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THE PRACTICE, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN ETHIOPIAN HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS: THE CASE OF ARBA MINCH UNIVERSITY

BY

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ACRONYMS

AAU	Addis Ababa University
ADRC	Academic Development and Resource Center
AMU	Arba Minch University
APO	Academic Program Office
ARVP	Academic and Research Vice President
EQA	External Quality Audit
FBE	Faculty of Business and Economics
FGD	Focus-Group Discussion
HDP	Higher Diploma Program
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HERQA	Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency
HESO	Higher Education System Overhaul
IQA	Internal Quality Assessment
MOE	Ministry of Education
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
QCU	Quality Care Unit
RPO	Research and Publication Office
SED	Self-evaluation Document
UNESCO	United Nation Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization

ABSTRACT

This study attempted at examining the practice of internal quality assessment and its challenges and prospects in Ethiopian HEIs with particular reference to Arba Minch University. To this end, 'Mixed Research Design' was employed to grasp the general picture of the situation. Qualitative data were obtained via ten (10) interviews with the management of the University and HERQA and two (2) FGDs with instructors and students representatives. Questionnaires were used to gather data from 238 participants. These participants were composed of 128 prospective graduates, 76 instructors, and 34 university management. Qualitative descriptions were pursued to analyze data from in-depth interviews and FGDs. Descriptive and inferential statistics were run to analyze quantitative data obtained from questionnaires. The result of the study revealed that important preconditions to effective internal quality assessment were either missing or not properly functioning. Limited aspects of IQA strategies were practiced by the University. Exam review practice, internship programs, and instructors' performance evaluations were common traditions. Program review and external examiner system were occasionally used to make sure that programs are up-to-the standard. No formal survey of graduate employment and employers and students satisfaction has ever been undertaken. Educational research practice, teaching observations, peer reviews of programs and assessment of resource adequacy were quite scanty. Neglecting external constituencies, involvements in institutional quality assessments were limited to internal stakeholders. The use of quality assessment results to improve academic quality falls short of the desired level. HERQA has contributed a lot towards the development of institutional culture of quality and quality assessment. Notwithstanding this fact, a good number of challenges were encountered during the quality audit process. The University was not well-prepared to the audit in terms of human, material and financial resources. There was insufficient understanding of the audit procedures due to lack of experiences and inadequacy of the training offered to internal quality auditors. HERQA's quality audit did not consider the prevailing condition of the university when it used the quality audit procedure of developed countries. Lack of qualified and competent staff due to unbridled staff turn-over was intensified by involvement of MOE in staff recruitment and appointment policy of the University. This study recommends the diversification of quality assessment strategies by the University and provisions of adequate support by HERQA and MOE to the quality assurance efforts of the University. Moreover, the University has to design strategies to recruit and retain qualified and competent staff by arranging incentive mechanisms. Finally, HERQA has to revisit the audit methodology by gathering feedback from HEIs and drawing lesson from the first audit trial.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Higher learning institutions play a significant role in the development endeavour of every nation. It is crucial in order to provide prosperity and well being to citizens, improve conditions of life and reduce poverty as well as build stable societal structures. It has a vital role to play in shaping the way in which future generations learn to cope with the complexities of sustainable development. In achieving its roles and functions of promoting sustainable development, quality has to be the leading priority to be addressed.

The concept of quality and the concern for assuring and enhancing it was developed in business sector in the west, where commercial success depends on it (Lim, 2001). It is argued that during the same period, quality was not the concern of higher education sector. But, things started to change in western societies in the late 1980's, so that quality assurance has become firmly on the agenda of higher education (Biggs, 2003). Explaining this situation, D' Andrea & Gosling (2005, p. 8) stated: "it seems that higher education institutions want to boast that it offers high quality learning and teaching". Mission statements always claim that Universities seek to provide excellent teaching and high quality learning environment.

Students asked universities to prove their worth by becoming more vocal in their demand for relevant and quality program. Funding authorities did it by requiring universities to justify the large public expenditure on them (Lim, 2001). Today, there is general agreement on the need for accountability and value for money in the higher education sector and for establishing policies and processes to ensure quality. The very fact that educators and researchers spend great deal of time and effort attempting to understand the essence of quality is attributed to the fact that quality is sine-qua-non for sustainable functioning of HEIs in the modern era. Consequently, developing

quality assurance system to the enhancement of quality is fundamental precondition to address the intrinsic need to meet the demands of ever competitive situation.

The term quality assurance has come to be used as an all-embracing term to take in all the policies, processes and actions of HEIs, agencies and organizations through which the quality of higher education is maintained and developed (El-Khawas, 1998). It is realized through a set of actions aiming at the development of institutional ability to establish, plan and implement study programs which help beneficiaries confide in the fact that the institution providing education achieves all quality standards. One aspects of achieving this goal of quality assurance is to carry out institutional quality assessment on regular basis.

Internal quality assessment is an important element in universities strategies and procedures for assuring the quality of learning opportunities provided and the standards of programmes and awards offered to students (Keele University, 2006). It is an explicit aspect of quality assurance strategy that institutions take responsibility for assuring their quality and standards, as setout by their policies pertaining to education quality. Internal quality assessment is intended to promote high quality learning and teaching, provide a basis for public accountability and ensure that there is reliable information for student, employers and others. Institutional self-assessment is designed to examine internal quality assurance systems as well as their operation within the programmes of study (Watson & Maddison, 2005).

New systems of quality assessment have been developed in several countries so as to assure quality in higher education. Likewise, the Ethiopian Higher Education Proclamation (351/2003) was issued with the aim of setting up key agencies to guide the quality assurance and assessment practice in Ethiopia HEIs. HERQA is one of the autonomous agencies established by the Higher Education Proclamation (FDRE, 2003). As part of the quality assurance process, therefore, quality audit is being implemented in Ethiopian HEIs with specific aims of improving the quality

of the educational experience for students and also to identify an action plan and process that will lead to an improvement in quality. Quality audit begins by internal quality assessment at institutional level, followed by external audit by HERQA.

As one of the Public universities, Arba Minch University had conducted institutional self-assessment in 2007/08 academic year. The self-assessment document was submitted to HERQA with an official request of external quality audit. Based on the internal self-assessment document, HERQA's Quality audit team conducted an external quality audit which finally resulted in AMU Institutional Quality Audit Report produced by HERQA. This report provides an insight in to the state of relevance and quality of education offered in the University. The purpose of this study is, thus, to look into the practice, challenges and prospects of internal quality assessment at AMU.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The massive expansion of higher education and the notable increase in student enrollment has brought about the issues of quality as the major areas of concern in developing countries in general and in Ethiopia in particular. In recent years, the Ethiopian higher education system has demonstrating unprecedented increase in students' enrollment rate. However, it is acknowledged that achievements in access have not been accompanied by sufficient improvements in quality (MOE, 2007). In explaining the consequences of massive expansion, Teshome (2007) contended that expansion of higher education without the necessary and planned interventions could easily be compromising quality of education.

UNESCO (2003) reported that the development of higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa was characterized by a rapid increase in student enrollments and inadequate financial resources necessary to ensure quality education and research. Similarly, Daniel (2005) asserted that though the present expansion and improved access to higher education need to be encouraged, there is a

widely shared concern that quality is being compromised. A study conducted by Mulu (2005) concludes that the quality of education is deteriorating as result of the alarmingly increasing rate of student population in the higher learning institutions.

In spite of all this fact, the Ethiopian HEIs does not have a well established mechanism of evaluating whether they are working towards achieving their objective of producing qualified professionals prepared for world of work. Quality assessment at program level is not conducted up to the desired standard and does not usually involve the stakeholders (Zenawi, 2007). Despite the massifying trend of higher education, Ethiopian HEIs do not have the quality assessment and assurance systems in place (Tolera, 2008) Consistently, HESO (2004, p.37) states: "higher education in Ethiopia has no appropriate system of quality assurance within its higher education institutions, which guarantees the availability of appropriate and effective teaching, support, assessment and learning opportunities to learners or that ensures that the outputs of higher learning institutions meet the development needs of the country".

Though the deterioration of quality is an apparent reality, most research works have focused on the state of quality of education offered in its entirety than the quality assurance mechanisms underway in HEIs. Studies in the area of quality proclaimed the deterioration of quality in higher education and insignificant attention has given to actual practice of quality assessment/assurance employed and the mechanisms through which it could be improved. For instance, Saint (2003) asserted that the proportion and qualification of academic staffs in different public universities of Ethiopia appear below the expected standard contributing to low quality education provided by higher learning institutions. Daniel (2005) asserts that the rapid expansion can compromise the existing infrastructures and have an adverse effect on quality.

Apart from the aforementioned rationales, the researcher was motivated to conduct research on this problem after reading Institutional Quality Audit Report of AMU produced by HERQA.

HERQA reported its unequivocal dissatisfaction about the self-assessment document submitted by Arba Minch University which led the researcher to develop interest in finding out the actual practice, challenges and prospects of internal quality assessment at AMU. Therefore, this study explored the practice of internal quality assessment underway in Ethiopian HEIs with particular reference to Arba Minch University. It also meant to figure out challenges and prospects of the current practice of internal quality assessment

1.3. Basic Research Questions

In order to investigate the practice, challenges and prospects of internal quality assessment, the researcher formulated the following research questions:

1. How do stakeholders perceive quality in higher education? To what extent do internal stakeholders differ or concur in their perception of quality in higher education?
2. To what extent are important preconditions met to practice effective institutional quality assessment at Arba Minch University?
3. How internal quality assessment has been practiced? What methods and specific strategies of internal quality assessment have been practiced by AMU? Is there any significant difference in practicing internal quality assessment among faculties?
4. How HERQA initiated internal quality audit is viewed by major stakeholders. How effective and relevant was the approach to the prevailing conditions of the University?
5. What are the major challenges and prospects of internal quality assessment at Arba Minch University?

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study were to investigate the existing practices, challenges and prospects of internal quality assessment in Ethiopian HEIs with particular reference to AMU. In so doing, the study looked into important preconditions and major strategies of practicing internal quality assessment at the university. More specifically, the study has the following objectives:

1. Find out important preconditions that assist or impede effective internal quality assessment at Arba Minch University
2. Investigate methods and specific strategies of internal quality assessment practiced at Arba Minch University
3. Investigate the nature, effectiveness and challenges of HERQA initiated internal quality audit at the University.
4. Examine challenges and prospects of internal quality assessment at AMU
5. Explore stakeholders' perception of the quality in higher education.

1.5. Significance of the Study

Understanding quality and quality assurance systems of HEIs are precondition to enhance the quality of education provided and thereby contributing to institutional sustainability. But, the practice of quality assurance and quality enhancement are not well understood in Ethiopian HEIs. Thus, the proposed study will be expected to contribute in such areas as advancing the theoretical knowledge of quality assessment in Ethiopian HEIs in general and practical significance to the internal quality assessment and improvement activities of Arba Minch University in particular.

This study provides the total picture of current internal quality assurance practices and the state of important preconditions to practice effective quality assessment/assurance in Ethiopian HEIs. It further provides an insight on HERQA initiated quality audit, its nature, effectiveness

and relevance as practiced by Ethiopian HEIs. Moreover, it provides a better understanding of challenges and prospects related internal quality assessment. Finally, it is hoped that the findings of this study and their implications may provide some important directions for conducting further researches in the areas of quality and quality assessment in HEIs

1.6. Scope of the Study

The study was delimited to an assessment of quality assessment practice at one of the public Universities, namely Arba Minch University, given the likely problems of including other HEIs such as manageability of the study to the researcher and resource constraints. Although different stakeholders such as employers, alumni, and the community at large could be involved in quality assessment practice of the university, this study delimits its investigation to internal stakeholders' (students, instructors, University management, ADRC) and HERQA for similar reasons.

1.7. Limitations of the Study

The low return rate of the survey questionnaire was one of the major limiting factors to this study. Initially, all instructors in the randomly selected departments were intended to be included in the study. Due to the low return rate for survey questionnaire, however, instructors from other departments were also included in this study. Out of 101 copies of questionnaire distributed, only 71.3% (72) instructors properly filled and returned it. While 43 copies of questionnaire were dispatched to the University management, 34 (71.1%) of them were returned. Out of the 150 prospective graduates involved in the study, only 128 (85.3%) appropriately completed and returned the questionnaire. To overcome this problem, questionnaire was distributed twice in cases where very low return rates were observed during the first phase of data collection.

Moreover, some key informants were not voluntary to participate in the study. Although it was intended to include ten (10) participants for each of the two focus-group discussions, eight (8) student representatives and 7 instructors were practically involved in the study. While a better understanding of the practice of internal quality assessment could be achieved by including those stakeholders external to the University (alumni and employers), the study considered only the views of internal stakeholder due to constraints related to time, financial and material resources.

1.8. Definition of Terms

- **Quality assurance:** refers to making sure that academic standards and quality of provision are satisfactory, so that students, employers and the tax-paying public all get a good deal on their investment in higher education
- **Quality assessment:** is a quality assurance mechanism involving an assessment of the quality of what is really provided by institutions. It is a diagnostic review and evaluation of teaching, learning and outcomes so as to judge if the University or its programs meet the generally accepted quality and standard.
- **Internal quality assessment:** is a quality assessment carried out for the institution by the institution, i.e. when quality assessment is supplied by same institution providing education.
- **Quality audit:** is the process of quality assessment that intends to make sure that institution possesses quality assurance mechanisms, procedures and process that are adequate and actually practiced.
- **University management:** refers to Department Heads, Deans of Faculty, Academic Program Officer, Vice President for Academic and Research and Heads of different posts.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITRATURE

2.1. Higher Education and Quest for Quality: The Underlying Forces

The present era is characterized by a historical move towards mass higher education that intends to secure place for students of different socio-economic background. Higher education no longer remained the preserve of the rich and more students from more diverse backgrounds entered universities and colleges (Lim, 2001). This ideological move has been dramatically increasing the number of students beyond the existing capabilities of HEIs in terms of human, material and financial resources at their disposal.

This remarkable increase in enrollment has believed to be compromising the quality and standards of education in HEIs. World Bank (2002) argued that many countries that experienced a doubling or tripling of tertiary enrollments and increased participation rates for young people in recent decades have seen the negative effects of rapid expansion on quality. The impact of quality issues on the functioning of universities has increased significantly in recent years and has been oftentimes linked to trends in the massification of higher education (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2005).

This pressure of increasing numbers of students and demographic changes within higher education is one of the major reasons behind the top priority ascribed to quality assessment and improvement practice in HEIs. Sisay (2006) stated that the development of mass higher education has brought about concerns for standards and quality. Various stakeholders of higher education begin to question whether education offered in higher education is up to the standard. Students and their parents request for information about the quality of programs and courses, which forced HEIs to conduct periodic quality assessment of their programs.

There are many other deriving forces for the commendable concern for quality. Some of these factors are the advent of cost sharing; increasing competition among HEIs; demand for

transparency; growing autonomy of HEIs and the growing demands for accountability. Morley (2003) explained that funding for higher education become harder to obtain as funds become scarcer, partly as a result the user-pays principle and the greater demand for funds from other government departments. Moreover, Zenawi (2007) asserted that with the advent of cost sharing, the students and their families will sooner or later start questioning if the quality of the program is up to the standard.

2.2. Understanding Quality in Higher Education

The way in which the term "quality" perceived has obvious effect on attempts to manage or assure it (UNESCO, 2006a). But, the problem arises when we come to the meaning of quality. Quality is a highly contested concept and has multiple meanings for people who conceive higher education and quality differently. In his attempt to demonstrate its abstract nature, Prising (1976), described quality as 'Quality.... you know what it is, yet you don not know what it is...If no one knows what it is, then for all practical purpose it does not exist. But for all practical purposes, it does exist' (Doherty, 1994 p. 45). Sallis (2005) have described it as "a slippery concept' because it has variety of meanings and the word implies different things to different people.

Much of the confusion over the meaning of quality arises due to the involvement of various stakeholders in higher education. Quality is 'determined by a wider set of criteria which reflects the broadening social composition of the review system' (Firdissa, 2006). For instance, while discussing the quality of HEI, students may focus on the facilities provided and the perceived usefulness of education for future employment. Teachers, on the other hand, may pay attention to the teaching-learning process. Professional bodies tend to focus on standard and skills related to the profession that the students are trained for. Employers may consider the competence of the

institution's graduates. Hence, the meaning given to quality is not only a matter of its underlying conception; it is also very much a matter of who defines it and in what interest.

UNESCO (2006a) identified three further justifications for the variation in understanding and defining quality in higher education. Firstly, there is no consensus on the exact objectives of higher education. Secondly, higher education, like any education, is a melti-diamentional and complex process. It is difficult to grasp the interaction of inputs and throughputs and what exactly determines outputs. Finally, as higher education becomes more inclusive and student population heterogeneous, demands on higher education and on the provision of courses grow increasingly more diverse. What might seem an adequate definition of quality to one type of institution may, therefore, be quite inadequate for others.

Though it is difficult to give a single precise definition, it is possible to identify some basic conception of quality in higher education in general. Harvey & Green identified five definitions (Lim, 2001; Ashcroft, 1995, UNESCO, 2006b).

Quality can be viewed as an excellence. This view sees quality as something very distinct in the sense that it is necessary to excel or exceed in order to achieve quality, and clearly, in order to exceed, there needs to be others who are exceeded (Harvey, 2004). This definition set a goal for universities and academic communities to be always best; belong to the elite and achieve better outcomes than the others (SAUVCA, 2002). In higher education, it can include admitting the best school-leavers according to specific rankings as presumably the higher quality of input affects the higher quality of output.

Quality is also perceived as perfection implying both faultlessness and standard is checked to achieve consistency. Quality by this notion is viewed in terms of consistency in that a given set of specifications is perfectly met. This conception of quality fits with the 'quest for zero defect' being an appropriate mission for a well-known manufacturer of electronic goods. As products of

higher education, graduates, are not expected to be identical, this view is not always considered to be applicable to higher education (Mizikaci, 2006).

Others perceive quality as value for money. Quality for the society means accountability for both the responsibilities of academic freedom as well as accountability for the public funds that public universities rely on (Rayner & Tesfaye, 2005). The growing tendency of governments to require accountability from higher education reflects a value-for-money approach (Sisay, 2006). Value for money is a market view of quality i.e. quality is seen in terms of rate of return to an investment on education (Ashcroft, 1995). Increasingly, students, parents and the community in general require value-for-money for the increasing cost of higher education.

A conception most widely used in higher education today is the view that quality is fitness-for-purpose (Aschroft, 1995; Lim, 2001). If the education provided fulfils its purpose, whatever they may be, then it is said to be one of quality. This approach concentrates on what is needed to achieve the purpose or mission of the institution. Higher Education Council of Australia (1992) argued that quality is a relative concept, meaningful only in relation to the perspective of those judging it at the time against some stated purposes. According to this view, quality assessments have to start looking at the formulated mission statements, goals and expected outcomes. Without a clear picture about why one is doing what one is doing, successful assessment of quality is impossible (Vroeijenstijn, 2001).

Another way of understanding quality is as a threshold. Specific standards and norms are defined; a threshold is set that the institution should cross in order to certify that the instruction meets the quality standards (Harvey, 2004). Standards help to rationalize the definition of quality and make it more objective. European countries apply minimum standards that ensure the level of quality below which no institution offering higher education should not go (Ashcroft, 1995).

Moreover, quality is perceived as transformation. The main customer of higher education quality is a student whose understandings, attitudes and skills change and evolve in the course of the study process. The better the graduate can manage in the future working life with the help of the knowledge, experience and skills acquired at the university, the more fully has the particular University met its goals (Harvey, 2004). This implies that the greater the value added or the development of the individual, the higher the quality. This notion of quality includes the student as an active participant in a process of 'adding value' to the initial input (the student).

As a conclusion, each of these notions of quality has implications for the methods used to measure the desirable outcomes emanate from it. Therefore, all these conception of quality are fundamental to the way in which quality assessment will be put into practice by the HEIs and quality assurance agencies. In nutshell, quality assessment must consider the views stakeholders of higher education.

2.3. Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Higher education borrowed the concept, language and methodology of quality assurance from industry and production sector (Sallis, 2002). It is imperative for HEIs to ensure that the educational experience they are providing to their students is sound, relevant and of high quality. If an institution cannot assure that what it is doing is appropriate/relevant and is being undertaken to an acceptable standard then it cannot easily demonstrate its worth (Campbell, 2008). To this end, they need to have effective and efficient structures and systems to monitor their activities to ensure that they are compatible with their mission and achieving their stated objectives. In this regard, Campbell argued that HEIs need to integrate comprehensive quality assurance systems in to their practices and establish ways in which these quality assurance systems can be managed so that they can demonstrate that it knows its strengths and weaknesses.

The range of activities for effecting, monitoring and enhancing educational provision is called quality assurance. It refers to all the policies, processes and actions of HEIs and agencies through which the quality of higher education is maintained and developed (Lim, 2001). Quality assurance can be internal to an institution just as it can be external to it. It is widely recognized that the primary responsibility for quality assurance lies within each institution via introduction of internal quality assurance mechanisms (Campbell, 2008). Campbell defined internal quality assurance as the planned and systematic monitoring and review processes established by a HEI to determine the quality of its programs and the appropriateness of its infrastructure. It is an intra-institutional practice in view of monitoring and improving the quality of higher education.

The aim of the quality assurance in higher education is to guarantee the improvement of standards and quality in higher education in order to make higher education meet the needs of students, employers and financiers (Lomas, 2002). Hence, improvement and/or accountability are the primary purposes of quality assurance (Murdoch, 2005; Dawit, 2006). Quality procedures for accountability purposes are based on criteria set down by external authorities. Quality assurance for accountability purposes implies the use of a summative approach (Kis, 2005). Accountability is usually related to concern over 'value for money' and creation of transparency. On the other hand, quality assurance should improve student learning and their learning experience, and to improve the responsiveness of higher education to the needs of the society. Quality assurance for improvement implies a formative approach: the focus is not on control but on improving quality (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2005).

The improvement of quality requires ongoing assessment, analysis and corrective action from the institution providing education based on selecting the most suitable procedures, as well as on the selection and implementation of the most relevant reference standards. One of the most important aspects of quality improvement is conducting regular quality assessment that informs

institution the extent to which quality assurance mechanism and quality provision are maintained effectively. Institutions need to assess how well their activities map to their mission and if there is fitness of purpose (Campbell, 2008). Quality assessment indicates actual process of evaluation (reviewing, measuring, and judging) of quality and its programmes (Thune, 2001). It is a means of knowing the quality of what is really provided by institutions. It involves the judgment of performance against criteria, either internally or externally. It is a diagnostic review of teaching-learning and outcomes based on detailed examination of curricula, resources and practices so as to judge if the university or its programs meet generally accepted standard (Firdissa, 2006).

UNESCO (2006a) identified some important points to be considered in quality assessment. 1) the context (national, institutional); 2) the methods (self assessment, peer review); 3) the levels (system, institution, department); 4) certain quality values attached to quality assessment, such as academic values (focusing up on the subject field); 5) employment values (emphasizing graduate output characteristics). Consistently, Brennan and Shah as cited in Sisay (2006) expressed areas of variation in quality assessment in higher education and thereby its implication to the methods of quality assessment that would be employed.

> "Differences found in who assesses what, how, and how often. Basic distinction is between external and internal assessment. Self-assessment is often a first stage in a process which leads to an external assessment. The 'who' question can be: who initiated and carried the assessment? Who is expected to act on its results? The 'what' question is partly a matter of level: the whole institution, a faculty, a programme? It is also a matter of focus (teaching, research or community services). The 'how' question can have many answers: Surveys of student opinion, of performance and progression data, of the views of employers are all common."(p.19)

Generally, three major processes could conclude the whole process of quality assessment: defining what quality is, setting assessment standards, comparing the latter with the real outcome and decide to what extent standards are met. HEIs and quality assurance agencies develop their

own standards to assess the quality of educational provisions. Quality indicators, performance indicators and benchmarks are among the most commonly used reference points.

Quality Indicators

There is a general agreement that the quality of education is assessed by diagnosing three major aspects of education quality: the input, process and output (Derebssa, 2006). This view assumes that the education process resembles a production process that transforms inputs with process in to outputs and outcomes. Cheng and Tam (1997) noted that if higher education is viewed as a system, then any evaluation effort should assess within the framework of inputs, process and outputs. Vroeijenstijn (2001) developed Quality Model for institutional assessment that consider input, process and output as a major areas of analysis. Literatures of quality distinguish between input indicators, process indicators and output indicators. Quality assessment involves an assessment of the input i.e. the management, policy, staff, students, funding and facilities. A logical extension is assessment of processes (study programme, research projects and community services) which finally lead to outputs (graduates, scientific production and services).

Performance Indicators (PIs)

Vroeijenstijn (2001) defined performance indicator as empirical information quantitatively and qualitatively, drawing a picture of the institutions of the way in which they realize their goals and aims. The function of performance indicators is represented by various concepts. They have to give an idea of "achievement", the "condition" of education, the "performing-ability", and the "quality" of the institution. The indicators can be used for monitoring quality, support decisions, evaluating, and improving quality and ranking institutions.

Benchmarking

Benchmarking is a method of self-evaluation that involves measuring performance against specified standards to determine where to do well and what to improve (HERQA 008, 2006). It is an ongoing, systematic process of measuring and comparing work processes of an organization to those of another, by bringing an external focus to internal activities (Kempner 1993). It implies reference against measurable aspects of performance or criteria so that comparisons can be made and improvements indicated.

> "Benchmarking is a process for identifying, understanding and adapting best practices from other organizations in order to help one's own organization improve its own performance. In the case of higher education institutions, of course, the central focus is an improvement of students learning" (HERQA 008, 2006, p.1).

The goal of benchmarking is to provide institutions, in charge of quality assessment, with an external standard for measuring quality and identify where opportunities for improvement may reside. It attempts to answer questions pertaining to: How well are we doing compared to others? How good do we want to be? Who is doing it the best? How do they do it? How can we adapt what they do to our institution? How can we be better than the best? (Kempner 1993)

2.4. Approaches to Quality Assessment in Higher Education

Various models explain quality assessment practice in higher education. Though a rough distinctions can be made between different models of quality assessment, most of the time they are overlapping in practice. This is because existing country realities show a variety of practices. There is therefore no point in attempting to be conceptually pure.

2.4.1. Quality Audit

Quality audit is an approach to quality processes that has become more popular in the UK recently (Ashcroft, 2005). Quality audit is the process of quality assessment that intends to ensure that institution possesses quality assurance procedures that are adequate and actually practiced. It

is a scrutiny to determine that institutions have quality control mechanism in place. Quality audit checks whether university systems function and whether documents prove that (Hernon, 2002). A quality audit checks the extent to which the institution is achieving its own explicit or implicit objectives (Woodhouse, 2000). It is used to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the quality assurance mechanism, systems and structures adopted by an institution.

As cited in Kis (2005) "ISO (Standards New Zealand, 1994) defines quality audit as three-part process, checking 1) the suitability of the planned quality procedures in relation to the stated objectives; 2) conformity of the actual quality activities with plans; and 3) the effectiveness of the activities in achieving the stated objectives". Quality auditors relay on verbal reports and paper work to establish whether systems are in place for assessing/assuring quality and acting on that assessment (Ashcroft, 1995). The aim is to provide public information and reassurance about the suitability of methods used by the institutions to assure quality of their operation and to help them improve by suggesting areas of development. Auditors achieve this by looking at the mechanisms and structures that are in place to monitor, assure, promote and enhance academic quality in light of their stated aims and objectives.

According to Kis (2005) academic audits are carried out at the institution level. However, unlike accreditation or assessment, audits do not aim at making a comprehensive review of HEI's or programme's, resources and activities, nor do they directly evaluate the quality of teaching or learning. Rather audits focus on those processes implemented by HEIs in order to assure and improve the quality teaching and learning (Dill, 2000). In Europe institutional audit is regularly used by 28% of the quality assurance agencies. It is used on a regular base in Ireland and the UK and by some of the agencies in Nordic and associated countries (Kis, 2005)

Quality audit can be internal or external. Institutional audit is designed to examine internal quality assurance systems as well as their operation within academic disciplines and individual

programmes of study (Watson & Maddison, 2005). The audit is intended to promote and enhance high quality learning and teaching, provide a basis for public accountability, ensure that there is reliable information for students, employers and others, and provides a basis for improvement where this is necessary. Lim (2001) contended that even if the university quality audit system performs its tasks effectively and produces a continuous improvement, there is a need for an independent external audit. This would assess the university's performance against benchmarks set for the entire university sector.

In external quality audit, a team of auditors visits institutions to enquire in to its quality control systems. During this process, no attempt is made to observe teaching or learning or to assess quality it self. It does not assess quality or performance as such, but rather the quality of the quality assurance mechanisms (UNESCO, 2006a). This requires each university to submit a self-evaluation/assessment document/portfolio. Hence, the institutional self-assessment is the central element in external quality audit process (Lee Dow, 2001). The submission can be supplemented by on-site visits lasting a day or longer.

The auditors will usually find some aspects of the institutional mission, aims, or objectives; peruse a line of questioning these aspects with groups of people in the institution at various levels (Ashcroft, 1995). Then, they compare the responses of this group with information in background documents provided by institutions. Hence, audit depends upon the institution having developed its own quality processes that can be tested by audit trails to determine their robustness (Aschroft, 2005). This implies that the quality assurance agencies should give HEIs early indications of the minimum quality assurance systems and processes that they would expect to find. Finally, written report on the site visit which focuses on internal quality standards, quality assurance processes, and recommended improvements (Materu, 2007).

2.4.2. External Quality Assessment

External quality assessment is usually called quality assessment which involves external review of, and judgments about, the quality of teaching and learning in institutions. It refers to the action of an external body, which may be quality assurance agency or another body different from the institution, which assess its operation or that of its programme in order to determine whether it is meeting the standard that have been agreed on. It is consists of those techniques, mechanisms and activities that are carried out by an external body in order to evaluate the quality of higher education processes, practices, programmes and services (UNESCO, 2006a). External assessment makes summative judgment on quality by requiring conformity to externally imposed standards (Biggs, 2003). The agenda here is managerial than academic, with accountability a high priority. The procedures are top-down and bureaucratic than collegial and improvement based.

It is about quality as value for money. According to Kis (2005) external assessment is an evaluation that makes graded judgments about quality, in this respect it goes beyond accreditation that makes a binary judgment. Assessment asks "how good are your outputs?" The output of an assessment is a quantitative evaluation, a grade (Woodhouse, 2000). External assessments are widely used by European QAAs (Kis, 2005). .

2.4.3. Accreditation

Accreditation is the most widely used method of quality assessment and has recently been introduced in higher education systems. Accreditation is the process by which a government or private body evaluates the quality of HEIs as a whole or a specific educational programme in order to formally recognize it as having met certain predetermined minimal criteria or standards. According to Wossenu (2006), it is perceived as the final formal yes/no decision following multi-step evaluation procedure; it is an added, normative element to evaluations. It always involves some kind of benchmarking and a set of existing quality criteria.

The process usually involves steps roughly similar to the quality audit process. According to Vlassceanu et.al (2004) and National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) of India (1994) it involves three steps with specific activities (Wossenu, 2006; UNESCO, 2006a). The first step is self-evaluation process conducted by the institution or programme, resulting in a report that takes as its reference the set of standards and criteria of the accrediting body. The second step involves a study visits conducted by a team of peers selected by the accrediting organization, which reviews the evidence, visit the premises and interviews the staff, resulting in an assessment report, including a recommendation.

Finally, examination by the commission of the evidence and recommendation on the basis of a given set of criteria concerning quality and resulting in a final judgment and communication of the formal decision to the institution and other constituencies, if appropriate. The result of this process is usually the awarding of a status (a yes/no decision), of recognition, and sometimes of a license to operate within a time-limited validity. It is concerned with taking a formal, independent decision on whether or not certain requirements are met (Wossenu, 2006).

2.5. Programme Level Quality Assessment

Practices vary widely among countries whether quality review should focus on institutional or programme level. For example, the Australian system over the 1993-95 periods adopted whole institution approach. In Denmark, Netherlands and Portugal the focus is academic programmes, in some HEIs in Germany the reviews focus on the institutional level, while in France, the United Kingdom and Ireland reviews both institutional and programme. Many countries have begun with institutional reviews but, as their systems experienced growth in professional fields of study, there has been a trend towards programme-wide approaches (El-Khawas et al., 1998). The whole institution model is used only to assess the quality management processes either all in the same

year or in different years while the programme model can be used to assess the quality of the management processes or the standards achieved against benchmarks (Lim, 2001).

The main purpose of conducting program evaluation is to test whether programs at a given HEIs are helping the students develop the desired knowledge and skills (Zenawi, 2007). This type of evaluation is based on the perception of major stakeholders about quality of their experience. It involves assessing overall satisfaction of higher education stakeholders with respect to perceived quality of various aspects of provision including the design of curriculum, quality of the teaching, learning and assessment methods, and resources available to support these. Program evaluation helps to evaluate the quality of a program and its relevance by identifying the program strengths and weakness that ultimately enhances the quality education and improves services (Sisay, 2006). Vroeijenstijn (2001) developed a model for program evaluation to see perception of stakeholders about the quality of programme. In analyzing the program, this model looks at aspects such as the contents, the organization, the didactic concept, curriculum design, and the assessment.

2.6. Major Strategies of Practicing Internal Quality Assessment

Internal quality assessment can be can be practiced by using different specific strategies which inform the quality and standards of higher education. The 1993–1995 Australian national quality assurance programs identified the main internal processes within universities. It include processes of assessment for new programs and units of study; reviews of departments, faculties and research centers; student evaluation of teaching; use of external examiners; surveys of graduates and employers to assess graduate satisfaction and information on course experience and suitability of graduates for employment (Harman & Meek, 2000)

The most commonly used strategy is the conduct of periodic review of programs/courses offered in the institution. Misganaw (2006) stated "one way institutions can maintain the quality

of education is to possess formal mechanisms for periodic review of their programs" p. 144. Similarly, QAA (2000) contended that institutions should periodically review the continuing validity and relevance of programme aims and intended learning outcomes. This has to be followed by program monitoring that should consider the effectiveness of the programme in achieving its stated aims, and the success of students in attaining the intended learning outcomes. Monitoring and review are an activity likely to be undertaken within the providing department often involving external participants.

Institutional self-assessment usually includes obtaining advice from various stakeholders' such as students, professional associations, alumni, and employers. Information is obtained through membership of review panels, surveys and focus-groups. In this regard, the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors Committee's (NZVCC) has conducted an annual survey of graduate destination and use Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) to obtain comments from graduates about their employment and experiences of their courses (Woodhouse, 2000). Lim (2001) stated that views of current and past students on the effectiveness of the learning experience would be sought, as would views of employers on the relevance of the courses and the quality of graduates. Students' satisfaction survey and evaluation of teachers' performance are commonly used internal quality assessment in higher education (Zenawi, 2007).

Internal and external peer reviews; educational research; teaching observation; sharing sessions, meetings and conferences are also some of the commonly employed means of assessing internal academic quality and standards (Biggs, 2003).Van Vught (1994) is firm in his position that there is no substitute for the peer review process in assessing and maintaining quality in higher education. D'Andrea and Gosling (2005) has also argued that the day-to-day functioning of peer review in academic departments and universities should be robust enough to demonstrate

a commitment to ongoing development of their program and withstand the test whether external system is created and applied to monitoring quality.

Furthermore, external examining provides one of the principal means to maintain nationally comparable standards within HEIs (QAA, 2004). Independent senior and experienced colleagues from other universities or from relevant areas of professional practice are invited to comment on the appropriateness of the curriculum, assessment methods and the standard of performances expected in the different classes of degrees awarded (Lim, 2001). They assess the standards of student performance and the comparability of the standards with those of students following similar programmes in other UK higher education institutions (QAA, 2003). External examiners provide constructive criticism of the content and methods of teaching, learning and assessment used by Schools (Keele University, 2006).

2.7. Preconditions/Challenges to Effective Internal Quality Assessment

There are important preconditions to undertake effective quality assessment. Absences of these important preconditions are at times the challenges to effective implementation of quality assurance/assessment mechanism of any higher education. The experiences of many developed countries suggest that the adoption of institutional quality assurance in higher education can only work if a number of conditions are met. These conditions are taken for grated in universities of developed countries but their total or partial absence will make it difficult for steps involved in quality assurance in place in developing countries (Lim, 2001).

The first condition to internal quality assessment is the availability of independent quality assurance/assessment body in the institution. HERQA (2008) argued that there must be standing committee or body responsible for quality assurance/assessment within HEIs. Thus, one of the essential recommendations of HERQA's institutional quality audit is the establishment of a body

responsible for quality assurance. The second condition is availability of quality assurance policy and guidelines. A focused policy and strategy for 'quality' in the context of the whole institution is an essential element (HESO, 2004). Stimson (2001) described that quality management system is supported by a documentation system that attests to its quality policies and objectives, includes a quality manual with a system of procedures necessary to operating effectively and efficiently all processes in the quality system. HEIs should set clear goals and performance indicators against which they assess the quality of education. Academic quality managers will have to develop their own quality assurance mechanisms in order to guarantee quality service to all stakeholders. This may be done by establishing clear aims, objectives, goals and targets of higher learning institutions (HESO, 2004).

The third precondition to successful implementation of quality assessment is adequate prior planning in terms of financial, material and human resources. Success of quality management at institutions is, to a considerable extent, dependent on the integration of mechanisms for quality assurance and quality development with institutional planning and resource allocation (HEQC, 2004). Quality management mechanisms need to be integrated with institutional planning at all relevant levels of institutional operation. Similarly, financial planning should ensure adequate resource allocation for development, implementation, review and improvement of quality and quality management mechanisms (HEQC, 2005).

Another problem related to internal quality assessment is the involvement of stakeholders. In line with this, Zenawi (2007) argued that implementing effective quality assessment is impossible without stakeholders. He further commented that it is mandatory to involve major stakeholders, namely, students and their instructors to assess their reactions to the common indicators. In particular, the early works of Vroeijenstijn (1992), Middlehurst (1992) and Harvey and Green (1993) highlight the importance of considering quality from a variety of stakeholders'

perspectives (Kis, 2005). Students, employers, parents, government and other constituencies must have a say in the quality of higher education through their participation (Reyner &Tesfaye, 2005)

Organizational structure and governance of HEIs are another important factor that affects the implementation of effective quality assessment. University's top leaders and managers have to understand the reason for quality assessment and are committed to it (Lim, 2001). HESO (2004) suggest that the development of quality assessment mechanisms requires an institutional system and oversight of its implementation. Shared value to monitor, assure, and enhance quality has to be promoted among the constituents of HEIs.

Effective quality assessment depends largely on the availability of highly qualified staff and administrators within institutions and competent professional and technical staff. HEIs should commit themselves explicitly to the development of culture which recognizes the importance of quality, relevance and quality assurance in all their works (Campbell, 2008).Without the support from the adequately trained and committed academics, beautifully drawn strategic plan of quality assurance will remain just a plan and not working document (Brown, 2004). Success of academic reviews is particularly demanding of human capacity since the legitimacy and credibility of the results is so dependent on the quality, dedication, and integrity of the people who serve as peer reviewers, the administrators and faculty members who prepare the self-assessment and collect the needed data at institutions being reviewed, and the professional staff who eventually review the panel reports and disseminate results to the public (Materu, 2007)

According to Materu (2007) quality assessment in Africa (including those in countries with stronger economies like South Africa) are experiencing several constraints: difficulty of finding a sufficient number of academics who are qualified and available to serve as peer reviewers; lack of appropriate training for those involved in the process in the quality assessment, at institutions,

and as peer reviewers; and problems for institutions to amass the data, information and self-analysis needed for effective self-studies.

2.8. Quality Assessment: Countries Experiences

It is difficult to refer national higher education as system because there might not be unitary system that can be so called. Since countries have collections of separate systems of HE, there are variations among universities within the same national territory in the policies or efforts at quality assessment. Notwithstanding the difficulty, this part describes common features and the totality of quality assessment in higher education of three countries namely, United Kingdom, Australia, and South Africa. UK and Australia system of quality assurance is selected because literatures supported the comprehensive nature of quality assurance in these countries. In this respect, Lim (2001) studied and commented that the British and Australian systems have incorporated features of quality assurance found in developed countries, whether it be in scope and activity assessed, the types of regulation used and the financial impact of the exercise.

2.8.1. The UK Experience

Universities and colleges of higher education in the UK are autonomous and self-governing institutions (QAA, 2003). Each has its own internal procedures for attaining appropriate standard and assuring and enhancing the quality of its provision. The pre-1992 universities had a latent quasi-quality assessment system in place through the operation of the traditional university committee system and external examiner system (Lim, 2001). Under the traditional committee system, programs and courses within them were developed through committees with inputs from stakeholders and reviews of them undertaken regularly.

Currently, most institutions carry out internal quality assessment via regular monitoring and periodic review of programmes (QAA, 2003). It is undertaken by the department providing the programme, and often involves a programme team appraising its own performance at the end of an academic year (Brown, 2004). The process take into account reports from external examiners, staff and student feedback, reports from any professional body that accredits the programme and feedback from former students and their employers. Periodic review in institutions is carried out every five years and normally involves external experts (QAA, 2003). It looks at whether the aims and intended learning outcomes set for a programme are still valid and are being achieved. Institutions also have in place arrangements for the periodic review of the various services they provide to their students.

The quality assurance agency for higher education was established in 1997 to provide an integrated quality assurance services for HEIs throughout the UK (Randall, 2001). Although the quality assurance practice has gone through a number of transformations, the agency developed a new quality assurance method known as Academic Review in January 2000. Academic review seeks to assess quality by addressing three interdependent areas. These are assessing program outcome standards; quality of learning opportunities and institutional management of standard and quality. However, academic review was abandoned in 2001 following intensive lobbying of the government by a small group of universities (Brown, 2004). A new audit-based method is eventually approved in 2002 and the first audits were undertaken in 2003. Self-assessment is central, and is the starting point for the process of audit (QAA, 2005).

Each university produces a self-evaluation document (or a reflective analysis in Scotland) before external review visit. This document draws upon the results of internal assessment/review, evaluates the effectiveness of how standards and quality are managed, and identifies strengths and areas for improvement. It is the agency's role to provide public assurance that standards and

quality within higher education are being safeguarded and enhanced. It does this through a peer review process of audits and reviews. These are conducted by teams of auditors and reviewers, most of whom are academics but with some members drawn, when appropriate, from industry and the professions (Brown, 2004).

2.8.2. Quality Assessment in South African Higher Education

According to South African Universities Chancellors Association (2002), South African universities have a long tradition of 'trying to do things properly', being concerned that graduates should be of 'high quality'. However, modern quality assessment, a process which formally assesses and manages quality, is a relatively new concept. In some institutions, internal quality assessment policy and structures are in the early stages of development while others have quite sophisticated systems and undergone various forms of internal and external quality reviews (HEQC, 2003). Before the establishment of Higher Education Quality Committee, traditional approaches to assessing 'quality' in academic endeavors relied heavily on comment from peers which was applied mainly to the content of courses, external review of examination questions and use of external examiners for masters and doctoral theses(SAUVCA, 2002).

The HEQC employs audit methodology consisting of institutional self-evaluation, followed by external validation by peers and experts. Hence, a cornerstone of the HEQC audit approach is the submission of an institutional audit portfolio (Oosthuzen, 2005). The audit require institutions to develop an assessment portfolio, with supporting information and evidence, in which the effectiveness and efficiency of the institution's management of the quality of core academic activities are evaluated against the HEQC's audit criteria and any other relevant quality criteria that the institution has set for itself (HEQC, 2004).

Institution's audit portfolio is validated by a panel of peers and experts, which is appointed by the HEQC. The panel has to arrive at an independent judgment on the effectiveness of the institution's internal quality arrangements. The HEQC report to institutions based on the panel's findings. The report would identify areas of strength and good practice as well as areas in need of attention and provide commendation and recommendation for action. The report does not provide a single, overarching summative judgment on internal quality management systems. Institutions are required to implement appropriate follow-up strategies which address the recommendations of the report. A summary of the report are also available in the public domain.

2.8.3. The Australian Experience

Higher education institution in Australia have always been concerned with quality, though in the early days it was referred to as maintaining standards (Lim, 2001). Various internal quality assessment mechanisms have been used in Australian universities. Surveys of student satisfaction with teaching are very widely used, perhaps are universal. They appear to be used regularly and across all parts of the institutions (Lee Dow, 2001). The surveys are particular to each university, cover individual subjects, each year or each semester. Course Experience Questionnaire is used as a means of internal quality assessment to assess graduate perception of teaching. These survey questionnaires (CEQ) are administered a few months after graduation to obtain feedback about the program in which graduates were enrolled (Lim, 2001).

Post-1995 quality assurance framework integrated an important element such as external course validation by professional bodies, associations and registration boards; the use of external examiners for honours and research degrees and the conduct of benchmarking exercises with other universities (Lim, 2001). Graduate Destination Survey (GDS) on the employment of recent graduates is another requirement of quality assurance framework of Australian Universities used to assess the quality of programmes

The establishment of the Australian Universities' Quality Agency (AUQA) in 2001 and the commencement of institutional quality audits in 2002 add a new mechanism for the traditional internal quality assessment in Australian higher education. AUQA focus on how the prospect of an external audit can provide a positive driver for improving institutional quality management (Scott & Hawke, 2003). AUQA base each audit on internal quality assessment data generated by the institution itself, to check how effectively and professionally institutions monitor their own performance and use the information gained for planning and improvement (Lee Dow, 2001).

Many institutions have developed rigorous internal audit processes that are attuned to reflection, evaluation and development, and matched to the time and resources available. AUQA takes into consideration the robustness of such locally devised systems (AUQA, 2005). The audit entails an institutional self-assessment which results in the production an audit portfolio. This is followed by a site visit from set trained auditors in which the veracity of self assessment is tested, then the production of an audit report and a subsequent check that key improvements identified in that report have been addressed (Scott & Hawke, 2003).

There are common trends that can be easily synthesized through the analysis of the three countries experiences of internal quality assessment. Traditionally, there are internal quality assessment practices in place that are not systematic and performed as routine activities of the HEIs. External examiner system and the practice of regular review of programs and courses are the commonly used internal quality assessment to determine whether the quality of programs and graduates are up to the standard. However, the establishment of national quality assurance agency helped HEIs to develop formal and systematic internal quality assessment both as a requirement for external quality assessment and mechanism to maintain and improve the quality of academic provisions in the institution.

2.9. Quality Assessment in Ethiopian Higher Learning Institutions

Ethiopia is experiencing the challenges of massive expansion and tremendous increase of student enrollment in HEIs. Many researchers have indicated the consequences of this massive expansion especially in situation where the existing resources are not considered in the expansion process. Tekeste (1990) asserted that the present crisis is the result of the expansion of education sector far beyond financial resources of the country to manage it effectively. Quality of education is being compromised by rampant enrollment of students (Mulu, 2006; Daniel, 2006; Teshome, 2007). Similarly, HESO (2004) argued that massification of higher education in Ethiopia has exacerbated the problem of a lack of quality assurance mechanisms.

Even in the early days of higher education expansion, the UNDP study of the 1993 warned that while satisfactory progress has been made in territory education, the sub-sector is facing a new challenge of assuring quality and relevance (Tekeste, 1996). In order to safeguard quality in the expanding system, HEIs should conduct periodic assessment on the quality of education they are providing. Supporting this view, Zenawi (2007) contended that HEIs in Ethiopia need to have an acceptable quality assessment system to evaluate whether they are working towards achieving their main objective of producing qualified professionals prepared for the world of work.

Though, there has been various mechanisms underway directed toward maintaining quality of education, formal assessment of quality of educational provisions in Ethiopian HEIs is a recent phenomena. All Universities in Ethiopia have no mechanism to assure themselves in a systematic way to evaluate whether their teaching-learning and assessment processes, or faculties meet institutional, national or international standards (Tolera, 2008). Following the establishment of national quality assurance agency, HEIs in Ethiopia have started to conduct institutional quality assessment that serves as a starting point for external quality audit carried by the national agency.

Ethiopian higher education proclamation (351/2003) established higher education relevance and quality agency (HERQA) entrusted with the supervision of relevance and quality of higher education. The primary responsibility is to ensure that higher education and trainings offered at any institution are up to standard, relevant and have quality (FDRE, 2003). HERQA's mission is to ensure a high quality and relevant higher education system in Ethiopia. To this end, it assure stakeholders that accredited HEIs are of an appropriate standard and that the programs of study offered by these HEIs are of an appropriate quality and relevance to the world of work and the development needs of the country" (HERQA/6/V1, 2006).

Among the many activities, HERQA is responsible to conduct quality assessment in the form of external audit at least every five years. Institutional quality audit is an in-depth analysis and assessment of the quality and relevance of programs and the teaching-learning environment (HERQA QA/01/06, 2006). Equally importantly, an institutional quality audit will assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of a higher education institutions' approach to quality care, its systems of accountability and its internal review mechanisms (HERQA QA07/07, 2008).

The Quality audit process is based on the ideas of self-study and peer review, and on the notion of a detailed report which becomes available to the institution to assist in improving procedures and achieving enhanced outputs. Hence, the quality assurance system begins by quality assessment at institutional level, followed by external audit. According to HERQA QA03/06/V1 (2006) an essential contribution to institutional quality audit is a Self-evaluation Document prepared by the HEIs. In HERQA's institutional quality audit procedure HEIs carries out an institutional self-assessment and prepares a Self Evaluation Document which is sent to HERQA. Based on the request of HEIs which informs HERQA of their wish to have an external quality audit, HERQA institutional quality auditors make a one-day briefing visit to the HEIs

which is followed by a four-day institutional quality audit. The agency's external quality audit seeks to verify claims of quality and relevance made in a Self Evaluation Document.

Finally, HERQA issues a quality audit report on which HEIs prepares an action plan to enhance quality and relevance. An institutional quality audit report provides a description and evaluation of the quality of a HEI's activities and of its mechanisms for assuring quality and relevance (HERQA QA05/06/V1, 2006). HERQA institutional quality audit report highlights elements of good practice and makes recommendations for improvements. In issuing institutional quality audit reports, HERQA aims to support a HEI by recognizing its good practices and by indicating areas where changes in practice can enhance the quality and relevance of its activities.

Different quality assurance agencies all over the world have developed various focal areas of institutional quality assessment. Most of the quality assurance agencies focus on the three functions of higher education viz. teaching, research, and community services (Lim, 2001). In order to conduct the institutional quality audit, HERQA has identified ten major areas that form the focus points of its institutional quality audits (HERQA QA02/06/V1, 2006)

Area 1: Vision, Mission and Educational Goals

Area 2: Governance and Management System

Area 3: Infrastructure and Learning Resources

Area 4: Academic and Support Staff

Area 5: Student Admission and Support Services

Area 6: Program Relevance and Curriculum

Area 7: Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Area 8: Student Progression and Graduate Outcomes

Area 9: Research and Outreach Activities

Area 10: Internal Quality Assurance

The self-evaluation documents by an institution and HERQA's institutional quality audit report focus on these ten focus areas. The self-evaluation, the self report, the institutional audit and HERQA audit report concentrates on 10 focus areas of activity of HEIs (Campbell, 2008). Hence, higher education institutions prepare their self-evaluation document by taking these areas into account that serves as a reference point against which HERQA conduct an external quality audit that ultimately results in institutional quality audit report of the respective institution.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Design of the Study

With the intention of getting the general picture of the existing practice, challenges and prospects of internal quality assessment, 'Mixed Methods Design' was employed. The central premise of using this design was that the use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone. Among the major types of mixed methods design, the researcher used 'Concurrent Triangulation' by considering its intent, procedures, strengths and challenges. The method focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study.

This design involves concurrent/simultaneous, but separate, collection and analysis of the two types of data in which one type of data is used to compare results or to validate, confirm, or corroborate with other type of data. Hence, in this study, qualitative data were analyzed and then cross-validated by quantitative result about aspects of internal quality assessment gathered by the survey questionnaires. The results of data analysis from the two methods were merged during discussion/interpretation phase of this study by bringing the separate results together.

3.2. Research Setting

The study selected AMU as a relevant site to conduct research on the problem under study. The university was chosen because the researcher has first hand information about the prevalence of the problem. Moreover, the researcher has better access to information that was indispensable to the success of the study. The researcher had believed that he would easily secure professional support of experts in the University as well. Besides, as an academic staff of the University, the researcher has personally interested in engaging himself in research works that contribute to the academic development of the University.

Arba Minch University is one of the public universities in Ethiopia, established in 2004 by the regulation No. 111/2004 of the Charter (AMU, 2005). The progenitor of the present AMU was the former Arba Minch Water Technology Institute (AWTI), which was established in 1986 with objective of producing trained professional in the field of water resources (AMU, 2005). AMU is situated in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region, about 500 KM south of the capital of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa and 5 kilometers away from the capital of Gamo Gofa zone, Arba Minch. The University has an area of 200 hectares at the eastern foot of Gamo mountain ranges and adjacent to the vast low lying land stretching towards Lake Abaya and forming part of the East African Rift Valley.

The university is comprised of six faculties; an Institute; and a School, namely: Institute of Water Technology; Engineering Faculty; Applied Sciences Faculty; Business and Economics Faculty, Agriculture Faculty, Health Science Faculty and the School of Post Graduate Studies. At present, the University runs both undergraduate and graduate programs with enrolment of about 9735 students (2nd Semester, 2008-2009 A.Y.). Currently, the university runs 38 undergraduate and 11 graduate programs. The university aspires to be one of the leading higher education institutions in Ethiopia and center of excellence in the area of water resources in Eastern Africa.

3.3. Participants and Sampling Techniques

Out of 6 faculties, a school and an institute the recently established were excluded from the study because it was believed that adequate data about the practice of internal quality assessment might not be generated since they have very short experience and were not involved in the first comprehensive internal quality audit. Thus, this study included Institute of Water Technology; Engineering; FBE, Teacher Education and Applied Sciences Faculty.

Non-proportional stratified random sampling was used to select 10 departments in the aforementioned faculties/institute. Thus, two departments: Irrigation & Hydraulic; Mechanical & Electrical; Applied Mathematics & Biology; Economics & Management; and Geography & Biology Education were selected from each faculty, respectively.

Purposive sampling was employed for selecting University managements, HERQA and ADRC experts. Accordingly, ten (10) participants were involved in the interviews that targeted these groups. This study involved two FGD with eight (8) student representatives and seven (7) instructors, representing the 10 departments chosen to participate in the study. Instructors with long years of experience and who involved in various aspects of IQA were chosen to participate in the FGD by using snow-ball sampling.

All department heads (29) and faculty deans (5) were purposively selected as respondents to the survey questionnaires. All instructors (93) in the randomly selected department were included in the study and 72 of them were practically involved in responding to survey questionnaires. Only prospective graduates were included in the study given the long experience they have about quality assurance/assessment practice in the University. Thus, 150 students were selected from departments chosen to participate in this study using systematic random sampling.

3.4. Data Gathering Instruments

In order to enhance the validity and trustworthiness of the study, various instruments of data collection were used. This helped to triangulate data generated by the variety of data collection tools. Therefore, the following data collection tools were employed in this study.

Review of Documents

Thorough reviews of literatures were made to develop an insight on international practice of quality assurance in HEIs. Self-evaluation Document (SED) of AMU and HERQA's documents

including Institutional Quality Audit Report were the focus of the documentary analysis. Moreover, official documents such as Senate Legislation and five-year strategic plan were examined to substantiate data from interviews and focus-group discussions.

Interview Schedule

Semi-structured interview guides were developed to gather information from key informant of HERQA, ADRC coordinator, quality expert of the University, and University management. The interview questions focused on the practice of quality assessment/assurance and challenges and prospects associated with it. Moreover, stakeholders' perceptions of quality in higher education were assessed by using in-depth interviews.

Focus-Group Discussion Schedule

Focus-group discussion guides were developed so as to obtain adequate and relevant information about the practice, challenges and prospects of internal quality assessment. Data related to perception of quality in higher education was also solicited by using FGDs.

Questionnaire

Three types of questionnaires were designed. Questionnaires that target students, instructors and University management were prepared and administered. The questionnaires focused on the practice, challenges and prospects of internal quality assessment in the University. All items of the questionnaires were developed by the researcher.

3.5. Validity and Reliability of Data Gathering Tools

Before data collection, quality experts in the University were consulted as to how the instruments designed for data collection would be improved. Relevant experts in the University were requested to comment on the survey questionnaire prepared for data collection. Two experts provided important comments on the questionnaire; they added important aspect of internal

quality assessment that has to be included in the study. They also removed less important questions and repetitions. Moreover, the experts forwarded suggestions for improvement of the interview and FGD guides. An expert from ADRC having language background had commented on the clarity and offered valuable comments and corrections to all the instruments.

Finally, pilot testing was done with 51 participants selected from University management, instructors and students from departments which were not included in the study. Thus, students and instructors of Chemistry and Meteorology department were used for pilot study. Reliability of the items was computed using Cronbach alpha. Thus, reliability of the items scale was found to be 0.83, 0.94 and 0.87 for management, instructors and student questionnaires, respectively (see Appendix 8). Generally, the item total reliability ranges between 0.799 – 0. 946. The item-total statistics reveals that the removal of any single items with lower reliability shows very slight changes on the reliability of the rest of the items. As a result, most of the items were retained with minor modification in its wordings.

3.6. Procedures of Data Collection

Data from interview and FGD were gathered with informed consent of participants. Each of the participants was personally contacted and discussions were held on the purpose of the study in order to make sure that the participants are willing to involve in the study. They were told that the information obtained will be kept confidential and any mention of participants' identity will not be made in any case. All the interviews were held in participant's office after agreeing on the appointments given by the participants at any time they feel comfortable. The two focus-group discussions were held in classroom with a trained assistant helping in coding the different views raised by participants.

Most of the questionnaires for students were distributed in the classroom with the physical presence of both the researcher and classroom teachers. But for those groups of students who did not contacted in classrooms, for various reasons, questionnaires were sent via class representative with the help of heads of departments. Questionnaire for instructors and University management were distributed in their respective departments/offices with the help of trained assistant data collector. Questionnaires were distributed twice due to the low return rate of the first phase of data collection.

3.7. Methods of Data Analysis and Interpretation

Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis and interpretation were employed. Qualitative data gathered through interview, FGD, document review and open-ended questionnaire were qualitatively analyzed and discussed by categorizing them according to the major themes and basic research questions of this study. The qualitative data from these sources were briefly described as it was reported by participants. Whenever deemed necessary, direct quotes from key informants were put as it was stated to show their original views and arguments. Finally, both qualitative and quantitative data were combined and discussed in the discussion phase of this study.

Data obtained by all close-ended questions of the questionnaires were entered in to the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (Version 15) computer program. Descriptive statistics, particularly frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were computed to determine the extent to which various aspects of IQA practiced by the University. Moreover, important preconditions to practice IQA were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The mean value of the Likert scale (3.0) was used as a reference point for determining the extent to which various aspects of IQA are practiced.

Inferential statistics such as Chi-square, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and post-hoc tests were run to analyze quantitative data. Chi-square was applied to see the availability of quality assurance body, policies and manuals in the University. One-way analysis of variance was employed to observe whether there was significance difference among faculties in practicing various strategies of IQA. Scheffe's test was used whenever ANOVA indicated statistically significant differences among groups.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

In this particular section, the qualitative and quantitative data collected through various data gathering tools are presented and analyzed. Data gathered via interview, focus-group discussion and open-ended questionnaires are categorized and qualitatively described based on the major themes and research question of this study. Quantitative data obtained through close-ended questionnaire are summarized and presented in tables and quantitatively analyzed.

4.1. Characteristics of the Participants

Ten (10) interviews were conducted with key informants from the University management. The characteristics of participants involved in the interviews are indicated in Table 1 below

Table 1: Characteristics of key informant involved in the Interviews

Participants	Field of specialization	Qualification	Service years	Sex
I-1	Civil Engineering	PhD	12+years	M
I-2	Mechanical engineering	MSc	22+years	M
I-3	Mechanical Engineering	MSc	10+years	M
I-4	Irrigation Engineering	MSc	6+years	M
I-5	Chemistry	MSc	5+years	M
I-6	Economics	MSc	5+years	M
I-7	Curriculum & Instruction	MA	9+years	M
I-8	Physics	MSC	4+Years	M
I-9	Sociology	PhD	3+years	M
I-10	-	PhD (HERQA Expert)	2+years	M

As indicated in Table 1, 10 in-depth interviews were held with participants from University management. The interviews were held with deans of four faculties and an institute, APO and experts from ADRC and HERQA that were sampled as key informant to this study. As it can be seen from Table 1, the service years of the respondents ranges between 2 and 22 years. The academic qualification of the majority of the informants was MA/MSc with some participants with PHD, which reveals that the participants were above lecturer in their academic rank.

Focus-group discussions were conducted with representatives of prospective graduates and instructors of the University. The characteristics of participants who took part in the two FGDs are presented here under in Table 2 and 3.

Table 2: Characteristics of participants' (Instructors) involved in the focus-group discussions

	Field of specialization	Qualification	Service years	Sex
FGD-1 Participant	Management	MBA	4+years	M
	Mechanical engineering	MSc	5+years	M
	Hydraulic Engineering	MSc	4+years	M
	Irrigation Engineering	MSc	6+years	M
	Applied Mathematics	MSc	5+years	M
	Biology Education	MSc	4+years	M
	Geography Education	MA	3+years	M

As shown in Table 2, seven participants took part in instructors' focus-group discussion where all of them possessed MA/MSc/MBA academic qualification with service years ranging from 3 to 6 years. These participants represented the five faculties chosen to be included in the study. None of the participants from this group was female.

Table 3: Characteristics of participants' (Students) involved in the focus-group discussions

	Faculties/Institute	Departments	Sex
FGD-2 Participants	Business and Economics	Economics	M
	Business and Economics	Management	M
	Water Technology	Hydraulic Engineering	M
	Water Technology	Irrigation Engineering	M
	Engineering	Civil Engineering	M
	Applied Sciences	Applied Biology	F
	Applied Sciences	Applied Mathematics	M
	Teacher Education	Biology Education	M

As indicated in Table 3, a focus-group discussion was held with representatives' of prospective graduates of Arba Minch University. Eight participants were participated in the focus-group discussion. This group represented the 5 faculties and 8 departments included in the study. Only one female participant was involved in the FGD conducted with this group.

Questionnaires were used to solicit quantitative data from prospective graduates, instructors and University management. The characteristics of the participants involved in responding to the survey questionnaire are summarized and presented in Table 4 and 5:

Table 4: Frequency and percentage of respondents by faculty and sex

Faculties	Respondents Group						Sex				Grand Total	
	Mgmt[1]		Instructors		Students		Female		Male			
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
Applied Sciences	6	12.0	14	28.0	30	60.0	12	24.0	38	76.0	**50**	**21.0**
Teacher Education	11	18.6	17	28.8	31	52.5	16	27.1	43	72.9	**59**	**24.8**
Engineering Faculty	4	9.8	14	34.1	23	56.1	12	29.3	29	70.7	**41**	**17.2**
Business & Economics	6	12.2	18	36.7	25	51.0	11	22.4	38	77.6	**49**	**20.6**
Water Technology	7	17.9	13	33.3	19	48.7	5	12.8	34	87.2	**39**	**16.4**
Grand Total	**34**	**14.3**	**76**	**31.9**	**128**	**53.8**	**56**	**23.5**	**182**	**76.5**	**238**	**100.0**

As shown in Table 4, four faculties and an institute, namely, Applied Sciences (21%); Teacher Education (24.8%); FBE (20.6%); Engineering (17.2%), and Water Technology (16.4%), were participated in the study. The number of participants from each faculty was 50, 59, 41, 49 and 39, respectively. A cursory glance at Table 1 depicts that the majority of the participants were males with 182 (76.5%) and 56 (23.5%) females. Moreover, none of the participants from University management group was female. Totally, 238 participants appropriately completed and returned the questionnaires. These participants were composed of 34 (14.3%) university management; 76(31.9%) instructors and 128 (53.8%) final year students.

[1] Refers to University Management

Participants were asked the extent to which peer (both internal and external) reviews of academic programs/courses were practiced. It was reported that peer review of programs across faculties or departments within the University was almost nonexistent. It was only very recently that the university undergone peer reviews of programs by peer reviewers from peer institution under the initiative of HERQA. Following the establishment of HERQA, AMU has undergone the first external reviews of quality and relevance by a team of peer reviewers delegated by HERQA. Use of external examiner system to maintain standard with other institution was limited to graduate studies and occasionally by some departments within Water Technology and Engineering Faculty. Participant from certain faculty described the use of external examiner as:

> *"...due to the shortage of experts in some areas of specialization, guest instructors are invited from AAU...as a result they are assigned as advisors to final year project... though, examiner system is not established as formal system in departments, they are benefiting from the feedback of experts coming from peer institutions... these guest instructors are providing feedback to departments either through the grade they give to students or through direct feedback about quality of the students they taught or advised...this helps departments and faculty to know about competence of graduating students and maintain at least threshold standard of peer institutions.."*
>
> I-3, 08, 01, 2001

Besides, the University has final year project for prospective graduate by which students were assigned to different organizations. By internship and work placement programs prospective graduates were exposed to the world of work. In this programs the evaluation of students' performance are left to those organizations at which students are placed. As a result, potential employers provide feedback about the competence of prospective graduates via their evaluation.

The quantitative data from survey questionnaires disclosed roughly similar situation with respect to program review; peer reviews of programs and use of external examiner system in the University. Table 9 summarizes the aforementioned aspects of internal quality assessment.

Table 9: Frequency, Percentage, Mean and SD of items about program review practices

Items	Frequencies and Percentages						N	Mean	SD[7]
	SDA + DA		UD		A + SA				
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*			
Regular internal quality assessments	62	56.4	27	24.5	21	19.1	110	2.5	0.94
Regular program and course reviews	39	35.4	11	10.0	60	54.5	110	3.3	1.15
Peer review of programs across departments.	65	39.1	17	15.5	28	25.5	110	2.6	1.13
Peer review by peer reviewer from peer institutions.	78	70.9	18	16.4	14	12.7	110	2.2	0.97
External assessment by local/ international agencies	61	55.5	15	13.6	34	30.9	110	2.6	1.21
The use of external examiner	52	47.3	17	15.5	41	37.2	110	2.9	1.32
Weighted mean & SD								**2.7**	**0.76**

As indicated in Table 9, the items were rated below the average (Weighted mean =2.65, SD= 1.12). Although the weighted mean of items was below the scale mean, the item about the practice of regular reviews of programs was rated above the scale mean (mean= 3.3, SD=1.15). More than 55% of the respondents rated strongly disagree and disagree to the practice of regular quality assessment and peer-review of academic program across faculties or departments in the University. Similarly, respondents exceeding 60% rated strongly disagree and disagree to the practice of peer-review by local or international institutions or agencies. Highest score was rated for the item about the practice of regular program and course reviews/assessment by departments (M=3.3, SD=1.15). One-way ANOVA was used to see whether there were statistically significant differences among the sampled faculties on their program review practices.

[7] Refers to Standard Deviation

Table 10: Mean and SD of Faculties program review practices

Faculties/Institute	N	Mean	SD
Applied Sciences	20	2.56	0.74
Teacher Education	28	2.45	0.61
Engineering	18	3.03	0.69
Business & Economics	24	2.28	0.65
Water Technology	20	3.26	0.73

Table 10 depicts the mean and standard deviation of some strategies of practicing internal quality assessment among the sampled faculties and institute. As shown in the table, the faculties i.e. Applied Sciences, Teacher Education, Engineering, FBE and Water Technology Institute had a sample mean and SD of 2.56(.74), 2.45 (.61), 3.03 (.69), 2.28 (.65) and 3.26 (.76), respectively.

Table 11: Summary of One-way ANOVA of Faculties program review practices

Sources of variation	Sum of Squares	df[8]	Mean Square	F	Sig.[9]
Between Groups	14.57	4	3.64	7.87*	0.00
Within Groups	48.59	105	0.46		
Total	63.16	109			

* P< .05.

As it can be seen from Table 11, analysis of the variances for the items in Table 9 shows significant mean difference among the sampled faculties and institute, $F_{(4, 105)} = 7.87, p < .05$. Given an overall significant difference among faculties, post-hoc test (Scheffe's procedure) was performed to determine the faculty responsible for the observed differences.

[8] Refers to Degree of Freedom
[9] Refers to Significance

Table 12: Mean Comparison of Faculties on the six items of internal quality assessment (Scheffe's procedure)

(I) Faculty	(J) Faculty	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Applied Sciences	Teacher Education	0.11	0.98
	Engineering	0.45	0.35
	Business & Economics	0.28	0.76
	Water Technology	0.70(*)	0.04
Teacher Education	Engineering	0.58	0.10
	Business & Economics	0.17	0.94
	Water Technology	0.81(*)	0.00
Engineering	Business & Economics	0.75 (*)	0.02
	Water Technology	0.23	0.89
Business & Economics	Water Technology	0.98(*)	0.00

* P< .05.

As it can be seen from Table 12 statistically significant difference were observed between Applied Sciences and Water Technology (p=.04); Teacher Education and Water Technology (p=.00), Engineering and FBE (p=.02) and FBE and Water Technology (p=.00). However, there were no significant difference between Applied Sciences and Teacher education, Engineering and FBE; Teacher Education and FBE and Engineering and Water Technology. Thus, groups responsible for the significant difference might be Engineering Faculty and Water Technology.

Surveys of Graduate Employment, Employer and Students' Satisfaction

Information was gathered form participants about the practices of some aspects of internal quality assessment pertaining to tracer studies of graduate employment, surveys of employer and students satisfaction. In the past, there was only informal knowledge of employability of the graduates based on information from graduates themselves. A formal system of assessing employability of graduates has not been in place. As majority of the participants agreed, currently there is a need for establishing formal system graduate employment survey. An informant from University management expressed his view of graduate employment as follows:

"...previously employability was not an issue to worry about...however, currently due to massification of higher education and the accompanying increase in the number of graduates, there is informal knowledge that graduates are facing problems of employment."

I-6, 10, 01, 2009

Similarly, a participant described the need for graduate employment survey as follows:

"...before two years we have heard no complain about employment from graduates and we did not realize the importance of conducting graduate employment survey... currently, employability is a pressing issue that demands explicit knowledge of its status to win the competitive advantage of graduate employment by improving the quality of programs..."

I-8, 09, 01, 2001

Although formal system of assessment was not there, there were some mechanisms of determining employers' satisfaction of graduates of the university. During curriculum design review process employers are consulted about their satisfaction with the graduates. A participant described the comment of employers in one of the curriculum review process as follows:

"...employers were commented on the lack of practical knowledge among the graduates... graduates have not well equipped with practical skills...employers believed that there are some important components missing from the curriculum which resulted in the incompatibility of what is taught in the university and the practical skills and knowledge required in the real world context..."

I-2, 08, 01, 2009

On top of this, faculties know the quality of students graduating from the institution via informal feedback they obtained from employers. For instance, one of the deans of the faculty explained the cases where computer science graduates were found outsmarting graduates of other universities in developing software in certain company in which the employer gave recognition to the competence of the graduates. Similarly, students of Architecture department won the national competition of students in higher education of Ethiopia.

Table 13: Frequency, percentage, mean and SD of items about graduate employment, student and employers satisfaction.

Items	Frequencies and Percentages						N	Mean	SD
	SDA + DA		UD		A + SA				
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*			
Tracer studies of graduate employment have been carried out	63	57.2	23	20.9	24	21.8	110	2.42	1.12
Employer satisfaction surveys have been conducted	74	67.3	19	17.3	27	15.5	110	2.23	1.00
Students' learning satisfaction surveys have been conducted	114	48.3	54	22.9	68	28.0	236	2.71	1.20
Weighted mean & SD								**2.64**	**1.11**

As revealed in Table 13, the survey of graduate employment, employer and students satisfaction were rated below the scale mean which complement the data obtained via interview and FGD. The overall mean the items were 2.64 (SD=1.11) which reflect that the majority of the respondents rated the items between the range of disagree to undecided. More than 45 % of the assigned strongly disagree and disagree. The respondents who rated the items as agree and strongly agree were less than 30%.

Other Strategies of Practicing Internal Quality Assessment

In addition to aspects of internal quality assessment dealt formerly, participants were asked about use of instructors' performance evaluation, teaching observation, assessment of adequacy of resource provisions and engagement in educational research to make sure that the institution is offering quality higher education. During the interview and FGD, it was easy to recognize that departments were regularly engaged in evaluation of instructors' performance by students, colleagues and heads of departments.

Observation of teaching by colleagues and management so as to determine the quality of classroom instruction were not the dominant culture. Recently, the faculty of teacher education occasionally engaged in classroom observation as one requirement of HDP. With respect to assessing resources available to support students learning, the participants mentioned that its adequacy and availability were the central agenda during conferences and meetings. Hence, in different meetings and sharing sessions, the issue of quality was the center of debate in one way or another. During the general internal quality audit under HERQA's initiative, the first comprehensive assessment of adequacy and availability of resources provisions were made

Another issues of discussion during the interview and FGD were engagement of the staff in educational research as a means to assess the quality of educational provisions of the institution. With the establishment of Faculty of Teacher Education and the accompanying HDP, there were some indicators that show the importance ascribed to educational research activities to determine and improve the quality of education. Some staffs were engaged in educational research and almost all the staff of Faculty Teacher Education developed an interest towards action research following their participation in HDP. However, other faculties did consider educational research as the role of Faculty of Education and did not appreciate the importance of educational research to assess and improve quality in their respective faculty.

The following quantitative ratings may complement the data generated through interview and FGD described qualitatively above.

Table 5: Frequency and percentage of respondents' (Management and Instructors) age, qualification, position, academic rank and service years

Variables	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age	<25	10	9.3%
	25-29	37	34%
	30-34	17	21.3%
	35-44	18	29.6%
	>44	3	5.6%
Qualification	BA, BSc, BEd, LLB	19	18.3%
	MA, MSc, MBA, MEd, M. Phil,	79	76%
	PHD.	6	5.8%
Academic Rank	Graduate Assistant	13	11.8%
	Assistant Lecturer	6	5.5%
	Lecturer	83	75.5%
	Assistant and Associate Professor	7	6.4%
	Professor	1	.9%
Position/Responsibility	Head of Departments	22	64.7%
	Academic Deans	3	8.8%
	ADRC	4	11.8%
	Others: APO, RPO, CEPD, Exam Review Committee	5	14.7%
Service years	0-2 years	37	33.6%
	2-5 years	41	37.3%
	6-10 Years	21	19.1%
	>10 years	11	10%

Table 5 gives the general picture of the respondents' age, qualification, academic rank, position and service years. For reasons of convenience these characteristics of the respondents are classified in to manageable groups. The age range of most of the respondents was between 24 and 44 years. The dominant age group was between 25 and 29 years. About 10 % and 7% of the respondents were below 25 years and above 45 years, respectively.

Concerning the qualification of the participants, 79 (76%) of them were masters' degree holders. Where as about 19 (18.3%) and 6 (5.8%) of the respondents were bachelor and PhD

holders, respectively. The logical extension of qualification is the academics rank of respondents whereby Lecturer (75.5%) was the dominant academic rank participated in the study followed by graduate assistant (11.8%). Only a few participants were assistant and associate professor (6.4%) and professor (0.9%).

With respect to the responsibility of those on the management position, all department heads (29) were included in the study where 22 of them were appropriately filled and returned the questionnaires. About 64.7% of the positions held by the management respondent were head of departments. Where as about 8.8% and 11.8% of the respondents were academic dean and ADRC coordinators and unit leaders, respectively. With regard to the participants teaching experience in the university, the majority of the participants (about71%) had less than 5 years experience. As the table clearly illustrates, only about 29% of the respondents served more than 5 years.

4.2. Stakeholders' Perception of Quality in Higher Education

The data solicited by in-depth interview and FGD informed that there are variations in the perception of quality in higher education among internal stakeholders. In one of the interviews, an informant from university management described quality as:

> *"...producing qualified professionals for the world of work that the national economy demands...measured by efficient and effective resource utilization, rate of graduate employment, employers' preferences of graduates of the institution, the earning of the graduates of the institution..."*
>
> I-1, 08, 01, 2009

Similarly, another informant further explained higher education quality as follows:

> *"...the definition ascribed to quality depends on the institutional development. The definition should consider the stage of development of higher education; in our context quality in higher education can be defined as the preparation of students with knowledge, skills and attitudes...necessary for the world of work..."*
>
> I-2, 08, 01, 2009

On the other hand, another informant described quality as the attainment of program goal. It is meeting the target set for the program. It is producing graduates according to the goals of the program. This can be measured by evaluation of student learning against objectives of courses.

In the FGD held, most of the instructors understood quality in terms of students learning. The knowledge, skills, and attitudes students possessed at the end of period of instruction. They consider quality in context of small classes; good students; space and resources. Whenever issues of quality discussed, there are some important factors that has to be considered. Among these factors they pointed out teacher qualification, commitment and competence of staffs, inputs (libraries, laboratories, teaching aids), students' assessment and follow-up, and number and quality of students admitted to the university.

The students focus on inputs to teaching-learning process and the perceived usefulness of education for future employment and personal development. Inputs such competence and quality of instructors, availability of library resources and services were the major issues in students' discussion of quality in higher education. Moreover, they understand quality in terms of methods of instruction and learning assessment employed in the institution. One of the participants replied to the argument held among the student on their conception of quality as:

> *"....quality is nothing more than the provision of adequate resources and facilities... adequate books and library services; laboratory equipment and technical support; appropriate instructional methods and assessment techniques and ultimately, student learning"*
>
> FGD-2, 10, 01, 2009

On top of this, students perceive quality in terms of the extent to which their education helps them to hold position through employment. This entails obtaining relevant job in their fields of specialization and getting better earning. Generally, student perceive quality in terms of teaching excellence; access to rewarding jobs; academic support and personal enrichment

4.3. Preconditions to Effective Practice of Internal Quality Assessment

In-depth interview; FGD and survey questionnaire was used to solicit data about important precondition to practice effective internal quality assessment at AMU. From the interview held with university management, it is possible to conclude that most preconditions were missing. Most of the participants agreed that there was no independent quality assurance body, but by almost all, it was deemed necessary to have an office responsible for quality matters in the University. Some informants believed that the Quality Care Unit (QCU) of ADRC is responsible body for quality assurance and assessment in the University. Moreover, there were no official quality assessment/assurance policies, manuals or guidelines. Besides, the participants mentioned that there were no clear goals and performance indicators to assess the quality of education.

Concerning the commitment of academic staff and university management to quality and quality assessment, conflicting views were reflected. The management pointed their forefinger towards academic staffs for lack of commitment pertinent to assuring and enhancing academic quality. Instructors blamed the management for their failure to develop shared values among the University community about quality of educational provisions. The following excerpt is from one of the interview held with a participant from university management:

> *"...ask one of the instructors in the university about his/her responsibility...he/she may tell you...regularly going to the classroom; covering the units of the course; preparing examination and grading students...inquire them who is responsible for assessing, assuring and maintaining quality...they may refer to the University management; HERQA and if they go down they may mention the ADRC..."*
>
> I-1, 08, 01, 2009

Though there are participants of FGD who were in favour of this view, there were some who did not subscribe to this view. An informant arguing against this opinion stated the following:

> *"Generally, most of the staff...both management and instructors...are committed and feel responsible for those activities that they are supposed to accomplish...though there are some who have no shared values and strive for their own personal interest...one of the most prevailing challenges to education quality in the institution is not lack of commitment rather the lack of shared values among the academic staff and the management."*
>
> FGD-1, 09, 01, 2009

Most of the staff complained that they do not have adequate time to care for quality and quality assessment of programs and courses since they have engaged in various administrative duties in addition to the regular duties of teaching. One informant stated the following:

> *"...you cannot find any single individual whose responsibility is only teaching ... including the fresh and less experienced staff...most staff holds more than one posts in addition to the teaching duties...there are also departments who have excess teaching loads who teaches more than 30 cr.hrs including extension programs. So we are always dealing with the daily nitty-gritty than caring about quality or what you call quality assessment..."*
>
> I-4, 09, 01, 2009

Besides, FGD participants interrogated whether there are explicit financial arrangements and allocation of resources set-aside for purpose of quality assessment. In the course of both interview and FGD, participants reflected that the university does not have adequately trained and experienced staff to practice IQA due to unbridled staff turnover that the university has been experiencing. One participant talked angrily about the problem of staff turn-over as follows:

> *"AMU is located in remote areas and the climate is not favorable...on top of this, there are no incentive arrangements to retain staff...added poor working environment...all this contributed to the severe staff turn-over. As a result the university is always dealing with fresh and less experienced staff in a situation where the most experienced and competent staffs are always leaving the university."*
>
> I-7, 11, 01, 2009

Essentially similar situation was revealed by the survey questionnaire used for collecting quantitative data from students, instructors and University management. Table 6, 7, and 8 present the availability of important precondition to practice IQA in the University.

Table 6: Chi-square goodness of fit test for quality assessment/ assurance body

Item	Responses	Observed N	Expected N	Chi-Square(a)	df	Asymp. Sig
Availability of quality assurance body	Yes	21	36.7	26.74*	2	0.00
	No	62	36.7			
	I Don't Know	27	36.7			
	Total	110				

*p<0.05

Table 6 reveals that majority of the respondents (62 (56.4%)) agreed that there was no independent body responsible for quality assurance in the University. The difference was statistically significant ($\chi^2_{(2,\, n=110)} = 26.74$, $p < 0.05$) among the three alternatives (Yes, No and I Don't Know) given to respondents about the availability quality assurance body at AMU.

Table 7: Chi-square goodness of fit test for quality assurance policy/manuals

Item	Responses	Observed N	Expected N	Chi-Square(a)	df	Asymp. Sig
Availability of quality assessment/ assurance policy/ manuals/guidelines	Yes	25	36.7	7.873*	2	0.02
	No	49	36.7			
	I Don't Know	36	36.7			
	Total	110				

*p<0.05

Statistically significant difference was observed among three alternatives (Yes, No, & I Don't Know) with respect to the availability of policy/manuals/guidelines ($\chi^2_{(2,\, n=110)} = 7.87$, $p < 0.05$). The majority of the respondents (49 (44.5%)) replied 'No' for the availability of policies, manuals and guidelines for quality assurance/assessment.

Table 8: Availability of important preconditions to practice internal quality assessment

Preconditions to effective internal quality assessment	Frequencies and Percentages						N	Mean	SD
	SDA[2] + DA[3]		UD[4]		A[5] + SA[6]				
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*			
Clear goals are set to assess the quality of education	66	60.0	28	25.5	16	14.5	110	2.29	1.01
Availability of clearly defined performance indicators/benchmarks	48	43.7	48	43.6	14	12.7	110	2.55	0.95
Effective organizational structure & governance for quality assessment	40	36.4	17	15.5	53	48.2	110	3.05	1.28
Adequate time to care about quality and quality assessment	65	59.1	22	20.0	23	20.9	110	2.49	0.99
Adequate financial and material resources for quality assessment	61	55.4	34	30.9	15	13.6	110	2.38	1.01
Experienced & competent staffs to conduct internal quality assessment	48	43.6	28	25.5	34	30.9	110	2.92	1.20
Committed & supportive staffs to undertake internal quality audit	97	40.9	48	20.3	92	38.0	237	2.84	1.10
Shared values among internal stakeholders on quality matters	107	45.0	61	25.6	70	29.4	238	2.74	1.16
Weighted mean & SD								**2.67**	**0.84**

Table 8 portrays important preconditions and at times challenges to practice internal quality assessment at University. As indicated in Table 8, on the whole, the items were rated below the average (M =2.67, SD=0. 84). When we compare the mean scores of the items, taking the scale mean (3.00) as a point of reference, each item was rated below the expected level for most of the variables. Majority of the responses were falling between disagree and undecided.

For instance, 60% of the respondents rated strongly disagree and disagree to the existence of clear goals to assess quality in the University. Similarly, respondents exceeding 50% rated strongly disagree and disagree to the experience and competence of the staff to undertake IQA.

[2] Refers to Strongly Disagree
[3] Refers to Disagree
[4] Refers to Undecided
[5] Refers to Agree
[6] Refers to Strongly Agree

Highest score was rated for the item about the effectiveness of organizational structure and governance of AMU to practice IQA (M=3.05, SD=1.28) and the lowest was for the availability of clear goals to assess quality (M=2.29, SD=1.01).

4.4. Internal Quality Assessment practice at Arba Minch University

Here an attempt was made to examine the extent to which various strategies of IQA were practiced. Data were collected from University management, instructors and students via in-depth interview, focus-group discussion and survey questionnaires.

Program Quality Review/Assessment

Data were solicited about the extent to which regular program review and monitoring were practiced by the University. Considerable number of informants agreed that occasional program review were conducted. Usually, review process are initiated at the faculty level and performed by a committee established at department level. It involves internal and external stakeholders such as students, teachers, employers and professional association. The recent program review was undertaken in 2006/07 academic year though the result of the review has not yet been implemented due to the intervention of MOE in determining the number of years that students require to complete a program.

Some aspects of program monitoring were practiced by departments and faculties. This situation was described by one of the informants who mentioned the following.

> *"...departments monitor the preparation of course outlines in line with the program and course objectives...whether contents of the courses are covered within the semester and the review of examination by exam review committee. Department has exam review committee to evaluate the quality and standards examinations... exams have to pass through the scrutiny of the committee before its administration..."*
>
> I-5, 11, 01, 2001

Table 14: Mean and SD of items about some aspects/strategies IQA

Items	N	Mean	SD
Competencies of staff are examined through instructors' performance evaluation	238	3.64	1.26
There are periodic sharing sessions and meetings to discuss on the quality matters	237	3.24	1.19
There is a tradition of teaching observation to assess the quality of education	235	2.94	1.18
Department ensures that the resources are adequate and appropriate for each program	238	2.53	1.23
Departments are engaged in educational research activities to improve quality matters	110	2.30	0.96
Educational provisions are informed by action research carried out by departments	110	2.45	1.01
Weighted Mean & SD		**2.98**	**0.78**

As it can be seen in Table 14, the overall mean is 2.98 (SD=.78). The mean score is below an average on five point Likert scale. However, items like evaluation of instructors performance (M=2.64, SD=1.26) and sharing sessions and meeting on quality (M=3.24, SD=1.19) were rated above the mean. The lowest rating was assigned to the provision of education informed by action research (M=2.45, SD=1.01). ANOVA was run to see if there are significant mean differences among faculties included in the study with respect to the five internal quality assessment items.

Table 15: Mean and SD of Faculties on some aspects of IQA

Faculties/Institute	N	Mean	SD
Applied Sciences	50	3.10	0.71
Teacher Education	59	3.22	0.71
Engineering	41	2.67	0.77
FBE	49	2.92	0.71
Water Technology	39	2.84	0.96

Table 15 indicates mean and the standard deviation of faculties on the six items as rated by participants. The highest mean among the faculties was scored by Faculty of Teacher Education (M=3.22, SD=.71) followed by Applied Sciences Faculty (M=3.1, SD=.71) and the lowest mean went to Engineering Faculty (M=2.67, SD=.77)

Table 16: Summary of One-way ANOVA of Five Faculties on the six items IQA

Sources of variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	9.32	4	2.33	3.97 *	0.00
Within Groups	136.73	233	.59		
Total	146.05	237			

* P< .05.

As revealed in Table 16, statistically significant differences were observed among sampled faculties with respect to evaluation of teacher performances, observation of teaching, sharing sessions/meetings, and the practice educational research ($F_{(4, 233)} = 3.97, p < .05$.)

Table 17: Mean Comparison of Faculties on the six items of internal quality assessment (Scheffe's procedure)

(I) Faculty	(J) Faculty	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Applied Sciences	Teacher Education	0.12	0.96
	Engineering	0.44	0.12
	Business & Economics	0.19	0.82
	Water Technology	0.27	0.60
Teacher Education	Engineering	0.56(*)	0.01
	Business & Economics	0.31	0.37
	Water Technology	0.39	0.21
Engineering	Business & Economics	0.25	0.67
	Water Technology	0.17	0.91
Business & Economics	Water Technology	0.08	0.99

* P< .05.

As shown in Table 17, statistically significant differences were observed only between Teacher Education and Engineering Faculty. However, there were no significant differences among the rest of the faculties/institute with respect to the practice of some aspects of internal quality assessment mentioned in Table 14.

4.5. Nature and Effectiveness Internal Quality Audit Initiated by HERQA

In-depth interviews were held with the University management about the first HERQA initiated internal quality audit, its practice, challenges and prospects. Participants appreciated the role that HERQA has in institutional quality assurance of higher education. The interviewees believed that the current inspiration at quality assurance and assessment in higher education is primarily due to the establishment of HERQA. One of the informants mentioned the following:

> *"...had it not HERQA's pressure, there would have not been formal quality assessment in the university...there was no internal quality assessment initiative taken by the institution to conduct comprehensive quality assessment...rather it was imposed by HERQA's demand to undertake internal quality audit as a requirement for external quality audit... It is only after the establishment of HERQA as a national body for quality assurance that formal internal quality assessment was conducted..."*
>
> I-2, 08, 01, 2009

Another participant appreciates the 10 focus area identified by HERQA. The focus areas identified show the issues that have to be investigated with respect to quality in higher education. Participants were highly in favour of the establishment national agency to oversee the quality and relevance of higher education. Despite all its problems and inadequacy, establishment of HERQA helps to create the ground for future direction of higher education with respect to its quality and relevance. However, nearly everyone believed that currently the demand of HERQA is difficult to be met by HEIs provided the inadequate human and material resources.

Participants were asked about the general process involved in the first internal quality audit. Initially, an ad-hoc quality audit team was set up. Trainings were offered to internal auditors by members from HERQA. Committee for each of the 10 focus areas was established. Instruments of data collection were developed for the 10 focus areas. The instruments included interview, questionnaires, and observation schedules. The team collected the data and the analysis was made to produce the self-evaluation document.

An enquiry of important aspects of the internal quality audit was made by this study. The readiness of the university to undertake IQA was an issue presented during interview and FGD. The data generated in the study demonstrated that adequate preparations were not made in terms of material, financial and human resources. Participants mentioned that it was just with the order of HERQA that the university all of a sudden found itself in the self-evaluation processes. An expert participated in the internal quality audit described the situation as follows:

> *"...it was really shocking; most of the staff did not have idea or experience about internal quality audit...their cooperation was very limited. It is ridiculous to take a donkey to a drinking water, if the donkey doesn't know what water is all about..."*
>
> I-9, 12, 01, 2009

During the interview sessions, participants pointed out that there was lack of understanding about the quality audit. Notwithstanding series of training on the processes and procedures to undertake internal quality audit by HERQA, yet there were problems of properly implementing it. This was particularly due to the lack of practical knowledge and experiences of the ad-hoc committee to conduct the internal audit. On top of these problems, there were some participants who interrogate the adequacy of training offered to internal quality auditors by HERQA.

Although participants realized the importance of HERQA in facilitating internal quality audit of the university, there are some challenges that need reconsideration. Some informants argued that HERQA demands compliance to the guidelines and manuals which forced the university to go beyond the existing ability and experiences at hand to meet the demand of HERQA. HERQA demands higher education to concentrate on the ten focus areas irrespective of the availability or nonexistence of the focus areas as a practice in the institutions. The following excerpt of a participant complements this concern:

"HERQA should conduct a kind of survey to identify the focus areas of quality assessment which are already practiced out of the 10 focus areas and the quality assessment should focus on those focus areas that are in place"

I-9, 12, 01, 2009

An interview with HERQA's expert demonstrated that the approach to quality audit was adapted from the experience of other countries. Reviews of document of HERQA and quality assurance agencies of other countries have also shows the same situation. The quality assurance approach adopted by HERQA is taken form the quality assurance practice of developed countries particularly UK. For instance, the guidelines and actual practice of institutional quality audit of HERQA is essentially in accord with England's handbook for institutional Audit (2002) which is developed by England's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

This contention can be cross-validated by assessing the documents produced by HERQA and QAA. It is possible to compare Handbook for Institutional Audit: England (2002) and HERQA Institutional Audit procedures (2006) and Preparing a Self Evaluation document (2006). Though benchmarking good practice is a common and worthwhile experience, there must be some precaution in adopting the experience of other countries. The prevailing conditions and context shall be taken into consideration as reflected by participants included in this study. Participants mentioned that the quality assurance practice in Ethiopian HEIs is at its infancy stage to adopt and implement the quality assurance practice of developed countries. That is why an informant from a university management has forwarded the following recommendation:

"...it would have been better if such a comprehensive quality assessment would be preceded by a preliminary survey of prevailing condition of the university...this helps to identify the problems and quality assurance mechanism in place...quality audit has to be concerned with assessment of the quality assurance processes, procedures and mechanisms..."

I-9, 12, 01, 2009

Discussions were held about the extent to which internal quality audit report compatible with HERQA's external quality audit report. As majority of the participants agreed, there are some discrepancy between HERQA's expectations and the self-evaluation report produced by AMU. Reviews of a document about institutional quality audit report of AMU disclose the incompatibility between internal and external audit report. This was explained by lack of evidences for some mechanisms of quality assurance that the university claimed in the self-evaluation document.

Moreover, it was noted that the number of recommendations listed in the external quality audit report was by far greater than the number of commendations. As it can be seen from the quality audit report, generally there are 128 commendations and recommendations. Out of these, only 31 (24.22%) of them are found to be commendations whereas an overwhelming majority, 75.78% (97), of them were recommendations. All of the recommendations were directed to AMU and none of them were to HERQA or other external constituencies of the university. However, some informants argued that some of the current problems of the institution can be successfully acted up on if collaboration is secured from external stakeholders such as HERQA and MOE. Some participants were also complained that HERQA audit team focuses on the weak side of the institution than the strong side. An informant described the situation as:

> *"...have you read the quality audit report? It is really surprising... recommendations are significant part of the report...only few commendations were recognized by the audit team. What is most amazing is that all of the recommendations point towards the University. It is obvious that the University is responsible to take action on those problems identified; however, there are other stakeholders such as MOE and HERQA that should support the action of the University."*
>
> I-9, 12, 01, 2009

Table 18 summarizes important aspects of the first comprehensive internal and external quality audit initiated by HERQA.

Table 18: Mean and SD of items about HERQA initiated quality audit

Items	N	Mean	SD
Effectiveness of HERQA's approach to quality audit	34	3.44	0.82
The relevance of the approach to the prevailing conditions of the institution	34	2.59	0.86
The extent to which it allows the institution to design independent quality assessment mechanisms	34	3.15	0.99
The SED was in agreement with HERQA's Institutional Quality Audit Report	34	2.94	1.15
AMU was well prepared prior to internal quality audit	34	2.85	0.89
Internal quality audit is linked to the mission of the institution.	34	3.74	0.79
Adequate training was offered before internal quality audit	34	2.79	0.91
Quality audit teams have a good understanding of internal quality audit	34	3.03	0.82
Weighted Mean & SD		**3.07**	**0.47**

As indicated in Table 18, the over all mean of the respondents was slightly greater than the scale mean (M=3.07, SD=.47). Positive rating were observed about effectiveness of HERQA initiated internal quality audit (M=3.44, SD=.82) and the extent to which the quality audit was related to the mission of AMU (M=3.74, SD=.79). The mean of the items about the extent to which HERQA approach allows the institution to design independent quality assessment mechanisms and understanding of the audit team about internal quality audit were 3.15 (SD=.99) and 3.03 (SD=.82), respectively.

The lowest rating responses went to the relevance of HERQA approach to internal quality audit to the existing conditions of AMU (M=2.59, SD =.86); the adequacy of the training offered to undertake internal quality audit (M=2.79, SD= .91) and prior planning and preparation by AMU to carry out the quality audit (M=2.85, SD=.89). Concerning the compatibility of internal

quality audit (SED) and external quality audit report, the table shows a rating slightly less than the scale mean '3' (M=2.94, SD=1.15)

4.6. Stakeholders Involvement in the Internal Quality Assessment

The data collected revealed the involvement of internal stakeholders in some aspects of IQA. It was mentioned that only internal stakeholders' viz. students, academic and administrative staffs and the management were participated in both traditional quality assessment practiced by the university and the first comprehensive quality audit initiated by HERQA.

External constituencies like alumni, employers, professional association were overlooked during quality assessment in the university. As mentioned previously, only informal contact with employers were held during curriculum design and review where by they consulted about the graduate profile they demand and employment opportunity for graduates. During the interview participants disclosed that, very recently, the university is being engaged in setting up alumni network by forming AMU alumni association. The following table shows quantitative summary of stakeholders' involvement in institutional quality assessment.

Table 19: Mean and SD of items about stakeholders' involvement IQA

Items	N	Mean	SD
Communicating quality assessment/improvement policies/ practices to stakeholders	110	2.62	1.28
Awareness of students about internal quality assessment of the institution	237	3.0	1.23
Involvement of students in quality assessment of AMU	238	2.91	1.20
Student participation in curriculum design/review	128	2.61	1.34
External stakeholders' involvement in quality assessment	110	2.40	1.08
Weighted Mean & SD		**2.81**	**0.91**

As indicated in Table 19, the weighted mean of items about the involvement of internal and external stakeholders in institutional quality assessment is 2.81 (SD=.91) which is below an

average on the five point Likert scale. However, an item about awareness of student about internal quality assessment undertaken by the institution was rated an average of the scale mean (M= 3.0, SD=1.23). The least rating (M=2.4, SD=1.08) was assigned to the involvement of external stakeholders' (alumni, employers and professional association) in internal quality assessment of the university.

4.7. The Use of Quality Assessment Results

Data were gathered about the extent to which the outcome of various mechanisms of internal quality assessment is used to improvement of the teaching-learning process in general and quality assurance practice of the university in particular. However, this depends up on the extent to which various methods internal quality assessment is practiced by the institution. During the interview sessions, participants mentioned that the results of some aspects of IQA practiced by the institution were used for the improvement of academic program quality. The feedback collected from stakeholders (employers, students, academic staffs and management) during curriculum design and reviews are usually incorporated in the designed or reviewed programs. Although on a limited bases, students' evaluation of instructors' performance is used for some administrative decisions such as tenure, promotion and scholarship. But, information obtained from evaluations was not used to identify the strength and weakness of the instructors.

Regarding HERQA's initiated quality audit, a participant from ADRC explained that the university does not yet acted up on the result of the quality audit. Nonetheless, the institution has already prepared an enhancement plan and the plan has submitted to HERQA. Based on the enhancement plan the university will take action that reverse the problems indicated on institutional quality audit report.

Table 20: Mean and SD of items about the extent to which the university make use of the results of internal quality assessment

Items	N	Mean	SD
Departments make use of results of instructors' performance evaluation for improving teaching-learning	235	3.19	1.19
Result of quality assessment is linked to the improvement of quality	34	2.71	0.97
Result of quality assessment is used to provide up-to-date information about the educational activities stakeholders	237	2.67	1.23
Result of quality assessment is used to make informed decision about policies, mission & improvement of educational programs	236	2.75	1.07
Weighted Mean & SD		**2.85**	**0.88**

As it can be seen from Table 20, the items in general were rated below the scale mean (M=2.85, SD=.88). The highest rating was given to the item about the use of results of instructors' performance evaluation for improving teaching-learning (M=3.19, SD=1.19).

4.8. Challenges and Prospects of Institutional Quality Assessment

4.8.1. Challenges of Internal Quality Assessment

Previously several challenges were presented under various topics such as preconditions to effective internal quality assessment and nature and effectiveness of HERQA's approach to quality audit. Here, some general challenges of internal quality assessment will be dealt briefly.

The massification of higher education is one of the major problems of quality assurance in higher education. The number of students admitted to the university is beyond the capacity of the institution in terms of human and material resources at their disposal. As a matter fact, the university focuses on the number of students that they can graduate than the knowledge and skills they possessed. Due to this problem, the university do not give due attention to the

quality assessment and improvement mechanism. One of the research informants from university management stated that:

> *"...a single classroom is compelled to accommodate more than 150 students. In this condition it is difficult, if not impossible, to think about the quality assessment which lead to quality improvement..."*
>
> I-1, 08, 01, 2009

Another problem is the shortage of senior and experienced staff in the university. Due to the severe staff turn-over, the university is always dealing with junior and inexperienced staff that would hamper the quality assurance practice of the university. This problem is aggravated by the engagement of the management and academic staffs on routine activities at the expense of quality of education. Moreover, these problems of the staffs are exacerbated by the involvement of the Ministry of Education in the recruitment and assignment of instructors without rigorous recruitment procedure. The following is a quote taken from a participant:

> *"...in the ministry's assignment there is no systematic assessment of the competence of the graduates apart from looking at their CGPA...since the assignment considers only the GPA of student, it may not have predictive validity to be competent staff in higher education...that require many other skills to be considered...the university should have its own say in the recruitments of their own staffs rather than admitting all those who sent from the ministry..."*
>
> I-2, 08, 01, 2009

Telling the university experience in this regard, a participant from university management mentioned that there were graduates sent by MOE who didn't meet the minimum requirement. This was identified by the reinvestigation of the credentials of those who were assigned to the university. On a particular academic year 25 appointees who were not relevant to the field of study they were assigned and not having minimum GPA required to be academic staff were rejected. Mentioning the threat posed by this tradition, a participant stated:

"...unless this situation is revered, the trend is really threatening to the future of Ethiopian higher education institutions...otherwise...ብቃት በሌለዉ አስተማሪ የተማረ ብቃት የሌለዉ ተማሪ እንፈጥራለን..."

I-7, 11, 01, 2009

According to an informant who took part in internal quality audit, lack of commitment among the stakeholders was the basic problem observed during the self-evaluation process. Most of the staffs and the university management do not believe that they have the responsibility to involve in quality matters. Rather, they thought the ad-hoc committee or the ADRC is the one to care for quality. As a result, limited evidences were collected during the self-evaluation process which HERQA criticizes more on the external audit report. Similarly, one of university management had mentioned the following:

"...the staffs don't feel responsible for quality assurance/assessment practices of the university...if they are engaged in so doing they demand for additional incentive to accomplish the activities...they think they are accountable only to teach in the classroom...other ancillary tasks such as quality assessment and improvement are the responsibility of other offices/body..."

I-1, 08, 01, 2009

4.8.2. Prospects of Internal Quality Assessment

Data obtained via interviews and focus-group discussions; however, revealed that there are opportunities in the future which will improve the quality assurance practice of the university. The university management believed that the government heeded quality improvement in HEIs through staff development initiative. The government is engaged in promoting professional development of staffs by offering opportunities for further studies in Masters and PhD programs. This will solve the shortage of qualified staff that will improve the quality of education and quality assurance practice of the university.

However, some participants interrogated whether this initiative to staff development is producing qualified staff in higher education. They questioned that the staff development initiative still focus on the number of staff than the quality. This could by explained by the number of programs opened within a few years. There are no adequate considerations for the availability of resources to launch new programs that may compromise quality of education offered in graduate programs. This resulted in the vicious cycle of problems of quality assurance in higher education.

Business process reengineering (BPR) was mentioned as other opportunities to improve the quality assessment practice of the university. In the teaching-learning core process, academic quality assessment/assurance is included as one of the sub-process to be implemented in the institutions. Academic Quality Assurance Center AQAC is proposed to be established as a center responsible for quality assurance. This will provide an opportunity for effective quality assessment in the university.

Governments' commitment to the development of higher education is another prospect to the enhancement of quality in higher education. In addition to expansion of higher education, the government has recently paying attention to the improvement of quality. The government is providing infrastructural and material resources support to higher education. According to one of the participants, the expansion of campuses which will resolve the problem of space and resources in the institution shows commitment of the government to quality. Moreover, the governments' encouragement of HEIs to assign bachelor degree holders to various administrative posts epitomizes the emphasis given to quality in higher education.

The establishment of HERQA as a national body for quality assurance in higher education is another prospect to internal quality assessment. HERQA's pressure helps to develop concern about quality matters in higher education. Since HERQA demand self-evaluation, higher

education is compelled to engage in regular audit of their program in particular and their institution in general. There is also external support by international organization and NGOs to back-up quality in Ethiopian HEIs. The Netherlands support by establishing ADRC is one important input to the development of quality assurance system.

The commitment of the ADRC staff towards the development of quality assurance mechanism is another value adding input to the quality assurance practice of the university. Quality assessments instruments and other important manual and guidelines were developed by EQUIP and distributed to higher education which will support institutional quality assessment. Moreover, currently experienced and trained staffs are returning to the institution.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to explore the current practices of quality assessment, its challenges and prospects at AMU. This part discus the major findings of the study by making inferences from both qualitative and quantitative data presented in Chapter 5. Moreover, relevant evidences from literatures are discussed to supplement the findings of the study. Basic research questions are used as a basis to discuss the major findings of this study.

5.1. Stakeholders' Perception of Quality in Higher Education

As presented in previous part, variations were observed in perception of quality in higher education among internal stakeholders. Several researchers have reached similar conclusions. Students perceive and understand quality of higher education from their personal perspectives as do employers', government, parents, academic staff and the public at large (Tesfaye, 2008). In their study of the demands of various stakeholders, Tesfaye and Rayner (2005) concluded that it is unrealistic to expect all the stakeholders in Higher Education to agree and share common definition of 'quality'. In their review, they revealed how stakeholders' particular agendas and perspectives will influence their own individual notions of what is meant by 'quality'. Zenawi (2007) found significant difference in the perception of academic quality among stakeholders of Mekele University.

This implies that quality assessment should take in to account the views of stakeholders which have an implication to the methods of quality assessment employed. Since the view on quality is fixed by people's concept of higher education; there are not only different qualities; but also different aspects of quality, which should be considered in quality assessment (Firdissa, 2006). Firdissa further explained that every stakeholder should formulate his/her wishes and requirements that are to be reconciled by higher education institutions as ultimate suppliers. If the

requirements of all stakeholders are translated in the mission, the goals and the objectives of the educational program, the HEI has quality. Becket and Brookes (2005) stated that stakeholders might have disparate definitions of quality as well as different preferences for how quality is assessed.

5.2. Precondition to Effective Internal Quality Assessment

Whilst some promising initiatives are being taken by the university, currently it was found that important preconditions are either missing or not functioning properly. The University does not have independent quality assurance office/body to facilitate effective IQA. In favour of this, Campbell (2008) stated that it is doubtful if many HEIs in Ethiopia have implemented robust and comprehensive quality assurance systems managed by a quality assurance unit or committee. But, ADRC has been providing valuable professional supports for quality assurance through offering training and resources. As a result, some participants of this study believed that ADRC is the one responsible for quality assurance/assessment. However, HERQA argued that ADRC is not accorded the role of quality assessment so that it demands the establishment independent body for quality assurance (HERQA, 2008). Similarly, Tesfaye (2008) explained that ADRC are not being set up to take the role of internal quality auditing or to take responsibility for quality assurance, but they can serve as a source of expertise in quality matters.

In the general scheme of ISO 9001, quality system consists of two parts: documented and implemented (Stimson, 2001, p.2). Stimson further explained that the documented element (i.e., the quality manual) includes all those documents- be they policies, plans or procedures-that affect quality. Similarly, Campbell (2008) contended that HEIs should have a policy and associated procedures for the assurance of quality and relevance of their programs. Despite the importance of these official documents to the effectiveness of quality management system, there were no

explicit quality assurance policies and guidelines operating in AMU. Very recently, however, the University has developed quality care; teaching-learning and assessment policies which are not yet implemented. These documents were distributed to stakeholders for further improvement by incorporating comments and suggestions.

Conflicting views were reflected about the commitment of staff and the promotion of shared values among the University community so as to assure quality. During the FGD sessions, it was found that there were participants who believed that most of the staffs have commitment and sense of common goals. However, interview with majority of University managements and the survey result shows the lack of commitment among academic staffs. These situations are believed to limit the effectiveness of quality assessment. In this respect, Kis (2003) studied the quality assurance practice of OECD countries and identified lack of preparedness of staff as the major problem to quality assurance activities. In his study of teachers' commitment in HEIs in Addis Ababa, Tilaye (2008) revealed that an overwhelming majority of academic staffs were only moderately committed to their organizational goals. Similarly, Lim (2001) studied conditions that hamper quality assurance in developing countries and concluded that most university leaders don't have the required level of understanding of, and commitment to quality assurance.

Woodhouse (2000) explained that one university's procedure for review require that, before any review begins, budget is determined, staff are trained in the preparations of reviews, relevant data are made available and administrative support is provided. Quality management system must be organized to achieve system objectives and supported with necessary resources (Stimson, 2001). Despite this, lack of time, financial and material resources and qualified staffs were found to be the major challenges to practice IQA at AMU. HERQA (2008), in its external quality audit report of Arba Minch University, noted that the qualification of academic staff falls short of that specified by MOE and much of the teaching on some programs is done by first degree holders. It

further mentioned that nearly half (47%) are BA/BSc holders and that only 10% of the staffs holding PhD degree.

The engagement of the management and academic staffs on routine tasks and activities were the reason for inadequacy of time revealed in this study. In his study, Lim (2001) identified that Universities in developing countries do not meet the qualification required for successful implementation of quality assessment. He further added that the very small percentage of staff with adequate academic qualification does not have time to do proper teaching and research.

Most of the preconditions were rated below the expected level on the five point likert scale. Implementing quality assessment in the absence of these preconditions makes quality assessment in effective if not impossible. In his study of quality assurance, Lim (2001) argued that in most Universities of developing countries, there are significant differences between the necessary and sufficient conditions for quality assurance to work and the actual conditions present. He further argued that this situation suggests that the application of quality assurance in these universities will be a waste of time and resources.

Stakeholders' involvement is crucial in the practice of IQA. Data ought to be collected from students, graduates, teachers, and employers because all groups have a vested interest, and can provide relevant data specific to their position. The finding of the study shows the involvement of internal stakeholders. However, the participation rate was found to be very low particularly for students. Students were involved only in limited aspects of internal quality assessment. Despite this fact, literatures in the area advocate the crucial role that students play in such evaluation. Students are recognized as a central focus in evaluation of educational quality; they are also a major stakeholder group (Donald & Denison, 2001). Zenawi (2007) asserted that students' involvement in quality assessment process is very essential, particularly in assessing the quality of academic programs.

Any quality assurance system that is concerned with the assurance of the curriculum must make reference to external stakeholders (Campbell, 2008). However, external stakeholders like employers, alumni, professional associations were disregarded in the practice of internal quality assessment at AMU. The survey result shows the low levels of stakeholders' involvement. This shows that stakeholders' participation was below the desired level. Zenawi (2007) studied the perception of program quality at Mekele University and commented that the practice of involving stakeholders in quality assessment in Ethiopian HEIs was very limited. In the same vein, self-evaluation document produced by Haramaya University revealed that the contribution of self-evaluation to continuous improvement of quality has been less due to the low participation and feedback of stakeholders (Feyera, 2007).

5.3. The Practice of Internal Quality Assessment

By and large, traditional means of assessing quality was employed. There was no formally established mechanism to know the quality of education offered in the University. The University was engaged on limited aspects of internal quality assessment/assurance mechanisms. Occasional curriculum reviews were conducted, triggered by internal and external forces such as change in subject discipline and the need for accountability from governments, students and employers. All the faculties and institutions conducted curriculum review at least once since its establishment. Despite variation in its degree of comprehensiveness, Engineering Faculty and Water Technology Institute carried out program reviews more than that of the newly emerging faculties.

In this regard, one of the specific objectives of AMU's five years strategic plan (2005) was the review and improvement of quality and relevance of the curriculum at the beginning and end of the planning period. Similarly, Ashcroft (2005) studied models of quality and relevance in Ethiopian HEIs and come up with a conclusion that Ethiopian HEIs have developed a relatively

systematic process of curriculum design. This often involves workshops with colleagues from other universities, employers and an internal system of approval involving the relevant academic committee. Nevertheless, Tesfaye and Rayner (2005) conducted a pilot study of Ethiopian HEIs in an attempt to design common working guidelines and concluded that curriculum review is not conducted regularly in Ethiopian HEIs. Likewise, Tolera (2008) argued that the process of curriculum review processes do not exist in almost all Universities of Ethiopia.

Exam review practice was another good practice identified in this study. In this respect, AMU Senate Legislation (2006) stipulated that the department assembly/council shall have exam review subcommittee to ensure that all examinations for undergraduate courses are reviewed for completeness of content, rigor and soundness. Hence, departments have exam review committee responsible for checking whether examinations are up-to the standard. It reviews the difficulty level; content validity; mark distributions to items; time allocation; and the inclusion of various types of questions. Finally, the committee forwards recommendation as to how the exams could be improved. This would help to maintain the quality of learning assessment

Departments and faculties within the university did not develop a tradition of assessing quality of programs provided at others department to offer feedback to the reviewed department and draw lesson for improving their practice at their home department. Peer reviews of programs and courses by peers from peer institution were not in place. With the establishment of HERQA, the first initiative was taken to assess the quality of education by peers seconded by the agency.

Peer reviews are important aspects of IQA to legitimize the effectiveness of quality assurance in higher education. Vroeijenstijn (1995) suggests that academics are more likely to listen to their peers' opinion than to 'control' by administrators, inspectors or the like. Hence peer-reviews can contribute effectively to quality improvement by changing the attitude of academics about their contributions to a particular programme. Finch (1997) also underlines the

importance of peers in quality assurance processes. It seems that the only way in which QAAs can obtain legitimate authority is to depend for their judgments upon the sources of legitimacy recognized by the academic community, namely the opinions of peers.

Although there are no official documents or policy related to the use of external examiner system, it is partly used by engineering faculty, water technology institute and the school of graduate studies. However, it is practiced in situation where guest instructors are invited from peer institution due to the shortage of qualified staff for some courses. Nonetheless, the majority of departments do not engaged in external examining as method of IQA. Ashcroft (2005) found that there is no systematic way of assessing standards in Ethiopian HEIs by the use of external examiners. But, she acknowledges the availability of isolated examples of good practice in the area of medical schools and postgraduate studies. Moreover, the university has work placement and internship programs for prospective graduates. In this practice, potential employers are exposed to students so that they can provide relevant information about the quality of graduates of the university.

The weighted mean of the aforementioned aspects of internal quality assessment was found to be below the mean of the scale. However, the practice of regular reviews of programs was rated above the scale mean. This implies the better position that curriculum reviews have in IQA of the university. Statistically significant difference was observed among faculties with respect to these aspects of institutional quality assessment. The mean of engineering faculty and water technology institute were found to be above the average.

Significant difference were observed between Applied Sciences and Water Technology; Teacher Education and Water Technology, Engineering and FBE and Water Technology and FBE. This was probably due to the relatively long years of establishment of Engineering and

water technology as compared to other faculties. Besides, it was because the two faculties were found performing better in terms of regular curriculum review and external examiner system.

Practices related to surveys of graduate employment, employer and students satisfaction were found to be unequivocally patchy. The university has only informal knowledge of graduate employment. No formal assessment has ever been performed. Gaps were identified with respect to survey of employers' satisfaction and students' satisfaction. During curriculum design and review process employers are informally consulted regarding their satisfaction with the graduates of University. Even if students were informally asked about their satisfaction on a given course by the initiative of course instructors, there were no formal arrangements of assessing students' satisfaction soon after completion of a program or few weeks/moths after graduation. However, this is a common practice in many universities around the world. The student satisfaction survey is nowadays employed in many universities in UK as a way of involving students in the quality improvement process (Zenawi, 2007).

The survey result has demonstrated that survey of graduate employment, employer and students satisfaction were rated below average. In its enquiry about Ethiopian HEIs, HESO (2004) identified the absence of systematic approach of assessing the employability of graduates. Institutions focus their quality assurance on the quality of certain inputs (curriculum design, staff qualification). HESO explains that Ethiopian HEIs assess to a lesser extent quality of processes, but few have systematic approach for assuring themselves of the quality and standards of outcomes (e.g. comparable grading systems, assessment of the employability of graduates and so on). The quality and standards of academic outcomes is the most important feature of higher education institutions and so this lack is crucial. Similarly, a pilot study conducted by Tesfaye and Rayner (2005) indicated that there is no practice of collecting feedback from the world of work through tracer studies, employer reactions and comments from professional organizations.

Despite various problems associated with it, evaluations of teachers' performances were regularly carried out at the end of every semester. This evaluation has been done just immediately before the administration of final examinations. Since students are under stressful situation due to the inherent psychological impact of examination, they do not pay attention to the evaluation. As a result, instructors question the validity of student evaluation. Moreover, evaluation instruments are found to be defective. As reported by both students and instructors, the instruments consisted of irrelevant issues that may not be judged by evaluators. On the other hand, important issues that have to be evaluated are missing from the instruments.

In this respect, Tagomori did his Ed. Doctorate on instruments used for student evaluation of faculty (Simmons, 1996). He established that the assessment used by universities to appraise a professor's teaching effectiveness was conducted by instruments they design or adapt from other universities. The reliability of the instruments used is generally unknown. A Comprehensive content analysis of faculty evaluation instruments has not been conducted. As a result, faculty members in higher education may be evaluated with flawed evaluation instruments, conceivably leading to unfair assessment of their teaching performance

Weak traditions of teaching observation were identified in this study. It was only in the faculty of teacher education that observation by colleagues is used after the advent of HDP. Such observation can provide invaluable feedback on whether the course, curriculum is working in the way its designers intended, and also in identifying areas where some improvement might be made (Sisay, 2007). Similarly, systematic and comprehensive assessment of resources and facilities were not carried out until the first general internal quality audit initiated by HERQA.

The engagements of the staff in educational research as a mechanism to assess the quality and standards of education were found to be limited. Very recently, teachers, particularly from teacher education faculty, are involved in educational research under the sponsorship of research

and publication office of the university. Educational research play significant role in assessing and improving quality in higher education. In this respect Berhanu (2008) contended that the marginalization of research can severely affect the quality of education in HEIs. This is because one of the chief indicators of the quality of education in HEIs is a thriving research culture.

The aforementioned aspects of internal quality assessment mechanisms were not practiced adequately by the university. However, issues like evaluation of instructors' performance and sharing sessions and meeting on quality were rated above the mean. In this respect, significant mean differences were observed among faculties. The highest mean among the faculties was scored by faculty of teacher education followed by applied sciences faculty. But, statistically significant differences were observed only between Teacher Education and Engineering Faculty. This is perhaps due to the better performance of the faculty of teacher education in engagement in educational research activities and teaching observation than the rest of the faculties.

IQA is not an end in itself rather it is a means by which an institution obtain information about the quality of education so as to design an improvement mechanism based on the results. Quality assessment in any institution should be conducted on a regular basis and institutions should make use of the information obtained from the assessment (Dawit, 2006). Internal quality assessment in higher education should improve student learning and their learning experience, and to improve the responsiveness of higher education to the needs of the society. As mentioned earlier, feedback from stakeholders (students, employers, teachers and professional associations) were incorporated in to the program designed or reviewed during curriculum design and review. This provides useful ground for improving quality of programs designed/reviewed. During exam review process, the qualities of examinations were improved based on the comment forwarded by exam review committees. As a result, students' performance has been evaluated by examinations which are up-to the standard that can ascertains the quality of student learning.

Even though students' evaluation of instructors' performance has been regularly undertaken every other semester, its use in the improvement of teaching and learning was very limited. More often than not, results of the evaluation were used only for some administrative decisions than improving teachers' performance in particular and the teaching learning processes in general. Ideally, the evaluation is undertaken to identify the strength and weakness of the staff and the results is used to improve practice. In practice, however, it was done as one routine activities of the university having no clear target. No feedback is given to instructors as to their performance as evaluated by students, colleagues and heads of departments. In his study of internal quality care policy in Ethiopian HEIs, Zenawi (2006) noted that in some institutions the form is filled as a ritual and nothing happens afterwards.

5.4. HERQA Initiated Internal Quality Audit: Nature and Effectiveness

The findings of this study revealed the indispensable role that HERQA has in institutional development of Ethiopian HEIs in terms of their capacity and awareness pertinent to quality and quality assessment. This study attributed current awareness and initiatives at quality assessment to the establishment of HERQA and its comprehensive quality audit within the institutions. In favour of this view, Campbell (2008) asserted that the establishment of HERQA has helped to push quality and relevance towards top of the agenda being debated by HEIs and the stakeholders they serve. Discussions of quality audit in various national contexts assert that the process has contributed to the development of a quality culture within institutions (Oosthuizen, 2005).

Despite many problems encountered during the self-evaluation process, the participants believed that the first quality audit pave the way for future development of internal quality assessment at Arba Minch University. While it contradicts with enormous problems mentioned during the interview sessions, the participants rated the effectiveness of HERQA's approach to

institutional quality above the mean. However, a considerable number of participants doubt whether this approach will be successfully sustained with the prevailing conditions of the university. This is related to the relevance of the approach given the inadequacy of most of the preconditions to successful implementation of internal quality assessment in the university.

This situation might be explained by the difficulty of meeting most of the expectation of HERQA which were documented in external quality audit report. Besides, the big discrepancy between the Self-evaluation Document of AMU and Eternal Quality Audit Report by HERQA were the reflection of the inability of the university to meet HERQA's demand. HERQA reported the inability of the university to provide evidences for various claims it made in the SED. For instance, HERQA's EQA team reported that the team was not provided with documents to evidence the functioning of the various committees (HERQA, 2008:24). In this respect, HERQA explicitly expressed its dissatisfaction about the SED.

In this study an attempt was made to the address the extent to which HERQA prescribe the university to follow those manual and guidelines prepared for the audit purpose. It was identified that there was some kind of prescription imposed through the guidelines and manuals. HERQA's Quality Audit Report (2008) signifies the demand for compliance posed by the agency. In the report, the external quality audit team (EQA) blamed AMU on the ground that the self-evaluation document (SED) did not fully follows the advice given by HERQA. Probably, this is one of the reasons for the conclusion of EQA team that much of the SED were not very helpful to the audit team. However, in his study of internal quality assurance in Ethiopian HEIs, Campbell (2008) emphasize the need for each institution to develop a system to suite its particular situation rather than prescribing a quality assurance for all HEIs.

But, it was believed that the audit procedures and guidelines are in line with the mission of the university so that it was reasonable to follow the guidelines. As the audit was a new initiative,

there was some confusion on how to proceed in the process of the audit. Although, a series of trainings were offered, it was noted that the training were not yet adequate to successfully undertake the audit. Understanding the audit procedure is very essential component for the successes of any quality assurance practice. In relation to this, Woodhouse (2000) recommend that External Quality Assurance Agencies have to train their reviewers or auditors, and HEIs that take responsibility for reviews must ensure that the process are supported by well trained staffs.

HERQA initiated a comprehensive external quality audit which demand comprehensive internal quality audit from the audited institutions. However, this comprehensive audit did not consider the prevailing condition of the university. On the one hand, the university was new for such kind of quality assessment; on the other hand, important preconditions for the audit were not there. On top of this, participants argued that the 10 focus areas identified by HERQA for quality audit was too much to successfully carry out at the initial phase of the quality audit given the lack of experience and basic requirement for the quality audit. The ten focus areas for institutional quality audit were appreciated because it represents aspects of quality that has to be assessed in higher education. However, it was challenged due to its failure to explicitly indicate what is to be assessed under each of the focal areas. Supporting this view, Zenawi (2006) argued that the manual simply sets the ten areas like the ten commandments of the wholly bible so that it is not clear what has to be included under each areas of focus.

In line with this, Lim (2001) argued that imposing a quality assurance on top of the existing system may make quality management process in developing countries looks good on paper and inline with the best practice but it produce little else. In his study of the South African higher education, Oosthuizen (2005) suggested that considerable attention should be paid to the enormous challenges that the characteristics of the higher education sector present for the design and implementation of the institutional audit system. Participants in this study recommended that

it would have been better if the comprehensive quality audit was preceded by a preliminary survey of the quality assurance practice in place and the existing conditions of the University.

In this regard, the phased model, which was developed by Jeliazkova and Westerheijden (2002), argued that there is a hierarchy of problems that influence the development of quality assurance approaches by HEIs and national agencies. They contend that the quality assurance systems run through initial phases that are more focused on external problems relating to minimum standards of provision, before progressing to the third and fourth phases in which a concern with genuine self-evaluation and support for internal improvement processes becomes dominant. While Jeliazkova and Westerheijden recognize the fluidity that runs across various phases, they maintain that successful progression to more advanced phases depends on the implementation of effective mechanisms to deal with problems that present themselves at earlier phases.

Jeliazkova and Westerheijden argued that the characteristics of a higher education sector and cultural attributes of the national context in which it functions will influence the hierarchy of problems that the quality assessment system needs to address. The phased model suggests that an initial audit cycle should not be too ambitious in terms of the quality of self-evaluation reports that institutions are required to develop. It may take at least one audit cycle before institutions develop a more rigorous self-evaluative capacity. But, in the institutional audit report, HERQA expressed its bitter dissatisfaction about the SED. This is probably due to the over expectation of HERQA on the ability of the institution to produce quality self-evaluation portfolio. As it was pointed out earlier, however, it may take time for self-evaluation reports to develop the necessary analytical dimension (Jeliazkova and Westerheijden, 2002).

The relevance of HERQA's approach to the prevailing conditions of the university was examined in this study. According to the data gathered via interview and document review, the

approach was developed by examining the quality assurance system of higher education in developed countries particularly UK. In this regard, Tesfaye and Reyner clearly indicated that the development of the institutional audit process was based on experiences of UK, the Netherlands and South Africa. The quality assurance system of these countries has gone through enormous transformation since its long years of establishment.

Higher educations in these countries have well established mechanisms and procedures to assure quality. Consequently, the audit focuses on the effectiveness of the processes by means of which the institution assures quality. This shows that audit is conducted with an assumption that institutions have quality assurance mechanisms, processes and procedures in place. In this regard, Alderman (2000) asserts that audit is conformity to the stated procedures and processes and cannot be conducted in a contextual vacuum.

In favour of this view, Stimson (2001) contended that the most important objective of quality audit is measuring the effectiveness of organization's quality management system. For this to happen, he argued , an executive management must first meet its overriding responsibility of establishing and maintaining systems regarding quality policy, goals, resources, processes and effective performance indicators. The audit is concerned with reviewing the mechanism used by the institution to assure, promote and enhance academic quality (Brennan & Noonan, 2000). Its primary focus is the extent to which the prescribed procedures for assuring quality as adopted by the institution are fit for intended purpose.

Thus, it is difficult to conduct quality audit in the absence of these mechanisms, procedures and processes. Audit depends upon the institution having developed its own quality processes that can be tested by audit trails to determine their robustness (Aschroft, 2005). This implies that the quality assurance agencies should give HEIs early indications of the minimum quality assurance systems and processes that they would expect to find. This situation necessitates

carrying out the quality audit in different context quite different from higher education of developed countries. However, HERQA conducted the audit in the absence of well established mechanisms, procedures and processes in the University. What is more, it is difficult to determine whether HERQA quality audit is intended to assess the standard of quality achieved or the mechanism and procedures for achieving good quality. HERQA's guidelines stipulated that an institutional quality audit is an in-depth analysis and assessment of the quality and relevance of programs and the appropriateness and effectiveness of a HEI's approach to quality care, its systems of accountability and its internal review mechanisms (HERQA QA02/06/, 2006). But, it is argued that quality audit focus on the mechanisms and processes of assuring quality, not quality per se. It does not assess quality or performance as such, but rather the quality of the quality assurance mechanisms (UNESCO, 2006a).

Moreover, it is not clear from the guidelines developed by HERQA to know whether the audit is intended to assess the availability of quality assurance mechanism or the extent to which the quality assurance mechanism in place are effectively functioning. In this regard, Zenawi (2006) mentioned that the guidelines state that documents in the institution such as regulations, course guides, and student handbook will be assessed. However, he noted, no details are presented whether it is the availability of the handbooks per se or the quality and utility that will be the focus of the analysis.

Although it may not be appropriate to criticize on the ground that the quality audit approach is adopted from other countries, care must be taken in using the experiences of other countries. As many participants of the study recommended, the audit should take the existing situation of Ethiopian HEIs in to account. While the importance of encouraging development of internal quality assurance procedures with some level of external peer review is clear, it is also important

to consider the practical implication of such an approach, particularly, in countries where quality assurance mechanisms currently do not exist or are in their infancy (African Union, 2007).

In his study of quality assurance, Lim (2001) found that quality assurance was implemented without regard to different conditions found in developing countries. He suggests that 'for quality assurance to be successful for universities in developing countries, it must suit the conditions prevailing there'. Extending his argument, he stated that developing countries should not simply duplicate quality assurance system used in countries in developed countries. He believed the adoption will be useful if the design of the programme is kept simple, expectation of what can be achieved modest and the resources required for implementation realistic. In similar vein, Materu (2007) suggest that countries seeking to develop national accreditation systems would be advised to avoid simply copying a model that has been successful in another country. Instead, they would do better to adopt a phased development process that matches their resources availability.

5.5. Challenges and Prospects of Internal Quality Assessment

A great deal of challenges was facing institutional efforts at quality assessment. Inadequacy and at times absence of important preconditions were found to be the major obstacle to practice IQA. The absences of independent office/body, explicit policy/manuals/guidelines and clearly set quality indicators/ benchmarks were some of the preconditions responsible for feeble practice of quality assessment/assurance. Lack of qualified, experienced and committed staff and the failure of promoting shared values among the university communities were another problems prevailing to hamper quality assessment in the university.

During first general quality audit initiated by HERQA, inadequate prior planning and lack of experience were the main challenges to effectively carry out internal quality audit. HERQA's demand given the existing preconditions and experience of the institution was one of factors the

made the quality audit a daunting task for the university. The insufficiency of the training offered to internal quality auditors and the resulting lack of understanding on how to go about the audit process by the audit team was another problem encountered during the audit trial.

Massification of higher education and the accompanying increase in students' enrollment were identified as a threatening trend to quality and quality assurance practice of the university. Due to this problem, the university is being compromising quality so as to produce large number of graduates. In this respect, Campbell (2008) noted that a commonly voiced critique of the rapid expansion of higher education system in Ethiopia is that quantity is being achieved at the expense of quality. In the similar vein, Saint (2004) stated that Ethiopian HEIs are presently at risk since it is difficult for the sector to maintain good quality amidst rapid expansion, limited spending per student and absence of staff with desired qualification. Expansion without necessary intervention is believed to be compromising quality of education in HEIs (Teshome, 2007).

The unbridled staff turn-over and the accompanying shortage of competent and qualified staff are also challenges that act against the quality assessment efforts of the university. HERQA QAR07/07 (2008) identified the high staff turn-over as one of the challenges facing AMU. These problems are intensified by the intervention of MoE in staff recruitment and appointment policy of the university. This trend will be a challenge facing the future of higher education in Ethiopia. This is problematic for one thing it is against the higher education proclamation which entitled higher education to be independent of government intervention in their requirement policy. On the other hand, it does not enable higher education to have qualified and competent staff

Despite the challenges, there are opportunities which will improve the quality assurance practices of the institution. Government's attention directed at higher education development through extensive promotion of staff development can be mentioned as vital prospects to the future of higher education. Through this staff development initiative, the problem of qualified

staff will be resolved. This creates opportunity for future success of quality assurance practice of the university. Moreover, the growing commitment of the government to improve quality in higher education is another prospect to improve quality assurance mechanisms and procedures. The establishment of HERQA has witnessed the government's concern for and commitment towards quality of higher education in Ethiopian (Campbell, 2008).

In the newly designed business process reengineering (BPR), quality assurance/assessment is given the central position. In the newly designed BPR, AMU has reviewed its role in quality assurance and decided to set up a new body to assist in discharging its quality audit/assurance responsibilities. The new body is the Academic Quality Audit or Assurance Center (AQAC). The establishment of AQAC is presumed to serve to ensure that effective academic quality /assurance mechanisms are in place in improving quality in areas such as the quality of management, student teaching and learning, as well as performance against role (AMU BPR, 2008).

HERQA's demand for quality assurance mechanism and internal quality audit encourage HEIs to conduct regular quality audit of their program. This will provide an opportunity to strive for meeting important preconditions to effectively undertake IQA. Moreover, the establishment of ADRC will enhance the capacity of the University in accomplishing effective quality assessment. The commitment of ADRC staff towards the improvement quality through provision of resources, professional support and training will be of a great importance to success of quality assurance in the institution. Important manuals, guidelines and policies were developed under the support of EQUIP which will serve as important resources for future success of quality assurance

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate, the practice, challenges and prospects of internal quality assessment in Ethiopian higher education with particular reference to Arba Minch University. To this end, one of the variants of Mixed Methods Design, Concurrent Triangulation, was employed. Here, both qualitative and quantitative data were simultaneously collected and analyzed. Interview, FGD, document review and questionnaires were used to obtain data form graduating student, instructors and University management. In-depth interviews were held with 10 informants of the study including HERQA. Two FGD were conducted with instructors and student representatives. Survey questionnaire were distributed to three groups of participants where 128, 72 and 34 of them were students, instructors and management, respectively. Hence, 238 participants were found appropriately filled and returned the questionnaire.

Data from interview, FGD and open-ended questionnaires were qualitatively described based on the major themes of the study. Direct quotes were used whenever deemed necessary to reflect the direct views of informants. Quantitative data from the questionnaire were summarized and presented in tables. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (ANOVA, post-hoc tests, and Chi-square) were run to analyze quantitative data. Finally, both qualitative and quantitative data were mixed and discussed.

The finding of the study disclosed that there were observed difference in stakeholders' perception of quality in higher education. The difference was not only in their conception of what they mean by quality, but also they focused on different aspects of quality whenever they talk about issues of quality. In relation to important preconditions to internal quality assessment, it is safe to conclude that that a good number of preconditions were either missing or not properly

functioning. There was no independent office responsible for quality assurance. Besides, it was found that the University is being challenged by recurrent staff turn-over causing the loss of competent and qualified staff. This problem is being intensified by the intervention of MOE in recruitment and assignment of academic staff to the University without rigorous recruitment procedures. The lack of commitment and shared values among University community were the basic problems to practice effective internal quality assessment. The engagement staff on various administrative routines of the university resulted in shortage of time for academic staff to develop care for quality and quality assessment.

An attempt was made to point out aspects of quality assessment practiced in the university. The study revealed that the practice was confined to limited aspect of internal quality assessment. From the findings, it is possible to identify some ways of practicing quality assessment such as program review and monitoring. It is sound to contend that overwhelming majority of academic staffs had a better awareness about curriculum review than other aspects of quality assessment. However, the concern that how regularly and adequately practiced were an issue of doubt among most departments/faculties. External examiner was traditionally practiced in some departments of Water Technology Institute and Engineering Faculty. However, there was no official document which shows the policy of the university about the use of external examiner. In addition to this, considerable numbers of programs had internship for prospective graduates by which the quality of graduates was seen by potential employers. The University had exam review committees responsible for checking whether examinations are up-to-standard before its administration.

The use of peer reviews of programs across departments and faculties within the University or by national or international peer institutions was meager. Furthermore, the practice of formal survey of graduate employment, employer and student satisfaction were indisputably nonexistent. Some knowledge of graduate employment, informal in its nature, was claimed by some informant

of the study. These include informal contacts with graduates on different occasions such as curriculum review, conferences, and when graduates visit the institution for various reasons. The same is true for surveys of employer and student satisfaction. There were no formal mechanisms of assessing the extent to which employers are satisfied with the graduate of the university. No explicit knowledge of students' satisfaction with the overall programs of study

It is apparent from the study that the University was engaged in evaluation of instructors' teaching performance though the validity and the use for which it was undertaken are not clear. The issues of quality were the center of debate on various meetings held within the University. Teaching observation, assessment of adequacy of resources and educational research activities were not the dominant culture in the University. Formal assessment of resources was conducted only during the first HERQA initiated internal quality audit.

HERQA initiated quality audit process was an area of investigation in this study. This study disclosed immense contribution of HERQA to the development of quality assessment culture in the University. The present awareness and commitment to quality and quality assessment in the University was attributed to the efforts made by HERQA as a national agency. The staff believed that the mission of the University can be successfully achieved if the University is able to meet those demands posed by HERQA. Despite its contribution, the study revealed many challenges that encountered during the audit activities. The lack of adequate preparation (human, material, and financial), inadequacy of training and the lack understanding about how to conduct the quality audit among the internal audit team were among the challenges faced during the audit.

Moreover, it was not easy practice effective internal quality audit as recommended by HERQA, given the absence of most of the preconditions. However, HERQA did not take in to account the existing condition of the University while conducting the quality audit. As it was observed from the various documents and guidelines, HERQA applied the quality audit approach

used in developed countries, particularly UK. But, the characteristics of higher education and the culture in which it operates are quite different from developing countries like Ethiopia. The study shows that HERQA overestimated the capacity of the University to conduct effective internal quality audit. This can be witnessed by the quality audit report produced by HERQA which boldly condemned the quality of the self-evaluation document produced by the University.

As a final point, this study examined the extent to which stakeholders were involved in the quality assessment activities of the University. For some aspects of internal quality assessment practiced in the University, only internal stakeholders (students, instructors and the university management) were participated. However it was found that the participation of students was very limited. The same conclusion applies to the first HERQA initiated internal quality audit which involved only internal stakeholders. Directly involving external stakeholders (professional associations, employers, alumni,) in internal quality assessment was almost nonexistent. With regard to the use of quality assessment result to the improvement of teaching and learning, very limited evidences were obtained. What was obvious is that the University has already prepared an enhancement plan to take action on those recommendations forwarded by HERQA.

6.2. Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were reached:

1. Stakeholders have varying conception of quality in higher education and focus on different aspects of quality that needs to be considered in analyzing and assessing quality. It informs policy makers and quality assessor to take in to account the views of all stakeholders while defining and assessing quality in higher education.
2. There were significant difference between necessary and sufficient conditions for effective quality assessment and the actual conditions of the University. Important preconditions

were not met by university to practice effective internal quality assessment. There were no office, policy/manuals and performance indicators officially designed to help the quality assurance practice of the university.

3. There were severe problems of recruiting and retaining competent and qualified academic staff due to the rampant staff turn-over and intervention of MOE. Lack of commitment and shared values among some of the staffs and the shortage of time to care for quality and quality assessments were part of the problem.
4. The university was engaged on limited aspects of internal quality assessment. Occasional reviews of programs, use of external examiner system and internship program by some departments, exam review by exam review committee and instructors performance evaluation are some of areas where the university practice internal quality assessment.
5. Surveys of graduate employment, employers and students satisfaction were practically nonexistent. Peer reviews, teaching observation and engagement in educational research to make sure that the university is offering quality education were scanty.
6. HERQA played vital role to the current enthusiasm towards quality assessment in the University. It contributed to the development of quality culture and offered indispensable support by providing training and important guidelines that facilitate the audit process.
7. The university did not make adequate preparation (human, material and financial) while carrying out the quality audit rather it is with request of HERQA that the university all of a sudden found it self in the quality audit. The audit team did not have clear understanding as to how to go about the quality audit activities probably due to the inadequacy of the training and lack of experiences.

8. HERQA did not consider the existing situation of the University when it expects the type of internal audit it demands from higher education. Within the prevailing conditions of the university, it is difficult, if not impossible, to meet the demand of HERQA.
9. Involvement in institutional quality assessment was limited to internal stakeholders. The representation of students was not yet satisfactory. External stakeholders were entirely disregarded in the practice of internal quality assessment.

6.3. Recommendations

So as to alleviate the various challenges and shortcomings identified in the study, the following recommendations were forwarded:

1. The University has to establish quality assurance body responsible for regular quality assessment. Through this office, quality assurance policies/manuals/guidelines have to be designed. Moreover, the University has to set clear criteria and performance indicators to assess quality of education in the University.
2. The University should diversify aspects of quality assessment strategies. Regular reviews of programs, surveys of graduate employment, employer and students satisfaction has to be practiced in the university. Peer reviews of programs across departments and faculties within the University and peer reviews by peer institutions should be promoted.
3. The university has to enhance its link with external stakeholders such as professional associations, employers, alumni, national and international peer institutions. The view of these stakeholders must be entertained in quality assurance/assessment practice.
4. The University has to promote shared values and sense of common goals among the University community to secure their commitment and support. The staff should be committed and supportive to quality assurance practice of the University.

5. HERQA has to revisit the approach to quality audit by drawing lessons from problems faced during the initial quality audit. Lesson has to be drawn from the initial audit trial and feedback has to be gathered from higher educations that took part in the quality audit to improve the overall methodology of the audit. The Audit manuals and guidelines have to be as clear and exhaustive as possible to help higher education to understand what HERQA actually demands from them.
6. HERQA and MOE should provide adequate assistance to higher educations to meet those important preconditions to practice effective internal quality assessment. The duration of the training offered to internal auditors has to be extended until HERQA makes sure that the auditors have adequate understanding and skills about the quality audit procedures.
7. To curb the severe staff turn-over and retain competent and qualified staff, the University management and MOE have to arrange incentive mechanisms. There must be deferential treatment among HEIs depending on the existing condition of institutions. The university has to create conducive working environment to staffs.
8. There must be balance between massive expansion and effective staff development and resource allocation. The institutions and government have to ensure the adequacy of human, material and financial resources before determining the number of students admitted to an institution. The institution has to be empowered to determine and admit the number of students that they can successfully train.
9. MOE has to cease recruiting and assigning academic staff to HEIs. The institution has to be entitled the discretion to recruit the type of staff that meets their requirements. It is very important to recruit highly qualified academic staffs together with attracting outsiders by better salary and some fringe benefits.

10. ADRC should be strengthened so as to support the quality assurance activities of the University. ADRC must provide adequate professional support and resources to academic departments to reinforce the capacity to assure and enhance the quality of programs.
11. The study delimited only to some aspects of quality and quality assessment in higher education. Thus, it does not show the whole picture of the problem which necessitates further investigation by other researchers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Questionnaire for University Management

This questionnaire is designed to collect information about your experiences related to practices of internal quality assessment in your department/faculty/university. Your genuine responses are very helpful in the investigation of the practices, challenges and prospects of institutional quality assessment at Arba Minch University. Please read each of the following statements and mark "√" on the column that corresponds closely to your experiences and write the necessary information on the space provided. Your responses to the items in the questionnaire will remain confidential such that you are not required to write your name on it.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation!!

Part I: Background Information

For the following items mark "√" on the one that suits your response or write the required information on the spaces provided.

1. Sex: ☐ Female ☐ Male
2. Age:_____
3. Faculty:_____
4. Department:_____
5. Qualification: ☐ B.A/B.SC ☐ M.A/M.SC/M.Ed ☐ Ph.D
   ☐ Other (specify) _____
6. Academic Rank: ☐ Graduate assistant ☐ Assistant lecturer ☐ Lecturer
   ☐ Assistant professor ☐ Associate professor ☐ Professor
7. How long have you been teaching (working) in this university? _____
8. Positions held other than teaching_____
9. How long have you served in this position _____

Part II: Rating Items

I. *The following items are related to your perception or experiences related to internal quality assessment practices and challenges at your institution/faculty/department. Please use the descriptive rating and scale identified below for your responses. Place a check mark (√) on*

the column which corresponds to your nearest responses.5= strongly Agree (SA); 4= Agree(A); 3= Undecided(U); 2= Disagree (DA); 1= Strongly Disagree (SD)

A.	***The following are items related to important preconditions and at times challenges for effective internal quality assessment practice. Please mark "√" on the nearest responses of your choice.***					
1.	Is there a body/office or committee/s responsible for internal quality assessment/assurance practices of your university/faculty/department ☐Yes ☐No ☐don't know					
2.	If your response to Q.1is YES, which office is responsible for quality assessment/assurance? _____					
3.	Are there internal quality assessment policy/manuals in your institution/faculty/department? ☐Yes ☐No ☐don't know					
4.	If your response to Q.3 is YES please list down those policy/ manuals/guidelines you have in your department/faculty/institution. _____ _____					
		SA	A	U	DA	SD
5.	Clear goals are set to assess the quality of education offered in the institution/department/faculty.					
6.	There are clearly defined performance indicators/ benchmarks against which the quality of academic program/s is/are assessed					
7.	The organizational structure and governance of the university is organized in such a way that effective quality assessment and assurance practices are possible					
8.	Quality assessment and improvement policies and practices are communicated to stakeholders of the university					
9.	The management and academic staff do have adequate time to care about quality and quality assessment					
B.	***The following are items related to the practice of institutional quality assessment at your department/faculty/institution***					
1.	Regular internal quality assessments have been carried out in the University to ensure that standards are maintained.					

2.	Regular program and course assessments/reviews have been conducted by departments/faculty to determine whether quality is up-to-standard.					
3.	There is a culture of peer review of academic programs and courses across departments/faculties within the institution.					
4.	There is a culture of peer review of programs and courses by peer reviewers from peer institutions.					
5.	External review/assessment by local or international institutions or agencies has been practiced by departments/faculty/institution.					
6.	External examiner system is in place to ensure that graduating students possess the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes					
7.	The competencies of the academic staff are used to be examined through instructors' performance evaluation by students, peers, and management.					
8.	The department/s makes use of the results of instructors' performance evaluation for the improvement of teaching-learning processes					
9.	The department/faculty/institution has periodic sharing sessions, meetings and conferences to discuss on the quality of education offered					
10.	There is a tradition of teaching observation in the University to assess the quality of education offered to students.					
11.	Tracer studies of graduate employment have been carried out by the institution/ faculty/department.					
12.	Employer satisfaction surveys have been conducted by the department/institution.					
13.	Students' learning satisfaction surveys have been conducted by the department/institution.					
14.	The department/faculty/institution ensures that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each program offered.					
15.	The institution/departments are engaged in educational research activities to improve the quality of internal quality assessment in					

	particular and the teaching learning process in general.					
16.	The educational provisions (teaching methods, instructional technologies and assessment) are informed by action research carried out by the institution/departments					
C.	***The following are items related to the practice and challenges to the first quality audit of Arba Minch University***					
1.	The institution is well prepared prior to first internal quality audit/ assessment carried out by the institution.					
2.	Internal quality assessment/audit practice is linked to the mission of the institution.					
3.	There were adequate financial and material resources during the self assessment process.					
4.	There were adequately trained, experienced and competent staffs to conduct the institutional quality audit/assessment					
5.	Adequate training was offered before conducting internal quality assessment/audit					
6.	The internal quality assessment/audit team have a good understanding of institutional quality assessment					
7.	Students were aware of in the internal quality audit/assessment undertaken by the institution					
8.	Students were fully involved in the internal quality audit/assessment undertaken by the institution					
9.	Stakeholders (alumni, employers, professional associations) were aware of and involved in the self evaluation process					
10.	Management and the academic staffs were committed and supportive to internal quality audit/assessment practice.					
11.	Shared values were promoted about quality and quality assessment among internal stakeholders (students, academic staffs, university management)					
12.	The approach to quality assessment/audit forwarded by HERQA was effective to undertake the internal quality assessment.					
13.	The approach to quality audit/assessment was relevant to the context/prevailing conditions of the institution.					

14.	The approach to quality assessment was prescriptive by dictating the institution to follow the guidelines developed by HERQA.					
15.	The internal quality assessment/audit report (SED) produced by AMU was in agreement with AMU institutional quality audit report produced by HERQA					
16.	The result of internal quality audit/assessment is linked to the improvement of the quality of teaching-learning processes.					
17.	The result of internal quality audit/assessment is used to provide up-to-date information about the strengths and weaknesses of the educational activities to students and staffs.					
18.	The result of internal quality audit/assessment is used to make informed decision about the policies, mission and improvement of educational programs of your institution					

Part III: Open-ended Items

1. In your opinion, what are the opportunities to internal quality assurance/assessment in Arba Minch University?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2. In your opinion, what are the major challenges of internal quality assurance/assessment in Arba Minch University?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2. Please give any suggestion that would help improve the quality assurance/assessment practices of the University

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Thank you!!!

Appendix 2: Questionnaire for Instructors

Dear Instructor! This questionnaire is designed to collect information about your experiences related to the practices of internal quality assessment in your department/faculty/university. Your genuine responses are very helpful in the investigation of the practices, challenges and prospects of institutional quality assessment at Arba Minch University. Please read each of the following statements and mark "√" on the column that corresponds closely to your experiences and write the necessary information on the space provided. Your responses to the items in the questionnaire will remain confidential such that you are not required to write your name on it.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation!!

Part I: Background Information

For the following items mark "√" on the one that suits your response or write the required information on the spaces provided.

1. Sex: ☐ Female ☐ Male
2. Age:_____
3. Faculty_____
4. Department_____
5. Qualification: ☐ B.A/B.SC ☐ M.A/M.SC/M.Ed ☐ Ph.D
   ☐ Other (specify) _____
6. Academic Rank: ☐ Graduate assistant ☐ Assistant lecturer ☐ Lecturer
   ☐ Assistant professor ☐ Associate professor ☐ Professor
7. How long have you been teaching in this university? _____

Part II: Rating Items

II. *The following items are related to your perception or experiences related to internal quality assessment practices and challenges at your institution/faculty/department. Please use the descriptive rating and scale identified below for your responses. Place a check mark (√) on the column which corresponds to your nearest responses 5= strongly Agree (SA); 4= Agree(A); 3= Undecided(U); 2= Disagree (DA); 1= Strongly Disagree (SD)*

A.	***The following are items related to important preconditions and at times challenges for effective internal quality assessment practices. Please mark "√" on the nearest responses of your choice.***
1.	Is there a body/office or committee/s responsible for internal quality assessment/assurance practices of your university/faculty/department ☐Yes ☐No ☐don't know
2.	If your response to Q.1is YES, which office is responsible for quality assessment/assurance? _____
3.	Are there internal quality assessment policy/manuals in your institution/faculty/department? ☐Yes ☐No ☐ don't know
4.	If your response to Q.3 is YES please list down those policy/ manuals/guidelines you have in your department/faculty/institution. _____ _____

		SA	A	U	DA	SD
5.	Clear goals are set to assess the quality of education offered in the institution/department/faculty.					
6.	There are clearly defined performance indicators/ benchmarks against which the quality of academic program/s is/are assessed					
7.	The organizational structure and governance of the university is organized in such a way that effective quality assessment and assurance practices are possible					
8.	Quality assessment and improvement policies and practices are communicated to stakeholders(students, teachers, alumni, employers) of the university					
9.	Stakeholders (employers, alumni and professional associations) are fully involved in the internal quality assessment/assurance practice of the department/faculty/institution					
10.	Students are aware of the internal quality assessment undertaken by department/faculty/institution					
11.	Students are involved in the internal quality assessment undertaken by department/faculty/institution					

12.	The management and academic staff do have adequate time to care about quality and quality assessment					
13.	There are adequate financial and material resources to practice internal quality assessment/assurance by your department/faculty.					
14.	There were adequately trained, experienced and competent staffs to conduct the institutional quality assessment					
15.	The management and the academic staffs are committed and supportive to internal quality assurance practice.					
16.	Shared values are promoted about quality and quality assessment among internal stakeholders (students, instructors and management)					
B. The following are items related to the practice of institutional quality assessment at your department/faculty/institution						
1.	Regular internal quality assessments have been carried out in the University to ensure that standards are maintained					
2.	Regular program and course assessments/reviews have been conducted by departments/faculty to determine whether quality is up-to-standard.					
3.	There is a culture of peer review of academic programs and courses across departments/faculties within the institution.					
4.	There is a culture of peer review of programs and courses by peer reviewers from peer institutions.					
5.	External review/assessment by local or international institutions or agencies has been practiced by departments/faculty/institution.					
6.	External examiner system is in place to ensure that graduating students possess the necessary skills to be successful in the world of work.					
7.	The competence of academic staff s are used to be examined through instructors performance evaluation by students, peers, and management					
8.	The department/s makes use of the results of instructors' performance evaluation for the improvement of teaching-learning processes.					
9.	The department /institution has periodic sharing sessions, meetings					

	and conferences to discuss about the quality of education delivered					
10.	There is a tradition of teaching observation to assess the quality of education offered by instructors and departments.					
11.	Tracer studies of graduate employment have been carried out by the institution/ faculty/department					
12.	Employer satisfaction surveys have been conducted by the department/institution					
13.	Students' learning satisfaction surveys have been conducted by the department/institution					
14.	The /institution ensures that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each program offered.					
15.	The institution/departments are engaged in educational research activities to improve the quality of internal quality assessment in particular and the teaching learning process in general.					
16.	The educational provisions (teaching methods, instructional technologies and assessment) are informed by action research carried out by the institution/departments					
17.	The result of internal quality assessment is used to provide up-to-date information about the strengths and weaknesses of the educational activities to students and staffs.					
18.	The result of internal quality assessment has been used to make informed decision about the policies, mission and improvement of educational programs of your institution					

Part III: Open-ended Items

1. In your opinion, what are the prospects to internal quality assessment/assurance in Arba Minch University?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. In your opinion, what are the major challenges of internal quality assurance/assessment in Arba Minch University?

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Please give any suggestion that would help improve the quality assurance/assessment practices of the University

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Questionnaire for Students

Dear student! This questionnaire is designed to collect information about your experiences/ perception related to internal quality assessment practices. Your genuine responses are very helpful in the investigation of the practice, challenges and prospects internal quality assessment at Arba Minch University. Please read each of the following statements and mark "√" on the column that corresponds closely to your experiences write the necessary information on the space provided. Your response to the items of the questionnaire will remain confidential such that you are not required to write your name on the questionnaire.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation!!

Part I: Background Information

1. Faculty/Institution_____
2. Department_____
3. Sex ☐ Male ☐ Female
4. Years of study ☐ Second ☐ Third ☐ Fourth ☐ Fifth
5. Major Areas of Study_____
6. Your cumulative G.P.A. _____

Part II: Rating Items

A. The following items are related to your experiences related to the practice and challenges of internal quality assessment of your department/institution. Please rate each item as: SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; U=Undecided; SD=Strongly Disagree; DA=Disagree

No.	Statements	Ratings				
		SA	A	U	SD	DA
1.	The department have written rules and policies about the quality of academic programs and courses					
2.	As a student, I am aware of internal quality assessment undertaken by my department/faculty/institution					
3.	I have been fully involved in the internal quality assessment undertaken by the institution					

4.	I have been participated in curriculum design/review practices of my department/faculty/institution					
5.	Regular program and course assessments/reviews have been conducted by departments/faculty to determine whether quality is up-to-standard.					
6.	The department/faculty/institution has periodic sharing sessions, meetings and conferences to discuss about the quality of education delivered					
7.	Students' satisfaction surveys have been conducted by the department/institution					
8.	Assessment of students' progress, support services and resources provisions are regularly undertaken.					
9.	The department/faculty/institution ensures that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each program offered.					
10.	The competence of academic staffs (instructors) are evaluated through instructors performance evaluation by students					
11.	The department make use of the results of instructors' performance evaluation for continuous improvement of teaching-learning process					
12.	There is a tradition of teaching observation to assess the quality of education offered by instructors and departments.					
13.	Students are allowed to periodically evaluate effectiveness of courses in the program.					
14.	I have been provided with up-to-date information about the strengths and weaknesses of the educational programs.					
15.	Internal quality assessment has been used to make informed decision about the improvement of educational programs of your institution					
16.	Management and the academic staffs are committed and supportive to internal quality assurance practice.					
17.	Shared values are promoted about quality and quality assessment among internal stakeholders (students, academic staffs, university management)					

Part III: Open-ended Items

1. In your opinion, what are the prospects to internal quality assessment/assurance in Arba Minch University?

2. In your opinion, what are the major challenges of internal quality assurance/assessment in Arba Minch University?

3. Please give any suggestion that would help improve the quality assurance/assessment practices of the University

Thank You!

Appendix 4: Interview guide for HERQA staffs

The following questions were points for interview held with HERQA experts on the practice, challenges and prospects of institutional quality audit/assessment.

1. What are the overall responsibilities and of HERQA in institutional quality assessment?
2. What are the general model/ approach to internal quality assessment adopted by HERQA?
   a. How this approach is adopted? Is that an experience of other country (benchmarking) or the result of research carried out at the national level or any other ways of developing quality assessment model?
   b. How does this approach have been implemented in the internal quality assessment conducted previously by HERQA, i.e. what are the general processes involved in quality assessment done previously?
   c. How effective are the approach to the Ethiopian HEIs prevailing conditions/contexts?
   d. What are the major challenges of using the approach currently adopted by HERQA?
3. What is the nature of internal quality audit/assessment?
   a. Is that meant to asses the quality of internal quality management process (the quality assessment/assurance mechanism in place/ or the way quality is managed/ assured) or the standards achieved against benchmarks for the university function (the quality education it self)?
   b. To what extent the nature of internal quality assessment adopted are clarified and made known to the stakeholders?
4. How do you evaluate the nature of influence of HERQA on the internal affairs of HEIs through the practice of quality audit? Is that prescriptive and intrusive by dictating HEIs to follow the guidelines to maintain the type of quality prescribed by HERQA
5. To what extent do you think that the internal quality assessment report produced by Arba Minch University (self evaluation document, SED) is compatible with what were directly observed during the site visit by HERQA (or Arba Minch University institutional quality audit report produced by HERQA)?
6. What do you think are the major challenges and opportunities of institutional/internal quality assessment and quality assurance practices in Ethiopian HEIs?

Appendix 5: Interview Guide for University Management and Quality Experts

The following questions were points for interview held with management of AMU on the practice, challenges and prospects of internal quality assessment.

1. How do you understand quality in higher education? What do you mean by quality as a stakeholder of higher education? To what extent do you think your conception/definition of quality is considered in the quality assurance practice of your institution?
2. How does your institution demonstrate that it is providing quality education? What strategies, methods and procedures are in place to assess/monitor quality in the institution/departments?
    - Availability of quality assessment/assurance policy/system, manuals/guidelines, quality assessment tools, clearly defined quality indicators.
    - Availability of self-assessment mechanisms and
    - Availability of responsible bodies/offices for quality assessment.
3. To what extent your institution planned prior to the first general internal quality audit carried out in 2006/2007 academic year in terms of resources (financial, human and material) necessary to effectively accomplish the quality assessment/audit?
4. How do you describe the implementation of the first internal quality audit undertaken by your institution?
    a. What were the general processes involved in the self-assessment/evaluation activities?
    b. To what extent stakeholders (students, employers, alumni, and professional associations) were aware of and involved in the self-evaluation activities?
    c. How effective were the practice/approach to internal quality assessment used with regard to the prevailing conditions/contexts of your university?
    d. What were the major challenges of using the model/approach to internal quality assessment employed previously?
5. How do you evaluate the nature of influence of HERQA on the internal affairs of HEIs through the practice of quality audit?
6. To what extent do you think that the internal quality assessment report produced by Arba Minch University is compatible with what were directly observed during the site visit by HERQA?

7. What are the basic purposes of internal quality assessment in your institution? How does your institution make use of assessment results?
    a. Informed decision making about policies, mission (goals and objectives), program design and review, university management and student learning in general.
    b. Linking quality assessment to the improvement of teaching, learning and assessment
8. To what extent do your management and the academic staff support the development and implementation of internal quality assurance policies and systems in your institution/faculty?
    a. The commitment to and perception of management and academic staff about the current practice of internal quality assessment and quality assurance in the university
    b. The extent to which shared values are promoted among students, academic staff, management bodies and other constituencies about the quality of education.
9. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of internal quality assessment in particular and quality assurance practices of your institution in general?
10. What do you think are the major challenges and prospects of internal quality assessment and quality assurance practices in your institution?

Appendix 6: Focus-Group Discussion Guide for Instructors

The following questions were points for focus-group discussion held with instructors of AMU on the practice, challenges and prospects of quality assessment/assurance.

1. How do you understand quality in higher education? What do you mean by quality? What basic conception and/or definition of quality you hold as a stakeholder of higher education?
2. What strategies, methods and procedures are in place to monitor or regulate quality of programs in your institution/faculty/department?
    a. Availability of quality assurance policy/system, manuals/guidelines, quality assessment tools or clearly defined quality indicators in your department/institution.
    b. Availability self assessment mechanisms and responsible bodies for quality assessment and thereby quality assurance in your faculty/department/institution.
3. To what extent you are aware of and involved in the internal quality assessment and quality assurance practices of your department or the university in general? What kind of internal quality assessment/assurance methods of your department/faculty
4. How do you evaluate the practice of continuous improvement of the teaching-learning process based on the results obtained from internal quality assessment?
5. To what extent do your management and the academic staff support the development and implementation of quality assurance policies and systems in your institution/faculty?
    a. The commitment to and perception of management and academic staff about the current practice of internal quality assessment/assurance in the university
    b. The extent to which shared values are promoted among students, academic staff, management bodies and other constituencies about the quality of education.
6. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of internal quality assessment in particular and quality assurance practices of your institution in general?
7. What do you think are the major challenges and opportunities of institutional (internal) quality assessment and quality assurance practices in your institution?

Appendix 7: Focus-Group Discussion Guide for Students

The following questions were points for focus-group discussion held with final year students of AMU on the practice, challenges and prospects of quality assessment.

1. How do you understand quality in higher education? What do you mean by quality? What basic conception and/or definition of quality you hold as a stakeholder of higher education?
2. To what extent you are aware of and involved in the internal quality assessment and quality assurance practices of your department or the university in general?
3. What kind of quality assessment/assurance methods of your department/faculty/ university are you aware of and involved in?
    b. Regular discussion and orientation programs about the teaching, learning and assessment, learning resources, student performance, leadership and management, students support and services etc.
    c. Curriculum design and review practices
    d. Institutional self-evaluation
    e. Written rules and policies of the department, broachers and leaflets
4. How do you evaluate the practice of continuous improvement of the teaching-learning process based on the feedback obtained from students in the form of students' course evaluation, teachers' performance evaluation or other internal quality assessment mechanism?
5. To what extent you are provided with up-to-date information about the strengths and weaknesses of academic program that you are involved in and the overall education process in general?

Appendix 8: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Statistics

	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Management Questionnaire	.824	42
Instructors Questionnaire	.938	31
Students Questionnaire	.872	17

Item-Total Statistics for Instructors Questionnaire

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Item1.3	87.38462	409.756	-.754	.946
Item1.5	86.53846	378.936	.251	.939
Item1.6	86.84615	377.141	.366	.938
Item1.7	86.15385	368.308	.384	.938
Item1.8	86.69231	350.731	.654	.935
Item1.9	86.69231	370.064	.470	.937
Item1.10	87.15385	374.641	.353	.938
Item1.11	86.69231	361.064	.570	.936
Item1.12	87.07692	353.244	.730	.934
Item1.13	87.07692	354.910	.798	.933
Item1.14	86.61538	370.756	.389	.938
Item1.15	86.92308	376.244	.258	.939
Item1.16	87.07692	353.244	.730	.934
Item2.1	85.92308	382.910	.100	.940
Item2.2	86.53846	351.269	.812	.933
Item2.3	86.46154	345.603	.829	.933
Item2.4	86.84615	351.808	.799	.933
Item2.5	87.00000	346.000	.910	.932
Item2.6	86.92308	358.910	.660	.935
Item2.7	87.15385	369.474	.457	.937
Item2.8	87.07692	372.077	.388	.938
Item2.9	86.61538	363.756	.461	.937
Item2.10	86.61538	353.923	.768	.934
Item2.11	87.15385	368.808	.529	.936
Item2.12	86.76923	360.359	.659	.935
Item2.13	86.61538	369.923	.329	.939
Item2.14	86.76923	359.026	.599	.936
Item2.15	86.53846	349.603	.800	.933
Item2.16	87.07692	358.410	.857	.933
Item2.17	86.92308	354.410	.838	.933
Item2.18	86.84615	354.974	.777	.934

Item-Total Statistics for Management Questionnaire

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Item1.3	132.40000	169.156	.701	.814
Item1.5	131.40000	186.489	-.325	.837
Item1.6	131.80000	177.289	.007	.830
Item1.7	131.20000	171.956	.279	.820
Item1.8	131.90000	171.656	.238	.822
Item1.9	132.10000	180.100	-.084	.833
Item2.1	131.70000	174.900	.174	.823
Item2.2	131.20000	163.067	.700	.809
Item2.3	132.00000	155.333	.785	.802
Item2.4	132.70000	166.011	.535	.813
Item2.5	132.60000	170.044	.254	.821
Item2.6	132.40000	172.044	.176	.824
Item2.7	130.70000	175.567	.108	.825
Item2.8	131.00000	171.333	.429	.818
Item2.9	131.90000	151.656	.806	.799
Item2.10	132.00000	177.111	.053	.826
Item2.11	131.90000	167.656	.557	.814
Item2.12	132.00000	170.667	.367	.818
Item2.13	132.40000	172.933	.196	.823
Item2.14	131.80000	165.067	.625	.811
Item2.15	132.20000	190.400	-.527	.840
Item2.16	131.60000	180.711	-.103	.833
Item2.17	131.70000	180.011	-.081	.833
Item3.1	131.50000	172.500	.262	.821
Item3.2	130.80000	165.733	.738	.811
Item3.3	131.90000	170.322	.553	.816
Item3.4	131.40000	169.378	.493	.816
Item3.5	131.70000	173.122	.362	.819
Item3.6	130.90000	158.322	.697	.806
Item3.7	131.90000	168.544	.509	.815
Item3.8	132.20000	164.622	.474	.814
Item3.9	131.40000	170.044	.242	.822
Item3.10	131.40000	165.822	.696	.811
Item3.11	130.80000	166.622	.684	.812
Item3.12	131.00000	176.222	.057	.827
Item3.13	131.00000	180.667	-.176	.827
Item3.14	131.50000	165.611	.332	.819
Item3.15	131.40000	177.378	.021	.828
Item3.16	131.00000	172.444	.279	.820
Item3.17	130.60000	174.711	.223	.822
Item3.18	130.50000	168.722	.442	.816
Item1.19	131.30000	166.900	.511	.814

Item-Total Statistics for Student Questionnaire

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Item1	53.6667	151.846	.538	.864
Item2	54.1481	151.746	.541	.864
Item3	53.7778	149.410	.530	.864
Item4	53.9630	153.037	.457	.867
Item5	53.8519	143.131	.738	.855
Item6	53.6296	158.165	.321	.872
Item7	54.0370	147.729	.631	.860
Item8	54.2963	156.447	.349	.872
Item9	53.2963	158.678	.454	.868
Item10	53.8519	156.285	.398	.869
Item11	54.2593	149.738	.503	.865
Item12	53.7407	152.353	.490	.866
Item13	54.0741	140.225	.735	.854
Item14	53.4815	148.336	.645	.859
Item15	53.7407	152.815	.532	.864
Item16	54.5926	157.866	.297	.874
Item17	54.9259	157.302	.334	.872

Declaration

The thesis, my original work, has not been presented for a degree in any other University and that all sources of materials used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

Yadesa Asfaw Melesse _____ 30/06/09

Signature Date

Approved by

Desalegn Chalchisa (PhD) _____ 01/06/07

Advisor Signature Date

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