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THEME 1. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND THE SUSTAINABILITY AGENDA

Ideality versus reality: The practices and reflection of inclusion and equity in higher education and quality assurance in Taiwan and Japan

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ABSTRACT

Influenced by the global sustainability agenda, governments worldwide are striving to achieve SDG 4 on quality education, with inclusion and equity as core pillars. The focus and practices of inclusion and equity vary across regions and countries. This study examines how the governments and quality assurance (QA) agencies of Taiwan and Japan promote inclusion and equity in higher education, offering insights from an Asian context. The findings indicate that both countries' regulations encompass the principles of inclusion and equity, but their priorities differ due to distinct social contexts. Both nations integrate inclusion and equity efforts at higher governmental levels and promote diverse higher education through policies and financial support. However, challenges remain, such as gender balance in governance and geographic disparities in implementing inclusive and equitable education. These insights highlight the need for QA agencies to consider local contexts and institutional differences to effectively advance inclusion and equity through QA.

Keywords: SDGs, quality assurance, inclusion, equity, university social responsibility

Research background

The United Nations launched the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, aiming to unite the international community in creating a sustainable future (United Nations, 2024). Central to this initiative are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with Goal 4, "Quality Education," focused on ensuring inclusive, equitable, and quality education, along with lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030. It highlights that inclusion and equity are essential for quality education (UNESCO, 2017) and vital for the success of the entire 2030 agenda (UNESCO, 2018). In this context, the UNESCO (2017) published *"A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education"*, providing guidance for countries seeking to implement the principles of inclusion and equity within their education system. This guide presents a unified framework for evaluating and advancing inclusion and equity in education, urging countries to tackle all forms of exclusion, marginalization, disparity, and inequality in student access, participation, and completion through the development of comprehensive policies and targeted measures. It emphasizes that these principles should serve as foundational elements in policy-making, directing the strategic allocation of resources to support disadvantaged groups and promoting professional development for key stakeholders to ensure effective implementation.

UNESCO observes that a widespread lack of belief in and implementation of inclusive principles has hindered the advancement of inclusive education. Globally, the concept of inclusion has not been fully integrated into national legal frameworks (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2020). In this regard, Salmi (2020) highlights in UNESCO's Higher Education and Inclusion report that identifying equity target groups is crucial for achieving inclusive and equitable education. These groups refer to those who are underrepresented in society, particularly students from low-income families, women, minority groups (based on factors such as ethnicity, language, religion, culture, age, or residence), and students with disabilities (Salmi, 2020). However, the emphasis placed on different target groups may vary by region and country. For instance, East Asia places a higher emphasis on low-income and minority groups than the global average, with rates of 32% and 30%, respectively. In contrast, gender, especially women's issues, receives the least attention, with only 14% (Salmi, 2018). In this context, the study focuses on Taiwan and Japan, aiming to gain insights into the promotion of inclusive and equitable education in higher education.

Research aims and questions

This study aims to examine how Taiwan and Japan promote inclusion and equity in higher education through policies and QA systems, in light of international trends. It explores whether national regulations and policies integrate these principles, support university diversity, address students' diverse needs, and ensure equitable learning opportunities. Additionally, the study investigates the roles of QA agencies, including QA standards, stakeholder involvement, while exploring the challenges faced by both QA agencies and universities in advancing inclusion and equity. The research focuses on the differences between Taiwan and Japan in implementing these principals and the associated challenges.

Based on these aims, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the differences in inclusion and equity policies between Taiwan and Japan?
2. How do QA agencies in Taiwan and Japan implement inclusion and equity in QA mechanisms?
3. What challenges do Taiwan and Japan face in promoting inclusion and equity in higher education?

Research method

This qualitative study combines document analysis and focus group interviews to explore inclusion and equity development in Taiwan and Japan. It analyzes government regulations, policy reports, QA handbooks, and official materials to understand the contextual application of inclusive and equitable practices. The study also conducts focus group discussions to explore how key agencies in both countries, HEEACT and TWAEA in Taiwan, as well as NIAD-QE, JUAA, and JIHEE in Japan, promote inclusion and equity within QA systems. The findings contribute to the ongoing development of inclusive and equitable practices in higher education, as well as benefiting government bodies, QA agencies, universities, and students.

Research findings

The research findings of this study are: (1) Taiwan and Japan prioritize different inclusion and equity issues due to their distinct social contexts, but both have established regulations to support these goal; (2) Following the introduction of the SDGs, both countries integrated inclusion and equity efforts at higher governmental levels to enhance effectiveness; (3) both nations promote diverse higher education through policies and financial, focusing on disadvantaged students and those with disabilities. In Taiwan, indigenous populations are also a key focus. In Japan, national policies focus on diversification, including the recruitment of international students, in response to low birth rates; (4) in QA, both countries advance inclusion and equity through QA standards, such as student admissions and support systems. Taiwan emphasizes interdisciplinary and undergraduate/graduate education. Both face challenges achieving gender balance in review panels where male professors and administrators are predominant; (5) Geographic disparities between urban and rural universities and differences in financial resources hinder equitable access to inclusive education.

Conclusion

This study draws conclusions from an analysis of the inclusion and equity policies and QA systems in higher education in Taiwan and Japan. It offers the following recommendations for governments, QA agencies, and universities to promote inclusive and equitable education: (1) Governments can enhance overall education quality by formulating appropriate policies and providing resource subsidies; (2) QA agencies should consider the socio-cultural context and the unique attributes, characteristics, and resources of each university when designing QA standards to offer more inclusive guidance; (3) Universities should address local needs and challenges to better promote inclusive and equitable education aligned with societal demands. In conclusion, this study contributes to international QA by presenting approaches from diverse contexts, particularly in Asia.

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Implementing SDGs through Engineering Education Accreditation

Aijun Zhou, Deputy Director-General, The Education Quality Evaluation Agency of the Ministry of Education of China (EQEA), China

ABSTRACT

The Education Quality Evaluation Agency of the Ministry of Education of China guides and structures a quality assurance system that aligns with the modern Higher education system, supporting the cultivation of talent in China's higher education sector. The center focuses on innovation and cooperation, guiding Chinese Higher education institutions in actively implementing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a particular emphasis on driving reforms in the engineering talent development process. This aims to enhance the ability of engineering professionals to tackle challenges related to sustainable development, contributing to the achievement of strategic

Outline

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to promote a transition to sustainable development pathways worldwide. Engineers are a key group in driving sustainable development, playing an essential role in enhancing industrial technological capabilities and innovation, as well as promoting long-lasting, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth. Engineering graduates are the primary group that becomes engineers, and their qualities and abilities directly determine the future role of the engineering community in contributing to sustainable development.

At this conference, we aim to introduce the close connection between China's engineering education accreditation standards and the SDGs, and work together to promote the transformation of higher education talent cultivation quality assurance systems to align with sustainable development models.

Since 2020, under the guidance of the Education Quality Evaluation Agency of the Ministry of Education of China, Chinese engineering education organizations have actively participated in the development of the new version of the "Graduate Attributes and Professional Competencies (GAPC)" jointly formulated by the World Federation of Engineering Organizations (WFEO) and the International Engineering Alliance (IEA), promoting the integration of SDGs into internationally recognized engineering talent development quality standards. At the same time, SDGs and the new version of GAPC requirements have been incorporated into the revisions of engineering education accreditation policies, standards, and procedures.

The revision of the engineering education accreditation standards follows principles of continuity, feasibility, and coherence. It covers the main revisions from the IEA, particularly regarding SDGs and non-technical competencies. New graduation requirements include considerations for sustainable development, life cycle costs, net-zero carbon emissions, diversity, and inclusivity. Graduates are required to understand and evaluate the impact of engineering practices on environmental and social sustainability for complex engineering problems. Nearly 20,000 programs, guided by China's engineering education accreditation standards, are incorporating SDG-related content into their talent development schemes.

Currently, China has published two group standards: the "Engineering Education Accreditation Standards" (T/CEEAA 001-2022) and the "Engineering Education Accreditation Guidelines" (T/CEAAA 002-2022), both of which fully reflect the SDG requirements and guide engineering programs to implement SDGs throughout the talent development process.

In the newly revised "Engineering Education Accreditation Standards (2024 Edition)", the graduation requirements reflect the new concerns raised in GAPC 2021, enhancing the awareness of sustainable development among engineering graduates. For issues related to problem analysis, design/development of solutions, and engineering and sustainability, new requirements include: "comprehensive consideration of

sustainability requirements," "life cycle costs and net-zero carbon requirements, legal and ethical factors," and "analysis and evaluation of engineering practices on health, safety, environment, legal, and economic and social sustainability," to emphasize the relationship between engineering and sustainable development. In the curriculum system, a new requirement for "sustainable development" has been added, highlighting the importance of humanities and social science courses in supporting students' understanding and application of "sustainable development" knowledge.

Through accreditation, over 2,000 engineering programs are continuously implementing SDGs in their professional development. Tens of thousands of engineering faculty members practice SDGs in their teaching, and millions of engineering students, through their studies and assessments, deeply understand SDG-related knowledge and are equipped with the ability to implement sustainable development in future engineering practices.

The role of quality tertiary education on scholarship recipients in fostering inclusivity and generating impact on society

Dr. Amir Dhia, Technical Manager of Higher Education, Education Above All (EAA) Foundation, Qatar
Dr. Mazen Hasna, professor of telecommunications, Qatar University, National Committee for Qualifications and Academic Accreditation (NCQAA), Qatar

ABSTRACT

This conference session highlights the eco-system of quality tertiary education with reference to scholarships for marginalized youth and communities. It stresses how quality assurance has a significant role in supporting the inclusivity and success in society of scholarship beneficiaries in line with SDG 4 and beyond. It illustrates the effect that relevant, market-driven tertiary programs and curriculum have on the expectations and outcomes to the students of various backgrounds and nationalities. It also demonstrates how such programs provide aspiring and talented students with a forward-thinking mind-set as they navigate the challenging yet diverse opportunities of today's dynamic world.

This presentation, furthermore, reflects on the importance of the competent authorities of quality assurance standards and accreditations in the eco-system to ensure and support the progressive transformation role of higher education institutions (HEIs) on society.

Outline

To maximize the impact of scholarship programs on marginalized youth and communities, there should be mechanisms in place to make sure that recipients of such programs choose the right disciplines at the right quality level. With sustainable quality and relevant education, the graduates accordingly become empowered to contribute with impact to the advancement of society through:
Economic growth: Beneficiaries of quality and relevant education contribute to the stimulation of the economy. Higher educational levels generally correlate with greater earnings and expenditures, boosting overall productivity, consumption and investment. And the higher the wages and expenditures of the skilled workforce thanks to quality tertiary education, the more they contribute to the funding of public services and infrastructure.
Private, non-private sectors, and entrepreneurship: With their advanced degrees and acquired skills, graduates boost overall performance in the private and non-private sectors. Those majoring and employed in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), healthcare, education, and business administration contribute, among others, to the advancement of science, innovation and business. Quality tertiary education also develops the graduates' mind-set and growth of entrepreneurship, innovation and ventures.
Well-being & prosperity: Quality tertiary education relates to the growing value of 'human capital', which not only breaks the cycle of poverty and offers opportunities for decent work, but also facilitates upward social and career mobility, and mitigates income inequality. That, in turn, helps the graduates to enjoy better well-being, along with a more balanced, sustainable and prospering standing in society beyond the attainment of SDG 4.

The presentation will build on data-driven findings, actual cases and success stories of scholarship recipients of the Education Above All (EAA) Foundation in local and international HEIs in Qatar, and beneficiaries in other countries. EAA leads efforts to transform lives through access to quality and relevant tertiary education, providing scholarships for over 10,000 marginalized youth in more than 60 top-tier universities in over 10 countries worldwide. Also highlighted in the presentation will be the quality assurance roles, responsibilities, standards, and best practices of HEIs as overseen by the National Committee for Qualifications and Academic Accreditation, especially when it comes to maximizing impact and meeting stakeholders' expectation. NCQAA has dedicated a whole standard among the five institutional accreditation standards to HEIs impact and stakeholders' engagement. Through a systematic process of identifying and engaging stakeholders, each HEI should present its efforts as part of the accreditation activity. Moreover,

impact of HEIs within their communities and globally is also part of the process, and many HEIs refer to their scoring in different SDGs as evidence for their impact.

Keeping Quality Assurance Processes in Step with Institutional Priorities around Sustainable Development Goals

Dr. Kathy Siedlaczek, Dean of Academic Planning and Quality Assurance at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT), Canada

ABSTRACT

In an evolving higher education landscape, institutional quality assurance (QA) processes need to continually adapt. This is critical to ensure they remain aligned with strategic directions and key institutional priorities, and therefore are seen as meaningful for faculty, students, and educational programs. BCIT has made a significant commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. A key initiative has been establishing our IDEAS framework, which provides guidance on integrating core principles into our educational programs. These principles include Indigeneity, inclusion, diversity, equity, access, sustainability, and student well-being (IDEAS). In 2023, BCIT created a series of resources to support faculty in embedding these principles into their programs, and in 2024 we built the IDEAS framework into our QA processes. These collective efforts will ensure sustained focus on the core principles in our IDEAS framework and will provide momentum to make meaningful progress towards achieving the UN SDGs.

Outline

Institutions of higher learning can and must play a significant role in advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). There is both a social responsibility and the institutional capability to do so. These institutions, through educational programs and meaningful learning experiences, play a key role in shaping future leaders by giving students the tools they need to become sustainable decision-makers in society. Quality assurance processes need to stay in step to support these institutional priorities.

At the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) in British Columbia, Canada, we have made an institutional commitment to align with the SDGs. Our provincial mandate and our focus on applied, experiential education across undergraduate and graduate credentials are key aspects of what differentiates BCIT from our peers. We combine theory and practice in a way that enables our learners to leave BCIT confident and able to have immediate impact in their work. This approach is critical to advancing the state of knowledge in sustainability and is a strength we build on as part of our provincial mandate.

Our strategic plan explicitly outlines our long-term commitment to sustainability, our commitment to actioning Indigenization, our commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion in helping dismantle systemic barriers, and our commitment to student well-being and access through diverse pathways to education. As an educational institution, one of our key priorities is transforming teaching and learning experiences to equip students with the necessary skills to succeed in their future paths and to contribute meaningfully as global citizens. Our quality assurance processes need to keep in step with these priorities to ensure they continually contribute to the type of education we want to deliver.

A key institutional initiative in 2023 was the formalization of our IDEAS lens. IDEAS encompasses Indigeneity, inclusion, diversity, equity, access, sustainability, and student wellbeing. The development of this framework recognized the interconnectedness of each of these components, and their foundational importance to how we want to move forward as an institution. The alignment of the IDEAS components with the UN SDGs underscores our commitment to the core principles outlined in many of the goals.

In order to enact the IDEAS framework and truly embed it into our educational programs, we established a pan-institutional working group, with members representing all aspects of the IDEAS framework. A key task of this group was to establish a guiding document focused on how the educational experience could be re-imagined through the IDEAS lens. Our resulting IDEAS Guiding Document was established in early 2024, and

has been very well received across the institution. The approach we took was to help faculty consider different aspects of the educational experience through the use of guiding questions and concrete examples. While curriculum is a critical aspect of the educational experience, a holistic approach to re-imagining education should also include other aspects such as admission requirements, delivery modes, assessment methodologies, and program relationships. Faculty are encouraged to look at all aspects. In addition, a series of support mechanisms were established to ensure faculty had the opportunity to build their confidence in understanding the different elements within the IDEAS framework. This was critical to demonstrate institutional commitment to the process, to recognize that there was a range of existing comfort and understanding of the IDEAS components, and to create an environment where learning and experimentation were welcomed.

Finally, in mid-2024, we embedded elements of the IDEAS framework into our quality assurance processes. This involved articulating expectations of engaging with the IDEAS framework through processes such as new program development, program review, and program renewal. We have integrated the IDEAS framework within guiding templates and resources, and have communicated the expectations across the community. Recognizing the importance of demonstrating alignment to the IDEAS framework as part of our academic governance and approval processes, it was critical that our quality assurance processes kept in step with these broader institutional priorities.

Future plans in terms of quality assurance-related processes include demonstrating how our educational programs are shifting to align with the IDEAS framework, holding forums for faculty to share insights from their experiences in working with the IDEAS lens, seeking insight from students about the impact these changes are making, and identifying opportunities to apply ideas across programs/disciplines. In addition, we will gather input from the BCIT community on how effectively our quality assurance processes provide guidance on engaging with the IDEAS framework and what additional guidance/support would be welcome.

All of this work at our institution has occurred within the context of broader quality assurance expectations at the provincial Ministry level. As a public post-secondary institution in the province of BC, we are required to align with provincial expectations for all public institutions. Each of these institutions is issued a mandate letter that outlines statutory obligations and government priorities for the public post-secondary system. BCIT's mandate letter includes expectations around several elements within our IDEAS framework, specifically provincial priorities related to sustainability, access to education, and Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. Similarly, other provincial quality assurance processes, such as the Degree Quality Assessment Board's degree criteria, have recently incorporated expectations for new programs focused on many of the same elements. Finally, the provincial Quality Assurance Process Audit is a process requiring that institutions have policies and procedures to oversee quality assurance of their educational programs and that there is evidence of enacting these policies. Each of these provincial-level quality assurance expectations serves to reinforce our responsibility as a public post-secondary institution, to articulate key provincial priorities related to the UN SDGs, and to underscore the importance of BCIT's commitment to aligning with the UN SDGs through our IDEAS lens.

The goal of this session is to engage the audience in a thoughtful conversation about using quality assurance processes in higher education to support advancing the UN SDGs. Participants will learn about the BCIT case study of implementing our IDEAS framework, and will have the opportunity to engage with this idea and others from the audience to identify possibilities for their own institutions to further align with the UN SDGs.

Transnational Education 3.0: Assessing the impact of Dubai's international economic hub on development and sustainability

Professor Yusra Mouzughi, Provost, University of Birmingham Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Dr Nitesh Sughnani, Director of Higher Education, Knowledge and Human Development Authority, United Arab Emirates
Dr Ishan Cader, Senior Director, Consultancy, Times Higher Education

ABSTRACT

This session will explore how international branch campuses (IBCs) contribute to socio-economic development and the sustainability agenda. Using the 'TNE 3.0' framework developed by Times Higher Education, the session will demonstrate how quality monitoring and evaluation of transnational education (TNE) can fully realise IBC integration into local ecosystems of education, sustainability and industry. This ensures long-term impact on workforce development, research excellence, innovation and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Perspectives from Dubai's Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) and the University of Birmingham Dubai will showcase the challenges and innovations for quality assurance of IBCs and the impact on sustainability.

The session will be a presentation divided into three key sections, inviting audience interaction through Q & A.

The first section will outline the evolution of quality assurance in TNE, and how the TNE 3.0 framework can ensure a more holistic means of achieving high quality impact of IBCs. The framework is organised into the six pillars of *strategy*, *innovation*, *infrastructure*, *integration*, *excellence* and *sustainability*, with suggested metrics to support the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of TNE on host nations, and other key performance indicators (KPIs) to support measurement of SDG progress. The framework has been developed through research on TNE practices across 31 countries worldwide, and applied across a number of consultancy projects for government and universities undertaken by Times Higher Education.

The second section will provide the perspective of a national education agency (KHDA), outlining the challenges and opportunities for managing the quality of TNE, and developing strategy and policy to ensure alignment with national development ambitions. As one of the world's largest IBC hubs, the approach of Dubai's government authorities has been fundamental to shaping both an operational environment and physical landscape conducive to developing impactful TNE. Yet despite its development as an attractive education destination, KHDA strives to achieve even greater impact on education, including alignment with Dubai's ambition D33 economic agenda.

The final section will review the approach of the University of Birmingham Dubai, showcasing how one of the world's top ranked universities has sought to positively impact on the society, economy and sustainability of Dubai and the surrounding region. Opening its new campus in Dubai International Academic City in 2022, the University of Birmingham is pioneering a research-intensive approach to TNE, committed to social, economic and sustainable impact in Dubai.

The session will conclude with 15 minutes of audience question and answers.

The session will contribute thought leadership to the on-going evolution of quality assurance mechanisms for TNE, advocating an approach that centres economic development, innovation and sustainability as a key framing for higher education quality assurance of TNE. It will be of interest to university leaders, branch campus directors, government education agencies, and other stakeholders involved in ensuring high impact and high quality TNE.

Higher Education Governance Reforms and Englishization

Poster

(Anna) Kristina Hultgren, Professor of Sociolinguistics and Applied Linguistics and UKRI Future Leaders Fellow, The Open University, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

In the past five decades, the higher education sector has undergone neoliberally predicated governance reforms centred on deregulation, autonomy, monitoring, control and quality assurance. This poster traces the links between governance reforms and the ongoing Englishization of European higher education, through a quantitative cross-European study and seven in-depth case studies in different European countries. Our research hypothesis is that higher education governance reforms centred on granting higher education institutions greater autonomy and accountability drive Englishization. Drawing on hierarchical regression and process tracing methodologies, developed in the interface of political science and linguistics, we find a statistically significant relationship between university autonomy and English-taught programmes across the European Higher Education Area. In each of our seven case studies, we find similar processes at work, with the rise of Englishization being traceable to the implementation of governance reforms seeking to deregulate the system. Each case looks differently, though, and is inflected by the political, cultural and societal environment. Nonetheless, we are able to conclude that higher education governance reforms centred on granting higher education institutions greater autonomy and accountability may have unintended consequences, here in terms of a rise of Englishization. This in turn, we argue, may have both positive and negative consequences for quality assurance. Positive consequences include global benchmarks, knowledge sharing and increased standards whereas negative consequences include Westernization, epistemicide and an exacerbation of inequalities.

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Challenges of Evaluating HEIs' "Green Initiatives"

Poster

Andrea Zacharová, Head, Accreditation Department, Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education, Slovakia
Dagmar Blight, Coordinator, Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education, Slovakia

ABSTRACT

If higher education institutions (HEIs) are in any way expected to contribute to the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) that are to transform the world, then quality assurance agencies (QAAs) must be prepared for a paradigm shift in the evaluation of HEIs' quality assurance (QA). A survey conducted among 12 QAAs shows most QAAs do not include "green initiatives" when evaluating HEIs. QAAs are aware of the methodological challenges such evaluation poses: a lack of clear definition of the concept, evaluation criteria, the legislative mandate in this area, and the diversity of implementation of "green initiatives" across HEIs.

Outline

The poster presentation aims to show the findings of an ENQA LDP 2024 (Project 1) examining how 12 ENQA QAAs address "green initiatives" provided by HEIs. Specifically, how QAAs understand the concept of "green initiatives", how they evaluate them, what challenges QAAs face in evaluating "green initiatives", and what recommendations QAAs have in relation to this topic. The poster presentation will also share examples of good practice in "green initiatives" that HEIs are already showing across the 12 ENQA countries, with special attention paid to the Slovak HEIs. It will conclude with a suggestion of embedding HEIs' environmental accountability in both IQA and EQA.

Re-engineering General Foundation Programme Quality Audit in Oman: Insights and Implications for the Evolving Higher Education Landscape

Poster

Dr. Khadija Al Balushi, Institutional Accreditation Expert, Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA)

ABSTRACT

This presentation highlights a research study aligned with OAAAQA's vision of ensuring quality education in Oman, contributing to Oman Vision 2040's goal for a high-quality educational system (OAAAQA, 2024), and supporting SDG 4 on equitable quality education, promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (UNESCO, 2017). The study examined the impact of General Foundation Programme Quality Assurance (GFPQA) on internal policies, practices, and outcomes within Omani HEIs. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, it analyzed 32 GFPQA reports, data from 29 HEIs, and surveyed 3,405 stakeholders, including faculty, students, and external reviewers. Findings revealed a moderately positive impact of GFPQA on programme design and student outcomes while underscoring the need for standardized structures and international collaboration. The study recommends regular updates to QA processes, emphasizing transparency, stakeholder engagement, and technology integration. This session provides insights for QA practitioners, evaluators, and policymakers to enhance QA systems for greater effectiveness and sustainability in higher education.

Outline

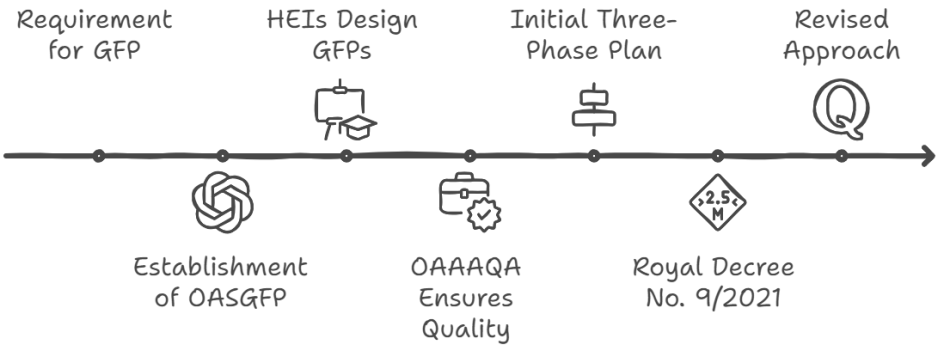
The description below outlines the structure and design of the session, which will be divided into six parts:

- Research Background
- Research objectives
- Research Methodology
- Research Findings
- Recommendations and Conclusions
- Discussion: Q & A session

Research Background

"The majority of students graduating from secondary school in Oman need to undertake a General Foundation Program (GFP) in order to develop the knowledge, skills, and competencies required for higher education programs" (OAAA, 2017, p.3). In 2008, a set of national standards, designated as Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programmes (OASGFP), referred to hereafter as GFP Standards, was established as the minimum requirements for GFPs to be achieved. HEIs are mandated to offer GFPs covering four core study areas: English Language, Mathematics, Computing, and General Study Skills. These should align with the GFP standards; however, HEIs retain the autonomy to tailor their curricula to meet these standards. To ensure GFPs fulfill their objectives and adhere to national GFP standards, OAAAQA conducts GFP Quality Audits (GFPQA) across all public and private HEIs in Oman. Initially, OAAAQA's quality assurance plan included a three-phase approach: GFPQA, a review of the OASGFP, and the eventual accreditation of GFPs. However, following ongoing reviews, restructuring, and mandate changes under Royal Decree No. 9/2021, OAAAQA has revised its approach and is no longer aiming to accredit GFPs beyond the first cycle of audits (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: GFPQA Process and Changes



Research Objectives

The ongoing reviews and updates by OAAAQA, along with the restructuring and mandate changes following the Royal Decree, aligned with the primary goal of Oman Vision 2040: to develop a high-quality education system in partnership with the community, while also reinforcing Sustainable Development Goal 4. Consequently, there was a pressing need for a comprehensive empirical investigation to re-engineer the GFPQA in accordance with OAAAQA's revised mandate for GFP quality assurance.

The primary goal was to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of GFPQA processes while proposing a roadmap for their updates. Similar to other External Quality Assurance (EQA) activities designed to drive behavior and foster continuous improvement, it was essential to assess the impact of GFPQA on GFPs among HEI's in Oman. This re-engineering project evaluated the effects of GFPQA on internal policies, practices, performance, and outcomes of GFPs and identified potential future directions for enhancing the system's effectiveness and efficiency. To achieve the overarching aims of the study, it addressed the following research questions:

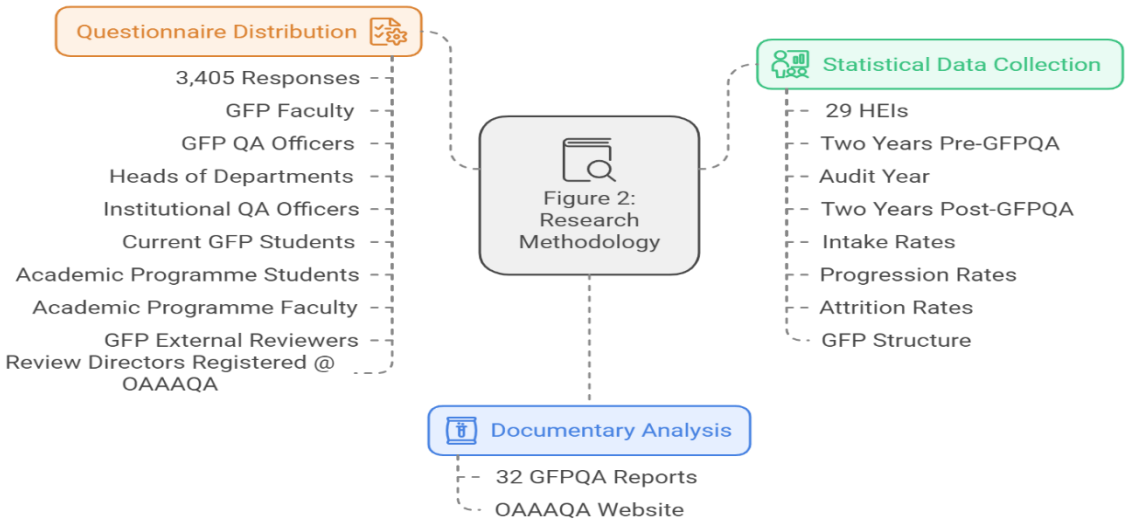
RQ1. To what extent has the Quality Audit impacted GFP's internal Quality Assurance policy, practice, performance and output?

RQ2. What is the most optimum design for GFP Quality Assurance in the future?

Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method sequential design featuring analytical, exploratory, and action-oriented phases, utilizing various data collection methods. The research began with a documentary analysis of GFPQA reports to assess the status of General Foundation Programmes (GFPs) across all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Oman that underwent GFPQA. This analysis involved reviewing 32 GFPQA reports available on the OAAAQA website. Next, statistical data from 29 HEIs were gathered, covering two years prior to the GFPQA, the audit year, and two years following the GFPQA. The focus was on GFP-related metrics such as intake, progression rates, attrition rates, and GFP structure.

Subsequently, an online questionnaire was distributed to stakeholders within the higher education sector to gather their perceptions regarding the impact of GFPQA on GFPs, along with suggestions for potential improvements in GFP quality assurance. The questionnaire garnered responses from 3,405 individuals across various stakeholder categories, including GFP faculty, GFP QA officers, heads of departments (HoDs), institutional QA officers, current GFP students, academic programme students who completed the GFP, academic programme faculty, and GFP external reviewers and review directors registered with OAAAQA (Figure 2 shows the research methodology).



Research Findings

The analysis of GFPQA reports highlighted the need to prioritize student learning (GFPQA Scope 2) in both HEIs and OAAAQA to enhance the quality of General Foundation Programmes (GFPs). The findings emphasized the importance of improving student learning outcomes, aligning GFPs with academic programme entry standards, and increasing overall programme effectiveness.

The study revealed a moderately positive impact of GFPQA on programme design, management, delivery, and assessment in HEIs. However, areas requiring improvement include the standardization of programme structures and fostering international collaborations. A moderately positive effect on students' learning outcomes was also observed, indicating overall benefits for academic achievement and study skills development.

In terms of GFPQA effectiveness and efficiency, the research found positive correlations between the scope, effectiveness, and efficiency of quality assurance, underscoring the importance of a holistic and transparent approach. Regular reviews, stakeholder engagement, and technology integration were highlighted as key to continuous improvement. The findings also pointed to the need for integrating technology and automation to streamline GFP processes, while aligning GFPQA efforts with updating GFP standards for optimal outcomes.

Recommendations and Conclusions

The re-engineering of the GFPQA study led to several key recommendations. First, a review and update of the Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programmes is essential to ensure their relevance for students' academic progression. This includes reassessing the core components—English, Mathematics, and Computing—and aligning them with modern requirements and global benchmarks. Additionally, the study highlights the need to explore specialized foundation programmes tailored to specific academic programmes within HEIs to enhance programme effectiveness.

Streamlining the GFPQA process is another critical recommendation. This involves reducing the audit's scope, focusing primarily on GFP Student Learning (Scope 2), and updating the GFPQA Manual to align with the revised Institutional Standards Assessment Manual. Emphasis should be placed on prioritizing improvement outcomes over extensive documentation by simplifying reports into concise formats and adopting technology-driven solutions for automating data collection, analysis, and reporting.

Post-GFPQA follow-up is crucial for sustaining quality improvements. HEIs should conduct annual internal reviews focused on implementing OAAAQA recommendations, supported by a risk-based, structured schedule for re-audits based on performance. This approach ensures timely support, accountability, and continuous improvement, especially as GFP accreditation is no longer part of the GFPQA process (Al Balushi & Al Balushi, 2024).

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The Impact of the iJAS Plus Implementation in Thailand: Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University

Poster

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ABSTRACT

The structural shift in Thailand's External Quality Assurance (EQA) occurred in 2019 with the enactment of the Higher Education Act of 2019 by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation (MHESI). The Act provides Thai higher education institutions (HEIs) with the autonomy to voluntarily select to receive external quality assessments through various systems. In this context, the Act has introduced challenges for the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA) as the external quality assurance body, prompting it to further strengthen its EQA framework, procedures, and strategies to ensure an effective system that aligns with the evolving landscape. Additionally, this would lead to the development of a more diverse EQA framework for HEIs that meets international standards. Currently, various internal and external factors are influencing the quality of Thai higher education, including the need to improve the standards of HEIs and graduates domestically. Moreover, the challenges posed by globalization and the impact of ASEAN integration, particularly in terms of cross-border education and the movement of students and graduates, further emphasize the necessity of ensuring the quality of higher education.

In 2021, ONESQA has had the opportunity to engage in the expansion of the International Joint Accreditation Standards concept known as "iJAS" which was originally developed and implemented by the Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA) and the Taiwan Assessment and Evaluation Association (TWAEA), three of whom have been long-standing partners. In doing so, EQA is extended into a new dimension, signifying a paradigm shift toward joint accreditation as an alternative assessment model in Thailand. This transformation will serve as a significant gateway of opportunity for Thai higher education to reach international standards and support the future of cross-border higher education and transnational education.

Outline
The VUCA world, along with the Higher Education Act of 2019, has become a significant factor motivating the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA) to explore alternatives to the EQA system, as external quality assessment has no longer been compulsory since then. ONESQA, as one of the two certified bodies under the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation (MHESI), subsequently developed a strategic plan and conducted an impact analysis of external quality assessment in 2022. This analysis identified the need to advance toward global standards, encompassing all levels of educational assessment systems, including higher education (Evans, K. et al., 2022).

The project of joint accreditation, known as the International Joint Accreditation Standards (iJAS), was launched in 2018 through a collaboration between the Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA) and the Taiwan Assessment and Evaluation Association (TWAEA). Their partnership led to set the joint standards, which were initially conducted in HEIs in Japan and Taiwan. This collaboration expanded with the inclusion of ONESQA in 2021. It is acknowledged by ONESQA that international joint accreditation provides additional benefits to the EQA system when partnered with foreign agencies. 1) Enhancing the university's competitiveness and global status; 2) Providing a reference for international cooperation agreements between universities involving academic equivalence, dual/joint degrees, and exchanges and

overseas students; 3) facilitating the recruitment of international students and outstanding scholars from abroad. In adopting these joint standards and indicators, ONESQA recognizes the importance of harmonization among ASEAN and Asian higher education communities, which will strengthen connections among them. As part of the joint accreditation system, it also promotes cross-border higher education and transnational education.

While ONESQA recognizes the advantages of participating in the iJAS project and the broader benefits, implementing the iJAS system in Thailand must align with existing laws and regulations governing higher education. This is to ensure that the developed joint accreditation aligns with the latest higher education standards that identified by MHESI. As a consequence, the iJAS standards were compared with Thailand's Higher Education Standards.

Comparison of iJAS standards with Thailand's 2022 higher education standards
Thailand's 2022 Higher Education Standards for comparison are categorized into 2 main parts: 1) the performance of duties and authority of HEIs, comprising 4 standards and 18 indicators; 2) the institutional management, comprising 1 indicator coving 5 areas and 6 outcome monitoring aspects, resulting in a total of 19 indicators.

While the iJAS is composed of 6 standards and 24 indicators. The iJAS Handbook is available through the provided link < iJAS Handbook >.

A comparison, of the iJAS with Thailand's 2022 Higher Education is shown in the APPENDIX and the provided link < comparison of iJAS standards with Thailand's 2022 Higher Education Standards >, was found to align with Thailand's 2022 Higher Education Standards. A detailed comparison revealed that 3 out of the 4 Thailand's 2022 Higher Education Standards (75%) align with the iJAS standards. The one standard not aligned is the preservation of arts and culture.

At the indicator level, 17 out of the 19 indicators of Thailand's 2022 Higher Education Standards (89.47%) align with the iJAS indicators. If the iJAS system is planned for implementation in Thai HEIs, the summary is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The Alignment Result and Recommendations

No.	Alignment with Thailand's 2022 Higher Education Standards	Recommendations
1	The alignment with the performance of duties and authorities of HEIs includes 4 standards. Of these, 3 align with the iJAS standards, specifically: • Standard 1 Teaching and Learning • Standard 2 Research and Innovation • Standard 3 Contribution of Academics to Society	In order to fully align with Thailand's 2022 Higher Education Standards framework when implementing the iJAS system, an additional standard for Standard 4 Preservation of Arts and Culture should be included.
2	Outcome monitoring encompasses 6 areas, 5 of which align with the iJAS standards as follows: 1. Student learning outcomes 2. Outcomes in benefiting the local community and society 3. Outcomes related to personnel 4. Governance outcomes 5. Financial outcomes	It is recommended to include the outcome monitoring related to the satisfaction and engagement of learners and stakeholders.

In summary, Thailand's 2022 Higher Education Standards and the iJAS standards are mostly aligned. However, to adopt the iJAS system for Thai HEIs, it is recommended to include an additional standard for the Preservation of Arts and Culture. To address this issue, the **iJAS Plus** was introduced.

The iJAS Plus framework was subsequently presented to the Higher Education Board of ONESQA, which approved it and recommended presenting the Framework to MHESI's Higher Education Standard Committee.

The MHESI has expressed favorable feedback on the Framework, recognizing it as a significant step toward developing an assessment system aligned with international standards. It was agreed that the Framework should be trial through a pilot assessment for a selected HEI, with the results to be discussed in detail following its implementation. Then the following actions have been taken by ONESQA:

1. University Recruitment and Preparation: After completing the assessment framework, which included the addition of 2 indicators related to the preservation of arts and culture, ONESQA developed an assessment manual and invited universities to take part in a pilot assessment. Out of 172 universities, 43 expressed their interest in the system, with 5 showing a willingness to join the pilot assessment. However, the Higher Education Board of ONESQA selected only one university for the pilot assessment, based on key criteria such as the administration's willingness to cooperate and the university's five-year evaluation cycle as required by law.

Once Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University (NSTRU) was selected, ONESQA provided the University with the assessment manual for preliminary review one month before a joint briefing with ONESQA. This briefing explained the project's details, the University's roles in the assessment process, the standards and indicators, the composition of reviewers, and the assessment schedule. Following this, NSTRU held internal discussions to prepare for the assessment, which is scheduled for July 2024. They spent about three months completing their self-assessment report (SAR), following the template provided in the manual, and submitted it to the iJAS Secretariat. All supporting evidence is attached in English via the hyperlink platform.

2. Organization Structure and Reviewers: JUAA, TWAEA, and ONESQA have agreed on a structure for the reviewer team, which will include representatives from all three countries. Each country will contribute two reviewers, except for the country of the assessed university, which will have only one reviewer. However, due to Thailand having an additional standard with 2 indicators, the iJAS Committee agreed to include one additional Thai reviewer in the team. The final composition of the reviewer team is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: The Composition of the Review Team (6 People)

Location of Applicant Institution: NSTRU, Thailand	
Reviewer Members	**Number of Reviewer**
Japanese	2
Taiwanese	2
Thai	2*
Chair	Appoint Japanese member
Remark * one extra reviewer from Thailand to responsible for Preservation of Arts and Culture standard	

3. Reviewer Recruiting and Training: The iJAS Plus initiative marks ONESQA's first joint accreditation effort.
Due to the international composition of the reviewers and the use of English as the working language, this became a critical consideration. ONESQA revisited its pool of reviewers and selected three out of fourteen reviewers listed in the ASEAN University Network (AUN), as AUN employs English throughout its quality assessment process.

A one-day training session was conducted by the three collaborating organizations, with experienced reviewers who had previously assessed universities in Japan and Taiwan sharing their insights. Some participants attended onsite at ONESQA, while others joined remotely via an online platform. The training followed the same standard used by JUAA and TWAEA. To ensure transparency in its operations, ONESQA invited five representatives from NSTRU to observe the reviewer training. This initiative received positive feedback from the University team, as it provided them with a clearer understanding of the standards, indicators, and assessment guidelines compared to the information shared during the initial preparation session for the University. The selected candidates were subsequently presented for approval by both the ONESQA Executive Board and the iJAS Committee subsequently.

4. Document Review: The reviewers examined NSTRU's SAR and accompanying evidence, which the University submitted electronically to iJAS Secretariat. Following this, the entire review team read through before meeting with each other the day before the onsite assessment.

5. On-site Review: The on-site review visit took place on July 11, 2024. The reviewers conducted interviews with various stakeholder groups, including NSTRU's management team, faculty members, students, support staff, and a separate group of students. Additionally, they reviewed supplementary documents to clarify specific areas after studying the SAR and other supporting evidence. Another critical aspect of the review involved assessing the adequacy and readiness of NSTRU facilities, such as buildings, laboratory, dormitory, research center, as well as Business Incubator Center. This included interviews with personnel from these organizations to evaluate their readiness, supervision processes, learning outcome assessments, and their attitudes toward students. At the end of the day, the reviewers met to determine the result.

6. Accreditation Result: The reviewers spent considerable time discussing the findings to determine the quality level of each indicator. Once a consensus was reached, the iJAS Secretariat informed the parties of the remaining schedule leading up to the conclusion of the accreditation process. The review team took six weeks to finalize the report before submitting it to NSTRU for approval. NSTRU agreed with the report but requested the Secretariat to include the results of the Thai standards in the radar chart. Unfortunately, this could only be reflected in the written assessment results rather than in the radar chart. The accreditation results were reviewed and approved by the iJAS Committee on October 31st, granting NSTRU a six-year accreditation.

7. Pilot Evaluation: Following the completion of the pilot evaluation, ONESQA held a feedback meeting to review and summarize the results of the iJAS Plus accreditation. Although the University highly appreciates and satisfies this initiated opportunity, there are some opinions on how to further improve iJAS Plus in the future:

7.1 There were recommendations to extend the on-site visit to two days, with the University recommending to focus on reviewing self-assessment report (SAR) data and conducting interviews with stakeholders on the first day. The second day focuses on recommending visits to the University's key areas in accordance with each standard, as part of the assessment, ongoing improvement and development are intended.

7.2 The on-site schedule should be settled at least a week in advance, so that the university will have enough time to schedule within their team.

Moreover, Thai reviewers and the ONESQA secretariat team also have some observations and recommendations, which were discussed in the iJAS Committee. It was agreed that ONESQA will develop a set of rubrics and revise the internal communication process with the iJAS Secretariat team. Here are the observations and recommendations

1) Given that the assessment team includes reviewers from three countries who may come from different backgrounds and cultures, to standardize the assessment decisions and reduce subjectivity, it was suggested that a rubric be developed. This rubric would provide a unified guideline for reviewer across various faculties when making assessment decisions and evaluating specific indicators.

2) During this pilot assessment, there were secretariat representatives from each country, which led to occasional duplicate communications, while some tasks were overlooked because one secretariat team assumed that another team would handle them. Therefore, it was recommended to establish a centralized system for coordinating assessments at the University level in each country to ensure clarity in communication and streamline processes.

8. Impact on NSTRU after Conducting the iJAS Plus Assessment: The pilot implementation of the iJAS Plus system has brought remarkable impacts on the University, including:

8.1 The University signed an agreement with Chengdu University to offer a Dual Degree program at the undergraduate level. The program is designed for students to study three years at NSTRU and one year at Chengdu University. Additionally, NSTRU is currently in contact with universities in Japan and Taiwan that are accredited under the iJAS system. This collaboration aims to develop

partnerships, particularly in dual or joint degree programs, to support student mobility and meet the demands of stakeholders.
8.2 The University invited faculty members from Chengdu University to teach in NSTRU's Educational Administration program.
8.3 The University arranged for Chengdu University to establish the Professional Teacher Training Center on the NSTRU campus.

Furthermore, the administrators of NSTRU noted that since the announcement of the upcoming assessment using an international evaluation system, NSTRU staffs have become more proactive and adapted their working methods. Additionally, there is an increasing interest in undergoing evaluations under other international standards. The University Council is currently supporting NSTRU's plan to seek an external assessment through other international joint accreditation system in the fiscal year 2025, namely the ONESQA-ASIIN Joint Accreditation.

All of the aforementioned are seen as the ultimate outcomes of fostering collaboration among higher education institutions. Lastly, fostering cross-border education through external quality assurance has shown that joint accreditation efforts, conducted in partnership with international collaborators, can effectively promote cross-border and transnational education.

Conclusion
The iJAS, an innovative external quality assessment system, initially developed through the collaboration of JUAA and TWAEA. After the collaboration was extended to include ONESQA, the system was optimized to align with Thai higher education law, resulting in the introduction of the iJAS Plus.

Following the recommendations of MHESI and the ONESQA Higher Education Board, the iJAS Plus was to be implemented through a trial assessment as a pilot at one Thai higher education institution. A pilot evaluation was conducted at NSTRU, and upon completion, it was accepted by the University, proving its applicability for assessing Thai HEIs. Building on this positive outcome, ONESQA is working on enhancing the system by developing detailed rubrics and scheming a promotion plan to introduce it to other HEIs. This initiative is in line with ONESQA's strategic plan and offers Thai HEIs an alternative external assessment option, paving the way for advancing quality assessment to an international standard.

Importantly, the three agencies (ONESQA, JUAA, and TWAEA) involved in the new system have been certified by INQAAHE. To sum up, the IJAS (Plus) complies with the requirements set forth by MHESI, Thailand, ensuring its alignment with national and international standards.

Assessing and Validating Key Competencies for Sustainability — Designing Quality Assurance Processes for the New Paradigm

Poster

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ABSTRACT

In a world of knowledge and data ever more accessible, transferrable, and AI-managed and -manipulated, educators are right to regard the building of student sustainability competencies as the emerging "gold standard" in Higher education teaching, learning, and assessment. Indeed, such competency frameworks have now been designed and adopted at multiple levels: international (*UNESCO Key Competencies for Sustainability*—2017), regional (*GreenComp: The European sustainability competence framework*—2022), national (*Sustainable Development and Social Responsibility Competency Framework*—2023, France), sectoral (PRME's *12 Sustainability Mindset Principles*), and disciplinary (*Competence Frameworks of Sustainable Entrepreneurial*—2021).

As TEIs progressively embed such competency frameworks into their institutional curriculum, pedagogy, and student assessment, how will EQAPs both define good practice in their use, and help TEIs develop effective tools and processes for measuring their impact? While TEIs still certainly reside in a learning and knowledge economy, it is students demonstrating their competency in applying that learning for sustainability and socially responsible decision-making that constitutes the new paradigm shift in education and the quality assurance processes that validate it.

As such, this poster presents a bird's-eye view of the landscape of sustainability competence frameworks, highlights the internal assessment tools and processes currently used to evaluate them, and indicates entry points where EQAPs are most needed to provide TEIs with guidance in good practice and quality assurance.

The aim of this poster is to highlight the important role QA professionals play in the coming paradigm shift of tertiary education. Competency-based assessment is not new, but its articulation around sustainability literacy certainly is. As such, both TEIs and the EQAPs that support them in quality assurance welcome additional training and insight into the complexities of newly emerging sustainability competencies—i.e., how to decipher them, how to compare them, how to advise on using them, and how to assess student mastery of them. Futures-thinking, anticipatory competency, integrated problem-solving competency, strategic thinking, systems thinking competency, etc.—these are not areas of student performative ability that traditional accreditation and QA indicators are designed to guide and assess, much less evaluate.

As such, the intent of this poster is purely instructional and didactic. How do we help QA professionals advance in lifelong learning around innovative, newly emerging, complex, and highly interdisciplinary constructs such as sustainability competencies? The sustainability and AI "Big-Bang" has indeed just hurled us all into a new universe. But quality assurance professionals are empowered and energized when they quickly adapt to the paradigm shift. This poster is designed to facilitate this transition.

Quality Assurance as a Catalyst for Achieving SDGs in Higher Education

Poster

Veronica Y.C. Huang, Manager, Taiwan Assessment and Evaluation Association (TWAEA), Taiwan

1. The link between QA and SDGs:
   - Ensuring academic and administrative standards as a foundation for SDG 4.
   - Expanding to other SDGs, such as SDG 7 (Energy) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).
2. Case analysis:
   - **Case 1: Campus Energy-Saving Measures and Quality Assurance**
     A domestic university implemented an energy efficiency improvement program under a QA framework, monitoring carbon emissions and optimizing campus energy management, achieving a 10% reduction in total energy consumption over three years.
   - **Case 2: Academic-Community Interaction Program**
     Through the QA system, the university conducted curriculum reviews to encourage faculty and student participation in local community environmental restoration projects. A tracking mechanism was established to ensure long-term effectiveness.
3. Visuals:
   - **Flowchart:** A comprehensive pathway diagram illustrating the process from quality assurance mechanisms to SDGs outcomes, highlighting monitoring and improvement steps.
   - **Data Charts:** Real-life examples, such as comparisons of energy consumption before and after energy-saving measures and growth trends in the number of students participating in community activities.
   - **Image Displays:** Photographic examples, such as solar panel installations on campus and community cleanup activities.
4. Conclusion:
   - Quality assurance serves as a catalyst for achieving the social impact of higher education and should be further integrated with the SDGs.
   - Propose the establishment of an international quality assurance sharing platform to facilitate the exchange of experiences and outcomes among global higher education institutions.

THEME 2. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING PATHWAYS

Quality Assurance of Micro-Credentials: a comparative perspective

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Dr. Anna Prades, Director of International Relations and Knowledge Development, AQU Catalunya (Spain); INQAAHE Board Director,
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ABSTRACT

This session will present insights from a capacity-building experience jointly developed by INQAAHE and REALCUP (Latin American and Caribbean Network of Associations of Privates Universities), aimed at empowering higher education leaders in the design, implementation, and quality assurance of micro-credentials. While addressing the growing demand for flexible and innovative learning pathways, it will highlight the value of micro-credentials in lifelong learning and their role in promoting relevance, trust, credential recognition, hence enhance access to HE. The contribution will evolve around a comparative analysis demonstrating the uniqueness of micro-credentials and the need for bespoke solutions for its quality assurance measures. Insights from practical cases showcasing results achieved in over 40 universities participating in the program will add value by demonstrating diversity of modalities in which tailor-made solutions to a range of micro-credential modalities are designed. The audience will have the opportunity to interact with panelists and explore practical solutions for implementing micro-credentials with robust quality assurance frameworks in diversity of contexts and cultures.

Introduction
The increasing need for flexible, personalized learning pathways aligned with labor market demands has driven the adoption of micro-credentials as one of the solutions for lifelong learning and beyond. While crucial for promoting flexible learning pathways, without bespoke and robust internal and external quality assurance the value of those programs is questioned. To ensure impact, credibility, hence recognition of the credentials, robust quality assurance driving both their design and implementation is paramount. This presentation will address micro-credentials from a global perspective, emphasizing their current importance, future potential, and role in enhancing flexible learning pathways, relevance of and access to HE.

Strategizing Micro-Credentials
The session will begin by examining the current landscape of micro-credentials and their potential to transform education and training systems by enabling flexible learning pathways. Key elements for impactful solutions will be explored, including:

- Institutional alignment
- Labor market alignment
- Learner's value proposition

Comparative Analysis of Quality Assurance Models
Quality assurance is crucial for establishing the credibility and acceptance of micro-credentials. The second part of the session will focus on creating quality assurance matrices applicable to the internal and external evaluation of these credentials. Topics include:

- Defining quality indicators to design micro-credentials aligned with international standards.

- Integrating internal and external evaluation mechanisms to ensure transparency, trust and recognition of credentials.
- Leveraging emerging technologies, such as blockchain, to enhance the portability and credibility of micro-credentials.

Presentation of Practical Cases
To illustrate the achieved outcomes, the session will share 3 concrete examples of QA solutions for micro-credentials designed within the capacity-building program and implemented by participating universities. These cases will highlight:

- Designs tailored to diverse educational and labor market contexts.
- Experiences in implementing quality assurance mechanisms.
- Tangible results, including institutional acceptance, student impact, and connections with labor market demands.

Interaction with the Audience
The session will include interactive activities to engage participants, such as:

- Group discussions to identify challenges and solutions in the quality assurance of micro-credentials.
- Use of tools like Mentimeter to gather opinions and foster participation.
- A final Q&A session to share reflections and experiences.

Conclusion
The session will provide attendees with insights and importance of developing bespoke QA solutions for diverse range of micro-credentials to enable enhanced relevance and value added. This includes practical tools and concrete examples that can be replicated within diversity of contexts and cultures, with the aim to maximize the impact.

Negotiating Binaries in Modes of Provision: A Higher Education Practice Standard for Blended and Online Learning

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Heather Goode, University of Pretoria, South Africa
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Britta Zawada, Council on Higher Education, South Africa

ABSTRACT

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) in South Africa was legislated into being through the Higher Education Act (Act No. 101 of 1997), with the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education. As part of the implementation of its new Quality Assurance Framework (QAF), the CHE is developing a number of new Higher Education Practice Standards (HEPS). In this paper, we reflect on the process of developing the HEPS as an exercise in reflexive practice for the community of practice responsible for developing the standard. The paper also brings the HEPS for Modes of Learning and Teaching Provision into focus, offering insight into the standard as a clear example of the CHE's new reflexive-generative methodology.

Outline

This paper examines the development of a Higher Education Practice Standard (HEPS) for Modes of Learning and Teaching Provision within South Africa's evolving quality assurance landscape. Through documenting and analysing the work of a Community of Practice (CoP) tasked with developing this standard, the paper demonstrates how reflexive-generative methodology can transform approaches to quality assurance in higher education.

The context for this work is significant. Higher education institutions globally face mounting pressure to adapt to technological advancement, shifting societal needs, and evolving educational paradigms. Traditional binary distinctions between contact and distance education no longer adequately serve the sector's needs, particularly in light of experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Council on Higher Education's (CHE) new Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) represents a strategic shift from compliance-based approaches toward more developmental, reflexive practices that promote continuous improvement.

Within this context, the paper examines how the CoP navigated the complex task of developing a HEPS that could transcend traditional binaries while working within existing regulatory frameworks. The process involved several key phases and conceptual developments:

First, the CoP engaged with literature and existing frameworks to establish a stable conceptual foundation. This included examining key CHE documents and broader scholarship on quality assurance in higher education. A critical early insight was recognising how existing terminology and frameworks often reinscribe binary thinking about educational provision.

The CoP then developed an initial framework using continua across five clusters: Modes of Contextuality, Invitational Engagements, Place and Presence, Relational Positioning, and Interactional Experience. This framework aimed to enable institutions to think more flexibly about their provision choices. However, through reflexive engagement, the CoP recognised that this approach still partially reinforced binary thinking and could be interpreted evaluatively rather than developmentally.

Responding to these insights, the CoP refined the framework to focus on five overarching clusters: time-pace-space, preparedness, responsiveness, integrity, and institutional support. This revision emphasised the

interconnected nature of these elements and their relationship to pedagogical purpose. The framework evolved to encourage institutions to consider how their choices across these dimensions create supportive learning environments that align with their educational objectives.

A key contribution of this work is its demonstration of how reflexive-generative methodology can transform quality assurance practice. The CoP's process involved continuous negotiation between existing policy constraints and the need for more flexible, future-oriented frameworks. Rather than simply accepting these constraints, the CoP used them as productive tension points to explore new possibilities.

The paper highlights several significant outcomes:

1. The development of a conceptual framework that enables institutions to move beyond binary thinking about higher education provision while working within existing regulatory parameters.
2. The creation of open-ended, reflexive questions that encourage deeper engagement with quality practices rather than mere compliance.
3. A demonstration of how communities of practice can effectively navigate between policy requirements and the need for innovation in quality assurance.
4. An example of how reflexive-generative methodology can transform quality assurance approaches.

The HEPS development process also yielded important insights about the relationship between quality assurance frameworks and institutional practice. Rather than prescribing specific approaches, the HEPS encourages institutions to consider how their choices across multiple dimensions create learning environments that support their educational objectives. This represents a significant shift from traditional quality assurance approaches that often focus on compliance with predetermined standards.

Looking forward, this work has implications for both policy and practice in higher education quality assurance. It suggests ways to develop more flexible, adaptive quality frameworks that can accommodate rapid change while maintaining rigorous standards. The paper also provides a model for how quality assurance bodies can work collaboratively with sector stakeholders to develop standards that promote innovation while ensuring quality.

The paper concludes by reflecting on how this approach to developing quality assurance standards might inform broader efforts to transform higher education practices. By demonstrating how reflexive-generative methodology can help navigate between existing constraints and future possibilities, it offers valuable insights for quality assurance practitioners and policymakers working to adapt higher education systems to meet evolving societal needs.

I. **Aims and intentions:**

Primary Aim: To demonstrate how reflexive-generative methodology, employed through a Community of Practice approach, can transform quality assurance frameworks to better serve evolving higher education needs, using the development of a Higher Education Practice Standard (HEPS) for Modes of Learning and Teaching Provision as a case example.

Specific Intentions:

1. To examine how Communities of Practice can effectively navigate between existing regulatory constraints and the need for innovation in quality assurance frameworks.
2. To demonstrate the development process of a conceptual framework that enables institutions to transcend binary thinking about educational provision modalities.
3. To illustrate how reflexive-generative methodology can be employed to create quality assurance standards that promote continuous improvement rather than mere compliance.
4. To share insights from the iterative process of developing and refining frameworks for understanding modes of provision in higher education.

5. To explore how quality assurance frameworks can be designed to encourage deeper institutional engagement with pedagogical purpose and learning environment design.
6. To contribute to broader discussions about transforming quality assurance practices in ways that support innovation while maintaining standards.

Innovative Quality Assurance for Lifelong Learning: Institutional Certification and Microcredentials

Dr. Stefanie Kröner, EVALAG | Evaluationsagentur Baden-Württemberg, Germany

ABSTRACT

The rapid growth in demand for academic continuing education requires higher education institutions (HEIs) to adopt agile approaches to program development, planning, and quality assurance. To meet these demands, HEIs must implement internal quality assurance mechanisms that support accreditation and certification beyond traditional cycles (e.g., the standard eight-year timeframe).

This session examines how HEIs can adapt quality assurance processes to foster innovative learning pathways in lifelong learning. Drawing from practical experience, we present a case study on integrating institutional certification with system accreditation. Our model enables the continuous assessment of microcredentials, empowering HEIs to quickly respond to market demands while ensuring high-quality offerings outside standard accreditation cycles.

Outline

HEIs are shifting from traditional teaching to lifelong learning, addressing a broader and more diverse audience beyond traditional students. Lifelong learning has expanded the role of HEIs to include academic continuing education within the quaternary education sector, encompassing adult education, vocational training, and lifelong learning opportunities.

This new paradigm demands that HEIs balance quality assurance with agility, responding swiftly to market needs through flexible and high-quality offerings. Internal mechanisms must support accreditation and certification processes that operate outside conventional timelines.

We will present a scalable institutional certification model for academic continuing education, focusing on microcredential certification. This approach aligns quality assurance with industry needs and the demands of lifelong learning.

Participants will learn:

- The role of institutional certification in fostering flexibility and responsiveness.
- How internal review processes, with external reviewer input, can maintain continuous quality assurance for microcredentials.
- Strategies for aligning quality assurance frameworks with lifelong learning paradigms.

Session Goals and intent

This session aims to share best practices and lessons learned in supporting HEIs to develop responsive, high-quality continuing education programs. We highlight the potential of institutional certification – especially when integrated with system accreditation – as a tool for meeting the dynamic requirements of lifelong learning. Establishing an internal review process with external reviewer participation enables continuous assessment and certification of microcredentials, ensuring flexibility beyond the standard accreditation cycles.

"Common Quality Assurance Standards" for inter-university exchange with quality assurance within the broader Asian region

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ABSTRACT

CAMPUS Asia (CA) is a concept originated in a proposal at the second Japan-China-Korea Trilateral Summit in 2009, to promote quality-assured student exchange among universities in the three countries. To support the success of the initiative, the QA agencies from the three countries have jointly conducted QA projects for the CA programs since its launch in 2010. Starting in 2021, the participating countries expanded beyond Japan, China, and Korea to include the ASEAN region. As the role of QA became even more important due to the expansion, the three QA agencies were commissioned by their respective governments to develop the "Common Quality Assurance Standards." When developing the "Standards," the following three principles were considered: 1. consideration of diversity, 2. promotion of flexibility, and 3. support for sustainable QA. The "Standards" are intended to serve as common reference points and contribute to the enhancement of quality-assured inter-university student exchanges in Asia.

Collective Action for Mobility Program of University Students in Asia (CAMPUS Asia) is a concept established by the governments of Japan, China, and Korea to promote quality-assured student exchanges. At the second Japan-China-Korea Trilateral Summit in 2009, a proposal was presented to further promote high-quality inter-university exchanges between the three countries. In April 2010, the Japan-China-Korea Committee for Promoting Exchange and Cooperation among Universities was established to discuss measures to promote quality-assured inter-university exchanges, and the government-led CAMPUS Asia initiative was hereby launched.

The three countries' governments jointly determined the adoption of CAMPUS Asia programs. The CAMPUS Asia program consists of at least three universities from Japan, China, and Korea, and offers various types of exchange programs, such as degree programs (including double/joint degrees) at undergraduate and/or graduate level, semester-long exchanges, and short-term intensive programs.

Each mode of the CAMPUS Asia project lasts five years. Mode 1, conducted from FY2011 to 2015, was a trial period during which ten pilot programs were implemented. The governments recognized their outstanding achievements and thus, Mode 2 from FY2016 to 2020, became a full-fledged implementation with the number of participating programs increasing to 17.

Having recognized the nature of quality assurance (QA) in international education as a common challenge, the three QA agencies of the three countries, National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE, Japan)[1], Higher Education Evaluation Center of the Ministry of Education (HEEC, China)[2], and the Korean Council for University Education (KCUE, Korea), launched the Japan-China-Korea QA Council in March 2010. To further promote international joint academic programs and support their quality assurance efforts, the Council conducted monitoring of the CA programs three times from 2013 to 2019. Monitoring activities were an initiative to identify good practices in the programs from the perspective of the quality of education, which were widely disseminated both domestically and internationally. Many good practices have been compiled into the reports.

Starting in 2021, the participating countries expanded beyond Japan, China, and Korea, aiming for sustainable development and expansion of CAMPUS Asia in Mode 3. Specifically, some universities from ASEAN countries joined from Mode 3, and 20 programs were initiated from November 2021.

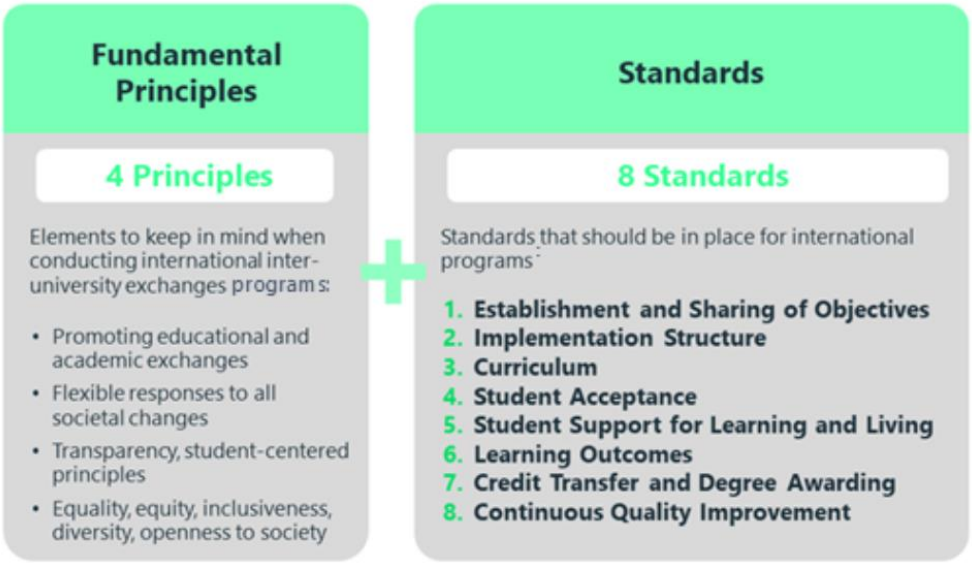
The role of QA becomes even more important in developing and expanding CAMPUS Asia beyond the boundaries of the three countries to further enhance student mobility and harmonious inter-university student exchanges. In particular, to ensure the quality of programs that transcend various countries and regions in Asia, a mutual understanding on what quality is commonly desired for inter-university student exchange programs is required, while respecting the differences between the national systems. It is also desirable to establish a reference point which encourages universities to engage in sustainable QA by themselves, under a common understanding and transparency across borders.

Thus, following the CAMPUS Asia monitoring, the QA agencies of the three countries were commissioned by the Committee to develop common QA standards.

The purpose of developing the "Standards" is to pursue common quality and values of international programs, to serve as common reference points for sustainable QA efforts of university consortiums, and eventually to support further promotion of quality-assured exchanges among universities throughout Asia. Based on this purpose, three principles were taken into consideration when developing the "Standards": 1. Consideration of Diversity (diverse countries of Asia and various types of exchange programs), 2. Promotion of Flexibility (provision of appropriate educational methods and support systems to ensure students' learning in times of uncertainty caused by the pandemic and social changes), and 3. Support for Sustainable Quality Assurance.

The first step in developing the "Standards" was to collect and organize examples of inter-university student exchange programs as well as guidelines/reference documents, and to carefully consider the perspectives required. The key reference examples include "Guidelines for Exchange and Cooperation among Universities in China, Japan, and Korea with QA," "ASEAN Plus Three Guidelines on Student Exchanges and Mobility," and "Joint Guidelines for Monitoring International Cooperative Academic Programs in 'CAMPUS Asia' (Second Edition)."

A basic structure of the "Standards" was created by the literature research, and the preliminary draft of the "Standards" was developed through discussions among the QA agencies of the three countries. The preliminary draft was then elaborated by consultation with experts and online survey on all twenty CAMPUS Asia consortiums. To review the appropriateness of the "Standards," and to support even further enhancement of the consortiums' programs, interview surveys based on the "Standards (Draft)" were conducted on four CAMPUS Asia consortiums by the three QA agencies. To collect perspectives and opinions from ASEAN countries, QA agencies and experts from ASEAN countries were invited in the interview surveys as observers. In these surveys, the internal quality assurance of the program was particularly focused on in terms of its continuous quality improvement. The feedback from the interviewed consortiums was taken into consideration in the process of finalizing the "Standards (Draft)."



The developed "Standards" consist of fundamental principles and eight standards, as outlined below. Each standard has sub-standard(s) which describe important perspectives for quality inter-university exchange (e.g. 1.1 The HEI, with partner institutions, clearly defines the objectives of the program, the personality to be cultivated, and the expected learning outcomes in terms of students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and shares them among stakeholders.) A final report, including the "Standards" and the experiences in their development, will be published in 2025-2026.

In this session, we would like to introduce the details of the developed "Standards" and exchange opinions and views on quality inter-university exchanges with the audience.

Non-university education – specific pathway, specific EQA? The examples of "grandes écoles/daigakko" in France and Japan

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ABSTRACT

The higher education landscape is characterized by great diversity, accentuated by the variety of types of institutions. A variety of non-university education providers are favoured by students for reasons as diverse as prestige, employability, perceived quality of education or choice of specialisation. In France, the well-established system of 'grandes écoles', selective higher education institutions recruiting through examinations, is often seen as a pathway to excellence in competition with university. Japan offers a direct example of comparability with the 'daigakko' (literal translation from 'grandes écoles') which are specialised post-secondary institutions, sometimes affiliated to government agencies. From the point of view of external quality assurance, the question arises of the recognition of these institutions and their diplomas. How can third-party agencies like Hcéres or NIAD-QE accommodate the specificities of non-university education and support flexible learning pathways?

Outline

A key notion of flexible learning pathways are the pathways for transfer within higher education. "Transfer pathways can facilitate horizontal mobility – i.e. allowing students to switch to a different study programme within the same level of education, or vertical mobility – enabling their progression to higher levels of education." (Martin & Godonoga, 2022). Along with a variety of policy instruments and national legislation, quality assurance agencies can facilitate transferability by strengthening the coherence between non-university education and university education. This presentation offers a unique opportunity to understand the concept and external quality assurance (EQA) of one specific type of non-university education provider, the "grandes écoles", that has developed in two different education system. Through the comparative case studies of France and Japan, key questions about the specificities of EQA procedures for non-university education and university education, their attempted convergence, and the implication for flexible learning pathways will be discussed.

Introduction: Non-university education institutions around the world: a growing contribution to the higher education system.

I. **Debunking the "grandes écoles" system in France and in Japan**
   a. In France: an elite system
   b. Japan: originally a system to educate civil services; now partly a variety of higher education providers
   c. Main similarities and differences: Japan; no legal framework to define daigakkos, vocational orientation, variety of prestige, paid/unpaid students.

II. **Implication for external quality assurance and flexible learning pathways in France**
   a. EQA of *Grandes écoles* at programme level: "Grade licence/master", a recognition system of Grandes écoles diploma as academic degrees to facilitate transfer and employability.
      - Specificities of "grade licence/master"

- EQA of “grade licence/master”: navigating through several types of Grandes écoles diplomas (at engineering schools, business schools, art schools…)

b. EQA of *Grandes écoles* at institutional level: towards a convergence as "grandes écoles" are increasingly integrated into university consortia.

- EQA of “Grandes écoles” versus “Universities
- EQA of « Grandes écoles » within « Universities ».

III. **Implications for external quality assurance and flexible learning pathways in Japan**

a. NIAD-QE assesses daigakkos’ programs focusing on their curricula and faculty organization to recognize them as:

- University’s bachelor’s program equivalent-
- University’s master’s program equivalent-
- University’s doctoral program equivalent-

b. NIAD-QE provides graduates of daigakkos with pathways to earn degrees based on the assessment at personal levels

- Grades of each graduate at all levels
- Thesis at the master’s and the doctoral equivalent levels that requires defences.

c. NIAD-QE as a QA agency is not supposed to evaluate NIAD-QE itself as an external degree-awarding organization.

- It is difficult to implement external quality assurance and provide flexible learning pathways at the same time.
- How can a quasi-governmental higher education agency integrate activities of quality assurance and expansion of opportunities to earn academic degrees through flexible pathways without contradictions?

Conclusion and discussion

Should non-university education require *ad hoc*/specific EQA?

What are the specific challenges regarding the EQA of private providers?

What role can external quality assurance agencies play in smoothing the transfer of students from non-university truck to university truck?

What is the limitation of external quality assurance agencies in playing such a role?

Aims and intentions

To clarify the function of external quality assurance in reconciling the legitimacy and flexibility of non-university learning pathways at the higher education level through a comparative study on French grandes écoles and Japanese daigakkos.

Trends and challenges in designing flexible and qualitative work-based learning: the role of QA agencies

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Drd. Horia-Şerban Onița, The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance of Higher Education - ARACIS, Romania

ABSTRACT

The session aims to explore various developments in quality assuring work-based learning in higher education around the world. Due to various public policy rationales for introducing or enhancing workbased learning, different approaches in the legislation and the practice of higher education institutions have emerged. These distinctive approaches require fit-for-purpose QA arrangements for providing qualitative work-based learning in view of successfully supporting students achieving labour-market relevant competences. The deep engagement of economic actors in WBL calls for analysing how various components of learning, teaching and assessment, as well as supporting services, are delineated between those involved in the study programme. The session will focus on identifying a typology of QA standards for WBL, highlighting the very recent case of ARACIS introducing QA of dual studies in 2024, and offer a space for discussing good practices and challenges identified by INQAAHE members.

Outline

Work based-learning ('WBL') in higher education has seen an increase in interest due to stubborn youth unemployment, calls and public expectations for better linking higher education with the labour market, a greater need for general competencies that allow adaptability in an increasingly complex, competitive and fast-paced labour market, and a credentialisation of qualifications, where for jobs not necessarily requiring higher education "being a graduate has become a semi-compulsory component"[1].

The role of QA agencies in quality assuring WPL is quintessential considering the distinctive features of WBL:

- Tension between WBL and academic standards[2];
- Different types of WBL, with particularities requiring a fit-for-purpose approach;
- Lack of experience in WBL in HE in comparison to VET;
- Particularity of engaging stakeholders (employers) in a specific, co-leading role.

The role of thissession is to reflect on recent developments, challenges and patternsin quality assuring WBL, considering its varieties of deployment, present the case of Romania in introducing the QA of dual education and foster a discussion among participants about practices related to the QA of WBL.

In Europe, the European Qualification Framework[3] distinguishes between knowledge, abilities and responsibility and autonomy. For the latter two, successfully achieving the relevant learning outcomes may

[1] Scott, 1995, apud J. Brennan & B. Little, 1996, A Review of Work Based Learning in Higher Education by John Brennan and Brenda Little

[2] ENQA, 2018, Quality Assurance and work-based learning

[3] Council Recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning

require work-based learning[4] , especially for competencies related to teamwork, problem solving, communication, creativity and innovation, independence in learning, entrepreneurship or intrapreneurship[5]. In terms of propositional knowledge, WBL supports the particularisation of principles in the applied field of professional action[6] , supporting the achievement of both transferable skills and transferring or meta-skills.[7] However, the literature on WBL mostly follows a VET context, while in HE, this is still an emerging development.

There is no agreed-upon definition of WBL. One of the few examples of defining WBL and its variations is seen in the UK, through the QAA's guidance[8]. QAA defines WBL as authentic structured opportunities for learning which are achieved in a workplace setting or are designed to meet an identified workplace need, involving learning through work, learning for work and/or learning at work. Based on the same document, in terms of intensity of work-based curriculum, WBL can be incorporated as live-work-based projects (lowest intensity) to apprenticeships (highest intensity), in the latter case the education experience being subordinated to the work experience. In the same vein, the European Commission[9] observed three models of WBL in VET: alternance schemes or apprenticeships, on-the-job training periods and integrated programmes.

The WBL can be included in the academic qualifications in various means, including through transportation, translation or transformation[10]. However, it is important that WBL does not become a way for replacing regular workers and companies understand their role in contributing to the learning experience.

In comparison with VET, QA of WBL in HE is not well defined. According to the WEXHE study, few QA agencies have adopted specific regulations on the QA of WBL in HE (e.g. ARACIS, ECCE, MFHEA, Unibasq – specifically for dual education, QAA, QQI). However, the most recent analysis is more than 4 years old. Analysing the regulations of QA agencies in Europe, some common patterns emerge: the responsibility of academic standards, monitoring and review remains with the higher education institution, according to institutional procedures related to QA, WBL elements need to be well placed in the academic calendar and curriculum, students need to be prepared for the working environment and supported through mentoring, managing or counselling, partnerships with enterprises need to divide responsibilities clearly and to prepare enterprises in their role in student assessment.

In the case of Romania, the new Law on Higher Education from 2023 introduced dual studies, based on a consortium with economic partners, where the learning, teaching and research activities areequally divided between academic learning and WBL. As such, there is no intensity of one component over the other. Courses and seminars are exclusively the responsibility of HEI, while practical and research activities are split between the institution and the economic partner.

A particularity is drawn from the requirement that the economic partner has an interest for hiring the students after graduation (setting conditions for employment in the student contract), similar to apprenticeships but without employment during studies. Furthermore, the economic partner contributes financially to the infrastructure of the HEI and provides tutors with certain academic qualifications who receive training in pedagogy. The Specific standards[11] adopted by ARACIS in 2024 for the QA of dual studies defines particularities related to partnership conditions, admission of students, content and organisation of learning and teaching, evaluation, diploma, students support, teaching staff and resources, sought in WBL.

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[4] ENQA & Groningen WEXHE team, 2020, Filling the Gap: Defining a Robust Quality Assurance Model for Work-Based Learning in Higher Education

[5] ENQA, idem

[6] Eraut, 1995, apud Brennan & Little, idem

[7] Bridges, 1994, apud Brennan & Little, ibidem

[8] QAA, 2018, UK Quality Code for Higher Education - Advice and Guidance on Work-based Learning

[9] European Commission, 2013, Work-Based Learning in Europe: Practices and Policy Pointers

[10] Portwood, 1993, apud Brennan & Little, ibidem

[11] ARACIS, 2024, Specific quality standards for dual bachelor & master studies

Determining how learning outcomes should be split between academic and WBL, as well as how they are interrelated, for each discipline, is remarkably challenging.

The session would take the following format:

- If available, the authors will send the participants a short survey before the session to gauge their experience in WBL, their view on the challenges in WBL and their expectations for the session. This will help the authors to adjust their session and divide participants in small groups for discussions ensuring a balanced composition
- The session will start with an introduction of the objectives of the session (3 min) and a Mentimeter interactive session (7 min), asking participants value-based judgements on the relevance and particularities of QA of WBL and stimulating follow-up answers
- This will be followed by a presentation by ARACIS (PPTX presentation) on main drivers and patterns of WBL in Europe, followed by the approach adopted by ARACIS in its recent introduction of QA standards for WBL (15-20 min)
- The participants will be divided into small groups with reflection questions for discussing the work (or potential work) of their QA agencies in WBL (15-20 min), followed by a group final reflection while addressing potential final questions/inputs and conclusion (5 min)

Innovative Learning Pathways and Quality Assurance in Sultan Qaboos Naval Academy in Oman

Poster

Hamed Salim Al Maqbali, Sultan Qaboos Naval Academy, Royal Navy of Oman, Ministry of Defense, Sultanate of Oman

ABSTRACT

Sultan Qaboos Naval Academy play a pivotal role in preparing personnel for dynamic and complex operational environments. With the increasing need for adaptable and mission-focused training, these institutions are incorporating flexible learning pathways that combine formal education, work-based learning, and non-formal training approaches. The integration of micro-credentials, recognition of prior learning (RPL), and competency-based training has proven essential in addressing the diverse skill requirements of modern military operations.

This poster examines how quality assurance frameworks can be adapted to support innovative learning pathways within military academic centres. It highlights strategies for ensuring the credibility and relevance of learning outcomes while accommodating the unique challenges of military training, such as time-sensitive operational demands and diverse learner profiles. Examples include the assessment of experiential learning in field training, the accreditation of specialized skills through micro-credentials, and the alignment of informal learning practices with formal educational standards.

The discussion will explore approaches to designing robust quality assurance mechanisms that reinforce confidence in Sultan Qaboos Naval Academy. Key objectives include maintaining alignment with global quality standards, fostering collaboration between military and academic institutions, and leveraging technology to enhance training outcomes. This poster aims to demonstrate how quality assurance can drive innovation in military education while ensuring mission readiness and operational excellence.

Aims and intentions

- To explore the integration of flexible learning pathways in Sultan Qaboos Naval Academy.
- To propose strategies for aligning military training with global quality assurance standards.
- To highlight the importance of quality assurance in maintaining public confidence and operational effectiveness in military education.

Introduction

Sultan Qaboos Naval Academy have a unique responsibility to develop well-rounded personnel capable of thriving in dynamic and high-pressure operational environments. The integration of flexible learning pathways has become increasingly critical to address the evolving nature of military missions and global challenges. These pathways include formal education, non-formal training, and work-based learning approaches that provide both theoretical and practical skills.

Quality assurance frameworks must adapt to ensure the credibility, relevance, and effectiveness of these diverse learning approaches. By focusing on robust assessment and accreditation mechanisms, military institutions can provide flexible yet reliable training that meets both operational and educational standards.

Key Components of Learning Pathways in Military Training

1. Formal Education:

- Degree programs in engineering, logistics, or military sciences.
- Partnerships with universities to offer accredited programs.

2. Non-Formal Training:

- Specialized workshops and tactical training.
- Certification programs for specific military technologies or systems.

3. Work-Based Learning:

- On-the-job training during missions or operations.
- Recognition of prior learning (RPL) to validate field experience.

A comparison of the learning pathways with examples is provided in the **Table 1** and **Figure 1** shows the proportion of learning modalities at Sultan Qaboos Naval Academy in 2024.

Table 1. Comparison of learning pathways.

Pathway	Characteristics	Examples
Formal Education	Structured, degree-based learning	Military science, engineering degrees
Non-Formal	Skill-specific, short-term training	Tactical workshops, certifications
Work-Based	Practical, experience-driven learning	Field missions, RPL assessments

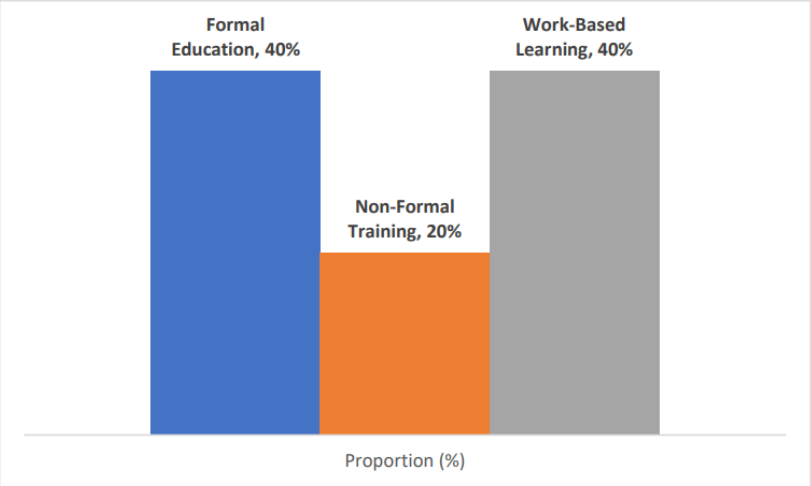


Figure 1. Proportion of learning modalities in a typical military training program at Sultan Qaboos Naval Academy in 2024.

Quality Assurance Considerations

- Alignment with Global Standards: Ensure training programs align with internationally recognized quality standards to maintain credibility.
- Stakeholder Collaboration: Facilitate partnerships between military institutions, academic organizations, and industry to enhance program relevance.

- Assessment and Validation: Develop robust mechanisms to assess informal and experiential learning outcomes.

The quality assurance components and framework are summarized in **Figure 2**.

Figure 2. Quality assurance framework for military learning programme.

Innovative Tools and Techniques at Sultan Qaboos Naval Academy

- Use of micro-credentials to recognize specialized skills.
- Integration of simulation-based training for enhanced practical learning.
- Application of digital platforms to track and evaluate learning progress.

In Sultan Qaboos Naval Academy many learning and teaching methods are followed such as computer-aided instruction, demonstration, discussion, flowchart text, gaming, in-tray exercise recording, lecture tactical trainer, textbook, practical 3D, self-study models, seminar video, simulation, touch-drill flannel-board and tutorial periodicals.

By combining rigorous quality assurance practices with innovative learning pathways, Sultan Qaboos Naval Academy can ensure their personnel are prepared for modern operational demands while maintaining public confidence in the education and training provided.

Professionalization of Academic Continuing Education Teaching to Promote Innovative Learning Pathways in Academic Continuing Education: Impulses from a Survey of Lecturers in HEIs in Baden-Württemberg, Germany

Poster

Dr. Stefanie Kröner (presenting & co-author),
Ana-Maria Bodo-Hartmann (co-author),
Galina Novikova (co-author)

Participants in continuing education differ significantly from students in undergraduate and graduate degree programs, as they require concrete, practical competencies as learning outcomes. These participants, who often have substantial professional experience, are specialists and/or managers with specific teaching and learning needs. To address these demands, workshops, as well as opportunities for exchange and networking among lecturers, have the potential to enhance the professionalization of teaching in academic continuing education. This professionalization is a key factor in enabling innovative learning pathways for participants in this field.

As part of the project *Hochschulweiterbildung@BW* (2022–2024) in Baden-Württemberg, Germany, EVALAG has developed various professionalization initiatives for academic continuing education. These initiatives were designed in collaboration with the higher education didactics centers across Baden-Württemberg.

In March and April 2023, a survey was conducted among 189 lecturers in academic continuing education in Baden-Württemberg to identify their specific needs. Based on the survey results, the following professionalization initiatives were developed:

- Online workshops
- Peer-to-peer teaching exchanges
- Networking events
- Publication of good practice examples

The poster presents the results of the online survey and the professionalization initiatives derived from it. It also addresses the challenges and opportunities encountered in implementing these measures. In particular, the poster reflects on the challenges faced by lecturers in academic continuing education, such as managing the heterogeneity of the target group and meeting market demands for innovative and flexible learning pathways.

Through this poster, we aim to spark a discussion on the importance of professionalizing teaching to foster innovative learning pathways in academic continuing education. This professionalization is crucial, given the diverse backgrounds and needs of participants compared to students in traditional undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

Promoting Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in Japan: Conditions and Future Directions

Poster

Ana-Maria CAZAN, Transilvania University of Braşov, Institute of Philosophy and Psychology, Romania
Simona LACHE, Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania
Cătălin Ioan MAICAN, Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania
Daniela Veronica NECŞOI, Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania
Maria Luminița SCUTARU, Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania

ABSTRACT

The validity of student evaluations of teaching (SET) is a debated topic (Hornstein, 2017). While evidence supports their validity, these evaluations face critique (Spooren et al., 2013, Boring et al., 2016). Students often assess instructional quality based on course characteristics (e.g., perceived difficulty), student factors (e.g., relationships with instructors), and instructor traits (e.g., strictness) (Quansah et al., 2024).

This study aims to propose and examine the psychometric properties of a new SET instrument premised on the multidimensionality of SET (Perry & Smart, 2007). The tool assesses seven dimensions: (1) Course organization, (2) Teaching methods, (3) Learning resources, (4) Professor-student relationship and climate, (5) Quality of student learning, (6) Overall course quality, and (7) Student involvement. Items, rated on a five-point Likert scale, were tailored for course and practical activities.

Data from 7,500 students at Transilvania University of Braşov (Romania) showed high internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha > .87). Exploratory and Confirmatory factor analyses identified a unified six-dimension structure, with Student Involvement emerging as a separate scale measuring participation, perceived subject difficulty, and self-assessment of involvement. Multigroup analysis revealed differences in evaluations based on students' educational field and educational level.

A key feature of the instrument is the method of delivering the results and feedback to the evaluated teachers. For each dimension, the scores were divided into three categories: low, medium, and high. Each level was accompanied by performance descriptors and suggestions for optimizing teaching activities, thereby emphasizing the qualitative evaluation of teachers. This approach emphasizes qualitative evaluation, enhancing both the assessment's accuracy and its potential to guide instructional development.

Validating a multidimensional instrument for Student evaluation of teaching: Insights into instructional quality and feedback optimization

Poster

Miharu Kato, Japan UniversityAccreditation Association (JUAA), Japan

ABSTRACT

In order to accelerate lifelong learning in a rapidly changing society, recognition of prior learning (RPL) has been developed in various regions and countries. For example, UNESCO and the EU have issued guidelines. It is also being promoted in ASEAN countries.

On the other hand, RPL has not been promoted much in Japan. This is due to conditions that are unique to Japan. These include unique employment practices and the difficulty of standardizing workers' skills. In the face of these conditions, the Japanese government has taken approaches that differ from RPL, but that share some similar elements with it in terms of standardizing workers' skills.

In addition, changing employment practices and a rapidly changing industrial structure require workers to have specific skills, which calls for greater visibility of prior learning.

This poster will present the approaches that the Japanese government has taken and the new approaches it is introducing, focusing mainly on the standardization and identification of workers' skills that are the key issues in RPL, and it will describe how these approaches are positioned within the concept of RPL.

Furthermore, the poster will show that it is important to deepen the discussion about RPL and will propose a way to introduce it in the Japanese context.

Sharing the Experience of INQAAHE ISG Application

Poster

Jan Fell, Assistant Research Fellow, Taiwan Assessment and Evaluation Association (TWAEA), Taiwan

ABSTRACT

This poster will showcase how the Taiwan Assessment and Evaluation Association (TWAEA) applies the International Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (ISGs) to address challenges in Taiwan's higher education sector, including a declining birthrate, an aging population, and resource allocation disparities. Through specific case studies, the poster will detail how ISGs are applied in self-assessment, site visits, and external evaluations. It will also highlight the critical role of international accreditation in enhancing trust among academic institutions and fostering international collaboration. Additionally, the poster will explore challenges encountered during implementation, such as language barriers and time investment, and present solutions. The practical benefits of ISGs in promoting the internationalization of Taiwan's higher education will be emphasized.

THEME 3. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Evaluation in the Era of Artificial Intelligence: The Roles of AI and Human Evaluators

Akinori Matsuzaka, Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA), Japan

ABSTRACT

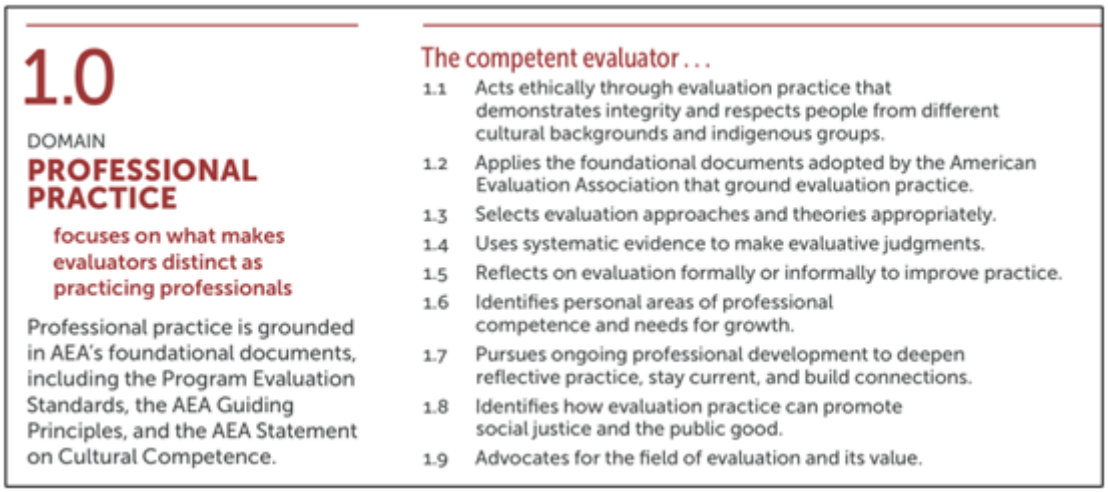
Revolutionary changes to human life are emerging as artificial intelligence (AI) brings multiple benefits to society while posing critical challenges to conventional practices. Higher education is not exempt from its effects, and quality assurance (QA) is undergoing a transition. This workshop explores external quality assurance (EQA) in the era of AI, highlighting the roles of AI and human evaluators. Glancing at Based on the a set of evaluator competencies which the American Evaluation Association (AEA) has stipulated, it poses two questions: (i) what roles should (and can) AI assume? And (ii) what responsibilities should human evaluators maintain? By discussing these two key questions, it is expected to gain insights into what human roles can and should not be replaced by AI.

Introduction

Revolutionary changes to human life are emerging as artificial intelligence (AI) brings multiple benefits to society while posing critical challenges to conventional practices. Higher education is not exempt from its effects, and quality assurance (QA) is undergoing a transition. This workshop explores external quality assurance (EQA) in the era of AI, highlighting the roles of AI and human evaluators. By discussing these two key questions, the workshop explores new approaches and perspectives in evaluation.

1. **Changed Circumstances for Evaluation**

Extensive practitioner and researcher discussions have been held over evaluators including the desired competencies of them. Patton (2018) speaks of 'evaluative thinking', describing core evaluator skills as critical thinking, reasoning, argumentation, and telling a coherent, evidence-based story (p. 20). The AEA (2018) has articulated a set of competencies across five domains (see Figure 1).



1.0

DOMAIN

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

focuses on what makes evaluators distinct as practicing professionals

Professional practice is grounded in AEA's foundational documents, including the Program Evaluation Standards, the AEA Guiding Principles, and the AEA Statement on Cultural Competence.

The competent evaluator . . .

1.1 Acts ethically through evaluation practice that demonstrates integrity and respects people from different cultural backgrounds and indigenous groups.

1.2 Applies the foundational documents adopted by the American Evaluation Association that ground evaluation practice.

1.3 Selects evaluation approaches and theories appropriately.

1.4 Uses systematic evidence to make evaluative judgments.

1.5 Reflects on evaluation formally or informally to improve practice.

1.6 Identifies personal areas of professional competence and needs for growth.

1.7 Pursues ongoing professional development to deepen reflective practice, stay current, and build connections.

1.8 Identifies how evaluation practice can promote social justice and the public good.

1.9 Advocates for the field of evaluation and its value.

2.0

DOMAIN
METHODOLOGY

focuses on technical aspects of evidence-based, systematic inquiry for valued purposes

Methodology includes quantitative, qualitative, and mixed designs for learning, understanding, decision making, and judging.

The competent evaluator . . .

2.1 Identifies evaluation purposes and needs.
2.2 Determines evaluation questions.
2.3 Designs credible and feasible evaluations that address identified purposes and questions.
2.4 Determines and justifies appropriate methods to answer evaluation questions, e.g., quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods.
2.5 Identifies assumptions that underlie methodologies and program logic.
2.6 Conducts reviews of the literature when appropriate.
2.7 Identifies relevant sources of evidence and sampling procedures.
2.8 Involves stakeholders in designing, implementing, interpreting, and reporting evaluations as appropriate.
2.9 Uses program logic and program theory as appropriate.
2.10 Collects data using credible, feasible, and culturally appropriate procedures.
2.11 Analyzes data using credible, feasible, and culturally appropriate procedures.
2.12 Identifies strengths and limitations of the evaluation design and methods.
2.13 Interprets findings/results in context.
2.14 Uses evidence and interpretations to draw conclusions, making judgments and recommendations when appropriate.

3.0

DOMAIN
CONTEXT

focuses on understanding the unique circumstances, multiple perspectives, and changing settings of evaluations and their users/stakeholders

Context involves site/location/environment, participants/stakeholders, organization/structure, culture/diversity, history/traditions, values/beliefs, politics/economics, power/privilege, and other characteristics.

The competent evaluator . . .

3.1 Responds respectfully to the uniqueness of the evaluation context.
3.2 Engages a diverse range of users/stakeholders throughout the evaluation process.
3.3 Describes the program, including its basic purpose, components, and its functioning in broader contexts.
3.4 Attends to systems issues within the context.
3.5 Communicates evaluation processes and results in timely, appropriate, and effective ways.
3.6 Facilitates shared understanding of the program and its evaluation with stakeholders.
3.7 Clarifies diverse perspectives, stakeholder interests, and cultural assumptions.
3.8 Promotes evaluation use and influence in context.

4.0

DOMAIN
PLANNING & MANAGEMENT

focuses on determining and monitoring work plans, timelines, resources, and other components needed to complete and deliver an evaluation study

Planning and management include networking, developing proposals, contracting, determining work assignments, monitoring progress, and fostering use.

The competent evaluator . . .

4.1 Negotiates and manages a feasible evaluation plan, budget, resources, and timeline.
4.2 Addresses aspects of culture in planning and managing evaluations.
4.3 Manages and safeguards evaluation data.
4.4 Plans for evaluation use and influence.
4.5 Coordinates and supervises evaluation processes and products.
4.6 Documents evaluation processes and products.
4.7 Teams with others when appropriate.
4.8 Monitors evaluation progress and quality and makes adjustments when appropriate.
4.9 Works with stakeholders to build evaluation capacity when appropriate.
4.10 Uses technology appropriately to support and manage the evaluation.

Figure 1. Source: AEA (2018).

As the AEA (2018) indicates, competencies range so wide, from, e.g., acting ethically (1.1), determining evaluation questions (2.2) to, e.g., facilitating constructive and culturally responsive interaction (5.7). Here, however, a question arises. Do these competencies still have meaning in the era of AI?

Mason (2023) argues that some evaluation competencies are likely to be impacted by AI. Drawing from the AEA (2018), she argues that competencies that are asocial and non-creative, and those that are less strategy-based, are likely to be replaced. This includes competencies like determining evaluation questions (Mason, 2023, pp. 16–20). Ferreti (2023) contends that conventional paperwork and 'by-the-book' approaches can be substituted by AI (pp. 76–83). This necessitates a re-examination of evaluation roles, raising critical questions about what roles AI should (and can) assume; and what responsibilities human evaluators should maintain.

2. The Roles of AI and Evaluators

Delineating these roles requires consideration of the purposes of evaluations. Threshold evaluations entail distinct procedures from enhancement-oriented evaluations. An exchange of ideas is, therefore, required to explore new approaches in various context. The following is merely ideas for initiating discussion, derived from the context of the Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA) and from some other studies.

2.1. Assigning Roles to AI

Some possible roles of AI include:

- Data collection and analysis
- Assistance in paperwork
- Dialogical partner
- Assistance in professional development of evaluators

The JUAA is an EQA agency in Japan, evaluating and accrediting higher education institutions (HEIs) and some programmes. All the practices adopt 'fitness-for-purpose' approaches, respecting each HEI's specific mission and purpose. For this reason, evaluators are required to be context-responsive and engage in clear reasoning in conveying their findings. Clear reasoning makes it central in evaluators' work to gather and interpret range of evidence which is collected from official documents and via dialogue with HEIs.

Of the possible four roles shown above, the first two are most basic but greatly beneficial ones. While the JUAA has not employed AI in evaluation yet, utilizing AI for data collection and analysis, and in drafting, summarising, and simplifying evaluators' reports will increase operational efficiency. Increased efficiency could enable better allocation of evaluator time.

Given the potential of AI, it can help evaluators to deepen their thinking. Shibu (2024) reports how a US-based business school employed AI to evaluate scholarly articles and identify weaknesses for successfully passing accreditation. Chatbot-type AI plays the role of a dialogical partner which responds to individual queries. Like this case of HEIs' self-review, evaluators can also utilise AI to scrutinise their own evaluation findings. Context-responsive evaluation, like that conducted by the JUAA, is not a standardised and formulaic process. It requires situation-specific inquiry and understanding. AI could help evaluators in such work by becoming a dialogical partner.

AI may have utility in improving evaluators' professional development. Some researchers have acknowledged the benefits of integrating AI into professional training, because it enables the design of tailored training to suit individual needs and proficiency levels (Fakhar et al., 2024). In terms of the JUAA, evaluators are trained using case studies, yet the cases are not sufficient for diverse evaluators with different levels of expertise.. A personalised tutor system utilising AI may enable the delivery of training that is specifically customised to meet the learning needs of evaluators.

2.2. Rethinking the Roles of Evaluators

In terms of the evaluators' role, two points must be noted. Firstly, the limitations of AI. Despite its potential value in facilitating increased efficiency and accuracy, AI can produce biased or inaccurate outcomes. Secondly, the changed landscape. In Japan, a situation is emerging in which HEIs are leveraging AI to process extensive data and provide services like tailored learning support (Matsuzaka & Kato, 2023, p. 34). Although this is not yet ubiquitous, a recent surge in institutional research (IR) by HEIs suggests that AI data processing may soon be utilised for QA in many HEIs. In other words, more data-driven approaches to QA, and greater diversity in the types of evidencing data are likely to emerge in the future. In such situation, discerning the relevance and validity of evidence and providing a holistic view will become more important, underscoring the indispensable role of human evaluators. Attaining a holistic view is vital in ensuring the impact of QA, as highlighted by Stensaker & Leiber (2015, p. 335), especially context-responsive and enhancement-oriented evaluations like those by the JUAA. This holistic view is achieved by not only synthesising numerical and written evidence but also factoring in oral and visual evidence obtained through human interaction. Through human interaction, shared understandings can be created among evaluators and HEI, which are inevitable for impactful QA. This highlights the evident need for evaluators' interpersonal skills.

Conclusion

This workshop initiates an ongoing discussion of the roles of AI and human evaluators. Different EQA in different contexts generate diverse suggestions and require different skillsets. But it is evident that thinking about AI necessitates reconsidering the role of human evaluators, and the discussion must thoroughly consider this point.

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Development of Rule-based AI Framework for Programme Accreditation Assessment based on Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation (COPPA)

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ABSTRACT

The recent emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed the academic Quality Assurance (QA) practices. In Malaysia, the programme Accreditation exercise is governed by the Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation (COPPA), which outlined seven areas of assessment. This work presents the development of Rule-based AI Framework to assist the programme accreditation assessment submitted by the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The rules were derived from COPPA, and AI was used to provide recommendations whether the submitted information met the mínimum requirement as specified in COPPA. The AI inputs can be used as the check and balance mechanism, as well acting as a tool to generate preliminary reports that need to be validated by the panel of assessors. The results are promising, which suggest that this approach could provide a valuable solution and lay the foundation for the future of programme accreditation practices.

Outline

Part 1: Introduction to Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA)

- The formation of Malaysian Quality Agency (MQA) and its roles as per MQA Act.
- The body that is responsible for accrediting programmes in Malaysia.
- Develop policies related to QA in academics in Malaysia
- The adoption of quality assurance systems via Malaysian Qualifications Framework–MQF 2024.

Part 2: Introduction to the Code of Practice for Programme Audit (COPPA)

What Is COPPA?

- It is a policy that outlines the baseline standards to be met by the Higher Education
- Providers in Malaysia.
- It is meant specifically for the programme accreditation process.
- There are three different documents of COPPA: COPPA (for general programmes), COPPA:ODL (for open and distant learning programmes) and COPTPA (for TVET programmes).

Key Objectives of COPPA:

- To assess and analyse the quality of the academic programmes.
- To set out the principles under which programs are developed to be relevant to the nation's education policy trends and growth of the industry.
- To promote improvement in the processes of teaching, learning as well as assessment.

Structure of COPPA:

- Pre-Audit: Institutional preparation, self assessment, and document submission.
- Audit Process: Evaluation of the program by an audit panel including program objectives, curriculum and outcomes evaluation.
- Decision whether or not to approve the accreditation

Part 3: AI framework on COPPA

- Integration of AI in COPPA:
- The increasing involvement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the COPPA procedure is a new idea that intends to enhance the performance of the programs in conducting audits with respect to the AI recommendation used.
- AI systems trained to issue a preliminary report to be used as an early insight
- How AI Enhances COPPA:
- Data management: AI possesses the ability to collect enormous data from the institutions in order to check the overall adherence to COPPA and give very good insights within a short period of time.
- Predictive analytics: With the aid of program historical data, AI can be able to forecast the problems that may affect program quality and recommend some of the areas that improvement is needed.

Part 4: Rule-based AI algorithms on Programme Assessment

- Rule-Based AI Systems:
- Rule-based AI uses predefined rules and logic to make decisions or recommendations based on input data during the training process
- A few standards extracted from COPPA and used as rules for the training, validation and testing stages
- Application in Programme Assessment:
    - Curriculum Evaluation: AI was used to check whether the curriculum is inline with the naming of the programme, as well as looking into details of the curriculum contents
    - Program Structure: Ensures the program structure aligns with the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF), assessing credit hours, learning deliveries, and module content.
    - Assessment Methods: Evaluates the robustness and variety of assessment strategies used in the program.
    - Automatically flagging discrepancies or inconsistencies in documentation or program implementation.

Part 5: Results and Discussion

- Results of AI-Enhanced COPPA:
- The introduction of AI into the assessment process has shown that it able to give an early prediction about the specific items in COPPA
- In certain cases, it failed to give a definite or explicit explanation, and the assessor may require to conduct further triangulation

Part 6: Conclusions and Future Recommendations

- The integration of AI in COPPA has a positive impact on producing more consistent reports as well as allowing the assessor to concentrate on more complicated areas of assessment

- At this moment, AI is not meant to replace the rule of assessors, but rather as a complement to the current assessment exercise
- Future Recommendation:
    - More research needs to be conducted in order to incorporate AI as part of the QA systems

Using AI to Assist Audit Panel Members during Institutional Audits

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into various sectors has transformed traditional practices, enhancing efficiency and effectiveness. One area where AI's potential needs to be explored is in the realm of Institutional Quality Assurance (QA) audits. This presentation will report on our exploration of an innovative application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as an assistant to an audit panel conducting an Institutional Quality Assurance Audit in higher education. For the intent of this research project, we maintain the analysis of the AI assistant parallel to the one done by the audit panel members. There was no interaction between the two auditing parties. The goal is to present a comparison analysis by the two auditing parties and the implications for the future of QA.

Introduction

In recent years, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into various sectors has transformed traditional practices, enhancing efficiency and effectiveness. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed the teaching and learning landscape, particularly in the classroom environment, where it enhances instructional practices and assessment strategies. AI tools, such as intelligent tutoring systems and automated feedback mechanisms, provide personalized learning experiences, allowing educators to tailor instruction to individual student needs (Almasri, 2024). These technologies facilitate formative assessments by offering immediate feedback, thereby improving student engagement and learning outcomes (Zhai et al., 2022). However, despite these advancements in teaching and assessment, there has been less emphasis on the review of AI applications and their implications for quality assurance (QA) in education. The integration of AI into QA processes remains underexplored, raising questions about the effectiveness and reliability of AI-driven assessments and the need for robust frameworks to evaluate their impact on educational quality (Popenici & Kerr, 2017).

One area where AI's potential is being explored is in the realm of Institutional Quality Assurance (QA) audits in higher education (Elviwani, Dilham, & Buaton, 2020). This proposal discusses an innovative application of AI as an assistant to an audit panel conducting an Institutional Quality Assurance Audit. By examining how AI facilitates the review of substantial amounts of data, we can better understand its implications for the future of educational quality assurance.

The increasing complexity of educational environments necessitates innovative approaches to ensure compliance with quality standards. Traditional audit processes often involve extensive manual data analysis, which can be time-consuming and prone to human biases and error. This project aims to explore if and how AI can streamline these processes, providing a parallel audit experience that enhances the overall effectiveness of quality assurance in higher education.

Objectives

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of AI as an assistant in the Institutional Quality Assurance audit process.
2. To compare the findings of the AI audit panel with those of the human audit panel.
3. To identify strengths and weaknesses in the use of an AI Assistant in current QA processes and recommend improvements.

4. To align the findings with international good practices and contemporary educational standards.

Background

The Importance of Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Quality assurance in higher education is essential for maintaining academic standards and ensuring that institutions meet regulatory requirements. It involves systematic review processes that assess the effectiveness of educational programs, institutional governance, and student outcomes. As higher education evolves, so too must the processes used to ensure quality. The integration of AI into QA processes presents an opportunity to enhance these methods significantly.

AI in Data Analysis

AI technologies, particularly machine learning and natural language processing, have shown promise in various fields, including healthcare, finance, and education **(Tobias, et.al, 2023)**. These technologies can analyze vast amounts of data quickly and accurately, identifying patterns and insights that may not be readily apparent to human auditors. By leveraging AI, audit panels can focus on strategic decision-making rather than being bogged down by data processing.

Methodology

This project will employ a parallel exercise involving two distinct auditing parties: the human audit panel and the AI Audit Panel Assistant. Both parties will follow the same stages of the external audit without any interaction, ensuring an unbiased comparison of results.

Stages of the Audit Process/Data Collection

1. Review of the Audit Package: Both the AI and the audit panel will review the institution's Audit Package. This document typically outlines the institution's strengths, weaknesses, and compliance with the agency's standards.
2. Preliminary Assessment Submission: Following the review, both parties will submit a preliminary assessment of the institution's Audit Package against the agency's standards and requirements.
3. Request for Further Information: After the preliminary assessments, both the AI and the audit panel will create a document requesting the college for additional information and/or evidence.
4. Audit Visit: The audit panel will engage with staff, faculty, and students to gather insights about the institution's operations and compliance with standards. We will use the AI assistant of the conference software to summarize the conversations.
5. Review of Audit Visit Notes: Both the audit panel and the AI assistant will review the notes from the audit visit and submit a list of highlights.
6. Final Assessment Submission: Each party will then submit a final assessment for each of the standards and requirements.
7. Drafting the Comprehensive Final Audit Report: Finally, both the AI and the audit panel will draft a comprehensive final audit report. This report highlighted the institution's strengths and provided recommendations for continuous improvement.

Data Analysis

The analysis will focus on comparing the findings of both parties, identifying discrepancies, and assessing the overall effectiveness of AI in the audit process.

Expected Outcomes

1. Enhanced Understanding of AI's Role: This project aims to provide insights into how AI can assist in the QA audit process, potentially transforming traditional practices.

2. Comparative Analysis: By comparing the findings of the AI assistant and the human audit panel, we can identify areas where AI excels and where human judgment remains essential.
3. Recommendations for Improvement: The project will culminate in a set of recommendations for integrating AI into QA processes, aligning with international standards and best practices.
4. Framework for Future Research: The findings will lay the groundwork for further research into the application of AI in higher education, particularly in quality assurance and accreditation processes.

Significance of the Study

This research is significant for several reasons:

- Innovation in Quality Assurance: By exploring the integration of AI into QA audits, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on innovation in higher education practices.
- Preparation for Future Challenges: As the landscape of higher education continues to evolve, institutions must adapt to new challenges. This project will help prepare agencies and institutions to navigate these changes effectively.
- Contribution to Policy Development: The findings may inform policy development regarding the use of AI in educational quality assurance, promoting best practices and ethical considerations.

Conclusion

The integration of AI into Institutional Quality Assurance audits represents a promising frontier in enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of educational quality assurance processes. By conducting a parallel audit exercise involving both human auditors and an AI assistant, this project aims to explore the potential of AI to transform traditional practices in higher education. The outcomes of this research will not only contribute to the understanding of AI's role in QA but also provide actionable recommendations for institutions seeking to improve their compliance and operational effectiveness.

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Leveraging GenAI for enhanced efficiency in External Quality Assurance

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ABSTRACT

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is transforming our world and will likely change how we undertake both internal and external quality assurance (IQA; EQA). Notwithstanding the challenges that may be inherent in adopting GenAI (for example, the production of 'hallucinations' and inconsistent findings, the need for proofing and validation processes to ensure validity1), its potential to enhance efficiency and optimise processes in EQA is clear. Currently, there is a lack of experience and practice regarding the use of GenAI within EQA agencies. There are opportunities to pilot GenAI and foster interagency collaborations to evaluate the efficacy of using GenAI in EQA processes.

This session will present findings from two projects exploring GenAI in EQA. The first involves using GenAI to conduct a thematic analysis, while the second examines GenAI as a tool to support the programme evaluation process within the European Approach. The projects aim to highlight how GenAI can enhance EQA efficiency and foster interagency collaboration.

Much has been – and continues to be – written about the transformative nature of GenAI in higher education and its potential impact on teaching, learning and assessment processes. A simple question to any open GenAI tool on its impact in higher education yields a plethora of responses and information sources. In comparison there is a dearth of research, knowledge and practice regarding the application and impact of GenAI in external QA within EQA agencies.

In this session the presenter will share the findings arising from two pilot projects exploring the impact and efficacy of GenAI within two separate EQA processes.

Pilot project 1

Within the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, there is a requirement for EQA agencies to conduct thematic analyses of EQA outputs (ESG 3.4). For QQI, thematic analysis is a key strategic focus of the agency: QQI conducts (i) routine thematic analysis of EQA activities and (ii) research on and evaluations of specific topics in response to sectoral developments and/or issues[2]. QQI analyses of EQA activities are primarily qualitative in nature, and entail the interpretation of qualitative data from, for example, institutional review reports, or annual quality reports[3], to identify system-level trends. Such analysis, using traditional qualitative research methods, can be slow and expensive. The primary purpose of the pilot is to consider whether and how GenAI can be used to introduce greater efficiency into the process of conducting thematic analyses on external quality assurance reports, whilst maintaining the efficacy of the process.

In the pilot a thematic analysis is being conducted combining both GenAI and traditional methods for the thematic analysis of institutional review reports[4]. Using the licensed version of Microsoft 365 Copilot, a desk review to identify the key themes will be undertaken by one QQI executive and a draft thematic analysis produced. In parallel, a separate desk review will be undertaken by another QQI executive extracting the themes using traditional work processes and human led approach. Both executives will not communicate on the findings until each has completed their individual draft thematic analysis. Following this, the themes and insights will be compared; through internal discussion and collaboration the final set of themes will be identified,[5] and a single thematic analysis report will be produced. The methodology within the final published thematic analysis will articulate the process of use GenAI and the prompts framework.

Pilot project 2

QQI has established Procedures for the quality assurance of joint programmes based on the European Approach[6]. The procedures are established to assist Irish higher education institutions that wish to apply the European Approach for the accreditation of programmes as part of programme accreditation within European University Alliances. QQI will conduct its first evaluation using the European Approach in January 2025. GenAI will be piloted as a tool to support this evaluation process, this will include for example, as part of the panel briefing, mapping evaluation criteria, synthesising documentation, and utilising GenAI during the site visit (for example, to summarise meeting notes). The learnings from this process will include steps taken to ensure consent from the panel members and institution, and compliance with GDPR.

A key aspect of INQAAHE's mission[7] is an emphasis on sharing practice and cooperation between QA agencies. The project team considers that sharing their reflections on the process and the outcomes of these pilot projects and building case studies relating to carrying out EQA processes using GenAI within QA agencies, is a worthwhile undertaking.

Aims: The primary aim of this session is to share our firsthand experiences, insights and key learnings in using GenAI (including crafting a prompts framework) to enhance EQA processes through the case studies presented. The session will provide a forum for delegates to share their own experiences and perspectives and will explore practical opportunities for networking among and collaboration between EQA agencies regarding the leveraging of GenAI for the enhancement of EQA processes.

Approach to delivering the session: The session will be structured as a presentation of two case studies on piloting GenAI, followed by an interactive discussion. The presenter will use visual aids, such as slides and videos, and interactive tools, such as Mentimeter, to enhance audience engagement. Participants will be encouraged to share their own experiences and engage in group discussions.

This session (55min) will be divided into two sections, the first part of the session (30 mins) will involve a presentation of the two pilot project case studies and will be structured as follows:

1. **Introduction and Context Setting**
    - Short overview of QQI and the agency's functions in the external quality assurance of higher education in Ireland.
2. **Case Studies**
    - Case study (i) Using Microsoft Co-Pilot as a tool for the for thematic analysis of institutional review reports.
        - Findings, including key learning, challenges and benefits of using GenAI for thematic analysis; developing a prompts framework, and recommendations for peer agencies.
    - Case study (ii) Using Microsoft Co-Pilot as a tool to support the evaluation of a joint programme based on the European Approach.
        - Findings, including key learnings; evaluation panel members, agency staff; challenges and benefits of using GenAI to support programme evaluation processes; and recommendations for peer agencies.
    - Exploring future practical applications of using Gen AI within EQA processes in the agency.
3. **Q & A**

The second part of the session (25 mins) will involve interactive discussions to enable participants to share their experiences and ideas for using GenAI within EQA processes and to explore opportunities for interagency collaborations.

4. **Interactive Discussion (20 min)**

i. Sharing experiences

- Using Mentimeter, engaging the audience in an interactive discussion to share experiences, insights, and ideas on leveraging GenAI for EQA. Examples of indicative questions to guide the discussion include:
  - Have you used GenAI in IQA or EQA processes? (Quick audience survey)
  - What benefits do you perceive in using GenAI in EQA processes?
  - What challenges do you see in using GenAI in EQA processes?
  - What are some examples of GenAI where you consider GenAI could be used to enhance efficiency in EQA?
  - How do we ensure ethical use of GenAI in EQA?

ii. Collaborative opportunities for EQA Agencies

- Using Mentimeter, exploring opportunities for interagency collaborations, potential frameworks and strategies for collaboration on GenAI in EQA among QA agencies. Examples of indicative questions to guide the discussion for this session include:
  - What potential benefits do you see in interagency collaborations on GenAI for EQA?
  - What are the outputs you would like to see from interagency collaboration?
  - What opportunities are there for interagency collaborations? Suggest some practical ways in which EQA agencies could collaborate.
  - How could associations such as INQAAHE, ENQA[8], facilitate GenAI collaborations among EQA agencies?

5. **Conclusion (5 min)**

- Summarise the key takeaways from the session on leveraging GenAI in EQA.
- Next steps in fostering collaboration among QA agencies on using GenAI in EQA.

QA and AI: Between Gatekeeping and Guidance (Global study of practices used by higher educational institutions (HEIs) in addressing AI associated issues in dialog with internal stakeholders)

Poster

Dr. Nigar Asgarova, Agency for Quality Assurance in Education of Azerbaijan (TKTA), Azerbaijan
Dr. Martin Borg, EduAlliance, Quality Enhancement in Education and Training, Malta
Dr. Asiyah Bukhari, Pakistan's Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, Pakistan
Prof. Dr. Mark Lee, School of Computer Science, University of Birmingham, United Kingdom
Robert Raback, Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (ACQUIN e.V.), Germany
Dr. Jasmine Rudolph, Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (ACQUIN e.V.), Germany
Emilia Todorova, Academic Quality and Learning, University of Gibraltar, Gibraltar
Sofia Treskova, Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (ACQUIN e.V.), Germany

ABSTRACT

The poster presents an ongoing cross-national research project (currently including Azerbaijan, Indonesia, Germany, Netherlands, Kazakhstan and Pakistan and other countries) based on a global survey of representatives of internal quality assurance of HEIs on the benefits and risks of Artificial Intelligence in the context of Higher Education. The survey examines the overlapping problematics of providing AI-literacy and integrating AI at the operational level with the goal of enhancing the quality of student experience and strengthening student career prospectives, while simultaneously securing commitment to the quality and standards of qualifications. The study aims to identify the extent to which HEIs have adopted Generative AI in their internal policies and processes, the common challenges faced by HEIs, and capture best practices for addressing these challenges.

The developed questionnaire as a tool is intended to provide a holistic framework for assessing the current state of AI integration in HEIs. The first part of the of the questionnaire addresses conceptual, technical, and organizational aspects of AI integration. Part two investigates how HEIs are aligning their policies and processes with the ESG 2015 standards to address AI-related challenges and opportunities across key operational areas (including teaching staff management, program design and approval, student-centered learning etc).

This project, being a cross-discipline, cross-national collaboration of different types of stakeholders (representing both internal and externa QA) aims to stimulate exchange of ideas and insights, that can become as a basis for peer learning and the development of system-level solutions for addressing AI in the context of Higher Education.

The aims and intentions of the author(s) for the presentation

We seek to share the developed methodology and the research findings with the community of stakeholders, involved in external and internal quality assurance, with the goal of stimulating discussion and inspiring colleagues to contemplate the (im)possibility of developing universal solutions, and shared standards for AI integration in the context of HE and to emphasize the importance and potential of cooperation and open dialog of different types of stakeholders, that brings various perspectives together in attempt to solve common challenges.
The scope of the project, originally limited to 5 countries, has been expanded to reflect the global nature of AI-related issues that transcend national contexts. The developed questionnaire as a tool can be used at institutional, local, regional, national, or cross-national levels for evidence-based decision-making.

Enhancing Educational Quality Assessment in Thailand: Leveraging NLP and Machine Learning for Effective Benchmarking and Decision-Making

Poster

Punyisa Phumiphol, Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA), Thailand

ABSTRACT

Benchmarking plays a crucial role in External Quality Assurance (EQA), enabling educational institutions to measure their performance against defined standards and identify areas for improvement. In the context of Thailand's EQA, conducted by ONESQA, benchmarking is often hindered by the challenge of extracting useful insights from vast amounts of unstructured data.

This study attempted to address this issue by creating an NLP-based data extraction pipeline adapted to EQA benchmarking requirements through the mix-methods research, which combined quantitative data analysis with qualitative regards from stakeholders.

Stakeholder surveys found that approximately 87.5% of respondents identified the need for automated NLP techniques for transforming unstructured data into actionable insights, implying that the response emphasizes the practical relevance of creating technology to expedite and improve the benchmarking process in education. Moreover, the survey identified crucial benchmarking variables—such as student outcomes, instructional efficiency, and financial management—that are critical for assessing the performance of schools that should be used to analyze hidden patterns of the educational quality enhancing appropriate EQA benchmark settings. Leveraging these findings, the NLP pipeline was built using regular expression, pattern matching, and NER to capture the desired text from complicated documents, thereafter utilizing IF-IDF to vectorize and analyze meaningful insights with high accuracy, reaching a 98.33% match with annotated datasets and an F1 score of 1.0, which enabled the system to extract data effectively while also supporting advanced analytics and visualizations such as scatter plots and heat maps, which revealed hidden performance patterns for both regulatory and collaborative benchmarks.

The ability to turn unstructured data into clear, evidence-based insights enhances ONESQA's capacity to provide tailored recommendations for school improvement, making the benchmarking process more transparent and objective. While the pipeline demonstrated effectiveness, challenges remain in handling ambiguous language and expanding its scope to other EQA forms. Future research should focus on refining these aspects to further support data-driven decision-making and continuous improvement in Thai education.

THEME 4. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS AND CREDENTIALS

Developing open and quality micro-credential systems: case studies of Japanese initiatives

Shingo Ashizawa, Kansai University of International Studies, Japan
Akiyoshi Yonezawa, Tohoku University, Japan
Keiko Ikeda, Kansai University, Japan
Masahiro Inoue, Keio University and Taisho University, Japan
Hiroshi Ota, Hitotsubashi University, Japan

ABSTRACT

This session discusses the development and future perspectives of microcredentials and open badges for internationally open quality higher education. Through the active use of micro-credentials, Japan, a country facing a critical demographic decline among its youth, is trying to transform its higher education system to meet the increasing demand for re-skilling and up-skilling of adult learners, and is also trying to expand student mobility, both inbound and outbound. The presenters will introduce the trends of micro-credentials in the Asia-Pacific region and the initiatives to develop common digital protocols by the Japanese expert groups in collaboration with various stakeholders in Japanese higher education. The session will then facilitate an interactive discussion with participants on sharing experiences and future perspectives on internationally open and high quality micro-credential systems.

Outline

Microcredentials are now widely issued and recognized in the world as a new form of credential of learning in a short period of time, mostly with the specific job-related knowledge and skill formation. At the same time, there is significant diversity in the forms of microcredentials from different types of education and training providers, which poses significant challenges for quality assurance agencies, national governments and also international organizations such as UNESCO and OECD. This session discusses the development and future perspectives of microcredentials and digital credentials for internationally open quality higher education through a multifaceted examination of the case of Japan.

Singo Ashizawa, Vice President of Kansai University of International Studies and Chair of the Research Consortium for the Sustainable Promotion of International Education (RECSIE), examines the development of microcredentials through a regional lens, considering their implications for lifelong learning and skills mobility in Asia and the Pacific. Ashizawa and his colleagues review recent global initiatives to develop common definitions and principles for microcredentials, such as those led by UNESCO, and consider the significance of existing initiatives, such as the pilot project launched by the Australian government in 2022. It also examines the formalization of microcredentials within national education systems, with reference to frameworks developed by organizations such as the European Union (EU), Australia and the Malaysia Qualifications Agency (MQA, 2020). It notes the growing attention of international organizations and governments to the development and recognition of microcredentials, with significant efforts in countries such as Australia and pilot initiatives in New Zealand and Malaysia. It then highlights that many microcredentialing projects in Asia are still in their early stages of development, emphasizing the need for further progress and formalization.

Akiyoshi Yonezawa, Professor and Vice Director of the International Strategy Office, Tohoku University, examines the background, development, and challenges of micro-credentials and their quality assurance through the lens of comparative higher education research. With the active use of micro-credentials, Japan, a country facing a critical demographic decline among its youth, is trying to transform its higher education system to meet the increasing demand for re-skilling and up-skilling of adult learners, and to expand student mobility, both inbound and outbound. At the same time, a strong tradition of in-company training and internal career promotion among leading companies and the lack of a national qualifications framework are a burden for establishing clear quality assurance mechanisms for these micro-credentials.

Keiko Ikeda, Professor and Vice Director, Institute for Innovative Global Education (IIGE), Professor, Kansai University, JIGE(Japan hub for Innovative Global Education) Executive Project Lead, presents the activities and achievements of the Joint Working Group on Microcredentials established by Japan Virtual (JV) Campus and Japan Massive Open Online Education Promotion Council (JMOOC). Quality assurance of online educational content provided by universities, colleges, and other education and training providers is crucial to gaining international trust in Japanese education. In order to ensure the transparency and formation of quality education, she explains the achievement of this joint working group by her leadership.

Masahiro Inoue, Specially Appointed Professor, Graduate School of System Design and Management, Keio University and Professor, Taisho University, has led the development of microcredential framework and guidelines by the Joint Working Group of JV Campus and JMOOC. Through intensive research and exchange of international trends on microcredential descriptors, digital credentials, and quality assurance initiatives, he took the initiative to design and develop Japan's microcredential framework and guideline. This framework is now widely referenced in Japan and recognized internationally. He will highlight the goals, design, and future perspectives of this framework.

Hiroshi Ota, Professor, and Director of Hitotsubashi University Global Education Program (HGP), Hitotsubashi University, will discuss the implications of Japan's microcredentialing initiatives within a broader framework of internationalization and international quality assurance of Japanese higher education. Japan is now trying to further promote international student mobility for both inbound and outbound in various forms, such as short visits, student exchanges, study abroad for a degree, double and joint degree programs, and online forms through the platforms of JV Campus and MOOCs. Based on his expertise in international higher education, he examines the current issues, future visions, and challenges of microcredentials and their quality assurance.

Following the presentations by the five experts above, this session will facilitate an interactive discussion with participants to share experiences and future perspectives on internationally open and high quality micro-credential systems.

Reference

Ashizawa, S., Ziguras, C., & Yonezawa, A. (2024). Convergence or fragmentation? Recent developments in recognition of microcredentials and their impact on higher education in Asia and the Pacific. Journal of International Cooperation in Education, 26(1), 116-130.

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Exploring micro credentials in Taiwan's higher education institutions: objectives, regulations, and practices

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ABSTRACT

Micro credentials (MCs) are increasingly recognized as a flexible and progressive approach for specific knowledge, skills, and competencies. However, the definition and implementation of MCs remain varied, as there are currently no formal regulations or guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education in Taiwan. This study aims to investigate the current policy-making processes surrounding MCs in Taiwan's higher education institutions (HEIs) and explore the potential challenges associated with their adoption. The findings indicated that MCs in Taiwan are still in the early stages of development, largely due to the absence of a quality assurance system and inconsistent practices across institutions. These factors pose challenges for the awarding of qualifications and the recognition of learning outcomes. The study addressed two key issues for further discussion: (1) the definition of the term 'micro' in comparison to traditional courses or programs, and (2) the practical value of MCs for Taiwanese students.

Introduction

In response to the advancement of technology, the demand for flexible learning pathways, and the rapid evolution of the labor market, higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly adopting innovative teaching methods to enhance students' learning experiences. In light of this, it is crucial for HEIs to consider a range of pedagogical strategies and curricular innovations with a view to enhancing students' learning. Thus, micro credentials (MCs) are increasingly being recognized as a flexible and progressive method for validating specific knowledge, skills, and competencies, and for supplementing and complementing traditional formal education frameworks.

Literature review

It is becoming increasingly evident that traditional teaching models are unable to adequately address the growing need for knowledge, skills, and competencies within a limited timeframe. Concurrently, there is a growing emphasis on competency-based hiring, whereby employers seek to gain a more detailed understanding of candidates' skills before making hiring decisions (Gauthier, 2020). Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has indicated that institutional leaders perceive MCs as a potentially valuable supplement to existing higher education programs. On the other hand, institutions intend to develop MCs primarily by building on their existing resources or through the establishment of new programs in conjunction with partnerships. Moreover, governments acknowledge the significance of MCs in addressing workforce development requirements, particularly in terms of upskilling and reskilling the labor force, while also facilitating broader access to higher education opportunities (OECD, 2021).

However, due to the lack of formal regulations or guidelines for MCs from Taiwan's Ministry of Education (MOE), definitions and practices for MCs vary widely. Consequently, MCs have been promoted and utilized primarily through two main initiatives: the Taiwan Higher Education SPROUT Project (THESP) (MOE, 2019) and the Educational Big Data Micro Program (EBDMP) (MOE, 2022). THESP, implemented since 2018, aims to enhance the quality and multi-faceted development of universities, promote international competitiveness,

and support the establishment of leading research centers, serving as a critical source of funding for HEIs. In this context, Taiwan's HEIs have been encouraged to develop MCs as an indicator of innovation and clear development, as well as to align MCs with their institutional characteristics. EBDMP, launched in 2022, was designed to address future demands for talent skilled in cross-disciplinary applications of information technology. This initiative encourages HEIs to propose curricula and teaching approaches that integrate education with information fields, creating micro programs to supplement instructional materials and related teaching activities in order to foster professional integration. Thus, a total of 14 HEIs participated in the second cycle of the EBDMP projects, consisting of 11 public and 3 private institutions.

Consequently, MCs have been actively promoted through THESP and EBDMP projects instead of formal MCs policies since Taiwan MOE has yet to establish formal regulations or guidelines for MCs. This study aims to examine current MCs policy-making within Taiwan's HEIs and to explore the potential development trajectory of MCs in Taiwan. The study addressed three research questions: 1) What is the primary objectives of MCs implementation and practices in Taiwan's HEIs? 2) What are practices of MCs regulated by Taiwan's HEIs? 3) What are the potential challenges associated with MCs in Taiwan?

Methodology

This study conducted a qualitative approach to investigate the current state of MCs implementation and practices in Taiwan's HEIs. First, MCs regulations from 151 HEIs—including general, normal, technology, open, and religious universities or institutions, —were collected to gain an initial understanding of institutional MCs policies. As one university does not publish its curriculum regulations on its website, the final sample size is 150. Four main dimensions were used to evaluate HEI practices: objectives, implementation, recognition, and accreditation. Second, interviews were conducted with four deans of academic affairs to explore the quality assurance mechanisms and potential challenges for MCs within these institutions.

Initial findings

Firstly, the study found that the primary objective of MCs in Taiwan was to promote interdisciplinary and self-directed learning, in contrast to many studies which identify employability or lifelong learning as key objectives. Second, the various Chinese terms were used to represent MCs in Taiwan, primarily 'micro credits' (微學分) and 'micro programs' (微學程). Micro credits refer to courses developed within a single credit, which may be expressed in fractional amounts (e.g., 0.1 credit/2 hours), while micro programs consist of multiple regular courses forming a complete program with at least eight credits. Currently, 116 (approximately 77%) of Taiwan's HEIs have regulations for micro credits, and 112 (approximately 75%) have regulations for micro programs. Finally, MCs credit recognition is primarily designed for undergraduate students, with some institutions requiring MCs for graduation. Specially, part of HEIs allowed students to develop their own micro program based on interests and professionalism.

Conclusion and discussion

In conclusion, MCs provided multiple types of delivery, intensive learning, and diverse content to enhance students' interdisciplinary learning. Furthermore, it provided more opportunities for students to conceive their own learning modules of interest and to develop their professionalism. However, the development of MCs in Taiwan remains in its early stages due to the absence of a quality assurance framework specific to micro-credentials. This poses challenges for qualification awarding and the recognition of learning outcomes. Two main issues were identified: (1) How is the term 'micro' defined in comparison to traditional courses or programs? MCs are intended to offer intensive, purpose-built, and smaller-scale courses. However, there is a challenge in ensuring that learning outcomes are reliably met within such condensed formats. (2) What is the value of MCs for Taiwanese students? While MCs provide multiple learning pathways for interdisciplinary and self-directed learning, students' motivation to pursue MCs remains limited, thereby restricting the perceived value of MCs in the current educational landscape.

Joint Accreditation: A New Frontier for Quality Assurance

Prof. Galina Motova, Ph.D., D.Sc., President of Asia-Pacific Quality Network. Director of the National Centre for Public Accreditation (NCPA), Russia
Oksana Tanikova, Ph.D., Deputy Head of Accreditation Department of the National Centre for Public Accreditation (NCPA), Russia

ABSTRACT

The authors explore the potential of joint accreditation as a transformative approach to quality assurance in higher education. The presentation highlights the key challenges faced by QA agencies and universities during joint accreditation procedures and examines international best practices. It provides a comparative overview of joint accreditation practices in global higher education, examining cases from the US, Europe, Taiwan, Japan, Australia, and Mongolia, highlighting the contextual factors influencing their design and implementation.

The authors describe in detail the methodology of joint accreditation on the example of the National Centre for Public Accreditation (NCPA, Russia) with the focus on its specific features, stages, benefits, and challenges.

The authors identify the main challenges and opportunities that joint accreditation procedure may have for different stakeholders such as governing bodies, universities, students, QA agencies, scholars, etc.).

The results of the survey that was held among QA agencies and HEIs representatives who were engaged in joint accreditation are presented.

Bi-regional trust building: Comparison of the quality assurance reference frameworks of the European Higher Education Area and the Ibero-American Knowledge Area

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Amélie Bensimon, High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (Hcéres), France

ABSTRACT

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the Ibero-American System for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (SIACES) have launched the *ESG-PBP Alignment* project in 2024. This initiative aims to strengthen mutual trust between the European and Ibero-American regions by exploring the alignment between their respective frameworks for quality assurance and quality enhancement in higher education: the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the *European Higher Education Area (ESG) and the Declaration of Principles of Good Practices (PBP)*.

The first phase of this project is oriented to have a better understanding of the degree of concordance and discordance between both frameworks in order to provide a solid basis to build trust and facilitating the work towards inter-regional recognition of qualifications and credentials.

This session will be an excellent opportunity to discuss the results of this first phase of the project and gather other inter-regional perspectives.

Outline

As a result of the common will of the European region and the Ibero-American region to establish ties of friendship and cooperation, to build a common understanding that contributes to mutual trust and to strengthen their best practices in quality assurance in higher education, and to reinforce and broaden the collaboration and exchange of experiences in this field in their respective regions, a *Memorandum of Understanding between the Ibero-American System for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (SIACES) and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)* was signed in April 2022.

Within this framework of understanding, the joint initiative ***Alignment of SIACES-ENQA higher education quality guidelines for bi-regional trust building (ESG-PBP Alignment)*** seeks to take steps towards the development of the *harmonisation of standards and guidelines, good practices and procedures adopted in both regions*.

Thus, the overall objective of this project is to strengthen mutual trust in quality assurance and quality enhancement of higher education between the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the Ibero-American Knowledge Area (EIC) by working towards a better alignment of their respective frameworks for quality assurance and quality enhancement in higher education: the ESG and the *PBP*.

In the light of the above, the general aim of this project will be achieved by working on two specific objectives:

- To determine the degree of concordance and discordance between the ESG and the PBP.
- To prepare a joint proposal for potential further alignment of the ESG and the PBP.

This initiative, coordinated by ANECA, is running from February 2024 to the first half of 2025. In order to achieve the above-mentioned objective, a working group has been set up involving the SIACES Secretariat, the ENQA Secretariat and ten quality agencies from both regions: A3ES (Portugal), ANVUR (Italy), AQUA (Andorra), CNA Chile (Chile), CNA Colombia (Colombia), CONEAU (Argentina), Hcéres (France), JAN (Cuba), QAA (United Kingdom) and the coordinating agency (Spain).

In accordance with the specific objectives set out above, the **findings of the first phase of this two-phase** project will provide a diagnosis of the situation as a result of a systematic comparative analysis of the ESG and the PBP. Although both reference documents clearly have similar purposes and understanding of quality assurance, such a systematic comparative exercise endorsed by SIACES and ENQA had not yet been carried out.

While their unequal structures and scope do not facilitate a direct comparison between the ESG and the PBP, this exercise has allowed a number of relevant conclusions to be drawn.

This comparison highlights several common and different elements that can be divided into four thematic sections. The first of these sections deals with the comparison of the constituent elements of the two regional quality frameworks. The second section focuses on the comparison of elements relevant for the regional role of quality assurance as expressed in both documents. The third and fourth sections pay attention to the comparison based on the characterisation and performance of higher education institutions (HEIs) and quality agencies, respectively.

It is important to underline that the second phase of the *ESG-PBP Alignment* project will build on the above-mentioned results to develop a proposal of key elements that will facilitate the potential further harmonisation, yet not homogenization, of both regional frameworks. While recognising the different contexts in which these frameworks operate, this harmonisation effort should allow the growth of mutual trust and the strengthening of bi-regional relations and cooperation to face common challenges, such as the recognition of qualifications and credentials.

Last but not least, as a final step of this initiative, it is foreseen that ENQA and SIACES will be able to share the main results of the project within the context of the discussion on the revision and update of the ESG and the PBP in the near future. Therefore, the *ESG-PBP Alignment* initiative aims to become one of the building blocks of the bridge that both regions started to build decades ago through dialogue and mutual regard, based on a common will and shared values.

Quality Assurance Systems in a Global Context to be Accepted by Society and Academia

Poster

Toru Hayashi, Kanazawa University, Japan
Satoshi Ozeki, University of Miyazaki, Japan
Patrick Shorb, Kansai University of International Studies, Japan

ABSTRACT

Our presentation aims to foster more open, inclusive, equitable, and collaborative higher education systems, as outlined in "Beyond Limits: New Ways to Reinvent Higher Education" We focus on improving the quality assurance (QA) of educational programs, crucial for developing human resources and addressing global issues. We will discuss global QA systems that ensure program-level quality assurance across different learning modes, aligning with UNESCO's goals. Our international collaborative project, involving researchers from the US, UK, and Japan, investigates global QA trends and internal QA practices. We found that while common evaluation criteria exist, practices vary, affecting internal QA. We highlight the importance of stakeholder involvement and efficient role division in QA processes. Our findings emphasize the need for closer relationships between higher education institutions, accreditation organizations, and stakeholders to align external and internal QA effectively.

Outline

The main purpose of our presentation is to contribute to the realization of “co-creating more open, inclusive, equitable and collaborative higher education systems”, as mentioned in the report, “Beyond Limits: New Ways to Reinvent Higher Education.” Specifically, we aim to discuss HE systems from the perspective of improving QA of educational programs, which form the basis of human resource development. Irrespective of the modes of learning, assuring of the quality of educational programs are essential to contribute to the global society with specific skills obtained through the specific programs to solve various global issues that we all face. Thus, our presentation will foster discussion of the diverse approaches global QA systems take to ensure program-level quality assurance, and the different modes of learning that can contribute to the overall UNESCO-articulated goals.

Many countries have implemented external quality assurance in the form of institutional and specialized program accreditation. There are international standards for specialized program accreditation in certain fields. However, the core of quality assurance is internal quality assurance conducted by the institutions themselves (UNESCO, 2017), which significantly impacts employment upon graduation (UNESCO, 2018). Internal quality assurance has developed in response to external quality assurance, necessitating the development of internal quality assurance within the diverse quality assurance systems of international standards and individual countries.

Based on two research grants funded by the Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, this presentation seeks to discuss how external QA influences internal practices of OA at the degree-program level. First, it explores the institutional accreditation of higher education of many countries, and how such institutional accreditation requires and shapes HE institutions’ internal QA systems. The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015), for instance, indicate specific standards of establishing internal QA systems at each institution. Second, the work notes how various evaluation criteria emphasize the importance of educational program quality and conducting evaluations to improve educational programs and encourage specialized program accreditation. As indicated by the ESG’s evaluation criteria, the practice of internal quality assurance corresponding to

regional and specialized program accreditation evaluations is essential. At the same time, UNESCO (2018) points out that there is a lack of empirical research on quality assurance, although enhancing internal quality assurance remains a pressing global issue.

In response to this, the third part of this presentation will detail an international collaborative effort involving researchers and educators from the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), Japan and several ASEAN nations which investigates QA trends in global higher education and the evolution of internal quality assurance. Our project so far has revealed that while there are common evaluation criteria for internal quality assurance in the accreditation evaluations of each country, there are differences in details, which affect the practice of internal quality assurance at the institutional level. Specifically, the study found that, higher education institutions in the UK, US, and ASEAN countries like Malaysia, involve stakeholders in their internal quality assurance processes, ensuring that these processes are not just self-reviewing but also externally validated. There is also a division of roles to prevent overlap between institutional and specialized accreditation. This approach ensures that educational program reviews integrate with external quality assurance standards, maintaining social and international relevance. In contrast, Japan's accreditation systems are primarily managed by university personnel and led by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, resulting in low societal recognition and involvement. Thus far, we have concluded that fostering closer relationships between higher education institutions, accreditation organizations, and stakeholders is important to ensure that both external and internal quality assurance processes are aligned and effective. The common challenge for future quality assurance in higher education lies in efficiently ensuring the quality of educational programs by aligning the gears of external and internal quality assurance.

In our presentation, we introduce an overview of quality assurance systems in various countries and present the nature of educational program reviews in internal quality assurance. From our investigation of global higher education quality assurance systems, we discuss the common global direction in the relationship between accreditation evaluations and internal quality assurance in the UK, the US, Japan, and ASEAN countries, and conduct discussions to enhance quality assurance.

Aims and intentions

The purpose of our presentation is to discuss the nature of quality assurance systems globally for improving the quality of education. Specifically, we aim to discuss QA systems in global context, leading to "co-creating more open, inclusive, equitable and collaborative higher education systems". Mainly, we intend to explain the outline of quality assurance systems in higher education based on recent site visits. We will emphasize the importance of internal quality assurance, particularly the importance of reviewing educational programs, which serve as the fundamental unit for human resource development. Additionally, we will present our research results on three topics: 1) an overview of accreditation systems, 2) practices of internal quality assurance, and 3) educational program review in four countries: the United States, the United Kingdom, ASEAN countries, and Japan. After establishing a common understanding with the participants regarding global trends in quality assurance systems, we will discuss the nature of quality assurance systems and educational program review in internal quality assurance. We will particularly focus on quality assurance for the development of excellent human resources, a common challenge in higher education worldwide. We hope our discussion on how different models of learning can be incorporated into educational programs to achieve the Roadmap to 2030 vision set out by UNESCO.

Proposal for a Quality Assurance Metrics Tool: Shifting Convention in QA assessment reports (Self-Study Reports and External Program Review Reports)

Poster

Mohamed Elmokhtar Abdallahi, Mauritanian Authority for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, Mauritania

ABSTRACT

The intent of the poster is to share best practices in 1) evaluating receivability of assessment reports from the perspective of the agency, 2) proposal for a quality assurance metrics tool (QAM) as a maturement strategy for verifying quality in a given academic program (evaluation scheme peculiar to an internal review); along with a different measurement kit to ensure conformity of given academic program to the respective standards booklet by using a different evaluation scheme peculiar to external reviews.

The corpus analysis that we have undertaken in the course of this study uncovered an important finding that internal reports should have a peculiar characteristic to them i.e. they should only verify that QA is observed (qualité verifée) whereas external program review should present the assured quality (pin pointing the level of assured quality). This task however can surely be efficiently delivered by adopting the proposed Quality Assurance Metrics Tool with the subsequent quality tiers as per a given standards booklet.

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