakeholders that the program or the institution, “(a) has clearly defined and educationally appropriate objectives, (b) maintains conditions under which their achievement can reasonably be expected, (c) is in fact accomplishing them substantially, and (d) can be expected to continue to do so.” The review covers resources, mission and objectives, inputs, and other aspects. The result of accreditation benefits the institution or program itself, general public, employers, faculty and graduates.

Assessment: The glossary of the EU Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (n.d.) defines quality assessment as part of quality assurance practice “that focuses on assessment of fulfilling quality requirements (need or expectation that is stated, generally implied or obligatory).” What is mainly assessed is the output of an institution. Kis (2005) also stated that the result of a quality assessment goes more than an accreditation in that it produces quantitative evaluation and grades.

Audit: Like quality assessment, quality audit also focuses on reviewing outputs of institutions. It involves a “scrutiny by a group external to the university to check that the quality assurance and quality control process are appropriate and working properly” (Frazer, 1992, p. 11). Audit is concerned with the review of the assessment tools, procedures and outcomes to make improvements for future use. Woodhouse (1999) pinpointed three aspects of the audit process which includes checking the sustainability, conformation and effectiveness of actual and planned quality procedures against set of specified objectives.

3.3.2. Major actors

Quality assurance engages a number of key internal and external stakeholders in the process. These may include higher education institutions, internal quality assurance units, governmental agencies (ministerial and administrative offices), regional and state accrediting bodies, quality assurance agencies (autonomous or semi-autonomous), professional associations, faculty, students, alumni, employers, funding organisations (Hilliges & Kettis, 2013). Despite wide consensus on recognising the importance of involving stakeholders in the management of quality, Kis (2005) however indicated the existence of confusion regarding the optimal nature and level of doing so.

3.3.3. Methods

The most common methods of undertaking quality assurance checks include self-review which is often followed by peer review and external reviews.

In *self-review*, higher education institutions examine their own performance against their own mission and objectives. Institutions collect, analyse and interpret data to check how far they progressed towards meeting academic standards. Stakeholders therefore gain access information on institutions’ quality of educational provision. Such reviews, according to QAA (2006), are encourages institutions to be self-evaluative which eventually creates opportunities for devising future enhancement plans.

Peer review, on the other hand, consist of a review process carried out by university teachers, academicians, researchers and practitioners. The peer review is primarily based on an institution's self-evaluation document or report. What peer reviewers do afterwards is to examine what they hear and see against the self-review report. Peer reviewers look for any discrepancy between the two. Harvey (2002) indicated that the training, previous experience, preconceptions and prejudice, and intuitive capacities affect peer review results. They make judgements and offer advice.

External review enables the performance assessment of an institution carried out internally to be externally scrutinised. This paves the way for discussion and experience sharing between internal and external stakeholders on institutional practices. In the case of external review, non-academic public members such as representatives of employers, practitioners, and others interested in higher education may participate in the review panels. Professional and employment-linked evaluation bodies and government or state agencies may take the responsibility of undertaking the review. Literature also suggests that there has been a considerable rise in the practice of external quality assurance as a result of booming internationalisation of higher education, globalisation, and growing demand for ensuring accountability (Woodhouse, 2004).

3.3.4. Data gathering instruments

The task of conducting quality assurance requires collecting crucial information through self-review documents, site visits, surveys (national, institutional, program, or modular), and statistical or performance indicators. As discussed above, self-review documents are foundations on the basis of which peer review and external reviews are conducted. Besides this document, panel of peer and external reviewers also visit the institution in person to check whether the information on the self-review report matches the practical reality. Reviewers mainly observe and ask questions. Besides, quality assurance agencies can also conduct surveys using questionnaires (for instance, students filling teachers' performance evaluation questionnaire) and interviews although not widely common. In addition, information on quality can be obtained from

a variety of statistics and performance indicators. The use of this type of data has been politically appealing even though a daunting scepticism on whether quantitative performance indicators can be a valid and reliable operationalization of higher education quality.

The results of quality assurance evaluations are often published into reports as public documents. Despite this, Harvey (2002) cautioned on intentional withholding of certain detailed information in some occasions by institutions. In any case, reports and follow up procedures come after actual review activities are culminated. The type of the report may include websites and short summaries, list of publications, press releases, and emails or newsletters. Yet, disclosure of external review reporting may vary with cultural context. In general, the outcomes of quality assurance have strong implications for institutional reputation, funding and other financial assistances, public image or confidence, stakeholder trust, link with industry and labour market.

3.4. Changing trends in quality assurance

The practice of quality assurance has evolved over the past couple of decades. Its practice has spread wide across different parts of the world. It has become transnational particularly with the help of the Bologna process in Europe. Assuring quality also affected various aspects of higher education and its link to key stakeholders. Over the years, quality assurance has achieved remarkable success and encountered ardent critics. Researchers and practitioners have also called for significant improvements under the so-called 'quality evolution' slogan.

The origin and rapid expansion of quality assurance has been linked to a corresponding decline of trust accorded to higher education institutions. Amaral and Rose (2010) argued that this loss of trust, which has been caused due to numerous phenomena (for instance, the emergence of new public management, market economy, massification and diversification of higher education), had resulted in the growth of the state, independent, regional, and continent-wide systems of accreditation and other quality

evaluation schemes. In response to this, universities have been attempting to reclaim the lost trust through engaging in quality enhancement activities.

Despite its speedy expansion, quality assurance has been facing stiff resistance from academics. In the work of 'Fifteen Years of Quality in Higher Education', Harvey and Williams (2010), shed light on the trend that many academicians perceive quality assurance as 'burdensome', a little more than a ritual. The authors have indicated that "themes of bureaucratisation, administrative burden, stifling of creativity and lack of trust have been recurring concerns ever since" (p. 103). This created obstacle for quality assurance not to be embodied into the routine activities of academics. The quality of quality assurance agencies has also become another concern.

Another important development that took place over the years was the, according to Singh (2010), creation of 'centres and peripheries' in quality assurance. She noted the trend of the US and the UK – 'centres' – becoming countries the practice of which has been increasingly adapted and modelled after by numerous higher education systems in the process of developing their quality assurance schemes – 'peripheries'. Countries deemed as 'centres' of global quality assurance has enjoyed this strategic location as a result of their valuable experiences and long traditions of pioneering practice. They have also become sources of imagination to go about effectively dealing with quality concerns in less developed higher education systems.

Though quality assurance has been prevailing, the focus seems going towards quality enhancement recently. This is partly the result of the constant concern among policy makers and practitioners about the relationship between quality assurance and the subsequent impact on quality of teaching and learning. The reviews done on the evolution quality assurance over the last fifteen and twenty years by Harvey and Williams (2010) and Ewell (2010) respectively concluded in the same manner that the answer to the question of whether quality assurance have actually enhanced student

learning and higher education is 'still not clear' and 'elusive'. Meanwhile, strong interest is growing towards emphasising on quality enhancement.

In the meantime, quality assurance played a decisive role in encouraging institutions carryout proper documentation of their performance against set of standards. This is commendable as the practice laid the corner stone for institutional transparency to the general public and other key stakeholders. The documents, reports, news releases, newsletters, publications and other modes of communicating information on institutional effectiveness are thus made publicly accessible. The procedures for undertaking such activities have also become gradually standardised.

An interesting argument concerning the future of quality assurance forwarded by many (Singh, 2010; Amaral & Rose, 2010; Harvey & Williams, 2010; and Kristensen, 2010) is that a better balance between accountability and improvement should be pursued though external quality assurance has meaningfully contributed for the improvement of quality in higher education over the past couple of decades. Higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies should 'meet on equal terms' in order for a healthier balance between internal and external quality assurance, and quality improvement to be achieved. This requires a decrease in coercive external evaluation and a corresponding reinforcement of internal quality improvement related to student learning. Such adjustments also demand academics to be at the heart of quality improvement endeavour rather than being 'ritualistic' participants. Moreover, a stronger link must develop between internal and external evaluation processes.

Chapter Four - Quality in the Ethiopian Higher Education Context

This chapter presents a discussion of the development of Ethiopian higher education and the path to adopting a system of quality assurance. It covers the history of education in general and higher education in particular through ancient and modern times. The section also includes a discussion of existing quality concerns which arose due to rapid expansion in enrolment over the past decade. Next is a brief explanation of the legal underpinnings of education quality in the broader education and training policy, and higher education proclamations. Finally, the chapter closes with a short profile of HERQA as a central quality controller.

4.1. History of Ethiopian higher education

The Ethiopian higher education has evolved for many years before crafting itself into its current modernized shape. The system of education in general and higher education in particular have experienced considerable religious, political, economic, social and foreign influences through different regimes. Despite several ups and downs, the country's higher education has eventually seen commendable expansion and consolidation.

Yet, discussion on the history of Ethiopian higher education can be dubious as far as a time frame and fundamental progresses are exactly taken into consideration. While many people consider the birth of higher education as the beginning of 1950s where Addis Ababa University, then University College of Addis Ababa, was established (Kehoe, 1962), traditional and religious systems of education corresponding to the level of higher education however had already existed for centuries. Religious mode of higher learning had gained firm foundation when Orthodox Christianity was declared as a state religion in the fourth century. Speaking internationally, Wodajo (1961) described Ethiopia as "a nation whose church and monastic schools are by all reckoning

one of the oldest in the world”¹ (p. 232). Likewise, Saint (2004) also reiterated this 1700 years tradition of elite education linked to the church. The religious education with its exclusively ecclesiastical character had remained the sole medium of training until modern secular education started to develop in 1908.

The curriculum of the traditional church education consists of levels comparable to the Western-type education. Milkias (1976) indicated that the primary level contained five stages namely mastery of the *'Fidel'* (the 231 Ethiopian alphabet characters), *'Fidel-Hawaria'* (“the apostle’s syllabary”), *'Gebeta-Hawaria'* (some sections of the New Testament and the Apostles’ Creed), *'Dawit'* (the Psalms of David), and a transition period to become *'Debtera'* (cantors, the most educated philosophers) and, or take a fulltime career at church as a priest. The successful completion of these basic stages qualifies more ambitious students for a higher education which enables assuming the status of a *'Liq'* (master of knowledge). While the average laymen finish their formal education at this stage, few aspiring students usually travel to ancient centres of excellence renowned for their distinguished reputation in certain fields of studies. According to the works of Abebe, Girma, and Kassie (as cited in Asgedom, 2005), these legendary monasteries and churches include *Waldiba*, *Debre-Abai*, *Washera Mariam*, *Dimma Ghiorgis*, *Debre-Libanos*, *Debre-Damo*, *Ghedamat*, and many more. The advanced level of education, which corresponds to the higher education of modern world, included three specialisations: *'Zema Bet'*, *'Kine Bet'*, and *'Metsahaf Bet'* (Milkias, 1976). Contents of the *'Zema Bet'* (School of Music) include mastering *'Dugua'*, *'Zemare'*, *'Mewaset'* which are used during church prayer services. The *'Kine Bet'* (School of Poetry) trains students on *'Sewasew'* (grammar of Ge’ez, service language of the church) and *'Derset'* (composition). The *'Metsahaf Bet'* (School of texts, or books) had three main branches *'Kedusan Metsaheft'* (the sacred books of the Old and New Testaments), *'Awaledt'* (literature of ‘imagination’ or fiction’), and *'Gedle'* (books on monastic life). In

¹ Such claims by Ethiopian scholars often incorporate a temporal comparison of the country’s traditional church education with the birth of European modern institutions of higher learning where the former is argued to be a senior of the latter.

addition to this, a number of other books had to be mastered. The work of Wodajo (1961), however, incorporated a different specialisation indicated as '*Aquaquam Bet*' (School of Church Dance). Nonetheless, it takes a uniquely courageous student to master all the four advanced fields as it could takes 10 to 30 years besides spending 7 to 12 years on the basic level. Generally, the aim of church education was to train future priests and '*Debteras*' for church service and the larger civil service.

Even though church education thrived since 330 AD, it was however interrupted from 1527 to 1632 during the period of which the Sultanate of Adal, Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim al Ghazi of popular by the name Gragh Ahmed, waged war burning many churches to ash and slaughtering Christians (Asgedom, 2005). The suffering came to an end when Emperor Fasiledes came to power resulting in the restoration of church education in 1632. Consequently, centres of scholarship located at churches and monasteries soon throve. The restoration process continued into succeeding reigns along with shifts in the capital cities of the ruling headquarters before backsliding during the modernisation process that stormed the country in the early twentieth century. The march to modern education in Ethiopia first came when Emperor Menelik-II established the first secular school in 1908. Though a few more schools were constructed, there was little substantial progress in the three decades following (Yesus, 1966).

The brief Fascist Italian occupation² (1939-1941) of Ethiopia had adversely affected the infant modern education. The pre-war Ethiopian schools faced closure making the church education and private teachers the only viable options for basic education. Building new educational institutions were simply unthinkable. The observations of Dower and Konovalov (as cited in Pankhurst, 1972) clearly witnessed the unimaginable adversity of the Fascist Italian education policy in East Africa which essentially emphasised on 'political obedience and military discipline'. In this respect, students where indoctrinated to switch loyalty to Italy and encouraged to join the army of the

² Ethiopia remained an African nation while European colonisation swept the entire continent. The country successfully defended its territorial sovereignty against the odds of the scramble for Africa. It should therefore be noted that colonisation and occupation do not mean the same thing.

oppressor. Text books were prepared in Italian language. The Fascist approach was intended at stripping Ethiopian students off their native culture and identity. The phenomena of rigid racial discrimination against the natives also became commonplace. The entire occupation resulted in a terrible dearth of trained Ethiopian personnel. Even worse, Ethiopia lost majority of its educated elite in the five years blood-shedding of fierce struggle to free the entire country. Thus after the Ethiopian patriots defeated the Fascists and put an end to the occupation, the country found itself in the destitution of adequately trained human capital to effectively deal with the challenge of rebuilding the nation.

Striving against the odds, the restoration of modernisation process of education gradually grew stronger during Emperor Haile Selassie-I. Yet, the momentum got its turning point in the post-Fascist Italian period of the Emperor's rule. This saw the establishment of many primary and secondary schools. The government had also started granting scholarship to selected candidates to go abroad and pursue advanced education in North America, Europe and the Middle East. The establishment of secondary schools in the country however mounted the pressure on the emperor to embark on higher education at home. In 1950, the country's first modern higher education institution—the University College of Addis Ababa—was established. The university was staffed and run by expatriate faculty who came from the North America and Europe. It mainly covered Liberal Arts.

Higher education significantly expanded and diversified in the succeeding years. Colleges that cater to technical and vocational orientation quickly proliferated. These include the foundation of College of Engineering, College of Building and Construction, College of Agriculture, College of Health studies, Theological College of the Holy Trinity, and a number of Military Colleges. The expansion also carried diversity within the academic programs delivered at the level of higher education.

Though the commendable expansion, the emerging colleges had little indigenous character as they had been modelled after the essence of Western universities with which they were inarguably affiliated. This argument could not have been better expressed than what Asgedom (2005) stated. He stressed that, "It is possible to argue that the Ethiopian Higher Education system, though born in a non-colonial context, was not much different from the African colonial universities in being influenced by Western ideas and institutional structures." (p. 19). In colonial Africa, modern higher education institutions however were created, staffed and trained by Europeans during the colonial period. It is these universities that, being modelled after and patterned on the European higher education system (Materu, Obanya, & Righetti, 2011), shouldered the responsibility of training the manpower for Africa's public sector after independence in the 1960s through supports from Europe and their own governments and continued close affiliations with universities of coloniser countries. On top of this, Asgedom also added that the modernisation process and the unprecedented expansion of secular education unfolded in the form of 'discarding traditionalism' resulting in the marginalisation of traditional church education. The process saw a shift in the control of governmental bureaucratic administration away from traditional elite into the hands of Western educated ones. According to Marcus (1994), Emperor Haile Selassie-I believed that outcomes of modern education are decisive for sought the transformation of his 'feudal empire into a modern state'. The paradox exacerbated along with the evolving popular stereotype on the perceived conservativeness and insignificant contribution of traditional church education to the nation's development effort. In spite secular education was innately alien to the passionately religious culture of the Ethiopia; Wodajo (1960) indicated the positive attitude and enthusiasm of Ethiopian parents and children towards the benefits of modern education. At the same time, the church struggled to hold its firm grip on guarding its monopoly of the education system.

The modern education had been severely criticised on a wide range of issues. Schools and institutions of higher learning were not evenly distributed across the country. Most

institutions were concentrated around Addis Ababa, the capital city, and cities in the Northern part of Ethiopia (Marcus, 1994). Similarly, this problem by and large had challenged the traditional church education. Access to education had failed to be equitable. Yesus (1966) explained access to modern education was reserved for the nobility and the most highly privileged few, most of whom already had church education. Even worse, women were severely underrepresented. A disproportion in enrolment composition of ethnic groups was also indicated by Adejumobi (2007). Besides, the work of Wodajo (1960) summarised inherent quality concerns including, shortage of adequately trained teachers, scarcity of financial resources, and the challenge of reconciling “quality of instruction with the ever-increasing school enrolment” (p. 159). Shortage of modern teaching aid and dependence on traditional teaching method also posed another obstacle. Kehoe (1962) also indicated the challenge of Ethiopian students studying in a second language—English—particularly at higher education institutions. From the perspective of education as a catalyst for social change, Ethiopian education had strayed far away from being properly tailored to the economic and social needs of the country (Wodajo, 1960). Shack (1959) was so critical that educational program on the higher level had rapidly expanded resulting in a detachment of the educated elite from the mass. He also questioned the relevance of expanding technical trainings in non-industrialised society. Yesus (1966) went even further denounced the monitoring of course content pervasive in the system accusing the imperial monarchy for “consciously restricting the revolutionary potential that might result from university education” (p. 14). Yet, university students had remained active in politics and social revolution which eventually overthrew the imperial government.

In the wake of 1975, a provisional military government—Dergue—took control of the country and undertook several reforms that also affected educational development. The underpinning philosophy behind the reforms was embedded in the then fashionable ideology of socialism. Accordingly, the nationalisation of all private educational

institutions, with the exception of church-affiliated ones, came into effect. Campaigns of mass education, or '*Zemecha*' were conducted to help eradicate illiteracy in the rural countryside. "Ethiopia: Primary and Secondary Education in 1975", (2008) widening access to education as the main path to improving economic productivity in these rural areas was at the centre of the new education policy. Dergue also laid the foundation of a 'Commission for Higher Education' in 1977 with the issuance of Proclamation No. 109 which evidently tailored the mission of higher education institutions in accordance with the principles of socialism. In the following decade, higher education experienced modest expansion in the number of tertiary educational institutions, enrolment as well as the size of Ethiopians on teaching staff ("Ethiopia: Higher and Vocational Education since 1975", 2008). However, limitation in university study seats forced the climbing of admission standards. The new ideological ally, the USSR, assisted the regime in educational development endeavour. In the meantime, the Dergue attempted to expand vocational and technical schools. Additionally, colleges that give training on a diploma level were created in fields such as teacher education, commerce, polytechnic, agriculture, animal health, health science. Nevertheless, the regime was not content with the higher education community as students of universities continued to become sources of social turmoil and stiff opposition. The political rivalry led to the massacre of thousands of the educated young. In the 1970s and 1980s, considerable number of the young generation, including member of the previous feudal nobility, were forced to go abroad in search of peace, education, and economic opportunities. A determined portion of the educated young also took up arms which overthrew the socialist dictatorship.

Since 1991, the efforts towards developing education have been strengthened under the new democratic government. The government started by promulgating an 'Education and Training Policy' in 1994. Additionally, two higher education proclamations and other legislative regulations have been launched. The outcome was a burgeoning number of schools, universities, colleges, polytechnics, vocational and technical training

institutions in different regions of the country. Though still below expected, higher education has been showing improvement in several aspects including access, equity, management, finance, teaching staff, infrastructure and facilities, and technology among others. The sector is however far from securing adequate capacity in research and community service. Scoring improvement in the quality of higher education has also remained a complex task amid aggressive massification.

4.2. Existing concerns on quality

Against its long traditional and short secular higher education history, Ethiopia is recently moving aggressively towards mass³ public higher education system. The number of its public universities climbed from only 2 to over 30 within the past decade⁴. This was achieved by establishing new universities as well as upgrading and merging existing institutions. The private sector, being part of the process, has also proliferated

³ The term 'mass' should be understood as a trend of expansion. It is not however intended to indicate the concept of mass higher education as conceived by Trow (2006) which would otherwise mean the access to higher education of 15%-50% of the relevant age group. Ethiopia has not still met the minimum level of this tier.

⁴ The expansion process of Ethiopian public universities (owned by the Ministry of Education), for the purpose of this study, is broadly categorized into three main phases taking chronological aspect and other resources and infrastructural features into consideration. The categorisation however excludes sector-based government universities (owned by other Ministries) such as Ethiopian Civil Service University, Defence University College, Telecommunication & Information College, and Kotebe College of Teachers Education. Those public universities currently under construction and all private institutions are not included as well.

Senior Universities, established before 2004, include Addis Ababa University, Arba Minch University, Bahir Dar University, University of Gondar, Haramaya University, Hawassa (Dehub) University, Jimma University, and Mekelle University. Except Addis Ababa University, most were initially founded during early 1950s as colleges providing training in specialised subjects but later upgraded to a university status with diverse disciplinary programs.

Junior Universities, established between 2004 and 2009, include Axsum University, Ambo University, Debre Birhan University, Debre Markos University, Dilla University, Dire Dawa University, Jigjiga University, MadaWalabu University, MizanTepi University, Samara University, Walaita Sodo University, Wollega University, Wollo University, and Adama University.

Newly Established Universities, established after 2009, include Addis Ababa Science and Technology University, Asosa University, BuleHora University, Debre Tabor University, Metu University, Wachamo University, Welkite University, Woldiya University, and Adigrat University.

accounting for a considerable portion of student enrolment (Ashcroft & Rayner 2011; and Nwuke, 2008). Undergraduate and postgraduate combined enrolment grew from around 88,700 in 2000/2001 (MoE, 2001) to over 585,000 in 2012/2013 (MoE, 2013). The overall education sector was ranked seventh, according to Access Capital (2010), in terms of its pace and size of growth compared to other service types in the country. Accordingly, more portion of the total education budget⁵ has been committed to higher education. This was partially explained by recognition, on the part of the government, of the central role higher education plays in the social and economic development strategies of the nation (Ashcroft, 2010).

Many African countries also share this trend. Such massive expansions are backed by the fashionable devotion on the belief that the key for success in a globalised world increasingly lies in the effectiveness to assimilate available knowledge and build comparative advantages to address the most pressing development challenges. In this regard, increasing attention has been given to higher education and technological innovation.

Though massification was an “iron-law” of higher education elsewhere (Altbach, 2012), the process has escalated solid concerns regarding growing pressure on funding, diversification, equity, educational quality, infrastructure, academic staff, governance structure, professional leadership, institutional structure and mission, and other elements of the system in Africa compared to other parts of the world where conditions have been relatively better. Literature (Rayner, 2006; Materu 2007; and UNESCO, 2010) suggests that such ramifications of aggressive expansion coincide with circumstances elsewhere in Africa.

In Ethiopia too, the breakneck pace of massifying higher education has come along with eminent challenges. The expansion has led to financial constraints and deteriorating

⁵ Despite the 2009 Higher Education Proclamation (No.650/2009) made provisions for block-grant budgeting, Ethiopian public universities still receive budget through backward line-item negotiation with the Ministry the practice of which should have been abandoned long ago.

conditions of study. Reisberg and Rumbley (2010) deliberated the daunting challenge of maintaining optimal balance between access, cost, and quality due to the substantial magnitude and pace of the expansion. The central funding system is far from achieving a matching development with the massification. A scheme of student cost sharing thus came into effect thereby introducing elements of quasi-market to the previously free university education. Despite such measures, government expenditure per student still lags behind Sub Saharan average. On the other hand, the Ethiopian higher education is working hard not to sustain huge deterioration in quality alongside the booming expansion. Like all other countries, which passed through similar developments, the concerns for dwindling quality are increasing towards both the public and private institutions. It is particularly the case with the development of the patchy private higher education (Teferra, 2005; Nwuke, 2008; and Ashcroft & Rayner, 2011) and distance education. Consequently, it has never been easy for higher education institutions of Ethiopia to satisfy stakeholders' needs when it comes to the educational quality.

One of the features of the deplorable quality is evident in the strained academic staff. Higher education in Ethiopia suffers from a shortage of academic staff. Faculty⁶ size almost grew by over seven fold from 3,300 in 2000/2001 (MoE, 2001) to around 24,000 in 2012/2013 (MoE, 2013). Yet, this was still not enough in contrast to the boom in student enrolment. Overcrowded classes intensify the problem. The teacher-student ratio has remained unsatisfactory, i.e. 1:23. Even worse, scarcity of adequately qualified faculty has prevented more than ever the provision of quality instruction by high calibre faculty with qualifications of master, PhD and professorship. Faculty with a qualification of master and PhD grew from about 40 percent of the total university instructors in 2000/2001 (MoE, 2001) to over 58 percent in 2012/2013 (MoE, 2013). Despite this, the proportion of PhD instructors failed to grow even by 2 percent. As a result, the Ministry of Education has been forced to centrally recruit graduates with a

⁶ Academic staff of Ethiopian origin has maintained the overwhelming majority of the overall higher education teaching staff while the proportion of expatriates has not changed considerably over the past decade.

qualification of bachelor degree. These fresh graduates are assigned particularly to *Junior* and *Newly Established* public universities. The proportion of faculty that, according to Ashcroft (2010), qualifies only to a bachelor level approximates 70 percent of the academic staff in most of these universities. To gain balance, therefore, the government has established an extensive program of in-country provision of masters and PhD training programs hosted at the country's *Senior* universities. Yet, the progress to this end by no standards matches the expectation. On the other hand, high turnover and brain drain of top scholars has contributed to the dreadful deterioration. The situation is exacerbated by considerably low salaries centrally determined by the government (Ashcroft & Rayner 2011). In the face of escalating cost of living, faculty is forced to search for supplementary jobs outside campus often in better paying private institutions. Since such opportunities are concentrated around main cities, public institutions located at remote areas suffer as better calibre staffs are unwilling to work at such locations where prospects for moonlightings are comparably low. In an extreme case, Areaya (2010) noted that the number of faculty with PhD qualification at Addis Ababa University, the oldest higher education institution of the country, alone almost equals the sum total of PhD staff of 22 public universities combined.

Complaints on the deteriorating status of quality in the Ethiopian higher education have also been voiced by employers. Though the country strives to achieve more graduates without incurring visible loss of educational quality, important elements including curriculum, assessment, pedagogy, and training methods have fallen short of satisfying the needs of stakeholders. In a study, employers and other stakeholders interviewed by Ashcroft (2010) stressed on the need for "graduates who display self-confidence, initiative, inquisitiveness and creativity" (para. 4). In addition, the work of Rayner (2006) also pinpointed employers' dissatisfaction with graduates' poor performance at carrying out job tasks for which they took trained. The concern is stronger on those who attended programs at private institutions, and on distance, evening and summer basis. He further discussed that the Ethiopian higher education

should produce graduates with necessary transferrable and employment skills such as problem-solving, communication, team work, information technology, entrepreneurial and creativity. The methods of teaching that plays decisive role in making this possible has been crippled with overcrowded class size and reliance on traditional style of instruction. Ashcroft (2010) draws attention to the alarming danger of graduate unemployment and underemployment resulting from the combination of these obstacles. In spite of the fact that institutions bear a status of university, stakeholders are sceptical of whether certain minimum quality standards are met in the education they provide.

Problem with infrastructure and facilities has exacerbated deplorable quality. The supply of electricity, water, telecommunication and other basic infrastructures have failed to cope up with the intensified construction of public universities particularly in remote regions. Even at campuses located within an accessible range regularly suffer from frequent irregularities and power cuts. Shortage of generators in most emerging universities means interruption of academic work. On the other hand, Reisberg and Rumbley (2010) indicated that the rapid expansion of enrolment has not been accompanied by sufficient development in key facilities such as classroom, library, laboratory, office, dormitory, and electronic networks. Shortage of supply in computer, stationery, office furniture, and vehicles also deepens the magnitude of concern on quality.

The performance of higher education institution managers has been troublesome as far as the issue of quality is considered. Leadership and management capacity has been low with regard to professionally handling strategic planning and human resources (HESC, n.d.). Though massification of access is not necessarily related to deterioration in quality (Ashcroft, 2004), existing circumstance of Ethiopia's higher education indicate patchy preparation for the expanding sector. The commitment of managers in maintaining internal and external standards of quality is doubtful. Effort in ensuring institutional accountability raises questions. Another challenge is effectively motivating academic

and non-academic staff towards improved performance while salary is still centrally controlled by the Ministry. In nutshell, enormous capacity building programs are essential for enhancing the performance of board members, presidents and vice-presidents, deans, academic department heads, heads of finance, procurement and human resource departments, and academic faculty members.

In general, Ethiopia needs to find a way of ensuring high quality education whilst aggressively expanding its higher education enrolment. Valuable lesson on how to achieve such targets can be learned from the experiences of successful countries such as the UK and US.

4.3. Adoption of quality assurance practice in Ethiopia

4.3.1. Legal Underpinnings: Policy and proclamations

With regard to higher education, Ethiopia has issued relevant legislative documents that provide direction on the management of quality at national and institutional levels. These documents duly recognise the significance of expanding access and the need to proactively address issues of quality.

Education and Training Policy (1994): The policy was launched by the current government in power few years after the socialist regime was overthrow. The document consists of explanation of general and specific objectives of education and training. It also deliberates overall strategy on curriculum, educational structure, educational measurement and examination, language, teachers, finance, organisation and management, support inputs and nexus between research, education, and development. In addition, the policy identifies areas of special attention and action priority in education.

The view of the policy on education quality begins with a brief summary of challenges in the education sector:

“Our country’s education is entangled with complex problems of relevance, quality, accessibility and equity. The objectives of education do not take cognizance of the society’s needs and do not adequately indicate future direction...inadequate facilities, insufficient training of teachers, overcrowded classes, shortage of books and other teaching materials, all indicate the low quality of education.” (FDRE, 1994, p. 2)

In order to address these challenges, the policy argues that education relevance and quality should be improved through: 1) properly developing necessary infrastructure to increase access to rural areas, 2) giving due attention to the supply, distribution and utilisation of educational materials, educational technology and facilities, 3) adopting an efficient educational financing system, and 4) decentralising educational management.

Higher Education Proclamation (No.351/2003): This proclamation is a comprehensive legal document that incorporates crucial directives on higher education quality. It sets the objective of higher education towards producing skilled manpower in quantity and quality on the basis of the needs of the country. It provides regulation regarding accountability of private higher education institutions and guidelines on accreditation requirements.

Perhaps the most celebrated achievement of this proclamation rests on its provisions on establishing Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) and bestowing a comprehensive list of power and duties. Progress towards improving quality of education secured its first significant break with the setting up of this agency. It also indicates the degree of attention paid to issue. On its establishment, the agency assumed the objective of supervising the relevance and quality of higher education offered by any institution in the country.

Higher Education Proclamation (No.650/2009): This proclamation is the latest legislative document on higher education. In terms of quality, this document provides

appropriate legal framework to guide focus of institutions on critical issues of relevance and quality of education. The two unique features of the proclamation are its provisions on institutional quality enhancement (article 22) and quality of teaching-learning and assessment of students (article 41).

While the previous proclamation made significant breakthrough in launching external quality control by HERQA, the latest proclamation, in addition to the external, introduced guideline for practice of internal quality enhancement. Accordingly, every institution is required to have a reliable internal system for quality enhancement which should be continuously improved. Such institutional level endeavour is also required to emphasise on professional development of academic staff, teaching-learning processes, student evaluation, assessment and grading systems. Developing quality standards, undertaking academic audit on periodical basis as well as follow-up and documentation are some responsibilities of institutions. It is this provision that triggered public universities to set up structures of institutional quality enhancement.

On the other hand, guidelines on improving quality of teaching-learning and assessment of students demand institutions to strive towards interactive student-centred learning, of education knowledge and skill added value, institutionally recognised and well-defined student assessment and examination methods, and on-job professional training of academic staff.

4.3.2. HERQA: A quality controller

The Ministry of Education embarked on an unprecedented move in response to the dangers posed by numerous concerns on increasingly deteriorating education quality by setting up the quality managing agency, HERQA, bestowed with a responsibility of overseeing effort towards improving quality. The organisation of HERQA includes an administrative board, a director, and staff. Even though it is claimed to be an autonomous organ, it is also accountable to the Ministry. Since its establishment, the agency has been handling accreditation (for private institutions), and performance

review and quality audits (for private and public institutions). Through institutional quality audits, the agency conducts a deeper assessment of the relevance and quality of programs and institutions, and an analysis of learning-teaching environment. According to HERQA (2006), such audits focus on ten key aspects of institutional operation including: 1) vision, mission and educational goals, 2) governance and management system, 4) academic and support staff, 5) student admission and support services, 6) program relevance and curriculum, 7) teaching, learning and assessment, 8) student progression and graduate outcomes, 9) research and outreach activities, and 10) internal quality assurance. Furthermore, the agency also gathers and disseminates information to the public about the standards and quality of institutions and programs. In addition to ensuring relevance and quality of education provided at any institution in the country, HERQA is also tasked with developing awareness and involvement of stakeholders in quality improvement endeavour.

The education reforms conducted in Ethiopia at the beginning of this century paved the way for quality improvement initiatives. The reform had themes of expanding enrolment, granting autonomy to institutions, and making education market-oriented (Ashcroft, 2004). The commitment towards introducing quasi-market elements in higher education facilitated the platform for quality to gradually penetrate into the agenda of the reform.

Besides the Ministry of Education, effort on addressing concerns on dwindling education quality have also joined by various international donors who took part in expanding and reforming Ethiopian higher education (Rayner, 2006). These institutions include the World Bank, UNESCO, EU, UNDP, NUFFIC, Department for International Development and others. Cognizant of the pace of the expansion in public and private sectors, donors recommended setting up effective external regulation and a robust quality assurance system to guard the public from institutions that provide education of a dubious quality. Such suggestions cemented the determination towards launching HERQA. Likewise, Ashcroft (2010) noticed that introduction of quality assurance

concept to Ethiopia has strong foundation on Western university experts offering consultation to the Ministry based on their advanced experience. With this regard, the World Bank was a principal source of influence through consultation and mobilising experienced UK academics to the service of the agency during the period of its infancy.

Although HERQA developed through the course of time, the work of Ashcroft and Rayner (as cited in Yimam, n.d.) indicated that the agency faced a challenge during its early period in precisely planning proper methods of conducting quality assessment and accreditation. Even more, a comprehensive agreement on how quality should be conceptualised and evaluated was lacking.

Chapter Five - Result and Discussion

This chapter presents the result and discussion of the empirical data collected. The content of the chapter is divided into four main parts. It begins with presenting a general profile of the case university and its institutional quality enhancement office used for the study. The remaining parts are dedicated to the discussion of the three sub-questions of the study: quality assurance activities carried out by the institutional quality enhancement centre of the case university; the state of essential elements necessary for institutionalising quality assurance at the case university; and the phase at which the overall quality assurance effort of the case university is found.

5.1. The Anonymous case university

5.1.1. General profile

The organisation used as the case university of the study is a public university in Ethiopia. The institution is owned by the country's Ministry of Education. It was founded during mid-1980s. As one of the *Senior* universities of the nation, it was initially founded as an institute that delivers specialised training in certain disciplines. During the early 2000s, the institution was upgraded to the status of a university by the Ministry. This transformation was followed by the expansion of classroom, dormitory, cafeteria, library, laboratory, administration and other offices. The university has made considerable stride towards expanding fields of training delivery and service rendering system. It became a comprehensive university opening programs in different disciplines similar to other public universities of the country.

The university trains students in both undergraduate and post-graduate programs. Its academic areas are structured into six colleges: College of Natural Sciences, College of Agriculture, College of Technology, College of Business and Economics, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, and College of Medicine and Health Sciences. The university has a total of 39 academic units, or departments.

It should therefore be noted that information that could allow the tracing back of the exact identity of the university is intentionally concealed from the presentation of the university's general profile in order to maintain confidentiality.

5.1.2. Institutional quality enhancement (IQE) office

The case university has an institutional quality enhancement (IQE) (hereafter referred to as centre, office, or directorate) office that was established in 2010. The office evolved out of an earlier centre that used to work on developing academic and resource aspects of the university. The rationale behind the establishing the IQE office were stated to be the phasing-out of this previous centre and the growing awareness on need for fundamentally improving the quality of input, process, and output as was claimed to have been indicated in the results of the university's Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) conducted in 2009. In this case, it is important to be critical as the university attributed nothing to the provisions made by the 2009 Higher Education Proclamation (No.650/2009) which unequivocally required all higher education institutions of Ethiopia to set up their own institutional quality enhancement structure. Though it is not openly acknowledged, or the IQE office staff might not have sufficient knowledge of such national developments on quality, it is however impossible to deny the fundamental legal foundations the proclamation laid down for the establishment and operation of the office.

The IQE directorate represents the main ongoing institutional processes that are targeted at assuring and enhancing quality. Its vision emphasises on developing the quality assurance and quality enhancement directions of the university's teaching-learning, research and community service. It also includes becoming the leading agent in improving the university's service quality and adopting quality culture in all core functions of the university. The IQE office is an internal structure that particularly deals with supervising the relevance and quality of higher education at the case university. It primarily conducts regular quality audits and provides different trainings for professional development of staff among others. The mission of the office is assisting

the university in providing quality education, problem-solving research, and prominent community service. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the office mainly works on academic quality assurance. The task of supervising the quality of research and community service is given less emphasised.

In order to meet its mission, the IQE office carries out several activities which are discussed in detail later on. In doing so, the office is guided by the direction on the areas of focus for institutional quality audit indicated by the Ministry and Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA).

The IQE office clearly identified its stakeholders as students, academic staff, researchers, community, regional and federal governments, agencies working on quality assurance (such as HERQA) and other supporting organisations.

The core values of the IQE office include priority to quality; care for community; perseverance and commitment; equality; culture of innovation; democratic thinking; and appreciation.

In general, the IQE directorate takes operational responsibility for quality assurance of the case university. In addition to carrying out quality audits, the office provides guidance to colleges and departments of the university on quality assurance matters. It ensures that procedures towards assuring and enhancing quality are followed. Besides, it also liaises with HERQA representing the university's endeavour in quality care.

5.2. The quality assurance activities of the IQE centre

Tasked with the responsibility of supervising overall institutional endeavour towards quality care, the IQE centre of the case university carries out several crucial activities. This deal with the first sub-question of the study: *What are the quality assurance activities carried out by the institutional quality enhancement centre of the case university?* Thus the discussion of the key activities is presented as follows.

✚ ***Carrying out internal quality audit:*** The IQE office has operational responsibility for quality assurance of the university. It initiates and leads internal quality audit, an overall institutional quality inspection, through its internal Quality Audit Team (QAT). The institutional self-assessment focuses on evaluating the quality of: programs and courses; academic staff; teaching and learning experience; student assessment; resources and facilities; research; and support services. The team examines how the university's endeavour in each of these focus areas contribute to student learning quality. The audit involves evaluating the interaction between academic staff and students. The audit team gathers all the necessary data from stakeholders (students, academic staff and management) and prepares an institutional audit report which is finally compiled by the IQE directorate. This was also used by the office as a mechanism of cross-checking the trustworthiness of information collected. However, the internal quality audit lacks a genuine evaluation of the graduate value-added which is the transformation in the knowledge, skills and attitude of graduates as a result of going through graduate and undergraduate trainings in the university. By the same token, assessment of employability and entrepreneurial ability of graduates is yet from being adequately audited. The evaluation of graduate and employer satisfaction also lags behind.

✚ ***Monitoring and supervision of quality assurance:*** The IQE centre mainly conducts supervision on the quality assurance of several academic and administrative issues of the university:

- The performance of academic staff is regularly undertaken every semester and the result of the evaluation is used to suggest improvement in practice which in turn helps improve the teaching and learning processes. Academic staff are evaluated by students, fellow academic staff, and department heads on the last day of the course completion. The IQE office oversees the conduct of the evaluation. The evaluation is undertaken to identify strengths and weaknesses whereby the feedback is communicated to faculty.

- The implementation of continuous assessment and student-centred learning of all programs of the university is assessed. The Exam Review Committees (ERC) of

departments review all examinations in undergraduate courses for completeness of content, rigour and soundness. The IQE directorate supervises the task of these committees on checking whether examinations are to the standard set by the university.

- The IQE centre monitors whether each training program delivered by the university contributes to the objectives set in the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) of the country. Such checks are targeted at assessing the relevance of education.

- The IQE office ensures the implementation of day-to-day teaching-learning activities as per the academic calendar of the university. One of the participants of the focus group discussion, for instance, explained that:

We are working hard to ensure the proper observance of the university's academic calendar using mottos such as 'Day one, class one!' and 'First day, first class!' as a powerful mechanism to prevent wastage of priceless class hours. (p. 6)

- The IQE centre assesses the availability and quality of facilities and resources of the university such as classrooms, libraries, laboratories, ICT centre, internet facilities, E-learning resources, chairs, and books. In addition, the sanitation of campus, student dining halls and dormitory are occasionally monitored.

- The IQE office supervises the Student Feedback Groups (SFG) and One-to-Five Student Study Groups (OFSSG). These groups indicate the motive of the IQE office to participate students in the institutional quality enhancement endeavour. This also allowed the office to collect information crucial to identifying areas of student satisfaction and discontent on the performance of the university with regard to teaching-learning, administration, and other student services.

- The application of module-based delivery of courses is monitored for implementation consistency throughout the university.

- The IQE office supervises the preparation of course outlines in accordance with program curriculum. The centre also oversees the preparation and distribution of

class schedule to respective academic staff two weeks in advance before the class starting date.

- Fairness in the distribution and utilisation of teaching aids such as laptops, projectors, tape recorders and other materials is another aspect that is under the infrequent supervision of the IQE centre.

- Whether tutorial class for female and low-achieving students are delivered properly is monitored by the IQE office.

✚ **Conducting program and course audits:** The IQE centre reviews existing and newly proposed programs and courses. The office assists departments to periodically review the continuing validity and relevance of the objectives and learning outcomes of their training programs and courses. The IQE directorate strives to ensure quality standards are maintained in the design and implementation of program and course based on guidelines, manuals and procedures approved by the Senate. Such audits cover assessing relevance of programs with respect to national development goals; compatibility with national higher education strategic objectives; the demand of potential students; resources necessary for operation; cost effectiveness; professional profile; graduate employability; and other important aspects of program and courses. Besides, the IQE office also conducts evaluation studies to examine any practical improvement achieved with the help of the Higher Diploma Program (HDP).

✚ **Curriculum review:** The IQE centre coordinates the implementation of curriculum development and reviews. Quality Assurance Committees at each department initially reviews curriculums before further evaluation is done by the IQE office. All curriculums are reviewed based on several aspects including rationale; objectives; graduate profile; admission criteria; graduation requirements; program duration and degree nomenclature; program and course profile; grading scheme; and resources and facilities required to properly run the program. After reviewing these features, the IQE office prepares curriculums for

final approval by the Academic Standard and Quality Assurance Committee (ASQAC).

- ✚ ***Ensuring fair distribution of courses:*** The IQE office calculates the fairness in course distribution among academic staff based on the amount of working hours per week. Hence, the workload of each academic staff within the same department, or academic unit is compared. The purpose behind carrying out such monitoring is to avoid some academic staff from disproportionately accumulating excess working hours, which is subject to payment additional to normal salary, in the presence of other academic staff of the same department with a workload lower than the standard working hours set per week. It was reported that the extra payment for above-the-standard working load attracts academic staff to a mass courses and research projects while their counterparts have very few to do. The IQE office makes effort to prevent this practice as it is believed to pose serious threat on educational quality of the university.
- ✚ ***Developing instruments for quality assurance:*** The IQE centre develops instruments for ensuring educational quality. With this regard, the office prepared policies and manuals necessary for carrying out quality assurance activities in the university. A policy for academic quality assurance was prepared in 2012 to guide the entire quality assurance endeavour of the university. In addition, the office prepared manuals, formats and guidelines quality audit reviews. It also developed approaches and methodologies for curriculum review. Likewise, the centre developed academic quality standards towards which the university is required to function. In spite of inadequate accomplishment so far, the IQE office strives to design quality assessment around focus areas including: vision, mission and educational goals; governance and management system; infrastructure and learning resources; academic and support staff; student admission and support services; program relevance and curriculum; student progression and graduate outcomes; and research and outreach activities. Some of these tools inspected by the researcher during site visit to the case university

include exam review form; monthly teaching report form; instructors' performance evaluation forms to be filled by students, colleagues and department heads for courses, clinical laboratory, technology workshop, and practical attachment; curriculum review manual and curriculum approval form; continuous assessment and student-centred learning manuals; HDP modules; peer review manual; planning and audit report formats; and course delivery format.

✚ ***Celebrating 'Educational Quality Day':*** The IQE centre has started to celebrate an educational quality day at the university. On this day, a panel discussion on quality was held with the university community (students, academic staff, and senior management). A visiting expert from HERQA led a discussion on the meaning of educational quality and how to improve institutional quality.

✚ ***Giving trainings for academic staff:*** The IQE office initiates university-wide local professional development trainings for academic and technical support staff.

These trainings include:

- *Instructional Skills Training:* All new academic staff takes a five-days training on learner-centred approach, classroom management, assessment, instructional planning, and ethical in higher education teaching. Apart from acquainting instructors with necessary pedagogical skills, the training is used by the IQE centre as a medium to introduce new academic staff to the academic quality assurance policy of the university.

- *Higher Diploma Program (HDP):* The IQE directorate provides HDP for teacher educators in order to improve the quality of education in the university through using the training as a licensing program that helps develop the skills and professionalism of academic staff. The training lasts for around 10 months and its modules include reflective teacher educator, managing learning, action research, and organisational or school placement. The director of the IQE office reported that the centre has produced more than 500 HDP graduates since 2006. As a result of this achievement, he also explained that the case university has been mandated by the

MoE with the responsibility of moderating four higher education institutions in its regional cluster.

- *English Language Enhancement Training*: Another training given by the IQE centre is dedicated to improve the English language skill of academic staff. This was facilitated by recognition, on the part of the office, on the need to improve instructors' command of English. The training is used as a tool to enhance quality instruction and scholarly publication.

- *Other demand-driven trainings*: Trainings on exam preparation, module preparation, computer applications, cooperative learning and others are given by the IQE centre when needs arise.

✚ *Liaising with HERQA*: The IQE centre liaises with HERQA on behalf of the university. It communicates with the national quality agency; the office receives national guidelines and central assignments on what is to be done from HERQA and reports back on the institutional and program audit of the university.

✚ *Other planned activities*: Although not operational so far, the IQE centre has made preparations to carry out some crucial activities:

- *Follow up on graduate employability*: the IQE centre intends to record contact addresses of graduating students before they leave campus in order to later contact a group of sample graduates and check on their employability. By doing so, the centre plans to locate itself in a better position to evaluate the demand and marketability of its graduates.

- *Academic Programs Quality Prize Competition*: The IQE office has prepared set of criteria to be used in ranking and prizing departments that score high performance in academic quality. The criteria on the basis of which departments are going to be evaluated include teaching-learning; student assessment; curriculum; training and research; coordinate the functions of committees; community service; administration; utilisation of teaching materials; and educational quality. The first academic programs quality prize is expected to be given to top five departments at the 2014 graduation ceremony of the university.

5.3. The state of essential elements

The institutionalisation of quality assurance requires certain essential elements to be fulfilled in an organisation. This building blocks necessary in the process include an internal enabling environment, structure, and support functions. This section deal with the second sub-question of the study: *What is the state of essential elements necessary for institutionalising quality assurance at the case university?* The IQE centre of the case university is therefore examined in accordance with this leading inquiry.

5.3.1. An internal enabling environment

Certain elements within an internal environment of an organisation that support the initiation, expansion and development of a quality assurance practice are necessary. These include policy, leadership, resources, and core values. The state of these elements in the IQE office of the university is explained.

✚ **Policy:** The necessary national and institutional policies that guide the entire quality assurance endeavour of the case university are in place. This provided the legitimacy to launch quality assurance activities at the university through laying the necessary legal foundation. These legislative documents include the following:

- *Education and Training Policy (1994):* This national policy duly identifies the major challenges in education quality of Ethiopia. The document provided the legitimacy for quality assurance programs of the case university by clearly stating the need to improve educational relevance and quality. It therefore indicated the task of maintaining educational quality as one of the area that needs priority in all institutions including the case university.

- *Higher Education Proclamation (No.351/2003):* This proclamation incorporates crucial directives on higher education quality. It sets the objective of higher education towards producing skilled manpower in quantity and quality on the basis of the needs of the country. The document also made provisions on establishing HERQA, a national quality managing agency bestowed with the objective of supervising the relevance and

quality of higher education offered by any institution in the country. The proclamation also calls for measures to be taken by higher education institutions, including the case university, towards assuring and enhancing education quality.

- *Higher Education Proclamation (No.650/2009)*: In terms of quality, this proclamation provides appropriate legal framework to institutional quality enhancement and quality of teaching-learning and assessment of students. Accordingly, the case university was required to have a reliable internal system for quality enhancement which should be continuously improved. Developing quality standards, undertaking academic audit on periodical basis as well as follow-up and documentation became responsibilities of the university. This proclamation is the most important legal document that triggered the case university to set up its IQE centre.

- *Academic Quality Assurance Policy*: This is the most important policy framework on quality assurance at the case university. The IQE centre has prepared this policy in 2012 and all institutional academic quality assurance activities have been guided in accordance with the provisions made in the document. One of the participants stated;

Perhaps the most important achievement of our centre is the development of the Academic Quality Assurance Policy...We developed this policy in agreement with other national policies and proclamations...All internal and external quality assurance activities of the university are guided by this policy. (p. 3)

The policy contains description on several issues including: quality assurance mechanisms, quality assessment tools, focus areas for internal quality assurance, and responsibilities of quality assurance management assigned for the university Senate, IQE centre, Campus quality enhancement coordination office, College and department quality assurance committees, and quality audit team.

✚ **Leadership**: The data collected from interviews and focus group discussion showed that IQE office lacks sufficient support from university senior management. It was reported that the university management hardly involves in setting priorities towards quality improvement and promoting quality culture. By the same token,

leadership support in mobilising required human and material resources towards internal quality care activities is very limited. For instance, one of the participants said:

Support from the university management comes only when assignments are given to our office by the management...it's difficult to access resources for the day-to-day activities we do...but we get reasonable assistance in handful of occasions for instance when there we organise trainings and symposium on quality ...it may be because the university management don't respect what our office does. (p. 1)

Speaking in relative terms, another respondent added that:

The support we get from department heads and college deans is better than the support we get from senior management of the university...it's much easier to get for resources like stationery, office, vehicle and other inputs for our office from college deans than the Academic Affairs Vice President or other senior managers. (p. 6)

Therefore, managerial leadership in the university is far from taking a leading role in implementing policy provisions on quality management. This was identified to be one of the sever setbacks to the operation of the IQE centre.

🚩 **Core values:** Although the Senate legislation, Academic Quality Assurance Policy, and curriculum of all academic program put quality as one of the core values that guide principal functions of the university, data collected through interviews and focus group discussion clearly suggest that quality has not yet become truly valued. Appreciate and recognising the merits of improved performance and quality culture are far from becoming part of the mind-set of the university community. A respondent stated that:

If you go around the university and randomly ask people what they think of quality, they will easily tell you it is a very important principle that should be maintained in all functions of the university, in fact, in the

activities of any organisation...but if you ask them what he or she personally have done to improve quality, they will have very little to say...our centre develops and distributes instruments to assess educational quality throughout the university but quality must be truly valued so that academic staffs can properly put these tools to use. (p. 7)

As long as the desire towards maintaining and improving quality is not translated into action, it is easy to understand that valuing quality has only remained a lip service in the university.

Resources: The availability of human, material, and financial resources necessary for institutionalising quality assurance at the case university was found to be inadequate. The IQE centre formally has only 8 staff members: a general director; five campus coordinators; a coordinator for Higher Diploma (HDP); and a coordinator for English language Enhancement program. This however does not include department quality assurance committees. In the absence of well-established institutional quality assurance mechanisms, such very small number of overburdened staff who performs quality assurance activities on part-time basis is simply inadequate to shoulder the responsibility of supervising quality endeavour in a university that has more than 2000 staff (academic, administrative, and technical support staff) and 20,000 students. The IQE centre does not have office assistants and secretary. The researcher also observed the poor office facilities of the centre. The office was small and crowded with curriculums and manuals piled up everywhere. During an interview, one of the participants explained that:

The number of staff that we have is very small...and we all have teaching, research and community service responsibilities just like any other academic staff of the university...we carry out our quality assurance duties on part-time...for example, I only have 6 hours per week to spend on supervising the quality assurance activities of the two colleges I am

assigned to coordinate. I have a huge workload every day of the week. (p.

5)

On the other hand, the respondents reported that whatever material resources the centre secured has been the result of individual efforts of its staff, not specifically allocated to the centre's disposal. The staff struggled to obtain office, laptop and computer, hard disk, projector, and stationery. There is no vehicle assigned to the IQE centre. Its staffs use fixed schedule transportation service like every other staff of the university

The IQE directorate also suffers from shortage of financial resources. A respondent further explained that:

Our office used to receive budget from a non-governmental organisation that sponsors quality assurance programs in several higher education institutions of the Ethiopia...however this financial assistance was discontinued starting from this year and the activities of our centre has considerably slowed down afterwards...it's because there is shortage of budget received from the university administration...at the moment, we are only getting budget for administrative purposes but not for other activities...as a result of this, we couldn't organise symposium for the university community on quality issues...we also couldn't conduct the regular HDP moderation workshops. (p. 8)

Generally, the allocation and mobilisation of resources instrumental for institutionalising quality assurance in the university has not been available to the level it should have been.

5.3.2. Organising for quality: Structure

The institutionalisation of quality assurance necessitates a structure or other form of organisation to which clear roles and responsibilities are bestowed for carrying out quality care programs.

With regard to this, the case university was found to have appropriate quality assurance structure that entirely deals with the task of supervising overall institutional quality assurance activities. This structure of quality assurance management includes the following:

- *Institutional quality enhancement (IQE) centre:* It is a central structure for carrying out all operational responsibilities related to managing and supervising quality assurance at the university. It is led by a director.
- *Campus/college quality enhancement coordination offices:* These are branches of the central IQE office located at all campuses of the university. Accordingly, there are 5 campus quality enhancement office coordinators. Every campus is consisting of only one college except the one that have two. Difference in the number of colleges per campus, led to unequal division of labour among campus coordinators.
- *Department quality assurance committees:* These are quality assurance structures made up of academic staffs at department level. The establishment of these committees started in the 2012/2013 academic year. The committees are responsible for handling matters related to assuring quality at departments. The size of these committees however varies across academic units.
- *Quality audit team (QAT):* It is an ad-hoc team which is responsible for carrying out institutional quality audits at the university on part-time basis. It also reports on the institutional self-assessment. The members of the team are campus quality enhancement coordinators and quality assurance Committee from the Senate to departments.

There are also other offices under the IQE centre:

- *Higher Diploma Program (HDP) Coordination office*: The office is responsible for coordinating HDP trainings delivered to academic staff of the university towards licensing them as trained professionals in teaching at higher education institutions.
- *English language enhancement program coordination office*: It is responsible for running training programs that are targeted at improving academic staffs' command of English for quality instruction at the university.
- *Institutional quality enhancement training and resource centre*: The centre coordinates short-term trainings such as instructional skill trainings and lends teaching aid materials (such as laptops, projectors, and books on pedagogy and professional teaching) and other professional development resources.

The IQE centre works in collaboration with and represented through its directors and campus coordinators at the Academic Standard and Quality Assurance Committee (ASQAC) of the Senate. Members of the committee include Academic Affairs Vice President, campus quality enhancement coordinators, the registrar, academic program evaluation and implementation director, and the IQE director.

The duties and responsibilities of these structures are clearly described in the Academic Quality Assurance Policy of the university developed by the IQE directorate.

5.3.3. Support functions

The institutionalisation of quality assurance demands the existence of certain ongoing support processes in relation to capacity building, information and communication, and rewarding quality. The IQE centre of the case university is therefore assessed based on these processes.

🚧 *Capacity building*: Data from interviews and focus group discussion indicated that the staffs involved in quality assurance endeavour were not adequately trained. They were barely assisted in continuously upgrading their skills in quality care. In

other words, mechanism for training, supervising and coaching the quality assurance staff were found to be at its infancy. Most of the IQE office staffs also have disciplinary backgrounds that are not related education and quality.

Table-2: Disciplinary background of the IQE centre staff

Position	Specialisation Background
IQE director	Psychology and Pedagogy
Coordinator for College of Natural Sciences	Applied Biology
Coordinator for College of Agriculture	Plant Science
Coordinator for College of Technology	Mechanical Engineering
Coordinator for College of Medicine and Health Sciences	Health Officer
Coordinator for College of Social Sciences and Humanities, and College of Business and Economics	Accounting
Coordinator for HDP training	Applied Biology
Coordinator for English language enhancement	Foreign language and literature

In other words, the problem of lack of training worsened the problem together with shortage, overburden, and lack of appropriate qualification of the IQE office staff. The case in point, a respondent explained that:

We were not properly trained by HERQA on internal quality care...very few short trainings are organised by HERQA in the form of workshops may be once or twice in a year but this isn't enough...Another problem is that 7 out of 8 IQE staff don't have disciplinary background relevant for the internal quality assurance activities of the centre...The task of dealing with quality care requires common language and shared understanding of the meaning of educational quality and how it can be assured and

improved. Hence, it is extremely difficult to communicate among each other since we don't share common similar way of thinking. (p. 3)

Another respondent also mentioned that:

After I was recruited by the IQE centre to serve as a campus coordinator, I didn't receive any training before I start doing the job...it's only few of the IQE office staff who are actually trained on internal quality assurance but most of us just try our best to do the job even though we haven't taken the necessary training...it's easy to imagine how difficult it is to train department quality assurance committees and other academic staff on quality issues while we ourselves are not trained. (p. 2)

As a result of this problem, it was reported that the IQE centre struggling with shortage of internal quality audit experts endangering the proper undertaking of quality evaluations.

In addition, the collected data indicated that there is lack of support and periodic supervision from HERQA. The agency has inadequate mechanism for continuous and systematic training of the IQE centre staff. The director of the IQE centre explained that:

Our office don't receive sufficient assistance from HERQA...The communication we have with the agency is that it sends us assignments and we submit whatever is instructed to be prepared within the specified deadlines set by the agency...The agency contacts us only when it needs something from our office...Apart from this, we hardly receive training and support...it has been over 8 months since I've become a director of the IQE office. Within this period, we have submitted around 10 program quality audit reports but the experts of the agency never came for a site visit, not even once, although they repeatedly say they will do so. (p. 4)

The official letters from HERQA to the IQE centre were examined by the researcher. These official communications appeared to have authoritative tone inherent to them such that most of its contents mainly consisted of instructions and assignments that were set to be completed within certain deadlines. Besides forwarding instructions on assignments, the agency did not appear to be supportive.

✚ ***Information and Communication:*** There is lack well-integrated system of multi-directional communication and flow of information among the IQE directorate branches of the case university. Progress on quality assurance activities is not communicated properly. There is a communication gap. One of the respondents put it as:

We don't have regular meetings since all of us are very busy with teaching and research loads which make it very difficult to have all coordinators available at the same time. (p. 1)

It was found that the extent of communication and information flow between the director of the IQE centre and campus coordinators was moderate. They hold meetings when there is an issue to be discussed. Campus coordinators also submit the quarterly reports of their activities to the director of the IQE centre. However, the communication among campus coordinators is weak. Even worse, the communication between campus coordinators and department quality assurance committees is non-existent. The same is true for the communication among department quality assurance committees. Most of the participants in the focus group discussion reported that despite the department quality assurance committee was set up about a year ago with a letter from the College instructing so, members of the committee were not informed about the duties and responsibilities the committee. In the absence of clear purpose, members attempted to improvise carrying out certain tasks which they believed were appropriate such as reviewing department curriculum, making sure exams were prepared to the standard, reviewing modules, collecting and organising electronic and

hardcopy books, and supervising departmental One-to-Five Student Study Groups (OFSSG).

Even though an academic quality assurance policy exists, it was not communicated throughout the university. This partly explains the fact that department quality assurance committees do not know the specific duties and responsibilities assigned to them. Likewise, the policy is not communicated at all to departments. As it stands currently, it appears that the IQE centre has failed to strive towards all-inclusive quality assurance which requires the contribution of all members of the university community.

During the focus group discussion with department quality assurance committee members, one of the respondents stated that:

We know that there is a coordinator of quality enhancement at our campus but he never had contacted us...The campus coordinator never invited us for a meeting, or symposium, or gave us training of any type since the committee was established about a year ago...We report our progress to the department head, not the campus coordinator or the director of the IQE centre. (p. 8)

This problem created obstacle in peer learning and the sharing of best practice experience among staff. In addition to this, the IQE centre failed to disseminating achievements and utilising this for policy advocacy and obtaining resource. Yet, the centre claims to have developed the Academic Quality Assurance Policy before its counterparts and held discussion with their representatives in an effort to share its best practice.

In spite of this, the IQE centre prepares communicates its plans and reports to the ASQAC of the Senate. It also organises and submits annual internal quality audit and program audit reports to HERQA. The researcher also observed the creditable

endeavour of the office in recording and documenting manuals, forms, guidelines, and official communications.

✚ **Rewarding quality:** The data gathered through interviews and focus group discussion showed that there is very poor culture of incentivising and rewarding hard workers. This is probably because quality has not yet been truly valued. Although unorganised, there is some department heads and college deans acknowledge staff with exemplary and extra-ordinary performance. The effort of the IQE centre to promote a culture of rewarding quality has been inadequate. Conversely, one campus coordinator explained that:

I've tried my best to orally express my gratitude to departments for their kind cooperation since what my office has managed to achieve was due to this collaboration...but I am not comfortable with doing the same in writing...it's because people are sensitive to written acknowledgement and it could have a counterproductive effect as non-appreciated departments develop grudges and resentment for not being appreciated...this could constrain future cooperation. (p. 5)

Although what practically exists in the case university is far from setting incentives to motivate respectable quality, the IQE centre is currently making preparation to launch a scheme of academic programs quality prize competition. Progress with regard to developing implicit and explicit incentives to influence the attitude and behaviour of staff may show considerable improvement if this scheme is implemented properly and consistently.

5.4. The phase of institutionalisation

The framework for institutionalising quality assurance applied in this study explains the roadmap for the process of institutionalisation. This covers the stages through which the entire process passes. The roadmap is thus used in analysing the third sub-question of the study: *At which phase of institutionalisation is the current institutional*

quality assurance practice of the case university found? This section analyses the stage of institutionalisation of quality assurance based on the table below.

The main phases include awareness, experiential, expansion, and consolidation. In reality, the passage through these phases occurs in between an initial state of pre-awareness of quality assurance and ends in a state of maturity.

Table-3: Institutionalisation phase characteristics

Phase	Illustrative Characteristics	Potential Strategies or Activities	Indication of Readiness to Progress
Awareness phase	Decision makers become conscious of need to systematically address improvements in quality of care	Demonstrate need for improvements (using comparative data, community surveys, media) Create QA awareness through formal and informal benchmarking Plant seed that all improvement is changing	Deliberate decision by organisation to explore QA as a mechanism to improve quality of care
Experiential phase	Organisation trying approaches to learn and document results that QA leads to improved care	Implement small scale QA activities or experiments Develop mechanism for diffusion of QA results and lessons learned	Increased leadership support and formal decision to develop an organisational strategy for QA
Expansion phase	Strategic expansion of QA activities in scale, scope, and implementation Increasing organisational capacity to conduct QA activities	Development of strategy for QA expansion (e.g. priorities, organisation) Capacity building and leadership development for QA Diffusion of innovation and results	Existence of demonstrated improvements in quality as a result of QA activities Consensus among decision makers that QA strategy merits continuation
Consolidation phase	Simultaneously strengthening and anchoring existing QA activities into standard organisational operations, while addressing lagging or missing activities	Identify missing or lagging QA activities and essential elements, and take corrective action Enhance coordination of QA strategy and activities Continue support for learning environment	Full implementation of a set of balanced QA activities that are integrated into daily responsibilities throughout the organisation

(Source: Franco et al., 2002, p. 26)

The authors who developed the framework highlighted certain circumstances where organisations simultaneously display the characteristics of more than one phase (Askov

et al., 2000; Franco et al., 2002; and Silimperi et al., 2002). Therefore, the organisation is considered to vacillate between the phases instead of identifying it with any single phase.

By the same token, evaluating the quality assurance activities and state of essential elements necessary for institutionalising quality assurance at the case university, through its IQE centre, on the basis of the key characteristics, activities and progress indications described in the above table shows a vacillation between the experiential and early expansion phases of institutionalisation of quality assurance. The case university's institutionalisation of quality assurance demonstrates features of experiential and early expansion phases which are discussed below.

✚ *Experiential phase:* The case university duly recognised the concern on deteriorating institutional quality and made decision to implement quality assurance in order to achieve improvement. The university also set up the IQE centre to develop and implement institutional quality enhancement. The IQE centre assumed all operational responsibilities in managing and supervising internal quality. In its operation over four years now, the office strove to experiment internal quality care. Although the scope of the implementation was initially confined to delivering trainings such as HDP and English language enhancement, it gradually progressed to carrying out several internal quality assurance activities. With regard to this, the IQE centre prepared an Academic Quality Assurance Policy to guide the entire process of implementing quality assurance at the institution. This became an important milestone for the centre to define the duties and responsibilities of each structure involved in carrying out internal quality assurance. The centre also prepared tools and instruments that are used to conduct quality assurance checks. The IQE office started documenting and recording on quality assurance endeavours. The centre also attempted to conduct some rough evaluation studies to examine any change brought with the help trainings given to facilitate professional development of academic staff. The indications that quality assurance brought decent improvement to the academic quality of the university increased the

desire to further expand the institutional quality enhancement effort. In general, the university explored internal quality enhancement through establishing an IQE centre that developed relevant policy and tools necessary for the institutional quality enhancement effort. It also conducted different quality assurance activities. As far as the experiential phase is concerned, the case university has attained necessary national and institutional policies, proclamations and legal frameworks. A separate structure of quality assurance, i.e., the IQE centre, was also established and became functional.

✚ *Expansion phase:* The analysis of the data collected from interviews and focus group discussion indicate that the university featured characteristics of an early expansion phase. The IQE centre of the case university attempted to conduct some evaluation studies to examine any change brought with the help of quality assurance activities and trainings (HDP, instructional skills, and English language enhancement) given to facilitate professional development of academic staff. The indications that quality assurance brought decent improvement to the academic quality of the university increased the desire to further expand the institutional quality enhancement effort. Using the experience from the experiential phase, the IQE directorate engaged in strategic expansion of the scale, scope and magnitude of its institutional quality enhancement activities. As a result, the centre expanded its organisation by setting up branch structures: Campus/college quality enhancement coordination offices, Department quality assurance committees, and Quality audit team. The expansions also led to the setting up of Academic Standard and Quality Assurance Committee (ASQAC) at the university Senate. The expansion was not only structural; the IQE centre also diversified its quality assurance unlike its prior engagement confined to coordinating trainings targeted at enhancing academic quality. Currently, the activities carried out by the centre carries include: carrying out internal quality audit; monitoring and supervision of quality assurance; conducting program and course audits; curriculum review; developing instruments for quality assurance; giving trainings for academic staff; ensuring fair distribution of courses; liaising with HERQA; and

celebrating educational quality day. This was possible due to growing organisational capacity towards employing quality care.

The analysis of overall institutional quality enhancement endeavour indicates that it vacillates between the experiential and early expansion phase. Its comfortable development into the complete expansion phase and other succeeding phases is constrained by several challenges.

- *Limitation in certain essential elements:* The analysis of the essential elements necessary for institutionalising quality assurance showed that the IQE centre encountered limitation securing key leadership support from the university senior management. Respondents repeatedly mentioned that the IQE centre is not given proper recognition which made it difficult to effectively mobilise resources. The centre also suffers from inadequate financial, human and material resources at its disposal. The staff of the IQE office also lacks sufficient capacity building trainings which made it difficult to attain desired level of achievement in institutional quality enhancement. In addition, the progress towards institutionalising quality assurance at the university further complicated by the value that the university community has on quality. Quality has not become part of the thinking and acting process of academic staff. This created challenges promoting the culture of rewarding and incentivising quality. It was also found that the communication and the flow of information among branch structures of the IQE centre is weak.

- *Structural confusion:* There is serious confusion regarding the accountability and reporting chain of the IQE. Utterly opposite perceptions became apparent when the researcher asked to locate the IQE centre within the organisational structure of the university by drawing diagram.

- Director of the IQE office put the centre below the university President and above the Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs; Administration and Development; and Research and Community Service. According to his understanding, the IQE centre is

under the direct supervision of the university President along with other Information Communication Technology (ICT), Corporate Communications, Gender Office, HIV/AIDS Office, and other directorates. This positions the IQE centre completely separate from the Vice President office for Academic Affairs.

- Campus institutional quality enhancement coordinator for College of Business and Economics, and College of Social Sciences and Humanities, on the other hand, located the IQE centre within the directorates supervised under the Vice President for Academic affairs.

Furthermore, the IQE office claims to be directly accountable to the university President while the Academic Quality Assurance Policy of the university unequivocally mandates the Academic Affairs Vice President to oversee the implementation of institutional academic quality. Yet, the above examples are enough to indicate that the IQE office hardly coordinates and supervised by the Academic Affairs Vice President regardless of the policy provisions. There is a breach of the legal dictation requiring the IQE office to remain accountable and report to the Academic Affairs Vice President. This indicated that the quality management structures within the case university are not well integrated into the overall university structure.

The structural confusion is also exacerbated by complexity in functional and operational relationship between the different structures of the IQE centre. For instance, department quality assurance committees and campus coordination offices are both functionally accountable to the director of the IQE centre while they are operationally accountable to department heads and College deans respectively. It appears that this confusion partly explains the limitation in leadership support and communication. One campus coordinator explained that:

To be honest, I don't know who [the director of the IQE centre or the College dean] to ask for budget for non-administrative activities of my office such as organising symposiums... (p. 3)

Another part of this structural complexity is the duplication and overlapping of tasks between department quality assurance committees, on the one hand, and exam review committees, resource mobilisation committees, and a quality task force, on the other. The tasks assigned to department quality assurance committees were found to be carried out by these committees which only added more confusion to the departmental level quality assurance activities. The study found that there is lack of clear lines of authority which constrained members of the department quality assurance committees from concentrating on their particular mission.

- *Negative attitude:* The data analysis also shows that the IQE centre suffers from negative attitude that the university community particularly the academic staff has towards the centre and its activities. A respondent explained that:

Academic staffs tend to see our office as an alien and fault finder...they see IQE officers as people who only want to get people punished for their mistakes...carrying out the task of supervising academic quality within this kind of environment is highly discouraging...No proper acknowledgement is given to our effort from the university management.
(p. 7)

Another respondent also added that:

Academic staffs don't see the activities of our centre as an important input to the overall university functions...people want to see some sort of physical thing when they think of quality just like they can easily see what the university registrar, property management, finance, continuing and distance education, and other offices do...this kills my enthusiasm and excitement in conducting quality care tasks. (p. 2)

Chapter Six – Conclusion and Implications

6.1. Revisiting the research questions

The Ethiopian higher education has been undergoing a recent development that strives towards developing internal quality enhancement processes in addition to a prior exclusive dependence on external quality assurance. Based on this national trend, the study investigated how quality assurance has been institutionalised in public universities. Within this broader inquiry, the study answered all three of its key research questions. A brief summary of the discussion is presented as follows:

What are the quality assurance activities carried out by the institutional quality enhancement (IQE) centre of the case university?

The findings of the study showed that the IQE centre of the case university carries out several activities primarily targeted at assuring academic quality. These include carrying out internal quality audit; monitoring and supervision of quality assurance; conducting program and course audits; curriculum review; developing instruments for quality assurance; giving trainings for academic staff; ensuring fair distribution of courses; liaising with HERQA; and celebrating educational quality day. Although currently not operational, the centre has also made preparations to begin conducting academic programs quality prize competition and follow up on graduate employability. It developed the necessary criteria for ranking and prizing the performance of departments on their academic quality. The IQE centre has also started working on documenting the contact addresses of graduates which will be used later to assess their marketability and employability. In general, the IQE directorate strove to lead and assist the continual assurance and improvement of academic quality and relevance in the university.

What is the state of essential elements necessary for institutionalising quality assurance at the case university?

On the other hand, study showed the state of essential elements necessary for institutionalising quality assurance in the IQE centre of the case university. Accordingly, findings indicated that there are appropriate policies and structural establishments. In addition to existing national policy and proclamations, the IQE centre also prepared a comprehensive academic quality assurance policy for the case university. The structure of IQE centre for internal quality assurance is found at different levels; Senate, colleges, campuses, and departments. Although very weak, there is also an effort towards expanding the structure into students. On the other hand, leadership, resources, and information and communication are inadequate. The findings of the study indicated that the IQE centre received limited support from the university management. The centre also suffered from an acute shortage of human, material and financial resources. The budget given to the centre remained meagre which put pressure on non-administrative activities. The size of its staff continued to be very small and strained. Even worse, the status of capacity building, core values and rewarding quality has been low. The staffs of the IQE centre lack the required expertise and training to carryout quality assurance activities. Mechanisms for enhancing overall institutional capacity towards implementing internal quality assurance are rudimentary. Respondents also reported that quality is far from being truly valued; although the desire towards assuring and improving quality exists, practical action lags behind. Recognising and rewarding good quality performance is nearly non-existent. The culture of appreciation barely became part of the institutional mind-set.

At which phase of institutionalisation is the current institutional quality assurance practice of the case university found?

Finally, the study revealed that the institutional quality assurance of the case university vacillated between the experiential and early expansion phases of institutionalisation. The university duly recognised the concern on deteriorating institutional quality and made decision to implement quality assurance in order to achieve improvement. The university also set up the IQE centre to develop and implement institutional quality assurance. The centre assumed all operational responsibilities in managing and supervising internal quality. In its operation over four years now, the office strove to experiment internal quality care. Although the scope of the implementation was initially confined to delivering trainings, it gradually progressed to carrying out several internal quality assurance activities. The indications that quality assurance brought decent improvement to the academic quality of the university increased the desire to further expand the institutional quality enhancement effort. Using the experience from the experiential phase, the IQE directorate engaged in strategic expansion of the scale, scope and magnitude of its institutional quality enhancement activities. As a result, the centre expanded its organisation by setting up branch structures at different levels. The expansion was not only structural; the IQE centre also diversified its quality assurance unlike its prior engagement confined to coordinating trainings targeted at enhancing academic quality.

The findings of the study also showed that the challenges of structural confusion, negative attitude, and limitation in certain essential elements constrained the IQE centre from comfortably expanding into complete expansion phase and other succeeding phases.

6.2. Conclusion

The quality assurance activities of the IQE centre overemphasised on academic issues. There was very limited effort explicitly targeted at assuring the quality of research, community service and administration of the case university. There is policy for academic quality assurance but not for other core functions of the case university. Besides, the IQE centre does not differentiate between quality assurance and quality enhancement.

The task of conducting institutional quality assurance has been a part-time activity carried out by a handful of the IQE centre staffs who are overburdened by routine teaching, research, administration, and community service duties. Internal quality care has not yet become a full-time responsibility. This however constrains the development of institutional quality assurance and enhancement. Mechanisms of motivating this strained staff should also be in place in order further encourage the IQE centre.

Most of the achievements attained in the institutional quality assurance of the case university were the result of individual efforts of the IQE centre staff. From developing an academic quality assurance policy to securing material resources and office facilities fell on their shoulder. Limited leadership support partly explains this situation. Therefore, institutional support to the IQE centre should be strengthened if internal quality assurance is to further institutionalise and expand throughout the entire university.

Finally, the study revealed that institutional capacity for institutionalising quality assurance is greatly determined by the extent of support from university senior management, availability of necessary legal frameworks, and institutional value on quality. The allocation of necessary financial, human and material resources is equally critical. Proper guidance and training from HEQA can as well capacitate the currently incapacitated IQE centres of public universities found in different parts of Ethiopia.

6.3. Implications for future studies

The study investigated the institutionalisation of quality assurance through studying the institutional quality enhancement (IQE) centre of the case university. Therefore, it exclusively focused on examining the entire IQE centre and its activities. All the data used in the study was collected from the IQE centre staff (i.e., director, campus coordinators, department head, and department quality assurance committees). Thus future studies could focus on other aspects that are not adequately addressed in this study.

Investigating other aspects of an institution in addition to institutional quality enhancement structures to comprehensively capture overall institutional processes towards developing internal quality assurance.

Future studies can investigate how university management influence the practice of institutional quality assurance. This is important because from making formal decision to experiment quality assurance to allocating and mobilising necessary resources concerns leaders and senior managers. Thus, detail examination of the role of university management in raising concern on deteriorating quality and providing institutional focus towards taking necessary measures to improve it can be an appropriate area of future studies.

It is also important to analyse the integration of institutional quality enhancement centres within the overall organisational structure of universities. Though sufficient structure exists, this study indicated that the IQE centre suffered from structural confusion. With this regard, studying the accountability and reporting structures of IQE centres and how this fits into university chain of command becomes important. By examining problems in the existing structural integration, future studies can indicate improved ways of setting up structural organisation of the centre.

Examining the nature of relationship that exists between IQE centres and HERQA can also be another area of future studies. This study showed that limited form of communication exists between the two bodies where the agency provided assignments and centre submits the reports on the assigned tasks. Further studies can be dedicated to thoroughly investigating the exact landscape of the relationship. This helps to understand the strengths and drawbacks of the existing relationship. It could also shade light on the range of support and supervision the agency can provide to institutional quality assurance endeavours.

Finally, it is also important to examine the performance of *Newly Established* and *Junior* universities in institutional quality assurance. This could show where these institutions stand in contrast to *Senior* universities. It also helps to depict a comprehensive picture of the state of internal quality assurance at all expansion phases of public universities. The phases represent varying overall institutional resources and facilities which considerably affects internal quality care.

6.4. Limitations of the study

The study used only one case institution as an example to show how the institutionalisation of quality assurance has been taking place in Ethiopian public universities. Therefore, the findings of the study cannot represent the status of institutional quality assurance in all public and private higher education institutions of the country. Despite this limitation in generalizability, it may however offer an insight into key trends in the adoption and development of internal quality assurance.

Another limitation of the study could be that it relied on the views and experiences of the IQE centre staff. Though the target group for data collection was these participants who are deeply involved in the institutional quality assurance activity, the findings of the study however may not indicate the views of other segments of the case university community such as senior management, academic staff, students and technical support staff on the institutional quality assurance endeavour of the university.

The subjective judgement of the researcher could not be avoided during interpreting and analysing data particularly on the essential elements necessary for institutionalising quality assurance, and phases of institutionalisation. The researcher decided on whether the state of certain essential elements was sufficient for institutionalising quality assurance, and whether the existing institutional quality assurance coincides with any particular phase of institutionalisation as indicated in the analytical framework.

In addition, using an anonymous case university could limit readers from drawing on their imagination in better understanding the findings of the study. Reader and fellow researchers could make the most out of the findings of the study had the specific identity of the university was disclosed. Maintaining confidentiality of the university could equally limit the range of critiques that could be forwarded at the findings of the study.

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Appendix-1: Interview guide

1. How do you describe the establishment and the missions of the IQE centre?
2. How does the organisational structure of the IQE centre look like? Where does the IQE centre fit into the university chain of command?
3. What are the main activities of the IEQ centre?
4. How are these tasks divided between structures of the IQE centre found at different level?
5. What legal frameworks guided the function of the IQE centre? Are there policies and legislative frameworks?
6. Who and how is the IQE centre supervised? How do you evaluate the leadership support the centre receives from the university management?
7. In your opinion, do you think quality has already been really valued? How do you think IQE centre staff and the university academic staff perceive quality?
8. What material, human and financial resources does the IQE centre need for its operation? How do you personally evaluate the availability of these resources to the IQE centre?
9. Do the IQE centre staffs undergo through trainings on quality issues? How do you personally evaluate the adequacy of these trainings?
10. Does the IQE centre document the record of its activities? How does the IQE centre communicate between its structural branches? How does the centre identify and disseminate best practice experience?
11. How do you personally evaluate the level of coordination between the structural branches of the IQE centre?
12. Are there any mechanisms for rewarding hard working academic staff and departments? How does the IQE centre promote a culture of motivating exceptional performance?
13. How do you describe the cooperation between the IQE centre and HERQA?
14. What challenges have the IQE centre encountered so far in its operation?
15. How can the function of the IQE centre be improved in the future?

Appendix-2: Focus group discussion guide

How and why was the department QA committee established?

What are the main tasks carried out by department QA committee?

How do you evaluate the value that the university staff has towards quality? Do you think quality has really been valued?

How do you evaluate the availability of material, human and financial resources necessary for the department QA committee to carry out its main tasks?

How do you describe the cooperation between the department QA committee and the central IQE office? How does the communication and supervision look like?

Have you ever received trainings on quality issues before or after becoming a member of the department QA committee?

Does the department QA committee reward hardworking academic staff in the department?

What challenges have the department QA committee encountered so far in its operation?

How can the function of the department QA committee be improved in the future?