Quality Assurance in the Arab Region in the Era of Customization: Where Do We Stand in Terms of Relevance?

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Abstract A major paradigm shift from standardization to the customization era has posed a whole range of challenges in terms of relevance of higher-education (HE) in general and that of quality assurance, in particular. With everlasting changes, the role of quality assurance (QA) in HE is rapidly expanding to move from its initial purpose of ensuring credibility and trust to also ensure relevance of HE provisions and, most recently, the issues of recognition of the HE outcomes and outputs. On top of considering the diversity of needs resulting from globalization and the ICT revolution, to be a success, the needs of a specific system should be considered at a diversity of levels, including but not limited to subject-specific, institutional, system-wide, national and regional levels to name but a few. To ensure the HE systems are relevant and cover the diversity of provisions in the increasingly customized environment, multiple and diverse measurement tools need to link and lead to the solution of a range of system needs.

The article takes a stock of the last decades of developments in the HE and QA provisions in the Arab region through a critical reflection on the relevance of those provisions to the diverse socio-economic needs. It also endeavors to critically analyze the existing QA systems in the Arab region in terms of international comparability and national suitability. Overall, the HE system in the region is characterized as booming in terms of diversification, including transnational provisions as the major trend. On the other hand, the QA systems seem to be successfully completing their establishment phase and are currently in a transition to revise and introduce a more customized system to coherently link the QA mechanisms with the set priorities at a diversity of levels. One of the major findings in terms of relevance is the further need to link the national qualifications frameworks in the region with respective QA tools to promote relevance and ultimate recognition of the qualifications offered nationally, regionally, and internationally. To promote relevance and recognition, a need to move from input- and process-based mechanisms to more outcome-based approaches seems to be tangible. Recognition of external QA

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systems against robust international criteria needs to lead the priority list on the agenda of governments if outcomes of the QA are to lead to international recognition of the HE systems and awarded qualifications, in particular.

Keywords Internal quality assurance · External quality assurance · Subject-specific reviews · Relevance · Recognition of qualifications · Standardization · Customization era · Diversification of HE

1 Introduction

Education has always been the driving force and the critical success factor for societies throughout history. Just as custom was essential for the tribal societies, land was important to agrarian societies and capital investment was paramount for industrial economies; in the twenty-first century, superior talent is necessary to establish knowledge-based economies the governments strive for. The shift towards a knowledge-based society and economy has increased the need for superior talent embodied by higher education (HE), training, skills, creativity, and innovation capacity. To ensure sustainable economic growth and social development, governments all over the world revise their strategies to emphasize the importance of knowledge development and knowledge transfer (Chart 1).

Higher education has been traditionally considered a key agent for human resource development and thus strongly influences countries' capacity to innovate and become competitive. The transition to a knowledge economy places HE among the sectors that are undergoing an increasingly rapid transformation across dimensions of purpose, content, and methodologies. Globalization, technological developments, social change, increased diversification of demand, and the decades-long trend of ever-increasing costs and very supply-side planning have left HE institutions with multiple challenges and the need to be highly innovative in an educational culture that tends to be wary of change [1]. Thus, the recent developments have evolved into a major paradigm shift from standardization, which is peculiar to the industrial society and economy, to a more advanced level of development, which is knowledge driven, requires customized approach to problem solutions, and is predominantly built around superior talent.

The shift from standardization to customization era has posed a whole range of challenges in terms of relevance of HE provisions in general and that of quality assurance QA), in particular. With ever-lasting changes, the role of QA in HE is rapidly expanding to move from its initial purpose of ensuring credibility and trust to also ensure relevance of HE provisions and, most recently, the issues of recognition of the HE outcomes and outputs. On top of considering the diversity of needs resulting from globalization and ICT revolution, to be a success, the needs of a specific system should be considered at a diversity of levels, including but not limited to subject-specific, institutional, system-wide, national, and regional levels to name but a few. To ensure the HE systems are relevant and cover the diversity of

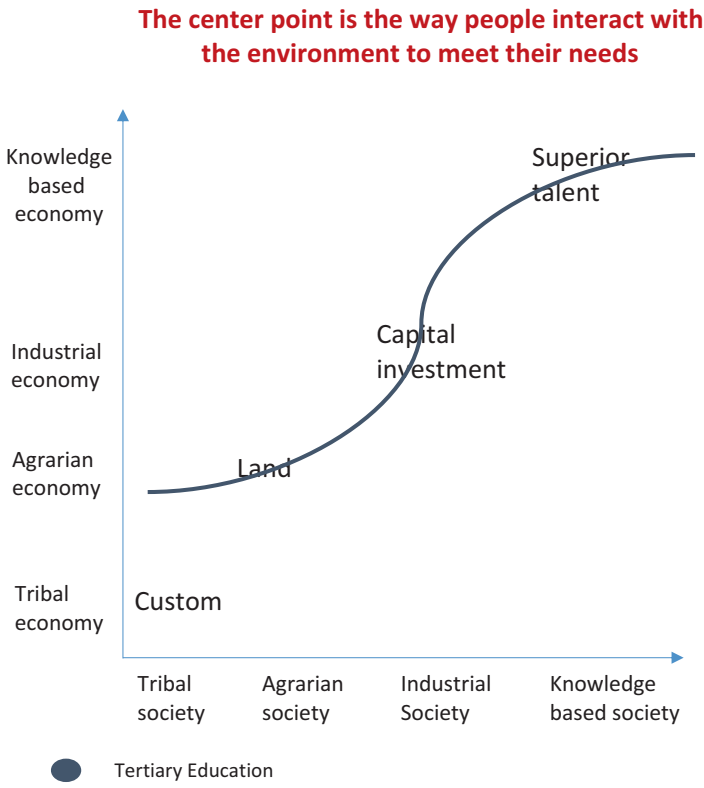

Chart 1 Evolution: society vs. economy

provisions in the increasingly customized environment, multiple and diverse measurement tools need to link and lead to solution of a range of system needs.

The article takes stock of the last decades of developments in the HE and QA provisions in the Arab region through a critical reflection on the ***relevance*** of those provisions to the diverse socio-economic needs. It does so through an in-depth analysis of the existing QA systems in the Arab region in terms of international comparability and national suitability as well as sets a stage for further deliberation on the effectiveness and efficiency.

2 Major Trends Influencing HE Systems

Relevance of QA mechanisms is highly dependent on the extent to which those mechanisms are linked to the solution of a diverse set of needs a system has. To better understand the needs in Arab higher education, it makes a whole lot of sense

to deeper explore the diversity of developmental trends peculiar to the region and look at the fitness of the QA mechanisms to resolve those needs.

To start with the perspectives of a diversity of stakeholders, the following five major trends are identified, each of which bring with them a whole new array of requirements, thus, needs.

- **Government.** With the diminishing trend in the natural resources, governments in the Arab region have a revised approach to education as a key component to a sustainable foundation for economic recovery and long-term health. More and more emphasis is being placed on knowledge development and transfer and tertiary education institutions have found themselves with a new array of demands and expectations placed upon them along with the diminishing public funding. Further, more and more expectations are placed on the success of the entire HE systems to benefit the societies and contribute to economic growth. The majority of governments in the region have significant investments in promoting knowledge development and knowledge transfer at the system level, while putting an extra pressure on the HEI to be listed among the top 200 HEIs in the world.
- **Industry.** With diversification of economy, the demand for diversified workforce is rapidly increasing and acts as a crucial contributor to economic growth. As per the British Council report in 2017 [2], an estimated 75% of the fastest-growing occupations will require STEM-related skills and knowledge (science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The need for an increased emphasis on computer coding, computational thinking, problem solving, and design thinking into all levels of educational institutions is paramount [3, 4]. With the trend being palpable in the economy of the region, the trend that has been registered is for the governments emphasizing the necessity of STEM and setting strategic priorities around its enforcement.
- **Tertiary-education institutions.** Budget cuts on the one hand and increased expectations in terms of establishing a knowledge society alongside unprecedented demands on HE in terms of credibility of provisions and accountability place an extra load on HEIs. HE institutions find themselves in dire need of increased autonomy of operations, revised approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment methodologies to meet the ever-increasing diversity of needs. Additionally, the need to reconsider approaches to formal, informal, and non-formal learning, capitalizing on improved links with industry, research, and development is paramount.
- **Society.** A major shift in the way individuals learn, work, do business, innovate, and entertain themselves is apparent. This entails further diversification of needs, which HE needs to accommodate to ensure inclusive and quality education for all.
- **Students**. What do the direct consumers of TE want? To study and find internships or work placements side by side and to build relationships with future employers? Ideally, integration of academia and industry could be a solution. As per QS Best Student Cities (2018) ranking, “Employer Activity” Index, the cities of London, Tokyo, Melbourne have excellent concentration of national and international companies with strong ties to the university community [5]. However, caution should be taken not to lose the values accumulated in academia

throughout centuries – in the rush for meeting industry demands HEIs should not neglect the basics necessary for knowledge development.

In short, recent developments in the economy of the region requires mobilization of an entire ecosystem that includes a solid **knowledge infrastructure**, a highly **skilled labor force, creative workplaces**, **business models** built with both **customers** and **competition** in mind, and engagement of **global forces.**

The next factor to consider in HE development in the Arab region is rapid diversification of the system in terms of provisions and demands, both vertically and horizontally. In terms of vertical differentiation of the system, governments in most of the countries have put in place a diversity of approaches to ranking, rating, classification, and categorization to better understand performance of each provider, whereas international rankings have been the hot topic on the government agenda with a major ambition to be listed in the top 200. In terms of horizontal differentiation of tertiary-education provisions, at all the levels a diverse range of HE providers, programs, and qualifications is registered, with transnational providers actively invading the region.

Further on the diversification of provisions, Life-Long Learning (LLL; non-formal and in-formal learning) – projected into national qualifications frameworks (NQFs), has been a trend for the last decade; however, clear mechanisms to operationalize LLL and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) are yet to be developed and put in place. Along with the latter, on-going learning, e-learning, personalized and adaptive learning are creeping into the systems, thus widening the gap between the provisions and the needs. Thus, diversification of needs generates trends leading to incorporation of a diversity of methodologies and approaches to teaching and learning. Now, to what extent HE in general and QA in particular are ready to accommodate the ever-growing diversity of needs?

In addition to the internal developments, international trends are also high on the agenda of the governments, and the requirements to align with international standards are gaining momentum rapidly. The center of attention at this point is the issue with the global recognition of the HE outcomes and outputs in broader terms. To facilitate the ever-growing migration, qualifications are still the main currency that are in use and signal both national and international value. As of now, readability and recognition of qualifications across the border is still a challenge, namely an absence of a global system of qualifications recognition allowing a learner or worker to take his/her qualifications to other countries and have them recognized. The world is moving towards establishing global recognition of HE qualifications. The UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications will become effective in 2019[1] and special arrangements need to be made to meet the "soft" regulation. However, currently, all the regions all over the world are guided by the Regional Recognition Conventions, which are at different stages of implementa-

[1] UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications Project (to be published in 2019), https://en.unesco.org/themes/higher-education/recognition-qualifications/global-convention

tion at regional and country levels. The UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab and European States Bordering on the Mediterranean was developed in 1976[2] and has been ratified by only 5 countries out of 22 in the Arab Region [7]. While the regional conventions did not have any focus on quality assurance, in the Global one to be adopted in 2019 quality assurance is one of the major points to be operationalized, which actually entails a major revision of approaches to QA from input and process to outcome based to also allow QA of the qualifications awarded and their recognition.

If we talk about recognition of qualifications, then some elaboration on the qualifications frameworks is necessary. There is growing momentum of setting up National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) and cooperation in the use of Qualifications Framework (QF) for cross-border recognition. Over 154 countries all over the world are involved in regional, transnational, and national qualifications frameworks [6]; 35 countries (69%) in Europe out of 51 are working towards comprehensive NQFs covering all types and levels of qualification and by 2018, the 35 countries have formally referenced the NQFs with the European Qualifications Framework [7].

What qualifications frameworks do actually, among other uses, is to provide a transparent context for referencing qualifications and address the need to resolve specific recognition problems. Usually, they are used for certain stipulations in free-trade agreements, become a basis for qualification recognition in intergovernmental and interagency (QA) commitments, multilateral commitments with international or regional agency funding, to name but a few. However, some caution is due not to exaggerate its potential. QFs, as a matter of fact, do not address recognition in the legal meaning of the word and should be taken as a transparency tool for promoting readability of qualifications across the borders. As for quality assurance, clearly it is seen as the main driver for successful operationalization of the QFs and ensuring relevance of the HE provisions to the ever-changing needs.

Thus, through the analysis of the quality assurance developments for the last couple of decades, in this article an attempt is made to look at the QA systems in the Arab region in terms of their relevance, which will be further detailed against such major dimensions as *relevance in teaching and learning* and relevance of QA in terms of addressing *qualifications recognition*, the *knowledge-based economy* ambition set by the countries in the region. Last, but not least, the issue of the *recognition of the QA outcomes* will be discussed as a frame of reference for credibility and trust in the QA provisions in the region. As a basis of analysis, reference will be made to the INQAAHE Global Study,[3] within which a Scoping Study on the Arab Region was made.

[2] http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13514&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

[3] The Global Study was initiated by the INQAAHE in 2017 to look at the overall developments and relevance of the QA mechanisms worldwide and the study is in the process of finalization and publication. The Scoping Study in the Arab Region was made in close cooperation with the ANQAHE.

3 QA in the Arab Region: The Landscape

The Arab region consists of 22 countries, which are spread over the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. QA of HE institutions is a relatively new development as compared to the countries in the western hemisphere. So far, out of 22 countries, 12 countries have established external QA bodies (EQABs) and most of the EQABs were established between 2000 and 2010 with the most recent one being established in Morocco in 2016. The rest are either in the process of establishment or are in the planning process. While QA in the majority of western countries evolved from the HE institutions themselves, in the MENA region, like in many parts of the world where QA of HE is a relatively new phenomenon, QA evolved from government initiatives, mainly as an accountability tool. However, although incremental, efforts are invested to also make use of QA as an enhancement tool.

At the regional level, the organization tending to the issues of promoting, enhancing and developing capacities for quality assurance is the Arab Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE) established in 2007. The purpose was to create a mechanism between the Arab countries to:

- Exchange information about quality assurance;
- Construct new quality assurance agencies or organizations;
- Develop standards to establish new quality assurance agencies or support the already present one;
- Disseminate good practice in quality assurance;
- Strengthen liaison between quality assurance bodies in the different countries.[4]

At the international level, almost all the EQABs in the Arab region are members of the INQAAHE – the global, umbrella network for quality assurance in tertiary education and an enhancement platform for QA providers worldwide.

3.1 The Nature of QA in the Arab Region

Compared with the establishment of QA systems in western cultures, where the demand came from the HEIs for such a system, in the Arab region the motion for QA establishment was from the governmental authorities. Predominantly, the EQABs in the region (80%) operate within a single country, and only in one country there are more than one quality assurance bodies established by the government. In terms of independence of operations, majority of the EQABs are placed within government structures, with very few cases of full independence. The major area of EQABs operations is licensure of HEIs and accreditation of programmes and to a lesser extent audits and authorizations are also applied. All the EQABs in the region were developed based on either the USA model of accreditation or sometimes

[4] https://nbaq.edu.kw/en/anqahe/

international guidelines such as INQAAHE GGPs were applied. QA has been seen as one of the major accountability tools for the government and the use of the QA in supporting the HE systems to enhance and meet the socio-economic targets has been scarce. One of the major benefits of the QA throughout the decades, as per the findings, is it has been a major driver of formation and molding of higher education systems, institutions and programmes in the region.

3.2 Relevance of QA: Teaching and Learning

3.2.1 External Quality Assurance of HEIs

To better understand the relevance of the QA in teaching and learning, an in-depth analysis of the institutional licensure and programme accreditation criteria has been done. While at the institutional level the criteria are targeting all the necessary dimensions for evaluation, at the programme level the standards and criteria are at generic level across the region. The need for subject-specific evaluations is still covered by international/transnational accreditors, in majority of the cases by those from the USA and Western Europe. Further, in majority of cases one set of criteria is used to conduct all types of procedures – institutional and programme level, with some additional stipulations for each. A further look at the levels of qualifications revealed the criteria and standards for evaluating programmes at different levels are appropriate for programmes at mainly bachelor level, whereas the actual evaluations demonstrate coverage of all the levels – BA/BSc, MA/MSc, and Doctoral – all through one set of criteria. As for the actual nature of the standards for programme accreditation, the main concentration is on the inputs and processes, while outputs in terms of student achievement and learning gain – which are actually the core of teaching and learning success and, ultimately, all that matter – are hardly considered. The same standards are applied also to the HEIs with different legal statuses – for-profit, non-for profit, transnational, government-funded, partnership HEIs and the like. In some countries, the transnational providers are under the purview of different QA bodies.

Further, to better understand the relevance of QA an inquiry was made to what extent the QA covers the diversity of HE provisions and supports the latter to meet the diversity of ever-growing teaching and learning demands, in particular, the extent to which distance and online education were in the center of QA procedures and criteria. As per the results, external evaluation of distance and online learning is still in the inception phase, and a deeper exploration into the applicability of those modes of study, and their quality assurance still needs to be done. In majority of the cases, there was a predominate distrust in the e-learning and distance education itself due to the absence of robust mechanisms to safeguard the systems from frauds and the governments have special policies based on which such provisions and qualifications awarded could be recognized as valid. However, a developmental trend in this direction has also surfaced as around 31% of the respondents stated that they

were planning to introduce policies, criteria, and procedures for evaluating distance education, considering the needs of the country and the trends in the market. In the countries, where distant education and e-learning were supported by the governments the EQABs evaluated distance education through a standard 'core' applicable to all kinds of education and organizations with add-on modules specific to distance or e-provisions. As per the EQABs, the major challenges so far evolve around assuring security management systems for online and distance education and capacity of the HIEs to offer online and distance education through trusted platforms and methodologies.

The next factor influencing the extent of the relevance of the QA mechanisms is the extent of stakeholder involvement in different phases of EQA development, establishment, and operationalization. While governments and HEIs, guided by the international experts and consultants were involved in the development and operationalization of the EQABs, the direct consumers – students, employers and industry at large – do not seem to be a key in the EQA operationalization, thus reducing the chances of constant enhancement of HE provisions through feedback and therefore relevance.

Last, but not least, independence of the QA procedure and decision-making was considered as a factor influencing relevance. The independence of the EQABs was also considered in the final decision-making. In 23% of the cases, the final decision was made by the government, but in 77% of the cases the decision was made by the EQAB Boards, which, in most of the cases is composed of government representatives. In terms of transparency of operations, while in majority of the countries the policies, criteria, and procedures were made publicly available prior to their implementation, none of the countries makes the final reports public.

3.2.2 Internal Quality Assurance of HEIs

Internal quality assurance (IQA) of HEIs is a relatively new phenomenon in the region, with the first one being established in the 1990s in Jordan, and 1999 in Iraq. The majority of IQA units in the sample were established between 2006 and 2011, more as a response to the national regulations rather than a demand from within an institution. The primary focus of IQA units or institutional effectiveness offices in the sample is the institution as a whole, its programmes and ensuring compliance with the EQA policies and criteria being as the major function. To a lesser extent, diploma programmes, doctoral programmes, distance education, and e-learning are covered, which is in line with the findings on the EQABs in the region. However, in most of the cases, the policies for IQA were set at the institutional level with little follow up, or there were policies which are not adopted, yet have found their implementation, which actually questions the relevance of the IQA policies and mechanisms in the first place.

With regard to stakeholder involvement in the IQA activities, a distinction between internal and external stakeholders was made. Predominantly, IQA is the business of top-level management, administrative staff, and faculty members,

whereas student and alumni involvement is expressed through participation in the surveys only. With regard to external stakeholders, mainly local governments and employers and international consultants and experts have been identified as having some type of involvement in the IQA.

As for transparency, in majority of the cases the self-evaluation reports done by the HEIs were mainly shared with the government authorities as per request. In some countries publication of the results of the reviews is the norm.

To close the loop, the survey looked at the extent the HEIs and their programmes followed up on the recommendations resulting from the external reviews, but only 55% claimed to comply and to follow up on recommendations. Only 4% claimed that they did not follow up on the recommendations at all. When asked about the reasons for the non-follow up, most emphasized the lack of policies for the follow up, mainly depending on the top management; lack of resources, and non-relevance of recommendations.

The major obstacles for effective operationalization of the IQA were identified as follows:

- Lack of awareness and capacity in basics of IQA;
- Financial constraints;
- Resistance to change;
- Absence of quality culture;
- Issues related to the accuracy and usefulness of the data collected as well as its availability
- Lack of local experts;
- Capacity of faculty and staff involvement.

When asked about the main achievements in the IQA, the majority of respondents emphasized enhancement of resources and structural changes.

As for the QA of distance education, only a blended approach has been a norm and there are only a couple of HEIs in the region that offer full distance education e-learning. As identified by the respondents, the major challenges for provision of e-learning/distance are the need for well-developed tools for recognition of e-learning and the respective degrees/qualifications as well as robust QA mechanisms.

3.3 Relevance of QA: Recognition of Qualifications

To understand the state of art with national qualifications frameworks (NQF) and the links with QA, we looked at the state of affairs in terms of developing, adopting, operationalization, and self-certification of the NQFs in the region. NQF is at its inception phase and out of 22 countries in the region only 6 have fully developed NQFs, two are in the process, and the rest have not started yet. The pioneers in the region were Oman (2003/2004 and the new version in 2017), Tunisia (2009), and the UAE launching it in 2010.

In most cases, the NQFs look at the whole education system providing expected qualifications for all levels through K-12 and up to higher education and lifelong learning (LLL), including Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Further, although RPL and LLL are identified in the NQFs, their operationalization is slow in the region and no data were found to attest QA of the LLL and RPL, although some of the systems have embarked on a pilot projects for implementing LLL.

In terms of international recognition of the NQFs in the region, out of the well-established NQFs in the region only two countries have undertaken alignments with foreign NQFs. However, none of the NQFs has undergone a self-certification procedure necessary for international recognition. Activities are in progress to come up with a regional qualifications framework for the Arab region.

As for the links with QA systems, considering NQFs are still a new phenomenon, further investments need to be made to link QA mechanisms with NQFs, and make QA one of the main drivers for NQF implementation and promoting its relevance. As it is currently practiced, the QA criteria and indicators in the region are mainly input and output based and to better see the implementation of the NQF, the criteria need to also address outcomes and recognition of qualifications. Last, but not least, the inquiry into the QA criteria demonstrated lack of relevant tools measuring alignment and achievement of the alignment of the programmes with NQF.

3.4 Relevance of QA: Knowledge-Based Economy

To understand to what extent the QA contributed to the ambitions set by the governments in terms of establishing a knowledge-based economy, we also looked at the QA of research outputs and that of the doctoral programmes.

As the findings demonstrate, both EQABs and IQA systems predominantly focus on QA of teaching and learning, while QA of research and doctoral programmes is not core of the activities in many countries. In the countries where the EQAB does look at research outputs as well, no country has been identified as having special policies and criteria for measuring research outputs and doctoral programmes. Rather, in all the cases where they did look at the component, a standard core applicable to all education levels, and add-on modules specific to doctoral education were common. The purpose of the QA scheme for doctoral programmes varies from system to system, but in the majority of cases the QA provides only for the minimum requirements and is developed based on the national legislation, with no or minimal reference to internationally accepted ones, e.g. Salzburg Principles.[5]

Overall, because of the lack of clear criteria for doctoral programmes in many countries, there is hardly any distinction between professional doctorates and PhD programmes, although both are awarded. Originality of research, lack of skills in developing and delivering relevant doctoral programmes, lack of funding, and

[5] http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/Salzburg_Report_final.1129817011146.pdf

language issues were identified as major challenges for promoting this important aspect contributing to the establishment of a knowledge-based economy.

3.5 Recognition of the QA Outcomes: Trust and Credibility

Last, but not least, the study also looked at the credibility and trust of the QA providers in the region as well as their visibility at the international level. In terms of membership and visibility at the international level: 90% of the members claimed membership with INQAAHE, 10% with ENQA, 80% with ANQAHE, 50% also had membership with other organizations: Association of Quality Assurance Agencies of the Islamic World; CHEA; Gulf Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education; Quality Beyond Boundaries Group (QBBG).

In terms of trust and credibility, the most commonly adopted approach is either through recognition done by international bodies or audits done by national authorities. The majority of the EQABs are recognized by the country's legislation and to a lesser extent the EQABs in the region are recognized by the HEIs and state authorities but not by law.

As for the international recognition and alignment with the international norms, only 33% of the respondents underwent evaluation against INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice (2003) [8], which was a one-run procedure, already expired and needs renewal. As for the current status, a good indicator is that about 46% of the respondents are planning to undergo international recognition procedures, which is a manifestation of commitment to become internationally credible and visible in the long run.

4 Conclusions

The HE system in the Arab region is characterized as booming in terms of diversification, including transnational provisions as the major trend. As for QA, it started in the region from government initiatives and the nature of the set policies, procedures, and criteria led in the direction of establishing a compliance culture while creating lags in establishing a quality culture along these lines. This development left the HEIs with little chance to take a full responsibility of QA and thus taking ownership. The bottom line is that QA always succeeds if it is based on a robust internal QA of HEIs and further investments need to be made to ensure the HEIs do build on the capacity to own the QA and the EQABs ensure such an opportunity.

Overall, due to the developments in the region, QA systems seem to be successfully completing their establishment phase and currently in a transition to revise and introduce a more customized system to coherently link the QA mechanisms with the set priorities at a diversity of levels. One of the major findings in terms of relevance is a further need to link the national qualifications frameworks in the region

with respective QA tools to promote relevance and ultimate recognition of the qualifications offered and QA outputs nationally, regionally and internationally. To promote relevance and recognition, a need to move from input- and process-based mechanisms to more outcome-based approach by establishing links to the diversity of needs seems to be inevitable.

In summary, QA of HE in the region needs major reconsideration to serve the diversity of needs, to enhance in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, while addressing the current needs to ensure:

- Recognition of qualifications regionally and internationally;
- Coverage of diversity of HE providers, profiles, performance;
- Measurement of learning outcomes/learning gain;
- Accuracy, availability and usability of the data;
- Links with the labor market and measurement of employability;
- Reduction of accreditation fatigue resulting from the lack of clear, coherent, and comprehensive National Quality Assurance Frameworks – a crucial element for efficiency and effectiveness in operationalization of QA mechanisms.

Last, but not least, the major revisions need to be accompanied with the efforts to promote credibility and trust of the QA systems in the region through undergoing robust international recognition procedures, among the rest.

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