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AN INVESTIGATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM IN ETHIOPIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

BY

GIRMA AWAKI FEYERA

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An Investigation of Internal Quality Assurance System in Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions

By

Girma Awaki Feyera

A PhD Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Educational Planning and Management, College of Education and Language Studies, Addis Ababa University in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education Studies

Supervisors:

Prof. Belete Kebede Mebratu (Main Supervisor), Professor, Bakke Graduate University, Dallas, Texas.

Dr. Firdissa Jebessa Aga (Co-Supervisor), Associate Professor, Center For Educational Research, Addis Ababa University

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Addis Ababa University
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Declaration

I hereby declare that the work presented in this PhD dissertation is my original work and has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification. I have adhered to all ethical guidelines and standards in conducting this research. All sources and references used in this dissertation have been duly acknowledged.

Date: June, 2026

Signature: 

Girma Awaki Feyera
Center for Educational Research
Institute of Social and Economic Research
Addis Ababa University

Supervisors' Approval Form

This is to approve a PhD dissertation entitled "An Investigation of the Internal Quality Assurance System in Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions," submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education Studies*: *Quality and Quality Assurance in Higher Education Institutions*. This dissertation was developed by Girma Awaki Feyera under our supervision. Therefore, we recommend that the student has fulfilled the requirements and hence hereby can submit his dissertation to the Department of Educational Planning and Management, College of Education and Language Studies, Addis Ababa University.

Prof. Belete Kebede Mebratu	Mebratu, BK	June, 2026
Main Supervisor	Signature	Date
Dr. Firdissa Jebessa Aga	_____	_____
Co-Supervisor	Signature	Date

Examiners' Approval Sheet

This is to certify that the dissertation prepared by Girma Awaki Feyera entitled "**An Investigation of the Internal Quality Assurance System in Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions of Ethiopia,"** is submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education Studies*, complies with the regulation of the University and meets the accepted standards to originality and quality.

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Department Head	Signature	Date
Prof. Abebaw Yirga	_____	_____
Chairperson	Signature	Date
Dr. Temesgen Fereja	_____	_____
Internal Examiner	Signature	Date
Prof. Solomon Melesse	June 15,2026	June 15, 2026
External Examiner	Signature	Date

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Abstract

This study investigated the internal quality assurance system in Ethiopian higher education institutions. Despite the policy interventions, evidence suggests that the quality of education continues to deteriorate, indicating a need for systematic investigation into the functioning of internal quality assurance systems. A convergent mixed-methods design was employed, integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. Data were gathered from 303 instructors and 355 postgraduate students through structured questionnaires, as well as from 20 key informants such as quality assurance directors, coordinators, experts, and senior instructors through semi-structured interviews, totally 678 participants. Additionally, document analysis was conducted on quality assurance policies, audit reports, and institutional documents, especially the document of institutional quality audit standard for HEIs has been reviewed and analyzed critically. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations, and inferential statistics including one-sample t-test, ANOVA, and Pearson's correlation, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework.

The findings revealed that while formal internal quality assurance system structures exist across all sampled institutions, these structures operate primarily as compliance-oriented mechanisms responding to external accountability demands rather than as engines of genuine quality improvement. Students demonstrated limited familiarity with internal quality assurance system concepts, with 40.8% reporting no familiarity and only 23.4% affirming the existence of an effective system. Student participation in quality assurance activities was consistently low, with a composite mean of 2.44 ($p < .001$), and only 18% reported ever attending quality assurance-related meetings. The student support system received below-moderate ratings ($M = 2.84$, $p < .001$), with PhD students rating support services significantly higher than master's students, and government-sponsored students reporting better support than self-sponsored students. Research and publication support was particularly weak ($M = 2.70$, $p < .001$), with funding opportunities and grant awareness identified as the most severe deficiencies. Instructors have demonstrated higher awareness of internal quality assurance system compared to students, with 86.5% reporting at least some familiarity with internal quality assurance system concepts, yet only 40.3% affirmed the existence of clear implementation guidelines. The overall effectiveness rating from instructors (M

= 2.97) did not statistically differ from the moderate benchmark, indicating neutral perception. Pearson correlation analysis revealed that all dimensions of the internal quality assurance system were positively and significantly correlated, with the strongest correlation observed between IQAS policy and effectiveness ($r = .70$, $p < .001$), followed by focus area implementation and effectiveness ($r = .61$, $p < .001$), and policy and focus area implementation ($r = .58$, $p < .001$). Student participation correlated moderately with policy ($r = .56$, $p < .001$) and effectiveness ($r = .55$, $p < .001$), but weakly with educational resources ($r = .34$, $p < .001$). Qualitative findings revealed a persistent gap between policy and implementation, with participants characterizing internal quality assurance system impact as "effort without measurable impact" and educational quality as "stagnant." Resource scarcity was identified as the most significant barrier by 84.8% of instructors, followed by inadequate training and development (81.2%), limited stakeholder engagement (75.2%), lack of institutional commitment (70.6%), and poor communication (67.0%). Enabling factors included leadership commitment, growing institutional autonomy, and the reservoir of senior academic expertise. Despite numerous challenges, several best practices were identified.

The study concludes that the internal quality assurance system in Ethiopian higher education institutions is characterized by institutionalized formalism rather than substantive transformation, with a deep disconnect between policy and implementation, chronic resource scarcity, superficial student participation, significant inter-institutional variation, and stagnant educational quality. The Pearson correlation findings confirm that IQAS functions as an integrated system wherein improvements in one dimension are associated with improvements in others, and that student participation is driven more by policy and culture than by physical resources. Recommendations are offered for higher education institutions, the Education and Training Authority, and the Ministry of Education. The study contributes to the literature on quality assurance in developing country contexts and provides empirical evidence for policy reform aimed at transforming Ethiopian higher education from compliance-driven to quality-centered institutions.

Abbreviations

AAU	Addis Ababa University
ADRI	Approach, Development, Result, and Improvement Model
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
APA	American Psychological Association
EFQM	European Foundation for Quality Management
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQA	External Quality Assurance
ETA	Education and Training Authority
ETP	Education and Training Policy
HU	Hawassa University
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HERQA	Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency
JU	Jimma University
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
IQAS	Internal Quality Assurance System
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoSHE	Ministry of Science and Higher Education
QA	Quality Assurance
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SSS	Student Support System
TQM	Total Quality Management
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides background information on the historical emergence of quality assurance before its adoption in higher education institutions (HEIs). It also discusses the reason why quality assurance was established in higher education worldwide. The issue of quality has become a significant concern in Ethiopian HEIs due to the rapid expansion of private colleges and public universities in the country. Consequently, HEIs have been granted the right to establish quality assurance and quality enhancement offices and structures to govern the quality of their education. However, the quality of education is deteriorating from time to time, as the existing literature shows (Feye, 2025; Mekonnen Yimer et al., 2024; Tareke et al., 2024). There seems to be something that needs to be fixed in the quality assurance system within HEIs that requires further investigation. Hence, this study examined the internal quality assurance system of Ethiopian HEIs. This study focuses on the establishment, effectiveness, student support system and perceived quality outcomes, practices and challenges, enabling and disabling factors, and best practices of the internal quality assurance system in HEIs.

1.1. Background of the Study

Quality assurance initially focused on industrial and commercial sectors but gradually expanded to encompass broader societal concerns, notably affecting public services (Manatos et al., 2017). Since the 1980s, it has grown significantly within higher education, becoming a vital and pervasive aspect of academic institutions and establishing itself as an integral component of academic quality (Huisman et al., 2015). Quality frameworks have played a key role in higher education, helping to maintain academic standards across disciplines, facilitate benchmarking at the disciplinary level, institutional level, and national level, and support accountability measures (Gunn & Cheng, 2015). From its inception, universities have consistently prioritized educational quality as a core concern (Tamrat, 2020). The rapid expansion of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Ethiopia has led to a significant increase in student enrolments and the variety of undergraduate and graduate programs across both public and private institutions (Kahsay, 2012). However, this swift growth has adversely affected the quality of education due to a shortage of human and financial resources necessary for delivering high-standard instruction (Yirdaw, 2016).

Official quality assurance systems have been put in place in several nations to monitor and improve the caliber of their education system. In industrialized countries like the USA and Western Europe, the idea of formal quality assurance in higher education was first established in the 1980s and 1990s (INQAAHE, 2021). Since then, as reported by Westerheijden et al. (2007), it has quickly expanded to other developed and developing nations.

In the United States of America, the first major step toward formal accreditation occurred in 1885 with the establishment of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). This association began as a voluntary effort among colleges in the New England region to set common standards for academic quality. This model was soon adopted by other regional associations. In 1895, the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA) was founded, becoming another influential regional accrediting body. Similar organizations were established in other regions of the United States, such as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) in 1895, and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) in 1962 (Verhine, 2022).

In Europe, the emergence of quality assurance can be traced back to the Bologna Process in 1999, which aimed to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by harmonizing higher education systems and promoting quality assurance across European countries. In this effort, the development of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) helped establish shared expectations for quality. Implementing QA in line with the ESG became one of the Bologna Process's key commitments, and it provides a foundation for enhancing trust, mobility, and recognition between higher education systems (Enders & Westerheijden, 2014).

Internationally, the establishment of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) in 1991 marked a significant step in promoting global cooperation and the exchange of best practices in quality assurance in higher education (INQAAHE, 2021). Since then, quality assurance in higher education has continued to evolve and expand worldwide. Many countries have developed their own national quality assurance frameworks, established quality assurance agencies, and implemented institutional accreditation processes to ensure the quality and accountability of HEIs (United Nations, 2019).

The combined impacts of globalization and massification, according to Brennan and Shah (2000) have also radically altered the traditional relationship between the state and institutions of higher

education and motivated policymakers to seek new means for assuring academic quality in higher education (Dill, 2007). Today, higher education systems and institutions face ongoing transformations. With the rapid growth of the sector, institutions and programs have become more varied. Privatization has also been observed in many institutions. As a result, there is a rising apprehension regarding the quality of HEIs and their programs (Martin, 2018b).

To address these concerns, governments worldwide have introduced external quality assurance (EQA) mechanisms to address worries about the quality of HEIs and their programs. These mechanisms include regular external assessments using tools such as accreditation, quality audits, and evaluation. Initially prompted by external influences, an expanding number of HEIs have also implemented internal quality assurance (IQA) mechanisms to proactively monitor and manage their own quality standards, aiming to tackle concerns about the quality of education (Martin, 2018a).

Ensuring the quality of education has been an inherent priority for universities since their inception and continues to be a significant concern in the present era (Tamrat, 2020). Quality frameworks have played a pivotal role in higher education since the 1960s. These frameworks act as mechanisms to ensure that educational standards are upheld across various disciplines. They serve multiple purposes, including enabling comparisons and evaluations at disciplinary, institutional, and state levels. Additionally, these frameworks provide valuable evidence for accountability purposes, ensuring that educational institutions are held responsible for the quality of education they deliver (Gunn & Cheng, 2015).

The quality assurance movement of recent decades has emerged due to several contributing factors. Various elements have played a significant role in propelling the advancement of this movement. These factors encompass apprehension about declining academic standards, a diminishing trust in conventional educational quality management capabilities to meet the requirements of employers, insufficient funding, a growing need for accountability, and the heightened competitiveness and diversity within the educational landscape (Geda, 2014).

As a result of the factors mentioned above, HEIs began exploring methods to improve their internal quality by establishing internal quality assurance systems, implementing integrated quality management systems, and conducting self-assessments to ensure they were ready for national, and

sometimes international, accreditation (Semela, 2011). Furthermore, HEIs are giving significant importance to the development and adoption of best practice applications that cover all aspects of program design, delivery, performance evaluation, and follow-up. However, different countries utilize different concepts when it comes to quality assurance. Even though the methodologies employed in diverse quality assurance reviews vary significantly, most quality assurance reviews rely on one or a combination of a small number of core approaches (Wariyo, 2020).

One of the most effective methodologies in which quality assurance can be ensured is through an internal quality assurance system. Due to the widely held belief that HEIs are primarily accountable for the quality of their services, internal quality assurance (IQA) mechanisms have been implemented in numerous HEIs worldwide (Martin, 2018a). An Internal quality assurance (IQA) system can have a significant impact by addressing both external demands and the internal quality objectives of an institution.

As expected, the growth of HEIs in Ethiopia has resulted in a notable rise in student enrollments and a wide range of graduate and undergraduate programs in both public and private HEIs. However, it has been negatively impacted by the country's disproportionate rapid growth in the number of HEIs and student population, along with a lack of human and financial resources to provide high-quality instruction (Yirdaw, 2016).

Furthermore, Tamrat (2020) claims that the official quality assurance (QA) movement in Ethiopia started at the beginning of 2000 and was motivated by the need to address the quick changes and related difficulties the higher education sector had been facing for the previous 20 years. The government's reaction to quality issues was largely evident in the establishment of a national quality assurance agency and the formalization of quality assurance components, in addition to restoring the entire higher education system.

Since then, Ethiopian HEIs have placed significant emphasis on prioritizing quality assurance as a means to enhance the standard of education. This involves implementing national and institutional processes aimed at assessing and improving the quality of research and instruction. Moreover, these processes provide valuable information to stakeholders regarding academic standards and post-graduation employment prospects. However, it should be recognized that the concept of quality assurance can be interpreted differently by academics, leading to divergent

viewpoints on the most effective methods for evaluating and enhancing it in the context of higher education, as highlighted by Geda (2014).

In Ethiopia, the concept of quality assurance was introduced and established as a crucial element in HEIs in 2003. This notion was incorporated into the 2003 Higher Education Proclamation, which emphasizes the need for a dedicated agency to oversee and enhance quality assurance efforts (Ashcroft & Rayner, 2012). In order to ensure the standard of education, the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA), now changed to the Education Training Authority (ETA), was founded in 2003 through proclamation (351/2003). It is a crucial organization responsible for overseeing and controlling the higher education sector. Among its primary responsibilities, HERQA plays a significant role in promoting and supporting the development of a cultural environment within Ethiopian higher education that prioritizes excellence and strives for ongoing enhancement (Teshome & Kebede, 2009). HERQA aims to guarantee that accredited HEIs satisfy the necessary standards. Its purpose is to evaluate the quality and appropriateness of the programs provided by these institutions in alignment with job market requirements and the country's developmental needs. Moreover, HERQA endeavors to offer assistance to the higher education sector in improving the quality and relevance of its educational offerings (Wariyo, 2020).

In addition, HEIs have a vital role in guaranteeing the quality of their education. Consequently, they must take essential steps to create strong institutional systems for ensuring the quality of education. The importance of this duty is highlighted by the implemented regulation (Higher Education Proclamation No. 650/2009), which emphasizes the role of HEIs in this area. The regulation explicitly mandates that HEIs establish a reliable internal system to enhance quality (Semela, 2011). Since the declaration of the Higher Education Proclamation in 2009, all Ethiopian HEIs have established internal quality assurance systems to enhance the quality of education provided at institutional level.

A well-functioning IQAS serves as a driver of continuous improvement, accountability, and institutional transformation, moving beyond a narrow focus on external compliance. This is achieved by creating a structured framework for systematically monitoring all operations from teaching and research to administration to ensure that they meet established standards and strategic

goals (HOU et al., 2025). Research and practical case studies from various contexts confirm that this internal mechanism not only helps an institution meet external requirements but also drives genuine enhancement in educational processes and outcomes (O'Sullivan, 2017).

Quality is primarily the responsibility of the higher education institution itself. Although the government has a special responsibility regarding quality assurance in many countries, it is the university that is responsible for providing and assuring quality of education. Therefore, it is important that HEIs develop an efficient IQAS. It involves the methods and practices that academic institutions use to assess and improve the quality of their educational programs. It is a basic function of institutional self-regulation, allowing HEIs to proactively examine, monitor, and optimize their academic programs, administrative rules, and teaching practices.

Internal quality assurance refers to the procedures and techniques used by educational institutions to evaluate and enhance the caliber of their curricula (Ai Tran et al., 2025). It is a fundamental aspect of institutional self-regulation that enables HEIs to proactively review, track, and improve their academic programs, administrative policies, and instructional strategies. Hence, HEIs must establish a system that provides a wide range of academic and non-academic support services to meet the unique needs of their students in addition to implementing comprehensive policies, mechanisms, and procedures that align admission requirements with program standards and government regulations in order to ensure effective management of admissions and student support services (ETA, 2025).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

According to Martin & Stella (2007), internal or institutional quality assurance refers to the procedures and guidelines put in place within an organization to make sure that it is accomplishing its goals and upholding the standards that are relevant to the particular field or profession in question as well as to higher education as a whole.

There are theoretical, empirical, and practical gaps identified in the literature on the quality assurance system in Ethiopian HEIs. Theoretically, the literature on quality assurance in higher education has predominantly focused on external quality assurance mechanisms such as accreditation, audits, and assessment, with limited theoretical attention to internal quality

assurance system as integrated organizational frameworks. Existing quality assurance dimensions, including Harvey & Green's (1993) five approaches to quality, have been applied primarily to describe quality conceptions rather than to explain the systematic functioning of IQAS in developing country contexts. Moreover, no previous study has integrated Contingency Theory, Institutional Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and Total Quality Management principles to holistically explain the establishment, effectiveness, and challenges of IQAS.

In terms of empirical gap, despite the rapid expansion of HEIs in Ethiopia over the past two decades and growing concerns about quality, no comprehensive and systematic examination of internal quality assurance system as integrated system has been conducted in the Ethiopian context. Materu (2007) observed a lack of diverse research findings employing various methodologies to assess the quality of higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa. Additionally, Kahsay (2012) emphasized that external quality assurance is often characterized as accountability-focused, summative, and judgmental, providing only a limited snapshot of quality. In contrast, IQAS is described as formative in nature, fostering ongoing quality improvement efforts and cultivating a culture of quality within institutions.

With regard to practical gap, the primary focus of quality assurance is often placed on external quality assurance systems such as accreditation, audits, or assessments. However, the significance of developing a robust internal quality system is often overlooked or underestimated in many countries. An Internal quality assurance system is essential for achieving effective and transformative quality, but it is frequently neglected or simply designed for external requirements. In Ethiopia, most quality assurance studies focus on practices, challenges, and implications, but these studies are either too general or too specific, and none have investigated IQAS as a complete system across multiple institutions. Moreover, to the extent that the knowledge of the researcher is concerned, no studies have been conducted regarding the internal quality assurance system in HEIs as a system.

Another reason that captures the researcher's interest in conducting this study is the issue of institutional quality audits. HEIs rarely evaluate the quality of education based on focus areas established by HERQA. During quality audits, what typically occurs is the use of a quality audit checklist to assess or monitor quality at the institutional level. However, quality assurance involves more than just utilizing a checklist. Institutions often produce a two-to-three-page report on their

research and outreach engagement as part of their overall institutional quality audit report (Abebe, 2015). Therefore, it is essential to assess the entire system of quality assurance procedures, and there is also a need to properly understand and evaluate the multi-dimensional aspects of quality rather than focusing only on a limited number of elements.

Consequently, the researcher has developed a keen interest in investigating the internal quality assurance system in Ethiopian HEIs. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the internal quality assurance system of the Ethiopian HEIs.

1.3. Research Questions

Based on the aforementioned problem statement, this study intends to answer the following research questions:

1. How is the internal quality assurance system established in Ethiopian HEIs?
2. How effective is the internal quality assurance system in improving the quality of education in Ethiopian HEIs?
3. To what extent do student support system influence perceived quality outcomes among students in Ethiopian HEIs
4. What are the practices and challenges of the internal quality assurance system in Ethiopian HEIs?
5. What are the enabling and/or disabling factors that affect the implementation of internal quality assurance system in Ethiopian HEIs?
6. What are the best practices in internal quality assurance system in Ethiopian HEIs?

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study was to investigate the internal quality assurance system of the Ethiopian HEIs.

Based on the general objective, specific objectives were listed as follows:

1. To explore the establishment of the internal quality assurance system in Ethiopian HEIs.
2. To assess the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system in improving the quality of education in Ethiopian HEIs.

3. To evaluate the student support system and perceived quality outcomes in Ethiopian HEIs.
4. To explore the practices and challenges of the internal quality assurance system in Ethiopian HEIs.
5. To identify the enabling and/or disabling factors that affect the implementation of internal quality assurance system in Ethiopian HEIs.
6. To explore best practices of internal quality assurance system in Ethiopian HEIs.

1.5. Significance of the Study

This study holds great importance since it seeks to investigate internal quality assurance system of Ethiopian HEIs. It is also significant because it adds both theoretical and practical knowledge to the existing literature on how universities establish and apply internal quality assurance systems to improve the quality of education in a higher education context. By applying four theoretical frameworks such as contingency theory, institutional theory, stakeholder theory, and Total Quality Management principles, the study provides a comprehensive analytical lens for understanding how internal quality assurance system is established, implemented, and evaluated in resource-constrained environments. The study also benefits society as a whole, as a stakeholder in quality higher education. The findings of this study are beneficial to a variety of stakeholder groups which includes university administrators at all levels, students, teachers, and advisors, employers of university graduates, policymakers, and other education quality experts in the MOE and ETA that support university programs, as well as other organizations and individuals committed to advancing higher education in Ethiopia.

1.6. Scope of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the internal quality assurance system in Ethiopian HEIs to ensure that they are meeting established standards. The study specifically focused on assessing the establishment of the internal quality assurance system, evaluating the effectiveness of the system in improving the quality of higher education, assessing the quality of student support system, identifying the enabling and or disabling factors, comparing the system across different institutions, and exploring the best practices across the Ethiopian HEIs. To ensure a comprehensive assessment, the study encompasses a total of three public HEIs. The sample institutions were selected taking into consideration the various types or categories of universities established by the

Ministry of Science and Higher Education (MoSHE) or Ministry of Education. From the eight first-generation public universities, three universities (Addis Ababa University, Hawassa University, and Jimma University) were selected and included in the study. As far as they are from the first-generation universities, they are expected to have enough resources and good infrastructure compared to the second, third, and fourth generation universities. It is also believed that the academics in the first-generation universities are experienced professionals, and they are expected to have enough information that would provide comprehensive data and insights regarding the internal quality assurance system in HEIs.

1.7. Operational Definition of Key Terms

Accreditation: is a quality assurance process through which an external body evaluates and verifies the services and operations of educational and training institutions to determine whether they meet applicable and recognized standards.

Approach: is the first dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on evaluating what the HEI aims to achieve for a given topic and how it proposes to achieve it.

Deployment: refers to the second dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on whether a HEI's plans for a given topic are being followed in practice, and if not, why not.

Fitness for purpose: refers to a quality assurance approach that evaluates how effectively an HEI or its programs meet the institution's stated objectives, such as its mission, vision, and strategic goals.

Fitness of purpose: refers to a quality assurance approach that evaluates the relevance and appropriateness of the institution's stated objectives, considering the HEI's legal and regulatory responsibilities.

Focus Area: refers to a category or domain within the institutional quality audit standards consisting of a set of related quality audit standards sharing common characteristics.

Improvement: refers to the fourth dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on how effectively an HEI is improving its approach and deployment for any given topic in order to achieve better results.

Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS): refers to a structured framework implemented by a HEI to monitor, evaluate, and enhance the quality of its academic and administrative processes, ensuring the institution meets standards, achieves its mission, and promotes continuous improvement.

Quality: The degree to which a HEI meets established standards, guidelines, and stakeholder needs, assessed through the concepts of fitness for purpose and fitness of purpose to ensure the institution is effective and aligned with its mission.

Quality as exception: refers to quality as something rare, elite, and beyond ordinary expectations.

Quality as perfection: is often linked to consistency, defines quality as meeting specifications precisely and achieving a zero-defect standard.

Quality as value for money: conceptualizes quality as achieving worthwhile outcomes efficiently relative to the sources invested; quality is not only about academic standards or goal achievement, but also about how economically and effectively resources are used to produce results

Quality as transformation: refers to a process of meaningful change, especially the improvement of learners and the institutions over time, in which quality is demonstrated through enhanced knowledge, skills, competencies, personal development, employability, and broader educational growth.

Results: refers to the third dimension of the ADRI cycle, which focuses on the evidence of the outputs and outcomes of a topic's approach and deployment.

Self-Evaluation: refers to a systematic internal process through which an institution assesses its performance and practices against established standards, using the ADRI model to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

1.8. Theoretical Frameworks of the Study

HEIs have different demands, goals, and contexts that affect how effective quality assurance techniques are, hence there is no one best theory for HEIs (Manning, 2018). The design and implementation of quality assurance systems in HEIs might benefit from the views and insights provided by many theories. The particular goals and interests of the organization determine which

theory is used. Thus, the following organizational theories and quality assurance model served as the foundation for this investigation.

1.8.1. Contingency Theory

Contingency theory is a management theory that focuses on contingency strategy in particular situations and is part of Western organizational management science. It holds that since every organization has unique internal components and external circumstances, no general management principles or techniques that can be applied to every situation (Guan Gong, 2011). In other words, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to organizing, and organizations must tailor their structures and strategies to align with the demands and challenges of their specific operating conditions (Yusuf et al., 2023). In the same way, based on the concept of this theory, there is no universal approach to quality assurance systems. A quality assurance system should be contingent upon the specific circumstances and needs of each institution. This means the importance of aligning the quality assurance system with the institution's unique characteristics, such as its mission, goals, size, structure, and resources, is very important for higher education institutions to improve the quality of education.

1.8.2. Institutional Theory

The fundamental principle of institutional theory is that the functioning of organizations is greatly influenced by their surroundings. Institutional theory examines how external norms, regulations, and expectations shape organizations and how organizations, in turn, influence and are influenced by these factors (Cai & Mehari, 2022). When applied to quality assurance in HEIs, institutional theory emphasizes the impact of external factors, such as government regulations, accreditation requirements, and professional standards, on the design and implementation of quality assurance systems. Hence, understanding the institutional context and aligning the quality assurance system in HEIs with external expectations are key considerations in this framework.

1.8.3. Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory emphasizes the importance of considering and addressing the needs and expectations of various stakeholders in an organization (Freeman et al., 2010). In the context of quality assurance system in HEIs, stakeholder theory highlights the significance of engaging

stakeholders such as students, faculty, staff, employers, and the wider community in the quality assurance processes. This theory emphasizes the idea that the quality of education and institutional performance should align with the interests of key stakeholders. The fundamental concept underlying university governance is the coordination process involving various individuals and groups involved in higher education. The stakeholder model can be employed to guide and govern the operations and activities within the realm of higher education (Hong, 2019).

1.8.4. Total Quality Management (TQM)

Total Quality Management (TQM) is a management concept that places a strong emphasis on customer focus, ongoing improvement, and employee participation in improving quality (Patel, 2013). It sees quality as an all-encompassing idea that ought to be present in all aspects of an organization's activities (Kanji et al., 1999). TQM is attracting the genuine attention of educators, policymakers, academics, and researchers because it is a successful management concept that promotes customer happiness, organizational excellence, and continuous improvement (Sohel-Uz-Zaman & Anjalin, 2016). TQM principles, such as customer orientation, process improvement, and data-driven decision-making, have been applied to quality assurance in HEIs to promote a culture of excellence and foster systematic approaches to quality enhancement.

In practice, institutions often develop their own frameworks and models that integrate various theories and best practices to suit their specific needs and goals. The choice of theory and framework should be guided by a thorough analysis of the institution's context, objectives, and stakeholder expectations (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

1.9. Conceptual Framework of the Study

The researcher designed a conceptual framework that guide the investigation of the internal quality assurance system in HEIs based on the theoretical frameworks presented. The conceptual framework consists of the themes of the study and shows how they relate to the theoretical frameworks selected for this study.

Institutional Theory: As mentioned above, the main objective of this study was to investigate the internal quality assurance system in Ethiopian HEIs. To achieve this objective, it is important to relate it to the theoretical frameworks and quality assurance models regarding the internal quality

assurance system in Ethiopian HEIs. Quality assurance policies and guidelines can be influenced by external factors, according to the concept of institutional theory. One of the fundamental assumptions of institutional theory is that the environment exerts enormous influence on how organizations operate. According to this theory, organizations are influenced by social, cultural, and regulatory pressures, which shape their structures and practices. The rest of the objectives can also be managed and guided by this theory as long as they are related to the internal quality assurance system in HEIs.

Contingency Theory: This theory explains how organizations adapt to their immediate operating contexts. It posits that the best way for an organization to organize depends on the environmental context in which it operates. It focuses on the interface between the organization and its task or technical environment. Internal quality assurance system of HEIs can be affected by the context surrounding the organizations. Hence in addition to institutional theory, this study is guided by contingency theory.

Stakeholders Theory: It is obvious that considering and meeting the needs and expectations of various stakeholders in any organization is critical to making the organization highly desirable in the community (Freeman et al., 2010). This theory emphasizes the importance of addressing the needs and expectations of various stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, employers, and the wider community, in quality assurance processes in HEIs. It guides operations and activities within the realm of HEIs. As a result, understanding the entire internal quality assurance system of HEIs requires considering the needs and expectations of stakeholders, as expecting quality education without these stakeholders would be unimaginable.

In addition to these theories, the Total Quality Management (TQM) model was used to guide the study of the internal quality assurance system in Ethiopian HEIs. TQM is a process that was successfully implemented in US industries during the 1980s. Then, many US HEIs have adopted TQM following the success of firms in using it to overcome crises (Kanji et al., 1999). It also views quality as an all-encompassing concept that should be present in every aspect of an organization's activities. Hence, the issue of the internal quality assurance system of higher education institutions couldn’t be out of the concept of TQM.



Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework that guided this study. The framework is organized around a central construct of IQAS, with seven dimensions arranged around it. The following narration focuses specifically on the relationships among these six dimensions as they interact within the Ethiopian higher education context.

Establishment of IQAS serves as the foundational dimension. It represents the formal structures, policies, and legal mandates (Proclamations 351/2003 and 650/2009) that brought IQAS into existence across Ethiopian HEIs. The relationship between Establishment and the central IQAS is foundational. It is believed that without proper establishment, including approved policies, clear guidelines, and communicated procedures, the entire system cannot function effectively. This dimension captures the regulatory and structural inputs that initiate quality assurance.

Practices, challenges, and implementation of IQAS represents the operational dimension. This dimension relates to the central IQAS through the day-to-day activities of quality assurance, including program audits, teaching-learning audits, research audits, and compliance mechanisms. The relationship between this dimension and IQAS captures the translation of policy into action, recognizing that implementation may encounter challenges that affect how quality assurance is operationalized in HEIs.

Availability, accessibility, and quality of student support system represents the stakeholder-centered dimension. This dimension relates to the central IQAS through the provision of academic advising, personal counseling, career services, and research and publication support system. The relationship is theorized as reciprocal: an effective IQAS should ensure adequate student support, and the quality of student support should influence how stakeholders perceive IQAS effectiveness.

Effectiveness of IQAS in HEIs represents the outcome dimension. This dimension relates to the central IQAS as the ultimate measure of whether quality assurance efforts translate into tangible educational improvement. The relationship between this dimension and the other dimensions captures the intended impact of IQAS on institutional quality of education in HEIs.

Enabling and/or disabling factors to implement IQAS represents the contextual dimension. This dimension relates to the central IQAS as the conditions that either facilitate or obstruct implementation. Enabling factors include leadership commitment, institutional autonomy, and the presence of senior academic expertise. Disabling factors include resource constraints, inadequate training, limited stakeholder engagement, lack of institutional commitment, and poor communication. These factors are theorized to moderate what IQAS can achieve.

Learning and encouraging best practices represents the improvement-oriented dimension that captures the identification, documentation, and dissemination of exemplary quality assurance practices. This dimension relates to the central IQAS as a mechanism for organizational learning: when effective practices are identified, they should be shared across the institution to promote continuous improvement. Best practices emerge from successful navigation of challenges and effective implementation.

Feeding into transforming policies and guidelines represents the improvement-oriented dimension that completes the cyclical nature of the framework. This dimension relates to the central IQAS as

the mechanism through which evidence generated from IQAS functioning should systematically inform policy revision. The relationship between this dimension and Establishment closes the continuous improvement loop: transformed policies should inform the re-establishment or refinement of IQAS structures.

In summary, the conceptual framework illustrates that IQAS operates as an integrated system wherein all six dimensions are conceptually interrelated. Establishment provides the foundation; practices and implementation capture operational reality; student support addresses stakeholder needs; effectiveness represents intended outcomes; enabling and disabling factors moderate system functioning; and feeding into transforming policies closes the improvement cycle. The framework thus provides a holistic lens for investigating IQAS in Ethiopian higher education institutions, recognizing that no single dimension can be understood in isolation from the others.

CHAPTER TWO

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In this chapter, existing national and international literature related to higher education and quality assurance systems in HEIs were reviewed and cited to enable the readers to have detailed perspectives concerning the topic under investigation.

2.1. History of Higher Education in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, modern higher education began in 1950 with the establishment of the University College of Addis Ababa, a government institution, which later became Haile Selassie I University and still later Addis Ababa University (Saint, 2004). The expansion of HEIs in Ethiopia has led to a significant rise in student enrollments and a wide range of graduate and undergraduate programs in both public and private HEIs, as anticipated. In particular, the last 20 years have seen a tremendous massification that has resulted in the creation of several new HEIs as well as the restructuring and modernization of already established ones (Abebe, 2021). However, this rapid growth in the number of HEIs and the student population, coupled with insufficient human and investment capital to ensure educational quality, is having a detrimental impact on higher education in Ethiopia (Yirdaw, 2016). Furthermore , (Negash, 2006)) has identified the uncontrolled expansion of the sector, in relation to available material resources and job opportunities, as the primary underlying factor contributing to the decline in education standards.

Throughout its relatively short history, Ethiopian higher education has encountered a multitude of challenges. These challenges encompass an inadequate production of skilled manpower to fulfill the country's demands, programs and curriculum that do not adequately address the practical needs of the nation, institutions that exhibit excessive conservatism, a lack of sincere dedication to academic freedom and institutional autonomy, and limited availability of resources (Wariyo, 2020).

Furthermore, because of overcrowding and dilapidated physical facilities, a lack of academic rigor among students, limited and outdated library resources, inadequate equipment and instructional materials, and poorly prepared secondary students, universities face significant challenges in maintaining student retention and developing academic competencies, thereby ensuring the quality of education (Altbach et al., 2009). Consequently, the provided training and education initiatives

have not made a meaningful impact on reducing poverty in Ethiopia or other related social issues (Teshome, 1990).

2.2. Challenges of Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions

Higher education in Ethiopia has suffered from a lack of clear objectives, weak institutional support for student learning, oppressive teaching practices, and autocratic administration. These issues have persisted with little change, resulting in a system that fails to address crucial developmental needs such as food security, healthcare, and a liberal education promoting civility, democracy, and good governance (Amare, 2005).

Despite certain attempts and initiatives, Ethiopia's higher education faces several obstacles. Staff qualification, for example, has long been a key issue. Worker unhappiness with the current work environment and how they are treated is a corollary to inadequate staff qualification. It has also cleared the path for less privileged students to be admitted into the system. In recent years, the first-year attrition rate has risen dramatically. Another issue is the poor quality of student services (Yallew, 2020).

Over the past 15 years, Ethiopia has seen significant growth in higher education infrastructure, qualified human resources, and enrollment and graduation rates. However, issues persist, notably gender disparity in enrollment, inadequate educational materials, lack of laboratory and workshop equipment, and limited access to ICT facilities. Additionally, according to the World Bank's fiscal incidence analysis, access to higher education is unequal, with only 2.6% of the lowest income group receiving funding for higher education. The support system for underprivileged students appears ineffective, as those from disadvantaged backgrounds face stigma and are often reluctant to seek help (Teferra et al., 2018).

The quality of higher education is closely linked to the preparedness of students from secondary and preparatory schools, with many entering university lacking essential subject understanding. Widespread cheating in schools and admission exams contributes to this problem. Additionally, the shift to a competency-based curriculum faces challenges due to unclear skills definitions, weak module structures, and a reliance on traditional lecture methods, which detract from alternative teaching approaches. Moreover, current university programs in Ethiopia fail to impart necessary entrepreneurial skills (Olamo et al., 2019).

The lack of high-quality research is a major challenge in Ethiopia's higher education system, with research achievements falling short of objectives. There is inadequate control over research applicability, limited knowledge advancement, and a shortage of qualified professionals for relevant research. Although Ethiopian universities have numerous academic staff capable of contributing to research, many young staff members possess only minimal scientific skills. The research landscape is marked by poor infrastructure, insufficient integration of teaching and research, weak community linkages, and limited university-industry collaboration (Goshu et al., 2025).

Majority of Ethiopian universities have concentrated on teaching and are not as involved in development, research, or community service as they ought to be. There is limited interaction between universities and the public sector, and universities and the business sector are kept apart. Since most university instruction has remained primarily textbook-based with little incorporation of local practical knowledge and experiences, these have had a detrimental impact on the quality of education (Abdela & Pillay, 2014).

The direct research funding for universities is less than 1% of the overall expenditure. The funding possibilities available to Ethiopian HEIs are somewhat restricted. For many colleges, government funding is their only source of revenue. The only expenses that HE users (students) paid (shared) were the subsidized direct costs of meals, housing, and 15% of educational services. Research findings on problem-solving and learning outcomes are little related to budget allocation. Research, technology transfer, and community services receive very little of the funding; the majority is allocated to teaching and learning. Universities receive less than 1% of total funding for direct research (Yigezu, 2013).

2.3. Quality Assurance System in HEIs

Quality assurance originally emerged in business and industrial organizations and has been an essential aspect of various industries for many years. Its roots can be traced back to the early 20th century when manufacturing processes became more complex and required systematic methods to ensure product quality. However, the concept of quality assurance has evolved and expanded significantly over time. According to Dill (2007), the term "quality assurance" in higher education is commonly employed to refer to the practices that are implemented to uphold and enhance

academic standards, specifically the level of academic achievement attained by graduates of HEIs. Furthermore, quality assurance relates to a continuous process of evaluating, assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving the quality of a higher education system, institutions or programs (UNESCO, 2006). The primary rationale behind the heightened demand for quality assurance in HEIs is to uphold public confidence in the provision of education and to facilitate the preservation and enhancement of future academic standards in the realm of higher education (Shamelo, 2022). And a useful distinction was made between internal and external quality assurance system in HEIs. Internal quality assurance pertains to the policies and practices adopted by academic institutions themselves to monitor and enhance the quality of their educational offerings (Dill, 2010).

2.3.1. Approaches to Quality

Defining quality is notoriously difficult because the term shifts meaning depending on context, perspective, and purpose. What one person considers a hallmark of excellence, another may see as merely meeting minimum expectations, while a third might define it entirely by cost-effectiveness or personal growth outcomes. This conceptual slipperiness means that any attempt to pin down a single, universal definition of quality is bound to fall short (Harvey & Green, 1993). Recognizing this complexity, Harvey and Green (1993) explain quality in terms of five conceptions or views that describe different but interrelated ways quality is understood and judged in organizations and services, including education. In their account, "quality" is not a single fixed idea; rather, it reflects the criteria different stakeholders use when deciding what counts as "good" performance. Accordingly, an internal quality assurance system can be examined through these lenses to see whether it primarily emphasizes excellence and prestige, adherence to standards, achievement of stated goals, efficiency in resource use, or the transformative improvement of learners and institutions.

In Ethiopia, the Education and Training Authority has historically emphasized "fitness for purpose" as the primary lens for defining and judging quality in higher education. This approach measures quality by how well an institution's outputs, particularly its graduates align with predetermined national and labor market needs. ETA's definition was predominantly restricted to "fitness for purpose," evaluating institutions solely on their internal objectives. This narrow scope

neglected “fitness of purpose”, the crucial alignment of institutional goals with broader societal needs, national development priorities, and critical stakeholder demands (Melka, 2025).

2.3.1.1. Quality as Exception

According to Harvey & Green (1993), “quality as exception” conceptualizes quality as something rare, elite, and beyond ordinary expectations. In this view, quality is associated with outstanding performance, high status, prestige, and a strong reputation often evidenced through benchmarking, rankings, selective entry, and exceptional outcomes. In higher education institutions, this dimension trends to emphasize academic excellence and assumes that quality can be identified by outperforming others or by meeting unusually high standards. This conceptualization is deeply embedded in the logic of global university rankings, which have been shown to shape institutional behavior by directing attention toward research outputs, internationalization, and reputation at the expense of other educational missions (Smith & Voigt, 2020). Rankings such as the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), the Times Higher Education (THE), and the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) have established themselves as dominant arbiters of institutional quality, yet critics argue that they capture a university’s “halo” (i.e., its reputation, financial sustainability, and institutional age) rather than a holistic measure of educational quality (Smith & Voigt, 2020).

Empirical research has confirmed the “quality as exception” remains a salient conceptualization among higher education stakeholders. A study of graduate students at Addis Ababa University found that quality as exceptional, particularly as excellence, was the second most common way students conceptualized quality, linked to their views on student admission criteria and teacher recruitment standards (Ademe, 2023). However, this dimension has attracted significant critique. Van Kemenade et al. (2008) associate “quality as exception” with a “breakthrough” value system that emphasizes outstanding performance and distinction, yet note that it can lead to an excessive focus on being exceptional at the expense of broader educational values. Furthermore, scholars have argued that the predominance of exception-based thinking in higher education contributes to vertical differentiation, where a small number of elite institutions receive disproportionate attention and resources, while the vast majority of universities (over 99% of the world’s 17,000+ institutions) are rendered effectively invisible in global comparisons (UNESCO, 2016). Thus, while “quality as exception” provides clear, communicable markers of prestige, its uncritical

application risks narrowing the definition of educational quality to what can be ranked and compared, rather than what is educationally valuable.

2.3.1.2. Quality as Perfection

Quality as perfection which is often linked to consistency, defines quality as meeting specifications precisely and achieving a zero-defect standard. Quality is viewed as reliability: doing things correctly according to agreed procedures, criteria, and measurable requirements. In higher education institutions, this perspective supports systems that stress documentation, rule compliance, internal monitoring, and audit mechanisms to ensure that teaching, assessment, and administrative processes are consistent across departments and cohorts (Harvey & Green, 1993). On the other hand, according to Starkey et al. (2022), quality is differentiated from standards, defined as conformity to a specification not assessed against any standards. It emphasizes achieving zero faults at each process stage instead of final inspections for flaw detection. This conceptualization makes quality relative, permitting disciplines and individuals to establish their own zero-fault standards.

2.3.1.3. Quality as Fitness for Purpose

Quality as fitness for purpose frames quality as the extent to which an institution or program achieves its stated mission and intended outcomes. Rather than judging quality by universal excellence alone, this dimension asks whether performance is appropriate for the purpose the organization claims to serve (for example, whether curricula deliver expected learning outcomes, whether student support aligns with institutional aims, and whether graduates meet defined competence goals) (Harvey & Green, 1993). This view encourages internal quality assurance system to focus on goal-setting, planning, outcome measurement, and continuous improvement aligned to institutional objectives.

On the other hand, while Harvey & Green (1993) are known for their five-dimensional framework, a critical but often overlooked distinction exists between “quality as fitness for purpose” and the more fundamental question of “fitness of purpose.” The former asks whether an institution or program successfully meets its stated goals, focusing on conformance, reliability, and the achievement of specified outcomes. The later however, precedes this by interrogating the worthiness, relevance, and appropriateness of the goals themselves. Harvey & Green (1993)

explicitly acknowledge this distinction, arguing that it is possible to be perfectly fit for a purpose that is trivial, immoral, or outdated; thus, a judgement on "fitness for purpose" is incomplete without an evaluation of the quality of the purpose itself (Campbell & Rozsnyai, 2002).

Although Harvey and Green do not use "fitness of purpose" as a separate standalone dimension, the logic underpinning it is embedded within their framework. They suggest that assessing the appropriateness of a given purpose requires a different evaluative logic, one that overlaps with their concepts of "quality as transformation" (which emphasizes empowerment and critical social change) and "quality as exception" (which uses benchmarking against elite institutions to reveal unambitious or misaligned missions). Consequently, a robust conception of quality in higher education institutions must move beyond measuring conformance to include ongoing, critical reflection on whether an institution's purposes remain relevant, ethical, and valuable to its stakeholders and the wider society (Stephenson, 1998).

2.3.1.4. Quality as Value for Money

Quality as value for money conceptualizes quality as achieving worthwhile outcomes efficiently relative to the sources invested (Harvey & Green, 1993). Here quality is not only about academic standards or goal achievement, but also about how economically and effectively resources are used to produce results (e.g., cost-effectiveness, productivity, affordability, and reducing waste). In higher education institutions, this dimension often leads to qualify assurance attention on indicators such as unit costs, resource allocation efficiency, staff utilization, graduation or progression outcomes, and the sustainability of quality improvements within budget constraints. Van Kemenade et al. (2008) position this concept within a broader framework of quality values, associating it with a "control" value system that that emphasizes efficiency, measurement, and accountability. However, the value for money approach has not been without critique. Bengu et al. (2007) argue that it is often "perceived and significantly misconstrued as placing emphasis on financial efficiency," which can create tension between financial considerations and evaluation systems notes that "value for money" is frequently used alongside "student satisfaction" and "student as customers" as terms that risk reducing education to a transactional, economic calculation rather than a memorial or developmental enterprise. Despite these concerns, the value for money dimension remains influential, particularly among funding bodies and government agencies that require demonstrable returns on public investment in higher education (Cheng, 2016)

2.3.1.5. Quality as Transformation

Quality as transformation treats as a process of meaningful change, especially the improvement of learners and the institutions over time. In this conception, quality is demonstrated through enhanced knowledge, skills, competencies, personal development, employability, and broader educational growth. Harvey & Green (1993) root this transformative notion of quality in the philosophy of "qualitative change," drawing on dialectical traditions from Aristotle to Max, and argue that education is not a service for a customer but an ongoing process of transformation of the participant. Cheng (2014) provides empirical depth to this concept, revealing through interviews with PhD supervisors and students that transformation involves five distinct forms of development: intellectual, critical, personal, emotional, and physical, with quality perceived as "goodness" and "value" expressed as an expectation of something meaningful. For internal quality assurance system, this dimension emphasizes enhancement: using evidence not only to confirm compliance or meet targets, but also to transform teaching practices, learning experiences, student support, and institutional capacity so that students and the institution develop beyond their starting point. Cheng (2016) further argues that the empowerment of the student is a key element of transformative quality, as education is an ongoing process of transformation that includes cognitive transcendence in the learning process. This notion of quality may be particularly appropriate when there have been significant changes in the profile of learners, for example, when changes in society or politics have enhanced access to higher education for large numbers of disadvantaged learners.

The transformative dimension, however, has faced challenges in practical application. Lomas (2002) found that while transformation was identified by senior UK higher education managers as one of the two most appropriate definitions of quality (alongside fitness for purpose), problems of measuring quality as transformation have led to difficulties in its practical application. Despite these measurement challenges, contemporary quality assurance frameworks have increasingly embraced value-added approaches that operationalize transformation. Khodabocus et al. (2025) note that institutional quality policies in teaching and learning have evolved globally toward a learner-centered, outcome-based framework that emphasizes supporting students in developing both academic knowledge and real-world skills, shifting focus from mere compliance to demonstrable student growth. This enhancement-oriented approach positions quality as a dynamic, developmental process rather than a static standard to be achieved.

2.3.2. Internal Quality Assurance System in HEIs

Internal quality assurance is an integral part of the overall quality management system within academic institutions. It encompasses a range of activities and processes that are designed to monitor, evaluate, and enhance the quality of education provided by the institution (Dill, 2007) . It pertains to the processes implemented within organizations to scrutinize, appraise, evaluate, audit, or otherwise verify, inspect, or guarantee the excellence of the education offered or the research conducted (Martin, 2018b). Moreover, Martin (2018b) further states that internal quality assurance stands as the most efficient means of fostering progress, provided that there is a collective desire for improvement among management, academics, and students according to this author. It refers to the measures taken by academic institutions to oversee and enhance the quality of the education they provide, whereas external quality assurance refers to extra-institutional measures taken by external organizations to guarantee the caliber of programs and institutions of higher learning (Ayano, 2020).

There is a prevalent argument that external quality assurance tends to focus more on accountability, providing final judgments, and offering a snapshot of quality at a specific point in time. On the other hand, internal quality assurance is often seen as more formative in nature, emphasizing ongoing improvement efforts and the development of a quality culture within academic institutions (Kahsay, 2012). The arguments suggest that while externally regulated quality assurance processes may not always improve in quality, they can complement internally regulated quality assurance procedures. It can therefore be argued that, when internalized and controlled, a formal quality assurance system encourages continuous quality enhancement that requires organizational commitment for self-evaluation, whereas an external quality assurance system serves as a vehicle for supporting and enabling internal practices (Dill, 2007).

2.4. Quality Assurance Methodologies

Different countries apply different concepts and arrangements for quality assurance in higher education institutions, reflecting their regulatory systems, stakeholder expectations, and educational policies. In many systems, quality assurance is treated not only as an inspection activity but also as an ongoing institutional mechanism for improvement.

Quality assurance is defined by (HERQA, 2006) as a planned, systematic, structured, continuous process of reviewing and evaluating all university programs and their core elements such as courses, instructional materials, teaching, learning, and assessment with the explicit goal of maintaining and improving quality through continuous quality care efforts. It also emphasizes verifying that the relevant conditions are in place so that students can achieve the standards set by the university and relevant national bodies (DAAD, 2010).

In parallel, the World Bank (2013) frames quality assurance as planned and systematic processes that create trust in the educational services delivered by training providers, particularly when those services operate under the authority of competent authorities. Even though the specific methods used in quality assurance reviews vary across countries and agencies depending on whether systems prioritize accreditation, audit, benchmarking, or continuous improvement, most quality assurance reviews rely on one or combination of a limited set of core approaches. Typically, these approaches include internal quality assurance, where institutions regularly collect evidence and use it to improve curricula, teaching, and assessment, and external quality assurance, where external bodies evaluate programs or institutions against predefined criteria and standards(World Bank, 2010) .

2.4.1. Accreditation

Accreditation refers to the quality assurance process under which services and operations of educational and training institutions are evaluated and verified by an external body to determine if applicable and recognized standards are met which is conducted by an accrediting body refers to legal entities that develop a set of standards and accredit programs and or institutions meeting predefined quality standards (ETA, 2023b).

Ethiopian education dates back to the early 1930s, but according to the World Bank (2003), its quality and relevance have fallen short of expectations. Despite this, the Ethiopian government has shown strong commitment to improve higher education, as reflected in the 1994 Education and Training Policy (ETP). This policy emphasizes the need for relevant, appropriate, and nationally standardized education, with curricula based on sound pedagogical and psychological principles (ETA, 2023b).

Both the 1994 ETP and the 2018 policy study highlight higher education quality as a key national and international priority. In 2003, Ethiopia demonstrated its commitment by ratifying the Higher Education Proclamation and establishing HERQA (Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency) as an autonomous body under the Ministry of Education. HERQA's role includes overseeing accreditation, which was further detailed in the revised Proclamation of 2018 (1152/2018), where Articles 72 through 82 comprehensively address accreditation processes such as application, issuance, renewal, revocation, and appeals (ETA, 2025).

Thus, accreditation is one of the fundamental mechanisms for ensuring that higher education institutions meet and maintain established standards of quality, relevance, and integrity (Adamu and Addamu, 2012). It serves both an external accountability function, reassuring students, employers, government, and the public that an institution's programs are credible and valuable, and an internal improvement function, encouraging institutions to engage in continuous self-evaluation, reflection, and enhancement (Harvey, 2002). When institutions also conduct internal accreditation or self-assessment processes, they foster a proactive culture of quality that complements external oversight. Ultimately, accreditation protects learners' investments, facilitates mobility and recognition of qualifications, and drives institutional development toward excellence.

While accreditation standards are essential for maintaining educational quality and accountability, they are not without challenges and critiques. Critics argue that such standards may unintentionally inhibit innovation by enforcing a one-size-fits-all approach to quality, making it difficult for institutions to experiment with new educational models. Additionally, accreditation criteria are often seen as too rigid, preventing institutions from adapting to changing circumstances or addressing unique local needs. The process also places a significant resource strain on institutions, particularly smaller colleges and universities, due to the high costs and administrative burdens involved. Furthermore, concerns about bias and inequity have been raised, as some criteria may inadvertently favor certain types of institutions while penalizing others. Finally, a lack of transparency in accreditation processes leaves stakeholders unable to fully understand how decisions are made or how well institutions meet the required standards (Kayyali, 2024).

2.4.2. Institutional Quality Audit

One of HERQA's primary tools for proving quality improvement in higher education institutions is the institutional quality audit. Many of the institutions that HERQA reviewed showed a lack of responsiveness in putting the audit reports' recommendations into practice, despite the existence of legal procedures for accountability. This disparity demonstrated the need for a more efficient system to guarantee that organizations take quality issues seriously. As a result, HERQA underwent substantial changes and, by Proclamation No. 1263/2021, became the Education and Training Authority (ETA). The Council of Ministers also approved Regulation No. 515/2022 to specify the Authority's duties and organizational structure. Since then, ETA has revised the quality audit procedures and implemented a system of certification for HEIs based on the degree of functionality of their internal quality assurance systems (ETA, 2025).

ETA (2025) defined quality audit as a systematic and independent evaluation process that assesses whether the internal quality assurance system established by a HEIs is effective or not. In addition, (Harvey, 2005) defined the term ‘audit’, in the context of higher education, as a process for checking that procedures are in place to assure quality, integrity or standards of provision and outcomes.

Audits are a methodical way to assess the overall performance of an institution as well as the caliber and efficacy of educational programs. As a result, audits evaluate these systems' ability to sustain and consistently raise the standard of educational programs.

According to ETA:

> There are two different types of external quality audits carried out by ETA: program and institutional. Higher education institutions' (HEIs) internal quality assurance systems are the main focus of institutional quality audits, which evaluate how well these systems support the institutions' overall quality objectives and adherence to set standards. Program audits, on the other hand, are system-oriented assessments that determine how well educational programs' unique quality assurance procedures work (ETA, 2025, p.2).

These audits examine how well the programs' internal quality assurance system operate, ensuring that all processes from curriculum design and delivery to assessment and continuous improvement are aligned with institutional goals and industry standards. The structure, criteria, and recommendations for carrying out institutional quality audits in Ethiopia are described in the Quality Audit Standard for HEIs document of ETA 2025. The institutional quality audit evaluates how well internal quality assurance processes meet institutional goals, adhere to ETA regulations, and meet both national and international quality standards.

In order to guarantee high-quality and pertinent education throughout Ethiopia, the Education and Training Authority (ETA) conducts an Institutional Quality Audit. First, it fosters continuously improving internal quality assurance systems by identifying institutional strengths and areas for development. Second, it encourages accountability by making organizations answerable to the public, parents, and students for the efficient use of resources and making sure that their operations are in line with their vision, mission, and strategic goals. Third, it increases openness by making information about institutional operations, governance, and results publicly available. This promotes stakeholder trust and helps staff and prospective students make well-informed decisions. Fourth, it helps institutions link policies, strategic plans, and resource allocations with national developmental needs by providing decision-making assistance through audit results and suggestions. In the end, ETA's quality audit guarantees compliance while laying the groundwork for ongoing development, accountability, and transparency, all of which are critical to realizing ETA's goal of being an internationally renowned leader in quality assurance by 2032.

In terms of legislative frameworks, HERQA was created under Proclamation No. 351/2003 to guarantee quality and relevance in higher education through the use of two techniques: quality audits (for all HEIs) and licensing (for private HEIs only). Despite the fact that HERQA examined a large number of institutions, poor accountability and insufficient oversight prevented many HEIs from implementing audit findings. A new legal framework was required since the current legal provisions were insufficient. As a result, HEIs' quality assurance obligations were detailed in HEP No. 650/2009 and Proclamation No. 1152/2019. Institutions are now legally obligated to carry out the recommendations of the Authority's quality audit under HEP 1152/2019 (Article 21/6) and Council of Ministers Regulation No. 515/2022.

2.4.3. Peer Review

The peer review process in quality assurance systems in higher education in Ethiopia and globally involves various practices and challenges. In Ethiopia, the implementation of quality assurance is crucial for enhancing academic performance and standards. However, the sector faces challenges such as limited supervisor accessibility, excessive supervision workloads, and difficulties in mentoring underprepared students. These challenges hinder the effectiveness of the quality assurance system and require improvements to promote equitable and effective higher education across the region (Dibaba, 2022).

In higher education, peer review is a recognized academic procedure. Peer review, in its conventional form, usually entails a visit by a group of reputable scholars in a specific field to conduct an evaluation. Peer evaluations have recently incorporated other specialists, such as business or industry professionals. This is particularly true when evaluating professional programs or fields (Saketa, 2014).

2.4.4. Self-Evaluation

Self-Evaluation is the phase of the accreditation process in which an institutionally recognized group of professionals collects and reviews data about the program in order to identify strengths to be maintained and effectively address areas of improvement. This process can also be called self-review, self-assessment, self-audit, or self-evaluation. It is a mandatory step in the process of evaluation to obtain accreditation and guarantees the program's compliance with standards via a transparent, constructive self-evaluation and improvement process (ETA, 2023a).

According to the document of the self-evaluation guide for higher education institutional accreditation:

> The self-evaluation to be objective and evidence-based, the evaluation needs to have a tool that is in line with international and regional accreditation standards. To be accredited, a program must use the current program accreditation standards developed by ETA. In the process of self-evaluation, the program owner brings together representation from all its stakeholders in order to collect

> and review data, identify strengths and areas for improvement, and develop future plans and strategies (ETA, 2023a, p.1).

Besides, the examination of institutional activities and practices by members of the specific institution is known as self-evaluation (Saketa, 2014). Furthermore, (Craft, 2003) defined it as seeing oneself through external quality assurance agents, self-training or self-evaluation staff development, and using both local and global information about performance indicators, descriptions of best practices, and new developments in teaching, learning, and assessment.

Shamelo (2022) defines self-evaluation as a method for keeping an eye on, evaluating, and appreciating professional behavior and its results in order to help create better learning opportunities. Because of this, an organization's planning, execution, analysis, and reporting procedures must to include self-evaluation. In addition to starting the QA process and working toward their own predetermined objectives, HEIs should carry out efficient self-evaluations of their operations at the departmental, college, and institutional levels. Universities should therefore make self-evaluation a regular practice. The more self-evaluation is emphasized in the monitoring process, the more HEIs will be able to accept responsibility for their own quality development instead of only using it as a source of information for the outside quality assurance organization. Coordination of the self-evaluation process by professionals with pertinent expertise is essential (ETA, 2023a).

2.5. Focus Areas of Institutional Quality Audit in Ethiopian HEIs: A Critical Review

The Education and Training Authority (ETA), established through Proclamation No. 1263/2021 as the successor to the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA), has developed a comprehensive framework for conducting institutional quality audits in Ethiopian HEIs. This framework is organized around seven thematic focus areas that serve as the foundation for evaluating institutional performance, ensuring accountability, and promoting continuous quality improvement (ETA, 2025). However, a critical examination of this framework reveals a fundamental conceptual distinction; while the first six focus areas represent substantive domains of institutional activity, the seventh one (the internal quality assurance system) functions not as a parallel domain but as the overarching meta-system that encompasses, integrates, and assures

quality across all other domains. This section critically reviews the seven focus areas, clarifies the distinctive role of IQAS within the framework, and synthesizes the literature on institutional quality audit frameworks worldwide.

Globally, quality assurance in higher education has undergone significant transformation over the past three decades. The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) has played a pivotal role in promoting global cooperation and the exchange of best practices in quality assurance (INQAAHE, 2021). According to Adzidzah and Yudiawan (2025), the quality assurance of higher education in the contemporary era has shifted from traditional approaches focusing on administrative compliance to more holistic and adaptive paradigms that emphasize outcomes-based education and data-driven decision-making. This shift reflects broader societal changes, including the integration of advanced technology and the emphasis on cross-cultural competencies and non-technical skills such as creativity, collaboration, and ethics.

2.5.1. The Conceptual Distinction of the Focus Areas

A critical conceptual clarification is necessary before examining the seven focus areas. While ETA (2025) presents all seven areas as parallel categories, a deeper analysis reveals a fundamental distinction between the first six focus areas and the seventh. The first six focus areas such as Vision, Mission and Governance; Infrastructure and Learning Resources; Academic and Support Staff; Student Affairs and Graduate Outcomes; Program Development and Delivery; and Research, Community Engagement, Industry Linkage and Incubation and Innovation, represent the substantive domains of institutional activity. These are the core functions and operational areas that higher education institutions perform in pursuit of their educational mission.

In contrast, the seventh focus area (internal quality assurance system) represents the meta-system that establishes, monitors, evaluates, and improves the quality of all other domains. The ETA document itself defines IQAS as “a structured framework implemented by a higher education institution to monitor, evaluate, and enhance the quality of its academic and administrative processes, ensuring the institution meeting standards, achieve its mission, and promotes continuous improvement” (ETA, 2025). This definition explicitly positions IQAS as the

framework that governs quality across all academic and administrative processes, not as one domain among many.

The document further states that the purpose of the institutional quality audit is “to assess the robustness and effectiveness of the HEIs’ internal quality assurance system” (ETA, 2025). This language confirms that IQAS is the primary object of evaluation, while the other areas serve as the substantive domains through which the effectiveness of IQAS is demonstrated. In other words, the audit evaluates whether the institution has a functioning IQAS and whether that system effectively assures quality across governance, infrastructure, staff, students, programs, and research.

This conceptual distinction is not merely semantic; it has profound implications for how institutions design their quality assurance system and how auditors evaluate them. Recognizing IQAS as the overarching meta-system rather than a parallel domain positions quality assurance as an integrative, system-wide function rather than a discrete set of activities. This understanding aligns with the ADRI evaluation model, which evaluates Approach, Development, Results, and Improvement across all institutional functions, precisely because IQAS is expected to operate across the entire institutions (Woodhouse, 2003). Regarding the ADRI model specifically, Tamrat (2025) acknowledges its potential to transform the sector by shifting focus "from an earlier focus on input requirements to a new focus on process and output" and by linking audit outcomes to accreditation decisions, which "corrects past misunderstandings and offers additional enforcement capacity" . However, he cautions that the model's success is not guaranteed, identifying critical challenges including the substantial administrative burden it imposes, the demands it places on resources and data management, and the need for significant capacity building within both institutions and the ETA itself.

2.5.2. ETA’s Quality Audit Approach

A distinctive feature of ETA’s quality audit framework is its dual emphasis on both “fitness for purpose” and “fitness of purpose”. The fitness for purpose approach evaluates how effectively a higher education institution meets its stated intentions, including its mission, vision, and strategic goals. The fitness of purpose approach goes further by assessing the relevance and appropriateness of these strategic intentions in light of the institution’s legal and regulatory responsibilities, national priorities, and stakeholder expectations (ETA, 2025). This dual approach ensures that

institutions are evaluated not just on their ability to meet their stated goals, but also on the relevance and appropriateness of those goals within the broader national and global context.

According to Melka (2025), this dual approach represents a significant conceptual advancement over frameworks that focus exclusively on fitness for purpose. The previous HERQA framework was predominantly restricted to "fitness for purpose," evaluating institutions solely on their internal objectives, thereby neglecting the crucial alignment of institutional goals with broader societal needs and national development priorities. The ETA's expanded conceptualization integrates both concepts, allowing for greater recognition of individual institutions' identities while ensuring that institutional purposes are appropriate, relevant, and aligned with national development goals.

As Martin and Stella (2007) argue, external quality assurance systems must balance respect for institutional autonomy with accountability to broader societal interests. By evaluating both the achievement of stated goals and worthiness of those goals themselves, ETA's framework addresses a critical limitation of purely goal-based quality assessment: the possibility that an institution might be perfectly fit for a purpose that is trivial, outdated, or misaligned with national development priorities (ETA, 2025). This resonates with findings from the OECD (2025), which emphasizes that a well-functioning and strategically integrated standards and quality assurance system can enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, and agility of regulatory frameworks. However, the implementation of this dual approach presents significant challenges. Determining the appropriateness of instructional purposes requires subjective judgements that may very across different stakeholders. As Melka (2025) notes, balancing accountability with institutional autonomy remains a persistent tension, and the strengthened enforcement mechanisms may create resistance from institutions concerned about preserving their autonomy.

2.5.3. The ADRI Evaluation Model as the Operational Framework for IQAS

ETA's institutional audits are conducted using the ADRI (Approach, Development, Result, and Improvement) model, a structured and cyclical evaluation framework that emphasizes not only how institutions plan and implement their quality assurance systems but also the results these systems produce and the mechanisms in place for continuous improvement (ETA, 2025). This model has been successfully employed in quality assurance systems across multiple countries,

including Australia, Malaysia, Oman, Singapore, and South Africa (Tamrat, 2025). The adoption of the ADRI model represents a strategic move from input-focused evaluation to outcome-based assessment, recognizing that quality cannot be assured by focusing solely on goals, plans, and inputs but must emphasize what is actually achieved. This aligns with the OECD's recommendation that policymakers should make use of flexible regulatory frameworks by utilizing standards and quality assurance tools that can be more responsive than legislation to market innovations and stakeholder needs.

Compared to traditional input-focused evaluation model, the ADRI model represents a more mature and comprehensive approach to quality assessment. Kettunen (2012) notes that external and internal quality audits in higher education must balance formative and summative purposes, supporting both accountability and improvement. The ADRI model's cyclical nature explicitly links these purposes: results inform improvement, which in turn refines approaches and deployment strategies. However, the ADRI model also presents implementation challenges. The process of data collection, follow-up, and continuous improvement requires substantial resources, time, and energy on the part of both institutions and the quality assurance authority (ETA, 2025). Melka (2025) acknowledges that the administrative burden imposed by the model and the demands it places on resources, capacity, and data management are substantial, and historically, resource constraints have been a serious limitation for Ethiopian quality assurance efforts. The level of awareness required for successful implementation is considerable; institutions and audit panel members must understand the ADRI model's philosophy, methodology, and application (ETA, 2025).

2.5.4. Analysis of Institutional Quality Audit Focus Areas

The first six areas represent the substantive domains of institutional activity that IQAS is designed to monitor, evaluate, and enhance. Each domain is examined below.

2.5.4.1. Vision, Mission and Governance

This focus area addresses the foundational elements of institutional identity and leadership. It requires institutions to establish clear and realistic vision, mission, and goals developed with stakeholder participation, aligned with national priorities, and approved by governing body. The governance component mandates appropriate governance systems, defined roles and

responsibilities, grievance handling mechanisms, risk identification and mitigation systems, and regular monitoring and evaluation using key performance indicators (ETA, 2025). Effective governance in higher education is widely treated as a precondition for accountability, ethical stewardship, and institutional performance (World Bank, 2020).

A significant strength of this focus area is its emphasis on stakeholder participation in policy formulation, which aligns with stakeholder theory in higher education governance (Freeman et al., 2010). The requirement of regular monitoring and evaluation using KPIs introduces accountability mechanisms that are essential for continuous improvement and performance management (Neely, 2005). The inclusion of risk identification and mitigation systems reflects contemporary management practices that have become increasingly important in higher education quality assurance and compliance cultures (COSO, 2017). The OECD (2025) emphasizes that preserving the integrity, independence, and impartiality of quality assurance bodies is essential to enable effective, evidence-based standards and quality assurance tools that can optimize regulatory outcomes.

However, several weaknesses are evident. The focus area does not explicitly address the balance between institutional autonomy and external accountability, a persistent tension in quality assurance systems globally (Dill & van Vught, 2010; Martin & Stella, 2007). Melka (2025) notes that this tension is particularly acute in Ethiopian context, where strengthened enforcement mechanisms linking audit outcomes to accreditation decisions may create resistance from institutions concerned about preserving their autonomy. This autonomy-accountability tension is also discussed in the literature on regulation, compliance, and "governance through audit," where institutions may experience audit as coercive rather than developmental (Power, 1997).

2.5.4.2. Infrastructure and Learning Resources

This focus area highlights the procedures and mechanisms that HEIs must set up for efficient administration of learning resources and physical and digital infrastructure. It focuses on obtaining, making use of, and keeping, upgrading, and preserving resources in accordance with the objective of the organization (ETA, 2025).

The strengths of this focus area include its comprehensive coverage of both physical and digital resources, recognition of the importance of maintenance and calibration (not just initial

acquisition), and attention to environmental sustainability through waste management requirements. Resource management in quality assurance is consistent with the principle of "fitness for purpose," where inputs and resources must be adequate for intended learning outcomes and institutional responsibilities (ESG, 2015). The emphasis on digitalization of core and support functions reflects contemporary trends in higher education, particularly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic (OECD, 2021). Adzidzah and Yudiawan (2025) identify the use of artificial intelligence and big data analytics for data-driven decision-making as a key trend in contemporary quality assurance. Broader evidence also shows that analytics can support quality assurance and decision-making when governance, data quality, privacy, and capacity are addressed (OECD, 2021).

The focus area does not adequately address the financial constraints that many Ethiopian HEIs face in acquiring and maintaining infrastructure. The guidelines assume a level of resource availability that may not reflect reality for many institutions (ETA, 2025). Equity and feasibility concerns in quality assurance frameworks are well documented in studies of capacity gaps and uneven institutional readiness (ESG, 2015). The OECD (2025) further emphasizes that failing to account for quality infrastructure services can affect economic activity, lead to inefficiencies, hinder compliance, and weaken intended regulatory impact.

2.5.4.3. Academic and Support Staff

This focus area addresses human resource management systems, including recruitment, selection, appointment, promotion, termination, professional development, performance evaluation, inclusiveness, and disciplinary procedures. It requires institutions to conduct periodic human resource needs analysis and implement staff retention plans (ETA, 2025). The strength of this area include its comprehensive coverage of the HRM cycle from recruitment through professional development to retention. The emphasis on fair and transparent performance evaluation and the requirement for appeal systems reflects good governance principles and due to process (Tight, 2020). Contemporary quality assurance requires attention to cross-cultural competencies and non-technical skills such as creativity, collaboration, and ethics (Adzidzah & Yudiawan, 2025). Quality assurance literature also highlights that staff competence and teaching capacity are central to learning quality, not only institutional compliance (ESG, 2015; Harvey and Williams, 2010).

However, the focus area does not adequately address the challenges of recruiting and retaining qualified staff in a context of limited resources and international brain drain. The professional development requirements, while important, may be unrealistic for institutions that struggle to meet basic operational needs (ETA, 2025). The previous HERQA framework suffered from inadequate accountability, fragmented oversight, and limited program reach, challenges that continue to affect implementation of staff-related standards (Melka, 2025). In parallel, the literature on quality culture recognizes that staff development requires stable resourcing and credible institutional incentives, not only formal requirements (ESG, 2015; Huisman and Currie, 2004).

2.5.4.4. Student Affairs and Graduate Outcomes

This focus area encompasses student admission, student support services, and student progression and graduate outcomes. It requires institutions to establish admission policies that consider diversity, verify student credentials, integrate student information management systems, provide academic and non-academic support services, implement retention mechanisms, conduct tracer studies, and maintain alumni relationships (ETA, 2025). A notable strength of this focus area is its attention to the full student lifecycle from admission through graduation to alumni engagement. The requirement for tracer studies to evaluate graduate effectiveness and program outcomes reflects an outcome-oriented approach to quality assessment that aligns with international best practices (UNESCO, 2016). Brennan and Shah (2000) identify the shift in focus from input-output to outcomes-based education that emphasizes the relevance of graduates to industry needs as a key trend in contemporary quality assurance. Nevertheless, several weaknesses are evident. The support services requirements, while comprehensive, may exceed the capacity of many institutions to implement given resource constraints. Also, the focus area does not explicitly address the specific needs of different student populations, such as first-generation students, students with disabilities, or students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Student success and inclusion are now widely treated as core quality dimensions rather than optional add-ons (OECD, 2021).

2.5.4.5. Program Development and Delivery

One of the important focus areas of institutional quality audit is program development and delivery. This focus area addresses program design, development, approval, review, learning and

teaching, and student assessment. It requires institutions to conduct program needs assessments, secure necessary resources before program operation, equip faculty with pedagogical skills, use technology-assisted learning, employ diverse teaching methods, maintain balance between theory and practice, and implement valid and reliable assessment methods (ETA, 2025). The strengths of this focus area include its comprehensive coverage of the curriculum lifecycle and its emphasis on alignment between learning outcomes, teaching methods, and assessment. This "constructive alignment" logic is a well-established approach in outcomes-based education and assurance (Biggs & Tang, 2003). Furthermore, Adzidzah and Yudiawan (2025) identify the adoption of agile approaches and flexible curriculum design as a key trend in contemporary quality assurance, noting that collaboration between academia, industry, and government is key to creating a resilient and relevant education ecosystem. However, the requirement to secure necessary resources before program operation may be unrealistic for institutions that rely on external funding or need to demonstrate demand before resources can be allocated (ETA, 2025). Additionally, the focus area does not adequately address challenges of implementing active learning methods in large classes, a common reality in Ethiopian public universities. The literature notes that teaching innovation requires scalable pedagogical strategies, not only policy statements (UNESCO, 2020).

2.5.4.6. Research, Community Engagement, Industry Linkage and Incubation and Innovation

This focus area addresses research policies, thematic prioritization, funding, monitoring, publication, collaboration, impact evaluation, community engagement, industry partnerships, and incubation and innovation. It requires institutions to establish entrepreneurship and innovation centers, integrate innovation into the curriculum, protect intellectual property rights, and provide technical and advisory services to small and medium enterprises (ETA, 2025). A significant strength of this focus area is its recognition that higher education institutions have responsibilities beyond teaching, including knowledge generation and societal contribution. The inclusion of incubation and innovation reflects contemporary emphasis on universities as drivers of economic development (OECD, 2025). Quality assurance in the contemporary era demands fundamental reforms where collaboration between academia, industry, and government is key to creating a resilient and relevant education ecosystem (Adzidzah & Yudiawan, 2025).

Nevertheless, several weaknesses are apparent. The research requirements presuppose a level of research capacity and funding that many Ethiopian HEIs do not possess. Melka (2025) notes that the previous HERQA framework suffered from input-centric evaluations that did not adequately capture research and community engagement outcomes. Research quality evaluation literature also warns that impact indicators must be interpreted carefully, since outcomes can be long-term and context-dependent (OECD, 2021)

2.5.4.7. Internal Quality Assurance system

Quality assurance is a common practice in higher education worldwide. Yet the literature on internal quality assurance system pays little attention to measuring the effectiveness of quality assurance systems. IQAS can produce significant results within HEIs; in particular, it can improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning, increase employability, and enhance management (UNESCO, 2018). Unlike the first six substantive domains, IQAS is not a domain of institutional activity but rather the meta-system that governs how quality is assured across all domains. The ETA document defines IQAS as "a structured framework implemented by a HEI to monitor, evaluate, and enhance the quality of its academic and administrative processes (ETA, 2025). The IQAS focus area requires institutions to establish comprehensive quality assurance policies, quality assurance structures with decision-making autonomy, quality care committees at institutional, faculty, and program levels, periodic self-evaluation, and regular monitoring and evaluation using KPIs (ETA, 2025). The document further specifies that the quality assurance and improvement strategy applies to "all aspects of the institution and its activities".

The strengths of this focus area include its emphasis on institutional ownership of quality assurance processes and the requirement for quality assurance structures at multiple organizational levels (ETA, 2025). The requirement for decision-making autonomy for quality assurance units addresses a critical weakness identified in many quality assurance systems worldwide (D. D. Dill & van Vught, 2010). The emphasis on periodic self-evaluation aligns with international best practices that recognize self-evaluation as the foundation of effective quality assurance (ESG, 2015). Self-evaluation is also closely associated with building "quality culture," which is widely recognized as necessary for sustained improvement beyond compliance (Harvey & Williams, 2010).

However, the focus area has significant limitations. It does not adequately address resource requirements for effective internal quality assurance, including adequate staffing, training, and technological support. The requirement for quality committees at all levels may be challenging for institutions with limited human resources. Melka (2025) notes that the previous HERQA framework suffered from fragmented oversight and institutional malpractices, and the new framework's success depends on whether these systemic challenges can be overcome. The quality assurance literature similarly argues that IQA systems fail when they become "paper systems" without sufficient capacity and leadership commitment (Power, 1997).

2.6. Student Support System in HEIs

One of the quality assurance systems focus areas in many countries including Ethiopia is the quality of student support provision system in higher education institutions. According to Sukhdeep Kaur (2016), the quality of higher education depends directly on the student support provision in higher education institutions. Education risks becoming nothing more than a process for issuing degrees if higher education institutions do not provide sufficient support for their students. This indicates that the student support provision is highly important for the quality of education in HEIs across the world.

Most HEIs these days are attempting to get more students and keep them longer so they can be financially independent and economically stable (Zhang et al., 2019). However, in order to maintain the standard of instruction and guarantee access to high-quality support services in higher education institutions, a large enrollment goal necessitates a substantial increase in resources. The strength of the support system in HEIs must increase with the number of students they may accept.

Research shows that university staff and international students frequently have different perspectives about students' needs and the staff's role in satisfying those needs, despite the fact that many HEIs offer a variety of student support services (Roberts & Dunworth, 2012). Besides, the amount of resources that HEIs invest affects the quality of student support services.

According to Admas & Teferra (2017), pupils who used student support services outperformed their counterparts in the classroom. It is commonly known that student support services are offered in higher education institutions. But the crucial query still stands: how much are these services

offered to students? It is crucial to assess these provisions' quality. Additionally, it is useful to find out how students feel about the support services offered by HEIs.

On the other hand, measuring students' satisfaction or perception in educational institutions can be considered as one of the greatest challenges of the quality movement which is one of the several that revolves around quality enhancement progresses in HEIs (Quinn et al., 2009). The concept of service quality is always studied from the point of view of consumer. Hence students are the main consumers of HEIs, it attracted the interest of various authors to explore this area of research (Kaur & Amanpreet, 2021).

In the process of the development of the quality assurance system in the field of higher education, a number of strategies and frameworks have been developed for the betterment of education in higher learning institutions. And one of the key internal quality assurance systems used to guarantee the caliber of education in HEIs is the provision of student support (Abidin, 2015). It is thought that students' academic performance suffers as a result of the inadequate student assistance system. On the other hand, a system that helps students achieve their goals would be an excellent student support system. The growth in expansion, both in terms of enrollments and the number of universities, has, however, not been accompanied by a proportional increase in learner support services to enhance the quality of teaching and learning (Michubu et al., 2017) .

Many previous studies have examined Ethiopian higher education quality assurance policies, practices, and concerns. These studies have also looked into the causes of the low efficacy of quality improvement programs in higher education (Oliso, 2023). However, the student support network has received less attention. In order to manage and meet the needs of students and, most importantly, improve the quality of services offered to them, universities must identify, correct, and redesign their academic support system in order to become academic powerhouses of education and research enhanced by industrial and business experience (Ntoyakhe & Ngibe, 2020).

Recently, in Ethiopian higher education institutions, it is a mandatory for postgraduate students to publish an article in a reputable journal from their MA/PhD thesis. This is taken as a requirement for presenting or defending their thesis before graduating from a higher education institution. As this issue is a rule for all Ethiopian public higher education institutions, it is important to deal with the research and publication support system in HEIs.

Additionally, for a number of reasons, it is crucial to look into the effectiveness and sufficiency of the student support system in higher education institutions. Since academic advising and tutoring can greatly improve academic achievement (Bettinger & Baker, 2011), this type of support system initially plays a critical influence in student success and retention rate (Johnson et al., 2022). Furthermore, having access to mental health services promotes wellbeing, assisting students in stress management and creating a feeling of community inside the school. Furthermore, having access to mental health services helps students manage their stress (Eisenberg et al., 2009) and fosters a sense of community within the school (Kramer et al., 2025).

To address the various needs of student populations and guarantee individualized support for everyone, a comprehensive assessment is also crucial. Furthermore, an institution's reputation is directly impacted by the quality of its support services (Masserini et al., 2019), since successful graduates raise the institution's profile and draw in new students (Johnson et al., 2022).

Despite the recognized importance of effective student support systems in enhancing academic success, mental well-being, and retention rates (Estacio et al., 2022; Johnson et al., 2022), many higher education institutions exhibit significant variability in the adequacy, accessibility, and quality of these support services (Mireku et al., 2024). This raises critical concerns about whether existing support systems are sufficiently meeting the diverse needs of the student population, including underrepresented and vulnerable groups. Additionally, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the effectiveness of these systems in fostering positive outcomes for students. This study seeks to critically assess the current state of student support systems to ensure that all students receive the necessary resources to thrive academically and personally.

2.6.1. Types of Student Support System

The student support system (SSS) is a collection of resources and activities designed to facilitate and enhance the learning process for students. It acts as a channel between the student and the institution. The student support system offered in different forms of higher education has a direct impact on the quality of higher education. Higher education institutions risk becoming mere degree-granting entities if they fail to provide adequate support for their students (Sukhdeep Kaur, 2016). This underscores a significant impact that a well-structured student support system can have on the overall quality of education in higher education institutions.

Research illustrates that adequate support systems, including academic advising, mental health services, and career counseling enhance student performance and retention rates (Neuville et al., 2007). Conversely, a lack of sufficient support can lead to diminished educational quality and student satisfaction (Ajayi, 2024). Thus, the effective provision of student support services is essential; when these services are robust, they contribute to a high-quality educational experience, whereas inadequate support can result in a decline in educational outcomes.

Regarding research and publication support system, students are also under pressure to publish research articles, work to support their families financially, and acquire more general skills that will improve their employment once they graduate. Pressures and expectations can have a detrimental effect on the production of new knowledge, groundbreaking work, keeping up with the current body of knowledge by critically analyzing contemporary literature, and producing high-quality theses by postgraduate students if the necessary infrastructure, supervision, and research environment are not available (Abiddin & Ismail, 2014).

It is believed that students acquire a multiple skills from postgraduate programs as shown in Fig. 1 below; however, deficiency in any of these skills will lead postgraduate students to experience delays in their studies or withdrawing from the program altogether (Petrus, 2022).

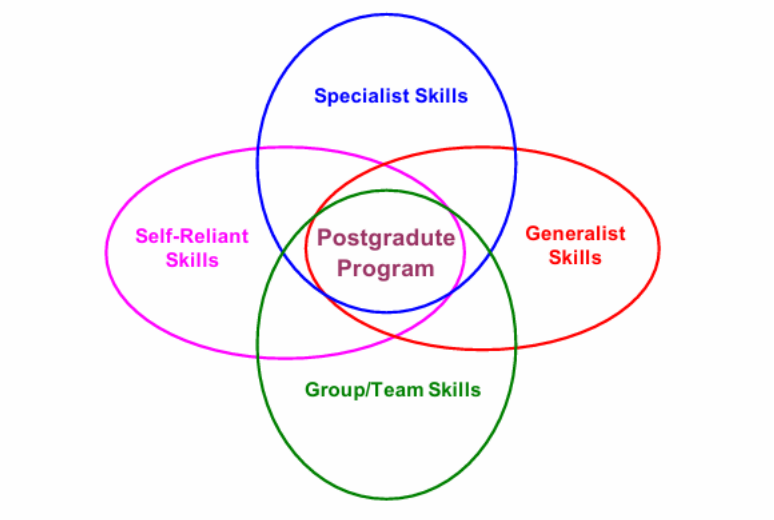


Figure 2: Schematic Postgraduate Skills

Source: (Alam et al., 2013)

2.6.1.1. Academic Support Services

Apart from teaching learning services, students are expected to get academic support services to be successful in their career in HEIs. According to Michubu et al. (2017), Student support services are those services that are meant to make the learners' academic life more effective and comfortable. Academic advising is one of the most important support services usually provided in HEIs. Young-Jones et al. (2013) mentioned that academic advising is a point at which student behavior and institutionally controlled conditions meet to potentially influence student achievement. It is not only a component of a student's educational experience that can be enhanced as a mechanism to assist students in attaining their academic and professional objectives, but also aiding institutions in fulfilling their declared educational missions. Besides, according to White (2015) Education should not just focus on knowledge acquisition, but also on empowering students to be autonomous intellectual actors, which includes necessary support services. Thus, most researches conducted in this regard encourages that students need to get enough academic advising to become successful in their career in higher education institutions.

2.6.1.2. Research and Publication Support Services

Typically, postgraduate students participate in proposals, mini-research, seminars, and workshops during their university tenure. On top of this, they are expected to conduct a thesis/dissertation as a requirement of their graduation from university. Not only are they conducting research, but they are also expected to publish their work in a reputable journal as a requirement for graduation. This process helps students to become scholars in their academic areas. Thus, students should get enough support services regarding research writing and academic publishing in higher education institutions.

The development of knowledge and the growth of society depend on the unbreakable bond between research and publication (Mohammad, 2023). No matter how innovative, research stays in the brains of its authors unless it is disseminated through publication. In addition to validating results through thorough peer review, this distribution enhances the larger scholarly conversation by allowing others to expand on this work (Jonathan, 2024).

Moreover, publication is a crucial means for scholars to get financing, be recognized, and add to the body of knowledge in their professions (Ashikuzzaman, 2025). Researchers have an ethical

obligation to disseminate their findings, especially if they could influence public health or guide policy (World Medical Association, 2024). Research essentially loses its impact without publication; information thrives, spurs innovation, and eventually propels society advancement through this crucial connection (Mohammad, 2023). Therefore, encouraging an informed and involved global community requires embracing both research and publication.

However, the importance of research and publication lies in fostering the development of individuals, groups, and societies. Engaging in research allows scholars to contribute to the body of knowledge, address societal challenges, and advance their fields. Despite these benefits, securing publication in a reputable journal poses significant challenges, particularly for students in higher education institutions.

One major barrier is the high cost associated with publication fees, which can deter researchers, especially those with limited funding or institutional support. Many reputable journals require authors to pay submission or processing fees, making it financially burdensome for early-career researchers (Kaliuzhna et al., 2025).

Additionally, the submission process can be rigorous, often involving extensive peer review and adherence to strict formatting and content guidelines. This complexity can intimidate inexperienced authors, who may find it daunting to navigate the expectations of established journals (Ochner & Mineo, 2020).

Moreover, the competitive nature of academic publishing further complicates this process. With a high volume of submissions, only a small percentage of articles get accepted, placing immense pressure on researchers to produce work that is not only original but also impactful (Ali et al., 2023).

These factors collectively create an environment where the pursuit of publication is both essential for academic success and fraught with obstacles, ultimately making it more challenging for students and emerging scholars to share their findings and contribute to their fields.

CHAPTER THREE

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter is the most important part of conducting research that involves the research paradigm, research design, and research method, which govern the entire structure of this study.

3.1. Research Design

Prior to describing the study design, it is critical to discuss the research paradigm that the researcher intends to use. A research paradigm represents the set of beliefs, assumptions, and worldviews that inform how research is conducted, including the nature of reality (ontology), the relationship between the researcher and what is being investigated (epistemology), and the methods used to generate knowledge (methodology). Different researchers use different philosophical research paradigms to guide their research. The researcher believes that the pragmatic research paradigm is appropriate for this study because it emphasizes the use of subjective and objective methods to understand the world and solve its problems (Maarouf, 2019). Pragmatist researchers are adaptable and practical in their search for viable solutions to the phenomenon under investigation. They understand the importance of having a variety of perspectives and worldviews when solving research problems (Elgeddawy & Abouraia, 2024). This paradigm also allows the application of a mixed-methods research design that enables a comprehensive understanding of the issue under investigation (Sim et al., 2024). Hence, based on the pragmatic research paradigm, a mixed method research design was employed in this study.

A mixed method research design was used to enhance understanding of the complex nature of the topic under investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design combines quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis into a single study or program of research. The rationale behind combining quantitative and qualitative data is based on the understanding that each method alone is insufficient to fully grasp the details and patterns of the study.

The purpose of employing this convergent mixed-method design was to explore the phenomenon of internal quality assurance system in HEIs. Given that assessing the internal quality assurance system in higher education institutions involves multiple perspectives and requires data collection and analysis from various sources, the use of this method was appropriate for this study (Creswell

& Creswell, 2018). By utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data together, they complement each other and result in a more comprehensive analysis (Hands, 2022). As depicted in Figure 3 below, the convergent parallel mixed-method design entails collecting and analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative and quantitative results were then compared, and the findings were interpreted to determine if they align or diverge with one another.

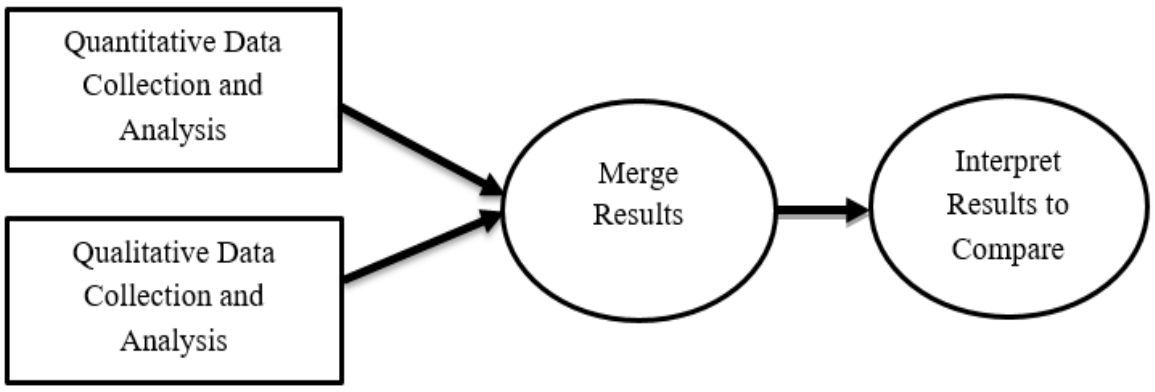


Figure 3: Convergent Mixed Method Design

Source: (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)

3.2. Method

As the study applies a mixed method research design, which includes both quantitative and qualitative research design, this research employed a mixed method of data gathering instruments. Data collection methods are the means, tools, or techniques that researchers use to collect data for their research projects. It can occur in a variety of settings, including libraries, historical archives, and online sources, as well as in the field (Yin, 2016). There are numerous data collection methods, but not all of them are appropriate in all situations.

3.3. Data Sources

In this study, the researcher employed both primary and secondary data sources. The data sources were from postgraduate students, instructors, quality assurance directors, experts, and quality assurance documents and related literatures.

3.3.1. Primary Data Sources

Stakeholders in HEIs, such as instructors, administrators, quality assurance experts/officers, and students, provided primary data on the institution's internal quality assurance system. The study's data sources were randomly selected regarding administrators, instructors, and students. In this study, while administrators, instructors, and students were chosen using a simple random sampling technique, quality assurance experts and officers were purposefully selected since they are the key informants of quality assurance in HEIs. Besides, they are front-runners and have first-hand information concerning quality assurance system in HEIs. Therefore, this study intentionally included all quality assurance directors and officers from the sampled universities as participants.

3.3.2. Secondary Data Sources

In addition to primary sources, secondary data sources were policy documents, quality assurance reports, accreditation procedures, institutional audit reports and standards, quality assurance frameworks, and existing literature regarding internal quality assurance systems. These sources supplement and provide additional insights, contextualizing the study within the existing body of knowledge about internal quality assurance systems in HEIs.

3.4. Sampling Procedures

Ethiopian HEIs were classified into four generations based on their establishment years as first, second, third, and fourth generation. Among this classification, the first-generation universities were selected purposely as research setting areas, assuming that they are well established and can provide rich data regarding internal quality assurance system. These universities include: Addis Ababa University, Arba Minch University, Bahir Dar University, Gonder University, Hawassa University, Haromaya University, Jimma University, and Mekele University. In this study, two universities, Hawassa University and Jimma University were selected and included through simple random sampling technique, which is the lottery method, to give equal chances to be a

representative sample of HEIs. However, Addis Ababa University was selected using the purposive sampling technique for this study because it offers diverse research opportunities across various disciplines, promoting interdisciplinary collaboration. Moreover, conducting research in a culturally rich setting like Addis Ababa University allows for unique insights that can improve the quality and relevance of the findings. Thus, the study includes three first-generation or research universities: Addis Ababa University, Hawassa University, and Jimma University.

Addis Ababa University, which is one of the research settings, is Ethiopia's first and oldest higher education institution, making it unique among the country's eight old universities. Founded in 1950, Addis Ababa University boasts a rich history and enjoys widespread recognition as a top-tier educational institution. The university provides a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate programs across multiple disciplines. Its long-standing presence and comprehensive academic offerings have helped it become the country's oldest and largest university. Hence, having AAU as one of the research sites could be considered a blessing since it offers diverse research opportunities across various disciplines, promoting interdisciplinary collaboration.

Hence, three colleges namely the College of Education, the College of Social Sciences, and the College of Humanities, were selected by simple random sampling techniques from Addis Ababa University. These colleges have since been merged into two colleges: the College of Education and Language Studies, and College of Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities. The total number of academics from these colleges was 408 comprising 112 from the College of Education, 143 from the College of Social Sciences, and 153 from the College of Humanities, Language Studies, Communication, and Journalism.

The second research setting was Hawassa University, which was included in this study as one of the first-generation universities through a simple random sampling. Three colleges namely the College of Natural and Computational Sciences, the College of Education, and the College of Social Sciences and Humanities were randomly selected and included in the study. The total number of instructors in these colleges was 360, comprising 199 from the College of Natural and Computational Sciences, 44 from the College of Education, and 117 from the College of Social Sciences and Humanities.

The third research site selected for this study was Jimma University, which is also one of the first-generation universities established in Ethiopia. Three colleges were randomly selected from the university: the College of Education, the College of Social Sciences and Humanities, and the College of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine. The total number of academic staff in these colleges was 505, comprising 75 from the College of Education, 231 from the College of Social Sciences and Humanities, and 199 from the College of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine.

Thus, a total of 1273 academic staff (408 from Addis Ababa University, 360 from Hawassa University, and 505 from Jimma University) were targeted in this study. From this total, a representative sample size determination was calculated, resulting in 319 academic staff that was distributed proportionally to each randomly selected college. The sample determination was done based on the Yamane (1967) sample size determination formula.

Therefore, the total sample size of academic staff drawn from the total target population of 1273 across the three selected universities was 319. However, only 303 questionnaire were completed and returned.

The study also included a sample of postgraduate students (MA and PhD) from the selected universities, in addition to academic staff. Focusing only on academic staff is unlikely to provide comprehensive and insightful data regarding internal quality assurance systems in HEIs. It also limits data collection to academic staff alone, excluding students. Moreover, studies focusing on the quality of education should include instructors and students as they are key stakeholders in education. Graduate students were included because they can provide more detailed and relevant information than undergraduate students regarding the issue under investigation. Thus, it is imperative to include graduate students as an important data source in this study, complementing the data collected from academic staff.

Based on the preliminary data collection, the target population of graduate students was 2,165 (812 from Addis Ababa University, 819 from Hawassa University, and 534 from Jimma University) in the previously selected colleges from each university. Using the same sample size determination formula applied to the academic staff selection, a sample size of 355 postgraduate students was obtained. This sample was then distributed proportionally across the three universities.

In addition, quality assurance directors, experts, and coordinators were selected purposively since they are the main stakeholders regarding the quality assurance system in the HEIs, and they are also key informants of the study. Hence, 3 quality assurance directors (one director from each university), 6 quality assurance coordinators (3 from Hawassa University and 3 from Jimma University), 2 quality assurance experts/officers (from Addis Ababa University), and 9 experienced instructors (3 from each university) have been contacted and interviewed in this study. In total, 20 key informants were included in the study. To maintain confidentiality, the participants were coded as Participant 001, Participant 002, Participant 003, and so on, up to Participant 020. The data collection period was from April 2025 to June 2025.

Thus, as shown in Table 1 below, 303 instructors, 355 postgraduate students, and 20 key informants yielding a total of 678 participants were included in the study.

Table 1

Sample Institutions and Participants

Institutions	**Participants**			
	Questionnaires		Interviews	
	Instructors	Students	Key informants	**Total**
Addis Ababa University	86	133	6	**225**
Hawassa University	90	134	7	**231**
Jimma University	127	88	7	**222**
Total	**303**	**355**	**20**	**678**

3.5. Data Collection Instruments

In this study, a survey questionnaire was the main data-gathering instrument for the quantitative part, while interviews and document analysis were used to collect data for the qualitative parts. Thus, the study already employed three data collection methods such as questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis, to collect the required data on the internal quality assurance system in Ethiopian HEIs.

3.5.1. Questionnaires

In this study, a self-administered questionnaire was designed and used for the quantitative part. Both closed-ended and open-ended questions were included to gather data from both instructors and postgraduate students on concepts related to quality assurance system in HEIs. The questionnaires enabled the researcher to obtain reliable, representative, and scientifically sound data concerning the internal quality assurance system.

The development of the questionnaire involved a scientific approach to ensure its validity and reliability. It is also essential to define the purpose and objectives of the study, the target population, and the information required. So, the questionnaires were prepared based on the objectives of the study to answer the research questions designed from the statement of the problem. Besides, a group of experts were invited to check and comment on the appropriateness of the questionnaire for the intended research work. Apart from the comments of the group of experts, a pilot test was conducted with a sample of 60 instructors and postgraduate students from AAiT (the current CETB) prior to the main data collection. The results indicated a reliability coefficient of 96%, suggesting that the items included in the questionnaire are both reliable and internally consistent. The Cronbach's Alpha for the questionnaire items is .958, which exceeds the acceptable threshold of 0.7. The data were collected by the Kobo Toolbox software, which facilitates the organization, storage, and management of collected data, making it easier to analyze information later. This thorough process enhances the effectiveness of the questionnaire, and it also results in accurate and meaningful data (Cohen et al., 2011). In gathering comprehensive data, all possible types of items were included in this study. These items were multiple-choice items, yes/no questions, rating scale items, ranking questions, and all applicable item types were applied.

3.5.2. Interview

In addition to the questionnaires, the researcher used interviews to collect qualitative data from key informants of the study. An interview is one of the data collection methods that was employed when one adopts the qualitative methodology to conduct research. A semi-structured interview was employed in this study since it is meant to be adapted according to the answers and reactions of the respondents, which gives much flexibility (Cohen et al., 2011). Besides, it is comfortable and feels more natural and casual for participants than a formal interview. It enabled the researcher

for in-depth exploration of stakeholders' experiences and perspectives, providing qualitative data to complement and enrich the quantitative findings.

Thus, an interview guide was prepared with a list of questions or topics that the interviewer hopes to cover during the course of an interview. The interview guide was designed to gather qualitative data from key informants regarding the internal quality assurance system of Ethiopian HEIs. The data collection includes audio recording with consent from the informants as well as taking field notes, which is important to remember major points raised from the informants. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim for further analysis using available means, like transcription software.

3.5.3. Document Analysis

Document analysis is a well-established data collection technique. This method entails examining a diverse range of documents, such as books, newspaper articles, academic journal articles, and institutional reports (Morgan, 2022). Furthermore, since converting optically scanned text from a bit-map into symbol codes significantly lowers the cost of storing or sending the data, a document analysis system might offer a general data compression feature (Wong et al., 1982). In this study, document analysis was used as an additional data collection method to supplement data collected via questionnaires and interviews. As a result, documents pertaining to quality assurance in HEIs were used as secondary data sources in the research. Policy documents, accreditation protocols, quality assurance reports, institutional audit reports, and quality assurance frameworks were some examples of these documents. More specifically, the document pertaining to institutional quality audit standard prepared by ETA has been reviewed and analyzed critically under the review of related literature section.

3.6. Methods of Data Analysis

In this study, the data analysis adopted a convergent mixed method design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach involved analyzing the quantitative and qualitative data separately but with the intention of integrating the results to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

The data collected through the questionnaires were coded, then entered into SPSS, and subsequently cleaned to ensure accuracy and consistency prior to analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using the most recent version of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive analysis such as frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations were used to summarize participants' responses. In addition, inferential statistics techniques were employed to test relationships and differences among variables, including Pearson's correlation, one-sample t-tests, and ANOVA.

For the qualitative component, the responses were subjected to thematic analysis guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process. This involved familiarization with the data, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing and refining themes, defining and naming themes, and finally producing the report. This process ensured that recurring patterns of meaning within participants' responses were systematically identified and interpreted.

Finally, the quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated and interpreted in relation to the study's research questions. Integration occurred during the interpretation stage, where the results from both stands were compared, contrasted, and synthesized to support coherent conclusions and recommendations.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

In all studies, ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge concerning data collection, the dissemination of findings, and, in particular, the relationship between the researcher and informants or participants. Hence, in this study, the researcher informed all participants about the study's goal and gave them all pertinent research information. The study was carried out under the ethical issues that must be considered while doing research. To be a fair and legal researcher, the letter of ethical clearance was written from the Institute of Educational Research to the sample institutions to get permission for the purpose of collecting data. It also helped the researcher to convince the informants that their responses would be kept confidential and only used for research purposes. In addition, all the sources that were used in this research were acknowledged and cited as per the APA 7th guidelines (*Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association.*, 2020).

CHAPTER FOUR

4. DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter presents the quantitative and qualitative findings derived from the data collected across three first generation public universities such as Addis Ababa University, Hawassa University, and Jimma University. The chapter is organized according to the mixed-methods design employed in this study, which integrates data from three primary sources. First, quantitative data from 355 postgraduate students are presented, covering their demographic characteristics, evaluation of teaching and learning, involvement in the internal quality assurance activities, assessment of educational resources and facilities, perceptions of student support systems, familiarity with the concepts IQAS, perceived effectiveness of the system, and factors hindering implementation. Second, quantitative data from 303 instructors are presented, including their background information, conceptual understanding of IQAS, perspectives on policy formulation and implementation, involvement of stakeholders, effectiveness of IQAS standards and components, implementation of focus areas, educational resources, student participation, and hindering factors, supplemented by correlation analysis among IQAS dimensions. Third, qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with 20 key informants, including quality assurance directors, college-level quality assurance coordinators, quality assurance experts, and senior academic staff are analyzed thematically to provide deeper contextual understanding of the establishment, effectiveness, practices and challenges, student support system and perceived quality outcomes, enabling and disabling factors, best practices, and strategies for enhancing the internal quality assurance system. In general, the total number of participants in this study was 678. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, one-sample t-test, ANOVA, and Pearson correlation, while the qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis following Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. The findings are integrated and interpreted on the basis of data sources.

4.1. Students' Data Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation

The quantitative results from the data generated from 355 postgraduate students at the three first-generation public universities, namely Addis Ababa University, Hawassa University, and Jimma University were analyzed in this section. In order to determine the demographic profile of the participant sample, the analysis starts with the presentation of the respondents' background data, which includes university affiliation, program level, gender, year of study, college affiliation, and sponsorship status. The students' assessments of teaching and learning, delivery methods, and the learning environment are then systematically examined in this phase, and their participation in the internal quality assurance activities is then evaluated.

The analysis then moves on to the quality, accessibility, and availability of educational facilities and resources as well as the efficacy and sufficiency of student support system, including as career services, academic advising, counselling, and research and publication support system. Additionally, the part looks into how familiar students are in the idea of internal quality assurance system, how effective they think the current system is, and what they believe prevents their institutions from successfully implementing quality assurance procedures.

Inferential statistical tests, such as one-sample t-tests, ANOVA, and Pearson correlations are used to assess the statistical significance of the results, while descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, are used throughout the analysis to summarize the data. In order to find trends, variances, and areas in need of focused intervention, the results are evaluated in light of the research questions that guide this study. Where applicable, comparisons were made between universities, colleges, and demographic groups.

Table 2

Background information of respondents

Variables		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Name of your university	Addis Ababa University	133	37.5	37.5
	Hawassa University	134	37.7	37.7
	Jimma University	88	24.8	24.8
	Total	355	100.0	100.0
Program	MA/MSc	144	40.6	40.6
	PhD	211	59.4	59.4
	Total	355	100.0	100.0
Gender	Male	283	79.7	79.7
	Female	72	20.3	20.3
	Total	355	100.0	100.0
Year	1st Year	80	22.5	22.5
	2nd Year	83	23.4	23.4
	3rd Year	60	16.9	16.9
	4th Year	59	16.6	16.6
	5th and above	73	20.6	20.6
	Total	355	100.0	100.0
College	Education and Behavioral Studies	124	34.9	34.9
	Social Sciences and Humanities	140	39.4	39.4
	Natural and computational sciences	65	18.3	18.3
	Veterinary Medicine and Agriculture	26	7.3	7.3
	Total	355	100.0	100.0
Sponsorship	Government sponsorship	297	83.7	83.7
	Private/ Self-sponsorship	58	16.3	16.3
	Total	355	100.0	100.0

Table 2 above displays the composition of the respondents by the Universities, demographic data, program level, year of study and sponsorship. Among the 355 students, the three universities represented in the study were represented by 37.5% (Addis Ababa University), 37.7% (Hawassa University) and 24.8% (Jimma University) of the respondents. These students were from four colleges representing EBS (34.9%), SSH (39.4%), NCS (18.3%), and VMA (7.3%).

The gender composition of the students was 283(79.7%) male compared with 72(20.3%) female students. These students were either government sponsored 297(83.7%) or private/self-sponsored

58(16.3%). This indicates that majority of respondents participated in this study were government sponsored students while a few were self-sponsored.

Regarding the program level, relative majority of the students, 211(59.4%), were attending PhD programs, while the remaining 144(40.6%) were doing their masters degrees. The sample comprised of students from 1st to 5th year of the study. The 1st year and 2nd year students were represented by 22.5% and 23.4% of the respondents, respectively. The 3rd year and 4th year students were 16.9 and 16.6% in the sample; while 20.6% of the sample was in their 5th year of study.

4.1.1. Concept of an Internal Quality Assurance System

This subsection presents postgraduate students' familiarity with the concept of an internal quality assurance system. Understanding the level of awareness among students is fundamental, as meaningful participation in the quality assurance processes presupposes basic knowledge of what the system entails and how it functions within their institutions.

Table 3

Familiarity with the concept of internal quality assurance system

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not familiar	145	40.8	40.8	40.8
	Somewhat familiar	178	50.1	50.1	91.0
	Very familiar	32	9.0	9.0	100.0
	Total	355	100.0	100.0	

A total of 355 respondents completed the item assessing familiarity with the concept of an internal quality assurance system. Responses indicated that 145 participants (40.8%) were not familiar with the concept, 178 respondents (50.1%) were somewhat familiar, and 32 respondents (9%) were very familiar with the concept of internal quality assurance system in HEIs. These results suggest substantial gaps in basic awareness and a small pool of respondents with in-depth knowledge, indicating that efforts to build foundational awareness should precede more advanced capacity-building activities.

4.1.2. Evaluation of teaching and learning, delivery modes, and learning environment in HEIs

Having reviewed the general background information of the respondents, it is invaluable to evaluate the general highlights of the teaching, modes of delivery, learning environment before going to deep analysis of the internal quality assurance system of the HEIs. In this case, postgraduate students were asked to rate their level of agreement from strongly disagree to strongly agree on the level of general status of their institutions.

Table 4

Evaluation of teaching and learning, delivery modes, and learning environment in HEIs

		N	M	SD
1.	Our institution provides programs in different modes of delivery (e.g. full- and part-time, campus-based and distance-learning).	355	3.74	1.05
2.	Our institution offers flexible learning paths to students (e.g. individual study programs / paths).	355	3.43	1.11
3.	Our institution uses a variety of teaching and learning methods, including those which encourage active and interactive engagement of students in their learning.	355	3.60	1.05
4.	Our institution evaluates and adjusts the modes of delivery of programs on a regular basis.	355	3.29	1.09
5.	Our institution evaluates and adjusts teaching and learning methods on a regular basis.	355	3.20	1.10
6.	Our institution defines course objectives clearly.	355	3.71	1.01
7.	Our institution explains concepts clearly.	355	3.68	1.04
8.	Our institution prepares teaching materials carefully.	355	3.39	1.09
9.	Our institution communicates course expectations to students effectively.	355	3.44	1.13
10.	Our institution creates conducive learning environment to students.	355	3.28	1.15

As can be seen from the Table, modes of delivery has got the highest mean score (M=3.74). In addition to this, clear definition of course objectives, explanation of concepts, and using variety of teaching and learning methods have got relatively highest mean scores respectively (M=3.71, 3.68, and 3.60) compared to other dimensions. On the other hand, the rest dimensions such as offering flexible learning paths (M=3.43), adjusting and evaluating modes of delivery (M=3.29), evaluating and adjusting teaching-learning methods (M=3.20), careful preparation of course materials

(M=3.39), effective communication of course expectations to students (M=3.44), and creating conducive learning environment for students (M=3.28) have got relatively minimum mean scores, which is between (M=3.2 to 3.44).

This result implies that structurally modes of program delivery, clear definition of course objectives, explanation of concepts, and using a variety of teaching and learning methods are in a good situation as per the data collected from postgraduate students. Where as in terms of flexibility of learning paths, adjusting and evaluating modes of delivery, teaching-learning methods, and careful preparation of course materials, effective communication of course expectations, and creating conducive learning environment need attentions for improvements as the data depicted. Addressing these areas would strengthen institutional readiness for more advanced internal quality assurance reforms and better align practice with students' expectations.

4.1.3. Involvement of students in internal quality assurance activities

Table 5

Involvement of students in IQA activities

	N	M	SD
Students are involved in the program review process	355	2.49	1.16
Fill in course evaluation surveys	355	2.87	1.10
Regularly receive feedback on findings from course evaluation surveys	355	2.44	1.00
Students are regularly informed about measures to be taken as a result of course evaluation surveys	355	2.47	1.06
Propose measures to improve teaching-learning process	355	2.61	1.09
Valid N (listwise)	355		

It is imperative that quality is the issue that needs involvement of many stakeholders in HEIs. Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics of students' involvement in quality assurance activities, and students were asked to rate their level of agreement with statements on a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. As can be seen from the Table, all mean score results are below average scale (3.0), indicating generally low to moderate perceived student involvement in quality

assurance activities. The most frequently reported form of involvement was completing course evaluation surveys (M = 2.87, SD = 1.10); however, this mean is still below the midpoint, suggesting that even survey participation is not perceived as particularly strong.

Items reflecting two-way communication and formal participation in quality assurance activities were rated lowest, receiving feedback on evaluation findings (M = 2.44, SD = 1.00), being regularly informed about taken following evaluations (M = 2.47, SD = 1.06), and involvement in program review processes (M = 2.49, SD = 1.16). These findings point to a lack of openness and institutional avenues for student involvement. The mean score for the ability to suggest ways to enhance instruction and learning was slightly higher (M = 2.61, SD = 1.09), suggesting that students have some opportunity to offer suggestions, albeit still below average. When taken as a whole, the descriptive results demonstrate that postgraduate students primarily see quality assurance involvement as completing tests, with minimal indication of meaningful contact, feedback, or follow-up. Student participation in quality assurance programs is usually very low in Ethiopian higher education institutions.

Table 6

Frequency distribution of involvement of students in meetings on IQAS issues

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	64	18.0	18.0	18.0
	No	291	82.0	82.0	100.0
	Total	355	100.0	100.0	

To check the involvement of stakeholders in the internal quality assurance system, 355 postgraduate students were asked; however, only limited number of students 64 (18%) of respondents replied that they have been involved in meetings regarding the issue of quality assurance in their institution. Whereas majority of respondents 291 (82%) responded they have never been involved in meetings regarding the issue. This suggests limited stakeholder participation in IQAS across the institutions. The result indicates a potential engagement gap in communication, outreach, or inclusiveness of IQAS processes.

Table 7

Focus areas of student participation in IQAS meetings

		Responses		
		Number of Cases	Percent	Percent of Cases
Focus of IQAS Meeting[a]	Curriculum development, review, and approval	47	24.0%	73.4%
	Teaching, learning and assessment	43	21.9%	67.2%
	Institutional accountability and follow-up measures	17	8.7%	26.6%
	Learning resources	20	10.2%	31.3%
	Student support and services	21	10.7%	32.8%
	Students' evaluation of teachers and the course	33	16.8%	51.6%
	Students' satisfaction survey	15	7.7%	23.4%
Total		196	100.0%	306.3%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Table 7 is an extension of Table 6 regarding the student participation in IQA issues, and this result indicates 18% of respondents who replied that they have been involved in IQA meetings. The students were asked the focus areas of the meetings they have ever been involved. Of the 64 respondents who indicated they had attended meetings related to the IQAS, responses to a multiple response item about the focus areas of meetings showed a strong emphasis on curriculum and instructional matters. 73.4% of respondents reported that meetings addressed curriculum development, review, and approval, and 67.2% indicated that meetings focused on teaching, learning, and assessment. More than half of respondents (51.6%) reported coverage of students' evaluation of teachers and courses. In contrast, operational and institutional monitoring topics were less frequently reported: student support system (32.8%), learning resources (31.3%), institutional accountability and follow up measures (26.6%), and students' satisfaction survey (23.4%). Since respondents selected multiple items, the sum of the percent of cases exceeds 100% (306.3%).

The results indicate that academic and instructional quality issues were the main topics of discussion among respondents who attended meetings pertaining to the internal quality assurance system. In particular, the majority of teaching, learning, and assessment (67.2% of cases) and curriculum development, review, and approval (73.4% of cases) suggests that the IQA process

may serve mainly as a method for improving program and classroom delivery. This form suggests that enhancing academic components may receive more institutional attention than more general governance procedures. Furthermore, the very large percentage of student evaluations of instructors and the course (51.6% of cases) suggests that the agenda of IQAS meetings incorporates student input. Wider indicators of student experience and satisfaction may, however, be less commonly highlighted, debated, or operationalized in quality assurance efforts, as indicated by the lower selection of student satisfaction surveys (23.4% of cases). Moreover, the relatively low selection of institutional accountability and follow-up measures (26.6% of cases) suggests that IQAS meetings may place less focus on complete mechanisms. This suggests a possible weakness in the quality assurance cycle's implementation phase, where problems should result in recorded actions, accountability, and monitoring. Together with ongoing focus on curriculum and instructional quality, the distribution of meeting attentions shows opportunities to further strengthen the internal quality assurance system by emphasizing follow-up, accountability, and the systematic use of student satisfaction data.

Table 8

Perceived improvements in the IQAS as a result of students' involvement

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes, significant improvements	22	6.2	6.2	6.2
	Yes, some improvements	57	16.1	16.1	22.3
	No noticeable improvements	84	23.7	23.7	45.9
	No improvements at all	52	14.6	14.6	60.6
	Not applicable	140	39.4	39.4	100.0
	Total	355	100.0	100.0	

Among the 355 respondents, perceptions of whether involvement produced improvements in the institutions' IQAS were mixed. 39% of respondents indicated the item was not applicable to them, which suggests that many of the participants either were not in roles where improvement could be observed or did not consider their improvement relevant to the system changes. Among

respondents for whom the question was applicable, fewer than one-quarter perceived tangible improvements (6.2% significant; 16.1% some), while a larger share reported little or no change (23.7% no noticeable improvements; 14.6% no improvements at all). This implies that involvement in IQAS activities does not consistently translate into perceived system improvements for students as stakeholders in HEIs.

Table 9

Frequency of department meetings with students to discuss the IQA activities

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Once every two years	9	2.5	2.5	2.5
	Once every year	62	17.5	17.5	20.0
	Once every semester	45	12.7	12.7	32.7
	Not at all	106	29.9	29.9	62.5
	Don't know	125	35.2	35.2	97.7
	Other	8	2.3	2.3	100.0
	Total	355	100.0	100.0	

In the sample of N = 355 respondents, the frequency of department meetings with students to discuss quality assurance activities varied considerably. Only a small portion reported that such meetings occur regularly, with 2.5% indicating “Once every two years” and 17.5% reporting “Once every year”. A further 12.7% stated that meetings take place “Once every semester”, while 29.9% reported “Not at all”. Notably, the largest group (35.2%) selected “Do not know”, indicating limited awareness of quality assurance meetings among many respondents. In general, 62.5% of respondents either indicated that meetings do not occur at all or they were unaware of them, suggesting gaps in the communication and visibility of quality assurance activities to students, and potentially inconsistent implementation of student-engagement mechanisms within the internal quality assurance process.

This result implies that IQAS may be weak in terms of student participation and engagement, particularly where stakeholders are either not informed or do not experience regular consultative processes.

4.1.4. Perceived Assessment of Educational Resources and Facilities

The perceived quality of higher education institutions' facilities and educational resources was also examined. The averages and standard deviations for each resource and facility assessment item are shown in Table 10. All items used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Very Poor, 2 = Poor, 3 = Fair, 4 = Good, 5 = Very Good).

Table 10

Perceived assessment of educational resources and facilities

	N	M	SD
Quality of equipment in the classroom	355	3.22	1.20
Flexibility of classroom layout	355	3.07	1.24
Availability of computers	355	2.97	1.20
Reliability of internet access	355	3.15	1.26
Availability of leaning materials	355	3.14	1.19
Resources for proposal development and thesis writing	355	2.90	1.18
Availability of entertainment facilities	355	2.63	1.18
Overall, how do you evaluate the availability of resources in your institution?	355	2.98	1.15
Overall, how do you evaluate the quality of resources in your institution?	355	2.94	1.17

Perceptions of institutional resources were mainly neutral to slightly positive, with item means grouped around the midpoint (3 = Fair) on the scale ranging from 1 to 5. Classroom equipment quality (M = 3.22, SD = 1.20), internet access dependability (M = 3.15, SD = 1.26), and learning material availability (M = 3.14, SD = 1.19) received the highest ratings, all of which fell between Fair and Good. Access to leisure facilities (M = 2.63, SD = 1.18), and resources for developing proposals and writing theses (M = 2.90, SD = 1.18) received the lowest ratings, all of which fell

between Poor and Fair. Both availability (M = 2.98, SD = 1.15) and quality (M = 2.94, SD = 1.17) had ratings that were roughly fair. Standard deviations for each item varied from roughly 1.15 to 1.26, demonstrating significant variation in respondents' views and pointing to differences in experiences or expectations among respondent categories.

Academic impact, personal well-being, and educational quality in higher education institutions were the outcomes of this. As a result, research support is undermined, which results in slower development and lower-quality research outputs; courses that depend on laboratory or project work suffer; and students have less depth of learning and fewer opportunity to acquire practical and collaborative skills. Furthermore, unstable internet access exacerbates these issues by interfering with online learning, submissions, and distant resource access, which further jeopardizes learning and course continuity for students who rely on digital access.

Additionally, lack of recreational opportunities and inadequate guidance and counseling services have a detrimental impact on students' social and mental health. Reduced access to personal support makes students feel more stressed, anxious, and alone. It can also make it harder for students to deal with academic setbacks, increasing the likelihood of withdrawal or long-term problems. This is a common problem for postgraduate PhD students in Ethiopian HEIs who should publish two articles in reputable journals before defending their dissertations. In addition to undermining motivation and peer relationships, a lack of social and recreational options exacerbates academic and emotional difficulties for students without private resources.

4.1.5. Student Support System in HEIs

The quality of student support systems in higher education institutions is one of the focus areas of quality assurance systems in many countries, including Ethiopia. Sukhdeep Kaur (2016) asserts that the provision of student support in higher education institutions has a direct impact on the quality of higher education. If higher education institutions don't give their students enough assistance, education runs the risk of becoming just a degree-granting procedure. This suggests that the provision of student support is crucial to the standard of instruction in HEIs worldwide.

Table 11

Student support system in higher education institutions

Student Support System Characteristics	N	M	SD	Test Value = 3					
				t-value	Df	p-value	MD	95% CI of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
The institution provides adequate academic advising services.	355	3.07	1.133	1.218	354	.224	.073	-.04	.19
The institution offers effective counseling services for personal issues.	355	2.75	1.066	-4.382	354	.000	-.248	-.36	-.14
The institution provides career services that assist in job placement.	355	2.75	1.074	-4.396	354	.000	-.251	-.36	-.14
Information about support services is clearly communicated to students.	355	2.81	1.107	-3.309	354	.001	-.194	-.31	-.08
Support services are easily accessible when I need them.	355	2.75	1.118	-4.224	354	.000	-.251	-.37	-.13
Staff members in support services are friendly and helpful.	355	2.98	1.142	-.279	354	.781	-.017	-.14	.10
Overall, I am satisfied with student support system at this institution.	355	2.77	1.068	-3.975	354	.000	-.225	-.34	-.11

Table 11 above also presented the students' perception with specific features of the support system. The maximum rating among the seven items was *M*=3.07, which identified a moderate level of agreement regarding the provision of adequate academic advising services by the institutions. This result suggests that academic advising services is above the test value in HEIs, but it is not sufficiently provided to postgraduate students. Students were also made to have a moderate level of agreement ($M = 2.98$) that they have received friendly and helpful support services from staff members. Apart from these, low-level evaluation with $M = 2.75$ was attested regarding the effectiveness of counseling services for personal issues, career services that assist in job placement, and easy access to support services as needed by the students. The 95% CIs for these aspects of the student support systems were all below the moderate level (3.00), indicating inadequacy of the support system. Lack of clear communication regarding information on support services was also indicated with an $M = 2.81$ average rating. Students were also found to have a low level of satisfaction with the institutions' student support system ($M = 2.77$, $t = -3.975$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 12

Evaluation of SSS by university, college, and year of study

					95% Confidence Interval for Mean		ANOVA		Scheffe Subset for alpha = 0.05		
		N	M	SD	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	F-value	p-value	1	2	3
University	Addis Ababa University	133	2.70	0.86	2.55	2.85	13.108	.000	2.70		
	Hawassa University	134	3.16	1.08	2.97	3.34				3.16	
	Jimma University	88	2.57	0.74	2.41	2.73			2.57		
	Total	355	2.84	0.95	2.74	2.94			0.57	1.00	
Year of Study	1st Year	80	2.82	0.80	2.64	3.00	10.544	.000	2.82	2.82	
	2nd Year	83	2.42	0.76	2.25	2.58			2.42		
	3rd Year	60	2.74	0.92	2.50	2.98			2.74	2.74	
	4th Year	59	2.95	0.97	2.69	3.20				2.95	2.95
	5th and above	73	3.34	1.08	3.09	3.60					3.34
	Total	355	2.84	0.95	2.74	2.94			0.15	0.76	0.16
College	Education and Behavioral Studies	124	2.60	0.81	2.46	2.75	72.223	.000		2.60	
	Social Sciences and Humanities	140	2.61	0.83	2.47	2.75				2.61	
	Natural and computational sciences	65	4.06	0.56	3.92	4.20					4.06
	Veterinary Medicine and Agriculture	26	2.17	0.34	2.03	2.31			2.17		
	Total	355	2.84	0.95	2.74	2.94			1.00	1.00	1.00

Table 12 identified that all three universities did not have similar levels of provision of student support systems ($F = 13.108$, $p < 0.05$). Relatively, Hawassa University has a moderate level of service ($M = 3.16$), which was significantly better than the low-level services rendered by both Addis Ababa University ($M = 2.70$) and Jimma University ($M = 2.57$). The 95% confidence interval for the rating of Hawassa University was strictly above the respective confidence intervals of the other two universities.

The assessment of the level of student support systems among the four colleges was also conducted and identified that these colleges did not have similar levels of support services ($F = 72.223$, $p < 0.05$). The difference in student support services was attested to by a high level of support ($M = 4.06$) within the colleges of natural and computational science, which was in contrast to the low level of student support services ($M = 2.17$) in the colleges of veterinary medicine and agriculture.

Scheffe's test identified that only the Colleges of Education and Behavioral Studies (M = 2.60) and Colleges of Social Sciences and Humanities (M = 2.61) have similarly low-level support systems.

The perception of the student support system was found to have significantly differed among students with different years of study (F = 10.544, p < 0.05). 4th-year students (M = 2.95) and 5th-year students (M = 3.34) have a relatively higher and more positive assessment of the support services they have received compared to the low level of student services witnessed by 1st-, 2nd-, and 3rd-year students.

In terms of universities, the significant ANOVA result (F = 13.108, P < .001) indicates that students' evaluation of the student support system varies meaningfully from one university to another. So, the support system experience is likely influenced by how each institution organizes, implements, and delivers student support system. While students at Hawassa University reported the highest mean rating (M = 3.16), suggesting comparatively stronger or better functioning support mechanisms; however, students at Addis Ababa University and Jimma University reported lower mean ratings (M = 2.70 and 2.57, respectively), implying that these universities may have relatively weaker support experiences or greater inconsistency in service delivery.

Table 13

Evaluation of SSS by program level, gender, and sponsorship

					95% CI for Mean		ANOVA	
		N	M	SD	Lower	Upper	F-value	P-value
Program Level	MA/MSc	144	2.59	0.77	2.47	2.72	17.366	.000
	PhD	211	3.01	1.03	2.87	3.15		
	Total	355	2.84	0.95	2.74	2.94		
Gender	Male	283	2.87	0.97	2.75	2.98	.895	.345
	Female	72	2.75	0.90	2.53	2.96		
	Total	355	2.84	0.95	2.74	2.94		
Sponsorship	Government	297	2.89	0.97	2.78	3.00	5.299	.022
	Private/ Self	58	2.58	0.84	2.36	2.80		
	Total	355	2.84	0.95	2.74	2.94		

The result of one-way ANOVA in Table 5 indicated that there was no significant difference in student support services based on gender (F = 0.895, p = 0.345 > 0.05). However, students at different program levels and with different sponsors significantly differed in their evaluations of the student support system. The results indicated that government sponsored students have moderate (M = 2.89) and better support compared to private/self-sponsored students, who attested low level support (M = 2.58). Moreover, evaluation of support system by PhD students (M = 3.01) was significantly higher than the support level MA/MSc students have complained (M = 2.59).

This study also conducted an assessment of research and publication support system in higher education institutions on 355 postgraduate students. The result of the study reveals that the overall research and publication support system is M = 2.70, which was significantly below the moderate level research and publication support system expected (t =-5.89, p < 0.05). The 95% CI was [2.60, 2.80] that was significantly below moderate level agreement (3.00). The result indicated that students have low level satisfaction of the research support system in higher education universities. This indicates that the research and publication support system provision in higher education institutions is below average percent or minimum.

Table 14

Research and publication support system in HEIs

One-Sample Statistics				Test Value = 3					
								95% CI of the Difference	
	N	M	SD	t	df	p	MD	Lower	Upper
Adequacy of research advising	355	3.11	1.17	1.77	354	.078	.11	-.01	.23
Sufficient workshops on research issues	355	2.85	1.15	-2.53	354	.012	-.15	-.28	-.03
Availability of sufficient funding opportunities	355	2.29	1.12	-11.98	354	.000	-.71	-.83	-.59
Awareness of grants offered for research projects	355	2.43	1.10	-9.77	354	.000	-.57	-.69	-.46
Access to editorial services for research papers	355	2.48	1.14	-8.53	354	.000	-.52	-.63	-.40
Training on research ethics and compliance	355	2.82	1.18	-2.87	354	.004	-.18	-.30	-.06
Training on academic writing and publishing	355	2.88	1.19	-1.88	354	.061	-.12	-.24	.01
Access to reputable journals for publication	355	2.72	1.24	-4.31	354	.000	-.28	-.41	-.15
Overall support services for research and publication	355	2.70	1.12	-5.13	354	.000	-.30	-.42	-.19
Total	**355**	**2.70**	**0.97**	**-5.89**	**354**	**.000**	**-.30**	**-.4046**	**-.2020**

Table 14 also presented the satisfaction of students in specific features of the research support system. Adequacy of research and publication support system by the faculty members was rated with moderate rating M = 3.1; while sufficiency of research workshops was rated with M = 2.85 average inferior rating. However, Availability of sufficient funding opportunities was drastically at a low-level rating with mean, M = 2.29. Awareness of grants offered for research projects and access to editorial services for research papers were also rated inadequate with M = 2.43 and M = 2.48, respectively.

Training on research ethics and compliance, rated with mean M = 2.82; and access to reputable journals for publication (M = 2.72); were also rated below moderate level rating; and hence found inadequately low-level performance. Whereas, Training on academic writing and publishing (M = 2.88) is nearly moderately observed in the universities.

In the analysis of the overall research and publication support system, a sample of 355 participants reported a mean score of 2.70 (SD = 0.97), indicating moderate variability in responses. A t-static of -5.89 with 354 degrees of freedom resulted in a p-value of .000, demonstrating statistical significance. The effect size, calculated as Cohen's d at -0.30, suggests a small to moderate negative effect, reflecting a trend of dissatisfaction with the research and publication support system. Furthermore, the 95% confidence interval ranged from [-0.4046 to -0.2020], confirming a significant deviation from neutrality. These findings imply that the provision of research and publication support system in higher education institutions is quite limited, necessitating a thorough evaluation and establishment of a more robust support system in HEIs.

Table 15

Comparison of universities in research and publication support system

	N	M	SD	95% CI for Mean		ANOVA		Subset for alpha = 0.05		
				Lower	Upper	F	P	1	2	3
Addis Ababa University	133	2.58	0.80	2.44	2.71	30.346	.000		2.5781	
Hawassa University	134	3.14	1.10	2.95	3.32					3.1368
Jimma University	88	2.21	0.68	2.06	2.35			2.2058		
Total	355	2.70	0.97	2.60	2.80			1.000	1.000	1.000

The results of one-way ANOVA analyses in the above table showed that research and publication support services were significantly different among universities ($F = 30.346$, $p < 0.05$). The mean score for Jimma University, $M = 2.21$, indicated the least low level performance of the university compared to both other universities. Addis Ababa University was also have low level performance in the 95% CI range of [2.44, 2.71]; which was significantly inferior to that of Hawassa University at a moderate level research support service with mean, $M = 3.14$ in the 95% CI range of [2.95, 3.52].

The current study utilized a one-way ANOVA to examine whether research and publication support services differed significantly across three Ethiopian universities. The results indicated a statistically significant difference among the institutions, $F = 30.3$, $p < .001$. This finding suggests that the infrastructure and institutional backing provided to students are not uniform across the higher education landscape in the region. These findings are critical because research and publication support services are direct predictors of a university's global ranking and its contribution to the knowledge economy. The low performance levels at Jimma and Addis Ababa Universities suggest that students at these institutions may face substantial structural barriers that hinder their ability to publish in reputable journals.

The significant advantage held by Hawassa University, while only reaching a "moderate" level, provides a benchmark for peer institutions. It indicates that while progress has been made, there is a systematic need for a more robust investment in research lifecycles across all surveyed universities to move from "low/moderate" support to "high" institutional efficacy.

4.1.6. Effectiveness of the Internal Quality Assurance System

Postgraduate students were asked whether there is an effective internal quality assurance system established to improve the quality of education in higher education institutions, and the results indicate that respondents' perceptions are not strongly aligned with effectiveness of IQAS for improving quality of education.

Table 16

Perceptions of the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	83	23.4	23.4	23.4
	No	134	37.7	37.7	61.1
	Not sure	138	38.9	38.9	100.0
	Total	355	100.0	100.0	

Specifically, a minority (23.4%) agreed that the IQAS in their institution is effective, while a substantial portion (37.7%) reported that it is not effective. The large group (38.9%) selected "Not sure", which may suggest limited awareness, inconsistent implementation, or insufficient evidence of IQA impacts among respondents. In general, the distribution shows that 81.1% (37.7% No + 38.9% Not sure) either doubt the effectiveness or are uncertain, whereas only 23.4% demonstrate clear confidence in the effectiveness of IQAS in HEIs.

Therefore, the findings suggest that an effective internal quality assurance system is either not consistently implemented or not sufficiently visible and understood, which can limit its ability to improve educational quality. This results point that there are potential gaps in IQA implementation consistency, stakeholder awareness, and evidence-based communication of outcomes within higher education institutions in Ethiopia.

4.1.7. Factors hindering the implementation of internal quality assurance system in HEIs

This section identifies and analyzes the factors that postgraduate students perceive as hindering the successful implementation of internal quality assurance system in their institutions. Recognizing these barriers is essential for designing targeted interventions and institutional reforms aimed at strengthening quality assurance practices.

Table 17

Factors hindering the implementation of internal quality assurance system in HEIs

		Responses		Percent of
		N	Percent	Cases
Factors hinder the implementation of internal quality assurance system in HEIs	Lack of institutional commitment	246	13.9%	69.3%
	Ambiguous policies and frameworks	178	10.1%	50.1%
	Inadequate training and development	247	14.0%	69.6%
	Limited stakeholders engagement	199	11.3%	56.1%
	Lack of sufficient resources	217	12.3%	61.1%
	Resistance to change	136	7.7%	38.3%
	Lack of quality culture	196	11.1%	55.2%
	Poor communication among quality assurance stakeholders	176	10.0%	49.6%
	Lack of coherence in quality assurance activities	140	7.9%	39.4%
	Other	31	1.8%	8.7%
Total		1766	100.0%	497.5%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

The study also looked into the things that prevent HEIs from implementing internal quality assurance systems. According to the results, lack of institutional commitment and insufficient training and growth were the most commonly mentioned obstacles. In particular, 69.6% of respondents said that IQAS implementation is hampered by insufficient training and development, and 69.3% said that institutional commitment is lacking. This implies that staff competency and ongoing capacity building are critical to the successful deployment of IQAS. It also suggests that the system may continue to be underdeveloped, implemented inconsistently, or perpetuated badly if institutional leadership does not continuously promote IQAS. Significant percentages of respondents also mentioned difficulties relating to participation and resources. 61.1% of respondents said they lacked necessary resources, suggesting that HEIs' capacity to set up and manage IQA initiatives successfully may be hampered by insufficient financing, staffing, and

material assistance. Similarly, low stakeholder engagement (56.1%) suggests that when important stakeholders are not actively participating in the planning, monitoring, evaluation, and improvement processes, IQAS implementation is hampered.

Barriers pertaining to communication and quality culture were also prevalent. The findings indicate that inadequate communication among quality assurance stakeholders (49.6%) and a lack of a quality culture (55.2%) were frequent obstacles. These results suggest that when quality assurance is viewed as a compliance task rather than an institutional value, IQAS may not yield the anticipated improvements. Furthermore, poor communication might jeopardize role coordination, responsibility clarity, and feedback systems, all of which are crucial for ongoing quality improvement.

Similar emphasis was placed on framework and policy-related limitations. 50.1% of responses were related to ambiguous policies and frameworks, suggesting that imprecise guidelines could lead to inconsistent implementation strategies across programs or departments. Similarly, 39.4% of respondents noted a lack of coherence in quality assurance operations, indicating that internal quality assurance procedures may be dispersed, poorly integrated across units, or inconsistently carried out from planning to evaluation and improvement in HEIs. Despite being chosen less frequently than the other variables, resistance to change (38.3%) is nevertheless a significant implementation issue. This shows that staff attitudes, a fear of taking on more work, or a lack of support for quality initiatives may make it difficult for some HEIs to embrace new or enhanced IQAS procedures. Lastly, the "other" category was quite small (8.7%), indicating that the majority of the obstacles encountered by respondents fell into the pre-established categories.

Generally, the study shows that capacity and leadership problems (training and institutional commitment), support limitations (resources), and system functioning concerns (stakeholder involvement, quality culture, communication, and policy clarity) are the main obstacles to IQAS implementation at HEIs. Therefore, in order to strengthen IQAS implementation and create a sustainable quality culture and functional quality assurance system, HEIs need to invest in staff development, secure leadership commitment, allocate sufficient resources, clarify policies and frameworks, and improve communication and stakeholder participation.

4.2. Instructors' Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

This section summarizes the quantitative results generated from data collected from 303 instructors at the three first-generation universities. To build the demographic profile of the instructors' sample, the analysis begins by presenting respondents' background information, such as university affiliation, college affiliation, educational qualification, gender, academic rank, and years of teaching experience. The section then systematically investigates instructors' familiarity with the concept of internal quality assurance system, their perspectives on the establishment of internal quality assurance system, including the presence of clear guidelines and accountable bodies at the departmental level, and the extent of stakeholder involvement in program review processes.

The analysis then moves on to assess the adequacy of internal quality assurance standards, the efficiency of various IQAS components, the execution of ETA's focus areas, and the availability and quality of educational resources and facilities. The section also investigated instructors' opinions of student participation in quality assurance activities, the barriers to IQAS implementation, and the interrelationships among different characteristics of the internal quality assurance system using correlation analysis.

Throughout the analysis, descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, are used to summarize the data, while inferential statistical tests, such as one-sample t-tests, ANOVA, and Pearson's correlation, are used to determine the statistical significance of the findings and strength of relationships between variables. The findings are interpreted in relation to the research topics that guided this study, and comparisons are made between universities and demographic groups to uncover patterns and areas that need institutional attention.

Table 18

Instructors' Background Information

		Frequency	Percent
University	1 Addis Ababa University	82	27.1
	2 Hawassa University	88	29.0
	3 Jimma University	133	43.9
College/Institute/School	1 Education and Behavioral Studies	104	34.3
	2 Social Sciences and Humanities	121	39.9
	3 Natural and Computational Sciences	48	15.8
	4 Veterinary Medicine and Agriculture	30	9.9
Educational Qualification	1 BA/BED/B.Sc.	2	0.7
	2 MA/M.Sc./MD	155	51.2
	3 PhD	146	48.2
Gender	1 Male	251	82.8
	2 Female	52	17.2
Academic Rank	1 Assistant Lecturer	7	2.3
	2 Lecturer	123	40.6
	3 Assistant Professor	125	41.3
	4 Associate Professor	44	14.5
	5 Professor	4	1.3
Experience at the University in years	1 1-5 years	25	8.3
	2 6-10 years	86	28.4
	3 11-15 years	89	29.4
	4 16-20 years	72	23.8
	5 Above 20 years	31	10.2
	Total	**303**	**100.0**

As can be seen from the table, the demographic results indicate that majority of the respondents were from Jimma (43.9%), followed by Hawassa University (29%) and Addis Ababa University (27.1%). Regarding academic units, most respondents came from Social Sciences and Humanities (39.9%), followed by Education and Behavioral Studies (34.3%). Smaller portions were from Natural and Computational Sciences (15.8%) and Veterinary Medicine and Agriculture (9.9%). In terms of educational qualification, respondents were predominantly Master's level (51.2%) and PhD level (48.2%), with very few at the BA/BED/B.Sc. (0.7%). The sample also shows a strong gender imbalance, with most respondents being male (82.8%) and fewer being female (17.2%). With respect to academic rank, the majority of respondents were Assistant Professor (41.3%) and

Lecturer (40.6%), while fewer were Associate Professor (14.5%) and Assistant Lecturer (2.3%) or Professor (1.3%). Finally, in relation to experience, respondents were mostly distributed across the mid-career categories, with 11-15 years (29.4%) and 6-10 years (28.4%) being the most common, followed by 16-20 years (23.8%), and the smallest group reported 1-5 years (8.3%) of work experience at HEIs.

4.2.1. Concept of internal quality assurance system

Table 19

Level of familiarity with the concept of internal quality assurance system

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not familiar	41	13.5	13.5	13.5
	Somewhat familiar	195	64.4	64.4	77.9
	Very familiar	67	22.1	22.1	100.0
	Total	303	100.0	100.0	

Table 19 summarizes instructors' level of familiarity with the concept of the internal quality assurance system. The answers were divided into three categories: very familiar, somewhat familiar, and not familiar. Out of all respondents, 41 (13.5%) said they were not familiar with the notion of an internal quality assurance system, 195 (64.4%) said they were somewhat aware, and 67 (22.1%) said they were very familiar. The majority of instructors fell into the "somewhat familiar" category, indicating a generally modest level of exposure to the idea of internal quality assurance system, according to the cumulative distribution.

The results show that the vast majority of teachers (86.5%) said they were somewhat knowledgeable (64.4%) or extremely familiar (22.1%) with the internal quality assurance system. Just 13.5% of respondents said they were unfamiliar with the idea. This trend implies that many instructors have at least a rudimentary understanding of how internal quality assurance frameworks are supposed to function within institutions, and that HEIs have probably developed some degree of awareness or communication on internal quality assurance.

The prevalence of the "somewhat familiar" response (64.4%) suggests that although awareness is present, it has not yet resulted in a thorough or profound conceptual grasp for all instructors. The very modest percentage of people who are "not familiar" (13.5%) suggests that HEIs may need to close this inclusion gap by providing focused orientation or assistance. In general, the data indicates that HEIs have a fairly knowledgeable instructor base. However, in order to increase the effectiveness of internal quality assurance, institutions should concentrate on transforming instructors from "somewhat familiar" to "very familiar" through organized training, more precise descriptions of roles and responsibilities, and chances for hands-on participation in internal quality assurance activities.

4.2.2. Establishment of internal quality assurance system

Table 20

Are there clear guidelines for conducting internal quality assurance system?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	122	40.3	40.3	40.3
	No	69	22.8	22.8	63.0
	Not sure	112	37.0	37.0	100.0
	Total	303	100.0	100.0	

The study evaluated respondents' perceptions of the existence of explicit rules for carrying out an internal quality assurance system. The results show that 122 (40.3%) respondents selected “Yes”, 69 (22.8%) respondents selected “No”, and 112 (37%) respondents selected “Not sure” out of a total of 303 responses. The majority-level opinions were divided between those who reported absence (22.8%) and those who were unsure (37%), with 40.3% indicating overall guideline clarity.

Interpretation of the results indicates that respondents do not always recognize explicit internal quality assurance rules. The largest single category, "Yes," at 40.3%, shows that a sizable majority of the population thinks there are guidelines; nonetheless, this percentage is much below 50%, indicating that there is no significant consensus in favor of general clarification. The 22.8% "No"

answers further suggest that a sizable percentage of participants believe there are gaps in the guidelines that prevent the establishment of a consistent internal quality assurance system.

Lastly, the comparatively large "Not sure" rating (37%) suggests confusion that may be related to poor procedural communication, insufficient staff exposure to quality assurance documents, or inconsistent departmental use of rules. When combined, the percentage of respondents who selected "No" or "Not sure" is 59.8%, indicating that internal quality assurance procedures need to be developed, made more accessible, and communicated. Increasing staff understanding and bolstering the dissemination of guidelines could help make the quality assurance system more transparent and less ambiguous.

Table 21

Is there a responsible body for the implementation of quality QAS in your department?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	139	45.9	45.9	45.9
	No	108	35.6	35.6	81.5
	Not sure	56	18.5	18.5	100.0
	Total	303	100.0	100.0	

The study looked at whether the respondent's department has a responsible body in place to establish a quality assurance system. 139 individuals (45.9%) answered "Yes" out of 303 total responses, indicating that almost half of the respondents believe there is a responsible entity. However, 108 respondents (35.6%) said "No," meaning that more than one-third think there isn't a body like that. Furthermore, 56 respondents (18.5%) chose "Not sure," indicating ambiguity on the departmental duty structure for quality assurance.

In general, the results show that the department's perception of a responsible organization for quality assurance is not well-established. Despite being the largest single response category, "Yes" is still below the 50% criterion, indicating that a majority-level agreement in favor of the existence of a responsible body was not reached. The comparatively large percentage of "No" answers also

points to possible weaknesses in implementation supervision, quality assurance governance, or clarity about who is responsible for maintaining quality procedures.

Lastly, the significant "Not sure" response rate suggests that respondents may have little or inconsistent knowledge of quality assurance duties and responsibilities. The mix of "No" and "Not sure" replies (54.1%) highlights the necessity of bolstering accountability frameworks and making sure that duties in quality assurance governance are precisely defined, recorded, and conveyed to employees. Ownership and implementation practices of the quality assurance system can be better understood and aligned if roles are made clear and the quality assurance implementation body is made more visible.

Table 22

Reported levels of internal quality assurance system in HEIs

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Levels of IQAS at Universities	University Level	264	47.9%	87.1%
	College Level	188	34.1%	62.0%
	Department Level	77	14.0%	25.4%
	Program Level	22	4.0%	7.3%
Total		551	100.0%	181.8%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

The table shows that the internal quality assurance system is mainly located at the university level in the majority of sampled universities. The high percentage of respondents who chose the university level (264 picks; 87.1% of cases) reflects this. This suggests that the IQAS framework is mostly institution-wide and centralized, with the most prominent or well-established quality assurance structures, rules, and supervision mechanisms found at the top of the organizations.

The presence of IQAS becomes significantly less noticeable as it gets into more operational domains, even though the college level is also chosen somewhat frequently (62% of cases). Only 25.4% of cases choose the department level, and only 7.3% choose the program level. This pattern suggests that IQAS is not regularly applied (or at least not perceived) at the levels where curriculum delivery, teaching, learning processes, evaluation, and ongoing program improvement really take place. To put it another way, the approach is well-established in administrative systems but has little use in regular, unit-level practice.

One important conclusion is that centralized IQAS is insufficient on its own to promote long-term program quality improvements. Internal quality improvement stays mostly procedural (e.g., documentation, reporting, and compliance) rather than evidence-driven continuous improvement of teaching and learning if program and department-level quality assurance processes are weak or poorly articulated. Therefore, enhancing vertical alignment and operational capacity, such as defining roles and responsibilities at the departmental and program levels, guaranteeing frequent program monitoring and review cycles, and creating feedback loops to ensure that institutional quality objectives are translated into day-to-day academic practice, and it should be part of strengthening IQAS.

4.2.3. Involvement of stakeholders in program review

Table 23

Have you ever participated in any quality assurance related activities in your institution?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	166	54.8	54.8	54.8
	No	137	45.2	45.2	100.0
	Total	303	100.0	100.0	

This inquiry aimed to ascertain the involvement of instructors in HEI quality assurance initiatives. "Have you ever participated in any quality assurance related activities in your institution?" was the

question posed to respondents. 303 genuine responses served as the basis for the analysis. Instructor participation levels were described using frequency and percentage statistics.

According to the findings, 54.8% of teachers (166 respondents) reported that they had taken part in quality assurance-related activities, whilst 45.2% (137 respondents) noted that they had never done so. This distribution indicates that while professors participate in quality assurance procedures in many HEIs, it is not always the case. To put it another way, while the majority of teachers are working on quality assurance projects, a sizable percentage are either not involved at all or are not impacted by them.

Since a successful quality assurance system usually depends on academic staff engagement for installation, feedback, and continual development, the 54.8% participation percentage can be seen as a moderately supportive level for institutional quality assurance system. However, the nearly half percentage of non-participation (45.2%) raises concerns for HEIs; if instructors do not understand their roles, do not regularly participate in quality assurance mechanisms, or do not believe that quality assurance activities are relevant to improving teaching and learning, quality assurance becomes less effective.

Generally, the results suggest that HEIs should improve their methods for increasing instructor involvement in quality assurance initiatives. To lower obstacles related to workload or low awareness, practical measures could include enhancing communication regarding quality assurance procedures, outlining instructor responsibilities, providing training on quality assurance procedures and expectations, and incorporating quality assurance activities into regular departmental routines. This would guarantee that quality assurance is credible, inclusive, and able to promote steady gains in academic quality throughout the institutions.

Table 24

Involvement external stakeholders in the program review procedure

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	84	27.7	27.7	27.7
	Sometimes	208	68.6	68.6	96.4
	Frequently	11	3.6	3.6	100.0
	Total	303	100.0	100.0	

The table demonstrates that external stakeholders, such as employers and other partners, are primarily intermittently involved in program monitoring and/or review at their institutions. 3.6% of the N = 303 respondents said they were involved "frequently," indicating that outsider participation in program reviews is not very widespread.

Given the part stakeholders play in raising the standard of education, it is crucial to interpret this outcome. Regular stakeholder interaction is crucial because it enables program review to be influenced by current expectations from society and the labor market, such as graduate competencies, emerging industry needs, and relevant skills. Program evaluation may rely more on internal evidence and viewpoints when external input happens "sometimes" (or not at all). This can lessen the possibility that teaching, learning outcomes, and assessment will continue to be well linked with real-world objectives.

To sum up, the results point to a clear area for improvement; institutions should work to institutionalize stakeholder involvement to increase the frequency of outside input during program monitoring and review cycles. Establishing advisory committees, scheduling partner feedback sessions, and mandating employer/partner participation to curriculum revisions and quality assurance reports are a few examples of how to do this. By making stakeholder evidence a regular component of ongoing improvement, this would improve the caliber and applicability of instruction.

Table 25

Does your institution have IQA standards to control all of its activities?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	148	48.8	48.8	48.8
	No	44	14.5	14.5	63.4
	Not sure	111	36.6	36.6	100.0
	Total	303	100.0	100.0	

The responses of HEIs' instructors to the question of whether their institutions have internal quality assurance standards to oversee all activities are compiled in the table. There were 303 respondents in the entire sample. Of them, 44 instructors (14.5%) said "No" that such standards exist, while 148 instructors (48.8%) said "Yes." An additional 111 instructors (36.6%) indicated that they were unsure whether these internal quality assurance requirements were in place by answering "Not sure." According to the statistics, almost half of the instructors (48.8%) are aware of internal quality assurance requirements that apply to all operations in HEIs. Nonetheless, a sizable percentage of educators either dispute the existence of these standards (14.5%) or are unsure of their presence (36.6%). Combining these two categories results in 51.1% of valid replies (No + Not sure), indicating that instructors are not regularly informed about or acknowledged by the institutional quality assurance standard.

These results suggest a communication and awareness problem in HEIs; many instructors do not believe that the internal quality assurance standards exist or do not have enough knowledge to verify their existence, even though they may exist at the institutional or administrative levels. Because it indicates potential gaps in the transmission of quality assurance policies, limited visibility of quality assurance processes in daily academic work, or unequal implementation across units, the comparatively large "Not sure" category is especially significant.

Table 26

Effectiveness of the standards of IQAS in terms of controlling the quality of education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very ineffective	1	.3	.7	.7
	Ineffective	19	6.3	12.8	13.5
	Neutral	44	14.5	29.7	43.2
	Effective	82	27.1	55.4	98.6
	Very effective	2	.7	1.4	100.0
	Total	148	48.8	100.0	
No IQAS	standard	155	51.2		
Total		303	100.0		

The efficiency of an educational standard for regulating the quality of education in their institution is rated by respondents (N = 148) in the table. This figure represents the number of respondents who said in the previous table (table 25) that their organization has an internal quality assurance standard. More than half of the respondents in that table stated that either their institution does not have such a criterion or they are unaware of its existence. The ratings in the above table mostly cluster in the positive range: 82 respondents (27.1%) chose "effective," and 2 respondents (0.7%) chose "very effective." When efficacy is combined across "effective" and "very effective," the cumulative valid percent is 98.6%. On the other hand, the negative ratings are rather low: 19 respondents (6.3%; total valid percent = 13.5%) reported being ineffective, while 1 respondent (0.3%; cumulative valid percent = 0.7%) reported being highly ineffective. With 44 responses (14.5%), the largest single category is neutral, indicating that a significant segment is unsure of how well the standard works or views it as neither obviously beneficial nor ineffective.

The distribution suggests that perceived efficacy is high but not unqualified. When cumulative categories are taken into account, the cumulative pattern suggests that nearly all valid respondents who gave a rating ended up at or below the "effective" and "very effective" points; however, the existence of neutral responses indicates variation in how the standard is interpreted or applied. This neutrality may be due to variations in institutional acceptance (some departments may apply

the standard as it is now but not clearly generate improvements) and awareness variability (some respondents may not be fully informed). Conversely, the comparatively low number of negative evaluations indicates that the majority of respondents did not express displeasure.

Because the majority of valid respondents rate the internal quality assurance standard as effective (55.4% effective + 1.4 very effective) and only a small minority view it as ineffective (12.8% ineffective + 0.7% very ineffective), the distribution indicates that higher education instructors who responded have a generally positive awareness of and buy-in to the standard. To put it another way, the majority of instructors who are contacted by or participate in the internal quality assurance process believe that it helps to ensure the quality of education.

Simultaneously, "Neutral" (14.5%), the primary sign of communication gaps, incomplete awareness, or uneven experience of the standard, is the greatest single category. "Neutral" typically refers to one or more of the following: instructors may have little exposure to the standard's practical application; they may be aware of the IQA requirements but not persuaded that they produce noticeable improvements; or implementation may be uneven across units or programs, resulting in some instructors seeing benefits while others see little impact. Therefore, neutrality indicates confusion rather than strong disagreement, which is frequently the result of ineffective instruction, communication, or feedback.

Table 27

The extent to which the policy of IQAS fulfils the stated requirements

		Test Value = 3							
								95% CI of the Difference	
IQAS Policy:		N	M	SD	t	df	P	MD	L	U
1.	is integrated with academic programs.	303	3.41	.829	8.66	302	.000	.413	.32	.51
2.	is clearly communicated and accessible.	303	2.97	.916	-.63	302	.531	-.033	-.14	.07
3.	provides a comprehensive framework for quality assurance practices.	303	3.10	.928	1.92	302	.056	.102	.00	.21
4.	encompasses the rules and responsibilities of quality assurance stakeholders.	303	3.12	.903	2.35	302	.019	.122	.02	.22
5.	is aligned with national and international quality assurance standards.	303	3.13	.873	2.57	302	.011	.129	.03	.23
6.	is open to feedback mechanisms.	303	2.83	.906	-3.36	302	.001	-.175	-.28	-.07
7.	is regularly reviewed and updated to reflect changing needs and best practices.	303	2.84	.856	-3.29	302	.001	-.162	-.26	-.06
8.	satisfies stakeholders' needs and interests.	303	2.81	.833	-4.07	302	.000	-.195	-.29	-.10
9.	contributes to achieving the long-term vision of the university.	303	3.17	.935	3.07	302	.002	.165	.06	.27

A one-sample t-test with a value of three was used to analyze instructors' opinions on how well the IQAS policy satisfies specified standards. The table's findings show that most IQAS policy statements were scored considerably higher by participants than the benchmark (test value = 3). In particular, mean scores for statements pertaining to the implementation of a thorough framework for quality assurance procedures and the integration of the IQAS policy with academic programs were significantly higher than the test value.

The statement "clearly communicated and accessible" in relation to policy communication and accessibility did not significantly differ from the test value, t = -0.63, p =.531, indicating that

although instructors generally agreed with this statement (M = 2.97), the perceived degree of fulfilment was not statistically significant enough to surpass the expected level. Similar to the benchmark, the statement "offers a comprehensive framework for quality assurance practices" had a little higher mean (M = 3.10) and was nonetheless statistically nonsignificant (t = 1.92, p =.056). This pattern implies that even while instructors have a favorable opinion of the policy structure, it might not be consistently applied or comprehended as fully fulfilling the stated demand.

A number of policy elements showed a strong positive alignment with the fulfilment criterion. The test value (M = 3.12, t = 2.35, p =.019) was considerably lower than the policy statement that "encompasses the rules and regulations of quality assurance stakeholders." Furthermore, the statement "aligned with national and international quality assurance standards" received a rating that was considerably higher than the benchmark (M = 3.13, t = 2.57, p =.011). Additionally, "open to feedback mechanisms" was evaluated much lower than the test value (M = 2.83, t = -3.36, p =.001), suggesting a perceived flaw in the IQAS policy implementation process's inclusion of input.

Additionally, the data demonstrates that some policy statements about continuous improvements were far below the test value. Specifically, "regularly reviewed and updated to reflect changing needs and best practices" was rated far lower than 3 (M = 2.84, t = -3.29, p <.001). Furthermore, the rating for "satisfies stakeholders' needs and interests" was much lower than the benchmark (M = 2.84, t = -4.07, p =.000), indicating that this feature might not be fulfilling stakeholders' expectations as planned. Finally, "contributes to achieving the long-term vision of the university" was evaluated much higher than the benchmark (M = 3.17, t = 3.07, p =.002), indicating that instructors believe the IQAS policy supports strategic institutional goals.

Overall, the results suggest that although the IQAS policy is thought to be somewhat successful in structural alignment, such as coherence with national and international standards and integration with academic programs, its implementation seems to be weaker in mechanisms that support ongoing improvement and responsiveness, especially feedback incorporation and frequent updating. To guarantee that stakeholders' requirements are met more successfully and that policy implementation stays in line with changing best practices, the IQAS policy has to be strengthened throughout its operational cycle (feedback, review, and adaptation).

Table 28

Effectiveness of the components of the IQAS

	Test Value = 3								
								95% CI of the Difference	
IQAS Components	N	M	SD	t	df	P	MD	L	U
Reviewing curriculum/program	303	3.36	.966	6.48	302	.000	.360	.25	.47
Controlling the quality of teaching-learning process	303	3.26	.945	4.74	302	.000	.257	.15	.36
Preparing seminars, workshops and conferences	303	3.18	.964	3.22	302	.001	.178	.07	.29
Research and publications	303	3.16	1.00	2.69	302	.007	.155	.04	.27
Regular quality inspection	303	3.00	.951	-.06	302	.952	-.003	-.11	.10
Reviewing and updating quality assurance policy	303	3.02	.971	.41	302	.679	.023	-.09	.13
Implementing good governance and administrative policy	303	2.98	.985	-.41	302	.683	-.023	-.13	.09
Constant supervision of teachers	303	2.89	.967	-2.02	302	.044	-.112	-.22	.00
Training and development opportunity for staff	303	2.85	1.05	-2.47	302	.014	-.149	-.27	-.03
Overall, how do you rate the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system in improving the quality of education in your institution?	303	2.97	.993	-.58	302	.563	-.033	-.15	.08

A one-sample t-test with a test value of 3 (moderate benchmark) was used to examine instructors' opinions on the IQAS's efficacy in raising educational standards. *M* = 2.97 (*SD* =.993) was the overall effectiveness rating given by instructors. With a 95% CI for the mean difference ranging from -.15 to.08, this overall mean did not differ statistically from the benchmark (*t* = -0.58, *p* =.563). This suggests that teachers believe the IQAS to be reasonably effective, but there is no concrete proof that it is very beneficial in raising educational standards.

Several IQAS components were found to be highly successful by teachers at the domain level. Specifically, curriculum/program review was scored much higher than the benchmark (*M* = 3.36,

t = 6.48, p <.001). Additionally, controlling the quality of the teaching-learning process was substantially better than the benchmark (M = 3.26, t = 4.74, p <.001). Additionally, research and publications (M = 3.16, p =.007) and seminars, workshops, and conferences (M = 3.18, p =.001) were assessed as significantly effective. These results imply that instructors see IQAS activities pertaining to curriculum review and instructional quality monitoring as favorably influencing the enhancement of educational quality.

Two important IQAS domains, on the other hand, received ratings that were far lower than the baseline. Staff training and development opportunities received lower ratings than anticipated (M = 2.85, t = -2.47, p =.014). In a similar vein, teachers' continuous monitoring received ratings below the benchmark (M = 2.89, t = -2.02, p =.044). These findings suggest that even in cases when IQAS procedures are in place, the system may have a smaller overall impact since staff capacity-building and continuing instructional supervision do not consistently match instructors' expectations for the increase of educational quality.

Crucially, other IQAS elements, such as conducting routine quality inspections, reviewing and updating quality assurance policies, and putting excellent governance and administrative policies into practice, did not differ appreciably from the benchmark. This mixed pattern indicates that although some quality assurance activities are seen as robust and functional, implementation gaps undermine the efficacy of IQAS, especially those that promote staff development and long-term teaching improvement through supervision.

In general, the results show that instructors consider the IQAS as generally moderately successful, with notable strengths in curriculum review and teaching-learning quality control and notable deficiencies in staff development and ongoing teacher monitoring. Therefore, in order to increase the effectiveness of IQAS, it would probably be necessary to build on current strengths in curriculum and instructional quality monitoring, prioritize structured and ongoing staff training, and improve the consistency and supportiveness of teacher supervision.

Table 29

Quality of Educational Resources and Facilities

				Test Value = 3					
								95% I of the Difference	
	N	M	SD	t	df	p	MD	L	U
Quality of classroom equipment	303	2.61	1.02	-6.63	302	.000	-.389	-.505	-.274
Flexibility of classroom layout for different teaching methods	303	2.56	1.01	-7.64	302	.000	-.442	-.556	-.328
Availability of computer labs for teaching	303	2.63	1.00	-6.41	302	.000	-.370	-.483	-.256
Reliability of internet access	303	2.86	1.07	-2.25	302	.025	-.139	-.260	-.017
Availability of teaching materials	303	2.73	0.99	-4.69	302	.000	-.267	-.380	-.155
Resources for curriculum planning and development	303	2.70	0.93	-5.70	302	.000	-.304	-.409	-.199
Availability of teaching assistants	303	2.50	0.93	-9.44	302	.000	-.505	-.610	-.400
Access to guidance and counseling services for students	303	2.56	0.99	-7.77	302	.000	-.442	-.554	-.330
Availability of entertainment facilities	303	2.36	1.05	-10.51	302	.000	-.637	-.756	-.518
Overall, how do you rate the availability of resources in your institution?	303	2.58	0.99	-7.40	302	.000	-.422	-.535	-.310
Overall, how do you rate the quality of resources in your institution?	303	2.53	0.98	-8.42	302	.000	-.472	-.582	-.362
Total	**303**	**2.60**	**0.81**	**-8.63**	**302**	**.000**	**-.399**	**-.490**	**-.308**

The findings demonstrate that instructors routinely gave educational facilities and resources a rating that was much lower than the moderate criterion for both availability and quality. $M = 2.60$ ($t = -8.63$, $p < .001$) was the overall evaluation for educational resources, and the 95% confidence interval remained well below the moderate level (95% CI: [2.51, 2.69]). This suggests that instructors view inadequate teaching resources as a widespread and systemic problem in higher education institutions rather than a singular issue.

Entertainment facilities ($M = 2.36$) and the availability of teaching assistants ($M = 2.50$) received the lowest ratings at the item level, indicating that universities are likewise constrained in their ability to offer resources that promote student engagement, learning support, and efficient teaching delivery. Furthermore, the quality of classroom equipment ($M = 2.61$), the adequacy of the

classroom layout (*M* = 2.56), and the availability of computer labs for instruction (*M* = 2.63) were all scored low. These low ratings suggest that instructors may not have sufficient learning environments to use interactive, diversified, or technology-enhanced teaching approaches, even when instruction is scheduled.

Additionally, instructors' ratings of internet reliability fell well short of the moderate threshold (*M* = 2.86, p =.025). This mean indicates inadequate digital infrastructure for teaching and learning, even though it is relatively higher than a number of other metrics. Similarly, the low means for resources for curriculum planning and development (*M* = 2.70) and teaching materials (*M* = 2.73) point to constraints that might have an impact on curriculum responsiveness, instructional quality, and academic staff's capacity to modify teaching content to meet changing educational demands. Additionally, the scant resources had a very low overall quality rating (*M* = 2.53, *t* = -8.42, *p* <.001). This indicates that bad quality is a problem in addition to scarcity, which can further diminish the efficacy of instruction and impede students' educational opportunities.

Table 30

Implementation of Focus Areas of IQAS

				Test Value = 3					
								95% CI of the Difference	
Focus Areas	N	M	SD	t-value	df	p-value	MD	Lower	Upper
Institutional mission	303	3.00	0.87	0.00	302	1.00	.000	-.098	.098
Institutional good governance	303	2.68	0.91	-6.10	302	.000	-.320	-.423	-.217
Teaching-learning Resources	303	2.73	0.93	-5.08	302	.000	-.271	-.375	-.166
Program relevance	303	3.14	0.92	2.56	302	.011	.135	.031	.239
Teaching-learning processes	303	3.07	0.91	1.39	302	.164	.073	-.030	.175
Student support systems	303	2.70	0.98	-5.26	302	.000	-.297	-.408	-.186
Student progression	303	2.90	0.99	-1.79	302	.074	-.102	-.215	.010
Quality of Academic staff	303	3.23	0.94	4.34	302	.000	.234	.128	.340
Research activities	303	2.89	0.95	-1.93	302	.055	-.106	-.213	.002
Graduate outcomes	303	3.01	1.00	0.17	302	.863	.010	-.103	.123
Total	**303**	**2.94**	**0.72**	**-1.56**	**302**	**.119**	**-.064**	**-.145**	**.017**

A series of one-sample t-tests were used to determine whether instructors' judgments of the achievement of emphasis areas inside the internal quality assurance system differed from the test value of 3 (the middle). The findings revealed statistically significant variances in various key areas, including heterogeneity in perceived implementation achievements among higher education teachers.

Instructors judged the institutional mission as lower than the test value, M = 3.00 (SD = 0.87), t = 0.00, p = 1.00, indicating no significant difference from the criterion reference. Institutional good governance was likewise ranked below the test value, M = 2.68 (SD = 0.91), but the difference was not statistically significant (t = -6.10, p =.000). In terms of teaching-learning resources, instructors assessed the focal area at M = 2.73 (SD = 0.93), with a statistically significant difference from the test result (t = -5.08, p =.000). Instructors judged program relevance as M = 3.14 (SD = 0.92), with a statistically significant difference (t = 2.56, p = 0.11).

In terms of teaching-learning processes, instructors reported M = 3.07 (SD = 0.91), with no statistically significant variation from the test value (t = 1.39, p =.164). The mean value for the student support system was 2.70 (SD = 0.98), and the test revealed a statistically significant difference (t = -5.26, p =.000). In terms of student growth, instructors assessed the emphasis area as M = 2.90 (SD = 0.99), and the difference from the test value was not statistically significant (t = -1.79, p =.074), indicating that achievement did not differ significantly from the test value based on the reported significance. Instructor ratings for research activities did not differ substantially from test results, M = 2.89 (SD = 0.95), t = -1.93, p =.055 (MD = -0.106, 95% confidence interval [-0.213, 0.002]). Although the mean was somewhat lower than the threshold, the difference was not statistically significant according to the given p-value. Overall, the total implementation achievement score did not change substantially from the test value: M = 2.94 (SD = 0.72), t = -1.56, p =.119, MD = -0.064, 95% CI [-0.145, 0.017]. Thus, the outcome or implementation of the focal areas of the internal quality assurance system in higher education institutions was moderate (M = 2.94), falling within the 95% confidence interval of [2.85-3.02].

The findings indicate that instructors perceive the success of IQA implementation to be uneven across priority areas. The greatest perceived elements were academic staff quality and program relevance, which received scores much higher than the criteria value. Nearly all of the sampled HEIs have reached the capacity of their academic staff to translate quality assurance systems into

actual execution, according to this form, institutional IQA activities relevant to academic program alignment and human capacity.

On the other hand, instructors gave teaching-learning materials, the student support system, and institutional good governance ratings that were far lower than the criteria value. These findings point to weaknesses in the governance mechanism's execution, the effectiveness of student-centered support services, and the sufficiency of teaching-learning support inputs. Even in cases when program relevance and staff quality are relatively greater, such deficiencies can impair the downstream quality of instructional delivery and learner experience in higher education IQAS.

Instructors' evaluations did not substantially deviate from the criteria value in terms of teaching-learning procedures, student advancement, research endeavors, and graduate results. This suggests that these elements might be applied at a level that is broadly in line with the anticipated standard; on the other hand, the variation in ratings might be due to variations between departments or programs that cancel each other out at the overall level.

Generally, the total score did not considerably deviate from the criterion, even though there were notable variations in a number of key areas. This implies that even if some IQA components are thought to require development, the overall implementation of IQA may be partially established but still lacks consistent efficacy across all target area dimensions.

Table 31

Participation of students in IQA activities

				Test Value = 3					
						p-		95% CI Difference	
	N	M	SD	t-value	df	value	MD	Lower	Upper
Students are involved in program review	303	2.21	1.05	-13.09	302	.000	-.789	-.907	-.670
Fill in course evaluation surveys	303	2.79	1.08	-3.40	302	.001	-.211	-.333	-.089
Regularly receive feedback on findings from course evaluation surveys	303	2.38	1.03	-10.53	302	.000	-.624	-.740	-.507
Regularly informed about measures to be taken as a result of course evaluation surveys	303	2.34	1.00	-11.45	302	.000	-.660	-.773	-.547
Propose measures to improve teaching-learning process	303	2.47	1.01	-9.20	302	.000	-.531	-.645	-.418
Total	**303**	**2.44**	**0.85**	**-11.57**	**302**	**.000**	**-.563**	**-.659**	**-.467**

A one-sample t-test was used to see if students' involvement in internal quality assurance activities differed from the benchmark test value of 3. The composite measure of student participation was considerably lower than the test value, with $M = 2.44$ ($SD = 0.85$), t (302) = -11.57, $p < .001$. The mean difference between the observed score and the test value was negative ($MD = -0.563$, 95% CI [-0.659, -0.467]), indicating that students reported lower levels of participation than expected. Students rated individual IQA items much lower than the test value (all $p < .05$), indicating continuous under-participation across procedures.

The data suggest that students' involvement in IQA activities is still restricted and does not match the required participation requirements. Although students appear to engage to some amount (e.g., by completing course assessment questionnaires), the composite pattern implies gaps in deeper participation, such as involvement in program review, receiving and implementing feedback, and being informed about next steps. This low participation suggests impediments to the implementation of the IQA system, such as a lack of mechanisms for student engagement, poor communication of results and follow-up actions, or restricted chances for students to contribute to improvement planning. As a result, enhancing IQAS should prioritize established student

participation channels, timely publication of evaluation results, and explicit feedback loops that demonstrate how student input influences quality improvement decisions.

Table 32

Hindering factors to the implementation of IQAS

		Responses		Percent
		N	Percent	of Cases
Hindering Factors	Lack of institutional commitment	214	11.8%	70.6%
	Ambiguous policies and frameworks	156	8.6%	51.5%
	Inadequate training and development	246	13.6%	81.2%
	Limited stakeholders engagement	228	12.6%	75.2%
	Resistance to change	132	7.3%	43.6%
	Lack of quality culture	179	9.9%	59.1%
	Poor communication among quality assurance stakeholders	203	11.2%	67.0%
	Lack of coherence in quality assurance activities	187	10.3%	61.7%
	Lack of sufficient resources	257	14.2%	84.8%
	Other	13	0.7%	4.3%
Total		**1815**	**100.0%**	**599.0%**

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Using a multiple-choice style, the survey question asked participants to list the obstacles to implementing an internal quality assurance system ("Please select all that apply"). Therefore, rather than representing mutually exclusive categories, the total number of replies represents cumulative selections across the possibilities. Overall, the findings indicate that capacity and organizational support concerns are linked by respondents to the biggest obstacles to internal quality assurance. Lack of adequate resources was the most commonly mentioned barrier (f = 257; 84.8% of instances). Insufficient training and development (f = 246; 81.2%) and low stakeholder participation (f = 228; 75.2%) came next. According to these results, respondents believe that the execution of internal quality assurance is mostly dependent on sufficient funding, staffing, and possibilities for staff development, as well as on the significant involvement of pertinent stakeholders in quality assurance procedures.

In addition, respondents also identified institutional commitment and internal coordination issues as major challenges. Specifically, 67% of cases (f = 203) supported inadequate communication among quality assurance stakeholders, and 70.6% of cases (f = 214) indicated a lack of institutional commitment. These results imply that IQAS is hampered by insufficient leadership commitment and poor communication strategies among quality-related units or actors. Respondents also mentioned structural and cultural issues. 61.7% of instances (f = 187) reported a lack of coherence in quality assurance efforts, while 59.1% of cases (f = 179) supported a lack of quality culture. Furthermore, 51.5% of cases (f = 156) chose confusing rules and frameworks, indicating that respondents encounter some ambiguity or inconsistency in the guidelines guiding quality assurance methods. Lastly, resistance to change emerged as a significant barrier (f = 132; 43.6%), while being less commonly endorsed than the other categories. This suggests that overcoming attitudes and behaviors associated to change are still required for the successful implementation of the IQA system, even when resources, training, and communication are addressed.

4.2.4. Correlation analysis between the dimensions IQAS

A statistical technique for determining the direction and intensity of a relationship between two continuous variables is correlation analysis (Prematunga, 2012). An essential diagnostic tool for comprehending how institutional quality mechanisms operate as a cohesive ecosystem is the investigation of correlations between the components of an internal quality assurance system. Researchers can ascertain how much these elements reinforce one another by looking at the statistical links between factors including policy, efficacy, educational resources, focus area implementation, and student participation. These variables usually show strong positive correlations in a high-functioning academic setting, indicating a direct relationship between the perceived effectiveness and influence of the quality assurance system and a strong policy framework and strategy implementation focus.

This kind of study shows which particular forces, such formal policy, have the biggest impact on the system's overall efficacy in addition to identifying the degree of these interdependencies. Academic administrators must comprehend these dynamics in order to make data-driven decisions that prioritize the most important factors, ensuring ongoing institutional progress and stakeholder satisfaction.

Table 33

Correlations between dimensions of internal quality assurance systems

Variables			1	2	3	4	5
1.	Policy of IQAS	Pearson Correlation	1				
		p-value					
		N	303				
2.	Effectiveness of IQAS	Pearson Correlation	.70**	1			
		p-value	.000				
		N	303	303			
3.	Educational Resources and Facilities	Pearson Correlation	.44**	.45**	1		
		p-value	.000	.000			
		N	303	303	303		
4.	Implementation Focus areas of IQAS	Pearson Correlation	.58**	.61**	.58**	1	
		p-value	.000	.000	.000		
		N	303	303	303	303	
5.	Students Participation in IQAS	Pearson Correlation	.56**	.55**	.34**	.54**	1
		p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	
		N	303	303	303	303	303

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The study's five dimensions, policy, efficacy, educational resources and facilities, focus area implementation, and students' involvement in the internal quality assurance system were examined using a Pearson correlation analysis. N = 303 was the sample size utilized in the study for each pairwise test. The table demonstrates that the dimensions evolve together in a consistent way, with all correlations being positive and statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) (p-values indicated as.000). This general trend shows correlation as well as proof that enhancements in one aspect of the IQA system might result in enhancements in other aspects. These coefficients' moderate to strong characteristics imply that the IQAS operates as a cohesive system as opposed to a collection of discrete administrative duties.

The policy and the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system had the strongest correlation found in the data (r =.70, p <.001). This high link implies that the most important predictor of the perceived effectiveness of the quality assurance system is the existence of a formal, well-defined policy framework. Operational success seems to be considerably better in institutions with well-documented norms and procedures.

Additionally, there was a strong association between the implementation of priority areas and both IQAS policy (r =.58, p <.001) and effectiveness (r =.61, p <.001). This suggests that the practical implementation of the policy becomes more apparent and effective when an organization concentrates its efforts on particular high-priority areas of quality assurance. The information shows that a significant factor influencing the system's overall effect is the shift from policy to practice.

Overall, there were moderate correlations between the role of educational resources and facilities and the implementation of focus areas (r =.58, p <.001). Although resources are necessary for carrying out quality assurance tasks, their somewhat lower correlation with overall effectiveness (r =.45, p <.001) indicates that infrastructure by itself is insufficient; in order to maximize its usefulness within the IQAS framework, it must be combined with strong leadership and policy.

Participation of students in quality assurance activities is still a major factor and has the strongest correlation with the IQAS policy (r =.56, p <.001). It's interesting to note that student participation and educational resources had the smallest association in the entire matrix (r =.34, p <.001). This suggests that institutional policy and culture, rather than the actual availability of facilities and resources, are what motivate students to participate in quality assurance.

In general, the information points to the IQAS as a highly interdependent system. Administrators should give formal policies and execution strategies top priority in order to improve institutional quality since they offer the best basis for system efficacy. Resources and student involvement are important, but their effects are greatest when they are incorporated into a well-defined, policy-driven organizational structure.

4.3. Qualitative Data Analysis

In this section, data collected through interview from instructors were presented, analyzed, and interpreted in thematic approach. The thematic analysis was followed by a systematic process such as familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for and reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing a coherent narrative that links the findings to research questions and relevant literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding was conducted manually, with attention paid to recurring patterns, concepts, and experiences across participants' accounts. Participant codes (P001-P020) were used throughout the analysis to maintain anonymity while allowing for cross-referencing of responses. A total of 20 participants from three first-generation universities (Addis Ababa University, Hawassa University, and Jimma University) participated in this study. Participants included quality assurance directors, college-level quality assurance coordinators, senior academic staff, and quality assurance experts/officers.

4.3.1. Establishment of Internal Quality Assurance System in HEIs

Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS) was established in Ethiopian HEIs after the introduction and establishment of the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) now called Education Training Authority (ETA), the governing body that oversee the quality of higher education institutions in 2003 following the decision of the Higher Education Proclamation No. 351/2003 (FDRE, 2003).

Later in 2009, the Higher Education Proclamation No. 650/2009 was enacted, mandates that HEIs establish a reliable institutional or internal quality assurance system to improve educational standards (FDRE, 2009). Since its adoption, the majority of Ethiopian HEIs have initiated the development of IQAS aimed at enhancing the quality of education at the institutional level.

The establishment of the IQAS at Addis Ababa University began in 2012 with the establishment of Office for Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement. Staffed by specialists in educational management, information systems, and quality management, this initiative marked a significant milestone in the University's commitment to academic excellence (AAU, 2012). As the institution aspires to be among Africa's top graduate and research universities, safeguarding the quality of its programs is both essential and strategic, especially given the breadth of study programs it manages. Moreover, it is widely believed that Addis Ababa University served as a model for other Ethiopian

HEIs, many of which subsequently began developing their own internal quality assurance system based on its experience.

Across Ethiopian HEIs, internal quality assurance system exists under various names and organizational structures. In the sampled three universities, IQAS is referred differently, such as Quality Assurance and Academic Standards, Quality Enhancement and Standards, and Quality Assurance and Risk Management. With regard to accountability, quality assurance is accountable either to the president or academic vice president in Ethiopian HEIs. However, according to the new autonomous structure, quality assurance at Addis Ababa University, is accountable to the university's governing board. This shift grants the office greater authority and independence in overseeing academic quality, minimizing executive interference. The autonomous arrangement is expected to empower more robust execution and control over educational standards and is widely regarded as best practice that other Ethiopian HEIs may emulate.

> Although the IQAS is structured at some levels in the HEIs, responsible groups at every level have not been quite aware of what type of quality is needed and how it should be handled. It's not properly explained, guided, and put in place (participant 011, June 2025).

The interview participants were asked how the IQAS was established, how it works and the reasons behind its establishment. The interviews conducted with participants regarding the establishment and functioning of the IQAS revealed varying levels of understanding and knowledge about its historical background and significance.

One of the participants reacted that "I am not very clear about the historical issue of this, how the quality assurance systems, especially for higher education, established (participant 001, May 2025)". Besides, another participant added that "To be honest, I don't have explicit information on the historical background of quality assurance practices in our education system (participant 003 May, 2025)".

In addition, one participant added that:

> Honestly speaking, I don't recall when the Internal Quality Assurance System was established at our institution, but I know that without even having a structure

> as a Quality Assurance System, in one way or the other, there has been a unit responsible for assuring quality (participant 010 June, 2025).

It is unlikely to hear from key informants that they really do not know the historical background and establishment of the IQAS in Ethiopian HEIs working as a quality assurance director, expert and coordinator. This implies that less attention is given to IQAS and/or showcases lack of awareness on the topic.

In addition, participant coded P018 added that "I think there is not a fair, maybe, understanding or equal understanding and equal perception about quality." Apart from its establishment, understanding of quality assurance by itself is under question among stakeholders in higher education institutions.

The researcher asked again whether the university has established the quality assurance office by its own or by other external forces direction. However, one of the key informants coded 002 responded that "…there was no external force in the establishment of quality assurance office in our institution…it was the university's plan to set up the office." Although the reality behind the establishment of the system is HERQA and MoE that made the HEIs to establish their own institutional quality assurance system as per the Proclamation No. 351/2003 (FDRE, 2003). In addition, the primary purpose of the Office for Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement is to provide leadership in the coordination of university-wide efforts to improve student learning and enhance institutional effectiveness.

The data from key informants depict that there is lack of clarity and historical context regarding the establishment of the IQAS in HEIs. For instance, participant 001 expressed uncertainty about the historical aspects of the IQAS, indicating a gap in knowledge regarding the origins and development of QAS in higher education. This sentiment was echoed by participant 003, who admitted to lacking explicit information about the historical background of quality assurance practices within the higher education system.

Furthermore, differences in perspectives can be attributed to a lack of awareness and clear working guidelines with commitment of the stakeholders. Mensah (2022) believes that the implementation

of internal quality assurance system can only be effective if all members of the institution are aware of it and if all members are involved.

This issue can be the result of less communication of quality assurance guidelines as one of the research participant raised as follows:

> Quality assurance policies and guidelines put on paper, you know, are not quite communicated to the concerning individuals at departmental level, college level and other stakeholders. They do not know this, you know, they are not that much oriented. There is less orientation on this, on the need of quality assurance and how to improve, how to improve at the level of the department, level of academy commission and all the way through to the head of the university system (Participant 019, June 2025).

Participants described the establishment of internal quality assurance system as an externally driven process, primarily originating from national policy mandates rather than institutional initiatives. The majority of participants lacked precise historical knowledge, often prefacing their responses with uncertainty.

According to data from participants, a striking pattern emerged regarding institutional memory. Many key participants explicitly stated their lack of historical knowledge:

"I am not very clear about the historical issue of this, how the quality assurance systems, especially for higher education, established" (P001, April 2025).

"To be honest, I don't have explicit information on the historical background of quality assurance practices in our education system" (P003, April 2025).

"I am not sure when exactly the quality assurance office is established" (P008, May 2025).

"Honestly speaking, I don't recall when the internal quality assurance system was established" (P013, June 2025).

"I don't have exact information when the office was established" (P015, June 2025).

This consistent pattern of historical uncertainty suggests a potential discontinuity in institutional memory and the possible absence of documented historical records accessible to current personnel. To sum up, the result indicates a mix of awareness and knowledge gaps among participants regarding the historical context and establishment of the IQAS, with some participants being able to pinpoint specific milestones while others expressed uncertainty.

4.3.2. Internal Quality Assurance System Policy and Guidelines

Ethiopia formally introduced quality assurance as a fundamental component of its higher education system through the Higher Education Proclamation No. 351/2003. This legislation led to the establishment of a dedicated regulatory body, originally named HERQA (now ETA), to oversee and uphold educational standards. Subsequently, HEIs were mandated to develop their own internal quality assurance systems to ensure the provision of quality education. To fulfill this requirement, HEIs are expected to formulate quality assurance policies and guidelines that govern their internal processes and practices.

Participants were asked whether their institutions have policy guidelines, and to what extent they are implemented in their institutions. As the data from participants revealed, a significant disconnect emerged between the existence of quality assurance policies and their actual implementation. Participants across all three universities acknowledged the presence of draft policy documents while simultaneously questioning their effectiveness in practice.

Participant 001 described the recent development of guidelines at Hawassa University:

"We developed our own guidelines, guideline for academic quality assurance, guideline for research and community service engagement and guideline for student services. So we do have now…we are at the stage of approval of the documents" (Participant 001, April 2025).

This implies that the guidelines are not working as long as they are not approved. Another participant (P005) from the same institution noted the limitations: "We have only a guideline, no policy and manual" (Participant 005, April 2025). This in turn reveals the communication or knowledge gap among the participants of the study working in the same area but different information about the policy and guidelines of their institution.

The ongoing disparity between the availability of quality assurance rules and standards and their successful application in routine institutional practice emerged as a major issue from the interviews. The majority of participants from all three universities acknowledged that quality assurance policy documents either already existed, were being developed, or were in draft form. They did, however, also express skepticism regarding the degree to which these documents were applied as intended and uniformly enforced throughout units and institutions.

On the extreme end of the spectrum, several participants talked about continuous development processes where guidelines were being created and awaited approval. For instance, participant 001 explained the development of several guidelines pertaining to quality assurance and mentioned that the institution was in the approval stage for these documents (P001, April, 2025). Similarly, P013 said that a quality assurance strategy was in place and described institutional measures to improve policy coverage by creating a taskforce to create new policy tools (P013, June 2025).

In other instances, participants indicated that the policy environment was inconsistent or lacking. Jimma University participants discussed the use of draft policies that were not fully approved by the institute's proper governance procedures. Participant 007 clarified that a draft policy was being used in spite of worries that it had not been approved by the appropriate body and officially implemented. In a similar vein, participant 008 explained that although a draft had been created, it had not yet been submitted to important authorities for approval, and the endorsement process was still ongoing. These instances highlight a prevalent circumstance where policy texts are accessible on paper or in draft form but lack the institutional ownership, formal authority, or legitimacy that frequently support successful implementation.

Participants mentioned the function of governing instruments and supporting paperwork in addition to the availability of general policies. For example, Addis Ababa University's P016 and P017 described complementary resources such program-specific manuals, audit checklists, and operational instructions and designated the Senate Act as the main regulating text. This suggests that high-level institutional instruments meant to direct implementation are stacked into quality assurance governance.

Participants repeatedly highlighted implementation as the primary problem, even in cases when policy documents were characterized as existent. P013 made it clear that the implementation of

policies and directives, rather than a lack of policies, was the main obstacle. This framing is crucial because it moves the focus of the issue from "policy absence" to operationalization, execution, and enforcement.

For instance, P002 at Hawassa University suggested that participants could confidently affirm the existence of defined policies, procedures, and guidelines in practice, attributing this uncertainty to administrative and structural factors like a centralized education system and delayed or top-down policy availability. Additionally, P001 stated that as the guidelines were still being developed and had not yet been approved for further deployment, it was impossible to determine their effectiveness. These observations imply that the existence of a policy does not always translate into its functionality: documents may be awaiting approval, lacking in useable forms, or insufficiently operationalized to direct regular quality assurance operations.

Participants at Addis Ababa University and Jimma University also characterized implementation as inadequate or shallow. Participant 008 explained an audit/checklist-driven strategy in which departments filled out necessary checklists to identify strengths and weaknesses, but then failed to create action plans to address weaknesses or meaningful enhancements, leading to the conclusion that implementation was ineffective (P008, May 2025). P017 reaffirmed the same point by highlighting that, despite the policies' strength on paper, uniform implementation across colleges remained the largest obstacle. Similar to this, P009 recognized that a number of quality assurance tools were suitable and that service quality might progressively improve; the main issue, however, was the implementation phase, when policies were not carried out as planned (P009, May 2026). Jimma University's P010 also mentioned that there were rules and regulations, but there were difficulties in putting them into practice.

Collectively, these accounts indicate that implementation issues stem from a number of interrelated problems, such as converting quality assurance requirements into practical operational plans, addressing identified weaknesses, guaranteeing uniform enforcement across organizational units, and the institutions' ability to go beyond documentation and compliance toward ongoing system improvement.

The general trend shows that Ethiopian HEIs have made investments in creating frameworks, policies, and guidelines for quality assurance; yet, a significant obstacle still stands in the way of

translating these tools into uniform institutional practice. Therefore, the study shows a wider implementation gap as well as a documentation gap, where policies may exist but lack institutional authority, endorsement, enforcement mechanisms, and conversion into workable improvement systems.

4.3.3. Effectiveness of and Impact of Internal Quality Assurance System

The results of the interviews conducted under this issue showed a wide range of opinions regarding the efficacy of the internal quality assurance system, but a common worry remained; the existence of IQA-related activities doesn't always result in observable quality improvement. In general, participants reported a pattern of "effort without measurable impact," wherein IQA procedures are either in place or consistently being pursued, but they are either tangible, unclear, or not sufficiently demonstrated. Some participants framed IQAS as a continuing process rather than a completely functional quality assurance mechanism, expressing cautious hope. This conflict was encapsulated in P006 from one of the institutions, which noted that it is challenging to draw the conclusion that quality is completely guaranteed while highlighting that there is still a discernible effort and the system is still "in the making." In a similar vein, P003 described the IQAS's effectiveness as "somehow moderate," meaning that while improvements are happening, they are not consistently or convincingly.

However, some participants expressed more doubt about the effectiveness of IQAS. P009 concluded that the IQAS is insufficiently effective since due consideration is not sufficiently given. P008 also provided a critical analysis, stating that while quality assurance is required for programs, significant evaluation and improvement are hindered by the practical difficulties in putting the auditing system into place.

> For any program, a quality assurance mechanism is essential. However, we can claim that the quality of education is still on the stack because of practical features or factors associated to executing the auditing system. Therefore, there has been no increase in the quality of education since we are not adequately addressing quality issues and then doing the required evaluations of the attributes of our programs (P008, May 2025).

Because of this, educational quality is characterized as "stagnant," with little improvement resulting from inadequate attention to quality-related concerns. These reports show that even in cases when IQA frameworks are in place, their efficacy may be limited by implementation issues that erode the connection between IQA activities and real educational improvement.

A number of individuals linked apparent or persistent quality issues to the low perceived efficacy of IQAS. From a longitudinal standpoint, P014 contended that IQAS has been "quite less effective" in light of the efforts made under various regimes and that significant intervention by accountable academic entities is necessary. P016 and P017 offered especially direct criticisms. P016 observed that there are still issues with the caliber of students enrolling in the university and said it is challenging to declare complete quality improvement. P017 also revealed poor graduate outcomes, such as concerning language proficiency issues that raised worries about low grads' ability to fulfill completion requirements.

Participant 016 and Participant 017 expressed their sayings as follows respectively:

"It is difficult to claim that the system has brought about a full improvement in quality. While there are some improvements, the quality of students entering the university is a major concern" (Participant 016).

"We are seeing graduates whose language skills are embarrassing, which raises questions about how they managed to graduate in the first place" (Participant 017).

This issue was connected to the more general measurement and assessment issue. Furthermore, P017 noted a structural issue: IQA's propensity to rely mostly on report-based procedures and the lack of a well-defined national standard for assessing educational quality in universities. *"There is currently no clearly defined national standard to measure educational quality in universities" (Participant 017),* the participant said. The majority of our work is report-based. This implies that the lack of agreed-upon performance indicators that may make improvement quantifiable and compared over time, in addition to implementation problems, may compromise the efficacy of IQAS.

However, other participants provided a more complex understanding of what "quality" implies in regard to IQAS, so they did not solely rely on criticism. P012 defined quality in terms of graduate

achievement, encompassing both academic and professional accomplishment. This framing reflects differences in how participants interpret and operationalize quality, suggesting that the efficacy of IQAS may be evaluated through outcomes rather than only internal auditing procedures (P012, May 2025).

In general, the results show that IQAS is thought to be inadequately successful in generating demonstrable improvements in educational quality in the HEIs under study. Concerns about stagnant improvement, poor execution of auditing responsibilities, limited measurable impact, and ongoing problems with educational quality lead to a broader pattern of skepticism, even though some participants see IQAS as an emerging or moderately effective process. Furthermore, the apparent lack of nationally established standards for evaluating educational quality and the observed dependence on report-based activities raise the possibility that IQA systems are generating documentation and compliance outputs rather than trustworthy proof of learning-quality improvement.

A relative ranking from least to most unfavorable judgments of IQAS impact consistency can be deduced based on the participants' descriptions in the given data. Hawassa University's quality assurance policy development was defined as continuing and its perceived efficacy was described as somewhat modest (P001; P003, April 2025). Jimma University showed greater worries about inadequate policy endorsement, poor audit-to-action plan conversion, and doubt about efficacy (P007; P008; P009, May 2025). In addition to the lack of national standards and report-based procedures, Addis Ababa University had the most direct and serious concerns about implementation consistency and educational quality outcomes, despite having stronger formal quality assurance documentation and governance tools (P013; P016; P017, June 2025).

Participants' testimonies from all three universities came to the same conclusion: IQA systems may generate compliance and reporting results more consistently than long-term gains in educational quality. The cross-case evidence indicates that governance support, uniform implementation across organizational units, actionable post-audit follow-up, and the availability of reliable standards and metrics to assess educational quality outcomes are all necessary for IQAS to be effective.

In conclusion, the results demonstrate that the effectiveness of IQAS cannot be deduced from the existence of an IQA structure alone; rather, it depends on the system's ability to generate valuable outcomes, transform them into improvements, and evaluate outcomes using dependable and measurable standards.

4.3.4. Practices and challenges of the internal quality assurance system in HEIs

Practices of internal quality assurance system in HEIs can vary considerably from one institution to another. Differences may arise in mission, vision, strategic priorities, governance structures, resource allocation, organizational culture, quality assurance frameworks, and the extent of stakeholder participation. These variations shape how institutions design, implement, monitor, and review their internal quality assurance processes. In the same way, HEIs face distinct challenges when implementing IQAS within their institutions.

4.3.4.1. Practices of IQAS in HEIs

As the establishment of quality assurance system differs the practical implementation of the system also differs in HEIs. For instance, at AAU, quality assurance is established at institutional level with one director and two experts. In other HEIs, quality assurance is termed as “a one-man office” with quality assurance coordinators at college level. Having minimum number of directors, experts, and coordinators at the top level of HEIs, it is difficult to practically implement the internal quality assurance system.

The researcher asked how internal quality assurance is practiced in their institution and one of the key informants said that:

> Institutionally, we do have quality assurance mechanisms. In addition to the previous HERQA’s 10 focus areas of quality audit, we had three extra focus areas and totally our institution had 13 focus areas for quality audit mechanism; however, according to the revised ETA institutional accreditation, there are only 7 focus areas that our institution also applies (participant 010, June 2025).

These focus areas are actually prepared by HERQA/ETA that HEIs are usually checked and examined their quality of education which is all about the institutional quality audit and applied

through a kind of checklist which is done once at four years. But quality assurance is beyond using a checklist that needs a comprehensive stages like inputs, processes, and outputs.

Another key informant explained that

> Although we have the system at institutional level, we do not have the system that reaches the low level of academic units, but we have tried to prepare a structure that can be implemented to the low level. And, the structure was approved, but not implemented yet (participant 011, June, 2025).

The first key informant again explained the practices of quality assurance as follows:

> We also made program audit, teaching learning audit and research audit in our institutions based on the thirteen focus areas. This internal audit was done in our institution last year for the first time, however, there was a trial before which seems a kind of supervision (participant 001, May 2025).

In addition, another key informant coded 010 added "…there are other practices for example preparing guidelines, a PhD tracer, a ten-year strategic plan, and others" (Participant 010). However, as the data from the quality audit report of AAU reveals, there is no quality assurance office at college level that works to assure the quality of education provided to students of the college in coordination with the quality assurance office organized at the university level.

Another participant added:

> Theory of quality assurance on paper may be crystal clear, but that crystal clear policy guideline can only be put in place into practice by practical personalities, because theory and practice are very difficult unless otherwise there are people who could understand that and make it work on the ground (participant 011, June 2025).

This implies that while quality assurance policies may be well-defined in theory, their successful implementation relies heavily on individuals who possess the practical skills and understanding to translate those policies into action. This highlights a crucial gap between theoretical frameworks

and real-world application, emphasizing that effective quality assurance requires capable personnel who can navigate this transition.

And coming back to the respondent's idea, teaching, learning and assessment in one of the ten focus areas that internal and external quality audit officers use in maintaining and improving the quality of education. Hence, from the respondent's point of view, instructors know little about quality assurance practices and challenges.

In most audit reports, the External Quality Assurance (EQA) team reached at important main conclusions that directly related with the research question raised, but not limited to the following:

- There is no organized quality assurance system and assigned personnel at each level.
- Most HEIs do not have quality assurance policy.
- There is no systematically organized quality assurance endeavor and activities.
- Most HEIs lack mechanism for the identification and dissemination of good practices.

Furthermore, an examination of every audit report reveals that HEIs understand the need of ensuring quality within the establishments. The main issue is the incomplete quality assurance system or methodology. The majority of HEIs that have been audited lack methods for gathering information that may be utilized to assess the institutions' quality (Yirdaw, 2016).

For example, according to the key informant coded 017, only two colleges from Addis Ababa University (College of Health Sciences and Ethiopian Institute of Architecture, Building Construction, and City Development) have assigned quality assurance coordinators to run the quality assurance system at their respective colleges. On the contrary, as per the interview data, all colleges at Hawassa University and Jimma University have quality assurance coordinators at all colleges. In general, although there are different mechanisms and procedures of quality assurance at the institutional level, it is less likely in practice. Yet, with respect to establishing quality assurance system, it is required to work more strongly.

4.3.4.2. Challenges of IQAS in HEIs

The opportunities for sustaining quality in HEIs are not without risks and/or challenges. One of the main challenges of quality assurance in higher education is absence quality indicator. Compounding this challenge is that practitioners in countries like ours have low or no say on critical matters to sustain quality by identifying the indicators and assessing their own classroom

practices for the better (Aga, 2006).

While the formation of HERQA and HESC provide chances for quality assurance in Ethiopian HEIs, several difficulties that are unique to Ethiopia for ensuring quality are left unaddressed. These might be brought on by a number of factors, including a quick increase in enrollment that necessarily admits underprepared students, a lack of resources to support the expansion efforts, and a dearth of academic personnel with the necessary qualifications.

In addition, very little deliberate effort has been made in Ethiopia to define higher education by its international dimension: knowledge exchange, interactive networking, teacher and student mobility, and international research projects, while taking into account the national cultural values and circumstances with a purpose to promote and manage international co-operation and a focus on quality instead of enrollment and graduation figures (Aga, 2006).

As the response from the respondents showed, there are different factors that affect the practical implementation of IQAS in Ethiopian HEIs, especially in the sampled institutions. For example, one of the participants said that:

> I think there are a number of factors that affect the internal quality assurance system in the university where I am currently teaching. The students' background, the facilities available and the quality of teachers and the methodology they employ can be some of the challenges that hinder the IQAS and quality of education as well (participant 001, May, 2025).

Quality of education and its assurance need rigorous and comprehensive processes to bring the intended quality of education and competent graduates in the job market. However, due to a number of factors in the country's education system, as per the data from participants, bringing quality of education and applying the IQAS in HEIs is quite challenging. However, majority of the research participants reacted that there are promising progresses currently happening in their institution.

On the other hand, Participants were also asked about the disabling factors of the IQAS implementation. One of the participants reacted that:

> When I come to the disabling factors that hinder the implementation of the internal quality assurance system, number one, there is no freedom or autonomy.

> Okay? Internal quality assurance system is working under controlled environment. Okay? The other is there is no resource. No resource. Even there are no rooms (Participant 006, May 2025).

This participant added:

> Look, I'm working in my own office. Okay? Therefore, you know, resource should be there. Autonomy should be there. Freedom should be there. Okay? Sometimes, this internal quality assurance body will be thrown under other wings (Participant 006, May 2025).

According to this participant, internal quality assurance should be autonomous with full freedom and settled with good environment and equipped with necessary resources to execute the quality assurance system and to bring quality of education in HEIs. Hence, IQAS in HEIs lacks authority, and it is difficult to bring change in the system unless the system is stand-alone by itself without the power interference of university presidents.

In addition to this, another participant 002 added:

> Nowadays, it seems that technology has eased the problem of educational facilities like books as it made it available online. However, the online materials are not as such convenient to read as the hard copies that earlier students used to rely on. Besides, the students are more attracted to movies and other non-academic online sources which takes much of their time. So, the time given to their academic activities is low (participant 002, May, 2025).

On the other hand, participant coded 002 added another significant effect which can involve greater amount the poor quality of education which reads: “the methodology that teachers use these days has also some impact on quality of education. Instructors mostly rely on PPT (PowerPoint presentations) to cover their portion without worrying whether students’ have understood the lesson or not” (participant 002, May, 2025). This implies that methodology of teaching is very important in improving the quality of education if it is appropriately used; and it can again lead to poor quality of education if it is applied as the respondent mentioned above.

In addition to the factors as raised by participant 001, there are additional factors like “the social and economic status of the academic staff. Low salary which is not enough to cover their expenses,

lack of housing and incentives are contribute to poor service and thereby provision of poor-quality education."

Another participant coded 012 replied to the factors affecting the internal quality assurance system and quality of education as follows:

> Existing curricula is the most significant factor. Besides, since higher education is the most essential degree of education, the manpower resources, problems, and its solutions must be quality based. And the future of the country depends largely on the high quality of people groomed in the organization of higher education. And factors contribute to this case are the level of competency of instructors, curricula and the standards of student's intake which are important for the quality of higher education (participant 012, June, 2025).

Moreover, participant coded 010 also added some important factors that affect the quality of education as follows:

> I believe the graduates, the research outputs, and the community services rendered are the expected end results of higher education where the quality of the education could be assessed. So, there are input, process, and output factors that could affect quality ends in all three. Factors that affect the quality of graduates could be the inputs like the student characteristics at the entry-level, the guidance offered, the motivation of the learner, the availability of resources necessary for learning, the relevance of the content, the methodology of learning used, etc. in the research and community service area again you can think of the process and output factors (participant 010, May, 2025).

The issues raised by the participants were also supported by the report of the External Quality Assurance (EQA) made in one of the sampled HEIs, and the team recommended HEIs for the enhancement of quality of education that they:

> improve the availability of working equipment, make laboratory manuals for available labs, make enough offices with the required resources for all academic staff, ensure the functionality of laboratory equipment, ensure that students are getting practical training according to the curriculum, work with the respective

> organ to improve the financial system of the institution and allocation of financial resources, and work with the respective organs of the institution to establish system for monitoring proper resource utilization, maintenance and updating.

This suggests that the improvement of high-quality education in HEIs is influenced by a variety of factors. Additionally, the caliber of the personnel who instruct and assist students has a significant impact on the quality of an educational program. Institutions should make sure that a method for ensuring that all new hires possess the requisite level of competence is part of their hiring and appointment processes. For its programs to be implemented effectively, every HEI needs to have an adequate number of staff members (HERQA, 2006).

Besides, another participant was asked, "Can we say the system has improved the quality of education?" The participant replied:

> It is a bit challenging. As I said earlier, quality assurance system is mandatory for any program. But due to practical aspects or factors which are related to implementing the auditing system, we can say the quality of the education is still on stack. So, because we are not working on quality issues properly and then making the necessary assessments on the qualities of our programs, the educational quality is still stagnant, so no improvement. (Participant 020, June 2025).

To sum up, based on the interview data collected from key participants one can understand that quality assurance system in HEIs is certainly challenging task where there are no clear guidelines, lack of awareness among stakeholders, lack of autonomy or freedom, and lack of necessary resources, and no conducive working environment and conditions.

4.3.5. Factors in the implementation of IQAS in HEIs

This section presents the qualitative findings on the factors that facilitate or impede the successful implementation of IQAS in Ethiopian HEIs. Understanding these enabling and disabling conditions is crucial, as they shape the institutional environment within which quality assurance operates and ultimately determine whether IQAS efforts translate into meaningful educational improvement.

4.3.5.1. Enabling Factors

Participants of the study were asked about the enabling and/or disabling factors that could affect the implementation of internal quality assurance system in HEIs. And across all three universities, they consistently described several enablers that sustain internal quality assurance efforts and make improvement initiatives possible.

Foremost among these was leadership commitment. Interviewees repeatedly emphasized that the visibility support of university presidents, vice presidents, and deans has been critical to advancing quality reform. For example, one participant observed that "the positive attitude of top management created conducive environment for change" (P003, April 2025). Such commitment, they explained, signals institutional seriousness and motivates staff who might otherwise regard quality activities as routine paperwork.

Another enabling factor was the strengthened structural presence of internal quality assurance units. Compared with the early 2000s, when quality functions were loosely attached to academic vice presidential offices, each university now operates a dedicated quality assurance directorate at institutional level and quality assurance coordinators at college level. These permanent offices situated within formal organizational charts, provide continuity and legitimacy to quality monitoring procedures.

Participant P013, from Addis Ababa University further cited the university's growing autonomy as a decisive factor. The participant explained that the new governance structure, which places the Quality Assurance and Risk Management Directorate directly under the authority of the University Governing Board, represents "a best practice that builds confidence and removes conflicts of interest" (P013, June 2025). By reporting to the board rather than academic administration, the office can evaluate teaching, research, and management activities independently and objectively.

A final enabling condition mentioned by many participants was the presence of an expertise reservoir, which is a wealth of senior scholars whose institutional memory and professional stature anchor quality culture. Particularly, Addis Ababa University, long-serving professors and experienced administrators were regarded as invaluable resources for mentoring younger staff and preserving standards that newer universities are still striving to establish. Together, these enabling factors, including, committed leadership, formal structures, slight institutional autonomy, and

accumulated expertise, were viewed as the foundation for sustaining and advancing quality assurance practices across Ethiopian HEIs.

4.3.5.2. Disabling Factors

Despite these supports, the narratives are dominated by disabling conditions. The most severe is the chronic shortage of financial and human resources. Many directors and quality assurance coordinators described their units as "one-man offices." Participant (P016) explained that staffing dropped from seven to two members before recent recruitment plans. Budgetary constraints are equally severe: Participant 017 revealed that "the annual budget allocated to the office of quality assurance was reduced from one million to five hundred thousand" (Participant 017, June 2025).

Another obstacle is low motivation, fueled by stagnant salaries and limited recognition. Participant 014 lamented,

"Quality teachers are leaving the university because survival has become difficult. Without motivated instructors, talking about quality is meaningless" (Participant 014, June 2025).

Participants across universities also blamed frequent policy changes from Ministry of Education, which "creates confusion and instability in planning" (P015, June 2025), and wider macro-economic issues that "distract both staff and students from academic focus" (P016, June 2025).

4.3.6. Best practices in internal quality assurance system in HEIs

Participants found a number of institutional best practices and creative strategies that have promoted operational efficacy and quality improvement despite the complex issues present in Ethiopian higher education. These approaches, which include pedagogical development, quality assurance, and academic governance, point to a significant focus on systemic responsibility and evidence-based management.

4.3.6.1. Comprehensive Academic Program Review at Addis Ababa University

Addis Ababa University undertook a systematic, evidence-based review of its entire academic program portfolio, evaluating over 750 programs using technology-assisted methods.

P013 explained:

> As you are aware, we used to have over 750 academic programs. At the very least, we were able to analyze all of those programs and make a conclusion based on evidence, so I would consider the academic program review to be really historic. It was quite interactive. It was somewhat evidence-based and scientific, and we also employed certain technologies to examine commonalities across various plans (P013, June 2025).

According to this key informant, the program review was characterized by several distinguishing features. First, it was comprehensive in scope, covering all academic programs across the university rather than sampling or targeting specific units. Second, it was evidence-based, relying on documented data about program performance, student outcomes, resource utilization, and market relevance. Third, it employed technology to analyze commonalities and redundancies across curricula, enabling the identification of overlapping content and opportunities for program consolidation. Fourth, the process was described as “interactive” and “scientific,” involving multiple stakeholders in deliberate evaluation. This practice operationalizes evidence-based decision-making at the program level and demonstrates institutional commitment to continuous quality enhancement.

4.3.6.2. Autonomous Quality Assurance Structure at Addis Ababa University

One of the most significant best practices discovered in this study is Addis Ababa University's autonomous quality assurance organization. Under the AAU's new autonomous governance system, the Quality Assurance and Risk Management Directorate reports directly to the University Governing Board, as opposed to the previous academic administration hierarchy of the president and Academic Vice President. Key informant P013 describes this arrangement as "a best practice that builds confidence and removes conflicts of interest." In this approach, the quality assurance office can review teaching, research, and management operations in an impartial and objective manner, without fear of critical findings being buried by administrative superiors who are also being evaluated. The system establishes a direct line of accountability from quality assurance to the university's highest governing body, ensuring that quality concerns are raised to decision-makers with the authority to require corrective action.

This technique immediately tackles a significant problem found in this study: a lack of autonomy for quality assurance teams. According to an institution participant, "internal quality assurance should be autonomous with full freedom… but IQAS lacks authority, and it is difficult to bring change in the system unless the system is stand-alone without the power interference of university presidents" (P006). This contradiction is resolved by the AAU model, which removes quality assurance from academic administration's direct supervision while maintaining institutional cohesion through board oversight.

Participants described the independent structure of quality assurance as having numerous advantages. First, it protects the quality assurance function from any meddling by academic leaders whose programs are being reviewed. Second, it raises the standing and authority of quality assurance in the institutional hierarchy, allowing for more effective enforcement of quality standards. Third, it increases the credibility of quality assurance findings with external stakeholders such as the Education and Training Authority, financial authorities, and international partners. Fourth, it is consistent with worldwide best practices, which acknowledge that successful quality assurance necessitates independence from the units under evaluation.

The participant further stated that this independent structure is "widely regarded as best practice that other Ethiopian HEIs may emulate." However, transferring this model to other institutions would require amendments to institutional governance statutes, clarity about the respective roles of quality assurance, academic administration, and governing boards, protection against retaliation for quality assurance personnel, board capacity to understand and act on quality assurance reports, and continued collaboration between quality assurance and academic administration despite the independent report.

4.3.6.3. Multi-tiered Quality Assurance at Jimma University

Jimma University has implemented a quality assurance system that decentralizes oversight to the college level, resulting in various tiers of quality assurance responsibilities rather than consolidating all functions at the central university level. According to key informant P007, the multi-tiered organization is run by quality assurance coordinators assigned to each institution, who retain direct communication links with the central quality assurance directorate while simultaneously participating in college-level academic administration. This structure allows for

regular monitoring of teaching and learning at the operational level, early detection of quality issues before they escalate, contextual adaptation of quality assurance requirements to college-specific circumstances, and systematic exchange of best practices across colleges via the coordination structure.

4.3.6.4. Examination Integrity Measures at Hawassa University

Hawassa University developed systematic methods to address test misconduct, a long-standing issue in Ethiopian higher education that damages assessment integrity and qualification worth. According to key informant P003, examination integrity measures included improved handling procedures for exam materials, increased supervision during exam administration, and rigorous follow-up on detected incidences of misbehavior. The end result was "significant elimination of the need for repeated exams over a multi-year period," demonstrating that the measures not only decreased misconduct but also enhanced the testing system's efficiency.

4.3.6.5. Synthesis of Best Practices: A Critical Reflection

The best practices found in this study must be understood through a critical lens that distinguishes true structural innovation from everyday operational functionality that should be standard in any functional higher education institution. Only AAU's autonomous quality assurance system stands out as a fundamental governance innovation that differs from standard practice. The remaining procedures, while impressive in Ethiopian terms, are simply ordinary quality assurance tasks that would be regarded as baseline needs in a mature higher education system.

AAU's independent quality assurance, in which the Quality Assurance and Risk Management Directorate reports directly to the University Governing Board rather than to the academic administrative hierarchy, is a genuine best practice. This institutional change tackles the underlying conflict of interest that arises in quality assurance when evaluators are subordinate to those being evaluated. By shielding the quality assurance role from administrative interference, AAU has established circumstances for objective, trustworthy, and authoritative quality oversight. This paradigm is not conventional; it is a deliberate governance reform that other Ethiopian higher education institutions have yet to implement.

The fact that everyday operations are hailed as "best practices" reflects a depressing truth about the level of quality assurance in Ethiopian higher education institutions. It means that the baseline

for quality assurance implementation is so low that satisfying minimum operational standards, such as program review cycles, college-level coordination, examination security, and instructor preparedness, is considered extraordinary. In a well-functioning higher education system, these actions are accepted as routine operating practices rather than being highlighted as exceptional.

This fundamental observation has significant ramifications. First, it implies that Ethiopian higher education institutions are still striving to attain fundamental quality assurance capability, which is the foundational level at which routine quality activities are consistently and reliably conducted. Second, it demonstrates that the quality assurance culture is still immature, as even everyday operations require purposeful documenting and promotion as "best practices" to encourage adoption across organizations. Third, it emphasizes that genuine innovation, such as AAU's independent structure, is still isolated and has not been thoroughly studied or scaled.

In conclusion, distinguishing between true innovation and ordinary functioning is critical for accurately assessing the condition of quality assurance in Ethiopian higher education institutions. AAU's autonomous structure stands out as a governance innovation deserving of the title "best practice." The remaining practices, while progressing in the correct direction, are best described as baseline functions that should be common across all institutions. Their existing status as "best practices" exposes the structural flaws in Ethiopian higher education quality assurance, indicating how far the sector must go before routine quality operations become truly routine. To grow, Ethiopian higher education institutions should shift their attention from celebrating the ordinary to institutionalizing the ordinary, while also researching and scaling true innovations like AAU's autonomous quality assurance model.

4.3.7. Availability, Accessibility and quality of educational resources and facilities

Participants were requested to discuss the practical reality of the quality, accessibility, and availability of educational facilities and resources in HEIs. Participants consistently indicated significant resource limitations that compromise quality assurance efforts across all institutions.

Participant 001 provided a stark assessment:

> There is no chalk, no duster, no whiteboard, no blackboard, no green board, and so on. At times, even we are terrified of chalk, let alone the other problems,

> whiteboard, something, and so on. This will therefore continue, and you will report today and tomorrow as well. Absolutely no progress (P001, April 2025).

This suggests that quality assurance efforts are structurally limited and that reporting does not result in timely improvements. It also shows persistent shortages of even basic teaching and learning resources.

P002 similarly stated:

> When it comes to educational resources, providing educational facilities or educational materials for quality enhancement, I don't think we are very much poor and we don't have, there are no resources, no resources at all (P002, April 2025).

The participant highlights a severe lack of resources for improving quality, suggesting that institutional quality assurance programs may be limited not only by a lack of resources but also by a general incapacity to provide high-quality inputs.

Another participant provided a nuanced assessment for the question "Do you believe that your institution effectively provides the necessary resources to enhance the quality of education?"

> Both yes and no. For instance, there are crucial inputs for our daily activities, such as the stationery we use, the chalk, the duster, etc. They continue to have a steady supply. Why did I decline? As you are aware, ICT, computers, and laptops are among the inputs in this respect. Many teachers today do not own laptops, and many instructors who did have laptops are no longer able to use them (P003, April 2025).

This implies unequal resource availability: although ICT resources which are crucial for contemporary teaching and quality assurance procedures are failing because of a shortage of supply and inadequate maintenance or replacement cycles, fundamental supplies may be rather steady.

P004 offered a poignant example from his department:

> It used to be the case that computer science students and IT students had 24/7 open laboratory where they go and practice the code they learn in the classroom…I think about three years ago, I don't know why, but at higher level, that role was shut down and so there were no more lab attendants; the students didn't have any access to the laboratory till today (P004, April 2025).

The closure of lab support services (e.g., absence of lab attendants) highlights how quality assurance is affected by infrastructure management capacity-not only availability of space/equipment but also operational staffing.

In addition, P006 described the deteriorating conditions as follows:

> As far as resources in the university is concerned now, we are facing a very critical problem. We don't have resources these days. When I say resources, even if you really want to change this fluorescent that will take you months after months. If you want to get some of the materials for your offices, you don't get them (P006, May 2025).

This reflects slow procurement and maintenance process, where even minor repairs and office supplies are delayed for months indicating that infrastructure breakdowns persist and disrupt day-to-day quality assurance related activities. In the same way, P007 provided historical context:

> We are using resources that we have established before 10 years or 15 years or 20 years. And of course, we need the latest resources. And for example, the technology is advancing. Our computer labs are using the computers that were bought before 20 years or something like that (P007. May 2025).

The use of outdated equipment implies that resource scarcity is partly expressed as aging infrastructure, which may reduce effectiveness of the quality of the internal quality assurance system in HEIs.

The participants' accounts coverage on a clear pattern: resource scarcity is not an isolated logistical issue but a foundational barrier to effective quality assurance and continuous

improvement. The theme shows that constraints operate across multiple levels of inputs such as basic instructional materials, ICT infrastructure, laboratories, and even the internal manpower and budgets required to run quality assurance functions.

As can be seen from the interview data, several participants describe chronic shortfalls in basic teaching and learning supplies (e.g. chalk, whiteboard, dusters). These narratives imply that quality assurance initiatives are heavily dependent on the availability of day-to-day inputs, and when such basics are missing, quality assurance processes cannot realistically translate into improved learning experiences. The emphasis that the situation remains unchanged over time suggests a gap between institutional reporting/monitoring and actionable remedial capacity.

The data also indicate that scarcity is not uniform. Some resources point to relatively stable provision of certain items, while other resources, especially ICT tools such as laptops and functional computers are frequently absent or become unusable. This unevenness suggests that quality assurance challenges are tied to resource categories that require more funding, maintenance, and technical support. As a result quality assurance becomes dependent on informal mitigation, which may improve outcomes locally but is unlikely to ensure consistency or system-wide quality.

The participants also highlight infrastructure degradation and institutional decline, including closures or shutdowns of laboratory access and reliance on equipment purchased many years earlier. This implies that quality assurance is constrained not only by lack of resources, but also by weaknesses in infrastructure lifecycle management: procurement, replacement, maintenance, staffing, and operational continuity. The example of laboratories being closed without sustained access underscores that quality assurance depends on functioning of teaching capacity, not merely the existence of facilities on paper.

In addition, the theme extends beyond facilities into institutional governance capacity, particularly within quality assurance offices. When quality assurance offices operate with minimal staffing for large numbers of colleges and institutes, and when their budgets are reduced, the organization's ability to conduct systematic monitoring, follow-up, verification, and support diminishes. Therefore, the resource constraint is twofold: universities lack materials and

infrastructure needed for teaching and assessment and quality assurance units lack operational capacity and funding to ensure that teaching quality is maintained and improved.

Moreover, some participants introduce an important nuance: the challenge is not only scarcity but also proper utilization of available resources. This suggests that even where resources exist, weak distribution practices, limited coverage, and inadequate functionality checks undermine quality. In other words, resource scarcity may be necessary to explain many problems, but it is not sufficient-how resources are used and maintained also shapes quality assurance outcomes.

In general, the theme implies that effective quality assurance system requires more than compliance mechanisms or periodic evaluations. It requires sustained investment in infrastructure and staffing, stronger maintenance and replacement systems, and improved operational practices for monitoring resource availability and functionality. Without these, quality assurance efforts risk becoming primarily documentary rather than transformative.

4.3.8. Strategies to enhance the internal quality assurance system in HEIs

Regarding strategies, one of the key informants responded as follows:

> I think persistence in what has begun is very important. If quality assurance and enhancement activities continue to be emphasized, if raising awareness of the importance of quality maintenance, quality assurance, if it continues, it can become a culture of the system and that can contribute a lot. But there is still confusion in terms of how it is perceived (participant 003, April 2025).

According to this key informant, for some years quality assurance used to be part of the academic wing, but recently it has been relegated to the administrative wing and some of the university communities were complaining. This issue signals the confusion, maybe lack of clarity and understanding of what quality assurance is in an academic setting like this one.

And the participant suggested the following:

> So, clarifying those things is very important, I think, and preparation of strong guiding documents, maybe procedures that can be applied across all our higher learning institutions that will help us to improve the practice as a nation. Sometimes

> institutions try to develop their own, but national level improvement can be achieved if it is applied across universities, not in one or a few universities, that's what I feel (participant 003, April 2025).

This implies emphasizing the importance of creating clear and comprehensive guiding documents and standardized procedures for internal quality assurance system in HEIs is highly recommended. By establishing a cohesive framework, stakeholders can enhance the overall quality of education and ensure that best practices are consistently implemented throughout the country. This underscores the need for collaboration and shared standards to foster improvement in higher education as a whole.

In addition, another participant added:

> It is impossible to bring changes of quality with the limited human power of quality assurance experts. Hence, in addition to the framework, we asked the concerned bodies to stretch or expand the structure from top to bottom to the department level although it has left unanswered. Currently, there is no any chain that links quality assurance office with the department level implementers since the structure by itself wasn’t allowed to go ahead by top managers (participant 011, May 2025).

According to this key informant, it is also difficult to implement internal quality assurance system in HEIs which is hindered by insufficient human resources dedicated to quality assurance. The participant highlights the need for a more robust organizational that connects quality assurance offices with departmental implementers. Without this connection, efforts to improve quality are likely to be ineffective. The lack of support from top management further complicates the situation, suggesting that leadership must be more proactive in facilitating the necessary structural changes. Hence, to assure the quality assurance system, it is important to establish a well-defined chain of responsibility and adequate staffing to enable effective quality assurance practices in all levels of HEIs.

To summarize, the qualitative findings depict an IQAS that is formally introduced and periodically activated through audits, guidelines, and quality-related activities; however, its practical functioning is repeatedly described as constrained by weak institutional memory, limited stakeholder orientation to "what quality means" and "how it should be handled," and an

implementation gap that reduces many policy intentions to documentation rather than improvement. Participants emphasized that, while policy documents, offices, and follow-up mechanisms exist in varying degrees, their effectiveness is dependent on operational ownership, credible audit to action translation, and the availability of enabling conditions, particularly stable authority, adequate staffing, sufficient budgets, and functional teaching and research resources. As a result, "effort without measurable impact" emerges as the dominant narrative: quality assurance is considered to provide reports and checks more consistently than long-term educational achievements. At the same time, the data show that progress is possible when leadership commitment, stronger structural arrangements, and accumulated expertise create a supportive quality culture; however, without scaling these enabling factors to departmental levels, participants argue that IQAS will remain fragmented, inconsistent, and incapable of generating long-term, evidence-based transformation in teaching, learning, research, and student outcomes.

4.4. Discussion

This study used mixed-method data from 355 postgraduate students, 303 instructors, and 20 quality assurance key informants to investigate the establishment, effectiveness, practices and challenges, student support system and quality outcomes, enabling and disabling factors, and best practices of an internal quality assurance system in three first-generation Ethiopian higher education institutions. Qualitative thematic evidence was used to supplement and understand the quantitative results, allowing for cross-stakeholder triangulation and strengthening the conclusions' validity. Overall, the findings show an IQAS environment that diminishes the quantifiable impact of IQAS on educational quality due to significant implementation constraints, limited stakeholder-driven improvement loops, and partial system-building. The findings of this study also revealed a nuanced understanding of the state of internal quality assurance system in Ethiopian first-generation public universities. Drawing on The study's conclusions also demonstrated a sophisticated comprehension of the condition of Ethiopia's first-generation public universities' internal quality assurance systems. The results, which are based on Harvey and Green's (1993) multidimensional paradigm, show a contradictory landscape: formal IQAS structures are present in all sampled institutions, but their substantive efficacy in improving educational quality is still noticeably limited.

To begin with, students' assessments of the teaching and learning conditions reveal moderate strengths in structural and instructional aspects, particularly delivery modes, conceptual clarity, clarity of course objectives, and use of a variety of teaching methods with comparatively higher mean ratings. Students did, however, also point out shortcomings in areas that are essential to ongoing development, such as the systematic assessment and modification of delivery techniques and instructional strategies, as well as restrictions on how conducive the learning environment is. These trends suggest that although the universities may offer a basic academic framework and instructional activities, their internal quality assurance procedures have not yet entirely translated into a constant improvement that students can see. This view is consistent with the more general quality assurance concept that internal quality assurance should produce evidence-based learning-quality improvement in addition to monitoring teaching activities. Rather than focusing on one-time compliance checks, internationally recognized quality assurance systems prioritize feedback-based procedures and continual improvement. (ESG, 2015).

Building on this, students' participation in IQAS appears to be limited at all three colleges, frequently limited to completing surveys rather than actually taking part in program evaluation, interpreting comments, and taking appropriate action. A significant percentage of students reported never attending IQAS meetings, and the majority of student-rated involvement metrics were quantitatively below the neutral middle. Discussions among the minority who had attended IQAS-related meetings focused mostly on curriculum and teaching and learning subjects, with less emphasis on institutional accountability/follow-up procedures and student satisfaction methods. This contradicts the principles of stakeholder theory (Freeman et al., 2010) and limits the potential for quality to be co-constructed by all members of the academic community. This finding substantiates Healey's et al. (2014) assertion that students are often audited rather than engaged as partners, and that meaningful quality requires students as co-creators and active participants, not passive recipients.

Students' perceptions of impact further support this pattern: many selections were "not applicable," indicating that students either did not perceive accountability outcomes from IQAS activity or were not close enough to improvement implementation cycles. Improvements attributed to student involvement were limited and frequently reported as "no noticeable improvements." An explanatory mechanism is provided by qualitative evidence: instructors and key informants frequently emphasized inadequate communication of guidelines, a lack of departmental and college-level orientation, and uneven institutional memory and comprehension of IQAS operations. These circumstances lessen the possibility that student input will result in responsible behaviors and noticeable progress. The results point to a traditional IQAS implementation gap in mixed methods: input collection without a strong feedback-to-action loop. One important implication is that rather than functioning as a participatory governance system that empowers students as co-producers of quality, IQAS in these universities may be functioning more strongly as a quality documentation and review process. This is at odds with the student-centered quality assurance standards that are emphasized in international practice, which state that choices should be made based on student feedback and that transparent improvement actions should follow.

Systematic inadequacy in facilities and resources makes it more difficult for internal quality assurance systems to achieve their "quality" goals. Data from instructors and students both show that facilities and instructional resources are a significant limitation. In comparison to other

resource components, students gave low ratings to resources for thesis/proposal development, guidance/counselling access, and recreational/entertainment facilities. Additionally, instructors ranked the quality and accessibility of educational materials below moderate benchmark levels; teaching assistants, entertainment facilities, and learning-environment enabling supports received particularly low ratings.

Qualitative accounts substantially deepen this interpretation: informants described shortages even for basic learning tools, deteriorating laboratory support and access, outdated equipment use, insufficient ICT usability, delayed maintenance/procurement cycles, and infrastructural management weaknesses. This evidence supports a conclusion that resource constraints are not a peripheral implementation issue but a foundational precondition limiting the effectiveness of the IQAS. Evidence-based improvement in quality assurance theory and practice necessitates the capacity and chance to put recommendations into practice. Effective quality assurance processes enable institutional capacity and ongoing improvement, which implies that resource and capacity limits can directly impair quality assurance outcomes, according to UNESCO's work on higher education quality assurance (UNESCO, 2026). The findings thus lend credence to a strong causal interpretation: even in the presence of IQAS activities (such as curriculum review, audits, and supervision), a lack of resources diminishes the practical capacity to address issues and achieve quantifiable quality improvements, especially in the areas of teaching delivery, research support, learning experience, and student progression support.

Deficits in the student assistance, research, and publishing support systems are constant and statistically supported in the higher education institutions studied. Overall student satisfaction with the student assistance system is low, according to the quantitative statistics. The general perception was nevertheless below modest expectations, despite some variations by university, with Hawassa University receiving comparatively higher ratings. Furthermore, research and publishing support fell well short of the modest guideline levels; funding opportunities, grant awareness, editing services, article processing charge (APC), and access to credible journals received especially low evaluations.

Qualitative research on this topic also agrees. Key informants and instructors attribute quality assurance flaws to a general mismatch between IQAS intent and practical realities as well as inadequate investment in the research lifecycle. This is important because research assistance is

essential to the quality of postgraduate education, particularly in PhD training, where program results require financing, publishing, mentorship, and access to scholarly products, and procedures for research supervision. As a result, the study shows that IQAS flaws affect more general academic capability-building activities including counseling, advising, and research production processes in addition to classroom pedagogy.

Regarding awareness, policy existence, and effectiveness of internal quality assurance system, awareness is uneven, policy existence does not guarantee implementation, and effectiveness is contested in HEIs. The students' familiarity with IQAS concepts was mixed, with a large proportion not familiar or only somewhat familiar. While instructors displayed higher familiarity with the concept of IQAS overall, they also reported uncertainty about the existence of clear guidelines, responsible quality assurance bodies at departmental levels, and internal standards governing all institutional activities.

Critically, instructors' results revealed that while many policy statements received favorable ratings related to structural alignment (integration with academic programs, alignment with national/international standards), several key improvement-oriented elements were rated lower, particularly policy feedback openness and regular updating. Furthermore, instructors' overall effectiveness ratings of IQAS did not significantly exceed the moderate benchmark. Qualitatively, participants described an "effort without measurable impact" pattern, report-based auditing practices, limited national standards for measuring educational quality, and a tendency toward documentation/compliance rather than demonstrable enhancement.

These results collectively imply that IQAS is developing institutionally but struggling to achieve implementation integrity and measurable educational transformation. In governance terms, the system appears to have "structural components", yet the "functional components" (feedback-to-action mechanisms, updating cycles, standardized outcome indicators, and implementation accountability) are weaker.

With regard to focus areas, instructors reported that IQAS implementation achievement is uneven across the focus areas. The result revealed that higher scores were observed for quality of academic staff and program relevance, while lower scores were observed for teaching learning resources, student support system, and institutional good governance execution. This is consistent with the

earlier resource and support deficits found in both students and instructors ratings. From a system perspective, uneven implementation implies that the IQAS mechanism does not consistently provide enabling conditions across the full educational value chain. This helps explain why overall IQAS effectiveness perceptions remain moderate rather than strong, strength in selected domains cannot offset persistent failures in resource-dependent and student support-dependent areas.

In case of correlation analysis, Pearson correlations among five internal quality assurance system dimensions (policy, effective, educational resources/facilities, focus-area implementation, and student participation) were positive and statistically significant across the five dimensions. The strongest correlation was between IQAS policy and perceived effectiveness, indicating that policy framework presence and coherence are strongly associated with perceived outcomes. Resources and facilities showed moderate associations with focus area implementation and weaker association with student participation. Although resources and student participation are important, their effects are probably dependent on how well policy and implementation mechanisms integrate them. This correlation structure supports an integrative conclusion: the efficacy of IQAS appears to depend on policy-driven coherence and system implementation alignment. Qualitative evidence highlighting communication gaps, poor operationalization of guidelines, and low departmental-level implementation consistency further supports this methodical interpretation.

According to qualitative data, the most debilitating problems are lack of institutional commitment, inadequate training/development, insufficient resources, restricted stakeholder participation, poor communication among quality actors, a lack of quality culture, and coherence in IQAS operations. These characteristics closely match the quantitative patterns reported, including low student participation, poor feedback and information transparency, limited student assistance and research services, and modest overall efficacy. Importantly, these barriers do not operate independently; rather, they reinforce one another. Inadequate training and resources, for example, limit the ability to operationalize policies and implement audit findings; poor communication and stakeholder participation weaken feedback loops; and a lack of quality culture and coherence impede continuous improvement cycles. The end result is a quality assurance system that generates reviews and reports but fails to produce long-term educational progress.

Despite prevalent obstacles, qualitative evidence points to supportive elements such as leadership commitment, dedicated quality assurance systems, partial institutional autonomy shifts, and an

expertise reservoir. Program reviews and audit systems, teaching-learning integrity controls, peer control cultures, and evidence-based program assessment activities are all examples of best practices. The major takeaway from this enabling story is that excellent practices are not absent, but rather inadequately scaled and operationalized across levels and domains. The study demonstrates that structural presence and leadership visibility must be coupled with departmental implementation chains, enough manpower, and resources to allow critical recommendations to be carried out.

In general, based on the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings, the study concludes that the IQAS exists and is evolving, as evidenced by the presence of institutional structures and policy alignment components; however, implementation integrity across departments and programs remains lacking. Student participation is likewise limited, and improvement visibility is minimal, suggesting that student criticism is not routinely transformed into accountable follow-up measures. The report further cites resource insufficiency and inadequate learning and research support as important systematic obstacles that undermine IQAS's capacity to deliver measurable educational improvement. Furthermore, the effectiveness of IQAS is rated moderately, and qualitative evidence suggests a propensity toward "effort without measurable impact," which appears to be linked to report/compliance orientations and low expectations for measurable results. Finally, the findings demonstrate that the IQAS dimensions are interdependent: policy coherence has a strong relationship with effectiveness, implying that improving IQAS will necessitate strengthening policy-practice alignment while also improving feedback mechanisms and ensuring effective updating cycles.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents a synthesis of the major findings, draws overarching conclusions, and offers actionable recommendations based on the investigation of the internal quality assurance system in Ethiopian higher education institutions. The study employed a convergent mixed method design, collecting quantitative data from 355 postgraduate students and 303 instructors, as well as qualitative data from 20 key informants including quality assurance directors, college deans, quality assurance coordinators, senior academic staff, and quality assurance experts across three first-generation public universities: Addis Ababa University, Hawassa University, and Jimma University. The study was guided by the contingency theory, institutional theory, stakeholder theory, and Total Quality Management Model. The findings revealed that while formal IQAS structures exist across all sampled institutions, their substantive effectiveness in transforming educational quality remains markedly limited, with significant gaps between policy and implementation, chronic resource constraints, low stakeholder participation, and substantial inter-institutional variation. The following sections summarize the key findings by the data source, draw conclusions grounded in the triangulated evidence, and provide differentiated recommendations for higher education institutions, the ETA, the MoE, and future researchers.

5.1. Summary

This study investigated the internal quality assurance system in Ethiopian higher education institutions, focusing on three first-generation public universities: Addis Ababa University, Hawassa University, and Jimma University. Employing a convergent mixed-method design, data were collected from 303 instructors, 355 postgraduate students, and 20 key informants through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The following points summarize the major findings organized by the research questions.

5.1.1. Establishment of Internal Quality Assurance System

All three universities have established formal IQAS structures, typically comprising a quality assurance directorate at the institutional level and coordinates at the college level. The establishment of IQAS in Ethiopian HEIs followed the introduction of the Higher Education

Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA), now called the Education and Training Authority, in 2003 through Higher Education Proclamation No. 351/2003. Later, the Higher Education Proclamation No. 650/2009 mandated that HEIs establish reliable institutional quality assurance systems to improve educational standards. At Addis Ababa University, IQAS establishment began in 2012 with the creation of the Office for Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement, which subsequently served as a model for other Ethiopian HEIs. Regarding accountability, quality assurance offices typically report either to the university president or academic vice president; however, under AAU's new autonomous structure, the quality assurance office reports directly to the University Governing Board, a best practice that grants greater authority and independence.

Despite the presence of formal structures, the qualitative data revealed significant gaps in institutional memory and policy implementation. Many key informants were unable to recall when or under what circumstances their IQAS was established, with responses including "I am not very clear about the historical issue" (P001), and "honestly speaking, I don't recall when the internal quality assurance system was established" (P013). This consistent pattern of historical uncertainty suggests a potential discontinuity in institutional memory and the possible absence of documented historical records accessible to current personnel. Furthermore, policy documents exist primarily in draft form, awaiting approval from university senates or governing boards, and are inconsistently communicated to departmental-level stakeholders. One participant noted that "quality assurance policies and guidelines put on paper are not quite communicated to the concerning individuals at departmental level, college level, and other stakeholders…they are not that much oriented" (P019). Another participant emphasized that while a draft policy exists, "it has not yet been approved by the senate or the board" (P008). This implementation gap where policies exist on paper but lack institutional authority, endorsement, and enforcement mechanisms, represents a fundamental weakness in the establishment of IQAS across Ethiopian HEIs.

5.1.2. Perceptions on the Effectiveness of Internal Quality Assurance System

Perceptions of the effectiveness of internal quality assurance system were mixed across stakeholder groups, revealing a significant gap between instructor and student perspectives. Among instructors who were aware of IQAS standards (representing 48.8% of the instructor sample), 55.4% rated these standards as effective, suggesting that those who are engaged with the system tend to view it positively. However, only 23.4% of students affirmed that an effective IQAS

exists in their institution, while 37.7% explicitly stated that no effective system exists and 38.9% expressed uncertainty. This disparity indicates that students, who are the primary beneficiaries of quality assurance efforts, have substantially lower confidence in the system than instructors. The overall effectiveness rating from instructors (M = 2.97) did not statistically differ from the moderate benchmark (test value = 3, p = .563), suggesting that IQAS is perceived as neither highly effective nor entirely ineffective, but rather occurring a neutral middle ground that reflects inconsistent implementation and mixed outcomes.

Qualitative data from key informant interviews provided deeper insight into these mixed perceptions, with participants consistently characterizing IQAS impact as limited and inconsistent. One participant described the situation as "effort without measurable impact," noting that while quality assurance activities are ongoing, it remains challenging to conclude that quality is completely guaranteed. Another participant rated IQAS effectiveness as "somehow moderate," indicating that while improvements are happening, they are not consistently or convincingly observable. More critically, some participants concluded that IQAS is insufficiently effective because due consideration is not sufficiently given to quality issues.

Another participant added a stark assessment: "due to practical aspects related to implementing the auditing system, we can say the quality of education is still on stack…because we are not working on quality issues properly and then making the necessary assessments on the qualities of our programs, the educational quality is still stagnant, so no improvement." This characterization of educational quality as "stagnant" was echoed by multiple participants, who linked the low perceived effectiveness of IQAS to persistent quality problems, including concerning graduate outcomes such as language proficiency issues that raised questions about how students managed to graduate in the first place. The qualitative data thus confirms that while some improvements may be occurring at the margins, the overall impact of IQAS on educational quality remains limited and not consistently observable across the system.

5.1.3. Student Support System

The student support system in Ethiopian HEIs received below moderate ratings overall (M = 2.84), indicating that students are not adequately supported in their academic and personal development. This finding is particularly concerning given that the quality of higher education depends directly

on the provision of student support services; without sufficient support, education risks becoming merely a degree-granting process rather than a transformative learning experience. Significant differences were found across universities ($F = 13.108$, $p < .001$), colleges ($F = 72.223$, $p < .001$), and years of study ($F = 10.544$, $p < .001$), suggesting that the support experience varies meaningfully depending on institutional context, academic unit, and student progression level. Hawassa University demonstrated relatively stronger performance with a moderate level of service ($M = 3.16$), while Addis Ababa University ($M = 2.70$) and Jimma University ($M = 2.57$) exhibited low-level support systems. The Colleges of Natural and Computational Sciences received the highest support ratings ($M = 4.06$), while the Colleges of Veterinary Medicine and Agriculture received the lowest ($M = 2.17$), indicating significant intra-institutional disparities in how support is distributed across academic disciplines.

Further analysis revealed that PhD students rated support services significantly higher ($M = 3.01$) than master's students ($M = 2.59$), suggesting that doctoral candidates may receive preferential attention or that longer institutional engagement leads to better awareness and utilization of available support mechanisms. Government-sponsored students reported better support ($M = 2.89$) than self-sponsored students ($M = 2.58$, $F = 5.299$, $p = .022$), indicating potential inequalities in service access based on sponsorship status. No significant difference was found based on gender ($F = 0.895$, $p = .345$), suggesting that male and female students experience support services similarly. The research and publication support system was particularly weak, receiving an overall rating of $M = 2.70$ ($t = -5.89$, $p < .001$), significantly below the moderate benchmark. The most severe deficiencies were identified in availability of sufficient funding opportunities ($M = 2.29$), awareness of grants offered for research projects ($M = 2.43$), and access to editorial services for research papers ($M = 2.48$). Given the mandatory requirement for postgraduate students to publish articles from their theses before graduation, this inadequate support infrastructure creates substantial structural barriers that hinder students' ability to complete their degree requirements and contribute to the knowledge economy.

5.1.4. Practices and Challenges of Internal Quality Assurance System

The practices of internal quality assurance system across Ethiopian HEIs vary considerably depending on institutional mission, governance structures, resource allocation, and organizational culture, yet a common pattern of compliance-oriented documentation rather than substantive

improvement activity characterizes most institutions. Some of the current practices include program audits, teaching-learning audits, and research audits, typically conducted using checklists aligned with the ETA's focus areas. However, as key informants revealed, these audits are applied through a kind of checklist done once every four years, whereas quality assurance requires comprehensive attention to inputs, processes, and outputs. Significant inter-institutional variation exists in the structural implementation of IQAS. At Addis Ababa University, quality assurance is established at institutional level with one director and two experts, yet only two colleges (Health Sciences and EiABC) have assigned quality assurance coordinators. In contrast, all colleges at Hawassa University and Jimma University have quality assurance coordinators. Despite these structural differences, a common challenge persists: while the system exists at institutional level, it does not reach the lower level of academic units. As one participant explained, a structure was approved to extend IQAS to lower levels, but it has not yet been implemented. Another participant emphasized the critical gap between theory and practice, nothing that "theory of quality assurance on paper may be crystal clear, but that crystal clear policy guideline can only be put into practice by practical personalities."

Resource, capability, institutional, and cultural impediments are only a few of the many, serious, and multifaceted difficulties that IQAS implementation faces. Inadequate training and development (81.2%), limited stakeholder engagement (75.2%), lack of institutional commitment (70.6%), and poor communication among quality assurance stakeholders (67.0%) are the next most commonly mentioned barriers, according to quantitative data, with 84.8% of instructors citing resource scarcity. These difficulties were further shown by qualitative data. Participants noted that practitioners have little or no influence over crucial issues to maintain quality by developing indicators and evaluating their own teaching methods. They recognized the lack of quality indicators as a significant barrier.

The quick rise in enrolment that accepts unprepared students, a lack of funding to support growth initiatives, and a shortage of academic staff with the required credentials are further difficulties. One participant emphasized the lack of autonomy, saying that the "internal quality assurance system is working under controlled environment" with no freedom, no resources, and occasionally no dedicated rooms. This led to the conclusion that IQAS lacks authority and is unable to effect change on its own without interference from university presidents. Inadequate teaching strategies

(teachers using PowerPoint presentations without checking students' comprehension), low staff motivation brought on by stagnant pay, a lack of housing and incentives, out-of-date curricula, subpar student intake standards, and poor external connectivity with global quality assurance networks are some other factors that have been identified.

The consequences of these challenges are reflected in external quality assurance audit reports and participant testimonies. Audit reports have concluded that there is no organized quality assurance system with assigned personnel at each level, most HEIs do not have quality assurance policies, and there is no systematically organized quality assurance endeavor and activities, and most HEIs lack mechanisms for the identification and dissemination of good practices. The main issue, as documented in audit reports, is the incomplete quality assurance system or methodology; the majority of HEIs lack methods for gathering information that can be utilized to assess institutional quality. External quality assurance teams have recommended that HEIs improve the availability of working equipment, ensure functionality of laboratory equipment, ensue students receive practical training according to curriculum, improve financial resource allocation, and establish systems for monitoring proper resource utilization, maintenance, and updating. To summarize, based on interview data from key informants, the quality assurance system in HEIs faces certainly challenging tasks including no clear guidelines, lack of awareness among stakeholders, lack of autonomy or freedom, lack of necessary resources, and no conducive working environment and conditions.

5.1.5. Enabling and/or Disabling Factors

The analysis of enabling and/or disabling factors affecting the implementation of internal quality assurance system revealed that while several positive conditions exist, disabling factors significantly dominate the institutional landscape across Ethiopian higher education institutions. Enabling factors identified include leadership commitment from top management, which participants described as critical for creating a conducive environment for quality reform. The structural presence of dedicated IQAS units at institutional and college levels provides organizational legitimacy and continuity for quality monitoring procedures. The growing institutional autonomy, particularly at Addis Ababa University where the quality assurance office reports directly to the University Governing Board, was cited as a best practice that removes conflicts of interest and enables objective evaluation. Additionally, the reservoir of senior

academic expertise, long-serving professors and experienced administrators who provide institutional memory and professional standards, was viewed as an invaluable resource for anchoring quality culture.

However, disabling factors dominated participant narratives across all three universities. Chronic resource shortages emerged as the most severe barrier, with quality assurance units described as "one-man offices" operating with reduced budgets and inadequate staffing. Low staff motivation, fueled by stagnant salaries and limited recognition for quality work, has led to an exodus of qualified teachers, rendering quality improvement efforts meaningless when motivated instructors are absent. Frequent policy changes from the Ministry of Education were identified as creating confusion and instability in institutional planning, preventing the development of sustained quality cultures. Macroeconomic instability distracts both staff and students from academic focus, while the absence of institutionally defined standards for measuring educational quality means that quality assurance efforts remain report-based rather than outcome-based. To sum-up, these disabling factors create a systemic environment in which even well-designed IQAS policies struggle to produce meaningful improvements in educational quality.

5.1.6. Best Practices

The summary of best practices identifies five exemplary quality assurance initiatives from three Ethiopian universities, demonstrating that meaningful improvement is achievable despite systematic resource constraints. From Addis Ababa University, two notable practices were documented: a comprehensive, evidence-based review of over 750 academic programs using technology-assisted methods; and an autonomous quality assurance reporting structure that places the Quality Assurance Directorate directly under the University Governing Board, thereby removing conflicts of interest inherent in reporting through academic administration. From Jimma University, the multi-tiered quality assurance structure decentralizes oversight to the college level, addressing the critical finding that IQAS is concentrated at university level (87.1% of cases) with minimal presence at department (25.4%) and program (7.3%) levels. From Hawassa University, systematic examination integrity measures significantly reduced examination misconduct and the need for repeat examinations over a multi-year period.

Collectively, these best practices illustrate several principles that distinguish effective quality assurance from mere compliance activity: evidence-based decision-making, vertical integration of quality functions across organizational levels, explicit cultural standards that become normalized expectations, structural independence for quality assurance units, and sustained implementation over time rather than episodic initiatives. The existence of this practices within the Ethiopian system demonstrates that improvement is possible even under resource-constrained conditions. The challenge for Ethiopian higher education institutions is not to invent new quality assurance approaches but to scale and institutionalize the approaches that already exist as islands of excellence, with the Education and Training Authority playing a crucial role in documenting, validating, and disseminating these practices across the system.

5.2. Conclusions

Based on the findings of this investigation, the following conclusions were drawn.

First, the internal quality assurance system in Ethiopian higher education institutions exists in a state of institutionalized formalism rather than substantive transformation. Although the structural apparatus of quality assurance directors, coordinators, policies, and audit checklists is apparently present across all sampled universities, these elements function primarily as compliance-oriented mechanisms designed to satisfy external accountability demands imposed by the ETA. The profound disconnect between policy pronouncements and implementation effectiveness constitutes the central paradox of this study: Ethiopian HEIs possess the formal architecture of quality assurance yet remain incapable of translating this architecture into tangible educational improvement. Institutions have become proficient at demonstrating fitness for the narrow purpose of satisfying audit requirements, submitting reports, completing checklists, and documenting compliance, but have not yet evolved into self-improving organizations that continuously and demonstrably enhance student learning outcomes. As documented in the qualitative data, one participant characterized this phenomenon as “effort without measurable impact,” while another concluded that “educational quality is still stagnant, so no improvement.” Thus, the prevailing condition is one of performative compliance rather than authentic transformation, wherein the mechanisms of quality assurance have been adopted without the substantive culture of quality improvement that renders those mechanisms meaningful. This finding aligns with Bromley &

Powell's (2012) assertion that organizations often adopt formal structures for external legitimacy without changing core activities, resulting in quality assurance becoming a ritualistic compliance exercise rather than genuine improvement.

Second, the study concludes that the internal quality assurance system is perceived as neither highly effective nor entirely ineffective, occurring a neutral middle ground that reflects inconsistent implementation and mixed outcomes. The Pearson correlation analysis revealed that IQAS policy had the strongest relationship with effectiveness ($r = .70$, $p < .001$), indicating that well-defined policy frameworks are the most powerful predictors of perceived system effectiveness. Besides, resource scarcity constitutes the most sever systematic barrier to the effectiveness of internal quality assurance system. The chronic shortage of teaching supplies, outdated ICT infrastructure, understaffed quality assurance offices, and reduced budgets fundamentally undermine any quality assurance initiative. Without addressing these material constraints, even the well-designed policies cannot produce meaningful improvements. This finding challenges the assumption that quality assurance can be achieved primarily through procedural mechanisms; rather, quality requires sustained investment in the physical and human infrastructure of education.

Third, student participation in internal quality assurance system remains symbolic rather than substantive. The consistently low level of student involvement in program review, feedback reception, and improvement planning suggest that students are treated as passive recipients rather than active partners in quality enhancement. The absence of feedback loops where students complete evaluations but never learn how their input was used reflects a transactional rather than transformative approach to stakeholder engagement.

Fourth, the study concludes that inter-institutional variation in IQAS effectiveness is not random but systematically related to governance structures and institutional autonomy. Hawassa University’s consistently stronger performance on student support and research publication support, Jimma University’s successful vertical integration through multi-tiered structures, and Addis Ababa University’s innovative board-reporting quality assurance model demonstrate that institutional choices matter significantly. The conclusion is that while system-wide challenges are real, individual institutions retain meaningful agency to improve quality assurance within existing constraints. The variation documented in this study provides empirical evidence that improvement

is possible and identifies specific practices such as autonomous reporting structures, college-level coordination, examination integrity systems, and pedagogical readiness standards that distinguish more effective from less effective institutions.

Fifth, and most fundamentally, the study concludes that the internal quality assurance system in Ethiopian HEIs has not yet achieved its transformative purpose. Despite years of investment, structural development, and external oversight, the quality of education remains, in the words of one participant, "stagnant." Graduates continue to exhibit concerning deficiencies, research output remains limited, and the gap between institutional aspirations and actual outcomes persists. The conclusion is that Ethiopian HEIs have mastered the mechanics of quality assurance without internalizing its ethos. They can produce documents, complete checklists, and submit reports, but they have not become self-improving organizations that continuously learn, adapt, and enhance student learning outcomes. The journey from compliance to transformation remains incomplete, and completing that journey will require not more procedures but a fundamental cultural shift from performing quality to being quality.

5.3. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions above, the following recommendations are offered for different stakeholders.

For Higher Education Institutions:

1. Bridge the policy-implementation gap. Institutions should move beyond draft policies and compliance-oriented checklists to develop actionable implementation plans with clear timelines, aligned responsibilities, and dedicated budgets. Quality assurance policies must be formally approved, disseminated to all academic units, and translated into departmental-level procedures that staff can realistically follow.
2. Prioritize resource allocation for quality assurance initiatives. Given that resource scarcity was the most frequently cited barrier (84.8%), institutions should advocate for increased budgets for quality assurance offices, ensure that basic teaching supplies are consistently available, invest in ICT infrastructure maintenance and replacement cycles, and adequately staff quality assurance units beyond the current "one-man office" model.

3. Institutionalize student participation as a core quality assurance mechanism. Institutions should establish regular, structured opportunities for student involvement in program review, curriculum development, and quality improvement planning. Feedback loops must be created so that students receive timely information about how their evaluation data have been used to inform changes. Student representation on quality assurance committees should be mandatory, not optional.
4. Strengthen vertical integration of IQAS across all organizational levels. Quality assurance must not remain concentrated at the university level. Departments and programs require their own quality assurance coordinators with clear terms of reference, regular training, and direct communication channels to institutional quality assurance directorates. The finding that only 25.4% of respondents identified IQAS at the department level indicates a critical gap that must be addressed.
5. Develop and implement staff development programs specifically focused on quality assurance. With 81.2% of respondents identifying inadequate training as a barrier, institutions should invest in ongoing professional development that helps instructors understand quality assurance concepts, participate effectively in review processes, and use evaluation data for continuous improvement.
6. Strengthen research and publication support systems. With overall research support system rated below moderate (M = 2.70), universities should establish grant writing workshops, editorial services, funding opportunities for early-career researchers, and access to reputable journals. The requirement for postgraduate students to publish should be accompanied by adequate support infrastructure.
7. Enhance communication and transparency in quality assurance processes. The finding that 67.0% of respondents identified poor communication as a barrier indicates the need for systematic communication strategies. Institutions should publish annual quality assurance reports, create quality assurance web portals, and hold regular town hall meetings to discuss quality issues with all stakeholders.

For Education and Training Authority (ETA)

8. Shift the focus of external audits from compliance to capacity building. While accountability remains important, ETA should redesign its audit processes to emphasize

institutional development rather than mere verification. This could include providing formative feedback, facilitating peer learning among institutions, and recognizing improvements even when standards have not been met.

9. Develop a national strategy for operationalizing "quality as transformation." Moving beyond the dominant exception and fitness-for-purpose paradigms, stakeholders should collaboratively define what transformative quality means in the Ethiopian context and develop metrics for measuring value-added student development, empowerment, and long-term graduate outcomes.

For the Ministry of Education (MoE)

10. Increase and stabilize funding for quality assurance activities. The chronic resource constraints documented in this study require systematic solutions, the Ministry should consider earmarked funding for quality assurance infrastructure, staff development, and ICT upgrades. Budget allocations should be predictable and multi-year to enable strategic planning.
11. Reduce the frequency of policy changes to enable institutional stability. Key informants identified frequent policy changes as a disabling factor that creates confusion and instability. The Ministry should consult with HEIs before introducing major policy shifts, provide adequate transition periods, and ensure that new policies are accompanied by implementation resources.
12. Address the macroeconomic factors affecting staff motivation. The finding that low salaries and poor working conditions drive qualified staff away from universities requires policy attention beyond the education sector. The Ministry should advocate for improved compensation packages, housing provisions, and career development pathways for academic staff.

For Future Research

13. Conduct longitudinal studies to track whether IQAS improvements lead to measurable gains in student learning outcomes and graduate employability over time.

14. Investigate the relationship between institutional autonomy (particularly AAU's quality assurance autonomous structure) and quality assurance effectiveness to determine whether governance reforms should be scaled to other HEIs.
15. Explore the applicability of the "quality as transformation" dimension in the Ethiopian context, including the development and validation of instruments to measure student empowerment and value-added learning.

5.4. Limitations of the Study

This study acknowledges some limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. These limitations pertain to the scope of institutional coverage, participant selection, data collection methods, and the broader contextual factors affecting Ethiopian higher education during the research period. The limitations are discussed in details, recognizing that no single study can fully capture the complexity of internal quality assurance system across all institutional contexts.

First, the study was confined to three first-generation public universities, including Addis Ababa University, Hawassa University, and Jimma University which means the findings may not be generalizable to second, third, or fourth generation public universities or to private higher education institutions that operate under different resource constraints and organizational cultures.

Second, the study focused exclusively on postgraduate students, excluding undergraduate students, on the assumption that postgraduate students possess greater awareness and experience to provide informed responses; however, this delimitation means the perspectives of undergraduate students who constitute the majority of the student population were not captured.

Third, the study did not include employers or external stakeholders as data sources, although their perspectives on graduate quality and program relevance would have enriched the understanding of quality assurance outcomes.

Forth, resource and time constraints limited the number of institutions, participants, and the depth of document analysis that could be undertaken. These limitations notwithstanding, the study provides robust empirical evidence on the state of internal quality assurance system in Ethiopian higher education and offers a foundation for future longitudinal and comparative research.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire for Students

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Students,

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather data for my PhD dissertation research titled **"An Investigation of Internal Quality Assurance Systems in Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions."** Your kind and genuine responses are very important for success of the study. Your responses will be kept confidential and the information obtained will be used only for the research purpose. Please do not write your name on the questionnaire. Use a tick (✓) mark to indicate your answer for items with alternative responses. Please provide brief answers for open-ended items.

Thank you in advance for your time and kind cooperation.

Part 1: Background Information

Direction: Please respond to the following background information by putting a tick mark (√) from the given alternatives.

1. Respondent's Code: _____
2. Name of your University
   - ☐ 1 Addis Ababa University
   - ☐ 2 Hawassa University
   - ☐ 3 Jimma University
3. Program
   - ☐ 1 MA/MSc
   - ☐ 2 PhD

4. Gender:

    ☐ 1 Male

    ☐ 2 Female

5. Year

    ☐ 1. 1st

    ☐ 2. 2nd

    ☐ 3. 3rd

    ☐ 4. 4th

    ☐ 5. 5th and above

6. College

    ☐ 1 Education and Behavioral Studies

    ☐ 2 Social Sciences and Humanities

    ☐ 3 Natural and Computational Sciences

    ☐ 4 Health Sciences

    ☐ 5 Engineering and Technology

    ☐ 6 Business and Economics

    ☐ 7 Law

    ☐ 8 Veterinary Medicine and Agriculture

    ☐ 9 Other

7. Sponsorship

    ☐ 1 Government

    ☐ 2 Private/Self-sponsorship

    ☐ 3 Other

Part 2: Institutional Background

Direction: Rate the extent do the statements below apply to your institution.

	Our institution:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	provides programs in different modes of delivery (e.g. full- and part-time, campus-based and distance-learning).	①	②	③	④	⑤
2.	offers flexible learning paths to students (e.g. individual study programs / paths).	①	②	③	④	⑤
3.	uses a variety of teaching and learning methods, including those which encourage active and interactive engagement of students in their learning.	①	②	③	④	⑤
4.	evaluates and adjusts the modes of delivery of programs on a regular basis.	①	②	③	④	⑤
5.	evaluates and adjusts teaching and learning methods on a regular basis.	①	②	③	④	⑤
6.	defines course objectives clearly.	①	②	③	④	⑤
7.	explains concepts clearly.	①	②	③	④	⑤
8.	prepares teaching materials carefully.	①	②	③	④	⑤
9.	communicates course expectations to students effectively.	①	②	③	④	⑤
10.	creates conducive learning environment to students.	①	②	③	④	⑤

Part 3: Involvement of students in quality assurance activities

	Direction: Rate the involvement of students in the quality assurance activities at your institution.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
11.	Students are involved in the program review process	①	②	③	④	⑤
12.	Fill in course evaluation surveys	①	②	③	④	⑤
13.	Regularly receive feedback on findings from course evaluation surveys	①	②	③	④	⑤
14.	Students are regularly informed about measures to be taken as a result of course evaluation surveys	①	②	③	④	⑤
15.	Propose measures to improve teaching-learning process	①	②	③	④	⑤

Part 4: Educational Resources and Facilities

	Direction: Rate the quality of the following educational resources and facilities at your institution.	Very poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good
16.	Quality of classroom equipment	①	②	③	④	⑤
17.	Flexibility of classroom layout for different teaching methods	①	②	③	④	⑤
18.	Availability of computer labs for teaching-learning activities	①	②	③	④	⑤
19.	Reliability of internet access	①	②	③	④	⑤
20.	Availability of learning materials	①	②	③	④	⑤
21.	Resources for proposal development and thesis writing	①	②	③	④	⑤
22.	Access to guidance and counseling services for students	①	②	③	④	⑤
23.	Availability of entertainment facilities	①	②	③	④	⑤

24.	Overall, how do you evaluate the availability of resources in your institution?	①	②	③	④	⑤
25.	Overall, how do you evaluate the quality of resources in your institution?	①	②	③	④	⑤

Part 5: Evaluation of the Provision of Student Support System

	Direction: Rate the provision of student support system at your institution.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
26.	The institution provides adequate academic advising services.	①	②	③	④	⑤
27.	The institution offers effective counseling services for personal issues.	①	②	③	④	⑤
28.	The institution provides career services that assist in job placement.	①	②	③	④	⑤
29.	Information about support services is clearly communicated to students.	①	②	③	④	⑤
30.	Support services are easily accessible when I need them.	①	②	③	④	⑤
31.	Staff members in support services are friendly and helpful.	①	②	③	④	⑤
32.	Overall, I am satisfied with student support system at this institution.	①	②	③	④	⑤

Part 6: Evaluation of Research and Publication Support Services

	Direction: Rate the adequacy of research and publication support provision at your institution.	Very poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good
33.	Adequacy of research advising from faculty members	①	②	③	④	⑤
34.	Sufficient workshops on research issues	①	②	③	④	⑤
35.	Availability of sufficient funding opportunities	①	②	③	④	⑤
36.	Awareness of grants offered for research projects	①	②	③	④	⑤
37.	Access to editorial services for research papers	①	②	③	④	⑤
38.	Training on research ethics and compliance	①	②	③	④	⑤
39.	Training on academic writing and publishing	①	②	③	④	⑤
40.	Access to reputable journals for publication	①	②	③	④	⑤
41.	Overall support services for research and publication	①	②	③	④	⑤

42. How familiar are you with the concept of internal quality assurance system?
    - ☐ 1. Not familiar
    - ☐ 2. Somewhat familiar
    - ☐ 3. Very familiar

43. Do you think that there is an effective internal quality assurance system that works to improve the quality of education in your institution?
    - ☐ 1. Yes
    - ☐ 2. No
    - ☐ 3. Not sure

44. Have you ever involved in meetings regarding the issue of the internal quality assurance system at your institution?
    - ☐ 1. Yes
    - ☐ 2. No

45. If yes to question number 44, what was/were the focus of the meeting? Select all that apply.

- ☐ 1. Curriculum development, review, and approval
- ☐ 2. Teaching, learning and assessment
- ☐ 3. Institutional accountability and follow-up measures
- ☐ 4. Learning resources
- ☐ 5. Student support and services
- ☐ 6. Students' evaluation of teachers and the course
- ☐ 7. Students' satisfaction survey

46. Are there improvements in the internal quality assurance system as a result of your involvement?
    - ☐ 1. Yes, significant improvements
    - ☐ 2. Yes, some improvements
    - ☐ 3. No noticeable improvements
    - ☐ 4. No improvements at all
    - ☐ 5. Not applicable
47. How often does your department hold meetings with students to discuss quality assurance activities?
    - ☐ 1. Once every two years
    - ☐ 2. Once every year
    - ☐ 3. Once every semester
    - ☐ 4. Not at all
    - ☐ 5. Don’t know
    - ☐ 6. Other

48. What factors hinder the implementation of internal quality assurance system in your institution? Please, select all that apply.

- ☐ 1 Lack of institutional commitment
- ☐ 2 Ambiguous policies and frameworks
- ☐ 3 Inadequate training and development
- ☐ 4 Limited stakeholders engagement
- ☐ 5 Lack of sufficient resources
- ☐ 6 Resistance to change
- ☐ 7 Lack of quality culture
- ☐ 8 Poor communication among quality assurance stakeholders
- ☐ 9 Lack of coherence in quality assurance activities
- ☐ 10 Other

49. What challenges and threats have you encountered in your institution throughout your learning career?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

50. What support services does your institution provide to enhance the teaching learning process?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

51. What recommendations do you have to enhance the internal quality assurance system in your institution?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

End of Questionnaire

Thank you for your time!

Appendix 2: Questionnaire for Instructors

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

ISTITUTE OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RESEARCH

CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR INSTRUCTORS

Dear Instructors,

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather data for my PhD dissertation research titled **"An Investigation of Internal Quality Assurance Systems in Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions."** Your kind and genuine responses are very important for success of the study. Your responses will be kept confidential and the information obtained will be used only for the research purpose. Please do not write your name on the questionnaire. Use a tick (✓) mark to indicate your answer for items with alternative responses. Please provide brief answers for open-ended items.

Thank you in advance for your time and kind cooperation.

Part 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Direction 1: Please respond to the following background information by putting a tick mark (√) from the given alternatives.

1. Name of Data Collector: _____
2. Respondent's Code: _____
3. Name of your University
   - ☐ 1 Addis Ababa University
   - ☐ 2 Hawassa University
   - ☐ 3 Jimma University

4. College/Institute/school

    - ☐ 1 Education and Behavioral Studies
    - ☐ 2 Social Sciences and Humanities
    - ☐ 3 Natural and Computational Sciences
    - ☐ 4 Health Sciences
    - ☐ 5 Engineering and Technology
    - ☐ 6 Business and Economics
    - ☐ 7 Law
    - ☐ 8 Veterinary Medicine and Agriculture
    - ☐ 9 Other

5. Educational Qualification

    - ☐ 1 BA/BED/B.Sc.
    - ☐ 2 MA/M.Sc./MD
    - ☐ 3 PhD
    - ☐ 4 Other (please specify) _____

6. Gender:

    ☐ 1 Male

    ☐ 2 Female

7. Academic Rank

    ☐ 1 Graduate Assistant

    ☐ 2 Assistant Lecturer

    ☐ 3 Lecturer

    ☐ 4 Assistant Professor

    ☐ 5 Associate Professor

    ☐ 6 Professor

8. Year/s of teaching experience in the University

    ☐ 1. 1-5 years

    ☐ 2. 6-10 years

    ☐ 3. 11-15 years

    ☐ 4. 16-20 years

    ☐ 5. Above 20 years

Part 2: Establishment and Policy of Internal Quality Assurance System: Direction 1: Questions 1-8 pertain to the general highlights and concepts of the internal quality assurance system at your institution. Please select the option that best represents your experience and perspective regarding your institution's quality assurance system.

1. How familiar are you with the concept of internal quality assurance system?

    ☐ 1 Not familiar

    ☐ 2 Somewhat familiar

    ☐ 3 Very familiar

2. Are there clear guidelines for conducting internal quality assurance system?

   ☐ 1 Yes

   ☐ 2 No

   ☐ 3 Not sure

3. Is there a responsible body for the implementation of quality assurance system in your department?

   ☐ 1 Yes

   ☐ 2 No

   ☐ 3 Not sure

4. Have you ever participated in any quality assurance related activities in your institution?

   ☐ 1 Yes

   ☐ 2 No

5. Does your institution have an internal quality assurance system at the following levels? Select all that apply

   ☐ 1 University Level

   ☐ 2 College Level

   ☐ 3 Department Level

   ☐ 4 Program Level

6. How often external stakeholders (employers and / or other partners) involved in the program monitoring and / or review procedure at your institution?

   ☐ 1 Never

   ☐ 2 Sometimes

   ☐ 3 Frequently

7. Does your institution have internal quality assurance standards to control all of its activities?

   ☐ 1 Yes

   ☐ 2 No

   ☐ 3 Not sure

8. How do you rate the effectiveness of the standard in terms of controlling the quality of education in your institution?

    - ☐ 1. Very ineffective
    - ☐ 2. Ineffective
    - ☐ 3. Neutral
    - ☐ 4. Effective
    - ☐ 5. Very effective

Direction 2: Rate the extent to which the policy of internal quality assurance system at your institution fulfills the stated requirements

	The internal quality assurance policy:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
9.	is integrated with academic programs.	①	②	③	④	⑤
10.	is clearly communicated and accessible.	①	②	③	④	⑤
11.	provides a comprehensive framework for quality assurance practices.	①	②	③	④	⑤
12.	encompasses the rules and responsibilities of quality assurance stakeholders.	①	②	③	④	⑤
13.	is aligned with national and international quality assurance standards.	①	②	③	④	⑤
14.	is open to feedback mechanisms.	①	②	③	④	⑤
15.	is regularly reviewed and updated to reflect changing needs and best practices.	①	②	③	④	⑤
16.	satisfies stakeholders' needs and interests.	①	②	③	④	⑤
17.	contributes to achieving the long-term vision of the university.	①	②	③	④	⑤

Part 3: Effectiveness of the Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS)

	Direction: Rate the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system in improving the quality of education	Very ineffective	Ineffective	Neutral	Effective	Very effective
18.	Reviewing curriculum/program	①	②	③	④	⑤
19.	Controlling the quality of teaching-learning process	①	②	③	④	⑤
20.	Preparing seminars, workshops and conferences	①	②	③	④	⑤
21.	Research and publications	①	②	③	④	⑤
22.	Regular quality inspection	①	②	③	④	⑤
23.	Reviewing and updating quality assurance policy	①	②	③	④	⑤
24.	Implementing good governance and administrative policy	①	②	③	④	⑤
25.	Constant supervision of teachers	①	②	③	④	⑤
26.	Training and development opportunity for staff	①	②	③	④	⑤
27.	Overall, how do you rate the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system in improving the quality of education in your institution?	①	②	③	④	⑤

Part 4: Educational Resources and Facilities

	Direction: Rate the availability and quality of the educational resources and facilities at your institution	Very poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good
28.	Quality of classroom equipment	①	②	③	④	⑤
29.	Flexibility of classroom layout for different teaching methods	①	②	③	④	⑤
30.	Availability of computer labs for teaching	①	②	③	④	⑤
31.	Reliability of internet access	①	②	③	④	⑤
32.	Availability of teaching materials	①	②	③	④	⑤
33.	Resources for curriculum planning and development	①	②	③	④	⑤
34.	Availability of teaching assistants	①	②	③	④	⑤
35.	Access to guidance and counseling services for students	①	②	③	④	⑤
36.	Availability of entertainment facilities	①	②	③	④	⑤
37.	Overall, how do you rate the availability of resources in your institution?	①	②	③	④	⑤
38.	Overall, how do you rate the quality of resources in your institution?	①	②	③	④	⑤

Part 5: Implementation of Focus Areas of Internal Quality Assurance System

	Direction: Rate the availability and quality of the educational resources and facilities at your institution	Very poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good
39.	Institutional mission	①	②	③	④	⑤
40.	Institutional good governance	①	②	③	④	⑤
41.	Teaching and learning Resources	①	②	③	④	⑤
42.	Program relevance	①	②	③	④	⑤
43.	Teaching-learning processes	①	②	③	④	⑤
44.	Student support systems	①	②	③	④	⑤
45.	Student progression	①	②	③	④	⑤
46.	Quality of academic staff	①	②	③	④	⑤
47.	Research activities	①	②	③	④	⑤
48.	Graduates outcomes	①	②	③	④	⑤

Part 6: Participation of students in internal quality assurance activities

	Direction: Rate the involvement of students in internal quality assurance system at your institution	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
49.	Students are involved in program review	①	②	③	④	⑤
50.	Fill in course evaluation surveys	①	②	③	④	⑤
51.	Regularly receive feedback on findings from course evaluation surveys	①	②	③	④	⑤
52.	Regularly informed about measures to be taken as a result of course evaluation surveys	①	②	③	④	⑤
53.	Propose measures to improve teaching-learning process	①	②	③	④	⑤

54. What factors hinder the implementation of internal quality assurance system at your institution? Please, select all that apply.

- ☐ 1 Lack of institutional commitment
- ☐ 2 Ambiguous policies and frameworks
- ☐ 3 Inadequate training and development
- ☐ 4 Limited stakeholders engagement
- ☐ 5 Lack of sufficient resources
- ☐ 6 Resistance to change
- ☐ 7 Lack of quality culture
- ☐ 8 Poor communication among quality assurance stakeholders
- ☐ 9 Lack of coherence in quality assurance activities
- ☐ 10 Other

55. What solutions can you suggest to address these hindering factors?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

End of Questionnaire
Thank you for your time!

Appendix 3: Interview Guides

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Interview Guide for Quality Assurance Directors, Quality Assurance Coordinators, Experts, and Senior Academic Staff

WELCOMING: Welcome, and thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I appreciate you taking the time to speak with me.

INTRODUCTION: My name is …….. I am from ……..

PURPOSE*:* The purpose of this interview is to gather data for my PhD dissertation research titled **"An Investigation of Internal Quality Assurance Systems in Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions."** Your honest and thoughtful responses are crucial for the success of this study. Please be assured that your responses will remain confidential, and the information collected will be used solely for research purposes.

Background Information

Responsibility/position of the Interviewee: _____

Code of the interviewee: _____

Name of the interviewer: _____

Date of the interview: _____

Starting time of the interview: _____ Ending time: _____

Basic research questions followed by specific questions

1. How is the internal quality assurance system established in Ethiopian HEIs?
    i. Could you please briefly describe how the internal quality assurance system works, its time of establishment, and the reasons for its establishments?
    ii. Could you mention available internal quality assurance policy, guidelines, manuals, and procedures established in your institution?
    iii. To what extent are they appropriate or implementable in improving the quality of education in your institution? Are they effectively implemented?

iv. To what extent do you think the establishment of the internal quality assurance system has improved the quality of education in your institution in particular and nationally at large?

2. How effective is the internal quality assurance system to improve the quality of education in Ethiopian HEIs?
    i. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system at your institution in particular and in Ethiopian higher education institutions in general?
    ii. What specific aspects of the internal quality assurance system do you believe contribute most to educational improvement?
    iii. Do you and/or other stakeholders have the opportunity to assess, provide feedback, and make suggestions regarding the internal quality assurance system?
    iv. How do you incorporate feedback from other stakeholders (e.g., students, faculty, employers, family, and administration) into the internal quality assurance system?
    v. In your opinion, what changes could be made to enhance the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system?
3. What are the enabling and/or disabling factors that affect the implementation of internal quality assurance system in Ethiopian higher education institutions?
    i. What *specific enabling factors* have you observed that facilitate the implementation of the internal quality assurance system in your institution?
    ii. What *disabling factors* have you identified that hinder the implementation of the system?
    iii. Are there any external factors (e.g., governmental policies, accreditation requirements) that significantly impact the implementation? If so, please specify.
4. What are the best practices in internal quality assurance system at your institution/university?
    i. What specific practices do you consider to be the most effective in the internal quality assurance system?
    ii. Have the best practices disseminated or shared to others? How? When?

5. How do you perceive the availability and quality of educational resources and facilities at your institution? Do you believe that your institution effectively provides the necessary resources to enhance the quality of education?

6. What strategies can be implemented to enhance the internal quality assurance system at your institution?

Appendix 4: Students' Sample Size Determination

The sample determination for postgraduate students was calculated as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + (e^2)}$$

Where:

n = sample size

N = total sample size

e = desired level of precision (expressed as a proportion, typically between 0 and 1)

From this total postgraduate students, the sample size was calculated as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+ (e^2)} = \frac{2165}{1+2165\ [0.05^2]}$$

$$n = \frac{2165}{1 + 2165\ (0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{2165}{1 + 5.4125}$$

$$n = \frac{2165}{6.4125}$$

$$n \approx 338$$

Adding 5% to the calculated sample size of n= 338 to account for non-response yields a final sample size of 355.

Appendix 5: Instructors' Sample Size Determination

The sample size is determined by using the following equation,

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + (e^2)}$$

Where:

n = sample size

N = total sample size

e = desired level of precision (expressed as a proportion, typically between 0 and 1)

From this total academic staffs, the sample size is calculated as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + (e^2)} = \frac{1273}{1 + 1273\,[0.05^2]}$$

$$n = \frac{1273}{1 + 1273\,(0.0025)}$$

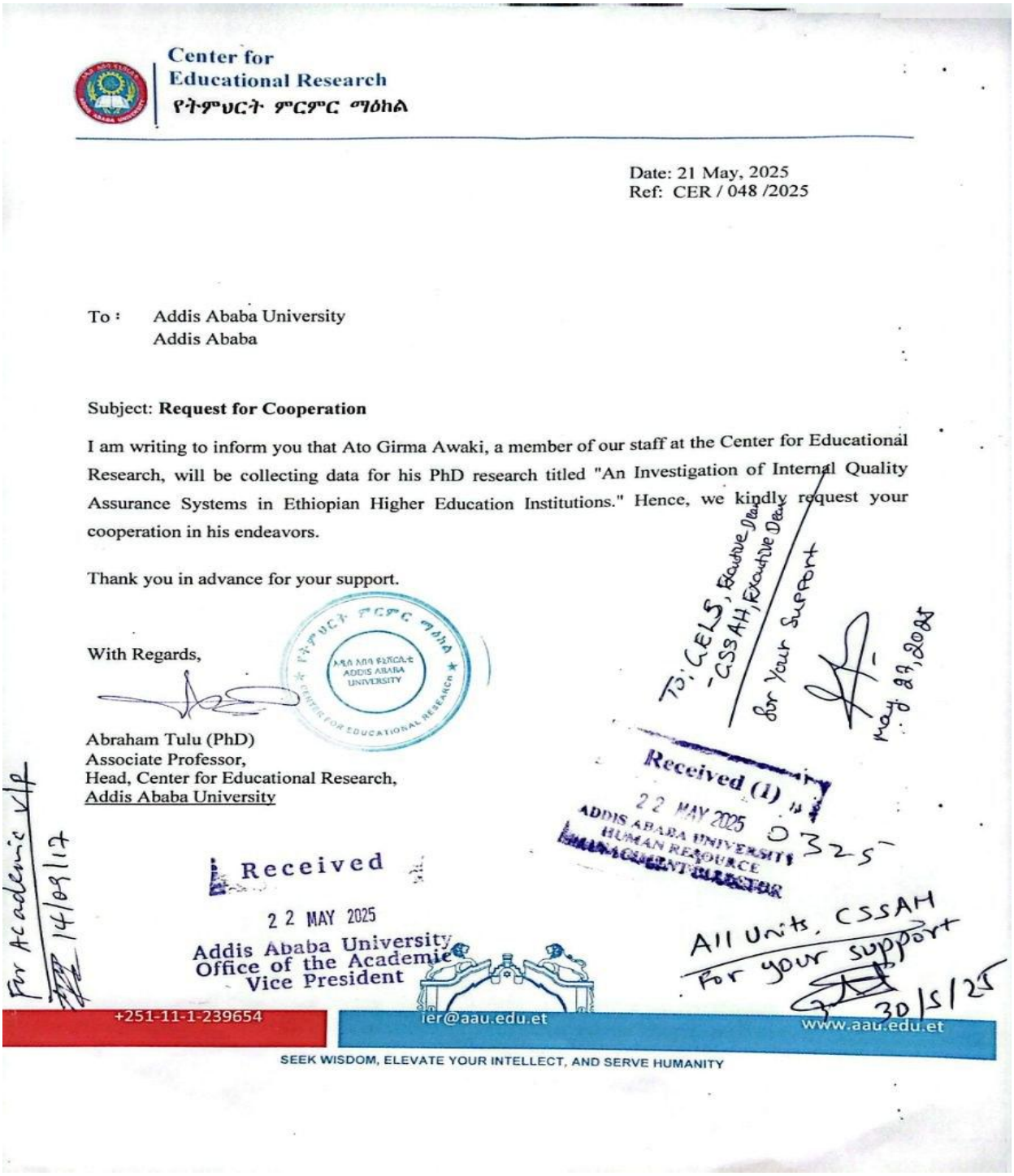
$$n = \frac{1273}{1 + 3.1825}$$

$$n = \frac{1273}{4.1825}$$

$$n \approx 304$$

Adding 5% to the calculated sample size of $n = 304$ to account for non-response yields a final sample size of 319.

Appendix 6: Support Letters



Center for
Educational Research
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Date: 21 May, 2025
Ref: CER / 048 /2025

To : Addis Ababa University
Addis Ababa

Subject: **Request for Cooperation**

I am writing to inform you that Ato Girma Awaki, a member of our staff at the Center for Educational Research, will be collecting data for his PhD research titled "An Investigation of Internal Quality Assurance Systems in Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions." Hence, we kindly request your cooperation in his endeavors.

Thank you in advance for your support.

With Regards,

Abraham Tulu (PhD)
Associate Professor,
Head, Center for Educational Research,
Addis Ababa University

For Academic VP 14/09/17

Received
22 MAY 2025
Addis Ababa University
Office of the Academic
Vice President

TO: GELS, Executive Dean
-CSSAH, Executive Dean
For Your Support
May 29, 2025

Received (1)
22 MAY 2025
ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
HUMAN RESOURCE
MANAGEMENT DIRECTOR
0325

All Units, CSSAH
For your support
30/5/25

+251-11-1-239654 ier@aau.edu.et www.aau.edu.et

SEEK WISDOM, ELEVATE YOUR INTELLECT, AND SERVE HUMANITY

Center for
Educational Research
የትምህርት ምርምር ማዕከል

Date: 04 April, 2025/17
Ref: CER /024 /2025

To : Hawassa University
Hawassa

Subject: **Request for Cooperation**

I am writing to inform you that Ato Girma Awaki, a member of our staff at the Center for Educational Research, will be collecting data for his PhD research titled "An Investigation of Internal Quality Assurance Systems in Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions." Hence, we kindly request your cooperation in his endeavors.

Thank you in advance for your support.

With Regards,

Abraham Tulu (PhD)
Associate Professor,
Head, Center for Educational Research,
Addis Ababa University

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

To: Whom it may concern
please facilitate the request.

Dr. Eng. Fisiha Getachew
Vice President for

Center for
Educational Research
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Date: 24 April, 2025/17
Ref: CER / 035 /2025

To :
To : Jimma University
Jimma

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Addis Ababa University

+251-11-1-239654 ier@aau.edu.et www.aau.edu.et

SEEK WISDOM, ELEVATE YOUR INTELLECT, AND SERVE HUMANITY

Appendix 7: Institutional Review Board (IRB)

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)

Form IER-IRB_0017/2025

IRB's Decision

Meeting No. 0017/2025
Meeting Date: Feb 04, 2025
Protocol Number: 0017/2025

Protocol Title: "An Investigation of Internal Quality Assurance System in Ethiopia Higher Education Institutions."				
Principal Investigator:	**Mr. Girma Awaki**			
Institute	Institute of Educational Research, Addis Ababa University			
Elements Reviewed:	Attached: ☐		Not Attached: [x]	
Review of Revised Application	Yes ☐	No [x]	Date of Previous Review	
Decision of the Board	Approved: [x]	Approved with Recommendation: ☐	Resubmission ☐	Disapproved: ☐

IX. Elements approved
- Methods and Procedure
- Consent Form
- Tools of Data Collection

X. Obligations of the Principal Investigator:
- Should Comply with the standard international and national scientific and ethical guidelines
- All amendments and changes made in protocol and consent form need IRB approval
- End of the study including manuscripts and thesis should be reported to IRB
- The PI should report noncompliance and unanticipated events

XI. IRB Approval Period: From February, 2025, to Jun ,2025

XII. Follow up report Expected in:

3 Months _____ 6 Months ____✓____ 12 Months' _____

IER IRB Chairperson Girma Lemma (PhD)

Signature:

Date: Feb 04, 2025