Addis Ababa University

College of Education and Behavioral Studies

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Comparative Study of Quality Assurance Practices in Public and Private Universities in Addis Ababa

By

Jemberu Alemayehu

Advisor: Fetene Regassa (PhD)

A Thesis Submitted to Addis Ababa University, College of Education and Behavioral Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Curriculum and Instruction

August, 2024

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Declaration

I, the under signed, declared that this thesis is my own work and has not been presented for the award of any academic degree, diploma or certificate in any other university, that all source of materials used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

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Approval Sheet

This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Jemberu Alemayehu, entitled: “Comparative Study of Quality Assurance Practices in Public and Private Universities in Addis Ababa” is submitted in Partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Curriculum and Instruction, complies with regulation of the university and meets the accepted standards with respected to originality and quality.

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Abstract

This study aimed to compare the QA practices implemented in public and private HEIs, while also investigating the challenges associated with these practices. By examining the differences and similarities between these sectors, the study seeks to highlight strengths and weaknesses, ultimately contributing to the enhancement of quality assurance frameworks. The study was limited to seven public and private universities recognized by the ETA and MoE, located within the Addis Ababa Administrative Region. This study used a mixed research design primarily based on the quantitative data obtained through questionnaire but for triangulation, qualitative data were incorporated through interview and analysis of documents. The findings indicated that private HEIs possess clearer QA structures and more effective communication, aligning with institutional goals, while public HEIs often lack comprehensive QA frameworks at lower levels. Both sectors face challenges with QA report accessibility, but private HEIs conduct self-evaluations more regularly and involve employers, teachers, and students more effectively in program reviews. Public HEIs experience significant financial constraints, a lack of genuine commitment from top management to QA, and inconsistent government policies. Additionally, inadequate QA training is more pressing in public HEIs, and time constraints are a greater issue for private institutions. Public HEIs also tend to prioritize process over substance and experience greater political pressure. Conversely, private HEIs rely more heavily on external validation. The study recommends that public institutions should develop comprehensive QA frameworks and enhance QA practices. The ETA should strengthen its role in monitoring quality education, while both sectors should encourage greater employer involvement and establish alumni associations. Public HEIs should seek increased government funding and prioritize strong top management commitment to QA.

Key terms: Higher Education Institutions, Quality Assurance, Quality Assurance Practice, Quality Assurance Framework, Descriptive studies.

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Abbreviation

AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
COA	Commission on Accreditation
CNAA	Council for National Academic Awards
CHEA	Council for Higher Education Accreditation
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training (Australia)
EQA	External Quality Assurance
ETA	Education and Training Authority
EQUIP	Education Quality Improvement Program
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HERQA	Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee (South Africa)
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance
ISO	International organization for standardization
MOE	Ministry of Education
QA	Quality Assurance
QC	Quality Councils
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
QMS	Quality Management System
SETAS	Sectorial Education and Training Authorities
USDE	US Department of Education

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the general framework of the study, outlining the theoretical and empirical foundations of the research problem. It encompasses the background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, research objectives, significance of the study, limitations of the study, scope of the study, and definitions of key terms.

1.1. Background of the Study

Secular higher education in Ethiopia commenced in 1950 with the founding of the University College of Addis Ababa. Over the past decade, the landscape of higher education in the country has undergone remarkable transformation. This shift was catalyzed by educational reforms initiated in the 1990s, which aimed to massif education as a strategy to combat poverty and promote national development. Consequently, the number of public universities surged from fewer than five to fifty, accompanied by a substantial increase in private higher education institutions (MOE, 2022). This expansion has resulted in a significant rise in enrollment rates; for instance, the World Bank reported a mere 2.4% attendance among the appropriate age cohort in 2008, which has since experienced a staggering increase of approximately 120% (Gulliksen & Audensen, 2013). Such growth indicates a broader access to higher education for an increasingly diverse population.

However, this rapid expansion has raised acute concerns regarding the quality of education delivered by these institutions. The swift growth of the higher education sector has placed considerable pressure on various resources, including funding, academic personnel, governance frameworks, infrastructure, and facilities, as well as the employability of graduates (Ashcroft, 2010). These challenges have fostered a prevailing perception among various stakeholders—both internal and external—that the quality of education is in decline. Kahsay (2012) notably pointed out that public universities are grappling with issues related to the quality of educational inputs, processes, and outputs, all of which critically influence the core educational mission.

In response to these pressing concerns, Ethiopia has implemented quality assurance practices at both national and institutional levels. The Higher Education Proclamation (No. 351/2003)

established the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA),which now renamed as Ethiopian Education and Training Authority (ETA), an autonomous body tasked with safeguarding and enhancing the quality and relevance of higher education throughout the country (FDRE, 2003). This agency plays a pivotal role in overseeing accreditation processes, evaluating institutional performance, maintaining educational standards, and ensuring that higher education aligns with national economic and social policies.

Further reinforcing these efforts, the 2009 Higher Education Proclamation (No. 650/2009) laid a crucial foundation for institutional quality enhancement. It mandated the establishment of reliable, internal systems dedicated to continuous quality improvement within every higher education institution (FDRE, 2009, Article 22). This initiative was particularly significant given that many institutions had previously struggled to develop effective quality assurance strategies. As a result, public and private universities have begun to take greater responsibility for assuring quality across various dimensions, including the professional development of academic staff, curriculum design, teaching methodologies, and assessment practices.

Despite the establishment of quality assurance systems at both the national level and within individual institutions, there has been a notable decline in public confidence regarding higher education. This decline can be attributed to escalating costs and increasing concerns about the efficacy of learning outcomes. Consequently, the perceived value and effectiveness of existing quality assurance mechanisms have become contentious issues.

The problem identified in this context highlights an urgent need for robust quality assurance mechanisms within Ethiopia's higher education sector. This study aims to conduct a comprehensive examination of the different quality assurance practices currently being implemented in both public and private higher education institutions. Additionally, it will explore the challenges associated with these practices, emphasizing the critical importance of effective quality assurance in enhancing the educational landscape in Ethiopia.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Ethiopia's higher education landscape is undergoing a significant transformation, characterized by rapid growth in both public and private institutions. While this expansion offers promising opportunities for future generations, it raises a critical question: is the quality of education

keeping pace with this growth? Although the government has initiated measures such as restructuring quality assurance bodies and revising education policies, the effectiveness of these initiatives in ensuring consistent quality across diverse institutions remains unclear.

Current research has highlighted a gap in empirical evidence regarding the impact of government initiatives on the quality of higher education in Ethiopia. As noted by Yimer et al. (2023), there is a lack of comprehensive studies that assess the actual outcomes of these policies. Furthermore, existing literature often neglects the distinct differences between public and private institutions (Teshome & Gebru, 2022), failing to address their unique challenges and potential best practices. This oversight creates a blind spot in understanding quality assurance, making it difficult to holistically address ongoing concerns.

Higher education institutions in Addis Ababa were selected based on the following justifications:

a) Accessibility to Data Collection:

Central location was one the basic rationale. Addis Ababa is the capital city of Ethiopia, making it a central hub for various educational and administrative activities. This proximity facilitates easier access to institutions, allowing for efficient data collection through interviews, surveys, and document review. Moreover, institutional Concentration was another reason related to accessibility. The city hosts a significant number of higher education institutions, both public and private, providing a diverse and concentrated sample for comparative analysis.

b) Availability of a Large Number of Private Higher Education Institutions:

Addis Ababa has witnessed a substantial increase in the number of private higher education institutions in recent years. This growth offers a wider range of institutions to study and compare, providing valuable insights into the variations in quality assurance practices within the private sector. Moreover, many private higher education institutions have their headquarters in Addis Ababa, making it a convenient location for conducting research and accessing key decision-makers and institutional records.

c) Representativeness:

Diverse Institutional Landscape is another reasons for the selection of the research site. Addis Ababa's higher education sector encompasses a mix of public and private institutions, offering a representative sample of the Ethiopian higher education landscape. Moreover, many universities in Addis Ababa have a national or even international reach, making their quality assurance

practices relevant to the broader higher education context in Ethiopia. By focusing on Addis Ababa, this study can benefit from the advantages of accessibility, a diverse range of institutions, and the potential for generalizability of findings to other regions in Ethiopia.

This study aims to conduct a timely and essential investigation into the state of quality assurance in Ethiopian higher education, focusing specifically on the comparative study of public and private institutions. The research will explore the following key areas:

- Quality Assurance Processes and Procedures: This study will identify and compare effective quality assurance approaches utilized by both public and private institutions, while also uncovering weaknesses that hinder quality improvement. This comparative analysis aims to facilitate targeted interventions and promote knowledge sharing across sectors.
- Stakeholders' Involvement in Quality Assurance Practices: The research will examine the role of various stakeholders, including faculty, students, employers, and accreditation bodies, in the quality assurance processes of both public and private institutions. Understanding how these stakeholders engage in and influence quality assurance practices is crucial for fostering a collaborative environment that enhances educational standards. Effective stakeholder involvement can lead to more relevant curricula, improved teaching methodologies, and better alignment with labor market needs.
- Challenges of Quality Assurance Practices: This study will illuminate the challenges faced by each type of institution. Public universities may encounter limited resources and bureaucratic hurdles, while private institutions might grapple with market pressures and reliance on tuition fees. Understanding these distinctions is crucial for developing tailored solutions and effective policy interventions.

In conclusion, this research aims to provide a detailed comparative study of quality assurance practices in Ethiopia's public and private universities. By investigating the differences and similarities between these sectors, the study seeks to highlight strengths and weaknesses, ultimately contributing to the enhancement of quality assurance frameworks. This comparative approach will help inform policies and practices that ensure all Ethiopian students receive a high-

quality education, empowering them to reach their full potential and contribute meaningfully to the nation's future.

1.3. Research Questions

The main research questions of the study are:

- How do the quality assurance systems and structures of private and public universities differ, and what similarities do they share?
- How do the quality assurance activities of private and public universities differ, and what similarities do they share?
- How do stakeholder involvement in quality assurance processes differ between private and public universities, and what similarities can be identified?
- What significant challenges do public and private universities face in effectively implementing quality assurance practices?

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to compare quality assurance practices in public and private higher education institutions. Specifically, the study aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- Identify and compare the quality assurance systems and structures employed by private and public HEIs.
- Identify and compare the quality assurance activities implemented by private and public HEIs.
- Identify and compare the involvement of stakeholders in the quality assurance processes of public and private institutions.
- Identify and compare the significant challenges faced by public and private institutions in implementing quality assurance practices effectively.

1.5. Significance of the Study

This research aims to provide valuable insights and actionable recommendations for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders committed to enhancing the quality of higher

education in Ethiopia. By conducting a comparative analysis of the quality assurance practices in public and private higher education institutions (HEIs), this study can:

It informs policy development by assessing the effectiveness of current quality assurance initiatives across both sectors, this research can guide future policy adjustments and resource allocation to interventions that have a proven impact on educational quality.

It helps in tailoring solutions to specific needs by identifying the unique challenges faced by public and private institutions, enabling the development of targeted interventions that address their specific needs. This tailored approach can result in more effective quality improvement strategies.

Moreover, it helps in enhancing quality assurance systems by examining the strengths and weaknesses of quality assurance practices in both public and private institutions, this research will contribute to the creation of sustainable quality assurance systems. These systems can promote excellence across the Ethiopian higher education landscape, ultimately benefiting all students.

1.6. Limitations of the Study

The responses to the questionnaire used in this study will be based on the participants' knowledge, experience, and perception of the subject. In spite of every attempt to keep individual participant's response confidential, the possibility remains that the responses and replies may not be free of bias.

1.7. Scope of the Study

This study is limited to seven public and private universities accredited and recognized by the Education and Authority (ETA) and the Ministry of Education, located within the Addis Ababa Administrative Region.

The research will focus on three main themes: the quality assurance processes and procedures employed by these institutions, the involvement of stakeholders in quality assurance practices, and the challenges encountered in the effective implementation of the quality assurance practices in the selected public and private universities.

Temporarily the study primarily examines current quality assurance practices and recent trends. With respect to data Source **t**he study relies on a combination of institutional documents, interviews with key stakeholders (e.g., administrators, faculty, students), surveys to gather quantitative data, and secondary sources (e.g., research articles, reports) to provide a comprehensive understanding of quality assurance practices.

1.8. Definition of Terms

The central concepts used in this study:

Quality Assurance: is the systematic review of educational programs to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained. (IIEP, 2010).

Internal Quality Assessment: is a procedure for determining whether an institution's activities meet the institutional standards. (Martin & Stella, 2007).

External Quality Assessment: is participation in the assessment visit, gathering sufficient evidence on the provision of Quality Assurance policy, and providing a collective judgment on the quality of education. (Martin & Stella, 2007).

Private Universities: are universities that are not funded by the government, but have been approved by ETA/MOE for the provision of university education in Ethiopia and are regularly monitored by the QA agency (MOE, 2003).

Public Universities: are universities that have been established by an act of parliament and which are largely financed by the public funds of the Government (MOE, 2003).

Stakeholders refers to any person or a group of people that can influence the process of achieving the aims of an academic institution (Freeman, 1984)

Challenges refer to the barriers that hinder the systematic evaluation and improvement of educational quality, including inadequate resources, lack of stakeholder engagement, and insufficient training for staff (Kembabazi, 2019).

Procedures refers to a systematic approaches to quality management, including the establishment and implementation of processes to ensure the quality of educational programs, teaching, research, and administrative functions (Williams, 2008).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter provides a thorough review of the literature and establishes the theoretical framework for the study. It begins with an exploration of the concepts of quality and quality assurance in higher education. Next, it analyzes the implementation of quality assurance practices across various countries, highlighting both differences and similarities. The chapter then examines the roles of stakeholders in the quality assurance process, followed by a discussion of the challenges faced in effectively implementing these practices within higher education institutions. Finally, the chapter presents the theoretical framework that guides the study, laying the foundation for understanding its context and objectives.

2.1. The Concept of Quality and Quality Assurance

2.1.1. The Concept of Quality

Quality is a complex, dynamic, historically constructed and multifaceted concept, often defined by what is lacking rather than by its contents. Quality also reflects national, regional and global socio-economic, cultural and political visions (UNESCO, 2002). The European University Association (EUA) has also acknowledged the diversity of higher education Quality concept: Diversity of higher education embraces institutional profiles, missions as well as legal regulatory frameworks (European University Association, 2007). Almost all the authors who attempt to define quality in higher education have quoted Harvey & Green (1993) who have pointed out the complexity of "quality definition" in the context of higher education because different stakeholders attach different meanings to it.

Garvin (1988) has enumerated five main groups of quality definitions based on thorough review of literature about quality in the business setting but his findings are used and quoted by many authors in education setting as well (Lozier & Teeter, 1996; Koslowski, 2006; Mishra, 2006). Following are the five groups of quality definitions:

1. Transcendent definitions. Just like beauty lies in the eyes of beholder quality is subjective and it is different for everyone. It can be experienced only and it cannot be defined. It is

eternal but goes beyond measurement and logical description. It is a concept such as beauty and love which cannot be measured by a gauge.

2. Product-based definitions. Contrary to the above definition quality is considered a measurable variable and all the attributes can be measured objectively.
3. User-based definitions. Customer satisfaction is Quality. These definitions are partly subjective because it takes into consideration the requirement set by the customers.
4. Manufacturing-based definitions. Quality is judged as conformance to the set standards, specifications and requirements.
5. Value-based definitions. Quality is defined in relation to the cost incurred. And good quality is more value of money.

Harvey and Green (1993) have grouped five approaches of quality in higher education: quality as exception, quality as perfection, quality as fitness for purpose, quality as value for money and quality as transformation.

1. Quality as exception: this is traditional concept of quality where the standards are hard to meet by ordinary institutes and only best can attain this level like Oxford or Cambridge.
2. Quality as perfection: this refers to consistent output and thus very much similar to "Zero Defect" concept which is widely used term in industry.
3. Quality as fitness for purpose: to meet specific requirements set by the customers to satisfy them. But in higher education it is not an easy task to define customers. In later part of the dissertations customers of higher education will be discussed in detail.
4. Quality as value for money: whenever customers spend some money they evaluate the benefit of the service or product and if they can get same service or product at relatively low price they will prefer cheap one.
5. Quality as transformation: transformation is change from one sate to another. In the context of higher education transformation means the change in knowledge, believes, attitudes, behavior and personality of the students.

Campbell & Rozsnyai (2002) have used the term quality as threshold instead of fitness for purpose and besides this they have added one more dimension to the definition of quality in higher education: quality as enhancement or improvement which means that continuous improvement is at the heart of quality and the academician can define their course of action by themselves because they know more than anybody else about quality in higher education.

In literature about quality in higher education there are numerous conflicting interpretations of quality subsists Newton (2002). Jones (2003) has summarized these conflicts as quality at institutional level versus quality at micro level (classroom); quality assessment as accountability versus quality assessment as continuous improvement; qualitative measures for quality versus quantitative measures and benchmarking. Another most debated issue is that who are the customers of higher education? This matter is critical for the definition of quality in higher education setting because customers define quality and unless we define customers we cannot define quality. In the context of higher education stakeholders term is most commonly used instead of customers. And there are as many definitions of quality exist in the literature as the number of stakeholders (Brennan & Shah, 2000). Watty (2003) argues that there may be many conflicting definitions of quality in higher education depending upon the contradictory interests of the different stakeholders. Because quality is value laden and each stakeholder of the higher education has different values (Boulding et al., 1993; Douglas et al., 2006; & Van Kemnade et al., 2008).

The definitions of quality have different origins and based on different set of believes and values and to implement these in the higher education contexts these should be modified to reflect the unique nature of higher education. This issue of quality in the higher education scenario has been pondered over by many authors (Harvey & Green, 1993; El-Khawas, 1998; Birnbaum & Deshotels, 1999; Campell & Rozsnyani, 2002). The term quality, as used in industry and business, needed to be re-defined to make it more relevant to the higher education context. Dill and Soo (2005) have explained the specific characteristics of higher education that distinguish it from other services and experience goods. Quality can only be judged by its consumers (students) after they have joined the institution, unlike other product or services it is a rare purchase because most of the students attain one undergraduate degree during their entire life, and it is very difficult if not impossible to change the institute after admission due to high cost and deadline of admission.

All the approaches used to define quality in higher education have pros and cones as Quality is a contextual phenomenon that takes into account specific higher education institutions and the national context (European University Association, 2007). If we examine the development of quality we can find the definitions varying from relative to absolute, internal to externally driven

and simple to complex notion of quality. Van Damme (2001) has identified four common essentials in all approaches of quality: 1) minimum standards and benchmarks must be realized 2) setting the objective and achieving them within available resources 3) satisfying the demands of all the stakeholders 4) continuous improvement and drive for excellence.

2.1.2. Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Knowledge based economies and massification of higher education have put quality assurance and quality enhancement at the top priority of almost all the governments in the world. Now traditional methods of quality assurance in higher education are considered to be redundant and inadequate to face today's challenges and thus new and more explicit quality assurance system is needed (Mizikaci, 2006). The history of quality assurance in higher education has undergone identical phases as it has witnessed in the industry because most of the quality assurance mechanisms were devised for manufacturing industry and later on adapted for service industry including education (Koslowski, 2006). Voreijenstijn (1995) described that the history of quality assurance in higher education is as old as of the universities. Its roots can be traced back to medieval ages. At that time chancellor of Notre Dame Cathedral was acting as an external authority for quality assurance at the University of Paris. Thus French model of quality assurance was an example of external quality assurance model for higher education. On contrary, at Oxbridge the fellows of the college form a community can replace incompetent members with new members. Thus the quality of British higher education was assured through self-assessment and academic peer review. University of Bologna has a student oriented quality assurance mechanism where the student body "the alma Mater Studiorum" has full authority to hire or fire the professors.

Industrial revolution led to quality movement for industry and massification of higher education and knowledge based economies showed the way to the quality movement for this sector. Quality improvement initiatives continue to be established in all service industries including those of healthcare and education (Moullin, 2002). "Quality assurance schemes are being developed in many states and higher education systems as one of the necessary instruments to adapt higher education institutions to the increasing demands put upon them within the states' economy and society, and equally to prepare or adapt the states' systems for the increasing impacts of globalization on higher education" (Vlk, 2006). Few years back quality in higher

education was considered to be the internal matter of the universities but this concept has changed drastically since 1980s due to the massification of higher education (Neave, 1994), shrinking public funding , knowledge based economy , and globalization (mobility of the students).

Before discussing quality assurance it is inevitable to discriminate between different terms used for quality management: quality control, self-assessment, quality audit and quality enhancement. Self-assessment is reflection of strengths and weaknesses of an organization to identify area of improvement (Ruben, 2005 & Schraeder, 2004). This process helps to create common direction for all the stakeholders and chalk out frame of reference for future direction of the organization (Ruben, 2004).

Self-assessment is mainly about improvement and external assessment is mainly about accountability and in some cases for allocation of funds (Brennan & Shah, 2000). It has been advocated by many authors that in order to survive in the global economy and for continues improvement a self-assessment is imperative.

Lomas (2007) have classified two major approaches of quality improvement: quality assurance and quality enhancement. Quality assurance is based on the quality definition of fitness for purpose. It ensured that the product or service is of good standard. External stakeholders are more interested in this type of quality management. While Quality enhancement is more concerned about continuous improvement and value addition. Internal stakeholders are more interested in this type of quality management.

Mostly the quality assurance process is comprised of five methods: accreditation, self-assessment or self-evaluation, peer review, quality audit or inspection and report for follow up (Ahmad, 2006). Fraser (1994) has pointed out four essential components of quality assurance:

1. All the stakeholders are responsible for maintaining quality
2. All the stakeholders are responsible for enhancing the quality
3. All the stakeholders understand, use and own the system for quality assurance
4. System for quality assurance should be examined regularly by management and sometimes by other stakeholders as well.

Other important components of Quality Management System (QMS) as conceptualized and documented by authorities such as W. Edwards Deming, Joseph M. Juran, and Philip Crosby include:

- Vision, mission, and outcomes driven
- Systems dependent
- Leadership: creating a quality culture
- Systematic individual development
- Decisions based on fact
- Delegation of decision making
- Collaboration
- Planning for change
- Leadership; supporting a quality culture (Lodi & Tufail, 2006).

European University Association (2009) has described in its report that quality assurance of higher education institutes is a broader term comprising all activities which means to define, assure and enhance quality. Though quality assurance is context dependent and it vary from culture to culture and country to country but certain common elements have been identified by European University Association (2009) i.e. self-evaluation, external evaluation and results presented in a publication.

2.1.3. Purposes of Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Prof. Maria Jose Lemaitre (2006), Former President of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education, (INQAAHE) elucidated the role of quality assurance as: "Quality assurance is used as a common denomination for a variety of mechanisms intended to control, guarantee and promote quality in higher education institutions". Quality Assurance has three main purposes:

- Quality control
- Accountability/Guidance
- Improvement

In general, it can be said that the core purpose of quality assurance mechanisms is to provide information to different stakeholders on the most significant aspects of higher education in a given system. But, as may be immediately obvious, different stakeholders have different

information needs and the characteristics of a given higher education system also poses different information requirements. The growing emphasis on quality in higher education is due to cultural and environmental forces. According to their assessment there are particular environmental forces in a specific country that boost quality culture (Alexander, 2000; Downey, 2000; Cullen, Joyce, Hassall, & Broadbent, 2003). Some of them are:

1. A growing climate of increasing accountability.
2. An expansion in the size of student population.
3. Greater expectations of students as paying customers.
4. An increase in collaborative provision between institutions.

QA implements a set of policies, programs and procedures set-up by an institution to provide confidence and transparency in their outcomes related to their graduates, teachers, exams, and infrastructure. QA in education does not focus just on the academic performance, but also on the social and national outcomes. In many developing countries, the quality of education is not being addressed properly which is a major cause of deteriorating quality of higher education (Moosa, 2006).

2.1.4. Approaches of Quality Assurance in Higher Education

This section critically explains some of the common QA methodologies employed in higher education institutions. The key methodologies identified from the literature are: (1) self-study or self-evaluation, (2) peer review, (3) quality assurance, (4) quality audit, (4) student surveys, and (5) accreditation.

2.1.4.1. Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation (or self-study) refers to the study of institutional processes and practices by members of the respective institution. This practice has proved to be both effective and cost-effective (Harman, 1998: 353). According to Harman, the concept of self-review first emerged in the US in relation to institutional and courses accreditation. However, this methodology has now become an important feature of many QA systems. Harman explains the positive features of self-study as follows:

- They are cost effective. The main work is done internally; hence, often few additional resources are necessary.

- They usually achieve a high degree of ownership since key staff is involved and such involvement increases the chances of substantial improvements being achieved.
- The overall process of review or assessment is less threatening when emphasis is placed on self-evaluation.

Studies indicate that self-study is employed as a methodology in a number of countries, for instance India, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, and Turkey (Billing, 2004; Billing & Thomas, 2000; Stella, 2002; Strydom & Strydom, 2004). Self-study is also known to be valuable in combination with other methodologies, for example peer review and audits. The methodology of self-study and by extension the self-regulatory approach presupposes the notion of the existence of a self-critical academic community among HEIs. This would imply that HEIs can themselves monitor their input, processes and their output. Yet, according to Harvey (1998), it is this very notion of "self-criticism" that makes politicians skeptical, causing them to insist on "hard" statistical data. Self-regulation through self-evaluation is imbued with amateurism and a sense of "playing the game" (Harvey, 1998: 242). In such a context, the game rather than the result may be emphasized. This undermines whatever strength may be attributed to this process. It could prove to be a useful methodology, if the process involves "open dialogue and helpful feedback" (Harvey, 1998). When self-evaluation is made part of a compulsory monitoring process of HEIs where judgments are reached, especially about aspects such a funding, there is "disinclination to be open about weakness and a tendency to overstate strengths" (Harvey, 1998). As Harvey observes, a lack of openness can make the dialogue more difficult and consequently the self-evaluation process becomes a defensive account rather than an opportunity to explore future improvements.

2.2.4.2. Accreditation

Accreditation (Vlasceanu, Grunberg & Parlea, 2007) is the process by which a government or private body evaluates the quality of a higher education institution as a whole or a specific educational program in order to formally recognize it as having met certain pre-determined minimum criteria or standards. The result of this process usually awards a status (a yes/no decision) of recognition, sometimes of a license, to operate within a limited time of validity. The process can imply initial and periodic self-study and evaluation by external peers.

The accreditation process typically involves three stages: First, the institution or academic program conducts a self-evaluation, referencing established standards. Second, a team of external experts visits the institution to review evidence, inspect facilities, and interview staff. Finally, the accrediting body's commission examines the self-evaluation, peer review, and other evidence to make a final decision regarding accreditation, including any conditions or recommendations. This decision is communicated to the institution and other relevant stakeholders.

Accreditation is an evaluation of whether an institution or program meets a threshold standard and qualifies for a certain status. Obtaining accreditation may have implications for the HEI itself (permission to operate) and its students (eligibility for grants). The focus of accreditation is comprehensive, examining the mission, resources and procedures of the HEI or program (UNESCO, 2010 & Woodhouse, 1999). Accreditation is a sign of commitment by the institution to continuous development and improvement in the context of the dynamic sphere of higher education. It is more than a onetime procedure that is automatically renewed. Commitment to accreditation sets a tone for the way an institution operates in its financial, organizational and academic affairs (Koenig, 2005: 12). Accreditation is widely used method in quality assurance in many countries. In the United States, accreditation of both programs and institutions is the main quality assurance method. Accreditation of institutions is done on a regular basis by 22% of the agencies in Europe.

According to Koenig, accreditation is now perhaps the most widely used instrument of external quality assurance in HEIs. Accreditation, understood as a formal system of official recognition, and carried out on strictly academic grounds by an independent and authoritative agency, is a very sensible idea. As higher education institutions increase in volume and become more market related, there is probably a growing need to protect degrees (and students) from inadequate provision and “rogue providers”. But must one therefore burden institutions repeatedly with full-scale evaluations in order to perform these tasks? (EUA, 2010: 52) Accreditation is the most widely used method of EQA and has recently been introduced in many higher education systems. It can represent either a transformation of other existing methods of EQA, or an entirely new method. Based on assessment and evaluation, it makes an explicit judgment as to whether a programmer or institution meets particular quality standards that may be either a set of minimum standards, standards of higher quality or excellence, or the institution’s own purposes.

Accreditation against minimum (also called threshold) standards provides assurance of acceptable programs or institutions. When it is also linked to the authorization to operate, it is usually called licensing. Some systems also apply high standards. This makes it possible to differentiate between those programs or institutions that meet threshold standards (and are thus acceptable) and those whose purpose is to meet the basic standards for the profession or for higher education in general (Peace Lenn, 2004).This discussion on the concept of QA shows the difficulties in defining and categorizing processes and procedures. It is particularly difficult when international experiences are considered. This is because existing country realities show a variety of practices that use concepts in a disorderly manner. There is therefore no point in attempting to be conceptually pure. However, there is a definite need to establish a common language for pedagogical reasons.

2.2.4.3. Quality Audit

The process of reviewing an institution or a program is primarily focused on its accountability, and determining if the stated aims and objectives (in terms of curriculum, staff, infrastructure, etc.) are met. In the United Kingdom, when an audit in an institutional process is carried out internally, the process is described (since, 2002:12) as an "institutional review" process. "Institutional Audit/institutional Review is an evidence-based process carried out through review that investigates the procedures and the mechanisms by which an institution ensures its quality assurance and quality enhancement." When it specifically addresses the final responsibility for the management of quality and standards that rests with an institution as a whole, the process is called an institutional review (Vlasceanu, Gruenberg, & Parlea, 2007). Quality audit is the process of quality assessment by which an external body ensures that (1) the institution or program has quality assurance procedures, or (2) that the overall (internal and external) quality assurance procedures of the system are adequate and are actually being carried out. Quality audit looks to the system for achieving good quality and not at the quality itself. Only persons (i.e., quality auditors) who are not directly involved in the areas being audited can conduct a quality audit. Quality audit can be undertaken to meet internal goals (internal audit) or external goals (external audit). The result of the audit must be documented through an audit report.

2.2.4.4. Peer review

Peer review is a well-established academic process in higher education. In its traditional format, peer review generally involves "a visit by a group of well-regarded academics in a particular field to undertake an assessment" (Harman, 1998). In recent practice, other experts, such as persons from industry or business, have been included in peer reviews. This is especially the case in reviews of professional programs or disciplines.

Auditing in higher education appears to have its origin in the UK (Massy, 2004). Changes in the regulation of public life, following the election of a conservative government in 1979, posed particular challenges to universities, which until then had enjoyed a high degree of self-confidence in terms of their excellence (Williams, 1992). Quality, standards and accountability became major issues for debate and action. Normally, audits are performed through a series of steps involving self-evaluation and the preparation of a performance portfolio by the auditee, the establishment of the audit panel together with a portfolio meeting, an audit visit by the panel and preparation of the report. In the US tradition, academic program review is essentially "a comprehensive evaluation of a curriculum leading to a degree" (Bogue and Hall 2003). This review will ordinarily involve the acquisition of historic, current and projected data on the program's purpose, the resources used and needed and an evaluation of performance (Bogue and Hall, 2003). Audits, Harvey (1998: 350) states, in effect check that QA procedures work. Quality audits, as they are called in some countries, for example the UK, do not make any judgment about standards, teaching quality or resources. Their principal task is to audit the system the institution has in place. However, they also provide suggestions of good practice in relation to QA. Australia and New Zealand have followed more or less in the same tradition as Britain and have established academic auditing within their HEIs (Carroll, 2000).

Academic review and audits have some advantages. The process is said to have the ability to identify unnecessary duplication of programs. The study itself can give rise to an opportunity to examine general issues usually unnoticed in the routine management of institutions. Depending on the evaluation panel or committee, the study could produce supportive and helpful dialogue for quality improvement. Audits in the UK opened up, for the first time, the old universities to external scrutiny at an institutional level. Peer reviews are thought not to be good at finding out what is really going on. Peer-review teams mainly make judgments based on what they are told

and tend to look for discrepancies in the story. Both program review and audits have been regarded as expensive. Dill (2000) notes, with reference to audits in the UK and other countries, that unlike accreditation or subject assessments, however, academic audits make no attempt to comprehensively revise an institution's or program's resources and activities nor to directly assess the quality of teaching or learning.

2.1.5. External versus Internal QA Mechanisms

Another important question or theme in the quality assurance literature is whether quality assurance would be better determined by external or internal mechanisms. External quality monitoring mechanisms ensure the integrity of higher education institutions, including international integrity, through procedures similar to an accreditation procedure. The context and the stage of development of the higher education sector is a key variable. For instance, the development of private higher education institutions increases the need for institutional accreditation (Harvey, 2002). Thune (1996) highlights the potential of external agents in assuring accountability in higher education. Middlehurst and Woodhouse (1995) also argue that the function of independent agencies that undertake external quality assurance activities is usually characterized as providing accountability of higher education institutions to different stakeholders.

External quality assurance acts as a catalyst for internal improvement within higher education institutions. It is argued that an external quality assurance agency could enhance improvement by being available to higher education institutions for advice, research, and development on request; having general issues referred to it by accountability and certification agencies for investigation; undertaking research and promulgating ideas on its own initiative and by providing benchmarking data across the sector (Middlehurst & Woodhouse, 1995). Harvey (2002) suggests that this role of catalyst for improvement requires dialogue and advice as part of the monitoring process, and the renewal of a trusting relationship between the external quality assurance body and HEIs.

External quality assurance should provide information to various stakeholders, including prospective students, employers and funders (Harvey, 2002). This aspect is particularly important from an accountability point of view. Thune (1996) suggests that some of the key

advantages of external quality assurance are: impartiality, credibility, authority, comprehensiveness, consistency and transparency.

However, some authors critically argue that quality would be better addressed by internal mechanisms. Middlehurst and Woodhouse (1995) argue that achieving improvement requires an acknowledgement by providers of a need to improve, an understanding of the appropriate focus of improvement, knowledge of the means of achieving the objectives of improvement and an appreciation of the benefits that will accrue from the effort. In other words, improvement relies upon individual or group engagement with the desired objectives and commitment to their achievement.

It is suggested that without intrinsic motivation to improve quality, the best that can be achieved is compliance with external requirements: "Compliance may pass for improvement in the short term, but as soon as the need to display improvement has passed; old habits are likely to re-emerge" (Middlehurst & Woodhouse, 1995). Askling (1997) also highlights the essential role of internal processes to achieve improvement. It is argued that while internally initiated quality monitoring can be problem-driven and be useful as a means for improvement, externally initiated processes tend to be more accountability-driven and less sensitive to internal needs. Similarly, Kis (2005) warns that reliance on external quality monitoring is unwise and argues that more attention should be paid to internal quality improvement. However, it is also suggested that an emphasis on internal processes does not exclude the use of external processes. Harvey (2002) argues that the interaction between both processes is essential to ensure that the results of external monitoring are not just temporary adjustments but lead to lasting improvement.

Harvey (2002) also reports that external quality reviews inhibit innovation through its conservative or rigid evaluation criteria. The problem is that the quality assurance bureaucracies become established, and politicians are reluctant to dissolve quality assurance agencies as this would appear to be an admission of failure. Hence, external quality assurance systems risk to become standardized, which may lead to excessive bureaucratization and inflexibility (Harvey, 2002). Kis (2005) argues that over-elaborate bureaucratic systems of external monitoring may lead to internal processes becoming determined by external requirements, but at the expense of

what is good for the higher education institutions. Thus innovation may suffer from fear that it will not be understood.

As cited in Newton (2002), a study conducted by Graham (2000) highlights the significant workload associated with external quality reviews, where the frequency of assessments in resource-starved systems detracts from quality delivery. This can lead to a loss of professional trust, a drift towards a risk-averse higher education system, and insufficient investment in quality enhancement. Middlehurst and Woodhouse (1995) argue that fully external quality assurance mechanisms are costly and inefficient for lasting quality improvement. Similarly, Harvey (2002) suggests that external quality monitoring incurs excessive costs that do not reflect the value gained. Significant resources spent on quality bureaucracies could be better allocated to improving internal quality assurance mechanisms.

One of the disadvantages reported by the opponents of external quality assurance is that it promotes game playing and compliance instead of quality improvement. Newton (2002) warns against the risk of ritualism and tokenism in external quality arrangements, with participants primarily engaged in learning the "rules of the game". One of the dangers of overelaborated bureaucratic systems of external monitoring is that they can lead to a compliance culture to the detriment of real quality improvement.

2.2. The Practice of Quality Assurance in Different Countries

2.2.1. Quality Assurance in UK Higher Education

Till 1990 quality assurance was a relatively new term for old universities and quite familiar to the new or post-1992 universities of UK because these universities have to undergo extensive inspection procedures of inspections carried by the Council for National 75 Academic Awards (CNAA). This council was introduced in 1964 to monitor the polytechnic and many colleges of higher education. In 1992 most of the polytechnic were granted university status therefore these universities are known as 'post-1992' universities (Bellingham, 2008).

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) was established in 1997 as an independent self-governing body. The chief responsibility for academic standards and quality in UK higher education rests with each university and college. QAA examines how well they meet their responsibilities;

identify good practices and recommendations changes for improvement. QAA publishes guidelines to help institutions develop effective systems and to ensure that students have high quality experiences (QAA, 2009). Bellingham (2008) has summarized the evolution of external quality assurance in UK.

The following steps have identified by the QAA to achieve the goal of quality assurance:

1. Conduct reviews of Institutes, universities and colleges.
2. Publish reports on the confidence that can be placed in an institution's management of standards and quality.
3. Provide guidance to Institutions of Higher Education on maintaining academic standards and improving quality, in line with the Academic Infrastructure.
4. Investigate causes for concern about academic standards and quality
5. Advise governments on applications for degree awarding powers and university title.
6. Coordinate with European and wider international developments (QAA, 2009).

Recently the focus of QAA has been skewed towards quality enhancement instead of quality assurance which is defined as 'the process of taking deliberate steps at the Institutional level to improve the quality of learning opportunities' (QAA, 2006). Higher Education Academy (HEA) was established in 2004 for the enhancement of the students' learning experience as reflected in the Academy's Strategic Plan 2005 to 2010 (Filippakou & Tapper ,2008).

Table 1. Methods of external audit and review for teaching and research

Time period	Method of quality audit/review	Major coordinating body
1986, 1992, 1996, 2001 and 2008	Research assessment exercise	UK Higher Education Funding Council
1991-1997	Academic quality audit	UK academic audit unit Higher education quality council
1998-2002	Continuation audit	Quality Assurance Agency of Higher Education
1993-1995	Teaching quality assessment and subject review	UK Higher Education Funding Council
1995-2001	Universal subject review	UK Higher Education Funding Council (till 1997) Quality Assurance Agency of Higher Education (1998-2001)
2000- present	Institutional audit (revised 2006)	Quality Assurance Agency of Higher Education

Source: QAA, 2006.

2.2.2. Quality Assurance in the US Higher Education

In the United States higher education institutions are accredited by public and private accreditation organizations. This mechanism of external quality assurance is practiced in USA since the start of 19th century. It is called voluntary accreditation model for quality assurance though most of the accrediting organizations are private but accreditation is mandatory for Higher Education Institutes to get public funds and degree recognition. The accreditation system in USA is very diversified and decentralized where more than 100 public and private accreditation organization are accrediting more than 6400 institutions and 18700 programs (Schray, 2007).

It is a collegial process based on self- and peer-assessment for improvement of academic quality and public accountability. In USA this accreditation process is at institution level instead of program level (Billing, 2004). For professional education like medicine, engineering and accounting etc. there are specialized program level accreditation bodies like (formerly the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology) are also functioning (Alderman, & Brown, 2005).

Mostly the accreditation process consists of the following steps as summarized by Eaton (2000) are:

1. Institutes prepare self-evaluation report according to the criteria prescribed by the accreditation organization.
2. This is followed by the peer review based on the self-study report.
3. Site visit by the peer reviewers to validate the claims made by the institutes.
4. Accreditation organization can review the accreditation at any time.

Since the commencement of accreditation process in USA higher education accreditation is conducted by the private organizations. In 1949 first national Commission on Accreditation (COA) was established to monitor accreditation organizations as a major intervention by the US government. After many transformations this commission is now substitute by Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). All the accreditation agencies apply to the CHEA or US Department of Education (USDE) for recognition. USDE review the accreditation after every five years where as accreditation confers by the CHEA is valid for ten years. Federal grants and students aid funds are available to only those institutions which are accredited by USDE.

Different national, regional, and specialized accreditation organizations accreditation agencies operate under different standards and processes. There are 2963 regional, 3458 national and many specialized agencies which accredit programs, departments or schools in specific field operate throughout the country. There are 18,713 such accredited programs and institutions have been accredited throughout the country (Schray, 2007).

2.2.3. Quality Assurance in Australian Higher Education

Higher education institutions in Australia have undergone performance review for the last two decades (Department of Education, Science and Training [DEST], 2004). It was initiated first time in 1985 when Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission started conducting discipline based performance reviews. The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee has also performed the role of external performance auditor from 1987 to 1994 (DEST, 2004b). Since 1998 it is mandatory for all the federally funded institutions to have a quality assurance and quality improvements strategies and plans. While addressing to the Committee for Economic Development of Australia in 2002 the Prime Minister pledge his commitment to ensure that world class research should be conducted in the Australian universities. He also pointed out four key principles for ensuring world class standard: diversity, quality, equity and sustainability.

Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) was established in March 2000 by Ministerial Council on Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCETYA) as an independent, not-for-profit national agency to promote, audit, and report on quality assurance. The main responsibilities of AUQA are:

- Quality audits of higher education institutions and accreditation authorities;
- Reporting on performance and outcomes;
- Assisting in quality enhancement;
- Advising on quality assurance; and
- Liaising internationally with quality agencies in other jurisdictions, for the benefit of Australian higher education (AUQA, 2008).

AUQA enjoys complete monopoly in the field of Quality assurance in Australia because universities do not have choice to select any other public or private quality assurance body other than AUQA for their quality assurance process and outcomes validation (Anderson, 2006). The first cycle of quality audit conducted by AUQA was completed in 2007. AUQA audit is based on

the objective and goals of the institutions to safeguard the autonomy and unique disposition of higher education. There are no predefined steps for AUQA quality audit, it is designed to suit the needs of the auditee but mostly following stages are witnessed:

1. Selection of audit panel for particular auditee
2. Setting the parameters of the audit after negotiation with the auditee
3. Self-review report (Performance Portfolio) preparation and submission by the auditee
4. Portfolio Meeting of the panel to discuss the Portfolio of the institution and if required a request for any additional documentation
5. Preparatory Visit
6. Audit Visit, including other sites where the auditee operates
7. Audit report preparation and finalization
8. Follow-up. (AUQA, 2008)

"Years of self-improvement, sharing of best practices and periodic internal and external audit has made Australian quality assurance system a vibrant and robust one. This has engendered not only good repute nationwide but internationally it has been recognized as well by increase in number of overseas students every year" (Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee, 2005).

2.2.4. Quality Assurance in South Africa

A quality assurance system was introduced in South Africa in 2004. Quality assurance is the responsibility of the CHE, a statutory advisory body. Its Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) conducts audits of universities. The HEQC also accredits courses and does national reviews, quality promotion and capacity development. It reports directly to the Minister of Education.

These Quality Councils (QCs) oversee all education programs in South Africa. Umalusi serves as the Quality Council for General and Further Education and Training, while the HEQC is the Quality Council for Higher Education. A new Quality Council – the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) – has brought together in one single body the quality assurance role formerly undertaken by the SETAs. However, the SETAs may continue to do quality assurance in their specific sectors, with the QCTO as an overarching organization (Allais, 2007).

Professional Associations

Many professions have associations that exist by law in order to maintain standards of education and testing within their profession. These bodies sometimes play a role in evaluating and licensing institutions that offer courses within their area of specialty. For example, the Engineering Council of South Africa monitors universities that offer engineering degrees, and only recognizes them if they reach certain standards. Sometimes, professional bodies also set their own examinations, which must be passed by people wanting to join the profession. For example, the Institute of Chartered Accountants sets an examination that must be passed by anyone who wants to practice as a chartered accountant (Caldwell, 2006).

Sectorial Education and Training Authorities (SETAS)

SETAs look specifically at the programs offered by the institutions; this is referred to as program approval. Sometimes the SETAs evaluate a sample of assessments conducted by the institutions in order to check that assessments adhere to the same standards (CHET & Umalusi, 2007). The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) carries out audits on universities every six years in the areas of teaching and learning, research and community engagement. It employs input, process, output and outcome type indicators as well as open-ended questions within its audit criteria. The review panel verifies the claims an institution makes in its self-evaluation and assesses them against its audit criteria. The review panel then prepares an audit report. After the first round of audits has been completed, the HEQC conducts an evaluative study that examines the efficiency and effectiveness of the institutional audits (CHET& Umalusi, 2007). HEIs currently implement the quality imperatives of the HEQC with a primary focus on teaching and learning. The drive to satisfy the criteria of the HEQC, of which the outcome is the accreditation of programs, does not satisfy customer expectations within a higher education landscape. HEIs should move a step forward, by creating a quality culture within higher education, thus eliminating the "burden" of being accredited to offer quality programs (Kruger, 2009).

The implementation of quality assurance initiatives in higher education in South Africa is neither new nor unfamiliar. A range of internal and external formal and informal quality assurance arrangements has been in place for many decades. What is new in relation to quality assurance in

South Africa is the need to embed total quality management principles as a culture within higher education (Allais, 2007).

The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) ensures academic quality as a means of quality assurance by the implementation of institutional audits on teaching and learning, research and service learning at higher education institutions. There is a much greater need, in that customer satisfaction is still a matter of concern. Institutional quality, through the implementation of the ISO 9001: 2008 requirements, also including aspects of the SAEM model, would together improve the status of quality in HE. Institutional quality is addressed by adopting quality principles and institutional self-assessment approaches where issues like leadership, policy and strategy, people management and satisfaction, client/customer focus and satisfaction, resource and information management, processes, impact on society and organizational results are analyzed to determine the institution's strengths and areas to improve (CHET & Umalusi, 2007).

2.2.5. Quality Assurance in Ethiopian HEIs

The current QA landscape of Ethiopia contains license, accreditation, control and inspection, and institutional quality audits as its basic elements of external quality audits (EQA). On the other hand, structures and systems lately created by higher education institutions (HEIs) for the purpose of ensuring their internal quality could be labelled as elements of the Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) framework that is now prevalent in the sector. The framework for both the external and internal quality assurance frameworks have largely been specified in the higher education proclamations of 2003, 2009 and 2019. The Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) and now Education and Training Authority (ETA) play the role of steering, defining, and enforcing the rules and regulations that pervade the quality assurance framework (Tamirat, 2011).

2.2.5.1. External Quality Assurance

As part of its mandate, the HERQA is responsible for conducting EQAs for all HEIs. An EQA, according to the HERQA (2006), is an in-depth analysis and assessment of the quality and relevance of programs and of the teaching and learning environment. Furthermore, EQA focuses on the appropriateness and effectiveness of the approaches to quality care, systems of

accountability, and internal review mechanisms adopted by HEIs (HERQA, 2006). The specific elements against which an EQA is done are: institutional vision, mission and educational goals, governance and management systems, infrastructure and learning resources, academic and support staff, student admission and support services, program relevance and curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment, student progression and graduate outcomes, research and outreach activities, and internal quality assurance (HERQA, 2006:6). A survey of the national system oversight activities in sub-Saharan Africa reveals that the above yardsticks are the most widely used in the region (Materu, 2007).

Regarding accreditation, the three higher education laws (Higher Education Proclamation No. 351/2003, No. 650/2009 and 1152/2019) established the HERQA's mandates to accredit private HEIs. The accreditation system focuses at both institutional and program levels. In the case of the program level, the HERQA is assigned to handle accreditation applications concerned with undergraduate (bachelor) degree and post-graduate level programs (HERQA, 2019).

2.2.5.2. Internal Quality Assurance

The introduction of a formal IQA system is a new phenomenon in Ethiopia. This should not be construed to mean that HEIs had no mechanisms of assuring the quality of their educational provisions. In fact, prior to the move towards a more formalized system, institutions had their own mechanisms of assuring institutional quality. However, the influence of such mechanisms has been limited mainly because feedback from such sources were not in most cases driven by the purposes of institutional improvement (Cantrell 2010). The move towards a more formalized system of quality assurance in Ethiopia has thus been justified by the deficiencies of the traditional quality assurance systems of institutions which were considered to be inefficient in 'a mass system, where there must be more checks and balances built in and less reliance on individual effort and knowledge' (Ashcroft and Rayner 2004).

As noted earlier, Ethiopia's second and third higher education proclamations set out specific provisions about internal quality systems of HEIs, capitalizing on the need for continuous self-evaluation and improvement. Both proclamations underscore the need for establishing an IQA framework, the responsibilities of individual HEIs, and the role of external bodies like HERQA and MoSHE in enhancing changes towards a strengthened internal quality management system

(Tamirat, 2020). According to these proclamations, the IQA system of an institution should provide for clear and comprehensive measures of quality that include professional development of academic staff, course contents, teaching-learning processes, student evaluation, assessment, and grading systems (FDRE 2009, 2019). Besides developing their own quality standards, HEIs are expected to undertake internal quality audits periodically, follow up and rectify deficiencies observed, document all activities undergone and report this to the Agency. Both proclamations further recognize the need for complying with HERQA's recommendations with regard to quality enhancement tasks that need to be undertaken after passing through the external quality assurance process (Tamirat, 2020).

Over the last decade, there have been encouraging signs in Ethiopia in terms of introducing IQA systems. The Agency's quality audit reports (HERQA 2014, 2017) show the success of most higher education institutions in the establishment of internal quality assurance units, the development of QA policies and guidelines, the designation of pertinent quality committees at various levels, and practical tasks that include internal quality assessments, program and course audits, curriculum review and pedagogic training for academic staff.

Challenges of Internal Quality Assurance

The IQA systems of most universities are afflicted with a raft of limited policy directions, and significant structural challenges (Tamirat, 2020). Most often, IQA units are not well- integrated into the university system, and deficiencies such as lack of vision, resource and leadership support, and poorly articulated procedures are commonly observed across many universities (Nega 2012; Tamrat 2012). The units are also overburdened with extra tasks, poor staffing, little budget and facilities, and high turnover (Cantrell 2010; Nega 2012; Tamrat 2012; Teshome 2015). Even in universities where better internal quality assurance activities are said to be undertaken, the major focus areas have been the academic functions of the university to the exclusion of other areas of engagement like research, community service and administration (Abebe 2015; Tadesse 2015). These system-level deficiencies obviously hamper the task of coordination, implementation, and follow up of IQA tasks and responsibilities.

Another deficiency of the IQA system at most universities is the limited involvement of stakeholders in the process. Most of the audit reports show the limited participation of students

and staff in the internal quality assurance processes of institutions implying the lack of awareness, contribution, and ownership of the university community which can impede the success of the whole process (Tamirat, 2020). As noted by Vettori, Lueger and Knassmuler (2007), 'if a quality culture should indeed be sustained by the whole organization, its basic principles have to be largely shared or at least accepted.'

Furthermore, most universities seem to have neither the motivation nor the structural readiness to make use of the recommendations given during the EQA process toward improving their internal performance. There is limited accountability and follow up in the system, which encourages this ambivalent practice (Tamirat, 2020).

The QA units set up at universities appear to have little authority in terms of follow-up actions which restrict their roles in the assurance and enhancement of institutional quality for which they were set up in the first place (HERQA, 2017). The same thing happens to be true as regards disseminating good practices: 'It has been learnt that whereas the departmental peer review and their implementation are part of the procedure to identify good practice as best practice, dissemination of the same is not as expected and its sustainability is also not guaranteed' (HERQA 2017). Apart from trivializing the whole activity, this has the potential to create negative attitude on the university community about the seriousness of the EQA exercise (Tamirat, 2020).

In general, the IQA systems of most universities appear to have been haphazardly set up in response to external demands than based on inherent needs to implant durable systems that accommodate institutional changes and improvements. If there are at all any changes, they have been cosmetic and at the level of structure and policy design than aimed at enhancing student learning experiences (Geda 2014; Nega 2012; Tadesse 2015). In a similar vein, very few institutions have developed the culture of assessing themselves on regular basis (HERQA, 2017). As a result, most HEIs are far from creating a strong quality management framework that will allow them to foster institutional improvement and meet the challenges of public accountability. Given these shortcomings, the existing IQA systems of institutions may not be expected to contribute systematically to the improvement of internal capacities (Tamirat, 2020).

2.3. Stakeholders Involvement in the Higher Education QA

A number of researchers have identified that there are different perspective of different customers of higher education. Therefore, it is necessary to identify the customers of higher education (Owlia & Aspinwall, 1998; Lawrence & Sharma, 2002). It is imperative to recognize the customers of higher education because all the stakeholders have different views and meanings of quality education (Motala, 2000). The business terms like customer and market focus are replaced with student and stakeholders in the education setting (Blazey, Davison, & Evans, 2003). Higher education customers (stakeholders) are classified as internal and external by Venkatraman (2007). Internal customers are faculty members while external customers can be further grouped as primary external customers: graduates; secondary external customers:

Employers and parents and tertiary external customer: government, alumni and labor market. Awino & Agolla (2008) have also identified faculty members as primary customers (stakeholders) of higher education. Students have also been acknowledged as an important internal customer in an empirical research by Lomas (2007). Also Srikanthan & Dalrymple (2005) have taken students as users of the higher education during study and product of the higher education after graduating. Van Kemenade, Pupius and Hardjono (2008) in their recent article have classified the stakeholders as internal and external. External customers are the employers who provide jobs to the alumni of the institutes.

In the manual for quality assurance for higher education institutes partners and stakeholders include universities/higher education institutions, the faculty, the management, the researchers, the students (current and perspective), the graduates and alumni, funding organizations, the employers of graduates; and the society have been recognized as important stakeholders of higher education (Rauf, 2006).

One importance debate in higher education is about the role of students as a customer. Lomas (2007) explored this phenomenon and concluded that government and funding agencies emphasis the role of student as a customer while on contrary very few academician agree with this notion. He also established that the type of university rather than discipline have more influence on the perception about the role of students as customers. The latest Malcolm Baldrige National Quality award for education has used the term student satisfaction and other

stakeholders instead of customers. This reflects that students are not considered as customers because students do not have "freedom of choice, responsibility for paying the price and requirements to probe merit and eligibility" (Sahney, Banwet and Karunes, 2004).

2.4. Challenges of Quality Assurance Practices in HEIs

According to Zaki and Rashidi's (2013) Octet quality framework, there are eight (8) important variables that drive or influence quality assurance in higher education. These are: the institutional leadership, curriculum, student's profile (which recognizes the student as an important stakeholder in institution and also the quality assurance process), institutional design and strategy, institutional policies and practices, resources (financial, human and physical resources) faculty knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA).

2.4.1. Resources

According to Zaki and Rashidi (2013), financial, physical and human resources are important factors towards ensuring higher education that is of excellent quality. Disregarding and compromising on these can compromise the quality of education for any higher education institution. Zaki and Rashidi lament that, when considering quality education, institutions tend to neglect the issue of sufficient financial resources, yet it plays a huge role in the overall operation and success of the institution towards providing students with quality education. It is when financial resources are sufficient that institutions can also be in a position to have appropriate and relevant infrastructure such as buildings, with proper lighting, well equipped laboratories, libraries and appropriate furniture in each learning space. Without adequate financial resources, it is not possible to give proper quality of higher education services to students (Gulua, 2020).

On a similar note, having physical resources is not enough to ensure quality education, without adequate human resource in the form of academic staff, that is fairly distributed to all the offered programs. Gregory and Lodge (2015) argue that academic workload is a silent barrier to quality education. That is, if lecturers in an institution are not enough for all the programs, and are not fairly distributed, teaching becomes a huge burden and an overwhelming load for the available academics. This, in many ways, make teaching and learning less effective at the same time compromising the quality of education. It is therefore imperative that institutions not only have

the physical infrastructure, but also enough funds to cover the financial aspect of teaching and learning and also enough human resource to do the actual teaching.

2.4.2. The Curriculum

Osberg and Biesta (2021) define curriculum as the way in which educational events and every planned learning experience is organized. A curriculum entails all the objectives and outcomes, contents and credits, materials, assessments methods and audio-visual aids that are used to achieve institutional educational objectives (Zaki & Rashidi 2013). It is guided and framed within a set of values about what students should know and how they come to acquire that specific knowledge (Prideaux, 2003). For quality education, it is therefore a requirement that each discipline of the curriculum uses standard curriculum development models and approaches, in order to fulfil the national objectives, while addressing the local and international needs (Medrick, 2023). It is only through the right curriculum, that education can bring about the specific educational good", and at the same time "achieve its predefined normative ends (Osberg & Biesta, 2021). For instance, it is important for institutions in their program development stage to consider student diversity. That is, not only considering individual students' learning style, educational, cultural and social background and experience as well as the presence of any physical or sensory impairment and their mental well-being, but also ensuring that every student is entitled to educational success despite these limiting factors (Gulua, 2020).

To ensure quality education, higher education institutions should also discard enforcing unsuitable academic systems and procedures that serve as bottlenecks (Kohn, 1993), in preference to educational systems that go beyond enabling students' access to the curriculum but those that also prioritizes on educational success for all.

2.4.3. Faculty Knowledge, Skills and Abilities

The quality of higher education is directly created by academic personnel (Lucky & Yusoff, 2015). This means, the overall success of an institution towards offering quality education is a manifestation of lecturer performance, knowledge, skills and abilities which then become the breadth of educational institutions (Toni, Gani, Nujum & Latif, 2015). Hence, low lecturer performance indicates poor quality of education offered to students. The correct selection of faculty members tends to result in the perfect implementation of all institutional processes and

functions at the appropriate level. That is to say, faculty members should have the relevant qualifications, empowered with the right knowledge, skills and abilities to efficiently work in a higher education space, without which quality education cannot be attained. Giatman, Siswati, and Basri (2020) argue that, students' knowledge acquisition is largely dependent on how and what lecturers teach. On the same vein, how and what they teach is itself dependent on the knowledge, skills and commitment they bring to their teaching.

Faculty members who are not appropriately qualified can therefore mar quality education for any higher education institution. It is the educational institutions' responsibility therefore to find and foster competent lecturers. Those are lecturers who are mature in expertise and are ready and intellectually able to contribute to the nations' intellectual life by presenting graduates who have global insight, character, and internationally competitive (Anggraeni, 2014). Higher education institutions should therefore prioritize on hiring qualified staff for all their programs. It would also be in the best interest of the institution to have faculty members who continuously upgrade and professionally develop themselves. This would enable them to remain relevant to the needs and demands of the society and industry, for the betterment of the students they teach. These academics are inclined to produce graduates that are well competent and well conversant with prevailing trends and environmental demands, hence perfectly fit into the industrial and job market space.

2.4.4. Open System Thinking and Change

Arthur and Kuranchie (2022) further point out that, faculty members' attitude, resistance to change, no motivation, innovation and fear of change can be a barrier to quality assurance. According to Zaki and Rashidi (2013), open system thinking and change has to do with learning institutions and the academic staff being flexible to adapt to change and intellectually embracing the constantly changing global, environmental and industrial demands (Zaki & Rashidi, 2013). This means, as the world develops and transitions, the lectures who bear the great responsibility of developing graduates who should be in a position to address the socio-economic, political and global problems, need to be in a position to confront and also help their students confront and embrace this change. For instance, this calls for academic staff to move from the conventional pedagogic approaches that hinder educational transformation and perpetuates the culture of

stagnation, but rather be innovative and acquainted with the prevailing educational and technological trends of teaching and learning (Osberg and Biesta (2021).

Lecturers need to change their pedagogic styles from being devoted only to content delivery to incorporating total quality assurance trends into their teaching. This could enable them to develop graduates with "sufficient technical knowledge and skills to undertake their careers, along with the capacity to exhibit higher order thinking skills for solving myriad of complex problems emerging in the professional, social and economic spheres of life" (Zaki, Rashidi & Kazmi, 2013). The starting point could be faculty members considering quality education as a key performance indicator in their work, understanding and recognizing what constitutes quality teaching and learning, having the correct attitude to effect change but most importantly, be willing to play a role in ensuring it takes place in their institutions (Nguyen, 2016).

Considering that, institutions might not have the required expertise to train and develop the staff in order to align with global developments and also to bring about a positive and the much needed change in the classroom and outside the four walls of the classroom, Gulua (2020) advises that, institutions that value quality education should, as a matter of primacy, invest in their academic staff through institutional systematic and strategic training of all the employees to best align with the requirements of quality education and mandate of the institution.

2.4.5. The Profiles of Enrolled Students

Zaki and Rashidi (2013) highlight that disregarding and not recognizing students as important stakeholders in any educational institution could mar any prospects for quality education. This is because all institutional processes revolve around them and any decision made by those in power either benefits or compromise their educational success. In all their processes, practices and decisions, institutions should consider the multiple identities and personal experiences that students bring into the school context, and how these identities and past experiences act as basis for their learning. Students come to school with backgrounds relative to their family environment which influence their aptitude (language, reasoning, etc.) and attitude (motivation and others) necessary for learning (Fomba et al., 2022). Disregarding these factors would not only compromise the education of most students, but also make educational quality a far-fetched dream for most institutions (Morgan et al., (2022).

Such understanding would enable lecturers not only to understand diversity within their lecture rooms but also for them to design pedagogic practices in ways that could be inclusive as to accommodate and align every student to equitable success, despite their limiting life or academic experiences (Motsa, 2021). Institutional practices, teaching and learning should therefore be both deficit based and strengthen issues of equitability. That is, pedagogic practices should be designed in such a way as to meet every student at their point of need. This could help institutions to close opportunity gaps for students, deal with issues like poor performance and dropout rates whilst increasing academic engagement. In such a situation, every student is equitably empowered with fair encouragement of excellence (Zaki & Rashidi, 2013), professional and competent skills so as to fit into the job market and also contribute towards the growing national and international economy and social relations.

2.4.6. Institutional Policies and Practices

According to Matadi and Uleanya (2022), poorly developed policies and those that remain on paper with glaring disparities between policy and practice tend to be barrier to quality education for higher education institutions. One way to ensure that institutional policies are excellently developed and implemented, higher education institutions need to re-define collegiality in their individual contexts as to engage and empower academic staff with regard to implementing quality policies (Whalley, 2017).

Matadi and Uleanya highlight that, institutional policies should not only be considered as a "framework and benchmark" to all institutions; be it private or public, but should also be aligned with and also guide practice. This calls for institutions to examine their existing systems and structures to realize the intentions expressed in all its policy documents (Czerniewicz & Brown, 2009). For instance, Whalley (2017) mentions that institutions that value quality education and aim to produce competent graduates should develop an institution-wide framework for teaching and learning that reflects the mission, values and specialties of the institution and defines the objectives of teaching and the expected learning outcomes for students. It should also ensure that all specific teaching and learning frameworks at department, school or program level are consistent with the institution-wide framework and further align the teaching and learning process as well as student assessment to the teaching and learning framework (Salmi & D'Addio, 2021).

2.4.7. Institutional Design

Zaki and Rashidi (2013) point out that both the structural and contextual design of an institution have a huge influence on educational quality. The structural domain relates to the formalization, specialization, hierarchy of authority, centralization and professionalism within an institution (Morgan et al., (2022). This includes the management, academic and non-academic staff members. Contextual design on the other hand has to do with the size, the environment, technology, learning space and goals of an institution (Zaki, Rashidi & Kazmi, 2013). Institutional design is concerned with the relevance and actual design of what is taught and learned and space within which it is taught, and also the people on whose responsibility quality and excellence in the institution is vested. That is, how all these are structured and designed to meet the prevailing and future needs of the students, also taking into account their subjective circumstances and perspectives (Fomba, Talla and Ningaye, 2022).

Effective institutional design towards educational quality in an institution would therefore consider and relate to "the quality and extent to which institutions can affect the inputs of education, the education system, or even the education process" (Fomba, Talla & Ningaye, 2022). For instance, infrastructure must be designed in such a way as to serve the educational process and also improve the quality of the learning experience (Salmi & D'Addio, 2021). There is also the heightened need for every institutional design to accommodate and consider the significant changes in the overall education system itself, the nature of the students, teachers, infrastructure and the institutional objectives, educational and technological technologies, and its socio-economic, cultural and political environment (Fomba, Talla & Ningaye, 2022). It is imperative for higher education institutions that wish to ensure quality education to design potent and efficient teaching and learning strategies. Considering these could effectively enhance the quality of education within higher education institutions and help them achieve the desired result.

2.4.8. Institutional Leadership

Institutional leadership also has a huge influence on the quality of education. Connolly, James and Fertig (2017) point out that institutional leadership has to do with carrying out the responsibility of the proper functioning of the institution and influencing the people working within to achieve the institutional goals. It has to do with aligning people with the institutional

vision as well as motivating and empowering them (Fatihma & Syahrani, 2022), and this becomes the institutional leader's responsibility. To ensure quality education, institutional leaders should therefore be able to articulate this vision, establish direction and develop change strategies (Leal Filho Eustachio, Caldana, 2020), otherwise the existence of the institution risks being eroded at the detriment of the student it seeks to serve.

For example, Fathima (2022) argues that authoritarian leadership should not be encouraged in institutions that wish to adopt quality and excellence. For the mere reason that such leadership create the feeling of oppression and the imposition of force, it stifles innovation and creates a rigid work atmosphere, immerse pressure for the lower level academics and on the administrative and other staff. Yet innovation and creativity are imperative in an educational institution that wishes to ensure quality and also align with environmental demands. A transformative leader on the other hand is credible, capable to bring change and also competent because of the huge responsibility of controlling the organization (Fatihma, 2020). Transformative leaders possess certain administrative core values like creativity, vision, intelligence, initiative and honesty as these play a significant role towards university performance (Connolly, James & Fertig (2017). They are responsible, courageous, and passionate and have the capacity to champion change and adopt a collaborative approach, frequently consult academics to gain the necessary support for the quality management initiatives (Drew, 2006). Without these valuable qualities, leaders can limit optimum university performance and these institutions would not be in a position to achieve their pre-set objective of being vital hubs for the production of quality human capital focusing on the achievement of individual, organizational and State goals (Leal Filho Eustachio, Caldana, 2020).

2.5. Conceptual Framework of the Study

This section presents the conceptual framework of the study which is derived from the quality assurance literature and the neo-institutional and contingency theories. The framework consists of three dimensions. These are external organizational environments, quality assurance implementation practice (including the outcomes or impacts of quality assurance) and internal organization environments.

2.5.1. External Environment

External organizational environments, the first component of the conceptual framework, can be conceptualized in relation to institutional environments. The concept of institutional environment is used to describe external factors that indirectly affect an organization through societal norms, resources, and constraints (Carroll & Huo, 1986).

Institutional theory focuses more specifically on the pressures and constraints of the institutional environment and the contingency theory tends to emphasize the task environment (Oliver, 1991).

Bastedo (2005) argued that the environments for HEIs are very complex due to "… the multiple constituencies that higher education must serve, including parents, alumni trustees, state boards, legislators, and governors." Internal actors, including faculty, staff, and students, present their own demands for organizational adaptation to their needs (Kahsay, 2012). In addition, higher education must accommodate multiple, occasionally competing demands from the environment to increase access, lower costs, improve quality, and increase effectiveness. This suggests that the adoption and implementation of quality assurance is not free from the influence of an organization's environment. As Newton (2002) argued, any quality assurance system will always be affected by situational factors and by the context. In this study, the political-legal and the regulatory elements of an environment will comprise the forces of the external organizational environments. The aspects of external organizational environments are presented as follows.

2.5.1.1. Political-Legal Environment

Law provides a model of and for organizational life, defining roles for organizational actors and meanings for organizational events and imbuing those roles and meanings with positive or negative moral valence (Suchman & Edelman, 1997). The political-legal framework refers to the legislative and regulative aspects through which governments influence the operation of an organization. It includes the government laws, acts, sets of rules and regulations, and reform policies that govern and influence the functioning of an organization. In the context of higher education, the legal environment may contain proclamations, funding and quality regulatory frameworks, government control over higher education, and policies regarding government's initiatives to widen access (Kahsay, 2012).

Organizations encounter the legal system in at least three distinct ways which Suchman and Edelman (1997) call, the facilitative, regulatory, and constitutive legal environments.

- As a facilitative environment, the legal system appears as a system of procedural rules, furnishing legal vehicles for organizational initiatives that might otherwise occur through market tactics, media campaigns, industrial espionage, violent self-help, etc. In facilitative law, organizations are the players, and the legal system is merely an arena – albeit an arena whose shape may dramatically affect the course of the game.
- The regulatory environment, in contrast, places law in a far more active posture. Here, the law appears as a system of substantive edicts, invoking societal authority over various aspects of organizational life. As a regulatory environment, the legal system is taking the initiative directly to modify organizational behavior.
- As a constitutive environment, the legal system constructs and empowers various classes of organizational actors and delineates the relationships between them. Thus, if the facilitative legal environment primarily consists of procedural rules, and the regulatory legal environment substantive edicts, the constitutive legal environment comprises of definitional categories – those basic typologies that identify the legally cognizable components of the social world and that explain the natures and attributes of each. Constitutive law generally functions almost invisibly, providing taken-for-granted labels, categories, and "default rules" for organizational behavior; however, by establishing the background understandings that frame social discourse, constitutive law helps to determine what types of organizations come into existence and what types of organizational activity gain formal recognition.

The political-legal framework may facilitate or hinder the actual practice of quality assurance in universities.

2.5.1.2. Regulatory Structures

This refers to regulatory agencies or organizations that undertake any kind of monitoring, evaluation or review of the quality of higher education. In the context of higher education, this may mean any credible agency or office independent of a higher education provider which provides evaluations, reviews, audits or similar services pertaining to that higher education

provider's academic activities. The regulatory agencies might be established or empowered by legislation (law, decree, statute). Statutory agencies are usually government departments or agencies that are ultimately responsible to a government department (education, science, employment, etc.) or bodies with delegated regulatory powers (Harvey, 1999). Regulatory agencies can be dependent on or independent from government or politics. Independence refers to the extent to which the day-to-day activities and decisions of regulatory agencies are formed without the interference of politicians.

2.5.2. Internal Environment (University Characteristics)

It is the second component of the conceptual framework of the study. This dimension is conceptualized in the backdrop of the contingency theoretical perspective after considering the notions of the task or technical environment. The task or technical environment in this respect deals squarely with the immediate and specific context of an organization within which staff/workers perform and an organization operates (Betts, 2003; Gupta et al., 1994).

So, critical issues that differentiate let's say one HEI from the other such as organizational complexity, institutional leadership and quality culture, profile and involvement of internal actors, etc. can be situated in the internal environment (Lenz & Engledow, 1986; Rowley, 1996). Nevertheless, for the purpose of this research study, some foremost constructs like institutional leadership and quality culture and internal actors' profile and participation have been treated under the internal environment to apprehend the actual EQA practices in selected private and public universities in Ethiopia. Henceforward, the brief presentation is made on the above two imperative aspects under the umbrella of the internal environment.

2.5.2.1. Institutional Leadership and Quality Culture

Leadership establishes a structure and through which it influences the behavior of other persons in an organization by motivating, persuading, and directing towards attaining a common or shared purpose (Salter, 2002). Nguyen (2016) and Rediet (2014) have remarked that effective leadership, particularly in HEIs, with a necessary capability, needs to mobilizing staff members and deploying other essential resources to safeguard the quality and most importantly, to augment the quality-assuring activities. Leadership can have also a direct bearing on a culture of a given organization (or institution).

Organizational culture refers to traits and norms usually specific to a certain organization, which would likely influence the intra-organizational practices and inter-organizational relations (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008; James, Brian, & Joseph, 2011; Loukkola & Zang, 2010). James, Brian, and Joseph further assert that as part and parcel of the overarching organizational culture, one can look into a quality culture in an institution that deals largely with a set of shared, accepted, and integrated patterns in which the process of quality enhancement and assurance is achieved. Also, Hobson et al. (2008) note that a quality culture goes more than adopting a set of rules and procedures, and it demands a persistent negotiation and agreement upon them and also on what quality is and how it ought to be upheld and sustained.

Consequently, Haileleul and Ayele (2011) have claimed that the success of quality assurance activities or practices is highly premised on the presence of strong leadership and solid quality culture in HEIs. Based on this fact, therefore in this study, the role of the senior leaders (presidents, vice presidents, and directors and heads of different administrative units) and the existing organizational trends and practices (or capacity, including the relevant resources and infrastructures) as part of quality culture in the institutions, in higher education EQA, and the possible repercussions afterward have been investigated thoroughly to uncover the actual EQA practices in selected public and private universities in Ethiopia.

2.5.2.2. Internal Actors' Profile and Participation

Academics (mostly teachers and researchers) are the main actors that can directly influence the attainment of the educational goals in HEIs (Mulu, 2012). When it comes to the subject herein under study, Abeya (2014) and Rowley (1996) expound that the effectiveness of a quality assurance system, be it internal or external, in HEIs depends, to a larger extent, on the knowledge, commitment, engagement, and ownership of the academics in the area.

Based on this reality, 'internal actors' profile and participation' in this study are situated to deal with the overall knowledge (conceptions, views, positions, experiences, etc.) of the academic staff members (teachers and/or researchers) towards/in higher education EQA, the actual commitment they have, to discharge their roles and duties to reinforce it, and eventually the possible outcomes thereafter in case study institutions. Thus, in this connection, I have managed to explore the profile and participation of the internal actors just to unearth the real portraits of the EQA practices in selected public and private universities in Ethiopia.

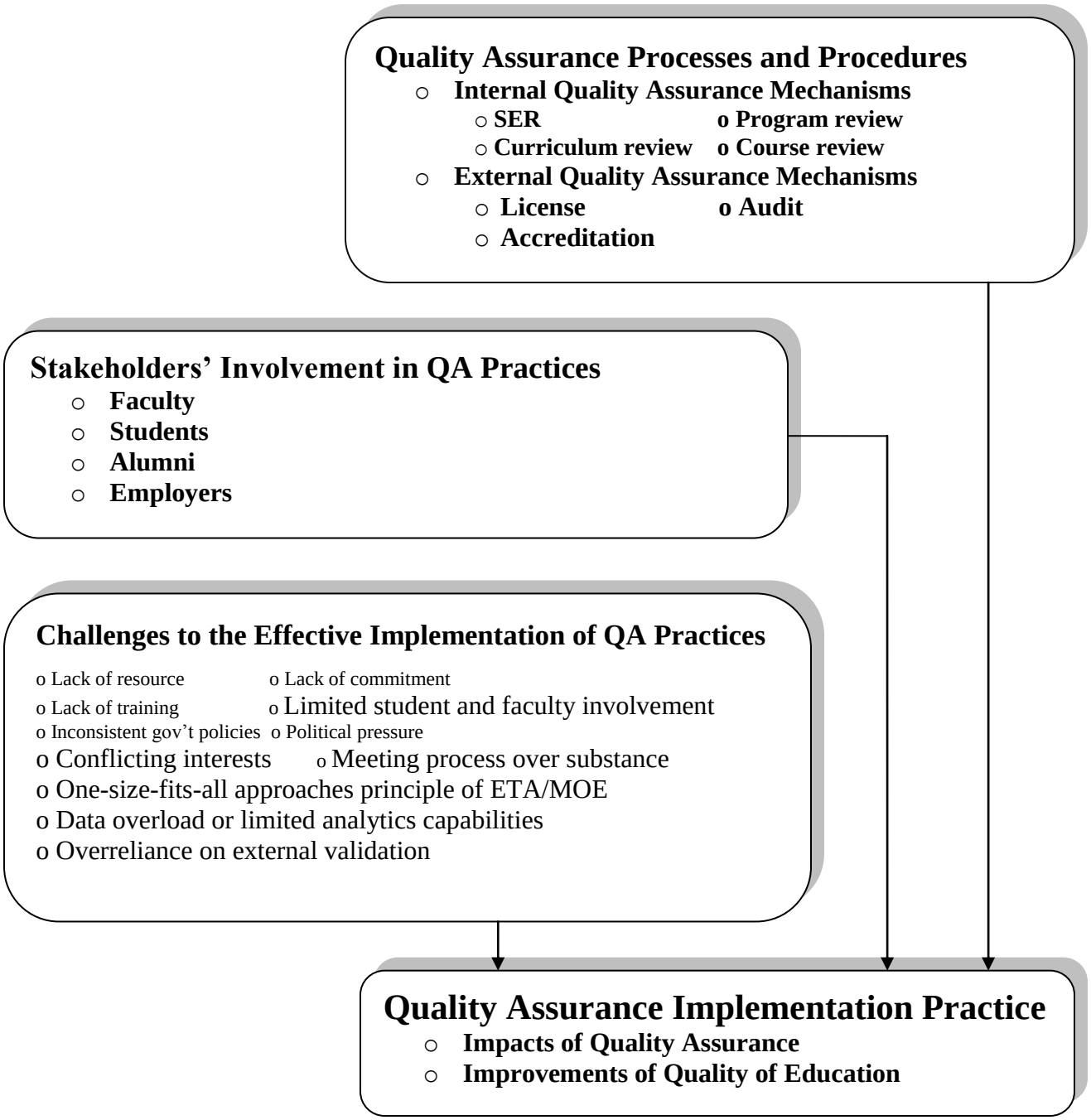

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methods and techniques employed in the collection, processing, and analysis of data. The subsections covered include: Research Design, Population, Sample of Study and Sampling Techniques, Sources of Data, Data Analysis, Validity and Reliability, and Ethical Considerations.

3.1. Research Design

This study used a mixed research design primarily based on the quantitative data obtained through questionnaire but for triangulation, qualitative data were incorporated through interview and analysis of documents.

3.2. Population, Sample of Study and Sampling Techniques

3.2.1. Population

All the public and private sector universities located in Addis Ababa City Administration were included as population for this study. From the total of seven universities located in Addis Ababa, three of them are public and the remaining four are private universities. The public universities are Addis Ababa University, Kotebe University of Education and Addis Ababa Science and Technology University whereas the private universities are Unity University, Rift Valley University, Saint Marry University and Admass University.

3.2.2. Sample of the Study

In this study, I employed a multifaceted sampling strategy to investigate higher education institutions (HEIs) and their instructors. The initial phase involved purposive sampling to select HEIs that hold university status as recognized by the Ministry of Education. This intentional selection process ensured that the institutions included in the study were well-equipped to deliver a comprehensive higher education experience, providing deeper insights into their unique characteristics and the challenges they face.

To enhance the richness of the analysis, I implemented random sampling within the selected universities. I began by compiling an exhaustive list of colleges and departments within each university, ensuring that all academic areas were represented. I then employed a random number generator to select three colleges from each university. Subsequently, I used the same generator to choose three departments from those selected colleges. This systematic approach guaranteed that each unit had an equal chance of being included, thereby minimizing bias and capturing a diverse array of academic perspectives.

Furthermore, the researcher utilized stratified random sampling to select instructors from the three departments within the chosen colleges of both public and private universities. I organized the instructor population into distinct strata based on institution type i.e., public versus private and compiled a comprehensive list of eligible instructors within each stratum. To ensure a representative sample, I employed a lottery system to randomly select instructors from the three departments in each stratum. This method facilitated a systematic and unbiased selection process, which significantly enhanced the overall validity of the research findings.

Data collection involved administering questionnaires to a total of 424 academic staff members participating in the study, drawn from an overall population of 3,351 instructors. This sample included 168 instructors from private institutions and 256 from public institutions, providing a balanced representation of perspectives from both types of universities. The sample size was calculated using the Taro Yamane formula for sample size determination:

$n = N/ 1+ N (e)^2$

Where: n = sample size; N = total population size; e = margin of error (expressed as a decimal)

This formula is instrumental in determining an appropriate sample size relative to the population and desired level of precision, ensuring that the findings of the study are both representative and statistically robust. Together, these sampling methods significantly strengthened the reliability and depth of the study's findings, facilitating a comprehensive investigation of quality assurance in higher education.

3.2.3. Instruments of Data Collection

3.2.3.1. Questionnaire

The first data-collection method in this study was the survey questionnaire, selected for its widespread use in educational research. As noted by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), survey questionnaires gather data at a specific point in time, allowing for standards of comparison. This method measures variables quantitatively by posing the same questions to multiple respondents and analyzing their responses. It is regarded as an effective means of collecting extensive information from larger groups.

In this study, a self-administered structured questionnaire was employed to assess respondents' perceptions of quality assurance practices. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions to capture the academic community's views. This approach aimed to obtain reliable, representative, and scientifically sound data.

The self-administered questionnaires were developed to collect insights from academic staff at seven universities and consisted of three components: Quality Assurance Processes and Procedures, featuring 12 items; Stakeholders' Involvement in HE Quality Assurance Practices, with 9 items; and Challenges to the Effective Implementation of Quality Assurance Practices, which included 12 items.

3.2.3.2. Interview

Interviews were the main data-collection method in this study, allowing the researcher to gather in-depth information from participants. The strength of the interview as data-collection method is its capacity to access the perspectives, attitudes and opinions of the interviewees (Babbie, Mouton, Vorster & Prozesky, 2001). They are particularly valuable when observing behaviors is difficult or when exploring implicit factors such as beliefs and feelings.

In this study, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven heads of quality assurance from both private and public universities. The focus was on three key areas: Quality Assurance Processes and Procedures, Stakeholders' Involvement in HE Quality Assurance Practices, and Challenges to the Effective Implementation of Quality Assurance Practices. This

approach aimed to gather insights into quality assurance practices and the challenges faced within these institutions.

3.2.3.3. Documents review

To gather information on higher education policies, regulations, and quality assurance practices in Ethiopia, a comprehensive review of relevant documents was conducted. These documents included higher education proclamations, which represent government-issued laws and regulations governing the higher education sector. In addition, quality audit reports generated by quality assurance agencies or internal quality assurance units within higher education institutions. By examining these documents, the study aimed to establish a foundational understanding of the existing framework for higher education and quality assurance in Ethiopia.

3.3. Sources of Data

The primary data was collected through self-report questionnaire administered to the faculty members and head of different departments in public and private universities. Another sources of data was interview of the heads of quality assurance units. Interviewing the heads of QA unit enabled the researcher to get the full range and depth of the information needed for the study. Secondary sources of data such as websites of the universities, quality audit reports, prospectus of the universities, official documents of ETA and Government of Ethiopia were used as a source of data.

3.4. Data Analysis

The data collected through questionnaires are coded and entered into a spreadsheet. Once the data is input into SPSS software, it will be cleaned and verified against the original hard copies to ensure accuracy.

The analysis aims to identify and compare quality assurance procedures and processes, stakeholder involvement in quality assurance practices, and the challenges of implementing these practices as perceived by faculty members and department heads. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated to illustrate the current status of quality assurance. In addition to this, t-tests are utilized to assess differences in perceptions of quality assurance practices among faculty members from both sectors.

Additionally, suggestions and recommendations from respondents in the questionnaire are analyzed manually and reported in a narrative way. This involves coding and grouping the data to identify recurring patterns and meaningful themes. On the other hand, interviews with seven heads of quality assurance units are recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed to address the qualitative aspects of the study.

Description of the respondents of the study

Table 2. Academic Ranks of the Respondents

Academic Rank	**Public**		**Private**	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Assistant Lecturer	23	9	15	9
Lecturer	89	35	144	86
Assistant Professor	124	48	9	5
Associate Professor	20	8	-	-
Professor	-	-	-	-

The table reveals that the public sector has a diverse range of academic designations, with a significant number of Assistant Professors (124, 48%) and some Associate Professors (20, 8%). In contrast, the private sector is heavily focused on Lecturers (144, 86%) and lacks higher academic ranks, such as Professors and Associate Professors.

Table 3. Gender of the respondents

Sex	**Public**		**Private**	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Male	211	82	127	76
Female	45	18	41	24

The table shows that both the public and private sectors are predominantly male, with 82% of respondents in the public sector and 76% in the private sector identifying as male. Female representation is notably lower in the public sector (18%) compared to the private sector (24%).

3.5. Validity and Reliability

The idea of strictly maintaining validity and reliability issues is often subjected to academic disagreements as most social science researchers consider these principles to be of not a paramount importance to social researches as opposed to researchers in physical sciences. Yet, they are central issues in all measurements. Both principles are important in establishing the

trustfulness, credibility, or believability of findings. The study hence attempts to incorporate both principles in carrying out its scientific inquiry.

3.5.1. Validity

As literature suggests, qualitative researchers should strive to show an honest and candid account of respondents' social life (Neuman, 2007; Silverman and Marvasti, 2008; and Walliman, 2011). Based on this principle, the study emphasizes on giving fair and balanced account of the institutionalization of quality assurance process from an unbiased stance. It therefore concentrates on capturing an authentic insider view and provides a detailed account of how respondents feel about and understand the process. As the core principle of validity is to be trustful, the study aimed to avoid false or distorted accounts. By doing so, it sought to create a tight fit between respondents' accounts, ideas and statements, and what is actually occurring in the practical reality. Through appropriately conceptualizing institutionalization of quality assurance, the study will use relevant questions believed to adequately address the conceptually defined subject in in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. The study thus strived to achieve strong fit between the reality and the constructs that the study design set to describe or analyze. Accordingly, it carefully addressed the challenge of measuring how well reality could be captured through the methods employed in the study.

3.5.2. Reliability

This study emphasizes consistency and dependability in addressing its core inquiries by employing various data collection methods, including questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Achieving consistent results can be challenging, especially when studying dynamic processes that are not stable over time (Balnaves & Caputi, 2001; Walker, 2011; Bryman & Burgess, 1994; Neuman, 2007). The study recognizes the evolving interaction between its inquiries and the subject matter, acknowledging that different researchers or the same researcher using alternative measures might yield varying results. The context often necessitates a unique mix of measures that are difficult to replicate.

To enhance reliability, the researcher utilized consistent questions throughout data collection, aiming to ensure that the methodology and findings could be reproduced by other researchers. A pilot study was conducted based on the principles outlined by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), principles and benefits.

A pilot study of the questionnaire was conducted using purposive sampling of 14 teaching staff and 6 department heads from two public and two private universities which are similar to the ones included in the study. The Participants were selected for their relevant background and knowledge but were not part of the main study group. Verbal consent was obtained, and respondents provided feedback on the questionnaire's duration, comfort level, and clarity of questions.

The data from the pilot study were analyzed to evaluate the internal consistency and homogeneity of the questionnaire's sub-scales.

Table 4. Overview of Reliability Statistics

Variable	Reliability Statistics	
	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Quality Assurance System and Structure	.982	4
Quality Assurance Activities	.964	8
Stakeholders' Involvement in QA practices	.989	9
Challenges to the effective implementation of QA Practices	.991	12

All listed variables have Cronbach's alpha values above 0.9, indicating excellent internal consistency and robust constructs for quality assurance practices. They are reliable for further analysis. Any spelling and grammatical errors have been corrected to improve the instrument's quality.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

According to Lawrence (1997), direct involvement of field researchers in the social lives of others raises many ethical dilemmas. There may be a lack of trust between the researcher and the community. A researcher has a moral obligation to uphold the confidentiality of data and must keep information confidential from others in the field. It is the researcher's duty to build trust and rapport with participants. They should not force individuals to take part in research but encourage them to volunteer their time for the project (Marshal, 1998).

In conducting qualitative and quantitative inquiries ethically, researchers need to be careful when asking about private matters and procedures: they must consider how they ask, what they expect interviewees to disclose, and whether and how they can guarantee confidentiality and anonymity.

Interviews may be recorded with the knowledge and permission of the participants. Researchers remain accountable for the ethical quality of the inquiry and should exercise great care while collecting data. Subjects must enter the research project voluntarily and understand the value of the study, as well as the associated risks and obligations.

Researchers should protect subjects from any risk, treat them with respect, and seek their cooperation in the research. Failing to obtain permission to use a site can jeopardize the study. Informed consent must be confirmed by a signature. In this research, I provided participants with information and clarification about the study's purposes and how I would ensure the confidentiality of the information they supplied. I also obtained permission from HEIs, academic vice-presidents, faculty deans, institutional quality assurance directors, department heads, and instructors when collecting data from each section of these institutions. I kept the information provided by participants confidential from others, emphasizing this to them prior to the interview to guarantee their privacy.

The anonymity of all informants will be assured in this study. In the final report, there will be no references to participants by name; instead, their job descriptions, positions, or levels of seniority in the management hierarchy will be used during data analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter the data obtained through questionnaire and interviews is analyzed and interpreted. This chapter is organized in to three sections: the first section deals with the analysis of quantitative data obtained through questionnaire. The second section of the chapter deals with analysis of qualitative data obtained through the interview of heads of quality assurance and the third section discusses the main finding obtained from the questionnaire, interview and documents.

4.1. Analysis of Quantitative Data

The questionnaire proved to be fairly effective as an information gathering tool as it allowed the respondents, all of whom are academic staffs, to reflect on the following: Quality assurance processes and procedures; Stakeholders' involvement in HE quality assurance practices and Challenges to the effective implementation of quality assurance practices in four private and three public universities.

4.1.1. Quality Assurance Processes and Procedures

4.1.1.1. Quality Assurance System and Structure

Table 5 presents the results of a comparative analysis of quality assurance system and structure between private and public higher education institutions (HEIs) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The data is based on a survey administered to faculty members from both types of institutions. The table includes four quality assurance indicators, along with mean scores, standard deviations, and t-test results to assess the statistical significance of differences between the two groups.

The mean scores for each indicator represent the average rating assigned by faculty members on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A higher mean score indicates a more positive perception of the respective quality assurance practice. The standard deviation measures the dispersion of responses, providing insights into the variability of opinions within each group.

The t-test is used to determine if there are statistically significant differences in mean scores between private and public HEIs for each quality assurance indicator. A p-value less than 0.05 indicates a significant difference at a 95% confidence level.

Table 5. Quality Assurance System and Structure

No	Quality Items/indicators	Private HEIs		Public HEIs		t-test	Sig. (2-tailed)
		M1	SD1	M2	SD2		
1	Quality assurance unit has a clearly defined structure.	3.53	0.98	3.01	0.99	5.29	0.00
2	Quality assurance systems are well communicated to the stakeholders.	3.14	1.02	2.96	0.96	1.87	0.06
3	Quality assurance systems are related to the attainment of the overall mission of the institution.	3.14	1.09	2.95	0.85	2.03	0.04
4	Quality assurance reports of your institution are available to all the stakeholders.	3.11	1.04	3.05	0.94	0.62	0.54
Grand Mean and Standard Deviation		3.23	1.03	2.99	0.94	0.34	

Quality assurance unit has a clearly defined structure

The survey results indicate that respondents from Private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) perceive their quality assurance unit's structure as more clearly defined, with a mean score of 3.53, compared to 3.01 for Public HEIs. Despite this, Public HEIs exhibit a greater standard deviation (0.99) than Private HEIs (0.98), reflecting more variation in opinions about their quality assurance structures. Furthermore, a t-test analysis (df = 422) yielded a t-value of 5.29 with a p-value less than 0.05, confirming that the difference in mean scores between the two types of institutions is statistically significant.

Communication to Stakeholders

The quantitative analysis reveals a notable difference in the perceived effectiveness of communication between Private and Public HEIs. Specifically, Private HEIs exhibited a higher mean score of 3.14, in contrast to 2.96 for Public HEIs, indicating more favorable perceptions among respondents from Private institutions. However, the standard deviation for Private HEIs is 1.02, compared to 0.96 for Public HEIs, suggesting a greater variability in responses within the

Private sector. A t-test analysis (df = 422) produced a t-value of 1.87 and a p-value exceeding 0.05, indicating that the observed difference in mean scores is statistically insignificant.

Alignment with Mission

The survey results reveal that the mean score for the alignment of the quality assurance system with the mission of the institution is higher in Private HEIs (3.1369) compared to Public HEIs (2.9453), indicating that respondents from Private HEIs perceive a stronger alignment. Additionally, Private HEIs show greater variability in perceptions (standard deviation of 1.09394) compared to Public HEIs (0.84768), suggesting a wider range of opinions on how well the systems align with their goals. Furthermore, a t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of 2.03 with a p-value less than 0.05, confirming that the difference in mean scores between the two types of institutions is statistically significant.

Availability of Quality Assurance Reports

The survey results reveal that Private HEIs have a slightly higher mean score (3.11) for the availability of QA reports to all stakeholders compared to Public HEIs (3.05), suggesting a marginally better perception of report availability. However, the standard deviation indicates that Private HEIs (1.04) exhibit greater variability in responses than Public HEIs (0.94), reflecting a wider range of opinions about report availability among Private HEIs. A t-test (df = 422) produced a t-value of 0.62 and a p-value exceeding 0.05, indicating that the observed difference in mean scores is statistically insignificant.

In summary, private higher education institutions (HEIs) tend to have more positive perceptions of quality assurance across all aspects, reflected in higher mean scores compared to public HEIs. Public HEIs, on the other hand, show lower mean scores across all items, indicating less favorable views and somewhat less variability in responses.

Private HEIs exhibit greater variability in perceptions, particularly regarding alignment with goals, suggesting differing opinions among respondents. In contrast, public HEIs show more consistent but less positive responses.

4.1.1.2. Quality Assurance Activities

Table 6 presents the results of a comparative analysis of quality assurance activities between private and public higher education institutions (HEIs) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The data is based on a survey administered to faculty members from both types of institutions. The table includes eight quality assurance indicators, along with mean scores, standard deviations, and t-test results to assess the statistical significance of differences between the two groups.

The mean scores for each indicator represent the average rating assigned by faculty members on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A higher mean score indicates a more positive perception of the respective quality assurance practice. The standard deviation measures the dispersion of responses, providing insights into the variability of opinions within each group.

The t-test is used to determine if there are statistically significant differences in mean scores between private and public HEIs for each quality assurance indicator. A p-value less than 0.05 indicates a significant difference at a 95% confidence level.

Table 6. Quality Assurance Activities

No	Quality Items/indicators	Private HEIs		Public HEIs		t-test	Sig. (2-tailed)
		M1	SD1	M2	SD2		
1	The institution's self-evaluation practices improved the quality of education.	3.78	0.92	3.22	1.04	5.62	0.00
2	Programs and curricula are reviewed periodically	3.43	0.93	2.83	1.06	6.04	0.00
3	Courses are evaluated periodically	3.32	0.93	2.82	1.08	4.88	0.00
4	Feedbacks from the stakeholders are used to improve the program	3.12	1.08	3.02	1.00	1.01	0.32
5	ETA supervises or monitors and evaluates quality education in your institution	4.05	0.78	2.49	0.93	17.98	0.00
6	ETA quality assurance initiative has improved the quality of academic programs.	3.63	1.70	2.76	1.00	6.57	0.00
7	There are shared quality culture and	3.01	1.02	3.00	0.94	0.12	0.90

	values across departments in your institution						
8	Data are analyzed for quality assurance purposes	3.23	0.96	2.98	0.96	2.58	0.01
Grand Mean and Standard Deviation		3.45	1.04	2.89	1.00	1.10	

Impacts of Self-Evaluation Practices on Education Quality

The survey reveals a notable difference between the two sectors. The mean score for Private HEIs (3.78) is higher compared to Public HEIs (3.22), indicating stronger agreement that self-evaluation practices improve educational quality. Public HEIs, on the other hand, have a lower mean and a higher standard deviation, suggesting more variability in perceptions and generally weaker agreement. Furthermore, a t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of 5.62 with a p-value less than 0.05, confirming that the difference in mean scores between the two types of institutions is statistically significant.

Programs and curricula review

The survey reveals that the mean score for Private HEIs (3.43) indicates a higher level of agreement that programs and curricula are reviewed periodically compared to Public HEIs (2.83). Public HEIs have a lower mean score and higher variability, suggesting less consensus and weaker agreement on the periodic review of programs and curricula. Furthermore, a t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of 6.04 with a p-value less than 0.05, confirming that the difference in mean scores between the two types of institutions is statistically significant.

Courses evaluation

The survey reveals that Private HEIs have a mean score of 3.32, indicating a higher level of agreement regarding the periodic evaluation of courses compared to Public HEIs, which have a mean score of 2.82. Additionally, Public HEIs exhibit a higher standard deviation, suggesting both a less favorable view and greater variability in responses. Furthermore, a t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of 4.88 with a p-value less than 0.05, confirming that the difference in mean scores between the two types of institutions is statistically significant.

Using Feedbacks from the stakeholders

The survey reveal that both sectors show similar levels of agreement regarding the use of stakeholder feedback, though the mean score of the Private HEIs (3.12) is slightly higher compared to the Public HEIs (3.02). The variability in responses is similar across both sectors. A t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of 1.01 and a p-value exceeding 0.05, suggesting that the difference in mean scores is not statistically significant.

ETA's supervision, monitoring and evaluation of quality education

The survey reveal that the Private HEIs shows strong agreement that ETA effectively supervises and evaluates quality education, while the Public HEIs shows much lower agreement. The significant drop in mean score in the Public HEIs (2.49) compared to the Private HEIs (4.05) indicates a negative perception or less confidence in ETA's role. Furthermore, a t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of 17.98 with a p-value less than 0.05, confirming that the difference in mean scores between the two types of institutions is statistically significant.

ETA's quality assurance initiative impact on the quality of academic programs

The survey result reveal that the Private HEIs shows moderate agreement that ETA initiatives have improved academic programs, while the Public HEIs shows weaker agreement. The higher variability in the Private HEIs may indicate mixed opinions about the effectiveness of ETA's initiatives. Furthermore, a t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of 6.57 with a p-value less than 0.05, confirming that the difference in mean scores between the two types of institutions is statistically significant.

Culture of sharing experiences on quality issues across departments

Both sectors show similar levels of agreement regarding shared quality culture and values. The means are close, and the standard deviations indicate similar levels of variability. A t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of 0.12 and a p-value exceeding 0.05, suggesting that the difference in mean scores is not statistically significant.

Culture of analyzing data for quality assurance purposes.

The Private HEIs shows slightly higher agreement that data are analyzed for quality assurance purposes. The means are close, and both sectors have similar standard deviations, reflecting comparable levels of agreement and variability. Furthermore, a t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of 2.58 with a p-value less than 0.05, confirming that the difference in mean scores between the two types of institutions is statistically significant.

In summary, private higher education institutions (HEIs) generally report higher mean scores, indicating more favorable perceptions of quality assurance practices compared to public HEIs. This includes greater agreement on the effectiveness of self-evaluation, periodic program and course reviews, and the role of the Education and Training Authority (ETA) in quality supervision. Conversely, public HEIs show weaker perceptions regarding ETA's effectiveness, with significantly lower mean scores for its role in supervision and the impact of its initiatives. This may suggest a decline in confidence or perceived effectiveness of ETA-related quality assurance activities over time or across different groups surveyed.

Both sectors are consistent in their views on shared quality culture and the analysis of data for quality assurance purposes, showing similar levels of agreement and variability.

Overall, the comparison indicates a notable difference in perceptions of quality assurance practices, particularly concerning the role and effectiveness of ETA. It would be valuable to investigate potential reasons for these differences, such as changes in institutional practices, stakeholder experiences, or survey conditions.

4.1.2. Stakeholders' Involvement in QA practices

Stakeholders' Involvement in Quality Assurance Practices

Table 7 presents the results of a comparative analysis of stakeholder involvement in quality assurance practices between private and public higher education institutions (HEIs) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The data is based on a survey administered to faculty members from both types of institutions. The table includes nine quality assurance indicators related to stakeholder involvement, along with mean scores, standard deviations, and t-test results to assess the statistical significance of differences between the two groups.

The mean scores for each indicator represent the average rating assigned by faculty members on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A higher mean score indicates a more positive perception of stakeholder involvement in the respective quality assurance practice. The standard deviation measures the dispersion of responses, providing insights into the variability of opinions within each group.

The t-test is used to determine if there are statistically significant differences in mean scores between private and public HEIs for each stakeholder involvement indicator. A p-value less than 0.05 indicates a significant difference at a 95% confidence level

Table 7. Stakeholders' Involvement in QA practices

No	Quality Items/indicators	Private HEIs		Public HEIs		t-test	Sig. (2-tailed)
		M1	SD1	M2	SD2		
1	Employers are involved in need assessment to commence programs	3.05	1.08	3.06	0.97	-0.05	0.96
2	Employers are involved in program review	3.09	1.09	3.05	1.00	0.34	0.74
3	Faculty members are involved in program or course review	3.57	1.02	3.12	0.98	4.57	0.00
4	Students are involved in program or course review	3.27	1.07	3.07	0.97	2.00	0.05
5	Alumni are involved in program or course review	2.55	0.92	2.72	0.93	-1.86	0.06
6	Professional bodies are involved in program or course development	3.26	1.11	3.07	1.00	1.76	0.08
7	Faculty members are involved in quality assurance process	3.43	1.06	3.07	1.01	3.60	0.00
8	Students involve in teacher evaluation	3.58	1.01	3.21	0.97	3.77	0.00
9	There is strong support, supervision and monitoring of quality assurance practices by ETA	3.15	1.18	2.89	1.15	2.32	0.02
Grand Mean and Standard Deviation		3.22	1.06	3.03	1.00	0.39	

Employers' Involvement in Need Assessment

The mean scores for Private HEIs (3.05) and Public HEIs (3.06) are very similar, indicating comparable perceptions of employers' involvement in needs assessment. However, Public HEIs exhibit a slightly lower standard deviation (0.97) than Private HEIs (1.08), suggesting that responses are more consistent among Public HEIs. A t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of -0.05 and a p-value exceeding 0.05, suggesting that the difference in mean scores is not statistically significant.

Employers' Involvement in Program Review

The mean score for Private HEIs (3.09) is marginally higher than that for Public HEIs (3.05), suggesting a slightly greater perception of involvement in Private HEIs. Additionally, Public HEIs exhibit a lower standard deviation, indicating less variation in the responses. A t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of 0.34 and a p-value exceeding 0.05, suggesting that the difference in mean scores is not statistically significant.

Faculty Members' Involvement in Program or Course Review

Private HEIs (3.57) shows a higher mean, indicating a stronger perception of faculty involvement in program/course review compared to Public HEIs (3.12). Private HEIs also has higher variability. Furthermore, a t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of 4.57 with a p-value less than 0.05, confirming that the difference in mean scores between the two types of institutions is statistically significant.

Faculty Members' Involvement in Quality Assurance Process

Similar to the previous item, Private HEIs (3.43) show higher involvement compared to Public HEIs (3.07). The standard deviation for Private HEIs is slightly higher (1.06) than for Public HEIs (1.01), indicating greater variability in perceptions among Private HEIs. Furthermore, a t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of 3.60 with a p-value less than 0.05, confirming that the difference in mean scores between the two types of institutions is statistically significant.

Students' Involvement in Program or Course Review

Private HEIs (3.27) have a higher mean compared to Public HEIs (3.07), suggesting a stronger perception of student involvement. Additionally, public HEIs have a lower standard deviation. Furthermore, a t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of 2.00 with a p-value of 0.05 indicates that there is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 significance level.

Students' Involvement in Teacher Evaluation

Private HEIs (3.58) show greater student involvement in teacher evaluations compared to Public HEIs (3.21). Additionally, the lower standard deviation for public institutions indicates more uniform responses from students. Furthermore, a t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of 3.77 with a p-value less than 0.05, confirming that the difference in mean scores between the two types of institutions is statistically significant.

Alumni Involvement in Program or Course Review

Public HEIs (2.72) exhibit a higher mean compared to Private HEIs (2.55), suggesting a somewhat greater perception of alumni involvement in public institutions. However, both sectors still reflect low levels of involvement. The standard deviation for Public HEIs is similar to that of Private HEIs. A t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of -1.86 and a p-value exceeding 0.05, suggesting that the difference in mean scores is not statistically significant.

Professional Bodies' Involvement in Program or Course Development

Private HEIs (3.26) have a higher mean score compared to Public HEIs (3.07), suggesting a stronger perception of involvement. Additionally, Public HEIs exhibit a lower standard deviation, indicating less variability in their scores. A t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of 1.76 and a p-value exceeding 0.05, suggesting that the difference in mean scores is not statistically significant.

Support, Supervision, and Monitoring by ETA

Private HEIs (3.15) have a higher mean score compared to Public HEIs (2.89), indicating that they are perceived more favorably in terms of support and monitoring. The standard deviations are similar, which suggests that the variability in perceptions is comparable between the two

types of institutions. Furthermore, a t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of 2.32 with a p-value less than 0.05, confirming that the difference in mean scores between the two types of institutions is statistically significant.

In summary, private higher education institutions (HEIs) demonstrate higher stakeholder involvement in quality assurance practices across most categories compared to public HEIs. This suggests that stakeholders in private HEIs feel more engaged. In contrast, public HEIs typically show lower standard deviations, indicating more consistent perceptions among respondents. Meanwhile, private HEIs exhibit greater variability, reflecting a broader range of opinions and experiences.

4.1.3. Challenges to the effective implementation of Quality Assurance Practices

Table 8 compares the perceived challenges faced by private and public HEIs in implementing quality assurance practices. It presents mean scores, standard deviations, and t-test results for twelve indicators related to challenges, such as financial constraints, lack of commitment, and inconsistent policies.

Table 8. Challenges to the effective implementation of Quality Assurance Practices

No	Quality Items/indicators	Private HEIs		Public HEIs		t-test	Sig. (2-tailed)
		M1	SD1	M2	SD2		
1	Lack of financial resources and funding limitations	3.34	0.98	3.41	0.86	-0.83	0.41
2	Lack of commitment from top management	2.99	1.12	3.21	1.07	-2.10	0.04
3	Inconsistent policies of the government	3.21	1.08	3.25	1.00	-0.35	0.73
4	Lack of appropriate training and experience on quality assurance	3.10	1.01	3.14	1.06	-0.44	0.66
5	Time constraints	3.54	1.06	3.32	1.01	2.14	0.03
6	One-size-fits-all approaches principle of ETA/MOE	3.44	1.08	2.89	0.93	5.62	0.00
7	Meeting process over substance	2.92	1.15	3.45	1.04	-4.96	0.00
8	Limited student and faculty involvement	3.16	1.22	3.21	1.09	-0.44	0.66
9	Conflicting interests among the needs and priorities of diverse stakeholders	3.32	1.01	3.09	1.05	2.26	0.02
10	Data overload or limited analytics	3.20	1.28	3.10	1.05	0.92	0.36

	capabilities						
11	Political pressures: Political interference or external pressures to prioritize specific aspects of education over others	3.04	1.29	3.15	1.06	-1.02	0.31
12	Overreliance on external validation	3.29	1.07	2.76	1.04	5.11	0.00
Grand Mean and Standard Deviation		3.21	1.11	3.17	1.02	0.09	

Financial resources and funding limitations

The average score is higher for Public HEIs (3.41) than for Private HEIs (3.34), suggesting that respondents from Public HEIs view this challenge as somewhat more significant. Additionally, the lower standard deviation in Public HEIs indicates a greater consistency in opinions among respondents. A t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of -0.83 and a p-value exceeding 0.05, suggesting that the difference in mean scores is not statistically significant.

Commitment from top management

Public HEIs have a higher average score (3.21) compared to Private HEIs (2.99), indicating they are perceived as more significant. Additionally, the lower standard deviation in Public HEIs suggests that responses are more consistent. Furthermore, a t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of -2.10 with a p-value less than 0.05, confirming that the difference in mean scores between the two types of institutions is statistically significant.

Inconsistent policies of the government

Public higher education institutions (HEIs) have a higher average rating (3.25) compared to private HEIs (3.21), and they also show a lower standard deviation (1.00) compared to private HEIs (1.08). This suggests that the challenge is perceived as more significant in public HEIs, with responses being more consistent. A t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of -0.35 and a p-value exceeding 0.05, suggesting that the difference in mean scores is not statistically significant.

Training and experience on quality assurance

Public higher education institutions (HEIs) have a higher mean score (3.14) compared to private HEIs (3.10), as well as a slightly higher standard deviation (1.06) compared to private HEIs (1.01). This indicates that public HEIs are perceived as having greater significance and that there

is more variability in responses about them. A t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of -0.44 and a p-value exceeding 0.05, suggesting that the difference in mean scores is not statistically significant.

Time constraints

Private HEIs have a higher mean score (3.54) compared to Public HEIs (3.32), indicating that this challenge is perceived as more significant in private institutions. Additionally, the higher standard deviation in private institutions points to greater variability in their responses. Furthermore, a t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of 2.14 with a p-value less than 0.05, confirming that the difference in mean scores between the two types of institutions is statistically significant.

One-size-fits-all approaches principle of ETA/MOE

Private HEIs (HEIs) have a higher average score of 3.44 compared to Public HEIs, which have an average score of 2.89. This suggests that the significance of this challenge is perceived more strongly in private HEIs. Additionally, the standard deviation is greater in Private HEIs, indicating more variability in perceptions among them. Furthermore, a t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of 5.62 with a p-value less than 0.05, confirming that the difference in mean scores between the two types of institutions is statistically significant.

Meeting Process over Substance

Public HEIs (HEIs) have a higher average score (3.45) compared to Private HEIs (2.92), indicating a stronger perception of significance. Additionally, the standard deviation is lower for Public HEIs, reflecting less variability in responses. Furthermore, a t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of -4.96 with a p-value less than 0.05, confirming that the difference in mean scores between the two types of institutions is statistically significant.

Student and faculty involvement

Public HEIs (HEIs) have a higher mean score of 3.21 compared to 3.16 for Private HEIs and a lower standard deviation of 1.09, versus 1.22 for private HEIs. This suggests that the challenge is viewed as more significant and opinions are more consistent in public HEIs. A t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of -0.44 and a p-value exceeding 0.05, suggesting that the difference in mean scores is not statistically significant.

Conflicting interests among the needs and priorities of diverse stakeholders

Private HEIs have a higher mean score (3.32) compared to Public HEIs (3.09), indicating that they are perceived as more significant. The standard deviation is comparable for both types of institutions, suggesting similar levels of variability in their ratings. Furthermore, a t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of 2.26 with a p-value less than 0.05, confirming that the difference in mean scores between the two types of institutions is statistically significant.

Data overload or limited analytics capabilities

Private HEIs (HEIs) have a higher mean score of 3.20 compared to Public HEIs, which have a mean score of 3.10. Additionally, Private HEIs show a greater standard deviation of 1.28, compared to the Public HEIs' standard deviation of 1.05. This suggests that Private HEIs are perceived as having greater significance, with more variability in responses. A t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of 0.92 and a p-value exceeding 0.05, suggesting that the difference in mean scores is not statistically significant.

Political pressure

Public HEIs have a higher mean score of 3.15 compared to Private HEIs, which have a mean of 3.04. This suggests that the challenge is perceived as more significant in public HEIs. Additionally, the standard deviation for Public HEIs is lower at 1.06, compared to 1.29 for Private HEIs, indicating less variability in the perceptions within public institutions. A t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of -1.02 and a p-value exceeding 0.05, suggesting that the difference in mean scores is not statistically significant.

Overreliance on external validation

Private HEIs have a higher mean score of 3.29 compared to Public HEIs, which have a mean score of 2.76, suggesting that the challenge is perceived as more significant in Private HEIs. Additionally, the standard deviation is slightly higher in Private HEIs (1.07) than in Public HEIs (1.04), indicating greater variability in responses within private institutions. Furthermore, a t-test (df = 422) yielded a t-value of 5.11 with a p-value less than 0.05, confirming that the difference in mean scores between the two types of institutions is statistically significant.

In summary, public HEIs tend to report higher mean scores for most challenges, suggesting that respondents perceive these challenges as more significant compared to those in private HEIs. Additionally, public HEIs generally exhibit lower standard deviations, indicating less variability in responses than private HEIs.

4.2. Analysis of Qualitative Data

In this section, the researcher analyzed qualitative data gathered from interviews with heads of quality assurance offices structured interviews were conducted with three heads from public sector universities and four from private sector universities. To maintain the anonymity of the respondents, the names of the institutions and individuals have not been disclosed.

4.2.1. Quality Assurance Processes and Procedures

Mechanisms used for internal quality assurance within the institution

In examining the internal quality assurance mechanisms of private and public higher educational institutions (HEIs), notable differences emerge.

Private higher education institutions (HEIs) utilize a more comprehensive internal quality assurance framework that includes multiple layers of oversight and evaluation. One QA officer from the private universities noted, "We have established department, school, and college-level program/curriculum review teams that are essential for maintaining academic standards." Additionally, they have dedicated Quality Assurance Directors who oversee quality initiatives. As one officer explained, "The University has a quality assurance director and experts who conduct periodic program audits. These audits are crucial for identifying areas for improvement and ensuring compliance with quality benchmarks."

Private institutions also form ad-hoc committees to conduct program reviews, allowing for timely responses to educational trends and stakeholder feedback. One officer stated, "Ad-hoc committees are established to conduct program reviews and revise the existing curricula."

In contrast, public HEIs often face challenges due to inadequate internal quality assurance frameworks. One QA officer remarked, "While we have established curriculum review teams, we frequently encounter difficulties in oversight and evaluation across the department, school,

and college levels. The connection between department-level and college-level quality assurance units is often weak or even inexistent."

External Quality Assurance Reviews: Processes and Impact on Institutional Improvement

External quality assurance reviews are crucial for both private and public higher education institutions, significantly contributing to the improvement of educational standards and institutional effectiveness. A QA officer from a private institution noted, "As QA officer, I understand the critical role that external quality assurance reviews play in enhancing our institution's educational standards." He further explained, "During the evaluations, conducted by bodies such as the Ministry of Education or the Education and Training Authority, we engage fully by providing necessary documentation and access to programs."

After the reviews, private institutions receive comprehensive reports that highlight key findings. One officer noted, "After the reviews are finished, we obtain comprehensive reports that highlight the results. These reports are shared with department heads and relevant officials, allowing for thorough analysis to identify strengths and areas for improvement." Insights from external reviews inform strategic planning, with one respondent stating, "External reviews inform our strategic planning and help us prioritize initiatives that promote academic excellence."

In public HEIs, external quality assurance reviews also serve as a framework for evaluating strengths and growth opportunities. One officer acknowledged, "While the external quality assurance reviews are inadequate, the Education and Training Authority conducts these external evaluations at our institution." This recognition of limitations underscores the reviews' necessary role in the quality assurance process. Additionally, findings from these evaluations are disseminated to relevant officials, with another officer stating, "The reports from these reviews are distributed to relevant university officials, and we ensure that the results are utilized for institutional enhancements."

Faculty Members' Role in Quality Assurance Processes

Faculty members are vital to the quality assurance processes in both private and public higher education institutions. In private HEIs, one QA officer noted, "Faculty are integral to our quality enhancement teams, where they bring their expertise and insights to improve curriculum and

standards.” Their collaborative involvement is further emphasized by another officer who stated, “Through feedback from faculty, we can implement best practices and identify areas needing improvement, which directly enhances the overall quality of education we provide.”

Similarly, in public HEIs, faculty contributions are essential for quality assurance. One officer acknowledged, “Though it is not adequate, faculty members participate in the curriculum review committee at our institution, which facilitates critical evaluation and enhancement of course offerings in alignment with current educational standards.” Another officer added, “Faculty members are involved in revising course content and materials, ensuring our curriculum remains relevant and rigorous.”

4.2.2. Stakeholder Involvement in HE Quality Assurance Practices

Stakeholders in Program Goals and Quality Assurance Review

Stakeholder involvement in setting and reviewing program goals and quality assurance processes is vital in both private and public higher education institutions. QA officers from private HEIs emphasize the crucial role of faculty, with one officer noting, "The faculty members play an essential role in establishing and reviewing the program goals. They also participate in discussions and workshops aimed at aligning educational outcomes with institutional standards, benefiting the overall framework of programs."

Students also contribute significantly to this process. One officer noted, "Students are encouraged to contribute to the setting and reviewing of program goals. Their feedback is collected through surveys and focus groups, which has fostered a collaborative environment." This involvement empowers students and ensures that programs are responsive to their needs and expectations. However, a gap exists in alumni engagement, as one officer remarked, "Currently, there appears to be a lack of alumni involvement in our program goal-setting and quality assurance processes. This is a gap that we recognize, as alumni perspectives can provide valuable insights into the long-term effectiveness of our programs."

In public HEIs, faculty involvement is similarly positive. One officer stated, "Our faculty members, who possess extensive academic and industry expertise, engage in collaborative discussions. They contribute their insights and recommendations, ensuring our programs not only meet rigorous academic standards but also align with current industry demands." Student

feedback is also crucial, with another officer noting, "Though it is not adequate, students also play a crucial role in this process. Their voices are integral to shaping our programs."

Regarding alumni, another officer acknowledged the challenges, stating, "Although there is no alumni involvement in the processes, we do strive to have a link with them because their perspectives help us identify areas for improvement and ensure that our programs remain relevant and effective in preparing future graduates for the workforce." Together, these insights illustrate the multifaceted nature of stakeholder engagement in enhancing program goals and quality assurance processes."

Feedback Mechanisms for Evaluating Academic Program Quality

To gather feedback from stakeholders on the quality and effectiveness of academic programs, both private and public higher education institutions employ a variety of mechanisms. One QA officer from a private HEI emphasized the role of program needs assessments, stating, "We conduct a program needs assessments to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of our academic offerings. This systematic approach involves a diverse range of stakeholders, including students, faculty, and industry professionals. Through surveys, interviews, and focus groups, we gather valuable insights that help us identify areas for enhancement and necessary adjustments to our curricula, ensuring that they remain relevant and effective."

Workshops are also a crucial part of the feedback strategy. Another officer noted, "Workshops play a vital role in our approach to gathering stakeholder input. These interactive sessions provide a platform for open dialogue, where participants can share their experiences and express their viewpoints regarding program effectiveness."

Additionally, seminars are organized to foster constructive dialogue. One officer explained, "We organize seminars to create an environment conducive to constructive discussion around academic quality. These events bring together various stakeholders, including faculty, students, and external partners, to share their insights, experiences, and recommendations."

Public HEIs also utilize similar mechanisms. One officer highlighted, “We conduct program review activities specifically designed for stakeholder engagement, allowing us to gather critical insights on program effectiveness. These reviews involve systematic evaluations that solicit

feedback from students, alumni, faculty, and industry professionals, ensuring diverse perspectives shape their understanding of academic quality."

Surveys are identified as a key tool for collecting both quantitative and qualitative feedback, with one officer stating, "These surveys enable us to systematically measure stakeholder satisfaction and outcomes, aligning our programs with best practices."

Utilizing Stakeholder Feedback for Decision-Making and Continuous Improvement

QA officers from both private and public HEIs underscore importance stakeholder feedback in shaping curricula and educational offerings. One officer from a private HEI stated, "Based on the feedback from stakeholders, we revise existing curricula, courses, and programs to align more closely with the needs of learners and the expectations of the institution."

Another officer emphasized the role of diverse perspectives in strategic planning, noting, "We conduct surveys and focus groups, allowing us to gather diverse perspectives that inform strategic changes. This comprehensive input facilitates a data-driven approach, ensuring that adjustments are targeted and responsive. By integrating stakeholder insights, the institution fosters an environment of ongoing improvement, creating a cycle of feedback that benefits all parties involved."

Similarly, QA officers from public HEIs highlighted the meticulous use of feedback in decision-making. One officer explained, "Based on the feedback from stakeholders, inputs are meticulously utilized to revise existing curricula. The University requires a comprehensive account of how all comments are addressed prior to granting approval. This process ensures that stakeholder perspectives are integrated into curriculum development, promoting collaboration and responsiveness."

4.2.3. Challenges to the Effective Implementation of Quality Assurance Practices

Challenges in Implementing Effective Quality Assurance Practices

Implementing effective quality assurance practices in higher education institutions (HEIs) involves several significant challenges, as noted by QA officers from both private and public sectors. One of the issues highlighted by private HEI officers is financial constraints. One officer

stated, "While there is leadership commitment to support our quality assurance initiatives, financial constraints may impact our ability to invest more in essential quality assurance efforts."

Public HEI officers also face similar obstacles. One officer mentioned, "We often encounter a financial constraint to introduce new quality assurance initiatives." Resource limitations were emphasized as a critical challenge, with another officer noting, "Resource limitations severely hinder our ability to conduct comprehensive assessments; we simply don't have enough personnel or tools at our disposal."

Training deficiencies further complicate the situation. One officer pointed out, "Without adequate training, faculty and staff are unsure about the quality assurance processes, and this gap leads to inconsistent implementation." Moreover, the organizational structure presents challenges, as noted by another officer: "The organizational structure lacks a clear framework for establishing quality assurance offices at both the School and Department levels."

Impact of Bureaucratic Processes on Quality Assurance Implementation

Bureaucratic processes play a significant role in the implementation of quality assurance practices in higher education institutions (HEIs), presenting both challenges and supportive elements as identified by QA officers from private and public sectors. In private HEIs, one officer noted, “Bureaucratic processes in our institution are very low, and its impact on quality assurance activities is minimal.” However, some resistance to change persists, with another officer commenting, “Many staff members are accustomed to existing practices and show reluctance to adopt new quality assurance protocols.”

Conversely, some bureaucratic elements can enhance quality assurance efforts. One officer highlighted the benefits of standardization of procedures, stating that “having set protocols allows for consistency in quality assurance across different departments.” Accountability mechanisms were also seen as advantageous, with one participant stating, “Clear accountability helps ensure that everyone takes ownership of their roles in maintaining quality.” Furthermore, thorough documentation fosters transparency, as noted by another officer “Thorough documentation creates a reliable foundation for assessing quality and provides transparency for all stakeholders.” Support for training and development was also appreciated, with one officer

emphasizing, “Investing in staff training fosters a culture of continuous improvement that is crucial for effective quality assurance.”

In public HEIs, bureaucratic processes pose significant challenges. One officer commented, “Hindrances include various complexities within the system that can overwhelm the implementation phase, along with resource allocation issues that often limit our ability to execute quality initiatives effectively.” Additionally, addressing resistance to change, another officer noted, “Resistance among staff stifles innovation, resulting in a focus on compliance rather than genuine improvement, which undermines the essence of quality assurance.”

Facilitating elements are also evident. One officer highlighted that “standardization of procedures brings clarity and consistency to our quality practices, making implementation and monitoring easier. Clear accountability fosters ownership, while collaborative support enhances the sharing of best practices. Additionally, access to essential resources and effective data management systems enables teams to make informed decisions and track quality metrics efficiently.”

Resource Limitations and Their Impact on Quality Assurance Practices

A lack of resources significantly hinders the implementation of effective quality assurance practices in both private and public higher education institutions (HEIs). QA officers from private HEIs emphasized that resource shortages are a challenge. One officer stated, “Although we have some budget allocated for QA activities, it is inadequate and impacts our ability to implement effective quality assurance practices. Without sufficient funding, we struggle to invest in necessary training programs and resources to maintain high standards.” Another officer noted, “Time limitations are a serious challenge. Our staff are often stretched thin with multiple responsibilities, leaving little room for thorough evaluations and improvements in quality assurance processes.” Additionally, a third officer remarked, “Personnel shortages are also an issue. With an insufficient number of qualified staff, we find it difficult to uphold rigorous quality standards, as there aren’t enough people to manage the workload effectively.”

Similarly, QA officers from public HEIs highlighted the impact of resource constraints. One officer remarked, “Resource constraints significantly hinder our ability to implement effective quality assurance practices. Without adequate funding, we're often forced to prioritize immediate

needs over comprehensive quality initiatives." Another officer pointed out, "Time limitations are a major barrier; we are constantly juggling multiple responsibilities, which makes it difficult to thoroughly engage in quality assurance processes and assessments." A third officer added, "Personnel shortages exacerbate these challenges, as our small teams struggle to cover all necessary areas of quality assurance. This results in oversights and compromises the integrity of our quality assurance efforts."

Resistance to Change as a Barrier to Quality Assurance

Resistance to change among faculty and staff poses a significant barrier to quality assurance practices in both private and public higher education institutions (HEIs). QA officers from private HEIs noted that while resistance is not overwhelming, it does exist. One officer remarked, "While the resistance is not overwhelming, it does exist among certain faculty members who may feel threatened by the new quality assurance initiatives. This apprehension often stems from a lack of comprehensive understanding of the significant impact that quality assurance practices can have on educational outcomes." Another officer emphasized the importance of awareness, stating, "It's crucial to recognize that many stakeholders are not fully aware of how these practices enhance not only institutional reputation but also the learning experience for students. When faculty and staff grasp the true value of quality assurance, they are more likely to engage positively with the changes." This highlights the need for targeted communication and training to bridge knowledge gaps and create a supportive environment for quality assurance measures.

In public HEIs, resistance to change is also pronounced. One officer noted, "There is substantial resistance from faculty, as many prefer to stick to their existing teaching methods and materials rather than embracing necessary changes. This reluctance often arises from a fear of the unknown and comfort with established practices." Another officer added, "When faculty members are unwilling to adapt their courses, it undermines our efforts to implement quality assurance measures effectively. It creates a culture where innovation is stifled, and the overall educational experience suffers." Furthermore, a third officer pointed out that "buy-in from stakeholders is crucial for successful quality assurance initiatives; without it, we face hurdles in aligning our objectives with the institution's mission."

Workload Allocation and Its Impact on Quality Assurance Activities

Responses from QA officers in both private and public higher education institutions (HEIs) reveal concerns about workload allocation and its impact on quality assurance activities. Several QA officers in private HEIs emphasized that their current workload limits their engagement in essential tasks. One officer stated, "The current workload allocation does not allow the staff to dedicate enough time to quality assurance activities, such as curriculum development and assessment design." Another echoed this, noting, "With increasing expectations and limited resources, it is difficult to balance routine duties with the essential QA processes that ensure our programs meet high standards."

In public HEIs, responses reflected a mix of perspectives on workload allocation. One officer remarked, "I find that the current workload allocation hampers staff's ability to dedicate adequate time to essential QA activities such as curriculum development and assessment design. The demands of our roles often leave little room for these critical tasks." Conversely, another officer pointed out, "While workload is a factor, I believe the root issue lies more in the systemic and structural limitations we face in implementing effective quality assurance processes. Without a robust framework in place, even a balanced workload cannot ensure the necessary focus on QA activities."

Performance Evaluation and Incentives for Quality Assurance Participation

In private HEIs, many QA officers believe that the performance evaluation system encourages faculty involvement in quality assurance activities. One officer stated, "We incentivize faculty who engage in and excel at quality assurance activities by offering various benefits, including salary increases and formal recognition. This not only motivates faculty to participate but also fosters a culture of excellence and accountability within our institution." Another officer added, "Our approach to performance evaluation includes specific metrics related to quality assurance, ensuring that those who contribute meaningfully are rewarded. This has resulted in increased involvement from faculty, as they see benefits for their efforts in enhancing educational standards."

Conversely, QA officers from public HEIs expressed concerns about the effectiveness of their performance evaluation systems. One officer noted, "We do incentivize our faculty members and have a performance evaluation system in place; however, we lack a structured approach that

aligns the performance evaluation criteria with the incentives designed to encourage participation in quality assurance initiatives." This indicates a need for a more cohesive framework that connects rewards to faculty involvement in quality assurance processes. Another officer echoed this sentiment, emphasizing that "to truly enhance participation in quality assurance initiatives, our evaluation system must be restructured to integrate clearly defined incentives that motivate faculty to engage actively in these efforts."

4.3. Discussions of the Results

4.3.1. Quality Assurance Processes and Procedures

4.3.1.1. Quality Assurance System and Structure

Defined Structure of Quality Assurance Units in Universities

A well-structured quality assurance (QA) system is essential for maintaining high educational standards at higher education institutions (HEIs). Survey results indicate that respondents from private HEIs view the clarity and effectiveness of their QA frameworks more positively than those from public HEIs. This disparity suggests that staff and stakeholders in private institutions perceive their QA structures as clearer. Additionally, the greater variability in responses from public HEIs points to a wider range of opinions, potentially reflecting confusion or inconsistency within their QA processes. Overall, these findings underscore a significant difference in perceptions of QA effectiveness between private and public institutions.

Interviews conducted with QA officers from both private and public HEIs shed light on the differences in QA structures. Private HEIs have developed comprehensive QA frameworks that operate from the institutional level down to colleges and departments. Conversely, while public HEIs maintain an institutional-level QA structure that reports to the president, they often lack corresponding frameworks at the faculty and departmental levels. This absence is particularly concerning, as it indicates a gap in localized QA processes that are crucial for addressing specific educational needs and challenges. Research by Moller and Haug (2021) emphasizes the importance of a tiered QA structure to effectively address various educational contexts.

Policy documents in the higher education sector and various studies indicate that it is a requirement for higher education institutions (HEIs) to establish quality assurance (QA) offices

at all levels—institutional, college, and departmental (Khan et al., 2022). However, analyses of documents and interviews have shown that most of public HEIs have not set up QA units at the college or departmental levels. This discrepancy raises serious concerns, as effective internal quality assurance should cover all aspects of university operations, particularly the teaching and learning processes. Establishing QA units at these lower levels is essential for improving educational quality.

Further interviews underscored the inefficiencies present in the current QA arrangements at the institutions studied. There was a widespread agreement on the importance of restructuring and providing adequate funding to improve the functionality of existing QA systems (Smith & Jones, 2023). One public HEI's Self-Evaluation Document (SED) noted that, despite the existence of policies and committees, there is a lack of coordination and execution within the Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS). This highlights an urgent need to establish quality committees across all levels: faculty, college, and department to ensure effective monitoring and enhancement of quality standards.

Communication of Quality Assurance Systems to Stakeholders

Quantitative data indicates that stakeholders in Private HEIs have a more favorable perception of their communication effectiveness compared to those in Public HEIs. This suggests that individuals in Private institutions feel more informed and engaged with QA processes. However, the higher variability in responses from Private HEIs points to differing levels of satisfaction regarding communication among individuals. This inconsistency may reflect variations in how QA systems are implemented and experienced across different departments or units within these institutions.

Interviews with quality assurance (QA) officers reveal communication gaps, particularly a lack of shared vision between management and academic staff regarding quality enhancement. Brennan and Shah (2000) highlight these communication challenges and stress the need for clearer policies to foster a unified understanding among all stakeholders. The ambiguity surrounding QA policies and procedures suggests that current systems are not effectively communicated. This disconnect has led to low motivation for improving teaching and learning, resulting in minimal efforts toward quality assurance.

To address these challenges, it is essential for both Private and Public HEIs to enhance the dissemination of information regarding QA processes. Clear communication strategies should be established to ensure that all stakeholders' academic staff, students, and administrative personnel are well-informed about QA policies and practices. This can be achieved through regular workshops, training sessions, and the development of accessible manuals that outline QA requirements and expectations.

Moreover, it is crucial to integrate quality assurance into the everyday activities of academic staff. Rather than treating QA as a separate bureaucratic process, it should be woven into the fabric of teaching and learning practices. Creating an environment where quality improvement is a collective responsibility can foster a culture of collaboration and engagement among faculty members.

Finally, cultivating a shared vision among management and academic staff is vital. Engagement initiatives that involve faculty in the development and refinement of QA policies can help align perspectives and enhance commitment to quality enhancement efforts. By focusing on clear communication, comprehensive training, and collaborative practices, both Private and Public HEIs can significantly improve their quality assurance systems and, consequently, the educational outcomes they deliver.

Alignment of QA Systems with Institutional Mission

Analysis of responses from questionnaires, interviews with Quality Assurance (QA) officers, and institutional documents reveals key insights into the alignment of QA systems with the mission of institutions across higher education institutions (HEIs).

Survey results indicate that respondents from Private HEIs perceive a stronger alignment between their QA systems and the mission of institutions compared to those from Public HEIs. This suggests that stakeholders in Private institutions feel more connected to their missions through QA processes, although opinions vary widely among them.

In contrast, QA officers from Public HEIs express concerns about the misalignment of QA policies with institutional missions. They emphasize that prioritizing QA in institutional planning is crucial for effective policy support and that regular reviews are necessary for continuous development.

QA officers from Private HEIs, however, believe their QA policies are intentionally aligned with their missions, highlighting a proactive approach that differs from the more aspirational stance seen in Public HEIs.

Research underscores the critical importance of aligning Quality Assurance (QA) systems with institution mission and goals. Henard and Roseveare (2012) supports this notion, indicating that effective alignment of QA systems with faculty and department mission and goals enhances stakeholder engagement. Additionally, studies by Stensaker and Harvey (2011) indicate that alignment between QA systems and department mission is crucial for fostering a culture of quality improvement.

In summary, while Private HEIs report stronger alignment of QA with department missions, Public HEIs face significant challenges. Both sectors must prioritize QA in their planning processes to enhance institutional effectiveness and achieve strategic goals.

Accessibility of Quality Assurance Reports to Stakeholders

Analysis of questionnaires, interviews, and document reviews reveals key insights into the availability and perception of Quality Assurance (QA) reports in higher education institutions (HEIs). It appears that private HEIs tend to have a more favorable perception regarding QA report availability compared to public HEIs. However, the variability in stakeholder experiences within private HEIs suggests a broader range of opinions.

Despite the importance of QA reports for accountability and continuous improvement, neither public nor private HEIs make these reports easily accessible to stakeholders. While institutions have websites, none display their QA reports online, undermining the reports' role in identifying institutional strengths and weaknesses and promoting enhancement (Martinez & Liu, 2022).

Additionally, the HERQA audit report highlights systemic shortcomings, revealing inadequate systems for disseminating QA reports. This aligns with qualitative insights from interviews, which emphasize the need for improved transparency and accountability through better access to documentation (Anderson, 2020). Overall, these findings underscore the urgent need for HEIs to enhance the availability of QA reports, reinforcing their commitment to quality education and stakeholder engagement.

4.3.1.2. Quality Assurance Activities

Impact of Self-Evaluation Practices on Education Quality

Responses from questionnaires and interviews reveal key differences in self-evaluation practices between private and public higher education institutions (HEIs). Private HEIs show a stronger consensus on the effectiveness of self-evaluation in enhancing educational quality, aligning with findings by Henard and Roseveare (2012) that suggest they often implement more rigorous assessment processes.

In public HEIs, Quality Assurance (QA) officers reported that self-assessment is crucial for identifying strengths and areas for improvement. However, they noted insufficient support from the Education and Training Authority (ETA), expressing hope that enhanced support could lead to more regular and effective self-evaluation reports, echoing Baird's (2015) emphasis on the importance of external support.

While audits have improved governance, teaching, and research, inconsistencies in applying self-evaluation across departments remain, as highlighted by Durrani (2017). In contrast, private HEIs adopt a systematic approach, regularly developing comprehensive self-evaluation reports that foster a culture of accountability and continuous improvement. This engagement helps align educational offerings with industry standards and promotes stakeholder involvement, as noted by Kearney (2015).

In summary, while both sectors value self-evaluation, private HEIs implement these practices more consistently and effectively, whereas public HEIs face variability that necessitates more uniform application across departments.

Periodic Review of Programs and Curricula

Analysis of questionnaire and interview responses reveals a significant difference between private and public higher education institutions (HEIs) in curriculum evaluation and revision. Private HEIs show a strong consensus on the importance of periodic reviews, while public HEIs exhibit a lower level of commitment. This highlights private institutions' dedication to regular assessments, as noted by Hawkins and Gunter (2019).

Interviews with QA directors and deans further clarify these findings. Private universities report evaluations by both external quality assurance agencies and internal processes, with revisions

occurring after each graduating cohort. In contrast, public universities rely mainly on internal evaluations, with external assessments happening infrequently, leading to inconsistencies in curriculum updates (Baker & Pomerantz, 2020).

Both sectors involve committees in curriculum development, but the drive for regular updates is stronger in private HEIs due to external quality assurance mandates. Public institutions tend to have a more reactive revision process based on specific departmental needs rather than systematic oversight. This divergence underscores a significant gap in commitment to continuous improvement, with private HEIs taking a more proactive approach to maintaining curriculum relevance.

Periodic Evaluation of Courses

Analysis of questionnaire and interview responses reveals a significant difference in curriculum evaluation between private and public higher education institutions (HEIs). Private HEIs emphasize the importance of periodic reviews, while public HEIs show a lower commitment, underscoring private institutions' dedication to regular assessments (Hawkins and Gunter, 2019).

In private HEIs, course evaluation is integral to their quality assurance framework. QA officers note the structured involvement of department heads and program owners, with well-defined academic committees monitoring course performance through internal indicators and external stakeholder feedback. This dual approach enhances course relevance and quality.

Conversely, public HEIs face challenges with irregular course revisions, often driven by immediate needs. Updates may be initiated by instructors or departmental leadership, but this reactive approach leads to inconsistencies in course quality. The lack of formal guidelines results in sporadic feedback collection, creating gaps that misalign courses with intended learning outcomes. This informality can hinder updates, risking stagnation in course content.

Ultimately, while private HEIs benefit from systematic evaluation processes, public HEIs struggle with irregular revisions and a lack of formal procedures. Addressing these challenges could enhance course quality and better align offerings with student needs and industry expectations.

Stakeholder Feedback for Program Improvement

Responses from the questionnaire and interviews reveal a nuanced understanding of stakeholder feedback in public and private higher education institutions (HEIs). Both sectors agree on the importance of stakeholder input, with private HEIs scoring slightly higher, though this difference is not statistically significant.

Interviews highlight the critical role of external stakeholders such as experts, students, and employers in the quality assurance of program development. Both public and private HEIs actively involve these groups in reviewing and improving curricula, as confirmed by audit reports showing feedback mechanisms in place across public HEIs (Shah and Nair, 2017).

However, there is a divergence in procedural adherence. While stakeholder involvement is reported in curriculum processes, these activities often lack necessary protocols, indicating an area for improvement. Enhancing the effectiveness of feedback could benefit from more structured procedures. Overall, findings suggest a strong commitment to stakeholder involvement in curriculum development, with potential for greater adherence to established processes.

ETA's Role in Monitoring and Evaluating Quality Education

Analysis of responses reveals a stark contrast in perceptions of the Education and Training Authority (ETA) between private and public higher education institutions (HEIs). Private HEIs strongly believe in the ETA's effectiveness, while public HEIs exhibit significant distrust, highlighting a statistically significant negative perception of the ETA's role.

Qualitative responses emphasize the need for external accountability mechanisms in higher education, supported by Thune (1996) and Altbach (2011). While the ETA effectively implements quality assurance practices in private HEIs, its influence in public institutions is limited, with only one approach in use. This is compounded by a lack of mandatory licensing or accreditation for public HEIs, undermining educational quality.

To address these challenges, the ETA should develop robust licensing and accreditation procedures applicable to both sectors. Implementing these measures would enhance accountability and motivate public institutions to meet minimum quality standards. Additionally, establishing regular communication with all HEIs would foster collaboration in quality assurance

and ensure effective follow-ups on audits. By bridging these gaps, the ETA can significantly improve the quality of higher education overall.

Impact of ETA Quality Assurance Initiative on Academic Program Quality

Responses from private and public higher education institutions (HEIs) regarding the impact of Education and Training Authority (ETA) initiatives reveal distinct perspectives. Survey results indicate that private HEIs moderately agree that ETA initiatives have significantly improved academic programs, while public HEIs show weaker agreement. This discrepancy is statistically significant, with a notable difference in mean scores.

Private HEIs emphasize the vital role of national quality assurance bodies like ETA in enhancing educational quality. They appreciate ETA's comprehensive framework, which ensures compliance with national standards and promotes continuous improvement (Khan, 2021). Quality assurance officers note that ETA's initiatives support program development, effective teaching, and strong governance, fostering accountability and transparency.

In contrast, public HEIs focus on the external audits conducted by ETA, which offer valuable insights but limit the scope of quality assurance initiatives. While these audits help identify strengths and weaknesses, the lack of broader strategies means public HEIs may miss opportunities for continuous improvement (Brown & Adams, 2022). Nonetheless, audit feedback encourages a culture of self-reflection and accountability.

In summary, while private HEIs benefit from a broader engagement with ETA's initiatives, public HEIs rely heavily on external audits. Both sectors value ETA's contributions but experience its impact differently, highlighting the need for tailored quality assurance approaches to address their unique challenges.

Shared Quality Culture and Values across Departments

The analysis of responses from both the questionnaire and interviews reveals important insights regarding the quality culture in higher education institutions (HEIs), particularly within public and private sectors. Both sectors show similar levels of agreement about the presence of a shared quality culture and values. Statistical analysis supports this finding, indicating no significant differences between the sectors.

However, despite the apparent consensus on quality culture, a critical divergence emerges in the practical application of quality assurance mechanisms. While these mechanisms are theoretically established at the institutional level, their implementation is inconsistent across various departments and institutions. A notable gap exists in the cultivation of a truly shared quality culture, where all members of the organization, not just designated quality controllers, take responsibility for maintaining and enhancing quality. This aligns with the definitions provided by Harvey and Green (1993) and Vlasceanu et al. (2004), which emphasize the importance of shared values, beliefs, and structured processes in fostering a cohesive quality culture.

In summary, while there is an overarching agreement on the ideals of quality culture among HEIs, the reality of its implementation reveals significant inconsistencies. This indicates a need for more robust strategies to integrate quality assurance practices uniformly across all departments, thereby fostering a genuine culture of quality within these institutions.

Data Analysis for Quality Assurance Purposes

Responses from questionnaires and interviews provide key insights into data analysis practices for quality assurance in higher education institutions (HEIs), revealing both agreement and divergence between public and private sectors. Private HEIs show slightly higher agreement on data analysis for quality assurance, with significant statistical differences noted. However, both sectors face limitations in their data practices.

Private institutions engage with external quality assurance requirements, such as self-evaluation documents and progress reports, but lack systematic organization and application of this data for improvement.

In public HEIs, challenges are more pronounced. The lack of organized data on student cohorts hampers tracking progression from admission to graduation, leading to insufficient information for assessing educational outcomes. Key practices like progress reports and tracer studies are often poorly executed, restricting public HEIs from monitoring performance and making meaningful improvements.

In summary, while private HEIs demonstrate a marginally better approach to data analysis, both public and private institutions encounter significant barriers. The absence of a robust data framework undermines informed decision-making, ultimately impacting educational quality.

4.3.2. Stakeholders' Involvement in HE Quality Assurance Practices

Employer Involvement in Needs Assessment and Program Review

Responses from questionnaires, document analysis, and interviews reveal insights into employer involvement in needs assessment and program review across private and public higher education institutions (HEIs). Both sectors exhibit similar perceptions regarding needs assessment, though public HEIs demonstrate a more consistent viewpoint. In program review, private HEIs show a slightly more favorable stance than public HEIs, highlighting the need for greater alignment in stakeholder experiences.

Qualitative responses further clarify these findings. Private HEIs actively engage employers, students, and professional bodies in needs assessments, using workshops to capture market insights. Public HEIs primarily adopt a bottom-up approach, involving departments, but also recognize top-down influences from external experts on curriculum design (Roberts, 2019).

Both sectors value stakeholder involvement, with faculty and students playing key roles alongside external professionals. This dual engagement model enhances the educational framework, underscoring the need for ongoing collaboration between HEIs and employers to improve program relevance. Overall, findings indicate a shared commitment to enhancing educational outcomes through robust employer engagement, while acknowledging the distinct approaches of private and public HEIs (Davis et al., 2023).

Student Involvement in Program and Course Review

Responses obtained from the questionnaire indicate that Private HEIs demonstrate a stronger perception of student involvement in evaluation processes compared to Public HEIs. Additionally, the more uniform responses in Public HEIs suggest a lack of diverse perspectives among students.

In Private HEIs, students play a vital role in both program and course review processes, which occur regularly to ensure that curricula remain relevant and effective. Their involvement is complemented by contributions from various stakeholders, including faculty, administrative staff, and industry representatives. The Quality Audit reports from the Education and Training Authority (ETA) advocate for enhanced student engagement, emphasizing that incorporating student feedback leads to a more collaborative approach. This collaboration not only enriches the

review process but also ensures that educational offerings align closely with student needs, fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

Conversely, while Public HEIs also involve students in program and course reviews, the degree of involvement is inconsistent across departments and often deemed inadequate, as highlighted by the ETA's quality audit report. This disparity suggests that, although students have a seat at the table during evaluations, their contributions may not be fully integrated into the decision-making processes. Addressing this gap in engagement is critical for enhancing the effectiveness of evaluations and ensuring that all student voices are heard, ultimately improving the quality of education in these institutions.

Supporting these findings, a study by Kemball and McKenzie (2019) emphasizes the importance of student involvement in quality assurance processes, showing that higher levels of student participation correlate with improved educational outcomes.

Alumni Involvement in Program and Course Review

The responses from both the questionnaire and interviews indicate a concerning trend regarding alumni involvement in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Public HEIs appear to have a marginally greater perception of alumni engagement compared to Private HEIs. However, both sectors reflect low levels of involvement overall, suggesting that the differences in perception are not statistically significant.

Further insights from the qualitative responses reveal a significant absence of formal and active connections with alumni across both Private and Public HEIs. Notably, neither sector has established an alumni association, resulting in limited opportunities for alumni to engage with their alma maters. This lack of organization restricts potential avenues for alumni contributions, such as mentorship, networking, and financial support, which could greatly enhance the educational experience for current students (Adams & Clark, 2022). Additionally, without a structured alumni network, graduates miss out on professional development opportunities and resources that could aid in their career advancement (Khan & Patel, 2020).

In summary, while Public HEIs may perceive slightly higher levels of alumni involvement compared to Private HEIs, the overall engagement remains insufficient. The absence of formal alumni associations across both sectors highlights a critical gap in fostering mutually beneficial

relationships between institutions and their graduates, ultimately hindering the potential for enriched educational outcomes and professional support networks.

Student Involvement in Teacher Evaluation

Responses from questionnaires and interviews provide insights into instructor evaluation processes at private and public higher education institutions (HEIs). Private HEIs report greater student involvement in evaluations. The more uniform responses in public HEIs suggest a lack of diverse opinions.

In private HEIs, instructors are evaluated at the end of each semester through feedback from students, colleagues, and administrative staff. This comprehensive approach offers a holistic view of performance, influencing promotions and professional development. By linking assessment outcomes to appraisal criteria, these institutions foster accountability and responsiveness to student needs.

In contrast, public HEIs rely on longstanding internal evaluation practices, including assessments from department chairpersons and peers. However, a significant gap exists in communicating feedback to instructors. A quality audit report of HERQA (2016) noted that instructors often do not receive results from student evaluations, undermining their effectiveness as tools for professional growth. Addressing this communication gap is crucial for enhancing the evaluation process.

Supporting these findings, a study by Burch and Kauffman (2017) highlights that increased student involvement in teacher evaluations leads to more meaningful feedback and greater faculty development opportunities.

In summary, while both sectors have systematic evaluation frameworks, public HEIs struggle with feedback communication, while private HEIs benefit from more comprehensive practices. This highlights the need for both sectors to refine their approaches to improve teaching quality and faculty development.

Strong Support and Monitoring of Quality Assurance by ETA

Questionnaire responses indicate that private higher education institutions (HEIs) perceive greater support and monitoring from the Education and Training Authority (ETA) compared to

public HEIs. This highlights a clear distinction in perceptions, although the variability in responses is similar across both sectors.

In private HEIs, the ETA provides comprehensive support, including licensing, accreditation, and regular inspections, which are crucial for maintaining quality assurance. The licensing process ensures that private HEIs meet specific criteria, protecting student interests and upholding educational integrity. Accreditation benchmarks institutions against established standards, while inspections identify areas for improvement, promoting accountability. As noted by Dyer and Tuck (2018), effective support from external bodies significantly enhances the quality assurance processes in HEIs.

In contrast, the ETA's role in public HEIs is primarily limited to external audits focused on identifying enhancement opportunities, lacking extensive oversight or support. This approach, while emphasizing improvement, reveals significant limitations in the quality assurance efforts for public HEIs. Insufficient supervision may hinder timely interventions, making it difficult to implement changes based on audit findings and maintain high academic standards.

In summary, while the ETA's involvement in private HEIs is proactive and multifaceted, its limited role in public HEIs restricts potential enhancements. Strengthening oversight mechanisms in public HEIs could create a more effective quality assurance framework, benefiting both institutions and students.

4.3.3. Challenges to the Effective Implementation of Quality Assurance Practices

Financial Resource Limitations and Funding Challenges

Responses regarding financial resource and funding challenges in higher education institutions (HEIs) reveal a complex relationship between public and private sectors. Public HEIs perceive financial constraints as a more significant challenge compared to private HEIs. The more uniform responses in public HEIs suggest a stronger consensus on the severity of these issues. However, the differences between the two sectors are not statistically significant.

Interviews with QA officers provide further insights into financial challenges. Public HEI representatives cited inadequate resources for internal quality assurance (QA) processes, while private HEIs mentioned difficulties in offering incentives for quality reviewers alongside their

financial constraints. As highlighted by Perkins and Neumayer (2014), financial stability is critical for the effective functioning of QA mechanisms in HEIs.

Both quantitative and qualitative data highlight how financial limitations impact the implementation of internal QA systems. Public HEIs face greater challenges due to reliance on government funding, slowing QA implementation. In contrast, private HEIs, less dependent on government support, can often implement QA systems more quickly, though they still face financial hurdles.

Overall, both sectors acknowledge the importance of financial resources for enhancing quality assurance, but the specific challenges differ. Greater commitment from institutional leaders and adequate resource allocation are crucial for improving QA system effectiveness, particularly in public HEIs.

Lack of Commitment from Top Management

The issue of commitment from top management in higher education institutions (HEIs) shows notable differences between public and private sectors. Questionnaire data indicate that a lack of commitment is perceived as a more significant issue in public institutions. The more uniform responses in public HEIs suggest a stronger consensus on this concern, and the differences are statistically significant.

Interviews provide further context. In private HEIs, top management shows strong commitment to quality assurance (QA) by establishing comprehensive QA systems, appointing full-time QA directors, and allocating adequate resources. Leaders actively engage in monitoring and supporting QA initiatives, reflecting a commitment to quality improvement. As noted by Henard and Roseveare (2012), effective leadership is crucial for fostering a culture of quality in higher education.

Conversely, public HEIs demonstrate more symbolic commitment. While leaders express dedication to QA in official documents, this often does not translate into effective implementation. Reports indicate that critical areas like resource allocation and accountability for QA processes are often neglected. Public HEIs may develop monitoring processes but struggle to make meaningful decisions for effective QA implementation, revealing a gap in leadership commitment.

Overall, while both sectors recognize the importance of leadership commitment to QA, private HEIs exhibit a more robust and practical approach. In public HEIs, commitment is often perceived as insufficient or merely procedural, hindering effective quality assurance practices. This divergence highlights the crucial role of leadership in fostering a culture of quality within HEIs.

Inconsistent Government Policies

The challenge of inconsistent government policies is viewed differently by public and private higher education institutions (HEIs). Public HEIs perceive government policy inconsistencies as a more significant issue compared to private HEIs. The more uniform perceptions among public HEIs suggest a stronger consensus among respondents. However, the differences between the two sectors are not statistically significant.

Interviews highlight that QA officers in public HEIs frequently cite inconsistent government policies as a major hurdle, expressing concerns about unclear and unstable guidelines that complicate planning and implementation. In contrast, private HEI representatives acknowledge the challenge but have developed more adaptive strategies to navigate these inconsistencies. This suggests that public HEIs feel the impact more acutely due to their reliance on government regulations and support. As noted by Teichler (2009), the variability in government policies can significantly impact the operational effectiveness of public institutions, creating challenges for quality assurance.

Overall, while inconsistent government policies concern both sectors, their implications are felt more intensely in the public sector. The uniformity of responses among public HEIs underscores the need for more stable and coherent policies to enhance their operational effectiveness and quality assurance initiatives.

Lack of Training and Experience in Quality Assurance

Inadequate training and experience in quality assurance (QA) is a significant concern for both public and private higher education institutions (HEIs). Public HEIs perceive this issue as more pressing compared to private HEIs. The greater variability in experiences among public HEIs suggests differing perspectives on the matter. However, the differences between the two sectors are not statistically significant.

Interviews reveal that both sectors struggle with this gap. QA officers in public HEIs emphasize that insufficient training hampers effective internal QA systems, leading to inconsistent practices and a lack of confidence. In contrast, private HEI representatives acknowledge similar challenges but highlight proactive measures, such as hiring external experts and providing targeted training. According to a study by Harvey and Green (1993), effective training is essential for the successful implementation of QA processes, particularly in public institutions facing resource constraints.

Overall, while both sectors recognize the importance of training in enhancing QA systems, public HEIs face more pronounced difficulties with less consistent training support. Private HEIs demonstrate a more adaptable approach, suggesting a need for tailored training programs to better equip staff across both sectors. This divergence underscores the critical role of training in fostering effective QA practices in higher education.

Time Constraints

Time constraints are a significant challenge for both public and private higher education institutions (HEIs), but perceptions of their severity differ notably. Stakeholders in private HEIs view time limitations as a more pressing concern. The greater variability in experiences among private HEIs reflects differing perspectives on these constraints. Statistical analysis confirms that this difference is significant, highlighting that time constraints are felt more acutely in private HEIs.

Interviews with QA officers reveal frustration over being stretched thin due to multiple responsibilities, which limits focus on quality assurance (QA) initiatives. Both sectors note that teaching, administration, and compliance demands hinder thorough evaluations. However, private HEIs emphasize that time pressure leads to rushed assessments, potentially compromising QA quality, driven by a competitive emphasis on rapid results. As highlighted by Becket and Brookes (2006), the pressures of time management can significantly impact the effectiveness of QA processes.

Overall, while both public and private HEIs recognize the negative impact of time limitations on QA practices, the challenge is more pronounced in the private sector. This divergence

underscores the need for effective strategies to allocate adequate time and resources for QA activities, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and enhancing education quality.

One-Size-Fits-All Approach of ETA/MOE

The one-size-fits-all approach of the Education and Training Authority (ETA) and the Ministry of Education (MOE) poses a significant challenge for both public and private higher education institutions (HEIs). Private HEIs perceive this challenge more acutely than public HEIs. The greater variability in perceptions among private HEIs suggests differing views on the effectiveness of these policies. Statistical analysis confirms a significant difference, underscoring that a one-size-fits-all approach may not meet the unique needs of different institutions.

Interviews reveal that QA officers in private HEIs express strong concerns about the rigidity of ETA/MOE policies, arguing that standardized approaches overlook the diverse missions, student populations, and resources of individual institutions. This inflexibility can hinder innovation and responsiveness. In contrast, public HEI respondents acknowledge the challenges but emphasize the need for some standardization to ensure accountability. According to a study by Wende (2007), the effectiveness of educational policies is often compromised when they fail to consider the unique contexts of different institutions.

Overall, while both sectors recognize the limitations of this approach, private HEIs voice greater concern over its inflexibility, which can obstruct effectiveness. This divergence highlights the need for a more tailored policy-making approach that considers the diverse contexts of institutions, fostering accountability and innovation in higher education.

Meeting Process over Substance

The challenge of prioritizing process over substance in higher education is perceived differently by public and private HEIs. Public HEIs tend to perceive this issue more strongly than private HEIs. The more uniform concern among public HEIs suggests a shared view on the importance of procedural compliance versus substantive quality. Statistical analysis confirms a significant difference in perceptions between the two sectors.

Interviews reveal that QA officers in public HEIs often express frustration with bureaucratic processes that prioritize regulations over meaningful outcomes, arguing that this focus stifles innovation and diminishes educational quality. In contrast, private HEI stakeholders

acknowledge the issue but emphasize the importance of accountability and transparency, suggesting that while process matters, it can overshadow substantive educational goals. As noted by Stensaker and Norgard (2001), an excessive focus on procedural compliance can detract from achieving genuine improvements in educational quality.

Overall, both sectors recognize the challenge of prioritizing process over substance, but the concern is more pronounced in public HEIs, where procedural requirements can hinder progress. This divergence highlights the need for a balanced approach that values both compliance and meaningful outcomes, fostering institutional accountability and quality improvement.

Limited Involvement of Students and Faculty

Limited involvement of students and faculty is a challenge for both public and private higher education institutions (HEIs), though perceptions of its significance vary slightly. Public HEIs tend to view this issue as somewhat more significant than private HEIs. The more consistent opinions among public HEIs suggest a stronger shared perspective, while private HEIs exhibit greater variability in perceptions. Statistical analysis indicates that the difference in perceptions is not statistically significant, implying that while public HEIs generally perceive limited involvement as more pressing, the variation in perceptions does not establish a clear distinction.

Interviews reveal that QA officers from both sectors express concern about the lack of effective engagement from students and faculty in quality assurance processes. According to a study by Kettunen (2015), effective QA systems benefit significantly from the active involvement of stakeholders, particularly students and faculty, which enhances the overall quality of education.

Overall, while both sectors recognize the importance of involvement, public HEIs appear more unified in their perception of this challenge. This underscores the need for institutions to implement strategies that enhance engagement and integrate the voices of students and faculty into the quality assurance process.

Conflicting Interests among Diverse Stakeholders

Conflicting interests among diverse stakeholders: students, faculty, employers, and governing boards pose a significant challenge for both public and private higher education institutions (HEIs). Data indicate that this issue is perceived as more significant in private institutions. The comparable variability in stakeholder views across both sectors suggests that concerns are widely

shared. Statistical analysis confirms a significant difference in perceptions, underscoring heightened concern among private HEIs about balancing diverse stakeholder priorities.

Interviews reveal that QA officers from both sectors acknowledge the challenges posed by conflicting interests. Private HEI officers note that the competitive environment often intensifies these conflicts, making it difficult to address the concerns of students and faculty. In contrast, public HEI officers emphasize governance structures that help mitigate these conflicts, suggesting that established frameworks allow for more effective balancing of needs. As highlighted by Pritchard (2017), the presence of diverse stakeholder interests can complicate decision-making processes, particularly in environments where competition is prevalent.

Overall, while both sectors face challenges related to conflicting stakeholder interests, private institutions perceive this issue more acutely. This highlights the need for both public and private HEIs to develop strategies that promote collaboration and communication among stakeholders, ensuring that diverse needs are adequately addressed in decision-making.

Data Overload and Limited Analytics Capabilities

The analysis of responses regarding data overload and analytics capabilities reveals differing perspectives between public and private higher education institutions (HEIs). Private HEIs perceive handling complex data as more significant than public HEIs. The broader variability in responses among private HEIs suggests differing levels of confidence in their data analytics capabilities. However, the differences in perceptions are not statistically significant, indicating that the overall effectiveness between the two sectors may not differ greatly.

Interviews with QA officers support these findings, noting that private HEIs typically do not face data overload and have the analytical capacity for quality assurance. However, some officers from both sectors highlighted that limited analytics expertise and excessive data could hinder their ability to translate complex information into actionable insights. As noted by Dyer and Eriksen (2013), institutions often struggle with data management and analytics, which can significantly impact their decision-making processes.

This indicates that both public and private HEIs face challenges in fully utilizing their data analytics capabilities, despite differences in perception and investment.

Political Pressures in Education Priorities

Responses about political pressures in higher education reveal differing perceptions between public and private HEIs. Public HEIs perceive political interference as a more significant challenge than private HEIs. The more consistent perceptions among public HEIs contrast with greater variability in responses from private HEIs. However, the differences in perceptions are not statistically significant, implying that while public HEIs may feel political pressures more acutely, the overall distinction between the sectors is not substantial.

Interviews with QA officers revealed that many public HEI representatives express concerns about external pressures prioritizing research over teaching and emphasizing assessment over genuine learning. Conversely, some private HEI respondents noted that their institutions can adapt more easily due to flexible governance structures. According to a study by McGuinness (2016), political influences can shape institutional priorities in higher education, often leading to tensions between competing demands.

This divergence highlights that while both sectors face political influences, their impacts and responses vary, suggesting distinct approaches to navigating these challenges.

Overreliance on External Validation in Education

The issue of overreliance on external validation in higher education is perceived differently by private and public HEIs, as indicated by questionnaire responses. Private HEIs view this challenge as more significant than public institutions. The greater variability in perceptions among private HEIs reflects differing views on the impact of external validation. Statistical analysis confirms that this difference is significant.

Interviews provided further context, with many QA officers arguing that sustainable quality improvement relies heavily on internal engagement. As noted by Askling (1997), effective internal quality assurance processes are essential, while externally driven processes may prioritize accountability over responsiveness to internal needs. Some interviewees expressed concern that excessive focus on external audits and rankings can lead institutions to prioritize compliance over genuine quality enhancement, echoing Middlehurst and Woodlouse's (1995) view that compliance may yield short-term benefits but often fails to foster lasting change.

Despite these concerns, respondents acknowledged that external quality assurance (EQA) bodies can serve as important catalysts for institutional reform. Many agreed that pressure from national QA agencies through audits and accreditation can positively impact performance, especially when institutional leaders are committed to quality assurance.

Overall, while both sectors recognize the importance of external validation, responses indicate that private HEIs may be more affected by this reliance, potentially at the expense of developing robust internal improvement processes. Balancing internal and external quality assurance efforts is crucial for achieving sustainable enhancement in higher education quality.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a conclusion to the study, this chapter summarizes the main findings presented in Chapter four. These findings are based on the descriptions and observations made by the participants on their own experiences and perceptions of quality assurance practices. The findings emerged from the responses of QA officers during the interviews combined with the information obtained from institutional and national documents and survey questionnaires as documented in the previous chapter.

5.1. Summary of the Major Findings of the Study

By synthesizing the main ideas presented in Chapter 4 of the thesis, this section attempts to summarize the major findings of the study as follows

5.1.1. Quality Assurance Processes and Procedures

Structure of Quality Assurance Units

The structure of Quality Assurance (QA) units is essential for upholding educational standards in higher education institutions (HEIs). Private HEIs report a higher clarity in their QA frameworks, with an average rating of 3.53 compared to 3.01 for public HEIs, indicating that private institutions generally have more effective QA systems. In contrast, public HEIs exhibit a range of opinions about their QA structures, revealing some confusion among stakeholders. While private HEIs typically maintain comprehensive QA frameworks, public institutions often lack similar structures at the college and departmental levels. Despite policies that require QA offices at all institutional levels, public HEIs have not fully implemented these mandates, raising concerns regarding the overall quality of education. There is a growing call for the restructuring and increased funding of QA systems to improve their effectiveness.

Communication of QA Systems

The communication of Quality Assurance (QA) systems reveals that private higher education institutions (HEIs) perceive their effectiveness to be better, with an average rating of 3.14 compared to 2.96 for public HEIs, although satisfaction levels vary within both sectors.

Communication gaps and a lack of a shared vision among stakeholders are significant obstacles to quality improvement. To address these challenges, both private and public HEIs need to enhance the dissemination of QA processes through workshops and accessible manuals. Additionally, integrating QA into daily practices and fostering collaboration among stakeholders are essential for promoting a culture of quality.

Alignment with Institutional Goals

Private higher education institutions (HEIs) perceive a stronger alignment between their Quality Assurance (QA) systems and institutional missions, with an average rating of 3.14, compared to 2.95 for public HEIs. QA officers in public institutions express concerns regarding misalignment and emphasize the need for strategic integration of QA processes. While private HEIs actively align their QA efforts with their missions, public HEIs tend to demonstrate only aspirational alignment. To ensure the relevance and effectiveness of QA policies, continuous self-examination is essential for all institutions.

Accessibility of Quality Assurance Reports to Stakeholders

Private higher education institutions (HEIs) perceive the availability of quality assurance (QA) reports as slightly better, with an average rating of 3.11 compared to 3.05 for public HEIs. However, neither sector makes QA reports easily accessible online, which undermines accountability. Systemic shortcomings in the dissemination of QA reports underscore the need for improved transparency and greater stakeholder engagement.

Impact of Self-Evaluation Practices

Private HEIs demonstrate greater effectiveness in self-evaluation practices, scoring an average of 3.78 compared to 3.22 for public HEIs, with a significant difference indicated by a t-value of 5.62. While public HEIs acknowledge the benefits of self-evaluation, they often lack adequate support from external agencies, although there is optimism for future improvements. In contrast, private HEIs implement systematic self-evaluation processes that significantly enhance accountability within their institutions.

Periodic Review of Programs and Curricula

Private higher education institutions (HEIs) demonstrate a stronger commitment to the periodic review of programs and curricula, achieving an average rating of 3.43 compared to 2.83 for public HEIs, with a significant difference reflected in a t-value of 6.04. Private institutions regularly conduct evaluations of their curricula, while public HEIs encounter inconsistencies in their review processes.

Periodic Evaluation of Courses

Private higher education institutions (HEIs) score an average of 3.32 in the periodic evaluation of courses, whereas public HEIs score only 2.82, highlighting a need for improvement in the latter, as indicated by a t-value of 4.88. Private HEIs benefit from structured evaluation frameworks, while public HEIs face challenges due to irregular updates in their course evaluation processes.

Stakeholder Feedback for Program Improvement

Both private and public higher education institutions (HEIs) value stakeholder feedback for program improvement similarly, with private HEIs scoring 3.12 and public HEIs scoring 3.02, showing no significant difference as indicated by a t-value of 1.01. Both sectors involve stakeholders in program development; however, adherence to established procedures is often inconsistent across institutions.

ETA's Role in Monitoring and Evaluating Quality Education

Private higher education institutions (HEIs) view the effectiveness of the Education and Training Authority (ETA) positively, with an average rating of 4.05, while public HEIs express significant skepticism, scoring only 2.49, as indicated by a substantial t-value of 17.98. Additionally, the absence of mandatory licensing and accreditation for public HEIs hinders efforts to enhance quality improvements.

Impact of ETA Quality Assurance Initiative on Academic Program Quality

Private higher education institutions (HEIs) moderately agree that the Education and Training Authority's (ETA) quality assurance initiatives positively impact academic program quality, whereas public HEIs express weaker agreement. Private institutions benefit from a

comprehensive quality assurance framework, which fosters compliance and supports continuous improvement in their academic programs.

Shared Quality Culture and Values across Departments

Both private and public higher education institutions (HEIs) demonstrate similar levels of agreement regarding a shared quality culture, with a t-value of 0.12 indicating no significant differences between the two sectors. However, the practical application of quality assurance mechanisms varies, revealing inconsistencies in the effective fostering of a genuine quality culture across departments.

Data Analysis for Quality Assurance Purposes

Private higher education institutions (HEIs) exhibit slightly higher agreement regarding the use of data analysis for quality assurance purposes; however, both sectors encounter limitations in this area. Public HEIs, in particular, struggle with disorganized data collection, which negatively impacts their monitoring capabilities.

5.1.2. Stakeholders' Involvement in HE Quality Assurance Practices

Employer Involvement

Both private and public higher education institutions (HEIs) have similar perceptions regarding employer engagement in needs assessment, with private HEIs scoring 3.05 and public HEIs scoring 3.06. However, private HEIs scored slightly higher in program review, with ratings of 3.09 compared to 3.05 for public HEIs, highlighting a need for more unified stakeholder experiences. Private HEIs typically involve employers through workshops, while public HEIs often employ a mixed bottom-up and top-down approach to engagement.

Student Involvement

Private higher education institutions (HEIs) perceive stronger student involvement in evaluations, scoring an average of 3.27 compared to 3.07 for public HEIs, indicating a significant difference. In private HEIs, student feedback is integral to program reviews, which fosters continuous improvement. In contrast, public HEIs display inconsistent levels of student

involvement across departments, underscoring the need for better integration of student perspectives.

Alumni Involvement

Public higher education institutions (HEIs) report slightly higher alumni engagement, with an average score of 2.72 compared to 2.55 for private HEIs; however, overall involvement remains low in both sectors. Additionally, the lack of formal alumni associations in both private and public HEIs limits opportunities for mentorship and networking.

Student Involvement in Teacher Evaluation

Private higher education institutions (HEIs) demonstrate greater student involvement in teacher evaluations, scoring an average of 3.58 compared to 3.21 for public HEIs, with significant backing for this difference. Private institutions effectively link student feedback to staff appraisals, promoting accountability among faculty. In contrast, public HEIs encounter communication gaps regarding feedback, which undermines their potential for growth and improvement.

Support and Monitoring by ETA

Private higher education institutions (HEIs) perceive more favorable support from the Education and Training Authority (ETA), with an average rating of 3.15 compared to 2.89 for public HEIs. The ETA offers comprehensive support to private HEIs through licensing and inspections. In contrast, its role in public HEIs is primarily limited to external audits, highlighting the need for enhanced oversight and support in these institutions.

5.1.3. Challenges to the Effective Implementation of Quality Assurance Practices

Financial Resource Limitations and Funding Challenges

Public higher education institutions (HEIs) perceive financial constraints as a greater challenge, scoring an average of 3.41 compared to 3.34 for private HEIs. Interviews reveal that public HEIs struggle to secure adequate resources for internal quality assurance (QA), while private HEIs face difficulties in incentivizing quality reviewers. These financial limitations significantly

impact internal QA systems, particularly as public HEIs are heavily reliant on government funding.

Lack of Commitment from Top Management

Public higher education institutions (HEIs) express greater concerns regarding management commitment, with an average rating of 3.21 compared to 2.99 for private HEIs. Private HEIs demonstrate strong commitment to quality assurance through comprehensive systems, whereas public HEIs often exhibit only symbolic commitment without practical implementation. This inconsistency in leadership commitment significantly hinders effective quality assurance practices within public institutions.

Inconsistent Government Policies

Public higher education institutions (HEIs) rate the impact of inconsistent government policies higher, with an average score of 3.25 compared to 3.21 for private HEIs. Quality assurance (QA) officers in public HEIs identify these inconsistencies as significant hurdles, whereas private HEIs tend to adapt their strategies more effectively. Establishing stable policies is crucial for enhancing operational effectiveness, particularly in public HEIs.

Lack of Training and Experience in Quality Assurance

Public higher education institutions (HEIs) report a higher mean score of 3.14 for inadequate training compared to 3.10 for private HEIs. While both sectors face training gaps, public HEIs struggle more with the effective implementation of quality assurance (QA) systems. In contrast, private HEIs often hire experts to help address their training challenges.

Time Constraints

Private higher education institutions (HEIs) report greater severity of time constraints, with an average score of 3.54 compared to 3.32 for public HEIs. Quality assurance (QA) officers express frustration over the multiple responsibilities that limit their focus on QA initiatives, particularly in private HEIs. Additionally, the competitive nature of private institutions intensifies the pressure for effective time allocation toward QA activities.

One-Size-Fits-All Approach of ETA/MOE

Private higher education institutions (HEIs) find the one-size-fits-all policies of the Education and Training Authority (ETA) and the Ministry of Education (MOE) more challenging, scoring an average of 3.44 compared to 2.89 for public HEIs. Statistical analysis confirms a significant difference, with a t-value of 5.62 ($p < 0.05$). Quality assurance (QA) officers in private HEIs express frustration over the rigidity of these policies, while public HEIs appreciate the standardization they provide.

Meeting Process over Substance

Public higher education institutions (HEIs) prioritize processes over substance more than private HEIs, scoring an average of 3.45 compared to 2.92. Statistical analysis indicates a significant divergence, with a t-value of -4.96 ($p < 0.05$). Quality assurance (QA) officers in public HEIs criticize the bureaucratic focus, whereas private HEIs emphasize accountability in conjunction with substance.

Limited Involvement of Students and Faculty

Public higher education institutions (HEIs) perceive the limited involvement of students and faculty as more significant, scoring an average of 3.21 compared to 3.16 for private HEIs; however, this difference is not statistically significant (t-value -0.44, $p > 0.05$). Both sectors acknowledge the need for improved engagement of students and faculty in quality assurance (QA) processes.

Conflicting Interests among Diverse Stakeholders

Private higher education institutions (HEIs) report a greater concern regarding conflicting stakeholder interests, scoring an average of 3.32 compared to 3.09 for public HEIs. Statistical analysis confirms this significance, with a t-value of 2.26 ($p < 0.05$). Quality assurance (QA) officers in private HEIs emphasize competitive pressures as a source of conflict, while public HEIs point to governance structures as a means to manage these conflicts.

Data Overload and Limited Analytics Capabilities

Private higher education institutions (HEIs) perceive the challenges of data handling as more significant, scoring an average of 3.20 compared to 3.10 for public HEIs; however, this difference is not statistically significant (t-value 0.92, $p > 0.05$). Both sectors face difficulties in translating complex data into actionable insights.

Political Pressures in Education Priorities

Public higher education institutions (HEIs) report a higher concern regarding political pressures, scoring an average of 3.15 compared to 3.04 for private HEIs; however, this difference is not statistically significant (t-value -1.02, $p > 0.05$). Public HEIs express concerns about prioritizing research over teaching, while private HEIs demonstrate a greater ability to adapt to these pressures.

Overreliance on External Validation in Education

Private higher education institutions (HEIs) view external validation as a greater challenge, scoring an average of 3.29 compared to 2.76 for public HEIs, with statistical analysis confirming this significance (t-value 5.11, $p < 0.05$). Many quality assurance (QA) officers emphasize the importance of internal engagement over external compliance, although they acknowledge that external audits can drive improvement when there is a strong internal commitment.

5.2. Conclusion

On the basis of the findings of the study (see section 5.2 of this Chapter), the following conclusions were drawn:

5.2.1. Quality Assurance Processes and Procedures

The assessment of quality assurance (QA) processes and procedures across private and public higher education institutions (HEIs) underscores significant differences in effectiveness and implementation. Private HEIs demonstrate a clearer structure and more effective communication within their QA frameworks, leading to a stronger alignment with institutional goals and systematic self-evaluation practices. This proactive approach fosters a culture of accountability and continuous improvement.

Conversely, public HEIs face challenges with variability in QA perceptions, inconsistent implementation of policies, and gaps in communication. The lack of structured QA frameworks at various levels contributes to potential confusion and misalignment with institutional missions. Additionally, public institutions exhibit skepticism towards external accountability mechanisms, highlighting the need for improved support and resources.

The findings signal an urgent need for public HEIs to enhance their QA systems, ensuring more consistent practices and better stakeholder engagement. By addressing these challenges, both sectors can work towards fostering a robust quality culture that ultimately enhances educational outcomes and institutional effectiveness.

5.2.2. Stakeholders' Involvement in HE Quality Assurance Practices

Stakeholder involvement in quality assurance practices within higher education institutions (HEIs) is crucial for enhancing educational standards and outcomes. Both private and public HEIs demonstrate a commitment to engaging employers, students, and alumni, although the levels and effectiveness of this involvement vary significantly.

Private HEIs tend to foster stronger employer engagement and more robust student participation in evaluations and program reviews, thereby creating a culture of continuous improvement. Their proactive approaches, such as conducting workshops and integrating student feedback into teacher evaluations, contribute to greater accountability and responsiveness to stakeholder needs.

Conversely, public HEIs exhibit inconsistencies in stakeholder involvement, particularly concerning student engagement and alumni participation. The lack of formal alumni associations limits opportunities for mentorship and networking, which could benefit current students. Additionally, the perceived limited support from the Educational Training Authority (ETA) in public institutions highlights a critical area for improvement.

To enhance the effectiveness of quality assurance practices, both sectors should prioritize unified stakeholder experiences, improve communication strategies, and create formal mechanisms for alumni involvement. By doing so, HEIs can better align their programs with industry needs and foster a more inclusive environment for all stakeholders.

5.2.3. Challenges to the Effective Implementation of Quality Assurance Practices

The effective implementation of quality assurance (QA) practices in higher education institutions (HEIs) faces several significant challenges, particularly for public institutions. Financial resource limitations emerge as a primary obstacle, with public HEIs feeling the strain of inadequate funding more acutely than their private counterparts. This financial constraint undermines their ability to establish robust internal QA systems.

Additionally, the lack of commitment from top management in public HEIs further complicates the situation. While private institutions demonstrate a proactive commitment to QA, public HEIs often exhibit only symbolic adherence, hindering practical implementation. Inconsistent government policies also play a critical role, creating uncertainty that affects both operational effectiveness and the ability to adapt to changing educational landscapes.

Training gaps in QA processes are prevalent across both sectors, though public HEIs face more pronounced challenges. Time constraints, particularly in private institutions, exacerbate these issues, as QA officers struggle to balance multiple responsibilities. Furthermore, the one-size-fits-all approach of regulatory bodies like the ETA and MOE limits the flexibility needed for tailored QA practices.

Both sectors recognize the importance of engaging students and faculty in QA processes; however, limited involvement remains an issue. Compounding these challenges are conflicting interests among diverse stakeholders, data overload, and external validation pressures, all of which hinder the development of effective QA systems.

Addressing these challenges is crucial for enhancing the quality of education and ensuring that HEIs can meet the needs of their stakeholders while maintaining high standards of accountability and effectiveness.

5.3. Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations are put forward:

5.3.1. Quality Assurance Processes and Procedures

1. Public institutions should prioritize the development and implementation of comprehensive quality assurance frameworks at all levels. This includes establishing clear structures within colleges and departments to enhance localized QA processes.
2. Both private and public HEIs should invest in improving communication strategies regarding QA processes. Workshops, accessible manuals, and regular updates can foster a shared vision among stakeholders, motivating collective efforts towards quality improvement.
3. Public HEIs need to integrate QA more strategically into their planning processes. Continuous self-examination of QA policies will help ensure alignment with institutional missions and educational standards.
4. Institutions should provide adequate resources and training to facilitate effective self-evaluation practices, particularly in public HEIs. Encouraging systematic reviews can enhance accountability and better align programs with industry standards.
5. Establish regular cycles for curriculum and course evaluations in public HEIs to ensure they remain relevant and up-to-date. This should involve multiple stakeholders to create a more robust review process.
6. Both sectors should enhance the accessibility of QA reports to stakeholders by improving online availability. This transparency is crucial for building trust and accountability within the educational community.
7. Education and Training Authority should strengthen its role in monitoring and evaluating quality education, particularly in public HEIs. Implementing mandatory licensing and accreditation processes can significantly improve quality standards.
8. Institutions should actively promote a culture of quality assurance across all departments. This involves training and workshops to ensure that all faculty and staff understand and are committed to QA principles.

5.3.2. Stakeholders' Involvement in HE Quality Assurance Practices

1. Both private and public HEIs should develop structured programs to facilitate greater employer involvement in needs assessments and program reviews. This could include regular workshops and advisory boards that actively include employer feedback.
2. Institutions should implement systematic processes to integrate student voices into evaluations and program reviews. This includes regular surveys and feedback mechanisms to ensure that student insights are valued and acted upon.
3. Both sectors should create formal alumni associations to foster mentorship and networking opportunities. Engaging alumni can provide current students with valuable insights and career guidance, enhancing their educational experience.
4. Public HEIs should adopt more comprehensive student involvement in teacher evaluations, similar to practices in private institutions. Clear communication about how feedback is used can promote accountability among faculty.
5. The Education and Training Authority should enhance its support for public HEIs beyond external audits. This could include regular consultations, tailored training programs, and resources to strengthen quality assurance processes.
6. Encourage collaboration between private and public HEIs to share best practices and effective stakeholder engagement strategies. Joint initiatives can foster a culture of continuous improvement across the higher education landscape.

5.3.3. Challenges to the Effective Implementation of Quality Assurance Practices

1. Public HEIs should advocate for increased government funding and explore alternative revenue streams to alleviate financial constraints, ensuring adequate resources for effective QA implementation.
2. Institutions must prioritize the development of a strong commitment to QA from top management. Leadership training programs can emphasize the importance of active involvement in QA practices.
3. Policymakers should work towards creating stable and coherent QA regulations that allow for flexibility while ensuring accountability. This will help public HEIs adapt more effectively to changing educational needs.

4. Both sectors should invest in comprehensive training initiatives for QA personnel. Collaborating with experts can help build capacity and improve understanding of effective QA practices.
5. Institutions should implement strategies to better manage time constraints, such as delegating responsibilities and creating dedicated QA roles, allowing officers to focus on quality initiatives.
6. Regulatory bodies like the ETA and MOE should consider the diverse contexts of HEIs and develop adaptable QA frameworks that cater to the unique challenges of both private and public institutions.
7. Institutions should actively engage students, faculty, and alumni in the QA process. Creating formal mechanisms for feedback will enhance the relevance and effectiveness of QA practices.
8. HEIs should invest in data analytics tools and training to improve their ability to handle data and translate it into actionable insights for QA improvements.
9. Institutions must recognize the importance of internal QA processes while also benefiting from external evaluations. Developing a culture of internal accountability can reduce overreliance on external validation.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Questionnaire for Faculty Members

The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect and analyze data on the quality assurance processes and procedures, stakeholders' involvement in quality assurance practices and challenges to the effective implementation of quality assurance practices. The result of the study will be used for the partial fulfillment of Masters of Arts in Curriculum and Instruction. The response you provide with regards to the questions is meant for academic purpose only, and they are confidential too.

PART I: Preliminary information

Your institution type: (1) Public ☐ (2) Private ☐

Your program/department: _____

Your academic rank:

Assistant lecturer ☐	Associate Professor ☐
Lecturer ☐	Professor ☐
Assistant Professor ☐	

Your position in the institution:

1. Instructor ☐	2. Head of department ☐
3. Dean/Associate Dean ☐	4. Director ☐
5. Other, specify ☐	_____

Your years of service in this institution:

1. Less or equals to 5 ☐	2. 6 - 10 ☐	3. 11 – 15 ☐
4. 16 – 20 ☐	5. 21 & above ☐	

Teaching load (per week) in this semester (in credit hours):

1. Less than 5 ☐	2. 6- 10 ☐	3. 11 – 15 ☐
4. 16 - 20 ☐	5. 21 & above ☐	

PART II: Quality Assurance Practices.

Please rate the provided quality assurance practices statements regarding quality assurance performance in your department:

a. Quality assurance processes and procedures

b. Stakeholders' involvement in HE quality assurance practices

c. Challenges to the effective implementation of quality assurance practices

Use the following scale to rate:

Strongly agree (5): The statement fully describes the current practice, and it demonstrates a strong commitment to quality assurance.

Agree (4): The statement partially describes the current practice, or there is room for improvement.

Undecided (3): There is insufficient information to make a judgment, or further clarification is needed.

Disagree (2): The statement does not describe the current practice, or it suggests a lack of commitment to quality assurance.

Strongly disagree (1): The statement is the opposite of what should be happening, and it indicates significant weaknesses in quality assurance practices.

A) Quality Assurance System and Structure

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	Quality assurance unit has a clearly defined structure					
2	Quality assurance systems are well communicated to the stakeholders					
3	Quality assurance systems are related to the attainment of the overall mission and goals of the faculty/department.					
4	Quality assurance reports of your institution are available to all the stakeholders					
	Others (please specify and rate)					

B) Quality Assurance Activities

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	The institution's self-evaluation practices improved the quality of education.					
2	Programs and curricula are reviewed periodically					
3	Courses are evaluated periodically					
4	Feedbacks from the stakeholders are used to improve the program					
5	ETA supervises or monitors and evaluates quality education in your institution					
6	ETA quality assurance initiative has improved the quality of academic programs.					
7	There are shared quality culture and values across departments in your institution					
8	Data are analyzed for quality assurance purposes					
	Others (please specify and rate)					

C) Stakeholders' involvement in HE Quality Assurance Practices.

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	Employers are involved in need assessment to commence programs					
2	Employers are involved in program review					
3	Faculty members are involved in program or course review					
4	Students are involved in program or course review					
5	Alumni are involved in program or course review					
6	Professional bodies are involved in program or course development					
7	Faculty members are involved in quality assurance process					
8	Students involve in teacher evaluation					
9	There is strong support, supervision and monitoring of quality assurance practices by ETA					
	Others (please specify and rate)					

PART III: Challenges to the effective implementation of Quality Assurance Practices

Following is a list of possible challenges encountered by your department in the process of implementing quality assurance practices. Kindly rate each statement the extent to which they are negatively affecting the quality assurance practices in your institutions. Use 1,2,3,4 and 5 for very low, low, medium, high and very high respectively.

No	**Statement**	**Very Low (1)**	**Low (2)**	**Medium (3)**	**High (4)**	**Very High (5)**
1	Lack of financial resources and funding limitations					
2	Lack of commitment from top management					
3	Inconsistent policies of the government					
4	Lack of appropriate training and experience on quality assurance					
5	Time constraints					
6	One-size-fits-all approaches principle of ETA/MOE					
7	Meeting process over substance					
8	Limited student and faculty involvement					
9	Conflicting interests among the needs and priorities of diverse stakeholders (students, faculty, employers, governing boards)					
10	Data overload or limited analytics capabilities of expertise to analyze complex data sets and translate them into actionable insights for improvement.					
11	Political pressures: Political interference or external pressures to prioritize specific aspects of education over others (e.g., research over teaching, more emphasis on assessment than learning).					
12	Overreliance on external validation (prioritize achieving good results in external audits or rankings over focusing on internal improvement processes.					
	Other challenges (please specify and rate)					

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Introduction and Purpose of the Interview:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview!

My name is Jemberu Alemayehu and I am conducting this interview to gather information about the quality assurance practices at your institution. This interview is part of a broader effort to better understand the institution's commitment to continuous improvement and its effectiveness in achieving its academic goals.

The interview will focus on four key areas:

- Quality Assurance Processes and Procedures
- Stakeholders' involvement in HE Quality Assurance Practices
- Challenges to the effective implementation of Quality Assurance Practices

Your response to the questions will be confidential and used only for the purpose of this research. The interview is expected to last approximately 1 hours, and you are free to stop the interview at any time.

Please feel free to ask any questions you may have before we begin.

Additionally, depending on the specific audience you are interviewing:

Introductory:

Your experiences and insights are crucial in understanding the effectiveness of the institution's quality assurance practices.

Quality Assurance Processes and Procedures:

1. Can you describe the various mechanisms used for internal quality assurance within the institution?
2. How are external quality assurance reviews conducted, and how are the findings used to inform institutional improvement?
3. What role do faculty members play in the quality assurance processes of the institution?

Stakeholder involvement in HE Quality Assurance Practices:

1. How does the institution involve students, alumni, employers, and other stakeholders in setting and reviewing program goals and quality assurance processes?

2. What mechanisms are used to gather feedback from stakeholders on the quality and effectiveness of the institution's academic programs?
3. How is stakeholder feedback used to inform decision-making and continuous improvement efforts?

Challenges to the effective implementation of Quality Assurance Practices:

1. What are the main challenges you face in implementing effective quality assurance practices in your role?
2. How do bureaucratic processes, if any, hinder or facilitate the implementation of quality assurance practices?
3. Do you feel a lack of resources (e.g., time, budget, and personnel) creates challenges to implementing effective quality assurance practices?
4. To what extent do you see resistance to change or a lack of buy-in from faculty, staff, or other stakeholders as a barrier to quality assurance?
5. What suggestions do you have for overcoming the challenges you have mentioned?
6. Do you feel the current workload allocation allows you to dedicate sufficient time to quality assurance activities (e.g., curriculum development, assessment design)?
7. Do you believe the current performance evaluation system incentivizes participation in quality assurance initiatives?