QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY AND PRACTICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN ETHIOPIA

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that **QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY AND PRACTICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN ETHIOPIA** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to explore the current policy and practice of the national and institutional QA system in public HEIs in Ethiopia in order to determine how the quality of teaching and learning might have been enhanced through the QA system. Two organisational theories – contingency and neo-institutional theory – provide a theoretical lens to explain how internal and external organisational environments affect the implementation of QA in the HEIs. The mixed-methods research approach was used in the study, including document analysis, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. Three public universities were chosen as data source. At macro level, the HERQA was also included to examine the effect of the institutional environments on internal quality assurance practices.

The findings revealed that there is little evidence of self-initiated quality enhancement activities in the public HEIs. They do not have adequate structures, systems, and written policies to assure quality. The quality assurance efforts were implemented without a clear sense of direction and purposes and therefore lacked effective coordination. The self-evaluations were symbolically took place at the higher levels of the universities and that the results of the evaluations were rarely used in a structured way in improvement of teaching-learning, faculty decision-making and planning processes. It is far from clear that whether the internal quality assurance contributed to the teaching and learning or transformed the student learning experience. It can be concluded that the HERQA's quality assurance policy and practices seems to be de-coupled from internal initiatives to improve quality in the higher education institutions.

It is recommended that HEIs should develop QA policy, mobilise resources for institutional quality improvement, establish full-fledged QA structures at all levels, and furnish the structures with necessary human resources. The HEIs should initiate and undertake effective self-assessment of their activities, own it and work towards achieving their own stated objectives. It is important that the HERQA should develop accreditation procedures, particularly at programme level, for the public HEIs. The HERQA should

consider playing more active roles in communicating with HEIs regularly about QA; pay more attention to a follow-up of the audits, the punctual development and delivery of the SEDs. The HERQA should be more independent, have more autonomy and sufficient resources to become a viable professional agency informing the HE sector on the quality of its performance.

KEY TERMS

HERQA; Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions; Quality assurance policy and practice; Quality audit; Quality improvement; Quality assurance mechanisms; Quality assurance structures; Quality assurance implementation practices; Mixed-methods research design

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AAU	Addis Ababa University
AC	Academic Council
ADRCs	Academic Development Resource Centers
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
BPR	Business Process Reengineering
BSC	Balanced Score Card
CBC	Competence-Based Curriculum
CBE	Community-Based Education
CEPU	Consortium of Ethiopian Public Universities
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CSA	Central Statistics Agency
EFQM	European Foundation for Quality Management
EGSECE	Ethiopian General Secondary Education Certificate Examination
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance
EQAs	External Quality Audits
ESDP	Education Sector Development Plan
ETP	Education and Training Policy
EUA	European University Association
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GER	Gross Enrolment Rate
HDP	Higher Diploma Programme
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HEP	Higher Education Policy
HERQA	Higher Education Relevance and Quality Assurance Agency
HESC	Higher Education Strategic Center
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IQA	Internal Quality Audit
ISO	International standard organization

JU	Jimma university
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoFED	Ministry of Finance and Economic development
MoI	Ministry of Information
MTU	Mizan-Tepi University
MU	Mettu University
NER	Net Enrolment Rate
NGOs	Non-Government Organizations
NPM	New Public Management
QA	Quality Assurance
QUAL	Qualitative
QUAN	Quantitative
SED	Self-evaluation Document
STR	Student-Teacher Ratio
SNNP	South Nation, Nationalities and People
TQM	Total Quality Management
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UCAA	University College of Addis Ababa
UEE	University Entrance Examination
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Globally, there has been considerable concern pertaining to the quality and outcomes of university education (Dill, 1998:361; Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000:284; Grigg, 1996:158; Marginson & Van der Wende, 2007:8; Neave, 1988:10). Quality assurance has increasingly become an important aspect of higher education institutions in developing countries, as expressed in the development of policies, structures and systems at national and institutional levels. It is seen by governments as having the purpose of closely linking policy to the outcomes of university education, and represents a growing manageralism in universities (Vidovich, 2002:392). An important question is whether such a policy-management arrangement can substantially improve the educational quality of universities.

In the 1990s, countries all over the world were confronted with the "quality industry" or the upcoming of an "audit culture" (Brennan & Shah, 2000a:346). Thus, quality is at the centre of higher education today, and is reviewed through various national quality mechanisms and managed within the lines of academic disciplines (Becher & Trowler, 2001:86). Quality assurance is linked to certain standards which are based on shared understanding (formal rules and regulations), (Luijten-Lub, 2007:61). From the governmental procedures for evaluating quality in terms of indicators, different kinds of monitoring procedures were elucidated. The main reason for more monitoring procedures is the massification of higher education, and, as a consequence, the lack of public money to finance this expansion. Therefore, the new public management system gained importance (Harvey & Akling, 2003:79). All these changes and transformation processes in higher education, according to Newton (2007:14), are tightly linked to a "...

growing interest in quality, demands for accountability, and the establishment of national quality agencies. By the end of the 1990s concern for quality and standards was global." Today quality is one of the main issues of the institutional and political agendas of higher education policies with its roots and reasons in the latter part of the 20th Century (Westerheijden, Hulpiau & Waeytens, 2006:2).

For some time now, higher education institutions in developed countries have had quality assurance systems and arrangements to improve the quality of their teaching, research and direct community engagement activities. In recent years, quality assurance has also gained favour in universities in developing countries (Lim, 2001:6). Such developments have been motivated by the challenges universities in developing countries face, many of which relate to changes that are taking place in the higher education market globally, and to which these institutions have to adjust. Higher education in most developing countries today is characterised by expansion, resource scarcity, increased competition, accountability to more stakeholders and the growing complexity of knowledge (Materu, 2007:xiii).

Enrolment growth was but one of the many new pressures that raised quality issues in both developed and developing countries (El-Khawas, 2007:25). Over the past half century or so, tertiary education has transformed from a preserve of elites, accessible largely by the wealthiest and privileged groups, to a global industry annually enrolling tens of millions of students. This growth, particularly in developing countries, has been especially rapid in the last decade. In 1991, the global tertiary student population was 68 million. By 2004 it had nearly doubled to 132 million and is projected to reach 150 million by 2025 (UNESCO, 2006:21). Like much of the developing world, African universities have also witnessed a significant increase in enrolment in the past decades. Between 1985 and 2002, the number of tertiary students in Sub-Saharan Africa increased from 0.8 million to about 3 million (Materu, 2007:9). Such expansionist policies have not only resulted in significant increases in enrolments at existing institutions, but they have also seen the birth of many new universities and technical colleges, both public and private. At the same time, increased enrolments have also been characterised by

significant changes in student demographics, as more and more students from disadvantaged communities participate in university education. The World Bank (2000:27) notes that much of this expansion has "… been unbridled, unplanned and often chaotic. The results – deterioration in average quality, continuing interregional, inter-country, and intra-country inequalities, and increased for-profit provision of higher education could all have serious consequences".

At the same time, new accountability concerns emerged. The development of new technologies, especially distance education and the creation of "virtual" universities that rely primarily on electronic learning, added new questions about how the quality of non-traditional modes of delivery can be evaluated (El-Khawas, 2007:27). A quickening pace in terms of globalisation in higher education provision also raised new issues. With globalisation, the impact of international standards are increasing and public demand for transparency and accountability is on the rise. Educators and policy-makers alike are therefore challenged to set appropriate standards of their own which draw on and reflect the unique history, needs, and expectations of their stakeholders. Furthermore, they are expected to put in place mechanisms to enforce those standards and to monitor the performance of their tertiary education systems with a view to taking appropriate and timely measures to adapt to new realities. Without a robust system to ensure that programmes offered are relevant to the socio-economic needs of the society they serve, a higher education (HE) system lacks a mechanism to promote and monitor the accountability of higher education institutions (HEIs) to their stakeholders (students, parents, governments, and other funders), (Van Damme, 2001:416).

Due to increased student numbers and diminishing government subsidies, most public universities have been characterised by a reduction in their per student expenditure, and the general spreading of available resources among various key aspects such as student support services, research, library facilities, laboratory equipment and personnel. This trend has been accompanied by the emergence of transnational providers on the higher education market, and the lobbying by some developed nations to include higher education under the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) General Agreement on Trade in

Services (GATS) arrangements – a development that implies the liberalisation of the higher education system (Kapur & Crowley, 2008:85). Proponents of the liberalisation discourse view higher education as a major industry that could yield potentially good returns on private investments, just like any other service. This quest for profits is one of the major concerns most African governments have about opening up their higher education systems to transnational providers, namely that quality may be sacrificed at the expense of profit making (Badat, 2003:1).

Trends in higher education suggest that institutions cannot ignore the effect of globalisation on knowledge. The commodification of knowledge and the changing nature of the international labour force will definitely influence not only curriculum reforms, but also the dynamics relating to how the curriculum is transmitted, including quality assurance. University delivery systems have to be informed by the fact that the world's workforce is becoming increasingly geographically fluid across national, regional and international borders. In this context, knowledge has emerged as an economic commodity. This has put pressure on national higher education systems to ensure that they are placed competitively in the dynamic international marketplace. At the same time, local stakeholders like governments, industry, professional bodies, students and parents demand accountability on the part of university institutions. All these trends pose challenges for efficiency and quality delivery by higher education institutions, and thus lead to an emphasis on quality assurance (Mhlanga, 2008:3).

Concern about the quality and quality assurance of higher education is on the rise in Africa. It comes at a time of growing recognition of the potentially powerful role of tertiary education for growth. It is also a natural response to public perception that educational quality is being compromised in the effort to expand enrolment; growing complaints by employers that graduates are poorly prepared for the workplace; and increasing competition in the higher education market as numerous private and transnational providers enter the scene (Materu, 2007:vii).

As Van Vught (1994:38) argues, "quality" is a political, highly sensitive, multi-dimensional and subjective concept. The concept of quality within the context of higher education cannot be pinned down to any particular and precise interpretation. In higher education it is not easy to define the concept of "quality" as it differs depending on the interpretations and needs of the different stakeholders. In the words of Lim (2001:14), "... there are as many definitions of it [quality] as there are stakeholders." Quality may thus take different, sometimes conflicting, meanings depending on the understanding of the various interests of the stakeholders (students, universities, the labour market, society and government) in higher education.

Harvey and Stensaker (2008:443) outline five fairly distinct, yet, overlapping conceptions of quality in higher education: quality as exceptional products or services, quality as perfection or consistency, quality as fitness for purpose, quality as value for money, and quality as transformation. The first conception of quality sees it as something special or exceptional. A traditional concept linked to the idea of "excellence", usually operationalised as exceptionally high standards of academic achievement. Quality is achieved if the standards are surpassed (Harvey, 2007:5). The second, the perfection or consistent conception of quality, is similar to traditional notions of excellence in some ways. This notion focuses on process and sets specifications that it aims to meet all (Van Berkel & Wolfhagen, 2002:339). The perfection or consistency conception, or the right every time conception, defines quality as the absence of errors, where once the design or a specification has been established by the producer, any deviation from it, means a reduction in quality (Harvey & Knight, 1996:4). The third conception of quality is fitness for purpose. It equates quality with the fulfilment of a specification or stated outcome. Quality is thus judged by the extent to which the product or service fits a stated purpose (Harvey, 2007:8). The fourth conception of quality is value for money and it refers to quality judged against monetary cost, and is seen by stakeholders in terms of return on investment. The fifth conception of quality is quality as transformation or "transformative". This definition sees quality as a process of change, which in higher education adds value to students through their learning experience. Education is not a

service for a customer, but an ongoing process of the transformation of a participant (Harvey & Green, 1993:24).

These various definitions of the concept of "quality" has its own implications for standards and indicators emphasised in a given quality assurance system (Van Damme, 2004:133). The fitness for purpose approach has been accepted as a working definition in Ethiopia (Teshome & Kassa, 2008:3). It makes more sense to have this kind of approach or conception as any talk of excellence as a concept of quality is difficult to achieve within the current development stage of the Ethiopian higher education system. However, there might be a dilemma as to who sets the objectives of a given institution, or, the entire system.

The processes of quality assurance are quite separate from the concept of quality. Quality is to quality assurance, what intelligence is to IQ tests. Quality in higher education is, for example, about the nature of learning. Quality assurance is about convincing others about the adequacy of the processes of learning (Harvey, 2007:4). Quality assurance is a new comer to the higher education vocabulary over the past two decades or so. While there are many definitions of quality assurance in the literature (see Ball, 1985, Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994), in essence, quality assurance refers to the systematic management and assessment procedures adopted to ensure the achievement of specified quality or improved quality, and to enable the key stakeholders to have confidence in the management of quality and the outcomes achieved (Harman, 1998:346).

There are four broad types of quality assurance processes, although the methods adopted overlap extensively. The four are accreditation, audit, assessment and standards checking (Harvey, 2004–2012:2). One of the oldest and most important processes in quality assurance is the accreditation of higher education systems. Accreditation includes quality control and programme recognition, or granting a status to an institution or programme (Maassen, 1997:122). Hence, to be accredited, a certain threshold of quality has to be passed, and the formal public recognition has to be based on agreed, pre-defined standards or criteria (El-Khawas, 1998:48). Another particular process to quality

assurance is quality audit, which does not assess quality or performance *per se,* but the quality of the quality assurance mechanisms. It is a process to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the quality assurance mechanism adopted by an institution to monitor and improve the activities and services of a subject, programme, or whole institution. Quality audits can be undertaken to meet internal goals (internal audit) or external goals (external audit), (Vlãsceanu, Grünberg & Pârlea, 2007:77). A related, equally broad concept is quality assessment, which in many instances is a synonym for "evaluation" or "review". Quality assessment consists of those techniques, mechanisms, and activities that are carried out by an external body to evaluate the quality of the higher education processes, practices, programmes, and services (Vlãsceanu *et al*., 2007:73). The fourth process to QA is standards checking. There are four realms of standards in higher education: academic, competence, service, and organisational (Harvey & Newton, 2004:150). Quality and standards are different: the former is essentially about process and the latter refer to the level (grading) of the outcome (Harvey, 2007:8).

In conclusion, quality assurance is not about specifying the standards or specifications against which to measure or control quality. Quality assurance is about ensuring that there are mechanisms, procedures and processes in place to ensure that the desired quality, however defined and measured, is delivered. The assumption implicit in the development of quality assurance is that if mechanisms exist, quality can be assured. Government policy which focused on assurance is primarily concerned with ensuring that institutions of higher education have quality control mechanisms in place (Harvey & Green, 1993:20; Harvey, 2007:3). It needs to be stressed that quality assurance is about good management practice. It is a systematic approach to make sure that there are systems in place so that the organisation can continue to deliver the right product every time and to meet the customers' requirements (Harvey & Green, 1993:20). However, a number of questions remain: Do the quality assurance mechanisms ensure that students get what has been offered? And do they ensure that students know what they have been offered?

Against the backdrop of the above introductory remarks, the statement of the problem is discussed.

1.2.   PROBLEM STATEMENT

In 1991, Ethiopia changed from a socialist to a market-based system when the current government, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), overthrew the Marxist *Derg* regime (1974-1991); and as a result the government formulated various strategies to reform all public sectors, including the education sector. Accordingly, in 1994 the first education and training policy was introduced to revamp the higher education sector (Saint, 2004:85). As a result of this new education and training policy, the opening of private HEIs was made possible. The student enrolment figures have increased since 1994. According to Tessema (2009:124), some of the trends which have been seen in the Ethiopian higher education system since then are:

- The higher education system has been growing at a faster rate, with the focus on quantitative outcomes.
- The main focus has been on adult learners which is evident from the growth in the number and kinds of programmes offered through the distance and evening delivery modes in both public and private HEIs.
- A cost-sharing scheme has been introduced in public HEIs for students to share parts of the costs.
- More market-oriented programmes were being introduced in both the public and private HEIs.
- New offices were being created to assist the MoE in handling the growing higher education sector, namely the Higher Education Strategy Centre (HESC) and the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) [1]. Furthermore, the procedures on how these agencies should function were outlined in the proclamation no. 351/2003 (FDRE, 2003:24).

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[1] Its name was recently changed to the Education and Training Quality Assurance Agency (ETQAA)

Against the background of the above information, the following problems were identified:

1.2.1. Expansion of higher education as problem: The implementation of the above policies resulted in the expansion of the higher education sector. The Federal Democratic Republic Government of Ethiopia (FDRGE) has embarked on an ambitious higher education expansion project allocating a substantial budget to the latter, which amount to 23% of the total earmarked for the education sector development plan (ESDP[2]). Over the last two decades, the rate of expansion in higher education in Ethiopia has been remarkable. In the public domain alone, the number of universities grew from just two in 1991 to 32 in 2010/11. Similarly, while there had not been any private higher education sector for the past several years, there are now about 80 accredited private providers in the country. Parallel to this rapid expansion, a huge number of students from different backgrounds are joining the higher education institutions. As a result, enrolment jumped from about 34,000 in 2000 to over 309,000 in 2010. The expansion rate is also expected to continue over the coming years to meet the goals of the Education Sector Development Programme IV (ESDP IV), which covers the period from 2010/11 to 2014/15(ESDP, 2010:62).

Regardless of the huge challenges faced by the subsector, the pace of expansion shows no sign of slowing down for reflection on the way forward. Although these developments are viewed by some as a showcase of the government's efforts to intensifying Ethiopia's entry into the club of middle income countries, scholars such as Reisberg and Rumbley (2010:1) argue that the higher education system is actually facing a triangular problem of access, quality, and sustainability.

1.2.2. Access to higher education as problem: At all levels, access to education in Ethiopia has improved significantly, with greater numbers of students completing their

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[2] The education sector development plan (ESDP), derived its goals and strategies directly from the Education and Training Policy, it is a five-year education sector indicative plan. The main thrust of the ESDP is to improve educational quality, relevance, efficiency, equity, and expand access to education.

secondary education and continuing on to post-secondary studies. However, many more men than women are benefiting from the expanded access: less than 30% of the undergraduate enrolments and only just 10% of the graduate enrolments is female.

The expansion in tertiary education has also brought about an increase in the number of teachers (academic staff)[3] from 8,355 in 2006/07 to 17,402 in 2010/11, with a 20.1% annual increase (MoE, 2010/11:59). However, the number of teaching staff has not kept pace with the enrolment growth. In other words, while enrolment nearly quadrupled, the teaching staff barely doubled. This disparity is also apparent in the evolution of the teacher-student ratio, which grew from 1:8 in 1995 to 1:15 in 2010. Most universities do not have the resources to effectively supervise or mentor so many new and inexperienced teachers. Fewer than 20% of the current teachers hold master's degrees, and fewer than 4% hold PhDs, underscoring the limited experience with regard to scholarship. Besides, the movement of individuals from one university to another, or out of the higher education sector altogether is pervasive throughout Ethiopia. Staff turnover takes place at all levels, driven by the desire to improve earnings and to move from rural to urban areas. The constant staff turnover results in chaos in terms of the institutions' capacity to operate efficiently and to manage long-term planning and development (Reisberg & Rumbley, 2010:2).

The lack of necessary infrastructure and resources is also a problem – the construction of classroom space, expansion of library collections, addition of computer labs, and the development of electronic networks lag behind the enrolment expansion. The cost of educating a growing cohort of university students is quickly exceeding the available government funding (Ravishankar, Abdulhamid & Alebachew, 2010:vii). A new cost-sharing policy has eased the country away from fully-subsidised higher education to a cost recovery scheme; but this system will not return funds to the government coffers for

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[3] In this study, "teacher" or "academic staff" means members of an institution employed in the capacity of teaching and/or research, and any other professional of the institution who is recognized in this capacity by a statute of the senate (FDRE, 2009:4977).

several years to come because of the difficulties and complexity in its administration system.

1.2.3. Quality of higher education as problem: Many observers praise the government's initiative largely for opening up educational opportunities to previously marginalised social groups and regions. At the same time though, the pace of quantitative growth prompted a genuine concern among scholars such as Ashcroft (2010), Reisberg and Rumbley (2010), Saint (2004), Semela and Ayalew (2008), Semela (2011), and Tessema (2009). These scholars argue that the issue of quality as a key ingredient of higher education received little attention. On the part of the government, however, the rationales driving the expansion are underpinned by strong ideological, political, and economic justifications that it believes to be vital for the survival and development of Ethiopia as a multicultural state (Semela, 2011:404).

The expansion is controversial: a recent Department for International Development Report, known as the "Education Public Expenditure Review", suggests that the rate of expansion of public higher education in Ethiopia has been too fast for the government to allocate the recurrent expenditure needed to maintain quality, i.e. higher education absorbs over 40 percent of the total public resources available for education in the country. The Report suggests that the government should slow down the pace of expansion and pay more attention to the quality of education and value for money to uphold, for example: accountability and improvement, cost-effectiveness, and efficiency (Ravishankar, Abdulhamid & Alebachew, 2010:20). However, according to Philip and Ashcroft (2011:3), it is unlikely that the Ethiopian government will do this; instead the government has pushed forward, by constructing ten additional new universities.

Recognizing the importance of quality and relevance in this new context, the 2003 Higher Education Proclamation No. 351/2003 (FDRE 2003) established the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Assurance Agency (HERQA) as a quasi-autonomous organisation to oversee quality and standards within the sector. The HERQA's mandates include quality monitoring, including conducting external quality audits (EQAs), setting

standards, accreditation of private HEIs, monitoring HEI quality enhancement activities, and providing technical assistance in terms of curriculum development (FDRE, 2003:2253; 2009:4989).

As part of its mandate, the HERQA is responsible for conducting external quality assurances (EQAs) for all HEIs. An EQA, according to the HERQA (2006:3), is an in-depth analysis and assessment of the quality and relevance of programmes, 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, 2006:4). The specific elements against which an EQA is done are: institutional vision, mission and educational goals, governance and management system, infrastructure and learning resources, academic and support staff, student admission and support services, programme relevance and curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment, student progression and graduate outcomes, research and outreach activities, and internal quality assurance (HERQA, 2006:5). A survey of the national systems oversight activities in sub-Saharan Africa reveals that the above yardsticks are the most widely used in the region (Materu, 2007:xv).

The two higher education laws (Higher Education Proclamation No. 351/2003 and No. 650/2009) establish the HERQA's mandates to accredit private HEIs, namely ensure that higher education and training offered at any institution are up to standard, relevant and have quality; ensure that higher education and training offered at any institution are in line with economic, social and other appropriate policies of the country; examine the application submitted to the agency for a pre-accreditation permit, accreditation permit and renewal of an accreditation permit in accordance with other relevant laws (FDRE, 2003:2257). The current practice of accreditation, however, raised some questions. The frequently mentioned criticism purport that the HERQA's accreditation is entirely dependent on educational input (such as buildings and infrastructure and the number of full-time academic staff) with the exclusion of educational processes and outcomes (Woldetinssae, 2009:47). The dispute in Ethiopia related to accreditation poses the

question of: Why is accreditation intended for private HEIs *per se*? At the moment, public universities do not have to undergo a process of accreditation, nor do they have to comply with the government's prescription that teaching staff should be representative of 20 percent bachelor degree, 50 percent master's degree and 30 percent PhD graduates. According to Tamrat (2011:41), the HERQA operates a "double standard" where most of the HERQA's activities are seen to focus on the regulation of the private sector and have little influence or jurisdiction over the public sector.

Higher education institutions have the highest responsibility and autonomy when it comes to institutional quality assurance. Hence, universities should do whatever they believe is necessary to put in place institutional quality assurance systems. The 2009 issued regulation (the Higher Education Proclamation No. 650/2009) also emphasizes the role of HEIs in that regard. It specifically stipulates that HEIs should put in place a reliable internal system of quality enhancement:

> ... the internal system of quality enhancement of every institution shall provide for clear and comprehensive measures of quality covering professional development of academic staff, course contents, teaching-learning processes, student evaluation, assessment and grading systems, which shall also include student evaluation of course contents together with the methods and systems of delivery, assessment, examinations and grading (FDRE, 2009:4988).

These quality assurance policies, systems, mechanisms and procedures (external and internal) are the crux of this study. This study investigates the various ways in which quality assurance and quality enhancement policies are being implemented at higher education institutions. It focuses on presenting an overview of the current practice of quality assurance in higher education institutions in Ethiopia. The study also outlines the quality assurance policies formulated and adopted by the Ethiopian Ministry of Education, the HERQA after 2003. Thus in terms of thematic focus, the study has two fairly distinct dimensions, namely the analysis of national quality assurance policy and an investigation of the QA implementation practices at HEIs.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In light of the above information and the discussed problems, the following main research question was formulated: **HOW DID THE AUTHORITIES IN ETHIOPIA IMPLEMENT QUALITY ASSURANCE IN ITS HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS, AND WHAT WERE THE OUTCOMES OF THE PROCESS?** Based on this main question, the study also seeks to answer the following subsidiary questions:

1. What are the national and institutional quality assurance policies that inform practice in the HEIs, and what are the underlying assumptions of these policies?
2. To what extent, and in what way, did higher education institutions implement quality assurance mechanisms? What are the current QA policies, structures and instruments?
3. What are the possible factors that enable or hinder the adoption and practice of the formal QA system at HEIs?
4. To what extent did the HERQA and HEIs discharge their roles and responsibilities to enhance the implementation of the quality assurance system in HEIs?
5. What are the perceived impact/outcome of the current national and institutional quality assurance system *vis à vis* the teaching and learning, management, and quality culture of the HEIs?
6. Are there any differences between the higher education institutions in terms of their implementation of the quality assurance system? In what ways can existing quality assurance practices be improved to enhance sustainable quality?

1.4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The overall purpose of the study is to explore the current policy and practices of the national and institutional quality assurance system in public higher education institutions in Ethiopia to determine how the quality of teaching and learning might have been

enhanced through the quality assurance system. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- survey the quality assurance policy process in Ethiopian HEIs from a macro (national) as well as a micro (HEIs) level perspective.
- analyse procedures and experiences employed in different HEIs in implementing quality assurance.
- investigate the activities put forward for enhancing the quality of higher education in Ethiopia.
- examine the perceived impact of quality assurance on quality improvement at HEIs.
- make recommendations for improving the quality assurance policy and practice in Ethiopian higher education.

1.5. THESIS STATEMENT

In the context of the above information presented in problem statement, research questions and objectives, the argument pursued in this study puts forward three related claims:

- Firstly, the establishment of quality assurance policies and systems in the Ethiopian higher education system is not necessarily followed by significant improvements in institutional performance. Not many academics will dispute that the quality of teaching in higher education is an important issue, but many argue that the present-day quality assurance systems have not resulted in the self-improvement of the higher education institutions. They feel that the current quality assurance system in operation at HEIs was overly bureaucratic, and that it addresses quality only symbolically. The QA policies and mechanisms are more concerned with standardisation of procedures than with enhancement of academic practice. Hoecht (2006:556) comments on the extensive need for documentation and "... box-ticking" at the expense of more direct quality improvement activities such as teaching preparation. The establishment of

quality assurance policies and the putting in place of structures and procedures are necessary, but not sufficient conditions for enhancing academic practice in universities.

- Secondly, there is an apparent lack of ownership and accountability among academic staff regarding the actual practice of quality assurance. An effective implementation of a quality assurance system requires professional commitment by all participants in the system, and empowerment of those participants to demonstrate their commitment. Academic staff should be involved and committed to the development and implementation of quality assurance. Teachers have a pivotal position in higher education. They develop educational programmes, they deliver them, and are responsible for assessment. What they think and do is crucial to the quality of higher education (Newton, 2000:162). Given the nature of academic work, academics should occupy central stage in the quality assurance system. The academic staff is best positioned for the development of norms, standards of performance, evaluation criteria, and for defining suitable procedures and practices for driving the actual quality assurance processes. If academic staff will not engage with the QA process, it is likely to be counterproductive at worst, or result in short-term compliance at best (Harvey, 2004:9).

- Thirdly, although one can notice much rhetoric on the impact of external quality assurance at institutional level, there are reasons to believe that there is a gap between intent and reality, at least from the perspective of academic staff (Newton, 2002:46). There is a lack of studies addressing how academics perceive the impact of quality assurance; it requires more empirical investigation of the actual role that quality assurance plays inside higher education institutions. The impact issue is far from being explored and the potential impact of external and internal quality assurance systems is less known in Ethiopian HEIs. Hence, an important question worth studying in Ethiopia is: How do the various actors inside higher education institutions perceive and value the impact? The basic assumption for an empirical investigation is that, some quality assurance systems are more related to control, while others are

more enhancement-oriented. There exists a strong risk that the efforts made by universities and university authorities to improve quality, may end up introducing repetitive rituals and losing sight of the contents of academic activities. Most impact studies reinforce the view that quality is about compliance and accountability, and has contributed little to any effective transformation to make it more appropriate (Harvey & Newton, 2004:157).

- The thesis statement of this study therefore is: **The quality assurance system implemented in Ethiopian higher education institutions did not deliver the expected results (quality improvement), the system needs to be revisited and improved.**

1.6.   SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant because it adds both theoretical and practical knowledge to the existing literature on how higher education institutions develop and implement quality assurance systems to improve the quality of their education in a given context. Theoretically, therefore, this study is believed to bridge the research gap in the area of quality assurance in higher education in the context of developing countries. Secondly, this study may also serve as a motivation and reference for further research in the area of higher education in Ethiopia.

This study also has practical contributions. It contributes to the establishment of a baseline or template for the status of quality assurance in HEIs in Ethiopia. It may provide pertinent and timely information concerning the existing systems and practices of quality assurance in the Ethiopian public universities, to the other higher education institutions and the governmental organisations. The study also helps to raise the awareness of key stakeholders regarding the problems in the development and implementation of quality assurance, and the areas that need improvement. The identification of QA challenges and constraints in the country (at national and

institutional levels) will provide valuable information to policy-makers, managers and the practitioners of QA. As such, it is expected that the study will serve as a useful resource for informed decision-making regarding QA policy and practice in Ethiopia. Finally, this study provides information to policy-makers involved in the planning, management and improvement of the higher education system in Ethiopia.

1.7. LIMITATIONS AND DELINEATIONS

The following limitations and delineations could affect the outcomes of the research:

- The empirical scope of the study is delineated to the analysis of the policy and practices of quality assurance at the undergraduate level of public HEIs in Ethiopia. The private sector is excluded from the study due to the fact that it is the Ethiopian public HEIs that are primarily engaged in degree-granting higher education. The private HEIs which function with the status of a university college, college or an institution mainly run diploma programmes. In addition, given the researcher's experience of working in public institutions and his expertise in teaching and learning, he has chosen to confine this study to the quality assurance system for teaching and learning in relation to the public sector only.

- Another limitation of this study is that it deliberately foregrounds the quality assurance of teaching and learning at public higher education institutions; and thus ignores other perspectives of looking at quality assurance such as research and community service. In the Ethiopian context, the focus is more on the formation of human capital through enrolment and programme expansion at both the undergraduate and post-graduate levels than on research.

- The study focused exclusively on three public universities; hence, it may not be easy to generalise results to private and other HEIs where conditions of quality management are different. Access to recently published books and other sources in quality assurance area is very limited within the Ethiopian context.

Nevertheless, the researcher has endeavoured to use and include all the relevant, available, and recently published literature on the topic "Quality assurance policy and practices in higher education institutions in Ethiopia" in his thesis. It was not always possible, but he did his level best given his location and context. Some government documents and participants were difficult to access. Time and financial constraints limited the sample size for the study.

- The HERQA is treated in this study in terms of its role in stimulating and impacting on the development and implementation of internal quality enhancement mechanisms in the public universities.

1.8. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES[4]

Two organisational theories: contingency theory and neo-institutional theory provide a theoretical lens to explain how internal and external organisational environments affect the development and implementation of QA in the HEIs. The main reason for using both of these perspectives is that a higher education institution's quality assurance system and practice is shaped and influenced by its internal and external environmental factors. The difference between the two theories lies primarily in whether organizations are supposed to respond to contextual demands for rationality or for legitimacy (Kahsay, 2012:26). Here, the notion of rationality is used to refer to the extent to which a series of actions is organized in such a way as to lead to predetermined goals with maximum efficiency.

Contingency theory suggests that the organisational practice is dependent on the specific circumstances or situations in which an organization operates. In contrast, an institutional perspective focuses on the ways in which an organization interacts with its environment in the face of uncertainty. Rather than attributing a rational internal logic to its coping strategies, emphasis is placed on how management practices and actions attempt to mediate and moderate the relationship between key elements of the external environment

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[4] See Chapters 3 and 5 for a comprehensive discussion.

and the internal functioning of the organization (Scott, 1987a:493). From an institutional perspective, the QA implementation process in HEIs can be seen as reflecting institutional values rather than purely rational and instrumental objectives. Therefore, as Meyer and Rowan (1977:341) suggest, actual organizational activities might be loosely coupled with the ways in which they are externally legitimised.

Moreover, neo-institutional theory focuses on the role of myths, beliefs and norms in organisational structure and behaviour. Many policies, programmes and procedures of organisations are enforced by public opinion, by stakeholders and by laws. In neo-institutionalism, legitimacy is seen as the dominant factor securing stability and survival. In order to gain legitimacy, internal and external parties must show "confidence and good faith" (Meyer & Rowan, 1977:357). External evaluators from their perspective can maintain stability and public confidence by disclosing inconsistency. This results in symbolic effects of the planning system within institutions. Studies carried out under the neo-institutionalism umbrella, demonstrated that symbolic compliance may be sufficient for the attainment of legitimacy and survival. Hence, neo-institutional theory emphasises that organisations may respond to environment pressures through formal and symbolic steps. If that is the case, the implementation of quality management mechanisms can be seen as "... symbolically mediated change processes" (Dunn, 1993:259).

This study uses contingency theory in parallel with institutional theory to achieve a wider understanding of organizational practices representing both contextual and institutional environments. Contingency theory is adopted to support the researcher's interpretations by simply noting that the implementation practices of quality assurance system are dependent on the specific circumstances or situations of the HEIs. Institutional theory, in turn, is adopted from the writings of Meyer and Rowan (1977:341), which asserts that actual organizational activities are frequently loosely coupled with the ways in which they are externally legitimized. Scott (1987a:507-509) has observed that contingency and institutional theory explanations, when applied separately, offer only an incomplete understanding of the different practices of contemporary organizations, but that both

theories together could be used to better understand the instrumental and symbolic roles fulfilled by organisations.

This study applies the mixed-methods approach. The mixed-methods research design is formally defined here as research where the researcher mixes or combines the quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study (Creswell & Plano, 2007:5). Mixed-methods research is an attempt to legitimatise the use of multiple approaches in answering research questions, rather than restricting or constraining the researchers' choices (i.e. it rejects dogmatism). In this research design, what is most fundamental is the research question(s) as research methods should follow research questions in a way that offers the best chance to obtain useful answers (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004:17).

The convergent mixed-method design is employed in this study. In a convergent, parallel mixed-method design, qualitative and quantitative data are collected parallel, but analysed separately and then merged and reported. The type of mixed-method design that will be employed in this research can be labelled as quantitative dominant mixed-method research. This type of research is symbolised as QUAN + qual research. Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007:124) described quantitative dominant mixed methods research as the type of mixed research in which one relies on a quantitative, post-positivist view of the research process, while concurrently recognising that the addition of qualitative data and approaches are likely to benefit most research projects.

1.9.   ASSUMPTIONS

Assumptions are the aspects that I take to be true without checking whether or not they are true. Two organisational theories – contingency and neo-institutional theories – that have proved to provide valuable insights into organisational change and stability in general as well as in higher education studies in particular are used as theoretical framework for this study. This study considers contextual and institutional environments

to understand their influences on the QA practices at HEIs. The contextual or task environment is thought of as the context immediately surrounding the organization, which directly influence the goal setting and goal achievement of an organization (Lenz & Engledow, 1986:333). The institutional environment is defined as being characterized by the elaboration of rules and requirements to which individual organizations must conform if they are to receive support and legitimacy (Scott, 1987a:497). The concept of quality assurance in this study denotes: designing, implementing and improving policies, processes and instruments in the governance of higher education institutions aiming to assure and improve the quality of education.

This study argues that organisational characteristics matter in the implementation of quality assurance in Ethiopian higher education institutions. General organisational variables, such as leaders' commitment, institutional quality culture, decision-making processes, institutional reputation and characteristics particular to higher education institutions, all have major effects on the quality assurance implementation in higher education institutions. Hall and Tolbert (cited in Csizmadia, Enders & Westerheijden, 2008:442) pointed out that the more complex an institution is, the more difficult it becomes to implement new programmes or models. The cultural features of higher education institutions should be seen as an important factor in the context of organisational change and adaptation (Maassen, 1996:38). The distinctive academic viewpoints, values, perspectives, and definitions of quality are bound to have an impact on quality management.

This study argues that symbolic compliance, while internally resisting change (i.e. de-coupling), is sustainable for higher education institutions which are confronted with the quality assurance implementation of which the goals and methods are not internalised by the academics. Differently stated, the Ethiopian government policy concerning the improvement of institutional quality did not increase the value of institutional quality, but resulted in widespread symbolic compliance of higher education institutions. One of the aims of this study (among others) is to test these assumptions.

1.10.   DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

The main concepts used in this study are quality assurance, policy and practice, higher education institutions and Ethiopia. An elaboration of the concepts follows.

1.10.1.   Quality assurance

Quality assurance is an all-embracing term covering all the policies, processes, and actions through which the quality of higher education is maintained and developed (Harvey & Green, 1993:19). The concept quality assurance refers to national and institutional systems designed to assess and improve the quality of teaching and research, and provide relevant information to key stakeholders on academic standards and the employment of graduates. It is important, however, to recognise that different scholars define quality assurance in different ways, reflecting different conceptions of what quality in higher education is, and how it can be best assessed and developed. Harman and Meek (2000:62), for example, define quality assurance as specialised management and assessment procedures adopted by higher education institutions or systems for the purpose of monitoring and enhancing academic performance, safeguarding academic standards and generating information on outputs and standards for stakeholders. This definition highlights the need for formal, specialised mechanisms to ensure quality standards and the provision of detailed information to stakeholders on outputs. Harvey (2004-2012:1) defines quality assurance as the processes of "establishing stakeholder confidence that provision (input, process and outcomes) fulfils expectations, and measures up to threshold minimum requirements." This definition draws attention to the importance of stakeholder confidence and the need for assessment mechanisms to ensure that quality thresholds and expectations of stakeholders are being met. The concept quality assurance also can be conceptualised as those policies, attitudes, actions and procedures necessary to ensure that quality is being maintained and enhanced (Harman, 2011:37). Significantly, this definition draws attention to the importance of both the maintenance and enhancement of quality standards.

1.10.2. Quality assurance policy and practice

The 2003 Higher Education Proclamation established the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Assurance Agency (HERQA) as a quasi-autonomous organisation to oversee quality and standards within the Ethiopian higher education sector. The HERQA represents the national quality monitoring body. The Agency was officially established in 2003 following the approval of the Ethiopian Higher Education Proclamation No. 351/2003 (FDRE 2003), though it started actual operation two years later. The duty and objectives of the agency as a monitoring and accreditation body is detailed in the Proclamation. Article 80 of Proclamation 351/2003 states the objective of the agency as "...to supervise the relevance and quality of higher education offered by any institution." The HERQA is given 14 duties and powers in the Higher Education Proclamation No. 351/2003 which could be subsumed under five major headings, namely (i) ensuring quality and relevance of the sector; (ii) examining, evaluating and responding to pre-accreditation and accreditation requests; (iii) preparing and issuing directives; (iv) supervision and continuous evaluation of HEIs; and (v) provision of information (FDRE, 2003:2256-2257).

As one of its key activities the HERQA will carry out institutional quality audits of all HEIs. An institutional quality audit is an in-depth analysis and assessment of the quality and relevance of programmes and of the teaching and learning environment. The model of external quality assurance adopted by the HERQA allows the monitoring of higher education institutions through the scrutiny of their compliance with specific benchmarks in ten focus areas, including among others human, financial and material resources. Higher education institutions' performance is judged by evidence from their self-evaluation document, written policy documents, discussions with staff and students, and observations by auditors during visits. The HERQA also reports on quality at the institutional level. In relation to quality assessment rather than accreditation, the HERQA has located its responsibility with the institutions and sees its role as one of supporting the universities and auditing institutional systems to determine whether they represent

good practice and are fit for purpose as well as suggesting ways for improvement (HERQA, 2006:6).

The HERQA's central concepts stem from the Dutch and UK quality assurance systems which are based on self-evaluation and external review (Philip & Ashcroft, 2011:4). Universities (whether private or public) are expected to benchmark their own performance in administrative and academic areas against national and international best practice and come up with plans for improvements. The HERQA also expects them to analyse and use this data for quality improvement. In the Ethiopian model the university completes a comprehensive self-evaluation document that should highlight strengths and weaknesses within the institution. Thus the main feature of the system is self-evaluation and peer review against peer-generated criteria (Philip & Ashcroft, 2011:4).

Ethiopia's system of quality assurance in higher education has currently developed a conceptual and philosophical framework (Ashcroft, 2010:3). There is a consensus about the following essential features:

- The autonomy of institutions should be respected.
- The HERQA's role is to look for and value local innovation, and then disseminate results.
- The institution takes responsibility for designing good quality processes and outcomes, rather than the HERQA prescribing a set of inputs (e.g. curricula content or types of assessment).
- The university's mission and objectives are the starting point for assessment.
- The system assumes most of the innovatory ideas and improvements in the quality systems that will come from universities rather than the HERQA.
- The HERQA's task is not to control, but to recognise and disseminate these results.
- Institutional self-assessment of their own strengths and weaknesses is expected to lead universities to seek and implement improvements.

- The system relies on skills of self-assessment that generally require some training – the latter is provided by the HERQA.

- Universities trust that they will get a better report where they have identified their own weaknesses as well as the ways in which they will address them.

According to Teshome and Kebede (2009:8), in spite of its major responsibilities, the HERQA is made up of only 12 experts, grouped into three working teams consisting of a Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team, an Accreditation Team, and the Administrative Department. The lack of qualified and experienced personnel makes it difficult to establish the HERQA as a robust organisation to fulfil its main tasks. There is also still an issue over the autonomy and efficiency of the HERQA itself, such as when the Minister of Education heads its Management Board and many positions on the Board are left vacant (Teshome & Kebede, 2009:8-10).

1.10.3.   Higher Education Institution (HEI)

The Ethiopian Higher Education Proclamation no. 650/2009 defines higher education, in the Ethiopian context as "... education in the arts and sciences offered to undergraduate and graduate students who attend degree programmes" (FDRE, 2009:4977). The MoE formally defined Higher Education in Ethiopia as institutions that offer undergraduate degrees for three, four or more years and specialization degrees such as Masters' and PhD programmes (MoE, 2012:57). The Higher Education Proclamation divided the HEIs into four types: university[5], university college, college or institute. Only the universities are involved in research; the tasks of the other institutions are limited to education (FDRE, 2009:4982). The same HEP no. 650/2009 proclaimed that an institution shall be granted the name and status of a university by the Ministry where (FDRE, 2009:4983):

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[5] In this study, higher education institution (HEI) refers to institutions with the "university" status.

a) it has a minimum enrolment capacity of 2,000 students in regular undergraduate and graduate programmes in at least three academic units larger than departments, or it has a minimum enrolment capacity of 2,000 students in regular undergraduate programmes in at least four academic units larger than departments;

b) it has a record of at least four consecutive classes of graduates in a degree programme if it has been rendering services of higher education after being accredited as a university college, college or institute;

c) it undertakes research in different appropriate fields, has published its research products and has facilitated means of dissemination of the research findings to end-users; and

d) it has a curriculum that match the national standards set by the Ministry, the necessary academic staff, institutional governing structures as provided for by this Proclamation, teaching materials, classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and other appropriate discipline-related facilities.

However, contrary to this criterion, the same proclamation definitely gives unnecessary authority to the Ministry of Education to establish an institution with the name and status of a university without necessarily fulfilling the requirements. This is apparent when the HEP Article 11, No. 2 (FDRE, 2009:4983) of the proclamation states:

> ... an institution may be established with the name and the status of a university if it is conceived as such and its resource provisions as well as its institutional plans and vision are such that it can, in the judgement of the Ministry, fulfil the requirements ... in an acceptable time.

This is where the proclamation is unclear and stipulates highly subjective standards for which the MoE will look in establishing an institution as a university. It suffices the Ministry to anticipate the potential and not necessarily the actual capacity of an individual institute to give it the name and status as a university (Areaya, 2010:99).

1.10.4.   Ethiopia

Ethiopia is a country in the horn of Africa bordered by Eritrea to the north, Somalia to the east, Djibouti to the north-east, South Sudan to the west and Kenya to the south. Ethiopia has a total area of 1.1 million square kilometres. It is the second most populous country in Africa. Ethiopia's total population was estimated to be 82.8 million in 2009 and is growing at a rate of 2.6%. Economically, Ethiopia is predominantly dependent on agriculture, with 80% of the population living in rural areas. The industrial sector shares between 13 and 14 percent of the GDP (Mwanakatwe, 2010:3). The average GDP grew by 10 to 11% between 2006 and 2009. Ethiopia's GNP per capita currently stands at USD 361, which is still below the sub-Saharan average of USD 480. Though the adult literacy rate is lower than most countries in the region (i.e. only 36% is literate), significant achievements have been registered in the formal education sub-sector. Accordingly, over the past decade, the primary net enrolment rate (NER) jumped from 44% (in 2000/2001) to 85.3% (in 2010/2011), and the level of participation of girls at the primary level of schooling also markedly improved (MoE, 2011:5). The fact that the average gender parity index closing one unit (that is GPI 0.94), suggests a narrowing gender gap at national level (Ministry of Education, 2011:29). A similar trend is evident in secondary education. At the general secondary level (Grades 9-10), over a period of five years, the NER has gone up from 14.7 in 2006/2007 to 16.3 in 2010/2011, but in the first cycle the rates for boys was still greater than that of girls (Ministry of Education, 2011:44). In preparatory education (Grades 11-12), the female gross enrolment rate has increased to 42.2 % from the level of 35.7% in 2009/2010.

There are more than 80 local languages spoken in the country, and Amharic is the working language of the federal government. The official name of Ethiopia is the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE). The FDRE is divided into nine regional states and two federal city administrations. The nine regions are Afar, Amhara, Bensihangul, Gambella, Harari, Oromia, Somali, the Southern Nations and Nationalities and people's region (SNNPR) and Tigray. The two city states that administer themselves are Addis Ababa (the capital city) and Dire Dawa. English is the

medium of instruction in the secondary and higher education institutions. Under the federal system of government, education is a shared responsibility of the federal, regional state and wereda governments. The MoE gives technical and policy support to regional states and manages university education. Regional states and weredas have the mandate to run formal and non-formal education programmes. Weredas are responsible for primary and secondary education as well as non-formal education for adults, the youth and the out-of-school children. An Education and Training Policy was put in place in April 1994, and an action plan programme, also known as the Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP), was launched in 1997/1998 to meet the EFA (Education for All) and MDGs (Millennium Development goals) by 2015 (FDRE, 2010:10).

1.11. CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

The layout of the rest of the study is as follows: The thesis contains six more Chapters.

- Chapter 2 provides the conceptual framework of the study. This chapter draws on literature from the quality assurance of teaching and learning in HEIs. It begins with the debates on what counts as quality and its assurance in higher education. Then it proceeds to discuss the approaches to quality assurance including the notions of quality values and the ways of thinking in terms of quality assurance. It presents the arguments on the power tension between the accountability-oriented external and the improvement-led internal quality assurance approaches.

- This third Chapter attempts to examine and elaborate the organisational theories that facilitate an understanding and explanation of the factors that either enable, or hinder the practice of quality assurance in universities. The main elements and assumptions of two organisational theories, namely contingency and neo-institutional theories are also discussed. This Chapter also presents an outline and discussion of the conceptual framework used in the study.

- The fourth Chapter explains the context of the study. It describes the higher education system of Ethiopia, including its socio-economic and demographic contexts, historical development, the present educational structure, the legal and regulatory frameworks, and the major changes in the higher education landscape. These serve as a contextual basis for the study.

- Chapter 5 presents the research design, validity and reliability, data gathering and collection methods, and data analysis techniques. It clarifies the arguments regarding the use of the mixed-methods research design for this study.

- Chapter 6 provides the empirical findings based on both the interview and questionnaire analyses and the interpretation of the data. The data analysis of the implementation of quality assurance policies, systems, structures, procedures and instruments are also discussed in this Chapter. Findings of the data analyses concerning the organisational and environmental factors that influence the adoption and implementation of quality assurance systems and policies in the HEIs in Ethiopia are presented and discussed.

- Chapter 7 summaries and synthesises the findings, presents the conclusions derived from the study; and finally, proposes recommendations. Topics for further research will also be outlined.

CHAPTER 2

QUALITY ASSURANCE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this literature review Chapter is to describe and discuss the conceptual literature related to the nature and characteristics of quality and quality assurance in higher education. Sections 2.1 to 2.10 address the notion of quality and quality assurance in relation to higher education, and analyse ways of thinking about quality. It further provides an analysis of the quality assurance methodologies or approaches employed by a higher education sector. In Section 2.11 an account of the research findings related to the impact of quality assurance mechanisms on higher education systems is provided. Section 2.12 is dedicated to a critical review of the different quality assurance approaches, methods and the underlying values and power relations. It also focuses on the power tension between improvement and accountability, respectively associated with internal and external quality assurance.

Section 2.13 reviews the literature concerning the origins and implementation of quality assurance models in higher education. Both industry-originated and education-oriented models are critically reviewed, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses. The final section of this Chapter includes the conclusions and final remarks. Although there exists extensive literature on quality assurance in higher education internationally, this review will only focus on the themes relevant to this thesis.

2.2. DEBATE ON THE NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF QUALITY AND ITS ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION (HE)

The concept of quality and how it should be defined resulted in a fierce debate in higher education literature. This, according to Harman (1998:346), is not surprising as quality deals with a number of complex notions, and only in the widest sense is there broad agreement about what quality is. Apart from this lack of agreement, scholars interested in researching quality issues differ significantly in their views about the way a number of key concepts used in the current debate about quality were defined. The following subsection looks at the ways in which various authors define the term quality in higher education; and the definitions are grouped according to how these scholars approached the definition.

2.2.1. Definitions of the concept quality in higher education

Defining quality is an intricate endeavour. Harvey and Green (1993:10-11) call quality "... a slippery concept ...", "... no easier even to describe and discuss than deliver in practice." The definition may vary according to the interests and priorities of the different stakeholders, and in different situations. Therefore, a range of definitions of the concept quality exists (Harvey & Green, 1993:28). For Becher (as cited in Newton, 2007:14), quality was "... a creature of political fashion." For Neave (1986:159), it was "elusive", a sentiment echoed by Harvey and Green (1993:11), who saw it as slippery and value-laden. Westerheijden, (1999:240) was quite clear that: "No authoritative definition of quality in higher education is possible ..." while reflecting on the lack of theory on quality in higher education. Harvey and Green (1993:28) concluded that, "... in the last resort, quality is a philosophical concept."

According to Kis (2005:3), a review of the literature on change in higher education reveals two schools of thought: The first school of thought attaches quality to a context, and as a consequence quality becomes meaningful. For example, references to the quality

of assessment, student intake, academic programmes, teaching and learning, the student experience and programme designs are not uncommon. The second school of thought relates to a stakeholder-specific meaning. Here quality is considered, with regard to a variety of stakeholders with an interest in higher education, each having the potential to think about quality in different ways. In particular, the works of Harvey and Green (1993), Middlehurst and Woodhouse (1995) and Vroeijenstijn (1995) highlight the importance and value of considering quality from a variety of stakeholders' perspective (Kis, 2005:4).

In discussing the concept of quality, Harman (1996:4) indicated that, "… many see quality as a relative concept, meaningful only from the perspective of particular people at particular points of time, measured against some either explicit or implicit standard or purpose." While quality is a widely used concept in industry where clearly definable products exist, the concept of quality is more difficult to define in education. Hager (1997:6) states that, "... there is no one universally applicable answer to the question "what is quality?" since quality is a function of many factors which vary with the nature of the organisation, its particular purposes, its overall philosophy and the nature of its client" (Hager, 1997:6).

However, some authors (Harvey & Green, 1993; Harvey & Knight, 1996) discussed the nature of quality in the context of education, and identified five ways of thinking about quality: quality as exceptional, quality as perfection or consistency, quality as fitness for purpose, quality as value for money, quality as conformance to standard, and quality as transformative. This group of definitions are elaborated below.

2.2.1.1.   Quality as exceptional

The exceptional notion of quality takes it as a given that quality is distinctive, exclusive or excellence (Harvey & Green, 1993:11). This is the more traditional concept of quality, usually operationalised as exceptionally high standards of academic achievement. The

emphasis is on high quality input. It is associated with the notion of providing a product or service that is distinctive and special, and which confers status on the owner or user. In higher education, an institution that demonstrates exceptionally high standards is seen as a quality institution (UNESO, 2011:10).

2.2.1.2.　　Quality as consistency

The consistency view of quality is similar to traditional notions of excellence in some respects. This notion focuses on process, and sets specifications that it aims to meet perfectly (Harvey, 2007:6). The perfection or consistency approach, or the right-every-time approach, or the conformance to specifications approach define quality as the absence of errors where once the design or a specification has been established by the producer, any deviation from it, means a reduction in quality (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008:433). According to Yong and Wilkinson (2002:103), the consistency view of quality is a manufacturing-based outlook.

2.2.1.3.　　Quality as fitness for purpose

Fitness for purpose was the definition of quality proposed by Ball (Harvey & Green, 1993:16). Fitness for purpose judges quality by the extent to which a product or service meets its stated purpose. The purpose may be customer-defined to meet requirements, or (in education) institution-defined to reflect the institutional mission (or course objectives), (Harvey, 2007:6). Yong and Wilkinson (2002:104) claim that the extent to which a product or service is meeting and/or exceeding the expectations of customers is currently the most widely used definition of quality. This approach implies that quality is relative to a particular activity, product or service. The judgment as to whether an activity, a product or a service is of quality depends on whether it successfully meets or serves the purpose of the user, or for which it is carried out. The addition of customer, user or market to the definitions of quality, according to Yong and Wilkinson (2002:104),

extends its meaning to a wider dimension; in particular it ensures that firms and educational institutions are more externally focused.

Harvey (as quoted in Van Berkel & Wolfhagen, 2002:337) stated that in education, fitness for purpose is usually based on the ability of an institution to fulfil its mission, or a programme of study to fulfil its aim. A course of study in an educational institution is of satisfactory quality when it satisfies requirements of particular standards or levels of achievement for the purpose it was designed. This view of quality implies relative autonomy for educational institutions to define their purpose in an institution's objectives and missions (Van Berkel & Wolfhagen, 2002:337). This, according to the authors, will encourage diversity and variability, as opposed to uniformity in quality. Woodhouse (1996:351), reviewing trends internationally, suggests that approaches to quality assurance based on fitness for purpose are the most commonly accepted and practiced.

2.2.1.4.   Quality as value-for-money

At the heart of the value-for-money approach in education is the notion of accountability. Value-based definitions of quality describe quality in terms of costs and prices. Based on this definition, a quality product is one that provides performance, requirements and conformance at an acceptable price or cost (Yong & Wilkinson, 2002:102). Value-for-money is also linked to concepts such as effectiveness and efficiency in the use of resources and management (Harvey & Green, 1993:21). This definition sees quality in terms of return on investment. If the same outcome can be achieved at a lower cost, or a better outcome can be achieved at the same cost, then the customer has a quality product or service.

2.2.1.5.   Quality as transformative

Harvey (1998:244) in explaining transformation as a definition of quality in education, states that transformative education is about adding value to the students by enhancing

their attributes; but it is also about empowering them as critical, reflective, transformative, lifelong learners: "Education is not a service for a customer – but an ongoing transformation of the participant. … Education is a participative process. Students are not customers or consumers; they are participants" (Harvey, 2007:6). This leads to the two notions of transformative quality in education: enhancing and empowering the student or researcher.

Among the different concepts of quality within this framework, Harvey (2002a:252) argues that transformation is a meta-quality concept; and that the other concepts are a "… possible (although not very good) operationalization of the transformative process, rather than ends in themselves." Moreover, he suggests that "… in an era of mass higher education, value-added transformation ought to become the central element of any concept of quality rather than excellence, fitness for purpose or value for money … ." (Harvey, 2002b:20). In Ethiopia, the concept fitness for purpose is employed as a guiding principle in external quality monitoring by the QA agencies.

2.2.1.6. Quality as conformance to standards

This view has its origins in the quality control approach of the manufacturing industry. Here, the word standard is used to indicate predetermined specifications or expectations. As long as an institution meets the pre-determined standards, it can be considered a quality institution fit for a particular status. This is the approach followed by most regulatory bodies for ensuring that institutions or programmes meet certain threshold levels. Conformity to standards may result in approval to start programmes, recognition for a particular status, or funding depending on the context. Overall, in discussing quality, Harvey (1999:15) mentioned the interrelationship between quality and standards which depends on the approach to quality and the particular notion of standard.

In conclusion, according to Harvey (1999:15-16), the exceptional approach to quality emphasizes the maintenance of academic standards through the summative assessment of knowledge. The approach presumes an implicit, normative gold-standard both for

learning and for research. The perfection approach, he added, emphasizes consistency in external quality monitoring of academic, competence and service standards while the fitness for purpose approach relates standards to specified purpose-related objectives. This requires criteria-referenced assessment of students. The value-for-money approach, he says, places emphasis on a good deal for the customer and requires the maintenance or improvement of academic standards, graduate abilities and research output, for the same unit of resources. While the transformative approach, according to him, uses standards to assess the enhancement of students in terms of academic knowledge and a broader set of transformative skills, such as analysis, critique, lateral thinking, innovation, and communication. Such quality perceptions may apply, alone or in combination, to any type of product or service in education. But different people may hold different views about the same object.

2.3. CONCEPTUALISING THE CONCEPT QUALITY ASSURANCE IN EDUCATION

2.3.1. The definition of the concept quality assurance

The concepts quality and quality assurance have recently become key issues internationally; and managers of education systems and institutions alike became concerned about quality and how to put in place appropriate quality assurance mechanisms. Quality assurance is a generic term used for all forms of external quality monitoring, evaluation or reviews. It may be defined as a process of establishing stakeholder confidence that provision (inputs, processes and outcomes) fulfils expectations, or measures up to the minimum requirements. This definition contains the various aspects of quality assurance, which relate to the inputs, processes and outcomes of higher education. However, the process and nature of quality assurance also bears a dynamic dimension, whereby quality assurance not only seeks to ensure that the minimum quality thresholds are reached at a certain point in time, but also aims to improve the quality of higher education provision over time (Harvey, 2004-2012:2).

In addition, other scholars have also proposed definitions of the concept quality assurance. According to Vlãsceanu, Grünberg and Pârlea (2007:47), quality assurance is "... an all-embracing term referring to an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) the quality of a higher education system, institutions, or programmes." Harman and Meek (2000:5), for example, define quality assurance as specialised management and assessment procedures adopted by higher education institutions or systems for the purpose of monitoring and enhancing academic performance, safeguarding academic standards and generating information on outputs and standards for stakeholders. This definition highlights the need for formal, specialised mechanisms to ensure quality standards and the provision of detailed information to stakeholders on outputs. Vroeijenstijn (1995:xviii) defined quality assurance as the "... systematic, structured and continuous attention to quality in terms of quality maintenance and quality improvement." Quality assurance can also be conceptualised as "… policies, attitudes, actions and procedures necessary to ensure that quality is being maintained and enhanced" (Woodhouse, 1999:30). This definition draws attention to the importance of both the maintenance and enhancement of quality standards.

In the context of higher education, Bowden and Marton (1998:213) viewed quality assurance as the ongoing development and implementation of an ethos, policies and processes which aim to maintain and enhance quality, as defined by articulated values, plans, goals and stakeholders' needs. Harvey and Green (1993:19) view quality assurance in terms of institutional processes, and define it as "... ensuring that there are mechanisms, procedures and processes in place to ensure that the desired quality, however defined and measured, is delivered." Other definitions are, for example, Harman (1998:346) who also associates quality assurance with processes or procedures more than outcomes. Some of the definitions capture the dual nature of quality assurance, that is, fitness for purpose and continuous enhancement. However, according to Hodson and Harold (2003:336), pressures at the end of the second millennium tended to focus more on those elements of the definition that emphasised fitness for purpose rather than continuous enhancement.

Brennan (1997b:1-11) prefers the use of the term quality assessment instead of quality assurance. However, Harman and Meek (2000:11), claim that even though a great deal of the effort in quality assurance relates to quality assessment, their view is that quality assurance is generally conceived as a broader term which embraces not only assessment but also other activities. These activities, according to them, include communication of assessment results to stakeholders and follow-up efforts aimed to achieve improvement.

Many systems distinguish between internal quality assurance (i.e. intra-institutional practices in view of monitoring and improving the quality of higher education) and external quality assurance (i.e. inter- or supra-institutional schemes of assuring the quality of higher education institutions and programmes). Internal quality assurance refers to the policies and mechanisms implemented in an institution or programme to ensure that it is fulfilling its own purposes and meeting the standards that apply to higher education in general, or to the profession, or discipline in particular. External quality assurance refers to the actions of an external body, which may be a quality assurance agency, or anybody other than the institution, that assesses its operation or that of its programmes, in order to determine whether it is meeting the agreed or predetermined standards. Quality assurance activities depend on the existence of the necessary institutional mechanisms, preferably sustained by a solid quality culture. The scope of quality assurance is determined by the shape and the size of the higher education system:

> Quality assurance varies from accreditation in the sense that the former is only a prerequisite for the latter ... Quality assurance is often considered as a part of the quality management of higher education, while sometimes the two terms are used synonymously (Vlãsceanu *et al*., 2004:48-49).

Quality assurance is sometimes used in a more restricted sense, either to denote the achievement of a minimum standard, or to refer to assuring stakeholders that quality is being achieved (i.e. accountability), (Vlãsceanu *et al*., 2004:49)

## 2.3.2.	The origins and importance of the quality assurance movement

The origins of the quality assurance movement of the past few decades lie in a variety of factors. A number of factors have been important in driving the development of this movement.	This subsection details five interrelated factors that explain the surge of interest in the quality assurance movement. These factors include: the concern of decreasing academic standards, loss of confidence in traditional educational quality management capacities and capability to meet employers' demands, lack of funding, increasing demand for accountability and the increased competitiveness and diversity of the educational environment. A brief explanation of the factors is presented in the paragraphs that follow.

Firstly, there was the concern of a potential decline in academic standards due to the massification in education (Van Damme, 2000:11). Modern quality assurance systems are common outcomes from the transition from elite higher education to mass higher education, leading to substantially increased student enrolments and expanded financial burdens on national governments. This has heightened the interest of governments in cost efficiencies and ensured that allocated funds are being well spent. In turn, much larger enrolments have often raised questions about whether or not academic standards are being maintained in times of rapid student enrolment expansion (Harman, 2011:38).

Secondly, the quality assurance movement has also been driven by the impact of increased international competitiveness, the need for increased mobility of professional labour, and demands for greater accountability by public institutions which flow from the emergence of the evaluative state. Moreover, concerns related to the expansion of private higher education, and pressure from employers and the professions for university courses to become more relevant to the work place needs are more of the reasons that heightened the interest towards quality assurance. Quality assurance has become a particularly important element in the higher education systems that have adopted a self-regulation approach to relationships between government and higher education institutions. With this approach, governments set the policy framework and steer from a

distance, and put major emphasis on the monitoring of performance (Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994:357). Besides, with the adoption of what may be referred to as the corporate model of governance, universities in many countries have been given autonomy to make their own decisions. However, in return, governments have set in place new quality assurance and accountability measures (Santiago, Tremblay, Basri & Arnal, 2008:89).

Thirdly, the implementation of neo-liberal policy and its financial and administrative technologies in the New Public Sector Management (NPM) have also contributed to the development of quality assurance. With a strong emphasis on the achievement of efficiencies and the use of competition and markets, governments have taken a growing interest in higher education, particularly public higher education or publicly-supported higher education. Fourthly, with the growth of more knowledge-based economic activities, highly dependent on information and communications technologies, associated with increased competition in international trade, there have been increased concerns about the need for large numbers of young people receiving higher-level qualifications relevant to the labour market needs. This, in turn, has placed increased pressures on universities and colleges to produce graduates with appropriate knowledge and skills. Thus, quality assurance becomes an important mechanism to ensure that graduates receive quality education to meet the needs of employers (Santiago *et al*., 2008:50).

Quality assurance has become a necessity for policy-makers to demonstrate that public funds are spent effectively and that the public purposes of financing higher education are actually fulfilled. The increase in the scale of higher education systems has also made the central management of higher education institutions increasingly inappropriate, especially in the light of the rise of new public management (NPM), (Santiago *et al*., 2008:260). Governments have stepped back and agreed to provide more autonomy to HEIs to enhance the reactivity of the system, but in exchange for effective quality assurance procedures designed to demonstrate a wise use of public funds. Quality control has been seen as a complement to the remote steering of the system (Woodhouse, 1999:34). Another consequence of the massification of higher education and the trend

towards deregulation has been the appearance and/or the expansion of private providers, and the emergence of a growing diversity of educational offerings, including distance learning. These new forms of provision and the development of private HEIs – some of which are operating for profit – have called for a better protection of consumers, notably through quality assurance (El Khawas, Robin DePietro-Jur & Lauritz Holm-Nielsen, 1998:13). Quality assurance is an important tool to provide signals to the labour market on the skills and competencies held by graduates, to guarantee that certain minimum standards are met and to ensure that the qualification awarded is fit for its intended purposes.

Fifthly, quality assurance has also become increasingly more important with the internationalisation of higher education and the increased student and professional labour mobility. Internationalisation not only places increased emphasis on greater supervision of the courses undertaken by international students, but also has led to the increased convergence of higher education systems. Professional bodies have been prompted to work to achieve sets of common national standards for professional recognition and to facilitate the employment of graduates in foreign countries (Harman, 2011:39).

Finally, an increase in competitiveness and diversity of the education environment, nationally and internationally, called for the establishment of the quality assurance movement. This is supplemented by the rapid erosion of traditional student recruitment networks, the growing mobility of students, professionals and academics, the pressure and expansion of private institutions, the increased use of distance education and open learning, and the expansion of transnational education, including the opening of branch campuses by foreign educational institutions (Harman, 2000:199). All these changes and transformation processes in higher education are linked to a "… growing interest in quality, demands for accountability, and the establishment of national quality agencies. By the end of the 1990s concern for quality and standards was global" (Newton, 2007:14).

2.4. QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE PURPOSES OR FUNCTIONS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS

In reviewing the literature, several important dimensions of international variations of quality assurance mechanisms concerning the purposes or functions of quality assurance systems were identified (Harvey & Newton, 2005; Hervey, 2007; Kells, 1995; Vroeijenstijn, 1995). These purposes or functions are the improvement of education, accountability, compliance, and control. The latter will be discussed consecutively.

2.4.1. Improvement of education

Improvement is one of the purposes or functions of quality assurance mechanisms in higher education. Harvey, (1998:249) and Van Damme, (2000:13) indicated the improvement of education as the main and most frequently stated purpose of the quality assurance process. Improvement, according to these authors, is linked to the definition of quality as transformation. This approach to the quality assurance process leads to institutional innovation. The goal of quality assurance, they argue, is to help institutions acquire the necessary input, improve the processes and raise the standards of their outcomes.

Quality improvement is often used as a generic term to cover both quality and standards improvement. It is also a term used to imply both a rationale for quality processes (internal or external to the institution) and the actions undertaken by an institution following a quality evaluation event (Bernhard, 2012:59). According to Newton (2007:16), the crucial point in the context of quality is its external and internal purposes which highlight the two approaches of accountability (external) and quality improvement (internal). Though, both terms are commonly used without any clarification, and the difference lies within the extent of increasing the quality. Harvey and Newton (2007:243) argue that enhancement has a strong impact on change.

Moreover, the difference between improvement and enhancement is described by Harvey and Newton (2007:243) as:

> In some countries, notably the United Kingdom, the term enhancement has grown up as an alternative to improvement. In practice, the two terms are used interchangeably. To improve means to make things better or to ameliorate. To enhance means to make larger, clearer or more attractive. Enhancement thus has connotations of changing appearance, making quality look better, whereas improvement has connotations of delivering a better service.

The improvement purpose is less about constraint and more about the encouragement of adjustment and change. Most systems of external review claim to promote improvement. However, it has been a secondary feature of most the systems. The improvement function of quality assurance procedures is normally about encouraging institutions to reflect on their practices, with a view to enabling a process of continuous improvement of the learning process and the range of outcomes (Harvey, 2007:4).

However, it is necessary to closely examine the claims for an improvement process; it is to ask what is to be improved, in what ways, and for whose benefit. The involved role-players need to ask: Does the external quality evaluation aim to improve academic or research quality, and, if so, how is that measured? Or is it really claiming to improve standards? Is the purpose to directly improve the student experience, or is it to improve the way the institution monitors its own activities? Or perhaps, does the improvement amount to nothing more than ensuring the production of programme documentation and outcomes information? According to Van Damme (2000:12), the quality assurance system serves primarily to give feedback to the teaching staff of institutions to improve the curricula, content, infrastructure and delivery modes of their academic education. Harvey (1998:248) stated that in many cases improvement also means renewal and innovation. It is also about improving the learning experience so that students feel that their lives are transformed by pursuing education.

The most effective improvement seems to occur when external processes mesh with internal improvement activities. In the main, external processes tend to effect improvement at the organisational level and may encourage the better use of, and investment in, infrastructure. It is more difficult for external review to engage with the learning-teaching interface. The improvement function of quality monitoring procedures is to encourage institutions to reflect on their practices and to develop what they do. Evaluation needs to be designed to encourage a process of continuous improvement of the learning processes and the range of outcomes (Harvey & Newton, 2004:153).

2.4.2. Accountability

The second purpose or function of a quality assurance mechanism is accountability. Accountability, according to Brown (2000:330), literally means rendering an account to a third party of what one is doing, why one is doing it, and how one knows it is effective. For this reason, accountability is usually, if not always, linked to public information and to judgements about the fitness, soundness, or level of satisfaction achieved (Middlehurst & Woodhouse, 1995:260). In the Analytic Quality Glossary, the following core definition of the concept accountability can be found: "Accountability is the requirement, when undertaking an activity, to expressly address the concerns, requirements or perspectives of others" (Harvey, 2004-2012:1). Accountability is not a political-neutral underlying rationale for quality monitoring. Indeed, quality monitoring can be used to legitimise changes in the structure or the resourcing of higher education; while simultaneously providing reassurance to external stakeholders about the standard, quality, or international comparability of higher education at a time of rapid change.

Accountability is about institutions taking responsibility for the service they provide and the public money they spend. According to Van Damme (2000:13), the concept of public accountability has been the dominant and most important rationale for introducing quality evaluation. Higher education institutions in most countries have to demonstrate its worth and to account for its use of public resources in the face of competition for state funds.

The notion of accountability is compatible with the value-for-money definition of quality (Harvey, 2007:3). The worldwide accountability approach includes not only political pragmatism and efficacy of research methodology, but also improvement impact (Harvey & Askling, 2003:72).

There are various aspects related to the growing importance of accountability. In describing the accountability function of quality assurance, Huisman and Currie (2004:532-533) detailed three broad concerns: First of all, the aspect of the massification of higher education and the growing costs demand a clarification of private and public expenditure. Accountability is required because of the cost of massification, the need to account for and prioritise public expenditure, and, hence, the pressure to ensure value for both private and public monies. There is also a more general pressure to identify clear lines of accountability within higher education systems.

A second aspect of accountability is, for students, the assurance that the programme of study is organised and run properly, and that an appropriate educational experience is both promised and delivered. This accountability notion is consistent, when the focus is on service delivery, with a fitness-for-purpose definition of quality or, when linked to inputs to an excellence definition. When the focus is on the learning process, then it comes closer to a transformation definition of quality.

A third aspect of accountability is the creating of public information about the quality of institutions and programmes (important for funders, students, graduates, employers), (Harvey & Askling, 2003:74). This might be information for funders that can be used, for example, to aid funding allocation decisions. It may be information for users, such as prospective students and graduate recruiters that helps inform choice. However, there is little evidence to suggest that when making selections, students or employers make much use of information that results from quality monitoring, evaluations and/or from the learning environment.

Accountability raises important questions about who is accountable, for what, to whom and through what means. Romzek (2000:24) provides a comprehensive framework for analysing types of accountability relationships, identifying four basic types: hierarchical, legal, professional and political. All are important in higher education, although professional and political accountability is probably the most important reflecting situations where the individual or the agency has substantially more discretion to pursue relevant tasks than under legal or hierarchical types (Romzek, 2000:25).

Trow (1996:3) adds some useful pointers with regard to higher education. Firstly, accountability should be seen as a constraint on arbitrary power, thereby discouraging fraud and manipulation and strengthening the legitimacy of institutions that are obligated to report to appropriate groups. Secondly, accountability sustains or enhances performance by forcing those involved to subject their operations to critical review. Thirdly, accountability can be used as a regulatory device through the kind of reports and the criteria required by reporting institutions.

In the above subsection, the two common approaches to the quality assurance of higher education – accountability and improvement – have been reviewed. The perpetual debate about accountability and improvement is as old as the notion of quality assurance in higher education (Harvey & Newton, 2004:151). A wide body of literature discusses the relationship between the two purposes of quality assurance, whether they are incompatible, or whether and how a balance could be found between them. However, there is now consensus that the nature of educational quality is contestable, and that there is always a tension between accountability and improvement in the quality endeavour under the current QA paradigm.

It is undeniable that the overall quality culture within most HE systems worldwide, as currently manifested, tends to favour the institutional aspects rather than the student aspects of the quality issues, and tends to lean more on the accountability-led view rather than the improvement-led view of quality assurance. While from a pragmatic perspective these two approaches have their respective reasons for existence, the accountability-led

view of quality assurance is mainly driven by demands of satisfying external agendas (e.g. to enforce institutional accountability or compliance) instead of academic considerations (e.g. to facilitate student learning). As a result, a mismatch between the rhetoric and reality of educational quality has become a common experience of most practitioners, not only in western contexts from which these approaches were originated, but also in other cultural contexts that have adopted them uncritically (Dennis, 2010:72).

To seek improvement in practice, Harvey and Newton (2004:149) suggest that attention should be focused on internal processes and motivators, and instead of politically acceptable methods, appropriate research methodologies should be adopted. Dennis (2010:72) argue that useful changes can be introduced through developing a culture of trust between staff and management and thus reducing the negative sentiment of "feeding the beast" (Newton, 2000:153) on the part of academic staff.

Finally, it is worth noting that most of the recent arguments tend to support quality as transformation as an important underpinning conception, and the centrality of the "student experience" as an important underlying principle of the quality endeavour, especially the need to focus on student learning which is viewed by many researchers as "the heart of quality" in education and training (Tam, 2001:53). To properly address the quality issues, more attention should be paid to the quality assurance of the student aspects, in particular the quality of student learning, which are of paramount importance in the education reforms (Carmichael, Palermo, Reeve & Vallence, 2001:449).

2.4.3.   Compliance

Compliance, as the third purpose or function of a quality assurance mechanism, is ensuring that institutions adopt procedures, practices and policies that are considered by funders and governments to be desirable for the proper conduct of the sector and to ensure its quality (Harvey, 2007:3). Harvey (1999:24) explains that in the compliance model, quality assurance serves as a means of increasing state control over the academy and as a means of enforcing compliance with particular policy demands. This coercion

may occur overtly, but usually it operates covertly and indirectly, often behind a discourse of improvement and of serving the interests of other stakeholders. This introduction of a third dimension (compliance) into the improvement-accountability debate is important, for it helps to shift the debate from the setting up of dichotomies towards a more sophisticated understanding of the ways in which politics and ideologies "get into" quality assurance. Harvey's (1999:25) position also suggests that it may be possible (although very difficult) to design a model of quality assurance that includes both the improvement and accountability dimensions, provided that accountability and compliance motivations do not dominate.

Government is usually the most important and powerful as far as higher education goes, because it supplies so much of the money, and in many cases controls the licensing of institutions. Governments around the world are looking for higher education to be more responsive, including making higher education more relevant to social and economic needs; widening access to higher education; expanding numbers, usually in the face of decreasing unit costs; ensuring comparability of provision and procedures, within and between institutions, including international comparisons; and responding to value for money imperatives. Quality has been used as a tool to ensure some degree of compliance to these overt political agendas as well as to less overt ones, such as attempts to reduce the autonomy of academia and questioning the extent to which mass higher education is producing work-ready graduates. There are other stakeholders who seek compliance through quality monitoring, notably professional or regulatory bodies who may use quality monitoring to check whether their preferences or policies are being acknowledged or implemented. Quality monitoring is also a tool that can be used to ensure compliance at the local level, that is, within an institution. For example, quality assurance can be a tool to ensure compliance to local guidelines and regulations (Harvey & Newton, 2004:152).

At its simplest level, quality monitoring may encourage, or even force, compliance in the production of information, be it statistical data, prospectuses, or course documents. This represents the minimum required shift from an entirely producer-oriented approach to

higher education to one that acknowledges the rights of other stakeholders to minimum information and a degree of service (Harvey, 1998:241). Quality monitoring can also be used as a smoke screen to ensure compliance to resource restrictions by covering the issues that arise when student numbers increase rapidly without a commensurate increase in staffing and resources. Indeed, a quality-management system can be viewed as a method of controlling. The control of academia is not via direct intervention; rather the state and the institutional management maintain a degree of surveillance from a distance that ensures that the requirements of the system are met (Barrow, 1999:35).

2.4.4. Control

The fourth and last purpose or function of a quality assurance mechanism is control. Harvey and Newton (2004:151) and Harvey (2007:3) explain the two control functions of the quality assurance process as follows: firstly, the government's intention to control the education system by restricting unrestrained growth. In many countries, especially those with a significant private sector, governments seek to control unrestrained growth in higher education in an increasingly unrestricted market (Harvey, 2007:3). This is done either by financial control or by using the outcomes of quality monitoring to encourage or restrict expansion. Secondly, external review is used to ensure that the principles and practices of higher education are not being eroded or flouted, thereby undermining the intrinsic quality of university level education and research. The control aspect of quality evaluation specifically addresses the comparability of standards: that is the standard or level of students' academic or professional achievement, nationally and internationally. The use of externally set and marked examinations; specification of the content of syllabuses; (threshold) descriptors of outcomes; external examiners to ensure inter-institutional comparability of awards for example, is well established in some countries as a means of making comparisons between programmes within subject disciplines (Harvey, 2007:3).

2.5. DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO QUALITY AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

Over the past decades, extensive experimentation has taken place internationally with quality assurance and how it is managed. The literature reporting these developments points to a variety of approaches and methods of quality assurance. This section describes the different approaches to quality that can be taken by quality assurance systems. Quality assurance agencies can adopt one or more of these according to different educational systems and traditions (Woodhouse, 1999:30). The three main approaches to quality are accreditation, assessment and audit.

2.5.1. Accreditation

Accreditation is the most widely used method of external quality assurance to be introduced recently in many higher education systems, either as a transformation of previously used methods of external quality assurance, or as an entirely new method. Accreditation is the process by which governmental or private bodies evaluate the quality of a higher education institution as a whole, or a specific educational programme in order to formally recognise it as having met certain predetermined minimal criteria or standards. The result of this process is usually the awarding of a status (a yes/no decision) of recognition, and sometimes of a license to operate with a time-limited validity (Vlãsceanu, *et al*., 2004:19). Within the Analytic Quality Glossary (Harvey, 2004-2012:3), accreditation is defined as the "… establishment of the status, legitimacy or appropriateness of an institution, programme (i.e. composite of modules) or module of study …", and is bound to a certain time limit when a re-accreditation process has to be undergone.

Accreditation is an evaluation of whether an institution or programme meets a threshold standard and qualifies for a certain status. It is based on assessment and evaluation methods, but it makes an explicit judgement on whether a programme or an institution meets particular quality standards. Accreditation, therefore, inevitably involves some

kind of benchmarking (of what is acceptable and what is not) and a set of existing quality criteria. Accreditation is thus the only method within the quality assurance spectrum which makes an explicit judgement about the degree to which an institution or programme actually meets the pre-determined standards or requirements. Obtaining accreditation may have implications for the higher education institution itself (e.g. permission to operate) and/or its students (e.g. eligibility for grants), (Woodhouse, 1999:32). The focus of accreditation is comprehensive, in examining the mission, resources, and procedures of a higher education institution, or programme (Dill, 2000a:187).

When accreditation is also linked to authorisation to operate, it is usually called licensing or registration. These two activities have different emphases, but similar outputs. Specialised or professional accreditation is an evaluation of whether an institution or programme qualifies its graduates for employment in a particular field (Woodhouse, 1999:33). Critique on the accreditation approach demonstrates that national accreditation arrangements work towards national uniformity rather than diversity, and fail to prevent problems in both academic and administrative integrity (Westerheijden, 2001:70).

2.5.2. Audit

Audits are a rather recent approach, and currently, a clear trend towards audits is visible. In the Analytic Quality Glossary (Harvey, 2004-2012:1) the term audit, in the context of higher education, is defined as "... a process for checking that procedures are in place to assure quality, integrity or standards of provision and outcomes." The term audit is often short for "quality audit". Harvey and Asking (2003:77) further specify the process as "... checking to ensure externally or internally-specified practices and procedures are in place" – most commonly "... to assure quality or standards of higher education." The same approach could, if the audit is subject focussed, also be used to validate or accredit programmes (Harvey & Askling, 2003:76). Quality audits can be undertaken to meet

internal goals (an internal audit) or external goals (an external audit). The result of the audit must be documented (the audit report), (Vlãsceanu *et al*., 2004:50).

A quality audit checks the extent to which the institution is achieving its own explicit or implicit objectives. When an institution states objectives, it is implicitly claiming that this is what it will do, and a quality audit checks the extent to which the institution is achieving its own objectives. When the claims are explicit (as in financial reporting or if the institution has done a self-quality audit), the audit becomes a validation (or otherwise) of those claims. An audit asks the question, Are your processes effective? The output is a description of the extent to which the claims of the HEI are correct (Woodhouse, 1999:31). Academic audits are carried out at the institutional level. However, unlike accreditation or assessment, audits do not aim at a comprehensive review of a HEI's or programme's resources and activities, nor do they directly evaluate the quality of the teaching or learning. Rather audits focus on those processes implemented by HEIs in order to assure and improve the quality of teaching and learning (Dill, 2000a:188).

2.5.3. Assessment

Assessment is a "... general term that embraces all methods used to judge the performance of an individual, group or organisation" (Harvey, 2004-2012:1). Assessment is an evaluation that makes graded judgements about quality, in this respect it goes beyond accreditation that makes a binary judgement (Dill, 2000a:188). Assessment asks the question, how good are your outputs? The output of an assessment is a quantitative evaluation, resulting in a grade (whether numeric, literal or descriptive). There may or may not be a pass/fail boundary along the grade spectrum (or it may simply be a two-point scale), (Woodhouse, 1999:32).

Quality assessment in many instances is a synonym for evaluation or review. Quality assessment indicates the actual process of external evaluation (reviewing, measuring, and judging) of the quality of higher education institutions and programmes. It consists of those techniques, mechanisms, and activities that are carried out by an external body in

order to evaluate the quality of the higher education processes, practices, programmes, and services. Some aspects that are important when defining and using the concept of quality assessment are: (i) the context (national, institutional); (ii) the methods (self-assessment, assessment by peer-review, site visits); (iii) the levels (system, institution, department, individual); (iv) the mechanisms (rewards, policies, structures, cultures); (v) certain quality values attached to quality assessment such as academic values, traditional values (focusing on the subject field); managerial values (focusing on procedures and practices); pedagogical values (focusing on staff and their teaching skills and classroom practice); employment values (emphasising graduate output characteristics and learning outcomes), (Vlãsceanu, *et al.*, 2007:74).

2.6.   APPROACHES TO AND METHODS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

Despite the varied objectives of evaluation and the array of different types of agencies, there is conformity in the methods that are adopted. Approaches to evaluation in higher education are heavily dependent on three basic elements: self-assessment or self-evaluation; peer evaluation; and statistical or performance indicators. An elaboration of the elements follows.

2.6.1.   Self-evaluation/self-assessment

The notion of self-assessment, first developed in the United States with regard to institutional and course accreditation, over the last decade or so has become an important feature of many quality assurance systems. Self-assessments have many positive features. They, in the right context, are useful for encouraging fundamental reviews of objectives, practices and outcomes. Self-assessment is a key element in most evaluation procedures. It provides a standard against which the HEI can measure itself, and a framework for developing a definition of quality. Thus it helps the HEI to check how far it has achieved its strategic mission and goals, and it allows it to prepare an

action plan for further development. Self-reviews are carried out by many HEIs, though their nature varies significantly (Kis, 2005:6).

Furthermore, in recommending the use of self-assessment Harman (1998:354) and Van Damme (2000:13) highlighted a number of its positive features. According to them, self-assessments are cost effective, since the main work is done internally, often with a few additional resources. They usually achieve a high degree of ownership since key staff are heavily involved, and such an involvement increases the chances of substantial improvement being achieved. The overall process of review or assessment is made less threatening when emphasis is placed on self-assessment. Harvey (2002a:246) in supporting the use of self-assessment argues that, "... internal reviews and assessments are more accurate and fruitful than those done by outsiders."

However, Barnett (1990:104) as early as 1990 argued that there were indications that the positive achievements that higher education institutions had achieved through self-assessment were coming under threat. Gosling and D'Andrea (2001:9) stated that since the time of Barnett's observations the quality assurance processes have far exceeded Barnett's fears in terms of their intrusiveness, external control, requirements on reporting, and external accountability. De Vries (as cited in Kis, 2005:15) distinguishes between full-scale self-assessment and self-assessment for compliance, referring to the latter as write-up, and warns against the risk of such practices. It is argued that there is a risk of compliance and of using self-assessment as a political act.

Harvey (2002b:7) also draws a distinction between self-assessment for internal use and self-assessment for external use, which according to him, may lead to two different sets of reports, one prepared for internal consumption and another for external consumption. This lack of openness, he says, is due to a fear of revealing weaknesses or problems in the self-evaluating process, especially when resources are used to reward strengths rather than eliminate and reduce weaknesses. Brennan (1997a:21) points out that if self-assessment is a stage preliminary to a process of some form of external judgement, it is likely to be carried out primarily in order to attempt to influence these external

judgements rather than to inform the self. Thus self-assessment which has external consequences runs the danger of producing compliance on the part of those who are carrying it out.

2.6.2.   Peer review

Peer reviews are one of the main methods used by quality assurance systems. Investigation by the external team is commonly called peer review. This is a term with a long tradition in academia, and it has usually denoted an evaluation by another academic or academics, usually in the same discipline. It is argued that peer reviews bring more legitimacy to quality assurance mechanisms. According to Kis (2005:17), academics are more likely to listen to their peers' opinion than to administrators, inspectors or the like. Hence, peer reviews can contribute effectively to quality improvement by changing the attitude of academics about their contributions to a particular programme. It is argued that external quality assurance agencies cannot operate on the basis of naked power; their authority needs to be considered legitimate by academics. It seems that the only way in which quality assurance agencies can obtain legitimate authority is to depend for their judgements upon the sources of legitimacy recognised by the academic community, namely the opinions of peers. Undoubtedly, peer review can have a stimulating effect on the internal operations of an institution, especially for use in the long term (Kis, 2005:8).

In highlighting some critiques of this approach, the contributions of Harvey are given prominence in this section. Harvey (2002a:257) argues that although self-assessment is often taken seriously only if a peer review follows, peer reviews themselves are not particularly an effective or efficient means of unravelling what is really going on. He added that during the review process, peer-review teams make judgements based on what they are told and tend to look for discrepancies in the story. Harvey also states that the reviewers neither have detailed documentation, nor fully observe what goes on in the educational institution under review. According to him, even if during the short duration of their visit, reviewers have access to appropriate documentation which allows them

some form of cross-checking, and the opportunity to observe facilities and practices first-hand, they tend to see and assimilate only small aspects of the whole institutional operation.

Harvey (2002a:257) also argues that peer-reviewers are often not trained, and that some of them may even conduct the review without any proper training. Furthermore, the prior experience of peer reviewers tended to influence the outcome of reports. Stensaker (1999:365) noted that "... on the whole, the visits appeared to be more geared to the needs of the auditing teams than those of the institution." Brennan (1997a:17) argues that one of the most important issues concerning peer reviews is the selection of peers to assure the legitimacy of the review.

2.6.3. Statistical or performance indicators and the selection of measures of quality

The use of statistical or performance indicators and the selection of adequate measures of quality is a widely discussed issue in the literature. A performance indicator can generally be defined as "... an item of information collected at regular intervals to track the performance of a system" (Fitz-Gibbon, 1996:5). Amid the education reforms around the world, performance indicators have gradually become standard components of the language of educational quality (Dennis, 2010:68). From a theoretical point of view, the development of performance indicators in the educational context is affected by the idea that quality cannot be improved unless measured (Dill, 1995:95), and that education is a highly complex system, and to get quality into it "... the best strategy lies in improving the information in the system, particularly by defining and measuring the many outcomes that we care about and feeding back the measurements to the units of responsibility" (Fitz-Gibbon, 1996:4).

In reality, the use of performance indicators has been fuelled by an increasing concern relating to accountability, mainly on the part of government agencies and ministerial officials who are responsible for ascertaining the appropriate delivery of educational

services at an affordable cost. It was also affected by a concern for the transparency of institutional performance, as one of the supposed reasons for the failure of a competitive market, that consumers may have insufficient information and therefore cannot make efficient choices. The above concern has motivated the formulation of quality policies to require an appropriate dissemination of academic quality information to the public, and this requirement is expected to also motivate educational institutions to maintain and improve the quality of their provisions (Dennis, 2010:68).

It is argued, that the use of performance indicators allows an objective measurement and comparability of quality, which are important to government. Performance indicators are regarded as useful tools, both for accountability purposes and in informing policy and decision-making. They are aimed at the discharging of established accountability obligations to the public and elected officials by providing a relatively straightforward set of publicly available statistics about performance. Furthermore, they provide policy-makers with an overall picture of what is happening in a particular institution or system in order to inform policy discussion (Ewell, 1999:193). For governments, a major role of external quality assurance is to collect objective information on the performance of HEIs, and to provide them with an objective measurement of the quality. Ministries are keen on using performance indicators, since they allow them to measure and compare the effects of government policies on quality as a proof that the right decisions were made (Kis, 2005:19).

It is argued that the use of performance indicators can contribute to quality improvement by stimulating certain kinds of institutional behaviour. The monitoring focuses more on desired outcomes and behaviours, than in the case of traditional accountability mechanisms. Performance indicators are used intentionally to encourage HEIs to increase their progress toward meeting certain standards. The direction of the underlying incentive can be either positive or negative. The HEIs can be rewarded for the desired improvements or actions, or can be punished if they fall behind (Ewell, 1999:194).

Performance indicators, however, have their limitations as measures of quality performance. Reportedly, many academics have been opposed to the increasing use of performance indicators, arguing that they are reductionist, offer inaccurate comparisons, and are unduly burdensome (Kis, 2005:19). Middlehurst and Woodhouse (1995:259) also warn against the pitfalls in comparisons. It is argued that popular discussion often trivialises comparisons, selecting only one or two aspects, reducing them to simplistic terms and paying little regard to whether the aspects are truly commensurate. Furthermore, the use of performance indicators might encourage the manipulation of data by HEIs to meet their targets (Harvey, 2002b:6).

Another criticism concerning performance indicators is that there is no necessary link between performance indicators and quality. Viewed from the input-process-output paradigm, the use of these indicators can be criticized for their lack of appropriateness with regard to the relevant aspects of the educational process or outcomes, especially those relating to student development, which are arguably the most important measure of educational quality. Harvey (1998:243) concluded that, the so-called performance indicators are invariably simplistic, convenience measures that bear no relation to any notion of quality.

Despite the problems regarding the notion of performance indicators, it is believed that under suitable arrangements their employment in the quality assurance endeavour can be fruitful. An example of such an arrangement is proposed by Yorke (1998:57) who views an education system as a nested set of levels, with the higher levels (e.g. the system or the institution) being more responsible for the accountability aspect of educational quality, and the lower levels (e.g. the programmes or the courses) more responsible for the enhancement aspect. As suggested by Yorke (1998:57), when one moves from the higher levels towards the lower levels they tend to get "softer", i.e. they are much more subjective. With this perspective, performance indicator data should be evaluated and acted on at the lowest level possible, and the higher levels are expected to audit whether the data have been obtained and acted on in an appropriate manner (Yorke, 1998:58).

Yorke (1998:58) also argues that to be effective in measuring and improving educational quality, "... it is not the performance indicators that constitute the primary problem (despite their technical inadequacies), but the context in which they may be used." Overall, for effective employment of performance indicators in the quality assurance process, more research needs to be done to improve the performance indicator data with respect to its surrounding theoretical, technical and socio-political issues; and to balance the performance indicator purpose between external accountability and quality improvement (Yorke, 1998:58).

2.7.   EXTERNAL VERSUS INTERNAL EVALUATION 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, 2002b:6). Thune (1996:21) highlights the potential of external agents in assuring accountability in higher education. Middlehurst and Woodhouse (1995:257) also argue that the function of independent agencies that undertake external quality assurance activities is usually characterised 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, 1995:265). Harvey (2002b:6) 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, 2002b:6). This aspect is particularly important from an accountability point of view. Thune (1996:31) 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 (1995:261) 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, 1995:263). Askling (1997:18) 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 (2005:15) 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 (2002b:9) 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 (2002b:10) 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 standardised, which may lead to excessive bureaucratisation and inflexibility (Harvey, 2002:5). Kis (2005:16) 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 (2002:41), a study conducted by Graham (2000) highlights the huge workload that is associated with an external quality review; the frequency and burden of quality assessment in a resource-starved system which, paradoxically, detracts from the delivery of quality; the loss of professional trust and consensus; the drift towards a risk-averse higher education system; and the lack of investment in quality enhancement. Middlehurst and Woodhouse (1995:263) argue that fully external quality assurance mechanisms are likely to be a costly and inefficient means of achieving lasting quality improvement. Similarly, Harvey (2002b:8) suggests that external quality monitoring implies excessive costs which do not reflect the value gained from the process. It is suggested that the significant resources spent on quality bureaucracies could be better spent on 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 (2002:43) 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 over-elaborated bureaucratic systems of external monitoring is that they can lead to a compliance culture to the detriment of real quality improvement.

2.8. SOME OF THE CRITICISMS AGAINST QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS

The 1990s saw a change in the approach to education quality, and this change, according to Harvey and Askling (2003:70), required higher education institutions to demonstrate the quality of its activities. Educational institutions that previously viewed excellence or transformation as the self-evident key indicator of education quality now emphasised value for money and fitness for purpose. In so doing, they argued that, quality as an implicit, self-evident property of education becomes transformed into a mechanism of control, a process of accountability and compliance that seemed to have no relation to education. In the next subsections, similar arguments and criticism levelled against quality assurance systems in the context of higher education are discussed.

2.8.1. Quality assurance is inefficient in achieving quality improvement

Brown (2000:324) in commenting on quality arrangements stated that whilst there are plenty of comparative data about quality, there is little to tell about quality generally, or about changes in quality. Vidovich (2002:405) stated that many scholars maintain that the quality system approach is a paper trail mentality that does not develop or improve the organisation, but merely binds it to its rules and regulations. Quality, according to Harvey and Askling (2003:70), is about a change in culture, which involves a slow process of evolution. The delegated accountability approach to quality that emphasizes procedures has led to a degree of scepticism about quality. They view it as counter-productive to the development of a quality culture within educational institutions. Harvey (1999:9) illustrated that in some institutions with a well-established culture of dialogue between teaching staff and students, there were amendments to course content, teaching styles and assessment procedures. However, such a process, he says, was often overlooked as a

quality process because it lacked the formalism of a prescribed procedure. Auditors may examine the paperwork without any apparent concern for the implications it may have on procedures. At times, according to Love and Li (2000:139), the focus of the audit was as such that more attention was given to getting the details of the minutes right with emphasis being placed on inputs rather than outputs, an approach often referred to as "... counting the spoons", which requires an educational organisation to have "... adequate and appropriate means to achieve its goals and objectives ..." (Blackmur, 2004:113).

2.8.2. Quality assurance carries the risk of game playing and impression management

Another drawback of quality assurance systems is the concern that these systems have led to compliance behaviour and inordinate paperwork burdens. Compliance games can be played by educational institutions where a culture of "box-ticking" may emerge. It is argued that bureaucratic demands of quality assurance are creating a compliance culture that dampens creativity, rewards conformity and slows down the responsiveness of the system to a rapidly changing environment. Martin (1999:127) acknowledges that "... accountability can be a potent force both for and against learning ...", and only encourage minimal compliance with bureaucratic procedures and does not address the improvement or maintenance of the quality of academic work. The British system, for example, may have initially encouraged better documentation but has deteriorated into a compliance game in which many resources that could otherwise be used for improvement are being diverted to fulfil external monitoring requirements (Harvey, 2002b:8).

2.8.3. Efficacy and cost-effectiveness issues

Some authors (Blackmur, 2004:105; Laughton 2003:312; Woodhouse, 1995:15) state that the vital issue in quality assurance is the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of the quality system, more specifically the question regarding the results obtained in relation to the costs and resources. Blackmur (2004:105) confirms that there is a widespread consensus

that the benefits of at least some forms of external quality assurance exceed the costs; although, he noted that this may probably be a matter of faith more than the outcome of a scientific analysis. From a quality management perspective, the quality assurance method has the weakness of relying on inspection and corrective action and result in inefficiency because of the tediousness and high costs of the inspection activity. The added cost in administrative labour hours to develop, implement and monitor any quality assurance system is considerable. Laughton (2003:312) stated that as education institutions began to take the quality review process seriously, they devoted more time and resources to preparing for review. Woodhouse (1995:15), in supporting these arguments, emphasised that achieving quality is not cheap and the more elaborate the mechanisms, the more the costs will be, in terms of the use of resources and staff time. He contends that the marginal returns on extra effort, in terms of the benefits in improvements to the quality of learning outcomes, decreases as the quality assurance system become more complex (Woodhouse, 1995:15).

In relation to the critique levelled against the quality assurance process, it was noted that the various experimentation that has taken place in quality assurance has been detrimental to its efficacy and efficiency. Questions have been asked about the costs, resources and time, administrative burden on staff and departments caused by the increase of bureaucratic procedures and paperwork, the amount of window dressing, the increased stress amongst academic staff, and the quality assurance mechanisms imposed from above which could erode or destroy the existing mutual, informal academic control systems. Criticisms have also been levelled at the transformation of quality as an implicit, self-evident property of education into control mechanisms which seemed to have no relation to education. This transformation led to a change in the management structure of educational institutions that gave rise to a class of managers and bureaucrats with limited support from the academic profession. Academic staff perceptions that these managers are a threat to their professional status and autonomy as well as the system's inability to capture variability of quality across departments, courses and staff within an educational institution are some of the other criticism levelled against the quality assurance system.

2.9. SOME OF THE DIFFICULTIES OF IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS

This section considers the reasons why effective quality assurance systems are apparently difficult to implement. One reported reason is the difference of interests and conceptions of quality between stakeholders in higher education. Another identified reason is the implementation gap and, finally, the external ownership of quality assurance systems which often leads to compliance instead of improvement. These reasons are discussed below.

2.9.1 Difference of interests and conceptions of quality between stakeholders in higher education

One reported reason is the difference of interests and conceptions of quality between stakeholders in higher education. There exists some difference between the government and the universities in their approach to quality assurance (Kis, 2005:23). Government has a more summative approach, while the approach of the universities tends to be formative. Vroeijenstijn (as quoted in Kis, 2005:23) argues that governments and HEIs are in most countries still opponents on the why of external quality assurance. On the one hand, government is interested both in accountability and improvement. It aims at demonstrating to society that it makes justifiable decisions on educational policy (such as the allocation of funding or the termination of academic programmes). On the other hand, the universities' main objective is quality improvement. Their concerns are whether it is possible to offer high quality education within the conditions as set by government, and to convince the public that the quality of their educational provision is the best possible. For HEIs, the most important function of quality assurance is an analysis of strengths and weaknesses, and the formulation of recommendations for further improvement. However, HEIs also emphasise the accountability function of external quality assurance, particularly its role in the process of self-regulation, internal steering and quality assurance (Kis, 2005:23).

2.9.2.   The implementation gap

Another reported reason for the failure of quality assurance systems is that they are imposed on academics through internal mechanisms of audit and review (Kis, 2005:25). This encouragement is backed by the use of rewards and sanctions to ensure implementation:

> However, the ownership of the system, let alone its intended outcomes, is unlikely to be achieved when the development of the system is carried out at a distance from the academic to whom, and by whom, the system is applied (Barrow, 1999:33).

There is a risk that quality assurance systems lead to a symbolic compliance to the requirements of the system, instead of quality improvement. Furthermore, as higher education and quality assurance systems mature, there is the risk to emphasise procedural elements of quality rather than innovative processes. Harvey (2002b:10) argued that, "... continuous monitoring by a controlling agency requiring overly bureaucratic procedures will result in detailed paper trails but entirely stifle development and innovation, leading to a continuous procedurising tendency and loss of academic autonomy."

Newton (2002:47) highlights the importance of the implementation gap, defined as the difference between planned outcomes of policy and the outcomes of the implementation process. He suggests that there is a gap between what was designed into and expected of the quality assurance system, and what, at ground level, prevented this from being achieved. It is argued that the views of front-line academic staff engaged in the implementation of policy are particularly important, since they are the makers and shapers of the policy implementation process, and not mere recipients. Thus how policy is received and decoded by academic staff seems to be of particular importance. The success of a quality assurance system may be dependent less on the rigour of application or the neatness of the dry documented quality assurance system *per se;* and, more on its contingent use by actors, and on how the quality assurance system is viewed and interpreted by them (Newton, 2002:47-48).

Moreover, Newton (2002:49) and Lipsky (1980:13) underline another significant feature of policy implementation: the discretion exercised by front-line workers, or street level bureaucrats. These policy implementers, it is argued, are the real makers of policy since they have a relative autonomy at the point of implementation. Newton (2002:49) highlights another problem related to this issue, suggesting that a growing emphasis on ownership and self-reviews in quality assurance systems, runs the risk of exacerbating the problem of the implementation gap since there is more likely to be a problem of goal distortion.

2.9.3.   External ownership leading to compliance instead of improvement

Another problem identified, is the lack of preparedness of the staff for quality assurance activities. Reportedly the lack of sufficient training in conducting self-assessments, the insufficiently explicit indicators and standards, and the usual change of members in the visiting committees seem to hinder the success of quality assurance activities (Silva, Reich & Gallego, 1997:31).

Higher education institutions are assumed to be more concerned about meeting basic standards, compliance and external accountability than about the improvement and enhancement of teaching and learning. At the same time, teaching staff often perceive quality management and the accessory cultural change as another bureaucratic checking device (Kleijnen, Dolmans, Willems & Van Hout, 2013:152), often leading to "... ritualistic game-playing with performance indicators and impression management" (Newton, 2002:45). This attitude reveals distrust. The development towards quality as "ritualism and tokenism", "lack of mutual trust" or "burden" is shown in a clear manner. Academics often associate quality assurance with "... bureaucracy, burden, accountability... ", and further negative associations (Newton, 2002:45).

The politics of quality have been dominated by macro and micro agendas focusing on value-for-money practices; reducing the autonomy of higher education institutions; and

questioning the extent to which they produce work-ready graduates (Harvey, 1998:244). This political agenda of role-players outside higher education has contributed towards a negative view of quality amongst academics (Harvey, 2005:272). Some critics were questioning the applicability of industry-born quality in higher education. Largely the rhetoric of quality management, namely that quality is defined by customer satisfaction; quality is the reduction of variation; and quality must be measurable were accepted uncritically (Houston, 2008:62).

2.10. SOME OF THE FEATURES OF EFFECTIVE EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS

The question of how effective external quality assurance systems should be designed and implemented is subject to a wide debate. Identifying the features of effective quality assurance systems is rendered more complicated by the difficulties in measuring the effectiveness and impact of such systems. This section summarises current evidence in terms of some features of effective quality assurance systems.

2.10.1. Clarity of purposes

Expectations regarding the aims and the outcomes of quality assurance may differ between different stakeholders; hence, in order to create coherent systems, the aim of external quality assurance must be clear. Quality will be enhanced more easily through improvement approaches than through control. Hence, it is important not to burden the quality assurance system excessively with accountability and information delivering (Kis, 2005:30). It is suggested that "... improvement and accountability must be conceptually and practically distinct, with separate resourcing, while allowing for close contact between them." Separate purposes can be served by several different mechanisms, but for mutual support, information should be shared (Middlehurst & Woodhouse, 1995:267). Ewell (2002:168) found that one of the characteristics of best practices is consistency with the mission and core values of the higher education institution. It is argued, that it is

"... remarkable how best practice organisations are driven by only a few well-articulated core values or mission elements, with evaluation processes attached visibly to these key areas in preference to being comprehensive."

2.10.2.   Legitimacy

Harvey (2002b:9) points out that a key issue is "... the legitimacy of external quality assurance systems, and how far it is supported by academics." Quality judgements which lack legitimacy in the eyes of those on the receiving end of them are not likely to be acted upon if action can be avoided. In this respect, the nature of the involvement of the academic community as a whole is particularly important. The success with which the authority of subject communities is exploited by the quality assurance agency may be a key factor affecting its overall legitimacy and impact (Harvey, 2002b:9).

2.10.3.   Dynamic link between internal and external processes

A range of analysts highlight the importance of coherence and interactivity between internal and external quality assurance mechanisms. Improvement "... needs to be addressed more widely, less intrusively, and more interactively ..." between HEIs and an external agency, and external quality arrangements should be complementary to internal processes (Middlehurst & Woodhouse, 1995:267). Empirical evidence shows that the most effective quality improvement seems to occur when external quality arrangements mesh with internal processes (Harvey & Newton, 2004:153). It is argued, that a "... balance of power and trust needs to be established between key stakeholders, supported by open communication and negotiating machinery ..." (Middlehurst & Woodhouse, 1995:267). Different purposes and interests must be accommodated at all levels of the system, and serious imbalances of power should be avoided since they risk damaging both the quality and the integrity of the higher education sector. Horsburgh (1999:26) suggests that, "... a partnership between the centre and the teachers must be established,

with the centre arbiter of key values and principles and the ways of doing things decided by the people who must actually do them."

2.10.4. Flexibility, confidence in higher education institutions, and more focus on the internal processes

It is argued, that in order to achieve quality improvement, trust in higher education institutions needs to be established, and more attention should be paid to the internal processes (Harvey & Newton, 2004:161). Similarly, Thune (1996:31) highlights the importance of trust, commitment and understanding in successful quality assurance arrangements. It is also essential to take into account the expectations and values of the staff, particularly if it is assumed that lasting quality improvement is based on the energies and initiatives of staff (Newton, 2000:160). Horsburgh (1999:24) underlines the importance of internal mechanisms and proposing some general principles that should guide internal accountability. It is suggested that quality processes must be non-burdensome, and responsibility for quality should be delegated to teaching units and other teams involved in providing student services since they are able to effect change in teaching and learning. In general, quality is foremost the responsibility of HEIs, thus they must have the ownership of the quality assurance system.

2.10.5. Adequate follow-up procedures and feedback to be linked to action

It is argued that, a series of well-executed evaluations do not in themselves bring any merit to the concept of systematic evaluations. The proof of success is the impact and follow-up in the longer term of a quality improvement programme launched from a successful evaluation (Thune, 1996:31). It is necessary that effective action and appropriate change flow from monitoring (Horsburgh, 1999:24). Student feedback should be linked to action and empowerment, since it is an essential element of quality assurance, especially if the emphasis is on internal processes (Harvey, 2002:11). However, it should not be used to make judgements about the personal performance of

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academics, but should be part of a dialogue to improve the programme (Gosling & D'Andrea, 2001:14). Concerning the question of who should be responsible for the follow-up, Vroeijenstijn (as quoted in Kis, 2005:32) argues that governments must leave the follow-up to the HEI and avoid direct actions based on the outcomes of the review. The government should take measures only when a HEI does nothing with the recommendations.

2.10.6. Regular and cyclical quality monitoring as a process

It is argued that external quality assurance must be regular and cyclical. One of the strengths of the quality assurance system is the ability to look at the improvements after a certain period of time. If quality monitoring is seen as an event rather than as a process, it is likely to lead to performance and game playing, instead of making a long-term impact. In order to achieve lasting internal benefits, the process should less comply with external requirements (Harvey, 2002b:9).

2.11. SOME OF THE FEATURES OF EFFECTIVE INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS

It is argued that external quality monitoring makes no attempt in most countries to encourage quality learning (Harvey, 1997:68). In order to shift the emphasis of quality evaluation to make it transforming, quality evaluation needs to be reclaimed from opportunistic politicians, trust in higher education needs to be re-established, and attention focused on internal processes and internal motivators. Harvey and Newton (2004:161) argued that there is a clear distinction between taking problems and making problems. In terms of agenda-setting and the shaping of systems for external quality monitoring and evaluation, academic communities and quality practitioners alike have, for over a decade, been "taking" rather than "making" the quality agenda, especially where external audit and assessment are concerned. A renewed focus for quality

evaluation on the enhancement of learning and teaching can address this imbalance (Harvey & Newton, 2004:161).

The argument for improvement-led quality assurance is embedded in the assumption that the quality of student learning depends largely on the quality of the internal processes of the institution; it is best guaranteed when the responsibility for quality assurance is located as closely as possible to the processes of teaching and learning (Wilger, 1997:8). In this context, the effectiveness of the accountability-oriented quality assurance system is viewed in terms of its facilitative role and in its reinforcing effect on the internal quality processes (Kahsay, 2012:65).

According to Harvey and Knight (1996:2), transformation is the most appropriate learning-oriented approach to quality. The emphasis is on "enhancing participants", "adding value" to their capability and ultimately "empowering" them. Bowden and Marton (1998:7) characterise the learners' world as growing richer and having more options for actions (variation). Haworth and Conrad (1997:xiii) see these learning experiences as having "... positive effects on their growth and development ..." Tierney (1998:164) envisages that the institution itself becomes "... student-centred in programmes, community-centred in outreach ... and nation-centred in research ..."; inexorably moving towards a responsive university". Thus, each methodology considered in the synthesis contributes to a different view of transformation from the learners' and the institution's perspectives, which should provide a rich range of elements for practice characterising the performance of the institution. Considered collectively, they represent a system for the quality management of a university. A commitment to life-long learning, critical reflection and the continuous flow of change is all characteristic of transformation. According to Harvey and Knight (1996:132–134), higher education is about "transforming the person", not simply about transforming their skills or domain understanding.

Transformation involves cognitive transcendence, engaging with the meaning of the subject, not just with relevant information. The graduates need a mastery of generic skills

to function in new environments with a degree of independence (Harvey & Knight, 1996:120-126). The development of students' talents and abilities should be at the core of higher education. There should be "... a systemic identification and synthesis ..." of programme attributes to result in a total quality of the learning environment (Haworth & Conrad, 1997:xiv). Through such a synergistic involvement of staff and the student body, a university becomes "... the most vital instrument in the process by which the collective mind is formed and transformed through its diverse ways of grasping the world ..." (Bowden & Marton, 1998:5).

It is argued that a formal quality assurance system leads to the improvement of students' learning experiences when the higher education institutions own it and when the external quality assurance domains play a supportive and facilitative role. Different authors argue that the quality of student learning is maintained through a professional commitment and engagement (e.g. Barnett, 1992; Harvey & Knight, 1996; Harvey & Newton, 2007; Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2003; Wilger, 1997). In line with this, Kahsay (2012:66–67) summarizes the key features of the good practices necessary for the functioning of an effective quality assurance system in higher education institutions as follows:

- *Focus on quality improvement*: The primary purpose of quality assurance should be improvement in student learning. This involves defining educational quality in terms of the student learning outcomes, taking care of students' needs in all aspects of the organisational processes, and making continuous quality improvement a priority. A culture of continuous improvement of learning is crucial.

- *Focus on core educational process*: Improvement of teaching, learning and assessment processes should be the *foci* of the quality assurance practice. This involves ensuring coherence in curricula, teaching-learning and assessment processes and checking whether the key educational processes are properly implemented, monitored and improved.

- *Involvement of academic staff*: Academic staff should be involved in and

committed to the development and implementation of quality assurance. This requires, as Wilger (1997:8) noted, an institutional environment within which quality is everyone's responsibility and within which a self-critical commitment to its maintenance and enhancement is a part of the professionalism of all faculty and staff members. This also involves the provision of opportunities for professional development, ensuring the motivation and satisfaction of the staff, and devising incentive mechanisms.

- *Involvement and commitment of leadership*: The institution's leadership should be involved in and committed to the development and implementation of quality assurance. This involves setting the overall direction of the institution towards improving the quality of the education, introducing policies and structures for quality assurance with clear responsibility at all levels, and monitoring their implementation. In this regard, an institution's leadership and management system is effective if it ensures the active participation of all actors (staff, students, etc.). A professionally capable, credible and visionary leader and/or manager are also crucial.

- *Participation of students*: The quality assurance systems should value the role of students in quality improvement. This involves the creation of a learning environment that ensures the active participation and commitment of the students in their learning and in the quality assurance processes.

2.12.   THE IMPACT OF QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS AND MECHANISMS ON HEIs

This section provides an account of the research findings on the effects of quality assurance mechanisms on tertiary education systems. Research on the impact of quality monitoring is difficult because of the following reasons: it is impossible to control all relevant factors to map causal relationships and the complexity and pace of change in most institutions (Harvey & Newton, 2004:149). There are also methodological problems

attached to a study of the effects of external audits (Stensaker, 2003:152); and to measure the impact is complicated due to universities' complex forms of information-processing and decision-making traditions (Weusthof, 1995:246). Another difficulty is to isolate the impact of quality assurance from the impact of the many other changes which HEIs are experiencing. In higher education, much educational change is invisible, slow and incremental (Kis, 2005:26). Despite these problems the available impact studies fall into three broad types, namely opinionated or theoretical analyses, anecdotal analyses that are based on limited available evidence, and analyses based on systematic data-collection (Harvey, 1999:17). The first type, opinionated or theoretical analyses, tend to predict the likely affects of the introduction of, or change in, evaluation systems (Wilson, 1996:152). The second type is anecdotal analyses that are based on limited available evidence, for example, the value attributed to self-evaluation is based on accumulations of such anecdotal evidence (Harvey, 1998:10). The third type is analyses based on systematic data-collection. These studies range from feasibility and system modification studies to studies of the effectiveness and the impact of the system put in place (Harvey, 1999:17). A brief overview of some of the studies relating to the impact of quality assurance systems is presented in the sub-headings that follow.

2.12.1.   Impact on teaching and learning

Some researchers (such as Gynnild, 2007, Stensaker *et al.,* 2011 and Weusthof, 1995) argue that the QA mechanisms have had positive impact on the performance of HEIs. For instance, the experience from a Dutch university suggests that internal self-reviews serve to increase faculty autonomy, as well as helping to improve the educational quality (Weusthof, 1995:235). Research at a Norwegian university implies that external quality audits have played a key role in strengthening the use of data to improve student learning (Gynnild, 2007:271). In Sweden, Wahlen (2004:139) found that the audits improved the policy and structure of institutional activities. The experience in Denmark suggests that external quality assessment using methodologies such as self-assessment, peer-review, audit report and follow-up, have resulted in useful information, and that the effectiveness

of the process is dependent on well-developed internal quality systems (Kristensen, 2010:156). A study at Sheffield Hallam University found that some processes, notably external examination, were perceived as providing a check on standard; however, there was little support for the view that external quality evaluation improved the student learning experience (Harvey & Newton, 2004:154).

A recent study using quantitative data, undertaken by Stensaker, Langfeldt, Harvey, Huisman and Westerheijden (2011:472) in Norway, suggests that national quality monitoring by an external agency had a positive impact. Their study suggests that the areas of significant positive impact as a result of external monitoring include: new routines and procedures; scholarly discussion on learning and teaching; quality of learning and teaching; and staff engagement in learning and teaching questions. Furthermore, there is agreement that the quality audit process has raised awareness of quality and systems, and that it has increased communication and transparency of accountability (Dill, 2000b:224). Research on external quality audits in the UK, New Zealand, Sweden and Hong Kong shows the effects have resulted in: increased responsibility for improving teaching and student learning; facilitating active discussion and cooperation within academic units on the means to improve teaching and student learning; clarification of responsibility for improving teaching and student learning in faculties; and providing information on the best practices both within the institution and across the systems (Dill, 2000b:221-222). Baldwin's (1997:59-60) evaluation of the impact of external quality audits at Monash University suggested that despite criticism it focused the attention on teaching and learning. Debate about effective learning and the use of student perspectives in the shaping of programmes of study had intensified; and, whether directly or coincidentally, there had been an improvement in the quality of attention given to teaching and learning. This may have been due to the external quality monitoring process or to the impact of new technology.

According to a case study on external quality evaluation in Chile (Silva *et al*., 1997:30), outstanding improvements have occurred in the teaching environment. These included curriculum reforms, higher standards in student assessment and the improvement of the

assessment instruments, innovation in professional degree programmes, the implementation of upgrading programmes for teachers, particularly in terms of the pedagogical aspects. Reportedly, further positive reactions have occurred in the academic hiring and promotion system including higher standards for staff; more stimuli to publish in refereed journals; and the revision of workloads.

Askling (1997:25) conclude that external evaluation is only one of several factors influencing institutional quality enhancement. Other demands come from, for example, increase in the number of students, growing diversity in terms of previous knowledge, and the need for external funding. However, as Askling (1997:25) and Baldwin (1997:60) point out, external quality monitoring has been a catalyst, "... it is itself a response to changes that are exerting great direct and indirect impact on institutions."

However, some sceptics argue that the quality assurance process might have very little effect on HEIs. For instance, Harvey and Newton (2004:157) point out that most studies reinforce the view that quality is about compliance and accountability, and has contributed little to the improvement of the student learning experience. Similarly, Harvey (2002b:11) reported that, "... most external evaluation led to only temporary adjustments rather than lasting improvement." There is considerable anecdotal evidence that the initial impact fades away quickly, especially if there is no significant connection between the internal and external processes. There is no evidence of the clear impact on learning; and, indeed, available research suggests that other factors entirely outweigh the impact of external quality monitoring on student learning. The structure and organisation of external quality monitoring is not compatible to the empowering of staff and students to enhance the learning situation (Horsburgh, 1997:7).

Harvey (2005:271) also argues that quality monitoring has been overwhelmed by overlapping and burdensome processes, as well as the competing notions of quality, a failure to engage learning and transformation, and a focus on accountability and compliance (Laughton, 2003:309; Mahsood, 2011:3). According to Harvey (2002:20) and Newton (2000:158), student experience and engagement in learning has been highlighted

as an area where limited improvements have been made despite the growth of quality audits. Reportedly, quality monitoring is frequently concerned with inputs, outputs and systems, rather than processes and learning outcomes. It is argued that the predominance of accountability means that quality monitoring focuses on aspects that may have little to do with outcomes in teaching and learning (Horsburgh, 1999:9-10). Similarly, Harvey and Newton (2004:157) report that most impact studies have focused on the effect of quality monitoring on staff, internal procedures, and management structures in HEIs. However, it is far less clear what impact quality assurance is having on student learning. Furthermore, it is argued that changes in learning outcomes are not necessarily linked to quality assurance mechanisms. Where positive changes to the student learning experience have taken place, these are not necessarily directly attributable to the existence of a quality assurance system, and, it is argued, that the existence of external quality arrangements provides, at the best, a legitimation for internally-driven innovation (Harvey & Newton, 2004:149). It is also argued that other factors completely outweigh the impact of external quality monitoring on student learning (Horsburgh, 1999:9).

Horsburgh's (1999:21) longitudinal study of the role and importance of external processes in quality assurance systems is a study conducted in the 1990s that addresses the impact of the latter on the students' experiences, more specifically changes to the transformative learning experiences of students. Horsburgh (1999:21) concludes that, "... quality monitoring processes had quite a narrow impact, and were not concerned with the complexity of a whole teaching programme, or issues such as leadership or the culture in which students learn", and that, "... the greatest impact on student learning was the curriculum, factors that influence the curriculum, and the teachers...", and "... the most direct impact on student learning was from teacher practices, how they help students learn and the assessment practices they employed" (Horsburgh, 1999:23). Thus, she argues that quality monitoring must focus on more than systems, inputs and outputs, if effectiveness is to be enhanced.

2.12.2. Impact on organisation and management issues within HEIs

2.12.2.1. Transparency

Increased institutional transparency is a noticeable effect of external quality assurance in higher education. Stensaker (2003:155) argued that evaluations have made the "black box" more open and quantifiable. More information than ever before is published about higher education and its outcomes, and external quality assurance systems are the main driver behind this development. Other studies in a range of countries resulted in the following positive effects: in Chile, indications of a change in institutional culture (Lemaitre 2004:89); in the West Indies, the implementation of review recommendations and enhanced learning and teaching (Gift & Bell-Hutchinson, 2007:145); and in New Zealand, an improvement in teaching and research outcomes (Carr, Hamilton & Mead, 2005:209).

2.12.2.2. Centralisation

Westerheijden (2001:70) argues that national accreditation arrangements envisage national uniformity rather than diversity. Others such as Harvey and Askling (2003:80) have also expressed their concern that external quality monitoring might inhibit innovation because of the application of conservative or rigid evaluation criteria which leads to uniformity rather than diversity and flexibility. They highlighted the need for a significant connection between internal and external processes, without which the effect of monitoring will only be temporary, rather than the permanent nature of review-inspired improvements. There are several studies indicating that external quality assurance tends to support more centralised decision-making structures in higher education institutions, stimulate debate on issues related to quality, contribute to developing a more professional administration and education support structures, and create new routines and systems for handling data and information on educational performance and quality (Askling, 1997:19; Stensaker, 2003:154; Stensaker, Langfeldt,

Harvey, Huisman & Westerheijden, 2011:465). It seems that the impact of external quality assurance systems is much more related to the structural, organisational and managerial processes within higher education institutions. Brennan and Shah (2000a:347) argued that the introduction of external quality assessment systems in many other parts of the world, over the past decade has been associated with a shift in the distribution of power within higher education. This shift has favoured the institutional level at the expense of the basic unit. It has also tended to strengthen extrinsic over intrinsic values as both managerial and market concerns have acquired greater importance compared to the disciplinary academic concerns.

2.12.2.3. Bureaucratisation

Closely related to the trend towards centralisation, is the tendency that higher education institutions have become more bureaucratic. Stensaker (2003:154-155) refers to a study from Norway which shows "... that university administration is changing its profile and functioning where simple tasks and positions are removed and replaced by administrators performing more complex and strategic tasks." Baldwin's (1997:60-61) study on the Australian quality assurance system suggests that numerous academics see the new managerial prerogatives associated with accountability requirements as undermining the traditions of collegiate decision-making and staff autonomy. As cited in Harvey and Newton (2004:155), Warde's (1996:2) impact study in the UK suggests that the most remarkable impact appeared to be the sense of declining morale, loss of job satisfaction and a decline of collegiality.

2.12.2.4. More manageralism

As demonstrated in Gosling and D'Andrea (2001:9), "... the origin of the quality industry is manageralism which is a substitute for a relationship of trust between government and universities." They see the traditional values of the university under severe threat because of the need of the quality assessments to use measures which can be seen to be more

objective and more easily accepted outside the institution. Newton (2002:56) argues that with the development of external quality assurance and the search for even greater efficiencies by higher education institutions:

> ... it will become an organisational requirement that senior managers are carried more directly into the heart of the academic domain. For academics, this suggests increased tension between the local level of department – the point of maximum professional and academic autonomy in terms of curriculum delivery, design, and standards – and the corporate requirement that the product should meet both institutional targets and external monitoring requirements (Newton, 2002:56).

2.12.2.5. Academics perception of and behaviour in response to quality assurance

Among those who have researched the impact of quality assurances systems on the academic community, Trowler (1998), (as cited in Gosling and D'Andrea, 2001:11) has provided a graphic account of the strategies adopted by academics to subvert managerial systems imposed on them with which they do not agree. Trowler (as cited in Gosling and D'Andrea 2001:11) also argued that manageralism is at best an irrelevance and a distraction from the daily business of teaching and learning, and at worst a serious threat to already vulnerable institutions. In supporting this, Martin (1999:127) acknowledges that accountability can be a potent force both for and against learning.

Newton's (2000, 2002, 2003) studies of the impact of quality and other regulatory processes at an institutional level, combine a critique of the impact with a deconstruction of the politics of quality. Based on qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with both front-line staff and academic managers, Newton (2002:47-48) explored the divergence between the views of managers and the managed. He identified a policy implementation gap and argued that situational factors and context are crucial in quality development. The success of a system may be dependent less on rigour of application, than on its contingent use by actors and interest groups, and on how the system is viewed

and interpreted by them. From this he argued that, when associated with managerial objectives quality appears as accountability and manageralism. It follows that, at the operational level, quality can only properly be understood relative to how actors, particularly front-line actors, construe and construct quality or a quality system. In turn, he argues, this demands that attention is paid to actors' subjectivities and how this influences how they react to shape, or even subvert quality policy (Newton, 2002:47-48).

The study concluded (Newton, 2002:59) that staff, especially front-line academics, do not mutely accept change, or the particular demands of quality assurance policy or systems. Policy implementation is complex and uneven. Through their own interpretative work actors attach meaning to the various aspects of the quality assurance system as they interact with it:

> They are not passive recipients of management objectives. Academic staff, in common with all actors involved, is "makers" and "shapers" of policy. They respond, adapt to or even resist and, while this may be patterned, it is not uniform. Accordingly, there is a need to focus on what academics think and do, and what meanings they attach to the different facets of policy, and how they work, change or even "work around" policy (Newton, 2002:59).

Two important themes emerged in respect of staff perceptions of quality assurance. The first theme was that quality continues to be perceived as bureaucracy, inspection, and intrusion. In respect of the second theme, quality assurance is associated with various manifestations of conforming behaviour (Newton, 2001:16).

2.13.   QUALITY MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORKS, MODELS AND APPROACHES

2.13.1.   Framework to categorise quality management models

Brennan and Shah (2000a:342) provide a framework as to how one could categorise quality management models. According to them, the choice of an approach to quality

management, as well as quality assessment depends on quality values and conceptions about what constitutes high quality in higher education. Furthermore, they also differentiate between four main types of quality values stressing different focuses in approaches to quality management. These are academic, managerial, pedagogic and employments focus.

In the first approach, the academic type of approach, the focus is on the subject field, which is associated with professorial authority, and where the academic values are of great importance: "conceptions of quality are based on subject affiliation and vary across the institution, which has limited scope to define and assess quality" (Brennan & Shah, 2000b:14). In essence, a quality management system should be decentralised, focusing on disciplinary characteristics and applying different quality standards.

The second approach, the managerial type of approach, has institutional policies and procedures as the main focus of assessment, underlying good management practices as the key factor of quality production. The characteristics of quality in this approach are considered as being invariant across the institution. Here, centralisation is seen as an essential characteristic of a quality management system, along with coupling to institutional strategies and more coherent quality standards (Brennan & Shah, 2000b:14).

The third type of approach, described as the pedagogic type of approach, is again considered as invariant across the institution. The source of quality in this type of approach is the technical – rather than the disciplinary – proficiency in teaching skills of academic staff. Unlike the first type of approach, a lot of attention is paid to a more standardised delivery process, rather than the content of the education (Brennan & Shah, 2000a:342).

The fourth approach, the employment-focus type of approach, focuses on the learning outcomes, standards and output characteristics of graduates. This type of approach deals with customer requirements, where the customers are often seen as the employers of graduates. It tends to take into account both subject-specific and core characteristics of

high quality education (Brennan & Shah, 2000b:15). Quality characteristics are regarded as both invariant and variant depending on a specific subject. The invariant dimensions could in this approach be linked to the generic skills often identified in national qualification frameworks.

These four categories or types of approaches offer a simple but efficient way of identifying key characteristics and focus on a given quality management model, and is used as a heuristic tool in further analyses (Pratasavitskaya & Stensaker, 2010:39).

2.13.2. Four caricatures of approaches to quality assurance

These four categories or types of approaches were further elaborated and applied by Luckett (2006). According to Luckett (2006:20), quality assurance systems are replete with power tensions; and according to Barnett (1994:168), the "… dialogue structure is contoured by unequal power relationships." In this regard, key questions that need to be asked in analyzing any quality assurance system are: Who is in control of the evaluation? Who initiates it, and who owns it? Is the ownership internal or external to the academic community? (Luckett, 2006:20). To capture the different possible answers to these questions, Luckett proposed four caricatures of approaches to quality assurance. These four caricatures of approaches are collegial rationality, managerial rationality, facilitative rationality and bureaucratic rationality. These adjectives are used with the term rationality to indicate that these are ways of thinking about quality assurance that lead to different approaches being adopted. In the following section these approaches, collegial rationality, managerial rationality, facilitative rationality and bureaucratic rationality, based on the work of Luckett (2006, 2007), are discussed.

2.13.2.1. Collegial rationality quality assurance approach

The purpose of this type of quality assurance is the enlightenment of academics; ideally, in order to improve their teaching practices so that the students can learn better. The

method most used in this approach of quality assurance would be self-evaluation, although it may be linked to external validation, and will feed into an internal audit. The academic teaching staff are therefore the primary audience for the findings of the evaluation, which are usually reported in a diagnostic and advisory manner (Luckett, 2006:37).

Collegial rationality is mainly concerned with the production of knowledge (research) and the promotion of the disciplines, basing its norms and values on the idea of a community of scholars' and the liberal concept of academic freedom. This rationality typically views students as novices or apprentices, and defines quality as academic excellence. Its approach to quality assurance is typically connoisseurial; that is, evaluation based on academic judgement by peers with disciplinary and experiential expertise (Luckett, 2007:101).

2.13.2.2.   Managerial rationality quality assurance approach

Kogan (2002:57) defines manageralism in higher education as the shift in power from senior academics and their departments to the central institution, and the dominance of systems over academic values, resulting in part, from an institution's need to meet new demands with fewer resources. The purpose of this type of quality assurance is to enlighten senior management, to inform them about how well their goals for the institution are being achieved, and to enable them to become more effective and efficient. Control of the evaluations is typically located at senior management level; and, usually devolved to middle management levels. The focus of this type of evaluation is on the institution as a whole and senior managers are the primary audience.

Managerial rationality works for the good of the organisation as a whole. It views good management exercised through central control as the solution to organisational effectiveness and efficiency. It also sees students as clients or customers. In this model, quality is usually understood as fitness for purpose (Luckett, 2006:40).

2.13.2.3.   Facilitative rationality quality assurance approach

In the facilitative rationality quality assurance approach, the external authority subsumes its own agenda to that of the academic community. In other words, the external authority is prepared simply to facilitate and support the quality assurance processes that occur in the institutions by arranging for them to be externally authorised and validated, and by aiming to provide expertise and useful feedback to the academics concerned. In the process, the external agent may also play a supportive role to institutional management by assisting to systematise and institutionalise quality assurance, and by providing constructive feedback to them on institutional quality assurance systems. Thus this type of quality assurance approach is owned and controlled externally, but is improvement-orientated because of its aims to facilitate and support a collegial rationality-type self-evaluation and self-improvement (Trow, 1999:16).

A typical method of quality assurance in this quadrant is an external audit. It is where the external agency validates the internal quality management system, but does not make judgements about quality *per se*. In this model of quality assurance, the evaluators are typically expert peers who operate on behalf of the external agency, but are also trusted and respected colleagues whose appointment is usually approved by the evaluated. The outcomes of the evaluation are neither punitive, nor linked to resource allocation (Luckett, 2006:43).

2.13.2.4.   Bureaucratic rationality quality assurance approach

In this approach, the authority on which the quality assurance is based is institutional or bureaucratic authority as opposed to professional authority. Bureaucratic rationality is, by definition, based on norms and values that are external to the life worlds on which it is imposed. It therefore is founded on an instrumental view of (higher) education. Bureaucratic norms and values are those related to governance and control, such as administrative efficiency and systems-building priorities. Bureaucratic rationality tends

to adopt a positivist epistemology because it is interested in setting up rule-based systems that can produce knowledge (in this case evaluation findings), and that can be considered scientific, value-free, generalisable and comparative. This means that bureaucratic rationality tends to be context insensitive and accepts cross-context judgements as unproblematic. The bureaucratic rationality quality assurance model has an accountability (and often compliance) purpose, and is externally owned and controlled. It reflects the values and interests of the external quality assurance agency, and the government to which it reports (Luckett, 2006:46).

The bureaucratic rationality quality assurance approach promotes the interests of the external quality assurance agency – the state, the funder or the professional body – and the purpose of the quality assurance is usually accountability and control. As the bureaucratic rationality approach is external to the educational process, it tends to view students as clients, citizens or (potential) voters. It subscribes to an understanding of quality as usually linked to that of value for money or fitness for purpose (Luckett, 2007:103). The bureaucratic rationality quality assurance approach typically promotes a pragmatic approach to quality assurance, involving external summative evaluation based on a goal-based, positivist methodology.

2.14.   AN OUTLINE OF THE MAIN SPECIFIC MODELS OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN EDUCATION

The body of quality management literature in education can contribute to an understanding of the quality management implementation. Therefore, this section first introduces the important quality management models developed for higher education institutions, and as proposed in the literature. The section that follows will examine three models such as the (TQM) total quality management, ISO (International organization for standardization) and EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) models that are currently the most popular quality management models in higher education. The concluding section will examine and compare these quality management models in

higher education, enroute to a better appreciation of the models' strengths and weaknesses, and of current practices in the higher education sector, as well as to see more clearly the path toward improving quality within higher education institutions.

At a theoretical level, there have been several re-examinations of fundamental quality management processes in education, and various new models have been proposed to this end in universities. Some of the significant models proposed in the recently published literature are described below.

2.14.1.   The transformative model of quality management

Quality as transformation is closely related to the theory of transformative learning, which is argued to have grown out of a confluence of post-1960s radicalism, critical pedagogy theories and a new interest in adult education as part of social welfare (Ming, 2011:5). Harvey and Knight (1996:120) have further developed the concept of transformative learning by arguing that it is more than student-centred pedagogy and perspective transformation. They linked transformation as a process of students developing confidence and self-awareness, to a continuous dialectical process of deconstructing a concept and building alternative conceptualisations. Based on this theory, students should not only engage with knowledge but also develop their capacity to understand and question existing ideas, assumptions and discourses that inform their experiences and commonsense understandings of society (Harvey & Knight, 1996:120-21).

The transformative model is premised on the notion of self-regulation, and is enhancement-led, and evidence-based. The object is the learner and learner output or outcomes, and this includes the researcher and research outcomes. In this model, the underpinning rationale is improvement. Given that the model is premised on self-regulation, it is argued that accountability follows continuous improvement (Harvey & Newton, 2004:157). Harvey and Knight (1996:39) present the transformation model as

the most appropriate learning-oriented model to quality. The emphasis is on enhancing participants, adding value to their capability, and ultimately empowering them. Hence, education is not a service for customers, but an ongoing process of transformation of the participant (Harvey & Knight, 1996:39). This model is premised in the proposition that an effective model is one that develops a quality culture of continuous improvement. It shifted the primary emphasis on quality from external scrutiny to internal effective action. There is a clear focus on student experience. Transformative learning requires a transparent process which is integrated, contributing to a rich and relevant total student experience. The term transparency means openness about the aims, processes and method of attainment of learning by the student. Integration means that such experiences are linked together into a cohesive whole. The quality assurance policies have to be learning-orientated and should be centred on the student experience. Learning is based on a dialogue between participant and providers. Dialogue involves the discussions between learners and teachers about the nature, scope and style of their learning. Dialogue also requires a dynamic exchange among the teachers about the teaching and learning process. The system requires a focus on the total experience of all aspects of the students' experience. This means a shift of focus to learning rather than teaching. The authors conclude that the transformative model is really about "... a responsive process that is explicit, integrated and based on a dialogue" (Harvey & Knight, 1996:40-41).

2.14.2.   The engagement model of quality management

Haworth and Conrad (as cited in Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2002:217) developed an engagement theory of programme quality, organised around the central idea of student, faculty (academics) and administrative engagement in teaching and learning. Based on extensive interviews of role-players involved in higher education, the authors define high quality programmes as those that "... contribute to the learning experiences of students that have positive effects on their growth and development." The theory maintains that in high quality programmes the principal stakeholders (academics, students and administrators) invest in five separate clusters of programme attributes, each of which

contributes to enriching the learning experiences for students. These programmes include: participatory culture, interactive teaching and learning, adequate resources, faculty and basic infrastructure. Each of these contributes to enriching the learning experience of students (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2002:217). In this model, like the transformative model, programme quality that enhances students' learning experience is considered a primary purpose of higher education. In broad terms, the engagement theory model advances a perspective on programme quality that emphasises student learning as the primary purpose of higher education, highlights the pivotal role that academics, administrators and students play, and provides a template for assessing the quality (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2002:217).

2.14.3.   The university of learning model

In this model, Bowden and Marton (1998:219-220) examine the organisational characteristics of higher education from a pedagogical perspective. The authors postulate that in all the commonly perceived functions of a university – teaching, research and community involvement – the core process is learning (at different levels). Hence, they argue that "... quality in a university context has a lot to do with the quality of learning and the quality of learning has a lot to do with qualities of different ways of seeing." When the learner "... widens the range of possibilities of seeing the same thing, the learner's world grows richer and has more options for actions." They begin to develop a perception of a range of ways in which the given phenomenon could be interpreted (variation). Then they also begin to distinguish between the aspects by differentiating among them to focus on the one most relevant to the situation (Bowden & Marton, 1998: 220).

2.14.4.   The responsive university model

Tierney (1998:163) collated the views of a number of leading scholars on the issue of restructuring for high performance, which together formed a model for excellence: the

responsive university. The model is based on the premise that the public will judge the university in terms of the quality of the relationships and the quality of the outcomes; i.e. quality relationships are characterized by mutuality and equality. Therefore, to survive universities will have to be responsive and be service-oriented. The emphasis is on the development of new internal relationships through communication and partnerships as well as new external relationships including social partnerships with communities. The term responsiveness comes from a focus on customers: this means being student-centred in programmes, community-centred in outreach and nation-centred in research (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2002:218). There is a need to move away from the traditional production function of instruction to developing new tools to meet the learning needs of students. Organisation systems must be information coupled; that is, with transparent availability of relevant operational data to be responsive.

The academic staff should "... regularly review and take into account shifts in student demand, resource allocations, departmental goals and the evolving mission of the institution ..." (Tierney, 1998:165). The staff must also develop a commitment to annual performance contracts, which can determine the extent to which and the ways in which the institution will be a responsive one. There is an obligation to measure and to determine whether each staff member are adding value or making a difference. The acceptance of assessment and evaluation as an ongoing activity will become the core thrust of the new academic culture. External relationships are important for enhancing quality with joint ventures across academic units and between institutions. Partnerships with government will be necessary to transform institutional performance, so that it is better aligned with public purposes, with increasing emphasis on relationships and outcomes – the university will be more a network than a place (Tierney, 1998:170).

2.14.5. The generic quality management model

A generic model of quality management has been put forward by Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2002, 2005). It is a synthesis of the transformative model, the engagement

model, the learning model and the responsive university model (Pratasavitskaya & Stensaker, 2010:43). In their research findings they advocated the need for a holistic model of quality management in higher education. They tried to combine the existing research outcomes on quality in the field into a more integrated framework. Hence, the model is an attempt to combine existing concepts and contributions emphasising transformation, engagement, learning and responsiveness in one single perspective. The central themes that emerge from these models are student learning and an active collaboration at the educational delivery level. Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2002:219) examined these themes and took them as a basis for their generic quality management model. They supported the idea expressed by other authors that quality in higher education institutions relates strongly to the quality of the students' learning, and that the focus has to be on enriching the learning experiences for students. It is argued that the improvement of students' learning experiences could be achieved if based on critical dialogue between the learners and the teachers about the nature and style of their learning, and also between the teachers about the teaching and learning process, and communication with the external partners.

Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2002:222) argued that to implement the generic quality management model a shared vision has to be developed within the community, based on an agreement on how the quality at all levels would be monitored, integrated and improved. The objective is "... to obtain a seamless meshing of different approaches to quality ..." (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2002:223). Through the dialogues the participants would develop common principles pertaining to the institution's values, methods for effective operation and new organisational solutions to create a foundation for an organisational architecture for learning. According to Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2002:223), this would maintain a continuous synergy with a deep learning cycle (Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith & Kleiner, 1994:46) of awareness and sensibilities about the higher education institution's role in the community. The generic model for quality management has, therefore, as its objective the creation of a synergy between educational and organisational theories.

2.14.6. The university as learning organisation model

The concept of learning organisation was first developed by Senge (1990:3). Senge (1990:3) offers the description of a learning organisation as an organisation "... where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together." Another definition stresses the ability of the learning organisation to adapt to the rapidly changing environment of the contemporary world, and to anticipate the future. Thus, a learning organisation is a consummately adaptive one (Meade, 1995:114). However, this definition offers little in the way of concrete explanation. More useful are definitions that address the activities of the learning organisation. Garvin (1993:80) suggests that "... a learning organisation is an organisation skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights." He thus emphasises that a learning organisation learns by acquiring new knowledge and then implements that knowledge to improve its functioning, specifying these as the essential functions of the learning organisation (Garvin, 1993:80).

The move to the strengthening of a culture of continuous quality improvement will be backed by introducing procedures that facilitate the rate at which the university organisation is able to learn and grow. An organisation learns in two ways: either its individual members learn, or it incorporates people who bring with them knowledge new to the organisation. In either case, the information must be transmitted to other members; it is insufficient for individuals alone to learn, and the dissemination of knowledge is a necessary step for organisational learning (Simon, 1991:125).

The leaders play a crucial role in creating a learning organisation. The only way to build a learning culture that continues to learn is for leaders themselves to realise that they do not know and must teach others to accept that they do not know. The learning task is then a shared responsibility (Schein, 1992:367).

2.14.7. Massy's quality process domains model

Massy (1997:249) proposed a Six Quality Process Domains Model. Although this model is meant to serve as a generic tool for all higher education institutions enjoying a certain degree of autonomy, the background for the design of this model can be related to the quality-process reviews conducted in 1996 at a range of the higher education institutions in Hong Kong for the purpose of assuring value for money in the higher education sector. The aim of the model was "... to focus attention on teaching and learning, assist institutions in their efforts to improve teaching and learning quality, and enable the institutions to discharge their obligation to maintain accountability for quality" (Massy, 1997:255).

In his model, Massy (1997, 2003) reviewed organisational issues, and faculty and departmental education quality processes on the basis of six domains, which included the determination of desired learning outcomes, the design of curricula, the design of teaching and learning processes, the design of student examinations and the use of examination results, the implementation of quality, and the commitment of resources to education quality work. Each of Massy's quality process domains were further elaborated by Pratasavitskaya and Stensaker (2010:42), and are presented below.

The first domain, the determination of desired learning outcomes, stresses the goals of study programmes and how they relate to students' needs, comprising students' prior knowledge, abilities, further employment opportunities and quality of life. The second domain, the design of the curriculum, addresses the processes of designing and improving the programme of the curriculum. These include the programme contents and from what perspective it will be taught; the role of design inputs from students, staff and employers; what will be done to create a coherent curriculum by collecting systematic feedback and acting upon it while adjusting it to programme goals, when necessary; and the assurance of the standard of academic programmes offered by organisations. The third domain, the design of teaching and learning processes, presupposes processes to design, review and improve teaching and learning methods, materials and the students' learning

environment, which include considering desired and achieved learning outcomes, the role of external inputs and students' views, and the innovation to improve student learning.

The fourth domain, the design of student examinations and the use of examination results, highlights the processes to design, review and improve the examination of students and its relation to educational objectives, including the placing of responsibility for examination; mechanisms for feedback to improve examinations; and the processes that connect examinations with educational objectives more closely. The fifth domain, the implementation of quality, implies processes that assure correct, coherent and effective implementation of learning outcomes, curricula, teaching, learning and examination design and processes that include staff recruitment and development; peer-review; measures of students' learning experience outside the classroom; and teacher-student interaction. The sixth domain, the commitment of resources to education and quality work, focuses on the use of resources by organisations to enhance quality work; the adequate funding of quality management processes; the establishment of incentives for rewarding good performance in delivering quality education; and whether unit levels receive sufficient funding to perform their mission (Pratasavitskaya & Stensaker, 2010:42).

2.14.8. The three quality dimensions model

The three quality dimensions model was developed by Mergen, Grant and Widrick (2000:347). It comprises a set of measurement parameters to be used in evaluating the quality of education, and the tools necessary for evaluating them. The basic parameters of quality can be grouped into three areas: quality of design; quality of conformance; and quality of performance. A brief description of these three parameters is provided below (Mergen *et al*., 2000:347).

The first parameter is quality of design, which refers to determining the characteristics of a good education in a given market segment at a given cost. It is determined by three

factors: (1) the quality of the insights gained about stakeholders and the depth of understanding of their requirements; (2) the quality of the process used to translate these requirements into a product and/or service that provide value to stakeholders; and (3) the continuous improvement of the design process (Mergen *et al.*, 2000:347).

The second parameter, the quality of conformance, deals with how well the designed requirements (i.e. the education ideals of a higher education institution) are satisfied including the cost requirements, uniformity and dependability. Quality of conformance is determined by the minimisation of variance from the design requirements for the products and/or services. Thus, for each design specification, a proper measure or measures should be developed in order to make sure that the design requirements are being met (Mergen, Grant & Widrick, 2004:425). The third area, the quality of performance, deals with how well the education serves the student in his/her environment. It is a measure of the value that students derive from their education (Mergen *et al.*, 2000:347).

The three parameters of the model are interrelated. For example, low quality of performance may lead to changes in the quality of design or quality of conformance. Similarly, low quality of conformance may require better quality control techniques or changes in the design stage. The rationale for the parameters of the model was that they are often used in quality practices, and the model itself has been used in several industries. In addition, the three components collectively represent a comprehensive approach to quality management. Quality management implementation should always address design, conformance and performance (Mergen *et al.*, 2000:347).

2.14.9.   The comprehensive educational quality assurance model

This model was proposed by Boyle and Bowden (1997:118), and its rationale was shaped by their general knowledge of quality assurance and academic needs and culture. According to the authors, the requirements for comprehensive quality assurance

approaches include the following *foci*: 1) Vision, primary purpose and plans which includes elements such as the overarching purpose or goal of the institution, key values, principles, strategic plans and quality policy; 2) Leadership and management that include elements such as vision, responsibility sharing and team orientation; 3) People which includes elements such as professional development and training, effective communication and performance management; 4) Customer focus that includes elements such as knowledge of expectations, desired outcomes and client satisfaction; 5) Evaluation, information, learning and continual quality improvement; and 6) Structures, policy and procedures (Boyle & Bowden, 1997:116).

The comprehensive educational quality assurance model includes a number of enabling conditions, basic principles and values, as well as a set of related key elements. According to Boyle and Bowden (1997:118), the model should be interpreted in the light of its principal elements as listed below.

2.14.9.1. *Key enabling conditions*

This principle includes strong leadership commitment in terms of the development of quality assurance and a culture of quality, adequate resources, quality assurance as a super-ordinate goal, the primary focus of quality assurance is the institution's primary purpose (student learning), and that quality assurance and planning are related. Role-players must be supported, and quality assurance must utilise knowledge of emerging good practice and expert knowledge in the field (Boyle & Bowden, 1997:118).

2.14.9.2. *Key principles and values*

Key principles and values include among others continual quality improvement, an integrated and systemic quality assurance framework, and effective evaluation and improvement-led quality assurance.

2.14.9.3.   *Key output elements*

The key output elements are evidence-based quality improvements in student learning (programmes), and evidence for accountability requirements, such as knowledge of the quality.

2.14.9.4.   *Key enabling/process elements*

The key enabling/process elements include vision, values and strategic goals (including plans); programme quality assurance system and processes; faculty development programmes; assessment of student learning (processes and information on outcomes); and faculty/personnel evaluation systems.

2.14.9.5.   *Key support systems*

Key support systems include support groups, structures, policies and resources, and their quality assurance system. Seeing the elements in the model in an integrated way is crucial to the notion of quality assurance in the model.

2.14.10.   Dill's framework for academic quality management

The framework proposed by Dill (1992:46), suggests that a higher education programme may be conceived as an interrelated system. Within the system, various sources supply students who are then educated through a designed programme featuring specific educational processes, and ultimately placed with various customers. According to this framework, the educational programme is not static. The educational programme should be continually designed and redesigned based on stakeholder needs as well as organisational knowledge and expertise. Quality in this framework, is not assessed in, or not controlled in, but designed in. In this perspective, academic quality is the responsibility of all academic programmes with strong leadership exercised collegially by the faculty as a whole. Academic quality management includes source management and

student selection; academic programme design; customer needs research; and the design and management of a supporting quality information system. An elaboration of the aspects follows.

- *Source management and student selection*: Source management entails identifying and tracking higher education institutions in terms of the quality of their student product over time. Thus, the academic quality management approach focuses on cross-functional teams and increased coordination of related processes including admission, registration, etc. A concern with student quality and success is the underlying idea in this regard.

  This academic quality management perspective would place great emphasis on the relationship between student selection and long-term student success, as well as the integration of student selection with the process of academic programme design. Furthermore, the academic quality management process also puts emphasis on assuring the continual improvement and reliability of incoming student performance based on measures of academic quality defined as critical by those involved in designing the academic programme.

- *Academic programme design*: Improving teachers' skills in instruction, course planning and student evaluation are the major concerns in this framework. This programme design stresses the importance of cross-functional design teams, educational evaluation and materials production. The early identification of vital academic programme components can contribute to reducing predictable variation in academic quality. This framework also emphasises the importance of the sequencing of various academic programme components to effective student learning.

- *Customer needs research:* The model recognises the importance of conducting research on college alumni as well as on potential employers. This is to determine the relevance of academic skills and knowledge to post-academic success. Surveys on the perceptions of alumni in various occupational sectors as to what

constitutes quality academic preparation could provide institutions with the potentially valuable customer research.

- *Design and management of a supporting quality information system*: A quality information system includes measures of the students' performance. The aspect entails measures based on assessment rooted in the educational process which include student admission and placement, dropout, graduates' competence and their satisfaction in their respective programmes. The information gained can be integrated with an active initiative in programme design. This model puts emphasis on institutional processes and conditions that affect student-learning experience.

2.14.11. The holistic educational development model

The holistic educational development model developed by Gosling and D'Andrea (2001:11) involves initiating and managing three major areas: academic development, learning development and quality development. Balancing improvement and accountability is a central theme in this model (Gosling & D'Andrea, 2001:12). Gosling and D'Andrea (2001:12) argued that a quality system is a system that "... not only performs a regulatory function but one that functions to improve the quality of the educational experience, one that provides a developmental function as well ..." (Gosling & D'Andrea, 2001:11). They further state that the dilemma outlined above, causes some tension in higher education institutions between offices responsible for quality assurance and educational development. The reason for this tension arises from the differences between these values, because quality assurance focuses on quality assessment and educational development on quality enhancement.

Therefore, Gosling and D'Andrea (2001:11) saw the holistic educational development model as the one that combines the enhancement of learning and teaching with the quality and standards monitoring processes in a higher education institution. In this

model, educational development includes the initiation and management of three major areas: academic development, learning development and quality development. According to the model, the activities of the educational development office would create a "quality loop". It takes the development, implementation and evaluation of the educational provision full circle by supporting the process of curriculum development with knowledge of current pedagogical theory and practice. It would also enhance the necessary professional development for teaching staff on teaching and learning strategies that would meet the educational goals and objectives of the curriculum developed.

One observation Gosling and D'Andrea (2001:11) made is that there is usually little dialogue between the offices responsible for curriculum development and for supporting students' learning, and for the quality assurance of both, as the responsibilities for these main areas are often separated. Thus, the important issue is then to create links between curriculum development and quality assurance by creating a collegial environment where quality is assured during the development of the curriculum. Moreover, it can also improve students' learning development. The linkage between learning development, academic development and quality development brings the expertise of each area into the educational process. The authors argued that improvement will take place if students are provided with sufficient support to achieve their educational objectives (Gosling & D'Andrea, 2001:11).

Gosling and D'Andrea (2001:12) claimed that this model offers many advantages for a higher education institution, staff and students. Firstly, it creates the linkage between quality assurance and educational development by supporting teaching activities to enhance the students' educational experience. Secondly, it facilitates the dialogue between those responsible for quality assurance and the ones responsible for educational development about the internal and external quality assessment policies and procedures. As a result "... there is less duplication of effort and a more holistic understanding of the relationship between quality assurance and learning enhancement ..." (Gosling & D'Andrea, 2001:12). The cooperation between the quality assurance processes and the quality enhancement processes can lead to a more effective dissemination of educational

policies within an institution and to maintaining good standards across the range of institutional provision.

An important aspect of the model is that it focuses on practice rather than on documentation. The outcomes of the model are represented not as measurable scores but as the development of quality assurance skills and processes accepted by staff as being beneficial for the students. The academics are free to decide on appropriate activities to achieve their goals; and there is no methodology or ideology imposed on the academics, as the model is based on their reflective practice. Therefore, quality development replaces trust in academics to investigate and evaluate their practices and to find ways of improving quality (Gosling & D'Andrea, 2001:13).

2.14.12. Veress's quality management model

In his model, Veress (as cited in Csizmadia, 2006:67) examines quality management of higher education from an engineering perspective. He defined the notion of quality as the satisfaction of stakeholders. Veress (as cited in Csizmadia, 2006:67) stresses that only the "demand-satisfaction process" has quality according to the modern quality management interpretation, while production or consumer processes alone do not. In order to improve quality it has to be known and measured (estimated). Organisations can measure the quality of education, the satisfaction of stakeholders, etc. but if they do not have clear educational processes, regulation processes and conformity control processes they cannot reproduce the processes under the same conditions.

Organisations can declare the satisfaction of stakeholders, but they do not know what kinds of activities and processes produced it. Thus, they do not know what to change for improvement. Therefore, he emphasises a clear description of educational and secondary processes concerning education, the regulation of processes, conformity control processes; and lastly, but most importantly, quality control processes (satisfaction of stakeholders). Furthermore, he stresses the importance of a "goal-oriented" quality

management system where a goal system is needed for regulating these activities. The quality goal system must be derived from organisational quality policy, which should be derived from the organisational mission (Csizmadia, 2006:67).

2.14.13.   Csizmadia's quality management framework for higher education

This model proposed by Csizmadia (2006) is based on insights derived from a review of quality assurance and management models previously described in the literature. This model is grounded in the basic system model that characterizes higher education as an academic organisation. It employs the input-output approach with a focus on education and its direct support processes. The main elements of the model are described under the input, throughput and output dimensions.

The input dimension includes external influences such as governmental expectations, accreditation agencies, students' demands and resources. The specific educational processes such as academic, governance and support processes are categorised under the throughput dimension. Finally, the elements such as student satisfaction with courses, student/employer satisfaction with degree programmes, study results, research output and services are categorised under output. This model also focuses on education and support processes that influence quality of learning outcomes.

2.15.   THE GENERAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT MODELS

Under this section, industry-originated quality management models are presented. Industry-originated quality management models are popular in higher education institutions all over the world. Therefore, the most popular models such as TQM, EFQM and ISO will be described and discussed. This is not the place to provide a complete analysis and description of these models. Instead the basic elements of these models will be described.

2.15.1. The total quality management (TQM) model

The TQM model is derived from the 1951 Total Quality Control concept originated by Feigenbaum. Kanji, Malek and Tambi (1999:129) consider that the rise of TQM in HEIs is a "... product of the market ideologies of the 1980's and of the manageralism that accompanied it." As is the case with the definition of the concept of quality, it is also very difficult to find a unique and unequivocal understanding about what is TQM. Although there is no single definition or approach to total quality management, a number of issues can be found in most of the approaches: improvement costumer-driven definitions of quality; cultural change; organisation-wide involvement in quality; organisational structure; management commitment; built-in quality, the "quality chain"; statistical techniques; and team work. Continuous quality improvement, quality consistency, participation of academics, students and non-academic staff, satisfaction of the clients' needs and the existence of management procedures that reinforce quality are a number of the TQM principles (Harvey, 1995:124).

 Kanji *et al.* (1999:136) has provided insight into how to link the TQM process to a quality assurance system. Kanji's Business Excellence Model is based on his pyramid principles of TQM. According to this model, organisations have to be guided through the TQM principles and core concepts by leaders in order to achieve business excellence (Kanji *et al*., 1999:135). He states that TQM is suitable for all higher education institutions regardless of age, size or type of control, i.e. whether public or private organisations. Kanji *et al.'*s (1999:152) model builds on four principles: delight the customer, people-based management, continuous improvement, and management by fact. An elaboration of the four principles follows.

- *Delight the customer:* Delight means being best at what matters most to customers, and this changes over time. Being in touch with these changes and delighting the customer now and in the future is an integral part of TQM.

- *People-based management:* Knowing what to do, how to do it and getting feedback on performance is one way of encouraging people to take responsibility for the quality of their work. Involvement and commitment to customer satisfaction are ways to generate this.

- *Continuous improvement:* Continuous improvement or incremental change, and not major breakthroughs, is the aim of all who wish to move towards total quality.

- *Management by fact:* Knowing the current performance levels of the products or services in the customers' hands and of all employees is the first stage of being able to improve. Management must have the facts necessary to manage business at all levels. Giving that information to people so that decisions are based upon facts rather than gut feelings is essential to continuous improvement.

Kanji's Business Excellence Model can be used to measure business excellence in order to show how well different areas of the organisation, i.e. leadership, continuous improvement and the other TQM principles are performing. It has been constructed in such a way to allow direct comparison across each area while at the same time being able to compare the same business in different geographical areas. The Business Excellence model also allows a particular business to be measured over time. The model is therefore a measurement of the complex interaction between total quality management principles and business excellence of the organisation at a certain point (Kanji *et al.*, 1999:148).

2.15.2.   The ISO 9000 standards series as procedural approach to quality assurance

The ISO 9000 series is a set of international management standards designed to govern quality assurance and was developed in 1987 by the International Organisation for Standardization, based in Geneva, Switzerland. ISO 9000 provides a framework for a systematic approach to process management. It requires a detailed account of procedures and operations, including the documentation of how a company designs, produces,

monitors, packages and ships its products. With ISO 9000 the focus is on management processes that affect quality (Abraham, Crawford, Carter, & Mazotta, 2000:182). ISO 9000 can be viewed as a set of generally accepted accounting principles for documenting quality procedures. It provides a framework for showing customers how products are tested, employees are trained, records are kept and defects are fixed. 9000 refers to the series of standards, which are numbered in the 9000 range.

ISO 9001 specifies a quality assurance standard for organisations wishing to demonstrate their capability to control their processes for design as well as for the production of the product or service. ISO 9002 is identical to ISO 9001 except for the deletion of all quality system requirements for design control. ISO 9003 specifies a quality assurance model for an organisation wishing to demonstrate its ability to assure quality to specified requirements at the final inspection and the test stage. ISO 9003 should be used when conformance to specified requirements is to be assured solely at the final inspection and the test (Abraham *et al.,* 2000:182).

From the current versions, the ISO 9001:2000 quality management system consists of a set of quality standards that have been revised and improved in order to better be applied to a wider variety of organizations (including education and service organizations). ISO 9001:2000 is a more generic and flexible standard that focuses on designing and establishing a quality management system. It also aims at meeting and enhancing the requirements of the customers, organisations and other concerned parties. ISO 9001:2000 is a process model that integrates the various internal processes within an organisation such as management responsibility, resource management, product (and or service) realisation and measurement. In addition, ISO 9001:2000 creates a quality management system that is focused on customer satisfaction and continual improvement of the system through objective evaluation (Thonhauser, 2008:335).

ISO certification comprises a third-party audit carried out by an accredited certification agency. It provides a company with a certificate to say that it has reached (or maintained) a level of quality system which meets the criteria laid out in ISO 9001, 9002 or 9003. For

a company to be recognised as being compliant to ISO, it must be audited by independent qualified auditors who work for an authorized ISO registrar prior to the company being recommended; and, subsequently recognised as ISO registered. An ISO registration is, however, not valid for a lifetime. Registration is dependent on periodic follow-up audits. Consequently, a company must always maintain its quality system compliant to ISO standards if it wishes to remain registered (Thonhauser, 2008:335).

2.15.3. The EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) model

The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) excellence model contains a number of criteria that are divided into sub-criteria and are designed to address every aspect of an organisation. The EFQM Excellence model was introduced in 1991 as the framework for organisational self-assessment and as the basis for judging entrants to the European Quality Award system (Borut, 2005:364).

The EFQM is a non-prescriptive model that recognises that there are many approaches to achieving sustainable organisational excellence. Excellence can be defined as the outstanding practice in managing the organisation and achieving results based on fundamental concepts, which include: results orientation, customer focus, leadership and constancy of purpose, processes and facts, involvement of people, continuous improvement and innovation, mutually beneficial partnerships, and public responsibility. Behaviours, activities or initiatives based on these concepts are often referred to as Quality Management. The EFQM model is based on nine criteria and argues that excellent results with respect to performance, customers, people and society are achieved through leadership driving, policy and strategy, people, partnership and resources as well as processes (Borut, 2005:364).

The self-assessment process based on the EFQM excellence model allows the organisation to discern its strengths, as well as areas in which improvement can be made. Therefore, the EFQM model could be used as an engine of improvement, as comparisons

of results with internal targets, competitors or similar organisations, and "best in class" organisations could (should) be used to prioritise and drive improvement. Ideally, the self-assessment process culminates in planned improvement actions, which are then monitored for progress. Regular use of self-assessment ensures that sound approaches are used and developed in the organisation (Samuelsson & Nilsson, 2002:21).

The literature suggests that a self-assessment tool based on business excellence models is helpful, as ongoing self-assessment using the EFQM excellence model, for example, is systematically helping organisations identify and correct gaps in their performance. The use of a recognised model will help carry out self-assessment quickly and effectively (Lee & Quazi, 2001:123).

Despite the general acceptance of the EFQM model among academics and practitioners alike, researchers warn that organisations face considerable difficulties and problems when trying to measure their overall performance in a bid to identify strengths, as well as areas for improvement, and to prioritise efforts (Borut, 2005:365).

2.16. A REFLECTION ON THE QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORKS, MODELS AND APPROACHES

Quality in higher education, how to enhance it and how to evaluate it has been placed squarely on the contemporary agenda in higher education. The literature from the late 1980s onward suggests a continuing interest in the popular industrial quality assurance models such as TQM in the higher education sector (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2002:215). However, the theoretical compatibility of the measures to higher education is controversial (Harvey, 1995b:140).

TQM can be considered as the first quality management model in higher education that resulted in discussions about the potential relevance for the sector, as well as its educational and social implications. Although there have been some studies showing

certain positive changes in several areas of institutional activities, such as improved enrolment, retention and internal institutional environment (Pratasavitskaya & Stensaker, 2010:38), some authors (Seymour, 1991:12) argue that TQM failed with respect to higher education. Among the reasons for the unsuccessful implementation of TQM in higher education institutions, Seymour (1991:12) mentioned the resistance to change; insufficient administrative commitment; high time investment due to personal training; the difficulty of the application of the TQM tools to the higher education institution environment; little experience of team leaders and staff in working as a team; and the concern of the institutions about the results being not sufficient enough. The ISO 9001:2000 and the excellence model – European Foundation for Quality Management – are also among the popular industry-originated models that have been applied to higher education. Nonetheless, Csizmadia (2006:61) argued that the ISO approach entails too general a view of the production processes of higher education. Hence, after the first wave of attempts to copy private-sector models in higher education, more attention has been devoted to the development of quality management models that would take into consideration the specific characteristics of higher education institutions (Harvey, 1995:140).

From the educationally-oriented management models for higher education cited in the previous section, two focal points seem to emerge: student learning and the dynamic collaboration around it. All the educationally-oriented management models emphasise student learning experience as the basis for quality. For example, the transformative model of quality management of Harvey and Knight (1996:11) requires quality policies to focus on the student learning experience. The theory of the engagement model of quality management of Haworth and Conrad (1997:xiv) maintains its focus on a compelling definition of student learning as the primary purpose of higher education. The responsive university model (Tierney, 1998:164) emphasises communication, with new partnerships, both internally and externally.

The generic model of quality assurance model in education proposed by Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2002:220) also focuses on the transformation of the learners. They suggested

that quality assurance policies have to be learning-oriented with the emphasis on students' experience, "... empowering students through adding value to their capability and ultimately empowering them." Massy (1997:225) maintained that organisational issues, faculty and departmental education quality assurance processes should be designed in the way that they lead to the improvement of the students' learning.

Gosling and D'Andrea (2001:11) saw a quality assurance system as a system "... that functions to improve the quality of the educational experience … and provides a developmental function as well". They emphasised the necessity of linking curriculum development with quality management to enhance students' learning development (Gosling & D'Andrea, 2001:11). A further shared view among proponents of the educationally-oriented management models is the need for interaction and dialogue at the education delivery level. For instance, the University of Learning (Bowden & Marton, 1998:189) model highlights a synergistic involvement of academics, on what is common and what is complementary. Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2002:220) required the students' learning experience to be based on a dialogue between a teacher and students, as well as between higher education institutions themselves and the external community. Massy (1997:256-260) foresaw teaching and learning to be based on teacher-student interaction, mentoring and cooperative peer learning. Gosling and D'Andrea (2001:11-15) underlined the creation of teaching and learning strategies that would meet the educational goals of the curriculum development, and would contribute to the improvement of the quality of students' experience of higher education as well.

An element shared by most models is to emphasise the need for different management measures to coordinate the educational processes at all levels of a higher education institution. Thus, Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2002:220) gave leadership an important role in creating and securing an appropriate collegial culture in order to achieve "... transformation of the learners... ". Moreover, transformation of the students, indeed the institutions themselves, forms the thrust of all the educationally-oriented models. Harvey and Knight (1996:7-10) emphasise the essence of quality in education as "transformation" – a "critical ability" in students, to assess and develop knowledge for

themselves. Bowden and Marton (1998:7) give a subtle pedagogic interpretation of transformation as the ability in learners to differentiate and focus on the most relevant solution. It is the key task of the programme teams to bring this about.

Taking into consideration the key features of the models, it can be argued that an effective quality assurance model in higher education is one that focuses on the core educational activities and processes that affect the quality of the student learning experience. The simplistic application of models from industry (e.g. ISO, TQM and EFQM) in higher education is unlikely to improve quality. The support and management areas can be managed by implementing formal quality management models but they are not adapted to the core education processes.

Based on the above discussions, it is argued that the approaches reported so far in the literature of attempting to implement quality management models as practised in industry across all the operations of a university is flawed in view of their tenuous fit with the core operation: education. The other extreme of ignoring the currently accumulated experience in implementing quality management models in industry would be equally unwise as a substantial segment of the university's function is amenable to service quality management systems (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2002:216). Therefore, the only logical conclusion that can be drawn in relation to a model for quality management in higher education is that inspiration that derives from models that have been developed and used in other organisations can be useful, but should not ignore the specific core functions of higher education, i.e. education and research. Therefore, sufficient attention should be paid to the specific educational processes concerning quality management, namely defining education quality in terms of student outcomes; focusing on the actual process of teaching; striving for coherence in the department's curriculum and educational processes; working collaboratively to achieve mutual involvement and support; basing decisions on facts wherever possible; identifying and learning from best practice; and, making improvement a top priority.

2.17.   CONCLUSION

In this Chapter, selected literature was reviewed on the topics related to quality and quality assurance in the context of higher education. The review of the literature on the definition of quality in education, in general, and in higher education in particular reveals that the concept is not easy to define. Various definitions were given, with no common agreement, which reflects the complexity of the meaning of quality. Authors in the area grouped the definitions of quality into five approaches: quality as exceptional, quality as consistency, quality as fitness for purpose, quality as value for money, and quality as transformation. There is consensus among some scholars that education is a sector with many stakeholders, who perceive quality with different combinations of dimensions. The different definitions of quality also reflect the different concerns at different levels.

Most authors agreed that quality assurance is an all-embracing term referring to an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) the quality of a higher education system, institutions, or programmes. The review of the literature also revealed five interrelated factors in explaining the increased importance and strengths of the quality assurance movement. These included the potential decline in academic standards due to massification, lost of stakeholders' confidence of traditional academic quality management capabilities, budget restrictions, increased demand for accountability, and the increase in competitiveness and diversity of the education environment. The review of the literature also revealed four purposes or functions of quality assurance. Each of these purposes demands a specific focus, which influences the architecture and methodology of the quality assurance mechanism and process. The focus of the first purpose concerns the internal institutional level itself, whereas the second, third, and fourth purposes were centred on the external responsibilities of the educational institutions in relation to the stakeholders. The rhetoric and documentary preambles in many countries refer to quality evaluation as a process of improvement; yet, all the emphases are on accountability, compliance and, in some cases, control of the sector.

The literature review also provided a variety of approaches and methodologies to quality assurance which are worthy of closer examination especially when creating or planning to implement a quality assurance system in higher education. These include accreditation, assessment, audit, and peer-review. The strengths as well as the weaknesses of each approach were also discussed. The literature review also highlighted a number of criticisms from various authors on quality assurance in general. This ranged from its control mechanism nature, focus on accountability and compliance, focus on process rather than outcomes, efficacy and cost-effectiveness of the system, and the approaches taken in its implementation. Countering such criticisms, some of the features of effective external and internal quality assurance systems are discussed.

This literature review provides an account of the research findings on the effects of quality assurance mechanisms on tertiary education systems. However, there was a general agreement in the literature that there is no simple causal model of impact. Some researchers argued that the QA mechanisms have had positive impacts on the performance of HEIs. However, some sceptics argue that the quality assurance process might have no or very little effect on HEIs. The literature also revealed that there is little concrete research on the impact of external quality on either learning or research. There was some agreement that quality assurance legitimises the discussion of teaching. It makes it acceptable to discuss teaching quality and innovation.

The recent literature also highlights the notions of both the industry-originated and education-oriented quality management models. It is concluded from the literature that industry-originated quality management models can be useful, but the specific core functions of higher education, i.e. education and research should not ignored.

The next Chapter presents an outline and discussion of the theoretical framework of the study.

CHAPTER 3

THE THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY: AN ORGANISATION AND ITS ENVIRONMENTS

3.1.   INTRODUCTION

There is general agreement among social scientists that an organisation does not and cannot exist in a vacuum, but has to interact with its environment for achieving its basic objectives. As such the open systems perspective is uncontested. Accordingly, the first section of the Chapter provides an overview of the organisational theories that are used in this study against the backdrop of the open-systems theory. The issue of organisational responses to environmental demand was addressed from the contingency and neo-institutional perspectives. Contingency theory concentrates its analytical focus on the internal adjustments to the organization as it seeks to modify procedures to meet the changing demands of the organisational environment. Neo-institutional theory focuses more specifically on the pressures and constraints of the institutional environment. Both approaches provide valuable insights in explaining organisational response to governmental reform or environmental pressures.

Thus, subsections 2.1 and 2.2 of this Chapter present a brief discussion of these organisational theories. The main elements of the models are discussed in subsection 2.3. It also provides an overview of studies on quality assurance in higher education that employ organisational change theories. The final section of this Chapter presents an outline and discussion of the conceptual framework of the study.

3.2.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS OF THE STUDY

3.2.1.   Contingency theory

Contingency theory is located in the concept of organizations as open systems. In other words, open systems theory provides the broad framework for understanding contingency theory whereby organizations exist and continuously interact with the external environment (Michael, 2012:14). Open systems refers to the concept that organizations are strongly influenced by their environment. It acknowledges that environmental forces shape the structure and behaviour of organizational systems. The environment also provides key resources that sustain the organization and lead to change and survival. Thus, open systems approaches view organizations as systems which take inputs from the environment and through a series of activities transform or convert these inputs into outputs, and discharge the outputs to the external environment in the form of goods and services. In higher education, for example, inputs include classrooms, teachers, desks, computers, academic knowledge, and pedagogy. The outputs of higher education are research, education, and knowledge production. The constantly changing environment and the exchange of information between the environment and HEIs in particular means that HEIs constantly change their programmes and services to meet the needs of the environment. As a result, HEIs are described as open systems in the literature (Kezar & Eckel, 2004:394).

A growing number of scholars are trying to understand the operations of the educational organisation through the perspective of contingency theory, which is a derivative of the open system theory. Contingency theory, concentrates its analytical focus on the adjustments internal to the organization as it seeks to modify procedures to meet the changing demands of the organisational environment. Thus, contingency theory contends that the correct management approach is contingent on the organization's situation. It holds the assumption that there is no "one best way" for designing organizations, jobs, authority patterns, and tasks; it all depends on the particular circumstances in a specific situation (Hanson & Brown, 1971:73).

There are many types of contingency theory. Worth mentioning is research into structural contingency theory. Bess and Dee (2008:138) define structural contingency theory as "... a process of achieving a fit between the conditions of the environment and the design of the organization." The structural contingency theory holds that organizational performance results from a fit between the environment encountered by the organization and the internal structure of the organization, and the greater the fit between the organization's environment and structure, the better its performance (Hendrick, 2003:493).

Pfeffer and Salancik (1978:227) argue that the relationship between organisations and their environments is important but at the same time indefinite. In other words, organisations are loosely coupled with their environment. If organisations are loosely or partially coupled to their environment, this implies that besides environmental influences, organisational actions are affected by other internal factors. For example, Pfeffer and Salancik (1978:227) describe that what happens in an organisation is not only a consequence of the environment and the particular contingencies deriving from that environment; what happens is also a function of the organisation, its strategy, its structure, its actions, its leadership and its procedures. This is confirmed by Maassen and Gornitzka (1999:298) who suggest that in addition to the focus on the external environment it is also necessary to examine the role of organisational leadership and the way internal practices are affected by external dependencies. The term internal environment here is examined in terms of task environment.

Various sets of variables are used in contingency theoretical studies. Internal environmental contingencies such as organisational size, dimensions of task environment, technology, structure and so forth can be recognized to affect organizations. Melan (1998:131) identified leadership commitment, a plan for deploying change throughout the organization, a means for assessing progress of the change and a system for sustaining the intervention as major contingent factors for successful quality management implementation. The leadership was identified to be the dominant factor in many cases. A number of organizations have been identified as having failed in the implementation of

quality management due to a lack of leadership and sustained management interest. On the other hand, successful quality management efforts have shown evidence of strong and involved leadership as well as an understanding of the change process. In addition to the leadership factor, forming an empowered group or structure to lead the change process; the change processes itself; and its manner of facilitation, motivation and communication are also important in implementing change in an organisation (Melan, 1998:143).

3.2.2.   Neo-institutional theory

According to institutional theorists, conformity to social expectations contributes to organisational success and survival (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983:155; Oliver, 1991:148). As Scott (1987a:498) observes, "Organisations ... conform because they are rewarded for doing so through increased legitimacy, resources, and survival capabilities ..." Institutional theorists are especially interested in how organisational structures and processes become institutionalized over time (Meyer & Rowan, 1977:340; Scott, 1987a:494; Zucker, 1987:445).

From an institutional perspective, organisations operate in an environment dominated by rules, requirements, understandings, and taken-for-granted assumptions about what constitutes appropriate or acceptable organisational forms and behaviour (Scott, 1987a:508; Oliver, 1997:699). Many of the studies and seminal theoretical contributions within neo-institutionalism emphasise the survival value of organisational conformity to institutional environments. It is argued that adoption of policies or programmes is importantly determined by the extent to which the measure is institutionalised – whether by law or by gradual legitimisation (Tolbert & Zucker, 1983:22).

Many policies, programmes and procedures of organisations are enforced by public opinion, by stakeholders and by laws. Such elements of organisations are manifestations of institutional rules which function as rationalised myths (Meyer & Rowan, 1977:343). The impact of the rationalised institutional elements on organisations and organising

situations is summarised by Meyer and Rowan (1997:345) as follows: "... rationalized institutional rules arise in given domains of work activity, formal organisations form and expand by incorporating these rules as structural elements." In general, this theory assumes that the institutional environment constrains the organisation and determines its internal structure; and, consequently, the behaviour of the actors in the organisation (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983:150). A central notion is that because of the pressures of the institutional environment, organisations show a trend towards conformity (denoted by the term isomorphism). The deviation from the expectations of the institutional environment threatens the legitimacy (and therefore the chances of survival) of the organisation (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983:150).

A distinguishing aspect of neo-institutional theory is the argument that organisations are structured by phenomena in their institutional environment, and gradually become isomorphic with them (Meyer & Rowan, 1977:346). This isomorphic process, in turn, promotes the success and survival of organisations. By incorporating externally legitimated formal structures and organisational practices, an organisation may increase the commitment of internal participants and external constituents. This is because "... by designing formal structures and implementing organisational practices that adhere to the prescriptions of myths in the institutional environment, an organisation demonstrates that it is acting on collectively valued purposes in a proper and adequate manner" (Meyer & Rowan, 1977:349).

DiMaggio and Powell (1983:150-52) argue that coercive, mimetic and normative forces produce homogeneity within a certain organisational field. An elaboration of the forces follows:

- Coercive isomorphism occurs as a result of the formal and informal pressures exerted on organisations and decision-makers to follow or adopt certain institutionalized rules and practices by other organisations upon which they are dependent, and by cultural expectations from the society within which organisations function.

- Mimetic isomorphism occurs as a result of organisations imitating other organisations and is especially evident in uncertain environments because it minimises risk. Mimetic behaviour also has considerable economic benefit because it reduces the cost of finding a viable solution when organisations are faced with similar problems with ambiguous causes or unclear solutions.

- Normative isomorphism is the result of the professionalisation of the organisational actors, such as managers and administrators. When organisational actors are professionalised (i.e. they have similar formal education and training and participate in professional networks), they tend to occupy similar positions across a range of organisations and possess similar orientations and dispositions in their professional activities to such a degree that they are almost interchangeable (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983:150-152).

Furthermore, conformity is often of a ritualistic nature where organisations construct symbols of compliance to environmental change (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983:150; Meyer & Rowan, 1977:358). Organisations thus are seen to combine conformity to environmental expectations with organisational stability. In this respect, neo-institutional theory will emphasises the stability of organisations and the barriers to change what exist within organisations. The neo-institutional theory would particularly question the extent to which organisational change is the outcome of reform. Well-developed institutions with stable values, interests, perceptions and resources exhibit inertia or friction when faced with reform efforts (Gornitzka & Maassen, 2001:87). For organisations to change as a result of government initiatives, a normative match is necessary, i.e. congruence between the values and beliefs underlying a proposed programme or policy and the identity and traditions of the organisation.

It has been suggested that a neo-institutional theory can "... readily accommodate a variety of strategic responses of organisations to the institutional environment" (Oliver, 1991:173). Oliver identifies five organisational strategies to deal with environmental

pressures: acquiescing, compromising, avoiding, defying, and manipulating (Oliver, 1991:152). An elaboration of each follows.

- Acquiesce refers to extreme forms of conformity to institutional pressures in the form of habit, imitation and compliance. According to Scott (1995:128), this strategy is emphasised by most institutional theorists.

- Compromise involves balancing, pacifying, or bargaining with external stakeholders. This strategy is very common in conflicting environments and in situations where there is an inconsistency between external expectations and internal organisational objectives.

- Avoidance can be defined as an organisation's attempt to disguise its non-conformity, buffer itself from institutional pressures, or escape from institutional rules and expectations (Oliver, 1991:154). Scott (1995:130) suggests that it should be evaluated empirically whether various forms of avoidance are practised as a response to institutional pressures stemming from legitimate sources of authority or from sources exercising unauthorised power.

- Defiance refers to organisations that publicly resist institutional pressures. This strategy will be used when the norms and interests of an organisation are very different from those incorporated in the requirements that are imposed on it (Scott, 1995:130). The tactics of defiance are dismissal, challenge and attack.

- Manipulation is the most active strategic response to environmental pressures. It consists of co-opting, influencing or controlling the environment (Oliver, 1991:157).

Furthermore, in neo-institutionalism, legitimacy is seen as the dominant factor securing stability and survival. In order to gain legitimacy, internal and external parties must show "... confidence and good faith ..." (Meyer & Rowan, 1977:358). Institutional theorists have contended that organisations facing conflicting, inconsistent demands about what

practices they ought to use can maintain legitimacy by adopting designs that mask or distract attention from controversial core activities that may be unacceptable to some key constituents. As Meyer and Rowan (1977:360) stated, organisations are prompted to engage in various ceremonies or rituals to appease powerful constituencies or public attitudes. The term institutional decoupling is understood as a formal mechanism that is adopted in response to external demands, while actual practices are tailored to the needs of internal staff members. Decoupling mechanisms are adopted primarily for external legitimisation purposes and are kept separate from core organisational activities. Oliver (1991:155) noted that "... from an institutional perspective … the appearance rather than the fact of conformity is often presumed to be sufficient for the attainment of legitimacy". Similarly, Meyer and Rowan (1977:349) suggested that through formal and symbolic steps "... an organisation demonstrates that it is acting on collectively valued purposes in a proper and adequate manner."

As a special issue in legitimacy, external evaluation can undermine legitimacy by exposing inconsistency. For this reason, organisations will seek to minimise, or avoid, external evaluation. External evaluators, from their perspective, can maintain stability and public confidence by disclosing inconsistencies. The withdrawal of "good faith" by the external constituents may render the implemented mechanism irrelevant as a symbol of a good organisation. As a further consequence, organisations that adopted a new model for purely symbolic purposes, with a view to gaining legitimacy, may stop using it or may not progress beyond a very superficial use if through withdrawal of "good faith" the mechanism has lost its symbolic value (Csizmadia, 2006:39).

3.2.3.   Merging the two theories: contingency theory and neo-institutional theory

This study considers contextual (or task) and institutional environments to understand their influences on the QA practices at HEIs. The task environment is thought of as the context immediately surrounding the organization, which is often described as stable

versus dynamic; simple versus complex (Gupta, Dirsmith & Fogarty, 1994:267). It is also assumed to include organizations, which directly influence the goal setting and goal achievement of an organization (Lenz & Engledow, 1986:333). The institutional environment is defined as being characterized by the elaboration of rules and requirements to which individual organizations must conform to if they are to receive support and legitimacy (Scott, 1987:497).

The difference between the institutional and contingency theories lies primarily in whether organizations are supposed to respond to contextual demands for rationality or for legitimacy. Here, the notion of rationality is used to refer to the extent to which a series of actions is organized in such a way as to lead to predetermined goals with maximum efficiency. Contingency theory suggests that the organisational practice is dependent on the specific circumstances or situations in which an organization operates. In contrast, an institutional perspective focuses on the ways in which an organization interacts with its environment in the face of uncertainty. Rather than attributing a rational internal logic to its coping strategies, emphasis is placed on how management practices and actions attempt to mediate and moderate the relationship between key elements of the external environment and the internal functioning of the organization (Scott, 1987:493).

From an institutional perspective, the QA implementation process in HEIs can be seen as reflecting institutional values rather than purely rational and instrumental objectives. Therefore, as Meyer and Rowan (1977:341) suggest, actual organizational activities might be loosely coupled with the ways in which they are externally legitimised. When institutional and contingency theories are combined, they may provide an adequate picture of organizational practices representing both contextual and institutional environments. An organization is expected to face both institutional and contextual environments (Gupta *et al.*, 1994:267). To prosper within these environments, an organization needs not only efficiency and effectiveness, but also legitimacy. Gupta *et al.* (1994:268) suggest that management may address these two environments separately, adopting a set of symbolic practices for addressing its institutional contexts and a separate set of rational practices for addressing its contextual environment.

This study uses contingency theory in parallel with institutional theory to achieve a wider understanding of the instrumental and symbolic roles of quality assurance implementation practices in the HEIs in Ethiopia. Contingency theory is adopted to support the researcher's interpretations by simply noting that the implementation practices of quality assurance systems are dependent on the specific circumstances or situations of the HEIs. Institutional theory, in turn, is adopted from the writings of Meyer and Rowan (1977:341), which asserts that actual organizational activities are frequently loosely coupled with the ways in which they are externally legitimized.

It should be noted that this study is not the first study to combine contingency and institutional theoretical perspectives. For example, the combining of the perspectives has been suggested by Gupta *et al.*, (1994) and Donaldson (2008). The organization theoretical study by Gupta *et al.,* (1994:265) has combined contingency and institutional theories. The study begins by acknowledging that contingency and institutional theories are some of the most prominent approaches. They further recognize that these theories hold almost opposite viewpoints to explain organizational phenomena. Donaldson (2008) in Selos (2013:13) ponders the relationship between the contingency and institutional theoretical perspectives. His analyses are motivated by the observation that besides contingency theory, institutional theory represents the major contemporary theory of organizational structure. His analyses concentrate especially on structural contingency theory and the new institutionalism in sociology. Based on these perspectives, he argues for the contingency fit to produce internal effectiveness and the institutional fit to produce external legitimacy and support (Selos, 2013:13).

3.2.4. Contingency and neo-institutional theories as topics in higher education studies

Several studies have highlighted the usefulness of both contingency and neo-institutional theories in the study of higher education organisations. A brief overview of some of the studies is presented in the paragraphs that follow.

Several studies have shown that neo-institutional theory can be a useful framework for studying higher education institutions' response to external demands (Csizmadia, 2006:39). For studying change in higher education organisations, Maassen and Gornitzka (1999:86) and Gornitzka (1999:27) found that changes occurred in the context of taken-for-granted values, norms and beliefs. In addition, Larsen and Gornitzka (1995:348) studied the planning system in Norwegian higher education, and suggested that there was evidence that one could trace mainly the symbolic effects of the planning system within the institutions. Besides, Rowan's (1982:259) study of educational organisations and Covaleski and Dirsmith's (1988:562) case study of a university's budgeting system both adopted neo-institutional theory to explore the process of accommodating conflicting institutional demands and constraints.

Other researchers such as Clark (1998), Peterson (1995), and Sporn (1999), (as cited in Michael, 2012:18) applied contingency theory to study organizational adaptation at HEIs. Clark (1998) used contingency theory in a case study of innovative and entrepreneurial HEIs. Peterson (1995) used contingency theory to study the effects of national and state policies on the structure and decision-making of HEIs. Sporn (1999) used contingency theory as the conceptual framework for case study and grounded theory research in an adaptation at HEIs in the U.S., Italy, Switzerland, and Austria (Michael, 2012:18).

Stensaker (2004:53), studying the policies concerning the quality of teaching and learning in Norwegian higher education, found that symbolic adaptation can be the first step in the adaptation process. Thus, even if the work reviewed here only represents a small number of studies carried out under the neo-institutionalism umbrella, they do signal that symbolic compliance may be sufficient for the attainment of legitimacy and survival. Therefore, management techniques implemented, i.e. quality improvement programmes, may help higher education institutions to manage the impression that outsiders have about them, even if they exist more on paper than in practice. Thus, a higher education institution can satisfy external demands for increased accountability to stakeholders by apparently adopting, but not genuinely implementing, programmes that address their interests. If that is the case, the implementation of quality management mechanisms can

be seen as "... symbolically mediated change processes which can be understood only if we uncover the action-motivation reasons that guide efforts to alleviate practical problems" (Dunn, 1993:259).

Csizmadia (2006:38), in a study on the implementation of quality management in higher education institutions, applied neo-institutional theory together with resource-dependency theory to analyse the introduction of quality management in Hungarian higher education. He found that organisational characteristics (organisational complexity, leadership, decision-making processes, etc.) influence the pace and scope of the implementation of quality management in higher education institutions. That is, the more complex the higher education institution is, the slower the pace of quality management to be implemented. Another finding was that the higher the commitment of the leaders is, the faster the pace and the wider the scope of quality management implementation. In general, the study conducted by Csizmadia, Enders and Westerheijden (2008:451) demonstrated the relevance of organisational theories in analysing the practice of quality assurance in universities. Kahsay (2011:68) attempted to examine the contextual factors that influence the adoption and implementation of quality assurance in the universities by adopting the institutional and contingency perspectives.

3.3.   CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of the study is to explore the current status and practice of the national and institutional quality assurance system in public higher education institutions in Ethiopia to determine how the quality of teaching and learning might have been enhanced through the quality assurance system. 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 organisational environments, quality assurance implementation practice (including the outcomes or impacts of quality assurance) and

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internal organisation environments. The conceptual framework of the study is schematically presented in Figure 1 (see p. 127). An elaboration of the conceptual framework follows.

3.3.1.　　　External organisational environments

External organisational environments, the first component of the conceptual framework, can be conceptualised in relation to institutional environments. The concept of institutional environment is used to describe external factors that indirectly affect an organisation through societal norms, resources, and constraints (Carroll & Huo, 1986:838).

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study
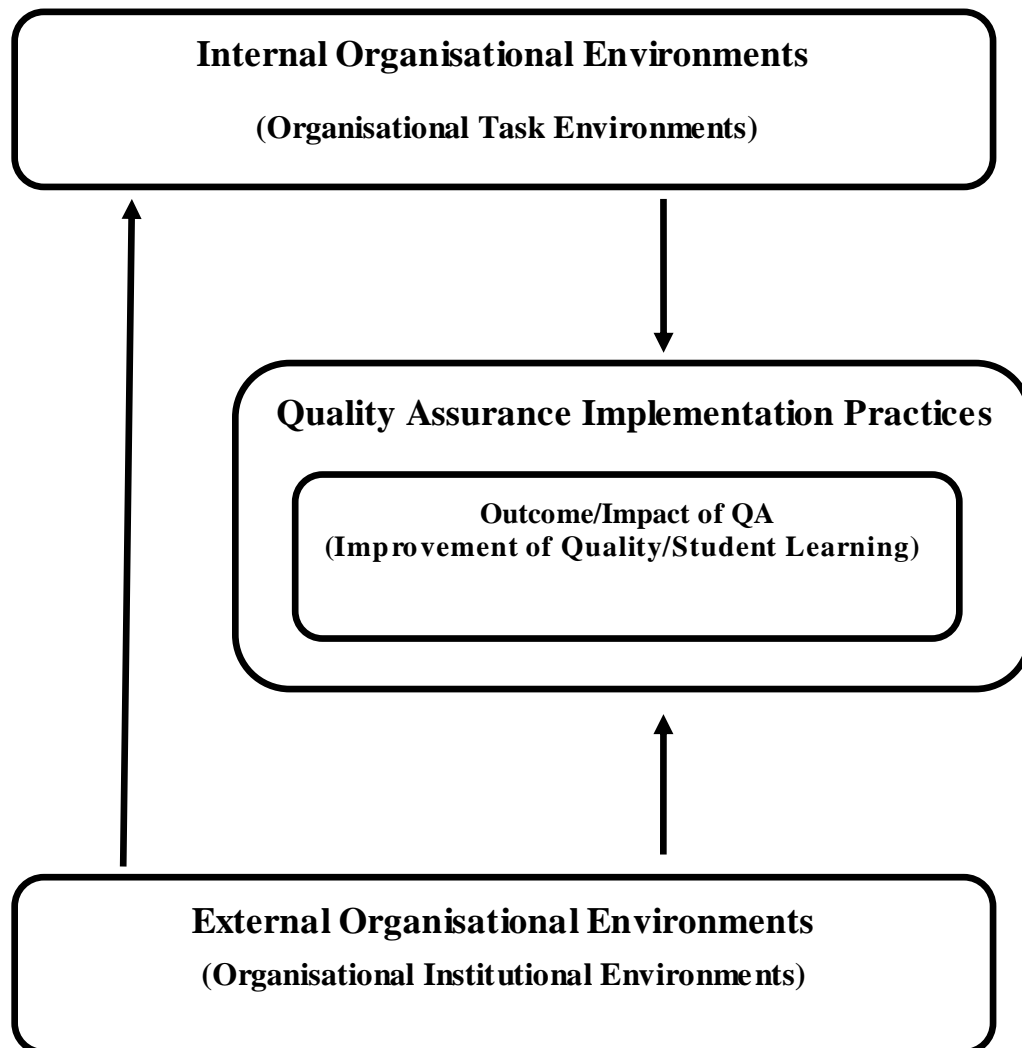
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│          Internal Organisational Environments          │
│                                                        │
│           (Organisational Task Environments)           │
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          ▲                        │
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          │      │  Quality Assurance Implementation Practices │
          │      │   ┌──────────────────────────────────┐   │
          │      │   │        Outcome/Impact of QA        │   │
          │      │   │ (Improvement of Quality/Student Learning) │   │
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│          External Organisational Environments          │
│        (Organisational Institutional Environments)     │
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Institutional theory focuses more specifically on the pressures and constraints of the institutional environment[6] and the contingency theory tends to emphasize the task environment (Oliver, 1991:148).

Bastedo (2005:6) 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 organisational adaptation to their needs (Kahsay, 2012:78). 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 organisation's environment. As Newton (2002:48) 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 organisational environments. The aspects of external organisational environments are presented as follows.

3.3.1.1.   Political-legal environment

Law provides a model of and for organisational life, defining roles for organisational actors and meanings for organisational events – and imbuing those roles and meanings with positive or negative moral valence (Suchman & Edelman, 1997:482). The political-legal framework refers to the legislative and regulative aspects through which governments influence the operation of an organisation. It includes the government laws, acts, sets of rules and regulations, and reform policies that govern and

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[6] An institutional environment refers to the regulatory structures, government agencies, rules, laws and professions which are considered as mechanisms of environmental control over organizations (Oliver, 1991:148).

influence the functioning of an organisation. 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, 2012:79).

Organisations encounter the legal system in at least three distinct ways which Suchman and Edelman (1997:482) 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 organisational initiatives that might otherwise occur through market tactics, media campaigns, industrial espionage, violent self-help, etc. In facilitative law, organisations 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 organisational life. As a regulatory environment, the legal system is taking the initiative directly to modify organisational behaviour.

- As a constitutive environment, the legal system constructs and empowers various classes of organisational 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 cognisable 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 organisational behaviour; however, by establishing the background understandings that frame social discourse, constitutive law helps to determine

what types of organisations come into existence and what types of organisational activity gain formal recognition.

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

3.3.1.2.   Regulatory structures

This refers to regulatory agencies or organisations 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, 1999:3-4). 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.

3.3.2.   Internal organisational environments

Internal organisational environments, the second component of the conceptual framework, can be conceptualised against the backdrop of contingency theory in terms of task or technical environments. This factor is often thought of as the context immediately surrounding the organisation within which the workers function, and is often referred to through such polarities as stable versus dynamic and simple versus complex (Gupta, *et.al*., 1994:267). The concept of task environment is used to describe factors directly related to the work of the organisation. Special emphasis has been given to variables that

characterize elements or dimensions of the input and output streams of the work flow process. In addition, this component of the conceptual framework incorporates some internal characteristics of higher education institutions that may influence the quality assurance implementation within them. In this study, the aspects of the internal organisational environments or characteristics are identified as organisational complexity (such as age, size, and location), institutional leadership and governance, quality culture, academic staff and student profiles and dependence. These aspects are discussed successively.

3.3.2.1 Organisational complexity

Organisations are structurally differentiated and organisational research has highlighted that complexity has major effects "… on structural conditions, on processes within the organisation, and on relationships between the organisation and its environment" (Hall & Tolbert, 2005:50). Complexity is thus expected to influence the possibilities for implementing quality assurance mechanisms, and for the ways in which these mechanisms are implemented. Similarly, Hall and Tolbert (2005:62) pointed out that complexity affects the speed and nature of the diffusion of reforms. They argue that organisations that are more complex (horizontally, vertically, or geographically) face the problem of integrating the diverse occupations and ideas deriving from the different organisational members, and information in the system can contain diverse proposals and concepts. Thus implementation processes would be expected to occur slower or with narrower scope in a more complex organisation. Complexity is a multidimensional phenomenon applying both to "… organisational units and up and down the hierarchy." In this study, organisational size, age and scope of activity are considered to explain the complexity of the higher education institutions.

3.3.2.1.1.   Organisational size

Organisational size is one of the most important factors affecting the structure and processes of an organisation (Damanpou, 1996:695). Organisational size can be defined as the scope of an organisation and its responsibilities (Kimberly, 1976:574). Both advantages and disadvantages are associated with large size. While large organisations have more resources for new projects and diversification, greater challenges and more opportunities for promotion and growth among their employees, and more control over the external environment, they also are more bureaucratic and less flexible, are unable to change and adapt quickly, and tend to have impersonal work environments (Damanpou, 1996: 695). Researchers' views on the size-innovation relationship are incongruent. Some researchers have argued that size would affect innovation positively because large organisations have more financial sources, marketing skills, research capabilities, and product development experience. Also, large organisations employ more professional and skilled human resources, and have high technical knowledge and technical potential; and, thus, are in the forefront of technological development (Dewar & Dutton, 1986:1442). However, large size has also been said to inhibit innovation because large organisations are typically more formalised, managerial behaviour is more standardized and managerial commitment to innovation is lower.

Small organisations, on the other hand, are said to be more innovative because they are more flexible, have greater ability to adapt and improve, and demonstrate less difficulty accepting and implementing change. Innovation requires the coupling of different parts of an organisation which can be achieved more easily in smaller than in larger organisations (Damanpou, 1996:695). Empirical research conducted by Frederiks, Westerheijden and Weusthof (1994:185) on a study of the utilisation of evaluation results in Dutch universities confirmed a positive relationship between the size of an organisation and the extent of the utilisation of the evaluation results. One consequence of larger size may be that decision-making on the basis of evaluation results takes longer, or even may never take place at all. It can be assumed that larger organisations will mean more formal

decision-making processes, with long advice and discussion tracks and more possibilities for delaying decisions.

3.3.2.1.2.   Organisational age

Theorists from a variety of perspectives have suggested that the age of organisations affects their capacity to change, innovate, grow, and survive. Sorensen and Stuart (2000:106) argued that aging has two seemingly contradictory consequences for organisational behaviour. On the one hand, experience with a set of organisational routines leads to gains in the efficiency with which these routines are executed. On the other hand, in rapidly changing environments, the fit between organisational capabilities and environmental demands declines with age (Sorensen & Stuart 2000:106). According to Kahsay (2012:187), an old and large university with greater experience, better staff capacity and deep-rooted believes and academic value is more likely to resist top-down policies and reform initiatives than the new and smaller ones.

3.3.2.2.   Institutional leadership and governance

3.3.2.2.1.   Leadership

Leadership in the academic community arises from the necessities of the structure of governance within a university. The structure of governance comes first, and the leadership role follows from it. Leadership is a structure that establishes roles, or influences the behaviour of other persons in a social unit. It is a process of encouraging, persuading, and even of directing others to make decisions and to perform in accordance with decisions. Leadership is defined in numerous ways but a common understanding of leadership is as "… a process of social influence whereby a leader (or group of leaders) steers members towards a goal" (Horsburgh, 1997:16). Change and leadership have a symbiotic relationship. Change creates the need for leadership and leaders as initiators or drivers of change. Leaders have a capacity to generate ideas and new perspectives; they

can engage individuals intellectually with notions of change and create a shared understanding.

The leaders of organisations help define and shape work contexts that contribute to organisational innovation, and there is evidence that the individual leadership style is an important determinant of change. In particular, transformational leadership has been shown to support and promote change, which in turn, can ensure the long-term survival of an organisation. Transformational leadership refers to behaviours of leaders who motivate followers to perform and identify with organisational goals and interests, and who have the capacity to motivate employees beyond the expected levels of work performance. As a result, employees feel engaged and personally rewarded through work, and work outcomes such as satisfaction and extra effort are enhanced (Sarros, Cooper & Santora 2008:148).

3.3.2.2.2.   Governance

Governance is a means for realising institutional goals and, in an ideal world, should enable the institution to respond to the demands of the political environment by regulating its internal affairs accordingly (Salter, 2002:246). Governance is both a structure and a process. It is a structure that legitimates power groups and power relationships. It is a process for making basic decisions about purpose and form of governance, either implicit or explicit. In a university, governance embraces internal management structures, decision-making arrangements and leadership roles. As autonomous entities, universities hold the primary responsibility for their internal governance. Internal governance refers to the institutional arrangements within universities (e.g. lines of authority, decision-making processes, financing and staffing). In many countries, universities have legislative, executive and supervisory bodies as internal governance hierarchies. In the Ethiopian context, the most senior decision-making body of a university is the governing board, which exists to oversee the development and adoption of institutional strategic plans and key policies, to monitor and

review the institution's overall performance and to bear ultimate accountability for the institution (FDRE, 2009:5008-5009).

3.3.2.3. Institutional quality culture

A culture of quality is one in which everybody in the organisation, not just the quality controllers, is responsible for quality (Harvey & Green, 1993:16). Denison (1996:624) asserted that culture is "… the deep structure of organisations, which is rooted in the values, beliefs and assumptions held by organisational members." James, Brian and Joseph (2008:147) describe culture as "… the normative beliefs (i.e. system values) and shared behavioural expectations (i.e. system norms) in an organisation." In other words, when scholars speak of organisational culture, they refer to the meanings inherent in the actions, procedures, and protocols of organisational business and discourse. Organisational culture is specific to an organisation, is relatively constant and can influence inter-organisational relations (James, Brian & Joseph, 2011:294). Quality culture refers to a set of shared, accepted, and integrated patterns of quality to be found in the organisational cultures and the management systems of institutions. Awareness of and commitment to the quality of higher education, in conjunction with a solid culture of evidence and with the efficient management of this quality (through quality assurance procedures), are the ingredients of a quality culture. The notion of quality culture is understood here as comprising two distinct sets of elements: shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitments toward quality, and a structural/managerial element with defined processes that enhance quality and aim at coordinating efforts (Vlãsceanu *et al.,* 2004:2).

Harvey and Stensaker (2008:436-437) suggested four possible taxonomies useful to examine university cultures: responsive, reactive, regenerative and reproductive taxonomies.

- Responsive quality culture is governed primarily by external demands, takes a positive approach to opportunities and seeks and shares good practice, but tends to view quality-related activities and strategies as a solution to externally-driven problems or challenges and lacks sense of ownership or control.

- Reactive quality culture is driven primarily by compliance and accountability, seeks opportunities for reward, and tends to delegate quality to a delineated space (e.g. quality office). The reactive mode may, for example, harbour counter cultures among academics that perceives any kind of quality culture as a beast to be fed (Newton, 2000:153).

- Regenerative quality culture is focussed on internal development and has co-ordinated internal plans which include clear goals. External initiatives are recognised but are secondary to a taken-for-granted commitment to continual improvement and organisational learning. A regenerative quality culture embodies the potential for subversion of externally-driven initiatives. Hence, reproductive quality culture manipulates situations to minimise disruption from externally-driven quality initiatives in order to maintain the *status quo*. It has established norms, good internal practices, and quality are an encoded and unremarkable part of daily practice and professional conduct.

Harvey and Stensaker (2008:436-437) recognise that most institutions will embody a number of these characteristics; and they argue that these differential orientations will result in very different approaches to quality activities.

3.3.2.4. Academic staff and students' profiles

Academic staff has a major role to play in achieving the objectives of an institution. The performance of academic staff, both as teachers and researchers and also as managers, determines, to a large extent, the quality of the student experience of higher education; and has a significant impact on student learning and the contribution that such institutions can make to society. Most higher education institutions have an implicit or explicit

mission to offer a high quality learning experience to students. Academic staff manages this learning experience and are the main interface with students. Likewise, the students are the most important stakeholders of higher education systems, and of the quality assurance mechanisms therein. Students play an important role in improving quality in higher education through participation in the decision-making process, formulating of learning and teaching practices, and providing feedback on the quality of their experiences (Rowley, 1996:11). Therefore, the successful implementation of quality assurance depends, to a larger extent, on the academics and students' commitment to and involvement in the quality process.

3.3.2.5.   Dependence

The term dependence refers to the relationship between higher education institutions and the HERQA (including the Ministry of Education). This independent variable indicates that a higher education institution depends on other actors whenever it strives for goals whose achievement can be facilitated or retarded by them. In the case of higher education, the most important resource is money. A higher education institution depends more on the government if it has fewer other resources available (Csizmadia, 2006:104).

3.4.   QUALITY ASSURANCE IMPLEMENTATION PRACTICES

The third component of the conceptual framework is the quality assurance implementation practices. Quality assurance implementation practices refers to the activities, roles and responsibilities discharged by the universities in terms of ensuring the quality of their educational provision (inputs, processes and outputs) with the ultimate goal of improving the students' learning experience. This includes policies, procedures, methods, structures, and resources necessary to ensure quality. The impact/outcome of the quality assurance on the student learning experience is added as one of the important components of the quality assurance implementation dimension (see Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study). Improving the student learning

experience is the crux of a quality assurance system and practices. It is worth noting that most of the recent ideas on quality assurance tend to support the notion of quality as transformation as an important principle underpinning the conception and the centrality of the student experience (Tam, 2001:53). Quality as transformation is an important underlying principle of the quality endeavour, especially the need to focus on student learning which is viewed by many researchers as "the heart of quality" in education and training (Carmichael, Palermo, Reeve & Vallence, 2001:459). Therefore, the quality assurance implementation practices in universities are investigated in terms of its emphasis on quality improvement for the enhancement of student learning.

3.5.   CONCLUSION

This Chapter presented and discussed the theoretical framework of the study – contingency and neo-institutional theories. It begins with the contingency theory, which holds the assumption that the organisational practice is dependent on the specific circumstances or situations in which an organization operates. In contrast, the neo-institutionalism perspective acknowledges that symbolic compliance may be sufficient for the attainment of legitimacy and survival. Hence, in neo-institutionalism, legitimacy is seen as a dominant factor for securing stability and survival. It also emphasises that the organisations may respond to environmental pressures through formal and symbolic steps. In the Chapter, it was discussed that a HEI is expected to face both institutional and contextual environments. To adapt to these environments, an organization needs not only efficiency and effectiveness, but also legitimacy. Thus, the contingency and institutional theories were meant to achieve a wider understanding of the instrumental and symbolic roles of quality assurance implementation practices in the HEIs. The neo-institutional perspective highlights that a higher education institution may be able to satisfy governmental demands by adapting symbolically but not genuinely implementing quality management mechanisms (Csizmadia, Enders & Westerheijden, 2008:443). The announced implementation might therefore engender a favourable governmental reaction, regardless of whether the mechanisms are actually implemented.

This Chapter also contained the conceptual framework of the study. The conceptual framework of the study was derived from the quality assurance literature and the neo-institutional and contingency theories. It consists of three dimensions: external organisational environments, quality assurance implementation practice, and internal university characteristics. In the next Chapter, the background information regarding the Ethiopian higher education system is provided.

CHAPTER 4

THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY: AN OVERVIEW OF THE ETHIOPIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

4.1.   INTRODUCTION

In this Chapter, the background information regarding the Ethiopian higher education system is provided. It begins with a brief overview of the demographic and socio-economic context of the system, followed by discussions of the history of the Ethiopian higher education system. It then focuses on emerging trends in the Ethiopian higher education landscape, and concludes with relevant policy and legislation in terms of the quality assurance system.

4.2.   THE DEMOGRAPHIC, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS

4.2.1.   Demographic context

Ethiopia is geographically located in East Africa with a total area of 1,127,127 square kilometres. Djibouti, Eritrea, the Republic of the Sudan, the Republic of the Southern Sudan, Kenya, and Somalia border the country. Ethiopia has a great geographical diversity; its topographic features range from the highest peak at Ras Dashen, 4,550 metres above sea level, down to the Affar Depression, 110 metres below sea level (CSA, 2006:1). It is located in one of the continent's most politically unstable and economically vulnerable sub-regions – the Horn of Africa. It is an ancient country with a history of more than 3000 years, and having its own unique alphabets (CSA, 2006:1). The country has maintained its independence, even during the time of the colonial powers in Africa. It is a country with diverse ethnic and linguistic groups – where over 80 different languages are spoken (MoI, 2004:2).

Ethiopia, with a population of about 84 million (World Bank, 2012:3), is the second most populous country in Sub-Saharan Africa. The population grows annually at a rate of 2.62% which is estimated to be doubled in about 26.3 years (MoFED, 2007:5)[7]. The age structure of the population ranges between the ages of 15 to 64 (about 51%). As one of the world's oldest civilisations, Ethiopia is also one of the world's poorest countries. At US$400 per annum, Ethiopia's per capita income is much lower than the developing Sub-Saharan African average of US$1,255, ranking it as the sixth poorest country in the world (World Bank, 2012:3).

4.2.2. Economic context

Economically, Ethiopia is predominantly dependent on agriculture with 80% of the population living in rural areas, while the industrial sector shares between 13 and 14 percent of the GDP (Mwanakatwe, 2010:3). In order attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, Ethiopia adopted the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) in 2015; it was the second poverty reduction strategy, covering the period 2005/06 to 2009/2010. In keeping with this Plan, the economy has grown in real GDP at a rate of 11 percent per annum in the past five years. Significant achievements were made in reducing the level of poverty in the country. In 1999/2000 about 44 percent of the country's total population was living below the poverty line. Recent studies showed that this level has declined from 43 to 29 percent in the past five years (MoFED, 2012:4). The literacy rate had increased from about 50 percent in 2004 to 56 percent in 2011 (CSA, 2012:5). This rapid growth is the result of diversification and commercialisation of small-scale agriculture, expansion of non-agricultural production in services and industry, capacity-building and good governance, off-farm employment, especially through small enterprises and investment in infrastructure (FDRE, 2010:5).

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[7] This is based on the 2007 population and housing census results.

4.2.3. Socio-political context

Historically, Ethiopia was ruled by successive emperors and kings, with a feudal system of government. In 1974 the military took over the reins of rule by force, and administered the country until May 1991. Currently, a federal system of government exists, and political leaders are elected every five years. The government is made up of two tiers of parliament, the House of Peoples' Representatives and the House of the Federation. The political system of the country is organised in the form of a Federal Government. There are nine ethnic-based National Regional States and two Administrative Councils – Tigray, Affar, Amhara, Oromiya, Somali, Benishangul-Gumuz, Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP), Gambela, and Harari. This structure also includes two city administrations that is, Addis Ababa and the Dire Dawa Administration Councils. Today, it embraces a complex variety of nationalities, peoples, and linguistic groups. Its peoples altogether speak over 80 different languages, constituting 12 Semitic, 22 Cushitic, 18 Omotic, and 18 Nilo-Saharan languages (MoI, 2004:2).

Ethiopia's education system is currently structured as primary education (Grades 1-8), lower secondary education (Grades 9-10), upper secondary education (Grades 11-12), Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), (formerly as Grade 10+1 years, 10+2 years, 10+3 years, but currently as Level 1 to Level 5), and higher education which provides under-graduate and post-graduate programmes. While the Ministry of Education is the highest governing and regulatory body of higher education institutions and universities, the Regional States are responsible for the TVETs. As of 2011, there were 33 public universities and more than 80 accredited private higher education institutions in Ethiopia (MoE, 2011:5).

As part of the positive developments in the socio-economic arena, the service sector has registered a significant growth in recent years. Education is one of these areas where promising progress have been made. Over the past decade, the primary net enrolment rate (NER) jumped from 44% (in 2000/2001) to 85.3% (in 2010/2011); and the level of participation of girls at primary school level also markedly improved (MoE, 2011:5).

The fact that the average gender parity index closing one unit (that is GPI 0.94), suggests a narrowing gender gap at national level (MoE, 2011:29). A comparison of rural and urban enrolment indicates that 79.5% of primary education enrolments were accounted for by rural areas and 20.5 % by urban areas. However, for general secondary education (grades 9-10), the situation is the reverse, in which urban enrolment is 85.8%, while rural enrolment is 14.2 % (MoE, 2011:29). A further inspection of the available data, however, discloses that regional variations still exist with respect to gender and overall educational participation, particularly in the previously underserved regional states such as Afar and Somali (Semela, 2011:401). A similar trend is evident in secondary education. At the general secondary level (Grades 9-10), over five years, the NER has gone up from 14.7% in 2006/07 to 16.3% in 2010/11; but in the first cycle the rates for boys is still greater than that of girls. In preparatory education (Grades 11-12) the female gross enrolment rate has increased to 42.2 % from the level of 35.7% in 2009/10 (MoE, 2011:44).

In general, according to the Ministry of Education (MoE 2011:5), there has been an 18.1% of average annual increase in enrolment for TVET, 21.8% for higher education (undergraduate programmes), 30.0% for higher education (postgraduate programmes), 4.5% for primary education and 5.8% for secondary education.

4.3.   THE HISTORY OF THE ETHIOPIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

In order to gain a clear understanding of the present status of education, especially the higher education system in Ethiopia, it seems sensible to go back in time, and capture the highlights of the historical development of the country's education system in general.

Ethiopia possesses a 1,700-year tradition of elite education linked to the Orthodox Church (Saint, 2004:84). In about the 4th Century, the Ethiopian Christian church established a comprehensive system of education that provided knowledge, skills, values and attitudes in terms of the Ethiopian cultural, spiritual, literary, scientific, and artistic

life. The church in Ethiopia was able to provide a sophisticated and peculiar type of education that took as many as 30 years to complete. Like church education in other parts of Christendom, the primary purpose of the Ethiopian church education was to prepare young men for the service of the church as deacons and priests. Moreover, in its long history of existence, church education has served as the main source of civil servants such as judges, governors, scribes, treasures, and general administrators (Teshome Wagaw, 1979:11).

In spite of its long literary heritage that could have been used as a basis on which to build an educational sphere unparalleled in Africa, church education in Ethiopia has played a limited role in the development of society in general, and the offering of general education in particular.   Unlike church education in many other regions, its access in Ethiopia was limited to only a few people and the country basically remained "... the land of the thumb prints ..." (Shibeshi, 1989:31). Besides the above, this limited church education was unevenly distributed. It flourished only in the north and north eastern part of Ethiopia. Moreover, the Ethiopian church, which up to the end of the 19th Century had a virtual monopoly on education, strongly opposed the introduction of modern public education in the country (Shibeshi, 1989:31).

Like the church, the mosques in the Moslem areas had a parallel function in running Quranic schools, starting from the 7th Century in Ethiopia. Unlike the church schools, the Quranic schools were maintained by the local committees themselves and received no state assistance of any kind. The lack of assistance from the state and the opposition from the church, limited the operation of such schools only to the centres of Islamic faith where community support was available (Shibeshi, 1989:31).

Even though traditional forms of education have existed for centuries in Ethiopia, higher education in its modern form is only six decades old. Western-style higher education began only in 1950 with the establishment of the University College of Addis Ababa (UCAA), (Semela, 2011:402). The UCAA consisted of the faculties of Arts and Science. The Engineering and the Building Colleges were located in Addis Ababa, the Alemaya

College of Agriculture near Diredawa, and the Public Health College at Gonder. In 1961, the UCAA was officially renamed as the Haileselasse I University which integrated more institutions which included the Faculties of Education, Law and Medicine, the School of Social Work, and the College of Business Administration. In the subsequent two decades, other specialised technical colleges were also established to offer professional training in the fields of "... agriculture, engineering, public health, and teacher education ..." (World Bank, 2003:1). From the inception, higher education institutions had the function of producing skilled personnel that can run the modern bureaucracy. Besides, they have been highly considered as an important instrument for the socio-economic development and modernisation of the country through advancing the knowledge and skills of the citizenry. As of 1973, the overall enrolment had reached 10,000 students, and at that time, the tertiary education Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) was barely 0.2% (UNESCO, 2007:1).

In 1974, a socialist military coup overthrew the monarchy of Emperor Haile Selassie and established an oppressive regime known as the *Derg* (which means committee). Government intervention in university affairs expanded, including security surveillance, repression of dissident voices, mandated courses on Marxism, prohibition of student organisations, appointment of senior university officers and control of academic promotions. Three notable outcomes were ensued over the following two decades: the intellectual life atrophied on campuses, academic brain drain soared and the country's education system became largely isolated from the western world (Saint, 2004:84).

During this time (1974 when the revolution erupted), only 15.3 percent of the age cohort were attending primary schools. For example, Kenya and Tanzania had reached a stage of universal primary education in the mid-1970s. The other neighbouring countries such as Somalia, the Sudan, Zimbabwe and Zambia had percentages of 50, 51, 72 and 95 respectively of their primary school aged children enrolled at school. Thus, the education participation rate in Ethiopia before the Revolution of 1974 was very low even by African standards (Shibeshi, 1989:35).

Moreover, as Saint (2004:85) argued, at the end of the 20th Century, Ethiopia found itself with a higher education system that was regimented in its management, conservative in its intellectual orientation, limited in its autonomy, short of experienced doctorates among academic staff, concerned about declining educational quality, weak in its research output, and poorly connected with the intellectual currents of the international higher education community. However, following the disintegration of the communist bloc in the late 1980s, the embattled military government was too weak to hang on to power with its discredited ideology. In effect, the Marxist-Leninist-oriented higher education curriculum had to be abandoned, heralding the end of the communist influence on the Ethiopian educational system. The reform pressures that had begun to build in the 1960s, only to be suppressed by the *Derg* in the 1970s and 1980s, returned to the scene with the establishment of an elected government in 1994. This time higher education reform was embraced as a critical national need by the government of the day (Saint, 2004:85).

Higher education in Ethiopia has been elitist in its nature until recently. The majority of the school age population has not had access to higher education as the institutions were built in the major urban areas of the country. For instance, the tertiary gross enrolment ratio (GER) that was only 0.2% by the year 1970 had not shown any significant improvement after twenty five years; in 1995 it was increased only to 0.7% and which increased to only 1.5% by the year 2003 (World Bank, 2003:6). In terms of the gender issue, available figures show that female participation in higher education has been one of the lowest in Africa.

Recently, the higher education system has been under the process of massive expansion by both public and private providers. For instance, the number of public universities which was only 2 until the year 2000, increased to 11 by 2006, and to 21 by 2008; and then to 33 by 2010/11. Whereas, the corresponding number of accredited private colleges increased from 14 in the period 2001 to 2003, it expanded to 66 in 2010 (excluding the 35 institutions that are operating pre-accredited programmes), (HERQA 2011:3). While the main delivery mode of education in both public and private sectors is in the form of

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regular day programmes, extension (evening) programmes are also employed extensively. Besides, almost all private and a few of the public higher education institutions provide distance education programmes.

Public HEIs are established following the regulations of the council of ministers in terms of Proclamation 2003, article 8/1 (FDRE, 2003:2237). Essentially, the public HEIs rely on public funding as the main source of income. Public HEIs do not have the power to select their students. Students who have passed the acceptable grade level to enter the HEIs will be allocated to different public HEIs by the MoE. Student allocation is made by referring to the final grades students have obtained for the national entrance examination. In most of the cases, students with good grades in the above examination attend public HEIs. Nevertheless, in the case of post-graduate programmes, public HEIs have the right to select students. In general, it can be said that the government has extensive power to influence the public higher education sector.

Private HEIs are owned by either private investors (individuals) or non-governmental organisations. The non-governmental organisations can be religious institutions, international donors and other related organisations. Private HEIs are established as the case may be in accordance with laws of associations, commercial law, cooperative or other relevant laws (FDRE, 2003:2237). The for-profit type institutions are dominant in the Ethiopian higher education system; it comprises 95% of the whole private higher education sector (Tamirat, 2008:91).

The status of HEIs in Ethiopia include that of university, university college, college, junior college and institute (FDRE, 2003:2236). To be able to get the above status, the institutions have to fulfil certain sets of criteria. The levels of programmes that could be offered by HEIs include first (bachelor) degree, second degree (master's), medical specialty and a doctoral (PhD) degree. HEIs can offer their programmes through regular, evening or distance modes. The language of instruction in both public and private HEIs, except language courses, is English (FDRE, 2003:2238).

4.4. EMERGING TRENDS IN THE ETHIOPIAN HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

4.4.1. Quantitative expansion of the system

As discussed above, the history of higher education in Ethiopia is a recent phenomenon. The system had not showed much expansion until recently. However, during the past few years, the system has been undergoing massive expansion both in the public and private domains. The number of public higher education institutions (universities) that was only two until 1990s, has now reached about 32. Similarly, while there had not been any private higher education sector for the past several years, there are now about 80 accredited private providers in the country. This shows that the private sector is growing faster. In general many of these transformations took place within the past two decades. The expansion rate is also expected to continue over the coming years to meet the goals of the Education Sector Development Programme IV (ESDP IV), which covers the period from 2010/11 to 2014/15.

Parallel to this rapid expansion, a huge number of students from different backgrounds are joining the higher education institutions. The annual intake of universities increased from 210,456 in 2006/07 to 467, 843 in 2010/11, and the total degree enrolment in both public universities and private higher education institutions (regular, evening and summer programmes) increased from 203,399 in 2006/07 to about 477, 693 in 2010/11, with an annual average growth rate of 21.8 %. The share of female participation is about 27.0 %; still a very low figure. Similarly, the total number of students enrolled in postgraduate programmes increased from 7,057 in 2006/07 to more than 20,150 with an annual average growth rate of 30.0 %, of which 13.8 % are females. In 2008/09 the enrolment in the private higher education institutions accounted for 17.76% (54,900) of the total student enrolment, out of which 35.6% comprised female students. The expansion in tertiary education has also brought about an increase in the number of academic staff from 8,355 in 2006/07 to 17,402 in 2010/11, with a 20.1% annual increase (MoE, 2010/11:59).

However, despite of this expansion, the higher education enrolment still remains very low (333 students per 100,000 inhabitants) when compared to other Sub-Saharan African countries (with a regional average of 542 students per 100,000 inhabitants), (UNESCO, 2012:3) and to the demographic characteristics of the country. Besides, there remain groups of the society who are under-represented in higher education. Female students, people with disability, pastoralists and semi-agriculturalist areas such as Afar, Somali, Gambella and Benishangul-Gumuz regional states are examples. Although the progress made so far in terms of structural reform, expansion and enrolment of the higher education sector is very significant, the perception that quality is being compromised in the current effort to expand enrolment is on the rise among all stakeholders including the government.

4.4.2.   The rationale underpinning the expansion

Within the Ethiopian higher education context, Semela (2011:406) identified three major reasons responsible for the triggering of the rapid expansion of education: responsiveness to the growing social demand, distributive justice/social inclusion, and the development imperative/focus on science and engineering. Each of the reasons is presented below.

- Responsiveness to the growing social demand: Although Ethiopia is one of the biggest nations on the African continent, until recently it has only managed to educate less than 1% of its eligible population at tertiary level. This is a totally unacceptable reality for the Ethiopian people and its leaders. Above all, the end of the protracted civil war (in 1991) brought with it the opportunity to reflect on past misdeeds and make up for the lost decades. Therefore, there has been strong public demand to seize the opportunities created. Further, since the 1990s, the changed realities at global level have further intensified the demand for higher education. Apparently, therefore, the government's actions have been emboldened by the changing domestic and global circumstances (Semela, 2011:406).

- Distributive justice/social inclusion: Ethiopia is made up of 85 ethno-cultural groups, though all of them did not enjoy equal treatment as citizens of the same nation in the past. In their recent history, their former rulers exercised servitude, subjugation and marginalisation on the majority of the population. Hence, social inclusion and ensuring fair distribution of educational opportunities across regional states, ethnic groups, and other disadvantaged segments of the Ethiopian society are the key political priorities. Hence, at the heart of the political discourse, social inclusion takes a central place with respect to the concretising of the constitutional rights of nations and nationalities. In other words, higher education policy-making is one of the key areas where the overarching ideological rationale of social inclusion can be manifested. Further, apart from recognition of their equal status in the Ethiopian state, establishing HEIs in the formerly under-served regions is believed to open up new avenues for solving local problems with scientific knowledge and technological skills acquired through higher education. On top of the opening up of access to marginalised populations, the social inclusion concept of the Ethiopian political discourse encompasses the notion of distributive justice (Semela, 2011:407).

- Focus on science and engineering: The government's poverty reduction plan capitalises on accumulating adequate human capital to ensure fast economic growth and achieve the vision of becoming a middle income country within 20 to 30 years. As a corollary of these huge development ambitions, in 2008, Ethiopia decreed that all universities should modify their curricula so that 70% is science and technology-based and 30% arts and humanities (Semela, 2011:409). However, many questions arose as the implementation started. Firstly, the pool of university applicants who would be fit to study science and engineering would be limited to satisfy the prescribed quota. Secondly, although there is adequate empirical support regarding the contribution of science and engineering to economic growth (e.g. Lin, 2004:370-371), it is questionable whether the labour market in Ethiopia is ready to absorb the huge influx of university graduates (Semela, 2011:409). The argument pursued on the part of the government is that the 70% enrolment in science and technology is based on a projection of human resource demand in view of the rapidly growing economy, and, subsequent, transformation from an agrarian to an industrial

society. Thus, apart from ideological rationales, the quantitative expansion of higher education is driven by economic rationales.

In summary, the current interest for expansion is a direct result and response to an anticipated demand of the growing economy and the push from the expanding lower levels (TVET, secondary education and primary education) that require large numbers of teachers, leaders and educational experts. It also comes as a result of the need for the new and expanding higher education institutions for additional teaching and research staff. The pressure from international donor agencies such as the World Bank, consultants and many forums outside the Ministry of Education and the government, are some of the stakeholders that contributed to the increased government interest in expanding access (Kahsay, 2012:110).

4.4.3. The dilemmas posed by the expansion

A recent UK Department of International Development (DFID) report suggests that the rate of expansion of public higher education in Ethiopia has been too fast for the government to be able to keep up with recurring expenditure needs despite higher education absorbing over 40% of the total public resources available for education in the country. The report suggests that the government should slow down the pace of public investment in higher education and pay more attention to quality and value for money (Ravishankar, Abdulhamid & Alebachew, 2010:22). However, it seems unlikely that the government will take the DFID report's advice, as it is already in the process of opening 10 new Institutes of Technology, and has the African average GER as its target. This emphasis on quantity is at the expense of quality. The situation is exacerbated as the HERQA, the national autonomous agency responsible for ensuring standards in higher education in Ethiopia, has not been given the additional resources necessary to oversee a greatly expanded higher education sector (Philip & Ashcroft, 2011:3).

Ethiopia's expansion is quite radical in comparison to the size of the existing higher education sector, and the size of Ethiopia's public purse. Ethiopia is one of the world's poorest countries and the expansion of higher education is a considerable investment, both financially and politically, and is therefore also a considerable risk for the government. A consequence of the plan is that there will be approximately 77,000 science and technology graduates entering the job market each year. At present it is not clear where the jobs are, but the government envisages that the economic returns will make the risk of graduate unemployment and subsequent civil unrest worthwhile. One of the ways in which the government is trying to mitigate these risks is through the establishment of some kind of transparent and objective quality assurance process: monitoring for accreditation purposes (especially important in regulating the expanding private sector), and also to ensure that quality does not suffer to an unknowable extent. The rapid expansion puts pressure on the limited pool of capable and qualified people and systems to manage the institutions. At the same time, the government cannot micro-manage a diverse and growing system (as it has done in the past), and must balance central control with institutional autonomy. It is devolving freedoms and responsibilities to the universities. It has looked to developed countries for ways to manage this and has used concepts of quality and quality assurance, operated through quasi-autonomous sector support units, as the basis for a relatively "hands-off" system of regulation and control (Philip & Ashcroft, 2011:2–3).

4.4.4. Increasing private initiatives

The expansion of private higher education institutions is apparent in most parts of the world, especially in the past two decades private higher education was established (virtually) all over the world (Levy, 2008:8). Although the expansion of the sector can be attributable to a number of factors, an increased demand for access to higher education and the change of thinking about the financing of higher education, which is related to the change in concept from the traditional idea that higher education is a public good, has been the major derivatives for the growth of private higher education. Besides, the

emergence and expansion of higher education is the response to an increased demand for higher education and the failure of public higher education institutions to accommodate this excess demand (Melaku, 2008:15).

Informed by this new world order and the national political and ideological changes[8], private higher education is rapidly expanding in Ethiopia. While the significant majority of the institutions are at a level of vocational college offering specialised training, there are few that offer the full range of academic subjects, and have reached the status of a University College. The private sector is playing a pivotal role, particularly in creating access to higher education to the whole of society. They are specifically providing study opportunities to those who would otherwise not be able to get a place at the public universities. The significant majority of private higher education institutions are for-profit-institutions. All private higher education institutions are under the direct supervision of either the Federal Ministry of Education or Regional Education Bureaus depending on the level of training they offer – while degree awarding institutions are regulated by the Ministry, those that provide training lower than this level are under the supervision of the Regional Education Bureaus. However, before commencing their full operation, they are required to be accredited by a public accrediting body. Besides, they should get a license from the Investment Office to enter into the market (Damtew, 2005:72).

4.4.5.   Concern for quality

The issue of the quality of higher education, as discussed in the literature review, is a contemporary agenda worldwide. As elsewhere in the world, the quest for quality has always been a priority in higher education in Africa. Provided with the rapid expansion of the system, and with an increasing demand of society for higher education, on the one

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[8] In 1991 Ethiopia was changed from a socialist to a market-based system when the current government, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), overthrew the hard-line Marxist *Derg* regime (1974-1991).

hand, and the concern for accountability, efficiency and effectiveness of the system, on the other, it has brought into the forefront the issue of concern for the quality of higher education institutions. For instance, in the case of Sub-Sahara Africa, Materu's (2007:xiii) study of the sector confirms that there has been an increasing concern about the quality of higher education due to the rapid growth in enrolment amidst declining public funding; the proliferation of private providers; and increasing pressure from the rapidly transforming labour market. This in turn has raised national concern for the need to ensure and enhance the quality of education among other things (Materu, 2007:xiii).

As part of Sub-Sahara African countries, Ethiopia has also been experiencing similar challenges. Particularly, the recent increases in private sector participation in tertiary education appears to have provided the trigger for governments, and to a less extent institutions, employers and the public, to give greater attention to educational quality.

4.5.   NATIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORKS

In this section, the relevant policy and legislation in Ethiopian higher education context is discusses. It begins with the 1994 Education and Training Policy (ETP) that provided a base for other forthcoming proclamations. The next sub-sections deal with the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) proclamation (No 391/2004), the 2003 Higher Education Proclamation (No 351/2003) and the 2009 Higher Education Proclamation (No 650/2009) consecutively.

4.5.1.   The Education and Training Policy (1994) as basis for other proclamations

The collapse of communism internationally, and the overthrow of the Marxist government in the country in 1991, necessitated a new market-oriented ideology that has been followed by a number of reforms in all government sectors, including education. Among these is the promulgation of the new Education and Training Policy (ETP) in

1994. The policy was adopted as a response to the government's new socio-economic development transformation requirement in all sectors. The policy in general has addressed the education system as a whole with specific deliberations on each level. It also encompasses overall and specific objectives, implementation strategies, including formal and non-formal education, from kindergarten to higher education and special education. It emphasises the development of a problem-solving capacity and culture in the content of education, curriculum structure and approach, focusing on the acquisition of scientific knowledge and practicum. Along with this, it directs that there be appropriate connection between education, training, research and development through a coordinated participation among the relevant organisations (FDRGE, 1994:1-5).

The policy incorporates the structure of education in relation to the development of student profile, educational measurement and evaluation, media of instruction and language teaching at various levels, the recruitment, training, methodology, organisation, professional ethics and the career development of teachers. Due attention is also given to the provision and appropriate usage of educational facilities, technology, materials, environment, organisation and management so as to strengthen the teaching-learning process and the expansion of education. The evolution of a decentralised, efficient and professionally coordinated participatory system is indicated in terms of the administration and management of the education system. It also stated that the financing of education should be just, efficient and appropriate to promote equity and quality of education (FDRGE, 1994:5).

Overall, the education and training policy envisages the moulding of citizens endowed with a humane life view, countrywide responsibility and democratic values, having developed the necessary productive, creative and appreciative capacity in order to participate fruitfully in development and the utilisation of resources and the environment at large (FDRGE, 1994:6).

As clearly indicated in the policy document (FDRGE 1994:12-14), the major emphasis has been given to the curriculum, educational structure, educational measurement and

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evaluation, teachers' training and development, educational support and inputs, educational organisation and management, and finance. An elaboration of only the major aspects of the policy follows.

4.5.1.1.   The curriculum

The focus of the policy was, among others, on the curriculum at all levels of education. Accordingly, the policy has given priority to the review and revision of the previous curriculum with the intention of adapting it to meet the national, societal, economic, cultural and geographical as well as global circumstances (FDRGE, 1994:13). The policy further emphasises that the "... curriculum and learning materials need to be prepared based on sound pedagogical and psychological principles and they are up to the national standard" (FDRGE, 1994:13). Curriculum reform in the Ethiopian education and training policy (EETP) is aimed at improving educational relevance and quality through the changing of the teaching methods, content/subject matter, and the system of examination and assessment. It is stipulated in the EETP that the curriculum for the basic and primary levels of schooling will be developed by regions according to their specific conditions in the first language of the child. Besides, higher education offered at any institution should focus on experience and student participation, be practice-oriented, and encourage independent thinking (FDRE, 2003:2238). As a result of the policy framework and strategic development directions of the country, many and diversified fields of training programmes, both at undergraduate and post-graduate levels were implemented.

4.5.1.2.   Educational structure

The higher education system of Ethiopia had been structured in a binary system composed of universities and national colleges, which had been governed under the same regulation. While universities had been authorised to provide education at diploma (12+2 or 12+3), and/or degree (bachelor, master's, and/doctoral) level(s), colleges had the responsibility to provide training only at a diploma level. However, with the introduction

of the New Education and Training Policy (in 1994), such a system had changed to a kind of dual system where the previous form of college education has been transformed to the new structure of a (regional) non-university sector that specialised in technical and vocational training. Unlike the former colleges, these sectors are accountable to the regional states and have the responsibility of meeting the local development needs of the society. With regard to higher education, the academic qualifications and study durations, diploma, undergraduate, and postgraduate (master's) degree programmes require respectively a minimum of two (12+2), four (12+4), and eight (12+4+4) years of additional study after successful completion of 12 years of primary and secondary education prior to the promulgation of the New Education and Training Policy (1994). However, later, while the duration of undergraduate degrees have been reduced to a minimum of three years of study (12+3), the duration of study at a postgraduate level (12+3+2) has been limited to two years of the study programme (FDRGE, 1994:14–17).

Before 1994, the education system had a 6–2–4 structure: six years of primary schooling, followed by two years of junior secondary education, and four years of senior secondary education. National examinations at the end of each cycle (in Grades 6, 8 and 12) regulated the student promotion and selection from one cycle to the next. Following the 1994 Education and Training Policy and Strategy, the government created a new structure. Still in place today, it consists of an eight-year primary education cycle, which is itself divided into a basic education cycle covering Grades 1-4, and a general primary cycle covering Grades 5-8, followed by two years of general secondary education (Grades 9-10), and two years of preparatory secondary education (Grades 11-12). National examinations are now administered only at the end of Grades 10 and 12; regional examinations have replaced those at the end of Grade 8. Technical and vocational training is institutionally separate from the regular educational system, forming a parallel track. Training is offered at the exit points of the general education system (Grades 4, 8 and 10). After completion of Grade 10, a new structure of 10+1, 10+2, and 10+3 certification has been introduced, and are offered by regional technical and vocational training colleges (Melaku, 2008:12).

4.5.1.3. Governance and management of institutions

One of the most important elements addressed by the education policy was the governance and management of higher education institutions. The policy has brought a major change in the governance and management of higher education institutions, and in particular provides a high degree of autonomy and academic freedom to institutions. According to the Policy (FDRGE, 1994:28), all educational institutions have become autonomous in their internal administration and in designing and implementing different training programmes. It also provides autonomy to institutions to administer their finances and personnel, including recruitment as well as establishing relations with local or international counterparts (FDRE, 2003:2247).

The governance and management structure of higher education institutions encompasses operations from the lowest level of operational leadership in the department to the top level governance of the institutions. The Boards of each institution are the head of the general administration of the public higher education institutions; and are accountable to the Ministry of Education or to the appropriate organ of the regional government. Each board, according to the provision, should be formed in such a way that it consists of persons from the Ministry of Education or Regional Governments, representatives of the users of services (products) of institutions and renowned persons, and the presidents of institutions. Next to the governing Board of the university, lies the Senate which is responsible for the overall management and leadership of the respective institutions (FDRE, 2003:2243).

According to the Higher Education proclamation (FDRE, 2003:2245), the Senates are responsible for preparing the institution's strategic plan, setting policy on academic matters, approving new courses, ratifying changes to the academic structure, awarding academic promotions below professorship, and for determining the type and amount of service charges. Each public university has also a president and two vice-presidents, each responsible for the academic and administrative wings. The president and academic vice-presidents are to be appointed by the government as per the recommendation of the board

for a term of maximum five years. Down the organisational structure goes the deans of faculties/colleges/schools and department heads (FDRE, 2003:2247).

4.5.2. Technical and Vocational Education and Training proclamation of 2004 (No 391/2004)

Proclamation No. 391/2004, issued in 2004, provides for the organisation of the technical and vocational education and training system in Ethiopia. Prior to this proclamation, the country's technical and vocational education and training had been in a state of disorganisation where there were no structured mechanisms to monitor the overall quality and standard of technical and vocational education in the country. Again, prior to this proclamation, there were no clearly stated and identified responsibilities and duties of the regional and the federal government as to how to control and run technical and vocational education and training programmes (Mekasha, 2005:115).

The proclamation No. 391/2004 provides clear provisions of law as how to run the three levels of technical and vocational education and training programmes: the basic, junior and middle-levels. In the proclamation, it is stated that these programmes could be run by the government, non-government organisations (NGOs), and private individuals. The proclamation has also clearly outlined the purpose of the three programmes, in terms of areas of training, criteria for admission, methods of teaching, duration of training, curriculum, etc. The proclamation clearly specifies requirements for a pre-accreditation license and accreditation certificate, accrediting powers, accreditation process, renewal of accreditation, and similar issues (FDRE, 2004:2564).

The proclamation, however, does not seem to be committed in broadening the participation of the private sector in identifying and also prioritising the needs in terms of the training of the public. It does not even imply, let alone express explicitly, the role of the private sector in the identification of areas of training and quality control mechanisms. It is in fact stated in the proclamation that these important areas of needs

analysis and quality control are all to be taken care of by the government both local and federal. The government seems to go to the extent of demanding that even private institutions keep books of accounts to be audited not by a neutral body, but by the government itself (FDRE, 2004:2575).

4.5.3. Higher Education proclamation of 2003 (No 351/2003)

Cognisant of the fact that Ethiopia has a dire need for quality manpower, the proclamation stipulates the objectives of higher education in the country. According to this Proclamation, (FDRE, 2003:2237), higher education, among several other things, should produce skilled manpower in quantity and quality that will serve the country in different professions. It also aims to expand higher education services that are free from any discrimination on grounds of race, religion, sex, politics, and other similar grounds, and lay down a problem-solving educational and institutional system that enables to utilise the potential resources of the country and undertake study and research. With reference to this same proclamation, education should provide higher education and social services that are compatible with the needs and development of the country, and make efforts to develop and disseminate the culture of respect, tolerance, and living together among the peoples of the land (FDRE, 2003:2237).

The Higher Education proclamation also provides provisions of law as to how to establish higher education institutions at various levels – institute, college, university college, and university. The proclamation grants autonomy for these higher education institutions in administrative, financial, and academic matters. The proclamation clearly stipulates the criteria for use in the establishment of these institutions' programmes, their educational programmes, the nature of the curricula, and their powers and duties. According to the proclamation, the government, private individual investors, cooperatives, commercial enterprises, and non-profit organisations may all offer higher education. It is stated in the proclamation that higher education institutions run by

religious organisations whose objectives and curricula are religious shall not be obliged by the decrees (FDRE, 2003:2236).

The Higher Education proclamation also contained provisions with regard to the accreditation of private higher education institutions at various levels and standing. Fulfilling the criteria set by the concerned body, institutions may apply to the Ministry of Education for pre-accreditation, accreditation, and renewal of accreditation permits (FDRE, 2003:2251-2256). It is not, however, clearly put in the proclamation as to how to carry out the accreditation procedures of the public institutions, except that it is stated that the same accreditation procedures may apply to government higher education institutions as well.

Moreover, the Higher Education proclamation provides for the establishment of an accrediting agency called the Education Relevance and Quality Assurance Agency (HERQA), and a higher education strategy centre called the Higher Education Strategy Centre (HESC), both of which are accountable to the Minister of Education of Ethiopia. The aim of the former is to monitor the quality of higher education in Ethiopia through means such as accreditation, while the latter aims at undertaking research and development in the areas of higher education policy and educational issues in general. The aim is that the country's higher education sector shall always meet the needs of the public (FDRE, 2003:2256). One of the strengths of the proclamation was that all higher education institutions are required by law to conduct research and development activities by earmarking some of their institutional budget for it. The proclamation also states that any individual or institution in the country must provide information necessary for carrying out research (FDRE, 2003:2238).

However, the proclamation also suffers from limitations: a lack of clear provisions regarding the establishment of an independent and autonomous private accrediting organisation, the accreditation of public universities, the autonomy of the HERQA and HESC, incentives and principles in public fund allocation *vis-à-vis* quality assurance as well as the absence of mechanisms to enforce the implementation of the requirements

(Kahsay, 2012:107). Mekasha (2005:114) argued that the private higher education institutions are required to do much in the name of accreditation while little or none is required of the government institutions to do the same. Again in the name of accreditation, it seems that the government is too much involved in the internal affairs of the private higher education institutions. Only one agency (as mentioned above) is to carry out the complex and heavy task of accreditation of all the higher education institutions in the country. The proclamation was modified in 2009 (FDRE 2009:5044). The next section presents the major changes made in the modified proclamation.

4.5.4. Higher Education proclamation of 2009 (No 650/2009)

The 2009 Higher Education proclamation contains almost all the provisions contained in the 2003 Proclamation with additions or modifications on some of the articles. Article five of this proclamation states that a public institution financed by the federal government shall be established by regulation of the Council of Ministers. The Ministry of Education grants an institution the status of a university upon fulfilment of the criteria stated under Article 11, which includes minimum programmes, enrolment capacity, a record of at least four consecutive classes of graduates in degree programmes, research capacity, and other national standards (FDRE, 2009:4984). The major components of the proclamation include the following:

- *Academic freedom and autonomy*: Articles 16 and 17 of the proclamation grants academic freedom and autonomy to every institution in pursuit of its mission to develop and implement relevant curricula and research programmes; create new or close existing programmes; set up its organisational structure and enact and implement its internal rules and procedures; select academic and other staff to be employed by the institution and designate or determine their responsibilities; administer its personnel; nominate the president, vice-presidents and members of the Board, and select and appoint leaders of academic units and departments; manage its funds; and at the same time, ensure

lawfulness, efficiency and effectiveness, transparency, fairness, and accountability (FDRE, 2009:4986).

- *Institutional quality enhancement*: According to Article 22 of the proclamation, every institution shall have a reliable internal system for quality enhancement that shall be continuously improved. Besides it was stated under Sub-article 2 of Article 22, that the internal system of quality enhancement of every institution shall provide for clear and comprehensive measures of quality covering professional development of academic staff, course contents, teaching-learning processes, student evaluation, assessment and grading systems, which shall also include student evaluation of course contents together with the methods and systems of delivery, assessment, examinations, and grading. The quality enhancement system shall be applied to all processes of importance to the quality of study programmes, beginning with the information provided to potential applicants and ending with student evaluation upon completion of the course. Institutions shall develop quality standards; undertake academic audits on a periodic basis, and follow-up and rectify the deficiencies revealed by the audit, and maintain appropriate documentation of the audit, activities undertaken and of the ensuing results; and submit such documentations regularly to the Agency. Institutions shall also be responsible to give practical effect to appropriate recommendation by the Agency on quality enhancement measures that have to be taken. The Ministry, the Centre, and the Agency shall also guide institutional quality enhancement efforts as well as curricula development through a national qualifications' framework that shall, as the case may be, determine or indicate core learning outcomes or graduate competencies (FDRE, 2009:4988-4989).

- *Academic guidance and counselling:* Higher education institutions, through Article 23 of this proclamation, are required to officially and properly inform students and applicants of the courses of study available, the content, structure, and requirements of each course. Furthermore, it is indicated in the sub-articles of Article 23 that every institution shall assist students throughout the duration of their courses of study by providing them with specialised academic advice and counselling relating to their studies. Academic units shall take remedial actions where academic advice and counselling reveal the need for

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special academic support and follow-up. Institutions shall also explore and establish as necessary a system of pre-admission counselling of students on their study choice (FDRE, 2009:4989).

- *Consultancy*: Article 26 of this proclamation allows universities to perform consultancy or other supplementary activities in areas that are related to their core mission and competencies. At the same time, the universities are required by this proclamation to issue regulatory directives and ensure that undertaking consultancy by academic staff does not erode their mission, or legal and ethical standards. The proclamation also contains provision for university-industry partnership and disciplinary measures to be taken for the violations of Article 26 (FDRE, 2009:4991).

- *Academic staff*: As stated under Article 29, every university shall ensure adequate supply of academic staff in quality as well as in quantity based on the staff-to-student ratio and additional research requirements. According to this article, graduate assistants may be employed for teaching only under strict circumstances, or conditions of transition. Otherwise, only staff members within the qualification range of professorship to assistant lecturership are eligible for teaching employment (FDRE, 2009:4993-4994).

- *Admissions of students*: Prior to 2003, the Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate Examination (ESLCE) was the only single instrument to ascertain students' completion of secondary education and to select candidates for subsequent tertiary education. But then the national examination was reformed and changed in 2003 into two distinct types – the Ethiopian General Secondary Education Certificate Examination (EGSECE) at the end of Grade 10, and the University Entrance Examination (UEE) at the end of preparatory education. According to Article 39 of the proclamation, admissions to undergraduate programmes of any institution shall be based on the completion of the preparatory programme and obtaining the necessary pass marks in the university entrance examination. Admissions may also be granted to students who completed their secondary school education in foreign countries on the basis of equivalent academic achievements that shall be determined by the Ministry (FDRE, 2009:5003).

- *Rights and responsibilities of academics*: Articles 31 and 32 of this proclamation is concerned with the rights and responsibilities of academics respectively. According to Article 31 of the proclamation, every academic staff member shall have the right to: exercise academic freedom based on the institution's mission; conduct research and render consultancy services; be entitled to further education and training for professional development; be promoted and assume a new academic rank; enjoy transparent, fair, and equitable administration and a system of remuneration and benefits; be informed on his/her performance results and of any records kept in his/her personal file; enjoy campus security while rendering the proper services; and be informed on the plan, development, direction, condition and performance of the institution; and elect and be elected where election of academic staff is the norm (FDRE, 2009:4995-4996).

Parallel with these rights of academics, the proclamation stipulates their responsibilities. Accordingly, every academic staff member of an institution shall have the responsibilities to: teach, including assisting students in need of special support, and render academic guidance or counselling, and community services; undertake problem-solving studies and research and transfer knowledge and skills, in the specific area of self-competence and professional position, that are beneficial to the country; or at least ensure that their own teaching is research and study-based; participate in curriculum development, review, and enhancement; and require the professional standard in curriculum delivery, student assessment, grading, counselling, and management of student complaints and grievances, and in professional ethical standards in general; uphold, respect and practice the objectives of higher education and the guiding values of the institution; and exercise academic freedom with professionalism and consistent with the applicable provisions of this proclamation; counsel, assist and support students in acquainting themselves with the mission and guiding values of the institution as well as with the objectives of higher education; devote his/her full working time to the institution; refrain from imposing his/her political views and religious beliefs on his/her students during the teaching-learning process; and treat and interact with members of the institution's community by refraining from acts that are contrary to the rights enshrined in the Constitution (FDRE, 2009:4997).

- *Quality of teaching-learning and assessment of students:* Article 41 of the proclamation is devoted to the teaching-learning methodology and students' assessments methods. It stated that the teaching and learning process in any institution shall be interactively student-centered to promote active learning. The teaching and learning conditions in any institution shall create an in-class and on-campus enabling environment and encouraging an atmosphere for students to learn. The designing of courses and their delivery shall be such that the courses shall add to the knowledge and skills the students already have, cultivate constructive professional values, and bring about attitudinal changes and development in students at the end of the courses. Students shall be assessed properly and fairly on the basis of their learning experience; and the marking system shall be reflective of the competences achieved by students. There shall be institutionally recognised and well-defined student assessment and examination methods and systems at academic unit levels to which all academic staff shall adhere, and have been made known to students. There shall be adequate structures, at the necessary levels of the pertinent academic units, which shall constitute leading authorities at any of the levels on student assessments, examinations and grading of results. Student complaints against assessment methods, examinations, grading systems, or results thereof shall be handled, at institutional level, with due care and expeditiously. Academic staff shall receive on the job and tailor-made professional training on student assessment theories and skills; and the mastery and successful application of assessment skills and teaching shall constitute critical prerequisites for continuity of employment and promotions. Plagiarism and cheating by students in assignments and examinations, and nepotism or vengeance by academic staff in the administration of examinations, correction of examinations and assignments, and in determining grades shall constitute breaches of discipline warranting severe penalties (FDRE, 2009:5005).

- *Governance and management:* With regard to governance and management, Article 43 states that a public university shall have governing and advisory bodies that include the board, president, senate, managing council, university council, academic unit council, academic managing council, department assembly, and advisory or specialised

committees or councils. The board of a public university is the highest governing body that supervises and ensures that the university operates as per the proclamation. This proclamation has provisions regarding responsibilities of the board, its compositions, meetings and performance self-evaluation. Next to the board, the senate is the highest and leading body at university level responsible for academic matters. The university senate is an assembly of professors and faculty and student representatives. According to the proclamation, departments are the core units in running the actual academic processes of the university. The president of a public university is the chief executive officer of the institution; one who directs and administers with the aim of ensuring the institution's mission. As stated under Article 52, the Ministry or head of the appropriate state organ appoints a university president based on nominations from the board. The board or its designees, publicly advertises the position of the president in selecting nominees. The board shall appoint, based on merit and through competition, the vice-presidents. This suggests that the proclamation requires merit-based selection and appointment of presidents and their assistants (FDRE, 2009:5007).

- *Finance*: Public universities are funded by the federal government through a block grant system based on strategic planning agreements (FDRE, 2009:5023). Funding has no link with the improvement of the universities' performance. Private higher education institutions are not eligible for public funding, except for some government subsidy based on strict preconditions (FDRE, 2009:5037). In relation to this, the government has introduced a cost-sharing scheme in the Ethiopian higher education sector that makes students liable for a small part of the cost of their education. According to this scheme, beneficiaries of public higher education are required to share full costs related to food and accommodation and to a minimum of 15% of tuition cost (Kahsay, 2012:109). In early 2011, there was a move to introduce a different funding formula for the public universities of Ethiopia.

According to Kahsay (2012:109), however, the proclamation has some limitations in view of enforcing the implementation of the internal quality assurance system. One of the shortcomings of the proclamation is a lack of provision regarding higher education

financing strategies. There is no precondition for the financing of higher education institutions. Public universities are eligible for government funding based on student enrolment regardless of the quality of education they provide. The other limitation is the absence of provisions that encourage competitions between students and funding among universities. The proclamation does not require public universities to gain accreditation. On the one hand, the proclamation grants autonomy to universities in pursuit of their mission; and on the other, the Ministry of Education controls student admission and placement, provides core funding, and coordinates curriculum review and development (Kahsay, 2012:109).

4.6.   QUALITY ASSURANCE PRACTICES IN THE ETHIOPIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

4.6.1.   Introduction

The formal quality assurance system that has been introduced in the Ethiopian higher education sector in the last ten years was a new phenomenon. However, previously there existed an internal quality assurance system where each academic staff member was evaluated by his/her students, peers and the head of the department (Tamirat, 2011:31). Furthermore, public HEIs admit students based on their academic merits regardless of sex, age, religion, and ethnicity. There are also periodic curriculum reviews as a mechanism to ensure quality (Teshome & Kassa, 2008:4). Yet, these traditional mechanisms of ensuring quality had not brought a significant improvement of the sector, and did not respond to current developments and needs in the area. Chief among new developments that demanded a new approach were the overall changes and reforms introduced in the education system; the higher education expansion drive; and the introduction of private higher education. Hence, there was a need for a more formalised system of quality assurance (QA). This formal quality assurance system is discussed below.

4.6.2. The Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA)

The issue of quality higher education has internationally become one of the prime agendas in the light of the prevailing national, international, and global dynamics. The HERQA was established through the Higher Education Proclamation (351/2003) as one of the key agencies responsible for guiding and regulating the higher education sector in Ethiopia. Being directly accountable to the Ministry of Education, the agency was established with the objective of supervising the relevance and quality of higher education offered by any institution in the country. One of the central roles of the HERQA was to encourage and assist the growth of an organisational culture in Ethiopian higher education that values quality and is committed to continuous improvement. The HERQA's specific powers and duties that are related to the quality of education include the following (FDRE, 2003:2256):

- Ensuring that higher education and training offered at any institution in the country are up to standard, relevant, and of high quality.
- Evaluating higher education institutions at least once every five years, with a view to ensuring whether such institutions are up to standard and competent.
- Supervising the standards and competence of the institutions.
- Giving information to the public about the current situation and status of the institutions periodically.
- Gathering and disseminating information about the standards and programmes of study offered by foreign higher education institutions, as well as about their general status.
- Evaluating the relevance and quality of the institutions and their programmes.

Tamirat (2011:31) described the new features of the quality assurance regime in Ethiopia in the form of quality assurance mechanisms; quality enhancement mechanisms; and frameworks created to infuse these mechanisms into the higher education system. A schematic presentation of the system is presented in Figure 2 below.
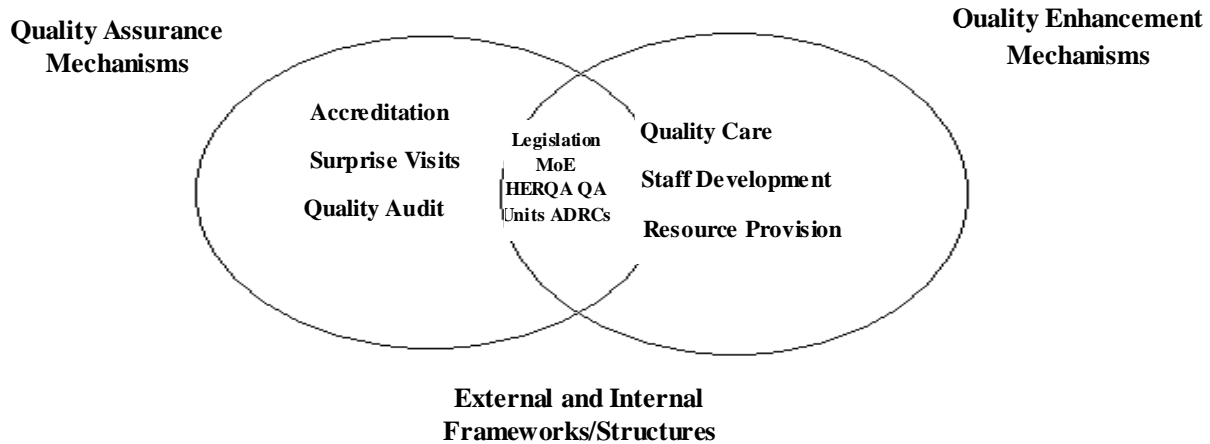
Figure 2: Conceptualising the Ethiopian Quality Assurance System (Tamirat, 2011:31)

As might be noted in the Figure 2, the current QA landscape contains accreditation, surprise visits, 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 and 2009. The Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) play the role of steering, defining, and enforcing the rules and regulations that pervade the quality assurance framework (Tamirat, 2011:31).

4.6.3. External quality audit (EQA)

As part of its mandate, the HERQA is responsible for conducting EQAs for all HEIs. An EQA, according to the HERQA (2006:4), is an in-depth analysis and assessment of the quality and relevance of programmes 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, 2006:4). 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, programme 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:xvi).

4.6.4.   Accreditation

The two higher education laws (Higher Education Proclamation No. 351/2003 and No. 650/2009) established the HERQA's mandates to accredit private HEIs. The accreditation system focuses at both institutional and programme levels. In the case of the programme level, the HERQA is assigned to handle accreditation applications concerned with undergraduate (bachelor) degree and post-graduate level programmes. Accreditation of diploma and certificate programmes is delegated to the regional education offices. The whole process of accreditation is done in collaboration with the MoE and the HERQA. To summarise up the process, in the first stage, the applicant private HEI will send the application to the MoE, in which the ministry has to send this application to the HERQA (FDRE, 2003:2253-2254). The HERQA will assess the application and forward its recommendations to the ministry. Then, the MoE will issue the pre-accreditation permit within 15 days after the recommendation has been forwarded by the HERQA (FDRE, 2003:2252). In the accreditation stage, the evaluation will focus on evidence for areas of improvement suggested during the pre-accreditation stage (Teshome & Kassa, 2008:10). The proclamation states that the HERQA should process the applications for accreditation within a 3-month period (FDRE, 2003:2252). The procedures developed by the HERQA to undertake the accreditation process are somewhat similar to the general trend in external quality assurance systems worldwide.

However, the current practice of accreditation raised some questions. The frequently mentioned criticism purport that the HERQA's accreditation is entirely dependent on educational input (such as buildings and infrastructure, number of full-time academic staff, and so forth) to the exclusion of educational processes and outcomes (Semela, 2011:418). The dispute related to accreditation poses the question: Why is accreditation intended for private HEIs *per se*? Unlike private HEIs, the fact that the public domain is not required by law (FDRE, 2009:5031) to undergo the same regulatory process has been construed as discrimination against the former. This has a grain of truth. The practices of other African countries such as Kenya, and South Africa, tell similar stories. Analysing the Kenyan case, Otieno (2007:191-192) draws the same conclusion stressing that the degree of regulation represents discrimination against private HEIs. In the Ethiopian case, however, regulation in the private domain is shaped by at least three interrelated factors: (a) the astronomical expansion of the private sector because of high public demand; (b) the variety and complex nature of private providers; and (c) the absence of a robust quality monitoring system. These situations within the private domain seem to have urged the government to resort to "special" treatment. The experience over the last two decades, on the other hand, suggests that the apprehension *vis-à-vis* private higher education is not without reason. Not to deny the government's shortfalls in terms of containing the problem before it happened; there is abundant evidence of credible threats to the quality of higher education due to widespread fraudulent practices (Semela, 2011:419). Nevertheless, the government still needs to exercise caution in order not to stifle the budding private higher education sector in Ethiopia.

4.6.5.   Past research on quality and quality assurance issues in Ethiopia

The discourse of quality of higher education in general, and quality assurance in particular, is a very recent phenomenon whose introduction in day-to-day language is less than a decade old. Hence, partly owing to its young age, little is known about the agency and its level of performance as a system oversight body. Nevertheless, all things being equal, the external quality audit reports that the Ethiopian Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency

(HERQA) has so far published are crucial sources. The other equally important source is a book entitled: "Quality of Higher Education in Ethiopian Public Institutions", published by the Forum for Social Studies in 2009. The book comprises six research papers focusing on different issues of quality of higher education. It consists of empirical data on the expansion and intake capacity of HEIs (Wanna Leka, 2009:131-160), the impact of pre-university preparation and level of English language proficiency (Kahsay, 2009:1-26), curriculum relevance and learning resources (Amare Asgedom, 2009:57-93), pedagogical training, workload, and performance evaluation of teachers' (Wessenu Yimam, 2009:95-160), assessment of science education quality indicators in Addis Ababa, Bahirdar, and Hawassa Universities (Shibeshi, Mekonnen, Semela & Endawok, 2009:161-258), and the status of quality assurance systems and accreditation in Ethiopian higher education (Woldetinssae, 2009:28-55).

Despite their specific methodological limitations, these studies reveal that the majority of pre-university students do not satisfy the requirements of higher education, because of inadequate preparation in general and low achievement in basic sciences and mathematics in particular (Shibeshi *et al.*, 2009:161-258). Furthermore, with respect to the academic qualifications of the teaching staff, the findings disclose that the significant majority of both private and public HEIs do not meet the minimum standard set by the Ministry of Education (Shibeshi *et al.*, 2009:254; Wanna Leka 2009:155). Besides, dismal engagement in research, poor publication track record (Shibeshi *et al.*, 2009:253), and the lack of pedagogical knowledge and skills among teachers characterize university teaching (Shibeshi *et al.*, 2009:254; Wessenu Yimam, 2009:124). The studies also found that poor English language proficiency among students and teachers affected the quality of teaching and learning in secondary schools and HEIs (Shibeshi *et al.,* 2009:253; Kahsay, 2009:22). Regarding quality assurance, the available data suggest that HEIs have no functional quality assurance systems; nor do they conduct tracer studies to follow-up their graduates' performance in the workplace (Woldetinssae, 2009:48). The empirical studies reviewed above, endorse the assertions made in earlier studies on Ethiopian higher education (Semela, 2011:405).

The recent study conducted by Semela (2011:399-425) entitled "Breakneck Expansion and Quality Assurance in Ethiopian Higher Education" disclosed that "... Ethiopia's higher education has shown an impressive quantitative growth". On the flip side, however, the author argued that the quality of education is under serious threat. Among other things, low academic qualifications and experience of the teaching force, increasing student-teacher ratios, diminishing per capita research outputs, shrinking public investment per student (unit cost) and the growing vulnerability of universities to human capital flight represents the current landscape. On the other hand, the state of institutional quality assurance is found to be in a much weaker position to apply the provisions of proclamation No. 650/2009, which capitalizes on an internal quality enhancement system. The findings also confirmed that the quantitative expansion has been underpinned by ideological and economic rationales although it registered limited progress in addressing issues related to quality assurance largely due the countertrend of financial impediments (Semela, 2011:422).

4.7.   CONCLUSION

This Chapter attempted to show that modern higher education in Ethiopia, which was shaped by the influence of western higher education systems, is currently undergoing a rapid change. Ethiopia is radically expanding its higher education sector. The huge expansion of student numbers is mainly in new regional universities and a vibrant private system. The rapid expansion may be partially explained by the need for a larger trained work force, but the location of the new public universities also relates to the need for national unity: universities established within the regions create a measure of autonomy and self-respect, and a stake in the national identity as well as being a catalyst for local economic development through the increased demand for goods and services in the local community.

The enrolment expansion will continue in the coming years and this in turn would obviously influence the operation of higher education institutions. The higher education institutions are facing frequent changes in the policy environment. Recently, there is a

paradigm shift in government policy regarding the focus of the education and training in public universities. Universities are required to ensure a graduate professional mix of 70% in engineering and the natural sciences, and the remaining 30% in humanities and social sciences. Also, all public universities are required to make their training programmes efficient and effective.

Ethiopia is one of the world's poorest countries and the expansion of higher education is a considerable investment, both financially and politically, and a considerable risk for the government. At the same time, the development of largely unregulated private higher education and the extension of open and blended learning formats have presented challenges. Partly to show that this expansion has been successful and has not resulted in a lowering of quality, a Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) was established in law by 2003. The higher education sector in Ethiopia is a fluid entity that and is still developing. The legal and regulatory basis for formal quality assurance is a recent phenomenon in the Ethiopian higher education system. The HERQA, which is responsible for the guiding and regulating of the quality of higher education in Ethiopia, operates with constraints of human resource capacity and a lack of full autonomy. Higher education in Ethiopia has been in a fairly constant state of change and development since the early 1990s, and there is no guarantee that HERQA's quasi-independence and mode of operation can be maintained. The next Chapter presents the research paradigm and the research design and methodology used in the study.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH PARADIGM, DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This Chapter presents an outline and discussion of the research paradigm, research design and methodology used in the study. Methodology is here understood as the strategy that guides the actual research design and the conduct of the research plan. Consequently, the Chapter firstly, operationalised the independent and dependent variables contained in the conceptual framework of the study (see Chapter 3). Secondly, it provides the research paradigm and the research design while the third section discusses the methods, sources of data and sampling, data-collection instruments and data analysis techniques. The Chapter is concluded with the issues of ethics and validity and reliability in the context of this study.

5.2. OPERATIONALISATION OF THE VARIABLES IN THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK IN TERMS OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

In this section, the variables for the empirical analysis are operationalised. It was developed in line with the theoretical perspectives (see Chapter 3) and the main constructs of the conceptual framework employed in this study, with special reference to the empirical objective of the study, i.e. quality assurance in Ethiopian higher education institutions. Accordingly, independent and dependent variables are presented in order to examine the quality assurance implementation practices in Ethiopian higher education institutions empirically. For each variable, further detailed (specific) measures are identified and discussed.

5.2.1.   The dependent variables

The quality assurance implementation practice in higher education institutions is the dependent variable for the empirical analysis in this study. In this study, quality assurance implementation practice can be conceptualized as policies, attitudes, models, values, methods, instruments, resources, procedures, and actions committed to ensure that quality is being maintained and enhanced in the higher education institutions. The dependent variables comprise of two sets of variables: the adequacy and efficacy of quality assurance. Each of these sets of variables is discussed below.

5.2.1.1.   Adequacy of quality assurance

The adequacy of a quality assurance mechanism implemented is primarily derived from quality assurance literature and refers to the extent to which a quality assurance system covers the aspects of input, process, and output elements. Furthermore, the adequacy of a quality assurance mechanism is connected to neo-institutional theory, namely to the question whether this system works symbolically or genuinely. In this study two sets of indicators are used to address the adequacy of quality assurance, namely:

- The first set refers to the extent to which the organisational quality assurance systems is comprehensive in a sense that it includes the input, process and output dimensions of quality. This is operationalised in terms of (a) input variables: such as quality of academic staff (e.g. competence and adequacy), quality of incoming students (e.g. academic background characteristics), and quality of resources and facilities (e.g. accessibility and adequacy), and sources and adequacy of education finance; (b) process variables: such as quality of programmes and courses, quality of teaching and learning experience, quality in student assessment and internal moderation, staff development programmes, utilisation of resources, and self-evaluation, and (c) output variables: such as the quality of graduates (information of academic results, information of a tracer study, student satisfaction with the

course and degree programmes). The concept of value-added is also important in examining the output of an education system. The effectiveness of any particular higher education institution should be evaluated not in terms of the absolute capability level of the higher education institution's graduates, but rather in terms of the relative improvement achieved in the students' capabilities between the "... time of matriculation [joining the university] and the time of graduation" (Yunker, 2005:355).

- The second set indicates whether the quality assurance system developed works in practice – such as clear procedures, operating elements in practice not only on paper, and improving activities – and not only in a symbolic way.

5.2.1.2. The efficacy of quality assurance

The effectiveness of quality assurance implementation practices is operationalised in terms of the following four aspects. An elaboration of each follows.

- The first aspect examines the perceived outcome/impact of quality assurance *vis à vis* the student learning experience and quality of teaching, teachers and the environment in which they practice (such as changes occurred in monitoring teaching, curriculum reforms, student assessment practices, empowerment of students, etc.). The aim here is not measure quality of student learning[9], but rather to see whether quality systems, policy, structure, procedures and instruments are in place to bring about fundamental changes that improve the students' experience of higher education.

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[9] Research on the impact of quality monitoring is difficult because it is impossible to control all relevant factors to be able to map causal relationships (Harvey & Newton, 2004:149). Besides, according to Weusthof (1995:246), different factors such as the complexity and pace of change; universities' information-processing and decision-making traditions; problems of isolating the impact of quality assurance from the impact of the many other changes made difficult measuring the impact of quality assurance mechanisms in HEIs.

- The second aspect refers to the extent to which the quality assurance practices/initiatives has been internalised and institutionalised into the formal system. This implies the extent to which the quality assurance is formalised; and the systems, policy, structure, instruments and procedures are developed and put into practices in order to assure the quality of the teaching-learning processes and conditions. Like the first aspect, the intention here is not to measure the quality of student learning, but rather to see if there are functional mechanisms to improve student learning. These mechanisms may include student surveys and established committees that have quality teaching, quality assessment, staff evaluation and development in their respective area of responsibilities.

- The third aspect is concerned with the degree to which the overall purpose of quality assurance is improvement-driven or accountability/compliance-oriented. Accountability is most often associated with external stakeholders, such as governmental agencies and the public, while improvement or enhancement focuses on internal processes (Koslowski, 2006:280). In the compliance model, quality assurance serves as a means of increasing state control over the academia and as a means of enforcing compliance with particular policy demands (Harvey, 1999:24).

- The fourth aspect is concerned with the pace of quality assurance implementation. This is measured by (1) the year the quality policy, manual, guidelines, etc. were developed; and (2) the year the first quality management system was implemented.

5.2.2. The independent variables

In this study, the independent variables comprise of two groups of elements. These are the internal and external organisational environments. An elaboration of each follows.

5.2.2.1. The internal organisational environment variables

As regards to the internal organisational environment variables, such as dependency, leaders' commitment, governance, organisational complexity (age, size, scope of activity), staff and student profiles, and quality culture are independent variables which are expected to influence the quality assurance implementation. Each of these variables are further operationalised, and measured as follows.

5.2.2.1.1. Dependency

This independent variable indicates that a higher education institution depends on other actors whenever it strives for goals whose achievement can be facilitated or retarded by them. In this study, the variable dependency is measured by (1) the extent to which institutional income is received from the government, and (2) the extent to which institutional quality assurance is compliance/accountability-led or improvement-oriented. The accountability-led view of quality assurance is mainly driven by demands of satisfying external agendas (e.g. to enforce institutional accountability or compliance) instead of academic considerations (e.g. to facilitate student learning).

5.2.2.1.2. Commitment of leaders

The variable commitment of leaders is defined as an agreement or pledge to do something in the future. The role and commitment of senior leaders is decisive for the adoption and implementation of reforms such as quality assurance polices in the HEIs. The following indicators are crucial with regard to the commitment of leaders. Firstly, it can be measured whether the leaders clearly expressed their commitment for consistent quality improvement (for example, in the quality policy manual of the higher education institution). Secondly, the assurance of appropriate resources (money, time, infrastructure, and staff) for quality implementation; this may include the capacity to establish a coherent framework of quality policy and strategies, resources and

structure. Thirdly, the ability to mobilise critical mass that values quality learning ability; fourthly, the implementation of feedback from self-evaluation and/or the quality audit; and finally, the indicators of influence on the quality culture. The more these activities can be observed within an organisation, the more the leaders are committed to QA implementation (Csizmadia, *et al*. 2008:443).

5.2.2.1.3.   Governance

Governance as variable is examined in terms of the (1) quality management structure; (2) roles and responsibilities of the quality assurance offices in the governance structure of the university; (3) role and responsibilities of the most senior decision-making body of the university (i.e. the governing board) pertaining to quality assurance; (4) and the role and participation of academics and students in the planning and implementation of quality assurance initiatives (Salter, 2002:246).

5.2.2.1.4.   Organisational complexity

The variable organisational complexity is measured in terms of two variables: organisational size and organisational age.

5.2.2.1.4.1.   Organisational size as variable

Organisational size is operationalised in terms of the number of colleges and students, and the universities' scope of activities or their focus of attention. Accordingly, in this study, three sets of sizes – large, medium and small – are employed. Large is examined in terms of the following aspects: (1) those universities with a total undergraduate enrolment that ranges from 16,675 to 40,513 (MoE, 2011:169); (2) with greater than six colleges/faculties and many

campuses; and (3) with their focus of attention on both undergraduate and post-graduate programmes. Medium refers to (1) universities with a total enrolment that ranges from 3,333 to 14,939; (2) universities with more than one campus and about six colleges/faculties; and (3) with their focus of attention on mainly undergraduate programmes, but also post-graduate programmes. Small refers to (1) those universities whose student enrolment is less than 3,000; (2) with less than six colleges/faculties and with only one campus; and (3) with their focus of attention on the undergraduate programme.

5.2.2.1.4.2. Organisational age as variable

In terms of the organisational age, this study categorises the Ethiopian universities into three age groups as: new, young and old. Old refers to universities that have more than ten years of experience in teaching, research and outreach programmes and that were upgraded from college to university status, and which were established during the years 1950 to 2000. Universities with their years of establishment between 2000 to 2008/2009, and are less than 10 years old are categorised as young universities, while those universities with their years of establishment between 2010 to 2011 and are less than 3 years old are categorised as new universities.

5.2.2.1.5. Academic staff and students

This variable is concerned with the academic staff and students' background characteristics or profile. Academic staff is uniquely responsible for delivering high quality education. These are operationalised in terms of (1) academic staff profile (number, qualification), motivation and working conditions, and (2) students' background, satisfaction, commitment, and engagement in learning.

5.2.2.1.6. Institutional quality culture

Berings, Beerten, Hulpiau and Verhesschen (2010:2) defined the term quality culture as an organisational culture which contributes to the development of effective and efficient care for quality. Quality culture is a set of group values that guide how improvements are made to everyday working practices and consequent outputs. A quality culture is, arguably, a set of taken-for-granted practices that encapsulate the ideology of the group or organisation (Harvey, 2004–2012:2). In this study, institutional quality culture is examined in line with the following key values: values, beliefs, expectations and commitments toward quality learning are shared; supported by structural and managerial elements and processes that enhance quality; quality of student learning and its enhancement is valued; academic community awareness and ownership of and commitment to the quality of higher education; partnership, co-operation, collaboration, sharing of experiences and team-work among all actors regarding quality assurance are valued and shared; the institution welcomes external critical evaluation from a variety of sources including formal external evaluations, external peers acting as critical friends, and internal peer review and support which uses feedback to improve quality; and the leadership, academics and students are committed and engaged in quality assurance activities (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008:436-437; James, *et al.*, 2011:294; Vlãsceanu, *et al.,* 2004:2).

5.2.2.2. External organisational environment as independent variable

The organisational environment comprises the second set of independent variables. The arguments from institutional theorists suggest that university organisations are not free of the influence of their institutional environment in undertaking quality assurance practices. In this study, the political-legal framework and the regulators are considered as sources of influences on the university environment. Each of these environmental variables is operationalised as follows (Harvey, 1999:3-4; Kahsay, 2012:79; Suchman & Edelman, 1997:482).

5.2.2.2.1. The political-legal framework as external environmental variable

The term political-legal framework refers to higher education polices, all other laws, and legal materials or documents that guides the operation of the higher education system. Specifically, in the context of this study, the term political-legal framework includes the HERQA's (the government) quality assurance policy documents and instruments of proclamation No. 351/2003 (FDRE, 2003), endorsed in 2003 and improved in 2009 through proclamation No. 650/2009 (FDRE, 2009:4976), laws on education reforms such as education expansion, business score card, modularisation of courses/programmes, and institutional quality assurance policy. In this study, the political-legal framework is examined in terms of the extent to which it may facilitate or inhibit the implementation of quality assurance in the universities; whether it only enforces institutional accountability and compliance, or if it facilitates student learning (the improvement purpose). Perceptual questions, legal documents and published government reports, including audit reports, have been used to address the legal issues.

5.2.2.2.2. Regulators as external environmental variable

Regulators of quality assurance are usually government departments, and agencies that are ultimately responsible to a government department (education, science, employment, treasury, etc.) or bodies with delegated regulatory powers. In the Ethiopian context, the 2003 Higher Education Proclamation No. 351/2003 (FDRE, 2003:2235) established the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Assurance Agency (HERQA) as a quasi-autonomous organisation to regulate quality and standards within the sector. The HERQA's mandates is quality monitoring, including conducting external quality audits (EQAs), setting standards, accreditation of private HEIs, monitoring HEI quality enhancement activities, and providing technical assistance in curriculum development (FDRE, 2003:2253; 2009:4989). In this study, the regulators are operationalised in

terms of the HERQA's role in stimulating and impacting on the development and implementation of internal quality enhancement mechanisms in the public universities.

In order to analyse the effects of the HERQA on the higher education institutional practice, this study draws on (1) perceptual questions for university leadership, staff, and the HERQA personnel; (2) the proclamations and published documents such as the HERQA and MoE's requirements; (3) self-evaluation portfolios produced by the universities themselves and submitted to the HERQA as part of the audit process; (4) the institutional audit reports prepared by the HERQA; and (5) other teaching and learning-related documents (such as the policies on teaching and learning, and teaching and learning strategies) available in the universities.

5.3.   RESEARCH PARADIGM, DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

5.3.1.   Research design and paradigm

5.3.1.1.   Mixed-methods research design and pragmatism

This study applies the mixed-methods approach. The mixed-methods research design is formally defined here as the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines the quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study (Creswell & Plano, 2007:5). Philosophically, it is the "third wave" or third research movement, a movement that moves past the paradigm wars by offering a logical and practical alternative. The mixed-methods research design makes use of the pragmatic method and system of philosophy. Its logic of inquiry includes the use of induction (or discovery of patterns), deduction (testing of theories and hypotheses), and abduction (uncovering and relying on the best of a set of explanations for understanding one's results). Mixed-methods research also is an attempt to legitimatise the use of multiple approaches in answering research questions, rather than restricting or constraining the researchers' choices (i.e. it rejects dogmatism). In this research design,

what is most fundamental is the research questions, as research method should follow research questions in a way that offers the best chance to obtain useful answers (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004:17).

Pragmatism is generally regarded as the philosophical partner for the mixed-methods approach. It provides a set of assumptions about knowledge and inquiry that underpins the mixed-methods approach, and distinguishes the approach from purely quantitative approaches that are based on a philosophy of (post)positivism, and from purely qualitative approaches that are based on a philosophy of interpretivism or constructivism (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004:17). Pragmatism also helps to shed light on how research approaches can be mixed fruitfully; the bottom line is that research approaches should be mixed in ways that offer the best opportunities for answering important research questions (Denscombe, 2008:273). Pragmatism has emerged as a common alternative to the either/or choice of positivism and constructivism (Creswell & Plano, 2007:16). Thus, instead of relying on deductive reasoning and general premises to reach specific conclusions, or inductive approaches that seek general conclusions based on specific premises, pragmatism allows for a more flexible abductive approach. By focusing on solving practical problems, the debate about the existence of objective "truth" or the value of subjective perceptions, can be usefully sidestepped. As such, pragmatists have no problem with asserting both that there is a single "real world", and that all individuals have their own unique interpretations of that world (Morgan, 2007:72).

However, the pragmatism worldview or paradigm as mixed-method partner is a much contested area. Two important and persistent issues, the paradigm-method fit issue and the "best" paradigm issue, have inspired considerable debate regarding the philosophical basis of mixed-methods research. The paradigm-method fit issue relates to the question "Do philosophical paradigms (e.g. post-positivism, constructivism) and research methods have to fit together?" (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, Petska & Creswell, 2005:225). Some researchers have argued, for example, that a post-positivist philosophical paradigm or worldview could be combined only with quantitative methods, and that a naturalistic

philosophical paradigm or worldview could be combined only with qualitative methods. This issue has been referred to as the paradigm debate. From this perspective, mixed-methods research was viewed as untenable (i.e. incommensurable or incompatible) because certain paradigms and methods could not "fit" together legitimately (Smith, 1983:9).

Reichardt and Cook (1979:28) countered this viewpoint, however, by suggesting that different philosophical paradigms and methods were compatible. In their research report, they argued that paradigms and methods are not inherently linked, citing a variety of examples to support their position (e.g. quantitative procedures are not always objective, and qualitative procedures are not always subjective). Indeed, the perspective exists today that multiple methods may be used in a single research study, for example, to take advantage of the representativeness and generaliseability of quantitative findings and the in-depth contextual nature of qualitative findings (Greene & Caracelli, 2003:97).

The "best paradigm" issue relates to the question, "What philosophical paradigm is the best foundation for mixed-methods research?" This issue, like the paradigm-method fit issue, has multiple perspectives (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003:11). One perspective is that mixed-methods research uses competing paradigms intentionally, giving each one relatively equal footing and merit. This "dialectical" perspective recognizes that using competing paradigms gives rise to contradictory ideas, contested arguments, and features of research that are to be honoured and that may not be reconciled (Greene & Caracelli, 2003:94). Such oppositions reflect different ways of making knowledge claims, and, Creswell *et al.* (2005:226) advocate for honouring and respecting the different paradigmatic perspectives that researchers bring to bear on a study. This perspective maintains that mixed-methods research may be viewed strictly as a "method"; thus allowing researchers to use any number of philosophical foundations for its justification and use. The best paradigm is determined by the researcher and the research problem, not by the method.

Another perspective is that pragmatism is the best paradigm for mixed-methods research because it draws on various ideas such as using "what works," utilising diverse approaches, and valuing both objective and subjective knowledge. Rossman and Wilson (1985:627) were among the first to associate pragmatism with mixed-methods research. They differentiated between methodological purists, situationalists, and pragmatists. The purists believed that quantitative and qualitative methods derived from different, mutually exclusive, epistemological and ontological assumptions about research. The situationalists believed that both methods have value but that certain methods are more appropriate under certain circumstances. The pragmatists, in contrast, believed that, regardless of circumstances, both methods may be used in a single study. For many mixed-methods researchers, then, pragmatism has become the answer to the question of what is the best paradigm for mixed-methods research. Recently, Greene & Caracelli, (2003:92) have attempted to formally link pragmatism and mixed-methods research, arguing that, among other things, the research question should be of primary importance – more important than either the method, the theoretical lens, or the paradigm that underlies the method. Many other prominent mixed-methods researchers and scholars also believe that pragmatism is the best philosophical basis of mixed-methods research (Creswell *et al.,* 2005:226). Thus, research can be viewed from a unified perspective in which the research question drives the methodological approaches or choices (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005:291).

5.3.2.   Mixed-methods research approach or strategy

A mixed-methods approach or strategy is defined as research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods in a single study or programme of inquiry (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007:4). Different reasons, or rationales, for mixing both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study can be identified. Greene, Caracelli and Graham (1989:255), for example, identified five rationales or purposes for conducting mixed-methods research: triangulation, complementarity, development,

initiation, and expansion. Applying these to mixed analysis decisions, when triangulation is the rationale for conducting the mixed analysis, the researcher would compare findings from the qualitative data with the quantitative results. If complementarity is noted as the purpose for the mixed analysis, then the researcher would seek elaboration, illustration, enhancement, and clarification of the findings from one analytical strand (e.g. qualitative) with results from the other analytical strand (e.g. quantitative). When development is identified as the purpose, then the researcher would use the results from one analytical strand to help inform the other analytical strand. With initiation as a rationale for performing a mixed analysis, the researcher would look for paradoxes and contradictions that emerge when findings from the two analytical strands are compared. Such contradictions might lead to new research questions. Finally, with expansion as a purpose, the researcher would attempt to expand the breadth and range of a study by using multiple analytical strands for different study phases.

With time, mixed-methods researchers have expanded the reasons for conducting a mixed-methods investigation. Creswell *et al.* (2005:226) suggested that mixed-methods investigations may be used to (a) better understand a research problem by converging numeric trends from quantitative data and specific details from qualitative data; (b) identify variables/constructs that may be measured subsequently through the use of existing instruments, or the development of new ones; (c) obtain statistical, quantitative data and results from a sample of a population and use them to identify individuals who may expand on the results through qualitative data and results; and (d) convey the needs of individuals or groups of individuals who are marginalised or underrepresented.

Collins, Onwuegbuzie and Sutton (2006:76-77) identified four rationales for conducting mixed-methods research: participant enrichment (e.g. mixing quantitative and qualitative research to optimise the sample using techniques that include recruiting participants, engaging in activities such as institutional review board debriefings, ensuring that each participant selected is appropriate for inclusion), instrument fidelity (e.g. assessing the appropriateness and/or utility of existing instruments, creating new instruments, monitoring performance of human instruments), treatment integrity (i.e. assessing fidelity

of intervention), and significance enhancement (e.g. facilitating thickness and richness of data, augmenting interpretation and usefulness of findings).

Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003:6) suggested that a variety of data sources and analyses is needed to understand complex social phenomena or realities thoroughly. In addition, Currall and Towler's (2003:515) review suggested that when organisational and management researchers used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate organisational phenomena, their research yielded greater information than could be achieved through single methods. The authors pointed out that mixed-methods are considered appropriate when research questions concern process and dynamic phenomena such as innovation and change. Furthermore, Currall and Towler (2003:516) advocated that quantitative and qualitative research methods are complementary rather than opposed approaches; thus, this combination of techniques can enhance and enrich current knowledge by "filling the gap" that other studies, which only adopt a single approach, are unable to do. Thus, the mixed-methods approach or strategy seemed the most appropriate methodology for such a study.

This study is an attempt to demonstrate the complementarity of using exploratory quantitative and qualitative methods in one study. The mixed-methods strategy is chosen for this study based on the following assumptions: firstly, the introduction of quality assurance in a higher education system is a complex issue that may appear different at various levels (macro and micro levels). Each level may need individualised research to fully explore the core theoretical approach that neo-institutionalism contributes to the complete study. Secondly, studying quality assurance as a public policy is a complex and multifaceted process that involves the perspectives of different actors, and collection and analysis of data from different sources. Finally, the quality assurance system involving the participation of governmental agencies in higher education is a new phenomenon in Ethiopia. It could be argued, therefore, that this study is largely exploratory as the notion of a centralised and bureaucratic quality assurance system is relatively "immature" in the Ethiopian context due to the conspicuous lack of theory and previous research on the topic. The QA policy was implemented in 2003. Available

evidence shows that only a few academic studies have been conducted on the implementation of QA since the introduction of the policy. If for no other reason, the quality assurance system in Ethiopian higher education is "immature" due to a lack of new theoretical and empirical insights into the management of quality in higher education. There is, therefore, a need to explore and describe the experience of the key role-players involved in the implementation of the new system of quality assurance in the Ethiopian higher education system. For this kind of exploratory study, a combined quantitative and qualitative approach was deemed appropriate.

The mixed-methods research design involves typically two dimensions, namely, status, that is, dominance of either qualitative or quantitative methods (QUAL/quan or QUAN/qual), or equality of each of the two (QUAN/QUAL), and sequence, with the initial use of either qualitative or quantitative methods, or the application of concurrent strategies. Based on the second dimension, Creswell *et al.* (2005:228) identified six major designs of mixed-methods: three sequential (explanatory, exploratory, and transformative) and three concurrent (triangulation, nested, and transformative). Each varies with respect to its use of an explicit theoretical/advocacy lens, approach to implementation (sequential or concurrent data-collection procedures), priority given to the quantitative and qualitative data (equal or unequal), stage at which the data are analysed and integrated (separated, transformed or connected), and procedural notations. Mixed-methods research designs are, generally speaking, complex, it is important to understand subtle differences and nuances between and among them (Creswell *et al.*, 2005:228).

Sequential explanatory designs do not use an explicit advocacy lens. In these designs, quantitative data are collected and analysed, followed by qualitative data. Priority is usually unequal and given to the quantitative data. Qualitative data are used primarily to augment quantitative data. Data analysis is usually connected, and integration usually occurs at the data interpretation stage and in the discussion. These designs are particularly useful for, as its name suggests, explaining relationships and/or study findings, especially when they are unexpected.

Sequential exploratory designs also do not use an explicit advocacy lens. In these designs, qualitative data are collected and analysed first, followed by quantitative data. Priority is usually unequal and given to the qualitative data. Quantitative data are used primarily to augment qualitative data. Data analysis is usually connected, and integration occurs at the data interpretation stage and in the discussion. These designs are useful for exploring relationships when the study variables are not known, refining and testing an emerging theory based in an initial qualitative analysis, and generalising qualitative findings to a specific population.

In contrast to the other two sequential designs, sequential transformative designs use an explicit advocacy lens (e.g. feminist perspectives, critical theory), which is usually reflected in the purpose statement, research questions, and implications for action and change. In these designs, quantitative data may be collected and analysed, followed by qualitative data, or conversely, qualitative data may be collected and analysed, followed by quantitative data. Thus, either form of data may be collected first, depending on the needs and preferences of the researchers. Priority may be unequal and given to one form of data or the other or, in some cases, equal and given to both forms of data. Data analysis is usually connected, and integration usually occurs at the data interpretation stage and in the discussion. These designs are useful for giving voice to diverse or alternative perspectives, advocating for research participants, and a better understanding of a phenomenon that may be changing as a result of being studied (Creswell *et al.*, 2005:229).

In concurrent triangulation designs, quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analysed at the same time. Priority is usually equal and given to both forms of data. Data analysis is usually separate, and integration occurs at the data interpretation stage. Interpretation typically involves discussing the extent to which the data triangulate or converge. These designs are useful for attempting to confirm, cross-validate, and corroborate study findings. In concurrent nested designs, like concurrent triangulation designs, quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analysed at the same time. However, priority is usually unequal and given to one of the two forms of data either to

the quantitative or qualitative data. The nested, or embedded, forms of data are, in these designs, usually given less priority. One reason for this is that the less prioritized form of data may be included to help answer an altogether different question, or set of questions. Data analysis usually involves transforming the data, and integration usually occurs during the data analysis stage. These designs are useful for gaining a broader perspective on the topic at hand, and for studying different groups, or levels, within a single study. In contrast to the other two concurrent designs, concurrent transformative designs use an explicit advocacy lens (e.g. feminist perspectives, critical theory), which is usually reflected in the purpose statement, research questions, and implications for action and change. Quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analysed at the same time. Priority may be unequal and given to one form of data or the other or, in some cases, equal and given to both forms of data. Data analysis is usually separate, and integration usually occurs at the data interpretation stage or, if transformed, during the data analysis. Similar to sequential transformative designs, these designs are useful for giving voice to diverse or alternative perspectives, advocating for research participants, and the better understanding a phenomenon that may be changing as a result of being studied (Creswell *et al.,* 2005:229).

Concurrent mixed-methods design is employed in this study. Specifically, the concurrent triangulation design (QUAN + QUAL) and the concurrent embedded design (both QUAN + qual; QUAL + quan) types are applied in the research (see Figure 3, p. 195). Employing these mixed-methods typology serves the purpose of (a) triangulation: collecting both quantitative and qualitative data to converge the two forms of data to facilitate greater understanding and insight into the problem from the data that would be obtained by either type of data (Creswell, 2011:81); (b) complementarity: employed for the elaboration, enhancement and clarification of the results from one method with results from the other method which helps to improve the breadth and depth of the data. In this study, the quantitative method is used to gather the opinions of the respondents regarding the nature of the current practices and systems of quality and quality assurance as well as its impacts or effects in the higher education institutions. However, the quantitative data may not enable deeper explanations for why a

phenomenon occurs. This dimension necessitates the use of qualitative data. The qualitative approach is used to get data that captures the different dimensions of the participants' experiences, personal perspectives and meanings, and values, norms, and beliefs regarding quality assurance practices. It may also help to obtain deeper insights of the issues under consideration, and capture some trends that may emerge from the data.

Research aim	Research questions and approach or strategy	
To survey the quality assurance policy process in Ethiopian HEIs from a macro (national) as well as a micro (HEIs) level perspective.	1. What are the national quality assurance policies that inform practice in the HEIs, and what are the underlying assumptions of these policies? **QUAL + quan**	
To analyse procedures and experiences employed in different HEIs in implementing quality	2. To what extent and in what way did higher education institutions implement quality assurance mechanisms? What are the current QA policies, structures and instruments? 3. To what extent did the top management of the HERQA, MoE and HEIs and the quality reviewers discharge their roles and responsibilities to enhance the implementation of the quality assurance system in HEIs? 4. What are the possible factors that enable or hinder the adoption and practice of the formal QA system at HEIs? 5. Are there any differences between the higher education institutions in terms of their implementation of the quality assurance system? **QUAN + QUAL**	**Integration and Inferences** In what ways can existing quality assurance practices be improved to enhance sustainable quality?
To investigate the activities put forward for enhancing the quality of higher education in Ethiopia.		
To examine the perceived impacts/outcome of quality assurance on quality improvement at HEIs		
To make recommendations for improving the quality assurance policy and practice in Ethiopian higher education	6. What is the perceived impact/outcome of the current national and institutional quality assurance system *vis à vis* the teaching and learning, the management, and the quality culture of HEIs? **QUAN + qual**	

Figure 3: **Diagrammatic presentation of the application of the mixed-methods research approach or strategy to this study**

The quantitative and qualitative data are combined during two stages of the empirical investigation of: (1) the national quality assurance policies that inform practice in the HEIs and the underlying assumptions of these policies (macro-level policy and practice); (2) the adequacy and efficacy of quality assurance systems at higher education institution level (micro-level policy and practice).

During the first section of the empirical study, the qualitative and quantitative (QUAL + quan) are combined to explore the national quality assurance policies that inform practice in the HEIs and their underlying assumptions. Interviews with HERQA officials; and document analysis on quality assurance policy, proclamations, rules and regulations, manuals and published reports are used to obtain qualitative insights. The second section of the empirical study investigates the adequacy and efficacy of quality assurance practices in HEIs, factors that enable/hinder the adoption and practice of the quality assurance system, and the extent to which HEIs officials discharge their roles and responsibilities. This involves a mix of quantitative and qualitative data analysis (QUAL+QUAN). The quantitative data is generated through survey questionnaires from academic staff, deans and department heads, while an interview with university management is conducted to obtain qualitative data. The document analysis on the universities' quality assurance policies, structures, instruments, rules and regulations, manuals and audit reports are also used to enrich the data. The study at institutional level deals with a survey of the perceived impact/outcome of national and institutional quality assurance *vis à vis* teaching and learning, and the management and quality culture of HEIs. It involves a mix of quantitative and qualitative data analysis (QUAN + qual). The quantitative data is generated through survey questionnaires from academic staff and students. While interview and document analyses are also used to obtain deeper qualitative insights to enrich the data. Finally, the findings from the empirical studies have been integrated and inferences drawn to answer the research questions of this study.

5.3.3.   Sample and sampling methods

In terms of the sample of the study, excluding the private providers, there are at present 31 public universities in Ethiopia. For this study, three public universities are chosen as data source for the sample of the study. The Hopkin's (2004:182) frame factor concept is used as starting point for the classification and selection of the universities. The classification proposed by Hopkin primarily focuses on the varied nature of the institutions in terms of their contexts and their assumed levels of development. Hopkin (2004:182) refers to such contextual differences as frame factors and advances the hypothesis that institutions can be categorised on the basis of such frame factors. The Hopkin's frame factors include the population size of a country (which has subtle effects on the supply of personnel), the size of the institution, the size of the national market, and the expectations of government and the society (which have implications for policy and practice in higher education institutions). On the basis of frame factors, Hopkin attempts a classification of universities that can be applied at country level. He identifies three categories of universities, namely mature, evolving, and embryonic (Hopkin, 2004:182). In terms of conceptualising, developing and implementing quality assurance systems at institutional level, there are also other frame factors like organisational age, size and scope of activities; the quantity and quality of the personnel in an institution and its influence on the quality assurance policy and practice in the institution.

Based on this rationale, the 31 public universities currently functioning are categorised into three major groups: mature (large and old), evolving (medium and young), and embryonic (small and new). More specifically the mature category includes two universities, the Haramaya and Addis Ababa Universities, which have each more than twenty years of experience in teaching, research and outreach programmes; and seven additional universities, the Mekelle, Jimma, Bahir Dar, Debub, Gonder, Adama, and Arbaminch universities which were upgraded from college to university status. Accordingly, these universities with a total undergraduate enrolment that ranges from 16,675 to 40,513 and year of establishment 1950 to 2000 are categorised as

relatively mature (large and old) universities (MoE, 2011:169). These universities are relatively old as compared to the other universities, and their focus of attention is both undergraduate and post-graduate programmes.

In the second category, the evolving category, about 12 universities (Axum, Debrebirhan, Debremarkos, Wollo, Dilla, Diredawa, Jijega, Medawolabu, Mizan-Tapi, Semera, Wolaita-Soddo, Wellega and Ambo Universities), which were opened towards the end of 2006 and the beginning of 2007, and at the end of the 2009 academic years, are included. Accordingly, these 13 universities with a total enrolment that ranges from 3,333 to 14,939 and year of establishment 2007 to 2008 are categorised as evolving (medium and young) universities.

The third category, the embryonic category includes the nine new universities (Adigrat, Asosa, Bule Hora, Debre Tabor, Metu, Wachamo, Welkite, Woldiya and Addis Ababa Science and Technology University) which were established during the 2010/2011 academic year. These 9 universities are relatively new as compared to the old universities, and their focus of attention is on undergraduate programmes. Thus, these universities, with years of establishment from 2010 to 2011, are categorised as embryonic (small and new) universities.

The Jimma University falls within the large and old universities group, Mizan-Tepi University in the medium size and young universities group, and the Mettu University in the new and small universities group were selected and included in this study using the simple random sampling technique. Multiple cases (three) instead of one case were selected for the study. Multiple cases will strengthen the results by replicating the pattern-matching and by yielding greater confidence in the robustness of the results of the study. In addition, including more than one case provides more representativeness to the analysis in terms of getting comprehensive and rich data regarding the quality assurance systems and practices in the Ethiopian public universities. Within each individual case, the perceptions of academic leaders, internal quality assurance structures and processes, and relevant contextual issues were explored.

Although there was an interest in understanding the perceptions, practices, and context of the individual cases, the greater interest was in the patterns and trends of the overall institutions. At macro level, the regulatory agency (HERQA) was also included to examine the effect of the institutional environment on internal quality assurance practices. This study takes frame factors as a much broader spectrum of influential forces that are both internal and external to an institution. Thus, the three cases were perceived as being different in terms of the levels of development they have reached in instituting quality assurance systems, institutional size and age, resource availability and other organisational characteristics.

A representative sample of middle managers involved in quality assurance at university level (deans and department heads), teachers and students were selected to complete the questionnaire as data-collection source. In this study, the multi-stage sampling method was used to select the colleges, departments, teachers and students. There are about six to ten colleges in the universities: Engineering and Technology, Health and Medical Science, Natural Science, Education Science, Social Science and Law, Agriculture, Natural Resource and Veterinary Medicine, Business and Economics. All the faculties, colleges or institutes were included in the sample of this study through the census method. Again from each college one department was randomly selected and included in the study. Twenty-five graduating students and ten teachers were selected from each department using the systematic random sampling technique. The list of selected students for each section was collected from the record offices of the respective colleges. In addition, all the department heads in all the selected departments of the target universities were included in the sample of this study. The purposive sampling technique was employed to include all the college deans of the target universities in the study.

The purposive sampling technique was also employed to select the key participants for the interviews of the study who were perceived as possessing the information needed to make a contribution to the phenomenon under study. Consequently, 17 participants were selected for participation in the semi-structured one-to-one interviews. The sample

included two HERQA experts, three quality assurance directors at university level, three higher academic managers and nine senior teachers (academics involved in quality assurance, in self-evaluation, etc.). The intention for interviewing the authorities and experts was to get in-depth insight into the policy issues and mechanisms within the national higher education system of the country. A summary of the sample of respondents and/or participants is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1:   Summary of the sample of respondents and/or participants

A. Survey questionnaires			
	University/Colleges	Sample	N
Students	JU (10 Colleges)	250	550
	MTU (6 Colleges)	150	
	MU (6 Colleges)	150	
Teachers	JU (10 Colleges)	100	220
	MTU (6 Colleges)	60	
	MU (6 Colleges)	60	
Total			**770**
B. Interviews			
HERQA experts		2	2
Quality assurance directors at university level		3x1	3
Higher academic managers (officers)[10]		3x1	3
Senior teachers (academics involved in quality assurance, self-evaluation, etc.)		3x3	9
Total			**17**

In general, the data were gathered from (a) academic managers (academic vice-presidents, quality assurance directors, deans and department heads in the three sampled universities); (b) academic staff and students; (c) HERQA experts; (d) policy and reform documents, strategic plans, guidelines, higher education laws, self-evaluation and audit reports, statistical abstracts, quality monitoring manuals and guidelines and the like.

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[10] In this study, "academic officer" or "academic manager" means quality assurance officer, research and publication officer, registrar, vice-presidents or any similar officers (FDRE, 2009:4977).

5.3.4. Data-collection methods

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative data-collection methods were used to address the research questions. The data-collection instruments used in the study were survey questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The following subsections describe each of the three data-collection instruments.

5.3.4.1. Survey questionnaire

The first data-collection method used in this study was the survey questionnaire. In exploring the possibility of using a survey questionnaire for this study, the researcher considered a number of factors. The survey questionnaire is the most commonly used descriptive data-collection instrument in educational research. Typically, according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007:205), they collect data at a particular point in time to identify standards with which existing conditions can be compared. This data-collection method is used to measure variables in a quantitative empirical study, and is usually used as a distinctive technique, and is a process of asking various respondents the same questions and examining the range of their answers. The survey questionnaire is considered by scholars such as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007:205) to be a most appropriate data-collection method to use when a large amount of information is needed from a larger group of respondents than is possible when using other methods.

In this study, a self-administered structured questionnaire was used to collect the data on the attitudes and perceptions of the respondents towards the practice and impact of quality assurance. Both closed and open-ended questions were used to sample the opinion of the academic community on the concepts of quality and quality assurance and the impact of the quality assurance system. The questionnaires were used to obtain reliable, representative, and scientifically-sound data.

Two versions of the self-administered questionnaires were developed based on the information obtained from the literature review. Relevant quality assurance literature such as Ahmed (2008), Csizmadia (2006), Hay and Herselman (2001), Kahsay (2012) and Luckett (2006) were consulted and used as sources for the development of the questionnaires. The first type of questionnaire was designed and administered to gather data from the graduating students of the three universities. The second version was designed and administered to gather data from the deans, department heads, and teaching staff of the three universities. The questionnaires contained items on (i) policies and institutional arrangements; (ii) quality assurance mechanisms and procedures; (iii) effectiveness of the quality assurance system; (vi) academic programmes and staff, teaching and learning, learning resources, student support, assessment and evaluation, curriculum, and physical and financial resources; (v) the effects/impacts of the quality assurance system; and (vi) other operative and strategic issues pertaining to the implementation of quality assurance. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather the quantitative data.

5.3.4.2.   Interviews

Interviews were the main data-collection method of the study, and were used by the researcher to gather rich information from the sampled 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, 2001:288). The literature suggests that interviews are an important data gathering research method when it is difficult to observe the appropriate behaviours, or when endeavouring to understand implicit factors such as the participants' beliefs, feelings and interpretations of the world around them. Moreover, within a semi-structured interview, the participants are more informants than respondents as they are proposing their own insights into certain occurrences, and these are used as the basis for further clarifications of the issues under consideration. In this study, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were used to elicit relevant information on the attitudes and perceptions of the participants regarding

the existing quality assurance policies and practices. University officials (vice-presidents and quality assurance directors), HERQA experts and senior teachers were interviewed from the three universities.

5.3.4.3. Document analysis

All relevant documents were obtained and analysed. The strengths of documents as a source of data lie in its stability, unobtrusiveness, exactness, and broad coverage (Yin, 2009:102). According to Stake (1995:68), documents serve as substitutes for records of activity that the researcher could not observe directly. In this study, documents such as manuals, guidelines and self-evaluation instruments provided insight into the institutional processes which could not be observed directly by the researcher. Additionally, as Yin (2009:103) notes, "... the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources." In this study, documents were used to corroborate and augment results obtained through the interviewees and questionnaires. The researcher's selection of documents was based on two principles. One principle was to identify documents that adduced information to confirm or refute the data generated during the interviews. The second principle was to collect as many documents that are related to quality assurance policies and practices in higher education institutions. The following documents were identified for analysis: quality assurance policy statements, higher education proclamations (no. 351/2003 and 650/2009) and other relevant laws, annual statistical abstracts, relevant guidelines, quality audit and self-evaluation documents, and other published materials related to higher education and quality assurance. The document analysis was conducted to discover information regarding policy intentions of quality assurance, the history of quality assurance in Ethiopian higher education, financial resources, and staff and student profiles. Besides, in order to analyse the effects of the quality assurance policy documents and instruments on the higher institutional practice, the study draws on the following sets of documents: self-evaluation portfolios produced by the universities themselves and submitted to the HERQA as part of the audit process; the institutional

audit reports prepared by the HERQA; and other teaching and learning-related documents such as the policies on teaching and learning, and the teaching and learning strategies available in the universities. The document analysis was used to provide a contextual understanding of the policy and practice environment that underlie quality assurance in universities. In this study, the questionnaire survey, the interviews and the document analysis should be viewed as complementary in nature. While providing new and more specific data to those already collected, each stage of the study serves to inform and validate the others.

5.3.5.   Data analysis

The data analysis of this research project was guided by Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie's (2003:372-378) seven-stage conceptualization of the mixed-methods data analysis process. According to these scholars, the seven data analysis stages are as follows: data reduction, data display, data transformation, data correlation, data consolidation, data comparison, and data integration (Combs & Onwuegbuzie, 2010:5; Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003:372-378). According to Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (2003:373), data reduction involves reducing the dimensionality of the qualitative data (e.g. via exploratory thematic analysis and memoing) and quantitative data (e.g. via descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, and cluster analysis). Data display involves describing pictorially the qualitative data (e.g. matrices, charts, graphs, networks, lists, rubrics, and Venn diagrams) and quantitative data (e.g. tables and graphs). This is followed (optionally) by the data transformation stage, wherein quantitative data are converted into narrative data, that can be analysed qualitatively and/or qualitative data are converted into numerical codes that can be represented statistically. Data correlation involves the quantitative data being correlated with the qualitised data, or the qualitative data being correlated with the quantitised data. This is followed by data consolidation, wherein both quantitative and qualitative data are combined to create new or consolidated variables or data sets. The next stage, data comparison, involves comparing data from the qualitative and quantitative data sources. Data integration characterizes the final stage,

whereby both quantitative and qualitative data are integrated into either a coherent whole, or two separate sets (i.e. qualitative and quantitative) of coherent wholes (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004:22). From Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie's (2003:372–378) seven stages of mixed-method data analysis, the data reduction, data display, data consolidation and data integration stages were applied in this study.

In this study, the data collected through the questionnaires were coded, entered, cleaned and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 20) computer software. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics such as percentages, chi-square tests, t-tests and one-way ANOVA. The qualitative data were also transcribed, coded and interpreted thematically. The thematic approach was followed to display the analyses and findings from both quantitative and qualitative data. The interview transcripts and data from the documents were analysed for descriptions and patterns related to the following primary areas: mechanisms of quality assurance; descriptions of structures and processes used to improve quality (specifically in reference to curriculum development and review procedures, staff development and appraisal practices, modularisation of courses/programmes, self-evaluation procedures, business process re-engineering (BPR), ranking of HEIs and institutional autonomy and academic freedom; and contextual issues (i.e., internal and external factors that impact on quality assurance). These themes for the data analyses are derived from the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the study that was grounded in the basic research questions. Analysis of quantitative data was displayed first and then corroborated by qualitative data analysis in the form of texts and quotes.

Thematic analysis was conducted with the open-ended questions. This consisted of transcribing each of the responses onto one document, identifying repeated and unique views, classifying them under broad categories, then subcategories. Stake (1995:74) proposes two strategic ways to analyse cases: direct interpretation of the individual instance, and aggregation of instances. Both strategies were used in this study. Direct interpretation is used in analysing data from individual universities to get an

understanding of the conceptual and contextual issues in operation there. This is followed by cross-case synthesis through aggregation of instances (perceptions, structures, processes, contexts) across universities to "tease out relationships," "probe issues", and "aggregate categorical data" (Stake, 1995:77).

5.3.6. Validity and reliability

Validity determines whether the research truly measures that which it was intended to measure, or how truthful the research results are. Validity can be defined as an overall evaluative judgment of the extent to which empirical evidence and/or the theoretical rationale support the adequacy and appropriateness of interpretations and actions on the basis of data generated through any means; whereas reliability can be defined as the extent to which results are consistent over time; the degree to which a measurement, given repeatedly, remains the same; and, the stability of a measurement over time. Internal validity seeks to demonstrate that the explanation of a particular event, issue or set of data which a researcher provides can actually be sustained by the data. To some degree this concerns accuracy, which can be applied to quantitative and qualitative research. External validity refers to the degree to which the results can be generalised to the wider population, cases, or situations (Cohen *et al.,* 2007:135).

Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006:56) identified nine types of legitimation that come to the fore as a result of combining inferences from the quantitative and qualitative components of a mixed-method research study to form meta-inferences. These nine types of legitimation are sample integration legitimation, insider-outsider legitimation, weakness minimisation legitimation, sequential legitimation**,** conversion legitimation, paradigmatic mixing legitimation, commensurability legitimation, multiple validities legitimation, and political legitimation. Of these nine mixed-method validation or legitimation types, this study attempts to address five of the nine legitimation types, namely sample integration legitimation, inside-outside legitimation, weakness

minimisation legitimation, paradigmatic mixing legitimation, and multiple validities legitimation.

Sample integration legitimation, the relationship between the quantitative and qualitative sampling designs (i.e. sampling scheme, sample size) is crucial to assessing meta-inference quality in the research. This legitimation type applies to situations in which a researcher wants to make statistical generalisations from the sample participants to a larger target population. Inside-outside legitimation refers to the degree to which the researcher accurately presents and utilizes the insider's view and the observer's view. A strategy for obtaining a justified outsider viewpoint is for the researcher to use peer review; that is, the research can have another outsider/researcher examine the interpretations being made, the conceptualisations, and the relationship between the data and the conclusions. An important strategy for obtaining a justified insider viewpoint is member checking or participant review (i.e. to have group members or participants assess the researcher's interpretations). Weakness minimisation legitimation is mixed-method research in the optimal position for maximising this form of legitimation simply because the researcher is able to systematically design a study that combines two or more methods. The key, however, is that the researcher must consciously and carefully assess the extent to which the weakness from one approach can be compensated by the strengths from another approach, and then plan and design the study to fulfil this potential; the researcher also use this knowledge when combining, weighting, and interpreting the results. This process is known as weakness minimisation legitimation. The greater the extent that the weakness from one approach is compensated by the strengths from another approach, the more likely that combining a weak inference with a strong inference will lead to a superior or high quality meta-inference (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006:58).

Paradigmatic mixing legitimation is combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, and is sometimes considered to be tenuous because of competing dualisms: epistemological (e.g. objectivist vs. subjectivist), ontological (e.g. single reality vs. multiple realities), axiological (e.g. value free vs. value-bound), methodological (e.g. deductive logic vs. inductive logic), and rhetorical (e.g. formal vs. informal writing style)

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beliefs. One solution is to argue in terms of continua rather than dualisms, and then take more moderate positions on each continuum: ontological (e.g. recognising subjective, inter-subjective, and objective types of reality); epistemological (e.g. making explicit how one judged one's own study); and rhetorical (e.g. use of formal and informal writing styles using both impersonal and personal voices), (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006:59).

Multiple validities legitimation is pertinent in virtually every mixed-method research, and refers to the extent to which all relevant research strategies are utilized, and the research can be considered high on the multiple relevant "validities." For example, when addressing legitimation of the quantitative component, the relevant quantitative validities are addressed and achieved; when addressing legitimation of the qualitative component, the relevant qualitative "validities" are addressed and achieved; and during integration and to allow strong meta-inferences, the relevant mixed-method legitimation types are addressed and achieved (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006:59). Similarly, one should ask to what extent is the whole (i.e. meta-inference quality) greater than the sum of its parts (i.e. inferences arising from each component).

Applying the above mixed-methods legitimation types to this study, a relatively large sample was selected for both quantitative and qualitative designs. Similarly, the perceptions of participants concerning quality assurance practices in their respective universities as well as the factors that influence existing practices are captured. Finally, quantitative analysis is combined with qualitative analysis of data to improve the interpretation of the findings.

In addition to the above mixed-methods legitimation types, the following specific strategies were used to enhance the validity and reliability of the study: triangulation, a pilot study, and member checks and peer scrutiny of the research project. These concepts are briefly discussed below.

5.3.6.1.   Triangulation

Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, different types of data, and different methods of data collection. Methodological triangulation is the use of multiple approaches within a single study. Use of multiple sources of data contributes specifically to construct validity, which Yin (2009:40) refers to as "... identifying correct operational measures for the concepts being studied." According to Yin (2009:116-117), construct validity is addressed when "... multiple sources of evidence essentially provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon." The use of interviews, documentation, and questionnaires in this study allow for methodological triangulation on several of the primary research questions posed. Another form of triangulation may involve the use of a wide range of informants. This is one way of triangulating *via* data sources. Here individual viewpoints and experiences can be verified against others; and, ultimately, a rich picture of the attitudes, needs or behaviour of those under scrutiny may be constructed based on the contributions of a range of people. Triangulation between different data sources within the same method (triangulation of sources) is also applied in order to nuance and control the interpretations presented in the study. In addition, just as triangulation *via* data sources can involve the use of a diversity of informants, a range of documents may also be employed as source material. These triangulations may enhance both validity and reliability.

5.3.6.2.   Pilot study

Since the questionnaire is designed specifically for the purpose of this study, it is imperative to pilot test it in terms of clarity of questions and statements, choice of words, missing items, effectiveness of instructions, completeness of response items, and length and amount of time it would take to complete. The purpose of the pilot analysis was to test the data-collection instrument for face validity, and in particular, to check that the questions elicited appropriate responses (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007:341).

A pilot study of the questionnaire was conducted using purposive sampling of 16 teaching staff and 23 students in a single university which is similar to the ones included in the study. The participants in the pilot study were chosen because they had a similar background and knowledge to the target population about the issues being investigated. They did not form part of the group to be surveyed. Verbal consent to participate in the pilot study was obtained from the respondents. Respondents were asked to note the following: how long it would take them to complete the questionnaire, if they felt uncomfortable about answering any questions, and if there were any ambiguous or difficult questions. They were also given the opportunity to make comments (in writing) regarding the content of the questionnaire. Of the 16 questionnaires distributed for teachers and 23 questionnaires for students, all were completed and returned.

The analysis of the pilot study data indicated that the sub-scales of the questionnaire have good item characteristics in terms of internal consistency and homogeneity of the items contained in each sub-scale. The results showed that the reliability coefficient (Cronbach Alpha) for the teachers' questionnaire ranges from 0.690-0.972 and it ranges from 0.765-0.916 for the students' questionnaire, which are considered good for the purpose of this study.

Additionally, during the pilot study, the questions and statements were examined and tested for appropriateness, content, wording, and order. The outcomes of the pilot study indicated the need for some changes. The three main concerns were: failure to understand some questions and statements; inappropriate choice of words; and the absence of a "Don't know" option, when respondents actually did not have any knowledge about the statements. To increase the clarity of the questions, those items that seemed vague for respondents were modified and rephrased. The results of the pilot study have not been included in the final results.

5.3.6.3.   Member checks

This technique involves giving all, or some, of the participants an opportunity to check or verify the interpretations and findings. This method is regarded as the most critical technique for establishing credibility. In this practice, participants' review rough drafts of writing for accuracy and palatability. Merriam (1998:204) describes member checks as "... taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible." Each participant was given a hard copy of the transcript of his or her interview, as well as a site report. The participants were also asked to provide feedback on the accuracy and palatability of their interview transcripts and site reports, including quotes derived from their individual interviews. This information was used to correct, or add to the data where necessary. In this study, some interviewees were requested to check the final report for any distortions and misrepresentations. This should have enhanced the internal validity of the study.

5.3.6.4.   Peer scrutiny of the research project

Opportunities for the scrutiny of the project by colleagues, peers and academics were also considered in this study. The presentation of preliminary findings of the study at annual research conferences at Jimma University enabled the researcher to refine his methodology, develop a greater understanding of the research design, and strengthen his arguments in the light of the comments made.

Attempts to increase the reliability of the study have also been undertaken by using a partially structured interview schedule during interviews. Besides, it is important that the researcher should describe and document his actions during the research process. Thus, it will be possible for other researchers to replicate the study. Supporting this, Stensaker (2004:92) claims that:

> ... high reliability during different interviews will depend on
> whether the procedures followed are identical from one interview to

another, that the informants understand the questions the same way, and that the answers may be grouped without misunderstandings occurring.

In order to enhance the reliability of the study, the interview schedule was pre-tested with two persons who all had been in similar circumstances as the interviewees selected.

Finally, the survey is also required to be valid and reliable. Developing the questionnaire involved several stages. The first stage involved the use of a literature review to develop the items of the questionnaire. The second stage was where academics and quality specialists constructively criticise the questionnaire. This process was used to establish the face validity of the questionnaire, eliminating linguistic ambiguities, reducing the ambiguity of questions, being a more controllable source of measurement errors, and analysing the adequacy of the questionnaire to ensure that it would be suitable for capturing the data required for the study. The third stage was to pilot the refined questionnaire on staff members in a university which is similar to the ones included in the study.

5.3.7. Ethical considerations

In this section, the ethical considerations incorporated in the study are discussed. In all studies, ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge with regard to the collection of data, the dissemination of findings, and, in particular, in the relationship between the researcher and each of the respondents or participants. Even though the data collected for this study are not politically, socially or physically sensitive in nature, ethical issues are considered important.

When collecting research data, it is very important that strict ethical standards are maintained at all times. Amongst others, this is to ensure that the rights and welfare of the subjects are protected (Hofstee, 2006:210-211). This study will also take into consideration certain ethical provisions as outlined below. The study focused on

investigating and describing quality assurance at a public university in Ethiopia, and the institution and some staff members as role-players were involved in this study. The main ethical issues that have to be considered in this study were confidentiality, anonymity, privacy, sensitivity, and voluntariness.

In this study, the personal data of the interviewees have been presented in an anonymous way. Respondents or participants' right to privacy was also maintained through the promise of confidentiality. This follows the advice from Cohen *et al.* (2007:64) that anonymity ensures that information provided by respondents and participants does not reveal their identity. A number of techniques were included to ensure anonymity and confidentiality in terms of the findings. The use of codes instead of the respondents' and participants' real names ensured that people other than the researcher cannot identify the respondents and participants from the information presented in this study. All role-players, the teachers, officials and students, were informed of the purpose, methods, and time frame of the study as it is unethical in terms of human relationships to conduct an investigation when the subjects are unaware of the real purpose. In the case of the interviews, the researcher always kept the point made by Patton (2002:354) in mind, that "... the purpose of a research interview is first and foremost to gather data, not change people...", and that the interviewee is not "... unresponsive to the human issues, including great suffering and pain, which may unfold during an interview" (Patton, 2002:354). The respondents and participants in this study were informed that they are to participate without feeling coerced, and were free to withdraw from participation at any time. The principle of informed consent was the most important ethical consideration in doing this research, which also involved the right to participate and refuse to take part. Hence, in this study, an introductory letter and consent form supported these assurances.

For the survey questionnaire, respondents were reminded not to write their name on the questionnaire. In order to reduce the possibility of losing confidentiality through the involvement of many interviewers (Patton, 2002:354), the data in this study were collected only by the researcher. The process of getting access to the universities began by requesting permission formally, in writing, through the official channels. The first step

the researcher took regarding this matter was to write and explain in detail the purpose of the study and the data-collection methods to be used to the target universities to get permission to conduct the research. The research offices at the sampled universities were requested to issue an ethical clearance certificate for this project, and this was appended to the final report.

Another consideration in terms of ethical considerations was the storage of the data during and after the study. The forms of data collected from the semi-structured interviews included a hard copy of the participants' informed consent and the respondents' demographic information, audiotapes of the interviews, and a hard copy of the transcribed interview data. The forms of data collected from the survey questionnaires included a hard copy of respondents' questionnaires, compact discs (CD) and memory sticks containing the data from the questionnaires. The data from the audio-tapes, disks and hard copies will remain in the possession of the researcher, and be accessed only by the researcher and his supervisor. Data will be kept for a period of five years in accordance with the University of South Africa's Human Research Ethics Committee, after which they will be destroyed.

5.4.   CONCLUSION

This Chapter has described the research paradigm and methodological approach taken to consider the research questions. Corresponding to the theoretical perspective and the main constructs of the conceptual framework employed in this study (see Chapter 3), the variables (independent and dependent) for the empirical analysis were operationalised. This study was based on a mixed-method research design that included the use of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. This was shaped by the pragmatism paradigm which is generally regarded as the philosophical partner for the mixed-methods design. The Chapter also detailed the rationale for using the mixed-methods research design. Then it examined and described the various parts of the mixed-

methods research design that were implemented in order to maximise the examination of the quality assurance policy and practices in higher education in Ethiopia.

The methods of data-collection and justification for using them have also been outlined. Multi-methods of data-collection were used including survey questionnaires, interviews and a document analysis. The development and implementation of the interviews and the self-administered survey questionnaire were also discussed. Issues associated with validity and reliability of the study was considered; and, finally, the analysis of the inherent ethical considerations within this particular study was highlighted and the resultant provisions used to address these issues were provided.

The presentation of the results and the summary, conclusion and recommendations of the study are discussed in the following two Chapters respectively.

CHAPTER 6

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

6.1. INTRODUCTION

The empirical evidence on the current status of quality and quality assurance in the HEIs in Ethiopia is put forward in this Chapter. In the first section, an attempt is made to critically analyse and interpret the data in terms of the adequacy of the quality assurance mechanisms implemented in the HEIs in Ethiopia. The second section of the Chapter examines the quality assurance systems, policies, mechanisms, and procedures in place in the universities. In the third section, the effectiveness and impact of the quality assurance system *per se* are assessed, and in the final section of the Chapter, an attempt was made to analyse the policies and practices of the HERQA *vis–à–vis* the quality assurance activities of HEIs in Ethiopia.

6.2. THE ADEQUACY OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS

The concept adequacy in this context refers to the extent to which the quality assurance system covers the aspects of input, process and output. The analysis is based on the notion that quality is not a unidimensional concept; and, therefore, it is more appropriate to talk about quality in a continuum. Thus the current status of quality and quality assurance of input, process, and output in the HEIs of Ethiopia is examined based on the relevant documents, and the quantitative and qualitative data.

6.2.1. Quality and quality assurance of the input in the universities

This section examines the quality and the quality assurance of inputs in terms of student admission and placement policies and procedures, the student and academic staff profiles, and resources for quality assurance in HEIs. An elaboration of each follows.

6.2.1.1. Student admission and placement policies and procedures

It is widely acknowledged that the pre-university preparation of students has a direct bearing on the quality of education offered at higher learning institutions. Students and teachers' evaluation of the adequacy of the preparation of students prior to enrolment in higher education, the students' readiness and motivation for learning, and their placement procedures in colleges/departments are reported. The academic staff were required to evaluate their students in terms of the academic preparation that they had for the higher education courses, and the results are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Academic staff and student perceptions regarding students' preparation for higher education courses across three universities

Preparation level	Students (N)	Percentage (%)	Valid percentage (%)	Academic staff (N)	Percentage (%)	Valid percentage (%)
Poor	160	31.0	31.0	116	56.3	65.2
Average	114	22.1	22.1	40	19.4	22.5
Good	242	46.7	46.9	22	10.7	12.4
Total	516	99.8	100.0	178	86.4	100.0
System	1	.2		28	13.6	
Total	517	100.0		206	100.0	

Table 1 (above) shows that about sixty five percent (65.2%) of the academic staff rated the academic preparation of the students for higher education as poor. About 12.4% of the academic staff believed that the students had adequate pre-requisite knowledge and skills to help them to succeed in higher learning institutions.

Although it was not as negative as the academic staff, the students' evaluation of the quality of their pre-university education was not above the average. As Table 1 indicates, that about forty six percent (46.7%) of the student respondents evaluated themselves as being "good" prepared for higher education, whereas about 53.1% of the students rated the level of preparation they had prior to entering the higher education institution as average and below average. The reasons for these negative responses (academic staff and students) might be the poor quality of education offered at secondary school level and the recruitment and admission policies that the Ministry has imposed on the HEIs. Based on research reports, Braun, Kanjee, Bettinger and Kremer (2006:19-20) concluded that the secondary education sector is characterized by inappropriate assessment policies which do not have a significant impact on the career paths of the learners, and inadequate and inappropriate systems and structures to address the quality of education and the poor evaluation and examination systems.

Table 2: **One-way ANOVA on differences of academic staff perceptions regarding students' preparation for higher education courses across three universities**

	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.069	2	1.535	2.036	.134
Within Groups	131.886	175	.754		
Total	134.955	177			

The ANOVA results in Table 2 (above) indicate that there were no significant differences in the academic staff's perceptions across the three universities in terms of the students' preparation for the higher education courses, F (2, 175)=2.04, p=.134. Similarly, a one-way ANOVA was used to test the students' perception differences among the three universities concerning their level of preparation to pursue higher education courses. There was no significant difference as perceived by the student respondents, (F (2, 513) =1.41, p =.243). The *post hoc* test shows no significant difference in the mean ratings of the student respondents in the three universities. This indicates that there is consensus in

academia and amongst the students in the three universities in this regard, i.e. many students were assigned to public universities and colleges without an adequate academic background, and accordingly are facing serious learning difficulties.

The entry behaviour of students was assessed taking into account a number of assumptions. One is by considering their pre-university performance. Students are placed in different public institutions by the MoE using their aggregated scores in the entrance examinations. Public universities in Ethiopia have no control over the students they enrol for their regular programmes. It is the federal ministry of education that recruits and determines the number of students to be admitted for study in the various universities, including specific colleges or fields of studies. The Higher Education Proclamation no. 650/2009, Article 39 (FDRE, 2009:5003) states the following regarding the recruitment of candidates for higher learning institutions: " ... admissions to undergraduate programmes of any institution shall be based on completion of the preparatory programme and obtaining the necessary pass marks in the university entrance examination."

To examine the appropriateness of the admission policies, the entry behaviour of students in the sampled universities was analysed by considering their performance in the university entrance examination (see Table 3 below).

Table 3:   **Students' entrance examination results and their placement in universities across three universities**

Student raw scores (Out of 700)	Number of respondents (N)	Percentage (%)	Valid percentage (%)
≤ 250	10	1.9	2.4
251-350	153	29.6	36.3
351-500	230	44.5	54.5
≥ 501	29	5.6	6.9
Total	422	81.6	100.0
System	95	18.4	
Total	517	100.0	

Table 3 indicates that out of the 422 student respondents who voluntarily reported their total score in the entrance examination, a significant proportion (38.7%) of them were admitted to public universities without scoring the minimum pass mark (50%) as stipulated in the policy document (Article 39 of the proclamation no. 650/2009:5003). Although the predictive validity of the instruments need to be scrutinised, it is most likely that the students who scored high at secondary school level tend to be more successful in their academic studies at higher education institutions.

At this stage it seems advisable to elaborate the above findings by presenting data from the MoE's annual abstract (2011, 2012) in this regard as well. Accordingly, Table 4 contains the contexts and practices of the last four academic years (2008 to 2012) of students' admissions to public universities.

Table 4: **Admissions to public universities for past four academic years, 2008/09 to 2011/12**

Year	No. of grade 12 students in Ethiopian Higher Entrance Certificate Examination	No. of. students scored above 50%	No. of students admitted to public universities	No. of students admitted to public universities without minimum pass mark (50%)
2008/09	86,238	31,934 (37.03%)	73,111 (84.8%)	41,117 (56.3%)
2009/10	85,610	38,901 (45.4%)	78,822 (92.0%)	39,921 (50.6%)
2010/11	141,424	42,988 (30%)	81,995 (57.98%)	39,007 (47.57%)
2011/12	153,214	45,557 (29.8%)	90,856 (59.30%)	45,299 (49.87%)

Source: MoE (Ministry of Education), 2011/12.

The data presented in Table 4 above provides a summary of the many students who joined the public universities who were ill-prepared for higher education and research activities for the period 2008 to 2012. About 50% of the students in 2011/12 were admitted to public universities without scoring the minimum pass mark (50%) as prescribed by the policy. However, it seems that the government has kept up its pressure for increased enrolments and graduates students as if they were goals in themselves.

These findings pertaining to student admissions suggest that in accordance with the selection tools used by the MoE, many students were joining the public universities irrespective of having the adequate grounding for their academic studies. This raises a serious question regarding the appropriateness of the admission policies, procedures and criteria that were used to make placement decisions in terms of the public universities. Most of the academic staff seemed to be dissatisfied and frustrated by the practices of the Ministry of Education in assigning students to HEIs who did not complete the prescribed secondary education programme with high scores. This became apparent when one of the academic staff had the following to say:

> Students' motivation and commitment for their learning is very low. Student background knowledge is another challenging area. There are students who cannot even properly spell or write simple words and complete sentences. We are dictated not to demote students but "assist" them to graduate ... The link between the preparatory school and the university education seems very weak. So, some action should be taken to improve students' achievement particularly at preparatory education level (Interviewee # AS3, 2013).

The findings of this study support the research results reported by many other researchers. The institutional quality audit report of the HERQA on eight relatively better public universities also indicated that many students entering university were seen by the staff as poorly prepared for higher education (HERQA, 2008:5). A more comprehensive study conducted by Shibeshi *et.al*. (2009:198) concluded that university teachers did not believe that the undergraduate science students have the adequate academic background to succeed in higher education. A study undertaken by Areaya (2010:104), similarly argued that:

> ... a good number of senior academic staff in Ethiopian public universities are not only unhappy with the recruitment and admission policies that the Ministry has imposed on them, but are confused and frustrated in dealing with candidates who, according to their judgment, are very much below their expectation and below the aspiration of the Education and Training Policy as well.

Thus it can be concluded that the inadequate preparation of students for higher education would have an implication for both their performance as well as the quality of their learning at the universities.

Table 5 (below) indicates the student placement procedures across the three universities. Student respondents were asked to indicate their placement procedures to the various academic departments.

Table 5:   Student placement procedures across three universities

Faculties/colleges	Total number of respondents (N)	Placement to department	
		Your choice	University decision
Engineering and Technology	115	86.1%	13.9%
Health and Medical Science	72	87.5%	12.5%
Natural Science	106	47.2%	52.8%
Education Science	20	5.0%	95.0%
Social Science and Law	81	22.2%	77.7%
Veterinary Medicine	73	82.2%	17.8%
Business and Economics	49	85.7%	14.3%
Total	516		

The results in Table 5 depict that the majority of the students from the Colleges of Engineering and Technology (86.1%), Health and Medical Science (87.5%), Veterinary Medicine (82.2%), and Business and Economics (85.7%) joined their field of study based on their first choices. Conversely, the majority of the student respondents from the College of Natural Science (52.8%), Education Science (95.0%) and Social Science and Law (77.7%) had been assigned to their fields of study by a university decision. The students were placed into the various fields of study based on their performance in the university entrance examination. In this case, the high school preparation and achievement of the students seemed to have a direct bearing on their fields of studies which the students joined at their preferred universities. One may argue that students have the right to choose the fields of study they are interested-in and based on their academic results. The paradox is that students who scored relatively low in the UEE but

who are admitted to universities have neither the chance to join the fields they wanted to study, nor the opportunity to be successful in their fields (Shibeshi *et al.,* 2009:198).

Further analysis of the students' fields of study (programmes or colleges) *vis-à-vis* their university entrance examination results showed that those with high scores were placed in fields such as medicine and engineering, and those with lower scores were placed in the Social Science, Natural Science, Education, etc. faculties or colleges. This has a direct bearing on the education system of Ethiopia itself, since the quality of the teachers is a proxy indicator of educational quality. Supporting this argument, Areaya (2010:103) concluded that many students who joined or were placed in the Faculty of Education lacked the minimum benchmark to be a university student. The fact that these poor achievers were deliberately placed into the Faculty of Education has crippled the efforts to produce excellent student achievers, or excellent teachers. Hence, important radical transformation is needed at the recruitment and admission stages of candidates for higher education in Ethiopia.

6.2.1.2.   Student enrolments and academic staff and student-teacher ratios in the target universities

To determine the trends in the enrolment patterns in the three sampled universities, the data of five years was analyzed, i.e. from 2008/09 and 2012/13.

Table 6: **Trends in student enrolments, academic staff and student-teacher ratios (STR) in three public universities**

University	Trends in student enrolments				
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
JU	23,699	32,185	36,327	37,645	39,589
MTU	2,574	7,514	5,869	12,658	9,743
MU*	—	—	—	274	2,089
	Trends in academic staff				
JU	997	887	1,149	1,149	1,341
MTU	274	404	372	619	614
MU	—	—	—	184	508
	Trends in STR				
JU	23.7	36.2	31.6	32.7	29.5
MTU	9.3	18.5	15.7	20.4	15.8
MU*	—	—	—	—	—

Source: MoE (Ministry of Education), 2010:61; 2012:167. MU* established in 2011.

As Table 6 above shows there was a rapid increase in enrolments in the three sampled universities for these years. For instance, the enrolment in the Jimma University was almost doubled from about 23,699 students (in 2008) to nearly 39,589 (in 2013) over the last five years. The enrolment in the Mizan-Tepi University increased about threefold (from 2,574 in 2008 to 9,743 in 2013) within a period of five years, between 2008/09 and 2012/13. Although it is not on a *par* with the student population, the number of teaching staff in the universities has also increased considerably. As a result, the academic staff in Jimma University increased from 997 in 2008/2009 to 1,341 in 2012/13. Within the same period, the academic staff in MTU increased from 274 to 614, while the MU increased from 184 in 2011/12 to 508 in 2012/13.

The student-teacher ratio was another input factor, which was argued to affect the quality of the teaching and learning. Close inspection of the data for the interval of 5 academic years (i.e. 2008/09 and 2012/13; see Table 6 above) revealed that the STR has steadily increased from 23.7 to 32.7 for Jimma University and from 9.3 to 20.4 for Mizan-Tepi University, signifying that the university teachers' workload had almost doubled within a period of five years. Considering the shrinking trend in the qualifications of the academic

staff and failing to maintain the high STR would have grave consequences for the quality of education in Ethiopia in terms of restricting access to and putting undue pressure on the limited resources. On the pedagogical front, the increasing STR can compromise the quality of teaching and learning through intensifying the teachers' workload.

Over the last decades, there has been explosive growth in higher education in Ethiopia. Undergraduate education, both public and private, has shown a huge expansion from slightly above 300,000 students in 2007/08 to almost 500,000 students in 2011/12. It is no question that higher education in Ethiopia needs to expand even more if the country is ever to catch up with the other developing regions worldwide. The question, however, is finding the appropriate balance between massification and the quality of education and training. Public universities, by and large, feel that they have little or no control over student admissions to their regular undergraduate programmes. The role left to them, they said, is just to place students randomly in different academic departments and programmes (Areaya, 2010:105).

Despite the importance attached to enrolment expansion, however, there seems to be limited attention related to faculty remuneration, working conditions and job satisfaction. Concerns about heavier workloads and the "managerialist" culture of universities are being voiced in Ethiopia. According to Kedir (2009:29), massification has resulted in increasing workloads and extended work schedules for academics. A managerialist attitude has evolved that measures teaching against instrumental outcomes. There is a sense of the deprofessionalisation and deskilling of staff. Academics were bogged down by the number of tasks they have to do and struggle with the large class sizes, which on average have grown from 35 students in 2000 to more than 100 in 2014. This situation leads to discontent among academic staff impacting on their morale and motivation. To make the quality issue more complex, the outflow of academic staff is no longer limited to foreign institutions as it used to be. Also, challenges of what Semela (2011:416) referred to as "internal brain drains" are becoming a reality. A person in the private or nongovernmental sector can earn more than what is earned by an academic of the same educational background and with years of experience. Interestingly, the salary of a local

academic is less than a quarter of the amount paid to an expatriate counterpart. The ever increasing inflation rate has made it impossible for academics to live on their salaries (Semela, 2011:416). The options considered viable are either to burden themselves with more than one job, or to leave the academic sector – a situation that seriously impinges on the quality of student teaching and learning, research and community engagement.

6.2.1.3. Academic staff profile in target universities

The profile of the teaching staff plays a major role towards ensuring quality education. As Areaya (2010:207) argued, "... at the heart of universities mission lies the learning quality of the students in which case the teaching staff are the key work forces." This is because those who are responsible for its implementation can only assure its quality. Academic staff numbers, academic qualifications, academic ranks, and staff motivation from the three universities were used as major proxy indicators of the quality of the teaching staff in the sampled universities. The qualifications of the staff are often used as an input indicator of educational quality. The underlying assumption is that the higher the qualification of university teachers, the better the quality of education offered by them. Assuming this as an instrument for quality assurance, the MoE set the minimum standard on academic staff profiles based on educational qualifications. Hence, the Ethiopian minimum requirements for university staff qualifications should be less than 20% Bachelors degree holders, about 50% Master's degree holders and about 30% PhD holders (Wanna, 2009:150).

To see if this minimum standard has been met, the statistical data on the three sampled HEIs were collected and computed. Data on the academic profiles of these universities were obtained from the relevant offices of the universities and the MoE annual abstract, and is presented in Table 7 on p. 226.

Table 7:   Qualifications of academic staff in the universities

| University | Level of qualifications | | | | | |
	Staff	PhD degree	Master's degree	MD/DVM[*]	Undergraduate degree	Diploma
JU	1149	50 (4.35%)	522 (45.43%)	98	459 (39.95%)	20
MU	184	2 (1.09%)	71 (38.58%)	17	82 (44.56%)	12
MTU	619	13 (2.10%)	235 (37.96%)	42	302 (48.79%)	27
Total	**1952 (100%)**	**65 (3.32%)**	**828 (42.41%)**	**157**	**843 (43.18%)**	**59**

[*]MD =Medical doctor, MVM =Doctor of veterinary medicine

As shown in Table 7 above, in the 2011/12 academic year, the composition of the academic staff profile in the three universities was found to be 43.18% Bachelor's degree, 42.41% Master's degree, and 3.32% Ph.D. degree graduates. The current profile of the teaching staff in almost all of the three target universities (see Table 7 above) is far below the requirement as set by the HERQA (20% Bachelor degree, 50% Master's degree and, 30% PhD holders), and much of the teaching was done by first degree holders.

The academic staff profile of the sampled universities is highly heterogeneous and uneven among the colleges and programmes of the universities. Some colleges are strong in their staff composition and others were by far below of what was recommended by the HERQA. In some universities, particularly the College of Engineering and Technology, were staffed entirely or largely by first degree holders. For instance, out of 246 academic staff in the College of Engineering and Technology in Jimma University, 174 (70.73%) were first degree holders. Conversely, the academic staff profile of the College of Agricultural and Environmental Science was excellent. However, generally, there was a lack of experienced senior teaching staff among the colleges and programmes at all levels.

To further substantiate this finding, the academic profiles of all of the 30 public universities were computed by level of qualifications (see Table 8, p. 227).

Table 8: **Summary of qualifications of university teaching staff in all Ethiopian Public Universities in 2011/12**

All universities	Level of Qualification					
	Staff (N)	PhD degree	Master's degree	MD/ DVM	Undergraduate degree	Diploma and others
Ethiopian	17,990	1,119	7,991	1,684	6,620	572
Expatriate	721	337	272	42	11	19
Total	18,711	1,456	8,263	1,726	6,631	591
% per qualification	100.0	7.78	44.16	9.22	35.44	3.26

The data shows that a significant proportion of the academic staff (35.44%) did not qualify for the teaching positions they are currently holding, and much of the teaching is also done by first degree holders. This figure includes two times more first degree holders than the maximum recommended by the HERQA.

Previous studies indicated almost similar results relating to the problems associated with the number and qualifications of academic staff in Ethiopian higher education institutions. Research by Semela (2011:412) revealed 42.3% bachelor's degree holders, 36.8% master's degree holders, and 14.7% PhD holders. The HERQA (2011) found similar percentages, respectively 50.7%, 44.1% and 13.1%. According to Areaya (2010: 109), as of 2010 only 8% of the academic staff had PhDs and more than half (in some studies 70%) were undergraduate degree holders. Besides, the Addis Ababa University alone accounted for about half of the PhDs compared to the other 21 universities which have 95.2% undergraduate degree holders.

The major issue that is worth addressing at this point relates to the clear contradiction between the current practices of quality assurance and existing policies in connection to the qualifications of the academic staff. It is apparent that the universities ended up violating their own internal legislations in two counts. Firstly, the internal regulations of most HEIs do not permit graduate assistants to present an independent class lecture. In practice, however, the majority of the graduate assistants are lecturing some of the courses (Shibeshi *et al*., 2009:185). Secondly, notwithstanding their inexperience,

graduate assistants are required to assume additional administrative responsibilities (such as departmental chairs), the teaching of senior courses, and even to work as senior essay advisors which is hard for a novice and very young faculty member to manage (Semela, 2011:413). Thirdly, the number and qualification mix of the teaching staff are highly heterogeneous and disproportionate. It seems as if there is no need for clear academic standards to be followed regarding the qualifications of university academic staff. It also seems that the issue of academic qualifications required to teach at public universities was intentionally omitted from the Higher Education proclamation No.650/2009 (Areaya, 2010:106). These issues are closely linked to the existing institutional practices, and have serious implications for the quality of education and institutional development in Ethiopia.

The interview data also confirmed the above presented quantitative findings. It was clear from the interview information that the lack of adequate staff in terms of qualifications, pedagogical training and experience was the challenge that the newly emerging higher education institutions like the Mettu University faces. Most teachers in the universities under investigation had no training in terms of teaching. Those who have undergone pedagogical training were limited to a few colleges and faculties. An academic from the MU reported that:

> Currently, 40 percent of the students are enrolled in the technology area and 40 percent of the university teachers are teaching in this area. Most of these teachers do not have pedagogical training. You can imagine the extent to which this affects education quality (Interviewee # AS8, 2013).

The academics who participated in the interviews noted that the background preparation of teachers was a problem area that currently jeopardised the education quality in the country. They claimed that it was difficult to educate and prepare teachers, through the HDP[11] or other teacher's development activities, after they have been deployed to HEIs.

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[11] The HDP aims at improving the quality of higher education in Ethiopia through a licensing programme that will develop the skills and professionalism of teacher educators within the country.

Thus, interested candidates who wanted to join the profession have to be selected and the pedagogical education and training needed to be done in the training institutions: "... we have to train teachers of engineers, teachers of medical science, teachers of animal science, etc. just in the training institutions … they should need to acquire the necessary pedagogical skills before they join the profession" (Interviewee # AS8, 2013). It was argued by most of the interviewees that the acquiring of pedagogical skills need to be a precondition for teaching in the HEIs.

The academic staff's job dissatisfaction was also raised by the respondents and participants in the study as a grave issue. Low salaries and the lack of incentives were mentioned as the major causes of the problem. Some compensation such as payments for the extra work loads, and the summer and extension classes were not remunerated in line with the rules and regulations. There was a high teacher turnover in the universities, and the problem was persistent in the Mizan-Tepi and Mettu universities. The devising and implementing of attractive salaries and other incentives in the higher education sector was among the minimum conditions for improving the quality of the teaching and learning in Ethiopian higher education institutions. Such a measure will not only help to retain the current available staff, but will also help to attract qualified and experienced staff from outside.

The inappropriate assignment of academic officials to different positions was a major quality challenge in the universities under study. The teachers who participated in the interviews for the study reported that some academic positions were assumed not based on merit but political factors, politicising the academic enterprise. This discouraged those efficient and capable academics who aspire for such positions based on merit. An interviewee from the JU strongly argued that:

> Qualifications or leadership abilities are hardly the criteria to be appointed on the different ranks of the university. What is important is political faithfulness to the government. This discouraged competent academics from applying for different positions. They

were dissatisfied and thus not willing to play their role in enhancement of education quality (Interviewee # AS1, 2013).

The main objective for introducing the BPR was to assign the appropriate person to the right position through the restructuring of the organisation. According to the HE proclamation no. 650/2009, the positions in the hierarchy of the universities, including the vice-president, directors, deans and department head positions are required to be held based on merit: "The vice-presidents of a public institution shall be appointed based on merit and through competition" (FDRE, 2009:5015). Contrary to the proclamation's stipulation, however, not only the vice-president positions, but also other lower academic and administrative ranks were held by politicians, often young recruits, trusted by the university authorities. The structures designed during the BPR were not staffed by authorised individuals, and this might have affected the proper implementation of the subsequent reforms (such as the BSC, CBC, Kaizen, etc.). Thus, it can be concluded that these reforms did not contribute to the improvement of the quality of education in the HEIs in Ethiopia.

With rapidly expanding universities and the mass enrolment of students, the MoE recently launched a central hiring system where large numbers of freshman graduates were recruited annually, and assigned to the newly founded institutions of higher education like the Mettu and Mizan-Tepi Universities. While this may seem to solve the supply problem, it entails a huge compromise on quality. Most of the recruits have little or no understanding of the needed pedagogical skills. They were reportedly recruited either due to only their cumulative grade point average (CGPA) and political commitment.

6.2.1.4. Resources for quality assurance

As major input for a quality education, sufficient learning resources are central to run an academic programme effectively. To demonstrate the extent to which this input is in

place in Ethiopia, this study focused on students and academic staff as data sources. The study particularly evaluated the availability, utilisation, and quality of the learning resources and student support services. The responses of the two groups of respondents were summarised in Tables 9, 10 and 11 (see on pages 231-234).

Table 9:   Availability of learning resources and student support services

Learning resources and student support services	Availability of learning resources and student support (% high)							
	Academic staff			X^2	Students			X^2
	JU	MTU	MU		JU	MTU	MU	
ICT facilities	76.7	51.2	50.0	12.93*	67.3	35.2	35.8	47.29*
Library resources	89.5	82.2	67.4	9.92*	83.8	58.6	56.3	38.96*
Laboratories	64.0	40.9	20.0	23.75*	59.5	29.5	40.3	32.77*
Course materials	75.6	55.6	44.4	13.46*	71.4	52.3	44.4	28.56*
Learning facilities	65.9	25.0	37.0	22.46*	47.8	34.6	28.5	14.82*
Counselling services	41.9	44.4	62.2	5.17	41.2	48.5	45.3	1.83
Financial support	51.2	22.7	31.1	11.43*	34.9	31.8	23.3	5.38
Remedial courses	69.3	36.4	71.7	16.31*	40.4	33.3	34.8	2.11

P<.05

Note: Total N for JU is (80-86), MTU (40-47) and MU (40-46).

As indicated in Table 9 (above), facilities such as libraries (89.5%), laboratories (64.0%), computers (76.7%) and course materials (75.6%) were available in Jimma University as reported by the majority of academic staff respondents. Contrary to that of the staff perception, the student respondents reported the inadequacy of learning facilities (47.8%), financial assistance (34.9%) and remedial courses (40.4%) in the Jimma University.

The majority of both student and academic staff from the Mettu and Mizan-Tepi Universities reported the availability of library facilities and course materials, whereas there was a difference in the students' and staff's responses concerning the availability of computer and information communication technology facilities. Such a difference in ratings could be due to the fact that what is accessible for staff may not be accessible for students. It is apparent from the above data that the counselling services were inadequate in JU and MTU universities, as reported by the academic staff (JU=41.9%, MTU=44.4%)

and student respondents (JU=41.2%, MTU=48.5%, MU=45.3%). Similarly, in Mizan-Tepi and Mettu universities, laboratories, learning facilities, remedial courses and financial assistances services were reported as minimal by the majority of both the academic staff and student respondents.

To determine the perception differences among the academic staff and students across the three universities, the chi-square was calculated. Significant difference was not observed among the three universities in relation to the availability of counselling services, X^2 (2, N=176)=5.17, p <.05) for academic staff and X^2 (2, N=498) =1.83, p<.05) for students. Nevertheless, the remaining results showed significant difference among the three universities, as perceived both by the staff and student respondents. The inadequacy of basic learning facilities and laboratories seems to be a very serious problem in Mettu and Mizan-Tepi universities. Jimma University seems to be in a relatively better position in terms of putting most of the facilities in place. However, all three universities have one or more problems in terms of the learning resources and student support services which resulted in the conclusion that the educational resources for ensuring quality of education in all three universities were not adequate.

In addition to the adequacy of facilities and student support services discussed above, the staff and student respondents were also asked to rate the utilisation of the available resources in their institutions. The results were presented in the Table 10 below (see p. 233 of this study). The Chi-square test was run to see whether there were differences in the rating of the respondents regarding the utilisation of learning resources and student support services among the three universities.

Table 10:   **Utilisation of learning resources and student support services**

Learning resources and student support services	Utilisation of learning resources and student support services (% high)							
	Academic staff			X^2	Students			X^2
	JU	MTU	MU		JU	MTU	MU	
ICT facilities	54.9	12.5	22.2	26.00*	39.9	16.5	19.5	28.84*
Library resources	52.4	24.4	30.4	11.61*	61.7	43.1	37.2	24.11*
Laboratories	30.0	9.5	13.3	10.35*	37.3	26.6	27.5	5.90
Learning facilities	46.2	14.3	22.7	15.27*	29.3	24.6	20.5	3.50
Course materials	51.9	40.9	53.3	4.27	52.0	40.5	35.0	11.29*
Counselling services	17.5	14.6	34.9	6.50*	28.8	33.1	27.3	1.21
Financial support	31.2	12.5	20.9	5.43	21.0	16.8	18.8	.964
Remedial courses	34.6	20.0	55.6	11.84*	28.0	27.8	28	.001

*P<.05

 Note: Total N for JU is (80-86), MTU (40-47) and MU (40-46).

As the data in the Table 10 show, the percentage of academic staff respondents who reported a higher utilisation of library resources (JU=52.4%), ICT facilities (JU=54.9%), laboratories (JU=30.0 %) and course materials (JU=51.9%) is significantly greater in Jimma University than in the other two universities. The percentage of students who reported a lower utilisation of library resources (MU=37.2%), ICT facilities (MU=19.5%) and course materials (MU=35.0%) is significantly greater in Mettu University than the other two universities. The percentage of academic staff who reported higher utilisation of counselling services (MU=34.9%) and remedial courses (MU=55.6%) is significantly greater in the Mettu University than the other two universities. However, there is no significant difference in the rating of the student respondents regarding the utilisation of some facilities such as the learning facilities and laboratories as student support services such as the remedial courses and counselling services across the three universities. This suggests that there may be a problem in terms of the use of the available resources effectively and efficiently by the various respondents.

The academic staff and student respondents were also asked to evaluate the quality of the available resources and services. The quality of resources and services refers to the extent to which the available facilities, such as textbooks and library reference materials are up-to-date; laboratories, equipment and ICT facilities are available and of high a standard;

and the support services are effective and efficient enough to enhance the quality of the education in the universities, (see Table 11 below).

Table 11:   Quality of learning resources and student support services

Learning resources and student support services	Quality of learning resources and student support services (% good)							
	Academic staff			X^2	Students			X^2
	JU	MTU	MU		JU	MTU	MU	
ICT facilities	57.1	16.3	18.6	28.76*	31.9	22.0	20.4	7.51*
Library resources	58.8	15.6	20.6	31.54*	54.3	34.6	26.1	33.95*
Laboratories	36.9	4.4	11.1	24.82*	39.3	34.1	25.9	7.06*
Course materials	54.2	20.5	26.1	28.80*	44.5	36.3	25.2	14.21*
Learning facilities	41.5	15.9	18.2	14.94*	30.9	27.1	20.7	4.59
Counselling services	21.7	17.4	37.2	5.37	27.7	27.6	23.6	.873
Financial support	23.2	8.5	19.6	17.18*	27.2	18.5	15.3	10.76*
Remedial courses	41.0	19.6	40.4	13.91	32.0	30.4	21.0	7.93

*P<.05; Total N for JU is (80-86), MTU (40-47) and MU (40-46).

It was indicated in Table 11 (see above) that, the percentage of academic staff who perceived the quality of laboratories (JU=36.9%), ICT facilities (JU=57.1%), learning facilities (JU=41.5%), and course materials (JU=54.2%) to be high, was significantly greater in Jimma University than the other two. The quality of the library resources (MU=26.1%), ICT facilities (MU=20.4%), laboratories (MU=25.9%), course materials (MU=25.2%), and financial assistance (MU=15.3%) were found to be significantly lower in the Mettu University than the other two, as perceived by the student respondents. Similarly, it was apparent from the data that the available laboratory facilities (MTU=4.4%) and counselling services (MTU=17.4%) were very poor in the Mizan-Tepi University in comparison to the others, as the majority of the staff respondents reported. These findings indicate that there were problems in the quality of the available resources in the three universities, and that the problems are severe in the Mettu and Mizan-Tepi universities. This means that the universities were not providing quality services in terms of libraries equipped with the latest reference materials and relevant textbooks and journals; well-equipped laboratories; the necessary teaching and learning facilities and equipment; an efficient ICT support system; organized and meaningful remedial courses and counselling services; and adequate financial support for the facilitating high quality student learning.

The above findings are also supported by the interview information and practical observations. As reported by the academic staff participants, there was a shortage of resources such as textbooks and reference materials for both teaching and research activities in all three of the public institutions. The problem was acute in the Mizan-Tepi and Mettu universities in the case of journals and Internet connections. The academic staff participants in these universities indicated that their universities have no official subscription to journals. In addition to the inadequacy and poor quality of the library resources, the learning facilities, ICT and course materials, there was a serious problem of space due to the rising number of students in the universities. An academic officer interviewed at the Mettu University complained that "... the construction of buildings and classroom space, library collections, science and computer labs, and the development of ICT lag behind the ever increasing student enrolments ..." (Interviewee # AM5, 2013). The academic managers and teachers in the Jimma University indicated that the available laboratory facilities and equipment were incompatible with the increasing number of students who have to complete experiments and practical activities. There was in addition, a problem of using the available resources efficiently and effectively, as some academic staff in the Mettu and Mizan-Tepi Universities reported. They reported that laboratory equipment and instruments have been purchased and supplied by the government to the universities. Yet, due to the lack of training and know-how of operating them, the majority of the instruments were not utilised. There were a few, and in some areas no, qualified technicians to operate and use them.

This study identified that the problem of adequacy, utilisation and quality of resources was common in all three universities under investigation. The exception was a few colleges or departments in Jimma University such as the Colleges of Health and Medical Science and Veterinary and Animal Sciences. It was identified during field observations that some departments of the above colleges were relatively equipped with adequate and the most up-to-date resources. In general, however, the universities operated with overcrowded and deteriorating facilities, limited and outdated library resources, insufficient science and computer laboratories and equipment, and instructional materials. This situation was reported by many of the participants. All of these problems may result

in a serious backlog to fully realize the objectives of quality teaching-learning in these HEIs.

Scholars such as Shibeshi *et.al*, (2009:219) argue that a growing mismatch between the expansion of higher education, and the available resources and facilities was leading to declining standards in the quality of instruction in Ethiopian public universities. Given the fact that more than 30 universities were founded in a matter of less than a decade, a chronic shortage of manpower, a sufficient pool of potentially qualified academic staff, and appropriate and adequate learning resources were to be expected. Due to the emphasis on enrolment numbers, at the expense of quality, the expansion has been criticised by various organisations and researchers (Shibeshi *et.al*, 2009:219).

6.2.1.5. Unit costs of higher education

Over the past 6 years, public expenditure on education has increased from 22.8 % (in 2007) to 25.2% (in 2013), (see Table 12 below), which accounts for about 4% of the GDP (MoE, 2013:17). In order to better understand how this size of public expenditure affects the quality of higher education, it is important to determine the cost per higher education student, which is commonly referred to as the unit cost of higher education.

Table 12:   Public expenditure in education

Category	Years					
	2007/08	**2008/09**	**2009/10**	**2010/11**	**2011/12**	**2012/13**
Education expenditure (million Birr)	9,372.9	11,340.7	15,658.6	21,328.1	27,447.2	33,063.9
Total government expenditure (million Birr)	41,070.9	48,035.2	60,342.3	78,986.5	108,687.0	131,297.6
% of Total government expenditure on education	**22.8%**	**23.6%**	**25.9%**	**27.0%**	**25.3%**	**25.2%**

Source: MoE (Ministry of Education), 2013:17

In this study, the concept unit cost refers to the cost per higher education student per year. It is computed as a ratio of the recurrent budget allocated for the higher education subsector by the total enrolment (in the regular, non-fee paying students in the undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate programmes) in the same fiscal year. Table 13 below presents the trend of unit cost of higher education over a period of 8 years, i.e. from 2000 to 2007.

Table 13:   Unit cost of higher education in public HEIs (2000/01 to 2007/08)

Academic year	Enrolment (N)	Recurrent higher education budget (in millions Birr)	Unit cost (in Ethiopian Birr)
2000/01	12,317	254,867,700	20,692.35
2001/02	13,368	328,480,300	24,572.13
2002/03	37,998	443,781,700	11,679.08
2003/04	58,632	510,434,300	8,705.72
2004/05	81,836	575,054,500	7,026.91
2005/06	100,074	675,400,000	6,749.00
2006/07	115,017	823,200,000	7,157.20
2007/08	134,502	1,425,700,000	10,599.84

Source: Yizengaw, 2007; MoE (Ministry of Education), 2010; Education expenditure review, 2010.

As indicated in Table 13 above, the per student recurrent spending declined in real terms in Ethiopia from a high of Birr 20,692.35 (US$ 2,488.76) in 2000/01 to a low of Birr 6749.91 (US$784.76) in 2005/06 before recovering in 2007/08 to 10,599 Ethiopian Birr. The question here is: Why did this happen in spite of the higher education sector absorbing over 40% of the total public resources available for education in the country? The explanation lies in the share of capital budget being as high as 65% of the total expenditure on higher education in this period (Ravishankar, Abdulhamid & Alebachew, 2010:21).

To conclude, even though the total public expenditure has relatively increased between 2004 and 2008, the unit cost of higher education has declined considerably over the same period. In concrete terms, the quality of teaching and learning impacted through, for

example, falling student-textbook ratios, shrinking access to ICT and laboratory facilities, and fewer available learning materials. The present findings endorse the assertions made in earlier studies (e.g., Areaya, 2010; Amare, 2009; Reisberg & Rumbley, 2010; Saint, 2004; Semela & Ayalew, 2008; and Semela, 2011) which stressed the ramifications of the rapid quantitative expansion of the quality of education, suggesting growth in student size has outpaced financing capabilities.

A further analysis was carried out to determine the extent of the "dependency" of higher education institutions on governmental funding. The institutional income was divided into two categories: financial resources from the government and from other sources. For the three universities, the total income from the government and from other sources was computed, and the financial dependency was defined as the governmental income divided by the total income at a particular higher education institution. The JU received more than 89.0% of its income from government, and the MTU and the MU respectively 96.0% and 97.8%. These findings illustrate that all the three sampled higher education institutions were quite dependent on governmental funding for their overall income.

6.2.2. Quality and quality assurance of the teaching-learning process in the universities

In the previous sections, an attempt was made to report the results related to inputs that are vital in ensuring the quality of education at HEIs. In this section, an attempt is made to present data on the issues relating to the teaching-learning process. Data obtained from various sources, including the questionnaire responses of students and academic staff the interview information, and document analyses are presented below.

In order to determine the extent of the students' satisfaction with the teaching-learning process, assessment practices and their teachers' competences, they were asked on a 5-point scale (1 = Very dissatisfied, 2 = Dissatisfied, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Satisfied, 5 = Very satisfied) to rate their level of satisfaction. The value 3, the Neutral, was considered as a

hypothesised mean against which the mean ratings of the students were assessed for their significance using the one sample test. This means that if the mean ratings of the students were significantly higher than the hypothesised mean (the Neutral), then it can be assumed that students were satisfied with the particular issue item and *vice versa*.

Table 14:   Student satisfaction with teaching-learning process, assessment practices and teachers' competence

No	Items	Test value = 3			
		Mean	SD	t-test**	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Institutional commitment				
1	Overall institutional commitment for quality learning	2.98	1.25	-.317	.751
2	Leadership commitment to improve student learning	2.65	1.06	-7.28	.000
3	Grievance management procedures	2.66	1.04	-7.35	.000
4	Academic staff commitment to high quality in teaching	3.19	1.07	4.15	.000
5	Student involvement in quality assurance practices	2.42	.940	-13.78	.000
6	University's reputation	3.13	1.28	2.42	.016
	Quality of teaching-learning process				
7	Overall teaching and assessment practices	2.84	1.03	-3.46	.001
8	Quality of academic programme	3.01	1.06	.414	.679
9	Implementation of a university academic calendar	2.99	1.08	-.202	.840
10	Relevance of the course offered	2.91	1.03	-1.95	.051
	Academic staff quality				
11	Quality of academic staff	2.89	1.36	-1.74	.082
12	Professional competence of teaching staff	2.66	1.40	-5.38	.000
13	Level of intellectual stimulation in courses	2.97	1.06	-.537	.591
14	Variety of learning activities provided	2.89	1.08	-2.26	.024
15	Standard of lectures and presentations	3.02	1.07	.493	.622
	Quality of assessment practices				
16	Variety of assessment methods	3.02	.904	.683	.495
17	Clarity of assessment and marking criteria	2.96	1.09	-.682	.496
18	Promptness of feedback	2.74	.965	-6.03	.000
19	Effectiveness of feedback mechanisms	2.72	.957	-6.45	.000

**DF = 513

As indicated in Table 14 above, the students' mean score on 8 of the items (2, 3, 5, 7, 12, 14, 18 and 19) are significantly lower than the hypothetical mean neutral score (which had a value of 3), signifying that students were dissatisfied with the issues raised. Hence, the students were not satisfied with the leadership commitment for quality learning

(m=2.65), grievance management procedures in the university (m=2.66), attempts made to involve them in quality assurance issues (m=2.42), overall teaching and assessment practices (m=2.84), competence of the academic staff (m=2.66), the variety of learning activities provided (m=2.89), and promptness and effectiveness of feedback mechanisms (m=2.74 and m=2.72). The results in Table 14 also indicated that the students were only satisfied with the "commitment of academic staff for high quality in teaching" since the mean rating of students regarding this item was significantly greater than the hypothetical mean 3.0 (m=3.19, t= 4.15, p <.001). The remaining items were not statistically very different from the test value, which is 3 or neutral. The students appeared to be ambivalent with regard to the overall institutional commitment for quality learning, reputation of their university, academic programme quality, the proper implementation of a university academic calendar, relevance of the course offered for the future world of work, the standard of the lectures and presentations employed by academic staff, and the variety and clarity of the assessment and marking methods.

Further analysis was carried out to examine if there were differences in the students' responses among the three universities. To this end, the items in each of the categories were aggregated (as measuring the same thing) based on the results of inter-item correlation and factor analysis of data. Then, a one-way ANOVA was conducted in order to examine the differences in perceptions of the students across the three universities (see Table 15 below).

Table 15: **One-way ANOVA on differences of perceptions of students concerning their satisfaction with institutional commitment in three universities**

	Sum of squares	DF	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.124	2	.562	.919	.399
Within Groups	311.874	510	.612		
Total	312.998	512			

Significant differences were not found in the students' perceptions regarding the institutional commitment to quality learning across the three universities (F (2,510)= .919, p = .399). This implies that, as perceived by the students in general, the universities were not committed to quality learning. The *post hoc* tests show no significant difference in the mean ratings of the student respondents in the three universities.

There was significant difference among the three universities regarding the quality of the teaching-learning process, academic staff, and assessment practices. The results were presented in Tables 16, 17 and 18 below (see on pages 241-244).

Table 16: **One-way ANOVA on differences of perceptions of students concerning their satisfaction with teaching-learning processes in three universities**

	Sum of squares	DF	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.038	2	1.519	4.810	.009
Within Groups	161.343	511	.316		
Total	164.381	513			

As indicated in Table 16 above there were significant differences in the responses of students in the three universities regarding the quality of the teaching-learning processes (F (2,511)=4.81, p = .009). In order to determine which university students' perceptions differs significantly from which, the Tukey *post hoc* multiple comparisons methods were employed. The results indicated that a significant difference exist between the JU and the other two universities, suggesting that the students were more satisfied in the quality of the teaching-learning process in the JU (M=3.02, SD=.54) than in the MUT (M=2.83, SD=.62) and the MU (M=2.93, SD=.52).

The quality of teaching staff is often used as a proxy indicator of educational quality. The underlying assumption is that the higher the professional competence of university teachers, the better the quality of education offered by them. The ANOVA results in

Table 17 below indicates that there were significant differences among the three universities concerning the quality of their academic staff, as perceived by the student respondents (F (2,511)=46.657, p <.000). The *post hoc* tests show that the satisfaction of the students with their teachers' competence was significantly higher in the Jimma University (M=3.25, SD=1.11) than in the other two universities, the Mizan-Tepi (M=2.55, SD=1.10) and the Mettu Universities (M=2.23, SD=.87).

Table 17: **One-way ANOVA on differences of perceptions of students concerning their satisfaction with quality of academic staff in three universities**

	Sum of squares	DF	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	102.864	2	51.432	46.657	.000
Within Groups	563.294	511	1.102		
Total	666.158	513			

Regarding the practice of teaching and learning in the universities under investigation, from the interviews conducted with senior teachers and academic officers, and from a scrutiny of the documents such as senate legislation and other documents, it was determined that the universities have no explicit policies on teaching and learning. Reflecting on the problems emanated from the lack of explicit policies on teaching and learning, an academic from the JU reported that:

> The teaching-learning was not governed by the academic rules and regulations. Students can sit for re-examination/make-up for unlimited number of times. Double standards are common. Most decisions were made based on goodwill of the academic leaders not rules and regulations. There were no standards for academic activities (Interviewee # AS2, 2013).

In the JU, currently, the ADRC represents the best prospect for the development of quality-centered approaches to teaching and learning. However, in MTU and MU the lack of the establishment of the ADRCs was reported as a major challenge to the quality of teaching and learning. The researcher learned the above from the study of the self-

evaluation documents, and this was reinforced during the interview conducted with teachers, and from practical observations. It can be concluded that the teaching and learning processes at the universities were dominated by the lecture method. It was reported that the combination of high student-staff ratios, the lack of pedagogical skills on the part of some young and inexperienced teachers, and the inadequacy of facilities make it difficult to employ the student-centered approaches effectively.

As input for quality teaching-learning, the JU adopted the community-based education (CBE) philosophy with the ultimate expression of its practice-based approach to teaching and learning. The programme, as defined in the JU's self-evaluation document, read as follows:

> Community Based Education is a means of achieving educational relevance to community needs and consequently of implementing a community-oriented education programme. It consists of learning activities that utilize the community extensively as a learning environment (JU, 2013:4).

The CBE programme, however, was not without challenges, some of which can be attributed to the expansion of higher education, and its attendant problems such as community fatigue as a result of over-exposure, shortage of transportation, lack of commitment on the part of some teachers, and problems of sustainability. Moreover, the effort made in the JU to establish smart classrooms was exemplary. The researcher was able to observe a good number of academic sections which have been equipped with computers and beamer LCD projectors to facilitate the teaching-learning process.

In general, the problems identified in relation to the teaching-learning process in the three sampled universities can be summarised as the using of the more teacher-centered methods by most of the academic staff; the lack of pedagogical skills on the part of some of the academic staff; the inadequacy of learning and teaching resources; the lack of motivation for teaching as well as learning on the part of the academic staff and students; and the lack of follow-up and controlling mechanisms for course implementation. All of the above are major challenges.

Table 18: One-way ANOVA on differences of perceptions of students concerning their satisfaction with assessment practices in three universities

	Sum of squares	DF	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	11.477	2	5.738	11.294	.000
Within Groups	259.640	511	.508		
Total	271.117	513			

As stated earlier, assessment is an important part of the teaching-learning process. Hence, understanding the assessment practices of universities provides data relating to the quality of student learning. In view of this, students were asked to report the level of their satisfaction with the variety and clarity of assessment and marking methods, as well as the promptness and effectiveness of feedback mechanisms (see Table 14, on p. 239). An analysis of the variance showed that the difference in level of satisfaction was significant ($F (2, 511)=11.294$, $p <. 000$). A *post hoc* analysis using the Tukey multiple comparisons methods indicated that the student satisfaction with assessment practices was significantly lower in JU (M=2.75, SD=.67) than the MUT (M=3.06, SD=.77) and MU (M= 3.00, SD=.71).

The document analysis and the interview data revealed that there were no general policies on assessment in the universities under investigation. Assignments in the form of projects, and term papers were limited in many of the programmes. It was disclosed from the interview data obtained from the university teachers that most assessment practices focused on the reproduction of memorised knowledge and facts, at the expense of the other key competences.

Furthermore, it was also identified that faculties and departments used fixed scale approaches for most of the courses, and the practice of continuous assessment was very limited. Academic staff complained about the large class sizes as a major problem for not implementing the continuous assessment procedures as required. Some of the academics who participated in the interviews expressed their concern that the assessment practices

were exposed to partiality and subjectivity. A teacher from MU said that: "... there are some teachers who give grades based on ethnic lines, religion affiliations or other relationships" (Interviewee # AS7, 2013).

The primary purpose of assessment in education is to improve learning. In practice, it was revealed that, assessment exercises in the sampled universities were poor in terms of giving feedback and in motivating further learning. It seems that there was a determination on the part of the university that all students enrolled must graduate with a minimal or no attrition rate. Nevertheless, this was used to the extent that there were no pass/fail decisions in the universities. An academic from MTU argued that:

> Currently, we are technically required to give pass marks for all students. If you give a fail grade, you are expected to give re-examinations as many times as required, until student ... score pass-mark. The implication is that you learnt that ... student will not fail … and you give a pass mark ... the first time, even if the student does not deserve it. This is how we play the game (Interviewee # AS5, 2013).

This compromises the quality of education and undervalues the time and effort invested in assessment. Another reported problem with regard to assessment practices was cheating. Currently, cheating is becoming part and parcel of the culture of higher education institutions. Passing or scoring high grades without hard work (through cheating) was regarded as "normal". Some of the academic staff were also blamed for not giving enough attention to the issue and to address these problems. To overcome the malpractices, the universities need to develop and disseminate a clear assessment policy, establish transparent and robust mechanisms to ensure that the students are graded fairly and in line with the course objectives, and develop practices that can assure the existence of high standards.

The explanation for the reported failure in the assessment practices of HEIs lies partially in the lack of the necessary knowledge in the designing, administering, and interpreting of tests for ensuring good learning and decisions pertaining to certification. This situation

needs to be improved through the organizing of short term training workshops for HEI teachers on the subject. It is worth mentioning here, that the establishment of committees at departmental levels in some colleges of the Jimma and Mettu Universities for the preparation, monitoring and administration of examinations was very encouraging. The use of external examiners in some of the colleges of the sampled universities was also another important good practice that needs to be emulated throughout the different colleges of the universities.

6.2.3. Quality and quality assurance of the output in the universities

Many of the mechanisms proposed for the regulating of quality in higher education have been shaped by the information of research results, service activities, and the satisfaction of stakeholders. Student satisfaction with courses is on a micro-level and student/employer satisfaction with degree programmes on a macro-level (Dill, 1995:97). The ultimate goal of any form of business is the satisfaction of the stakeholders. Satisfaction is achieved when the stated goals are fully attained, when the input and process result in acceptable output that fits the intended purposes, and when the quality of the service is well-designed so that the customers and the clients get what they want (Shibeshi *et.al*, 2009:238). Accordingly, the students were asked to evaluate their satisfaction with the quality of competencies they gained during their studies. The results for the student respondents are presented in Table 19 (on p. 247). The students were asked to rate their level of satisfaction on a 5-point scale (from very dissatisfied to very satisfied). The mid-point 3, which is "neutral", was used as a hypothetical mean against which their level of satisfaction was measured. If the mean rating score was significantly above the hypothetical mean, the researcher assumed that the students were satisfied with that particular competence and *vice versa*.

Table 19: Rating of students' satisfaction with quality of the learning competencies gained during their studies

No.	Learning competences	Test value = 3.0			
		Mean	SD	t-test	Sig. (2-tailed)
1	Subject matter knowledge	2.96	.885	-.998	.319
2	Problem-solving skills	2.92	.745	-2.36	.018
3	Critical thinking and reasoning skills	3.00	.899	.000	1.00
4	Practical skills	2.67	1.07	-6.83	.000
5	Oral and written communication skills	2.73	.845	-7.15	.000
6	Teamwork and collaboration skills	2.77	1.20	-4.17	.000
7	Research skills and practices	2.71	.937	-6.87	.000
8	Overall preparation for a professional career	2.99	.781	-.056	.955

*DF = 513. **p is significant at 0.05.

The results in Table 19 showed that, the mean ratings of the students regarding their satisfaction with all the acquired learning competences were not statistically higher than the hypothesise mean, which indicated that the students were overall not satisfied with the quality of their learning competences and experience.

A one-way analysis of ANOVA was carried out to examine if there were differences in the students' responses across the three universities. The results were presented in Table 20. Significant differences were found in the students' satisfaction to Items 1, 4, 5 and 7.

Table 20: Comparison of students' reactions to Items presented in Table 19

Learning competences	JU		MTU		MU		F
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1	3.09	.98	2.86	.77	2.84	.77	4.63*
2	2.91	.72	2.96	.79	2.89	.74	.300
3	3.09	.98	2.90	.86	2.94	.76	2.22
4	3.03	1.09	2.15	.99	2.58	.90	32.2**
5	2.87	.82	2.48	.88	2.73	.79	.9.00**
6	2.78	1.18	2.73	1.24	2.81	1.2	.157
7	2.87	.96	2.48	.97	2.67	.79	7.46**
8	3.04	.79	2.99	.76	2.93	.76	.919

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < .001$*

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In order to determine which university students satisfaction differed significantly from which, the Tukey *post hoc* multiple comparison method was employed. The results indicated that a significant difference in Item 1 existed between Jimma and Mettu Universities, where students in MU were less satisfied than those in the JU in terms of the subject knowledge they acquired during their studies. For Item 4 (see Table 20, p. 247), the variations were significant between JU and the other two universities, suggesting that students in Jimma University were more confident than those students in the MTU and MU regarding their practical competence. Moreover, the differences in Items 5 and 7 were attributed to significant variations between JU and MTU, indicating that the JU students tend to have higher mean scores in terms of their research ability and communication skills than the Mizan-Tepi University students. Students in JU perceived that they have acquired satisfactory research and communication skills during their stay at the University but their counterparts in MTU did not. This generally implies that there exist differences in the perceptions of the students regarding their satisfaction with the quality of their learning competencies gained during their studies. It can be inferred from the findings that students in JU were somewhat satisfied with the overall competences they acquired at the university, and those in the other two universities not.

To supplement the students' self-evaluation of their own competences, the academic staff were also asked to assess the competences of their students. As indicated in Table 21 (see p. 249) the responses of the academic staff showed that the mean rating of Item 14 was significantly higher than the hypothesised mean score of 3 (which is an average), indicating that the academic staff perceived the study programmes relevant for the later careers of the students. The mean scores of all the Items (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 13) were not statistically higher than the test value, suggesting that the academic staff evaluated the competences of their students as "poor". They reported a low satisfaction level with their students' competence.

Table 21: **Academic staff's assessment of the competences of their students**

No.	How do you evaluate your students in relation to the following aspects?	Test value = 3			
		Mean	SD	DF	t-test
1	Interest towards the courses you teach	2.32	1.14	177	-7.94*
2	Academic preparedness	2.16	1.08	177	-10.29*
3	Motivation to learn	2.39	1.21	177	-6.58*
4	Self-confidence	2.16	.986	177	-11.32*
5	Attitude towards their field of study	3.16	1.25	177	1.78
6	Value orientation towards quality learning	2.38	1.08	176	-7.50*
7	Engagement and commitment to studies	2.28	1.18	176	-8.00*
8	Academic competence	2.50	1.19	177	-5.56*
9	Problem-solving skills	2.75	1.13	177	-2.89**
10	Critical thinking and reasoning skills	2.69	1.12	177	-3.58*
11	Oral and written communication skills	2.57	1.15	176	-4.96*
12	Teamwork and collaboration skills	2.92	1.07	164	-.940
13	Time orientation	2.42	.991	179	-7.81*
14	Relevance programmes for later career of students	3.21	1.19	179	2.37*

$**p < .0.05, *p < 0.001$, All others are not significant at 0.05.

Table 21 showed that the academic staff's assessment of the competences of their students' academic preparedness, self-confidence, interest, and motivation to learn were low. Similarly, their value orientation towards quality learning, engagement and commitment were also low. Their problem-solving, critical/analytical thinking and communication skills were also found to be poor, as perceived by the academic staff. The mean scores of Items 5 and 12 were not significantly different from the test value (which was 3 or "average"), signifying that the students' attitudes towards their fields of study and team work skills were "moderate".

Table 22: **ANOVA on differences of staff perceptions regarding students' competence in three universities**

	Sum of squares	DF	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.385	2	1.193	2.943	.056
Within Groups	65.644	162	.405		
Total	68.030	164			

The ANOVA results in Table 22 (above) showed that there was no significant difference among academic staff perceptions in the three universities concerning the competences of the students, $F(2, 162)=2.94$, $p=.056$. The *post hoc* tests show no significant difference in the main scores of the staff respondents in the three universities. From the results of the above findings, it was apparent that there seemed to be a general discontent among the academic community *vis-a-vis* the quality of the performance of the students and their competences.

As mentioned previously, at the macro-level, information from a graduate tracer study may be used for the further development of the HEIs in the context of quality assurance, as it can identify possible deficits in a given educational programme. In some countries, HEIs are formally required to conduct graduate tracer studies as a requirement for a quality audit, or to get accreditation for their study programmes. This is also the case in Ethiopia, as the HERQA have considered tracer studies; and, the subsequent quality improvement actions as an area of focus for an institutional audit (HERQA, 2006:6). However, from the three sampled universities, only the JU conducted graduate tracer studies to date.

In 2012, Jimma University conducted a tracer study with its graduates to obtain information that could assist to improve the quality of its academic programmes. The results of the study revealed that graduates were satisfied with the academic provision, general teaching and learning methods, student support services and assessment conditions. However, in terms of the colleges, graduates from Jimma Technology Institute were very dissatisfied with the academic provision and teaching-learning process they have gone through at the JU, followed by respondents from the College of Business and Economics, while graduates from the Colleges of Social Science and Law took the opposite views. All colleges were not happy with the practice of participation in staff research projects and the supporting of students outside the classroom. Among the deficiencies mentioned were the poor computer, research and English language skills of graduates, the weak supervision of community-based education, unhealthy student-teacher relationships, some academic staff' who lacked experience of and inappropriate

assessment techniques, and the plagiarism of students. The latter were weaknesses consistently indicated in the document. Among the suggestions made by the graduates were academic staff's competency, the supply of learning materials, student-centered and practical-oriented instruction, improvements of the budget, the mitigating of plagiarism in student research projects, the maintaining of good student-teacher relationships, and the monitoring of a "smooth process" of teaching-learning (Jimma University, 2012:71).

6.3. THE QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICIES, MECHANISMS AND PROCEDURES IN THE UNIVERSITIES

Quality assurance structures, mechanisms and procedures are efficient ways by which an institution can achieve its quality assurance mission and objectives. The Higher Education Proclamation No. 650/2009 stipulates the need for the establishment of a robust internal quality assurance system in Ethiopia's HEIs (FDRE, 2009:5039). Accordingly, in addition to having proper policies, systems and procedures, institutions are expected to exhibit the ways in which they are engaged in continuously improving their operations. With this in mind, in this section, an attempt is made to examine the quality assurance systems, policies, mechanisms, and procedures which are in place in the sampled universities. To this end, relevant documents, survey questionnaires, and interviews were used as sources of information.

6.3.1. Quality assurance policies and structures

The HERQA guideline for institutional QA states that HEIs should have a policy and associated procedures for the assurance of quality. The survey questionnaires for this study asked the academic respondents in the three universities if they had an institutional quality assurance policy, or an equivalent document.

Table 23: **Presence of quality assurance policy and structures in sampled public universities as perceived by academic staff**

| University | Presence of quality assurance policy | | | | X^2 |
	Yes	No	Don't know	Total	
JU	68.4%	6.1%	25.5%	98	
MTU	51.9%	20.4%	27.8%	54	12.46*
MU	76.5%	11.8%	11.8%	51	
Total				203	

*P<.05

In Table 23 above, it is indicated that an overwhelming majority (JU, 68.4%, N=98; MTU, 51.9%, N=54; MU, 76.5%, N=54) of the staff replied that they do have such a policy document. However, the documents and interview data indicated the respondents' inability to discern the presence of quality assurance policies in the institutions. To substantiate the above quantitative data, the researcher conducted interviews with the quality assurance officers of the universities. It was revealed that there were no QA policies at the sampled universities; however, there have been a quality care policy that focuses on among others, continuous professional development (CPD), re-examinations, and affirmative action. An Interviewee from JU reported that: "Lack of quality assurance policy at the university is a major problem. We don't have broad goals and direction so quality is a mess in our case" (Interviewee # AS2, 2013). The researcher could also not get hold of any QA policy document through which the universities (departments or programmes) assessed the quality of the education that they were providing.

The academic staff were also asked to indicate whether quality assurance offices or structures were available in the universities, and whether they were involved in the quality assurance activities during the past five years (see Table 24, p. 253).

Table 24:   Availability of responsible organs for quality assurance

Universities	Ratings in (%)							
	Availability of responsible organs for QA				Academic staff involvement in QA activities			
	Yes	No	Total	X^2	Yes	No	Total	X^2
JU	87.5	12.5	96		44.8	52.2	96	
MTU	73.6	26.4	53	6.06*	34.6	65.4	52	1.64
MU	88.7	11.3	53		37.7	62.3	53	

P<.05

It was reported by a large majority of the academic staff (JU, 87.5%, N=96; MTU, 73.6%, N=53; MU, 88.7%, N=53) that the target universities had quality assurance offices which are responsible for the management of quality. There was a significant difference in the ratings of the first item among the three universities. This indicated that the ratings of the respondents from Mettu University were significantly higher, than the ratings of the other two universities. However, this does not lead to the conclusion that the availability of responsible offices or organs in the Mettu University was higher than the other two universities.

Regarding the academic staff's involvement in QA activities, the majority of the academic staff in the three universities (JU, 52.2%, N=96; MTU, 65.4%, N=52; MU, 62.3%, N=53) responded that they did not participate in quality assurance activities during the last five years. There was no statistically significant difference in the academic staff's rating across the three universities x^2 (2, N=206)=1.64, p>.05). This could imply that a reasonable proportion of the teachers as the implementers of the QA felt that they were not supportive of the quality assurance initiatives introduced on a central level by the institution.

According to Newton (2000:162), academic staff should be involved and committed to the development and implementation of quality assurance practices. Academic staff have a pivotal position in higher education institutions. They develop educational programmes; deliver the programmes; and, are responsible for the assessment. What they think and do is crucial to the quality of higher education (Newton, 2000:162). Nevertheless, although

academic staff were the frontline implementers of policy, they were not given sufficient opportunities in the development and implementation of the quality assurance measures in the public universities under study.

The quality assurance structure was established at an institutional level in the universities under study – at JU as an academic programme and quality assurance office; and at MU and MTU as quality assurance directorates. In the JU, the quality assurance structure existed from institutional to college levels, but no committee or relevant unit existed at departmental level. There was a so-called quality assurance unit at college level, but its role was limited to academic remediation, giving supplementary examinations for students, and providing affirmative action for female students. At college level, the academic commission (AC) often discusses and exchanges information about education quality, but no planned activities on quality issues were carried out by the AC. Apart from this, the JU faculty level QA officers reported the presence of an examination committee at departmental levels. Hence, after preparing examinations, university teachers submitted the examinations papers for approval to the committee. However, the practice was not common across faculties and departments, and in some departments, it ceased functioning due to a lack of incentives for the committee members. As a quality assurance mechanism, this committee has been found very helpful in the overall maintenance of quality in the departments.

In Mettu University, there was an office known as the quality assurance directorate at university level. The structure was established in 2005 as a "QA directorate" at institutional level. The QA director was accountable to the president, but there were no QA structures at the lower levels such as at the faculty or departmental levels. There were two subunits under the quality assurance directorate. The first unit focused on quality enhancement, providing short-term training on how to improve quality; and the second unit was aimed at audits and the monitoring of standards.

According to the HE policy, quality assurance offices have to be established on all three hierarchies of the university – at institutional, college, and departmental levels. However,

the document analysis and the interview information obtained from the academic managers showed that there were no quality assurance units at departmental level, and the college level quality assurance offices were no longer functional. As internal quality extends to every dimension of a university, and especially the teaching-learning process, it is the view of the researcher that the quality assurance units should also be established at college and departmental levels in all HEIs.

Moreover, from the collected interview information it can be established that in all three of the universities, there were no efficient institutional arrangements for quality assurance activities. In the JU, the QA office was not independent, but was attached to the academic programme office as an additional function. Organising the QA office with the necessary human resources was also essential. Currently (2014) for instance, the QA unit at JU is staffed by one person at institutional level (a quality assurance head), with no other experts included in the structure. It was impossible to monitor the quality of all the academic programmes available at the university with one specialist alone. QA requires the preparation of guidelines, manuals and policies. Such documents require high expertise and large budgets. There existed no allocated budget for these activities. Rearranging the structure and allocating the necessary budget was critical for making the present-day QA system functional.

Another reported problem was the inappropriate assignment of quality assurance personnel to the system. The persons assigned to the system did not have the relevant knowledge, skills, or experience. This was a major problem in the universities under investigation. The HERQA did nothing to improve the system. The assigned individuals had little or no exposure to the HERQA's quality assurance methods and procedures. An academic officer from the MU said that: "We don't have formal communication with HERQA. A year ago, our resource director consulted the HERQA and collected some documents. Apart from this, there was no formal communication between our university and the HERQA" (Interviewee # AM6, 2013). These practices negatively affected the implementation of the QA system in the universities. Perhaps the only support system available with a potential to enhance the quality in Ethiopian HEIs are the Academic

Development and Resource Centers (ADRCs). If organised effectively, the ADRCs can contribute a lot to quality improvement – it offers short-term training to academic staff in teaching methodology, curriculum development, student assessment, and other pedagogical skills. Apart from JU, the ADRCs were not established in the other two universities for the facilitating of quality assurance activities. Currently, in JU the target group for the pedagogical training was the newly recruited academic staff. The JU academic programme and quality assurance officer believed that the activities carried out so far by the ADRC were encouraging:

> Our ADRC attempts to improve the quality of academic staff through short-term training such as pedagogical skill training, continuous assessment, instructions, active learning methodologies and educational material preparation training. Moreover, technology-supported instruction and blended e-learning programmes were also introduced. We have a strategic plan for teachers' capacity development through further education programmes. A tracer study was conducted and the improvement plan was prepared based on the results of the study (Interviewee # AM2, 2013).

However, there have been indications that the potential contributions of the ADRC seemed to be little understood, or not appreciated by the university officials. In the Jimma University, ADRC was viewed as nothing more than the appendages of the Institute of Education and Professional Development, and hence, it was marginalised. Furthermore, in the sampled HEIs, there existed limited professional knowledge and skills as to what it takes to integrate quality assurance systems in to the institutional culture. One example of weak leadership in this regard relates to the failure of the Mizan-Tepi and Mettu Universities to establish the ADRC as an integral part of their quality enhancement initiatives. As it appears, the lack of vision and enthusiasm to do the groundwork on the part of the leadership seemed to have thwarted the efforts to put functional institutional quality assurance systems in place.

In the sampled universities, it was encouraging that quality management systems were established at institutional level. In terms of the latter, at least developing a draft quality

care policy and having aspects of the quality culture adopted were some of the strengths identified in relation to the Jimma and Mettu Universities' internal quality assurance systems. Apart from this, establishing quality management systems at faculty and departmental levels were some of the areas that need improvement.

The critical challenges for HEIs, in general, were manifested in committing resources that support institutional quality improvement efforts, the establishment of full-fledged quality assurance structures, the effort to furnish the structure with the necessary personnel, and the commitment of the institutional management in this regard. Therefore, the HEIs need quality assurance directorates or units that range from institutional to departmental levels. These units also should be functional. The positions need to be filled with university educators who have the relevant qualifications and experience. There is also a need for institutional wide policy that provides direction to all the activities of the QA system in the HEIs. Supporting guidelines and other manuals have to be developed to make the policy functional.

In achieving quality in higher education, the students played no smaller role than the academic staff. Student participation in quality assurance processes underpins the validity and reliability of both the internal and external review processes, and has been demonstrated to be a value-adding factor for improving the quality in higher education. The students involved in the study were asked to rate their participation in quality assurance matters in the universities.

Table 25: **Student involvement in quality assurance activities during their stay at universities**

No	Student participation	Responses (%)		
		Yes	No	Total (N)
1	Completing questionnaires on student learning experiences	56.1	43.9	515
2	Completing questionnaires on programme/course evaluation	59.4	40.6	515
3	Completing questionnaires on effectiveness of teaching-learning	62.3	37.7	514
4	Departmental meetings on quality of educational provision	48.0	52.0	515
5	Faculty meetings on issues related to quality of education	44.6	55.4	514
6	University wide meetings to discuss academic matters	47.9	52.1	514

The majority of the student respondents reported that they did not take part in academic or quality related issues such as departmental meetings on the quality of educational provision (52.0%), faculty meetings on issues related to the quality of education (55.4%), and university wide meetings to discuss academic matters (52.1%). There were no tradition of conducting meetings with students to discuss the quality of the teaching and learning at the universities.

The above responses indicate that the students participated in teaching-learning (62.3%) and programme/course evaluation (59.4%) by completing survey questionnaires. However, the results, which at this stage were a result of the quantitative analysis, do not indicate how active their involvement was, and how influential their contributions were.

6.3.2. Academic staff's understanding of the concept quality in HEIs

The survey questionnaire data was used to explore the academic staff's perceptions of the concept of quality in HEIs. In analysing the data, the questions and findings were grouped into five separate but interrelated ways of thinking about quality as proposed by Harvey and Green (1993:11-27), Harvey (1998:244) and Harvey (2007:6). These are quality as "perfection", quality as "transformative", quality as "excellence", quality as "value for money" and quality as "fitness for purpose" (also see Chapter 2, p. 34 of this study).

The findings on how the academic community in the target universities viewed the concept quality, showed that quality as transformative (72.7%), quality as excellence (64.9%), and quality as fitness for purpose (56.1%) were the top three choices for the respondents (see Table 26 p. 259). The respondents put relatively less emphasis on quality as value for money (28.3 %) and quality as perfection (47.3%).

Table 26:   Academic staff's understanding of the concept of quality in HEIs

No	To what extent does the following concept of quality describe your own view of quality and/or that of your institution?	Responses		
		Best describes	%	Total
1	Transformative	149	72.7	205
2	Excellence	133	64.9	205
3	Fit for purpose	115	56.1	205
4	Value for money	58	28.3	205
5	Perfection	97	47.3	205

An interesting observation was that the choices of the academic staff were not restricted to one particular way of understanding. This was shown when three of the definitions, namely quality as "excellence", quality as "transformative" and quality as "fit for purpose" were chosen as the three top choices, implying that no one definition was highly dominant compared to the other two definitions. The result also showed that different individuals defined the concept of quality differently. This demonstrates the difficult and complex nature of defining the concept of quality. This result is consistent with Hager's (1997:6) and Harvey and Green's (1993:28) conclusions that the concept of quality in education is difficult to define. The finding is also consistent with the view that quality is not a uni-dimensional but a multi-dimensional concept (Harvey, 1999:14). In Ethiopia, the concept fitness for purpose is employed as a guiding principle in the external quality monitoring by the Quality Assurance Agency.

Quality assurance processes have four broad purposes: accountability, compliance, control and improvement (Harvey, 1998; Harvey, 1999; Harvey, 2007; Harvey & Newton, 2004; Van Damme, 2000). The questions included in the survey questionnaires

were used to explore the range of purposes for implementing a quality assurance system as perceived by the academic staff. In analysing the data, the survey questionnaire questions were grouped into the four purposes or functions for implementing a quality assurance system as identified above (see also the Literature review, Chapter 2). The results are presented in Table 27.

Table 27:   The purposes of QA in HEIs as perceived by academic staff as significant

No	Purposes of QA implementation	Level of significance		
		Most significant	%	Total
1	Control	142	69.0	206
2	Compliance	133	64.5	205
3	Accountability	172	83.5	206
4	Improvement	184	89.3	206

The questionnaire data about the respondents' perceptions of the most important purposes for implementing a quality assurance system revealed that the three universities were in agreement that improvement of higher education should be viewed as the most important purpose (89.3%, N=206) for implementing a quality assurance system. The respondents rated accountability (83.5%, N=206), control (69.0%, N=206) and compliance (64.5%, N=205) in their order of importance as purposes for implementing a quality assurance system in their universities. This result showed that improvement of the quality of education was the top choice for all academic staff as compared to the other listed purposes for quality assurance implementation in the target universities. The staff placed less significance on control and compliance as the purposes of QA. However, in Ethiopia, as the QA system was established because of external pressures, it inclines to meet external accountability, and this makes quality enhancement a by-product, and not a central feature of quality improvement. At the sampled universities, the quality assurance system is clearly multi-purpose, serving an accountability function to an external state agency (e.g. satisfying the external quality audit of the HERQA) as well as enhancing self-improvement through the self-evaluation processes.

6.3.3.   Quality assurance mechanisms and procedures

Table 28 (see p. 261) sought to explain the mechanisms and procedures in place for the quality assurance in the target universities. Fifteen (15) methods and procedures were listed. The aim of these was to understand the use of quality assurance mechanisms (methods, instruments, etc.) and procedures in the target universities. The responses of the academic staff are given in Table 28.

Table 28:   Quality assurance mechanisms and procedures in place as perceived by the academic staff

No	Mechanism and procedure	Responses (%)						
		JU		MTU		MU		
		Yes	Total	Yes	Total	Yes	Total	X^2
1	Departmental self-assessment	48.0	98	47.2	53	64.8	54	4.68
2	External evaluation of department	23.5	98	11.3	53	35.2	54	8.49*
3	Student evaluation of teaching	82.7	98	86.6	53	86.8	54	.677
4	Peer-review	62.2	98	67.9	53	75.9	54	2.97
5	Needs assessment	63.3	98	38.9	54	44.4	54	9.93*
6	Programme/curriculum review	57.4	98	26.4	53	40.7	54	61.14*
7	Consultative meetings with stakeholders	25.5	99	15.1	53	44.4	54	15.27*
8	Institutional self-assessment	83.7	98	75.5	53	77.4	53	1.72
9	External evaluation of the institution	70.4	98	64.2	53	64.2	53	2.21
10	Tracer study	72.4	98	20.4	54	22.6	53	53.54*
11	Exit examination	70.2	98	22.2	54	18.9	53	53.62*
12	Student-satisfaction survey	71.4	98	66.0	53	77.8	54	1.82
13	Examination panel	29.6	98	24.1	54	51.9	54	13.45*
14	Internal course review	24.5	98	27.8	54	48.1	54	9.50*
15	External examiners' report	48.0	98	70.4	54	47.2	56	8.24*

$P < .05$

The researcher observed that different mechanisms and procedures were adopted by the universities for assuring the quality of the education they provided. The institutions have adopted various forms of practices; the most commonly adopted by the three universities

were institutional self-assessment (JU=83.7; MTU=75.5%; MU=77.4%), peer-review (JU=62.2; MTU=67.9%; MU=75.9%), external evaluation of the institution (JU=70.4; MTU=64.2%; MU=64.2%), student-satisfaction survey (JU=71.4; MTU=66.0%; MU=77.8%) and students' evaluation of courses and teaching effectiveness (JU=82.7; MTU=86.6%; MU=86.8%). The majority of the academic respondents from Jimma University reported programme or curriculum review (57.4%), tracer study (72.4%), exit examination (70.2%), and needs assessment for programme or course design (63.3%), as the most widely used methods for assessing quality. On the other hand, departmental level self-assessment (64.8%) and examination panels (51.9%) were reported by the staff respondents as methods for assessing quality in Mettu University. In the case of the Mizan-Tepi University, external examiners' reports (70.4%) were indicated as a method for assessing quality. A very small proportion of the respondents (about 20-30%) in the three universities believed that the external evaluation of the departments, consultative meetings with key stakeholders and internal course reviews were adopted as methods of quality assurance.

Similarly, to see if the universities have a properly functioning quality assurance mechanism that encourages the proactive participation of its major stakeholder (the students), questions were presented to this stakeholder. Table 29 below contains a summary of the quality assurance mechanisms and procedures in place as perceived by the students.

Table 29: Quality assurance mechanisms and procedures in place as perceived by students

No	Does your department/faculty employ one or more of the following as methods/tools to improve the quality of teaching and learning?	Responses					
		Yes	%	No	%	Don't know	%
1	Assessment of learning outcomes	330	58.5	173	33.5	40	8.0
2	Institutional self-assessment	228	44.3	227	44.1	60	11.7
3	Curriculum review	223	43.3	236	45.8	56	10.9
4	Consultative meetings with students	198	38.4	252	54.8	35	6.8
5	External evaluation	175	30.5	281	54.7	76	14.8
6	Tracer study	107	20.8	315	61.2	93	18.1
7	Interviews of prospective graduates	220	42.7	237	46.0	58	11.3
8	Evaluation of teaching by students	284	55.1	201	39.0	30	5.8

It can be observed from Table 29 that the evaluation of teaching by the students (55.1%) and the assessment of learning (58.5%) were reported by the majority of the student respondents as a major quality assurance mechanism and procedure employed by the departments in the universities.

The academic staff evaluated the implementation of quality assurance activities in their universities. A closer examination of the distribution of the individual items in Table 30 showed that the three universities were in agreement regarding the existence of strategic planning for teaching and learning in their respective universities.

Table 30: **Implementation of quality assurance activities as perceived by staff**

No.	Practices of Quality Assurance	Ratings (%)						X^2
		JU		MTU		MU		
		Yes	Total	Yes	Total	Yes	Total	
1	Developing QA policies, manuals, guidelines and procedures	57.1	98	27.8	54	35.2	54	22.75*
2	Establishing institutional QA offices, committees	54.1	98	35.2	54	57.4	54	15.43*
3	Setting quality performance standards for teaching, and learning outcomes across all programmes	41.2	97	24.1	54	38.9	54	12.06*
4	Setting incentive structures for good teaching	24.7	97	7.4	54	35.2	54	16.92*
5	Strategic planning with a clear mission, goals and objectives for teaching-learning	58.2	98	57.4	54	59.3	54	.049
6	QA Unit/Committee at college and departmental levels	56.7	97	34.0	53	51.9	54	10.89*
7	Institutional structure and responsibility for quality improvement	62.9	97	40.7	54	69.8	53	12.36*
8	Guidelines, procedures and support to academic staff to ensure quality of their teaching	38.8	98	29.6	54	37.0	54	2.37
9	A system to ensure good governance, transparency, and accountability to stakeholders	36.7	98	16.7	54	59.3	54	21.55*
10	Regular review of study programmes and curriculum	44.9	98	27.8	54	44.4	54	6.02
11	Regular staff meetings to discuss quality of education and student learning	29.6	98	22.2	54	40.7	54	8.47
12	Using results of programme/course reviews for improvement of student learning	34.7	98	25.9	54	42.6	54	11.50*
13	Information systems used for the effective management of its activities	29.6	98	7.4	54	29.6	54	13.48*
14	Shared quality culture and values across departments	20.4	98	18.5	54	29.6	34	3.45

p is significant at 0.05

As the data illustrated, a reasonable proportion of the academic staff believed that many quality assurance activities were not implemented in the target universities. Performance standards for learning outcomes (JU=41.2%; MTU=24.1%; MU=38.9%), well established information systems and feedback mechanisms (JU=29.6%; MTU=7.4%; MU=29.6%), guidelines and procedures for assuring quality (JU=38.8%; MTU=29.6%; MU=37.0%), meetings on quality related matters and incentive structures for good

teaching (JU=24.7%; MTU=7.4%; MU=35.2%) were found to be very minimal, as perceived by the staff.

There was a significant difference in the rating of Items 1, 2, 6, 7 and 9 among the three universities. Quality assurance policy, structure and committees were put in place in JU and MU, but this was not the case in the Mizan-Tepi University. Unlike the other two universities, the majority of the staff respondents in MU reported that the system to ensure good governance, transparency and accountability to stakeholders existed in their institution.

One significant finding in this study was the absence of a shared culture of quality in the institutions. The concept of culture of quality refers to one in which everybody in the organisation, not just the quality controllers, is responsible for quality (Harvey & Green, 1993:16). The notion of quality culture is understood here as shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitments toward quality, and a structural/managerial element with defined processes that enhance quality and aim at coordinating efforts (Vlãsceanu *et al.,* 2004:2).

Document analysis and interviews were also conducted to further extend and clarify the above quantitative data on internal quality assurance practices at the target institutions. Interviews were conducted with both academic staff and institutional quality assurance officers and relevant QA documents were consulted. Accordingly, curriculum development and review procedures, staff development and appraisal practices, modularisation of courses or programmes, business process re-engineering (BPR), self-evaluation practices, ranking of HEIs and institutional autonomy, and academic freedom were identified and analysed as major themes of the collected information. Hence, the results are presented as follows:

6.3.4.   Curriculum development and review procedures

Regarding the issue of the curricula of public universities, the HEP no.650/2009 has stipulated that: Every institution shall guide curricular development by its academic units through appropriate learning outcomes" (FDRE, 2009:4987). Although this proclamation recognizes the power and duty of individual public universities and award the mandate and autonomy to determine and implement academic programmes, the reality, however, is inconsistent with the rhetoric. It was identified that the activity of curriculum development was centralized at national level and it was often carried out by the MoE. An interviewee from Mettu University said that:

> Only when we are invited by the MoE to take part in curriculum development or reviews, usually to harmonize the curriculum at national level, we participated in such activities. So far, we did not conduct curriculum development or review, programme or course review at our university, or at department level (Interviewee # AM5, 2013).

In the case of this top-down approach, experts from outside the university prepared a curriculum as a national guide and each department is obliged to use it as a reference in institutionalizing the national curriculum. However, although very limited in scope, the experience of Jimma and Mizan-Tepi Universities showed that a few course or programme reviews were carried out at some of the departments.

At this stage, it seems logical to pose questions regarding who was responsible for developing curricula for a university, what the academic autonomy of a university was regarding curricular issues, and what the role of the teaching staff was in the process of curriculum revision and development. As Areaya (2010:100) correctly points out, teaching and research staff, directly and/or through their democratically elected representatives, should have the right to initiate, participate, and determine academic programmes for their institutions in accordance with the highest standards of education and basic principles.

However, the so-called revised and/or newly developed programmes failed to acknowledge institutional peculiarities and were all uniformly determined by the federal ministry of education. This seemed to have adversely affected the sense of ownership of the teaching staff. This was also apparent in one of the institutional audit reports of the HERQA which read: "Some members of staff were of the view that most of the curricula are designed through workshops conducted by the Ministry of Education and that individual teachers had no right to revise what has already been set" (Areaya, 2010:101).

Whenever the government wishes to initiate a new academic programme, whatever its relevance and demand, it will automatically launch it without necessarily passing through the necessary curriculum development process. Currently, for instance, the undergraduate curricula of the public universities were reengineered top-down into modular curricula and delivered through block teaching. This radical reform happened without the involvement or consensus of many of the owners of the academic programmes.

The academic communities in the universities seemed to have been considered as technicians to do whatever they are ordered to do by the Ministry. This has made the quality of the curriculum implementation questionable. Furthermore, the rapidity of the implementation process of the reforms added to the short life of most of the curricular reforms, and the latter also underlined the instability of the curriculum reforms in the Ethiopian public universities.

6.3.5.   The implementation of the competency-based curriculum (CBC)

The competency based-curriculum (CBC) was introduced to the Ethiopian higher education system from 2013 onwards. According to the JU academic officers, although too early to speak, the universities have gained some advantages by changing the subject or discipline-based curriculum to the competency-based curriculum (CBC). Some new and important content were introduced to the high-tech courses such as physics in terms of the introduction of the CBC. At the same time, the former irrelevant contents were

removed (since they had no alignment with the expected new competences) and new contents were introduced to some of the courses and programmes. It was also believed that this contributed to the quality of the curriculum. The CBC system introduced ECTS in line with the concept of the internalisation of education, and it was meant for facilitating the students' mobility from one area to another. An academic officer from MTU reported that:

> We reaped many benefits from the introduction of CBC when quality is interpreted in terms of student engagement – CBC increased student engagement. You never see students wondering here and there on the campus. Every student was busy ... engaged in his/her own learning, library reading, being prepared for continuous assessments, doing group work and other projects (Interviewee # AM3, 2013).

Although CBC is in place, it was identified in this study that, the system was characterized by many implementation challenges. Utilizing competencies requires the development of three distinct, but interactive components: a description of the competency; a means of measuring or assessing the competency; and a standard by which someone is judged to be competent (Barman & Knower, 2011:12). All these essences of CBC were missing in the case of the target universities under investigation: the competence levels were not clearly defined in the syllabi (course guides); a lack of appropriate allocated time for the courses; and the module competence instruments (measurements) were not determined.

Furthermore, the readiness and capability of the students to carry out many of the academic activities and to master the content of the courses within the time allocated for the module was reported as very low. It was identified that the implementation of the CBC was managed in a disorganized way. For instance, the grading system was changed to a criterion-referenced system, but the assessment was carried out in a traditional way. Teachers as well as students were rushing to cover the module content. An Interviewee (#AM6, 2013) from Mettu University said that: "… the modularisation system changed the subject-based curriculum to block teaching. Its contribution was not more than that".

The more a new curriculum deviates from the old one, the more training of the teachers is required. Thus, the competency-based curriculum demands an orientation of the teachers' at higher education level. This was neglected during the introduction of the CBC in the sampled universities. There was no attempt to educate and train the staff in the implementation of the new curriculum, so that the "… old wine was offered in new skins …" and consequently, the CBC was not implemented successfully. Moreover, according to an Interviewee from Mettu University (AM5, 2013), there was no strong justification given for the change of the previously discipline-based curriculum to the CBC. Again, this new curriculum was not supported by the necessary policies, guidelines, or manuals. The lack of these documents and orientation made the implementation of the CBC very complex and challenging.

The responses of the participants also revealed other challenges of CBC relating to assessment and the classroom management practices. Owing to the expansion of education, the number of students in classes was 100 or more, which was often very difficult for teachers to manage. In implementing the continuous assessment system, active learning methodologies and providing individualized attention as requirement of CBC successful implementation in such large class sizes were difficult. Readiness and willingness were another challenge relating to CBC. According to the participants in this study, readiness and willingness applied to both teachers and students alike. The ideal condition for CBC is that both teachers and students should be ready to be involved in the teaching and learning process in the class, but the participants reported the opposite condition in this regard:

> Most teachers are not ready to teach the courses in block time. They are complaining about a shortage of time to cover the course, to prepare activities, to conduct continuous assessment, and the lack of time for students to internalize the lessons, etc. The students attending the CBC classes are not proactive and many students still position themselves as passive learners. Hence, they do not take responsibility for their own learning: reluctant to complete more assignments, project works and other activities for the continuous assessment purposes (Interviewee # AS6, 2013).

Modularisation also demands more from the teachers, because they are expected to prepare different activities, conducting continuous assessment, and providing resources suitable for the active learning methodology.

Competency-based approaches demonstrated the need for enhanced assessment practices and tools. Since the end purpose of the CBC systems is competence, the emphasis of assessment is not on the acquisition of facts, information and knowledge, but rather on the performed competencies. Hence, assessment was another challenge perceived by the teachers in the sampled universities. The participants pointed out that it was more difficult to assess students' performance in a CBC class than in a conventional class, arguing that:

> In the conventional classes we just assess students two or three times through the fixed scheduled mid or final examinations. But in the CBC class as we have to conduct continuous assessments, we have to assess the students' work based on their daily basis activities … which is really time-consuming. We are doing this under an ever increasing workload and extended schedule; you know this leads to high dissatisfaction among the academic staff (Interviewee #AS3, 2013).

The implementation of the CBC faced difficulties due to a decrease in the teachers' motivation in the current context of increasing life costs, reduced salaries, and increased teaching responsibilities. It can be argued that, unless a strategic approach to teachers' motivation is implemented, the proper implementation of the CBC system will encounter serious difficulties influence the mainstream teaching. Competency-based curricula set ambitious goals for students, and the performances are not as a result of being lectured to. The implications for HEIs in Ethiopia are that changes are needed in classroom practice, and that support for teachers is necessary for the changes to occur successfully. Although there were challenges, the academic leaders are very optimistic regarding its implementation and benefits. An academic officer from JU reported that:

> Educational change process is very slow; we cannot expect its
> full implementation with in this short period of time. That is

why we currently face some resistances; until it will be internalized we expect such resistance. However, the preliminary activities done so far are satisfying. So far, we changed the curriculum to modular courses. The implementation was started on the first year students (Interviewee # AM1, 2013).

It is apparent that the modularisation (CBC) system was introduced to the universities under investigation in 2013 for first year courses and it is premature to conclude in terms of its effectiveness. However, those universities which introduced these changes were required to implement continuous monitoring activities to determine whether the basic pillars as indicated in the modularization document were implemented as required. The reformed curricula opened up new opportunities for both learning and critical thinking; but it is to be seen whether it can be achieved. The HEIs management and the government have strong expectations in this regard. However, the gap between the intentions and their implementation in the classroom needs to be bridged if the CBC reform is to be seen as something more than mere declarations.

6.3.6. Staff development practices

Strong and innovative staff development is one of the strategies which guarantees the quality and relevance of higher education in a changing world. The Academic Development and Resource Centers (ADRCs) have the potential to play a key role in staff development. This was somewhat recognized by the Jimma University and different short-term training programmes which mainly focused on pedagogical skills development, instructional skills, student assessment, module writing, and ICT that were offered by the ADRC for senior and new academic staff members. However, the ADRC positions and role has not yet been recognised within the University's structure. Besides, support to the ADRC, which, among other things, is supposed to coordinate the pedagogical training, was insufficient in the Jimma University and the MTU, and MU did not make any attempt to establish the ADRC in their universities. In these two

universities, the lack of ADRCs and pedagogical training programmes were reported as serious challenges of staff development.

Although differences existed among the three universities in terms of its implementation of staff development, a one year Higher Diploma Training Programme (HDP) was being offered to academics as part of the teachers' continuous professional development system. The JU reported that the University annually arranges induction training programmes for the newly recruited staff so that they can get acquainted with the University's vision, mission, values, rules, regulations, institutional arrangements, culture, and philosophy. The Strategic Plan Document (SPD) of the sampled universities includes a five-year Staff Development Plan (SDP), but there were no clear staff development policies in the sampled universities. Likewise, it was reported that some faculties and departments in the universities did not have staff development plans at all. Coming to staff recruitment, the three sampled universities have staff recruitment policies as part of senate legislation.

According to the interview information, there was a shortage of senior teachers in the sampled universities due to the high turnover of academic staff. The problem is critical, especially in the fields of technology and medicine. To overcome the problem some staff development endeavours were underway, as reported by an academic manager from the JU:

> We provide teachers further education opportunities within less than two years of services in the university. In the technology faculty, we provide them with an education opportunity within a year after employment. We also recruit expatriate staff from India, the Philippines, and the like where there is a critical shortage of qualified staff (Interviewee # AM2, 2013).

It was concluded from the interview information that the universities under investigation need to prepare a comprehensive staff development plan preferably designed to have the most impact at departmental level, and that this should be based on the incorporation of

skills gap approaches in the annual staff appraisals. The allocation of an adequate budget for its implementation is a necessary condition for its success.

6.3.7.   Staff appraisal practices

The study revealed that the staff appraisals for the purpose of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the staff component, and gearing them towards improvement were not practised. In the three universities, although not applied throughout all the departments, academic staff was evaluated by students, peers, and their immediate heads of department. This was carried out, however, only in the case of those who were seeking promotion. An academic officer from JU admitted that:

> It was set out that each academic staff member is evaluated by students, peers and department/school heads every semester. However, by providing different excuses it is not practiced uniformly in all departments/faculties. Since students are represented at different levels of the programme development and approval process, their interests and concerns are well considered (Interviewee # AM2, 2013).

Nevertheless, it was not established during the interviews if feedback was provided to the students who made a major input to the system. Likewise, it was learned that even where evaluations were taking place, some departments did not provide feedback to their respective staff members other than a summary of the evaluation results; while in some other departments the results were not disclosed to the teachers at all. This means that the staff members were not provided with useful data to enable them to take concrete measures to improve their teaching. Instead of identifying strengths and weaknesses, and areas for staff development, staff appraisals for the purpose of identifying the strengths and weakness of the staff and gearing them towards improvement was not practised. As a result, the link between staff appraisals and staff development was actually nonexistent.

The JU academic programme and quality assurance office claimed that it has been doing its level best to improve the staff evaluations by modifying the content and format of the existing staff evaluation format:

> Each semester all academic staff members are evaluated by students, peers and department heads. This is followed by labelling of staff as A, B, C based on their evaluation result and provision of feedback by their respective department heads. The university is also planning to arrange additional remedy for those staff that scored C and below (Interviewee # AM2, 2013).

However, many academic staff members were sceptical of the current practices of "labelling" staff based on their evaluation results. They believed that the labelling was not done on the basis of academic performance but rather on political factors.

6.3.8.   Business process re-engineering (BPR) in the universities

In the sampled universities, BPR was first introduced in 2009, followed by BSC in 2012 to implement the former. The BPR was introduced to restructure the organisation of the universities, and the BSC was meant for objectively evaluating the activity of both academic and support staff; hence, it was a BPR implementation strategy.

BPR was initiated in 2009 in the Jimma University. It was reported that some institutional arrangements were made as a result of the BPR activities. For instance in the JU, the separation of the community-based education (CBE) and post graduate-offices, the establishment of a QA office and examination committee at college level, and the establishment of an institutional transformation office were made possible because of the introduction of the above reform. Moreover, according to the MU quality assurance officer, the outcomes-based curriculum, continuous assessment strategies, and fixed grade systems were all the outcome of the BPR's recommendations. Therefore, he argued that, the BPR mission was "more or less" implemented. Nevertheless, the academic staff,

the implementers, were questioning the legitimacy of many of the recently introduced reforms in the universities. An academic from the MTU reported that:

> Many of the reforms, such as modularisation, BPR, BSC etc. were imposed on the teachers top-down by an external organ [MoE]. They were not planned … very rapid and often there was no justification. The consequence is that they were not implemented. The reforms always face high resistance from the academics. The academic staff attempts to satisfy the university management by following symbolically the changes in many cases (Interviewee # AS4, 2013).

For instance, as part of QA under the ADRC, a Higher Diploma Programme (HDP) was introduced with the objective of developing academic staff in the professional areas. The academic staff were not willing to attend the programme. Since it was a compulsory programme, they did not apply it in practice – they did not conduct classroom observations and fabricate false data and action research reports. The academic staff was not convinced of the importance of the programme and there were no incentives for the teachers, programme leaders and tutors. Thus all considered, the HDP activities were extra work, and they gave little attention to the quality activities. An academic interviewed for this study reported that:

> ... three or four years passed after its introduction, I don't know what you mean by BSC or BPR. Many academics also share my idea. I also see no tangible improvement as an outcome of these reforms. You should be clear here that I am not opposing change, but we are questioning it. We asked "how it works" and they [leaders] were not in a position to answer or justify it, and finally we all failed. What works in business and industry might not work in education (Interviewee # AS9, 2013).

Many in the university community felt that the reforms based on the BPR led to a paradigm shift from academic competence to operational competence, leading to the vocationalisation of the curriculum. Although the desired and attainment goals and objectives of the BPR are clearly written and documented at all the universities, these goals and objectives were not well communicated to and adopted by the staff members.

Consequently, the institutions were unable to manage and accomplish the goals and objectives as per the levels.

6.3.9.　　　Self-evaluation practices

Among the three sampled universities, only JU produced self-evaluation documents for the purpose of the external quality audit. The two other sampled universities (namely, Mizan-Tepi University and Mettu University) were up to now not involved in any external institutional quality audit system. Hence, they never conducted systematic self-evaluations in accordance with the external quality audit requirement of the HERQA. In the remaining paragraphs of this section, an attempt is made to analyze the self-evaluation report and the quality audit procedures of the Jimma University produced in 2007 for the purposes of their external quality audit.

According to JU's self-evaluation report, the self-evaluation was undertaken for two specific purposes: to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the JU in terms of the ten focus areas of the quality audit, and to meet the requirements of the HERQA (JU, 2007:vii). There was no particular department or unit responsible for the organisation and implementation of the self-evaluation. Thus, an *ad hoc* committee or team consisted of 10 members was established in the University to conduct the self-evaluation. Academic managers', students', and staff members' opinions were taken into account in the data-collection processes. The self-evaluation was done internally and no role-players from outside of the university were involved. Though there were a number of limitations in the procedures itself (for instance, the representativeness of the task force), the self-evaluation exercise assisted the JU to identify some of its strong and weak points. The JU quality assurance director reported that:

> The self-evaluation conducted in 2007 helped to identify the bottlenecks in the JU University's structure. The identification of problems relating to institutional arrangements was made as a result of the self-evaluation conducted in 2007 as well as other efforts of the reforms. The establishment of an institute of education and

professional development studies, e-learning, QA offices were some of the outcomes of the assessment efforts (Interviewee # AM2, 2013).

Additionally, according to the self-evaluation results, the JU did not seem to fare well in most of the categories (the ten focus areas) identified as criteria for the external quality audit. This was attributed to a variety of reasons; chief among these were the lack of an internal system that could put the assurance of quality at the center of the institutional operations.

The self-evaluation report was sufficiently informative; yet, the observations made were that the SED was not really analytical and critical. This may be partly due to the fact that the guidelines for writing the self-evaluation documents (SEDs) did not lead – up to now – to the institutions producing a really self-critical and analytical document. The SED appeared to provide a reliable starting point for an audit by external experts. After the SED was prepared, the quality audit team, consisted of two quality experts from the HERQA and three external auditors, visited the JU for three days. Following the field visit, the institutional quality audit report was published by the HERQA in October 2008.

The principal goal for conducting the external quality audit was to maintain and improve the quality of HEIs in Ethiopia. Until today (2014), the JU did not prepare an enhancement plan to implement the recommendations given by the external audit team. If this issue is not seriously treated, the quality audit exercise could turn out to be an end in itself and not a means to an end. Thus, JU and the other audited universities should have implemented the recommendations, and requested, the HERQA for a follow-up report before the next external quality audit.

The existing quality audit system seems to be a top-down approach, as both the initiation of the exercise and the procedures used came from the HERQA to the institutions. The quality audit system was also geared towards external quality assurance, which focused mainly on accountability rather than internal quality assurance, which focuses on quality improvement.

6.3.10.   Ranking as a quality assurance mechanism in universities

In the Ethiopian context, the quality audit of HEIs was conducted using the ten focus areas as set out by the HERQA for the purpose. There is currently a gradual move to rank the public universities against a set of performance elements or criteria developed by the consortium of Ethiopian public universities (CEPU). The CEPU was established in 2010 with a membership of 21 public universities. It is guided and consulted by the Higher Education Institutional Building Council which is led by the MoE.

Methodologically, the peer-review system was adopted as an evaluation mechanism. Accordingly, the peer-review mechanism started with a self-evaluation report (SER) followed by a peer-review by a team of vice-presidents, and with a validation by panels of the presidents. The exercise has two principal purposes, namely promoting institutional peer-learning and promoting competition. However, there are those who regard competition between the institutions as not necessarily beneficial. Harvey (2008:193) regarded such ranking-based competition as unhealthy. Institutions competing for top-rankings may negotiate with the ranking organisation to change their measures (the ranking levels). An academic officer from one of the target universities confirmed that: "... some universities negotiated with higher officials to change their ranking position. The ranking was often manipulated and not objective" (Interviewee # AM5, 2013). When the primary aim of the ranking system is not to respond to the messages that are being provided to improve the teaching and learning endeavours, but to manipulate the data to achieve a higher ranking, then the competition is not just unhealthy, but senseless.

Another concern is that the ranking system contravenes a fitness-for-purpose approach, which is the working definition of quality adopted by the HERQA for the Ethiopian context. Fitness-for-purpose implies that institutions have different purposes and are judged against those criteria, while the ranking system establishes and judges institutions against a set of generic criteria. The generic criteria approach, according to Harvey (2008:195), is "... also harmful to institutional diversity ..." An HERQA expert explained

that: "Ranking by the CEPU treated all public HEIs as if they have similar missions ... it contradicts with the unique characteristics and contextual differences that exist among the HEIs" (Interviewee # HE1, 2013). Consequently, the inability to take the institutional diversities into consideration might have rendered the outcome of the CEPU's ranking process useless. In pursuing ranking, the diversity of institutions is being reduced to homogeneity.

It is argued that rankings become an end in themselves, without any regard to exactly what they measure, or whether they contribute to institutional and systems improvement. A common problem is that, in ranking systems, institutions are rank-ordered even where differences in the data are not practically significant. An academic from Jimma University strongly argued that:

> Our University [Jimma] stood first for four consecutive years out of the 32 public universities in the country. I do not think we deserve such a position. Let us compare Jimma and Addis Ababa Universities against simple criteria – the input – there are 98 full-fledged professors in Addis Ababa University and 3 in Jimma. The Addis Ababa University ranked 53 out of the 200 African universities and the Jimma University does not exist on the list. Ranking leads to wrong misconceptions, unnecessarily labelling one as bad and creating another as elite (Interviewee # AS1, 2013).

This study revealed that the current ranking system has some influence on the trends relating to the student preference of universities. For instance, the available data shows that, the student selection process of Jimma University was improved recently based on its ranking position. Often it is argued that the rationale for university rankings is the provision of information for student "consumers". And there exists a relationship between student selection and the reputation of a university (the reputation that merely comes as a result of the ranking data). Yet, the data indicates nothing about the actual teaching, and are only marginally concerned with the educational quality.

The pressures of the possible outcome of ranking systems also deviates the attention of the leaders of higher education institutions from the students and the genuine purpose and

mission of higher education. In this sense, there is a real risk that higher education institutions focus on measures to climb higher on the ranking ladder, ignoring their mission of developing and disseminating knowledge for the advancement of society. Furthermore, ranking places too much emphasis on institutions and ignores study programmes. An interviewee from MU reported that the ranking procedure clearly deviated from the evaluation criteria as set out in the CEPU document:

> The ranking system is guided by two basic but implicit criteria: political factors and the individual qualities of the university leaders. The extent of political faithfulness and the extent you compromise institutional autonomy count a lot for the ranking position. If the university exercises a strong institutional autonomy, you will end up with a lower ranking position such as the Addis Ababa University, what so ever your performance is (Interviewee # AM5, 2013).

Many academics from the Mizan-Tepi University shared this opinion. They indicated that the quality of the report produced and the leaders' closeness to the MoE were taken more into account than the university's performance in the ranking of the university as high in the current CEPU's practice (Interviewee # AM4, 2013).

Peer-reviews were one of the main methods used by the CEPU for the ranking purpose. It is argued that peer-reviews bring more legitimacy to quality assurance mechanisms. According to Kis (2005:17), academics are more likely to listen to their peers' opinion than to those of others such as the External Quality Agency. One of the most important problems regarding the current ranking system led by the CEPU was the procedure of the selection of the peers to assure the legitimacy of the review. Regarding the flaws of the CEPU's peer review practice, an interviewee from Mizan-Tepi University reported that:

> Interestingly, the Addis Ababa University, the oldest and largest higher education institution in Ethiopia, currently runs 220 graduate programmes (of which 69 are PhDs), was evaluated by the Asosa University, which was new (established since 2012) and does not have a graduate programme. For me, the Asosa University was not a legitimate peer to review the Addis Ababa University (Interviewee # AM3, 2013).

Furthermore, it was identified in the study that some peer reviewers were not even trained, and that they conducted the reviews without any proper training.

6.3.11.   Institutional autonomy and academic freedom

Regarding the issue of institutional autonomy, the HEP No. 650/2009 asserts that every public institution is granted the necessary autonomy in pursuit of its mission. This permits HEIs, among others, to "... develop and implement relevant curricula and research programmes, select academic and other staff to be employed by the institution, nominate the president, vice-presidents, and members of the Board, and select and appoint leaders of academic units and departments ..." (FDRE, 2009:4986). Hence, the HEP document has formally authorized public higher education institutions a limited degree of administrative and academic autonomy. However, it can be argued that that there existed a clear gap between the rhetoric and the practice.

With regard to individual rights and freedoms, the study determined that academic staff were reluctant to criticize institutional and other government policies, and exercise self-censorship. A teacher from JU reported that:

> I don't believe that there exists academic freedom in the university.
> I am teaching education courses and I am afraid to criticise our
> education policy or the system. Today, each word you speak may
> be politicised. I always conduct self-censorship in my lessons
> (Interviewee # AS1, 2013).

In addition, the academic staff who participated in the interviews reported that the terms and conditions of employment, the payment rates for extra duties, and summer and extension classes were impossible to negotiate in the universities since the conditions are centrally determined by the government (MoE).

Proclamation 650/2009 stipulates that the appointment of higher education officials is through merit, except for the position of the president. However, the current practice

completely violates the Proclamation's provisions. All academic positions in HEIs were filled based on the government approval, or by the university higher officials. An interviewee from MU said that:

> The academic efficiency is considered secondary in the university and what matter is your political view ... to be assigned in different positions, to get job security and other benefits. Besides, there were no trust between these political-appointees and the other academics (Interviewee # AS7, 2013).

In relation to institutional autonomy, it was reported by Areaya (2010:110) that most public universities, especially those newly emerging ones, are ruled and operated under uniform day-to-day instructions from the federal ministry of education as if they all from a single university whose president is the Ministry of Education. Wana (2009:153) supported Areaya's generalisation and disclosed the absence of institutional autonomy and individual academic freedom in his case study report, and he argued as follows:

> Academic staff generally have little voice in the policy or decision-making process, although they are one of the key stakeholders in higher education and among the principal actors in quality assurance. The erosion of academic freedom and institutional autonomy, as exemplified by the top-down approach on policy and even curricular issues, has contributed to the marginalization of the teaching personnel.

The academic staff who participated in the study perceived institutional autonomy and individual academic freedom as very limited. They believed that they have little or no worthwhile role in the educational policy-making processes and the selection of the universities' leadership. The teaching staff felt that they do not have an association that can represent or protect their interests.

6.4. THE EFFICACY OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

In this section, drawing on the survey questionnaire data and interview information, an attempt is made to assess the effectiveness and effects, or impact of the quality assurance system. As specified in the higher education proclamation, the purpose of internal quality assurance in Ethiopian universities is quality enhancement. Thus, this section aims at assessing whether the current quality assurance system in Ethiopian higher education has led to improvements for the staff, the students and the higher education institutions in general. An elaboration of each follows.

6.4.1. Sources or forces that influence the initiation of QA in the HEIs

In Table 31 below, the academic staff were asked for their opinion regarding the sources of influence on the initiation and implementation of the quality assurance system at the universities.

Table 31: **Sources or forces of influence on initiation of quality assurance in HEIs**

| No | To what extent do you think the following factors/organs influenced the initiation and implementation of the quality assurance system at your institution? | Responses | | |
		High	%	Total
1	Governmental pressure	114	56.4	202
2	Reputation	87	43.2	201
3	Commitment of the university leaders	70	34.3	204
4	HERQA	123	60.6	203
5	The expectations of the MoE	97	47.8	203

From the data in Table 31, it was identified that the HERQA (60.6%, N=203), governmental pressure (56.4%, N=202), and the MoE (47.8%, N=203) took the lead to introduce quality assurance measures to the higher education system in Ethiopia. On the other hand, the role of the university leaders in the initiation of internal change regarding

quality assurance was rated as low by the respondents (34.3%, N=204). Thus, it can be inferred from the above results that the current quality assurance process is externally-driven.

Many argue that sustainable improvement in the quality and quality assurance in higher education heavily relies on internal engagement. Askling (1997:18) underscores the essential role of internal QA 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 and missions.

6.4.2. Effectiveness of quality assurance activities in the HEIs

Table 32 (see p. 285) elicited the results of the study in terms of the institutional approaches and attitudes towards quality assurance. The aim of the section was to test the effectiveness of the QA system, and to investigate how the institutions were responding to the national policy initiatives related to the quality assurance of higher education teaching and learning in Ethiopia. To this end, the academic staff were asked on a 5-point Likert scale to rate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the 15 factors relating to the quality assurance activities of the universities. The mean scores were compared with 3 (which is "undecided") to indicate the effectiveness of each of the factors as perceived by the respondents. If the mean score on the perceived accomplishments of the activity was significantly higher than the hypothetical mean (which is 3 or "undecided"), the researcher assumed that the activity was accomplished or the practice existed in the universities and *vice versa*.

Table 32: One sample t-test for mean ratings of academic staff regarding effectiveness of quality assurance activities in the universities

No	Effectiveness of the quality assurance activities in the universities	Test value = 3			
		Mean	SD	t-test[*]	Sig. (2-tailed)
1	Institution places a high premium on quality of teaching-learning	3.03	1.14	.424	.672
2	Management at all levels share same vision for enhancing quality	2.78	1.15	-2.72	.007
3	Staff professional development has been implemented successfully	3.08	1.06	1.17	.240
4	Decision-making for assuring quality at faculty/departmental levels is participative	3.00	3.13	.044	.965
5	QA system is clear, rigorous, and understood by staff	2.51	1.03	-6.76	.000
6	System is in place for ensuring quality of learning resources	2.59	1.01	-5.75	.000
7	Sufficient financial resources to ensure that quality teaching and learning take place	2.81	1.18	-2.23	.026
8	Measures are designed to detect learning problems	2.77	1.05	-3.05	.003
9	Motivation of academic staff towards improving the quality of academic programmes is generally high	2.56	1.20	-5.14	.000
10	Working conditions of staff generally promote a climate to improve the quality of teaching and learning	2.53	1.24	-5.35	.000
11	HERQA QA initiative has improved the quality of academic programmes	2.70	1.04	-4.01	.000
12	QA system is communicated among staff, students, and other key stakeholders	2.59	1.13	-5.04	.000
13	QA system is related to the quality of student learning	2.90	1.05	-1.33	.182
14	QA systems are helpful in the enhancement of the quality of teaching and assessment practices	3.02	1.06	.395	.693
15	QA system is related to the attainment of the overall mission and goals of the faculty/department	3.01	1.08	.261	.794

[*]*DF = 204*

As indicated in Table 32 (above), the academic staff mean scores on nine of the Items (2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12) were significantly and negatively different from the mean value 3 (which represents "undecided"), signifying that they tended to disagree with those issues raised in the Items. In terms of Item 2, the academic staff perceived that (M=2.78, SD=1.15) the management at all levels did not share the same vision for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning, t (204) = −2.72, p=.007). They do not believe that the existing quality assurance system is clear and rigorous, and that physical and financial resources were adequately available for ensuring the quality of the teaching and learning. It was reported by the respondents (M=2.59, SD=1.13) that the

existing quality assurance system (policy, models, guidelines, methods, and instruments) were not communicated to staff members, students and other key stakeholders, t (204)= −5.04, p < .001). To make this worse, the motivation and working conditions of the academic staff did not generally promote a climate to improve the quality of the teaching and learning, as perceived by the teacher respondents.

One would assume that all the respondents would have been of the opinion that their institutions placed a high premium on the quality of their teaching and learning programmes. However, as seen in the Table 32 (see p. 285), the teacher respondents (M=3.03, SD=1.14) indicated that they neither agree nor disagree with the statement, t (204)=.424, p > .05. Likewise, the academic staff appeared to be ambivalent in terms of the five items (3, 4, 13, 14 and 15) as their mean scores were not statistically different from the test value (which is 3 or "undecided"). The staff were not in a position to positively assert that the decision-making style for assuring quality was participatory, the implementation of the staff professional development activities was successful; and whether the existing quality assurance systems are related to the quality of student learning, helpful to the enhancement of the quality of the teaching and assessment practices, and related to the attainment of the overall mission and goals of the faculty or department.

A further analysis was conducted to identify if any differences existed in the respondents' perceptions among the three universities. The 15 Items as indicated in Table 32 were classified into one category based on the inter-item correlation and factor analysis of the data. The ANOVA result in Table 33 (see p. 287) showed that significant difference existed among the three universities regarding their effectiveness in implementing the quality assurance activities, F (2, 195)=12.216, p < .001.

Table 33: ANOVA on differences of perceptions of staff regarding effectiveness of quality assurance practices among three universities

	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	16.697	2	8.349	19.216	.000
Within Groups	84.719	195	.434		
Total	101.416	197			

The Tukey *post hoc* comparisons of the three universities showed that the quality assurance activities were more effectively implemented in MU (M=3.11, SD=.69) than in MTU (M =2.35, SD=.71) and JU (M=2.94, SD=.60). Interestingly, the finding showed that the Mettu University, which was recently established and a small university, was in a better position to effectively implement the quality assurance activities as compared to the relatively older and larger universities (JU and MTU). However, this needs to be interpreted with caution, as some qualitative data results contradict the findings. In general, it can be concluded from these findings that the endeavours made by the sampled universities in implementing the internal quality assurance system was very minimal.

6.4.3. Perceived impact of QA on the universities' practices

The Table 34 (see p. 288) presents the findings of the survey questionnaire data analyses on the academic staff's perceived impact of the current quality assurance system on institutional practices. The aim was to measure the perceived impact of both external (such as external audits) and internal (such as self-assessments) quality assurance systems on the institutional practices, student learning experiences, and the institution as a whole. Accordingly, the academic staff were asked to rate their level of agreement or disagreement among a list of factors on a five-point rating scale (Disagree=1-2, Undecided=3, Agree=4-5). The mean scores were then compared with the "undecided value" (3) to determine the respondents' perceived levels of each of the factors. If a mean score on the perceived impact of a factor was significantly higher than the mean value of

3, it was assumed that the quality assurance system had made a significant impact on that particular factor and *vice versa*.

Table 34: **Mean ratings of academic staff concerning perceived impact of quality assurance mechanisms on universities' practices**

No.	Impact/effects of quality assurance mechanisms	Test value = 3			
		Mean	SD	DF	t-test
1	Improve quality of the education/teaching	2.98	1.09	201	-.193*
2	Boost scholarly reputation of the institution	2.79	1.03	201	-2.84*
3	Enhance scholarly discussion on learning/teaching	2.93	1.10	201	-.889
4	Enhance staff engagement in learning/teaching	3.11	1.09	201	1.54
5	Enhance student involvement in learning/teaching	3.24	1.09	201	3.16*
6	Initiate the development of new courses/programmes	3.02	1.12	201	.376*
7	Improve the governance structures of the institution	3.21	1.16	200	2.18*
8	Help in introduction of new methods and procedures	3.03	1.11	201	.505*
9	Increase/facilitate the internal resource allocation	2.96	1.13	198	-.436
10	Help in meeting customer expectations	2.96	1.14	200	-.491
11	Help to be competitive	3.04	1.16	200	.544
12	Contribute to the university survival	3.11	1.14	199	1.42*
13	Improve the work environment	3.05	1.19	198	.653
14	Improve the institution and its processes	3.06	1.19	199	.769*
15	Minimise costs	2.97	1.10	199	-.319
16	Help in competing for funds	2.89	1.13	198	-1.25
17	Improve decision-making processes	2.89	1.14	197	-1.23

$p < 0.05$; All other values are not significant at 0.05.

As depicted in Table 34 above, the majority of the academic respondents in the three universities (M=2.98, 1.09) agreed that the internal quality assurance system had not made a significant impact on the improvement of the quality of the education or teaching in their universities, t (201) = -.193, p < .05. At the same time, the teacher respondents did not believe that the quality assurance system was enhancing staff engagement in teaching and learning.

Moreover, the staff respondents argued that the QA mechanisms have had no positive impact on internal decision-making processes, resource allocation, institutional reputations, and customer satisfaction (see Table 34, Items 2, 9, 10 and 17).

However, the academic staff respondents' mean scores on Items 6, 7, 8 12 and 14 were found to be significantly higher than the hypothetical mean (which is 3 or "undecided"), verifying that the quality assurance practices have had a positive impact on the issues raised in the Items. Accordingly, it was reported that, because of the introduction of the quality assurance system, new courses, programmes, methods and procedures (Item 8) were initiated in the universities. Most importantly, the quality assurance system changed and improved the governance structures of the universities, as perceived by the academic respondents (M=3.21, SD=1.16). The universities have strengthened their governance and system of quality assurance by building QA governance structures and by forming new units and committees for the supervision of the planning, quality and reviews.

Table 35:   ANOVA on differences of perceptions of staff concerning impact of QA on institutional practices among three universities

	Sum of squares	DF	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4.402	2	2.201	2.613	.076
Within Groups	161.703	192	.842		
Total	166.105	194			

The 17 items in Table 34, (see p. 288) were classified into similar categories through inter-item correlation and factor analysis of the data. ANOVA was calculated to identify any differences in terms of the staff perceptions in respect to the impact of QA on institutional practices across the three universities. The one-way ANOVA test confirmed that there was no significant difference in the perception of academic staff across the three universities regarding the impact of the QA system on the improvement of the institutional practices, $F_{(2, 192)}=2.613$, $p > 0.05$. The Tukey *post-hoc* mean comparison also depicted no significant differences in the mean ratings of the respondents across the universities.

To further consolidate the findings in Table 34 (see p. 288), the staff respondents were asked for their overall opinion regarding the impact of the quality assurance practice. As

the results in Table 36 (below, on p. 294) showed, the majority (37.9%) of the respondents across the three universities reported that the existing quality assurance practices had a moderate positive impact on the improvement of the everyday teaching and learning processes. However, an important question was how to interpret the word "positive impact"? From Table 34 (see p. 288), for example, one could interpret the positive impact associated with an improvement in governance and structure only, and not necessarily associated with teaching and learning. Thus, in general, the academic staff saw the "positive effects" of the quality assurance on the establishment of new routines and procedures (see Table 34, Item 8), the governance structures (Item 7), the university survival (Item 12), the development of new courses and programmes (Item 6), and, in particular, on the enhancement of the student involvement in the learning and teaching (Item 5), because the undergraduate discipline-based curriculum were changed to a competence-based curriculum through modular approaches.

Table 36:   **Impact of QA mechanisms on institutional practices as perceived by academic staff**

Overall, how do you evaluate the impact of QA mechanisms on the improvement of everyday teaching and learning in your faculty/department?	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage
High negative impact	17	8.3	8.5
Moderate negative impact	21	10.2	10.6
No impact	38	18.4	19.1
Moderate positive impact	78	37.9	39.2
High positive impact	38	18.4	19.1
Don't know	7	3.4	3.5
Total	199	96.6	100.0
System	7	3.4	
Total	**206**	**100.0**	

Interviews were also conducted with the academic officers and the HERQA experts to identify the extent to which the external quality assurance initiatives have improved the quality assurance in Ethiopian universities. Some of the questions used to elicit discussion during the interviews included: "Can external (e.g. quality audits) and internal

(e.g. self-assessments) QA practices be credited for change and improvement in universities?" The findings were as follows:

The JU quality assurance officer reported that the self-assessment process enabled institutions to identify areas of strengths and areas for improvement. Participants agreed that the opportunity for universities to undertake self-reviews has enabled them to implement improvements in a systematic manner. The external audit process used by the HERQA has also assisted the universities in improving quality assurance practices in areas such as governance, learning and teaching, and research activities. It was reported that the universities have strengthened the governance and monitoring of the QA by building up governance structures at different levels, and by assigning senior staff to lead the quality assurance activities. This practice strengthened the role of the planning and coordination of QA activities in the universities.

An HERQA senior expert who participated in this study witnessed the effects of HEP no. 351/2003 and the achievements of HERQA pertaining to the HEIs as follows:

> Majority of the institutions have now established quality assurance offices, (in large universities known as quality assurance directorates and in the others it is called offices or units), quality policies were developed, and most importantly quality and quality assurance have become agendas (issues) in HEIs although not in systematic and organized ways (Interviewee # HE2, 2013).

According to an HERQA expert, the development of guidelines and procedures of quality audit documents were a strong point of the Agency. The HERQA claims that it developed quality audit procedures and other guidelines that stood up to international standards. From the quality audit side, the preparation of these guidelines and procedures were considered as a major achievement of the HERQA. The focus areas included in the quality audit procedures were similar to those practiced internationally in different countries.

6.4.4. Staff and students satisfaction regarding quality related issues

Different scholars argue that the quality of student learning is maintained through a professional commitment and engagement of all actors (Barnett, 1992; Harvey & Knight, 1996; Harvey & Newton, 2007; Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2003; Wilger, 1997). The quality assurance system leads to the improvement of students' learning experiences when the leadership and academic staff and students are involved in and committed to the development and implementation of quality assurance. Accordingly, academic staff were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the stakeholders' involvement in and commitment to the quality assurance. It was reported in the Table 37 (see p. 292) that, the majority of the academic staff in the three universities were dissatisfied with the leadership and academic staff's involvement in and commitment to quality assurance (Items 2, 4 and 5). The academic staff's satisfaction was also very low regarding the practices of staff recruitment and development (Item 3), student recruitment and admission (Item 1), and teaching, learning and assessment in the universities (Item 8). Likewise, the academic staff's satisfaction was found to be low in relation to the shared responsibilities and structures for quality assurance implementation, coordination, and collaboration among the different actors in the implementation of quality assurance in the three universities.

Table 37:   Staff satisfaction regarding quality related issues

No	Staff satisfaction with respect to	Staff satisfaction in (%)						
		JU		MTU		MU		
		High	Total	High	Total	High	Total	X^2
1	Student recruitment and admission practices	33.3	87	23.9	46	54.4	46	18.57*
2	Academic staff commitment for quality education	48.9	88	50.0	46	67.4	46	11.33
3	Staff recruitment and development practices	40.2	87	36.9	46	60.9	46	21.90*
4	Staff involvement in quality assurance practices	35.3	88	19.6	46	58.7	46	21.12*
5	Leadership commitment for quality improvement	29.5	88	10.9	46	50.0	46	43.00*
6	Shared responsibilities and structures for quality assurance implementation	35.7	88	17.8	46	43.4	46	20.22*
7	Coordination and collaboration among the different actors in quality assurance implementation	27.3	88	8.7	46	41.3	46	35.77*
8	Teaching, learning and assessment practices	48.2	87	38.4	46	69.6	46	22.00*

$p < .05$, all other values are not significant at 0.05.

Although the staff satisfaction in terms of all the eight Items indicated in Table 37 was generally low, there are significant differences in the respondents' perception across the three universities. As compared to the two other universities, the academic staff in the Mettu University were "somehow" satisfied with the leadership's commitment to quality improvement (50.0%), staff recruitment and development activities (60.9%) and teaching, learning and assessment practices (69.6%). Whereas leadership commitment and the participation of staff and students were two of the key principles in developing a quality culture and QA processes, the above findings indicated that these conditions were not in place in the target public universities. This study clearly shows that more work still remains to be done in this respect.

In an attempt to further extend the analysis on universities' involvement and commitment (see Table 37, p. 292), students were asked to assess their faculty or departmental engagement in quality assurance activities. The results are indicated in Table 38 below.

Table 38: **Mean ratings of students' evaluation of effectiveness of QA practices in their universities**

No	How do you evaluate your department/faculty in the following aspects?	Test value = 3.0		
		Mean	SD	t-test*
1	Setting clear goals for maintaining quality of education	2.79	1.05	-4.47
2	Communicating quality improvement policies to students	2.59	1.08	-8.43
3	Promoting shared values about quality among students and staff	2.66	1.04	-7.34
4	Demonstrating its commitment to provide a high quality of teaching	2.64	1.02	-7.80
5	Establishing mechanisms that facilitate quality of students' learning	2.69	1.08	-6.37

p is significant at   0.001; DF = 509

The students' assessment of their department or faculty with respect to the setting of clear goals for maintaining quality, communicating quality improvement policies, promoting shared values and quality culture, demonstrating commitment to provide high quality teaching, and establishing mechanisms to facilitate quality learning were all found to be significantly lower than the hypothetical mean value (which was 3 or "average"); indicating that their department or faculty's effectiveness in the issues raised was very low.

Table 39: **ANOVA on differences of perceptions of students regarding effectiveness of quality assurance practices**

	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	11.917	2	5.959	10.947	.000
Within Groups	275.968	507	.544		
Total	287.885	509			

An analysis of ANOVA was computed to examine if there were differences in the students' perceptions across the universities. Significant differences were found in academic staff's responses across the three universities, $F (2, 507)=10.94$, $p < .001$. The Tukey post-hoc multiple mean comparisons showed that the significant difference was

between MTU (M=2.42, SD=.72) on the one side, and JU (M=2.73, SD=.75) and MU (M=2.81, SD=.72) on the other. This implies that the effectiveness of the quality assurance practices was very lower in MTU than in the two other universities, as evaluated by the student respondents. However, this does not necessarily indicate that the latter was effective, since their mean scores were lower than the hypothetical mean, which is 3 or "average".

The overall findings in this section demonstrated that the existing quality assurance practices are inadequate and ineffective in effecting improvement in the quality of education. Hence, the recently introduced quality assurance system (external and internal) might not have substantially effected the actual quality improvement across the sampled universities.

6.4.5. External and internal factors that hindered/enabled implementation of quality assurance system in the HEIs

An attempt was made to examine the extent to which both external environmental and internal university-specific factors enabled or hindered the activities of QA in the universities under investigation. To this end, the academic staff were asked on a 5-point scale to rate the level of hindrance of seven external and seven university-specific factors (Hinders=1–2, Neutral=3, Helps=4–5). The mean scores were compared to the 3 (Neutral) to determine the extent to which each factor enabled or hindered the implementation of quality and QA in the universities. If the mean score of the factor is significantly lower than the hypothetical mean (which is 3 or Neutral), then the factor was considered as hindrance and *vice versa*.

Table 40: **External factors that enabled or hindered implementation of quality assurance system as perceived by academic staff**

No	External factors	Test value = 3.0								
		JU			MTU			MU		
		Mean	SD	t-test	Mean	SD	t-test	Mean	SD	t-test
1	Government intervention in internal affairs of institutions	2.27	1.20	-5.86*	2.23	1.15	-4.71*	2.48	1.21	-3.08*
2	HERQA requirements and expectations	3.66	1.05	6.10*	3.50	1.12	3.13*	3.57	1.22	3.39*
3	Higher Education law	2.91	.996	-.824	3.07	1.18	.468	3.09	1.04	.671
4	External dependency of the institution	2.63	.923	-3.89*	2.30	.728	-6.85*	2.78	1.14	-1.33
5	Institutional and student enrolment expansion policy	2.74	1.11	-2.21*	2.65	.926	-2.69*	2.71	1.10	-1.87
6	Graduate mix policy	3.27	1.08	2.47*	3.00	1.31	.000	3.34	1.13	2.19*
7	Preparation of incoming students	2.66	.982	3.96*	2.23	1.29	-2.05*	3.39	.977	2.71*

*p< .05

The results in Table 40 above show that the academic staff across the three universities perceived the government intervention in internal affairs of institutions (JU, M=2.27; MTU, M=2.23; MU, M=2.48), external dependency of the universities (JU, M=2.63; MTU, M=2.30; MU, M=2.78), and current institutional and student enrolment expansion policies (JU, M=2.74; MTU, M=2.65; MU, M=2.71), as major external hindrance factors to the quality and quality assurance implementation in the universities. The results in Table 40 (see above) showed that the staff from both Jimma (M=2.66) and Mizan-Tepi (M=2.33) Universities indicated that the preparation of incoming students was a hindrance, while the staff respondents from Mettu University (M=3.99) did not view it as such. The HERQA requirements and expectations were perceived by the academic staff across the three universities as an enabler of the implementation of quality assurance.

In addition to the external environmental factors, an attempt was also made to assess the extent to which the internal university-specific factors enabled or hindered the activities of QA in the sampled universities.

Table 41: Internal factors that hindered/enabled implementation of quality assurance system as perceived by academic staff

	Internal factors	Test value = 3.0								
		JU			MTU			MU		
		Mean	SD	t-test	Mean	SD	t-test	Mean	SD	t-test
1	Commitment and support of institutional leaders for quality	2.66	1.20	-2.71*	2.23	1.30	-4.24*	3.62	1.25	3.60*
2	Willingness, commitment and support of academics for quality	3.52	.954	5.37*	3.19	1.18	1.16	3.49	.932	3.82*
3	Resources (physical, financial, etc.) in the institutions	2.45	1.37	-3.88*	1.94	1.09	-6.98*	2.19	1.24	-4.59*
4	Business score card (BSC)	3.32	1.02	3.10*	2.76	1.10	-1.51	3.55	.998	4.02*
5	Modularisation of programmes/courses	3.43	1.19	3.50*	2.74	1.36	-1.33	3.50	1.16	3.10*
6	Commitment to and engagement of students in learning	2.87	1.07	-1.14	2.50	1.04	-3.13*	3.00	1.02	.000
7	Institutional policy environment	3.65	1.13	5.59*	2.71	1.48	-1.29	3.67	1.19	3.82*

$p< .05$

Regarding the internal or university-specific factors, the academic staff across the three universities indicated that the existing learning and teaching resources (JU, M=2.45; MTU, M=1.49; MU, M=2.19) in the universities were a hindrance to quality assurance implementation. Commitment and the support of institutional leaders for quality and commitment to and engagement of students in their learning were perceived by the academic staff from JU and MTU as hindrance factors, while this was not the case at Mettu University. The academic staff of JU and MU had positive perceptions about their willingness, commitment and support for quality. Similarly, the BSC, the modularisation of programmes/courses and the institutional policy environment were positively perceived by the academic staff of JU and MU as enablers for implementing the quality assurance activities in the universities.

6.5. THE REGULATOR: THE HERQA

This section of the Chapter reports the outcome of an examination of the policies and practices of the HERQA *vis–à–vis* quality assurance activities in the HEIs in Ethiopia. It assesses the relevant aspects of the HERQA's actual performance against the background of the present legal mandate of the HERQA, and the Agency's operation within the Ethiopian context. To this end, the researcher has studied and assessed in detail the self-evaluation documents prepared by the HERQA; the report of an external quality audit; interview information obtained from the HERQA senior experts; and a number of HERQA documents relating to the institutional self-evaluations, quality audit procedures, external quality audit reports, etc. In the subsections below, the following aspects are reported: governance and organisational structure, autonomy of the HERQA, institutional quality audit, institutional self-evaluation and reporting to the HERQA and public, and the relationship between the HERQA and the HEIs.

6.5.1. The governance and organisational structure of the HERQA

The HERQA represents the national quality monitoring body of Ethiopia. Being directly accountable to the Ministry of Education, the Agency was officially established in 2003, following the approval of the Ethiopian Higher Education Proclamation No. 351/2003, Article 78 (FDRE, 2003) to supervise the relevance and quality of higher education offered by institutions in the country. Although it was established in 2003, it was the years after 2005 that could be regarded as the time when the HERQA fully assumed its responsibility. In relation to the HERQA mandates, the articles in Proclamation no. 650/2009 were not very specific, and much of the mandate was formulated in very general terms. Where the Proclamation refers to the duties and powers of the Agency, it appears as if these articles still refer to Higher Education. The current mission and vision of the HERQA are based on the Proclamation of 2003, which is less ambiguous and more specific than the Proclamation no. 650/2009. The HERQA identified its mandates under three major areas: the assurance of relevance and quality of higher education, the

accreditation and pre-accreditation of degree programmes in HEIs, and the providing of information to the stakeholders.

The Agency is governed by a board that oversees their policies and functions, and a management section that is responsible for their day-to-day operations. As per the Higher Education Proclamation of 2003, ten members should sit on the Board of the HERQA (FDRE, 2003:2258). In the history of the HERQA, the number of representatives on the board has not exceeded six people. Currently, only five members actively participate in the Board. The Board members who have left had not been replaced. This may have resulted in the reduction of the capacity of the Board to guide and advise the Agency in general, and increased the involvement of the government (as the chair person is the MoE and the other three members are representatives from other governmental organisations). The Agency recognises that there existed insufficient contact between the Board and the HERQA staff. The Proclamation also states that the Board should meet quarterly. However, it was identified in this study that the Board has not been meeting as regularly as desired.

The HERQA's organisational structure comprises of two technical and one administrative section, namely the quality audit and Enhancement Team, Accreditation Team, and the Administrative and Support Department. All the experts are accountable to the Director General of the Agency while having a horizontal relationship among them at the same time. The two technical sections were established in line with the HERQA's organisational objectives: control and enhancement. The accreditation section checks the minimum requirements before providing licenses and carries out emergency supervision to control the private HEIs. This section facilitates the control objective, and it focuses on private HEIs; whereas the quality audit section focuses on enhancement, and it works with both public and private HEIs. Accordingly, an HERQA senior expert argued that: "We [Herqa] give equal focus (concern) for both accountability and improvement purposes" (HE1, 2013). However, there exists unequal treatment between the private and public HEIs in relation to the accreditation procedures. The accreditation only focuses on

the private HEIs, and accountability is the purpose of the quality assurance system in this regard.

Currently, the Agency has a director, five experts in the audit department and nine in the accreditation department; and a total of 15 workers to accomplish the technical quality assurance activities for the Agency. In terms of qualifications, with the exception of the director who holds a PhD, the rest are MA degree graduates and below. The existing number and qualification profiles of the HERQA staff appeared not to be generally sufficient. The interviews held with the HERQA experts revealed that there was a critical shortage of professionals; particularly, in the accreditation and quality audit sections. It was the observation of the researcher that the workload of the HERQA expert staff was high. As acknowledged by the Agency, there was a high rate of staff turnover due to the salary scales which were not comparable to other similar organisations in the market. This year (2014) alone the Agency has lost three experienced senior staff who left for better pay and benefits. There was no evidence to determine if the HERQA has a well functioning staff appraisal system. It is the opinion of the researcher that the expertise of the HERQA expert staff should be maintained and developed in the field of quality assurance processes. Human resource development, possibly including formal training programmes, should be geared to increase the expertise.

With regard to financial resources, the HEP 351/2003 granted the Agency the right to generate funds from three sources: income generated by the Agency, government, and donors (FEDRE, 2003:2258). It was identified that the HERQA is strongly dependent on the government (MoE) for its budget. The trend for the last four years indicates that the government budget ranges from 71 to 93 percent of the overall budget of the Agency. The HERQA reported in its self-evaluation document that, though it has been mandated to generate its own income, the accreditation fees charged to private HIEs were not kept by the Agency, but were passed on to the MoFED (HERQA, 2011b:34). This shows that the HERQA was strictly bound to the rules, and regulations of the civil service with respect to the handling of its financial affairs related to its various activities. In principle, the HERQA should have a larger autonomy to handle its financial affairs.

In relation to the material resources, it was identified that the HERQA's website *www.herqa.edu.et* is generally poor; and updated information is hardly available to read and/or downloaded by the public. The Agency currently has 3 vehicles for all its activities. A senior HERQA expert said that:

> … the lack of vehicles jeopardized our activities to a considerable extent. These three cars are not enough to carry out our activity in the field. There are many private and public higher education institutions that need our supervision. Sometimes we cancel our plan [i.e. a field visit] due to a lack of vehicles and other logistics that help to carry out our quality assurance activities. It really hinders the HERQA from achieving its objective effectively and needs to be reconsidered (Interviewee # HE1, 2013).

For long periods of time, the Agency has been renting an office in the center of the city. Recently, however, the Agency has been given a new office building by the government (the MoE).

6.5.2.   Autonomy of the HERQA

One of the issues that are central to the HERQA's operation has been the level of autonomy it enjoys. The Higher Education proclamation no 351/2003, article 73 stipulates that the HERQA is an autonomous body having its own legal personality (FDRE, 2003:2256). At the same time, however structurally, the extent and form are not clearly indicated and the proclamation requires that the Agency is accountable to the MoE. To be autonomous may not necessarily mean "not to be accountable." However, there are some clear challenges, when the HERQA and the HEIs are accountable to the same organ – the MoE. According to the ENQA, the term independence is interpreted as "... autonomous responsibility for operations, where conclusions in reports cannot be influenced by HEIs, ministries or other stakeholders" (ENQA, 2008:33). However, the determination of the outcomes of the HERQA's processes was not undertaken autonomously and independently from the government, particularly the MoE. The Agency's responsibility was to conduct accreditation and institutional audits, and submits

its findings and recommendations to the MoE. It cannot make decisions based on its findings. Moreover, the director of the Agency is appointed by the government (FDRE, 2003: 2258), and since its establishment, the chairperson of the HERQA Board has always been the minister of education (however, after 2012 the MoE assigned its representative, i.e. the Science and Technology minister to this position for some time, but now the Minister of Health acts as chairperson). Firstly, for some role-players, this has been an indication that the HERQA is treated more as an organ within the Ministry (lacking the operational independence it needed), than an autonomous entity as claimed in the Higher Education Proclamation. Secondly, the HERQA gets its substantial budget from the government. This excessive dependence might influence the HERQA to act in accordance with the will and aspirations of the government compromising the Agency's ability to make independent decisions. Thirdly, as it stands now, the HERQA, like any other government institution, should adhere to the general rules set by the Civil Service Commission for employing its staff. It cannot dictate in any way how it should pay or remunerate its employees. These conditions hinder the Agency to prove its credibility.

Nevertheless, according to an HERQA senior expert, the HERQA is operationally autonomous and its dependence on the MoE for its resources and other arrangements did not deter it from the independence of its decision-making. He argued that:

> ... practically, we did not have any problem by working with the MoE. Until now I came across no decision made by the MoE that compromised the HERQA's autonomy and decisions. To the opposite, it supports us and it respects our decisions in all cases. And it did not interfere in our works. I personally believe that the current structure of the HERQA should be changed to improve the external image of the Agency. Many do not believe that the HERQA is an autonomous organization as it is accountable to the MoE as opposing to international practices (Interviewee # HE2, 2013).

It is important that the HERQA should be more independent, have more autonomy and that the HERQA Board should not be chaired by the MoE as this may compromise the HERQA's independent position as a professional Agency informing the tertiary sector on

the quality of its performance.

6.5.3.   Institutional quality audit

The HEP no. 351/2003 did not deal with the quality audit processes in the HEIs. The only provisions available were those on the pre-accreditation and accreditation mechanisms that were more directed at quality control, and meant to apply exclusively to the private sector. Although there were no clear provisions on external quality audits until Proclamation no. 650/2009, it should be noted that the HERQA started implementing the external quality audit practice in the year 2007. Prior to the external quality audit system, the HEIs performed the institutional self-evaluations and prepared a self-evaluation document (SED) organised in accordance with the guidelines issued by the HERQA. The completed SED was then sent to the HERQA. The SED was a starting point to conduct an external institutional quality audit. Based on the ten focus areas and the reference points or indicators of each focus area, the external evaluation is conducted. The HERQA reported that the external quality audit was a consensual process:

> The Agency offers regular training workshops on the external quality audit process and HEIs are welcome to send representatives. Until recently, if an HEI requested it ... the HERQA would run a half day or one-day workshop at the HEI to help the HEI familiarize itself with the 10 focus areas and the expectations of the audit team, now however it was planned to run these workshops automatically. HEIs also received all the guidelines produced by the HERQA to assist them through the external quality audit process.

The quality audit was a voluntary activity at the beginning. Recently, however, the HERQA is working towards making it a mandatory activity for HEIs. The audit is done based on the SED prepared by the institutions. Two experts from the HERQA carried out a briefing visit prior to the actual audit launch. The briefing visit has many purposes. Its primary purpose is to create a common understanding and mutual trust between the institution and the HERQA regarding the purpose, processes, and outcome of the audit process. It was reported by an HERQA senior expert that:

> ... in the case of a quality audit we have a smooth relationship with the higher education institutions. I participated in three quality audit projects carried out in Arba Minch, Gonder and Mekelle universities and there were no resistance on the part of institutions to take part in the audit process. However, low cooperation was observed after they were provided with recommendations for improvement in the audit report document (Interviewee # HE1, 2013).

In its institutional audit procedure document, the HERQA clearly states that audit reports should be published (HERQA, 2006a:4). The most important consideration after the publication of a quality audit report is perhaps what should be done about the recommendations made by the peer-reviewers. On the basis of the recommendations made in the quality-audit report, the HEIs are expected to develop an action plan that would chart the corrective measures they (the HEIs) would have to take. The action plan for improvement would identify the measures to be taken (*vis-à-vis* the recommendations made) and the time frame for accomplishing these. It was reported that some audited institutions were unwilling to accept the recommendations provided by the HERQA audit team and develop the enhancement plans. There were no actions (rewards or sanctions) attached to the quality audit in the Ethiopian case. Hence, it depends on the institution's interest to implement (or not to implement) the recommendations made by the HERQA audit team. Based on the HERQA's quality audit follow-up activities, an expert interviewed for this study generally concluded that "... the recommendations made by the audit team were not implemented" in the audited HEIs (Interviewee # HE1, 2013). If this concern is not seriously addressed, the quality audit exercise could turn out to be an end in itself.

Moreover, interviewees were asked to outline the consequences of the results of the assessment, if there were any, especially related to the funding of institutions. All of them replied that there has not been up to now any established or clearly stated link between the budgets and that of an institutional quality audit results. They argued that the lack of action attached to the quality audits was a major reason for considering this activity as a futile exercise. To complicate the conditions, neither the higher education proclamation

nor the other documents produced by the HERQA or the MoE addressed the possible consequences of the outcome of the report related to the sanctions. Until now, there was no explicit action taken by the MoE on the basis of the audit results. Contrary to what has been exercised in several other countries, the external audit results in Ethiopia are not used for making reallocations of funds, or ranking the audited institutions. This affected the implementation of the recommendations made by the audit teams. One of the HERQA experts reported that:

> We have attempted to relate quality assurance activities with funding. If the quality audit is not attached to some action, the HEIs will not take the report as serious and may not put into practice the recommendation. We urged the MoE to attach the quality assurance, particularly the audit results with some actions such as funding, but until today the quality audits have no consequences (Interviewee # HE2, 2013).

However, the new Ethiopian HE funding formula indicates that the quality of education, research and community services rendered by the institution are some of the elements used for the budget allocation system. This clearly shows that, in future, the outcome of a QA audit could be used as a criterion for the funding of HEIs (Adamu & Addamu, 2012:844).

Currently, the institutional quality audit reports are published only in a hard copy format, and they are not uploaded on the Agency's website. The reports contain preliminary explanations on the purposes of the review, its form, and the criteria used in the making of decisions or judgments. They cover description, analyses and conclusions. It contains an executive summary of the audited institution, the audit process, and the main findings. Commendations and recommendations are also summarized at the end of the main body of the reports.

It was established from the HERQA's institutional audit documents that the requirements pertaining to the performance of the institutions during the institutional quality audits have been clearly formulated. The focus areas did cover the core activities of an

institution. There were some limitations, however, as far as the implementation of the institutional quality audit was concerned. Some of the challenges identified were the employed methods and procedures, while others were related to conceptual issues. Firstly, there were weaknesses in terms of the involvement of other stakeholders such as professional associations, employment agencies, and the industry sectors in the institutional quality audits. Quality audits which have been conducted with external auditors comprised of only experts of the Agency and the academics drawn from the higher education institutions. This might have affected the range of experiences and feedback gained from the quality audit system. With regard to involving other organisations in quality audits, neither the HEP No.351/2003 nor the HEP No. 650/2009 made any provisions in this regard. There were no any other private organisations, or associations that had the legitimacy to conduct institutional quality audits in the country.

With regard to the audit reports, it was identified that the reports were not compact and efficient. For instance, the extensive list of conclusions and the extensive summary were invariably identical in terms of the narrative. Regarding the recommendations presented in the report, it was difficult to understand which criteria were used to distinguish between essential, advisable, and desirable recommendations. It is important that the HERQA should leave it to the professional autonomy of the institutions to decide on the priorities for improvement, on the basis of the recommendations made by the Agency. It was also observed that the audit reports published so far by the HERQA was more descriptive than analytical in nature. Besides, it was not fully clear whether the audits were real quality assurance audits, since it was not possible to establish if a properly functioning quality assurance system was in place, or whether the audits had the nature of a management audit, in which the management processes at institutional levels were investigated. Alternatively, or if the institutional audit sought to investigate in depth the quality of core activities such as teaching and learning, research, and community outreach services (HERQA, 2011a:27).

According to the interviewees, the HERQA tried very hard to prevent external experts to encounter problems in terms of potential conflicts of interest. However, it was not clearly

indicated in the document how the institutions have to bring the latter to the attention of the HERQA if there might be doubt about the independency of any of the external experts in the audit team (HERQA, 2011a:26). According to the HERQA, the institutions were given the opportunity to object, but from discussions with the JU officials it appeared to be not the case in practice. Although not unambiguous, an appeal procedure was included in the HERQA's institutional audit procedure document. However, until today (2014) no institution has objected to the audit processes, or has contested the decisions taken by the HERQA since the start of its activities in 2007. One of the reasons for this lack of appeal might be the HEIs generally feeling that the external quality audits so far undertaken by the HERQA did not have any serious consequences for them.

6.5.4. Institutional self-evaluation and reporting to the HERQA

An essential component of an institutional quality audit is that the HERQA requires the HEIs to conduct a self-evaluation as *per* the guidelines provided by the Agency, entitled "Institutional self-evaluation" (HERQA 2006a:5). The HERQA allows six months to prepare the SEDs. The report of the SED should take the following points into account in preparing the self-evaluation document (HERQA, 2006a:6-9):

> The self-evaluation document should be a concise document that is sufficiently descriptive and evaluative to allow the HERQA institutional audit team to gain a clear picture of the HEI and its own appraisal of its strengths and weaknesses; must also allow the audit team to gain a good understanding of the key features of the HEI's approach to assuring quality and relevance; must thus be an honest appraisal that is both accurate and verifiable by the HERQA audit team; and may typically be 30 to 40 pages in length, up to a maximum of 50 pages.

Since the establishment of the HERQA, for the first time in 2007, some of the HEIs carried out self-evaluations in a way that can be considered as systematised and organised. Nine public and five private higher education institutions have been requested by the HERQA to conduct self-evaluations since 2007.

An HERQA senior expert disclosed that the implementation of the results of the institutional quality audit was challenging. Since the institutional quality audits were a new phenomenon to the country in general, and to the HEIs in particular, and a certain degree of resistance has been observed. This was particularly observed in the area of communication. Delays in submitting the SEDs and action plans were common. It was reported that:

> ... despite the clear guidance offered by the HERQA some of the SEDs that have been submitted have failed to meet the HERQA's requirements, some of the focus areas were ignored or threshold points were missed. This might be because the HEIs underestimated the amount of time and resources required to assemble a SED to the appropriate standard. Despite the HERQA's guidelines, some HEIs delegate the role of producing the SED to junior or already over-burdened staff, or to the ADRC. Some SEDs were presented late (HERQA, 2011b:26).

The success of any institutional quality audit largely depends on the commitment of higher education institutions to conduct objective and critical self-evaluations. Some SEDs were written in such a positive manner that they were unrealistic, but perhaps hoped to influence or impress the auditors; others seemed to feel that a SED must only be critical of the HEI. These problems might be explained as follows: Firstly, institutions may lack the necessary awareness of the importance of undertaking such an assessment; secondly, although they may have an awareness of its importance, they might be less convinced about the impact of the outcome of the assessment in bringing about change and improvement in the quality of their teaching. It is therefore less likely that the self-evaluations would be critical and objective in cases where the leadership lacked commitment for the audit.

The HERQA advises the HEIs to include external stakeholders such as an employer or a recently graduate in the self-evaluation process (HERQA, 2006b:5). However, it was identified in this study, that the self-evaluations in Ethiopia were fully conducted by the academic staff members selected from within the institutions to be assessed. This might have negatively influenced the range of experiences gained from the self-evaluation

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process. Concerning the institutional self-evaluation reports, the HERQA guidelines do not precisely show whether it should be confidential or public, but it was confirmed that HEIs, for instance, the Jimma University, did not disseminate the self-evaluation report to the various stakeholders, such as the university community.

6.5.5.   Quality assurance of the HERQA and reporting public information

In terms of the higher education institutions whose work have been assessed, the quality assurance agencies have to be accountable for the quality of their work and are obliged to demonstrate publicly that the quality assurance process implemented achieved the desired objectives effectively (Martin & Stella, 2007:91). Currently, however, the Agency does not seem to have any published policy for the assurance of its own quality. The following paragraph was quoted from the SED of the HERQA:

> In the HERQA's Annual Plan there is the requirement to develop a quality assurance policy and the HERQA staff are currently looking at models from Europe to develop guidelines. The Self Evaluation Committee recommends that the HERQA develop an internal quality assurance system supported by a Quality Assurance Policy and that service level benchmarks be established to enable the Agency to measure the level of service it offers to its stakeholders (HERQA, 2011b:41).

It is concerning to find that an Agency which has to assess the systems for quality assurance in other institutions, is itself lacking a systematic procedure for ensuring its internal quality. It was identified that there was no committee, nor any individual staff member charged with ensuring the Agency's quality. There was also no formal quality policy or quality handbook. Only incidentally feedback was obtained from the HEIs that have been audited by the HERQA.

The credibility of the Quality Assurance Agency is a combination of many different factors, among which transparency and demonstrating accountability in all policies, procedures, and practices are the most important (Martin & Stella, 2007:91). The

HERQA is expected to inform and respond to the public in accordance with applicable legislation and its cultural context. This includes full and clear disclosures of its relevant documentation such as policies, procedures, and criteria. As part of its communication strategy, the HERQA reported that some of the documents have been uploaded onto the Agency's website, www.herqa.edu.et. Nevertheless, it was observed that the website was down for most of the time, that almost all the documents were outdated, and that some important documents, such as the institutional audit reports were not uploaded onto the website. This study identified that a sufficient flow of publications was produced by HERQA, but it was not clear in how far the information provided by the HERQA reaches the public at large.

6.5.6. Relationship between the HERQA and HEIs

This study identified that there was a sharp difference in the way the public and the private higher education institutions were assessed by the HERQA. Private HEIs have to apply for (pre)accreditation in order to obtain the green light for starting a new programme. The HERQA will then assess the expected quality of the programme on the basis of input criteria only. These (pre)accreditation audits for private HEIs are mandated by the HERQA on the basis of Proclamation no. 351/2003 and no. 650/2009. The public HEIs are authorised by law to start new programmes; and, hence, do not undergo such a (pre)accreditation assessment. The HERQA was highly focused on auditing and taking corrective measures in terms of the private institutions, while there was no evidence that the public universities are any better than their private counterparts. The HERQA's lack of capacity to impose its authority on the public higher education sector was an area that poses questions of credibility both from internal and external observers.

The Agency itself is critically limited in its capacity. Shortage of skilled manpower, lack of institutional experience and operational inefficiency were among its major problems. An expert from the HERQA acknowledges that:

... at this stage it is difficult for the Agency to use and apply all the procedures followed in the private HEIs to the public for the very reason that we do not have sufficient experts for accreditation and audit activities. In principle we [HERQA] believe that both public and private HEIs need to be treated equally, but with the currently available limited resources it seems difficult for the HERQA to accredit public institutions (Interviewee # HE1, 2013).

The demand of private HEIs relating to their programme accreditation was always high as measured against the capacity of the HERQA staff. Accreditation requires expertise in different programmes, or areas of study. The HERQA does not have professionals in all fields, and thus it is difficult for the HERQA to accredit both public and private HEIs.

Until recently, in the Ethiopian higher education context, the institutional quality audits have been carried out at institutional levels. However, currently, there was an attempt to start programme-level quality assessments. The manuals that support the programme-level assessment were prepared and pilot tested on two private and two public higher education institutions, and it was adopted as a formal document for the purpose. This year (2013/14), quality assessment was formally implemented at programme level. External quality auditors were selected and trained for the institutional and programme level quality audits. The HERQA argued that there are about 400 programmes in HEIs and it was unlikely to conduct assessments of the entire programmes at this stage due to a shortage of quality auditors. Thus, a few programmes from engineering (civil, computer science, and electrical) and from health (nursing, medical science, and health officer) programmes were selected for the first audit. Regarding its implementation, similar to that of the institutional quality audit, private HEIs were more responsive than the public HEIs that were requested to take part in the programme level audits. So far, many private HEIs sent their programme self-assessment documents to the HERQA. Nevertheless, on the part of the public HEIs, only one university (the Ambo University) completed the programme level self-assessment documents and sent them back to the HERQA.

In general, the study identified that the relationship between the HERQA and the public institutions was very fragile. As of 2012/13 the number of public universities audited for

quality was only 20%. The HERQA was actively working with private HEIs in the area of accreditation; but the quality audit activities were not given attention in both public and private HEIs. The HREQA has a strong mandate when it comes to private HEIs – it regulates them to the extent of shutting down the institution, revoking licences for some programmes, and so forth. However in the case of public institutions, in practice, the Agency's role was limited to the publishing of reports after a quality audit. It is left to the institution to prepare an enhancement plan and implement it according to the recommendations made in the quality audit report. Accreditation for public HEI is not done at this moment, but could contribute to the assurance of a threshold level of quality, and to fostering quality improvement in all HEIs.

6.6. CONCLUSION

The Chapter presented empirical evidence on quality and quality assurance policies and practices in the Ethiopian higher education context. In the first section, the adequacy of the quality assurance mechanisms implemented in the HEIs in Ethiopia was critically analysed. The adequacy of the quality and QA was treated in terms of educational input, process and output dimensions. In this regard, the results of the study established that the quality and quality assurance of the HEIs are affected by a triangular problem of input, process and outputs. The Higher Education Proclamation No. 650/2009 stipulates the need for the establishment of a robust internal quality assurance system in Ethiopian HEIs (FDRE, 2009:5039). Based on this assumption, in the second section of the Chapter, an attempt was made to examine whether the quality assurance systems, policies, mechanisms, and procedures were in place in the universities. Little empirical evidence existed of internal quality assurance systems in the sampled universities. It seems that the internal QA system is in its early stages of development in higher education institutions. The study also attempted to assess whether the current quality assurance system in Ethiopian higher education has led to improvements for the staff, the students, and the higher education institutions in general. It is far from clear whether the internal quality assurance programmes contributed to the teaching and learning process,

or transformed the student learning experience. Likewise, the conclusion that can be drawn in relation to the effect of external QA was ambiguous and not very positive when it comes to quality improvement. This Chapter of the study also attempted to examine the policies and practices of the HERQA *vis–à–vis* quality assurance activities in HEIs in Ethiopia. It was learnt that the HERQA was critically limited in its capacity to closely work with the HEIs. Shortage of resources, lack of institutional autonomy and experience, and operational inefficiency were among its major problems.

The next Chapter summaries and synthesises the findings, presents the conclusions derived from the study, and finally, proposes some recommendations.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION(S) AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1.   INTRODUCTION

This final Chapter of the thesis both summarises and reflects on the major findings of the study. Hence, the Chapter is divided into three sections. The first section summarises the thesis statement and the research questions. The main findings of the study are provided in the second section. In the last section, the conclusions and recommendations of the study are put forward. The thesis is concluded with suggestions for further research arising from the study.

7.2.   SUMMARY OF THE PROBLEM STATEMENT, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND LITERATURE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to explore the current policy and practice of the national and institutional quality assurance system in public higher education institutions in Ethiopia in order to determine how the quality of teaching and learning might have been enhanced through the quality assurance system. It focused on presenting an overview of the current practice of quality assurance in higher education institutions in Ethiopia. The study also focused on quality assurance policies formulated and adopted by the Ethiopian Ministry of Education (the HERQA) after 2003. Thus in terms of thematic focus, the study has two fairly distinct dimensions, namely the analysis of national quality assurance policy and an investigation of the QA practices at HEIs.

The argument pursued in this study put forward three related claims. Firstly, the establishment of quality assurance policies and systems in the Ethiopian higher education system was not necessarily followed by significant improvements in institutional performance. Secondly, there was an apparent lack of ownership and accountability

among academic staff regarding the actual practice of quality assurance. The QA policies and mechanisms were more concerned with the standardisation of procedures than with the enhancement of academic practice. The quality assurance systems had not resulted in the self-improvement of the higher education institutions. The establishment of quality assurance policies and the putting in place of structures and procedures were necessary, but not sufficient conditions for enhancing the academic practice in universities. The effective implementation of a quality assurance system required a professional commitment by all participants in the system, and the empowerment of those participants to demonstrate the set commitment. If academic staff would not engage with the QA process, it was likely to be counterproductive at worst, or result in short-term compliance at best (see Harvey, 2004). Thirdly, there was a lack of studies addressing how academics perceived the impact of quality assurance; hence it required empirical investigation concerning the actual role that quality assurance played inside higher education institutions. The basic assumption for the empirical investigation was that some quality assurance systems were more related to control, while others were more enhancement-oriented. There existed a strong risk that the efforts made by universities and university authorities to improve quality, might end up by introducing repetitive rituals, and losing sight of the contents of academic activities. Most impact studies reinforced the view that quality was about compliance and accountability, and contributed little to any effective transformation to make the programmes more appropriate (see Harvey & Newton, 2004).

The following main research question was formulated: **How did the authorities in Ethiopia implement quality assurance in its higher education institutions, and what were the outcomes of the process?** And based on this main question, the study also sought and did respond to the following:

1. The national and institutional quality assurance policies that inform practice in HEIs, and the underlying assumptions of these policies.

2. The extent and the way that higher education institutions implemented the quality assurance mechanisms. The current QA policies, structures and instruments were also dealt with.

3. The possible factors that enabled or hindered the adoption and practice of the formal QA system in Ethiopian HEIs.

4. The extent that the HERQA and HEIs discharged their roles and responsibilities to enhance the implementation of the quality assurance system in HEI in Ethiopia.

5. The differences between the three higher education institutions in terms of their implementation of the quality assurance system, and the way the existing quality assurance practices to be improved to enhance sustainable quality.

6. The perceived impact/outcome of the current national and institutional quality assurance system *vis à vis* the teaching and learning, the management, and the quality culture of HEIs.

Two organisational theories, namely contingency theory and neo-institutional theory, provided a theoretical lens to explain how internal and external organisational environments affect the implementation of QA in the HEIs. Contingency theory was adopted to support the researcher's interpretations by simply noting that the implementation practices of quality assurance systems were dependent on the specific circumstances or situations of the HEIs. Institutional theory, in turn, was adopted from the research findings of Meyer and Rowan (1977:341), which asserts that actual organizational activities were frequently loosely coupled with the ways in which they were externally legitimized. Scott (1987b:507-509) had observed that contingency and institutional theory explanations, when applied separately, offered only an incomplete understanding of the different practices of contemporary organizations, but that both theories together could be used to better understand the instrumental and symbolic roles fulfilled by organisations.

This study was also an attempt to demonstrate the complementarity of using exploratory quantitative and qualitative methods in one study. This was shaped by

the pragmatism paradigm which was generally regarded as the philosophical partner for the mixed-methods research design. The concurrent mixed-methods design was employed in this study. Specifically, the concurrent triangulation design (QUAN + QUAL) and the concurrent embedded design (both QUAN + qual; QUAL + quan) types were applied. Employing these mixed-methods typology served the triangulation and complementarity purposes of the mixed-methods design. In the study, the quantitative method was used to gather the opinions of the respondents regarding the nature of the current practices and systems of quality and quality assurance as well as its impact and effect on the sampled higher education institutions. The qualitative approach was used to obtain information in terms of the different dimensions of the participants' experiences, personal perspectives and meanings, and values, norms, and beliefs regarding quality assurance practices. It also helped to obtain deeper insight in the issues under consideration, and capture some trends that emerged from the data.

Three public universities were chosen as the sample of the study. The Hopkin's (2004:182) frame factor concept, which primarily focuses on the varied nature of the institutions in terms of their contexts and their assumed levels of development, was used as starting point for the classification and selection of the universities. Based on Hopkin's suggestions, the 31 public universities currently functioning in Ethiopia were categorised into three major groups: mature (large and old), evolving (medium and young), and embryonic (small and new). Accordingly three universities – the Jimma, Mizan-Tepi and Mettu Universities – were selected and included in the study using the simple random sampling technique. Multiple cases (three) instead of one case were selected for the study. Multiple cases would have strengthened the results by replicating the pattern-matching and by yielding greater confidence in the robustness of the results of the study. Within each individual case, the perceptions of academic leaders, internal quality assurance structures and processes, and relevant contextual issues were explored. Although there was an interest in understanding the perceptions, practices and context of the individual cases, the interest was primarily in terms of the patterns and trends of the whole institutions. At macro level, the regulatory agency (HERQA) was

also included to examine the effect of the institutional environment on internal quality assurance practices.

The data was gathered from academic managers (academic vice-presidents, quality assurance directors, deans and department heads); academic staff and students; the HERQA experts; and policy and reform documents, strategic plans, guidelines, higher education laws, reports, statistical abstracts, quality monitoring manuals and guidelines. In the study, multi-stage sampling, simple random sampling and systematic random sampling (quantitative) and purposive sampling (qualitative) techniques were employed to select the respondents and participants respectively.

In the study, both quantitative and qualitative data-collection methods were used to answer the research questions. The data-collection instruments used in the study were survey questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Two versions of the self-administered questionnaires were developed based on the results of the literature review. The first type of questionnaire was designed and administered to gather data from the graduating class students of the three universities. The second version was designed and administered to gather data from the deans, departmental heads, and teaching staff of all three universities. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were used to elicit relevant information in terms of the attitudes and perceptions of the participants regarding the existing quality assurance policies and practices. University officials, HERQA experts, and senior teachers were interviewed from all three universities. Consequently, 550 student respondents and 220 academic staff were involved in the completion of the survey questionnaire; and 17 participants were selected for participation in the semi-structured one-to-one interviews.

With regard to the document analysis as data collection-method, all relevant documents such as quality assurance policy statements, higher education proclamations (no. 351/2003 and 650/2009) and other relevant laws, annual statistical abstracts, relevant guidelines, quality audit and self-evaluation

documents, circulars, technical reports and other published materials related to higher education and quality assurance were obtained and analysed.

In this study, the data collected by means of the questionnaires were coded, entered, cleaned and analysed using the computer software programme SPSS 20 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics such as percentages, mean scores, standard deviations, chi-square tests, t-tests and one-way ANOVA. The qualitative data were also transcribed, coded and interpreted thematically. The thematic approach was followed to display the analyses and findings from both quantitative and qualitative data.

In an attempt to enhance the validity and reliability of the study, triangulation, a pilot study, member checks, and peer scrutiny of the research project were employed. The use of interviews, documentation, and questionnaires in this study allowed for methodological triangulation on several of the posed primary research questions. Triangulation between different data sources within the same method (triangulation of sources) was also applied in order to nuance and control the interpretations presented in the study. A pilot study of the questionnaire was conducted at a university similar to the ones included in the study. The analysis of the pilot study data indicated that the subscales of the questionnaire have good item characteristics in terms of internal consistency and homogeneity contained in each subscale. Additionally, during the pilot study, the questions and statements were examined and tested for appropriateness, content, wording, and order. Based on the outcome of the study, the items that seemed vague for the initial respondents were modified and rephrased. The results of the pilot study had not been included in the final results. In order to enhance the reliability of the study, the interview schedule was pre-tested with two individuals who had similar experiences as the selected interviewees. Some of the interviewees were requested to check the final transcribed report for any distortions and/or misrepresentations. This latter enhanced the internal validity of the study. The presentation of the preliminary findings of the study at annual research conferences at Jimma University enabled the researcher

to refine his methodology, develop a greater understanding of the research design, and strengthen his arguments in the light of the comments made.

The main ethical issues that were considered in this study include confidentiality, anonymity, privacy, sensitivity, and voluntariness. In the study, the personal data of the interviewees was presented in an anonymous way. Participants' right to privacy was also maintained through the promise of confidentiality. A number of techniques were included to ensure anonymity and confidentiality in terms of the findings. The use of codes instead of the participants' real names ensured that people other than the researcher could not identify the participants from the information presented in the research report. All role-players, the teachers, officials and students, were informed of the purpose, methods, and time frame of the study as it was unethical to conduct an investigation when the subjects were unaware of the real purpose. The participants in this study were informed that they were to participate without feeling coerced, and were free to withdraw from the participation at any time. The principle of informed consent was the most important ethical consideration on the agenda in doing this research, which also involved the right to participate and refuse to participate. Hence, in this study, an introductory letter and consent form supported these assurances. In order to reduce the possibility of losing confidentiality through the involvement of many interviewers, the information in this study was collected by the researcher only. The process of getting access to the universities began by requesting permission formally, in writing, through the official channels. The first step the researcher took regarding this matter was to write and explain in detail to the target universities the purpose of the study, the data-collection methods, and to get their permission to conduct the research. The research offices at the sampled universities as well as the University of South Africa were requested to issue ethical clearance certificates for this project, and these were appended to the final report.

7.3. SUMMARY OF THE MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

By synthesising the main ideas presented in Chapter 6 of the thesis, this section attempts to summarise the major findings of the study as follows:

7.3.1. It is widely acknowledged that the pre-university preparation of students has a direct bearing on the quality of education offered at higher learning institutions. It was learnt from the current practices in terms of the admission and placement policies and procedures of the MoE that many students were joining the public universities irrespective of having an inadequate grounding in their academic studies. The recruitment and admission of students were determined by the MoE exclusively and top-down. Public universities in Ethiopia had no control over the students they take in for their regular programmes. The role left to them was just to place students in different academic departments and programmes. The study indicated that about 40% of the students were admitted to the universities without scoring the minimum pass mark (50%) set by the policy. This had a direct bearing on the students' performance as well as the quality of learning in the university.

7.3.2. There was a rapid increase in enrolments in the three universities. For instance, the enrolment in the JU was almost doubled over the last five years. Although it was not on a *par* with the student population, the number of teaching staff in the universities had been increasing considerably. The study revealed that STR has steadily increased in the three universities, signifying that the teachers' workload had almost doubled within a period of the past five years. Considering the shrinking trend in the qualifications of the academic staff, failing to maintain the STR would have undesirable consequences on the quality of education via restricting access to and putting undue pressure on the limited resources. On the pedagogical front, the increasing STR compromised the quality of teaching and learning through intensifying the teachers' workload. It can be argued that higher education in Ethiopia needs to expand even more if the country was ever to catch

up with the other developing regions in Africa. The question, however, was finding the appropriate balance between massification and the quality of education and training.

7.3.3. Despite the importance attached to enrolment expansion there seemed to be limited attention for academic staff remuneration, working conditions, and job satisfaction. The teachers' job dissatisfaction was raised as a grave issue in the universities under investigation. Low salaries and the lack of incentives were mentioned as major causes for the problem. Some compensation such as payments for extra load in terms of summer and extension classes were not paid in line with the rules and regulations. There was a high teacher turnover in the universities and the problem was persistent in MTU and MU. To use Semela's (2011:416) argument, there was a high "... internal brain drain... " in the universities. The teachers out flow was no longer limited to foreign institutions as it used to be, but also to the private or nongovernmental sector where they could earn more of that earned by an academic of the same educational background and years of experience. Interestingly, the salary of a local academic was less than a quarter of the amount paid to an expatriate counterpart. The ever increasing inflation has made it impossible for academics to live on their salaries (see Semela, 2011). The options considered viable were either to burden themselves with more than one job or to leave their academic careers – a situation that would seriously impinge on the quality of student learning and research engagement. Concerns about heavier workloads, and the "... managerialist culture of universities... ", such as to measure teaching against instrumental outcomes, were developing in the universities (Kedir, 2009:29). The expansion has resulted in increasing workloads and extended work schedules for the academic staff. This situation has led to discontent among academic staff impacting on their work motivation.

7.3.4. The Ethiopian minimum academic staff qualification requirements for HE were as follows: less than 20% Bachelor's degree holders, about 50% Master's degree

holders and, 30% PhD holders. The study identified that the current profile of the teaching staff in all three universities was far below the requirement set by the MoE, and much of the teaching was done by first degree holders (43.18% Bachelor's, 42.41% Master's, and 3.32% Ph.D. holders). The academic staff profile of the sampled universities was highly varied and uneven among the colleges and programmes of the universities. Some colleges were strong in their staff composition and others were below what was recommended by the HERQA. In the sampled universities, particularly the Colleges of Engineering and Technology were staffed entirely, or largely, by first degree holders. It seems as if there was no need for clear academic standards to be followed regarding the qualifications of the university academic staff. It also seemed that the issue of academic qualifications required to teach at public universities was omitted from the definition in the Higher Education proclamation No.650/2009 (see Areaya, 2010). These issues, closely linked with existing institutional practices, have serious implications for the quality of education and institutional development. The lack of adequate staff in terms of pedagogical training and experience was another challenge in the universities. Those who had undergone pedagogical training were limited to a few colleges and faculties.

7.3.5. As major input for quality education, learning resources are central to any effective academic programme. The study revealed that the resources for ensuring quality of education in the universities were not adequate. Besides the inadequacy and poor quality of the library collections, science and computer labs, learning facilities, ICT and course materials, there was a serious problem of space due to the ever increasing student enrolments in the universities. There was also a problem of using the available resources effectively and efficiently. In relation to the financial resources, it was identified that, even though the total public expenditure on education has increased relatively (i.e. from 22.8% in 2007 to 25.2% in 2013), the unit costs of higher education has declined considerably. In concrete terms, the quality of teaching and learning was impacted through, for example, falling student textbook ratios, shrinking access to ICT and laboratory

facilities, and fewer available learning materials. The explanation for the paradox between the increasing public expenditure and the declining unit costs of higher education originated in the rapid quantitative expansion, suggesting that the growth in student numbers has outpaced the financing capabilities. Another reason might be the ever increasing share of capital budget which was as high as 65% of the total expenditure on higher education.

7.3.6. With regard to leadership commitment to quality learning in the universities, there existed limited professional knowledge and skills as to what it takes to integrate quality assurance systems in the institutional culture. The lack of vision and enthusiasm to do the groundwork on the part of the leadership seemed to have weakened efforts to put in place functional institutional quality assurance systems. The low participation of students and academic staff in quality assurance affairs was regarded as the main weakness of the HEIs under study. The teachers had a pivotal role to play in the development and implementation of QA. They developed educational programmes, delivered them, and were responsible for assessment. Similarly, in achieving quality in higher education, the students played no smaller role than the teachers. Student participation in quality assurance processes underpinned the validity and reliability of both the internal and external review processes and had been demonstrated to be a value-adding factor for improving the quality in higher education. Nevertheless, academic staff and students were not given sufficient opportunity in the development and implementation of the quality assurance measures in the public universities under study.

7.3.7. Regarding the practice of teaching and learning in the universities under investigation, it was identified that the universities had no explicit policies on teaching and learning. The teaching and learning strategies at the universities were dominated by the lecture method. The combination of high student-staff ratios, the lack of pedagogical skills on the part of some of the young and inexperienced teachers, and the inadequacy of facilities were reported as reasons

for not employing the student-centered approaches. As with the teaching and learning policies, there were no general policies on assessment in the universities under investigation. Assignments in the form of projects and term papers were limited to a few programmes. It was reported that most of the assessment procedures focused on the reproduction of memorized facts, usually using the cognitive domain and its taxonomy only. The assessment tasks were poor in terms of its feedback and motivation for further learning.

7.3.8.   The Higher Education Proclamation No. 650/2009 stipulates the need for the establishment of a robust internal quality assurance system in Ethiopian HEIs (FDRE, 2009:5039). Evidence presented in this study suggested that there were no comprehensive quality assurance structures, policies and system in the HEIs at the time of the study. A few quality assurance mechanisms were in place in the universities and these mechanisms were not uniformly practiced by all the HEIs or all the departments in the institutions. One significant finding was the absence of a shared culture of quality in the institutions. A culture of quality is one in which everybody in the organisation, not just the quality controllers, is responsible for quality (Harvey & Green, 1993:16).

7.3.9.   Although the HEP recognizes the power and duty of individual public universities and award them the mandate and autonomy to determine and implement academic programmes, the reality, however, is inconsistent with the rhetoric. It was identified that the activity of curriculum planning and development was centralized at national level, and it was often carried out by the MoE. In this top-down approach, experts from outside the universities prepared a national curriculum as guide, and each department was obliged to use it as a reference and template in institutionalizing the national curriculum. However, although very limited in scope, the experience of Jimma and Mizan-Tepi Universities showed that a few course or programme reviews were carried out in some of the departments.

7.3.10. The competency-based curriculum (CBC) was introduced to the Ethiopian higher education system from 2013 onwards. The implementation of the CBC was characterized by many challenges, namely the competence levels were not clearly defined in the syllabi (course guides); a lack of appropriate allocated time for the courses; and the module competence instruments (measurements) were not available. The implementation of the CBC was managed in much a disorganized way. For instance, the grading system was changed to a criterion-referenced system, but the assessment was carried out in the traditional way. There was no attempt to train and coach the staff in the implementation of the new curriculum, so that "old wine was offered from new skins"; and the CBC was not implemented at all. Moreover, there was no strong justification for the change from the previous discipline-based curriculum to a CBC. This new curriculum was also not supported by applicable policies, guidelines, or manuals. The lack of documents and orientation sessions made the implementation of the CBC complex and challenging. Owing to the expansion of education and the number of students per classes of 100 or more, was often very difficult for teachers to manage. Implementing continuous assessment practices, active learning methodologies and paying individualized attention as a requirement for the successful implementation of the CBC in these large classes, was very difficult.

7.3.11. If organised effectively, the Academic Development and Resource Centers (ADRCs) had the potential to play a key role in the quality improvement by offering short-term training to academic staff in teaching methodology, curriculum development, student assessment, and other pedagogical skills. However, there have been indications that the potential contributions of the ADRC seemed to be little understood, or not appreciated by the universities at all. Although differences existed among the universities in the degree of its implementation, a one year Higher Diploma Training Programme (HDP) was being offered for academics as part of the teachers' continuous professional development. The strategic planning document of the universities included a five-year staff development plan, but there were no clear staff development policies at

college and departmental levels. The staff appraisal for the purpose of identifying the strengths and weakness of the staff and gearing them towards continuous improvement was not practised at all. As a result, the link between staff appraisal and staff development was nonexistent. In all three universities, it was reported that academic staff were evaluated by students, peers and their immediate heads of department. This was carried out, however, only in the case of those who were seeking promotion. It was established by the researcher that there existed no feedback mechanisms to the teachers and the students in terms of the evaluation results.

7.3.12. With regard to the business process re-engineering (BPR) system, the academic community felt that the reforms based on the BPR contributed almost nothing to the academic improvement in the universities. It was identified that the objectives of the BPR were not well communicated and brought to the attention of the academic staff. As a result, the universities were unable to manage and accomplish the set goals and objectives at the desired levels.

7.3.13. In the Ethiopian context, the quality audit of the HEIs was carried out using the ten focus areas as set out by the HERQA for this purpose. There was a gradual move to rank the public universities against a set of performance elements or criteria developed by the consortium of Ethiopian public universities (CEPU). It was learnt that the CEPU ranking system was characterised by conceptual, methodological, and procedural problems. Firstly, the ranking deviated from its primary purpose of improving the teaching-learning activities, to manipulating the data in order to achieve a higher ranking. Thus, it can be said that the system was not sound. The other concern was that the ranking contravenes a fitness-for-purpose approach, which was the working definition of quality adopted by the HERQA in the Ethiopian context. Fitness-for-purpose implies that institutions have different purposes and are judged against those criteria, while the ranking system established judgement against a set of generic criteria. Ranking by the CEPU treated all public HEIs as if they have similar missions. It contradicted with

the unique characteristics and contextual differences that existed among the HEIs. Consequently, inability to consider the institutional diversities might have rendered the outcome of the CEPU's ranking process inappropriate. It was argued that the current ranking system diverted the attention of the university leaders from the genuine purpose and mission of the institution towards symbolic compliance and paper work in order to "climb" the ranking ladder. Many academics believed that the quality of the reports produced and the leaders' closeness to the MoE were credited more than the university's performance to be ranked as high in the current CEPU's assessment practice. Furthermore, ranking placed too much emphasis on institutions and ignored study programmes. Moreover, some of the peer reviewers were not regarded as legitimate peers and were never trained; hence, they conducted the reviews without any proper training.

7.3.14. The HEP has formally authorized public higher education institutions with a limited degree of administrative as well as academic autonomy. However, it was identified that there was a clear gap between the rhetoric and practice. With regard to individual rights and freedom, the study determined that teachers were reluctant to criticize institutional and other government policies, and exercised self-censorship. Teachers believed to have little or no worthwhile input in the selection of the leadership of the universities. The terms and conditions of employment and the payment for extra work loads such as summer and extension classes were impossible to negotiate with the universities since conditions were centrally determined by the government (MoE). Teachers generally also had little voice in policy or the decision-making processes although they were one of the key stakeholders in higher education and among the principal actors in quality assurance. The erosion of academic freedom and institutional autonomy, as exemplified by the top-down approach on policy and curricular issues, contributed to the marginalization of the teaching personnel.

7.3.15. With regard to the self-evaluation practices, from the three sampled universities, only JU produced a self-evaluation document for the purpose of the external quality audit. Mizan-Tepi and Mettu Universities were not involved in the external institutional quality audit scheme. There was no particular department or unit responsible to organize and carry out the self-evaluation. The self-evaluation report was sufficiently informative; yet, the observation was made that the SED was not really analytical and critical. This may be partly due to the fact that the guidelines for writing the self-evaluation documents did not lead to the institutions producing a really self-critical and analytical document. The existing quality audit system seemed a top-down process as both the initiation and procedures came from HERQA to the institutions. The quality audit system was also inclined to external quality assurance, which focuses on accountability rather than internal quality assurance, which focused on quality improvement.

7.3.16. In relation to the influence of external environments on the QA activities of the universities, the study established that the government intervention in internal affairs of institutions, external dependency of the universities, and current institutional and student enrolment expansion as well as the preparation of prospective student policy are major external hindrance factors to the quality and quality assurance implementation in the universities. The HERQA requirements and expectations were identified as an enabler for the implementation of quality assurance. Regarding the internal or university-specific factors, the study determined that the existing learning and teaching resources in the universities was a hindrance to the quality assurance implementation. Commitment and support of institutional leaders for quality and engagement of students in their learning were also regarded as hindrance factors. The academic staff had positive perceptions about their willingness, commitment and support for quality. Similarly, the BSC, the modularisation of programmes or courses and the institutional policy environment were perceived positively by the academic staff as enablers for implementing quality assurance activities in the sampled universities.

7.3.17. In this study, the students were required to evaluate their satisfaction with the quality of their learning competencies gained during their studies. Satisfaction is obtained when the stated goals are fully attained, the input and process result in acceptable outputs that fit the intended purposes, and the quality of the service is well designed so that the customers and clients get what they want (Shibeshi *et.al.*, 2009:238). Student satisfaction with courses was on the micro-level and student/employer satisfaction with degree programmes was on a macro-level (Dill, 1995:97). Accordingly, the results of the study showed that the students were not satisfied with the quality of their learning and learning experience. Similarly, the academic staff reported a low satisfaction level with the students' competence. It was reported that the students' academic preparedness, self-confidence, and interest and motivation to learn were low. Similarly, their value orientation towards quality learning, engagement and commitment to their learning, and problem-solving, critical/analytical thinking, and communication skills were found to be poor. From the results of the study, the researcher learnt that there seems to be a general discontent among the academic community *vis-a-vis* the quality performance of students and their competences.

7.3.18. The study found that the management at all levels in the three sampled universities did not share the same vision for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. The academic staff did not believe that the existing quality assurance system was clear and rigorous, and that physical and financial resources were adequately available for ensuring the quality of the teaching and learning at the universities. It was reported that the existing quality assurance system (policy, models, guidelines, methods and instruments) were not communicated among staff members, students, and other key stakeholders. To make this worse, the motivation and working conditions of academic staff did not generally promote a climate to improve the quality of teaching and learning, as perceived by the teacher respondents. In general, it can be concluded from these findings that the endeavours made so far by the universities in implementing an internal quality assurance system was very minimal.

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7.3.19. The study identified that internal quality assurance has not made a significant impact on the improvement of the quality of education and/or teaching in the universities. The academic staff did not believe that the quality assurance system enhanced staff's engagement in teaching and learning, facilitated internal decision-making processes and resource allocation, or increased the institutional reputations and customer satisfaction. However, they saw some "positive effects" of quality assurance, in particular, on the enhancement of student involvement in learning and teaching, as the undergraduate programmes were changed to a competence-based-curriculum using modularization. With regard to the effects of external QA on institutional practices, the study established that the self-assessment process enabled the institutions to identify areas of strengths and areas for improvement. The external audit process used by the HERQA had also assisted the universities to strengthen the governance and monitoring of the QA process by establishing governance structures at institutional level and by assigning staff to lead the quality assurance activities. This practice strengthened the role of the planning and coordination of the QA activities at the universities. The universities had established quality assurance offices, developed quality care policies, and most importantly, quality and quality assurance have become an agenda in the HEIs, although not in a systematic and organized way.

7.3.20. The study revealed that different individuals defined the concept of quality differently. This reflects the difficult and complex nature of defining the term quality. The finding was also consistent with the view that quality is not a uni-dimensional but multi-dimensional concept (Harvey, 1999:14). The working definition adopted in the Ethiopian HE context is "… fitness for purpose." This is an instrumental approach to quality. According to this definition, if education fulfils its purpose then it is said to be one of quality. However, stakeholders in education may have different views on purposes and fitness. Conceptually, this has led to practices in assessing and monitoring quality, with a focus on management systems. This, in turn, has engendered rigorous systems of accountability and associated surveillance policies and practices. With regard to

the purpose of QA, this study established "improvement" as the most important purpose for implementing a quality assurance system. However, in Ethiopia, as the QA system was established because of external pressures, it endeavoured to meet external accountability, and this made quality enhancement a by-product, not a central feature of quality improvement. At the sampled universities, the quality assurance system was clearly multi-purpose, serving an accountability function to an external state agency (e.g. satisfying the external quality audit of the HERQA) as well as enhancing self-improvement through the self-evaluation processes. Agreement amongst the HE stakeholders on the purpose of QA was important since each of the purposes for implementing a quality assurance system demanded a specific focus, which in turn influenced the design and methodology of the quality assurance systems and procedures. The use of overlapping, incompatible concepts and notions of quality, and different views on the purpose for implementing a quality assurance system, as argued by Ahmad (2007:264), resulted in a confused and confusing system of quality assurance.

7.3.21. The study has attempted to examine the policies and practices of the HERQA *vis–à–vis* quality assurance activities in HEIs in Ethiopia. The results of the study indicated that the HERQA had brought the agenda of quality to the forefront in the higher education sector, and it has played a significant role in the development of different quality assurance manuals, procedures, rules and regulations in consultation with stakeholders. Yet, many challenges were associated with the existing HERQA's policy and practices. In relation to the HERQA mandates, the articles in the Proclamation no. 650/2009 were not very specific, and much of the mandate was formulated in very generic terms. According to the latter, HERQA does not have the right to establish its own laws and Board, and cannot make final decisions based on its findings; hence, it may not be considered as an autonomous body. This implies that it was less likely that the agency would be independent from the government politics and policies. The World Bank working paper also identified the HERQA as one of the national QA agencies in Africa that have no autonomy (Materu, 2007:20). With regard to the HERQA's Board, it was

observed that it was only partially functioning. The actual composition of the Board differed widely from the way it was defined in the 2003 Proclamation. Various groups of stakeholders in the society were not represented. Half of the positions were vacant. The HERQA acknowledged that the Board would function better in a "… less tight relationship… " to the Minister (HERQA, 2011b:50). It can be concluded that the HERQA governance was not in line with the international code of good practice of quality assurance agencies. Moreover, it must be stated that the legislation (Proclamation) was not fully adequate, since the mandates of the HERQA were not clearly defined, and not consistently formulated. The existing number and qualifications profile of HERQA staff did not appear to be sufficient. There was a critical shortage of professionals, particularly in the accreditation and quality audit sections. As acknowledged by the Agency, there was a high rate of staff turnover due to salary scales which were not comparable to other organizations in the market. There was also no evidence to determine that the HERQA had a well functioning staff appraisal system. The HERQA was heavily dependent on the government (MoE) for its budget, was strictly bound to the rules, and regulations of the civil service with respect to the handling of its financial affairs related to its various activities. In relation to the material resources, it was identified that the HERQA's website *www.herqa.edu.et* was generally poor; and updated information was hardly available to read and/or download by the public.

7.3.22. With regard to the practice of the institutional quality audit, it was observed from the HERQA's audit documents that the requirements pertaining to the performance of the institutions during the institutional quality audits had been clearly formulated. There were some limitations, however, as far as its implementation was concerned. Some of the challenges were related to the prescribed methods and procedures, while others were to conceptual issues. With regard to the audit report, it was identified that the reports were not compact and efficient. They were more descriptive than analytical in nature. With regard to involving other organizations in the quality audit, neither the HEP No.351/2003

nor the HEP No. 650/2009 had any provision in this regard. As a result, there were no other private organizations, or associations that had the legitimacy to conduct institutional quality audits in the country. Delays in submitting the SEDs and action plans were common. It was reported that some of the audited institutions were unwilling to accept the recommendations provided by the HERQA audit team and develop the prescribed enhancement plans.

So far, there has not been any established or clearly stated link between the institutions' budgets and the institutional quality audit results. To complicate the situation, neither the higher education proclamation nor the other documents produced by the HERQA (the MoE) addressed the possible consequences of the outcome of the audit reports. Up to now, there was no explicit action taken by the MoE on the basis of the audit results. Contrary to what has been exercised in several other countries, the external audit results in Ethiopia were not used for making reallocations of funds, or ranking the audited institutions. This affected the implementation of the recommendations made by the audit team at institutional level. The success of institutional quality audits largely depends on the commitment of the higher education institutions to conduct genuine and critical self-evaluations. Some SEDs were written in such a positive manner that they were unrealistic, but perhaps hoped to influence or impress the auditors. Other role players seemed to feel that a SED must only be critical of the HEI. With reference to the institutional self-evaluation report, the HERQA guidelines did not precisely show whether it was confidential or public, but it confirmed that HEIs did not disseminate the self-evaluation reports to the stakeholders, not even to the university community.

7.3.23. Pertaining to the relationship between the HERQA and the HEIs, the result of the study revealed that there was a sharp difference in the way the public and the private institutions were assessed by the Agency. The HERQA had a strong mandate when it came to private HEIs – it regulated them to the extent of shutting down the institution and revoking the licence in terms of some programmes. In

the case of public institutions, in practice, the Agency's role was limited to the publishing of reports after the quality audits. It was left to the institutions to prepare an enhancement plan, and implement it according to the recommendations made in the quality audit report. Accreditation for public HEIs is not compulsory at the moment, but could contribute to the assurance of a threshold level of quality and to the fostering of quality improvement in the HEIs. The relationship between the HERQA and the public institutions could be generally labelled as very weak. The Agency itself was critically limited in its capacity. The shortage of skilled manpower, the lack of institutional experience and operational inefficiency were among its major problems. As for the 2012/13 period, the number of public universities audited for quality was only 20%.

7.4.   CONCLUSION(S)

On the basis of the findings of the study (see section 7.3 of this Chapter), the following conclusions were drawn regarding the implementation of the quality assurance system in the HEIs of Ethiopia:

7.4.1. In relation to the status of the internal QA system, it seemed that it was still in its early stages of development in the sampled higher education institutions. Little additional evidence existed of internal quality assurance systems in the universities under investigation although some initiatives could be observed. The quality assurance efforts were implemented without a clear sense of direction and purpose; and, therefore, lacked effective coordination. For instance, the three universities were not in a position to develop, disseminate or implement the teaching, learning and assessment policies in their own contexts. There were no functional quality assurance structures at college or departmental levels, and written policy on quality assurance was nonexistent. Similarly, there was no evidence that continuous assessment was widely practiced. The institutions' involvement in conducting tracer-studies did not exist. The lack of an organized

system for curriculum development and review was a major issue in the universities. The teachers' performance evaluation system was used more for promotion purposes than for the enhancing of teaching quality.

The study showed that the HEIs were suffering from a shortage of learning resources and facilities. Most of the academic staff lacked the experience and teaching and research skills; thus it was by far below the requirements of the ministry of education. The critical problems for the universities were observed in terms of committing resources that support institutional quality improvement efforts, the establishment of full-fledged quality assurance structures, resources to furnish the structure with the necessary personnel, and the commitment of institutional management in this regard. Therefore, it can be concluded that there was little evidence of self-initiated quality enhancement activities in the three universities investigated.

This study established that the QA systems which were driven by institutional managements at higher level were generally regarded as managerial, and lack ownership by the academic staff. The lack of QA ownership by academic staff had serious implications in terms of its implementation. Internal quality assurance systems remained external to the academic staff unless they were involved in the QA policy development and implementation. The extent to which the staff was involved in the policy process, their level of ownership of the policies, and the ability of the processes to take into account issues of context were key factors affecting the success of the institutional quality assurance policies and practices.

7.4.2. As referred to in the literature review, finding evidence on the impact of quality assessment processes was complicated by several factors, including the complexity of the higher education institutions and the different processes impacting on the institutions. However, the results obtained in this study allowed some conclusions to be drawn. In relation to the effect of the quality assurance processes on the universities, the first conclusion is that the quality assurance of

teaching was an issue that had obtained much more attention after the approval of HEP no. 351/2003 and no. 650/650, and the establishment of the HERQA. The higher education institutions were building quality-related processes and structures, but they were in early stages of development; they may not have yet achieved the kind of quality culture for which they are striving. The outcomes of the study suggested that self-evaluations symbolically took place at the higher levels of the universities, and that the results of the evaluations were rarely used in a structured way towards the improvement of teaching-learning, faculty decision-making and planning processes. It was far from clear whether the internal quality assurance systems contributed to the improvement of teaching and learning and/or transformed the students' learning experiences. Likewise, the conclusion that can be drawn from the study in relation to the effect of the external QA system, i.e., whether the HERQA quality assurance instruments and requirements have transformed the HE system so far, was ambiguous and not very positive when it came to quality improvement. It can be concluded that, in neo-institutional terminology, the HERQA's quality assurance policy and practices seemed to be de-coupled from internal initiatives to improve quality in the higher education institutions.

7.4.3. This study identified that the problem of adequacy, utilization, and quality of resources was common in all three universities. All the above would result in a serious setback to fully realize the objectives of quality teaching-learning in the HEIs. It must be said that a growing mismatch between the expansion of higher education and availability of resources and facilities resulted in declining standards in the quality of the instruction in the three public universities.

7.4.4. As Areaya (2010:100) correctly points out, teaching and research staff should have the right to initiate, participate and determine the academic programmes of their institutions in accordance with the highest standards of education and the basic principles. However, the curriculum development or review of programmes in Ethiopia failed to acknowledge the institutional peculiarities; and were all

uniformly determined by the federal ministry of education. This seems to have adversely affected the sense of ownership of the teaching staff. Whenever the government wishes to initiate a new academic programme, whatever its relevance and demand, it automatically launched it without necessarily passing through the necessary curriculum development process. Currently, for instance, the undergraduate curricula of the public universities were top-down reengineered into modular curricula and delivered through block teaching. This radical reform happened without the consensus of many of the implementers (the academic staff) of the academic programmes. This made the quality of the curriculum implementation at the universities questionable. Furthermore, the rapidity of the implementation process of the reforms added to the short life of most of the curricular reforms which underlined the instability of the curriculum reforms in the Ethiopian public universities.

7.4.5. It is a fact that the modularisation (CBC) system was only introduced to the Ethiopian universities in 2013 for the first year courses, and it was premature to determine its effectiveness. However, the universities which introduced these changes were required to undertake continuous monitoring activities, and to determine whether the basic pillars indicated in the modularization documents were implemented as required. The reformed curricula opened new opportunities for both reflective learning and learning to think. It is too soon to determine if they can be successfully fulfilled. Both the HEIs' management and the Ethiopian government have strong ambitions towards this change. However, the gap between these intentions and their implementation in the classroom needs to be bridged if the CBC reform is to be seen as something more than mere declarations. The implications for the HEIs in Ethiopia are that changes are needed in terms of classroom practices and that support for teachers is necessary for the changes to occur.

7.4.6. Relating to the institutional autonomy and academic freedom of the Ethiopian HEIs, it can be concluded from the study that, despite of the official discourse,

some form of control is still exerted by the government, and that academic freedom at the HEIs under study was implicitly controlled and restricted by the government and its bureaucratic machineries. The public HEIs have very limited institutional autonomy, for example, they have very little say in student admissions and placements. Curriculum development and revisions were also externally driven. The HEIs were strictly controlled by the MoE in terms of administrative and academic matters, and by the Ministry of Finance concerning financial matters.

7.4.7. From a neo-institutional perspective, the adoption of policies and programmes by an organization is constrained by the rules, requirements and values shared by its members on what constitutes appropriate organizational forms and behaviour (Rosa, Tavares & Amaral, 2006:148). Academic values and norms are supposed to be better established in older universities than in more recently established institutions. Therefore, it is expected that the former will be less open to the implementation of quality assessment processes than the latter. This was also visible when comparing the efforts of MU (the new university) and the JU (the old university) in initiating and implementing some QA activities. The former have been more diligent in implementing new structures for quality management, in adopting relatively diverse quality management approaches and in providing examples of good practice.

7.5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations are put forward for improving the quality assurance policy and practice in Ethiopian higher education institutions:

7.5.1.   Generic recommendations

7.5.1.1. If done correctly, a SED can be a valuable document to assist the HEI to gather information on the what and how of quality provision and suggestions for ways in which it may be improved. It is recommended that the universities in Ethiopia should undertake effective self-assessments of their activities at departmental, college and institution-wide levels. According to Thune (1998:11), a self-review helps institutions to determine how far they had achieved their strategic mission and goals. It also allows them to prepare an action plan for further development. Irrespective of the HERQA's requirements, self-assessment should be an integral part of an institution's planning, implementation, analyses, and reporting cycle.

It is recommended that institutions should initiate the quality assurance process, own it and work towards achieving their own stated objectives. Institutions should also consider adopting approaches that will enable them to achieve their own objectives. The self-review should not be considered as an exercise in meeting only the HERQA's requirements, as argued by Brennan (1997:15) "... if a self-review is considered as a stage preliminary to a process of some form of external judgements, it is likely to be carried out primarily in order to attempt to influence these external judgements rather than to inform itself ...". Thus, the self-evaluation process should become an ongoing process in the universities. It is argued that the more self-review is given priority in the monitoring process, the more it will function as preparation of the HEIs for taking responsibility for its own quality improvement, and the less as merely a source of information for the external authority. It is important that academic staff of appropriate experience and/or knowledge be assigned to co-ordinate the process of self-evaluation.

Moreover, the HERQA will have to develop more clearly defined guidelines and/or instructions for the institutional and programme audit and self-evaluation

system, and to bring the relevant existing manuals together in one single document. The HERQA should also design some strategies for enhancing the punctual development and delivery of the SEDs. The HERQA will also have to develop a clear picture of what an adequate quality assurance system entails. It is suggested that it is necessary to improve awareness of the self-evaluation results to increase the internal debate over review reports, and to integrate quality into management practices. It is recommended that there should be broad academic staff involvement to ensure that the self-evaluation process is widely understood and owned by all academic staff to make the implementation of the practices and results easier. It should be noted that quality is best guaranteed when the responsibility for it is located as close as possible to the teaching and learning processes. A necessary pre-requisite would be the training of staff in the conduct of self-evaluation and peer-review. Leadership that fosters staff engagement is important.

7.5.1.2. Currently, the higher education institutions do not have adequate structures and systems in place to assure quality. It is recommended that internal quality assurance structures should be guided by an institutional quality assurance policy that would reflect the institutions' missions and values. Institutions should have documented institution-wide quality assurance guidelines and set out clear definitions of the roles and responsibilities of the staff involved in the quality assurance process to ensure consistent practice. The development and implementation of policies for the key quality assurance functions such as curriculum development and review, faculty evaluation and development, and assessment of student learning appears to be the most important issues. Institutions should review these policies periodically. In addition to the institutional level, the HEIs should consider setting up quality assurance structures at departmental and college levels to address all quality issues. Staffing the QA offices with the necessary human resources is also essential. Incentives should be aligned to the structure. The responsibility of assuring that quality of education is provided should ultimately rest with the institutions in

partnership with the HERQA.

7.5.1.3. Whereas leadership commitment and the participation of staff and students are one of the key principles in developing a quality culture and QA processes, this study established that these conditions were not in place in the targeted public universities. The effective implementation of a quality assurance system requires a professional commitment by all participants in the system, and the empowerment of these participants to promote commitment. It is important that the national and institutional quality assurance initiatives, policies, measures, mechanisms, etc. need to undergo further discussion, communication and promotion to mobilise the commitment of all stakeholders, particularly academic staff in its implementation process. The QA activities should not be considered as the sole responsibility of the QA officer, as is currently the practice in the HEIs of Ethiopia. Designing QA structures alone were found to be inadequate in implementing the quality assurance initiatives. Defining clearly the roles and responsibilities of the QA officers in the HEIs is also an important issue. One important implication, arising from the study, is the need for the training of the QA coordinators in the universities. In the universities, the academic staff assigned to lead and manage the QA system have little or no knowledge and exposure to quality assurance matters. Thus, at the HEI level, different sets of skills such as a system conceptualisation and the development of methodology and skills for the implementation of the QA process are required, Materu (2007:51) puts it " ... to ensure that the work is credible and has its own internal quality guarantees". The QA officers should not have any additional administrative responsibilities, as is currently the case in the sampled universities. The universities also need to have sufficient capacity and the expertise to coordinate the QA activities efficiently.

7.5.1.4. In the study it was identified that the academic staff of the sampled universities were unaware of the quality assurance policies, systems and processes in the universities. There was a sense of confusion and a lack of clear information and

guidelines on the quality assurance procedures in the universities. The implication of this is that there was a serious lack of communication and cooperation regarding the quality assurance at the level of implementation. This also implies that a shared understanding of quality and the quality culture was missing within the HEIs, despite the availability of the QA structures and coordinators at the institutions. The communication, dissemination and induction of staff into QA systems, processes and practices were weak. In practice, this implies that there is a need for the clear dissemination of information relating to the QA requirements. There is also a need to expose all staff members to the various QA mechanisms and procedures at the HEIs, both at a conceptual and implementation levels. It is essential that induction trainings, manuals and handbooks on quality assurance would serve this purpose. Moreover, quality assurance should be built into all the regular activities of the academics; it should not be isolated and bureaucratised. As Ahmed (2008:306) argued, no report writing and/or form completion is going to bring about quality. Quality assurance needs to focus on the improving of the teaching and learning only.

7.5.1.5. Effective staff development and involvement in planning are important elements of successful quality assurance. This study demonstrated that the lack of appropriate experience and staff expertise in the QA area, as well as the lack of staff motivation and commitment, and unsystematic staff professional development seriously hamper the successful implementation of quality assurance in HEIs. Hence, there is a critical need for comprehensive staff development policies in the sampled higher education institutions. It was recommended that the universities need to prepare a comprehensive staff development plan preferably designed to have a major impact at department level, and this should be based on the incorporation of the skills gap approaches of staff appraisal. The allocation of an adequate budget is also a necessary condition for its successful implementation. There is also a need for the development of short and long-term in quality management training

programmes for the personnel who are working in the quality assurances areas. Quality assurance components could be incorporated into leadership development and induction programmes for new academic managers.

7.5.1.6. To maintain quality in higher education, the HE teachers need to be equipped with the necessary pedagogical skills. Taking appropriate measures such as raising the teaching and research excellence through continuous professional education in methods of teaching, action research, the evaluation of teaching and learning which are a few of the many important measures to consider. In order to accomplish this purpose and promote quality and efficiency in the HEIs, it has paramount importance that the ADRC is organised and empowered. Induction and mentoring programmes for newly appointed teachers could be organised by the HEIs to familiarise them with the institutional quality assurance policy and practices. Arranging short-term pedagogical training for these teachers could also be considered. Moreover, to overcome the identified problems associated with assessment practices, the universities need to develop and disseminate a clear and workable assessment policy, establish transparent and robust mechanisms to ensure that students are graded fairly and in relation to course objectives to develop practices that can assure the continuity and implementation of standards.

7.5.1.7. Negotiating and implementing attractive salaries and other incentives for public HEIs is recommended as a minimum condition for improving the quality in teaching and learning in higher education. Such a measure would not only retain the current available staff but would also help to attract qualified and experienced staff from other sources and professions. The universities should recruit academic staff based on their professional competency (competent teachers) and professional values instead of the current recruitment system and practice that uses political loyalty as criteria.

7.5.1.8. As indicated earlier, the public institutions do not have to apply for accreditation, as per Proclamation, and are therefore not assessed by the HERQA to start new programmes. The absence of the accreditation process in the public HEIs affects the quality of the education that they provide. Since accreditation requires the achievement of threshold standards of quality, it would have given public HEIs the opportunity to work hard and meet the minimum standards as set for accreditation. Therefore, it is recommended that the HERQA should develop similar accreditation procedures and quality audits for programme level audits, for both public and private higher education institutions. The HERQA should consider playing a role in communicating with all the HEIs regularly about quality assurance. Moreover, the HERQA should also pay more attention to the follow-up of the institutional quality audits. It may be a waste of time and money to conduct quality audits unless it is followed by actions for improvement and enhancement. So far, however, there was no evidence of any plan for improvement submitted to the HERQA. Therefore, more attention should be paid by the HERQA to a follow-up of the audits; and the institutions should submit a plan of action on the basis of the recommendations by the HERQA. It is important that the HERQA should also be more independent, have more autonomy, and that the HERQA Board not be chaired by the MoE as this may compromise the HERQA's independent position as a professional agency informing the tertiary sector on the quality of its performance.

7.5.2. Specific recommendations

In this section of the Chapter, a specific QA model that may be considered by the HEIs in Ethiopia is recommended. The QA model recommended here was conceived against the backdrop of the system theory that acknowledges the influence of internal and external environmental factors on the organizational (HEIs) practices. It employs the input-process-output approach with a focus on the core activities of teaching-learning.

The main elements of the model are described in the narrative below under the educational input, process and output dimensions.

- **Educational input:** The input dimension of the model includes human, financial and material resources that have a direct or indirect bearing on the teaching and learning quality. The development of structures, policy and procedures to support the purpose of QA, optimise the effectiveness of the processes and outcomes, and integrate and assure the coherence of the policies and procedures are viewed vital inputs for HEIs. Leadership and management that include elements such as vision, mission statements, goals and aims, expected outcomes, responsibility sharing and team orientation roles of the leadership in the institution are all viewed as important input elements.

  The quality of a programme firstly depends on the quality of the staff; the availability of adequate, qualified and motivated academic staff with the required teaching and research skills (applied competences). Staff quality should begin with the recruitment of new staff. During the recruitment process, experience and demonstration of ability and potential in quality learning and teaching methodologies are important considerations.

  Secondly, the quality also depends on the quality of the registered students. One of the inputs is the number and preparedness of the incoming students. The students' preparedness could be viewed in terms of their prior training and ability to pursue university education. The policies, mechanisms, and procedures employed to validate the preparation of students and the effectiveness of the admission criteria and standards are some of the critical issues to be taken into account to this end.

  The commitment of resources to education and quality work is the third input in terms of information, financial, and material resources. Adequate financial resource, the availability of physical facilities and support services are

considered necessary conditions to facilitate quality student learning. Information and its analysis are critical to the improvement of quality. It may include measures such as the educational quality of an institution, including its graduates' competence and satisfaction.

- **Educational process:** Sufficient attention should be paid to the specific educational processes concerning quality assurance. The educational processes refer to all the planned actions and strategies employed by the HEIs to deliver educational programmes, activities and services that facilitate the transformation of the learner. The specific educational processes such as curriculum development and review, effective teaching-learning, student assessments, and staff development are core elements identified under the educational process dimension.

The curriculum should be continually designed and developed in a responsive way, informed by feedback from a wide variety of stakeholders. The design of curricula for programmes should be informed by the systematic collection of feedback and advice from industry, employers, graduate surveys, current students and meetings between staff and students, and also by consultations with the appropriate academic departments within the higher education institutions. Particularly, curriculum development should involve the staff in an active process of consultation and discussion. Peer discussions, meetings and debates should be actively pursued in all the processes. Finally, there should also be mechanisms for ongoing updating of curricula.

Effective teaching incorporates critical reflection on experience-based and research-based knowledge and pedagogy (Kahsay, 2012:58). High quality education is, fundamentally, all about facilitating high quality student learning. HEIs should be committed to the development of student-centred learning to support the students' development of independent skills. Instructional strategies should be based on increasing the students' active engagement in learning.

Facilities should also be developed to enhance the students' learning and teaching and to ensure that the learning and teaching activities encourage active learning from students. Furthermore, HEIs should make sure that the technology applications are worth their cost. Higher education institutions should provide guidance and counselling, promote the improvement of learning and teaching methodologies and encourage the exploration of different approaches to learning. The examination and other results should be reviewed by individual teachers and programme teams to identify areas for improvement. The design of teaching and learning processes should be informed by feedback from the students that is gathered by systematic surveys. Assuring the quality of teaching and the learning processes is keeping the focus on the how and what of students' learning, and on the mechanisms of improving the processes. In this regard, Kahsay (2012:58) proposed the following critical issues to be considered: the assumptions that underlie the teaching modalities, methods, strategies and processes; the availability of policies and opportunities to reflect on practices; and a planned research programme on teaching.

Student assessment system and processes need to be revisited and reconsidered in a systematic way. Assessment should be an integral part of curriculum development, and an integrative approach should be adopted to ensure that the assessment methods address and are in alignment with the learning objectives, and that they appropriately indicate the level of ability in meeting the expected learning outcomes. A particular assessment method should work smoothly and connect effectively with the process of teaching and learning. Assessment processes and results of individual courses should be thoroughly reviewed and discussed at examination review meetings and the comments and feedback should be fed back to academic units for consideration and the appropriate action. Academic units should also evaluate all examination practises on regular basis.

Effective and ongoing professional staff development of faculty members should be instituted for existing staff. Improving the university teachers' skills

in instruction, course planning and student evaluation are the major concerns in this regard. To ensure and improve the quality of teaching, staff members should be required to attend staff development courses. These courses should provide the participants with theories and practice for effective teaching, and also act as a forum for open discussion and the sharing of experience.

- **Educational output:** Information that is systematically collected on the needs of the stakeholders can motivate and assist the higher education institutions to improve the quality of their activities. Therefore, HEIs should develop systematic processes of information gathering in terms of their output or outcomes that will be vital to improve the academic quality in their institutions in the future. Elements such as student satisfaction with courses, employer satisfaction with degree programmes, student examination results, research outputs and services may be categorised under the heading output. Besides, quality information systems also include student admissions and placements, the attrition rates, student learning experiences and achievements, graduate employment and earnings, the graduates' competence, and satisfaction with the respective programmes. HEIs should also analyse the learning outcomes, and use the results to revise all educational processes. There should be a clear statement of what is expected from the graduates after finishing the programmes. The expected outcomes (knowledge, skills, values and attitudes) to be used are the standards as set for the individual programmes.

7.6.   SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In the Ethiopian HEIs, the issue of quality assurance had previously received little attention. Consequently, the findings of this study were intended to provide valuable, usable baseline information for the HE administrators and researchers on quality assurance policy and its implementation in Ethiopia's HE environment. On the basis of the results of this study, some suggestions for further research projects are presented below.

Firstly, the impact of quality assurance policy on the private HEIs requires exploration. Whether and to what extent the introduction of quality audits and the accreditation process has improved the academic quality in the private HEIs is a worthwhile research topic. Included in such a study could also be the identification of challenges encountered by private HEIs in delivering the quality assured programmes. Such a study could contribute to a much needed policy development to assist the HEIs to improve the quality of their teaching and learning.

Secondly, a further research project which relates to the need to meaningfully institutionalise quality assurance in higher education institution, and, especially, at the level of academic departments is recommended. The question of exactly how to assure quality at departmental levels, the systems and programmes in a way that is in keeping with the academic domain, remains to be solved. Research should be undertaken on how best to achieve meaningful and honest self-evaluations within the HERQA's accountability frameworks. The researcher also recommends that a comprehensive study be undertaken on the functional relationship between the HERQA, the MoE and the HEIs with regard to assuring and ensuring quality.

Thirdly, a more in-depth study is also needed on the specific areas of quality assurance such as assessment, research and outreach activities, and support services. The purpose is to examine the extent to which these aspects can lead to improved quality by involving wider categories of HE stakeholders to provide a more comprehensive view of the topic, or issues being investigated. In addition to academic staff, the HERQA and students, involving other stakeholders such as alumni and employers is also required to get a broader perception of the issue of quality and quality assurance in the Ethiopian HEIs.

Finally, a research project should be undertaken on the impact of globalisation and the internationalization of higher education in Ethiopia. Most of the current reforms such as the CBC, BPR and BSCs were introduced to the Ethiopia higher education system through the wave of globalisation and internationalization. The question of how HEIs in Ethiopia can turn this development to their advantage needs to be explored.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS

Dear Respondent,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research study. My name is Abeya Geleta Geda and I am, currently, a registered DEd student at Unisa studying under the supervision of Prof S Schoeman. The purpose of this research is to explore the current policy and practice of the national and institutional quality assurance system in public higher education institutions in Ethiopia to determine how the quality of teaching and learning might have been enhanced through the quality assurance system.

Your participation in this research project involves completing a series of structured questionnaires which approximately 20 to 30 minutes. Your participation is strictly voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw at anytime during the research project. In addition, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.

The information you provide in the questionnaire will be treated with the utmost confidentiality, and your anonymity is fully guaranteed.

To the best of my knowledge, there are no actual or potential risks – be they physical, psychological, legal, social or otherwise – that might result from your participation in this research project; and there will be no compensation for participating.

You may find this study useful for sharing your institution's quality assurance practices and for learning about those of other institutions. You will also have the opportunity to contribute your perspective and ideas to the discourse on quality assurance in Ethiopian HEIs. The results of the study will be available to both policy-makers and institutional leaders for use in future planning and decision-making. Results of the research will be published in a DEd thesis and may be presented in public forums.

I hope that you will be able to take time and comprehensively complete this questionnaire. You can use a "√" tick mark to indicate your responses for items with alternative responses. Please briefly state your responses for the open-ended items.

Thank you for your time and willingness to participate in this research project.

Yours sincerely,

Abeya Geleta Geda, DEd. Candidate
Department of Educational Planning & Management
Jimma university

I. GENERAL

1. University_____
2. Faculty/College/Institute_____
3. Department _____
4: Gender: Male ☐   Female ☐
5. Educational qualification
    ☐ Diploma   ☐ MA/M.Sc.
    ☐ BA/B.Sc. MD   ☐ PhD
    ☐ Others (specify) _____
6. Academic rank
    ☐ Graduate Assistant   ☐ Assistant Professor
    ☐ Assistant Lecturer   ☐ Associate Professor
    ☐ Lecturer   ☐ Professor
    ☐ MD specialty   ☐ Others (please specify) _____

7. Area of specialization _____
8. Year/s of service at the University _____

II. QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICES and PRACTICES

    A. Policies and institutional arrangements

1. Does your faculty/university have quality assurance policies? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know
2. When did your institution start introducing a quality assurance system? _____

3. To what extent do you find the following concepts of quality important/relevant to your own view of quality and of your institution? Please tick (√) your choice in the box provided.	Not important	Of little importance	Moderately important	Important	Very important	Don't know
Quality as fitness for purpose						
Quality as value for money						
Quality as excellence						
Quality as perfection						
Quality as transformation of the learner						

4. Is there a responsible body for the implementation of quality assurance policy in your department?
    ☐ Yes. Please (state the responsible body/unit) _____
    ☐ No, why? _____
5. Did you participate in any quality assurance related activities in your faculty/university since the last 5 years?
    ☐ Yes
    ☐ No

6. In your opinion, how important/relevant are the following purposes of quality assurance for your institution? Please tick (√) your choice in the box provided.	Not important	Of little importance	Moderately important	Important	Very important
Improvement					
Accountability					
Control					
Compliance					

7. Does your institution have in place one or more of the following quality assurance systems? Please tick (√) your choice in the box provided.	Yes	No	Don't know
Quality assurance policies, manuals/guidelines and procedures			
A central quality assurance policy-making body for teaching and learning			
Key quality performance indicators or standards for teaching and learning outcomes across all programmes			
Incentive structure for good teaching			
Strategic planning with a clear mission, goals and objectives for teaching, learning and research			
QA Unit/Committee at institutional, college and department levels			
Institutional structure and responsibility for quality improvement			
Guidelines, procedures and support to academic staff to ensure quality of their teaching			
A system to ensure good governance, transparency and accountability to stakeholders			
Regular review of study programmes and curriculum			
Regular staff meetings to discuss the quality of education and student learning			
Using results of the programme/course review for improvement of student learning			
Information system (database) used for the effective management of its activities			
Shared quality culture and values across departments			

B. Quality assurance mechanisms and procedures

8. Does your faculty/university employ one or more of the following methods or tools of quality assurance? Please tick (√) your choice in the box provided.	Yes	No	Don't know
Departmental self-evaluation			
External evaluation of department			
Student evaluation of teaching			
Peer-assessment of teaching			
Needs assessment for programme/curriculum design			
Regular programme/curriculum evaluation/review			
Assessment of learning outcomes			
Consultative meetings with key stakeholders			
Institutional self-assessment			
External evaluation of the institution			
Alumni surveys (tracer study)			
Exit examination with prospective graduates			
Student evaluation			
SWOT analysis			
Student-satisfaction survey			
Rigorous course approval process			
Examination panel			
Regular internal course review			
Comprehensive programme review			
External examiners report			
Others (please specify)_____			

9. Do you think that the requirements of the quality assurance system set by the HERQA are acceptable and implementable in the context of your university/faculty?

☐ Yes ☐ No

What do you think are the major deficiencies and gaps of the HERQA quality assurance system?

_____

C. Effectiveness of the quality assurance system

10. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the statements about the activities of your institution in terms of the quality assurance area. Please tick (√) your choice in the box provided.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
My institution places a high premium on the quality of teaching and learning programmes.					
At my institution management at all levels share the same vision for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning.					
Staff professional development has been implemented successfully.					
The decision- making style for assuring quality at the faculty/departmental level can be described as participative.					
In my institution, many quality assurance initiatives are implemented in a haphazard manner with unrealistic time frames.					
The quality assurance system is clear, rigorous and understood by staff.					

	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very satisfied	No opinion
There is a system in place to ensure that physical resources for ensuring quality of the teaching and learning process are maintained and updated.						
My institution has sufficient financial resources to ensure that quality teaching and learning take place.						
At my institution measures are designed to detect learning problems.						
At my institution the generally accepted notion of quality is "fitness for purpose".						
Motivation of academic staff towards improving the quality of academic programmes is generally high.						
Working conditions of staff at the university generally promote a climate to improve the quality of teaching and learning.						
The HERQA quality assurance initiative has improved the quality of academic programmes at the university.						
The existing quality assurance system (policy, models, guidelines, methods and instruments) in my faculty/university are communicated among staff members, students and other key stakeholders.						
The existing quality assurance systems are related to the quality of student learning.						
The existing quality assurance systems are helpful in the enhancement of the quality of teaching and assessment practices.						
The existing quality assurance systems are related to the attainment of the overall mission and goals of your faculty/department.						

11. How satisfied are you with the following issues in your institution? Please tick (√) your choice in the box provided.	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very satisfied	No opinion
Leadership commitment for quality improvement.						
Academic staff commitment for quality education.						
Staff involvement in quality assurance practices.						
Shared responsibilities and structures for quality assurance implementation.						
Coordination and collaboration among the different actors in quality assurance implementation.						
Student recruitment and admission practices.						
Staff recruitment and development practices.						
Teaching, learning and assessment practices.						
Overall impact of quality assurance implementation on the improvement of the quality of education.						

12. To what extent do you think the following actors play an important role in assuring the quality of education in your institution? Please tick (√) your choice in the box provided.	To a very less extent	To a less extent	To a medium extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent
Academic staff					
Leadership, institutional level					
Leadership, faculty or departmental level					
Students					
External stakeholders (e.g. employers, experts)					
Alumni					
HERQA					

D. Learning resources and student support

13. How do you evaluate the following educational resources and facilities in your institution? Please tick (√) your choice in the box provided.	Accessibility		Utilization		Quality	
	Yes	No	High	Low	Good	Poor
Library resources						
Computing facilities , ICT, internet connection						
Laboratories						
Physical plant facility						
Student organizations and recreational facilities						
Learning facilities (language labs, any other material used for classes, etc.)						
Counselling services						
Remedial courses						
Course materials						
Financial support						

E. Effects/impacts of quality assurance system

14. To what extent do you think the following factors/organs influenced the initiation and implementation of the quality assurance system at your institution? Please tick (√) your choice in the box provided.	To a very less extent	To a less extent	To a medium extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent
Governmental pressure					
Reputation					
Commitment of the university leaders					
External experts, e.g. HERQA					
The expectations of the MoE					

15. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements relating to the influence of the current quality assurance system of your institution. Please tick (√) your choice in the box provided. The current quality assurance system at my institution:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Improve quality of the education/teaching					
Boost scholarly reputation of the institution					
Enhance the scholarly discussion on learning and teaching					
Enhance staff engagement in learning and teaching					
Enhance student involvement in learning and teaching					
Initiate the development of new courses/programmes					
Improve/change the governance structures of the institution					
Help introduction of new methods and procedures					
Increase/facilitate the internal resource allocation					
Help in meeting customer expectations					
Help to be competitive					
Contribute the university survival					
Improve work environment					
Improve the institution and its processes					
Minimise costs					
Help in competing for funds					
Improve decision-making processes					

16. Overall, how do you evaluate the impact of quality assurance practices on the improvement of everyday teaching and learning in your faculty/department? Please tick (√) your choice in the box provided.	High negative impact	Moderate negative impact	No impact	Moderate positive impact	High positive impact	Don't know

17. How do you evaluate your students in relation to the following issues? Please tick (√) your choice in the box provided.	Very poor	poor	Average	Good	Very good
Engagement and commitment					
Academic competence					
Problem-solving skills					
Critical thinking and reasoning skills					
Oral and written Communication skills					
Teamwork and collaboration skills					
Time orientation					
Interest towards the courses you teach					

Academic preparedness					
Motivation to learn					
Self-confidence					
Attitude towards their field of study					
Value orientation towards quality learning					
Relevance of study programmes					
Other (please specify) _____					

F. Operative and strategic questions of implementing quality assurance system

18. From your point of view, what hinders/facilitates the implementation of quality assurance in your institution? Please tick (√) your choice in the box provided.	Hindered	Neutral		Enabled	
	1	2	3	4	5
Commitment and support of institutional leaders for quality.					
Government intervention in internal affairs of institutions.					
Willingness, commitment and support of academics for quality.					
The HERQA requirements and expectations					
Resources (physical, financial, etc.) in the institutions.					
Higher education law					
External dependency of the institution					
Business score card (BSC)					
Institutional and student enrolment expansion policy					
Graduate mix policy					
Modularisation of programmes/courses					
Commitment to and engagement of students in their learning					
Institutional policy environment					
Preparation of incoming students					

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS

Dear Respondent

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research study. My name is Abeya Geleta Geda and I am currently a registered DEd student at Unisa studying under the supervision of Prof S Schoeman. The purpose of this research is to explore the current policy and practice of the national and institutional quality assurance system in public higher education institutions in Ethiopia to determine how the quality of teaching and learning might have been enhanced through the quality assurance system.

Your participation in this research project involves completing a series of structured questionnaires which approximately will last 20 to 30 minutes. Your participation is strictly voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw at anytime during the research project. In addition, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.

The information you provide in the questionnaire will be treated with the utmost confidentiality, and your anonymity is fully guaranteed.

To the best of my knowledge, there are no actual or potential risks – be they physical, psychological, legal, social or otherwise – that might result from your participation in this research project; and there will be no compensation for participating.

You may find this study useful for sharing your institution's quality assurance practices and for learning about those of other institutions. You will also have the opportunity to contribute your perspective and ideas to the discourse on quality assurance in Ethiopian HEIs. The results of the study will be available to both policy-makers and institutional leaders for use in planning and decision-making. Results of the research will be published as a DEd thesis and may be presented in public forums.

I hope that you will be able to take time and comprehensively complete this questionnaire. You can use a "√" tick mark to indicate your responses for items with alternative responses. Please briefly state your responses for the open-ended items.

Thank you for your time and willingness to participate in this research project.

Yours sincerely

Abeya Geleta Geda, DEd. Candidate
Department of Educational Planning and Management
Jimma University

I. GENERAL

University_____

Faculty/College_____

Department_____

Gender ☐ Male   Female ☐

Age_____

Academic year of study: Third ☐   Fourth ☐   Fifth ☐

Your current field of study_____

Your stream in preparatory schools: Science ☐ Social sciences ☐

Your parents' residential area

☐ Rural

☐ Urban

Your total score in the college entrance examination_____

Your current cumulative G.P.A in the department_____

II. QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY AND PRACTICES

1. Your placement in the department was

☐ Based on your own first or second choice

☐ By assignment

☐ Others, please specify_____

2. Have you been involved in any of the following activities during your stay at the university? Please tick (√) your choice in the box provided.	Yes	No
Completing student satisfaction survey questionnaires		
Completing questionnaires on course evaluation		
Completing questionnaires on effectiveness of teaching and learning		
Departmental meetings on quality of educational provision		
Faculty meetings on issues related to quality of education		
University wide meetings to discuss academic matters		

3. Which of the following methods are employed in your department/ faculty to help you become aware of your support to improve the quality of the education? Please tick (√) your choice in the box provided.	Yes	No
Orientation programmes		
Regular meetings of students		
Published rules and policies of the department		
Brochures		
Leaflets		
Others (please specify)_____		

4. How do you evaluate yourself in terms of the following aspects? Please tick (√) your choice in the box provided.	Very poor	poor	Average	Good	Very good
Attitude towards your field of study					
Interest towards your courses					
Academic preparedness					
Motivation for learning					
Engagement in your courses					
Time management skills					
Academic competence					

5. How often does your department conduct meetings with students to discuss the quality of the teaching and learning?

☐ Once every two years

☐ Once every year

☐ Once every semester

☐ There is no such tradition

Other (please specify)_____

6. Does your department/faculty employ one or more of the following as methods/tools to improve the quality of teaching and learning? Please tick (√) your choice in the box provided.	Yes	No	Don't know
Regular programme/curriculum evaluation/review			
Assessment of learning outcomes			
Institutional self-assessment			
Curriculum review			
Consultative meetings with students			
External evaluation			
Tracer study			
Interviews of prospective graduates			
Evaluation of teaching by students			
Others (please specify)_____			

7. How satisfied are you with the following issues in your department? Please tick (√) your choice in the box provided.	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very satisfied	No opinion
Institutional commitment						
Overall institutional commitment for quality learning						
Leadership commitment to improve student learning						
Grievance management procedures						
Academic staff commitment to high quality in teaching						
Student involvement in quality assurance practices						
University's reputation						
Quality of teaching/learning process						
Overall teaching and assessment practices						
Quality of academic programme						
Implementation of a university academic calendar						
Relevance of the course offered						
Academic staff quality						
Quality of academic staff						
Professional competence of teaching staff						
Level of intellectual stimulation in courses						
Variety of learning activities provided						
Standard of lectures and presentations						

Quality of assessment practices						
Variety of assessment methods						
Clarity of assessment and marking criteria						
Promptness of feedback						
Effectiveness of feedback mechanisms						

8. How do you rate your department in terms of the following? Please tick (√) your choice in the box provided.	Very Poor	Poor	Average	Good	Very good	Not applicable
Setting clear goals for maintaining quality of education						
Communicating quality improvement policies to students						
Promoting shared values about quality education among students and staff						
Demonstrating its commitment to provide a high quality of teaching						
Establishing mechanisms that facilitate the quality of students' learning						

9. How do you evaluate the following educational resources and facilities in your institution? (Please evaluate in terms of accessibility, utilisation and quality of materials). Please tick (√) your choice in the box provided.	Accessibility		Utilization		Quality	
	Yes	No	High	Low	Good	Poor
Library resources						
Computing facilities, ICT, Internet connection						
Laboratories						
Physical plant facility						
Student organizations and recreational facilities						
Learning facilities (language labs, any other material used for classes, etc.)						
Counselling						
Remedial courses						
Course materials						
Financial assistance						

10. How satisfied are you with the competencies gained during your study? Please tick (√) your choice in the box provided.	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very satisfied
Practical skills					
Critical thinking and reasoning skills					
Problem-solving skills					
Subject matter knowledge					
Oral and written communication skills					
Teamwork and collaboration skills					
Research skills and practices					
Your overall preparation for a professional career					

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR HERQA STAFF MEMBERS

1. What is your main area of responsibility within this organization?

2. Why did the government/MoE introduce the QA policy? What national factors influenced the introduction of the policy in the Ethiopia? (e.g. growth of the post-secondary education sector, public sector reforms, accountability, manageralism, increased private sector involvement, etc.) What external (global/international) factors may have influenced the introduction of the policy in Ethiopia (e.g. recommendations of international consultants and banks, participation in international conventions, developments in other countries, etc.)? Could you please comment on the impact the introduction of QA has had on the higher education sector in general, and its quality in particular?

3. What in your opinion is the role of QA in the development of higher education in this country? How is the role fulfilled at the moment? What is the purpose of QA in universities?

4. To what extent, in your opinion, has the HERQA initiated a QA process that led to the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning? What evidences would one look for? Is there any evidence of improvement in other institutional practices?

5. What in your view are the main strengths of the HERQA quality assurance systems? What do you think are the key values that underpin the HERQA's work? What is your general assessment of the implementation of the policy?

6. What do you believe to be the mechanisms that will really effect change in everyday teaching and learning practice in HE institutions? To what extent does the HERQA have control over these conditions and mechanisms? What changes are needed in the system in order for the HERQA's QA system to operate effectively?

7. Are you confident that the HERQA has sufficient resources and capacity at its disposal to run institutional audits and to accredit programmes across the system as required by law?

8. What do you think are the key conditions for the successful implementation of the HERQA's QA system?

9. What in your view are the main obstacles/barriers in implementing the policies for improving the quality in higher education? How could the government/the HERQA overcome them?

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR ACADEMICS

1. How in your opinion is quality and quality assurance in higher education understood at your university? What aspects of quality do you focus on? What principles underpin this focus on quality? How does your faculty/department demonstrate that it provides high quality education?

2. Have you been consulted by your university during the development of the quality assurance policies and systems? Do students have an opportunity to contribute? To what extent is the current QA system (practice) in your university related to the quality of student learning? Do you think that the institution's quality assurance policy, instruments, methods and processes adequately take into account the interests and concerns of the academics?

3. What criteria would you set for yourself to measure improvement in your own teaching programmes? How do you think quality assurance should be carried out in order to effect improvements in teaching and learning?

4. What is your level of satisfaction with the current performance of your university in enhancing the quality of its education? What are the major challenges the college/department face in assuring quality? Do you have academic freedom to manage your own affairs? How does the extent of academic freedom constrain or limit your efforts for QA? What bureaucratic control do you experience in terms of the policy environment, governance and leadership, and resources of QA? What control mechanisms affect your quality assurance processes – positively and negatively?

5. How do you evaluate the quality of education in general, and the effectiveness of the quality assurance practice in particular, in your faculty/department? Has the QA process led to improvement in the quality of teaching and learning? To what extent do you believe that the current reforms prevalent in higher education (such as the BSC, modularisation, etc.) are valid and implementable in terms of improving the quality of educational processes?

6. How would you describe the motivation of staff for improving the quality of programmes? (High/Low/Moderate) Are the working conditions of academic staff (e.g. remuneration, workload, facilities and status) appropriate?

7. What in your opinion are the greatest obstacles/challenges to improving the quality of teaching and learning at your college/faculty? What would you suggest to strengthen the current quality assurance policies and/or practices at your university?

8. What do you believe to be the mechanisms that will really effect change in the everyday teaching and learning practices in HE institutions?

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR ACADEMIC OFFICERS

1. How, in your opinion, is quality and quality assurance in higher education understood at your university? What aspects of quality do you focus on? What principles underpin this focus on quality? How does your faculty/department demonstrate that it provides high quality education?

2. What institutional policies, models, methods and procedures do you have in place to assure the quality of the academic offerings in your faculty/department? How have these polices emerged within the institution? Do students and staff have an opportunity to contribute? Have you ever been consulted by your university, or other organizations (e.g. HERQA) during the development of the quality assurance policies and systems? To what extent are these models and procedures related to the quality of student learning? What systems and processes are in place to implement these polices?

3. Has your university/faculty/department been engaged in quality assurance exercises (institutional self-evaluation, quality audit) in recent years? How often? Who initiates it and who is responsible for undertaking the review? How do you evaluate quality of education in general, and the effectiveness of the quality assurance practice in particular, in your faculty/department? Has the QA process led to an improvement in the quality of teaching and learning? If so, to what extent? How is this improvement evident? Is there evidence of improvement other than in the institutional practices? If so, in what areas? To what extent do you believe that the current reforms prevalent in higher education (such as BSC, modularisation, etc.) are valid and implementable in terms of improving the quality of the educational processes?

4. Do you have enough staff who are adequately qualified to run your academic programmes? Can you provide an academic staff profile? In your opinion, do your staff have the adequate training to serve this institution as a college? Are you doing anything to change the profile of the academic staff? If so, what are they? How would you describe the motivation of the staff for improving the quality of the programmes? (High/Low/ Moderate) Are the working conditions of academic staff (e.g. remuneration, workload, facilities and status) appropriate?

5. What are the main challenges your institution faces in working within a national QA framework? How do you intend to mediate the HERQA's demands in the internal quality management system you are setting up for your institution?

6. What do you think are the necessary conditions and resources required for the effective implementation of a quality assurance system that really effect change in the quality of teaching and student learning in your university/faculty/department? What in your opinion are the greatest obstacles/challenges to improving the quality of teaching and learning at your college/faculty?

APPENDIX F: REQUEST FOR LETTER OF PERMISSION

To Mizan-Tapi University
To Mettu University
To Jimma University

Subject: - Request for Institutional Permission

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Abeya Geleta Geda and I am currently employed at Jimma University as a teacher. Currently, I am a registered DEd student at Unisa studying under the supervision of Prof S Schoeman. I hereby wish to request permission to conduct research in your institutions towards my doctorial studies. The proposed study is entitled *Quality assurance policy and practice in higher education institutions in Ethiopia.* The purpose of the research is to explore the current status and practice of the national and institutional quality assurance system in public higher education institutions in Ethiopia in order to determine how the quality of teaching and learning might have been enhanced through the quality assurance system.

The data-collection instruments used in the study are survey questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document analyses. The data are gathered from (a) academic managers (academic vice-presidents, quality assurance directors, deans and department heads in the university); (b) academic staff and students (c) policy and reform documents, strategic plans, guidelines, statistical abstracts, quality monitoring manuals and guidelines and evaluation tools and instruments. Individual interviews of not more than 40 minutes will be conducted with academic managers outside of their normal working hours. The completion of the questionnaires will take approximately 20 to 30 minutes.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and there are no known risks associated with this research project. Information gathered will be treated anonymously and confidentially, and be used for academic purpose only. Although participation is completely voluntary, it is a goal of the study to include all the colleges because of their uniqueness and the need to generate a comprehensive understanding of the issues. I therefore look forward to the participation of all the colleges in your university. The focus of the research is to explore quality assurance policy and practices system-wide, but also from individual institutions; therefore, information on institutions will be reported either in aggregate or from individual institution perspectives. However, any sensitive or restricted information about institutions revealed during the course of the study will be treated as confidential and will not be reported.

Letters of approval should be written on the institutional letterhead, including the statement of willingness to participate, name and signature of the person granting the approval, and the applicable date. Please feel free to contact me by telephone number +251-911318585 or by email at 47551097@mylife.unisa.ac.za if you would like additional information about the study, or if you have any concerns. My promoter Prof S Schoeman may also be contacted regarding any complaints or concerns related to this study at telephone number (+27 12) 429-4503 in South Africa or by email at schoes@unisa.ac.za.

Thank you for your consideration. I am looking forward to your favourable response.

Yours sincerely

Abeya Geleta Geda, DEd. Candidate
Department of Educational Planning and Management
Jimma University

INTERVIEWS INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Research project: Quality Assurance Policy and Practice in Higher Education Institutions in Ethiopia

Dear Participant

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research project. Before agreeing to participate, you should know enough about it to make an informed decision. If you have any questions, please ask and make sure that you are satisfied with the answers before participating.

The purpose of this research is to explore the current status and practice of the national and institutional quality assurance system in public higher education institutions in Ethiopia to determine how the quality of teaching and learning might have been enhanced through the quality assurance system.

Your participation in this study will consist of an interview lasting approximately one hour. You will be asked a series of questions regarding the existing quality assurance policies and practices. You have the freedom to withdraw at any point in time before or during the study. You also have the right to ask any questions and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in the study and may also refuse to answer any of the questions asked during the interview. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. With your expressed permission, all the interviews will be tape-recorded.

The information you provide during interviews will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and your anonymity is fully guaranteed. This means that your name, including any identifiable features, will not be used in any reports or scholarly publications based on this research, nor will data obtained for this study be made available to outsiders without your further written consent. Although *verbatim* quotes may be used in the final report, any information obtained during the study that could identify specific participants will be kept strictly confidential. Participants' comments will be reported anonymously. Results from this research will be used for academic purposes only. To the best of my knowledge, there are no actual or potential risks – be they physical, psychological, legal, social or otherwise – that might result from your participation in this research project. There will be no compensation for participating.

You may find this study useful for sharing your institution's quality assurance practices and for learning about those of other institutions. You will also have the opportunity to contribute your perspective and ideas to the discourse on quality assurance in Ethiopian HEIs. The results of the study will be available to both policy-makers and institutional leaders for use in planning and decision-making. Results of the research will be published in a thesis format and may be presented at public forums. Please feel free to contact me by telephone number +251-911318585 or by email at 47551097@mylife.unisa.ac.za if you would like additional information about the study, or if you have any concerns. My promoter Prof S Schoeman may also be contacted regarding any complaints or concerns related to this study at telephone number (+27 12) 429-4503 in South Africa or by email at schoes@unisa.ac.za.

Yours sincerely

Abeya Geleta Geda, DEd. Candidate

Informed Consent

Name of participant: _____
I am voluntarily making a decision to participate in this study. My signature certifies that I have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. I understand that the interview will be audio-taped for the purpose of transcription. I have received a copy of this consent form.

_____   _____
Signature of participant   Date

QUESTIONNAIRE INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Research project: Quality Assurance Policy and Practice in Higher Education Institutions in Ethiopia

Dear Respondent

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research project. Before agreeing to participate, you should know enough about it to make an informed decision. If you have any questions, please ask and make sure that you are satisfied with the answers before participating.

The purpose of this research is to explore the current status and practice of the national and institutional quality assurance system in public higher education institutions in Ethiopia to determine how the quality of teaching and learning might have been enhanced through the quality assurance system.

Your participation in this research project involves completing a series of structured questionnaires which will approximately lasts 20 to 30 minutes. Your participation is strictly voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw at anytime during the research project. In addition, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research project. There will be no compensation for participating.

You may find this study useful for sharing your institution's quality assurance practices and for learning about those of other institutions. You will also have the opportunity to contribute your perspective and ideas to the discourse on quality assurance in Ethiopian HEIs. The results of the study will be available to both policy-makers and institutional leaders for use in planning and decision-making. Results of the research will be published in a thesis format and may be presented at public forums.

All identifying information obtained from this study will be kept strictly confidential, except as may be required by law. I will do everything I can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publications that will result from this study. The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. Individual data will be stored securely, and will be made available only to the researcher conducting the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

Please feel free to contact me by telephone number +251-911318585 or by email at 47551097@mylife.unisa.ac.za if you would like additional information about the study, or if you have any concerns. My promoter Prof S Schoeman may also be contacted regarding any complaints or concerns related to this study at telephone number (+27 12) 429-4503 in South Africa or by email at schoes@unisa.ac.za.

Yours sincerely

Abeya Geleta Geda, DEd. Candidate
Department of Educational Planning and Management
Jimma University

Informed Consent

Name of respondent: _____

I am voluntarily making a decision to participate in this study. My signature certifies that I have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. I have received a copy of this consent form.

_____   _____
Signature of Respondent   Date

JIMMA UNIVERSITY

To
Mizan- Tapi University
Mizan
To Mettu University
Mettu

Subject: - Request for letter of Permission to Conduct Research

Abeya Geleta, an academic staff in our university, is a PHD candidate at the University of South Africa (UNISA). He is by now working on a research project entitled *"Quality Assurance Policy and practice in Higher Education in Ethiopia".* The purpose of this research is to explore the current status and practice of the national and institutional quality assurance system in public higher education institutions in Ethiopia in order to determine how the quality of teaching and learning might have been enhanced through the quality assurance system. Hence, he is looking for your collaboration. This is therefore to request your good office help him in writing letter of permission that allows him collect data for the research.
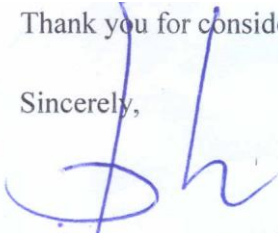
The data- collection instruments used in the study is survey questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The data are gathered from (a) Academic managers (academic vice-presidents, quality assurance directors, deans and department heads in the university) (b) Academic staff and students (c) Policy and reform documents, strategic plans, guidelines, student academic records, statistical abstracts, quality monitoring manuals and guidelines, evaluation tools and instruments. Individual interviews of not more than 40 minutes will be conducted with academic managers outside of their normal working hours. Completion of the questionnaires will take approximately 20 to 30 minutes.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and there are no known risks associated with this research project. Information gathered will be treated anonymously and confidentially and will be used for academic purpose only. Although participation is completely voluntary, it is a goal of the study to include all the colleges because of their uniqueness and the need to generate a comprehensive understanding of the issues.

Letters of approval should be written on institution letterhead, statement of willingness to participate, name and signature of the person granting the approval and the date.

Thank you for consideration.

Sincerely,

Berhanu Belay (Ph.D)
Senior Director For Research,
CBE & Post Graduate Studies

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APPENDIX G: RESEARCH ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

UNISA | college of education

Research Ethics Clearance Certificate

This is to certify that the application for ethical clearance submitted by

AG Geda [47551097]

for a D Ed study entitled

Quality assurance policy and practice in Higher Education Institutions in Ethiopia

has met the ethical requirements as specified by the University of South Africa College of Education Research Ethics Committee. This certificate is valid for two years from the date of issue.

Prof CS le Roux   23 July 2013
CEDU REC (Chairperson)
lrouxcs@unisa.ac.za
Reference number: 2013 JULY/47551097/CSLR