

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN  
HIGHER EDUCATION IN  
THE MIDDLE EAST

# INNOVATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING AND LEARNING

Senior Series Editor: Patrick Blessinger,  
St John's University and Higher Education  
Teaching and Learning Association, USA

Associate Series Editor: Enakshi Sengupta,  
Higher Education Teaching and Learning  
Association, USA

## Published Volumes:

- Volume 38 The Role of External Examining in Higher Education: Challenges and Best Practices – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta, Patrick Blessinger, Andrew Ssemwanga and Barbara Cozza
- Volume 39 International Perspectives on Supporting and Engaging Online Learners – Edited by Jaimie Hoffman and Patrick Blessinger
- Volume 40 International Perspectives in Online Instruction – Edited by Jaimie Hoffman and Patrick Blessinger
- Volume 41 New Student Literacies amid COVID-19: International Case Studies – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta and Patrick Blessinger
- Volume 42 Innovative Approaches in Pedagogy for Higher Education in Classrooms – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta and Patrick Blessinger
- Volume 43 Governance and Management in Higher Education – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta, Patrick Blessinger and Nasiruddin Nezaami
- Volume 44 Changing the Conventional University Classroom – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta and Patrick Blessinger
- Volume 45 ICT and Innovation in Teaching Learning Methods in Higher Education – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta and Patrick Blessinger
- Volume 46 Role of Education and Pedagogical Approach in Service Learning – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta and Patrick Blessinger
- Volume 47 International Case Studies in Service Learning – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta and Patrick Blessinger
- Volume 48 Role of Leaders in Managing Higher Education – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta and Patrick Blessinger
- Volume 49 Pandemic Pedagogy: Preparedness in Uncertain Times – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta
- Volume 50 Integrative Curricula: A Multi-dimensional Approach to Pedagogy – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta
- Volume 51 High Impact Practices in Higher Education: International Perspectives – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta
- Volume 52 Higher Education in Emergencies: International Case Studies – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta
- Volume 53 Higher Education in Emergencies: Best Practices and Benchmarking – Edited by Enakshi Sengupta

INNOVATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING AND  
LEARNING VOLUME 54

# QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST: PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES

EDITED BY

**SAMEERAH T. SAEED**

*Tishk International University, Iraq*

**KARWAN H. SHERWANI**

*Tishk International University, Iraq*

Created in partnership with the  
International Higher Education Teaching and Learning Association



**Higher Education  
Teaching & Learning**

<https://www.hetl.org/>



United Kingdom – North America – Japan  
India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited  
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21-23 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1 4DL.

First edition 2024

Editorial matter and selection © 2024 Sameerah T. Saeed and Karwan H. Sherwani.  
Individual chapters © 2024 The authors.  
Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited.

**Reprints and permissions service**

Contact: [www.copyright.com](http://www.copyright.com)

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters' suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80262-556-1 (Print)  
ISBN: 978-1-80262-555-4 (Online)  
ISBN: 978-1-80262-557-8 (Epub)

ISSN: 2055-3641 (Series)



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

# CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures and Tables</i>	vii
<i>Series Editors' Introduction</i>	ix
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction to Quality Assurance in Higher Education in the Middle East: Practices and Perspectives</b> <i>Sameerah T. Saeed and Karwan H. Sherwani</i>	1
<b>Chapter 2 Quality Assurance Breaking Down Barriers with External Stakeholders: An Investigation of Current and Potential Roles of Stakeholders</b> <i>Bassam Alhamad</i>	19
<b>Chapter 3 Online Learning Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Egyptian Higher Education Institutions</b> <i>Bavly Hanna and Andrew Hanna</i>	49
<b>Chapter 4 What Makes a High-quality Medical Education and Graduate? The Saudi Arabia Labor Market's Perspective</b> <i>Danah AlThukair and Julie Rattray</i>	67
<b>Chapter 5 Learning from Curriculum Development for Employability and Entrepreneurship in the Middle East</b> <i>Karin Oerlemans, Carlos Alberto Montana-Hoyos and Elke Stracke</i>	85
<b>Chapter 6 Quality in Online Education in Lebanon During the Pandemic: Challenges, Opportunities, and Lessons Learned</b> <i>Nael H. Alami and Latifa K. Attieh</i>	101
<b>Chapter 7 Riding the Waves of COVID-19: A Holistic Approach to Accreditation in Higher Education</b> <i>Safiya Mukhtar Alshibani, Atiya Bukhari, Renu Sharma and Norah Ali Albishri</i>	115

<b>Chapter 8 Quality Assurance in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region: Impacts and Challenges</b> <i>Sameerah T. Saeed, Mohammed Hussein Ahmed Bapir and Karwan H. Sherwani</i>	143
<b>Chapter 9 A Comprehensive Practical Framework for Assessing Academic Programs in Higher Education</b> <i>Zeinab Amin</i>	165
<i>About the Editors</i>	197
<i>About the Authors</i>	199
<i>Index</i>	205

# LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

## Figures

Fig. 3.1.	Eight Pillars of PCIQA.	59
Fig. 4.1.	Timeline of the Evolution of Quality Management in Medical Education in Saudi Arabia.	69
Fig. 7.1.	Hierarchy Followed During Accreditation Process and Role of Deanship of Quality Assurance & Accreditation.	128
Fig. 7.2.	CBA's QAA Model (based on PERMA).	129
Fig. 9.1.	Credit Hours Generated by Departments 1, 2, and 3.	175

## Tables

Table 2.1.	A Comparative Analysis of Stakeholders' Involvement in Universities Within Kingdom of Bahrain.	31
Table 2.2.	A Comparative Analysis of Alumni and Employer's Involvement in Universities Within Kingdom of Bahrain (Relation or Contribution = 1, No Relation or No Contribution = 0).	32
Table 2.3.	A Comparative Analysis of Professional Bodies' Involvement in Universities Within Kingdom of Bahrain Regarding Accreditation, Review, Certificates, Events, and Licensing (Relation or Contribution = 1, No Relation or No Contribution = 0).	33
Table 2.4.	A Comparative Analysis of Professional Bodies' Involvement in Universities Within Kingdom of Bahrain Regarding Sponsors and Endowments (Relation or Contribution = 1, No Relation or No Contribution = 0).	34
Table 2.5.	A Comparative Analysis of Ranking Organizations' Involvement in Universities Within Kingdom of Bahrain (Relation or Contribution = 1, No Relation or No Contribution = 0)	34
Table 2.6.	Academic Staff Involvement, Feedback, Use and Usefulness of IQA Tools on Teaching and Learning and Employability (Alhamad & Aladwan, 2017).	36
Table 2.7.	Effects of IQA Tools on Academic Programs (Academic Staff) (Alhamad & Aladwan, 2017).	36
Table 4.1.	Profile of Interview Participants.	71
Table 5.1.	Core Life Skills.	90
Table 5.2.	Comparison of the KSA NQF Domains of Learning to Bloom's Taxonomy.	93

Table 8.1.	Reliability Statistics of Scale Analysis.	153
Table 8.2.	Descriptive Statistics of Quality Assurance Support and Hindrance.	153
Table 8.3.	Descriptive Statistics for Factors Playing a Role in Assuring Quality.	154
Table 8.4.	Descriptive Statistics of Common Methods.	155
Table 8.5.	Descriptive Statistics of the Significance of Internal Factors to Ensure Quality.	155
Table 8.6.	Impact of Quality Assurance on Everyday Teaching and Learning.	155
Table 8.7.	Descriptive Statistics of Staff Satisfaction.	156

# SERIES EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this series is to publish current research and scholarship on innovative teaching and learning practices in higher education. The series is developed around the premise that teaching and learning is more effective when instructors and students are actively and meaningfully engaged in the teaching–learning process.

The main objectives of this series are to:

- (1) present how innovative teaching and learning practices are being used in higher education institutions around the world across a wide variety of disciplines and countries;
- (2) present the latest models, theories, concepts, paradigms, and frameworks that educators should consider when adopting, implementing, assessing, and evaluating innovative teaching and learning practices; and
- (3) consider the implications of theory and practice on policy, strategy, and leadership.

This series will appeal to anyone in higher education who is involved in the teaching and learning process from any discipline, institutional type, or nationality. The volumes in this series will focus on a variety of authentic case studies and other empirical research that illustrates how educators from around the world are using innovative approaches to create more effective and meaningful learning environments.

Innovation teaching and learning is any approach, strategy, method, practice, or means that has been shown to improve, enhance, or transform the teaching–learning environment. Innovation involves doing things differently or in a novel way in order to improve outcomes. In short, innovation is positive change. With respect to teaching and learning, innovation is the implementation of new or improved educational practices that result in improved educational and learning outcomes. This innovation can be any positive change related to teaching, curriculum, assessment, technology, or other tools, programs, policies, or processes that leads to improved educational and learning outcomes. Innovation can occur in institutional development, program development, professional development, or learning development.

The volumes in this series will not only highlight the benefits and theoretical frameworks of such innovations through authentic case studies and other empirical research but also look at the challenges and contexts associated with implementing and assessing innovative teaching and learning practices. The volumes represent all disciplines from a wide range of national, cultural and organizational contexts. The volumes in this series will explore a wide variety of teaching

and learning topics such as active learning, integrative learning, transformative learning, inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, meaningful learning, blended learning, creative learning, experiential learning, lifelong and lifewide learning, global learning, learning assessment and analytics, student research, faculty and student learning communities, as well as other topics.

This series brings together distinguished scholars and educational practitioners from around the world to disseminate the latest knowledge on innovative teaching and learning scholarship and practices. The authors offer a range of disciplinary perspectives from different cultural contexts. This series provides a unique and valuable resource for instructors, administrators, and anyone interested in improving and transforming teaching and learning.

Patrick Blessinger  
Founder, Executive Director, and Chief Research Scientist,  
International HETL Association

Enakshi Sengupta  
Independent Researcher & Scholar

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION TO QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST: PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES

Sameerah T. Saeed<sup>a</sup> and Karwan H. Sherwani<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>English Language Teaching Department, Tishk International University, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

<sup>b</sup>Business and Management Department, Tishk International University, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

### ABSTRACT

*Globally, higher education institutions have become reliant on a quality assurance (QA) system over the past four decades. QA is considered to be one of the most important drivers of continuous improvement and an essential tool for promoting excellence in teaching, learning, and research. It provides a framework for establishing and maintaining standards, and for assuring stakeholders that programs and services meet or exceed these standards. Despite the wide range of quality assurance models available to higher education institutions, there remains considerable debate over which model is the most effective, as well as what criteria should be used for evaluating the effectiveness of these models. Universities in the Middle East have tried to adopt different models of QA that can meet their needs and expectations and provide a framework for continuous improvement. A major objective of this book is to provide an overview account of the QA process as implemented in the higher education systems of a number of Middle East countries, including Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and*

---

Quality Assurance in Higher Education in the Middle East: Practices and Perspectives

Innovations in Higher Education Teaching and Learning, Volume 54, 1–17

Copyright © 2024 by Sameerah T. Saeed and Karwan H. Sherwani

Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited

ISSN: 2055-3641/doi:10.1108/S2055-364120230000054001

*the United Arab Emirates. This book lays out essential theoretical and practical insights into the role of QA policies and practices in higher education in the Middle East countries and builds upon this idea to provide a blueprint for future academic leaders in these countries and other Middle Eastern countries to enhance their QA policies and practices and drive higher education in those countries forward.*

**Keywords:** Quality assurance; Middle East; higher education; standards; improvement; stakeholders; policies; practices

## BACKGROUND AND SETTING THE STAGE

Middle East, the area under focus in this book, is the region that extends from “Egypt in the west through Iran in the east, and from Turkey in the north to the Arabian Peninsula in the south” (Cleveland & Bunton, 2009). The region is home to a variety of ethnic, cultural, and religious groups, with Muslims and Arabs constituting the majority. Middle East has a rich history, culture, and tradition and is known for its oil resources and strategic position, bridging Asia, Europe, and Africa.

The region is also known for its political and economic challenges and instability and has undergone several crises, notably with the socio-political uprisings of the Arab Spring sparked in late 2010 (Arjomand, 2015; Vignal, 2017). The Arab Spring, remarking a democratic transition, has led to several structural and political remapping and reforms, major in some counties such as Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen, and minor in others such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Morocco (Carbonnier, 2013, pp. 26–28).

Part of the reforms, following the Arab Spring, has addressed higher education, and education in general, which, due to its negligence and low quality, was another, rather indirect, factor that triggered the uprisings by youth, who mostly were pushed off by corruption, poverty, and unemployment (Mohamed et al., 2016; Salih, 2013). Higher education, as reported in various studies, has a great role in the economic and political development of a country and yields substantial economic growth, stability, and social benefits (Barrett, 2017; Benneworth, 2019). And thus, investment in higher education is a key strategy to unleash the potential of achieving a more stable and prosper Middle East.

In the last three decades, research about QA of higher education has developed on a global scale widely and rapidly (Duque, 2021). Today, the countries in the Middle East region strive to reform and develop their higher education systems and achieve excellence and quality. To facilitate these, practicing international standards, such as QA and accreditation, has become a target for higher education institutions in the region. In fact, in recent years, the higher education institutions of the Middle East, the Arab countries in particular, have given more attention than ever to QA and the implementation of its policies and procedures. QA has become a key issue and is in high demand at all universities in Middle East countries. However, these universities face the pressure and responsibility to

adhere to and meet international quality standards, especially when it comes to the accreditation process.

These concerns are covered in this book which presents the historical development, policies, and practices of QA in higher education at the Middle East countries exemplified in case studies from Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates. Furthermore, this book supplements the institutional structure and arrangements made for QA at these countries and challenges faced in their quality seeking experience. Finally, perspectives and recommendations are offered to guide future academic leaders, ensure better practices, and assist in the development of the QA process.

In each of the Middle East economies given in this book, QA is practiced in their Higher Education systems, with some having earlier experience than others. Besides, each offers a somewhat divergent model that more or less suits its political, economic, and educational system and conditions. For example, in Egypt, QA in education was among the six top recommendations released from the National Conference on Higher Education Reform in 2000. The actual implementation of QA in higher education in Egypt was in 2001. In 2007, the National Authority of Quality Assurance and Accreditation (NAQAA) was established to manage the external assessment of QA activities at the Egyptian higher education institutions. More specifically the NAQAA plays a pivotal role in raising awareness about quality culture, developing educational and accreditation standards, supporting self-assessment processes and issuing accreditation certificates.

QA at universities of the United Arab Emirates is supported by the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) and the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA). CAA, established in 2000, oversees and assures the quality of higher education institutions in the United Arab Emirates, while KHDA deals with the foreign university branch campuses. In Saudi Arabia, the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment exists and it was established in 2009. This commission is the body that has developed the standards for QA for all academic programs at universities of Saudi Arabia.

In Iraq, the QA process was introduced late. For example, in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq the QA process was first implemented in 2010 as a pilot project in four public universities. One year later a full implementation of the process was undertaken throughout the public and private universities. In Iraq, there is no national agency or institution that grants program or institutional accreditation. Higher education institutions have to seek accreditation certificates from international bodies. However, in Kurdistan Region, in February 2019, a national independent accreditation board was established by Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research of Kurdistan and will be running in coordination with the German Accreditation Body ZEvA.

Due to lack of manuscript publications in the area of QA practices at Middle East higher education systems, let alone a single detailed manuscript that gathers the experience of several such countries, this book will make a unique academic contribution to this area. It will become a unique reference to use and benefit

from when it comes to comparing, for example, QA and accreditation experience among Middle East countries and making necessary changes and progresses. The content of this book provides a massive background on the process of QA, its rise, development, and procedures in the higher education system at a number of Middle East countries. This book is significant in that it will gather the QA experience in several Middle East higher education systems.

Thus, the main contributions of this book are to develop an overview account of the QA process as implemented in the higher education system of a number of Middle East countries, which are Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates. Based on the theoretical and practical insights made, the book serves as a blueprint for future academic leaders in these countries and other Middle East countries to further their QA policies and practices and thus propel the process of higher education therein.

## BEGINNINGS OF QA IN HIGHER EDUCATION

With the rapid expansion of higher education institutions all over the world supported by tremendous changes over time in running higher education institutions, education process, funding and resources, policies and social and market demands, an immense interest and need have arisen for an evaluative and assessment process to assure the academic quality offered in the higher education sector, and hence, the introduction of QA (Liu, 2016; Shah & Jarzabkowski, 2013; Westerheijden et al., 2007). QA has become a core value and tool used today in world's higher education institutions to more regulate their higher education systems. The quality issue has never been new, and as Vroeijenstijn (1995, as cited in Bernhard, 2012, p. 45) puts it,

the concept of quality is not new: it has always been part of the academic tradition. It is the outside world that now emphasizes the need for attention to quality. It is the relationship between higher education and society which has changed.

However, if we trace back the real start of quality concern in higher education institutions, Europe and the United States can be regarded as the starting places in the 1980s and 1990s. For example, in France a national committee of evaluation was established in 1985 to evaluate universities and higher education institutions on a systematic basis (Chevaillier, 2013); in the United Kingdom quality was declared as one of the principal objectives for higher education in 1984; and in the Netherlands in 1985, and through a governmental policy paper called "Higher Education: Autonomy and Quality," higher education institutions were required to develop a formal quality control system for self-regulation purposes (Van Vught & Wersterheijden, 1994). These initiations have affected other European countries such as Finland, Denmark, and Spain which also started to develop their quality assessment systems. Across the Atlantic Ocean, in the United States higher education system quality issues have been given intensive attention at the state and institutional levels where new policies, assessments, and review processes were introduced and implemented (Kohoutek, 2009). On

an external observation and assessment basis, the United States was the starting point too. Quality has become a major concern in United States since the late 19th century when the United States higher education system was facing a chaotic situation, leading consequently policy makers therein to the evolution of accreditation system. Many of the European QA policies and practices, albeit modified, are borrowings from the United States quality and accreditation system (see [Kohoutek, 2009](#), pp. 33–44).

QA has since caught the attention of academic leaders in developed and developing countries and started to spread to their higher education systems. For example, in the island continent, Australia, the QA framework was first introduced in 2000 by the commonwealth government. However, earlier quality arrangements did exist at universities in the 1980s where universities were accounted for developing, implementing, and enhancing quality standards and processes ([Shah et al., 2011](#)).

In developing countries such as Asia and Middle East, the higher education systems have been largely influenced by the western models of internal and external QA. Several QA policies, frameworks, and assessment mechanisms have been adopted and adapted to meet their higher education contexts and infrastructure and nationally driven objectives. This influence, adoption, and adaptation have largely taken place during the last two decades and vary from one country to another.

In Asia, the region with the world's biggest higher education system having China and India from within, the quality schemes are taken to be new-fangled and in its beginning, but is rapidly progressing ([Shah & Do, 2017](#), p. xxiii). The Asian QA has traces of the three common traditional approaches to QA: The Continental tradition, the British tradition and the American one ([Harman, 1996](#)). Most importantly all Asian countries have set up their national accreditation schemes during the past decade to accredit their own academic institutions and programs (Hou, Morse & Wang, 2017, p. 21). Examples of Asian local accreditation bodies are: The Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT) (2005), the General Department for Educational Testing and Accreditation (GDETA) in Vietnam (2003), the Japan University Accreditation Association (1947), National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement of Higher Education (NIAD-QE) (1991, 2016), and the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) (2007) (for details, interested readers are referred to [Neubauer & Gomes, 2017](#)).

QA in Middle East, the region that will be further investigated in this manuscript, is proceeding in a way similar to the Asian countries to some extent and can be described to be young but slower development. In the Arab region, some countries have established local accreditation agencies and some with none rather seeking international accreditation. Although the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE) was established in 2007 with support of the World Bank, UNESCO and the British Council, it does not focus on evaluation or accrediting higher education institutions. ANQAHE rather serves to network QA professionals in the Arab region addressing quality issues, standards, and practices.

## WHY ALL THIS FUSS?

Over the last four decades, having a QA system has become an unavoidable and inevitable requirement at higher education institutions worldwide. QA is taken as a key driver for continuous improvement and an essential tool for promoting teaching, learning and research in higher education. The factors that lie behind this popularity, unavoidability, and inevitability of QA in higher education have been highlighted in several studies at the earlier stages and now.

According to Neave (1986), as cited in [Van Vught and Wersterheijden \(1994, p. 357\)](#), there are three factors that owe to the increasing interest in QA in higher education in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and several European countries in the early 1980s. These are: (a) “the expansion of the various higher education systems” which included increase in, for example, number of enrolled students, number of study fields and number of departments; (b) public spending, “budget cuts and retrenchment operations” which have affected the quality provided in higher education; and (c) “transition ... to technology-based economies” which has necessitated developing and updating study fields and programs as well as students demands in them in a way that will meet economic development.

The entry of private higher education institutions, increasing tuition fees, market demands and regulations, increasing mobility of international students and the introduction of the Bologna process in 1999 in most European countries have also contributed to increased interest in standardization, accountability, and evaluative procedures to ensuring quality in the tertiary education (see [Westerheijden, 2007](#), pp. 74–79). In addition, the level of trust in the higher education system, institutions, and professionals’ performance, as was the case in the United Kingdom, had declined by the states and public. This loss of trust was mainly due to rapid growth of higher education, introduction of new public management, lack of self-improving procedures and poor public services (see [Rosa & Amaral, 2014](#); [Trow, 1996](#)).

This aura of attention to QA has spread out to other parts of the world and more or less for the same factors highlighted above. In most Arab countries, as mentioned earlier, the QA system is relatively young and goes back to 1990s with some countries to 2000s. This late recognition of the quality need follows from the dominant political instabilities and economic crises of the Arab world. The Arab Spring has well established that. Anyway, two main factors that raised the need to quality in the Arab higher education system can be due to (a) the failure of public universities to meet increasing market demands and increased number of students; and (b) the increasing establishment of private universities and franchise campuses (see [Badran et al., 2019](#)). Private universities form 300 out of 700 universities in the Arab world which makes a population of around 400 million ([Badran & Badran, 2019](#), p. 179).

A few QA agencies have been established in the Arab world in response to quality demands and for assessment purposes, regional and national, for example, the ANQAHE (2007), The National Organization for Assessment and Accreditation (NCAAA) (2004), Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) (2010) and Oman Quality Network in Higher Education (OQNHE) (2006). Internationally,

there is the Arab Organization for Quality Assurance in Education (AROQA), which is established in Belgium in 2007 and aims at raising the education quality in the Arab countries. Also, to help raising awareness, sharing quality knowledge, and discussing quality seeking challenges, a few events are now held annually such as the regional conference of the Arab Network for Quality Assurance (Kuwait) and the International Arab Conference on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Lebanon). These global endeavors and investments in QA, be it national, regional, or international, demonstrate a great dedication and tendency to accountability and improvement and are responding to stakeholders needs in the sector of higher education.

## **QUALITY AND QA: DEFINITIONS, ROLES, AND IMPACTS**

The questions of what is quality, what is QA, what role does QA play in higher education and what impacts has it made on higher education have been under intensive discussion and debated for the last four decades by scholars, researchers, and policy makers. There are many definitions of quality and quality assurance in higher education, along with a lack of consensus, which makes it more challenging to answer the first two questions (see, e.g., [Harvey & Green, 1993](#); [Middlehurst, 1992](#)). This standing is quite understandable and appreciated since the notion of “quality” can be interpreted in different ways and looked at from different perspectives by different people and different institutions to attribute a single meaning to quality makes it unfair and non-inclusive.

[Schindler et al. \(2015\)](#) identifies three significant challenges when defining quality in higher education, which lie in the elusive, multidimensional, and dynamic nature of the term. When deciding on a quality model in a HEI, there should be an agreement on the concept of quality to be adopted. The agreement should integrate the perspectives of all four groups of higher education stakeholders (providers, students, academic and administrative staff, and employers) and the several other dimensions of the process. It should also consider the continuing change of the quality targeted and focused on based on the existing educational, political, economic, and social needs ([Schindler et al., 2015](#)). Similarly, UNESCO defines quality in higher education as “a multi-dimensional, multi-level, and dynamic concept that relates to the contextual settings of an educational model, to the institutional mission and objectives, as well as to specific standards within a given system, institution, programme, or discipline” ([Vlăsceanu et al., 2007](#), p. 70).

[Harvey and Green \(1993, p. 9\)](#), in their “Defining Quality” manuscript, have viewed quality “as exceptional, as perfection, as fitness for purpose, as value for money and as transformative,” five very common views of quality in the literature. Quality as exceptional is conceptualized in terms of being something distinctive, excellent or that it meets a set of minimum standards. In the sense of perfection, quality is to be viewed as something that requires no defects and is concerned with getting things right from the start. Another way to view quality is fitness for purpose which relates quality to the purpose of the product or service

and is thus judged according to “the extent to which the product or service fits its purpose” (Harvey & Green, 1993, p. 17). The fourth view of quality given in Harvey and Green (1993) is the one which equates it with value for money – the level or standard of quality aimed for, say of a product or service, is parallel to the amount of money paid for. This view of quality focuses on accountability to the providers (governments, funders, and taxpayers) and to the customers (students). In essence, while providers of higher education tend to enlarge their investments by enrolling more students with lower costs, the level of quality achieved will be questionable. Finally, quality as transformation is based on the notion of “qualitative change” which in education relates to students’ enhancement and empowerment. On one hand, a quality education is supposed to enhance learners through the value added to them in the form of knowledge, skills, and abilities. Unqualified learners and graduates imply that no transformation has ever taken place and no quality has been considered in the institution. On the other hand, a transformation process in education involves empowering students to take part in decision-making processes and enabling self-empowerment in a way that can affect students’ own transformation as part of the learning process. Student feedback evaluation is a remarkable example of empowerment that is implemented in almost all higher education institutions in the world. In this book, no specific view of any of these will be adopted or upheld, it will rather be sought and examined as to which view, be it one of Harvey and Green (1993) views or others, is followed in the QA system of the selected countries.

Defining QA in higher education is another challenging task. Similar to the various views given to the concept of quality, QA has also been viewed and defined in different ways, mostly affected by the national context the definition was developed in (see, e.g., Campbell & Rozsnyai, 2002; Frazer, 1992; Green, 1994; Vlăsceanu et al., 2007; Vroeijenstijn, 1995). For example, to Barnett (1992, p. 118), QA “implies a determination to develop a culture of quality in an institution of higher education, so that everyone is aware of his own part in sustaining and improving the quality of the institution.” Vroeijenstijn (1995, p. xviii) defines it as “a systematic, structured and continuous attention to quality in terms of quality maintenance and improvement.” QA is described as “an all-embracing term referring to an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) the quality of a higher education system, institutions, or programmes” (Vlăsceanu et al., 2007, p. 74).

For running QA, Frazer (1992, pp. 10–11) refers to four interrelated components; these are: everyone in the enterprise has a responsibility for (a) maintaining and (b) enhancing the quality of the product or service; (c) everyone in the enterprise recognizes ownership of the systems that are in place for guaranteeing (a) and (b); and that (d) management (and sometimes the customer or client) regularly checks the validity and viability of the systems for checking quality. In the context of higher education, the word enterprise would be replaced by “university” or “HEI”; the words product and service would rather be referred to as the sum of “students,” “alumni,” and the “education process”; and the word “everyone” here includes all stakeholders who are accountable to the success of the