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The Evolution and Development of QA Approaches and Associated Processes in Lebanese Higher Education; System and Institutional Perspectives

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**The Evolution and Development of QA Approaches and Associated Processes in
Lebanese Higher Education; System and Institutional Perspectives**

Wael Hamze

**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration (Higher
Education Management) – DBA:HEM**

**Supervised by:
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Abstract

The application of QA is a demanding reform area for Lebanon due to the distinctive organisation of its HE system and its cultural setting. This study explores different QA practices, approaches and systems in aim to establish a theoretical reference framework for the development of QA in HE in Lebanon. A major contribution of this study resides in the fact that it is the first attempt to approach the topic while drawing upon students' interest and the perceptions of numerous HE stakeholders. Using a qualitative research method, particularly semi-structured interviews, this study explored the QA nature within three HEIs in Lebanon and at the national level. This study shows that HEIs in Lebanon understand the importance of QA in HE, yet several lack the necessary standards, resources and methods to establish a quality culture. This study asks: how should the QA system and its associated process be developed in Lebanese HE in light of the existing experience; drawing on borrowing from international models and evident good practice in ways appropriate to the unique setting and cultural circumstances? This study shows that the need for the construction of a QA framework is exacerbated by the huge demand for economic, political and educational reforms in Lebanon. With the lack of a national QA framework, HEIs in Lebanon are left to define quality and set QA standards on their own. Given the lack of national standards, this study shows that several HEIs in Lebanon are using international accreditations to develop and ensure education quality. Hence, this study suggests the establishment of a Lebanese QA system while aligning it with international best practices in order to ensure quality among all Lebanese HEIs. Nevertheless, this study also suggests that such alignment should be carefully established taking into account the given cultural and political setting of Lebanon. This study depicts that collaboration at both the national and institutional level is needed to establish a QA system befitting Lebanon's conditions.

Keywords: Higher Education (HE); Quality Assurance (QA); Higher Education Institutions (HEIs); QA Framework; National QA Agency

Chapter 1- Introduction

The key objective of the current chapter is to lay the parameters of this thesis. The current chapter is divided into eight sections. Section one will be highlighting the historical asset of quality in higher education (HE) and the increasing importance of this topic on the global level. Section two will be highlighting the need for this study. Moreover, section three will discuss the rationale for, importance and contribution of this study.

The research questions are highlighted in section four. Section five will introduce the context of the study, particularly the Lebanese HE system. Moreover, this chapter reflects on the focus and the delimitation of this thesis (the research sample of this thesis) (section six); the theoretical foundation is explained in section seven. The last section, section eight, is allocated to the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Background

This study seeks to analyse the nature and effectiveness of quality assurance (QA) approaches and processes in Lebanese HE system and higher education institutions (HEIs) in light of the existing policies and practices, including borrowing of models from elsewhere, and to benchmark existing arrangements against international experience and examples of good practice, and, in so doing, generate relevant conclusions and recommendations. Since the founding of mediaeval academic institutions in Europe as independent and self-governing communities, quality has been perceived as a major concern guaranteeing their development and their survival (Neave, 1994, Vught and Westerheijden, 1994). It was also seen as an important natural but implicit indicator reflecting the level of awareness, learning and responsibility inherent to academia (Harvey and Askling, 2003).

By the 1980s, the world started observing an increase in liberalisation strategies and in trade, fast reduction in the effect of geographical distance and a progressively connected economy. In this globalisation wave, business gradually recognised the necessity to strategically adapt in order to survive; plus, geographical and cultural differences became less significant to customers. International cooperation, alliances or collaborations have

become vital means used by numerous businesses to overcome this ambiguous and complex setting- universities are certainly not immune to this environment/setting (Hashim and Bakar, 2007).

Today, the academic environment is highly dynamic and the need for innovative educational services is rising (Poole, 2000). A study done in Dubai and Ras el Khaymah showed that there are 37 international branch campuses from 11 countries aiding in the success of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) HE system: nine branches from the United Kingdom (UK), eight from India and six branches from the United States of America (USA) (Hanada, 2013). Hence, it is normal to witness the British government reporting that the returns of educational export surpassed 21.4 billion pounds sterling by year 2017, where HE exporting shared the biggest portion of that number at 14.4 billion pounds sterling (Department for Education, 2019). Also, a study conducted by Heffernan and Poole (2005) revealed that Australian HEIs benefit from over 1000 international partnerships in their educational programmes (Hefferman and Poole, 2005). Furthermore, Sir Daniel (2007) explained that the entire HE system is changing; the development of e-learning, increasing influence of private institutions and an exceptional international geographical expansion of institutions (Daniel, 2007).

Furthermore, and besides the great massification of education, the intense heterogeneity in terms of curriculum provision and student profiles, Westerheijden et al. highlight an urgent need to align curricula to labour market needs (Westerheijden et al., 2007a). The dynamic environment surrounding the HE context has generated concern for quality, which subverted the status quo inherent to the traditional perceptions of QA and enhanced the need for more explicit QA system at the HE level. (Becket and Brookes, 2008, Dill, 2007b, Massy, 2003).

In consequence, many academic institutions adopted explicit QA schemes to adapt to the external environment surrounding the academic system. The need for QA in HE was formally satisfied during the 1980's through the introduction of explicit QA schemes in developed countries like the USA and the European jurisdiction. This system was rapidly adopted in other developing countries (Dill, 2010). Numerous actors such as the participants to the Bologna process, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the World Bank, the Organisation for

Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), along with many professional local and international associations had their influence in the introduction and the enforcement of QA as an explicit scheme in the HE field on an international level (Singh, 2010).

Since the 1990's, the conventional collegial ways to deal with quality, as a set of demonstrable skills and trust, have offered routes, within the HE context, to a more systematised and unequivocal QA practices (Dill, 2010). According to Vaira (2007), the primary purpose of QA in universities is to enhance accountability, effectiveness and efficiency of the institution (Vaira, 2007). There is no doubt that experts do not all agree on a definition for quality; nevertheless, they all confirm the fact that quality is a crucial factor needed to conform HEIs' outcomes to the expanding expectations of their stakeholders (internal and external) everywhere throughout the world. As highlighted by Reichert (2008), people within the HE context tend to forget how recent the inauguration of the concept of 'quality' is because QA became so inescapable and commonly used (Reichert, 2008). QA remains a much-debated concept. Often universities are aligning with the governmental requirement to value and be more accountable for quality in order to improve it (ESIB, 2002, Anderson, 2006).

In Lebanon, QA is a very recent phenomenon gaining increasing attention especially with the aggressive expansion policies adopted by numerous Lebanese HEIs. In the past few years, with the political crisis in the Middle East and the migration of Syrian refugees, Lebanon has witnessed a sharp growth in both the number of students and the number of HEIs. Consequently, the need to regulate the quality of service provided by these emerging institutions became crucial in order to preserve Lebanon's competitive position in the region. Nevertheless, very little has been done to tackle these areas of study; in consequence, analysing the influence of such initiatives on the HE academic performance within the Lebanese context is a field of great interest for empirical researches.

1.2 The Need for this Study

HE systems worldwide have greatly expanded in the recent decades. This has caused the introduction of new forms of external regulatory control of HEIs and the activities which occur within them (Brennan, 2018). QA in HE has grown significantly effecting every level of the sector and becoming an accepted vital part of the academic life (Williams

and Harvey, 2015). Over the last three decades, a considerable number of research studies have tackled the concept of QA in HE. These have focused on either defining quality, or assessing the effectiveness of implementing business models to the academic context, or even evaluating QA systems adopted in developed and developing countries (Harvey and Williams, 2010, Pratasavitskaya and Stensaker, 2010). Nevertheless, these studies have failed to provide universities with a clear system or a unique process for quality management (Becket and Brookes, 2008). They also failed to identify the causal relation between QA schemes and the performance of the academic institution (Stensaker, 2003, Harvey and Williams, 2010). Furthermore, research has failed to reach a consensus on whether borrowing QA practices from developed countries is effective, relevant and useful to the developing countries trying to enhance the quality of education within their system (Lim, 2001).

For decades, HEIs in developed countries have implemented QA systems to enhance the quality of their research, teaching and direct community engagement (Lim, 1999). However, this has only been introduced to the developing countries relatively recently. This introduction can be derived from a number of reasons. First, it can be the trendy thing to do. Second, it can be due to the more important reason of improving quality of taught programmes and graduates thus enabling HEIs to be effective players in the economy's enhancement (Lim, 1999). Nevertheless, there is no universal consensus that the adoption of QA measures has resulted in the desired effect – whether in developed or in developing countries (Lim, 1999), and further research is needed to determine if QA has a positive, long-lasting and beneficial impact on the quality of education.

Empirically, therefore, little evidence is provided on how Lebanese universities adapt to this dynamic environment and guarantee QA in their academic institutions. As of the year 1990, marking the end of the 15-year civil war in Lebanon, the HE sector in Lebanon started witnessing tangible growth; with the number of universities tripling (by 2013) according to the American University of Beirut (AUB) Policy Institute (Al-Fanar-Media, 2017). Given this dynamic environment, QA became formally one of the most crucial concerns for the Lebanese HE actors. Therefore, this thesis studies QA practices adopted at the Lebanese HEIs. It sets out to assess these practices and to tackle factors influencing the implementation of a QA system in Lebanon. It also seeks to highlight the feasibility, the relevance and the effectiveness of borrowing QA schemes.

1.3 Rationale for, Importance and Contribution of this Study

This study is concerned with initiatives and systems that aim to ensure and enhance educational quality in the Lebanese HE system. The motives impelling me to investigate this area of study within this specific context are threefold:

First, QA in HE has been fostering for the previous two decades an on-going plethora of debates. Today, governments in numerous countries recognise the impact of HE on national development through organisations that are set to oversee quality of HE, detect and resolve weakness, make sure that customer satisfaction is reached and set basis to control how public funds are spent (Brennan, 2018). These practises are currently almost absent in Lebanon, thus assessing quality of education requires therefore an in-depth exploration based on empirical research of academic institutions' practices and mechanisms used for guaranteeing quality performance.

Second, QA within the HE context is a recent phenomenon under-researched and documented in the Middle East, particularly in Lebanon. Research on this topic in Lebanon is limited to articles or draft policy documents conducted by the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) (Guide II: Self Evaluation in HEIs, 2008; Guide III: Quality Audits and Accreditation, 2008) and to studies by international associations such as the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF). A review of these projects indicates that none of them sought to adopt and adapt international QA models to fit the Lebanese context's specificity.

Finally, the global HE environment is changing: an increasing high demand for qualified labour and an increasing demand on HE, justified by the young population growth within a turbulent competitive environment, are generating the speed in developing new programmes. They are also requiring universities to maintain their competitiveness both at the national and international level. Furthermore, and as globalisation continues, the institutional strategic expansion occurring within an unhealthy Lebanese economy results in serious concern over the quality of services provided by academic institutions; consequently, this expansion sheds light on the accountability of Lebanese universities, only reinforcing the pressure for QA. Hence, undertaking this research not only contributes to fill the research gap on QA within the Lebanese HE context but also aims

to craft a framework that ensures quality in the Lebanese HE system. In addition, a key contribution of this study resides in the fact that, to my knowledge, it is the first attempt to approach the topic while drawing it upon students' interest and the perceptions and perspectives of numerous experts, instructors and key actors in the Lebanese HE context.

This study is therefore theoretically significant since it contributes to bridging the gap existing in the current body of knowledge on how academic institutions in developing countries manage to set and implement QA mechanisms at the university level: my basic objective is to develop a theoretical reference framework for developing a QA system which takes into consideration specific characteristics inherent to the developing countries, Lebanon specifically, and which contributes to implementing a QA culture in HEIs.

The practical contribution is also as important since it will provide valuable and timely information on the Lebanese HE setting and will serve as a good practical example to stakeholders in similar contexts. It will also make policy recommendations for the development of a national HE QA system in Lebanon. Above all, this study grants the Lebanese government, policy-makers, HEIs and strategists important data that will contribute to the enhancement of the Lebanese HE system.

1.4 The Research Question

As highlighted previously, the need to preserve quality at the Lebanese HE level is of outstanding importance given the increasingly dynamic environment in which academic institutions operate. Under such circumstances, Lebanese universities are undertaking initiatives to cope with this urgent requirement, going from creating a QA system, to borrowing an already existing scheme proven to be efficient in the developed countries where it was conceived and implemented.

The issue of whether these initiatives are actually fully transferrable and in turn are culminating in improving quality of education is ambiguous (Billing, 2004) since Lebanon lacks established literature on evidence for effectiveness of QA systems in Lebanese HEIs. Consequently, the research question of this study could be stated as:

How should the QA system and its associated process be developed in Lebanese HE in the light of existing experience; drawing on borrowing from international models and evident good practice in ways appropriate to the unique setting and cultural circumstances?

This basic question is divided into the below sub-questions:

- Sub-Question 1: What are, and should be the purpose, role, scope and general operating characteristics of QA?
- Sub-Question 2: What are, and should be the internal QA mechanisms in universities?
- Sub-Question 3: What are the principal barriers and issues relating to the adoption and implementation of QA mechanisms in universities?
- Sub-Question 4: What are the constituent elements in a QA regime based on a student-centred learning culture, and how may these be evolved in this setting?
- Sub-Question 5: What are the issues involved in adopting/ borrowing/ adapting and effectively implementing models of QA derived from other international settings?
- Sub-Question 6: Why and how have national QA agencies evolved, and what should be the role, positioning and operating characteristics of such an agency in Lebanon?

The above research questions aim at bridging the gap in existing research on QA initiatives and practices in Lebanese HE. The above research questions address QA purpose, role, regime and mechanisms in HE in Lebanon given the existing cultural context and international good practice, including the borrowing of models from elsewhere, thus contributing to a study not done previously in Lebanon and the neighbouring region. Doing so, this study will aim at crafting a set of conclusions and recommendations to be used by HEIs and policy-makers to improve quality in HE in Lebanon.

1.5 Research Sample

This thesis research is conducted on both private and public universities in Lebanon. For this study, the MEHE's classification and representation of the Lebanese universities is taken into account, as HEIs are represented in the Council for Higher Education as

follows: The Lebanese University (LU) – the only public university, universities more than 50 years old, and universities less than 50 years old. For that reason I chose to conduct my interviews at three HEIs: the Lebanese University (LU), the American University of Beirut (AUB) which is the oldest university in the region – found in 1866 and is represented in the Council for Higher Education through its president who is representing universities that are more than 50 years old, and the Arts Sciences and Technology University in Lebanon (AUL) which was founded in the year 2000 and is represented in the Council for Higher Education through its president who is representing universities that are less than 50 years old in the Lebanese HE system; moreover, I chose to conduct interviews at the level of the ministry to have the perspective of the policy-makers in HE in Lebanon. In addition to the policy-makers' perspectives, I will be taking into account the students', instructors', chairpersons'/deans' and the governance perspective of every HEI.

1.6 Theoretical and Methodological Premises

Aristotle states clearly that the function of a knife is to cut, and sharpness enables the knife to cut well, so sharpness is the knife's virtue (Pakaluk, 2005). Since the common mission in the majority of academic institutions is to enhance the student's learning process, this mission comes to life when these institutions undertake an explicit QA framework. This latter is considered effective if it is founded on the set of processes that enhance student learning. Hence, the sharpness of a knife enables it to cut, and QA practices in HE enable HEIs to deliver quality education to satisfy HE stakeholders; in this context, both the knife and HEI are fulfilling their function/virtue. As with other corporations, universities are influenced by internal and external environments; therefore, studying the organisational culture of HEIs when implementing QA practices is necessary to the success of any QA system. Therefore, this study will take into consideration the HE organisational cultural classification of McNay (1994)- a quartet of collegium, bureaucracy, corporation and enterprise model that is bound by the two dimensions of policy definition and control over implementation each defined as either 'loose' or 'tight'. Moreover, Davies' (1992) model for QA saturation in HEIs will be used as part of the theoretical premises of this thesis. Davies (1992) developed a model that consists of four quadrants; each quadrant represents the level of QA saturation in a

HEI, which is determined following two axis: Style (ad hoc or systematic) and Importance (low priority or high priority).

Moreover, Phillips' and Ochs' (2004) four-stage model for policy borrowing will be taken as a theoretical reference when studying the different stages of borrowing an appropriate QA system at the national level. Phillips' and Ochs' had established a basic four-step model which identifies the different stages of policy borrowing starting by the initial 'cross-national attraction' stage to the 'decision' stage to the 'implementation' stage and, finally, reaching the 'internalisation/indigenisation' stage. The importance of this model is that it will work as a guideline on where Lebanon stands - as a system - in terms of borrowing and adopting external QA models. In addition, Trow's (1994) review typology will also be taken into consideration when studying the evaluation system in Lebanon. Trow developed a typology of academic review classifying four types of review against two dimensions: internal/external and supportive/evaluative. This typology will be important to determine the type of review that is needed for the specificity of the Lebanese HE.

The above mentioned four theoretical references, along with the work of other scholars in the field, will help in understanding how the Lebanese national system and universities perceive and implement QA systems and will form a solid conceptualisation for the purpose of this research. Those four models are discussed in more details in chapter 3.

Subjectivism and interpretivism, (discussed in more details in chapter 4) which highlight the socially constructed nature of reality and the fact that humans create meanings, are adopted to answer my set of research questions (Saunders et al., 2012). These philosophies are basically associated with an inductive approach and a qualitative research which focus on uncovering the real perceptions and significance of human experience rather than seeking generalisation (Gill and Johnson, 2010). The approach to data collection within the context of this method follows a highly flexible process given the fact that information is collected in textual form through interactions with participants and then analysed using non-numerical data.

1.7 Researcher's Role

Being the remote campuses coordinator at AUL, which has been involved in a recent transformation through the initiation of an internal QA process across all seven campuses, one of my duties is to disseminate QA initiatives taken at AUL's main campus into the six other campuses. This duty greatly helped me in collecting the primary data as I had broad knowledge of the discussed material, allowing me to tweak questions when necessary to acquire more information from the interviewee. Moreover, such duty helped me dig deeper in terms of collecting the "truth" of QA practices adopted at Lebanese HEIs. Nevertheless, to avoid bias and ensure objectivity, all of the conclusions and recommendations of this thesis are strictly derived from the collected evidence- whether primary or secondary. Moreover, the set research question and sub-questions were presented to experts in the field of QA in HE and were modified accordingly thus arriving at the current research question and sub-questions presented in this study.

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

Seven chapters formulate this thesis: Following this chapter (Introduction), the context of the Lebanese HE system will be overviewed. Chapter three will be dedicated to elucidate the literature review of QA in HE developing it against origins, philosophies, approaches, borrowing and best practices.

Chapter four is dedicated to the methodology where philosophies and approaches guiding my thesis will be presented. The data collection process highlighting the methods and the nature of the research design will be presented, along with details provided on the strategies, the time horizon and the techniques adopted. Chapter five provides the empirical findings and analyses and interprets the data based on the perspectives of the participant categories. Findings in this chapter will be clustered into multiple realised themes. Chapter six will discuss the outcomes with a thorough comparative discussion of the findings in relation to research literature. Finally, a conclusion will be presented in chapter seven with a discussion on the contributions, implications and recommendations for further study and policy and professional practice.

Chapter 2 - The Analysis of the Lebanese HE System and QA Issues

2.1 Introduction

The following chapter analyses the Lebanese HE system in relation to quality and QA. An overview and the evolution of the system, the distributional structure of the system, the role of QA in HE and the national quality organs, the principal problems and challenges confronting QA in Lebanon and the QA HE initiatives are presented in this chapter. Hence, the following chapter sets the basis or the context to answering the research question of this study: how should the QA system and its associated process be developed in Lebanese HE in the light of existing experience; drawing on borrowing from international models and evident good practice in ways appropriate to the unique setting and cultural circumstances?

It is significant to indicate that focused, up-to-date data is hard to obtain in Lebanon due to the scarcity of data available (Nauffal, 2019). Lebanon lacks sufficient, specialised data centres; most statistical data collected on HE can be obtained either from the Central Administration of Statistics (CAS), a governmental entity that provides statistics on various fields for the whole country, or from the Centre for Research and Educational Development (CRDP), an institution with administrative and financial autonomy that reports directly to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) in Lebanon, or through a few European Union (EU) funded projects, or from individual, personal research. Both CAS and CRDP have failed to provide up-to-date statistical data on HE in Lebanon.

2.2 Historical Overview and Distributional Structure of HE in Lebanon

Lebanon is a republic, and it is one of the four countries straddling the east coast of the Mediterranean. Although the official language in Lebanon is Arabic, other spoken languages include French and English. Other minorities' languages such as Armenian, Kurdish and Greek are also spoken. Lebanon encompasses 18 recognised religious communities, all represented in the Lebanese Parliament.

A multicultural Middle Eastern country influenced by the Western societies, particularly the French, Lebanon is distinctive for having an educational system that reflects the

openness of the Lebanese government to the international society. For instance, initially, modern education in Lebanon was implemented by missionaries and based on foreign education principles. During the 19th century, American and French missionaries had established HEIs such as the American University of Beirut (AUB), established in 1866, and the Saint Joseph University (USJ), established in 1875.

Year 1975 witnessed the start of the Lebanese civil war; Lebanon had established seven HEIs by that year. All Lebanese HEIs were located in Beirut - excluding the University of Kaslik, also known as USEK deriving its acronyms from its French name. The Lebanese civil war spanned over 15 years ending in 1990; it resulted in a devastating effect on HE in Lebanon. As a result, some foreign HEIs and schools were obliged to move abroad. Because of the devastating effects of the war on Lebanon and its division into several territories controlled by different military sectarian forces, most of the HEIs in general and the Lebanese University – the only public university in Lebanon - in particular were distributed into campuses or branches located across the various districts of Lebanon. This in turn caused a complete redistribution of the geography of HEIs, jeopardising the efficiency and quality of the education process and affecting very deeply the internal functions of the LU and as a result encouraging the appearance of autonomous/independent units (El Metni, 2017). The war also affected the sectarian distribution and mobility of the students enrolled in HEIs. Prior to the civil war, Lebanon was regarded as an international centre of education attracting many students from several different countries into its HEIs. As a consequence of the civil war, the number of foreign students registered in Lebanese HEIs significantly decreased from around 50% registration in year 1970 to 20% by the end of the war, and down to 12% in 2000 (CRDP, 2001).

Following the civil war, the private sector of HEIs has been expanding at a rapid rate. This rapid expansion of private HE has been fuelled by a big number of student grants advanced by foreign institutions, particularly from Eastern European countries to their affiliated political parties in Lebanon. Later on and during the nineties, a wealthy Saudi-Lebanese businessman and politician, late Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, launched the Hariri Foundation that provided around 30,000 student scholarships for different majors of studies not only for students in Lebanon but also for Lebanese students overseas, mainly in the USA and Western Europe. The HE system as a whole has been growing

due to the increasing social demand; students' enrolment has been rising gradually. As a response for this growing demand for HE, 23 new HEIs were established between 1996 and 2000 (MEHE, 2018). By the year 2015, the number of HEIs reached 42 in total; of the 42 establishments, 38 are still in operation till this day – the remaining 4 HEIs acquired their license yet are still not in operation. The 38 existing HEIs offer about 160 programmes that lead to several qualifications (MEHE, 2018).

The quality of private and public HEIs exhibits significant differences and features, specifically in relation to their educational outcomes (Nauffal, 2009). Upon her study on various Lebanese HEIs models, Diane Nauffal found that with regards to teaching and learning, the satisfaction levels of students in private universities specifically the universities based on the American, French and Egyptian models undoubtedly exceeded those in the Lebanese University (Nauffal, 2009). The history and the evolution of Lebanon's education system have notably contributed to this duality and helped to shape HEIs according to the existing pattern. Such a pattern has resulted in a distinct system mainly formulated - among others - of French or American-patterned HEIs. A number of private HEIs have implemented a customised combination between the national and foreign systems. Others have incorporated Egyptian or other more localised dimensions. Few institutions have completely embraced international systems like the French, the American, and the German HE models. The multicultural and the ethnic features of the Lebanese society are clearly reflected in the private HEIs. A multi-linguistic system based on different instruction languages is followed in Lebanon, which reflects the culture of each HEI: programmes and majors are usually provided in Arabic, English, or French. As a result, the differentiation in the instruction language creates different aspects for academic documents. For instance, a French-patterned HEI, such as the Lebanese University, can give documents in English or French. Although HEIs in Lebanon vary in terms of the instruction language and in terms of the regional/international system they abide to, student transfer across those HEIs is possible under certain MEHE regulations. In some circumstances, for example, a student can transfer his/her studies from a French modelled HEI that offers a three-year degree to an American credit based HEI and vice versa.

Table 2.1 below lists the total number of enrolled students and their distribution among Lebanese HEIs; in addition to the LU, top ten HEIs in terms of student market share for

the academic year 2017/2018 are presented (CRDP, 2018). The total number of students enrolled in HE in Lebanon in 2017/2018 was 200,807. Table 2.1 indicates that the largest portion, around 37.83% (75,956 students), were enrolled at the LU. Each private HEI accounts for a much smaller percentage (mostly less than 5%) of student enrolment than the single public university. It is evident that HEI's student market share ranking is independent of the HEI's holistic quality level; for example: AUB, which is ranked 4th in terms of the student market share in Lebanon, has been listed by the QA Arab Region University Rankings as the 2nd overall best university in the Arab world for year 2020 (AUB, 2020).

Table 2.1 Distribution of Students in Lebanese HEIs (2017/2018)

HEI	Number of Students	Student Market Share
Lebanese University (LU) - <i>Public</i>	75956	37.83%
Lebanese international University (LIU)	21434	10.67%
University Saint-Joseph of Beirut (USJ)	10463	5.21%
Beirut Arab University (BAU)	9676	4.82%
American University of Beirut (AUB)	8474	4.22%
Lebanese American University (LAU) Arts, Sciences and Technology	8250	4.11%
University in Lebanon (AUL)	7812	3.89%
Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK)	7270	3.62%
Notre Dame University (NDU)	6269	3.12%
University of Balamand (UOB)	5511	2.74%
Islamic University of Lebanon (IUL)	5185	2.58%
Others (27 private HEIs)	34507	17.18%
Total	200807	100%

Source: CRDP (2018)

The annual growth in the total number of HE students in Lebanon averaged around 4% between year 2010 and year 2018 (CRDP, 2018). Comparing the distribution of students between public and private HEIs, the number of students at the LU (being the only public institution) remains almost constant across the years, whereas the rise in the number of students is absorbed by the private HEIs (CRDP, 2018). This can be attributed to the limited number of public HEIs, given that only one public university is available in Lebanon. This matter raises several concerns: did the LU reach its maximum capacity in terms of the number of students it can enrol, or are there quality issues in the LU inhibiting students from choosing it and settling for affordable private HEIs? Moreover, competition among private HEIs to attain larger student market share poses concerns for

the quality of admitted students and the quality of the overall internal processes of private HEIs. Plus, the lack of direct competition with the LU puts minimal pressure on the LU to ensure an adequate level of quality. With no national QA framework in Lebanon to bind HEIs and organise competition, ensuring quality of Lebanese HEIs remains a concern. On the other hand, the high competition in such expanding sector has triggered several private HEIs to improve the quality of their programmes (EU, 2017).

Given that governmental expenditure on HE is relatively low (representing less than 0.5% of the GDP in Lebanon (ECHE, 2012)), a considerable share of expenditure on HE in Lebanon is derived from students' families (household expenditure) and external private expenditure, including foreign donors like France and the Gulf countries, as the majority of students in the country are enrolled in private HEIs. In addition, in many cases, private organisations give endowments to universities modelled on an American system (i.e. AUB, LAU). Furthermore, missionaries and other religious organisations are also representing a good source of finance and donations for the existing religious-based private HEIs. This compensates for the relatively low governmental expenditure, but this depends on the capacities of different income groups to spend. This pattern of HE expenditure suggests that QA drivers are more likely to come from market forces (student choice) rather than from central governmental policy. Hence, such a pattern portrays the negligible influence of the Lebanese government on HE matters, particularly on ensuring the quality of HE. Also, the above-mentioned forms of external expenditure on HE are not sufficient to ensure the quality of HE on a national level.

2.3 The Role of QA in Lebanese HE and the National Quality Organs

Governmental control over the private HE sector in Lebanon primarily deals with the licensing/accreditation process, thus control over meeting the initial quality indicators. According to the HE law established in year 2000 to regulate the private HE sector (which is now in the implementation stage), the licensing process comprises several stages such as initial verification and inspection/audit and the recognition of degrees three years after the start-up (EU, 2017). Here, the Director General for Higher Education (DGHE) manages the initial licensing of private HEIs with the verification of the offered programmes and the recognition of the degrees. The ongoing maintenance of quality

standards through periodic reviews and inspection is rather weak at the national level. In addition, quality enhancement measures, or measures that deal with each HE aspect elaborately, structurally and in separate sub-subsections, are not established at the national level. Nevertheless, the HEI may be subject to a new review and audit process as the license is not given for an unlimited period of time. Hence, in Lebanon, the MEHE has the authority of granting accreditation or recognition recommendations to the Council of Ministers; however, it has no clear guidelines nor organises regular assessments to ensure the ongoing efficiency and quality of the accredited HEIs. Moreover, there is neither a national QA agency to ensure quality in Lebanese HEIs nor a national QA framework. Nevertheless, several QA initiatives in HE have been instigated (*to be identified later in this chapter*).

At the level of the MEHE, the Lebanese HE system comprises three key HE bodies: the Technical Committee(s), the Equivalency Committee, and the Council of HE in Lebanon. The role of these three bodies is very central in ensuring the quality and requirements in HE, especially with respect to licensing, legalising, auditing, degrees authorising and programme validation. The operations of the above committees are based traditionally on laws and guidelines established in the late 1960s and 1990s. The procedures for licensing new HEIs are carried out in the cooperation of these three committees/boards. First, the role of the Technical Committee is to develop a list of indicators based on the existing laws/regulations that are followed for licensing and auditing of HEIs and HE programmes. The list covers a number of features such as the institution's constitution, the legal entity, internal regulations and organisations, responsibility and structure of councils, the board of trustees, faculty council and university council. The Technical Committee tackles a number of criteria in connection to teaching staff regulations such as evaluation, classification, and promotion. Students' regulations are also addressed by this committee; such as academic semesters, admission evaluation, credit requirements, programme structure, curricula, scientific equipment, laboratories, libraries, faculties and departments (MEHE, 2018).

Second, the Equivalence Committee, which was established in year 1955, has the responsibility of recognising the degrees and programmes of private HEIs in Lebanon according to an assessment process and measures of the available relevant laws. In addition, it issues equivalence to HE degrees that have been obtained by students who

graduated from foreign HEIs taking into consideration the international accreditation of those foreign HEIs upon issuing degree equivalences. The increasing number of private HEIs in Lebanon in the last two decades, applying different educational systems, caused the HE system in Lebanon to become more diversified. To deal with this heterogeneous system, the equivalence committee was set for recognition and equivalence of certificates and degrees of various domains in HE (MEHE, 2018).

Third, the role of the Council of HE, which is the highest in terms of the ministry's boards' hierarchies, is to tackle licensing for new HEI applicants requesting licenses, to oversee recommendations submitted by the Technical Committee, to decide on official requests by Lebanese HEIs for new majors and faculties, and to send the recommendations and decisions of the MEHE to the Council of Ministers. The Council of HE is currently regarded as the highest legalising HE board and is headed by the Minister of Education and Higher Education and includes nine members who are represented by: the DGHE, two independent HE experts, the president of the Lebanese University, a Lebanese judge, three presidents of private Lebanese universities representing universities over 50 years old and one president representing private universities less than 50 years old (MEHE, 2018).

Although these three official bodies are still playing their traditional role, many academic entities believe that there is an extreme need for further development internally for these governmental bodies (EU, 2017). The reason for so is to promote the efforts of these bodies and align them in accordance to the needed standards and criteria of QA on the regional as well as on the international levels.

2.3.1 Internationalisation and QA

Lebanon has no international education agreements for accreditation measures with other foreign countries. To compensate for the shortcoming in the Lebanese HE system (lack of national QA framework), a number of HEIs have established their own clear internal QA process by establishing a QA unit. Around one fourth of the HEIs in Lebanon have accreditation agreements with well-recognised international accreditation agencies that deal with QA (MEHE, 2018). For example, New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) has accredited the Lebanese American University. The “Agence

D'évaluation de la Recherche et de l'enseignement Supérieur" (AERES) has been evaluating the Université Saint Joseph. In September 2009, the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) has accredited the Université Saint Esprit Kaslik. A number of majors and programmes across several Lebanese private universities have also been accredited by different programme accreditation agencies, such as the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) that granted both AUB and LAU accreditations for their engineering faculties. Most recently, to urge the government to take measures in terms of HE quality, several projects dealing with QA in HE in Lebanon have been addressed by different international agencies and academic institutions (*to be identified later in this chapter*).

The rising trend in initiatives to follow the internationalisation of HE, particularly the rapid growth of cross-border private HEIs, has created a crucial need to establish reliable and useful frameworks for QA. This allows Lebanon to maintain the quality of its HE system under the auspices of both the government and the private academic agents and keep its regional reputation in HE (UNESCO, 2007). Social and commercial elites, and the private sector agencies have required more QA criteria for the existing HEIs in Lebanon in order to offer adequate and qualified educational services to the society at large. In this highly competitive environment, it is a very important task to ensure the Lebanese HE system's performance and quality excellence. For these prevailing reasons, there has been a huge need to improve the quality of the Lebanese HEIs in particular and the reform of the whole education system in general. Moreover, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) World Bank 2008 report stresses the need for reform of the Lebanese HE system; the report regards educational reform as a priority for the government and it recommends more attention on HE QA standards as a corner stone for any future economic and social development in the MENA region (WorldBank, 2008).

2.3.2 Potential Weaknesses in the Current Lebanese HE QA system

A study was carried out in 2008 by the DGHE in Lebanon based on a questionnaire that was distributed to 38 HEIs. The survey findings demonstrated a number of critical drawbacks and gaps in the education system. 62.5% of responding HEIs believe that the system is suffering from the following issues: the lack of national standards and guidelines, laws and national agency for QA process (EU, 2017). They have also

mentioned the lack of regular quality assessments at the national level. Other issues addressed include sectarian and political intervention in the system, absence of staff and instructor development, limited number of library facilities, absence of coordination or cooperation between HEIs and the governmental bodies, and the delays in issuing the proposed bylaws in relation to educational promotion and development (EU, 2017).

Article 10 of the Constitution in Lebanon stipulates that the political authority should recognise the importance of education in society and its general principles and guiding regulations (LebaneseParliament, 1926). In this context, one of the most crucial drawbacks of HE throughout Lebanese history has been the nature of the Lebanese political system in reproducing, and very often reinforcing, social and sectarian divisions among HEIs. These divisions have caused certain HEIs to become biased towards certain political or sectarian sects, thus eliminating fair assessments and honest procedures and processes on all levels at HEIs (EU, 2017). The sectarian system in Lebanon, which is deeply embedded in the political economy of the country, has certainly considered education as a mean of preserving and reproducing different religious groups' sectarian identities. For instance, upon taking the decision for legalising a HEI, the Council of Ministers take into account sectarian and political considerations which might, at times, not align with the recommendations given by the Council for HE. In addition, decisions of appointment of staff at the LU are, at many times, neither based on actual qualifications nor on the need of the departments – employment decisions at the LU are made by the government based on sectarian and political considerations (EU, 2017). In this context, the Lebanese government was never capable to form a national HE system and national QA system that can compete along with the existing sectarian institutions and overcome this historical drawback of education.

A European Union commission report published in 2012 indicates that governmental expenditure on HE is very low, representing less than 0.5% of the GDP in Lebanon (ECHE, 2012). The LU, which is almost free of charge, receives the major share of governmental spending on HE. On the other hand, private Lebanese HEIs receive minimal to none in terms of governmental funds or any official financial support. Low governmental spending on HE in general has an effect on the ability of the government to influence QA through policy levers. For instance, given the low governmental expenditure on HE, financial incentives given to HEIs that undertake QA systems is

absent in Lebanon. With the lack of a national QA framework, such incentives are necessary to ensure the quality of HE.

Private HEIs commonly raise the majority of their revenues through tuition fees. Such fees vary considerably from one institution to another. For example, for the academic year 2016-2017, AUB's credit fee ranged between 552 USD and 816 USD per credit for undergraduate programmes - thus an average of 20,000 USD tuition fee per year (AUB, 2017). Another case is the French-modelled USJ, which has an annual tuition fee varying between 14,000 USD and 50,000 USD depending on the undergraduate programme (USJ, 2017). Nevertheless, many universities established after the end of the civil war tend to target the mid to low income households like the Arts, Sciences and Technology University in Lebanon (AUL) and the Lebanese International University (LIU) with a credit price averaging at 115 USD or a yearly tuition fee of less than 3,500 USD (AUL, 2017, LIU, 2017). With the lack of public financial support to private HEIs, such HEIs would struggle to implement QA systems.

Because of the poor economic and social development in Lebanon, the labour market of HE graduates suffers from serious crisis as indicated by the high unemployment rate (36% in year 2019 and 40% in year 2020 (The961News, 2020)), the disguised unemployment rate, the immigration rate, and very importantly demand for lower calibre graduates (who in general demand lower salaries). From an educational perspective, the problem stems from the expansion of HEIs which are highly based on policies that favour political interests dominated by business and commercial targets far removed from the quality of HE learning outcomes and graduate qualifications. The inefficiency of existing databases for HE in connection to the labour market requirements, the weakness of partnership and communication among different types of HEIs and the absence of a decisive QA framework to improve the quality of education can also be regarded as important drawbacks in HE in Lebanon (LAES, 2006).

In addition, the poor economic situation in Lebanon affects HE's contribution to social mobility- a factor relating to the quality of the offered HE. The contribution of HE to vertical social mobility is limited in Lebanon. Moreover, the contribution of the public HE sector, the LU, to vertical social mobility is less than that of the private sector. With regards to the public sector, such mobility issues are mostly due to the low HE quality

and to the narrow career options for specific specialisations and majors. The limitation of financial contribution and other forms of student scholarships, which acts as obstacles to student enrolment, limits the private sector from further contributing to such mobility (LAES, 2006). The economic situation in Lebanon contributing to the high unemployment rate also contributes to the limitation in such mobility.

2.3.3 Proposed Quality Projects and QA Initiatives

In 2007, attempts towards formulating a Lebanese QA model were undertaken with the aid of the European Commission through its Tempus/Erasmus+ projects with the collaboration of the Lebanese MEHE. However, an official model never emerged. The joint efforts mentioned above only resulted in a draft (Towards Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency - TLQAA) for a Lebanese QA model for HE in Lebanon. The model was highly criticised by most private well-established Lebanese universities due to its generic nature (El-Ghali and Ghalayini, 2016, El-Hassan, 2019). Despite being very basic, the draft model has never been endorsed by the ministry nor enforced on Lebanese universities to date because of the laxity of the parliament and the political interference and personal interests of the commercial elites. Moreover, the suggested model lacked a lot of elements that would compose a solid HE QA model (El-Ghali and Ghalayini, 2016).

In 2010, another initiative was taken by the HE Reform Experts (HERE) aiming at contributing to HE development, reform and modernisation in Lebanon. The HERE's main activities focus on the main issues of the HEIs' reform agenda. In collaboration with the National Erasmus Office (NEO), the HERE team with the support of the DGHE took an action plan that addresses several research fields, focusing on the participation of civil society and expertise in developing the HE system in Lebanon. The ultimate target of this initiative was to modernise the Lebanese HEIs. An annual Strategic Action Plan (SAP) was also discussed in relation to HE QA. The plan has been prepared and submitted to the MEHE for approval; yet its realisation was never achieved.

In April 2014, the Lebanese Parliament passed a new law for the regulation of private HEIs. The law required HEIs to initiate their own QA process to prepare for external evaluation. Several HEIs used many reform measures taken from or aligned with international standards and trends.

Although several QA initiatives were undertaken on the national level, none were fully adopted. More importantly, such quality projects are inadequate to assure and enhance quality of HE, as confirmed by numerous authors (El-Ghali and Ghalayini, 2016, El-Hassan, 2019), neither on a national nor on an institutional level. The lack of concrete, specific national standards, guidelines and processes for QA in HE, including the lack of regular quality assessments at the national level, hinders the establishment of quality HE among all HEIs in Lebanon.

2.4 Summary

Lebanon is distinctive for having an educational system that reflects the openness of the Lebanese government to the international society. However, the lack of a decisive model and clear QA standards to develop HEIs is a critical problem. This is reflected in the expansion of HEIs that are operating without any QA measures or any efficient strategies for quality development. This is directly related in fact to the archaic quality control on HE in Lebanon and to the absence of a well-functioning national QA system based on the prevailing global standards.

Governmental control over private HE sector in Lebanon primarily deals with the licensing/accreditation process, thus control over meeting the initial quality indicators. The MEHE has no clear guidelines nor organises regular assessments to guarantee the ongoing efficiency and quality of the accredited HEIs. To compensate for the shortcoming in the Lebanese HE system (lack of national QA framework), a number of HEIs have established their own clear internal QA process through establishing a QA unit. Some HEIs in Lebanon have undergone accreditation agreements with well-recognised international agencies that deal with QA.

The HE sector in Lebanon faces several barriers to the effective implementation of QA system at the institutional level. Governmental expenditure on HE is low and funds are mainly allocated to the LU. The majority of private HEIs are solely relying on student tuition fees; therefore, they tend to struggle to abide to strict QA initiatives. The HE system is also suffering from political and sectarian intervention thus affecting the autonomy of HEIs and their ability to efficiently ensure the quality of the delivered education.

From another angle, the poor economic and social development in Lebanon limits the contribution of HE to vertical social mobility. Among the impediments of such mobility are the low quality management in HE and the limited financial aid and other types of student supports. Demand for lower calibre students is rather high in Lebanon due to the country's poor economic situation.

Moving forward, the following chapter aims at exploring the available literature to provide conceptual insights into QA matters in HE.

Chapter 3 – Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

The following chapter provides a map to understand and explain conceptually and practically the meaning of phenomena in the field of QA in HE. This chapter is structured into eight sections: following the introduction, section two is oriented to the origins of QA, section three elaborates on the philosophies and general approaches to QA and related phenomena, section four specifies the QA associated tools and mechanisms along with the possible barriers to the effective QA implementation, section five is devoted to the interface between system and institutional levels of QA with emphasis on national QA agencies, section six elaborates on quality cultures and their relation to the implementation of QA approaches, section seven is devoted to the different notions and experiences of international policy borrowing and lending, and, finally, section eight is a brief summary of the chapter.

This chapter is shaped on work of several researchers including David Billing, Martin Trow, John Brennan, Lee Harvey, Peter Knight, James Williams, Ian McNay, John Davies, David Philips and Kimberly Ochs among others who have elaborated on common phenomena in the field of quality and QA. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a template of good practice and a framework of key indicators upon which the current situation in Lebanon is assessed. Hence, this chapter provides the basis to explain the findings and propose solutions to problems identified in the evidence.

3.2 Origins of QA and the Justification for its Adoption in HEIs

HE systems witnessed immense changes during the 20th and 21st centuries in terms of quality. HE quality issues in our contemporary life have been addressed by different models, strategies, and instruments. One of the most important events is the shift of QA models from the domestic level towards the global level and from the domestic-oriented approach towards a market-oriented one (Healey, 2008). A number of factors have been behind these immense changes. First, the incremental increase in the number of enrolled students in HE globally. Second, having the dramatic increase in the number of enrolled students in HE caused a considerable rise in HEIs which possess a wider variety of

programmes (Healey, 2008). As a result, the question of quality management and QA has been gaining momentum. On the global level, this phenomenon has led to international competition among HEIs, which evidently put QA and quality instruments on the top of their agenda. As a result of HE massification, John Brennan believes that 'quality matters' more than ever, whether directly to its stakeholders or indirectly to the society as a whole (Brennan, 2018).

The application of QA in HE is a somewhat complicated phenomenon. QA in HE is interrelated with the socio-economic issues of any society. The integration of HEIs in the social system of each country plays a crucial role in the economic development of the country and the social fabric of the country. At the national level, QA in HE is addressed as the distinguishing guidelines between different HEIs to guide society and students when receiving and acquiring HE (Wen, 2012). Consequently, nowadays, most of national and international HEIs are actively adhered to QA to deal with the dramatic development and increasing needs of modern societies. This has led to the creation of a number of strategies and instruments in different countries to improve the quality, accountability, transparency, professionalism, and sustainable development of HEIs. According to Hoecht (2006), accountability and transparency are very important issues for academic institutions (Hoecht, 2006).

With the rise of globalisation since the 1980s, it is clear that a new phenomenon has been dominating the on-going debate on quality. Such a phenomenon is based on two new emerging terminologies, namely quality culture and global quality (Scott, 2000). Although QA is considered to be both the internal and the external processes for the development and improvement of HEIs, the concept of quality culture has recently gained the attention of academic communities. Quality culture focuses on a so-called holistic approach to quality (Vidovich, 2002). It seeks to establish quality within HEIs in different countries. Thus, it emphasises the development of a self-internal quality assessment to ensure and maintain improvement and development of HEIs' activities and services in accordance to well-recognised academic values. Quality culture is regarded primarily as an internal and a continuous quality process (Scott, 2000). Hence, quality culture seeks to enhance the quality of knowledge without requiring the intervention of an external agent of QA. Here, it is significant to mention that the growing awareness of internal quality culture is mainly attributed to the increased demand of HEIs for more

autonomy from authorities and external agents as well as for more accountability (Ka Ho Mok, 2000). The emergence of such phenomena during the last 20 years has overcome the traditional model of professionalism and domestic autonomy in HE and thereby diverged HEIs around the globe towards more integrated, efficiency-oriented and highly standardised QA trends.

With the internationalisation of HE, a variety of QA agencies with different quality procedures and instruments have emerged worldwide (Vidovich, 2002). Global quality standards guarantee that the global quality agencies meet the requirements to develop global appropriate procedures of QA among HEIs and programmes. As a result, HEIs that wish to be incorporated through these global procedures can gain reasonable, trustworthy, reliable and international standards of QA (Ka Ho Mok, 2000).

Globalisation in QA has not been successful in all cases since many national processes for QA in many countries have not contributed to the existing internationalisation process of QA in terms of both purposes and policies (Ball, 2017). The existing and widespread diversity and the lack of coordination between international agencies have a clear impact on QA internationalisation process. Hence, the question on how to create a global QA and accreditation system is still unanswered. Nevertheless, it has been reported by numerous researches and surveys that demand for internationalisation in HE has been increasing since the rise of globalisation during the 1980s and 1990s (Milton and Barakat, 2016, Majzoub and Agha, 2015, Mansouri, 2016). It was acknowledged that internationalisation in quality would strengthen QA outcomes especially in a highly competitive international education market. International mobility, the overseas education market, globalisation of professionalism and regional competitive advantage among national HEIs can be regarded as some of the main pressures toward the increasing momentum of internationalisation in QA.

3.3 Philosophies of, and General Approaches to QA and Related Phenomena

The key to understand QA in HE is how quality is defined (Williams and Harvey, 2015), and one of the principal subjects in the HE literature on QA is how to define and measure 'quality' (Nicholson, 2011). Vroeijenstijn (1991) believes that defining quality in HE is extremely difficult (Vroeijenstijn, 1991); however, perhaps the first workable definition

of quality in HE was the work of Harvey and Green (1993) when they categorised quality in HE by exception (associates quality to excellence; attaining minimum set of standards); perfection (connects quality to faultless outcomes); value for money (focuses on effectiveness and efficiency; to measure output against input); fitness for purpose (quality linked to satisfying consumer need; links quality to a defined purpose) and transformation (associates quality with change; associated with empowering and enhancing; student is essential) (Harvey and Green, 1993). Transformation was emphasised by Harvey (2006) as the heart of QA in HE (Harvey, 2006, Williams and Harvey, 2015, Brennan, 2018). Lomas (2004) believes that transformation and fitness for purpose are the two most suitable definitions to quality (Lomas, 2004).

QA has always been one of most discussed topics when it comes to HE. Given the diversity of perspectives on what constitutes good quality, experts could not agree on a universal conceptual framework for QA in HE. Barnett (1992) links QA to the planning process which involves everyone in the organisation and which aims to develop a culture of quality enhancement within every department of the organisation (Barnett, 1992). For many others, QA is a systematic maintenance and improvement process characterised by a continuing review of the alignment of educational programmes with education, scholarship and infrastructure standards (INQAAHE, 2005, UNESCO, 2004).

In this regards, quality in HE, as stated in the World Conference on HE, is a multi-dimensional principle that includes in its activities and functions teaching, academic programmes, scholarships, supervisions, research, students, staff, buildings, faculties and equipment to serve the academic environment and communities (UNESCO, 1998). In 1997, Boyle and Bowden (1997) linked QA to six main factors: clear vision, mission and objectives, effective leadership, effective human resource management, customer-focused orientation, continuing improvement, and a well-defined structure (Boyle and Bowden, 1997). Therefore, the scope of QA includes education and teaching and learning, personnel assessment, planning and budgeting, departmental reviews, research, buildings and equipment, internationalisation, relation with external environment such as employers, etc. (Kis, 2005). For example, Kettunen and Kantola (2007) stress in their paper “*Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance in the Bologna Process*” on the high importance of integrating QA processes with the HEI management strategy (Kettunen and Kantola, 2007).

Harvey (2002) discussed QA in relation to a structured process aiming to satisfy stakeholders' expectations (Harvey, 2002). This definition poses a number of questions concerning the relationship between QA and HE: what kind of criteria should be taken to decide which measures are relevant to determine quality? Answering this question is complicated when it applies to HE since the complexity in HE resides in the number of its interrelated stakeholders. Williams and Harvey (2015) identify that research on QA indicates that stakeholders tend to regularly categorise the three dominant norms of QA: fitness for purpose, value for money and transformation (Williams and Harvey, 2015). In relation to the external environment, HEIs should realise that importance of HE employers and employability of their graduates. Leisyte and Westerheijden (2014) state that many HEIs from around the world include external stakeholders, specifically employers, in their university boards. By being part of the HEI's governance system (e.g. UK, Czech), employers can play an significant role in setting standards for programmes' evaluations and learning outcomes (Leisyte and Westerheijden, 2014). According to Harvey and Williams, De La Harpe et al. (2000) suggest that HEIs should change the way their curriculum is delivered in order to meet the employers' expectation and prepare graduates who are more "fit for purpose", a notion that should involve extensive staff development and constant monitoring (Harvey and Williams, 2010, De La Harpe et al., 2000). Barrie (2006) states that is through the quality of their graduates that HEIs express their role and purpose (Barrie, 2006). Another definition tentative which emerged in 1994 by Green pointed at the relation between QA and the concept of the learning organisation (Green, 1994): universities which undertake QA initiatives seek to achieve QA through learning and conforming to standards set by the training organisation (Green, 1994).

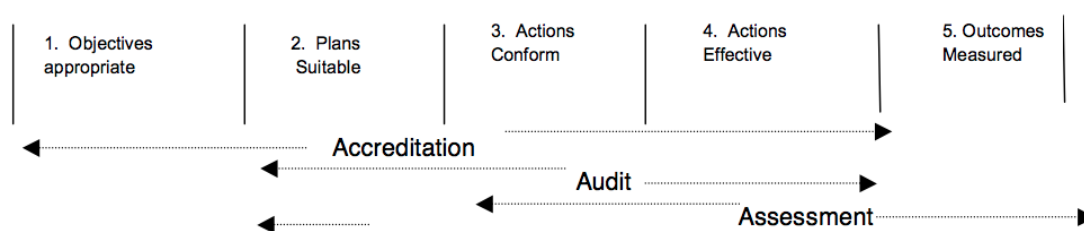
Despite the diversity of definitions of QA, numerous common characteristics are highlighted. The majority of authors emphasise the planned aspect inherent to QA and use terms such as systematic and structured. In consequence, QA can be defined as the set of steps, initiatives and attitudes directed to improve quality within educational institutions. Furthermore, accountability and improvement are important concepts highlighted indirectly by all the mentioned authors as inherent to the definition of QA. Following the same reasoning, FETAC (2007) linked improvement of quality in HE to accountability and continuous monitoring of the service offered not only at the internal level but also with regards to the relation between the institution and its context.

Therefore, QA should be implemented on both an intrinsic and extrinsic level (FETAC, 2007).

In light of the above, QA refers to the policies, attitude, actions and procedures needed to ensure that quality is preserved and enhanced (Woodhouse, 1999). Hence, QA is intended to ensure accountability and create improvement (Harvey, 1998). The notions of accountability and improvement are identified by Koslowski (2006); improvement is mainly related to continuous internal processes while accountability is usually correlated with external stakeholders (e.g. government, QA agencies, public) (Koslowski, 2006). Woodhouse (1999) identifies the difference between notions of or approaches to QA and the related processes. While accountability is usually defined in terms of inputs and outputs/outcomes, it requires quality measures like metric or performance indicators. Processes usually referred to as accreditation, quality audit and assessment are mainly used to collect the needed data to deliver evidence of accountability (Woodhouse, 1999).

In this context, accreditation provides clearly defined and appropriate programmes, recognition of degrees, and independent approval that adds assurance to the enrolling system of HEIs, which have the capacity to achieve given standards of quality in HE (Woodhouse, 1999). Accreditation determines whether a HEI or specific programme meets set quality standards by examining the resources, mission and pertinent processes of the HEI or programme. Accreditation may have effects/implications for HEIs (such as authorisations to operate). Assessment or evaluation measures the quality of outputs. Assessments make graded judgements (quantitative evaluations) about quality; European QA systems mainly rely on assessments to measure quality of programmes and institutions. Finally, audit validates whether the set quality procedures are suitable, meet the conformity and are appropriate to the HEIs' set objectives. Therefore, audits focus on internal procedures set by HEIs, which are usually implemented at the institutional level (Woodhouse, 1999). Though 'audit', 'assessment' and 'accreditation' represent three different concepts, they might overlap, blur or mix; Woodhouse clarifies the relation between the three concepts in a 'Five Point Checking Sequence' diagram represented in Figure 3.1 below.

Figure 3.1: Five Point Checking Sequence



Source: Woodhouse (1999)

In addition, accreditation is a requisite instrument for any successful quality process (ESIB, 2001). Betts et al. (2009) consider accreditation as the basic instrument of external QA review in colleges and universities. Betts et al. consider accreditation as a powerful force that is becoming an indicator of the market value of HEIs (Betts et al., 2009). HEIs are continually changing and evolving with time and, therefore, accreditation can be regarded as the cornerstone of the assessment process at a given period of time with reference to specific academic services, institutions or courses. This evaluation is necessary to recognise that the HEIs meet the given standards of QA. When accreditation is carried out by an academic agent, the role of QA here is to guarantee that the criteria measured in the accreditation instrument are ensured and realised in the long term, thus resulting in continuous improvement (ESIB, 2001). QA and accreditation go hand by hand to ensure the improvement process in HE. Hence, effective QA is continuous.

However, in his article “*Accreditation of HE in Europe- Moving Towards the US Model?*” Stensaker discussed several established criticisms on accreditations. He referred to Ewell (2008), Harvey and Mason (1995), Harvey (2004), Proitz, Stensaker and Harvey (2004) and Wolff (2005) who suggested that accreditation is neither value adding nor cost effective and utilises criteria which overlook the educational context while failing to ensure public accountability. In this regards, they suggest that accreditations do not take into consideration the current context a HEI is operating in (Stensaker, 2011, Ewell, 2008, Harvey et al., 1995, Harvey, 2004b, Prøitz et al., 2004, Wolff, 2005).

Effective QA is continuous (cyclical), dynamic and developmental. The success of any evaluation is thus linked to continuous follow-ups while attaining constant feedback that is linked to action (Harvey, 2002). For example, when emphasis is on internal processes,

student feedback needs to be cyclic and linked to action and empowerment. Cyclic feedback is perhaps the proper way to collect students' feedback in a dynamic fashion. Kane et al. (2008) studied student feedback over 18 years and found out that collecting feedback of students in a cyclic manner and setting the questionnaire itself in a dynamic and learning nature have had positive impact on HEIs (Kane et al., 2008, Harvey and Williams, 2010). In 2010 Nair et al. published a paper showing the increased interest of HEIs in staff satisfaction. It was mentioned that the University of Newcastle, the University of Sheffield and the University of Bath were among the first HEIs in UK to adopt an employee survey in their QA process (Nair et al., 2010). In 2002, the Monash University, in Australia, developed Learning and Growth Survey that aimed at acting upon their staff needs. The survey was aligned with and included in the university's quality cycle, which consists of four elements: Plan, Act, Evaluate and Improve. This methodology, adopted by Monash University, was reported by reviewers as a good example of investing in human capital and setting an effective change by 'closing the loop' (Nair et al., 2010). Harvey (2001) stated that a consistent and continuous cycle of analysis, reporting, action and feedback is necessary for effective improvement of quality in HEIs (Harvey, 2001). However, Powney and Hall (1998) and Leckey and Neill (2001) argued that the quality loop at HEIs was rarely closed; also, collecting and acting upon feedback from all stakeholders will never be fully established in HE (Powney and Hall, 1998, Leckey and Neill, 2001).

With regards to the different classifications that have been used in applying QA in HE, two major categories of QA can be considered, namely the intrinsic and the extrinsic qualities in HE. The intrinsic aspect of QA focuses on the basic ideas and values of knowledge that creates processes of learning, whereas the extrinsic qualities focus on capacities and response of HEIs to the increasing needs of modern societies (Westerheijden et al., 2007b). Therefore, extrinsic qualities are determined by the socio-economic factors rather than to an internal and self-evaluation process as the case of intrinsic qualities. As a result, intrinsic qualities refer to as the core of QA in HE, whereas extrinsic qualities are regarded as the guardians of QA process among HEIs.

Trow (1994) has developed a typology of academic review classifying four types of review against two dimensions: internal/external and supportive/evaluative. The four kinds of review can be categorised – Figure 3.2 - as: Type I (Internal Supportive), Type

II (Internal Evaluative), Type III (External Supportive), and Type IV (External Evaluative).

Figure 3.2: Trow's Typology

A Typology of Academic Reviews		
Origin of the Review:	Function of the Review:	
	<i>Supportive</i>	<i>Evaluative</i>
<i>Internal</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>II</i>
<i>External</i>	<i>III</i>	<i>IV</i>

Source: Trow (1994)

As classified by Trow, Type I, internal supportive reviews, is the form of academic reviews that are carried out within the HEI, whether it is a review of a programme, department or the institution as a whole. This kind of review is generally oriented for the purpose of helping the unit under review to identify its strengths and weaknesses and to submit recommendations for senior academics/administration suggesting ways for possible improvements. Examples of such reviews are vast, and are available in numerous HEIs around the world (Trow, 1994). Type II, internal evaluative reviews, is a form of review that is usually initiated by HEIs' decision makers for the purpose of fund allocation. This type of review is usually ad hoc rather than systematic and it is directly related to action, e.g. allocation of resources. It is common for Type II reviews to occur based on Type I reviews, especially if the latter presented early warnings of alarming problems (Trow, 1994).

Because external reviews are often linked with governments, who are usually concerned with the efficient use of public funds (more than helping HEIs overcome their weaknesses), Type III, external supportive reviews, is relatively a rare kind of review, as viewed by Trow. This kind of review, however, has the advantage of being highly objective over other types of reviews as it is not concerned with evaluation (like Type II and Type IV), and it is free from the constraints of collegiality that are inherent in internal reviews. Moreover, Type III reviews can help disseminate good practice from one HEI

to another free from the constraints of guild loyalties and jealousies within HEIs (Trow, 1994). The final type of review is Type IV, external evaluative reviews. Trow has identified two sub-types within Type IV: Type IV (1) which are operated by the government agencies that are linked to funding, and Type IV (2) which are operated by an independent agency and usually not linked to funding but rather to rankings.

Type IV (1) reviews were highly criticized by Trow for conveying notions of lack of trust between governments and HEIs in relation to the latter's internal QA process. Moreover, Trow expressed that this kind of review deviates the attention of academics from their actual work (teaching and learning, research) to an extensive preparation of presentations and documents that will be later evaluated. This type of review is usually remote from the life of the unit under review and, thus, cannot really diagnose its work. Trow discussed that these types of review serve a purpose for governments as they "*satisfy the government of the day, at least for the day*" (p.32) (Trow, 1994). Finally, Type IV (2) reviews, which are external and evaluative but not linked to funding, are greatly linked to comparative reputations of departments and HEIs. The generic problem of this sub-type of review, as expressed by Trow, is that it affects the reputation of the unit, department or HEI under review – for better or worse (Trow, 1994).

Numerous arguments in the literature exist on the value of internal and external reviews. Thune (1996) and Woodhouse (1995) believe that tackling accountability needs the involvement of an external agent; thus, external QA ensures the accountability of HE (Thune, 1996, Woodhouse, 1995). Moreover, external QA provides valuable information to HE stakeholders (Harvey, 2002). External QA has had a positive effect on various national sectors by raising awareness on quality at different HEIs (Harvey and Williams, 2010). Brennan (1997) and Harvey (2002) consider external QA as a catalyst for HE's internal improvement (Brennan, 1997, Harvey, 2002). For example, the preparation of self-reviews by HEIs requires substantial workload, so external reviews act as incentives to ensure the seriousness of the self-evaluation processes. On the other hand, some believe that external reviews constrain innovation in HE (Harvey, 2002), lead to a compliance culture, thus restraining actual quality improvement (Brennan, 1997), and are bureaucratic and involve high costs (Harvey, 2002). Nevertheless, Harvey (2002) discussed that interaction between internal and external QA is necessary to guarantee that outcomes of external evaluations are not merely short-term enhancements but result in

on-going improvements (Harvey, 2002). Moreover, such interaction leads to the essential cooperation between key HE stakeholders. In addition, evidence has suggested that when internal quality processes mesh with external QA, effective quality improvement occurs (Harvey and Newton, 2004).

In 2007, Parlea considered QA a global, ‘all-embracing’ concept aiming at the systematic assessment, control and improvement of programmes, institutions and systems via a solid quality culture (Parlea, 2007). In this context, the ultimate goal of any QA procedure is to establish a system of quality culture (Woodard Jr and Duncan, 2000). Quality culture can be regarded as the capacity of a HEI to develop QA as a continuing long-term process. Of course such a process should be maintained by a quality audit, a process that is used to examine institutional implementation of QA arrangements, standards, objectives, and procedures. As a result, HEIs need to establish an imbedded and an effective regime for assuring an implicit quality culture mechanism. In this domain, quality culture should exist and support the concept of ‘*fitness for purpose*’ of education (Harvey and Green, 1993). Quality culture exists in an institution that has a system for managing quality, and a QA system seems to be an obvious tool for providing confidence that quality requirements will be satisfied. Thus, quality audits coupled with external quality evaluations ensure continuous improvement in the HE sector. The concept of ‘fitness for purpose’ has been widely dominant in relation to quality in HE (Nicholson, 2011); fitness for purpose is the most commonly recognised definition of quality (Harvey, 1998, Woodhouse, 1999).

Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2002) believe that a holistic approach to quality in HE has the potential to build a synergy to address the service, education and implementation aspects (Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2002). A key characteristic of the holistic approach is to create a partnership between students and staff through their constant engagement, thus, enhancing the learning environment (Millard et al., 2013). This is directly related to the introduction of the ‘newer’ form of quality management known as ‘quality enhancement’ (QE) – sometimes referred to as quality improvement. As defined by Harvey (2004a), QE is a process of augmentation that is concerned with the enhancement of the learners and the improvement in the quality of a HEI or a programme (Harvey, 2004a). James Williams (2016) identified a spectrum of relationships between QA and QE (Williams, 2016). First, Williams identified authors who view QA and QE as two

separate activities distinct in nature – with QA mainly relating to accountability, and QE mainly focusing on quality improvement (Middlehurst and Woodhouse, 1995, Gosling and D'Andrea, 2001, Amaral, 2007, Newton, 2000, Newton, 2002b, Cheng, 2011, Williams, 2016). Second, Williams identified authors who portray that QA and QE are opposing in nature – where QA is viewed negatively as a top-down approach characterised by inflexibility, and QE is viewed positively as a bottom-up approach characterised by qualitative judgment and engagement with academics (Elassy, 2015, Swinglehurst et al., 2008, Raban, 2007, Gosling and D'Andrea, 2001, Williams, 2016). Third, Williams identified authors who believe that QA leads, or should lead to QE – where both approaches are on a linear scale of progression from QA to QE (Dill, 2000, Elassy, 2015, Leeuw, 2002, Williams, 2016). Finally, Williams identified the work of authors who explain that QA and QE share integral parts of the same process and are sometimes combined as part of a cycle to create a more holistic approach (Danø and Stensaker, 2007, Gosling and D'Andrea, 2001, Williams and Kane, 2009, Harvey, 2003, Williams, 2016).

3.3.1 QA Approaches: A Historical Sequential

The attention towards QA in HE increased in the 1980s. The idea back then was from one perspective, to invest the right capital in the right direction and to offer, from another perspective, quality service and in consequence provide graduates with the required skills to make a change (Westerheijden et al., 2007b). With all the market ideologies of the period and the strong influence of management on education (Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2003), many universities applied the QA tools adopted in the business sector such as the Total Quality Management (TQM), the set of the ISO 9001 standards originated in 1987, the Business Process Reengineering (BPR) and the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) excellence model. These approaches to quality were later, in many instances, replaced by performance-oriented, outcome-based approaches.

Houston (2007) argues that quality management tools are inappropriate for HE given the particularity of the culture, the operations process and the values underpinning academic institutions (Houston, 2007). Becket and Brookes (2008), confirming the point of view of Birnbaum (2001) who considers the management quality initiatives in HE a ‘myth’, speak about enforcing through these quality measures a culture of ‘managerialism’ (Becket and Brookes, 2008, Birnbaum, 2001). The implementation of the management

QA models proved to be inaccurate since they do not take into consideration the complexity and the nature of the HE context. It is within this environment that many authors undertook numerous initiatives aiming to develop QA models that fit the particularity of the HE context.

In 1983, Garvin introduced five approaches in connection to quality in general and quality in HE in particular (Garvin, 1983):

First, an approach named *the transcendent approach* implies that we can only discover quality, after we experience it a number of times. With respect to HE, this indicates that we have searched good-level universities, enrolled in a well-structured HEI and participated in sufficient and useful lectures. Briefly stated, the institution that has gained historic credibility and recognition in the HE fields has quality.

Second, the *product-based approach* indicates that products are assessed after the availability or unavailability of certain characteristics. This approach addresses quality as a measurable criterion. In the context of HE, this means that the HEI that provides the students with better knowledge and higher qualifications is an effective provider of educational quality; in other words, following such an approach, students of a HEI would have gained certain knowledge to use in their careers and lives.

Third, the *production-process-based approach* addresses quality in a broader sense in terms of criteria and standards. This means a HEI that employs more academic and administrative staff and technical tools such as computers and laboratories more than the government requires provides better HE than other HEIs that have less professors or equipment. According to this approach, quality of HE is determined by relying on an experienced set of standards such as the professors' number, the volume and contents of programmes the HEI has, the ranking of disciplines and the accreditation system.

Fourth, the *value-based approach* indicates that quality is a matter of benefits and costs. A product or service that has quality means it gives benefits and satisfaction at an acceptable cost and at a given price level. Regarding HE, this means that the students are satisfied as long as they gain some knowledge, pass examinations, and pay relatively low tuition fees. This approach is gaining more importance in countries where the incremental

increase in number of enrolled students is an essential factor; adhering to students' expectations and needs becomes an attractive vehicle to ensure quality in HE.

Fifth, the *user-based approach* addresses consumer's expectations. The target is therefore to focus on the consumers' needs and ambitions; the aim here is to provide them with what they are looking for. In terms of HE, this approach implies that HEIs provide education that fits the expectations of stakeholders, i.e. prospective students, parents, as well as the employers (Garvin, 1983).

In 1996, Harvey and Knight established the concept of transformative learning, a model based on students' empowerment and aiming at the development of a culture of continuing improvement (Harvey and Knight, 1996). This model denies the idea of education as a service and stresses the fact that quality in HE is linked to student transformation and in consequence is a continuing process culminating in making the student more confident. Harvey and Knight (1996) identify four different methods to empower students: to involve students in the evaluation process (e.g. allow students to comment on their education through collecting their feedback), to assure to students minimum standards of provision (e.g. involve students in the HEI strategic management, planning and quality policy development), to give students further control over their education (e.g. allow students to choose their own curriculum, and to have more control on how they learn and when and how it is evaluated) and to develop students' critical abilities (e.g. develop the critical ability of students to be capable to assess and develop knowledge on their own (intellectual performers), and thus empower students not only for the purpose of their educational journey but also for life) (Harvey and Knight, 1996). The fourth method is what Harvey and Knight consider to possess the real potential in transforming the students (Harvey and Knight, 1996). In this context, Carmichael, Palermo, Reeve and Vallenge (2001) claim that the perception of the student must be positioned at the core of quality in all education areas because students are an integral element of any QA process (Carmichael et al., 2001). In addition, according to Stukalina (2014), evaluation of the academic programmes by the students is an important assessment mechanism used for encouraging quality enhancement in HEIs. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in the United Kingdom also reported that student participation is "*an opportunity for students to develop their ability to analyse the quality of their programmes, creating a sense of ownership of these programmes*" (Stukalina, 2014).

In their book entitled “*Emblems of Quality in HE*”, Haworth and Conrad (1997) linked quality in HE to enriching the student learning experience through strong interaction between students and academic administrators. This is only possible if students are assigned serious tasks and in consequence are strongly involved in the teaching process (Haworth and Conrad, 1997). For example, Butler (1992) completed a survey-based study on teaching methods at Oxford University. She found through her studies that the perceived effectiveness of different teaching methods changes across the different used methods of teaching. As perceived by the students, the least effective method was the didactic, traditional lecture; however, by involving the students more vigorously in the teaching processes, the perceived effectiveness of this second teaching method was greatly enhanced; the second method was regarded as more effective. Plus, students perceived that utilising learning packages and experiential tasks in the teaching process as effective (Butler, 1992). Shreeve (2008) studied the effect of moving from didactic learning into experiential learning. The results of his studies showed that when the experiential learning method is delivered using a student-centred approach it has high advantages in effectively preparing students to become lifelong learners (Shreeve, 2008).

In 1998, Bowden and Marton pointed at the pedagogical aspect of quality in HE. They argued that this later is the result of a high quality of learning which in itself is characterised by the diversity of perspectives and the variety of visions (Bowden and Marton, 1998). In the same year, Tierney (1998) broadens the concept of quality in HE: according to Tierney, quality implies a student-centred programme, a country-centred outreach and a nation-centred research (Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2002).

In 2006, Csizmadia developed a QA model through the use of the input – throughout - output concept in the HE field. The input level includes factors such as customer requirement, government regulation and resources. The throughout level includes the academic operations and governance. The output refers to student satisfaction with the service, the market satisfaction with students’ skills, capacities and the research findings (Csizmadia, 2006).

In 2007, Srikanthan and Dalrymple argued that quality of the HE system is inherent to a rich learning experience and to students’ empowerment. Therefore, it is based on the

three following premises: 1) transforming the learner and enhancing his/her skills and capabilities; 2) creating a collaborative culture and collective conscious that facilitates learning experience; 3) having a tangible commitment to reach continuing progress and improvement of students' learning (Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2007).

3.4 QA Associated Tools, Mechanisms and Instruments

There are a number of QA mechanisms/tools that are widely used in HE. Most often, various combinations can be set in place when implementing those approaches. Examples of the mechanisms commonly used include: surveys, self-assessments (form the foundation for external assessments or peer-review), peer-reviews, site-visits and the use of performance indicators, which focus on inputs and outputs.

Harman (1998) explored various mechanisms used at HEIs for the purpose of QA implementation. According to Harman, the two most common used mechanisms are self-evaluation (internal) and peer-review (usually including external members). Harman believes that self-evaluation can be the most effective form of QA; moreover, it has been proven to be cost-effective (Harman, 1998). According to Dill (2007), when internal quality audits (self-evaluations) are properly implemented using the collaboration of all stakeholders, they can provide effective incentives for the improvement of teaching and learning (Dill, 2007a). Thune (1996) argues that HEIs should place high emphasis on self-review in order to prepare the HEI or programme to take responsibility of its own quality improvement (from external reviewers) (Thune, 1996). The use of statistical data, performance indicators and surveys on all levels (students, alumni, departmental, faculties) are used when performing self-evaluation (Harman, 1998).

Phillips and Kinser (2018) discussed in their book *“Accreditation on the Edge: Challenging Quality Assurance in Higher Education”* that peer-review can be used as an alternative solution to the bureaucratic internal audit mechanisms that can sometimes lead to rigidity, over-simplicity or irrelevance (Phillips and Kinser, 2018). They explained how the peer-review mechanism could reflect the complexity of a given situation based on the experiential knowledge of the participating panel, usually involving experts in the field. According to Phillips and Kinser (2018), peer-reviews can assume some sort of bias, as peer-reviewers from HEIs can be involved in a conflict of

interest when evaluating other institutions. Phillips and Kinser gave an example of some peer-reviewers being “soft” or “kind” to other institutions in hope that the opposed peer-reviewers from that institution would treat them the same (Phillips and Kinser, 2018). To guarantee the legitimacy of the review, Brennan (1997) argues that the selection of peers is an important criterion; in some cases peers can be colleagues and in other cases they are competitors- both cases possess legitimacy concerns (Brennan, 1997).

In regards to external assessments, Harvey (2002) explains that site visits (by external QA reviewers) coupled with the use of surveys impose needless bureaucratic burdens on HEIs. He suggests that, to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the QA process and to reduce HEIs’ event-related documents, quality monitoring should be made on the grounds of what universities already generate (Harvey, 2002).

Coates (2005) discusses good practices in relation to conducting student surveys and collecting data from students for the purpose of QA and quality enhancement. Coates explained that the US National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) groups good practices that indicate student engagement into five categories: active and collaborative learning, level of academic challenge, supportive campus environment, student–faculty interaction and enriching educational experiences. HEIs should use those benchmarks to measure various phenomena related to the student experience in the HEI when conducting surveys. The surveys conducted by HEIs should also examine whether institutions have been available, sympathetic and helpful, emphasizing academic effort and study, providing assistance to help students flourish socially or assessing students in means that encouraged them to accomplish their finest (Coates, 2005).

Ewell (1999) explained that there are four kinds of performance indicators (PIs) (or statistical data): hard statistics (e.g. number of graduates, age of building), ratios (e.g. faculty work-load measures, student retention), second-order statistics (e.g. student satisfaction *measured through survey or interview*, student learning outcomes *measured though assessment or examination*) and judgement calls which are *non-statistical* (e.g. whether a HEI established sufficient institutional assessment processes, the success of graduates in the labour market) (Ewell, 1999). Because of the rising demand for external/public accountability, the use of PIs has greatly increased in the HE sector. According to Ewell (1999), the former two categories are usually questioned for their

integrity or validity (Ewell, 1999). In this context, Vroeijerstijn (1995a) argues that there should be a distinction between quantitative and qualitative indicators; the former category is not indicative of performance whereas the latter category has an effect on quality. Vroeijerstijn highlighted the importance of interpreting PIs effectively; therefore, subjectivity in interpretation is sometimes questioned (Vroeijerstijn, 1995a).

QA mechanisms, whether internal or external, have been criticised by a number of academics for being over 'bureaucratic' and limiting freedom, which in turn can limit innovation. Cheng (2010) tested the effectiveness of eight QA mechanisms when he conducted a study involving seven HEIs in UK. Four of the QA mechanisms were internally derived: annual programme review, student course evaluation, peer observation, and the approval scheme for revised and new programmes and units. The remaining four mechanisms were externally initiated: UK's QAA institutional audit, two external examining bodies, and the review of professional, legal and regulatory bodies. The outcomes of Cheng's study indicated that two-thirds of the participants found that the implemented QA mechanisms are bureaucratic and contradicted their perceived notion of autonomy. Moreover, Cheng indicated that the academic participants exhibited resistance to the QA system on the faculty level. Plus, a conflict over power or conflict over decisions' ownership arose between HEIs and the QAA at the institutional level (Cheng, 2010).

Brennan (2018) believes that quality management, with QA as an embedded process, whether internal or external, has a developmental and innovative influence on HE. On the external side, instruments of good practices can be recognised and borrowed between HEIs; and on the internal side, mechanisms for good practices can be provided and introduced to the local context by adapting them accordingly (Brennan, 2018). On the downside, however, Williams and Harvey (2015) identify four key issues related to QA: excessive bureaucratisation of procedures, increased administrative and academic workload, formalism that can suppress individuality and innovation, and the creation of a 'lack of trust' culture by 'de-professionalisation' of academic staff (Williams and Harvey, 2015).

3.4.1 Barriers to Effective QA Implementation

Various scholars have addressed barriers to effective QA implementation. Newton (2002a) discussed the notion of financial constraints that he believes can be easily regarded as the sole reason behind poor quality (Newton, 2002a). In addition, the World Bank report "*Lessons of Experience*" concentrated its attention on the constraints and challenges that face HEIs everywhere. It was reported that in developing countries, HEIs offered programmes without having the resources necessary to ensure minimum quality standards (El-Khawas, 1998).

Another limitation to the proper implementation of QA is the heavy workload of the academic staff in HEIs. Academic staff has commonly reported this as affecting their dissatisfaction with the QA measures taken at their HEI. In this context, Harvey (1995) states: "*Quality systems are seen as increasing workloads and administrative burdens on teachers who are already expected to do more*" (p.131) (Harvey, 1995).

In another perspective, according to the "*Lessons of Experience*" report by World Bank, in developing countries with financial constraints, the qualification of faculty was inadequate to guarantee quality education where reduced compensation made it challenging to recruit and retain qualified employees. Hence, learning and research materials weakened, which in turn acted as key obstacles to improvement (El-Khawas, 1998).

Internal organisational culture of HEIs, at times, limits HEIs from effectively implementing comprehensive QA system (McNay, 1995, Davies, 1992) (*this notion is further elaborated in the following section*). In addition, Billing and Thomas (2000) and Tomusk (2000) identified other barriers to the effective development of QA systems/mechanisms on a national level, those being political issues and political intervention. They believe that such issues hinder the formation of an independent national QA agency and international QA borrowing, respectively (Billing and Thomas, 2000, Tomusk, 2000) (*both notions are explained later*).

3.5 Quality Cultures and Implementation of QA Approaches

In their book, *Transforming Higher Education*, Harvey and Knight (1996) described the desirable features of a good quality culture in HE. Continuous improvement is what they considered to be the most important aspect of an effective quality culture in HEIs. According to Harvey and Knight, continuous improvement should always be linked to internal action. Hence, a QA model based on continuous improvement moves emphasis from external inspection to internal action. Nevertheless, external quality audits continue to ensure accountability. Therefore, Harvey and Knight consider that the desirable feature of continuous improvement should be a combination of bottom-up and top-down approaches (Harvey and Knight, 1996). In the 2003 European Universities' Association Conference on Quality Assurance in European Universities, Davies (2003) addressed the main characteristics found at HEIs upon moving from a pre-quality culture regime into an ideal quality culture regime. Figure 3.3 portrays how a HEI should aim to evolve the university from the characteristics listed in the left column (pre-quality culture) to the ones listed in the right column (ideal quality culture)- all of which can be reached by adopting a number of relevant strategies of changing behaviour that is accompanied by proper leadership which embodies the notion of a 'learning organisation' (Davies, 2003).

Figure 3.3: University Culture

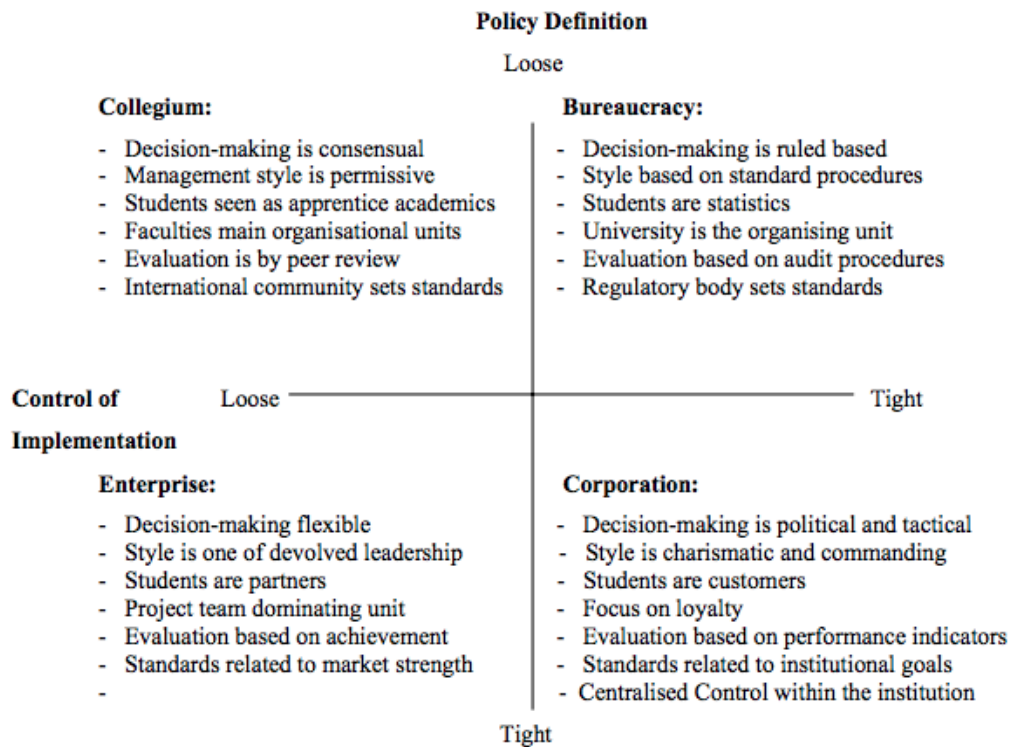
Elements in existing culture of University	Elements likely to be needed in University culture of new future
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem avoidance (or consensual?) • Internally oriented towards academia • Kind, non threatening, safe • Individualistic Defensive Isolated • Fragmented information • Low corporate identity Low corporate presence Largely non interventionist • Non accountable • Maintenance oriented Rule book on admin. matters • Limited horizons • Largely non-commercially oriented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem confrontation and resolution • Externally oriented towards (user) environment • Collective ability to admit to weakness and act accordingly • Ability to handle internal Competitiveness and Comparisons Transparently • Open communication and frankness • Strategic thinking ability to prioritise and make choices systematically : longer horizons • Readiness to be accountable • Developmentally oriented leadership and ability to bend and ditch rules • Discursive culture • Risk taking : commercially/financially aware • Experimentation and learning – Improvement oriented

Source: Davies (2003)

Organisational culture in HE is the facilitator to quality management in every HEI, and is in turn directly related to the development of the institution (Lapiņa et al., 2015). Many scholars discussing organisational culture, a socially created feature of organisations, concur that culture acts as the ‘social glue’ that binds an organisation together (Cameron and Ettington, 1988, O’reilly and Chatman, 1996, Schein, 1996). Internal and external (or environmental) interrelated factors determine the development of organisational culture at HEIs. To develop a desirable level of quality culture, HEIs must organise themselves around the effective implementation of quality management and QA principles (Lapiņa et al., 2015).

Within the HE context, it is argued that to improve quality, the ideal organisational behaviour is one that embodies the ‘learning organisation’ concept (Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2002). McNay (1995) identifies four internal cultures for universities and explains how universities evolve from one culture to another. The four cultures defined by McNay are: ‘collegium’, ‘bureaucracy’, ‘corporation’, and ‘enterprise’. McNay identifies each of those four cultures in relation to the university’s level of ‘*Policy definition*’ and ‘*Control of implementation*’ as portrayed in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.4: Models of Universities as Organisations



Source: McNay (1995)

McNay uses the word ‘freedom’ to describe the collegium culture. This includes freedom from external controls; thus, the structuring comes from the discipline-based department within a frame of reference set by peer scholars in the international community. External QA measures and means of evaluation are limited to peer review, as the collegium culture concentrates on freedom to follow personal and university goals uninfluenced by any external control. This culture is characterised by loose policy definition, loose control over implementation and students seen as apprentice academics; however, McNay criticises this model as being subject to personal bias and may only work in small organisations (McNay, 1995).

On the other hand, ‘regulation’ is the major aspect of the bureaucracy model, where committees become the key player for policy development. This culture is characterised by loose policy definition and tight control over implementation. It denotes notions of ‘managerialism’ in HE. Standards, which are generalised on the whole institution, are associated with regulatory bodies. QA measures are based on the audit of procedures (e.g. ISO9001 Quality Management System); also, students are statistics. Although this model

might have many positives like equal opportunities and quality of activities, many concerns arise. The uniformity of standards can cause standardisation for convenience. Moreover, this model cannot be used for rapid change due to its rigid nature and can always be contaminated by political manipulations (McNay, 1995).

‘Executive authority’ is the main theme of the corporation model, which is characterised by tight policy definition and tight control over implementation, with the vice-chancellor as the chief executive of the university. Decision-making in this culture is political and tactical. QA measures and evaluation processes are based on PIs and students are entities of resource and customers. According to McNay, this model is not a model of continuity as it is for crisis situations only. Moreover, there is a high risk of separation of the policymaker from the reality based on the distinction in which this model operates: “teachers teach, and managers manage” (McNay, 1995).

Finally, ‘client based’ or ‘customer oriented’ is the dominant theme in the enterprise model, which has well-defined central policy but control over implementation is loose. Policy making and key decisions are mainly set close to the client showing the importance of customers/students to the university. Change here is instant and always takes into concern the customer needs. QA measures in this culture are outcome-based and evaluation is based on accomplishment. Students in the enterprise culture model are seen as partners and clients in the exploration of knowledge. However, criticisms of this model reside in the high dangers of curriculum distortion due to the control of sponsors of chairs, thus causing education to become contaminated by commercial values (McNay, 1995). Table 3.1 shows the main characteristics of the four models suggested by McNay.

Table 3.1: Summary Characteristics of the Four University Models

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Collegium</i>	<i>Bureaucracy</i>	<i>Corporation</i>	<i>Enterprise</i>
Dominant value (Clark 1983)	freedom	equity	loyalty	competence
Role of central authorities	permissive	regulatory	directive	supportive
Handy's organization culture	person	role	power	task
Dominant unit	department/individual	faculty/committees	institution/Senior Management Team	sub-unit/project teams
Decision arenas	informal groups networks	committees and administrative briefings	working parties and Senior Management Team	project teams
Management style	consensual	formal/'rational'	political/tactical	devolved leadership
Timeframe	long	cyclic	short/mid-term	instant
Environmental 'fit'	evolution	stability	crisis	turbulence
Nature of change	organic innovation	reactive adaptation	proactive transformation	tactical flexibility
External referents	invisible college	regulatory bodies	policymakers as opinion leaders	clients/sponsors
Internal referents	the discipline	the rules	the plans	market strength/students
Basis for evaluation	peer assessment	audit of procedures, e.g. IS9001	performance indicators	repeat business
Student status	apprentice academic	statistic	unit of resource	customer
Administrator roles: Servant of . . .	the community	the committee	the chief executive	the client, internal and external

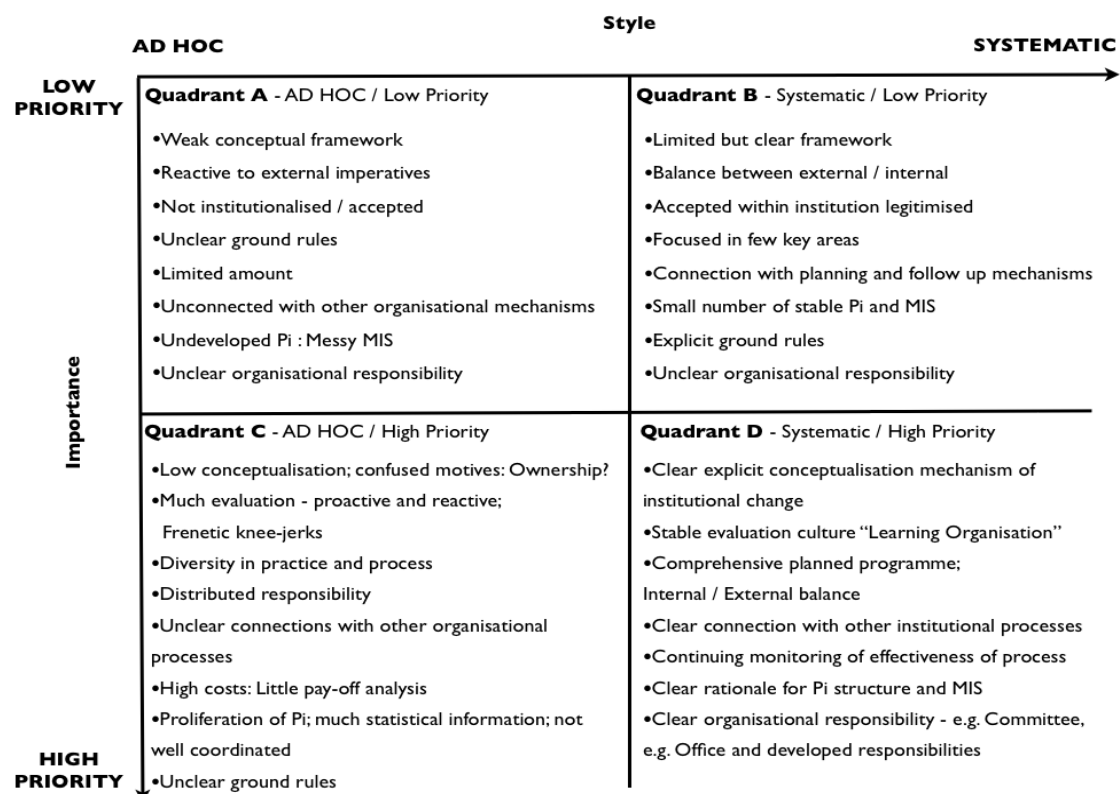
Source: McNay (1995)

Davies (1992) discussed the internal culture of HEIs in relation to the maturity level of universities in terms of QA. He classified the dimension of implementation into four quadrants a HEI can be positioned at (Davies, 1992). Figure 3.4 reflects on the four classified quadrants by Davies along with the characteristics of every one. In relation to the cultural transformation of HEIs, Davies (2001) discussed the cultural transformation in European universities in terms of the development phenomenon of entrepreneurialism, which holds the notion of QA embedded in its implementation. According to Davies (2001), a competitive HE environment necessitates universities to develop high quality courses, research and societal engagement to sustain a competitive advantage. As a result, quality audit and enhancement are thus essential. In this context, stakeholders' engagement is critical and the acquisition of their feedback on quality is crucial; a notion often neglected, as a lot of QA is not externally oriented. HEIs aiming for an entrepreneurial university culture can overcome this neglected notion as such a culture embeds strategic alliances, which forms an important criterion in determining perceived quality. Moreover, Davies explained within this context that there should be a close connection between the QA and planning cycles to ensure that QA findings have practical consequences (Davies, 2001).

Davies (1992) believes that quadrant D is theoretically the ultimate place for a university to be at with respect to its QA development. A natural and gradual development is from quadrant A to quadrant B, then quadrant C and ultimately reaching quadrant D.

Movement from A to C without passing through B (more gradual, less risk, and more systematic) first would likely lead to chaos, without a systematic base as a stopping off point (Davies, 1992). Nevertheless, in order for universities to sustain their internal cultural transformation into an entrepreneurial one, several investments on various domains need to be made; Davies categories them into three domains: personnel, financial, and quality. In the personnel domain, several measures must be taken by universities to ensure they reach or preserve their entrepreneurial state. An important measure is to free time from the teaching hours for the academic staff. Such a measure will allow academics to participate in quality-related processes. In the financial domain, universities should develop new initiatives for the aim of designating faculties and departments as profit centres. Finally, in the quality domain universities must set quality audit measures to make sure various faculties and departments of the HEI are aligning with good practice in terms of entrepreneurial activities. Moreover, HEIs should make sure that they have quality processes designed to provide a service that is client-focused (Davies, 2001).

Figure 3.5: Dimensions of Implementation of Quality Arrangement: Institutional Positioning - Major Characteristics of 4 Quadrants



Source: Davies (1992)

Although leaders within universities have a critical role in the cultural change, governments and national agencies also play a major role in imposing or forcing this change. HE cultural change can be simulated and imposed by the government through reducing governmental financial support, as the case of some demonstrations done by administrations in UK and Australia (Davies, 2001).

3.6 The Interface between System and Institutional Levels of QA

Studying different QA frameworks around the world suggests that different countries have different evaluation systems. Most of the models in Europe are directed towards self-evaluation of HEIs. Such processes become less influenced by the governments and more influenced by self-improvement, self-management and self-quality control; thus, QA models are more effective, useful and change oriented. Hence, universities act as ‘trusted adults’ rather than as ‘children’; universities have responsibility for self-assessment (Billing, 2004).

In this context, models of QA in HE can differ in terms of viewpoints and applied strategies. At the level of European HE systems, Prisăcariu (2014) distinguished between four types of QA models: the *review of comprehensiveness, functioning and effectiveness of institutional procedures* model which focuses on the quality of HEIs’ operations in terms of the methods, processes, instruments and procedures adopted in their QA system, the *review of the quality against external QA standards* model which is aimed at providing HE stakeholders, whether internal or external, guarantees that the reviewed HEIs meets the minimum set of QA standards, the *assessment of the quality of results* model which evaluates the performance of the HEI against the set learning outcomes and finally, the *quality of the governance of the education system* model which targets the whole HEI, mainly in regards to its mission and set objectives (rather than focusing on specific programmes) (Prisăcariu, 2014).

In the same context, Alzafari and Ursin (2019) studied the level of difference in adopting and adapting the European standards for QA: Standards and Guidelines of Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). They identified that ‘context matters’ when implementing QA standards (Alzafari and Ursin, 2019), a notion confirmed by Kauko (2014) and Nascimbeni (2015) (Kauko, 2014, Nascimbeni, 2015).

Within their findings, Alzafari and Ursin (2019) explained that the majority of HEIs in their study adopted either a QA system based on national standards or one that was internally developed to meet their own needs (Alzafari and Ursin, 2019). However, in this study, only nine ESG standards (internal) were taken into account, while the ESG comprises ten standards related to internal QA, seven standards related to external QA and seven standards related to QA agencies (*for more on ESG standards, refer to Appendix B*). The ESG's main purpose is to establish a common framework for QA systems at the European level- national and institutional. Moreover, it is aimed at enabling improvement of quality in HE and supporting mutual trust among various HEIs and educational systems across Europe. The ESG standards were revised and endorsed by the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) in September 2014 (EHEA, 2016). The Bologna process, a product of the last two decades, began with an aim to integrate HE standards across Eastern and Western Europe. The Bologna process succeeded in rationalising degree programmes, setting curriculum standards and imposing quality measures. Neave (2005) and Keeling (2006) have placed the role of the Bologna process on a global scale. They believe that the Bologna process cannot be viewed only in its European settings, and should be seen from its broader policy and its continuity at a global level (Neave, 2005, Keeling, 2006).

According to Billing (2004), QA frameworks for HE in some cases of European countries have common elements. Many countries have national QA agencies, which were mostly established by the government; however, the efficiency and power of each agency vary from one country to another, as does each country's model of QA (Billing, 2004). Brennan and Shah (2000) also compared QA in 14 European countries; they found a considerable convergence with a number of divergences especially in the methods, such as in self-evaluation and external evaluation reports (Brennan and Shah, 2000).

In a similar connection, Randal (2017) discusses the QA system in UK; he states that QA in the UK is mostly outcome-based, and a QA agency (QAA) for HE reviews and reports on the performance of institutions and programmes and advises the government on requests from HEIs for the grant of degree-awarding powers or university title (Randall, 2017). HEIs in UK have a limited choice. To further explain, the scores that HEIs achieve in quality audits identify their financial position. Hence, the QAA and government educational policy-makers control the discourse on quality management and decide

directly on HE funding (Hoecht, 2006). Yet, the QAA is structured in a way to guarantee its independence. HEIs in UK are subject to re-assessment within one year if one or more aspects of quality criteria were graded low or unsatisfactory (Randall, 2017). Accordingly, Hoecht (2006) in his critics upon the QAA model in UK, sees the preservation of individual autonomy as a major key factor for total quality management. Quality management in HE needs not to be as interfering and control focussed as the current system in place at numerous UK HEIs. Since no system is able to attain constant supervision, a quality control system relies on trusting employees to certain substantial extent. However, control-based quality models can weaken the intrinsic motivation of the people who provide the service quality. Trust, for instance, can monitor and create credibility and common commitment between the ‘trustors’ and the ‘trustees’, thus creating a mutual learning process for long-term improvement (Hoecht, 2006).

In the comparative study on QA models of Denmark, Australia and Sweden, Brennan (1997) assumed that discussion about QA’s different frameworks focus on power and changes in the educational system (Brennan, 1997). Prior to year 2013, the basis for evaluation of quality in Sweden was the result of self-assessment that was conducted in accordance to requirements stated by the Swedish National Agency for HE. The Swedish national QA model viewed the students’ interests as a way to guide the priorities of the HEIs. The Swedish agency for HE was responsible for the final evaluation, which had two main purposes: control and development of QA in all programmes that lead to general and professional degrees (Malmqvist and Sadurskis, 2009). Interestingly, in 2013 the Swedish National Agency for HE ceased to exist, and what was previously the role of the agency is now performed by two public authorities: the Swedish Council for HE and the Swedish HE Authority (EuropeanCommission, 2018). The Swedish government states that the agency failed to meet the ESG standards in 2012 (EuropeanCommission, 2018), yet on the website of the Swedish National Agency for HE, it is clearly mentioned that the reason for this change is that the Swedish government wanted to streamline the activities previously conducted by the agency to within the Swedish authorities (HSV, 2020). This mentioned transformation that occurred in Sweden at the beginning of year 2013 is an interesting example in line with the work of John Brennan (2001) who discussed the growth of national agencies in Europe and their relation to the redistribution of power and values (Brennan, 2001).

By contrast, accreditation, a private non-governmental system of self- assessment (in relation to accreditation standards) and peer review, is the primary tool for assessing QA in HE in the USA; it is the basic instrument for external QA assessment in USA (CHEA, 2008). HEIs in USA have enjoyed more self-governance and less governmental interference and control than in other countries. Hence, there is a decentralised approach to QA in USA. HEIs in conformity with the standards of the agency are accredited by that agency for a specific period of time (generally 10 years), after which another self-study and site visit are needed. Both HEIs and programmes are accredited in the USA. Accreditations acquired by HEIs assist with access to American federal funds such as student loans and grants for tuition fees (Schachterle et al., 2009).

According to Billing (2004), agencies established at national levels in Europe are mainly evaluation and assessment bodies; their accreditation powers/controls are essentially restricted to recognising or licensing. Therefore, Europe contrasts strongly with USA in terms of the enforcement power of such agencies (Billing, 2004) (*major characteristics of national QA agencies are depicted in the following section*).

3.6.1 National QA Agencies

Most of the national QA agencies are often established by governmental initiatives; nevertheless, QA agencies can be established or affiliated either by governments, by an autonomous public agent (quasi-government), by HEIs or by private groups (UNESCO, 2014). Quality audit has been identified as the key activity of QA agencies, and research in this area has shown positive aspects (Williams and Harvey, 2015). QA agencies, however, can cover a wide scope of operation: performing QA functions as external reviewers, preparing various QA guidelines for the sake of supporting HEIs and training reviewers, consulting with various HE stakeholders and academic experts, etc. (UNESCO, 2014).

Depending on the approach to QA, whether improvement or accountability, the degree of power or control of QA agencies ranges from supportive/developmental to control that might lead to undertaking external corrective actions, respectively (Billing, 2004). Following the accountability approach, agencies' publically published reports include clear statements of outcomes. Following the improvement approach, agency's report emphasises on recommendations, and it is written for the academic audience. This

approach to QA is usually used in countries whose HE system is subject to strong governmental regulations (Billing, 2004). However, in some cases, when the agency carries out accreditations, reports are not published; reports are published under evaluations (ENQA, 2009).

Cyclical external assessments support HEIs in the continuous enhancement of their QA and HE provision. Quality monitoring is not an event but a process; hence, QA systems allow for cyclical monitoring of improvements (Vroeijerstijn, 1995b). Such an external process leads to long-lasting internal benefits (Harvey, 2002). Therefore, national QA agencies usually operate in a cyclical manner (EHEA, 2016).

The issue of public funding in relation to external evaluation results is a controversial matter (Thune, 1996). Ewell (1999) argues that performance-based funding creates incentive to elevate performance (Ewell, 1999), yet Harvey (2002) argues that in countries where rewards are based on performance, HEIs would conceal weaknesses in self-evaluations in fear of losing such funds (Harvey, 2002). In relation to developing a compliance culture, Brennan (1997) argues that the issue of developing a compliance culture exists in any QA system which makes judgments on quality performance, regardless of the link to funding (Brennan, 1997).

Although national QA agencies can be state organisations (Brennan, 2001) ‘independence’ is the most desirable feature of any QA agency, freeing it from political interventions and avoiding conflict of interest (UNESCO, 2014). That being said, the affiliation of QA agencies with governments can raise questions of autonomy, where political intervention is always a concern that hinders actual change in QA. On the other hand, affiliation with HEIs is seen as a non-bureaucratic approach that focuses on quality improvement rather than control (UNESCO, 2014).

Three major functions can be defined within QA agencies: administrative functions (e.g. publishing the final QA evaluation report; setting a pool of expertise), coordination function (e.g. training experts on specific QA processes; developing the national QA framework) and decision-making functions (e.g. external review of HEIs; report writing of evaluation visits) (UNESCO, 2014). Harvey and Williams (2010) discussed the impact of evaluations of QA agencies. They have studied the work of Szanto (2005), Blakmur

(2008), Harvey (2006), and Ratcliff (2003) on the impact of external evaluation and the level of change QA agencies might have introduced (Szanto, 2005, Blackmur, 2008, Harvey, 2006, Ratcliff, 2003). Results are not clear whether the external evaluation performed by QA agencies did actually create a positive change in HEIs, as research varied from one culture to another; nevertheless, Harvey and Williams (2010) believe that external procedures can be better aligned to the daily activity of HEIs (Harvey and Williams, 2010).

John Smart (2001) published a book on HE named: “*Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*”. In chapter four of this book Brennan (2001) discusses the national QA agencies of Europe (specifically East and Central Europe, Western Europe, and the UK). Brennan suggests that the growth of national QA agencies in Europe is not merely related to quality, but it is also about redistribution of power and values in HE (Brennan, 2001, Smart, 2001). According to Brennan (2001), and as Trow (1994) confirms, the notion of expanding development of national QA agencies can indicate a lack of trust by governments and a drive for more quality control over HEIs (Trow, 1994, Brennan, 2001). Although Brennan showed different approaches of national QA agencies across Europe (e.g. Western Europe national QA agencies’ evaluations are based on the stated HEIs’/programme’s missions and objectives, while Central and Eastern Europe QA agencies are more concerned with the HEIs’ compliance with the state set standards and requirements (Brennan, 2001)), some major impacts of national QA agency monitoring should not be overlooked. For instance, national level assessment and/or accreditation can have a positive impact on controlling competition between traditional HEIs and newly established ones (Brennan and Williams, 1998, Brennan, 2001). Nevertheless, Brennan (2001) discussed the impact of political interference in HE with respect to national evaluation systems and the effect it imposes on HEIs’ autonomy. He identified the view of Darvas (1999) who believes that the academic society should be liberated from any governmental interference, which can cause some HEIs to lose their legitimacy, effectiveness and innovation (Darvas, 1999, Brennan, 2001). Brennan also criticises the “top-down” approach adopted previously by governments in Western Europe necessitating the need to move towards deregulation, which offers greater flexibility, diversity and innovation (Brennan, 2001, Neave and Van Vught, 1994).

Despite the fact that QA models in most countries are organised and structured along governmental regulations, there should be a certain degree of autonomy. Hence, the regulations should focus on supporting and advising the QA frameworks but not controlling them. A common approach can be used in this respect; for instance, the government should guarantee the institutional self-evaluation of each model without any interference from other governmental agencies. In the UK, the creation of student national participation and satisfaction survey has created participatory tools that have allowed students to contribute to the independent and national assessment process (Douglas et al., 2006). This can provide supplementary efforts to support any inspection/audit and can be valuable sources for QA models. Thus, it is very important that HEIs maintain their own internal QA systems.

3.7 International Borrowing and Lending of QA Frameworks

There is an abundance of literature on the theory and practice of policy borrowing for QA in HE under the general conceptual framework of policy-making and organisational leadership and in research into the development of quality control and continuous improvement. International borrowing and lending of QA frameworks is one of the elements in improving quality in HEIs; the recent focus of research has been on transnational policy borrowing for universities in developing countries (Al-Shafani, 2016, Steiner-Khamsi, 2014). Phillips, two decades earlier, had first referred to ‘cross-national attraction’ to explain the appeal of German education methods to British policymakers (Phillips, 2005). This theory came in the context of calls for a radical reform of British HE along the lines of vocational training in the German system; advocates also moved toward an American model promoting school diversity, academic quality and competitive privatisation (Halpin and Troyna, 1995).

By the new century, policy borrowing had become the accepted nomenclature, and Phillips and Ochs had established a basic four-step model which went from the initial ‘cross-national attraction’ to ‘decision’ to ‘implementation’ and, finally, to ‘internalisation/indigenisation’. They further elaborated that the cross-national attraction stage emphasises the relation between the motivation to borrow and the search for foreign external models. The decision stage highlights the introduction of the borrowed idea and methods into the national context. The implementation stage addresses how the borrowed

model is adapted into the national context. Finally, internalisation refers to the full absorption of the foreign model internally in the borrower's country (Phillips and Ochs, 2004).

According to Phillips and Ochs (2004) stage one, cross-national attraction, is the stage that includes 'impulses' that trigger the interest for a transformation. Impulses can be the result of globalisation, or internal displeasure in the local context, or an impulsive change in the national economy or political requirements, among others (Phillips and Ochs, 2004).

Stage two, decision, is when the educational system starts introducing new ideas, models, and policies for the purpose of initiating the change process. This stage contains four categories: theoretical (the decision to borrow pedagogical ideas), realistic and practical (the decision to borrow ideas/policies that have been a success in another context), quick-fix (the decision made in relation to authorities looking for immediate fixes without adequate regards to contextual factors) and phoney (when ideas or foreign models are introduced by the authorities in a manner that appeal to the public for the sake of instant effects, yet there is no real intention of implementation) (Phillips and Ochs, 2004).

Stage three, implementation, refers to the employment of a borrowed pedagogical idea or a model, which depends on a vast number of contextual aspects. According to Phillips and Ochs this stage is tedious and complex, and the degree of transformation depends on the manners of the actors engaged in the process (Phillips and Ochs, 2004).

The last stage of Phillips and Ochs' model is internalisation. In this stage, the borrowed policy grows into the educational system of the recipient nation. Phillips and Ochs consider this stage as an on-going process that is characterised by its cyclical and continuous nature (Phillips and Ochs, 2004).

In several countries of the world, especially in developing countries such as African and Middle Eastern countries, there is an increasing demand for well-developed international-based standards of external QA mechanisms in HE. These efforts for implementing such mechanisms have been particularly funded internationally by international organisations like the World Bank and European Union's projects. In this context, William and Harvey (2015) cite the work of Idrus (2003) who shed light on

negative implications of borrowing QA practices from developed countries into developing ones (Williams and Harvey, 2015, Idrus, 2003). In a similar connection, Tomusk (2000) analysed the dissolution of the centralised and authoritarian QA frameworks of the former Eastern Bloc and their attempts to replace them by ready-made Western European models (Tomusk, 2000). In his findings, he assumed that there were new processes supported by international organisations that were not related to the characteristics of the existing HE systems. Tomusk assumed that the major issues with the newly internationalised QA procedures seemed to be their failure to endorse academic frameworks to substitute the existing political system in many developing countries. Tomusk identified the patterns by which political interests drive the new QA in HE. First, state's agencies in many countries that suffer from the scarcity of funding seek some kinds of justification to shutdown programmes or HEIs; therefore, HEIs' failure in catching up to the given standard of accreditation often results in closure of the institution or the programme(s). Second, conventional HEIs are facing threats from the rapidly increasing private HEIs, with their attractiveness for a better educational quality (Tomusk, 2000).

David Billing and Harold Thomas (2000) introduced a project about the feasibility to implement the British QA model in HEIs in Turkey (Billing and Thomas, 2000). They addressed a number of substantial structural, cultural, technical and political issues that impacted the transfer of the British model to the Turkish conditions. They also addressed the broader implications for the transferability and borrowing of international QA standards and assessment models between different countries (Billing and Thomas, 2000). Billing (2004) addressed another study on Bulgaria in comparison to the Turkish case (Billing, 2004). He concluded that external quality frameworks are transferable in relation to principles, aims, concepts, style and approach. Billing (2004) suggested these items should be protected considerably for customisation so they are sustained and effective; thus, this is less involved with transferability itself and more involved with the consumer (i.e. the government) having the needed clarity of purpose, determination, priorities and resources to undergo changes and the continuity to move them through (Billing, 2004).

In this respect, in his survey of 24 countries, Frazer (1997) observed that a number of countries adopt approaches of external assessment utilised by other countries where the

degree of autonomy and nature of universities is different (Frazer, 1997). The result for these countries is confusion arising from the experience to enforce an inappropriate pattern of evaluation. Frazer analysed the extents to which external assessment can undermine the existing autonomy of HEIs. He wondered whether a common approach of external evaluation could be regarded as applicable in different countries that have different HEIs with distinct degrees of autonomy.

Steiner-Khamsi (2014) developed the octopus as a metaphor to explain cross-national policy attraction, resonance and reception. She explained how policy-makers grasp the arm of the octopus that is most similar to their specific policy, and she claims that policy borrowing is not wholesale but selective and reflects the context-specific causes for receptiveness. In addition, she explained that learning from comparison does not automatically indicate that practices and policies could be transferred from a context to another. She further elaborated that several ‘comparativists’ including Michael Sadler, Robert Cowen and Brian Holmes warned against using comparison to move educational reform from one setting (*particularly, country*) to another; also, they warned against studying education out of context. (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014).

The differences in quality management and QA frameworks around the world correspond to the variations in values, standards, criteria, institutional evaluation and accreditation requirements, certain practicalities such as the size of the HE sector and the rigidity or the flexibility of the legal system of quality (Brennan and Shah, 2000). Hence, Kells (1999) suggests that trying to implement the same QA model in countries with different social circumstances and cultures should be considered in the light of their variations, autonomy and academic culture of their HEIs (Kells, 1999).

In light of the above, several researches portray that a ‘common model’ of external QA cannot be entirely applicable in all countries; however, they also explain that a ‘general standards’ approach of QA can be applied in most countries. A ‘general model’ offers a starting point from which each country may make its own modifications or extensions. In his survey on European countries, Frazer (1997) concluded that the general model for QA appears to be ‘*variants of a mix of the same functions*’. These functions are to some extent related to a number of QA components such as quality improvement, commonality in terms of standards, accreditation and accountability (Frazer, 1997). A convergence

model may be constructed anywhere between a decentralised approach and a complete 'common model'. This can be conducted by the introduction of few of the fairly common criteria and standards discussed earlier such as institutional self-evaluations, international accreditation procedures, and the use of general performance measures.

Consequently, it is clear that there is no single common 'model' of QA with comparable criteria and methodologies. However, in many developing countries, there is still an increasing demand for a QA internationally oriented framework, but the relationship between a QA approach and accreditation procedures is still unclear in those countries. The decentralised approach to QA and accreditation may provide inspiration for international borrowing and lending mechanisms that are based on mutual exchange of QA criteria that respect the national and cultural differences of nations in relation to their strategic vision in HE and assessment policy within the HEIs.

3.8 Summary

Studying the origins of QA, the philosophies and general approaches to QA, QA instruments, the interface between system and institutional levels of QA, QA borrowing and lending and quality cultures, this chapter has demonstrated that all contain interrelated notions, showing the complexity and importance of QA implementation in the HE system. QA is regarded as an on-going process to ensure the eclectic standards of education. Hence, QA criteria in HEIs ensure that HEIs achieve elevated levels of quality management that leads elevated levels of educational processes. Therefore, implementing QA measures in HE maintains confidence and certainty throughout the HE system.

Hence, in this chapter, the analysis of QA approaches and instruments in HE has aimed at showing the complexity of QA in HE. The different international models of QA discussed differ in terms of aims, focus and institutional organisation. In many countries, HEIs have their own quality evaluation system and an entity at the national level responsible for the organizing and stimulating the QA process, yet one can conclude that there are no clear boundaries between QA models for different HE systems.

The development of a quality culture among HEIs includes not only the institutional culture that is focussed on improving QA in HE but also the institutional responsibility of HEIs towards external stakeholders and the public. On a global level, such culture would improve quality management by connecting the institutional internal QA process greatly to the mainstream of global quality culture. As a result, a 'general model' of QA based on the quality culture terminology might be applicable in different countries that are eager to borrow a well-effective and developed quality system; quality culture encourages each HEI in different countries to define quality in accordance to its own history, strategy, goals, geographical location, population, social culture and environment and to further improve quality.

The following chapter will portray the research methodology adopted in this study.

Chapter 4 – Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is a comprehensive description of the methodology adopted to conduct this thesis research, which is dedicated to develop a detailed understanding of the context of the measures the Lebanese universities are applying to ensure quality in their offered programmes and the QA measures used at the national level. Thus, this study aims at answering the following research question:

How should the QA system and its associated process be developed in Lebanese HE in the light of existing experience; drawing on borrowing from international models and evident good practice in ways appropriate to the unique setting and cultural circumstances?

This basic question is divided into the below sub-questions:

- Sub-Question 1: What are, and should be the purpose, role, scope and general operating characteristics of QA?
- Sub-Question 2: What are, and should be the internal QA mechanisms in universities?
- Sub-Question 3: What are the principal barriers and issues relating to the adoption and implementation of QA mechanisms in universities?
- Sub-Question 4: What are the constituent elements in a QA regime based on a student-centred learning culture, and how may these be evolved in this setting?
- Sub-Question 5: What are the issues involved in adopting/ borrowing/ adapting and effectively implementing models of QA derived from other international settings?
- Sub-Question 6: Why and how have national QA agencies evolved, and what should be the role, positioning and operating characteristics of such an agency in Lebanon?

Together with an introduction, this chapter consists of three main sections: an in-depth discussion and justification of the methods and the methodology adopted, which includes, among others, the philosophy, approach, strategy, time horizon, selection criteria and sample size of this research, and the final section is for ethical considerations.

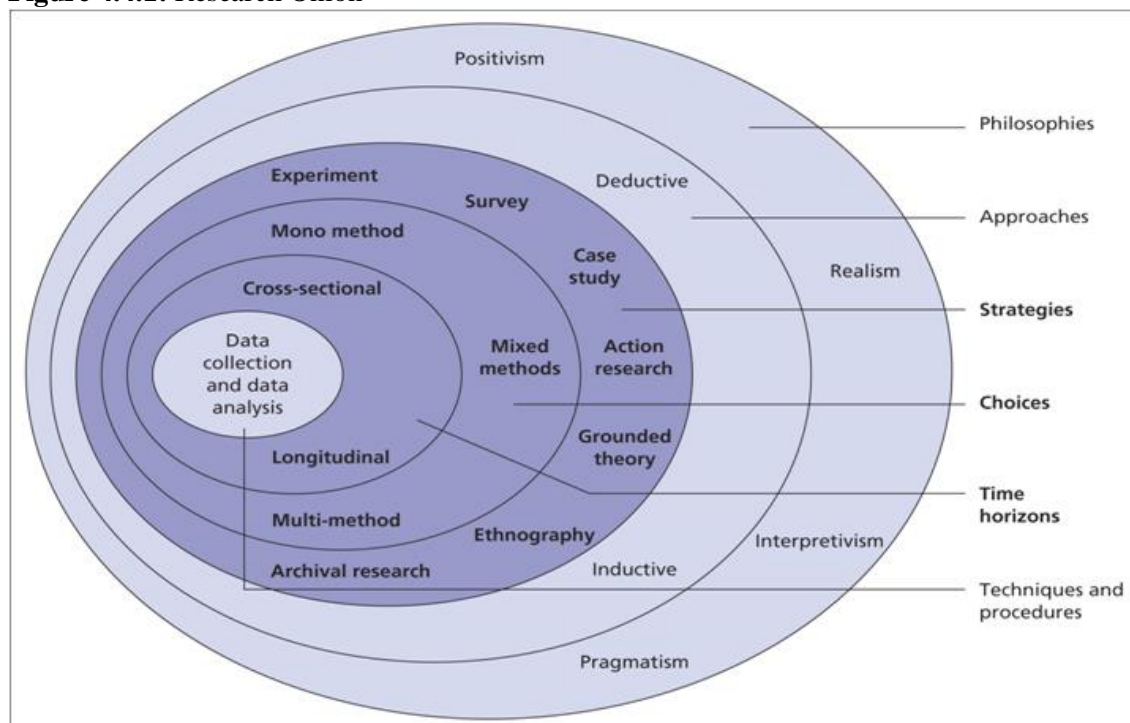
4.2 Data Collection, Research Methods and Design

The importance of research questions when identifying the research methodology was stressed by Collis and Hussey (2009) and Remenyi et al. (2003) who define the methodology as the overall approach to the process used to investigate a specific problem (Remenyi et al., 2003, Collis and Hussey, 2009). Therefore, they presume that the methodology varies according to the problem being tackled.

Saunders et al. (2009) follow the same reasoning but perceive research methodology in the form of an ‘onion’ in which the research problem lies and cannot be tackled before peeling away several layers (Saunders et al., 2009). These layers are the main components of the methodology of a research study; these layers are to be recognised and explained in order to guarantee a reliable and coherent process.

This thesis follows the Research Onion methodology design established by Saunders et al. (2009), which is demonstrated in Figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.4.1: Research Onion



Source: Saunders et al. (2009)

4.2.1 Research Philosophy

In order to justify the research process, it is important to reflect on the philosophical premises that base the arguments of this study (Creswell et al., 2007, Patton, 2002); thus, the following subsections will provide the ontological, epistemological and axiological foundation of this thesis.

4.2.1.a Ontological, Epistemological and Axiological Foundation

As discussed by David and Sutton (2004) and Cohen et al. (2007), identifying the ontological position is a crucial facet of research since it helps uncover how the researcher's view of human nature influences the methodological consideration he/she adopts to disclose social truths (David and Sutton, 2004, Cohen et al., 2007). The nature of being and reality are viewed differently- from an objectivist's worldview and from a subjectivist's worldview. Objectivists view the world as an external entity that is rationally independent from one-being's own insight of social reality (Gallagher, 2008). Subjectivists, on the other hand, recognise social reality as being co-constructed by individuals and not standing separate to oneself. Thus, subjectivists perform research through the understanding of human's experienced practices (Byrne-Armstrong et al., 2001, Churchill and Sanders, 2007).

The data collected for this study was done through close interactions with interviewees in order to understand their personal experience with QA in HE. Thus, the aim is to authenticate subjective connotations and understandings of the quality of the Lebanese HE system and of efforts deployed by Lebanese universities to align with good practices of QA. Moreover, since the major aim was to construct an impression of this undiscovered phenomenon based on insights and consequent behaviour of several Lebanese HEIs and related social factors, it was important to guarantee the interviewees' freedom to express their ideas and personal experiences (Gergen, 2001). Following the subjectivist ontology prevented me, as a researcher, from approaching my respondents as mechanical empty participants and allowed me to better understand universities' efforts and perceptions regarding QA because subjectivism emphasises the active role undertaken by these institutions to generate behaviour.

Brown and Dowling (1998) stated that the epistemological position is the researchers' religion since it defines the relationship between the reality and the researcher, highlights how the researcher later captures or views reality, and points at how the researcher believes truth is defined (Carson et al., 2001, Brown and Dowling, 1998).

Positivism and Interpretivism are two leading epistemological philosophies. Research in terms of the positivist's view is performed in a structural balanced and logical way, valuing facts and science rather than personal experience. Positivists stress the need to stay emotionally disconnected from the participants; this is validated by the assumption that the world exists externally and that there is a sole neutral reality to any circumstance (Saunders et al., 2007).

When conducting research, interpretivists stress the necessity to fully comprehend the role of people as social actors and incorporate people's interests. Thus, reality is socially constructed through human's perceptions rather than being objective (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). Using this method, the major focus when collecting data is set on the participants' point of views, where the researcher applies several techniques to explore diverse angles of the topic (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008).

In this thesis, the interpretivist position has been adopted since I did not presume any pre-existing reality regarding the quality of the Lebanese HE system, specifically when it narrows down to the credibility and the quality of practices undertaken by Lebanese universities to guarantee QA. Nevertheless, I based my findings on an in-depth analysis of the actual body of knowledge, which served as a main premise allowing me to compare my findings to the existing literature and to provide accurate and reliable conclusions.

One of the major criticisms of interpretivism is that methods adopted are unreliable and in consequence could lead to both biased results and to the misrepresentation of reality since it does not take into consideration the scientific procedures of verification (Cohen et al., 2007). Hammersley has argued that interpretivism does not permit generalisation since samples adopted in such traditions are usually small (Hammersley, 2005). Interpretivists react to these accusations and point at details and efforts involved in interpretive research which guarantee insights into phenomena that are normally hard to gain with other philosophies (McMurray et al., 2004). Others focus on the fact that the

notion of reliability is not objective and reality is not out there waiting to be studied; it is rather created through the interactions of social actors (Burr, 2003). The real context of the Lebanese HE system with regards to quality and efforts deployed to align with international standards can only be identified through understanding, analysing and interpreting perceptions of academic actors' experiences.

The last philosophical dimension discussed in this research methods chapter is Axiology. As stated by Heron and Reason (1997): “*values of being, about what human states are to be valued simply because of what they are*” (p.287) (Heron and Reason, 1997). Being the remote campuses coordinator at AUL, which has been involved in a recent transformation through the initiation of an internal QA process across all seven campuses, one of my duties is to disseminate QA initiatives taken at AUL's main campus into the six other campuses. Hence, my personal values as a researcher were engaged in this research to a certain extent; yet, I do not assume any pre-existing reality to my set research. To further explain, the selection of a research topic, and the decision on which philosophical position to adopt are all reflections of my personal values as a researcher. Nevertheless, to avoid being biased, and after indulging deeply in the literature, the set research question and sub-questions were presented to experts in the field of QA in HE and were modified and tweaked accordingly thus arriving at the current research question and sub-questions presented in this study.

4.2.2 Research Approach

As stated by Easterby-Smith et al. (2008), it is significant to highlight the research approach upon performing a research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). A clear approach formulates the core for the entire research design. In the aim of answering the research questions, the research approach should be able to highlight the methods used to understand and present the evidence collected. Moreover, the research approach should help the researcher choose the most fit strategy to adopt and align with the nature the study.

As portrayed by Goddard and Melville (2004) *deductive* and *inductive* are the two major methods of reasoning in a research approach. Identified as the ‘top-down’ approach, deductive reasoning, pursues to test the accuracy of a pre-existing theory by progressing

from the 'general' to the 'more-specific'. Thus, following the deductive reasoning, the research starts with a *theory* and then the research progresses to narrow the theory further into a clear *hypotheses* that needs to be verified and that should lead in turn, to the acceptance or the rejection of the initial theory. Most often, scientific ideologies and measurable data are the major means used within the deductive reasoning since it aims at generalisation (Goddard and Melville, 2004).

Identified as the 'bottom-up' approach, inductive reasoning, progresses from identifying precise facts and events to broader generalisations and theories. Thus, the researcher begins to identify patterns and consistencies in the aim to formulate a hypotheses through these observations- this in turn might ultimately progress into a theory (Goddard and Melville, 2004).

Creswell (2007) stated that the spirit of the research question and the nature of the research design are viewed as the utmost significant upon identifying the appropriate research approach (Creswell, 2007). Since the key aim of this study is to explore the context in which Lebanese universities are striving to reach high QA standards and to assess the deployed efforts, induction seems to be the appropriate approach for this research. The inductive reasoning approach allowed me, as a researcher, to obtain an understanding of the connotations Lebanese universities and HE actors assign to the research question and sub-questions of this study. This is further justified by the fact that this research is limited to the Lebanese HE context and by my reduced concern with the aim to generalise (Hakim, 2000). This study has an exploratory nature and a pliable structure, which enabled me, as researcher, to embrace changes in the research focus as new patterns emerged during the progression of the research. Moreover, in order to reflect a trustworthy and correct picture of the current QA situation in the Lebanese HE, this study avoided any pre-set theory derived from former studies. Thus, a solid foundation of this study was set through a comprehensive understanding of the data extracted on the Lebanese HE context and the point of view of the different participants including experts, policy-makers, pedagogues, HEI presidents, deans, instructors, key-personnel in the field of QA and 16 students. Nevertheless, this does not alleviate the significance of theory in this study, as all the findings and outcomes have been compared to the QA good practices used in the international HE context and the existing body of knowledge.

4.2.3 Research Choices

Subjectivism and interpretivism, which emphasise the socially constructed nature of reality and the assumption that humans create meanings (Saunders, 2012), are basically associated with qualitative research. This research choice focuses on uncovering the real perceptions and significance of human experience, emotions and beliefs rather than seeking generalisation (Gill and Johnson, 2010). The approach to data collection within the context of this method follows a highly flexible process given the fact that information is collected in textual form through interactions with participants and is then analysed using qualitative coding. It is important to note at this level that qualitative researchers adopt more exploratory and less narrow processes than those used in quantitative methods; therefore, they value participants' freedom and spontaneity only if the adequate environment, which enables respondents to express themselves, is granted. Qualitative research typically requires a small number of participants given the nature of this method, which does not seek generalisation. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the nature of qualitative methods does not suggest that they are less accurate or scientific than quantitative methods; qualitative methods consist of investigations that seek answers to the set research questions systematically by means of set processes and by gathering evidence, thus generating findings that were not set in advance and producing findings that are applicable outside the immediate boundaries of the study.

According to Denzin et al. (2000), when obtaining culturally specific information, a qualitative method is usually the most effective (Denzin et al., 2000). As such and for this research, which aims at the exploration of the Lebanese HE, a qualitative mono-method has been adopted. I did not base my research on pre-determined hypotheses since my objective is to explore and assess Lebanese universities' efforts at complying with QA good practices. Nevertheless, I am clearly guided by a theoretical lens extracted from the existing body of knowledge, one that provides the required framework for this study.

4.2.4 Research Strategy

The strategy layer of Saunders' et al. (2009) Research Onion is regarded by Churchill and Sanders (2007) as the main component of research methodology (Churchill and Sanders, 2007). According to Remenyi et al. (2003), strategy is the overall direction and the process through which research is conducted (Remenyi et al., 2003). Saunders et al.

(2009) consider research strategy as the plan which will guide the research to provide answers to the research questions (Saunders et al., 2009). Consequently, numerous criteria should be taken into consideration when selecting inter alia research philosophies, research questions and objectives, the available body of knowledge, corresponding time frame and available resources. Authors have identified different kinds of research strategies and emphasised the importance of selecting the most appropriate and beneficial for a particular research (Yin, 2003, Saunders et al., 2009). Of the numerous common research strategies identified by authors (e.g. *experiment, survey, ethnography, action research, grounded theory*) (Saunders et al., 2007, Collis and Hussey, 2009), this study: selects *case study* as the appropriate strategy for this research. The following paragraphs will be dedicated to explain the case study strategy and justify its selection in this research.

Yin (2003) defined the case study strategy as: “*an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident*” (p.13) (Yin, 2003). When the phenomenon to be studied and the context in which it is occurring are not distinguishable, Yin (2003) considers that the case study strategy is the most appropriate (Yin, 2003). Confirming Yin’s argument, Collis and Hussey (2009) link the case study research to the methodology used to explore concepts within their ‘natural setting’ (Collis and Hussey, 2009). On a similar note, Dul and Hak (2008) limit the case study strategy to the investigation of a specific phenomenon within its context (Dul and Hak, 2008). It can be confirmed, therefore, that case study research is usually adopted when the researcher seeks to study a particular phenomenon within its context. According to Yin (2003) three main factors depict the selection of the right research strategy: the type of research questions studied, the level of control the researcher has over real behavioural events, and the degree of the research’s emphasis on contemporary issues (Yin, 2003).

This thesis tends to answer the following research question: How should the QA system and its associated process be developed in Lebanese HE in light of the existing experience; drawing on borrowing from international models and evident good practice in ways appropriate to the unique setting and cultural circumstances?

The above research question aims at an in-depth exploration of a specific phenomenon in its specific context favouring, therefore, a case study approach. Furthermore, and as

required through Yin's second factor, there is no possibility for the researcher in this study to manipulate the actual behaviour and initiatives Lebanese universities undertake with regards to QA. Finally, QA at the HE level is a contemporary issue with increasing importance, and this satisfies the third condition stated by Yin.

In addition, Gulsecen and Kubat (2006) confirm that the role of research case study strategy is becoming more prominent in the education field (Gulsecen and Kubat, 2006). Zainal (2007) confirms this opinion and highlights the drawbacks of quantitative method when implemented in this context (Zainal, 2007, Gulsecen and Kubat, 2006). The above discussion confirms the fact that the case study strategy is very appropriate for research on education. Given the fact that case study strategies lead to in-depth knowledge, a case study strategy certainly suits an exploratory study conducted within a sector as heterogeneous as HE. The adequacy of case study strategy is further reflected through comparing it with other potential strategies. Experiment study, for example, is less applicable in the current study since I, as a researcher, have little control over the variables. In other words, my research is more exploratory than explanatory and does not tend to test the effect of an independent variable on another dependent one (Collis and Hussey, 2009).

Since my research is more associated with interpretivism, subjectivism, induction and qualitative method, the survey strategy is presumed inapplicable given the fact that it is inherent to the positivist objectivist philosophy, and it is more related to the deductive approach. Ethnography is also doomed inapplicable since it requires a real immersion and observation of the phenomenon which is different from the nature of this topic (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). Grounded theory is also not a recommended strategic option given the nature of this research, which pursues to explore a concept within its real-life setting and to specifically assess how Lebanese universities apply QA. Therefore, the aim is not to build a theory but rather to explore how an existing theory is implemented. Since the grounded theory seeks to elaborate concepts that culminate in a theoretical explanation of the concept being studied, this strategy is presumed incompatible.

4.2.5 Research Time Horizon

The fifth layer of Saunders' et al. (2009) Research Onion is the time horizon, which is regarded as the 'snapshot' of the research conducted within a specific time. Cross-sectional study and longitudinal study are two forms of time horizon research as identified by Saunders et al. (2009). Cross-sectional study occurs when a research is done within a precise time for the purpose of describing and explaining the manifestation of a certain phenomenon at a certain point of time. While the longitudinal study, can be portrayed as a 'diary' or group of snapshots over a period of time (Saunders et al., 2009).

In the case of implementing a case study strategy, Saunders et al. (2009) identified that qualitative methods can be used in a cross-sectional study (Saunders et al., 2009). Easterby-Smith et al. (2008) state that cross-sectional studies are additionally used when following different research strategies, like surveys (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). Nevertheless, the primary data of this research is collected and concluded within a period of 12 months; starting from 19 December 2018 and ending on 17 December 2019, thus following a cross-sectional time horizon study.

4.2.6 Research Techniques and Procedures

Given the exploratory nature of the adopted research design, my thesis' success relies on an open framework, which emphasises a focused, conversational and two-way communication. The main objective is to incite my respondents to talk freely while making sure they provide in-depth information needed to answer my research questions. These characteristics are inherent to the semi-structured interview technique, mostly used to explore concepts in a specific context. For these reasons, I prepared a set of questions (Appendix A) beforehand inspired by the existing literature review on QA in the HE system. However, the aim was to allow both the respondent and the researcher the flexibility to probe for details; therefore, the possibility of adding, changing the order of the questions and providing additional information or explanation to interviewees was always considered since the interview was intended to be conversational. In fact, the majority of questions were created during the interview since I, as the researcher, was free to stray from the questions previously set when judged pertinent.

Being a two-way communication method, this technique does not only grant the interviewee the possibility to express his/her perceptions freely but it also allows me, as the researcher, to gain a better understanding of the situation. It also it allows me, as a researcher, to obtain different perceptions from different social actors about the same topic; which is not feasible when using other techniques (Cohen et al., 2007). Despite the flexibility characterising semi-structured interviews, a structured process is required to conduct them properly (Saunders et al., 2009). The core success factor of semi-structured interviews is obtaining interviewees' trust; this guarantees continuous interactions, which in return provides increment access to data and consequently accurate information. After clarifying the purpose of the research, I contacted the respondents individually to obtain their consent to take part in the study. In other terms, this first contact explained what, why, and how I am conducting this study and how the participants will contribute to answering the research question (Laforest, 2009).

Saunders' et al. (2007) explained how the researcher should prepare for the interviews by using the '5Ps' method (Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance) (Saunders et al., 2007). Therefore, and further to familiarity with the body of knowledge relative to QA in the HE system, a number of general key questions is identified and prepared in order to guide the discussion. It is also important to have in mind a set of sub-questions and key questions, which will influence the understanding of the concept and help with the exploration of QA in the Lebanese universities. The reliability and the validity of the conducted interviews cannot be achieved if interviewees digress and depart from the research topic. Furthermore, interviewers' objectivity is another condition that militates in the same direction.

4.2.7 Participants

Researchers are normally unable to gather data from every entity of the population they are studying. Therefore, instead of using census, they have to recourse to a subset of individuals- a sample; hence, the researchers use the sample's responses to make inferences about the whole population. Probability and non-probability sampling techniques were identified by Saunders et al. (2009) (Saunders et al., 2009). With probability sampling, every unit in the population has the same probability of being included in the sample, and this probability can be calculated. Non-probability sampling

(sometimes referred to as non-random sampling), in contrast, precludes the possibility of estimating the probability of any unit to be included in the sample. In other terms, it provides a range of alternative techniques to select samples based on their availability or based on the researcher's subjective decisions (Saunders et al., 2009).

This research adopts census, and therefore acquires and records information about all Lebanese universities. In other words, all Lebanese universities are participants in this research. However, non-probability purposive sampling was adopted, given its conformity to the exploratory nature of this research (Bradburn and Sudman, 1988), to identify respondents in each university and other entities such as the Lebanese MEHE. In fact, this research seeks to describe, in an exploratory way, the concept of QA within the Lebanese HE context. Therefore, excluding all irrelevant interviewees and selecting those with specific profiles increases the value of my thesis.

Two stages compose the non-probability sampling technique. Deciding on the suitable sample size is the first stage of the technique. Patton (2002) explained that following a non-probability sampling technique, generalisation is inherent to theory rather than to population. Thus, insights gained from the research are more associated with data analysis than with the size of the sample. This implies that flexibility is the rule, with a focus on the logical relationship between the research question and the sample technique (Patton, 2002). Nevertheless, numerous authors recommended conducting interviews until saturation is reached. Guest et al. (2006) distinguished between a homogeneous and a heterogeneous population and judged that 12 interviews are sufficient when researchers seek to collect data from a homogeneous group; however, researchers should go beyond this number if the population is heterogeneous (Guest et al., 2006). Creswell (2007) following the same reasoning, considered that a minimum of 25 interviews should be conducted (Creswell, 2007).

The second stage of non-probability sampling is choosing the most appropriate sampling technique. Out of the five techniques identified by experts, precisely: quota, purposive, snowball, self-selection and convenience (Neuman, 2005, Saunders et al., 2009), the purposive sampling was employed to select the respondents of this study. This sampling technique is also called judgmental sampling, and according to Neuman (2005), it perfectly fits case study researches since it is built on the decision made by the researcher

to choose interviewees or participants (Neuman, 2005). For Onwuegbuzie et al. (2007), purposive sampling's advantage resides in the fact that it aids researchers in choosing interviewees or participants that are significant and unique for the research, and this advantage contributes efficiently to answering the research question (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2007). For this study, the heterogeneous sampling variation was chosen within the purposive sampling technique. This technique offers the most disparity in perspectives and conditions, and thus is of added value to the findings (Patton, 2002).

I have chosen to conduct my primary data via semi-structured interviews at the 'MEHE', the 'Lebanese University' (LU), 'American University of Beirut' (AUB) and 'Arts, Sciences and Technology University in Lebanon' (AUL). The reasons for choosing non-probability purposive sampling are explained below.

The General Director of HE in Lebanon, identified that the MEHE in Lebanon has grouped the Lebanese universities into three categories: public HEIs, private HEIs that are more than 50 years old and private HEIs that are less than 50 years old. This classification is reflected in the formulation of the elected members of the Lebanese Council for HE.

Nevertheless, previous research on the topic at hand and official material gathered from the ministry and from Lebanese universities will be used along with the primary data that will be collected from semi-structured interviews involving:

- Key officials/policy-makers at the MEHE
- Key persons occupying managerial/governance positions at LU, AUB and AUL,
- Deans at the LU, AUB and AUL,
- Instructors and chairpersons at LU, AUB and AUL,
- Students at LU, AUB and AUL,
- Experts, professionals and researchers in the field of HE.

Many drawbacks inherent to non-probability sampling are identified, but the most important criticism is related to the fact that reliability is hard to be measured in non-probability sampling since it is very difficult to measure the precision of the resulting sample (Jacoby and Handlin, 1991). Nevertheless, this sampling method is appropriate for my thesis. In fact, exploring the implementation of QA practices within the Lebanese

context is a preliminary study; the research design I adopt is exploratory and seeks to discover how Lebanese universities perceive the concept of good quality management in HE. In this case, there is no doubt that the characteristics of the respondents and consequently of the sample itself provides more insights than the representativeness of samples.

40 key informants constituted the sample for my semi-structured interviews: two policy-makers, 22: presidents, directors, deans, chairpersons, QA officers and full-time instructors, in addition to 16 students from different faculties and academic backgrounds. Interviews were conducted with the participants at their offices or at the HEI's allocated student spaces in case of the interviews done with students; one interview with a university president was done in Istanbul, Turkey due to a security situation that happened in Lebanon between October and December 2019 forcing me to meet the interviewee at his forced-vacation residence in Istanbul. Table 4.1 is a list of policy-makers and staff participants reflecting their role in the HE sector while keeping their names anonymised.

Table 4.1: Policy-makers and Staff Participants

Participants	Title	Duty
A.J.	Prof.	General Director of HE – (policy-maker)
A.S.	Prof.	Chief coordinator for European projects in Lebanon – (policy-maker)
F.K.	Prof.	President of AUB
Z.D.	Prof.	Associate Provost and hosting a high governance position at AUB
K.H.	Prof.	Director of the QA and Institutional Assessment office at AUB.
I.N.	Prof.	Dean of Faculty of Health Sciences at AUB
S.J.	Prof.	Teaching and Learning Centre director at AUB and a full time professor
B.D.	Dr.	Full time instructor at the Faculty of Business, Accounting department at AUB
J.O.	Dr.	Full time instructor at AUB, Business Faculty
A.M.	Prof.	President of AUL
A.H.	Prof.	Vice President for Academic Affairs at AUL
M.H.	Prof.	Director of QA and Institutional Effectiveness and chairperson of the CCE Department at AUL
S.H.	Prof.	Dean of Faculty of Engineering at AUL
N.K.	Dr.	MBA chairperson at AUL and full time instructor at the Faculty of Business

B.S.	Prof.	Full time instructor, Director of the LCPI and ex-Computer Science chairperson at AUL
K.B.	Dr.	Marketing Chairperson at AUL and full time instructor at the Business Faculty
P.K.	Prof.	Director of Quality Assurance at LU
E.H.	Prof.	Dean of the Faculty of Engineering at LU
H.K.	Prof.	Dean of Faculty of Medicine at LU and full time professor
F.S.	Dr.	Chairperson of Public Health at LU and full time instructor
W.H.	Dr.	Chairperson of Physiotherapy at LU and full time instructor
R.S.	Dr.	Chairperson of Computer Science Department at LU and full time instructor
P.H.	Dr.	Chairperson of Pharmacy at LU and full time instructor
H.G.	Dr.	Chairperson of the Civil Engineering at LU and full time instructor

In addition to the above mentioned interviewees in Table 4.1 and as stated earlier, 16 students from three different Lebanese universities were interviewed (six students from AUB, five students from AUL and five students from the LU).

4.2.8 Selection Methods and Criteria

The purpose of my research has been to produce a better understanding of how HEIs in Lebanon understand QA and implement quality management, which ultimately has directed the purpose of the case study's research toward the 'how' and 'why' of this phenomenon. Several selective criteria have been used to evaluate the existing theoretical background on quality culture in HE. My research seeks to generate new knowledge about the process of quality implementation and international borrowing of QA in Lebanon. This is introduced in my thesis by using a comparative process approach of data analysis. Accordingly, such data analysis provides the reader with comprehensive, detailed, narrative features of how and why HEIs in Lebanon have tackled the issues of QA and quality management within the existing and prevailing circumstances in the Lebanese HE system.

Despite the lack of well-defined pilot selective criteria and guidelines for such type of research, my research has used a comparative analysis. It appears that the answers to the research questions require HEIs that would bring the greatest possible amount of information on QA changes and HE policy in Lebanon. Therefore, a random sample was not considered in this study method, purposive non-probability sampling was used

instead. In the light of these selection criteria of HEIs and data gathering on QA process in Lebanon, the MEHE in Lebanon along with AUB, LU, and AUL represent the most interesting HEIs due to the following considerations:

1. My three chosen HEIs covered all the MEHE's university classifications. To further clarify, the MEHE has classified universities in Lebanon into three major categories:
 - a. Public HEI-like LU.
 - b. Private HEI more than 50 years old-like AUB.
 - c. Private HEI less than 50 years old-like AUL.
2. The Council of HE in Lebanon has elected members that represent the Lebanese universities. Current to this study, AUB's president represents universities that are older than 50 years in the Council of HE, and AUL's president represents universities that are less than 50 years old in the Council of HE. Finally, the president of the LU is a constant member considering that the LU is the only public university in Lebanon.
3. The LU is the only public university and represents around 40% of the student market share in Lebanon.
4. AUB is the very first private university established in Lebanon, and it was established even before the MEHE. AUB is currently considered one of the most elite and best reputed HEI in Lebanon and the Middle East.
5. AUL is considered among the promising newly established private universities and has a student market share that is close to that of AUB. Moreover, AUL's president is the elected key-person to represent all newly established universities in Lebanon (less than 50 years old) in the Lebanese Council of HE.
6. The three HEIs, to some extent, have provided reliable, valid and sufficient data for the analysis.

In accordance to the research question and to these selection criteria and analysis methods, the research in selected HEIs aimed at exploring the relationship between institutional arrangements and development in HEIs and policy changes in QA processes in Lebanon. In this respect, the selected HEIs are expected to represent the bulk and the mainstream practices in tackling and implementing QA standards in HE in Lebanon. As a result, the AUB, AUL and LU represent the different competitive types of HEIs in terms of power share/distribution in HE in Lebanon. A detail on the profiles of the three HEIs can be found in Appendix C.

4.2.9 Data Processing and Analysis

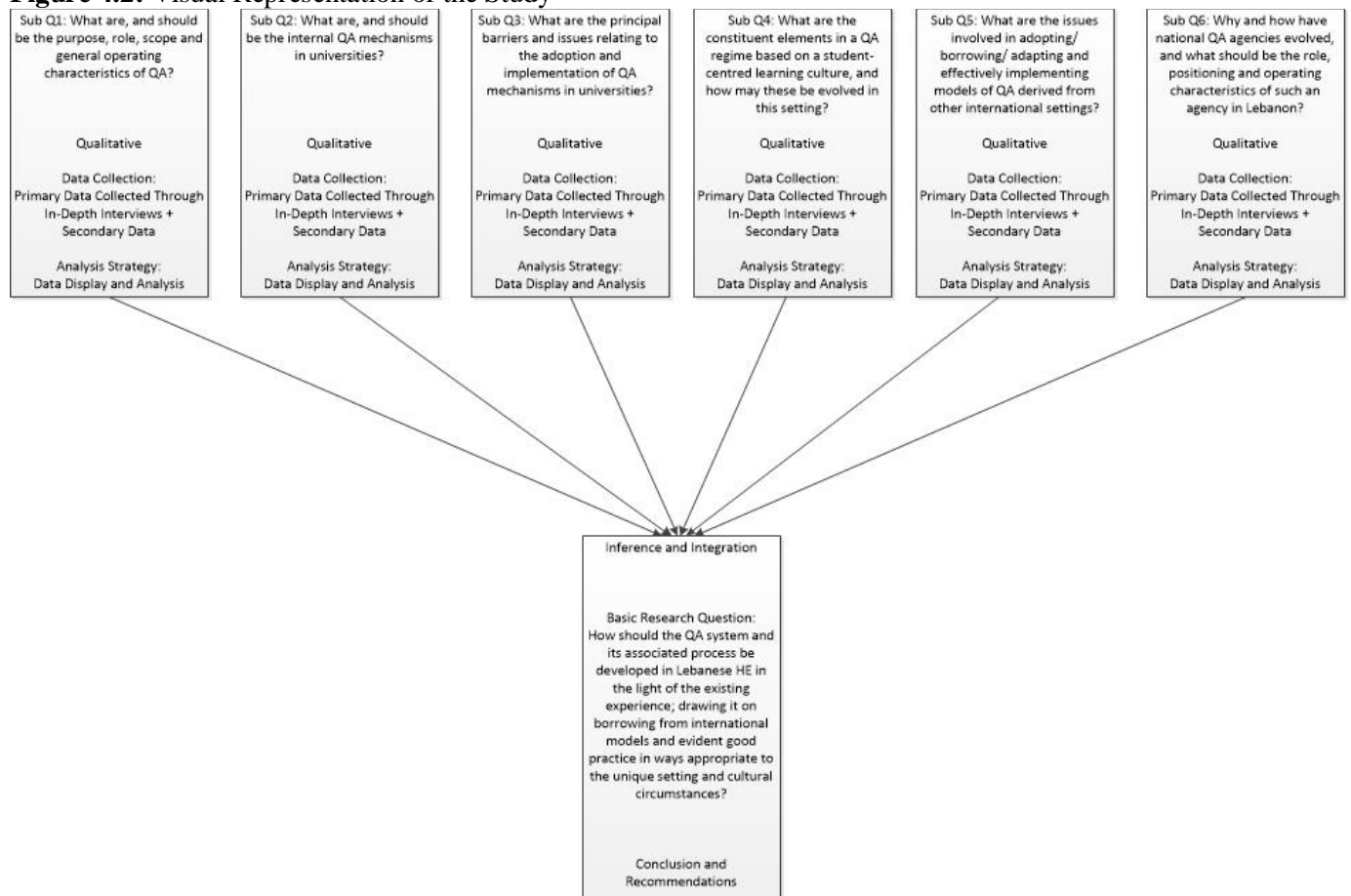
The intention of this study is to explore and investigate QA practices in Lebanese universities and then assess them by comparing them to good practices in the field.

Miles and Huberman (1994) defined the 'data display and analysis' method when processing and analysing collected data (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This study has analysed the collected primary data through two sub-processes: reducing the data collected, and displaying the data - while using an inductive semi-structured approach. First, the collected data was reduced by simplifying and highlighting some main ideas provided by interviewees. Thus, long statements were rephrased into smaller ones while maintaining the main meaning of the statement in fewer key points (Kvale, 1996). When approved by the interviewee, the interview was voice recorded, and then was transcribed and summarised via means of coding (Miles and Huberman, 1994) against QA good practices in HE and the ways Lebanese universities are implementing QA strategies. However, it was very challenging to assume a priori coding since the research at hand is considered innovative (Breakwell and Glynnis, 2006) in the Lebanese context, and there is a lack of consensus on good practices that lead to QA in the Lebanese HE. Instead, categories were created via categorising interviews' results on the basis of the interviews themselves. After finalising summaries of the transcripts, I asked for the respondents' feedback on the summaries in order to validate their accuracy.

The next step was dedicated to data display. As recommended by Lewins and Silver (2006), I have organised and assembled the collected primary data into diagrammatic displays using ATLAS.ti (Lewins and Silver, 2006). The main advantage inherent to this step is that it helped me develop a visualisation that represents data extracted from extended texts graphically. This allowed me to point at key concepts adopted by Lebanese universities in their strive to implement QA; it also enabled me to conduct a comparison between efforts deployed by Lebanese universities themselves from one side and local universities' practices and those undertaken at the international level from the other side. This culminates in a comparison between the literature review and the primary data, using triangulation and cross mapping which allowed me to draw and verify my conclusions. The 'codes' that emerged from the transcribed data were clustered into specific groups that were further narrowed into themes. As a result of the above, six themes emerged from my findings and will be reflected upon in chapter five.

The following is a visual representation (Figure 4.2) of the study:

Figure 4.2: Visual Representation of the Study



4.3 Ethical Considerations

Throughout all facets of this study, research ethics has been the driving force and the guiding protocol to deliver a methodological, sound and clear research design. The importance and criticality of this approach is well documented and published by numerous authors (McNeill and Chapman, 2005, Curran and Blackburn, 2001, Bryman, 2008). In the process of defining what the controlling factors of research ethics are and what this entails in terms of practices and methodologies, it is empirical to have a firm grasp of the following: How do we define ethics? What ethical considerations should be adopted by researchers? In its simplest form, ethics are defined as a set of norms that dictate and drive our moral choices about our behaviour and about our relationships and interactions with others (Cooper and Schindler, 2008). With that definition, it is empirical that the relationship between researchers and respondents is ethically

controlled along with the relationship of the researcher and the context in which the study is conducted (McNeill and Chapman, 2005, Curran and Blackburn, 2001, Bryman, 2008).

Throughout my research, the main guiding principles that dictated my approach was that outcomes do not justify unethical methods (Cooper and Schindler, 2008). This principle acted as the controlling factor throughout my research process be it communication to respondents, access to data and storing and processing it (Saunders et al., 2007). With this mentality and approach in mind, participants in this research were presented with full transparency of the research, along with its goals and scope, and their full voluntary informed consent was requested (Appendix E). For this reason, the first contact was established via email to address the purpose of the study (Appendix D). To ensure the guiding principles are met, my email conveyed the transparency mentioned above. This included introducing myself as the sole researcher of this study, my current status as a DBA student, the research project at hand and the probable duration of the interview along with information targeting any potential confidentiality concerns.

The collaboration and interactions with the respondents were controlled by the guiding principles of ethics. In other words, audio recordings were subjected to the consent of the participants, and participants had the full and unwavering right to decline to answer any question they deemed irrelevant. The same level of ethical approach was given to the process of data analysis and data interpretation. All gathered information and data from the respondents were treated with confidence, and it was made clear that the information is strictly used for the purpose of the study at hand (Kombo and Tromp, 2009). This served two purposes, on one hand the respondents are ensured that their participation would not expose them to any risk of physical or psychological harm, and on the other hand, it ensured that I avoid any subjective and biased interpretations by referencing scholarly resources. My goal was to provide an engaging climate to the participants. To provide an environment that allowed them to freely express their ideas that will eventually result in the collection of trustworthy and dependable data. The measures put in place allowed that to happen by establishing a mutual trust relationship governed by ethics.

The following chapter will present the primary data collected through semi-structured interviews.

Chapter 5 – Results and Findings: Themes and Data

5.1 Introduction

This chapter studies QA practices and issues within the Lebanese HE. The interviews carried out in this chapter were guided by the specific research questions mentioned earlier. The collected data is presented through six themes, and most of the portrayed themes are explained using the perception retrieved from all three participant categories. In other words, the presentation of the results and their interpretations follow the participant's point of views.

5.2 Theme 1: The Purpose, Role, Scope and General Operating Characteristics of QA in HEIs

When asked on the definition of quality and QA in HE and the main points necessary to have a high quality of education, each category of respondents explained quality and QA related factors in terms of the achievement of their own anticipations of HE.

Below is the presentation of key data in terms of the three groups of participants.

Policy-Makers' Perceptions of Quality and QA in HE

Both interviewed policy-makers stressed the importance of the existence of QA in HEIs. They believe that quality in HE can only be achieved when any QA tool, system, policy or mechanism is monitored and measured. In this context, Prof. A.S., chief coordinator for European projects in Lebanon, introduced QA as a monitoring system with measurable standards, as he explained: *“which consists of standards and criteria by which we can measure the performance of HEIs. In addition, we can measure the performance and judge on the value added that the HEI is making.”* In addition, Prof. A.J., general director of HE in Lebanon, believes that quality in HE is related to achieving a set of requirements or standards related to the learning outcomes of different programmes. He also believes that transparency with internal and external stakeholders is necessary to achieve quality in HE. He continued to stress the importance of having a QA system developed, as he stated: *“I believe that universities must go on with this [QA] process. It is very important, quality process is very important.”*

Prof A.J. explained that in order to achieve quality in HE, a HEI should focus on all aspects pertaining directly and indirectly to the achievement of QA. For instance, a HEI can start with having a clear and attainable mission and vision. He elaborated: “*All HE agencies of assessment or QA are talking about mission, vision, objectives, staff, teaching and learning, resources, student's rights, and integrity.*” As the policy-makers elaborated, the existence of such attributes in elevated benchmarks is important in creating a quality culture at a HEI. QA in HE is achieved when a quality culture exists. The policy-makers started to introduce this concept as of 2006, yet felt the need to have more engagement from universities that were not fully willing, and in other instances incapable of endorsing such a culture. Prof A.S. stated in this regards: “*It was in 2006 and after 2007, which we began with this process toward the dissemination of the cultural aspects of QA: if you don't clean this culture, it is very difficult to convince universities to go on with this process. You know, we need more efforts and more engagement from universities.*” Prof A.S linked the attainment ‘quality culture’ to the HEIs’ lack of complete engagement in QA. Such incomplete engagement is due to several factors and barriers including cultural limitations, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Staff Perceptions of Quality and QA in HE

In the conducted interviews, most of the staff participants, when asked on their perceptions of quality in education, emphasised the significance of qualified academic staff, teaching, research, and curricula- all within the concept of QA. The conducted interviews showed that the staff highlighted the need to have appropriate and necessary standards to achieve quality in HE.

A participant from AUL, Dr. N.K., the chairperson of the MBA department, believes that excellence in teaching, sound academic research, regular curriculum updates, and engaging in community service activities are among the factors needed for achieving and maintaining quality in HE. As explained by several participants, at AUL, quality focus is primarily on teaching and learning aspects (including curriculum updates and teaching methods). Also, the current focus at the institutional level is on HR qualifications.

Prof. M.H., director of QA and institutional effectiveness and chairperson of the computer communication and engineering (CCE) department at AUL, considered quality and QA in HE in relation to the HEIs’ beneficiaries or stakeholders. He believes that each

group of stakeholders have their own expectations when anticipating for quality in HE, and it is the duty of the HEI to achieve those expectations. He further elaborated by giving specific examples on the expectations of each stakeholder group, starting by students who link their educational gains to future employability. Prof. M.H. then elaborated on the academic staff's quality expectations when being involved in HE, as he stated: *"The professor is concerned with being able to teach up to date courses that are related also somehow to his/her own research and academic background, and to do further research to integrate in his/her courses- that can support the outside companies or the community."* He also elaborated on the employer's expectations of HE- they would anticipate graduates who are equipped with certain technical and soft skills. As Dr. M.H. explained, AUL takes continuous feedback from both students and employers (he explained that committees exist at AUL that include market representatives from a variety of fields). However, the involvement of external stakeholders is less extensive than the involvement of students in quality matters.

In this context, Prof A.H., Vice-President for Academic Affairs at AUL, explained that a QA system in a HEI takes input from the stakeholders to produce quality education. *"In QA you have 3 main points: inputs (from the stakeholders), processing, and outcomes. QA and all standards related to QA focus to control ways of collecting inputs, processing inputs and assessing outcomes. It is a complete loop."*

The role of having a dynamic curriculum was stressed by Prof. A.H, who stated: *"I think we should have a dynamic academic curricula that satisfy the needs of the labour market taking into account the students' potential. An initiative taken at AUL is the development of the LCPI (Lebanese Centre for Pedagogical Innovation), which is aimed to support and orient the faculties and the students for the new methodologies of teaching."* According to Prof. B.S., a full-time professor at AUL and the director of the LCPI, the role of the LCPI is to improve the level of teaching and the learning process at AUL. Here, both Prof. A.H. and Prof. B.S. stress the role of the use of innovative teaching methodologies to promote the students' learning curve while achieving the dynamic market needs.

In this connection, Prof. K.H., director of the QA and institutional assessment office at AUB, believes that for any QA mechanism to achieve quality results, it must be placed

in a continuous, monitored cycle, as she stated: “*So, basically, we developed our own QA model based on our needs and we continuously modify this model according to the regular structured feedback we acquire from our stakeholders- whether internal or external...*” Prof. K.H also stressed the importance of stakeholders’ role embedded within any internal QA system deployed. She also proved that any QA system could be internally developed to satisfy the HEIs’ unique mission and vision and educational objectives. Here, Prof. K.H. explained how AUB developed a comprehensive internal assessment system aiming to achieve high quality in teaching and learning, research, HR, community service along with factors related to the internationalisation of AUB. In relation to acquiring stakeholder feedback, Prof K.H. explained that AUB has comprehensive systems that primarily take into consideration feedback from students. Acquiring external stakeholder feedback, which includes feedback from prospective employers, is also done at AUB yet less extensively.

In another perspective, AUB’s president, Prof. F.K, linked indicators of quality with the success of the graduates and their level of contribution to the society. He said: “*Quality in HE is really self-evident in the students. Are your quality indicators right? If so, students will have good careers when they graduate, and they will have productive lives... Now, there are many parameters such as employability, likelihood of going on to post-graduate, what their median income is within 10 years.*”

The director of QA at the LU, Prof. P.K., presented QA as an internal continuous process connected to student success and market access. Moreover, she explained that quality in HE is attained through qualified academic staff who are able to set initiatives to achieve the target standard of student fulfilment of learning outcomes/objectives. Prof. P.K. was elaborate on what is needed to achieve quality education, yet she failed to depict the characteristics and scope of QA at LU (*most QA processes at the LU have terminated due to political barriers. To be explained later*).

Students’ Perceptions of Quality and QA in HE

Interviewed students showed high interest in the aspect of quality and QA in HE. Some students expressed that education and quality should always co-exist in HE. Some students related QA to the effectiveness of teaching and learning and others perceived quality and QA in relation to designing curricula that satisfy the dynamic market needs.

R.C., an undergraduate finance student at AUB, addressed this relationship and furthermore related QA to different features that directly affect the process of teaching and learning, she stated: *“I believe that quality and QA in HE refers to academic and non-academic aspects. To start, quality in HE is perceived as the quality of teaching and learning- that is- the quality of the courses being taught and whether they are being taught in their latest version and whether those courses are relevant to the dynamic market needs and the quality or the qualification of the instructors teaching those courses... the student-instructor relationship and the student’s experience at his/her university directly affect the quality of teaching and learning.”* From another perspective, R.G., an undergraduate student at AUB, defined quality in terms of increasing the students’ knowledge and shaping their objectives. She explained: *“Quality in HE can be defined in terms of raising the student learning curve, building their targeted goals, and achieving success in their future careers.”*

J.B., an MBA student at AUB, puts QA in its professional and organisational settings relating to the job market, as she mentioned: *“In HE, quality is related to providing meaningful professional development opportunities through various partnerships with organisations that aim to prepare students to improve their competitiveness in the job market by interacting with employers and faculty members in a variety of fields and industries.”* A student from the LU also linked quality in HE to the job market by stating: *“Quality in HE can be defined by the institution’s use of new teaching methods that are up to date with the technological innovations and the market needs.”* N.M., an MBA student at AUL, suggested that quality is the main aspect of education, and quality is necessary to help students achieve their educational goals.

In light of the above, it is evident that most of the responses in the three categories, although different in the way they are expressed, are very similar in their essence. Specifically, the participants emphasised that for HE, quality should be taken as a whole and as a continuous cycle with all its components and stakeholders including staff, students, curricula, projects, academic and community services and the infrastructure. As portrayed above, the scope and role of quality and QA differed across the three HEIs studied.

Although many common responses emerged, each category of respondents defined

quality and QA in terms of the achievement of their own anticipations of HE. Policy-makers highlighted the role of continuously monitoring and measuring QA processes for the attainment of a quality culture, academic staff focused on excellence in teaching and research and on the attainment of programme learning outcomes, and students linked quality in HE to future employability and to the attainment of necessary knowledge in relation to market needs.

5.3 Theme 2: Internal QA Mechanisms in HEIs

A bulk of the interviews conducted centred on the internal QA mechanisms, tools, structures, policies or systems implemented in the HEIs. The responses were numerous, and each participant explained the mechanisms implemented based on his/her perception of what appears to be QA mechanisms/systems. Many participants praised the QA mechanisms/systems implemented in their HEI, yet a few believed that the applied mechanisms are performing well to a certain extent- improvements or modifications can further be applied.

Table 5.1 below aims to present the participants' responses regarding various QA mechanisms implemented at HEIs. The mechanisms are listed in order of their significance in the data collected.

Table 5.1: Results' Analysis of Participants' Responses towards QA Mechanisms in HEIs

Mechanism number	QA Mechanism
M1	Continuous internal assessment
M2	Seeking feedback from internal and external stakeholders (such as the use of student surveys)
M3	Setting measurable course learning outcomes and programme educational objectives
M4	Use of PIs
M5	Creating an internal office for QA with sub-specialised committees
M6	Imposing quality audit measures
M7	Learning Management Systems and the use of appropriate technology

The degree to which those mechanisms or systems are comprehensive and are relevant to the current educational context across the three HEIs is highly varied. While AUB seems to have implemented a comprehensive internal QA system, the LU has stopped the implementation of most QA mechanisms. AUL is aiming for a comprehensive internal QA system, yet is still at an initial stage (*Theme 5 of this chapter explains the possible barriers to the effective and complete implementation of QA in HEIs in Lebanon*).

Some mechanisms seem to overlap across the different interviewee categories, while other mechanisms are stressed more in a certain category. Below is the presentation of key data in terms of the three groups of participants.

Policy-Makers' Perceptions of the Internal QA Mechanisms Implemented in Lebanese HEIs

The two interviewed policy-makers expressed the vital role of self-assessment as a major element in QA. In fact, they believe that the QA process begins internally regardless of any external accreditation process. Internal assessment of any HEI is important in exposing the strengths and weaknesses of the quality culture any HEI is aiming for. That being said, Prof. A.J. believes that self-assessment procedures are sometimes not sufficiently or effectively implemented at many universities in Lebanon. He explained: *"A lot of universities began the QA process. Others, unfortunately, didn't ... QA begins by internal assessment; most of the universities have some internal assessment tools, but they are not enough. They are not based on the standards of quality that we want, especially learning outcomes ... This must be visible for us, especially when universities ask for new licenses, programmes, or to develop their curricula, or to add postgraduate degrees or PhD programs. We look toward these aspects; if the university is doing a self-assessment, or if it has accreditation- based on this, we decide if we support the demands of this university or not."* In regards to other mechanisms implemented in the HE sector, Prof. A.J. claimed that the use of peer-reviews is not applicable in Lebanon due to "trust issues".

In this context, Prof A.S. argues that quality is a process, and it begins with self-evaluation. He stresses the fact that universities ought to begin on evaluating themselves before any external agency or accreditation body does so. This first step is crucial in any QA process, as he explained: *"Quality is a process, we evaluate you or you evaluate*

yourself as a whole, self-evaluation ... you measure how far you are from your objectives and you suggest some corrective measures... In general, this first step of QA should be carried out by the HEI, and this is not the job of an external agency.”

Staff Perceptions of the Internal QA Mechanisms Implemented in HEIs

Staff respondents from the HEIs interviewed in this study stressed the importance of implementing internal QA tools and mechanisms. Prof. S.H., Dean of Faculty of Engineering at AUL, regarded QA as an internal process that takes into consideration feedback from various stakeholders. Prof. S.H. highlighted the importance of self-assessments. He also explained how the faculty of Engineering at AUL has designed an internal-assessment method (based on ABET standards) to regularly measure the achievement course learning outcomes and programme educational objectives through setting PIs.

In this connection, Prof. Z.D., associate provost at AUB, stressed the role of internal periodic review in promoting quality in education; he explained: *“We have a pretty full-fledged internal program assessment process. The Academic Assessment Unit (AAU) was initiated so that departments in the university have to be assessed through a very formal process on a regular basis. It is something that AUB developed, and it has a cycle that lasts a few years. Before it was five years, but now it's like every eight years.”* According to Prof. Z.D., this internal quality audit system ensures the attainment of quality standards at AUB.

In this connection, as explained in the prior theme, AUB has developed a complete quality assessment unit to formally assess departments on a regular basis. Prof. K.H. explained that AUB uses numerous surveys at many levels, which are developed through collaboration with many stakeholders. She stated: *“We set the questions and scale together, once the data is collected we publish results out. Then we meet again and discuss ... then we learn new information and new initiatives to be done for the following year to change ... to make use of the results for improvement.”* She further explained that some surveys are done every semester, others yearly, and some are done every three years. Furthermore, she elaborated: *“The provost has established an assessment committee to make sure that all the results of the assessment are shared and made use of and included in the planning, and budgeting.”* In this context, she tackled evaluations at the

programme level where she explained that when learning outcomes are assessed based on those internal assessments, initiatives are taken at AUB. For example, the Centre for Teaching and Learning was established to make sure all instructors acquire the latest methodology on how to teach and assess.

Prof. P.K., the director of QA at the LU, elaborated on what is needed to achieve quality education, yet she failed to depict what mechanisms are actually implemented at the LU. Interviews with other LU staff showed that most QA mechanisms in the LU at the institutional level are not implemented since the beginning of year 2019 (*due to political interventions- to be explained in theme 5*). Staff interviewees, however, mentioned that several student surveys still exist, based on personal efforts, at the faculty levels. Moreover, Prof P.K. stated: *“However, the governance at the LU needs to impose more QA measures at the level of the whole university.”*

Dr. N.K. elaborated on the QA mechanisms, tools, and practices used at AUL such as the establishment of committees to overlook the course files and outcomes, the acquisition of qualified academics, the use of innovative learning management systems, and regular update of courses syllabi. She believes those are important tools set to improve and ensure quality in HEIs. In the same context, Dr. J.O., a full-time instructor at AUB at the faculty of business, gave examples of various internal QA tools used at AUB, as he stated: *“Internal periodic reviews are of similar importance as the external reviews if not more important. Some examples on such internal tools can be: different student surveys like instructor course review, exit survey, etc.”*

According to Prof. M.H., teaching supported by research is an ambitious mechanism in terms of implementing QA in HE; he further added: *“So, if you ask any professor with some ambition, he/she would say that it’s interesting for me to teach up to date courses that are related to the research that I am doing so that I can advance both in the teaching and learning and research (2 of the main 3 pillars of the university) related to the third pillar, community service.”* In addition, Prof. M.H. talked about the importance of setting Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for all mechanisms and objectives and regularly monitoring the achievement of the set targets. He explained: *“Doing so [setting KPIs], we are creating an internal quality review system- a step aiding a HEI to attain external accreditation”*. Here, Prof. M.H. elaborated that AUL is still developing an internal QA

system at the institutional level. The current focus at the institutional levels is on HR qualifications and the formulations of job descriptions and the establishment of various committees. In addition, he specified that different faculties/department at AUL are at different stages in implementing QA initiatives focusing on course learning outcomes. Moreover, he explained that different surveys are being used at the institutional and faculty levels. He stated: *“We still have a long way ahead of us in terms of full QA implementation.”*

Students’ Perception of Internal QA mechanisms implemented in HEIs

Many students elaborated on the QA mechanisms implemented at their HEIs. Others tended to suggest improvements or modifications to those mechanisms or processes in aim of improving their learning experience and the educational level in general. Some students elaborated on the need for additional QA measures at their HEIs.

When asked specifically on their direct involvement in QA practices, many students answered that the most common way of being involved in QA mechanisms at their HEIs is through filling out different forms of surveys. Most of the interviewed students identified that HEIs cannot solely depend on student surveys to identify students’ needs and wants; results of those surveys might be biased, and students might fill them merely because they are obliged to. In this respect, J.B. explained: *“The university administration must realise the shortcomings associated with solely relying on one mechanism (being mainly student feedback) to improve the quality of the programme as the feedback might not be always sincere, might be biased, and might not be enough to result in actionable change.”* Some students mentioned that they are involved in another form of QA practice at their university: they are part of organisational committees.

Student S.C., an engineering student at AUL, explained the initiatives that must be implemented in any HEI to improve quality in terms of improving student satisfaction, she stated: *“I believe that a HEI should update the curriculum constantly to align to the market’s needs, add several class sections in case of crowded classes, create more workshops and events for students to motivate them, train the non-academic and academic staff in terms of solving the students matters, and finally students need to be further aware of all the QA initiatives done at the university to further boost their motivation and eagerness to learn.”* In many respects students addressed their role as

stakeholders in the learning and QA continuous process; S.C. added: *“It’s about ensuring that proper and effective teaching and learning opportunities are given to students.”*

N.F., an AUB MBA student, regarded the current QA mechanisms as not enough; she criticised the existing QA mechanisms especially in relation to the prevailing market industry, as she stated: *“The current surveys are not enough, the university needs surveys from the market and from the employers or the industry. The university needs to check with the industry and follow up with their graduates and with their employers on students’ missing skills. Feedback on the market needs is to be taken from external stakeholders, and those needs must be translated into our curricula.”*

5.4 Theme 3: The Development of a Student-Centred Learning Culture

The concept of student-centred learning assumed a significant share of my interviews, especially interviews with the staff and the students. Generally speaking, when talking about quality in education and specifically in HE, it is assumed to be related to the educational level of the students. Hence, any QA mechanism or system implemented at a HEI will directly or indirectly have an effect on the students’ education. From here, the concept of student-centred learning emerged in my interviews, and many participants sought a huge need to ultimately reach a complete student-centred learning culture. This topic assumes a client orientation to QA and the treatment of students as partners in the learning process, a particular version of the QA culture.

Table 5.2 below presents the overall responses towards the factors needed in order to reach a student-centred learning culture. The responses are placed in order of their significance in the data collected.

Table 5.2: The Factors that Contribute to Reaching a Student-Centred Learning Culture

Factor number	Factor
F1	Continuous feedback from students
F2	Enhancing the relationship between students and instructors
F3	Encouraging a two-way communication channel between students and faculty members

F4	Student representation in various committees
F5	Providing meaningful professional development to improve student's competitiveness in the job market
F6	Student engagement in research projects related to the local industry
F7	Both instructors and students should learn to value values (Ethical considerations)
F8	Train instructors to become more accepting of the norm: 'Student-Centred'

Below is the presentation of key data in terms of the groups of participants who elaborated on student-centred learning, particularly the staff and the students.

Staff Perception of Student-Centred Learning Culture

The staff interviewed in this study elaborated on the concept of student-centred learning, and many saw the necessity of reaching a student-centred culture at HEIs in Lebanon. Prof. A.M., president of AUL, considered student engagement as the ultimate target for quality in education; furthermore, he mentioned that there is an extreme need to reach a complete student-centred learning culture, and he also expressed possible methods to empower students; he stated: *“There is a need to engage the students actively in the learning and teaching process. Students need to adopt the curriculum; they adopt the specialty that they want to do... But the second point is that it's rather the responsibility of the academic members to monitor, advice and supervise, encourage and follow up on every single student as much as possible... And the third point is to prepare them for academia. Sometimes we only talk about how to prepare them for the job market, but it's not always the case. They can create new jobs themselves by training them on entrepreneurial skills... So, I think these points are essential to ensure the high quality and good calibre of students.”*

Prof. F.K., AUB's president, considered a student-centred approach a very important tool in enhancing the quality of output; he gave very insightful information on such a phenomenon, comparing it to similar phenomena in other professions, and he elaborated on the evolution of education in relation to different teaching and learning strategies. He mentioned: *“I think ultimately we need to move towards a student centric model. I think*

we're making significant progress, just like medicine moved towards more patient-centric as opposed to doctor-centric model... Right now, the strongest is didactic or mentor-based learning. But, then you can have the professor step back and oversee the whole process, preparing experiential learning labs and in some cases projects... And to reach student centred learning, you're going to have to combine what I call distance or responsible learning with mentorship or in-class learning and experiential learning. It is design-based learning.”

In the context of student empowerment, Prof. K.H. commented on how empowering students and involving them in QA systems, particularly in committees, have been beneficial in obtaining their accreditations at AUB. However, she explained that reaching a complete student-centred learning culture requires time from the faculty, since faculty members are overloaded with teaching and research; in addition, it requires faculty trainings.

By contrast, Dr. B.D., a full time instructor at AUB, argued that a full student-centred approach to teaching and learning is not applicable within the Lebanese HE system; he believes that a complete student-centred learning culture cannot be achieved in HEIs in Lebanon due to ethical and cultural barriers unique to the Lebanese context. He also believes that the Lebanese society needs to have more value for values. Moreover, Dr. B.D. raised the concern of the lack of ethical moralities in some students when it comes to issues of plagiarism and cheating in exams. Other staff interviewees found this concern to be valid due to the current cultural and ethical barriers in Lebanon, yet moving to a student-centred approach to assessment can mitigate such concerns. Dr. B.D. did not negate the notion of student-centred learning; however, he believes that reaching a complete student-centred culture is currently not possible in Lebanon.

Finally, when asked the same question on what is further needed to reach a complete student-centred learning culture, the chairperson of the civil engineering at the LU, Dr. H.G., portrayed a different angle in his response from the one shared by Dr. B.D.; Dr. H.G. believes that a complete student-centred learning culture can be achieved when the instructor considers the utilitarian view of education- one that emphasises producing students who are able to fit into the society while contributing as productive citizens. He believes that an altruistic teacher who does not consider teaching as a mean of merely

gaining financial rewards and focuses on his/her desire to share knowledge will eventually attain a student-centred learning culture in his/her classroom or teaching environment.

Students' Perception of Student-Centred Learning Culture

The semi-structured interviews held with students showed huge interest in the expansion of student roles in HE governance. Students as stakeholders believe that they should be involved in the process of QA. According to most of the student interviewees, students are responsible for the quality of HE on an equal basis with HEIs' academic and administrative staff. Students consider that their participation in QA practices is necessary.

In this context, D.A., a student from AUL, suggested that students must be more vigorously involved in QA systems implemented in HEIs; she stated: "*Students need to be involved in all aspects relating to them. They need to give their feedbacks on all aspects, whether through the surveys, interviews, or online forums, and the university needs to act according to the feedback taken from the students. Plus, students need to participate in the creation of their events and workshops.*" Here, she mentioned a crucial point posing the question of whether or not HEIs act upon the feedback of students. In addition, A.R., an undergraduate marketing student from AUL and president of the student council, regarded a student-centred learning culture as the main driver for QA process, and he further stressed the necessity of the engagement of students in the teaching and learning process; he stated and gave following examples: "*I want to be more active rather than passive learner. The instructor should involve the students in their learning process. For example, involving the students in the exam-creating process will certainly motivate students and allow them to excel in their studies. To further explain... instructor can ask the students to create several questions to include in the exam, the instructor can then choose a few of those questions to include. This process would give the students a sense of excitement and involvement and would motivate them to study hard and do research in order to create 'the chosen question'.*"

In addition, J.B., an MBA student at AUL, addressed relationships between students and instructors and gave examples of the QA practices a HEI could implement to involve students in the QA process; she pointed out in this regard: "*I believe that combining*

graduate committees with student mentoring and emphasising an open two-way communication are effective mechanisms to instigate a student-centred learning culture at the university.”

Most interviewed students stressed the importance of having an open two-way communication between the student and instructor and between the student and the administration. Also, students assured the need for the use of innovative teaching strategies and stressed the necessity to shift from technical curricula to a better focus on soft skills and competencies required to succeed in the job market. Students believe that all these matters pave the way to a complete student-centred learning. Moreover, according to the interviewed students, one of the objectives of creating a student-centred environment should be to make learning challenging, joyful and engaging with more experiential/competitive activities.

As with most basic and readily achievable measures, interviewees emphasised that student engagement in QA should be transparent and efficient, and the real involvement of stakeholders, particularly the students, is crucial in the reformation process. The common trend here is that HEIs agree with student engagement in university management and most students also show great interest in participating in the process. It is evident that Lebanese HEIs haven't developed a complete student-centred learning culture, yet some HEIs involve their students more actively than other HEIs.

5.5 Theme 4: The Role of International Borrowing and Accreditation

It was evident throughout the interviews with policy-makers and academic staff that with the lack of national quality standards, some HEIs benchmarked against international best practices in order to implement sound, comprehensive internal QA mechanisms and systems. Both policy-makers stressed the need to borrow international standards at the national level- a notion that was also confirmed by a number of interviewed academic staff. Many interviewees expressed that such adaptation needs to be sensitive to the particular needs of the Lebanese situation in terms of the particular variables to ensure a good fit and avoid rejection because of incompatibility. The lack of national standards was identified as one of the reasons for seeking international accreditations by HEIs.

Policy borrowing and international accreditations are considered as QA measures taken to ensure the existence of a quality culture at the Lebanese HE system.

Below is Table 5.3 that presents the overall responses towards the advantages and downsides of international borrowing and accreditations. The responses are placed in order of their significance in the data collected.

Table 5.3: Advantages and Downsides of International Borrowing and Accreditations

Advantage Number	Advantages
A1	Benchmark against good practices
A2	A sound substitute for the lack of a national agency/framework
A3	Add market value and prestige to HEIs <i>(particularly international accreditation)</i>
A4	Gain better reputation
A5	Validate the internal QA mechanisms/systems
A6	Establish international recognition
A7	Establish a quality culture
Downside number	Downsides
D1	Diversity of Lebanese culture
D2	Diversity of Lebanese HE system
D3	Financial burdens
D4	Lebanese specifics and unique market needs
D5	Diverse socio-economic nature

Below is the presentation of key data in terms of the groups of participants who elaborated on the role of international borrowing and accreditation, particularly the policy-makers and staff.

Policy-Makers' Perception of International Borrowing and Accreditation

In a general review, it can be seen that according to both interviewed policy-makers, the national target to be reached is an important dimension in QA practices. Prof. A.J. elaborated on the different initiatives taken to create national standards to ensure quality in HE in Lebanon. Prof. A.J. stated the following in relation to this issue: *"The process*

began in 2004, we began to talk about the new strategy for HE in Lebanon ... One of the major issues was to implement the system of quality... we must remember that we have sided by Europe, the European Neighbourhood Policy and we are trying to align with the Bologna process. In the European Bologna process, QA in a HEI is a major component.” Prof. A.J. mentioned that in aim of creating national QA standards, they have tried to align national standards to those in the Bologna process. It is wise to mention here that those standards/framework have not yet seen the light of day.

Furthermore, according to Prof. A.S., the country’s engagement in QA is a crucial component of the Bologna process; he explained: *“But Lebanon is not a member of Bologna process. It is applying the Bologna process in a lot of universities, who apply the Bologna principles. Being in charge of the EU programs, I started to look at the quality issue, as it should be, because it's a part of Bologna process, but we had never acquired the Bologna process fully. Lebanon is not a signatory country in Bologna.”*

The diversity and complexity of the Lebanese culture and HE system is evident from the primary and secondary data (*see chapter 2*). Prof A.S. acknowledges the specific characteristics of Lebanon in the development of a national QA system, including language diversity, social diversity, and the diversity in the HE systems used in Lebanon. He explained: *“All these diversities in Lebanon give it specific characteristics that cannot be found elsewhere. All kinds of diversity: language diversity, external support diversity and even social level diversity.... We have the Francophone, the Anglophone, the American style, the European style, the Arabic style and the Armenian style in our educational system. We have universities that have yearly tuition fees of 20,000 USD while other universities offer the same licenced programmes for 3,000 USD. Lebanon is a multi-dimensional country. So, our national agency cannot resemble the one of Switzerland or UK or France, for example. Our national agency can resemble the model of whole Europe, since they take into account the diversity of languages and religious believes, like the Bologna process. Moreover, unlike the American models that pass and fail institutions, the European ones are more about recommendations and an evaluation report on the strengths and weaknesses and where you can improve. This is more applicable in Lebanon.”* Here, taking into consideration the Lebanese specificities, prof. A.S described what he believes is a suitable QA model for Lebanon.

Policy-maker A.S. elaborated on how international agencies do not take into account the Lebanese specifics; for example, the diversity of the Lebanese culture and the sectarian nature of Lebanon. He elaborated: *“International agencies do not take into account the Lebanese context and its specific culture and structure. However, if we develop a national agency, we can modify the standards to accommodate our circumstances, like Arabic culture and language. Other examples can be related to religious sects. International agencies can fail to punish an institution for recruiting academic staff from a single religious sect. The concept of the sect is not present internationally, which is not the case of Lebanon. Moreover, if we were to develop an agency we should have high loads on the standards of ethics and academic values to combat against corruption in the country.”*

In another view, both policy-makers considered the important role of international accreditations for Lebanese HEIs especially with the lack of a national QA framework/agency. Prof. A.S. mentions that even if Lebanon lacks a national QA framework/agency to portray the quality standards, a Lebanese HEI must implement QA mechanisms internally by benchmarking to international standards. In addition, policy-maker A.J. believes that by receiving an international accreditation, a HEI can help policy-makers judge the quality of its programmes better. Also, he explained that obtaining international accreditation is a value added for all involved stakeholders.

Staff Perception of International Borrowing and Accreditation

In the context of the lack of a national QA framework/agency, numerous staff stressed the role of international accreditations to benchmark against good practices, and others emphasised that international accreditations are a necessary source of external assessment. Prof. Z.D. from AUB, addressed the role of international accreditations when setting internal QA processes, as he mentioned: *“When we look at QA, we follow the international accreditation and we also use this to benchmark against our internal processes. We also adopt them to comply at the same time with national level guidance.”*

Prof M.H explained why they chose the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) as a benchmark when developing their internal quality review system at the faculty of engineering at AUL, as he explained: *“The ABET model is relevant to our context. ABET is very well known as an engineering accreditation agency.”*

In Lebanon, many departments are actually ABET accredited such as an engineering or computer science departments.” Additionally, Prof. M.H. stated that they are trying to benchmark with ‘Evaluationsagentur Baden-Wurtemberg’ (Evalag) agency on the institutional level.

In this respect and due to the lack of a national QA framework, Prof. S.J., Teaching and Learning Centre director and a full-time professor at AUB, highlighted the role of international accreditation agencies in ensuring the effectiveness of QA mechanisms. According to Prof. S.J., although an internal QA process is implemented at all levels at AUB, an external accreditation agency is needed to validate and ensure that the internal processes result in effective academic and non-academic excellence. He further explained that AUB relies on several different US accreditations at institutional and faculty levels to ensure alignment with best practices.

Prof. S.H. believes that the issue of governance in relation to QA, or lack of national QA agency, can be solved by utilising the external model of accreditation, he explained: *“I believe that in case we get an accreditation from a well-known external accreditation agency, it will also suit the Lebanese QA model because we are not the masters in this domain... Therefore, for sure the government should have a QA office and QA cycle, but in case they validate that cycle with an external agent, I think that this would be enough for them.”* Here, Prof. S.H. emphasised the role of external accreditation at the institutional level as a solid source of external assessment with the lack of a national agency.

In another perspective, some of the interviewed staff linked the acquisition of international accreditations to value and reputation; they believe that a HEI with an international accreditation is valued more by its stakeholders and thereby has relatively better reputation. Prof. I.N., dean of the health sciences faculty at AUB, believes that if a HEI is accredited by a reputable international accreditation agency, its academic standing as a whole will be greatly valued and accepted internationally. In this connection, Dr. J.O., from AUB, elaborated on how international accreditation can be used as means for a better reputation and for providing higher quality education; he explained: *“Mechanisms could be internally developed but if you get the international accreditation, it would give you a better reputation. But the need for it is to provide high quality for*

students. You know, even if you develop internal mechanisms for high QA, you still need some external help.”

On the other hand, although many interviewees viewed international borrowing and accreditation as positive steps toward QA in HE, some pinpointed their downsides or limitations. Prof M.H., from AUL, tackled the issue of finance and its relationship to receiving international accreditations; he mentioned: *“We don't really get funds from the government. We mainly depend on students' tuition fees. And this limits our ability to receive top-tier international accreditations at the institutional level and faculty levels.”* Here, Prof. M.H. explained that although AUL is benchmarking with international standards in aim of being internationally accredited at several levels, institutional and faculty, the process of applying and receiving international accreditations is financially demanding in terms of its vast requirements- infrastructural and research. *(This issue/concept is further elaborated in theme 5- the barriers to the effective development of QA mechanisms.)*

From another point of view, Prof. I.N., from AUB, gave an example where their faculty's accreditation from the international public health accreditation agency Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) forced them to amend their curriculum in a way that does not comply with the Lebanese market demands. He stated: *“For us, getting accredited from the most elite public health agency around the world CEPH was a must. However, the Lebanese market is different from the U.S. one. Over here we have a bad economic situation, which forces employees to be knowledgeable in a multiple of specialisations in the field. Thus, a single employee can be operating the jobs of 2 or 3 employees. For that, we developed our curriculum to accommodate to this; for example, we allowed the departments to teach common courses ... When this was reviewed by CEPH in 2016 we got a warning for failing to achieve the environmental health learning outcomes' requirements and if we were to become reaccredited by CEPH, every programme needs to be specialised in its specific field. Well, we decided that getting accredited by CEPH is something we cannot miss. So, we changed our curriculum to accommodate the international agency requirements.”*

On the national level, Dr. H.G., chairperson of the civil engineering department at the LU, believes that borrowing a QA model from overseas and implementing it as is into

the Lebanese HEIs can impose obstacles against a well effective QA system, he explained: *“In our university we use the French education system, however, we haven’t fully implemented it. So, it’s not necessary that if we move from one environment to another for the adopted idea to succeed. From what we took from the European countries, especially France, the project was incorporation with France, but France didn’t work with what the Lebanese culture dictates.”* In this line of argument, Prof. E.H., dean of the faculty of engineering at the LU, supported this point of view and explained the following: *“We cannot bring the system from France as is and bring it in to our universities. Certainly, amendments or some modifications should be carried out to fit into the Lebanese culture.”*

In light of what has been presented above, interviewed policy-makers and staff emphasized the important role of international policy borrowing and accreditation to the Lebanese HE arena. Both groups of participants showed similar views on the necessity of international accreditations given the lack of a national framework/agency. With the uprising need for a framework of QA standards and the lack of a national QA framework, the need for international borrowing and accreditation is rising in Lebanese HE. However, as mentioned above, such means have their downsides on the national level and on the level of HEIs, and not all HEIs are capable of utilising international accreditations

5.6 Theme 5: Barriers to the Effective Development of a QA System in Lebanese HEIs

Throughout the interviews I conducted, many participants mentioned several barriers that limit HEIs in Lebanon to effectively develop a complete QA system. The majority of these barriers are not within the scope of individual HEIs and thus are nationwide barriers that limit HEIs to reach a quality culture. Some HEIs are able to overcome many barriers, while others are overwhelmed by those obstacles.

Table 5.4 below presents the overall responses towards the barriers to the effective development of a QA system in Lebanese HEIs. The responses are placed in order of their significance in the data collected.

Table 5.4: Barriers to the Effective Development of QA in Lebanese HEIs.

Limitation Number	Limitation
L1	Financial constraint; Lack of governmental financial support to private universities
L2	Lack of law and regulations
L3	Corruption, nepotism, and political interference
L4	Internal organisational cultures of individual HEIs
L5	The sectarian political economy of the Lebanese society
L6	Resistance to change
L7	HR Limitations
L8	Lack of well-defined QA mechanisms
L9	Lack of independent QA agency
L10	Lack of standard indicators of QA
L11	Lack of transparency
L12	Lack of job market data on employability
L13	Lack of dynamic curriculum development
L14	High workload of teaching staff
L15	Unqualified administrative staff
L16	Lack of state/public universities
L17	Management's attitude and the governance system
L18	Limited infrastructure facilities
L19	Lack of achievable measures for student-centred learning culture
L20	Lack of sustainability in quality management
L21	Lack of collaboration between stakeholders and policy- makers
L22	Lack of high standards' research quality

Below is the presentation of key data in terms of the groups of participants who elaborated on the barriers to the effective development of a QA system in Lebanese HEIs, particularly the policy-makers and staff.

Policy-Makers' Perception on the Barriers to the Effective Development of a QA System in Lebanese HEIs

The interviewed policy-makers focused on several barriers to the effective implementation of QA system/mechanisms in HEIs in Lebanon. One of these barriers is the financial limitation, both at the national level and at the level of individual HEIs. Both policy-maker participants agree that HEIs in Lebanon are facing crucial financial problems due to the lack of funding from the government. In addition, in Lebanon, HEIs mainly rely on only one source of finance- the students' fees, with the exception of the Lebanese University (LU) – the only public university. Therefore, being financially restricted, many HEIs in Lebanon are not able to effectively implement a complete QA system. In this respect, Policy-maker A.J. mentioned: *“Financing is the more major issue because most HEIs depend on the fees from the students. Some of them tried to gain scholarships through NGO's, through the help of independent bodies in Lebanon but it is not enough. You need to have sustainable financing in HE. You can't make quality without resources and resources need financing”*. *“This agency needs a budget and needs the staff,”* stated A.S. in connection to the lack of funding at the national level. He believes that the creation of a QA agency/framework requires a set budget that is to be financed by the government.

Besides the financial limitations to effective QA, both policy-makers raised concern of the 'stuck' regulation process; the interference of certain political groups for the favour of their specific interest or connection with some HEIs has created the issue of the 'lack of law', demonstrating issues of strategic direction and dispersed responsibility for QA. They mentioned what might be termed a problem of articulation: the missing link between implementation of a QA framework and developing a quality culture.

According to Prof. A.J., politicians in Lebanon should not interfere in the process of creating a Lebanese QA framework otherwise the creation of such a framework will not arise effectively; he mentioned: *“If you want a sound QA system and if you want your agency to be recognised by international agencies, then you have to be independent. Political power should not interfere... We have a great problem in this country, all domains are being limited from success due to the political and religious sects' interventions.”*

In this connection, Prof. A.S. explained the importance of setting high KPI values when measuring ethical aspects upon constructing a strategy for the creation of national QA framework/agency: *“If we were to develop an agency we should have high loads on the standards of ethics and academic values in order to overcome the corruption of the country. These KPIs might not have high marks in international agencies; however, we should put high marks for such values due to the current state of Lebanon.”*

Staff Perception on the Barriers to the Effective Development of a QA System in Lebanese HEIs

Not only did the policy-makers focus on several barriers to QA in HE in Lebanon, but also many of the interviewed staff elaborated on several barriers to the effective development of QA system/mechanisms in HEIs in Lebanon. Prof. E.H., dean of the engineering faculty at the LU, mentioned that HEIs in Lebanon are facing financial, political, and governmental limitations; he explained: *“We need finance, and also legislative laws should accompany the development among the HEIs in Lebanon. If the government does not put in place laws that control and urge for improvement of quality in HE, we will remain where we are today, and we will not go further in terms of educational development.”*

Besides the financial and political barriers, Prof A.M., president of AUL, mentioned another limitation to QA in HE- resistance to change. Prof. A.M. explained that creating a culture for quality is not easy especially with various stakeholders’ resistance to change; he explained this barrier in connection to AUL’s endeavour of obtaining international accreditations.

Furthermore, Prof. M.H. introduced two barriers to QA in HE- the lack of highly qualified human resources and the lack of relevant market data; he linked those barriers to the financial barrier. He elaborates: *“I don't have enough human resources to make measurement to get data from beneficiaries fast enough...most universities in Lebanon are private and depend on student tuition fees... so you have a high level of competition. So, it's a budget problem and it's a human resources problem... this limits your ability to really go with the international standards at the institutional level.”*

In light of what has been portrayed above, several limitations to the effective implementation of a complete QA system in Lebanese HEIs exist. Both policy-makers and academic staff were elaborate in this matter, and the data showed many overlap in their expressed barriers/limitations.

5.7 Theme 6: The Need for, and Possible Operating Characteristics of a National QA Agency

Many of the interviewed participants sought the need to the development of a national QA agency in Lebanon. The development of such an agency would result in a clear well-defined QA framework to be implemented internally by all HEIs in Lebanon. This agency would also serve as an external assessment unit to ensure that all HEIs are implementing the stipulated quality standards.

Below is Table 5.5 that presents the data retrieved from the participants in terms of the necessary characteristics of and the need for a national QA agency. The responses are placed in order of their significance in the data collected.

Table 5.5: Results of Participants' Responses towards the Characteristics of and the Need for a QA Agency in Lebanon

Characteristic number	Characteristic
A1	Should be independent/autonomous from any political intervention
A2	Should involve academic experts in the field of QA
A3	Should be enabled to fulfil its role by means of laws and regulations
A4	Should take into consideration the diversity of the Lebanese culture and educational system
A5	Should have an international dimension
Need number	Need
N1	To formulate a national QA framework
N2	To supervise and monitor internal QA
N3	To ensure that HEIs are effectively implementing stipulated QA systems/policies/mechanisms/standards

- N4 To ensure that HEIs are selecting instructors/academics according to given- standards
- N5 To mitigate downsides to high competition among HEIs
- N6 To ensure that HEIs include students in the quality assessment procedures
- N7 To create a quality culture among HEIs

The need for and the general characteristics of a national QA agency is presented below in terms of the data retrieved from the interviews with the three groups of participants.

Policy-Makers' Perception of the Need for, and Possible Operating Characteristics of a National QA Agency

The national target to be reached according to interviews with two key policy-makers of HE is the ultimate establishment of a national QA agency; this national QA agency will display a clear framework of all internal QA mechanisms that must be implemented by HEIs in Lebanon, and the agency will also assess whether or not universities are ultimately producing quality education.

Both policy-makers participants agreed that a national QA agency should be developed and should be enabled to fulfil its duties by re-organised laws and regulations. In addition, they identified that they have worked on the formation of a proposed national QA agency in 2007, yet the proposal remains a draft law till this present date. They also recognised the importance of such an agency and linked the lack of its formation to political barriers.

Prof. A.J. further elaborated on the need for a national QA agency, and he mentioned that due to political barriers in Lebanon, such an agency should be completely independent from external interference; he believes that maintaining the autonomy of this national agency and HEIs is essential for the development of an effective national framework.

As has been previously elaborated in the '*International Borrowing and Accreditation*' section – theme 4, according to Prof. A.J., the independent national QA agency should certainly take into consideration worldwide common, general internal aspects of HE. Moreover, he believes that in order for the agency to be well recognised worldwide, the

national agency should have international dimensions when formulating its overall attributes.

In the context of external assessment, according to Prof. A.S., the role of an independent QA agency should be focused on auditing, reporting and controlling the HEIs, so he mentioned: *“If we had an independent national QA agency, and let us say they issued a report, it should be made public. This report should be sent to the Council for HE, which can be used further for the regulations and universities’ control. So, it would have been a report done by independent experts and submitted to the Council.”* Here, Prof. A.S failed to overcome the issue of political interference; he recommended that the agency should report to the Council of HE, which hosts the Minister of Education and HE as its president, for decision-making.

Prof A.J. argued that current Lebanese HEIs are not willing to accept the norm of peer-review from other HEIs due to trust issues, thus the need for an external independent assessment, as he explained: *“Universities might accept being reviewed from external bodies but not through other local HEIs. Since professors when hired are getting access to internal data of the university, and this professor can be operating at multiple universities simultaneously which are considered competitor institutions.”*

Staff Perception of the Need for, and Possible Operating Characteristics of a National QA Agency

It was apparent that the interviewed academic staff sought the need for clear internal QA guidelines and a form of external assessment for the validation of their internal QA processes. Many believe that with the downsides of international assessments, there is a demanding necessity to have a national agency. In addition, some mentioned certain attributes that they believe are necessary to be part of the national agency. It was certainly embedded in the interviews with the academic staff that there must be national entity responsible for the improvement of quality in HE.

Prof. K.H. explained that a national QA agency should be independent from any external influence. In addition, she mentioned that the lack of a national QA agency in Lebanon is one of the crucial challenges that face HEIs. Moreover, she criticises the set QA draft in 2007 to be out-dated and in need for an update, as she explained: *“To have a national*

QA agency is very important, unfortunately, this is not seeing light at the parliament level. And what was once a draft several years ago is now out-dated. This is why the agency should be independent from everything political and from the MEHE... having a national QA agency is a must, given the current rise in the number of HEIs in Lebanon. This increase is causing competition among HEIs and hindering high standards of quality. Hence, having a national QA agency is very important in imposing internal QA in all Lebanese HEIs.” Here, Prof. K.H. elaborated on the issue of competition among Lebanese HEIs, which is hindering, in some cases, the implementation of high standards of quality. Hence, she believes that it is of crucial importance to have a national agency for QA in Lebanon.

In another instance, prof. Z.D. supposes that the sudden increase in the number of HEIs in the country and the lack of accurate monitoring and external assessment lead to the deterioration in the quality of education produced at several Lebanese HEIs. In this context, he urged the formation of a national QA agency; he explained: *“certainly there is a lack or a gap of local national level quality system; it is more in terms of how the number of HEIs grew or the increase in the branches of universities. What are the checks and balances to establish and to accredit such universities or branches and to allow universities to offer degrees? So, certainly it's a major area of improvement and there were certain trials at the level of the ministry, but I would say they did not realise into a robust mechanism or system.”* Prof. Z.D considered that the national agency should impose quality labels on and accredit HEIs.

Students’ Perception of the Need for, and Possible Operating Characteristics of a National QA Agency

A number of the participant students mentioned the need for external assessment through an external QA agency. They suggested that a QA agency is required to ensure that experts and instructors are carefully selected according to given standards; they believe that QA agency is to ensure that both academic and non-academic personnel have appropriate skills and are competent in performing their tasks. Furthermore, any QA independent agency should ensure that HEIs include students in the quality assessment procedures.

Moreover, student N.F. emphasised the need for an external agency to assure that the QA

mechanisms implemented at AUB are relevant to the current context and to the actual improvement of learning. She believes, so do many of the interviewed students, that the university needs to regularly update its curricula to match the dynamic market needs, and the only way to ensure that such changes are made is through the availability of a third party- an external agency responsible to oversee the effectiveness of the mechanisms implemented at HEIs. N.F. stated: *“Are those learning outcomes fulfilling the relevant job descriptions and market needs? ... So, the job tasks need to be relevant to the course learning outcomes, and I do believe this criteria among others are to be monitored by a third party, who should have full autonomy and the right authority.”*

The need for a national QA agency is highly implied in the interviews with all three participant groups. Many of the participants elaborated on the required characteristics for such an agency, and others focused on the urgent need for a QA agency in Lebanon to ensure that all HEIs implement a certain set of quality standards. Most participants believe that not all HEIs will benchmark against international standards and apply for external international assessments (e.g. international accreditations) due to several barriers and downsides to such forms of external assessments (*mentioned in previous sections*). Hence, the need for a national QA agency remains especially given the drastic political intervention on HE.

5.8 Summary

This chapter has been modelled across different themes; the data has been thematically presented and further displayed based on the perceptions of the three groups of participants. Six different yet interrelated themes emerged in this chapter.

In this conducted study, all participants gave insightful responses upon quality perceptions in HE. The participants believe that QA in HE should be taken as a whole with all its components, processes and mechanisms; those processes and mechanisms should be part of a continuous process. The responses were decisive in terms of the quality of academic services, the nature of teaching activities in relation to the learning outcomes and the existing market industries, the interconnected internal QA activities and the involvement/engagement of the stakeholders in QA mechanisms.

It has been shown that student-centred learning culture has occupied a very important priority in the debate agenda. The results exhibited varied responses on the degree of student involvement in the whole process of quality assessment in different HEIs. According to a number of participants, the staff-student relationship and the collaboration between stakeholders, including students, are very decisive in stimulating a quality culture.

In regards to the barriers influencing quality in HE, the results show clearly a number of crucial obstacles that face QA in HE in Lebanon, such as corruption and nepotism, lack of accountability and transparency in addition to the lack of an ethical culture in quality management. A number of these negative aspects are attributed to the existing political economy of Lebanon that is based on so-called sectarianism and religious nepotism.

Many of the interviewees believed that international accreditations earned by HEIs are considered as solid steps towards QA. Nevertheless, many participants mentioned several drawbacks to international accreditations that include high finances, lack of complete alignment between the local market needs and international accreditation requirements in addition to local cultural, ethical, and political barriers. Also, many interviewees elaborated on the role of international policy borrowing and its crucial importance given the lack of a national QA system.

Numerous participants understood that there remains a huge need for a national independent QA agency. A fully autonomous assessment agency is widely seen among many participants as the most significant component in ensuring QA. Policy-makers saw the need to build such an agency while considering established international agencies. However, the matter has been always depending on the existing legal system in the country within the hierarchy of norms and traditional aspects of the Lebanese society.

The findings presented in this chapter will be discussed further in relation to good practices and the established literature in the next chapter.

Chapter 6 - Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine the findings of the quality factors in regards to QA in the Lebanese HE context and will link those findings to the established literature in chapter three. The thematic representation of the findings will continue in this chapter in the context of linking those findings to the established literature and good practices.

The six themes established in chapter five will be portrayed in the same order in this chapter. The aim, here, is to establish a discussion in connection to the data collected from the completed interviews with participants- from the Lebanese MEHE and the three HEIs- and the established literature review.

6.2 Theme 1: The Purpose, Role, Scope and General Operating Characteristics of QA in HEIs

In a general view, quality and QA in HE are emphasised by the interviewees in relation to the academic staff, teaching and learning, research, curricula, and stakeholders. The interviewees highlighted the need to have the appropriate and necessary standards to achieve quality in HE; those standards are reflected in several factors: excellence in teaching, sound academic research, regular curriculum updates, feedback from stakeholders, student-centred education, among others. According to the World Conference on HE, quality in HE is a multi-dimensional principle that includes in its functions teaching, academic programmes, supervisions, scholarships, research, staff, buildings, faculties and equipment to serve the academic environment and communities (UNESCO, 1998). It has been apparent during the interviews that some of the above-mentioned functions of quality are available at some HEIs more evidently than at others. For example, regular curriculum and programme updates are apparent at both AUB and AUL. The scope of quality and QA varied across the three HEIs. While AUB's quality and QA scope is more extensive, AUL's primarily focus is on teaching and learning. The scope of quality at the LU was somehow blurred during the interviews with LU's key staff.

Quality and QA in HE was elaborated on by all involved participants in aim of explaining the main points that are necessary to have a high quality of education; interviewees delved into several aspects that influence and are influenced by quality in HEIs, such as HEIs' stakeholders. In this context, Barnett discussed how QA in HE should aim to satisfy the students, the parents, the employers, the educational sector as well as the public sector and ultimately the whole society (Barnett, 1992).

In this context, many respondents, across the three categories, linked quality in HE to meeting the expectations and prospects of HEIs' beneficiaries, such as students or employers. For example, interviewed students anticipated quality education in relation to its applicability in the job market; in other words, they linked education and knowledge gained in HEIs to employability. The concept of 'fitness for purpose', identified by Harvey and Green (1993) and several others, elaborates on quality in relation to satisfying stakeholder needs or expectations (Harvey and Green, 1993). Also, Garvin (1983) elaborated on this concept when he introduced the five approaches in connection to quality in HE, particularly the fifth approach: the user-based approach (Garvin, 1983). Many respondents expressed the importance of attaining the anticipations or expectations of various stakeholders, like students, parents or employers, as a core-driving factor of the QA process. However, the extent of stakeholder involvement in QA processes varied across the three studied HEIs. Both AUB and AUL are acquiring input from several stakeholders, most evidently from students, in aim of establishing positive change. However, the LU is barely acquiring feedback from its stakeholders. Therefore, it is apparent, based on the perceptions of the three categories of respondents, that the quality target to be reached in Lebanon is in relation to Garvin's user-based approach to quality-where quality is fit to the expectation of stakeholders.

Many participants, whether policy-makers or academics, viewed QA in HE as a complete and continuous cycle that can be achieved through collecting inputs or feedback from all stakeholders, processing the inputs and finally producing quality outcomes or quality education; they explained that any QA mechanism or system implemented at HEIs must be part of a cycle that it continuously monitored and assessed, and stakeholder input is a crucial part of this complete cycle. They expressed the view that any QA process should be regarded as a connected chain that forms a complete cycle or loop. This perceived concept is very similar to the QA model developed by Csizmadia in 2006. The QA model

was based on the input-throughput-output concept in the HE field. The input level includes factors such as customer requirements, government regulations and resources, and employers' expectations. The throughput level includes the academic operations and governance. Finally, the output level refers to the stakeholder satisfaction, e.g. the student satisfaction with the service or the market satisfaction with graduates skills and capabilities (Csizmadia, 2006). Moreover, as identified by Harvey (2002), when emphasis is on internal processes, stakeholder feedback needs to be cyclic (Harvey, 2002). Cyclic processes were highly apparent at AUB where one respondent elaborated on the cyclic assessments done by AUB's assessment unit to all departments. In other instances, respondents from AUB and AUL identified regular assessments of curricula, syllabi, learning outcomes, among others. The aim of such assessments is to transform internal weaknesses into strengths.

Both policy-makers stressed the importance of having a clear mission and vision when implementing QA at any HEI in Lebanon; they believe that the path to achieve quality in HEIs starts with the formation of a clear, attainable mission and vision. This notion has also been confirmed by a number of interviewed academic staff, whether at AUB, AUL or the LU. Yet, the extent to which the QA processes initiated across those HEIs are effective in implementing their stated mission and vision was not apparent. In 1997, Boyle and Bowden linked QA to six main factors: clear vision, mission and objectives, effective leadership, effective human resource management, customer-focused orientation, continuing improvement and a well-defined structure (Boyle and Bowden, 1997). To further elaborate, all six factors mentioned by Boyle and Bowden have been specifically identified by the majority of the interviewed participants in aim of ultimately establishing a comprehensive QA system in Lebanese HEIs. Achievement of quality standards in aim of achieving those factors varied across the three HEIs.

Finally, most interviewees, especially policy-makers, hinted at the ultimate establishment of a quality culture across Lebanese HEIs. They identified that QA is achieved when a quality culture exists; thus, they linked the lack of 'quality culture' to HEIs' lack of complete engagement in QA processes. In this regards, Barnett linked QA to the planning process which involves everyone, all internal stakeholders, in the organisation and which aims to develop a culture of quality enhancement within every department of the organisation (Barnett, 1992). Therefore, it is apparent that many Lebanese HEIs have not

yet attained a quality culture. The extensive involvement of all HE stakeholders is not apparent across the three HEIs in this study. Plus, not all HEIs have comprehensive internal systems to manage quality; such a culture seeks continuous internal improvement without the need for external supervision- a notion distant from the current Lebanese HE setting.

6.3 Theme 2: Internal QA Mechanisms in HEIs

Both policy-makers and most of the academic staff interviewed from AUB, AUL and LU viewed QA as a long-term process that needs to be constantly monitored via means of quality audit. The collected primary data suggests the important role of internal quality audit in efficient implementation of QA measures and thus the development or maintenance of a quality culture in a HEI. Barnett regards quality culture as the capacity of a HEI to develop QA as a continuing long-term process; such a process should be maintained by a quality audit (Barnett, 1992). In this context, Billing (2004) and Brennan (2018) consider self-evaluation or self-assessment in the context of HE as one of the most vital components of any QA model (Billing, 2004, Brennan, 2018). The importance of self-evaluation was expressed by all interviewed policy-makers and academics throughout the three universities. Participants believe that self-assessment is the very first step in any QA process. Moreover, it sets ground for any external accreditation/evaluation. It also helps HEIs identify their strengths and weaknesses and set action plans accordingly. Yet, it is apparent from the interviews that there is no clear system for self-assessments in Lebanese HEIs. The implementation of cyclical and regular self-assessment mechanisms was more evident at AUB at both institutional and faculty levels and across all units (*an assessment unit was created at AUB for this purpose*). AUL has implemented regular self-assessments at its institutional level and at some faculty levels (e.g. at the Faculty of Engineering in aim for an international programme level accreditation). Evidence for self-assessments is minor in the LU (*although it has acquired an institutional accreditation from France, it appears that self-assessments at LU are not regular*). It has been evident during the interviewees that internal standards for self-assessments in Lebanese HEIs are usually benchmarked with international standards in aim for international accreditations.

All interviewed participants, across the three HEIs, elaborated on the internal QA mechanisms implemented at their HEI. Some considered the important role of setting performance indicators and many elaborated on the use of surveys (stakeholders' surveys). According to Harman (1998), there are many approaches adopted for QA assessments, yet most HEIs use mainly a limited number of different methodologies: self-evaluation or self-studies, peer-review involving the use of panels of experts, the use of performance indicators and relevant statistical data, and surveys of key stakeholder groups (Harman, 1998). Many HEIs in Lebanon use three of the four QA mechanisms mentioned by Harman. The use of peer-reviews is not common among Lebanese HEIs. To further elaborate, one of the interviewed policy-makers mentioned several reasons for the lack of such mechanism among Lebanese HEIs; the most important reason behind the lack of peer-reviews is what the policy-maker named as "*trust issues*". In Lebanese HEIs, there is a norm where one instructor can teach simultaneously in several HEIs; thus, issues of conflict of interests arise in the HE sector. Hence, the notion of external experts evaluating HEIs is not accepted among HEIs in Lebanon. In this context, according to Phillips and Kinser, peer-reviews can assume some sort of bias, as peer-reviewers from HEIs can be involved in a conflict of interest when evaluating other institutions (Phillips and Kinser, 2018); this explanation is very relevant to the Lebanese HE arena.

The essence of quality and QA in HE is evident in the delivered educational material itself. In this context, almost all interviewed students stressed the necessity to regularly update the curricula or programmes and the teaching and learning practices to align with the dynamic market needs. Hence, they believe that HEIs should be involved in market-driven research. Students were continuously concerned with the need to increase the practical aspects of programmes and the necessity to develop hands-on skills useful in their field of study. Therefore, interviewees explained that QA mechanisms used by HEIs, such as the use of PIs (including second-order statistics- e.g. measured through surveys, or judgment calls (Ewell, 1999)), need to be market-oriented. Although both AUB and AUL have shown signs of improvements in relation to the QA mechanisms implemented, yet students across all three HEIs believe that universities need to do more in terms of aligning their education to the job market needs. In this context, according to Harvey and Williams (2010), De La Harpe et al. (2000) recommended that HEIs should change the way their curriculum is delivered in order to meet the employers' expectation and prepare

graduates who are more 'fit for purpose', a notion that should involve extensive staff development and constant monitoring (Harvey and Williams, 2010, De La Harpe et al., 2000). As explained in the prior theme, Lebanese HEIs have not reached such a state; feedback from employers is not extensively taken across the three HEIs (although the degree of attainment of such feedback varies across the HEIs).

In this context, the interviewees elaborated on the effectiveness of the QA mechanisms implemented at their HEIs in terms of their relevancy to the current context of education and to the enhancement of the teaching and learning experience. The extent to which those implemented mechanisms are relevant and aligned with the best practices was questioned by some interviewees. The two interviewed policy-makers mentioned that most of the HEIs in Lebanon have implemented some internal QA assessment mechanisms, yet they are not enough and are not based on high standards of quality. In addition, some students criticised the lack of effectiveness of some QA mechanisms. A few expressed how the use of surveys needs an update to reflect their full, accurate feedback; they believe that HEIs cannot solely rely on surveys to attain students' feedback because results of those surveys might be biased. Some believe that HEIs are not truly considering the feedback attained from those surveys, which questions the effectiveness of such QA mechanism. Students from the LU expressed how the 'Instructor Evaluation' survey has been terminated and how some instructors chose to do the survey orally and in-class with the presence of the instructor him/herself. This method raised concerns among students questioning the effectiveness of such method and the level of transparency it can achieve. Coates (2005) discusses good practices in relation to conducting student surveys and collecting data from students for the purpose of QA and quality enhancement. Coates explained that the US National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) groups the good practices indicative of engagement into five benchmarks where HEIs should use those benchmarks to measure various phenomena related to the student experience in the HEI when conducting surveys (Coates, 2005). Coates, however, neither elaborated on the level of transparency associated with acquiring student feedback through surveys nor discussed how results of those surveys need to be linked to action. As explained by Harvey (2002), the success of any evaluation is linked to continuous follow-ups while attaining constant feedback that is linked to action; thus, student feedback needs to be cyclic and linked to action and empowerment (Harvey, 2002). Hence, some Lebanese HEIs' use of surveys, particularly student

surveys, does not always follow best practices, especially in relation to the purpose of those surveys and their contribution to actual change.

As explained, effective QA mechanisms result in actionable change. In this regard, it was evident that due to feedback taken from AUB's stakeholders, both internal and external, AUB established the Centre for Teaching and Learning, which was developed to make sure all instructors acquire the latest methodology on how to teach and assess. On the other hand, AUL has established a similar initiative (LCPI), yet its establishment was not based on feedback acquired from stakeholders but based on benchmarking with best practices.

6.4 Theme 3: The Development of a Student-Centred Learning Culture

The concept of student-centred learning was evident in the collected data. Many interviewees elaborated on the benefits and the need to ultimately encompass a student-centred culture at Lebanese HEIs. Both interviewed university presidents stressed the importance of moving into a student-centred learning culture. They emphasised how teaching and learning methods are changing and how student empowerment is becoming a vital element in student success especially after graduation when the student gives positive contribution to the society. Thus, they believe that adopting a student-centred culture is necessary. In addition, many interviewed academic staff believe that student engagement in the teaching and learning process is necessary to bring out the best in their students; they believe that student engagement makes students better learners, empowers them and enriches their learning experience. Harvey and Knight (1996) established the model of transformative learning, a model based on students' empowerment and the development of a culture of continuing improvement. This model denies the idea of education as a service and stresses the fact that quality in HE is linked to student transformation and in consequence is a continuing process culminating in making the student more confident. The fourth method of Harvey's and Knight model, developing the students' critical abilities, is regarded as the most effective, and it prepares the students not only for their educational journey but also for their life experience and contribution to the society (Harvey and Knight, 1996). However, it was apparent from the interviews that a student-centred culture has not been fully achieved Lebanon.

Interviewed students reflected on quality in HE in terms of their overall involvement in HE functions, such as their involvement in teaching and learning practices. Many students linked quality in HE to the enhancement of their learning experience. Thus, they highlighted the role of qualified instructors and the use of innovative technological teaching methods in relation to students' involvement in their learning processes- of what some students referred to as "active-learning". In their book entitled '*Emblems of Quality in Higher Education*', Haworth and Conrad (1997) linked quality in HE to enriching the student learning experience through strong interaction between students and academic administrators. This is only possible if students are assigned serious tasks and in consequence are strongly involved in the teaching process (Haworth and Conrad, 1997).

In this context, interviewed students believe that they should be more actively engaged in most aspects of the institution, especially in QA practices, such as being part of all major committees and taking a role in decision making. Carmichael, Palermo, Reeve and Vallenge (2001) claim that the perspective of students must be placed at the core of quality in all educational areas because students are an integral element of any QA process (Carmichael et al., 2001). In addition, according to Stukalina (2014), evaluation of the academic programmes by the students is an important assessment tool utilised for encouraging quality enhancement in HEIs (Stukalina, 2014).

However, some interviewed academic staff raised concerns regarding the establishment of a student-centred learning culture in view of the current ethical context in Lebanon and the region; they believe that the Lebanese culture is not yet ready for such a notion. Many interviewed academic staff expressed that reaching a student-centred learning culture should start with students' upbringing, and trying to enforce this culture in HEIs in Lebanon will doom ineffective. One instructor gave the example of cheating or plagiarising in examinations and explained that student-centred learning might increase such unethical acts. Probably, it is wise to mention here that moving to a student-centred approach to student assessment (as opposed to traditional assessment) can possibly mitigate such concerns. Many of the literature in relation to student empowerment and student engagement (e.g. Harvey and Knight (1996); Carmichael et al. (2001); Stukalina, (2014)) failed to elaborate on possible ways to mitigate ethical barriers, which might hinder the development of student-centred learning culture.

As mentioned by several interviewed academic staff and students, the notion of student empowerment remains unaccepted by many instructors in Lebanon, and they prefer to use the classic one-way communication in their course delivery. This is a rather dated approach to teaching that many academics in the field of education found to be ineffective on several levels. Butler has found through her studies on teaching methods done at Oxford University that the perceived effectiveness of distinct teaching methods changes across the different used methods of teaching. The students perceived the didactic, traditional lecture as the least effective method; however, by engaging the students more actively in the teaching processes, the perceived effectiveness of this second teaching method was greatly enhanced; the second method was regarded as more effective (Butler, 1992). A similar conclusion was reached by Shreeve (2008) who explained that when the experiential learning method is delivered using a student-centred approach it has high advantages in effectively preparing students into becoming lifelong learners (Shreeve, 2008).

6.5 Theme 4: The Role of International Borrowing and Accreditation

Both interviewed policy-makers discussed the importance of the adoption of QA best practices and standards into Lebanese HEIs. In aim of establishing a national QA system, both interviewed policy-makers discussed the adoption and involvement of the Lebanese HE system in the Bologna process. They believe that even though Lebanon is not a signatory country of the Bologna Accord, several HEIs have benchmarked with Bologna principles and practices in aim of attaining certain international accreditations. Yet, no Bologna practices are implemented, in the formal sense, at the national level. Neave (2005) and Keeling (2006) have placed the role of the Bologna process on a global scale. They believe that the Bologna process cannot be viewed only in its European settings and should be seen from its broader policy and its continuity at a global level (Neave, 2005, Keeling, 2006).

In this context, Phillips and Ochs (2004) and Steiner-Khamsi (2014) discussed the introduction of borrowed practices into the domestic setting- that is regarded as a search for practices and policies outside one's country, or what some authors name as 'policy borrowing' (Phillips and Ochs, 2004, Steiner-Khamsi, 2012). In this regard, Phillips and Ochs grouped policy borrowing into four stages: the cross-national attraction stage, the

decision stage, the implementation stage and the internalisation stage. As deduced from the interviews with the policy-makers, it is apparent that Lebanon has recognised only the first stage, 'cross-national attraction', of Phillips and Ochs' four stages model in regards to the Bologna process. Moving into the other stages appears to be difficult in Lebanon, given that the MEHE has failed to realise most of the national QA initiatives. Thus, moving into the 'decision' stage in terms of Phillips and Ochs' model is highly doubtful in the current Lebanese HE setup.

Policy-makers' attraction to the Bologna process is based on the notion that the HE system in Lebanon is highly diversified, thus resembling the diversity in the European HE setting. Given the fact that the Bologna process' initial purpose aimed at integrating university standards across Eastern and Western Europe, introducing the Bologna practices into the Lebanese HE setting seems attractive. Moreover, Lebanon's educational system is highly influenced by the European, particularly the French, model due to the fact that Lebanon was previously colonised by France. However, the policy-makers expressed that the aim of these borrowed practices is to initiate a national QA reform process in terms of meeting international standards. It is rather wise to mention that it is apparent that the purpose behind being part of the Bologna process in Lebanon is to find alternative solutions for the incapability of establishing a HE national framework. The HE system in Lebanon is prone to political interference, sectarianism and administrative corruption; therefore, if Bologna process were to be borrowed and implemented at the national level in the current HE setup, these obstacles may have an enormous impact on the local response to meet and efficiently implement the borrowed practices and principles of the Bologna process. In this context, according to Steiner-Khamsi (2014), learning from comparison does not automatically indicate that practices and policies could be transferred from a context to another. She further elaborates that several *comparativists* including Michael Sadler, Robert Cowen and Brian Holmes warned against using comparison to move educational reform from one setting (*country*) to another; also, they warned against studying education out of context. Steiner-Khamsi also used the octopus as a metaphor to explain cross-national policy attraction, resonance and reception. She explained how policy-makers grasp the arm of the octopus that is most similar to their specific policy, and she claims that policy borrowing is not wholesale but selective and reflects the context-specific causes for receptiveness (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014). Steiner-Khamsi's explanation is very relevant to the Lebanese HE setting;

however, based on Steiner-Khamsi's rationalisation, Lebanese policy-makers need to be selective on which quality standards of the Bologna process are relevant to Lebanon, given its socio-cultural context.

The National Union of Students of Europe has considered international accreditation as the cornerstone of the assessment process at a given period of time with reference to specific academic services, institutions or courses. This evaluation is necessary to recognise that the HEIs meet the given standards of QA (ESIB, 2001). In this context, several interviewed academic staff mentioned that if a HEI in Lebanon obtained an international accreditation for any of its programmes, this external assessment would certainly satisfy HE policy-makers in Lebanon. In addition, the interviewed policy-makers stated that HEIs are encouraged to acquire international accreditations in light of the current lack of a national QA framework; however, it is apparent that there is no clear guideline on the acceptable international accreditation agency standard, as mentioned by some academic staff interviewees.

The role of international accreditation has been considered by both interviewed policy-makers as a tool to better judge Lebanese HEIs, particularly with the absence of a Lebanese QA agency. Moreover, they believe that Lebanese HEIs should benchmark against best practices and standards to ensure quality education, and HEIs in Lebanon can further seek to obtain international accreditations in order to establish a culture of quality. Betts et al. (2009) consider accreditation as the basic instrument of external QA review in colleges and universities. They consider that accreditation as an instrument of self-review aims to improve the capacity and resources of HEIs (Betts et al., 2009). It is a catalyst for creating an on-going institutional conversation about the management of quality (Brennan, 1997, Harvey, 2002); moreover, accreditation is considered as a powerful force that is becoming an indicator of the market value of HEIs (Betts et al., 2009). In this context, many of the interviewed participants viewed international accreditation as an important tool for HEIs to gain prestige and market value. To further explain, of the three HEIs, AUB was the only university to acquire top-tier international accreditations on several levels (institutional and faculty levels), which allowed AUB to be ranked highly among universities worldwide; for instance, in year 2020 QA World University Rankings has a 244th overall worldwide ranking for AUB, and in the same year the Times Higher Education World University Rankings placed AUB as the 351st

university worldwide. While the 2020 QA Arab Region University Rankings report showed AUB as the 2nd overall best university in the Arab world (AUB, 2020).

Since it acts as a solid guideline for all internal processes, gaining an international accreditation helped in providing better quality education to students as some participants confirmed. The LU gained institutional evaluation and accreditation by 'The Higher Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education' (HCÉRES), an independent administrative accreditation authority in France. The evaluation process was sponsored by the French Embassy in Lebanon and was completed in year 2018. It is interesting to mention, however, that the LU did not obtain any accreditation on the faculty level and has terminated all the evaluation processes as of year 2019 due to a decision made by the president of the university- a decision that was guided by political influence, as confirmed by a number of interviewees at the university. It is evident, thus, that the LU has achieved a 'one-time' institutional evaluation/accreditation that was not part of a continuous improvement cycle. Harvey (2002) discussed that the interaction between internal and external QA is necessary to guarantee that results of external evaluations are not merely short-term enhancements but lead to on-going improvements (Harvey, 2002). AUL has obtained several faculty level international accreditations such as the "Commission des Titres d'Ingénieur" (CTI) accreditation from France at the level of the Faculty of Sciences and Fine Arts, and has benchmarked against standards adopted at the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) in its Faculty of Engineering. AUL has not yet obtained any institutional level international accreditation; however, AUL has developed an internal self-assessment process at the institutional level which was benchmarked against a mix of best practices in Europe, as explained by the director of QA and institutional effectiveness at the university.

Some participants believe that international accreditation has its drawbacks in the Lebanese HE sector. Although AUB has acquired an international accreditation on the university level (Middle States) and on various faculty levels, some faculty members found that in order to gain the international accreditation, they had to modify their curriculum in a way that does not meet the Lebanese market demands. In another perspective, being a private university where tuition fees is minimal and is the only source of income, AUL finds it very challenging to obtain top-tier international accreditations due to the high financial requirements that come with the accreditation.

Increasing tuition fees for this type of private universities means neglecting a major portion of the HE student market. Thus, a balance must be met in such scenarios. To further explain, AUB's relatively high tuition fees and private donations allowed it to acquire world-class accreditations. Very importantly, considering the specificity of the Lebanese nature and culture and unique market needs, some interviewed academic staff questioned the role of international accreditations. In his article "*Accreditation of HE in Europe- Moving Towards the US model?*", Stensaker discussed several established criticisms on accreditations. He referred to Ewell (2008), Harvey and Mason (1995), Harvey (2004), Prøitz, Stensaker and Harvey (2004) and Wolff (2005) who suggested that accreditation is neither value adding nor cost effective and utilises criteria which overlook the educational context while failing to ensure public accountability. In this regards, they suggest that accreditations do not take into consideration the current context a HEI is operating in (Stensaker, 2011, Ewell, 2008, Harvey et al., 1995, Harvey, 2004b, Prøitz et al., 2004, Wolff, 2005). Given the socio-cultural context of Lebanon, Lebanon is receptive to many of the issues mentioned by Stensaker. Hence, policy-makers cannot simply rely on international accreditation initiatives taken at institutional levels to improve quality in the Lebanese HE system.

6.6 Theme 5: Barriers to the Effective Development of a QA System in Lebanese HEIs

A number of interviewees elaborated on the barriers to the effective development of a QA system in Lebanese HEIs. Among these barriers are political interference, the internal organisational cultural of individual HEIs, financial constraints, HR limitations, lack of laws and regulations, among others. Several scholars in the established literature elaborated on some of these barriers and others elaborated on ways to mitigate such barriers.

A crucial issue facing QA implementation in HEIs in Lebanon is corruption and lack of an ethical value system on a national level, in addition to sectarian and political interventions in internal affairs of different HEIs. Interviewees, particularly the policy-makers and several academic staff, believe that the implementation of any QA system in Lebanon should take into account and have high loads on the ethical notions. Furthermore, it was expressed by almost all interviewees that significant amount of damage on all

aspects of the country - HE being one of them - is caused by political intervention. According to interviewees, the interference of politicians and attempts to monopolise various sectors in the country have been major obstacles in creating a national QA agency that should be characterised by its independence, autonomy and ability to monitor HEIs with the use of laws and regulations. Interestingly, the change of cultural context can be drawn here when comparing the findings of this study to the criticism of Hoecht (2006) of the British Quality Assurance Agency with respect to UK HEIs. He believes that the preservation of individual autonomy is a major key factor for total quality management. He states that a controlled-based quality model can weaken the inherent motivation of the individuals who deliver quality. Moreover, he believes that 'trust' can monitor and create credibility and common commitment between the 'trustors' and the 'trustees', thus creating a mutual learning process for long-term improvement (Hoecht, 2006). James Williams and Lee Harvey (2015) stated that 'lack of trust' is one of the major downsides to QA in HE, as QA can sometimes cause the formation of a culture of 'de-professionalising' of academic staff in HEIs (Williams and Harvey, 2015). Considering the ethical issues in Lebanon and the political intervention, a QA system based on 'support' and 'trust' might be prone to further manipulations.

In this aspect, a participant in the LU reflected on how political influence has resulted in making a vast number of academic and administrative staff "off-limits", an issue that resulted in the cancellation of the whole assessment process. In the book: *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, Brennan (2001) identified the work of Darvas (1999) who believes that HE should be liberated from any governmental interference, which can cause some HEIs to lose their legitimacy, effectiveness and innovation (Darvas, 1999, Brennan, 2001). Such a notion is highly relevant to the current Lebanese HE context, both on the institutional and national levels.

Many participants also mentioned that the lack of law or governmental regulations and the limited collaboration between stakeholders and the government affects QA in HE negatively. For example, an interviewed academic staff participant at AUB believes that the presence of a national QA law or framework will control means of competition among HEIs in Lebanon; the availability of QA laws and regulations will mitigate downsides due to high competition among HEIs in Lebanon. Brennan and Williams (1998) supported such a notion when they explained that the availability of a national level

assessment and/or accreditation can have a positive impact on controlling competition between HEIs (Brennan and Williams, 1998, Brennan, 2001).

Many interviewees, particularly academic staff, mentioned that financial constraints act as major obstacles when trying to accomplish QA. The critical economic situation of Lebanon has been reflected in the HE sector. AUL, for instance, is no different from this picture, especially that private universities do not get subsidies from the government. Moreover, the tuition fee of AUL is oriented towards low-to-medium income families (the bulk of the student market share) as is the case of many private HEIs in Lebanon; a notion consistent with Garvin's (1983) value-based approach, where quality is a matter of costs and benefits (Garvin, 1983), thus the tendency for some students in Lebanon is to settle for a cheaper university. AUL, however, is aiming for several international accreditations, yet financial constraints are hindering the near realisation to those accreditations. In this connection, Newton (2002a) discusses various barriers for effective quality management. Among the explored barriers are financial constraints that he believes can be easily regarded as the sole reason behind poor quality (Newton, 2002a). To mitigate against possible quality downsides due to financial constraints, Davies (2001) explained that universities should be in constant seek of diversifying their income sources, such as developing new initiatives for the aim of designating faculties and departments as profit centres (Davies, 2001).

The lack of sufficient and qualified human resources, in certain instances due to financial constraints and the critical economic situation in Lebanon, was among one of the barriers explored during the interviews. Moreover, heavy workload of teaching staff was raised as a constraint to effective QA by several interviewed academic staff, claiming that the university should lessen their teaching hours in favour of research and further development on several aspects of the teaching and learning process. In this context, Harvey (1995) states: "*Quality systems are seen as increasing work-loads and administrative burdens on teachers who are already expected to do more*" (p.131) (Harvey, 1995). In another perspective, according to the '*Lessons of Experience*' report by World Bank, in developing countries with financial constraints, the qualification of faculty was inadequate to guarantee quality education where reduced compensation made it challenging to recruit and retain qualified employees. Hence, learning and research

materials weakened, which in turn acted as key obstacles to improvement (El-Khawas, 1998); an explanation closely relevant to the current situation in HE in Lebanon.

The data collected through the interviews with the three HEIs suggests that the unique internal organisational culture of individual HEIs, which can be shaped by external influences, can in certain cases limit a HEI from effectively developing a QA system. The three HEIs seem to be different in their internal cultures and in the factors affecting their contribution to the creation of a quality culture; each targets a specific set of students and each is influenced by a specific set of internal and external factors. While AUB has established a culture of quality among its stakeholders in regards to internal assessment, student engagement, and well-established quality processes, the data suggests that the LU almost lacked this culture. The internal assessment at the LU is barely found at any level especially after the president has cancelled various evaluation tools due to political interventions.

Following is an elaboration on the current cultural state of each of the three studied HEIs- in relation to McNay's model of university cultures and Davies' QA saturation model. Displaying the internal cultural states of each HEI allows for a better understanding of the diversity of quality implementation across HEIs in Lebanon.

In relation to McNay's (1995) model, with loose policy definition and loose control over quality implementation being very apparent at the LU, the 'collegium' model is very dominant at the institution. However, the attainment of such a model in the LU was not based on a managerial choice but based on the fact that change at the LU is very difficult to achieve with all the sectarian and political aspects governing the university. McNay (1995) criticises the 'collegium' model as being subject to personal bias and may only work in small organisations (McNay, 1995). Hence, if the LU, the largest HE organisation in Lebanon (in terms of student market share, geographic distribution, faculties and programmes, etc.), continues its operation under such a model, serious quality concerns might arise. Moreover, QA measures at the LU are rather ad hoc and of less importance; thus, LU has a weak QA conceptual framework and its QA mechanisms are almost absent. Thus, it is very apparent that the current level of QA maturity at the LU is what Davies (1992) defines as quadrant 'A' (Ad hoc/Low priority) (Davies, 1992).

On the other hand, AUL seems to be in the initial to middle stages of quality culture development, where it is aiming for a complete quality culture but is struggling with financial and budget constraints. AUL has recently entered a state of reform realising the need to create a complete quality culture and acquire international accreditations; therefore, its culture resembles to a certain extent McNay's 'corporation model'- with tight policy definition and tight control over quality implementation. Moreover, students at AUL are viewed as customers and many units and processes are evaluated by the use of performance indicators as confirmed by most of AUL's interviewees. Since AUL's management seems to have set high importance on QA reform, different departments/faculties at AUL have implemented several QA initiatives- evident at certain departments/faculties more than at others. Thus, it is apparent that the current level of QA maturity at AUL resembles, to a certain extent, Davies' (1992) quadrant 'C' (Ad hoc/High priority) in his QA saturation model.

In relation to McNay's (1995) model, AUB tends to be moving into a client-oriented university, where concerns of students are taken seriously; feedback collected from students is linked to action. Moreover, at many instances, AUB's students are seen as partners; this was uncovered by a key interviewee at AUB where she explained that students are represented in the university's governance and strategic committees (e.g. AUB's budget committee). Thus, students at AUB are playing a role in the decision-making process. Although it is not entirely evident in all departments of the university, it seems that AUB is in its initial stages of moving into an 'enterprise' culture- as defined by McNay (1995). There is a high level of systemisation, and fairly high importance is given to QA practices and their implementation at AUB. With all those features of QA evident at AUB, it is safe to say that the current saturation level of QA corresponds to quadrant 'D' (Systematic/High priority) of Davies' (1992) model.

6.7 Theme 6: The Need for, and Possible Operating Characteristics of a National QA Agency

The majority of the interviewees agreed upon the need for an independent QA body in Lebanon. As the primary data suggested, having a national QA agency with a national QA framework in Lebanon will act as the basis for external assessment and as a solid guideline to the internal QA processes implemented at Lebanese HEIs. Hence, there

seems to be a convergence among the interviewees towards the need for a national agency that will ensure the attainment of national standards and quality culture among all HEIs in Lebanon. Trow (1994) has identified two types of external assessments in his typology for academic review. Type III of his model is external supportive, while type IV is external evaluative (Trow, 1994). Although type III can help HEIs disseminate good practices in terms of QA free from constraints of guild and loyalties among HEIs, yet there is a high need in Lebanon to what Brennan (2001) refers to as redistribution of power in terms of control and monitoring of QA (Brennan, 2001). The aim here, as stated by many interviewees, is to move the control from the MEHE, which is controlled by the state and thus subject to political interference, to an independent agency that is fully autonomous, by means of law and regulation, from any political interference. Hence, type IV, external evaluative, seems to be the appropriate direction in which a national QA agency should base its review in the Lebanese HE system.

Also, many interviewees believe that a national QA agency should exist in Lebanon to narrow the quality gap between different Lebanese HEIs and to regulate competition, a notion confirmed by Brennan and Williams (1998). In addition, many interviewed staff suggested that such an agency should audit and control the quality of HEIs to assess whether or not they are ultimately producing quality education. One interviewed policy-maker suggested that the national QA agency should report its findings to the Council of HE (which hosts the Minister of Education and HE as its president), yet such a scheme allows for possible political interventions- a notion expressed by several interviewed staff. In this context, the literature shows that 'independence' is the most desirable feature of any QA agency, freeing it from political interventions and avoiding conflicts of interest (UNESCO, 2014)- a notion closely relevant to the Lebanese HE context.

Both interviewed policy-makers and many interviewed academic staff highlighted the needed characteristics of a proposed national QA agency; they believe that the success of the agency lies within the actual realisation of those characteristics. The most significant characteristic portrayed in the interviews is that the agency must be independent with a high level of autonomy. Douglas et al. (2006) were elaborate concerning such factors. They explained that QA frameworks are structured by a governmental law and set of regulations, whereas external agencies retain their independence from the government. The authors express that despite the fact that QA

models in most countries are organised and structured along governmental regulations, there should be a certain degree of autonomy. Hence, the regulations should focus on supporting and advising the QA frameworks but not controlling them (Douglas et al., 2006).

Several interviewees suggested that a national QA agency in Lebanon should take into account diversity on all levels: various educational systems in Lebanon, different cultural states of individual HEIs in relation to quality, HEIs' tuition fees range, social level diversity, sectarian nature of Lebanon, various political powers and language diversity- all within the Lebanese context. In regards to such diversity, a study done by Frazer on 38 European countries in connection to self-evaluation and national models suggests that a general model for QA in HE appears to be "*variants of a mix of the same functions*" and that commonality represents the origin on national QA models (Frazer, 1997).

Interestingly, some of the interviewed students expressed a need for what they called an "*independent third-party*" organisation to monitor QA mechanisms in their HEIs and to make sure that QA mechanisms are effective in producing high quality of education. Those students believe that some of the implemented mechanisms are not very effective and do not thoroughly take into consideration their feedback and the importance of students' input as part of the continuous improvement process. In this context, the case of Sweden fits what some of the interviewed students deemed appropriate. The Swedish case, whose national QA system prior to year 2013, hosted a National Agency for Higher Education that developed a national QA framework centred on students' interests as a way to guide the priorities of HEIs (Malmqvist and Sadurskis, 2009). Although student's interest are taken into consideration at many Lebanese HEIs, there is no consensus on whether the students' interest should actually guide HEIs- a notion to be considered while drafting a national QA framework for Lebanon.

6.8 Summary

It has already been established that the participants/interviewees gave insightful responses concerning their perceptions of QA in HE. The interviewees' perceptions were presented in this chapter in relation to the established literature. The themes established in the previous chapter have been repeated in this chapter, and the findings were

recognised in relation to the literature and good practices. Below is a summary of the major discussions in each theme.

Theme 1 encompassed a discussion on the purpose, role, scope and general operating characteristics of QA in HEIs. Stakeholders' involvement in the QA process covered a major share of this discussion. The extent of stakeholder involvement varied across the three HEIs. The concept of 'fitness for purpose', identified by Harvey and Green (1993) and several others and Garvin's (1983) user-based approach to quality seem to be the quality target to be reached in Lebanese HE. Moreover, Boyle and Bowden (1997) linked QA in HE to six factors that include encompassing a clear vision and mission, an efficient management, a customer-focused orientation and continuous improvement. These factors were variably elaborated on by many interviewees.

Theme 2 centred on the internal QA mechanisms implemented at HEIs. Both Brennan (2018) and Billing (2004) and many interviewees considered the significant role of self-assessments in the development of quality culture. Yet, the primary data portrays that there is no clear system for self-assessments in Lebanese HE. As the interviews suggest, many HEIs in Lebanon implement the majority of the QA mechanisms presented by Harman (1998) to a certain extent. Several interviewees expressed the lack of effective mechanisms implemented at their HEIs, and they questioned the extent to which those mechanisms are aligned with best practices, specifically referring to the use of surveys. Coates (2005) discussed the importance of the use of surveys especially for collecting data from students.

Theme 3 centred on the development of a student-centred culture at HEIs in Lebanon. Many interviewees explained that student engagement and empowerment are necessary to bring out the best in students. Harvey and Knight's (1996) transformation model that is based on student empowerment links quality in HE to transforming the student and, thus, enhancing his/her learning experience. However, several academic staff interviewees raised concerns on the development of a student-centred learning culture in view of the current ethical setting in Lebanon.

Theme 4 focused on the role of international borrowing and accreditations. It was evident in the discussion that the interviewed policy-makers aimed to develop a national QA

agency based on international standards and best practices, whereby they chose to realise the Bologna process practices, yet Lebanon is currently at the ‘decision’ stage in relation to Phillips and Ochs (2004) model. Moving beyond the decision stage in relation to the adoption of the Bologna process seems currently difficult in Lebanon given the laxity of the government in realising HE initiatives. As established, policy borrowing is not wholesale but selective and reflects the context-specific causes for receptiveness (Steiner-khamsi, 2014). With the lack of national QA standards, HEIs tend to seek international accreditations.

Theme 5 encompassed a discussion on the barriers to the effective development of a QA system in Lebanese HEIs. Interviewees elaborated on political intervention and its drastic effect on QA in HE. Plus, as implied by several interviewees, the internal organisational culture of individual HEIs can limit a HEI from QA activities. This barrier was discussed in relation to McNay’s (1995) model of university cultures and Davies (1992) model of HEIs’ QA saturation. The three HEIs seem to be at different positions in relation to each of those models. Of the three studied HEIs, the LU’s positioning in both models is the least impressive.

Finally, theme 6 is centred on the need for a national QA agency. The majority of the interviewees stressed the necessity of such an agency and elaborated on the characteristics of the proposed agency, particularly independency. Douglas et al. (2006) defended this inherent characteristic of national QA agencies. This aligns with the notion mentioned by several interviewees that a national QA agency should be able to fulfil its role by means of laws and regulations. Given Lebanon’s cultural/political context, Trow’s (1994) type IV, external evaluative, seems to be the appropriate review type to be realised by the national QA agency.

The following chapter will form the conclusion of this study, providing conclusions and recommendations for policy and professional practice both at national and institutional levels.

Chapter 7 - Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

The following chapter will present the conclusions and recommendations of this study. Combining the primary and secondary data, presented at earlier chapters, allows for crafting conclusions and substantive recommendations for policy and professional practice at both institutional and national levels in the Lebanese QA HE setting.

This chapter is divided into five sections. Section two discusses the contribution of this study to the existing knowledge; section three depicts the conceptual model of the study. Section four is oriented towards giving conclusions and recommendations derived from where the existing practice has gaps compared with international benchmarks of good practice (as indicated by the literature), while taking into consideration the specificity of the HE system in Lebanon. The final section, section five, focuses on the limitation of this study and the need for further research.

7.2 Contribution to Existing Knowledge

Patterns of QA models in HE have not been uniform in all countries. The performance of any QA model depends on the interaction of a set of factors. Theoretical analysis of QA approaches, practices and issues in most countries has traditionally emphasised the structure, performance and outcome of HE system that have attracted the attention of scholars and researchers. However, few researchers have considered the importance of the existence of specific cultural conditions of countries, such as political issues, ethical matters and the economic condition, especially in relation to quality culture creation and QA borrowing models in HE. This study, therefore, is theoretically significant since it tackles one of the developing countries' contexts. In other words, it contributes to bridging the gap existing in the current body of knowledge on how academic institutions in developing countries manage to set and implement QA mechanisms at both national and university levels. It sets out a theoretical reference framework for developing a QA system which takes into consideration specific characteristics inherent to the developing countries - Lebanon specifically - and which contributes to implementing a QA culture in HEIs. The practical contribution is also as important since this study will provide valuable and timely information on the Lebanese HE settings and will serve as a good

practical example to stakeholders in similar contexts. Above all, this study grants the Lebanese government, policy-makers and strategists important data that will contribute to the improvement of the Lebanese HE system and to the implementation of a stable and solid QA model for quality enhancement in Lebanon. This study has, therefore, investigated characteristics and structure of HE system in Lebanon in connection to the various QA factors to illustrate the dynamics of QA model implementation and the measures that should be taken to create a HE QA model in Lebanon.

Despite the multiple conclusions that earlier studies have produced about the importance of QA in HE development, a notable feature of the present study is that it views the HE system in Lebanon within its institutional and national frameworks and its international setting in relation to collective educational reform and formation. A major contribution of this study resides in the fact that it is the first attempt to approach the topic while drawing upon students' interest and the perceptions and perspectives of numerous policy-makers, academic staff and key actors in the Lebanese QA HE context. To further elaborate, to my knowledge, no previous study exists in Lebanon in relation to QA in HE that has taken the students' perspectives into account. Hence, such a combination (students, policy-makers, academic staff and key HE personnel) of perspectives is certainly unique in the Lebanese HE QA research context. This was done by examining the experience of three selected Lebanese HEIs. This can provide fresh insights about different attempts of QA implementation in HE. Hopefully, this work will help to broaden current knowledge on QA implementation in developing countries. Exploring the Lebanese experience in struggling for the creation of an appropriate QA model can provide a useful theoretical and empirical context that considers the importance of HEIs in enhancing education quality.

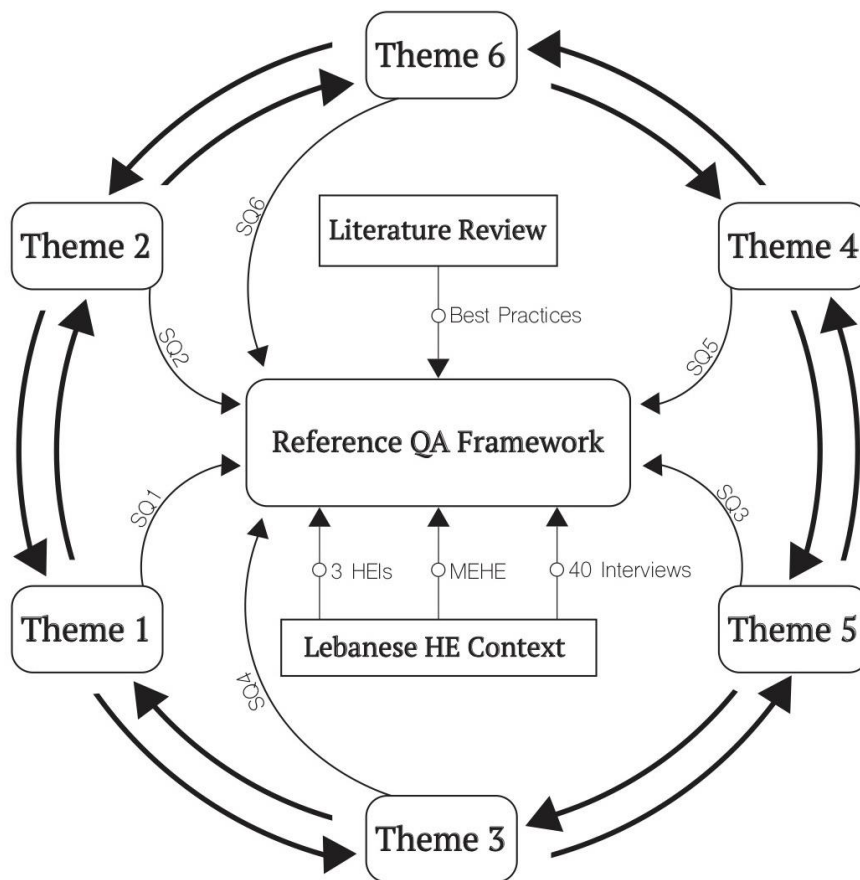
The aim of this study is to deliver knowledge on the ability of QA practices to create linkages between the country of a growing HE system and the domestic culture it belongs to and the world. This line of research asks the question: How should the QA system and its associated process be developed in Lebanese HE in light of the existing experience; drawing on borrowing from international models and evident good practice in ways appropriate to the unique setting and cultural circumstances? The attraction of this line of research is in its contribution to understanding the conjunction between the contemporary HE systems' formation and national culture and domestic circumstances.

In this domain, this study has stressed the role played by sectarian and political factors and capital shortages that hinder sustainable QA development in developing countries, particularly in Lebanon. From an institutional perspective, the system’s drawbacks manifest themselves in a number of factors. They are apparent in the weakness of practical strategy in adopting a new appropriate model to enhance QA processes in Lebanon. The lack of a national QA model based on international standards is one of the most considerable reasons behind the drawbacks of the HE system in Lebanon.

7.3 Conceptual Model

Figure 7.1 below represents the conceptual model of this study- drawing it upon the six themes that emerged from the primary and secondary data. At the centre of this model is the proposed reference QA framework- the product of this study.

Figure 7.1 Conceptual Model



It is evident from Figure 7.1 that the six themes are highly interrelated and provide the basis to answering the sub-research questions of this study. Theme 1, *The Purpose, Role, Scope and General Operating Characteristics of QA in HEIs*, plays the major role in answering SQ1 of this study: *what are, and should be the purpose, role, scope and general operating characteristics of QA?* Theme 2, *Internal QA Mechanisms in HEIs*, which is directly related to Theme 1 and SQ1, constitutes valuable information for answering SQ2: *what are, and should be the internal QA mechanisms in universities?* Theme 3, *The Development of a Student-Centred Learning Culture*, helps to answer SQ4 of this research: *what are the constituent elements in a QA regime based on a student-centred learning culture, and how may these be evolved in this setting?* Theme 4, *The Role of International Borrowing and Accreditation*, is directly connected with Theme 5 and Theme 6 and plays a major role in answering SQ5: *what are the issues involved in adopting/borrowing/adapting and effectively implementing models of QA derived from other international settings?* Theme 5, *Barriers to the Effective Development of a QA System in Lebanese HEIs*, helps in answering SQ3: *what are the principal barriers and issues relating to the adoption and implementation of QA mechanisms in universities?* Finally, Theme 6, *The Need for and Possible Operating Characteristics of a National QA Agency*, helps in answering SQ6 of this study: *why and how have national QA agencies evolved, and what should be the role, positioning and operating characteristics of such an agency in Lebanon?* Although each theme plays a key role in answering individual sub-questions, themes are highly interrelated, as shown in Figure 7.1. For example, although answers to sub-question five are mainly portrayed in theme four, further elaboration can be depicted in themes five and six.

In light of the above, the themes that have initially originated in chapter five (primary data) and continued in chapter six (where findings were linked to the established literature) played a very important role in answering the research questions. Hence, chapters five, six, and seven, along with the established literature review and the Lebanese HE context, have shaped answers to all the research questions of this study.

7.4 Conclusions and Recommendations

This study explored the nature and the existing conditions of the Lebanese HE system, particularly in relation to QA. The study discussed specific policies and measures of

education quality at both national and institutional levels and highlighted major obstacles that face the creation of quality culture regime across the HEIs in Lebanon. Furthermore, this study suggests that the prevailing circumstances of HE in relation to QA implementation requires immediate enhancement. Specifically, HEIs, on an individual level, have been trying to take specific measures to establish and ensure QA, and policy-makers have been trying to establish a national QA framework to monitor QA mechanisms in HEIs.

The Lebanese society remains vastly unequal in social and economic terms, and the quality of the offered academic programmes is uneven. The establishment of quality culture in Lebanese HE, which goes beyond accreditation, and the establishment of sustainable and reliable QA model have become matters of concern not only to HEIs but also to all stakeholders. For these reasons, the present study on the development of a QA model in HE has been a core issue of any education quality development in Lebanon.

This study gives recommendations in relation to quality and QA in HE in Lebanon. Such recommendations would support more aligned ways of tackling the issue of QA across the HE system. Securing improvement to the QA system in HE of Lebanon is extremely required. Significant reform in the whole educational system is ultimately required to secure QA collective standards, endorse quality culture and incorporate all stakeholders in the quality process.

In aim of initiating the development of a national QA model and ultimately a quality culture among Lebanese HEIs, below are the recommendations of this study in relation to the major themes established throughout chapters five and six. These recommendations are meant to craft a theoretical reference framework for developing a Lebanese QA model/system. Theoretical contribution along with conclusions and substantive recommendations for policy and professional practice in the Lebanese HE setting are presented under each theme.

7.4.1 Theme 1: The Purpose, Role, Scope and General Operating Characteristics of QA in HEIs

This theme has encompassed several notions on quality and QA in HE. Quality and QA in HE are viewed in relation to stakeholder involvement, stakeholder relationships, satisfaction of stakeholder expectations, achievement of a certain set of standards and requirements, monitoring and measurement, existence of clear and attainable vision and mission, significance of qualified academic staff, excellence in teaching, sound academic research, success of graduates and their contribution to society, curriculum design and its relevancy to market needs and establishment of quality culture.

The scope of QA varied across the three studied HEIs, with a higher emphasis being placed on teaching and learning criteria. Stakeholder involvement in the quality affairs of HEIs took a major share of the discussions. Respondents linked quality and QA in HE to satisfying the expectation of HE's stakeholders, particularly students. The extent of stakeholder involvement varied across the three HEIs. Both AUB and AUL acquire stakeholder feedback, most evidently from students. The LU is barely acquiring stakeholder feedback. Hence, the concept of 'fitness for purpose', identified by Harvey and Green (1993) and several others and Garvin's (1983) user-based approach to quality seem to be the quality target to be reached in Lebanese HE- where quality fits the expectation of stakeholders (although it seems that Lebanon is currently in relation to Garvin's (1983) value-based approach, where quality is a matter of costs and benefits, thus the tendency for some students in Lebanon is to settle for a cheaper university).

Below is a list of recommendations for policy and professional practice (national level and HEI level) in respect to theme 1 and relating to SQ 1: *what are, and should be the purpose, role, scope and general operating characteristics of QA?*

National level:

1. The developed QA framework should consider adopting QA processes that review quality on a fitness for purpose/mission related approach that might minimise potential rejection and any feeling of irrelevance.
2. The national QA framework should consider the importance of placing all QA processes as part of continuously monitored cycles. In this regards, the national QA

framework should place high importance on stakeholder involvement in QA processes, where feedback taken from stakeholders should be cyclical in nature and linked to action.

3. The national QA framework should be realised to ensure advancement of the teaching and learning process including teaching qualification and creation of a student-centred learning culture.
4. The national QA framework should broaden the scope of QA in Lebanese HE. The focus needs to extend beyond teaching and learning aspects and into other HE functions (such as qualifications of administrative staff).

Institutional level:

1. HEIs should consider developing their internal QA processes to involve all stakeholders and encourage their collaboration. There is a need to encourage external stakeholder involvement (e.g. alumni, employers) in various QA practices including curriculum development; the involvement of external stakeholders in Lebanese HE QA matters seems lower than the involvement of internal stakeholders.

7.4.2 Theme 2: Internal QA Mechanisms in HEIs

This theme reflects the QA mechanisms implemented in the three studied HEIs. It appears that many, but not all, of the measures taken by these institutions in trying to ensure sufficient education quality are similar. The frequency and timescales of evaluations was varied across the three HEIs. Certain QA mechanisms appear not to be fully implemented in some of these HEIs (*in some cases, due to certain barriers-discussed in theme 5*)

The primary data suggests that high emphasis needs to be placed on internal self-assessments. Both Brennan (2018) and Billing (2004) agree that self-assessment is one of the most vital QA components. Yet, the primary data also portrays that there is no clear system (no clear standards) for self-assessments in Lebanese HE. The implementation of cyclic self-assessments was most evident at AUB. Also, interviewees, especially students, elaborated on the effectiveness of internal QA mechanisms implemented at their HEIs- particularly the use of surveys. Coates (2005) explained good

practices in relation to conducting student surveys, yet Coates neither elaborated on the level of transparency associated with acquiring feedback through surveys nor discussed how acquiring such feedback needs to be link to action. Harvey (2002) explained that the success of any evaluation mechanism is linked to continuous follow-ups- while attaining constant feedback that is linked to action.

Below is a list of recommendations for policy and professional practice (national level and HEI level) in respect to theme 2 and relating to SQ 2: *what are, and should be the internal QA mechanisms in universities?*

National level:

1. The national QA framework should consider stressing the importance of developing internal self-assessments at the Lebanese HEIs in a cyclic and continuous manner. Plus, the national QA framework should consider placing clear quality standards for institutional self-assessments- including the frequency and time-scale of assessments.

Institutional level:

1. HEIs should consider developing quality units to ensure the accurate implementation of internal self-assessments at both the institutional and programme levels.
2. HEIs should consider collecting feedback from their students (e.g. satisfaction surveys, alumni surveys, course evaluation surveys, etc.), as it has been evident that this process is absent in some Lebanese HEIs; the questionnaires/surveys/interviews should be dynamic in nature and HEIs should consider acting upon gathered data.
3. HEIs should consider placing QA mechanisms (e.g. PIs) to evaluate the learning outcome of programmes, as this is not extensively done across all programmes in the three HEIs. Evaluating learning outcomes is essential in students' transformation- as confirmed by many researchers in the field (e.g. Harvey and Knight (1996)).

7.4.3 Theme 3: The Development of a Student-Centred Learning Culture

This theme is centred on the establishment of a student-centred culture, a specific area of importance mentioned in several occasions throughout this study. This study suggests that such a culture will not be realised unless a well-defined and well-functioning model

of QA is implemented. A student-centred method should be evident in the process of quality reform in Lebanon. A student-centred method to teaching and learning is seen as a necessary establishment in the global HE arena. In spite of some advancement in this area, student involvement, participation and empowerment in QA are still limited in Lebanese HEIs.

Harvey and Knight's (1996) transformation model that is based on student empowerment links quality in HE to transforming the student and, thus, enhancing his/her learning experience. Adopting Harvey's and Knight (1996) student empowerment model should be implemented in light of the ethical barriers in the Lebanese HE context (as highlighted by some academic staff interviewees). Harvey and Knight's first method, *student evaluation*, is currently not being implemented in all Lebanese HEIs. The fourth method, *developing student's critical abilities*, is regarded by Harvey and Knight to be the method that holds the real potential in empowering and transforming the students. Very importantly, the student must be placed at the core of quality in all educational areas because students are an integral element of any QA process (Carmichael et al., 2001).

Below is a list of recommendations for policy and professional practice (national level and HEI level) in respect to theme 3 and relating to SQ 4: *what are the constituent elements in a QA regime based on a student-centred learning culture, and how may these be evolved in this setting?*

National level:

1. The Lebanese state should consider establishing a National Student Council in Lebanon. This national council should encourage all HEIs in Lebanon to develop internal student unions/councils, which are almost absent from most Lebanese HEIs. Such a council must be represented through involvement in external (national QA agency) QA processes.
2. The national QA framework should establish guidelines to student representation in HEIs' committees and governing councils. Such committees and councils should include both students and HEIs' alumni.

Institutional level:

1. Using qualified instructors and innovative teaching methods, HEIs should enhance ways of teaching and involve the students more actively in their learning process. Thus, students need to be assigned serious tasks via means of experiential learning in aim of developing their critical abilities.
2. Students should be considered as full partners in HE quality development via their involvement in QA assessments and decision-making.

7.4.4 Theme 4: The Role of International Borrowing and Accreditation

This theme encompasses the role of international borrowing and accreditation on both the institutional and national levels. This study suggests that international QA borrowing in HE in Lebanon is needed to conceptualise a national QA framework. Nevertheless, there are certain practicality implications related to borrowing a QA model, particularly in Lebanon where QA in HE is still in its initial phase. This study depicts that a number of HEIs are still guided by international accreditation agencies to ensure QA.

In aim of establishing a national QA framework, interviews with HE policy-makers showed that the orientation at the national level is to borrow and adopt the quality standards of the Bologna process. In regards to the Bologna process, Lebanon is currently at Phillips and Ochs first stage, cross-national attraction. It worth mentioning that Phillips and Ochs' model does not provide clear cut-off boundaries between the four stages which can sometimes blur the evaluation of a current state. Moreover, the laxity of the Lebanese government is preventing the country from moving forward in most aspects, HE being no exception. That being said, shall the state move through Philips and Ochs stages to ultimately reach the 'internalisation' stage in regards to the Bologna process, policy-makers should take into account the unique cultural context of Lebanon and its HEIs. As already established, policy borrowing is not wholesale but selective and reflects the context-specific causes for receptiveness (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014); thus, borrowing the Bologna process should be done with great care in order to avoid any negative implications associated with borrowing QA practices from developed countries into developing ones (Williams and Harvey, 2015).

Below is a list of recommendations for policy and professional practice (national level and HEI level) in respect to theme 4 and relating to SQ 5: *what are the issues involved in adopting/borrowing/adapting and effectively implementing models of QA derived from other international settings?*

National level:

1. External quality frameworks are transferable in relation to principles, aims, concepts, approach and style (Billing, 2004). Thus, policy-makers should consider borrowing the ESG standards (*defined in Appendix B*) that were adopted by the Bologna Follow-up Group. Since ‘context matters’ when implementing QA standards (Alzafari and Ursin, 2019), the degree of implementation, on the national level, of each of those standards will vary. Yet, very importantly, there is a high need to consider developing a standard of ethics on its own which is currently only embedded in other standards of the ESG. Moreover, the standard of ethics should be considered as pivotal in the transformation of the Lebanese HE system if real change is to happen.
2. Policy-makers should consider adopting a centralised approach to QA that resembles the one of many European countries and that stresses on institutional self-assessment; yet, policy-makers should consider moving responsibilities of monitoring and control away from the MEHE to an independent national QA agency. This procedure shall eliminate much of the political intervention in HEIs and the HE system in Lebanon.

Institutional level:

1. Given the lack of national QA standards, international accreditations remain the only form of external assessment to quality in Lebanese HE. Hence, HEIs can continue to seek international accreditations, as it is known that such accreditations add value and further international recognition to HEIs.

7.4.5 Theme 5: Barriers to the Effective Development of a QA System in Lebanese HEIs

This theme encompasses the barriers and challenges to the effective development and implementation of QA mechanisms in Lebanese HEIs. The national QA framework needs to be clear on how such barriers can be diminished at the national and institutional levels because establishing clear guidelines, methods and standards will combat against

most of those barriers. This study identified the following barriers: financial constraints, lack of laws and regulations, lack of established clear QA guidelines and standards, communication issues and staff resistance, sectarian and political corruption, lack of sufficient public HEIs, HR limitations and high work load of teaching staff, lack of market-driven research and internal organisational cultures of individual HEIs. Additionally, the lack of a quality culture at the national level was considered as a major barrier to the implementation of QA in HEIs.

It was established that the internal organisational culture of HEIs plays a major role in combating against many of the above-mentioned barriers. In this regards, although McNay's model of university cultures and Davies model of HEIs' QA saturation can provide some solid references in the field of HE, they might seem overly simple in the Lebanese HE environment (Nauffal, 2004). In addition to the level of policy control over implementation (McNay's model) and the style of QA implementation over its level of importance (Davies' model), the Lebanese HE environment incorporates even more complex traits like the degree of secularisation, the cultural diversity of the country and the never-ending struggle over power in the region that is dyed with a high level of corruption at the government. That being said, McNay's and Davies' models can be used as a sound starting point to identify the general cultural states of the studied HEIs in relation to QA practices.

Perhaps the clearest identification among the three HEIs is the categorisation of the LU's culture. McNay's collegial culture is very dominant at the LU. Moreover, QA measures seem to be of a very low priority at the LU with very unclear ground rules. The collegial culture rather exists at the LU due to its inability to put change into effect, which is due to various political and sectarian interventions in most of the LU's internal and external affairs. The LU needs to systemise its QA practices via moving from Davies' quadrant A into quadrant B. Although political intervention is currently influencing the LU to set low priority to QA measures, developing a clear QA framework in the LU is necessary since politics change and a sudden interest in prioritising QA measures could lead to chaos, as discussed by Davies (1992) when describing universities trying to move from quadrant A directly into quadrant C (Davies, 1992). Developing the internal quality culture of the LU is essential in developing the Lebanese HE system as the LU is the only public university in Lebanon and hosts around 40% of the HE student market share. The

LU should consider moving into McNay's bureaucracy model for the purpose of triggering change at the university. This can be done by, among others, giving more importance to regulation, creating a clear chain of command, systemising QA processes, and creating equal opportunities regardless of gender, sects or political loyalty.

There was no definitive clear cut-line when categorising AUL and AUB along the notions established by McNay and Davies. Although traits of the four quadrants in each of the two models were available in each HEI, features of specific cultures where, to an extent, more dominant than others. AUL has recently entered a state of reform realising the need to create a complete quality culture and acquire international accreditation; therefore, its culture resembles McNay's corporation model and Davies' quadrant C. However, AUL needs to start moving into Davies' quadrant D and into McNay's enterprise model in terms of its QA implementation. According to McNay, such a transition is necessary because 'corporate' HE organisational culture is for crisis situations only. Also, Davies explains that quadrant C is not for continuity (Davies, 1992, McNay, 1995). AUB tends to be moving into a client-oriented university; therefore, AUB is in its initial stages of moving into McNay's enterprise model. AUB is becoming what Davies has explained as a 'learning organisation'; thus, AUB's current saturation level in terms of QA corresponds to quadrant 'D'. AUB needs to strengthen its QA practices across all institutional units shall it decides to fully absorb the features of the quadrant D of Davies' model and the enterprise culture of McNay's model- with a need to focus more on external stakeholders' involvement who seem currently less active than internal ones.

Below is a list of recommendations for policy and professional practice (national level and HEI level) in respect to theme 5 and relating to SQ 3: *what are the principal barriers and issues relating to the adoption and implementation of QA mechanisms in universities?*

National level:

1. The national QA framework should establish transparent national quality policies in relation to diminishing administrative corruption and sectarian nepotism (such as staff recruitment based on sectarian criteria and not qualification ones) in the educational sector. In addition, implementing a high standards system of ethical values should be emphasised at the institutional and national level.

2. The development of a national QA agency that is independent in nature from any state intervention should considerably eliminate much of the political intervention and/or corruption in the HE sector.
3. The state should consider establishing more public universities. This should help trigger positive competition between the LU, which is currently greatly influenced by most of the mentioned barriers in this study, and the newly established public universities. Thus, this would create incentives to the public universities to perform adequate and efficient QA measures.
4. There is a need for the establishment of a National Data Centre for the aim of providing HEIs with comprehensive market driven data. This will also help HEIs overcome human and financial limitations preventing them from individually collecting such data.

Institutional level:

1. Given the scarce financial resources of a large number of private Lebanese HEIs that merely rely on students' tuition fees as the primary source of income, diversification of financial sources is needed. Universities can develop funds and initiatives at the university or faculty level. Universities can also undergo research and development projects for the purpose of diversifying income sources (Davies, 2001).
2. HEIs should consider decreasing the teaching load of academic staff to help them engage more effectively and efficiently in QA practices.
3. HEIs should consider placing more focus on market-driven research, which can aid HEIs to develop dynamic curricula and programmes in relation to the Lebanese market needs.

7.4.6 Theme 6: The Need for and Possible Operating Characteristics of a National QA Agency

The focus of this study has been on HE QA enhancement within the Lebanese context, and therefore, has also shifted the agenda of QA process from its institutional to its national settings considerably.

As established by Brennan, Trow (1994) explained that the increase in need of governments to gain more control on quality shows signs of lack of trust by the

government towards HEIs' QA practices (Trow, 1994, Brennan, 2001), thus resulting in the implementation of external QA evaluation through the introduction of a national QA agency. However, the case in Lebanon indicates the opposite; it is the academic community, specifically private HEIs, who raised concerns of their lack of trust in the government, given its political and sectarian decisions and interventions. Hence, there is a need for the establishment of an independent national QA agency (agency-based model to QA) that can set standards, control and monitor QA activities in all HEIs in Lebanon. Trow (1994) has developed a typology of academic review classifying four types of review. Type IV of Trow's typology was further categorised into two groups: Type IV (1) – directly linked to funding, and Type IV (2) – related to rankings and not linked to funding. Although Trow's typology can be used as a good reference, it might be over-simplified for certain HE specific contexts, such as Lebanese HE. Brennan (2001) indicated the limitation with Trow's typology stating that it tends to “*adopt an over-simple dichotomous distinction between purposes*” (p.121) (Brennan, 2001). This limitation can be evident when trying to identify the nature of review that the proposed national QA agency in Lebanon should adopt. In order to deprive politicians and the sectarian government from its power over HE and in order to preserve HEI's autonomy, it might be obvious to classify the reviews of the proposed independent national QA agency to Type IV (1) – external evaluative and linked to funding, yet the Lebanese culture brings more complexity to the picture as the government offers no funding nor budget allocations to private HEIs, which constitute the majority of the HE system. Thus, there is a need to identify a third sub-type- an external evaluative review which is not related to funding nor based entirely on rankings.

The existence of an external QA agency creates incentives for HEIs to undergo self-reviews (which require substantial workload), thus ensuring the seriousness of the self-evaluation processes. Although criticism for national external assessments exist (e.g. limits innovation, leads to a compliance culture (Harvey, 2002, Brennan, 1997)), interaction between internal and external QA is necessary to guarantee that results of external evaluations are not merely short-term enhancements but lead to on-going improvements (Harvey, 2002). For example, given that the LU acquired an international accreditation, the primary data barely showed signs of internal-self assessments at the LU. Therefore, the existence of a national QA agency would ensure that self-assessments lead to on-going improvements.

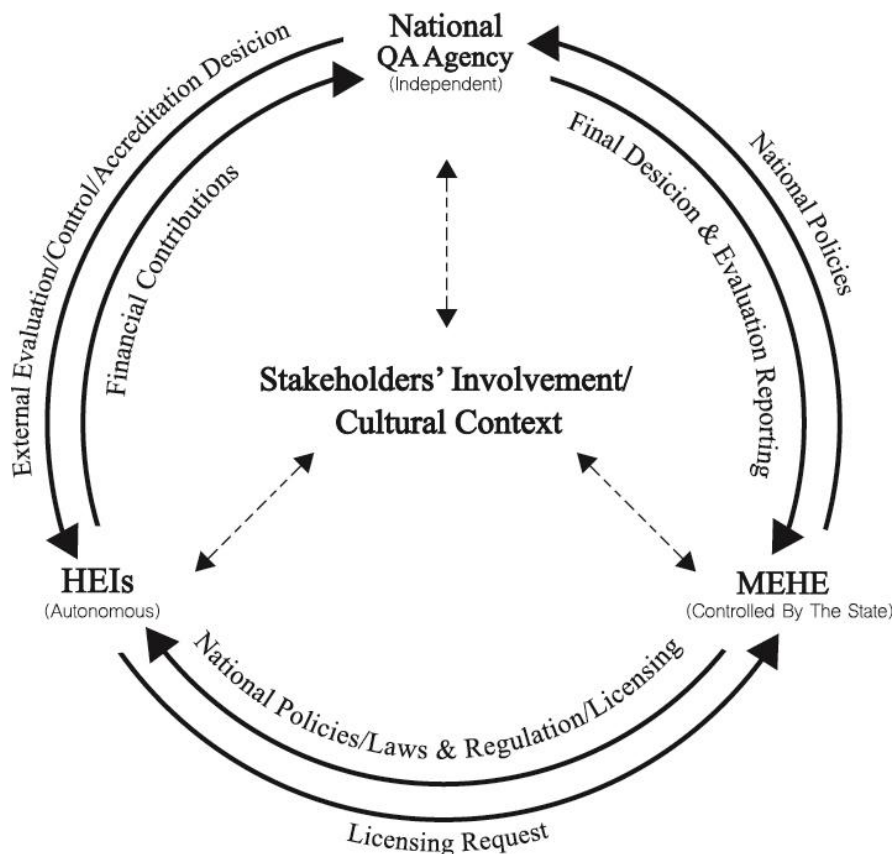
Below is a list of recommendations for policy and professional practice, defining the roles and attributes of the national QA agency, in respect to theme 6 and in relation to SQ 6: *why and how have national QA agencies evolved, and what should be the role, positioning and operating characteristics of such an agency in Lebanon?*

1. Within a new legislative framework, the national QA agency should be independent in nature, and attain certain authoritative roles previously owned by the MEHE, which is prone to political intervention. Given that governmental follow-up over HE quality matter in Lebanon is low, there is a need for an external body to overlook quality matters in HE. Following the accountability approach to QA, the agency's degree of control might lead to undertaking external corrective actions, if necessary. Also, reports published by the agency are to be made public; reports should include clear statements of outcomes, thus providing valuable information to HE stakeholders.
2. The national QA agency should consider being dynamic in nature (*standard number six of the ESG on QA agencies*). In this context, like HEIs, the national QA agency should be involved in self-assessments for continuous improvements, transparency and accountability reasons.
3. The national QA agency should consider including various stakeholders in its representation. Since it has been established (*in chapter six*) that there are 'trust' issues within the Lebanese HE arena, the academic representatives from individual HEIs should be professors with full-time contracts. Since there is a norm among Lebanese HEIs to rely on part-time instructors, certainly for financial reasons, such a recommendation can help avoid conflicts of interests and retain any 'trust' issue.
4. The national QA agency should be financed by yearly subscriptions paid by HEIs and not via state subsidies. This can help eliminate state intervention in the functions of the agency, and, thus, create more trust between HEIs and the QA agency.
5. The initial focus of the national agency should be on establishing a clear, comprehensive and collective QA framework, based primarily on institutional self-assessments, aligning it with best practices while taking the diversity of the Lebanese culture and educational systems into consideration. In this connection, HEIs should have substantial scope in responding to and implementing the appropriate strategy, missions and objectives proposed by this agency.
6. Based on the recommendations of the national QA agency, the state should consider offering financial incentives or subsidies for HEIs. However, given the current

economic condition of Lebanon, financial governmental assistance might be unattainable. Hence, the national QA agency can consider establishing other incentives to encourage HEIs to develop and monitor QA. Linking HEIs' tuition fees to the agency's evaluation can be an example of a possible incentive. Such an incentive can also regulate HEIs' tuition fees in a highly unregulated Lebanese HE market.

Given all the above recommendations in relation to all themes and conclusions from previous chapters, it is apparent that the studied HEIs through the interviewed participants understand the importance and necessity of QA in HE to ensure the improvement or enhancement of education quality at both the institution and national levels, yet several lack the necessary standards, resources and methods to establish a quality culture. Also, it is not hard to figure out that the Lebanese government has played a very minor role in implementing a national QA framework. It can be said with confidence that these kinds of inconsequential policies are not conducive to the mobilisation of all sectors in the country and to the realisation of a sustainable HE QA model. Therefore, there is a huge need to provide a well-defined and completely recognised QA system in Lebanon that would motivate both policy-makers and HEIs to engage effectively in QA. Since it has been identified that there are major stakeholders or constituents in the Lebanese HE system and since the proposed framework to QA development recommends a shift in national roles, below (Figure 7.2) is a proposed QA interaction model to identify the interaction among the main three constituents: The proposed National QA Agency, MEHE, and Lebanese HEIs.

Figure 7.2 Proposed QA Interaction Model



The relationship among those three constituents is proposed as follows:

- The National QA Agency, independent from any state control or political intervention, has the authority by law to construct its own decisions on all evaluated Lebanese HEIs. Moreover, the agency performs the role of quality control over HEIs to ensure the proper and effective implementation of the national QA mechanisms set by the agency.
- The National QA Agency will report the final evaluation decisions, compulsory in nature, to the MEHE that should have an executive role in terms of implementing decisions taken by the National QA Agency at the level of HEIs. In other words, the MEHE should disseminate all laws and regulations and use state authority, when needed, to implement decisions taken by the National QA Agency. Moreover, the agency's reporting on HEIs' evaluations keeps the MEHE informed on various states of Lebanese HEIs.
- All HEIs in Lebanon, public and private, should be forced by law to be evaluated by the National QA Agency. This will ensure that the set quality culture becomes present

in all Lebanese HEIs. Moreover, all HEIs are required to financially contribute to the National QA Agency via yearly memberships.

- HEIs shall acquire their initial institution and programme licenses through the MEHE. Hence, the MEHE should attain its role in the initial licensing of institutions and programmes.
- The MEHE should provide HEIs with the approval/denial decision of initial licensing of programmes and HE institutions.
- The MEHE should provide both the National QA Agency and HEIs the set national policies.

Figure 7.2, also shows a different dotted-relationship between all three HE constituents and stakeholders' involvement within the cultural context. This suggests that all QA operations done by the main three HE constituents should involve HE stakeholders. For example, HEIs should ensure that students, staff and external stakeholders, like employers, are participating in their internal assessments and decision-making processes. The MEHE and the National QA Agency should take into consideration all cultural aspects when developing policies. This relationship among the three HE constituents shall ensure that all decisions and operations are taken within the cultural context of Lebanon while involving all related stakeholders.

7.5 Summary of Contributions to Practice

This thesis has provided the academic community in general and the Lebanese HE society in specific a comprehensive list of recommendations (section 7.4) for the purpose of crafting a theoretical reference framework for developing a Lebanese QA model/system, which is currently absent in Lebanon. The list of recommendations tackled the theoretical contribution along with conclusions and substantive recommendations for policy and professional practice in the Lebanese HE setting.

It is important to mention, however, the most obvious gap in the literature, especially when borrowing models from developed countries into developing ones- the lack of explicit standards for ethics. It has been established in this thesis (chapter 4, 5, 6 and 7) the need for ethics and its importance in the success of any established QA model,

especially in developing countries. Although notions of ethics are currently embedded in most QA models, they are neither standards on their own nor do they have the majority of the weight/grade of the model assessment criteria. Thus, the QA model crafted or borrowed for developing countries should have a standard for ethics that will likely have high importance and act as the guiding principle to the effective implementation of other standards; only then can the borrowed QA measures be effective and beneficial.

It has also been established in this thesis that in order for HEIs to excel, the desirable feature that they need to adopt and adapt is the notion of the 'learning organisation'. Such notion is crucial if Lebanese HEIs are to reach what Davies (2003) considers as the ideal quality culture regime. This can be done by creating a combination of internal and external approaches to their QA mechanisms, by becoming more user-oriented and by adopting innovative leadership that is willing to accept change and act upon collected feedback.

7.6 Limitations of this Study and the Need for Further Research

It is essential to identify several possible limitations of this study. To start, this study is limited by several research questions and, thus, may have possibly omitted some aspects associated with the existing QA setting in HE in Lebanon. Also, despite the fact that most interviewees were outspoken about the existing QA mechanisms, practices, issues and barriers, it is not guaranteed that they have covered all possible knowledge on the QA situation in HE in Lebanon. Moreover, although the studied HEIs are representative of the Lebanese HE sector (*as discussed in chapter four - based on MEHE university classification*), this study is limited in terms of the number of the studied Lebanese HEIs and, thus, may have omitted some aspects related to QA implementation found at other Lebanese HEIs.

In addition, this study might be limited by its set time frame in relation to the primary data collected. The primary data was collected in a specific period of time (between 19 December, 2018 and 17 December, 2019). Thus, all QA practices and issues discussed in this study in relation to the three HEIs is a 'snapshot' of their experience in a given period of time.

Therefore, all those possible limitations call for the need for further research not bound by the limitations presented above.

As this study sought to establish a theoretical reference framework for the development of a Lebanese QA model, it forms the foundation for the development of a comprehensive Lebanese QA model upon which policy-makers and the to-be-established national QA agency can act. The establishment of a comprehensive QA model in Lebanon is necessary to ensure the achievement of quality education among all Lebanese HEIs. The Lebanese MEHE should consider initiating the formation of the national QA agency which will in turn establish the national QA framework to be implemented among all HEIs in Lebanon. This is crucial to the development of a quality culture among all Lebanese HEIs.

One of the recommendations of this study was the adoption of the ESG standards into the national QA framework with the addition of an ethical standard to mitigate against ethical barriers found in the current culture. This creates an opportunity for further research on the level of adoption of each of the ESG standards and on what formulates the best 'fit' in terms of a scale of priorities in standards' adoption and implementation. In addition, further research can be done on formulating the proposed ethical standard, with its various constituents, specific for the Lebanese setting.

Niccolo Machiavelli once said: "*Politics have no relation to morals*" (Machiavelli, 1983). Unfortunately, the political corruption in Lebanon is evident all over the country's various domains. After the civil war, Lebanon has been divided in a sectarian manner that suits the drives of various militia warlords. Such warlords have gained control over the country and have been strengthening their influence with every passing day. The struggle over power by various sectarian "elites" is only driving the nation backwards. In addition, Lebanon has been recently hit with an appalling inflation of its local currency (56.63% inflation in May 2020 as compared to 3.5% in May 2019 (TradingEconomics, 2020)); thus, this has further drastically deteriorated the economic situation in Lebanon. Hence, this system is prone to corruption. Thus, such issues need further investigation and research that might deal directly with the pros and cons of the political economy/regime and the prevailing sectarian socio-economic regime of Lebanon in relation to its existing educational institutions and religious sects. Consequently, there is a need for further research on possible ways to overcome such drastic factors that lead to

the deterioration of the HE sector in Lebanon. However, it should be noted that given the current political and sectarian control over the country coupled with the country's poor economic situation, moving forward in terms of developing the national QA system might seem currently difficult in Lebanon.

(Word count: 54,940)

Appendix A - Semi-Structured Interview Questions:

Policy-Makers

- 1) How do you define quality in HE?
- 2) Does the Lebanese government have a strategic plan for implementing QA practices in the country?
- 3) If yes, what are the reasons or needs in your opinion for implementing such QA policies in Lebanon?
- 4) Have the Ministry of Education and Higher Education involved in any QA projects in collaboration with other foreign governmental bodies or other international private agencies?
- 5) If yes what are the outcomes of these projects?
- 6) In your opinion, which function of QA should be the responsibility of the government: Accreditation, making decisions about QA process, organising a state agency of QA, monitoring the stages of QA process, taking role in QA evaluation activities? Or all of them?
- 7) In your opinion, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the current quality strategy and accreditation process administered by the Council of Higher Education in Lebanon?
- 8) In your opinion, what are the major obstacles and challenges facing QA practices in HE at the level of the country? The Ministry? The HEIs?
- 9) Do you think QA in HE should be a responsibility of a national QA agency or otherwise is a responsibility of each HEI in Lebanon?
- 10) In your opinion which policy or model is the most suitable or applicable for HEIs in Lebanon; internal QA administered by the HEIs themselves or an external QA policy administered by an office of national education standards and assessments?
- 11) What else would you share in relation to the future national QA policy?

HE Key Personnel

- 1) How do you define quality in HE?
- 2) What are the main points that are necessary in order to have a high quality of education?
- 3) What are the quality assurance mechanisms that can be implemented for the improvement of education?
- 4) What are the quality assurance systems, tools, structures, policies, and mechanisms implemented by your university to improve the student educational level at the undergraduate level?
- 5) Based on which model is your quality assurance system built or implemented? Why did you chose this internal quality assurance model in particular?
- 6) What are the challenges faced when adopting your model within the Lebanese context?
- 7) In what ways did this model fit within your university context? And in what ways it does not fit?
- 8) What parts of your model have been modified so as to be more relevant to the Lebanese context?
- 9) What parts of the model have been effective in actually improving the student educational level?
- 10) What parts of the model have not been very effective in improving the student educational level?
- 11) What is needed to further improve the student educational level and how can these improvement ideas translate into mechanisms?
- 12) What are the ideal main points that need to be addressed and improved in order to have a high quality of teaching and learning according to your university context? How can these points be addressed and assured?
- 13) What is further needed in order to reach a complete student-centred learning culture at your university?

Deans

- 1) How do you define quality in HE?
- 2) What are the main points that are necessary in order to have a high quality of education?
- 3) What are the quality assurance mechanisms that can be implemented for the improvement of education?
- 4) What are the quality assurance systems, tools, structures, policies, and mechanisms implemented by your university to improve the student educational level at the undergraduate level?
- 5) Based on which model is your quality assurance system built or implemented? Why did you choose this internal quality assurance model in particular?
- 6) Based on which model is your program/faculty quality assurance system built or implemented? Why did you choose this program quality assurance model in particular?
- 7) What are the challenges faced when adopting your model within the Lebanese context?
- 8) In what ways did this model fit within your university context? And in what ways it does not fit?
- 9) What parts of your model have been modified so as to be more relevant to the Lebanese context?
- 10) What type of quality assurance practices are you involved in?
- 11) What parts of the model have been effective in actually improving the student educational level?
- 12) What parts of the model have not been very effective in improving the student educational level?
- 13) What is needed to further improve the student educational level and how can these improvement ideas translate into mechanisms?
- 14) What are the ideal main points that need to be addressed and improved in order to have a high quality of teaching and learning according to your university context? How can these points be addressed and assured?

15) What is further needed in order to reach a complete student-centred learning culture at your university?

Instructors

- 1) How do you define quality in HE?
- 2) What are the main points that are necessary in order to have a high quality of education?
- 3) What are the quality assurance mechanisms that can be implemented for the improvement of education?
- 4) What are the quality assurance systems, tools, structures, policies, and mechanisms implemented by your university to improve the student educational level at the undergraduate level?
- 5) Have you been involved personally, or have other Instructor been involved in any form of quality assurance practices during your teaching period at the university?
- 6) What type of quality assurance practices are you involved in?
- 7) In what ways you believe that the applied mechanisms are performing well, and how do you believe that improvements or modifications can be applied?
- 8) In what areas have you seen substantial and actual improvement due to quality assurance mechanisms?
- 9) What areas need further improvement in order to see more practical results?
- 10) What is needed to further improve the student educational level, and how can these improvement ideas translate into mechanisms?
- 11) What are the ideal main points that need to be addressed and improved in order to have a high quality of teaching and learning according to your university context? How can these points be addressed and assured?
- 12) What is further needed in order to reach a complete student-centred learning culture at your university?

Students

- 1) How do you define quality in HE?
- 2) What are the main points that are necessary in order to have a high quality of education?
- 3) What are the quality assurance mechanisms that can be implemented for the improvement of education?
- 4) What are the quality assurance systems, tools, structures, policies, and mechanisms implemented by your university to improve the student educational level at the undergraduate level?
- 5) Have you been involved personally, or have other students been involved in any form of quality assurance practices during your study period at the university?
- 6) Do you believe that the adopted QA measures at the university are relevant to the current context and to the actual improvement of your learning experience?
- 7) In what ways you believe that the applied mechanisms are performing well, and how do you believe that improvements or modifications can be applied?
- 8) In what areas have you seen substantial and actual improvement due to quality assurance mechanisms?
- 9) What areas need further improvement in order to see more practical results?
- 10) What is needed to further improve the student educational level, and how can these improvement ideas translate into mechanisms?
- 11) What are the ideal main points that need to be addressed and improved in order to have a high quality of teaching and learning according to your university context? How can these points be addressed and assured?
- 12) What is further needed in order to reach a complete student-centred learning culture at your university?

Appendix B – Standards and Guidelines of Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)

The list of ESG’s current standards, with a brief explanation, are presented below (EHEA, 2016):

- Internal QA standards:
 1. *A policy for quality*; addresses issues related to including quality in the strategic management plans of HEIs, and the level of involvement and participation of stakeholders, whether internal or external.
 2. *Design and approval of programmes*; is concerned with defining the learning outcomes of courses and the level of involvement of stakeholders in the development of the curriculum.
 3. *Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment*; focuses on setting the conditions for students to select their own learning experience.
 4. *Student admission, progression, recognition and certification*; focuses on whether HEIs apply their set regulations of the student “life cycle”, e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.
 5. *Quality of the teaching staff*; is concerned with making sure HEIs are setting processes to boost the teaching capacity of their academic staff; especially that effective teaching does not come intuitively to everyone (Martin and Parikh, 2017).
 6. *Learning resources and student support*; concerned with allocating the adequate resources for an effective student learning experience.
 7. *Information management*; focuses on the collection and proper use of information by HEIs for their programmes’ management.
 8. *Public information*; is concerned with HEIs publishing various information pertaining to the institution (e.g. list of programmes, activities).
 9. *Ongoing monitoring and review of programmes*; addresses the set procedures for the cyclic assessment and improvement of programmes.
 10. *Cyclic external QA*; making sure HEIs are undergoing external QA in a cyclic manner.
- External QA standards:
 1. *Consideration of internal QA*; concerned with how external QA should administer the effectiveness of internal QA.
 2. *Designing methodologies fit for purpose*; external QA should be designed to fit the set aims and objectives.

3. *Implementing process*; external QA should include or ensure: self-assessment, external assessment like a site-visit, report of assessment, and a consistent follow-up.
 4. *Peer-review experts*; the pool of external review should include external experts in QA and students.
 5. *Criteria for outcomes*; judgements should be based on clear and published criteria.
 6. *Reporting*; assessments should be published to ensure transparency and accountability.
 7. *Complaints and appeals*; this notion should be well defined and communicated to HEIs as well.
- QA agencies standards:
 1. *Activities, policies and processes for QA*; this standard tackles the various activities of QA agencies e.g. external examination, its policies e.g. mission, and the processes e.g. involving various stakeholders.
 2. *Official status*; this standard is concerned with the initial establishment of QA agencies that should be by forms of law via the state.
 3. *Independence*; this standard is about providing QA agencies with the adequate autonomy without any interference from third parties.
 4. *Thematic analysis*; this standard states that QA agencies should regularly publish their findings and analysis of assessments.
 5. *Resources*; this standard describes the need for adequate human and financial resources for efficient operation of QA agencies.
 6. *Internal QA and professional conduct*; QA agencies should undergo self-assessments on their own selves.
 7. *Cyclical external review of QA agencies*; this standard states that QA agencies should undergo external assessment every five years to make sure they are still in-line with the ESG.

Appendix C – LU, AUB and AUL profiles

A. The Lebanese University, LU

History

The Lebanese University, established in year 1951, was initially named as ‘Teacher Training College’. In its inaugural year, the first class commenced with the induction of 68 students led by a number of professors. In 1953, the LU was recognised by a governmental decree as a public university. Ever since, the LU has been the sole public institution within the HEIs in Lebanon. During that same year of 1953, and via an official decree, a centre for financial and administrative matters was established and named as ‘Institution of Finance and Administration’ (LU, 2018).

However, the dramatic changes in the LU occurred during the regulating degrees that were issued between 1960 and 1972. During these years, the LU witnessed the emergence of the new structures of its activities as well as new administrative regulations within the different faculties. In 1976, the LU transformed into an autonomous state university under the supervision and backing of the MEHE, and thus it began its operation by a reasonable number of academic and administrative staff. Over the course of the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990), the Lebanese University, which was located only in the capital city Beirut, established branches in different districts in Lebanon: Beqaa, Mount Lebanon (East Beirut), North Lebanon and South Lebanon (Nahas, 2009).

Financing

One of the main characteristics of the LU is that it is the only university completely financed and supported by the state, thus reducing the tuition fees paid by the students to a bare minimum. The LU is supported by the government- administratively and financially. The detailed structure of its revenues includes: government transfers, student contributions, training fees, publication profits, leasing out of courts and open areas, and revenues from the medical and dental centres. On the other side of the spectrum, expenditures include: salaries and wages such as those made to academic (including part-time instructors) and administrative staff, research funding and support, administrative supplies, maintenance, advertising and public relations, general management expenses, rewards and allowances, and investment and equipment expenditures (Nahas, 2009).

Revenues exceed expenditures, but it is the latter that is more significant. This is due to the fact that revenues comprise of strictly virtual reserves and are a result of accumulated unspent credits due to the official financial independence of the LU. On one hand, the LU expenditures are tightly controlled by the Lebanese Ministry of Finance, and on the other hand, the LU expenditures are largely limited to wages and common consumables and supplies (Nahas, 2009).

Students

The establishment of the Lebanese University was a direct consequence of a student movement that took place in 1951 in the different cities of Lebanon. This movement developed into a general strike and demonstrations that lasted for several months. Later on, the student movement took the shape of a conflict with security forces and the government. The conflict obliged the government to recognise the increasing demand and wishes of the students in founding a well organised HE public institution that has the full support of the government (Nahas, 2009).

In fact, the LU has the largest number of student enrolment among all universities in Lebanon. In 1980, the total number of students was 14,000; however, a number of these students were part-time students. In 2018, the total number reached 79,000 students at all LU branches across the country, making it the largest and the most influential HEI in Lebanon (LU, 2018).

Faculties and Programmes

The university's main instruction languages are both Arabic and French in addition to English, which is used in specific courses. The LU has established programmes over all the territories of Lebanon, making it more accessible for a larger number of students from different social categories. The LU has five campuses distributed across the different districts of Lebanon: Tripoli campus, Sidon campus, East and West Beirut campuses, and Zahle campus. Since its establishment, its programmes have expanded to larger extents, including research, teaching, and professional training. Enrolment at the LU is comparatively free; hence, students pay only minimal tuition fees for admission. Whereas, those who enrol in the training programmes, such as teachers and administrative staff, receive scholarships and support from the university. The LU offers bachelor, master, and PhD degrees. Programme modelling at the LU is based particularly on the French model

of HE. The university today has 14 faculties: the Faculty of Business, the Faculty of Political and Administrative Sciences, the Faculty of Medicine, the Faculty of Law, the Faculty of Pharmacy, the Faculty of Literature and Human Sciences, the Faculty of Journalism and Documentation, the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, the Faculty of Natural Sciences, the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Faculty of Arts, the Faculty of Pedagogy, the Faculty of Dentistry, and the Faculty of Engineering. Moreover, the LU offers the broadest research range of PhD programmes in Lebanon. It has a number of doctoral schools that offer programmes in many various majors. The LU has 4,577 professors and instructors and 1,712 non-academic personnel. The University operates 62 libraries, hosting more than 700,000 books and periodicals (LU, 2018).

Accreditation

The Lebanese University is accredited by the Higher Council of Higher Education in Lebanon, has the full support from the government and has gained international evaluation. In 2018, ‘The Higher Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education’ (HCÉRES), an independent administrative accreditation authority in France, accredited the Lebanese University as the only public HEI that provides access to HE to all social classes and reflects the multiculturalism of Lebanon in major areas of knowledge. According to the accreditation decision, *‘the institution fulfils the accreditation criteria and has a good standard of quality’* (LU, 2018).

B. The American University of Beirut, AUB

History

The American University of Beirut (AUB) was established by a Protestant missionary called *‘the Evangelical Mission to the Levant in Beirut’* in year 1866 under the direction of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. First, the new-born institution was named the Syrian Protestant College. It wasn’t until 1920 when the name was changed to American University of Beirut. According to its catalogue (1984-1985), the AUB, functioning under an agreement from the state of New York, is a private non-sectarian institution of higher learning. It’s administered by an independent board of trustees based in Beirut and has relation with the State of New York. Since its foundation, the AUB has expanded and advanced by establishing new faculties, programmes and schools. In 1867, AUB founded the School of Medicine. Both a preparatory school and a school of pharmacy were established in 1871. In 1900, a school of commerce was

developed at the university that was later combined with the faculty of Arts and Sciences (founded in 1866). In 1905, the hospital (now the American University of Beirut Medical Centre, AUBMC) was established in addition to a school of nursing. Since the 1950s several programmes/faculties have been founded such as the Faculty of Engineering and Architecture in year 1951 and the Faculty of Agriculture and the Faculty of Health Sciences in 1954. In 2000, AUB declared a new independent School of Business, combining six faculties of the same field. The main reason behind the dramatic development of the AUB is that the university follows standards, educational philosophy, and practices of American liberal arts model in HE (Rouhana, 2018).

Financing

The AUB has been financed primarily by two major sources that make up more than 90% of the total income as a whole. The first category of revenue comes from the tuition fees, gifts and grants, and the second category of revenue comes from the AUMBC (its hospital and clinics). Nevertheless, tuition fees from students still makes the largest share of AUB financing; meanwhile, the bulk of private support to AUB comes from specific private organisations, individuals, and alumni. Only wealthy individuals can afford paying its high tuition rates; the tuition varies between \$20,500 and \$32,000 per year, depending on the faculty and programme (AUB, 2017). The AUB also receives limited extent endowments and grants from the State of New York and from national and international institutions. On the expenditures side, personal salaries and overhead costs make up more than 90% of the total expenses of AUB, with an operating budget of \$423 million (Rouhana, 2018).

Students

Students' number was in year 1985 around 4,562. Students at AUB come from 57 different nationalities; over 85% of students come from the Middle East and North Africa (AUB Catalogue, 1984-1985). In 2018, AUB had 9,102 students of which 48% are male and 52% are female. International students made up only 22% of the total number of AUB's students in 2018. Undergraduate students totalled at 7,180 and graduate students totalled at around 1,922 (Rouhana, 2018). The American University of Beirut has succeeded since its foundation to attract a good number of students from the whole region and has been regarded as one of the pioneer academic HEIs in the Middle East.

Faculties, Programmes and Academic Staff

AUB has seven faculties: Faculty of Engineering and Architecture, Faculty of Agriculture and Food Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, School of Business, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, School of Nursing and Faculty of Health Sciences. In its catalogue of programs, AUB currently hosts more than 130 programmes leading to the bachelor, master, MD, and Ph.D. degrees. With the exception of language-centric courses such as Arabic, the language of instruction is English (AUB, 2019).

80% of the academic staff in year 1985 came from the Middle East and the other 20% came from the USA and some other European countries. In 2018, full-time faculty reached about 903 members and part-time faculty about 293 members (AUB, 2019).

The AUB has many research centres and institutes that sponsor, promote and foster research in a wide range of fields. It has a number of libraries with around two million books and periodicals as well as 350 databases. The majority of these resources are microforms that span a multitude of local and regional newspapers and journals, which go back to the early 19th and 20th centuries. AUB has 1,398 manuscripts in ‘archives and special collections’, some of which have been assessed as museum items going back to eightieth and nineteenth centuries (AUB, 2019).

Finally, it’s worth mentioning that the AUB has also a medical centre, namely the AUBMC. AUBMC is the first medical institution in the Middle East to have received five international accreditations: College of American Pathologists (CAP), Joint Accreditation Committee for EBMT, Joint Commission International (JCI), Magnet, and ISCT Europe Medical Education-International (ACGME-I). All the accreditations are attesting the high standards of HE at the centre (El-Hassan, 2019).

Accreditation

In June 2004, Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools in the United States granted AUB an institutional accreditation, which was reaffirmed in 2016. Accreditation affirms that AUB as a HEI meets the international standards. The AUB degrees and programmes are also recognised by the Lebanese government through the equivalence committees of the MEHE. AUB’s seven faculties have received accreditation from American agencies also. Finally, the AUB

collaborates with a number of universities, notably with the Columbia University, George Washington University, Johns Hopkins University School and University of Paris (El-Hassan, 2019).

C. Arts, Sciences and Technology University in Lebanon, AUL

History

Arts, Sciences and Technology University in Lebanon was founded in year 2000 as a career-oriented institution with a mission of generating access to HE. Historically, the need for growth and expansion to meet the needs of Lebanon's students has been the strategic policy of the university in establishing new faculties, programmes and research centres (AUL, 2018).

The AUL has been expanding progressively since its establishment to become in 2018 a multi-campus HEI. In 2018, AUL has eight campuses widespread across the Lebanese districts to facilitate access for all students to HE in different regions; thus, AUL has become a career-oriented institution that aims to serve the educational needs of the Lebanese society as whole. Nowadays, AUL is at the crossroads of several interacting educational systems. In this respect, AUL aims to be one of Lebanon's leading HEIs that has recognition for excellence and innovation from international accrediting bodies both at programmes and faculty levels (AUL, 2018).

Financing

AUL has been financed continuously through tuition fees, which is the major source of income making up its total revenues. On the expenditure side, salaries and administrative costs make up more than 80% of the total expenses of AUL. Total expenditure was amounted at around \$16,166,894 in 2017. The total operating budget is distributed among: teaching services, salaries, maintenance, student funds, research and development, as well as partners' proceeds (AUL, 2017).

Students, Staff, and Faculties

The majority of students at AUL are Lebanese, but international students from the region are also well represented. The sharing of values from different domestic cultures at large as well as from other overseas cultures is enthusiastically promoted at the university. The number of students in year 2007 was 4,046 and increased dramatically to reach around

7,470 students in 2018, while the number of instructors increased from 126 in year 2007 to reach about 480 in 2018 (AUL, 2017).

The AUL offers bachelor and master degrees. Programme modelling at AUL is inspired particularly from the American model and the American credit system of HE. The university today has four faculties: Faculty of Sciences and Fine Arts, Faculty of Business Administration, Faculty of Humanities, and the Faculty of Engineering. The total number of programmes at AUL is 35 (AUL, 2018).

Accreditation

According to its website, AUL aims at establishing a culture of quality based on a self-assessment mechanism and continuous enhancement with a rich and strong focus and strategic direction to learn and share collective experiences gained through extensive engagement and continuous feedback. Since its foundation, AUL founded an office of quality assurance for auditing, monitoring and enhancing the teaching and research quality and student services. This office ensures that the level of all the academic and administrative bodies at AUL is up to the expected level of all stakeholders (AUL, 2018).

As part of their first order of business, the audit and quality assurance office at AUL worked towards acquitting the ISO 9001:2008 certification; a critical certification for its processes that cements the fact that its operations meet international standards (AUL, 2018). AUL has set international accreditation of academic departments on its highest priority. These efforts and milestones culminated in having a number of international agreements for exchange students with some leading universities in USA, France, UK, and Russia. Moreover, the Department of Computer and Communication Engineering at the university was awarded the European Accreditation for Engineering Programmes label (EUR-ACE). With this respect, AUL aims to get similar accreditations for the other existing academic departments/majors and faculties either from well-known European or American accreditation agencies. The Faculty of Sciences and Fine Arts has gained the CTI accreditation from France and the Faculty of Engineering has adopted the ABET model in its quality assurance system (AUL, 2018).

The LU versus the AUB and AUL

On one hand, the AUB and the AUL are independent, private, non-sectarian and co-educational of institutions HE. Those private institutions are governed by self-directed board of trustees, are both recognised by the state of Lebanon and both have international accreditations. Both HEIs have systems based on the American model, the credit system in HE, and both have English as the instruction language. On the other hand, the LU is the only public HEI in Lebanon that receives full support from the government-financially as well as administratively. The LU is governed by an independent board under the observation of the MEHE and has a system which is modelled in accordance to the French system; therefore, French is regarded to be the major instruction language at this institution.

On the financial side, tuition fees represents the bulk of revenues for AUL and AUB, whereas, being the only public university in Lebanon, the LU is financed completely by the government. Total expenditure of the LU was about 100,424,000 USD in 2017, while AUB's total expenditure was about 108,130,000 USD in 2017 and 16,736,137 USD for AUL in 2017 (Nahas, 2009, AUL, 2017, AUB, 2017, LU, 2018). Concerning the university budgets: the majority of LU's budget is spent on salaries and wages. LU's capital expenses (maintenance and construction) adds-up to 5% of the total expenses, while the operational costs compose 90%; these operational costs include 41% in wages and salaries for the LU's academic staff and 41% for the LU's administrative staff. AUB's wages, salaries and benefits consume 62% of the total expenses while maintenance and renewing of infrastructure is around 8%; meanwhile, at AUL, teaching expenses, salaries and wages make up only 43% of the total budget, whereas maintenance and infrastructure development makes around 9% from the total operating budget. Over the last few years AUB has applied an average rise of 5% in salaries, which aligns with the 5% average yearly increase in tuitions; while AUL has allocated around 6% of its operating budget to the student fund (Nahas, 2009, AUL, 2017, AUB, 2017, LU, 2018).

In 2007, the LU had a student to instructor ratio of 16:1, the AUB had a ratio of 8:1 and the AUL had a ratio of 32:1 (Nahas, 2009, AUL, 2017). The AUL showed the highest number of students to the available number of instructors in 2007, to decrease gradually to reach 14:1 in 2018; knowing that the number of student at AUL rose from 4,046 in 2007 to 6,551 in 2017 and the number of instructors rose from 126 in 2007 to 480 in 2017

(AUL, 2017). These figures reveal an impressive growth of AUL vis-à-vis AUB and LU. On the other hand, the AUB had one instructor for only 8 students in 2007 and for 11 students in 2018 (AUB, 2019). Meanwhile, the LU had 16 students and 17 students for each instructor in 2007 and 2017, respectively with an increase in students' number from 72, 900 to 79,000 in 2007 and 2017, respectively (Saad, 2017).

Appendix D – Introductory Email

Dear _____,

I present to you myself as a DBA student at the University of Bath, UK. If you are interested in participating in my research, kindly I would like to assign a date for an interview regarding quality assurance in higher education from your experience's point of view as a _____ at _____. Kindly find attached the list of questions I will be raising during the interview. Please note that this will be a semi-structured interview, so your answers to one question can sometimes include answers to many other questions or open the possibility for me to raise sub-questions in the topic.

Shall you decide to participate in an interview, please note you are free to withdraw at any moment if you feel so. Kindly, check the attached questions and please let me know when you are available. The interview can sometimes take up to 60 minutes.

Thank you.

Kind regards,

Wael Hamze

Appendix E – Interview Consent Form

Thesis Title: The Evolution and Development of QA Approaches and Associated Processes in Lebanese Higher Education; System and Institutional Perspectives

Researcher: Wael Hamze

HEI: University of Bath

Participant's Name:

For ethical considerations, this consent form is to ensure you are agreeing to be part of my DBA research. Kindly read the below carefully, if you approve please sign at the end of the form.

- Upon the interview I (researcher) will be recording your input (unless you refuse to give recording-permission).
- I (researcher) will write a transcript of the interview at a later stage.
- I (researcher) will send you the transcribed version of the interview for your final confirmation.
- I (researcher) will anonymise your name if I used quotes from your interview in my research to preserve your identity.

By signing this form I (participant) agree that:

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this research and I can chose to quit at any time.
2. I give permission to the researcher to use quotes from the transcript for the purpose of the research.
3. I am participating in this interview at my own will without any financial contribution.
4. I understand that I am eligible to contact the researcher in the future for any transcript modification related to my interview.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

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