# The International Directions in Higher Education Quality Assurance System: In the Context of Egypt and the United Kingdom

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## Abstract

A comparative research study was undertaken on Quality Assurance Systems (QAS) in higher education in Egypt and the United Kingdom to identify different implementation mechanisms for quality assurance in higher education institutions. The principal data sources are based on document analyses about both Egyptian and the United Kingdom higher education institutions, quality assurance agencies, and governments. The findings showed slight variations in the scope of applying their Quality assurance system mechanisms in terms of their process, funding, Institutional autonomy, accountability, and, accordingly, universities' efficiency. This concludes that the reform that could contribute to the quality assurance system regarding funding, governance, and application in higher education in Egypt may lead to better higher education outcomes and institutional internal and external competitiveness.

**Keywords**: Quality Assurance System, Higher Education System, Accreditation, Institutional Evaluation, Program Evaluation.

# ملخص الدراسة باللغة العربية

تم إجراء دراسة بحثية مقارنة حول أنظمة ضمان الجودة في التعليم العالي في مصر والمملكة المتحدة لتحديد آليات التنفيذ المختلفة لضمان الجودة في مؤسسات التعليم العالي. تستند مصادر البيانات الرئيسية إلى تحليلات الوثائق حول مؤسسات التعليم العالي المصرية والمملكة المتحدة، ووكالات ضمان الجودة، والحكومات. أظهرت النتائج اختلافات طفيفة في نطاق تطبيق آليات نظام ضمان الجودة الخاصة بهم من حيث العملية والتمويل والاستقلال المؤسسي والمساءلة، وبالتالي كفاءة الجامعات. ويخلص هذا إلى أن الإصلاح الذي يمكن أن يساهم في نظام ضمان الجودة فيما يتعلق بالتمويل والحوكمة والتطبيق في التعليم العالي في مصر قد يؤدي إلى نتائج أفضل للتعليم العالي وقدرة مؤسسية داخلية وخارجية على المنافسة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية** نظام ضمان الجودة، نظام التعليم العالي، الاعتماد، التقييم المؤسسي، تقويم البرامج.

**Introduction**

New managerialism in higher education and what it includes from neo-liberalism, total quality management, and new public management resulted in having students as clients and emphasis on accountability measures to ensure that provision meets clients' needs and expectations. Floud (2005) mentioned that Greater public service efficiency demands result from a loss of trust in public sector professionals and their institutions. Amaral (2007) added that, however, it is appropriate to recognize that the massification of higher education has also played a role in the loss of trust, with quality assessment and accreditation being used as a replacement for that trust. Accordingly, the spread of controls and regulations in the academic sector seems to have replaced collegiality, trust, and professional discretion (Roberts, 2004, 7).

Vroeijenstijn (1995) argued that quality has always been part of the academic tradition, and the change is the external interest in making quality more explicit, reflecting a change in the relationship between higher education and society.

These changes led to greater visibility of QA in Higher education in Egypt. The Egyptian higher education system has become increasingly focused on quality, evidenced by the quality initiatives stemming from the establishment of the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE) to ensure the quality of education in Egypt.

NAQAA keened to spread the culture of quality assurance in Egypt to ensure a continuous increase in accreditation rates in line with the authority's plans to work in accordance with Egypt's Vision

2030, which aims to increase the number of accredited educational institutions which will enhance the education system and its outcomes in return.

The imperfections of markets in higher education, including students as immature consumers, means the government intervenes to protect consumers (students) and create what Le Grand and Bartlett (1993) call quasi-markets which, Amaral (2007) adds, have been associated with increased institutional autonomy. Increased autonomy, combined with competition, may create difficulties for market regulation, as autonomous institutions might follow strategies aimed at their development and survival, even if it is to the detriment of the public good or the government's objectives. The introduction of competitiveness, autonomy and user choice is inseparable from the provision of information through systems of evaluation made available to users and funders alike (Calero, 1998). So, through QAS, the government intervenes to preserve the public good and manage the game's rules, using quality assessment as a compliance tool to regulate these markets.

The rapidly changing environment of higher education has seen the introduction of national QAS into many countries and its planned introduction elsewhere (Campbell and Rozsnyai, 2002). These are exciting developments, with QAS becoming the process for delivering change (Kemenade et al.,2008) as a significant component of governance in higher education (Jacob and Rust, 2010). This leads the discussion to examine the significant elements of the quality assurance system.

### Research Problem

The higher education system in Egypt faces multiple challenges. Despite the implemented quality assurance systems spread in

Egyptian higher education universities, most of these universities cannot obtain accreditation from the National Accreditation Authority and yet do not meet most of its requirements.

The deteriorating status of Egypt's basic education is the main reason for the global competitiveness index's low ranking; Global Competitiveness Report (GCR) is a yearly report published by the World Economic Forum, and it assesses the ability of countries to provide high levels of prosperity to their citizens. According to the Human Development Report (2019), Egypt ranked 116 out of 189 countries on Human Development Index (HDI) in 2018 with a value of 0.7; worth mentioning that Egypt has downgraded two ranks from 2013 to 2018. Conclusively, there is an apparent low-quality education process in Egyptian higher education that led to worsening distortion of the relationship between the labor market and the educational process (The global competitiveness report, 2019).

The final report published by the National Authority for Quality Assurance of Education and Accreditation for the year 2020/2021 showed that 232 higher education institutions were accredited out of 903 institutions, a rate of 26% of the total number of colleges and universities within ten years since NAQAA was established and started processing. In addition, Egypt shows a weak presence of Egyptian higher education institutions is noted in many world rankings of universities.

Cairo University, among the top 500 universities in the world, at a time when attendance is increasing in quantity and quality for several other countries from the Arab regions and the African continent (Fawzy, M. and Negm, E., 2018). Therefore, the research problem was initiated based on the impact of the quality assurance system in higher education institutions in Egypt and its inability to compete

among the rest of the higher education institutions internationally and globally.

### Research Questions

- What are the quality assurance systems applied in Egypt?

- What are the quality assurance systems applied in the United Kingdom?

- How can we benefit from the experience of the United Kingdom and develop the quality assurance system in Egypt?

### Research Purpose and Goals

This research reviews the quality assurance systems in Egypt and the United Kingdom. It is essential to understand different approaches and mechanisms for quality assurance systems and the various methods and tools to achieve the quality of higher education institutions. This research also aims to review funding techniques adopted by each country as per their regulations and policies to Increase the understanding of the existing system and to develop a proposal that may help elevate the current quality assurance systems.

### Research Methodology

The current research uses the descriptive approach, which is one of the approaches that specializes in the process of searching and investigating social and educational phenomena, describing them as they are in reality, diagnosing them, and analyzing them in order to explore and discover the relationships between its elements, and then reach meaningful generalizations regarding these phenomena.

### Theoretical Framework

### Principal Techniques of Quality Assurance system in Higher

**Education:**

The higher education quality system is divided into three main methods, as follows a) accreditation, b) assessment, and c) audit; both assessment and accreditation methods are used to monitor the quality of teaching and learning, but the auditing method is mainly concerned with internal procedures accepted by academia to accomplish the established objectives (Kis, 2005).

- **Accreditation**

Accreditation evaluates either the institution or a program fulfilling a threshold standard for a specific status (Kis, 2005). Woodhouse (1999) mentioned that obtaining accreditation affects higher education institutions and their students and that the output of accreditation is either a yes or no decision. Dill (2000) also illustrated that the focus of accreditation is comprehensive, examining the mission, resources, and procedures of a higher education institution or program.

- **Assessment**

Dill (2000) summarizes assessment as an evaluation process that makes graded conclusions about the quality and goes further than accreditation, which makes a binary conclusion, as assessment is more concerned with the outputs and the quantitative evaluation (Woodhouse, 1999).

European QAAs widely use the program and institutional assessments. Program assessment is one of the most frequently used methods, done by 53% of European agencies, mainly in English-speaking countries. On the other hand, the institutional assessment method is less widespread, as around 22% of European agencies are using it (ENQA, 2003).

- **Audit**

A quality audit checks the extent to which the higher education institution achieves its explicit or implicit objectives to ensure that its claims are correct and valid (Woodhouse, 1999).

Academic audits take place at the institution level and do not aim to comprehensively review higher education institutions or programs' resources and activities, nor do they directly evaluate the quality of teaching or learning. Instead, audits focus on those processes implemented by HEIs to guarantee and improve the quality of teaching and learning (Dill, 2000).

**Institutional audits are regularly in the UK by 28% of the quality assurance agencies. (ENQA, 2003).**

**levels of Review Techniques**

There are two main levels to apply different review techniques, as the levels of evaluation may differ from one quality assurance system to another, as quality is addressed at the institutional or program level.

- **Institutional Quality Review**

Kis (2005) defined institutional accreditation as an assessment of whether an educational institution meets a certain standard or doesn't, and accordingly, the higher education institution is being awarded the status of recognition (Vlasceanu, Grünberg, & Parlea, 2007).

In such case, the accreditation procedure shall include several identified criteria that identify the higher education institution's performance related to both teaching and research is consistent with some other scientific standards (ACQUIN, 2015).

The emphasis of accreditation is put on a comprehensive analysis of the mission, resources, and procedures of academia (Dill, 2010).

So the process of institutional accreditation should be holistic and systematic. Institutional accreditation focuses on several issues, including decision-making processes and efficiency of strategic management procedures, the analysis of institutional structures, the applicability of internal quality management processes, organizational resources, teaching and learning processes, and quality assurance in general (ACQUIN, 2015).

The advantages of an institution-wide review are that it asks for fewer experts, is less time-consuming, and is less expensive. Disadvantages of such reviews include little involvement at a grass-roots level, insufficient feedback at the discipline level, and a lack of recommendations for further curriculum improvement.

-       **Academic and Program Quality Review**

Higher education quality review processes either focus on the institutional level or academic programs. Several practices differ among different countries. In the United Kingdom, quality reviews are taking place in both institutional and academic reviews are carried out. Different countries used, to begin with, institutional reviews when they started executing the quality assurance system.

(El-Khawas et al., 1998). On the other hand, a program-wide approach allows more depth and detail; it involves individual staff members and results in feedback from the committee and recommendations for improvement. However, this approach is more time-consuming and expensive than the institutional review (Vroeijenstijn, 1995a).

**Involved Agencies, Associations, and Stakeholders in the Quality Assurance Process**

A quality assurance system involves several relevant agencies,

associations, and stakeholders responsible for applying different criteria and standards during the quality review.

- **Government body:** Government bodies often play an essential and significant role in higher education quality assurance. UK quality assurance in higher education is based on several sources of funding that may be called joined funding. Joined funding is done through the central government, national higher education funding councils, HEIs, and students (ENQA, 2003).

- **Independent quality assurance agencies:** In European countries, independent agencies cooperate in the quality assurance system. Quality assurance agencies are considered an external evaluation system established either by the national or regional government or by the higher education institutions themselves as a government requirement. QAANZ (1999) indicated that independent agencies have a steering body. Where institutions and government may be represented on the board of the quality assurance agency or to contribute to the funding of the agency or to evaluations.

- **Other stakeholders:** Generally, other stakeholders usually refer to students, graduates, employers, government, and other budget providers (Kis. 2005).

Quality Assurance System in Egypt

Higher Education Policy Reform and Accountability in Egypt

In Egypt, reforming education has been an issue of concern since the 1990s. However, educational reform has faced many challenges (El-Baradei and El-Baradei, 2004).

The National Commission on Higher Education Reform was

founded in 1997 by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), aiming to identify higher education challenges and formulate an educational strategy. In 2000, a National Conference aimed to implement a long-term reform plan. This reform resulted in a number of main objectives: improving higher education institutions' efficiency levels, reforming curricula, and enhancing the quality of education by training faculty and staff.

Accordingly, Six projects were endorsed from 2002-2007, including the Technical Colleges Project (TCP), the Information and Communication Technology Project (ICTP), the Faculty and Leadership Development Project (FLDP), the Faculties of Education Project (FOEP), the Higher Education Enhancement Project Fund (HEEPF) and the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Project (QAAP) (TEMPUS, 2010).

The principal techniques of the quality assurance system in Egypt are based on accreditation and evaluation roles, where both are monitored

the extent to which internal quality systems and processes are in place and are effective; as well as the academic standards of their programs, research, and the quality of the learning opportunities, research, and other scholarly activity. The quality assurance system is also concerned with community involvement and the effectiveness of quality management and enhancement (QAAP, 2007a, P.207).

The QAAP (2007a, p.4) highlighted that the research activity review procedure only focuses on the quantity of research, but its contribution to institutional mission and impact on the educational programs do not attempt to assess its quality.

The QAAP (2007a, p.4) also shows that quality assurance in Egypt is mainly focused on the institutional and program level to achieve

quality assurance accreditation and certification. Accreditation will initially be accorded to a higher education institution, a faculty, or a college within a university.

The quality review methods include self-review followed by peer-review (conducted by academics usually in the same discipline) and external evaluation, which provides an independent professional opinion on the assessment of student performance and the academic standards achieved by students' graduation (QAAP, 2007a).

There are three major sources of data resulting from the Egyptian Quality Assurance system, as follows, a self-review report, a site visit, and surveys. These data enable the institutions to understand how far they are in terms of improvement and accountability. The outcomes include reports and follow-up procedures. Responsibility can lie with the National Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committee (NAQAAC), the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAA), or the higher education institution itself.

Evaluation is also linked to funding under the Continuous Improvement and Qualifying for Accreditation Project (CIQAP), which is an important factor in improving the dialogue of accountability and also an incentive for improving efficiency; indeed, even an accredited Higher education institution is expected to continue to improve. The higher education institution is responsible for preparing its action plan for further development, informed by its mission, the accreditation report, and NAQAAE's criteria for accreditation. This may include any application for funding from CIQAP (QAAP, 2007a, p.68; PCIQA, 2009).

A higher education institution may also prepare a periodic (five-yearly) strategic report. After submitting its annual report to NQAAC,

the higher education institution and NQAAC consider the timing of a site visit and the size and composition of the review team. The review team's site-visit report results in one of two decisions that the HEI is either ready or not ready to receive an accreditation visit. If the higher education institution is not ready to receive an accreditation visit, it will be responsible for preparing its action plan for further development, and it may apply for funding from CIQAP to assist its work. A plan should be submitted to NAQAAC within eight weeks of receiving the review report, and the NQAAC will continue to support and monitor progress and, if appropriate, arrange a further follow-up or monitoring visit until the higher education institution is ready to apply for accreditation. Unlike the accreditation site-visit report, the peer review site visit report is not published, but NQAAC sends copies to the institution (QAAP, 2007a).

**For HEIs which are ready to receive an accreditation visit, the site-visit report results**

in either accreditation, accreditation conditional upon satisfying relatively minor changes, or a higher education institution is not ready to be accredited. An accredited higher education institution is listed in a published register for a period not exceeding five years and is invited to prepare for re-accreditation, normally every five years. HEIs which need to make further improvements can re-apply when they satisfy the published criteria. In all cases, the accreditation report will be published, and a copy sent to the higher education institution before publication (Ibid).

**Governing And Financing Higher Education Institutions in Egypt**

There are four regulating bodies: the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), the Supreme Council of Universities (SCU), and the Supreme Council of Private Universities; except for Al-Azhar University has its

own governing body, which is the Central Administration of Al-Azhar Institutes.

The MOHE is the main governing body, which formulates its policy, and supervises and coordinates its implementation across all higher education institutions. The Supreme Council of Universities (SCU) is headed by the Minister of Higher Education and includes the public university presidents and civil society members. The main functions enclose formulating the educational policy, organizing a general coordination policy between the different universities regarding exam times, for example, and formulating the internal bylaws of universities and faculties. Lastly; The Supreme Council of Private Universities has a secretary general with the Minister of Higher Education as president.

The governing bodies at the university level are university presidents, three vice presidents appointed by presidential decree, and a secretary general. At the faculty level, the governing bodies are represented by deans, vice-deans, and department heads, who are appointed by the university president (TEMPUS, 2010).

Higher education is free according to the Egyptian Constitution. The government funding of higher education ranges between 85% and 90%. Public universities, then, are to generate revenue up to 15%. One way of doing so is the creation of new departments at certain faculties. University students are obliged for fee-paying. The fee system enables the faculties to generate more revenue (TEMPUS, 2010).

Egyptian higher education public institutions' financing system is centralized and funded by the government and processed by the Ministry of Finance through the Ministry of Higher Education. Their

autonomy is, therefore, restricted and bounded mainly by available budgets and approval of the Ministry of Higher Education. However, very small tuition fees are imposed by some departments/faculties and approved by the Supreme Council of Universities. These fee-based public degrees were initiated in 2007 to meet market needs. Private institutions are self-funding, and mostly for-profit ones rely mainly on tuition fees. Private universities enjoy financial independence and can decide on resources and research funds (Buckner, 2013).

### Internal and External Quality Assurance in Egypt

Most quality assurance agencies consider both external and internal quality assurance as two complementary concepts, as the traditional external and internal quality assurance concepts seem to be disappearing, and they are no longer separate entities (Ansah, 2016).

### -    External Quality Assurance Approach in Egypt

The National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE) was established in 2007 under Law No. 82 (2006) and Presidential Decree No. 25 (2007) as an external accreditation body (OECD, 2010). NAQAAE is an independent agency responsible for Accrediting higher education institutions on both their institutional and Program levels to ensure their effectiveness and facilitate quality improvement.

NAQAA develops accreditation and quality assurance standards for educational institutions and higher education institutions. On the other side, works to validate the fulfillment of institutional capacity and educational effectiveness criteria. Institutions can apply for program and institution accreditation to promote competitiveness within the same institution and between programs in different institutions.

Programs are accredited when they fulfill two criteria: program management and educational effectiveness. Moreover, accreditation will not be granted to programs that fail to meet certain "decisive standards" in educational effectiveness, namely: "academic standards, design of programs and curricula, and teaching and learning" (Strategic Planning Unit, 2008, p. 35).

The Strategic Planning Unit (SPU) (2008) stated that the Ministry of Higher Education aims to promote ownership of the educational quality by faculty members. To achieve this aim, the Ministry of higher education has commenced several projects to establish a quality culture and offer ongoing professional development for faculty members. In 2006/2007, Quality Assurance and Accreditation Projects (QAAP) endorsed by the World Bank reached one hundred and eighty-eight projects. These projects function on the sector, university, and faculty/program levels. On the sector level, National Academic Reference Standards (NARS) have been formulated in different sectors, such as medicine, engineering, home economics, pharmacy, and nursing. At the university level, the projects aimed at establishing quality assurance centers. At the faculty level, the aim is to find internal quality assurance systems.

There are limited empirical studies on the impact of quality assurance and accreditation policies. In 2015, a study was conducted to analyze the quality of the Egyptian accreditation system, its strengths and weaknesses, and the current methods to enhance higher education quality. The study's results showed the scope of accreditation is "poor" (Schomaker, 2015, p. 159). Although there are incentives in place to encourage universities to apply for accreditation, this is not reflected by the number of institutions accredited. Currently, there are sixty-four accredited programs in

different universities, both public and private, out of three hundred and thirty-three faculties. However, the American University in Cairo (AUC) is the only university accredited by NAQAAE in 2011 (NAQAAE, 2016; Elassy, 2015b). The research assumes that the reason behind this limited scope is that "institutional drawbacks within the NAQAAE are the main reason for this delay.

Moreover, ensuring the anonymity and unbiased perspectives of the reviewers and peers has proven problematic. In addition, the results indicated the possibility of pressure to receive favorable evaluations, which in turn may lead to corruption. This will not improve quality assurance if proven a structural issue. The study suggested that the limitations of the Egyptian accreditation standards, compared to the international ones, might decrease the standards of the higher education institutions and the quality of outcomes. This is problematic as it may lead to a decrease in demand for graduates and jeopardize their opportunities to study abroad, especially from bachelor to master and from master to Doctorate. In addition, the study has shown that the documentation process is perceived as "weak" and the documentations themselves are "defective".

In addition, a study conducted to the extent of students' involvement in the quality assurance process contended that NAQAAE had achieved progress in setting standards and developing quality assurance manuals. However, there were still limitations. Namely, probable conflict of interest resulted from the vagueness of NAQAAE's roles. It performs the combined functions of enhancing quality, accrediting institutions and programs, and ensuring compliance. These roles are separated internationally. Similarly, NAQAAE is responsible for accrediting institutions on all educational levels (Elassy, 2015b).

## - **Internal Quality Assurance Approach in Egypt**

The internal quality assurance system includes quality assurance units in colleges and institutes, quality assurance centers at HE institutions, and the Program of Continuous Improvement and Qualifying for Accreditation (PCIQA), all supported financially by the Ministry of Higher Education. Each has features and functions that target the quality assurance and quality enhancement processes. For instance, quality assurance units help disseminate quality culture among faculty members and implement required quality procedures such as student feedback, course and program assessment, and institution self-assessment in terms of documentation, accuracy, and systematicity. Quality assurance units are supported by quality assurance centers which help the HEIs to be qualified for accreditation.

Establishing an internal quality assurance system in public universities was one the steps taken up and funded by QAAP. The latter was organized through a number of monitoring committees that monitored and evaluated the process of internal quality systems in academic institutions. Among the evaluative criteria were:

- the academic standards of the program, including the targeted learning outcomes, criteria, student assessment, and student achievement.

- quality of learning opportunities, which include teaching and learning, student support, and learning resources.

- research and scholarly activities.

- community and environmental services; e- the effectiveness of quality management and enhancement (Ramadan, Zaaba, & Umemoto 2011, p. 340).

All public and private HEIs in Egypt are required to develop their

internal quality assurance systems and among the main policies and procedures that should be developed are course specifications, program specifications, periodic strategic reviews, student feedback, class observation and annual self-evaluation reports. These quality assurance practices formed the bases of traditional education taking place in campus.

As for practices of external quality assessment, pre university and higher education institutions have been encouraged to obtain accredited status which will help improve the quality of education and academic standards of the institution and its programs. This will enable the institutions in Egypt to compete internationally through presenting high quality of education and be eligible to achieve international accreditation. Part of the quality assurance scheme called for the establishment of a national body that is responsible for the quality offered at the higher education institutions and accrediting them on a national basis. The result was the establishment of NAQAAE in 2006.

Another external assessment encouraged at the educational institutions in Egypt is benchmarking which involves comparison of national standards to equivalent international ones. This process is found challenging for most institutions in Egypt due to lack of national standards. However, the National Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (NQAAA) and the Supreme Council of Universities in Egypt have worked on developing national reference standards for higher education to consider as part of the benchmarking process (The National Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committee and the British Consultants in Higher Education 2004).

During the first and second phases of reform and enhancement for higher education, Quality assurance units were established in

around 297 of 319 Egyptian higher education institutions. Higher education institutions run and are responsible for the internal quality assurance system. HEI establishes an annual self-study assessing all quality components applied to academic programs and institutions, including academic standards, learning resources, governance and administration, research, community service, and quality management (Khalifa, A., Ibrahim, D., et. al, no date).

### Quality Assurance Units

Quality assurance units within the colleges responsible for

- **Creating the appropriate environment for students' education (Handbook of Quality Assurance and Accreditation for Higher Education in Egypt, 2007).**

- **Complete a computer self-assessment,**

- **Implementation of internal quality assurance procedures,**

- **Ensuring the completion of the course and program specifications and reports by academic departments.**

- **Spreading the culture of quality among faculty members and the subject.**

During unit activities, a course/teacher evaluation system is implemented. Faculty members respond to student feedback after the Quality Assurance Unit communicates in writing with the relevant department heads to raise students' comments on courses for discussion on department boards. Best practices are used to develop further courses in the academic program, while incorrect practices are addressed with appropriate solutions. The activities of the Quality Assurance Unit also encouraged faculty members to take the feedback from student assessments into consideration to

improve their teaching performance, develop course materials, or develop the curriculum as contained in the course reports.

The Higher Education Improvement Project Fund (HEEPF) has promoted collaboration and integration between industry and higher education institutions. Effective Quality Assurance units engage stakeholders in the quality improvement process through faculty councils, membership of curriculum development committees, or, more generally, in different stages of the internal review process conducted by the Quality Assurance Units in each college.

A system for monitoring student employment has also been implemented through the Alumni Office within the organizational structure of the Quality Assurance Unit in many higher education institutions. This office aims to follow up and support students' employment through continuous interaction with relevant employers. An impact assessment study described a significant change in some of the activities performed in the self-assessment studies as an example of quality assurance practices conducted during higher education reform projects compared to the time before the projects (HEEP Impact Assessment Study, 2008).

### Quality Assurance Centers

Quality assurance centers are located in universities to promote and support quality assurance activities, assist quality assurance units in qualifying their institutions for accreditation, spread a quality culture, and provide training programs to develop human resources capabilities. Egyptian universities' quality assurance centers cooperate at the national level to exchange experiences and best practices and enhance system-wide quality assurance monitoring and evaluation.

The quality assurance centers in each university also organize external evaluation visits to the faculties, where the external auditors evaluate the faculties' achievements towards meeting the accreditation standards. The reports of these visits are shared with the university administration, along with the annual internal audit report for continuous improvement. During the first development phase (2002-2007), Quality Assurance Centers were established in public universities with a clear organizational structure and job description. Some of these centers have been added to the financial and administrative organizational structure of universities, and their director is invited to attend the university council meetings to present and discuss issues related to quality assurance (Progress Report of the Higher Education Program, February 2008).

The Quality Assurance Center at Ain Shams University presents a case study that can embody the internal quality assurance system that helps in implementing essential quality assurance practices in the educational process by faculties throughout the academic year by specifying a specific month for each practice and monitoring the performance of quality assurance units.

Quality assurance and accreditation projects are managed by the "Continuous Improvement and Accreditation Qualification Program Steering Committee"; it is a  new entity established by the Ministry of Higher Education in February 2008, involved in quality assurance and assisting colleges/institutes in public universities to be ready for accreditation. This committee provides competitive funding for projects aimed at faculties' sustainable development and accreditation. The Ministry of Higher Education allocated a budget of EGP 1 billion for the two "Programme for Continuous Improvement and Accreditation Qualification" (PCIQA) projects from 2007-2012.

The total number of PCIQA projects approved until the end of 2010 was 282 out of 242 out of 319 higher education institutions in Egypt.

The strategic objective of PCIQA is to reach the inherent institutional capacity for continuous improvement and achievement of academic and institutional quality that assures competitiveness and qualifies for accreditation. The main objectives of the program are as follows:

- Attaining effectiveness and sustainability of QAAPs, which started at the first development phase.

- Establish and implement an internal QA system in every public HE college/institute in Egypt.

- Adopting the academic standards of educational programs in colleges/sectors and supporting their application.

- Qualifying public HE institutions for accreditation with continuous improvement in mind.

- Improving the effectiveness and international accreditation of several laboratories and scientific and research centers in public universities.

- Developing the institutional capacity in some sectors of high priority, like colleges of nursing, science, and arts.

- Comprehensive development of academic programs in fields of high priority and qualifying them for accreditation.

- Advancement of student assessment methods and improving the educational effectiveness in some HE institutions.

The projects offered through PCIQA and managed by its steering committee include the following:

1- Quality Assurance and Accreditation Project–second phase (QAAP2).

2- Continuous Improvement and Qualification for Accreditation Project (CIQAP).

3- Development of Academic Programs Project (DAPAP).

4- Higher Education Institutions' Laboratories Accreditation Project (HLAP).

5- Development of Student Assessment Systems Project (DSASP).

6- Infrastructural Quality Related Projects (IQRP).

7- Monitoring and Evaluation of New Programs Project (MENPP).

8- Quality Assurance Students' Projects (QASP).

In such new programs, a relatively small number of students are enrolled, with tuition fees reflecting a positive impact on the quality of education in institutions offering such programs. New programs offered in 2007/2008 reached 48 in 14 public universities under nine sectors serving a total number of students of 4622 (Monitoring and Assessment of New Programs Report 2007/2008). In 2009/2010, the number of new programs reached 63 in 15 public universities under ten sectors serving a total number of students of 10825 (Monitoring and Assessment of New Programs Report 2009/2010). Table 1 demonstrates that the number of new programs in the engineering sector constitutes the largest percentage of new programs is (46 %) out of the total number of new programs offered, followed by the pharmacy and then the medical sector.

Consequently, 45% of the total number of students enrolled in new programs was in the engineering sector. The QASP mentioned above aims at developing a positive interactive relationship between the undergraduate & graduate student community and the HE institution during the years of study and after graduation. This

is achieved through increasing student participation in activities related to enhancing the quality of education while continuously improving there HE institution, engaging them in the decision-making process, and fostering the spirit of belonging to their institutions. In October 2010, 162 projects were submitted from 19 different public universities, and they are currently being screened through the peer evaluation process for approval by the steering committee of PCIQA.

The Role of European governments in quality assurance According to EHEA (2012, p. 60), Before the start of the Bologna process, different European countries were following their quality assurance methods, and only a few of them had a well-developed quality assurance system. Since the Bologna Process was launched in 1999, there has been a rapid transformation of external quality assurance in Europe. Improving the quality of higher education and establishing quality assurance systems has been a high priority for many, if not all, countries. The development of the European Higher Education Area can undoubtedly be seen as a catalyst to this process, with quality assurance linked to establishing stakeholder confidence. When the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for quality assurance were adopted in 2005, this boosted European cooperation in the domain.

## Quality Assurance System in the United Kingdom

Higher Education Reform in the UK

In 1999, the Bologna Process began as an attempt to create the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), one of the largest ever-reform projects in higher education.

It is an initiative to strengthen and develop the European Higher Education Area as a means to ensure mutual recognition of qualifications and the transparency of educational systems.

The Bologna Process resulted in the emergence of standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) in 2005, and increased coordination, international cooperation, implementation leave, and technical tools for quality assurance at national and institutional levels (Enders & Westerheijden 2014). Al-Najjar (2007) stated that in 1995, the goals of the quality assurance and accreditation systems were to achieve three main goals: encouraging improvement and development, providing effective information to the public about the quality of higher education based on the institution's goals, and objectives, and ensuring a high-value return for public money invested in higher education.

In 1997, this task was transferred to the Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education Q.A.A., an independent agency funded by contributions from universities and colleges of higher education and from contracts with major higher education bodies, whose task it is to set standards to ensure the quality of higher education, and monitors continuing to ensure the application of these standards, and works to develop them, and accreditation standards in the UK are based on securing an appropriate educational environment, the independence of universities from their owners, ensuring financial liquidity, securing a coherent organizational structure, the existence of a system to ensure quality, ensuring the development of educational curricula, and the presence of external examiners (Al-Qaisi , 2011).

Governing and Financing higher education institutions in the UK

Universities in the UK are unlike most universities in other European countries or the United States in one major respect. They are all formally private institutions/corporations or enterprises, though established as charities serving a public benefit (Floud, 2005).

Funding in the UK is more devolved as universities are given block

grants for both teaching and research with funding for teaching student and subject-based, and funding for research is quality-driven, which is assessed in RAE. Universities are autonomous to spend that grant according to their priorities and, thus, each university has its financial mechanisms. Universities can diversify their sources of funding through different public and private activities. There is strong competition between universities as they are allowed to charge students higher tuition fees up to a cap decided by the government. Students are given loans for tuition fees and living expenses, which are repayable by graduates through the tax system once their income reaches a threshold of €15,000' per annum. A specific means is dedicated to students from low-income families, who should be exempted from tuition fees and entitled to means-tested grants. Universities have bursary schemes and other financial measures, such as need-based fellowships (Clark, 2006).

Research Councils UK (RCUK) also distributes public funds for research to universities and colleges to support projects and some postgraduate students. These are funded by the government (HEFCE, 2008).

The UK has a mixed economy of mechanisms (block grants, performance-based funding (RAE), competitive funding (RCUK), tuition fees, and income contingent loans), with the bulk allocated as block grants, one for teaching and another for research.

**Internal and External Quality Assurance in the UK**

Internal Quality Assurance or Audit refers to the responsibility of higher education institutions for the academic standards and quality of academic degrees and other academic degrees awarded. The internal quality review includes six basic criteria for the provision of scientific programs, including the scientific method, scientific

reference, faculty members, evaluation method, material facilities, and the administrative system. The External Quality Audit has Three primary external sources of quality audits that are distinguished, they are teaching quality assessments on funding boards, The Higher Education Quality Council quality audit process, and accreditation processes for professional and other accreditation and certification bodies.

While the role of higher education institutions in assuring and improving the quality of teaching and learning is recognized, much of the debate in the UK in the 1990s has been about the arrangements for external quality assurance. A major impetus for altering arrangements for external quality assurance was the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 and its abolition of the binary divide in higher education, creation of a unitary funding system, and the creation of quality assessment arrangements (Brown, 2004).

The funding councils were given a statutory responsibility for assuring the quality of the provision they funded, to be fulfilled through a system of external peer review Assessments focused on subjects and aimed to link quality to funding to improve quality and provide information to users. Quality assessment reports were published containing a graded summative result. The process required a self-assessment by the institution and a three-day visit by a team of peers" from other HEIs selected by the funding council. Much of the assessment visit was spent observing teaching, meeting staff and students, and reviewing course documentation (Brennan et al.).

In addition to external assessment of teaching, the councils also assessed research, a process first introduced for the old universities in the 1980s. Although its methodology changed over the years, it also

was based on peer review. The most significant feature of the research assessment, however, was the strong link to funding, as significant resources depended on the outcomes (Brennan et al., no date).

The third form of external assessment was the quality audit process by the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC). HEQC was a creation of the institutions themselves and "owned" by them through the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP). Created in 1992 out of separate organizations in the previous sectors, its' audit procedure was adopted from the Academic Audit Unit of the CVCP, introduced in the "old" universities in 1990. The process also used peer review and was focused on the institutional level. Audit assumed and emphasized the autonomy and responsibility of institutions, and its function was to test whether institutions had their internal quality systems and were working properly.

Thus, by the mid-1990s and for the first time, FIEIs faced assessment of the quality of three kinds: teaching, research, and institutional management of quality. This system was initially unpopular, especially among the old universities, who prided themselves on their autonomy and felt it was threatened by what was regarded as over-intrusive systems (Brown, 2004; Brennan et al., no date). Moreover, the subject reviews proved to be a massive logistical exercise, and there were concerns about the amount of bureaucracy involved. While some academic staff believed this intrusion into academic affairs should be resisted at all costs, the majority recognized there should be some accountability for one of the main functions of universities. Many accepted that reviews served a useful purpose, and some welcomed the increased attention given to the quality of teaching and learning. But there was persistent concern about the resources needed and the time is taken to participate. As a result, it was decided in 2000

that subject reviews should be regarded as complete at the end of the current round (Clark. 2006).

Since 1993 there had been proposals for a single quality assurance regime, which led in 1997 to the creation of a new Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), which took over responsibility for assessing teaching from the funding councils and institutional audits from the HEQC, while responsibility for assessing research remained with the funding councils (Brown, 2004). QAA continues to audit quality control procedures and monitors quality, along with limes adopted in many European countries, relying on institutional self-regulation and imposing a significantly smaller resource burden on institutions (Clark, 2006) as it has moved back from detailed forms of quality assessment, including of particular subjects, to a lighter touch (King. 2006).

The QAA is independent of the UK government and owned by the organizations representing the heads of UK universities and colleges (Universities UK, Universities Scotland, Higher Education Wales, and the Standing Conference of Principals). Universities and Colleges are responsible for managing the standards and quality of their awards through Internal Quality Assurance Systems (IQAS), and the QA carries out External Quality Assurance Systems (EQAS) to judge how reliably institutions fulfill their responsibility and the effectiveness of their processes for doing this. QAA safeguards the public interest in relation to higher education qualifications and encourages universities and colleges to keep improving their quality and its management (QAA, 2005a; QAA, 2005b; QAA, 2009) through:

- conducting external reviews in universities and colleges at the institutional level and at the subject and program level (academic review of HE delivered in FE colleges, a major review of healthcare education in England, review of Founda-

tion Degrees);

- advising the government on applications for degree award-
ing powers and university titles.

- describing clear academe standards through the Academic
Infrastructure comprising the frameworks of higher educa-
tion qualifications, the Codes of Practice for the assurance
of academic quality and standards, and subject benchmark
statements and program specifications:

- the licensing of authorized validating agencies to recognize
Access to Higher Education programs and award Access cer-
tificates:

- offering advice on academic standards and quality.

The switch to institutional-level reviews is the result of a desire to
reduce the amount of external scrutiny and recognize institutional
autonomy (QAA, 2005b), each approving its programs using QA
procedures, while QAA makes sure they do this satisfactorily. In
addition, however, individual programs that lead to professional or
vocational qualifications are also accredited by professional, statutory,
or regulatory bodies, a form of accreditation designed to ensure
that students are competent to undertake professional practice.
For example, the General Medical Council accredits programs in
medicine and licenses doctors to practice medicine in the UK (QAA,
2005a; QAA, 2005b). The British Accreditation Council, independent
of the Government, is the national accrediting body for further and
higher education outside the state sector (QAA,2005b).

The External audit is the main approach for institutional level
assessment. There are three basic methods of review: self-review
followed by peer-review (by academics usually in the same discipline)

and external evaluation (External Examiners), which provide an independent professional opinion on the appropriateness of the assessment of a student's performance and standards achieved on graduation.

There are five primary sources of data: self-review reports (a key reference point for the peer review team); site visits by peers (including professionals and students); surveys, students' written submissions, and external examiner reports. The site-visit results in a judgment in the form of qualitative reports and these are published on the QAA website (QAA, 2009).

QA systems in the UK serve two significant purposes: improvement and accountability. QAA reports to the audited higher education institution with recommendations for further consideration, including identifying good practices. There are follow-up procedures to ensure higher education institutions continue managing academic standards and quality. On accountability, the full report is published on QAA's website for the wider public and potential students, and when a higher education institution receives a judgment of limited or no confidence, the report will be published with a program of follow-up action. If the institution does not progress satisfactorily after implementing the remedial plan, HEFCE reserves the right to withdraw some or all of its funding (QA, 2009, PP.6-27).

Figure 4.6 is an overview of the process, beginning with the preparation of an internal self-evaluation document. QA then arranges a peer review site-visit. Institutional audit is intended to encourage self-evaluation and to offer opportunities for enhancing institutional management of standards and quality (QAA, 2009. QAA, 2005a; QAA, 2005b). These audits take place every six years and visits over five days where the audit team speaks to staff and students and

reviews relevant documents. The team makes a judgment about the confidence that can be placed in the soundness of the present and likely future management of the academic standard of awards and the quality of learning opportunities. The judgment is either limited confidence, no confidence, or confidence/broad confidence. The report is published on the QAA website, and follow-up procedures are taken when required. A mid-cycle follows up serves as a short check for the higher education institution and QAA on the continuing management of standards and quality, and is normally three years after an institutional audit, and is a paper-based exercise conducted by two senior QAA officers drawing upon institutional documentation and making limited demand on institutions (QAA 2009, pp.25-26).

While QAA reviews include some postgraduate research programs to see how research activity informs learning opportunities, the quality of research is reviewed through a Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), which allocates money based on peer review and has a serious impact on the reputation of departments through the published ratings (Bush, 2007).

### Conclusion and Recommendation

In light of the previous representation of the techniques, approaches, and responsibilities of the quality assurance system and the demonstration of different Quality assurance systems taking place on the international level in both Egypt and the United Kingdom in applying quality assurance internally and externally. The following conclusions and recommendations can be reached:

The contemporary world is witnessing a growing interest in the quality assurance system of higher education through adopting different methodologies and practices while considering their economic, social, and educational conditions.

- Egypt has maintained to apply internal and external quality assurance practices in its higher education institutions. The internal quality assurance system in Egypt is accomplished through three main approaches, including quality assurance units in colleges and institutes, quality assurance centers at HE institutions, and the Program of Continuous Improvement and Qualifying for Accreditation (PCIQA), on the other side NQAAC has developed an external quality assurance system in Egypt to assess and accredit higher education institutions since 2007, although these many applications in their quality assurance system, the in Egyptian higher education institutions is still in the transitional phase, and higher education institutions' status are still behind significantly, in regard to competitiveness index ranking locally and globally.

- It is recommended to grant higher education institutions that were able to follow the standards of quality assurance and accreditation more independence by the authorized governments and provide these institutions with various incentives and supports to encourage them to apply quality and accreditation standards constantly.

It is recommended to Emphasize the importance of periodic QA committee's meetings to follow up on the implementation of improvement plans, and ensure taking Stakeholder opinions and observations into consideration, as regularly reviewing quality assurance standards and test their efficiency helps ensuring their appropriateness for the Egyptian economic, social, and educational conditions.

- Regular training and following up shall take place for those responsible for applying the quality assurance program to

ensure that quality standards and criteria are not only applied superficially or theoretically but in a practical way that is constantly followed.

Higher education institutions in the United Kingdom refer to distinct practices in relation to the student's role in the quality assurance process, when comparing this with the student's role in Egyptian higher education institutions, we may find that student participation is marginalized in Egypt and does not impact the quality assurance process compared to the UK. Therefore, it is recommended to support the role of students by raising and enriching the role of students and graduates and increasing their role in terms of evaluating the educational process and institutional estrangement, ensuring the spread of a culture of quality among them, and encouraging students to participate about what are the quality assurance processes and improvement tools in the higher education system.

- The primary data sources to ensure institutions' quality assurance in the UK are the site visits by peers [includes professionals and students], surveys, students' written submissions, and external examiner reports. Therefore, the student's voice plays a significant role in audits and site visits.

Accountability is an essential factor that influences HE institutions, especially within the era of globalization and with the enormous technological development that enables the student and society to identify the quality of institutions most simply and easily.

Higher education in the United Kingdom is highly committed when it comes to accountability of audit and evaluation report results, the full report, and site-visit results in a judgment in the form of qualitative reports, which are published on the QAA website for the wider public and potential students. While there is much similarity between Egypt

and the UK, the novelty in Egypt may cause it to be viewed differently in terms of independence, accountability, and efficiency. Therefore, it is recommended to enhance the transparency, accountability, and awareness among those responsible for various quality assurance processes.

When it comes to funding mechanisms, funding impacts the autonomy, accountability, and process efficiency, Whereas the increase of mixed educational funding mechanisms enables higher education institutions to be more independent and practice more effective quality assurance applications, as seen in the UK model.

It may also be concluded that the difference in the cultural and social awareness contexts influence how these concepts are understood and applied regarding quality assurance systems between both Egypt and the UK.

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