The Implementation of Self Evaluation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia

The case of the Women's Section of King Abdulaziz University

By

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Abstract

This research analyses the implementation and impact of Quality Assurance practices within the Women's Section of the King Abdulaziz University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. For this purpose, the study examined the introduction of the Self-Evaluation process at the university, while also taking into account accreditation procedures, student evaluation, assessment and existing administrative policies.

The researcher chose to conduct a qualitative research that consisted of a single case study, in order to accurately depict the opinions and experiences of the people who participate in QA and SE practices at KAU. Therefore, the researcher conducted 42 individual interviews with various members of the management, with lecturers and with supporting staff, so as to create an intricate and diverse portrayal of the introduction of SE and QA in the women's section of KAU.

The findings revealed that SE, and QA practices in general, are either viewed by some members of the personnel as positive, or perceived by a bigger portion of the staff as disadvantageous. Thus, both institutional and personal SE is currently performed in pockets, and the procedures are lauded by those who practice it, as they have noticed improvements in administrative and academic endeavours. However, a large proportion of the staff remains reticent in their opinion regarding SE, as the personnel at the women's section of KAU has tried to implement this practice without addressing prior crippling issues. Most importantly, centralisation (for example, the decisions taken in the women's section depend entirely on the Dean of the men's section of KAU) disrupts all processes, including those pertaining to QA, and this causes dislike for the administrative requirements of successful SE practices. Furthermore, the stakeholders of the university are sceptical of each other and communication is neither open nor critical. This causes alienation and mistrust, and the consequences are most aptly observed when examining the student evaluations, which are not openly shared with the lecturers. As such, these issues create a significant collaboration gap between the management, the lecturers and the students, who do not work together towards implementing successful QA practices and towards creating a cohesive, quality culture.

Keywords: quality assurance, self-evaluation, accreditation, higher education, quality culture, student evaluation, King Abdulaziz University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Dedication

To my mum who always says: 'Allah (God) keep you safe and speed your return home with your PhD degree'.

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List of Acronyms

ABET – Accrediting Board for Engineering and Technology

AEA – American Evaluation Association

EFQM – European Foundation for Quality Management

GAT – General Aptitude Test

GBP – Great British Pound

HE – Higher Education

HEI(s) – Higher Education Institution(s)

ISO – International Organisation for Standardisation

IT – Information Technology

KACST – King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology

KAU – King Abdulaziz University

KSA – Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

KSU – King Saud University

NCAAA – National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment

NUSE – National Unions of Students of Europe

MoHE – Ministry of Higher Education

QA – Quality Assurance

QAA – Quality Assurance Agency

QAS – Quality Assurance System

QC – Quality Control

QE – Quality Enhancement

QIYAS – National Centre for Evaluation in Higher Education

SA – Self-Assessment

SE – Self-Evaluation

SSR – Self Study Report

TQM – Total Quality Management

UK – United Kingdom

UNESCO - The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Chapter 1

Introduction, Background and Context

The purpose of this study is to explore the Quality Assurance (QA) practices within the women's section of King Abdulaziz University (KAU) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). More explicitly, the following is a case- study informed exploration of Self-Evaluation (SE) and its impact on the institutional procedures and stakeholders of the women's section of KAU. The choice behind the research focus was influenced by the recent introduction of SE as a method to ensure quality in Saudi Arabian HE, all the while keeping in mind that QA is also relatively new to HE in this context. In addition, given the recent implementation of SE, very few studies have been conducted regarding this element of QA. Lastly, little qualitative research that specifically targets the women's sections of Saudi HEIs has been conducted. As such, the exploration of QA through SE is paramount to the creation of a unique discussion that allows HE stakeholders to understand the possible benefits and downsides to introducing this QA method in women's sections of universities.

The aim of this chapter is to provide a general understanding of QA procedures, with a particular focus on SE and accreditation, within the KSA context. The discussion in this chapter will address the importance of introducing a formal internal evaluation process within the education system of the KSA, with special regards to KAU.

To start, the chapter provide a context for the study by presenting the circumstances pertaining to higher education and women's education within the KSA, as well as exploring the limitations and benefits of QA and SE within the country. For this purpose, previous research is analysed and the relevant information provided pertaining to the formulation the problem statement. Following on from this, the section identifies QA practices within the KSA, as well as possible explanations behind the unresolved issues

within the field. Secondly, this chapter will argue the significance of the research, in order to present the purpose and the reasoning behind the study. This will be accomplished through presenting and explaining the research questions that constitute the basis of the research. Lastly, this section provides an overview of the research design, the assumptions and the probable limitations of the study, in order to illustrate the structure of the study.

1.1. The Origins of Quality Assurance in Education

1.1.1. Higher Education Institutions as Open Systems

According to Katz and Kahn (1978: 2), "the psychological approach to the study of problems in the social world has been impeded by an inability to deal with the facts of social structure and social organization". Therefore, in order to better understand and evaluate organisations, it is crucial to take into account the social aspects that characterise them.

Katz and Kahn (1978: 3) argue that organisations are open systems, as their success is dependent on acknowledging the necessary inputs from the social environment, given that they provide the community with products or services, with the aim of fulfilling the needs of the community and ensuring the organisation attains high quality results. In addition, Gabris (1983: 141) asserts that open systems seek to avoid entropy, or the "natural process of decay or dissolution which would occur unless the system is maintained by constant inflows of new inputs". Under these circumstances, while closed systems regard organisations as autonomous entities that are not required to collaborate with the outside world in order to achieve their purpose, open systems rely on the feedback gathered from outside sources (Daft, Murphy and Willmott, 2010: 14). Consequently, as stated by Scott and Davis (2016: 106), open systems are defined by the importance placed on the interdependence between the organisation and the environment it functions in, a circumstance that is crucial to the survival and prosperity of the organisation. The figure below illustrates the Open Systems Model (OSM):

Figure 1: The Open Systems Model
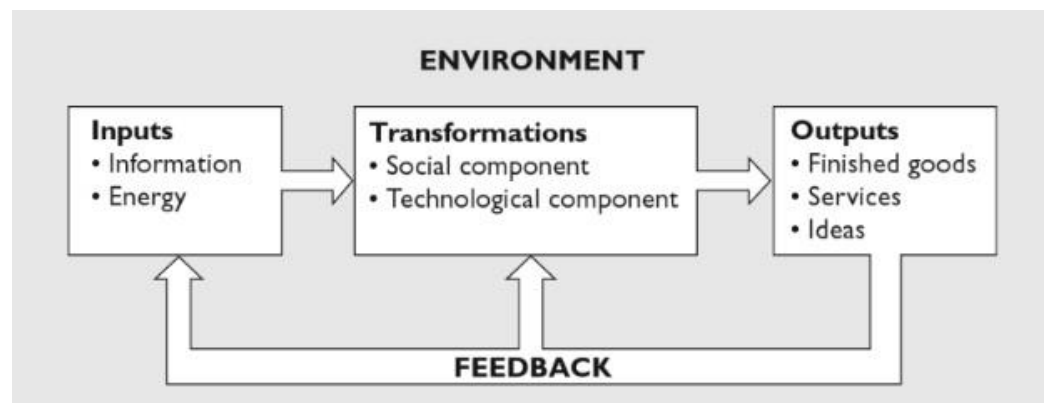
Source: Cummings and Worley (2015: 92).

According to Cummings and Worley (2015: 92-93), open systems acknowledge the existence of organisations within an environment that both influences and is influenced by an organisation, as the organisation gathers inputs from the environment, transforms these inputs by employing both social and technical mechanisms and afterwards offers outputs, in accordance with the required needs. As a result, the organisation and the environment are engaged in a continuous cycle dependent on social responses, or feedback, in order to succeed and evolve (Katz and Kahn, 1978: 3). In addition, Mele, Pels and Polese (2010: 127) explain that the open system theory takes into account the fact that the openness exhibited by an institution in its collaboration with the environment demonstrates a more adaptable nature, by comparison with closed systems organisations.

For these reasons, Lunenburg (2010: 1) argues that due to the innate social characteristic of education institutions, all institutes that offer education are open systems, regardless of the varying degree of interaction with the environment, as they regularly interact with their environment. This interaction is comprised of gathering four types of resources from the environment: human, financial, physical and information resources, which are transformed by the managers into outputs that satisfy the needs of the community (Lunenburg, 2010: 2-3). Similarly, quality assurance is a process that relies on stakeholder feedback in order to be efficient (Norris, 2007: 139), as well as to guarantee that educational institutions promote a culture that encourages both employee and student satisfaction (Ruben et al., 2007: 232). Therefore, organisations that consider themselves open systems are not only more successful in implementing quality assurance, but are

also more inclined to employing a superior institutional governance model (Weber and Dolgova-Dreyer, 2007: 143).

1.1.2. The Rise of Quality

As HEIs have evolved, so has the understanding of what providing a quality product should be, how it can be attained and the manner in which the quality process affects the institution's image. According to Woodhouse (2012: 4), the trend to assess the quality of education and the services of the educational institutions is more than a century old, and this movement has influenced the creation of an independent validation body within each country. Pounder (1999: 156) explains that universities' focus has shifted from a purely educational purpose to one that is influenced by delivering a quality service, thus the concept of quality assurance (QA) has emerged, which offers the concentration and adoption of diversified perspectives of quality standards existing within the industrial sector. With this in mind, Materu (2007) claims that the QA concept emerged in HEIs as a reaction to the diversification of education, especially considering the differences between the private and public universities, as well as those between face-to-face learning and distance education programs, differences that urged a regulation of the quality of education, as well as the harmonisation of national qualification practices. Furthermore, governments have a vested interest in developing a framework that supports quality education as education can support competitiveness, economic growth and the development of a knowledge-based economy (Sahlberg, 2006: 262). Therefore, universities have redefined their product in a way that acknowledges the importance of customer satisfaction, by employing procedures familiar to marketing specialists (Kotler, 1985 in Fitsilis, 2010: 227), in order to guarantee efficiency and accountability, as well as to privatise the public service in like manner to any other sector. Therefore, QA was introduced to provide evidence of the HEIs' 'value for money' performance (Pounder, 1999: 156). According to Harvey (2005: 264-266), this is done by focusing on the following purposes:

- making higher education more relevant to social and economic needs;
- widening access to higher education;
- expanding numbers, usually in the face of decreasing unit cost;
- ensuring comparability of provision and procedures, within and between institutions, including international comparisons; and

- ensuring higher education is accountable for public money
- ensuring students get value for money
- ensuring that institutions are able to cope with the increasing globalisation of higher education and the deregulation of the market (Harvey, 2005).

Internationally, the culture of quality revolutionised the public sector during the 1980s, when "reforms in higher education have been implemented across the globe and with these reforms, the idea of accountability, customer orientation, responsibility, responsiveness and quality came into the limelight" (Zubair, 2013: 25). On the other hand, Cheng (2003) argues that the transition to the current QA system in education occurred in three waves, with the first being an internal reform that began in the 1970s and focused on employee performance related to improving the teaching and learning process; the second reform took place in the 1990s and "concerning the accountability to the public and stakeholder's expectations" (Cheng, 2003: 202); while the third occurred at the start of the 2000s and aimed to improve efficiency "in terms of relevance to the new paradigm of education concerning contextualized multiple intelligences, globalization, localization and individualization" (Cheng, 2003: 203).

However, due to the history of the accreditation system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as well as in the establishment of a national accreditation body [the NCAAA] in 2003 by the Ministry of Higher Education, HEIs in KSA required no credentials prior to the complete national implementation of the NCAAA in 2004 (Rahman and Al-Twaim, 2015: 31). It is therefore possible that the universities in KSA have either not undergone all the stages described by Cheng (2003), or not experienced all three stages in a succinct manner. This has led to a lack of consolidation towards the desired quality-oriented culture. Prior to the introduction of the national QA system, "all accreditation and quality assurance initiatives were taken by individual universities" (Darandari et al., 2009: 40), meaning that each department within a university chose an accreditation style and adhered to its requirements. To illustrate, the engineering programmes at King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals follow the conditions of the Accrediting Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) style in the USA, and has had "substantially equivalent" results to similar programmes that were formally subjected to the ABET certification (Darandari et al., 2009: 40), as a result of their adoption of the existing quality standards in the United States.

Nevertheless, as Koslowski (2006: 277) states, "in an age of increasing competitive pressure, finite individual and institutional resources, and increased demand for universal access, assessing the quality of higher education has become a major public concern", with HEIs acknowledging the importance of stakeholder feedback and its impact on implementing QA systems in the entirety of the academic or administrative branches. At the same time, Loukkola and Zhang (2010: 9) discuss the importance of HEIs adopting internal quality cultures that acknowledge both the existing circumstances within the university and its organisational habits, when aiming to optimise a QA system, thus indicating that QA processes can differ from institution to institution, depending on management and culture. This being said, McKimm and Barrow (2010: 224) define the scope of QA in higher education as the ability to encompass the entirety of "policies, processes and actions through which quality is maintained, developed, monitored and demonstrated". This suggests that although QA implementation can be situational, as Loukkola and Zhang (2010: 9) illustrate, it still needs to be based on a basic, yet encompassing foundation that offers clarity and promotes homogeneity. Furthermore, regardless of location or position, HEIs will be continuously examined by stakeholders to assess whether institutional quality is improving (Koslowski, 2006: 277), a method that is crucial in guaranteeing the continued progress of a university.

1.2. Higher Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

1.2.1. A Brief History of the Higher Education System in KSA

The establishment of the KSA as an independent nation in 1932 precipitated the establishment of schools and universities in the peninsula, which had previously experienced thirty years of civil war and revolutions (1902-1932) that undermined the evolution of education (Bowen, 2015: 16). As such, within another twenty to thirty years from the country's genesis (1932-1960), the number of schools rose exponentially, elementary school became mandatory for boys and education for women was introduced, indicating the leaders' intent to develop a stable national scholarly structure. However, at the start of the 1970s, some regions of the KSA still lacked elementary education and education for girls was, for the most part, non-existent (Al-Rasheed, 2010, Bowen, 2015).

It was under the reign of King Faysal bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud (1964-1975) that education for women was prioritised, while education in the KSA as a whole, became the basis for progress and financial stability, following the prosperity of the oil export industry (Al-Rasheed, 2010: 117). King Faysal began his reign in an era dominated by a financial crisis, and saw in education an opportunity to create a more financially stable society. Kasozi (2008: 9) argues that the relationship between higher education and economic development is obvious, as HE promotes the "provision of human capital and knowledge needed for production and for good governance". Considering the fact that the KSA was a developing country during King Faysal's reign, the government focused on creating a secure HE system that would promote culture and progress.

The first university established in the KSA was King Saud University (KSU), which was opened in 1957 with the introduction of the Faculty of Arts (KSU, 2016). In the following year, the Faculty of Science was introduced, and the university now consists of a wide range of faculties. KSU opened its doors to female students and faculty members in 1962, and the total number of both female and male students at the moment surpasses 60,000. King Abdulaziz University (KAU) was established in 1967, and unlike KSU, in the first year of study, KAU admitted both male students and female students. KAU inaugurated its first faculty, the College of Economics and Management in 1969 (KAU, 2010) and the following year, the College of Arts and Human Sciences was introduced. At the time of writing, KAU comprised twenty-four faculties and another eight specialised branches.

The movement for women's rights in the KSA prior to the 1960s was met with hesitance, disregard and numerous debates, as women were supposed to stay at home and take care of the family and of the household (Hamdan, 2005: 42-43). However, according to Zuhur (2011: 211), the participation of Saudi women in education was supported throughout the years by Queen Iffat, King Faysal, as well as other governmental figures who advocated the education of women and their access to HE. In addition, the presence of American troops in the KSA has also expedited the emancipation of Saudi women, as new perceptions regarding the roles and responsibilities of women has allowed Saudi society to re-examine women's rights, including the right to education (and higher education) (Hamdan, 2005; Zuhur, 2011). Nevertheless, the process has been arduous and lengthy, with women's education at all levels remaining under the supervision of the Department of Religious Guidance until 2002, while men's education had been supervised by the

Ministry of Education. As Hamdan (2005: 44) argues, "this was to ensure that women's education did not deviate from the original purpose of female education, which was to make women good wives and mothers".

Regardless, both education and literacy in the country rapidly expanded during the 1970-2005 period, as the number of male and female students grew from 547,000 in 1970 to approximately 5.4 million in 2005 (Al-Mubaraki, 2011: 417). Under King Faysal's reign, numerous Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and faculties were inaugurated, causing various challenges within the Ministry of Education at that time, including budget allocation, coordination and communication deficiencies. However, as Smith and Bouammoh (2013a: 3) found, to compensate for the growing demand for higher education, a part of this ministry was repurposed in 1975 to create the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). Even more so, prior to this segregation, higher education was entirely under the supervision and administration of the Ministry of Education, which assumed responsibility for overseeing the planning and coordination of the needs of the Kingdom in all fields of education, including higher education (Al-Rasheed, 2010). The creation of the Ministry of Higher Education allowed the Kingdom to offer increasingly more specialisations and resources in areas that served the goal of national development, such as the sciences, economics or medicine. However, given the recent developments in international QA processes, as well as the rapid growth in the number of higher education providers within the KSA, the MoHE does not provide a framework for ensuring quality, and HEIs need to establish particular internal SE procedures.

1.2.2. The Current State of Higher Education in the KSA

The central authority responsible for overseeing the implementation of KSA's higher education policies is the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). In addition to the Ministry, two separate national agencies assist in ensuring that favourable practices are maintained in the HE sector: the General Presidency of Girls' Education, which solely concerns itself with the education of girls in a segregated environment, and the General Organisation for Technical Education and Vocational Training, whose main responsibility is supervising technical colleges (as portrayed by Smith and Abouammoh,

2013a: 2). Due to the combined efforts of the three departments, HEIs have been granted increasingly more financial support during the past decade, Alamri (2011: 88-89) notes.

However, Shahi (2013: 126) explains that while there are various technical colleges throughout the KSA, only a minority of students graduate in the field of science and technology, deeming technical pursuits the least sought-after specialisations. Furthermore, the lack of standardised accreditation procedures and guidelines in some technical colleges might be one of the reasons why these specialisations are not more pursued. According to Alzamil (2014: 127), the country employs the same accreditation standards developed by the NCAAA for all universities and departments; thus, the fact that KSA does not have an 'independent' accrediting body for evaluating technical colleges and departments, both within and outside of HEIs, may have contributed to a certain lack of public credibility. Even more so, although more women are enrolled in bachelor's degrees than men, women make up approximately one quarter of the students enrolled in the more demanding master's and doctoral degrees (Oxford Business Group, 2014: 274-275, Smith and Abouammoh, 2013a: 3). Additionally, the women's sections of universities are typically provided with less funding, inferior equipment, as well as less academic opportunities than the men's sections, resulting in inequality in education (Human Rights Watch, 2008: 15-16). For these reasons, the women's sections of Saudi universities need to establish and introduce a system that supervises and evaluates all institutional practices. According to various scholars (MacBeath, 2005b, Ritchie and Dale, 2000, Davies and Rudd, 2001), the process of self-evaluation can be beneficial in numerous departments, including accreditation achievement and continuous quality assurance, as well as budget management and people management, and as such can promote education for women in the KSA.

Objectives

Concerning the objectives of HE in the Arab world, the system aims to emphasise Islamic and Arab identity through a combination of national heritage, social and cultural principles, all the while enforcing the basis of national unity (Bowen, 2015, Al-Rasheed, 2010). Therefore, the focal point of higher education is the development of education through a culture that satisfies the specific requirements of the Arab countries. The

statement and articles of higher education policy and objectives in KSA, issued in 1969, include 236 objectives which represent the aims of this educational level (UNESCO, 1998).

Currently, HE's general objective is the achievement of social, technological and economic demands of an excellent academic development system (Al-Mubaraki, 2011: 427). To illustrate, the MoHE defines the official objectives of Saudi Arabian higher education as follows:

- To develop loyalty to Allah Almighty.
- To prepare citizens who are able and qualified to perform their duties and serve their country.
- To play a positive role in the field of research, so that it contributes to the advancement of the arts and literature, science and innovation and the creation of scientific solutions to the requirements of life.
- To develop production which harnesses the service of science (Althwaini, 2005).

These objectives are an appropriate reflection of the country's intellectual, political and social community, as the community determines the general framework of the activities and objectives pertaining to various sectors in a manner that is compatible with the foundations of internal politics and the general philosophy of KSA's approach to society (Althwaini, 2005). Thus, the ideology behind higher education looks at the extent to which education can progress or stagnate, and the objectives are identified in the following statements:

- The development of competent lecturers in a multitude of academic and vocational fields.
- The training of high-level specialists in various professions.
- An increase in the field of scientific research of various types and in various sectors.
- The pursuit of individual, social and cultural merits, leading to the integration of character and growth of consciousness (Ali, 1987).

In 2008, the MoHE introduced a 25-year strategic plan to reform higher education, as globalisation has created the necessity of providing a workforce that can compete with

international standards (Khalil and Karim, 2016). Thus, HEIs in the KSA are required to undertake a continuous reassessment policy that takes into account "global research and successful experiences of the more developed education systems" (Khalil and Karim, 2016: 518). This being said, Smith and Abouammoh (2013b: 189) argue that while the MoHE aims to achieve a 'world-class standard', KSA's plan for improving higher education lacks clarity, as it chiefly consists of ambiguous terms and overambitious objectives that are not properly described.

Similarly, KAU's mission advocates for community responsibility through the progress of knowledge, research, innovation and entrepreneurship (KAU, 2015b). Moreover, KAU's objectives include the development of standards for evaluating student performance, contributing to culture, providing high-quality research and development programmes, garnering the trust of society and the corporate world, and investing university resources and capabilities in an optimal manner (KAU, 2015c). Thus, it can be observed that, in a similar fashion to Smith and Abouammoh's (2013b) observations regarding MoHE's objectives, KAU has constructed its mission and goals by employing cryptic statements. Consequently, KAU also does not provide worthwhile insight into how each objective will be achieved, although the university has set out ambitious intentions.

1.3.   Quality Assurance in the KSA

According to Al-Rasheed (2010) and Bowen (2015), there have been some attempts to reform the academic system in the KSA in the past, yet the lack of national quality standards has undermined official efforts. Prior to 2004, all QA initiatives, including accreditation, were determined by university officials, which caused a discrepancy in quality standards and practices, as each university introduced QA methods in accordance with internal policies and employee potential (Darandari et al., 2009). As such, Badry and Willoughby (2016) and Smith and Abouammoh (2013a) found that unique forms of both evaluation and assessment were debated and employed, yet quality-related procedures were, for the most part, disregarded by the academic staff.

Darandary et al. (2009: 41) show that during the past two decades, KSA experienced a significant increase in the number of HEIs, and the country now encompasses twenty-one public universities, more than twenty private universities and more than one hundred specialised technical faculties. Given the demographic and economic changes occurring in the KSA, the need for all Saudi HEIs to attain the level of international best practices has been acknowledged (Almusallam, 2009: 1). However, as Onsman (2011: 519-523) notes, globalisation and the adoption of international standards can cause complications in a country that aims to maintain its cultural heritage. As such, numerous foreign academics have been employed to satisfy the rising demand of quality education, as the local staff have been seen as lacking the experience that some foreigners can offer (Al-Rasheed, 2010). Onsman (2011: 521-522) continues to argue that the issue has created cultural tensions and communication barriers that deeply affect the quality of services offered, in addition to the already existing faulty QA policies. Regardless, globalisation in higher education has also encouraged a slight decentralisation in some institutions, as HEIs are required to continuously adapt to international standards in order to receive international acclaim (Almusallam, 2007). Nevertheless, centralisation continues to be an impediment to establishing QA in Saudi Arabian HEIs (Badry and Willoughby, 2016, Smith and Abouammoh, 2013a).

The response of the Saudi government to poor QA practices was to establish the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA) in 2004, with the purpose of providing HEIs with official QA standards (Darandari et al., 2009: 40). An independent administrative and financial body, the NCAAA reports to the MoHE and its objective is the development of standards and accreditation procedures (NCAAA, 2007). The NCAAA also focuses on evaluating the performance of existing universities, and on providing support to improve the quality of programmes (El-Maghraby, 2011).

Onsman (2010: 513) further explains that for the purpose of providing a competent framework for ensuring quality and achieving accreditation, the NCAAA has based its structure on the following principles:

- Responsibility for quality rests with institutions;
- Quality relates to all institution's functions and activities;
- Emphasis on support for quality improvement rather than on satisfying standards;

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- Assessment of quality must be evidence- based and independently verified;

- Stakeholders should have substantial involvement in planning;

- Review and feedback should be regularly obtained, analysed, and responded to; and

- Total institutional commitment to quality improvement should be achieved through effective leadership and widespread involvement (Onsman, 2010).

In terms of the NCAAA, there is a pedagogical underpinning that gives the national approach some systemic and procedural legitimacy. The NCAAA has attempted to create good QA and accreditation standards, by deriving them from global practices that are viewed in high regard, such as from the UK's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), yet modifying them to fit the local academic culture. With this purpose in mind, the NCAAA has identified eleven areas of operation (criteria) in HE where it will seek evidence of successful practice before it grants accreditation to a higher education provider:

Mission and objectives; governance and administration; management of quality assurance and improvement; learning and teaching; student administration and support services; learning resources; facilities and equipment; financial planning and management; faculty and staff employment processes; research; institutional relationships with the community (Onsman, 2010).

This being said, El-Maghraby (2011) explains that the QA system was introduced in KSA in three phases, with the first two having depicted the requirements for QA in Saudi HEIs and the third being introduced to examine the progress of said HEIs. The MoHE acknowledges the need to employ practical methods and directly engage in the creation and implementation of QA, instead of simply providing a theoretical framework for QA practices that solely provides ambitions and unclear procedures, as theory did not aid in enforcing the minimum requirements for quality standards (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012). Thus, the Commission started several initiatives to support the implementation of QA practices in Saudi universities, including the creation of centres of excellence within all HEIs, as well as the creation of a Quality Committee to oversee the creation and advancement of quality standards and SE practices in universities (MoHE, 2012). In addition, yearly reports of the centres' activities must be submitted, while comprehensive institutional self-evaluations are conducted every five years to review all aspects of quality, including the programs, services and management (Almusallam, 2007).

According to Dr. Saad bin Saeed Al-Zahrani, the Assistant Secretary General of the NCAAA, a university seeking to obtain accreditation needs to first complete the initial SE process proposed by the NCAAA and then to successfully implement the NCAAA framework for accreditation, which urges the adoption of QA procedures in all aspects of the university (AlSharq, 2012). Given that both accreditation and QA are new in the KSA, the current consequences for failing to achieve accreditations solely imply that the university needs to restart the accreditation process (AlSharq, 2012). However, in the future, the NCAAA intends to severely sanction universities and programmes that continuously fail to be accredited, by reducing the budget, denying the continuation of programmes, and eventually by shutting down universities (Al-Arabiya, 2012; Al-Sharq, 2012). Currently, SE and QA procedures are not conducted at all levels within a Saudi university, and they are also misunderstood by some employees, as training is scarce and not comprehensive (El-Maghraby, 2011). As such, few Saudi universities have been, to this day, granted accreditation, while many others are still pursuing the national accreditation, as various scholars noticed (Albaqami, 2015; Onsman, 2011; Darandari et al., 2009; El-Maghraby, 2011).

Another crippling issue in the KSA is noted by El-Maghrabi (2011), in the pervasive deficit in academic research, as HEIs abound in disciplines where research is limited (i.e. languages, cultural studies, administration, communication and media, etc.), while continuous improvement, and by extension, academic performance is limited. However, in an attempt to advance its economy and the quality of education, the KSA has tried to promote academic research for more than a decade. For this purpose, the MoHE has started several campaigns to dedicate increasingly more resources to research, and Al-Ohali and Shin (2013: 95-98) noted that these campaigns included the creation of scientific research centres, a research park, technology incubators and the establishment of international collaborations in technical fields. In addition, Shahi (2013) found that higher education in the KSA is also characterised by a shortage in trained faculty members, which leads to a scarcity of research in some technical departments. Given that both research and employee qualifications pose problems, it is crucial that HEIs adopt the practice of continuous training and evaluation. At the same time, the implementation of sustainable QA measures cannot take place without staff members who are knowledgeable in QA practices. According to El-Maghraby (2011) and Darandari et al. (2009), this is another issue that higher education faces, as employees tend to rely on

traditional means of ensuring quality, as few HEIs offer QA training to all staff members. The scarcity of information regarding quality-oriented procedures, as well as the decision of administrators to disregard and not promote said trainings are some of the most impactful elements when ensuring quality, as QA cannot properly function in an environment that does not welcome it (Weber and Dolgova-Dreyer, 2007, Westerheijden, Stensaker and Rosa, 2007). Furthermore, El-Maghraby (2011) found that while the NCAAA offers training courses to aid with accreditation, and that while the participants of the trainings exhibited improvements in implementing QA techniques, HEIs still maintain a high degree of reticence to adopting said training.

Darandari (2009: 41) argues that the notion of "quality" in KSA universities has been adapted to the national circumstances. Onsman (2010: 512) states that the KSA Ministry of Higher Education addresses quality from two separate perspectives, as the ministry "is aiming for increased efficiency and effectiveness within each individual higher education provider, it is also determined to create a strong and coherent national system of universities". In addition to this, the NCAAA (2011) states that it is dedicated to providing strategies that encourage and assess the practice of QA processes in HEIs, "to ensure that quality of learning and management of institutions are equivalent to the highest international standards" (NCAAA, 2012a: 6). As such, the responsibilities of the NCAAA comprise of QA standards that emphasize the existence of quality in several domains, including management, teaching and learning, research performed, resource distribution and stakeholder involvement. Furthermore, the NCAAA does not offer any standard definitions of quality, which signifies that universities are not only allowed, but urged to create their particular vision of quality in a manner that satisfies the institution's beliefs. However, this also implies that the management of HEI should be an adequately competent designer of the community's acknowledgement of quality, to the point that stakeholders clearly understand how quality is defined, the reasons behind its importance and the techniques employed to ensure its ubiquity. Without agreement about quality and its standards, misunderstandings among stakeholders might occur, as Harvey and Williams (2010) argue that failing QA verifications occur due to the inability of academics to differentiate between evaluating the quality of daily tasks, which can be less demanding, and examining QA from an official viewpoint, which entails a higher performance level and a dedication to achieving superior standards. Therefore, "greater attention needs to be paid to exploring the internal stakeholder's perception of quality in

order to minimise the potential challenges in the implementation" (Albaqami et al., 2015: 59). As noted by Alharbi (2015: 427), quality is a crucial tool for ensuring the development of education, which is divided into multiple directions, in order to incorporate the entirety of academic pursuits and practices, including "Curriculum, educational programs, scientific research, students, infra-structure, serving community, self-internal education" (Alharbi, 2015: 427), thus further providing arguments against defining quality in a rudimentary fashion, such as the perceptions analysed by Green (1994) and Elassy (2015). Therefore, even though individual stakeholders have personal perceptions of quality, the management should strive to achieve a general consensus of the meaning of quality within the institution.

1.4.   Background of the Problem

The national QA and accreditation standards were adopted in the KSA in 2004 yet Albaqami's (2015: 66) study revealed that to this day, only a small percentage of Saudi Universities have managed to introduce the standards set by the government and receive accreditation, with the majority of universities struggling in maintaining QA practices. According to the findings, there are several reasons for the HEIs' inability to succeed in implementing QA, including a lack of a 'quality oriented' culture, the exponential growth in academic demand, the difficulty in creating adequate quality-oriented conditions to fit the Saudi culture, and the struggle to meet international quality requirements (Onsman, 2011: 521, Darandari et al., 2009: 41).

According to the Ministry of Higher Education, quality in the Saudi Arabian context can refer to two aspects: an official attempt to increase efficiency among HEIs, and a drive towards manufacturing a secure and comprehensive national academic structure (Onsman, 2010: 512). In this context, as Darandari (2009: 41) notes, the concept of quality in Saudi universities is deeply embedded in culture and adapted to fit the national circumstances. Alharbi (2015: 427) has discussed the importance of defining a unified notion of quality that needs to be incorporated within the entirety of academic endeavours, including curriculum, research, teaching and learning, with the purpose of serving the community. There is the sense that local HEIs ought to prioritise the implementation of a unified quality culture that is based on both the internal and external

stakeholders' perceptions (Albaqami et al., 2015: 59). As a response to the lack of a unified quality culture, Alzamil (2014: 133) has proposed that HEIs adopt a 'culture awareness initiative' in which stakeholders are thoroughly instructed on the benefits, practices and procedures of QA.

In order to evaluate the impact of the national QA system, El-Maghraby (2011) researched and compared the findings of recently established universities and well-developed ones. His study shows that the personnel in older institutions are more prone to accepting and implementing QA practices in contrast to the employees in recently formed institutions. Yet the number of universities in the KSA is rapidly expanding. This poses the question of what can be done to convince newer HEIs to adopt a QA system. Even more so, due to the importance placed by the Ministry of Higher Education on QA and accreditation, increasingly more HEIs are receiving partial accreditation, meaning that programmes are granted accreditation, yet universities as a whole, are not. Regardless, even if quality in HE is prioritised by the state, internal QA systems and their implementation differ from university to university, and plenty of work is still required from numerous HEIs throughout the KSA in the pursuit of accreditation (El-Maghraby, 2011:1). However, the necessary effort devoted to attaining accreditation in Saudi Arabian universities might not be sufficient. Darandari et al. (2009) discovered that employees in higher education tend to perceive accreditation as time consuming, especially due to the recent developments in QA. As such, some of the personnel employed in Saudi HEIs are inclined to disregard national accreditation standards, thus undermining the efforts of a university to receive credentials (Darandari et al., 2009). Furthermore, accreditation itself is not sufficient to guarantee quality, especially considering that the process can be fulfilled if the minimum requirements are met in an institution. Research shows that accreditation itself should not be the goal of a HEI, but rather, a tool that can be combined with other procedures, such as SE, in order to guarantee institutional quality (Kristoffersen, 2007: 98). Thus, HEIs need to develop internal self-evaluation programs to achieve quality.

Moreover, Smith and Abouammoh (2013a) found that Saudi Arabian HEIs have a centralised structure that tends to ignore the requests and necessities of employees at the local level, and this inadvertently obstructs the internal efficiency of QA practices, which typically rely on a rather decentralised structure. Centralisation is one of the four defining features of Saudi HE, as the MoHE "determines and enforces all the rules, regulations

and practices" of HEIs in the country, including the institutions that are privately owned (Badry and Willoughby, 2016: 164). Yet according to Holmes (1993: 7), centralisation can limit individual pursuits such as research. Darandari et al. (2009: 49) found that centralisation leads to diverging interests between management and academics, especially in an environment where a cohesive quality culture is still not formed. Even more so, given the social and cultural context of the KSA, centralisation tends to affect the women's sections of universities more than men's sections (Human Rights Watch, 2008), yet no compelling studies have been conducted to examine this issue.

On the subject of QA procedures, Al-Homoud's (2007) research into Saudi HEIs led him to approaching academic assessment as the process that concerns itself with the gathering and analysing of information relevant to improving academic programmes. However, Al-Homoud's (2007) study also demonstrated that while feedback on programmes and associated procedures can establish their success rate, assessment cannot guarantee the desired outcomes without a monitoring policy. Lastly, the most important findings of Al-Homoud's (2007) study was the fact that the new accreditation system could not properly function without self-assessment and continuous improvements in the quality of academic programmes that target student development. Similarly, another study regarding accreditation and assessment, carried out by Hamdi-Cherif (2011), strengthens the idea that academic programmes or HEIs that receive accreditation are those that implement, monitor and follow the criteria supported by national accrediting bodies (Hamdi-Cherif, 2011: 403). These issues demonstrate that although Saudi Arabian HE has adopted a rigid accreditation framework with the aim of enhancing the quality of services provided, the framework has to be implemented with a self-evaluation program that is specific to the university, in order to uncover the main challenges the institution faces in providing quality services.

Equally important is Alzamil's (2014) research, which addressed the benefits and deficiencies of self-evaluation, and yielded several important results. Firstly, the university was entirely dependent on the National Commission for Assessment and Academic Accreditation's (NCAAA) requirements and procedures for accreditation, as the personnel tried to enforce diversity in programme planning. However, several challenges arose in the implementation of self-evaluation, including difficulties in understanding and accepting evaluation as a valid QA process, the predominance of

subjective assessment and the lack of accuracy in providing information. This being said, SE needs to be evaluated for efficiency in all facets of academic and administrative procedures, in order to verify its impact.

Self-evaluation is a process relating to QA that offers HEIs the opportunity to explore the advantages and disadvantages of internal policies in order to determine the best QA practices that can be employed, by taking into account stakeholder feedback (Airasian and Gullickson, 2006, Borich, 1990). Therefore, SE is a procedure employed to analyse the existing methods of ensuring quality, and to indicate the measures that can be adopted to enhance quality within a university (MacBeath, 2005a, Davies and Rudd, 2001). SE can refer to an institutional operation that assesses the efficiency of protocols, policies and practices (Adelman, 2005), or to an individual process, which benefits the teaching and learning process by allowing the lecturers to adopt a critical mentality that enhances the services offered (Airasian and Gullickson, 2006).

More importantly, a study targeting various universities was conducted by the NCAAA in 2007, with the intention of verifying whether HEIs had managed to implement the national QA requirements (Albaqami, 2015: 59). The results showed that, while some universities or programmes were granted accreditation, King Abdulaziz University (KAU) was not successful in introducing QA practices, as a result of scepticism regarding these practices (Albaqami, 2015, Alzamil, 2014). The study, however, did not target the women's section of KAU specifically, as the findings presented were general.

In considering the best ways to implement quality assurance in Saudi Arabia, some researchers have proposed the implementation of approaches deriving from Organisational Learning and Total Quality Management (TQM) in the operational plan (Al-Arabi and Al-Qashlan, 2009). The researchers selected the strengths of both QA techniques to introduce a powerful quality-driven mentality, which further led to the endorsement of the European Foundation for Quality Management's (EFQM) excellence model. The study revealed several positive results. Firstly, the combination of the QA models, along with the introduction of a teamwork-oriented mentality achieved a beneficial level of adaptability to new procedural circumstances, as well as aiding the personnel in achieving a self-improvement mentality. Secondly, TQM has proven to be a successful model in evaluating the performance of HEIs, especially in regards to measuring the competence level of the senior management. Thirdly, organisational

learning has forced employees to confront internal obstacles, such as procedures that do not benefit the interests of some stakeholders, as well as compelling employees to provide solutions to said obstacles, with the purpose of improving the institutional environment. Lastly, both the TQM and EFQM models have contributed to creating a culture of enterprise, as the majority of personnel members has been encouraged to be more accountable for their decisions, thus increasing institutional cooperation and feedback, which ultimately has led to beneficial developments in the university's performance and quality of services offered. On the other hand, Alruwaili's (2013) research about the implementation of TQM in Saudi Arabia revealed several challenges in regards to the training opportunities, reward system, employee relations in and general misunderstandings about QA practices. Thus, it is probable that TQM is not the ideal option to ensuring quality in Saudi Arabia, and that the EFQM excellence model might be more apt, due to its versatility (Lyons, 2013). However, no study has been conducted that solely considers EFQM's framework, as TQM is the QA model preferred in the KSA. As such, for these reasons, TQM will be applied as the theoretical background, whereas EFQM was chosen in the analytical framework and proposed as a solution to the already existing QA issues in the KSA.

To sum up, the studies above, which are considered pioneering pieces of research in the field of QA in the Saudi higher educational system, were reviewed for their particular concepts and findings, as well as for their accounts of several possible methods employed in QA in the field of higher education. For example, Albaqami's (2015), El-Maghraby's (2011) and Al-Homoud's (2007) research into the various procedures pertaining to QA provided valuable insight into the possible benefits and limitations that might surface at KAU. Similarly, Al-Arabi and Al-Qashlan's (2009) investigation into TQM and EFQM implementation in KSA universities aided the researcher in deciding the Analytical Framework, which will be presented in Chapter 2. Notably, Albaqami's (2007) findings pertaining to QA practices within KAU was of crucial importance to the selection of the research topic.

1.5.   Statement of the Problem

The studies presented above offer significant insight into the introduction of QA practices in KSA universities. They present the benefits and detriments that can originate from implementing new requirements into traditional institutional contexts, thus revealing the unresolved issues of academic QA. However, although the results are compelling, all the findings reviewed in this section were obtained through questionnaires or other quantitative methods, while there are no qualitative studies regarding self-evaluation and accreditation in Saudi women's universities. As such, there is a gap in the knowledge of whether QA practices exist and the ways in which they are implemented in the women's sections of HEIs in the KSA. It is the researcher's belief that in order to aptly determine the impact of QA in a country, all higher education providers need to be taken into account. Therefore, given the deficit of information regarding QA practices in the women's sections of universities in the KSA, this study will attempt to provide insight into this issue.

1.5.1. Research Gap

Even though the higher education system in the KSA is growing and being influenced by the competitive nature of globalisation (Khalil and Karim, 2016, Onsman, 2011, Almusallam, 2007), recent studies of QA in the country mostly focus on analysing the implementation of various QA practices (Albaqami, 2015, El-Maghraby, 2011, Al-Homoud, 2007, Alruwaili, 2013, Al-Arabi and Al-Qashlan, 2009, Onsman, 2011), yet little research acknowledges the importance of creating a culture of self-evaluation within a university (Darandari et al., 2009, Alzamil, 2014, Alharbi, 2015). In addition, fewer studies focus on the advantages of SE (Albaqami, 2015), which can range from enhancing the teaching and learning process, to creating more unified internal relationships, as well as external relationships between stakeholders, while also increasing the performance of a HEI by introducing adequate monitoring and evaluation tactics (Airasian and Gullickson, 2006, Borich, 1990, MacBeath, 2005a, Adelman, 2005). This study aims to bridge this research gap, by providing an analysis of multiple QA procedures, including self-evaluation, assessment, accreditation, as well as determining the impact these procedures

have on institutional policies, such as those pertaining to people management and resource administration. For this purpose, the study acknowledges that all QA methods and internal policies are interdependent, and as such can influence one another. To date, there are no studies related to HEIs in the KSA that take into account all the standards presented by the NCAAA from a self-evaluation perspective, which is what this research will accomplish. Furthermore, there are even fewer studies that aim to specifically target the women's sections of Saudi Arabian HEIs, and there are numerous crucial issues that are specific to these sections, such as lack of funding and research, as well as a high degree of centralisation (Badry and Willoughby, 2016, Smith and Abouammoh, 2013a, Human Rights Watch, 2008). In addition, the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence model's framework for ensuring quality has not been singularly considered in the context of a Saudi university, and this study will employ the EFQM approach to analysing the findings and answering the research questions. Lastly, this thesis will take into account the influence of SE procedures on stakeholders, while also revealing the negative impact SE can have on institutional quality culture in environments that show reticence towards QA procedures. Consequently, this study will not only bridge the knowledge gap in the field of QA at women's universities, and at universities in general by analysing the impact of SE on all academic and administrative processes, but also consolidate the existing literature, by assessing the plausibility of introducing SE in a developing country.

1.6.   Research Aims and Questions

The aims of this study are to offer insight into existing QA practices in the women's section of King Abdulaziz University (KAU) in the KSA and to propose solutions to the possible issues that might arise from the findings. Therefore, the study will address subjects such as accreditation, self-evaluation, assessment and student evaluation, training of personnel and institutional research conducted at KAU, as well as the impact of the administrative policies on the success of QA.

This goal will be achieved by analysing the findings from a study conducted at KAU which employed personal interviews to address issues such as the nature and efficiency of

these practices, their impact on stakeholders, as well as the factors that affect their application in the context of obtaining accreditation.

In order to fulfil the aim of the study, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. How does self-evaluation relate to quality assurance in the women's section of KAU?
2. How do the internal policies and procedures in the women's section of KAU influence quality assurance and the self-evaluation process?
3. How does self-evaluation influence the stakeholders of KAU and university quality enhancement?

By addressing the above-mentioned issues, the study intends to contribute to the literature pertaining to the application of various QA procedures in Saudi Arabian universities in the women's section, by providing an analysis of the circumstances at KAU. Based on this analysis, the research will provide recommendations that could benefit the implementation of self-evaluation techniques in HEIs that aspire to obtain accreditation.

Lastly, the findings from this study will raise awareness of the interdependency of self-evaluation and internal policies, as it will analyse both the impact that institutional strategies have on the SE process, and vice-versa. To address these issues, several features will be considered, including: quality culture, centralisation, leadership and management, planning and monitoring, the mission, vision and objectives of KAU, as well as employee recruitment and training. This will be achieved by an in-depth evaluation of all procedures from both a social and institutional perspective. Lastly, the study will take into account several QA models, including the EFQM excellence model and TQM, in order to assess whether they would be suitably employed in the process of ensuring quality within the cultural context of the KSA.

1.7.   Research Contributions of the Study

This study aims to contribute to the enhancement of knowledge regarding self-evaluation within the KSA, and especially within the Women's section of King Abdulaziz

University, which has not yet been thoroughly investigated. As such, the information provided in this thesis offers knowledge that can benefit a number of stakeholders, including the personnel and students of KAU, the community as a whole, as well as other scholars.

According to Whetten (1989), a study that contributes to research must take into account several concerns, starting from the study's ability to devise a logical framework that can be adapted and employed by others to their benefit, to the study's relevance in time and ability to offer new information that changes existing perceptions. Taking these into account, the researcher aimed to uncover relevant information about new policies (as QA has been recently introduced in the KSA), as well as to formulate the study in a manner that is not only easily understood and adopted by the targeted stakeholders.

To start, it is the aim of the researcher to raise awareness regarding the situation of newly-implemented QA procedures, with the purpose of offering insight into the impact of SE and accreditation standards, as well as to promote the development of more efficient practices of ensuring quality. Therefore, exploring the impact of institutional policies on SE, and vice versa, can assist in the creation of a favourable framework of QA standards for Saudi higher education. Alternatively, the research conducted can be utilised as a foundation for the development of an internal evaluation system, as both the benefits and the challenges of employing SE will be presented. The researcher advocates the introduction of internal evaluations in all HEIs in the KSA, as the tendency in Saudi Arabian universities is to promote external QA practices, such as accreditation. However, accreditation should not be seen as an objective, as this approach can undermine the progress of quality. Instead, in order to guarantee continuous quality enhancement, self-evaluation needs to be acknowledged and adopted by the stakeholders of higher education providers. Most importantly, SE procedures can be employed to revise and improve the research and teaching standards at HEIs within the KSA, as they are the most important outcomes of higher education.

Furthermore, Whetten (1989: 494) further argues that contribution to research is evident if it makes a "significant, value-added contribution to current thinking", and thus if it demonstrates the need for certain modifications in the existing theory. Taking into account the proposed QA system (i.e. EFQM) for Saudi higher education, and the systems that are currently employed, be them TQM or ISO9000, the study reveals that

EFQM could breach the boundaries set by TQM and ISO9000 in terms of ensuring and maintaining quality in the sector. The research is also relevant to this period, as it coincides with the strategic efforts of the Ministry of Higher Education to reform the standards of quality in HE and with the latest interests of Saudi scholars, as such the ministry could make use of the findings presented throughout the study by employing the approaches that are proven to have productive results, whereas the scholastic community may employ the research findings as a starting point for a more in-depth analysis of the underlying QA issues in Saudi HEIs. Consequently, the study would contribute to the development of Saudi HEIs, by revealing the most efficient methods to approaching quality assurance, self-evaluation and accreditation, in addition to showcasing some of the problems that accompany Saudi QA standards. Through its findings and recommendations, the study can offer several indicators for the leadership of universities (both KAU and others), as the list of benefits and detriments will be socially, culturally and economically specific to the context of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The study will offer insight into the implementation of QA in a women's section of a Saudi university, which can set the path towards achieving quality and excellence in all areas of performance. In addition, the research will be able to provide the decision-makers at KAU specific details into the conditions surrounding QA practices at the universities, which can easily be detected and corrected, such as centralisation, resource allocation and internal communication issues. The feedback gathered from the interviews portrays the situation at KAU in an honest manner that can aid KAU in reaching international QA standards, by applying principles that are yet to be firmly established. The argued benefits thus strengthen the significance and potential influence of the study, which can be used to further understand the importance of introducing suitable QA models in HEIs.

1.8.   Methodology

The interviews were transcribed shortly after being recorded, which allowed the researcher to continually analyse the primary data. Following the transcription, and given the size of the study, the coding process was divided into a three- step process that allowed the researcher to accurately and systematically uncover a variety of individual perspectives and opinions. The researcher implemented a colour-coding system to easily identify the data relevant to answering the main objectives, by dividing and classifying

the findings according to the research questions. However, given the fact that qualitative research generally is an inductive process of investigation reliant on discovery examination (Saldana, 2013), the researcher decided to also approach the subject with a thematic analysis of the data gathered through interviews. Thus, the responses collected in the interviews allowed distinct themes and issues to emerge, regardless of the knowledge previously reviewed.

The coding scheme is comprised of two categories of codes: a priori codes and emergent codes. The former refers to the codes that were developed from the previous research and from the research questions. They include the following issues: governance and administration, employment process, teaching and learning, student administration and support, institutional relationships with the community and management of QA processes. The latter is a group of codes that emerged after the data gathered from the interviews was colour coded and analysed. This data revealed several important issues to understanding QA at KAU, including: the mission, vision and objectives of the university, the resources made available to KAU and the research conducted by both students and academics at KAU.

The data gathered through interviews was then triangulated with the data gathered from documentation, in order to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings.

Participants

A total of forty-two (42) interviews were conducted to serve as the prime material for the thesis. After an initial evaluation of the data at hand, the decision was taken to conduct interviews only with personnel from the women's section. As Balnaves and Caputi (2001: 5) note, the higher number of people consulted, the higher are the chances to aptly understand and decipher the issues existing within a community, especially when they are related to personal experiences. However, in qualitative research where numbers are not as important, but rather the reasons behind the questions, higher numbers also entail reaching a point where data saturation occurs early on (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006: 66). The researcher's initial intention was to solely interview 21 staff members from the women's section, yet after the findings regarding discrepancies between SE's influence at

KAU, the initial number of interviews with members from the women's section was doubled, in order to better ascertain and evaluate the situation at the university.

The interviewees had a range of experience in working at KAU (ranging from 2 years to 30 years) and some of them had participated in SE workshops and trainings. In order to get a wider perspective of the fundamental issues raised throughout the thesis, as well as to understand the impact of the SE process at a personal level, the researcher purposely sought employees who occupied different positions, ranging from senior management, to lecturers and support staff.

Study Structure

The study is divided into five fundamental segments. The first chapter has outlined the background and context of the research, by providing a brief overview of KSA's HE system. This section has also identified the issues that arise from introducing QA and accreditation within KSA universities. The second chapter is a review of the literature at both a national and global level. Additionally, the theoretical background, based on TQM, and the analytical framework, which is based on the EFQM excellence model, will be presented in the second chapter. The third chapter addresses the methodology of the research, data collection and analysis, by referring to the case study. The fourth chapter presents the findings from the research in light of the relevant literature. Lastly, the fifth chapter answers the research questions, draws the conclusions to the study and offers recommendations about how the issues revealed in the fourth chapter can be addressed.

1.9.   Assumptions, Limitations and Delimitations

Assumptions and Limitations

First and foremost, this study is predicated on the assumption that the employees participating in the research are people with experience, both in the field of higher education, and at KAU, who will, to the best of their abilities, offer truthful and accurate

depictions of the internal circumstances surrounding QA practices, given that the interviews will remain anonymous. However, the amount of details provided cannot be guaranteed, as some participants might not be willing to share some information, due to particular circumstances or consequences of sharing that information. Secondly, given the variety of people interviewed, it can also be assumed that the knowledge pertaining to self-evaluation, internal policies, programme development and quality standards is presented from several perspectives, in order to depict a diverse and complete portrayal of said issues.

Delimitations

The choice to investigate the women's section of KAU was not random, as the researcher's personal background consists of being both a student and an employee of the university. However, it was during the employment at KAU, that the researcher noticed several weaknesses in the internal evaluation system, which shaped the choice of the study.

Furthermore, although the intention was originally to examine both the female and male sections of KAU, the choice was made to only analyse the situation within the female section, for several reasons. Firstly, the researcher's experience of working there provided direct access to background information about the issues, and also inspired a desire to improve upon the self-evaluation practices, while knowledge of the male section was limited to second –hand information. Secondly, the interviews require a level of close contact that the researcher could not have achieved with the men employed in the male section of KAU. To interview men, the researcher would have had to find a male assistant to carry out the interviews instead, and the researcher could not guarantee the integrity of the responses from the personnel in the male section. For example, for the men who would not agree to be recorded. In addition, stemming from idea of employing an assistant, the researcher did not want to share personal information of the participants with other people, meaning to break anonymity. Lastly, the number of studies that specifically target the female sections of Saudi universities are minimal, and as such, the researcher preferred to solely analyse the impact of SE within the women's section.

Chapter 2
Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter aims to provide an analysis of previous studies conducted within the field of quality assurance. The discussion presented in this chapter addresses the research questions of this study, leading to the formulation of a coherent analytical framework which then underpins the discussion in the Findings chapter of the thesis. Therefore, the current chapter examines several aspects pertinent to the discussion. The chapter starts with a presentation of the theoretical background and the Total Quality Management (TQM) framework for quality assurance (QA), as the method is preferred in Saudi higher education institutions. It continues by defining quality assurance and self-evaluation procedures and appraising them in terms of utility, by examining their benefits and detriments. Secondly, it presents and evaluates QA strategies that are internationally acclaimed, such as the ISO 9000 and Hoshin Kanri methods, as well as QA frameworks that are highly developed. This chapter will assess whether the QA and accreditation systems in the KSA provide a sustainable, productive framework for HEIs, by assessing the strengths and limitations of Saudi QA practices. To continue, the role, requirements and influence of self-evaluation in employing a QA system in a higher education institution will be identified. Lastly, the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) excellence model is introduced as an analytical framework for the study, and is compared with the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment's (NCAAA) standards implemented in the KSA. Thus, this chapter presents and evaluates various quality assurance procedures, assessing the relevance and importance of self-evaluation within a QA system and discussing various accreditation systems in rapport with the one implemented in the KSA.

2.1. Theoretical Background - Total Quality Management

The "total quality" approach is a QA model that, similarly to the EFQM excellence model, prioritises the customer. According to Charantimath (2011: 78), TQM is commonly used in the industrial and commercial sectors to create a corporate culture that revolves around customer satisfaction, to the point where both external and internal customers are more satisfied with the company's performance and dedication, and are therefore more interested in continuously doing business with the company that employs the TQM approach. Furthermore, Mutafelija and Stromberg (2003) explain that TQM is a QA model that is based on four consecutive processes, under the PDCA initials, which stand for: plan, do, check and act. The planning phase consists of identifying the problem and analysing it; the doing phase concerns itself with the development and implementation of a solution; the checking phase evaluates and analyses the results; while the acting phase adopts the solution, while monitoring the results and searching for the next improvement opportunity (Mutafelija and Stromberg, 2003: 16).

Considering that in a HEI, every person involved is a customer (i.e. the students, the employees, the parents, society), Sallis (2002: 26) explains that TQM's success is feasible, given that quality "must be matched to the expectations and requirements of customers and clients", and is therefore defined by the customer, not just by the institution. Furthermore, Peratec (1995: 11) asserts that TQM strives for satisfying customers, perpetual improvement in both management and the creation of the product through process monitoring, as well as preventive strategies and teamwork, and its application in the higher education sector is potentially beneficial. With this in mind, Morfaw (2009: 17) argues that TQM is based on several tenets that are simple to understand, in order to further facilitate TQM's implementation. For example, a systematic and result-driven approach to problems; an acceptance and practice by all personnel, with a notable dedication from the top leadership; a long-term commitment to improving institutional quality culture.

It is Williams' (1993: 373-374) belief that TQM is beneficial to the education sector due to its potential to combat complacency and to "offer an effective way of developing a sense of common enterprise and interest", which are aspects required in HE. However, if the people involved in the delivery of quality services are interdependent and equally important, the QA approach is more susceptible to failure, as there are numerous

variables that can fail, such as the method of teaching, the capacity of absorbing knowledge and so on (Williams, 1993: 374). This being said, Argia and Ismail (2013: 138) argue that TQM's ability to increase internal cooperation within a HEI contributes to the establishment and distribution of quality services, by "fulfilling the needs and expectations of the stakeholders". However, as Sallis (2002: 26-27) notes, shifting the focus onto the customer is not a sufficient condition to ensure the success of TQM, as the institution that adopts the method needs to create and strictly follow the afore-mentioned strategies that ensure customer's needs are met. Yet this goal is particularly difficult to attain in HEIs, as both the definition of quality and expectations of success are diverse and difficult to secure in their entirety.

Nonetheless, Owlia and Aspinwall's (1997: 540) research into the effects of introducing TQM into certain HEIs revealed several benefits, including an increase in customer satisfaction, productivity and both staff and student morale, thus arguing that while implementing TQM in HE is different from its implementation in the business sector, they retain some similarities. In addition, Ali and Shastri (2010: 12-15) list the benefits of TQM as varying from teamwork enhancement, to an increase in staff morale, and an elevated perception of the quality of services delivered from the customer's viewpoint. Furthermore, other positive results include improved definition and development of administrative processes, better customer services and more efficient resource management (Owlia and Aspinwall, 1997: 536-537).

On the other hand, Sirvanci (2004: 382-385) has identified a variety of limitations for the application of TQM in HE, including issues in leadership, cultural and organisational transformation, customer identification and the role of students.

Firstly, given that TQM relies on the full commitment and involvement of management, Sirvanci (2004: 382-383) argues that the limited authority of the presidents and chancellors of HEIs, as well as the shared governance systems that are typical of the HE sector, causes difficulties in implementing the QA model. The issue with proper leadership guidance is, according to Brigham (1993: 43-46), common to both education and industry segments, as leaders who desire the outcomes indicated by TQM, yet are not dedicated to following the model, are universal. For this reason, in order for TQM to be successful, its culture needs to be fully embraced by the personnel of an institution, as it is a process that consumes considerable resources, exposes management issues, as well as

requiring continuous involvement and dedication of personnel (Charantimath, 2011: 76). Nonetheless, according to Sims and Sims (1995: 13), HEIs "where the top leadership was actively involved and committed to the effort" managed to successfully introduce TQM, therefore showing that while management can be an impediment, dedication and a shared interest can overcome potentially difficult issues.

Another limitation of TQM in the HE sector is the need for cultural and organisational transformation, which is typically easily overcome in organisations outside the education industry, yet the process is difficult within HEIs with "deep-rooted traditions", as the history of a university can cause the personnel to resist change (Sirvanci, 2004: 383). According to Hart and Shoolbred (1993: 22), as TQM is concerned with the behaviour of individuals, this behaviour is dependent on the institution's "climate and culture". Bearing this in mind, an example of the benefits of TQM can be seen in its implementation in a Malaysian university, where the lecturers openly accepted the QA model, which conclusively prompted improvement in both teamwork and commitment to ensuring QA (Sabet et al., 2012: 214). According to Sabet et al. (2012), communication between employees escalated throughout the practice of TQM, and thus the decision-making process conjointly improved, as members of staff shared ideas and offered suggestions. Overall, the study demonstrates that TQM can, under the right circumstances, improve satisfaction levels of stakeholders, management processes and, lastly, teamwork, an element that is capable of triggering innovations in organisational culture (Taskov, Mitreva, 2015: 228). Similarly, Hart and Shoolbred (1993: 23) argue that HEIs need to be aware of the necessary changes to the institutional culture if an efficient QA system is to be adopted. From this point of view, TQM is capable of improving QA processes within a HEI.

Furthermore, Wiklund et al. (2003: 99) argue that, regardless of the model's customer-oriented approach and its spread in the business sector, the issue with implementing TQM in the education sector is the fact that TQM is not clearly defined, thus creating confusion. On a similar note, Meirovich and Romar (2006: 325) indicate that TQM envisions quality from the customer's perspective and that this aspect is the very reason that can cause difficulties with successfully implementing the model. Therefore, given the fact that every participant in the academic process, including students, graduates, employees, employers and taxpayers, are considered customers, their needs and interests diverge, and thus the various, subjective concepts of quality cannot form a coherent

culture (Meirovich and Romar, 2006: 325). Moreover, Ahmed's (2006: 195-196) research into the implementation of TQM in HEIs revealed that the model had the most positive impact on the empowerment of customers, which implies an elevated degree of involvement from the students in the achievement of educational goals. The classification of students as participants in the delivery process is further explored by Meirovich and Romar (2006: 326-327), who ascertain that the behaviour of certain students, who, for example, cheat on a test or engage in plagiarism, are not specific to the student-customer, who does not actively participate in the process of acquiring knowledge. Such negative behaviours undermine the relevance of providing high quality teaching services and they constitute one of the unintended consequences of TQM, as the model, much like other similar QA models, is not particularly equipped to handle them. As a result, the quality provided by the HEI suffers, as well as the institution's ability to successfully adhere to its mission, vision and objectives. However, it is important to understand that student behaviour is not independent of institutional culture or practice, and that these behaviours may stem from said institutional issues, as institutional culture frequently moulds people's beliefs and attitudes (Smart, 2008). Thus, universities need to employ a QA model that focuses on creating a quality culture among all participants, including students.

Returning to classifying students as participants in the delivery of quality, Ahmed (2006: 196) argues that, while empowering the students has a positive impact on the quality culture of the university, this also creates a burden for the academics, who are required to assist the students in their endeavours. On the other hand, Motwani and Kumar (1997: 231-232) argue that while the involvement of students could be beneficial to QA, HEIs consider the acceptance of students as a part of the QA unit is a decision that threatens the autonomy of the institution. Similarly, Helms and Key (1994: 97-99) argue that students' desires may not coincide with the intentions of the university, and that HEIs ultimately might not be able to fulfil the demands of society, as well as their contribution to society as a whole, if they entertain the needs of the students. However, it is important to bear in mind that students can also be viewed as stakeholders or customers of HE, and their perspectives as a crucial part in creating and ensuring quality (Furedi, 2011, in Molesworth, Scullion and Nixon, 2011). In addition, the view expressed by Helms and Key (1994) in relation to university-student perceptions not being aligned, is antiquated and bizarre, as HEIs need to take into consideration the fact that students are not only

stakeholders or participants in HE, they are the main customer of this industry. As such, the involvement of students in creating an optimal QA system that oversees the needs and demands of the clients, first and foremost, is a crucial aspect of providing quality services (QAA, 2016d: 7-8).

2.2. Defining Quality

Despite the fact that quality is an old concept and that there is a vast amount of literature that discusses QA processes, the notion of quality, both in education and in general, is still one that is the subject of debated among academics and organisations. Harvey and Green (1993: 1) initially defined quality as the value of trading services for money, with Harvey (2006: 1) subsequently stating that quality is a tool through which the purposes of QA [compliance, control, accountability and improvement] are enforced. Quality is defined by the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO, 1986 as cited in Early, 1995: 7) as "the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs". However, Anderson (2006) presents the argument that each stakeholder has a different perception of quality. To illustrate the diversity of quality perceptions, Dew (2009: 4) says that there are five popular ways to frame the issue of quality in higher education: endurance, luxury and prestige, conformance to requirements, continuous improvement and value added. In a similar manner, Harvey and Green (1993) present five ways of thinking about quality, which are: exceptional, perfection, fitness for purpose, value for money and transformation. The figure below portrays the various perspectives on examining quality:

Figure 2: Interpretation of Quality from 5 perspectives
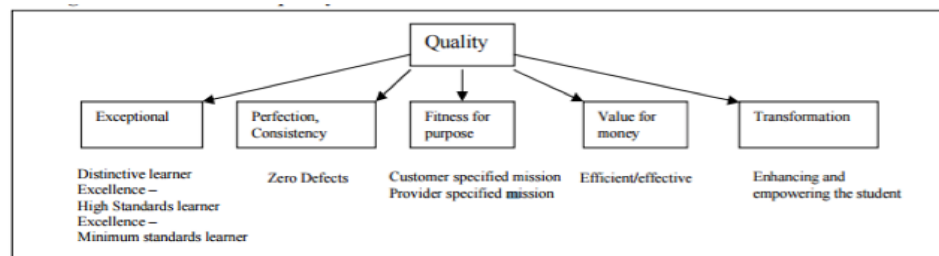
Source: Watty (2003: 215).

With this in mind, Harvey and Stensanker (2007) discuss five attitudes towards perceiving quality in relation to culture: excellence, consistency, fitness for purpose, value for money and the transformational approach. The table below shows the quality approaches and the differences within an elitist or democratic institutional culture:

Table 1: Embedding culture with Quality

Quality	Culture	
	Elitist	Democratic
Excellence	It helps to create an environment, which is based on gaining the best outcome regardless of other things	It aims to develop stated belief in order to provide a supportive environment for future excellence
Consistency	It ensures consistency in higher areas	It makes people accountable, so that they can meet expectations and perform their duties responsibly
Fitness for Purpose	It specifies purpose and ensures that everything is done according to it	It provides basic understating regarding purpose and provides the significance of achieving it
Value for money	It uses reputational leverage to attract money through high profile resources	It aims to develop internalised values to ensure that the resources are used effectively and efficiently
Transformational	It ensures that top grade students are empowered and enhanced	It provides a stakeholder centred approach to enhancing and empowering students, so that they can focus on future developments.

Source: Henard and Ringuet (2008); Harvey and Green (1993); Harvey and Stensaker (2007).

The Exceptional View –In the exceptional view, quality is a special construct, conveying distinctive features of a HEI connected with service excellence and probably unattainable by other institutions. Harvey and Green (1993: 11-14) offer three variations of quality as exceptional. Firstly, the traditional notion of quality, which offers status to the client, is characterised by elitism, yet "does not offer benchmarks against which to measure quality. It does not attempt to define quality. It is apodictic – one instinctively knows quality" (Harvey and Green, 1993: 11). Secondly, 'Excellence 1' encompasses two separate approaches to excellence, one being 'in relation to standards', while the other is interpreted as 'zero defects' (explained below). As Harvey and Green (1993: 12) state, "it does not matter that teaching may be unexceptional – the knowledge is there, it can be assimilated". Lastly, 'Checking Standards' consists in a type of view that concerns itself with attaining quality through meeting the specified quality requirements, thus ensuring quality is "the result of scientific quality control" (Harvey and Green, 1993: 12). Similarly, the 'traditional concept of quality', as presented by Green (1994) and Elassy (2015), is the approach that aims to provide an exclusive service in a manner that also provides the student with special status, such as prestige or influence. However, this definition is not viable to evaluate quality in higher education on a vast scale, as the traditional concept offers elitist services that cannot be duplicated properly by universities with unprivileged attendees without creating a gap between student privilege (Green, 1994: 13).

The Perfection View – In the perfection view, quality is perceived as a series of flawless and consistent results. When the services provided by an academic institution are consistently high, they achieve the quality standards maintained by the regulatory bodies. Harvey and Green (1993: 15-16) expand upon two versions of perfection. On the one hand, the 'zero defects' approach, also known as 'Excellence 2', advocates that quality is treated as excellence, that "perfection is ensuring that everything is correct, there are no faults", and that consistency is delivered to the client in a reliable manner. On the other hand, 'quality culture' promotes the importance of each stakeholder's implication in the distribution and accountability of quality, as the notion of quality control (QC) is emphasised (Harvey and Green, 1993: 16). Alternatively, Green (1994) offers two perceptions of quality that are similar to the perfection view in certain respects. Firstly, quality as conforming to specifications or standards is an approach primarily utilised in the public services to determine whether the product offered by the institution is in

conformance with the designated standards (Green, 1994). However, this approach is unreliable due to its dependence on exact measurements that are not characteristic of the higher education industry (Elassy, 2015: 252). Secondly, quality as effectiveness in achieving institutional goals, is an efficient approach solely if the university examined has clearly-defined mission, vision and objectives, as vague concepts cannot be appraised. Moreover, the concepts need to be established in a manner that does not cause resource deficits or management complications in other departments (Green, 1994: 16). Consequently, it can be argued that achieving quality through the perfection approach is inefficient due to the impossibility of measuring and defining what is considered a *defect* in an industry that provides unquantifiable services.

The Fitness for Purpose View – The fitness view of quality is defined as the fulfilment of customer needs and demands. In HEIs, fitness for purpose is based on the capacity to achieve the defined mission. Harvey and Green (1993) advocate the importance of ensuring customer satisfaction so as to provide evidence of quality, as well as implementing a system of QA to guarantee "that the desired quality, mechanisms, procedures and processes in place […] ensure that the desired quality, however defined and measured, is delivered" (Harvey and Green, 1993: 20), thus arguing that quality can be assured when specialised mechanisms are introduced to evaluate its development. Quality as fitness for purpose is widely utilised in the academic sector, which argues that quality is meaningless "except in relation to the purpose of the product or service" (Elassy, 2015: 252). However, Green (1994: 15) argues that the weakness of this view is the difficulty in defining the purposes of the product or service offered by HEIs, due to its dependency on the people who define said purposes, as several groups of stakeholders should be involved in this process (i.e. students, managers, academics, etc.) and their opinions can be conflicting. Furthermore, a fitness for purpose view is dependent on providing the desired service, yet does not incorporate a progress-oriented perspective typical of quality (Harvey, 2006). Instead, fitness for purpose limits the quality approach as a repetitive task that should only try to accomplish the singular goal of offering the product developed by the university, disregarding the manners in which the product can be altered.

The Value for Money View – The view of quality as value for money can be defined as judging the quality of "provision, processes or outcomes against the monetary cost (…) of making the provision, undertaking the process or achieving the outcomes" (Harvey,

2006). There are numerous approaches to defining value for money in the context of higher education, yet they share the view that value for money represents the efficient use of financial resources (Ramsden, 1998: 40). For example, Williams (2011: 174) argues that value for money can refer to achieving academic success, as students who perform well enough to be highly regarded by their lecturers believe they achieve value for money.

Quality as value for money can refer to return on investment. From this standpoint, value for money in the education sector is defined as value for the payment made by students in order to gain quality education (Harvey, 2006). On the other hand, alumni might perceive return on investment as the relationship between their initial investment on graduating from a HEI and the income generated post-graduation, if it is directly influenced by the diploma received. Therefore, it is the duty of the regulatory bodies to ensure that the educational institutions are providing quality that is worth the stakeholders' investment. For this purpose, educational institutions focus on building an attractive infrastructure in order to provide updated facilities to students, and thereby gain prestige in the community.

Transformation – The transformation view is based on the fact that "unlike many other services where the provider is doing something for the consumer, in the education of students the provider is doing something to the consumer" (Harvey and Green, 1993: 24), therefore continuously shaping the participant.

The transformation process provided by education is divided into two types of service: enhancing the participant, which is an approach that enhances the students by directly implementing changes (i.e. providing information), and empowering the participant, an approach that enables the students to determine their own development, through strategies such as student evaluation or selection of personal curriculum (Harvey and Green, 1993). However, it is important to note that this type of transformation is dependent on having knowledge about the participants, and the approach is therefore similar to Green's (1994) and Elassy's (2015) classification of quality as meeting customers' stated needs, which is based entirely on knowing the customers, their needs and the means through which to satisfy them.

This approach, however, has the disadvantage that all the stakeholders involved in HEIs, be they students, members of staff or the community, are both providers and customers,

therefore rendering the proposal difficult to supervise and evaluate (Elassy, 2015: 252-253). Thus, as Müller and Funnell (1992: 175) state, the students are involved in the learning process to such an extent that they "become responsible for creating, delivering and evaluating the product", which can lead to biased results or diverse product demands. Therefore, student implication may also negatively influence quality standards through personal preferences, as they may not be qualified enough or experienced enough to aptly determine what aspects of the teaching and learning process are beneficial to them and their professional future (Müller and Funnell, 1992). Nonetheless, it is important to take into account the fact that not all approaches to interpreting quality perceive students as stakeholders, but as customers or participants in HE (Molesworth, Scullion and Nixon, 2011). With this in mind, Furedi (2011, in Molesworth, Scullion and Nixon, 2011) explains that in such circumstances, HEIs adopt a stance that is built entirely on the pursuit and glorification of student feedback, which allows for a more competitive industry.

Furthermore, Harvey (2002) states that academic standards in universities refer to two aspects: standards in teaching and standards in research. In this situation, the connection between quality and the two standards refers to the different manners of perceiving quality in relation to research accomplishments and the academic performance of the students within a HEI. In the higher education sector, standards are divided into four separate sections: academic, competence, service and organisational, each of them being subjected to similar visions of quality (Harvey, 2002). According to Alharbi (2015: 428), academic standards concern themselves with the intellectual capacities of students, the standards of competence refer to the technical skills acquired by students, service standards indicate the level of services provided by HEIs to the students, while organisational standards refer to the processes through which a HEI ensures the supply of an adequate learning and research environment. However, Green (1994: 14) states that the approach of perceiving quality as the conformance to standards has the disadvantage of being dependent on clear measurements, which may not be efficiently applied to the services offered in higher education.

The following table shows the linkage between views of quality and types of standard, as presented by Harvey (2002):

Table 2: Relationship between Quality and Standards

Quality ╲ Standards	Academic Standards	Standards of Competence	Service Standards	Organisational standards
Exceptional	Emphasises the summative assessment of knowledge and 'higher-level' skills. Comparative evaluation of research output. Élitism: the need to maintain pockets of high quality and standards in a mass education system	Linked to professional competence; emphasis on traditional demarcation between knowledge and (professional) skills	Input-driven assumptions of resource-linked service/facilities. Good facilities, well-qualified staff, etc. 'guarantee' service standards. Reluctance to expose professional competence to scrutiny	Clear role hierarchy reflecting academic status and experience. Often a heavy emphasis on 'traditional values'. Strong emphasis on autonomy and academic freedom. Aversion to transparency
Perfection or consistency	Meaningless, except for an idealistic notion that peer scrutiny of standards or quality will be undertaken in a consistent manner.	Expectation of a minimum prescribed level of professional competence. Problem in assessing for 'zero defects'.	Primary relevance in ensuring service-standard based quality — mainly in relation to administrative processes	Right first time. Document procedures, regulations and good practice. Obtain ISO9000 certification.
Fitness for purpose	Standards should relate to the defined objectives that relate to the purpose of the	Specification of skills and abilities related to objectives. Evidence	The purpose involves the provision of a service. Thus, process is	Ensure appropriate mechanisms in place to assess whether practices

	course (or institution). Summative assessment should be criteria referenced, although as purposes often include a comparative element, these are mediated by norm-referenced criteria.	required to at least identify threshold standards. Professional competence assessed against professional body requirements for practice.	assessed in terms of (minimum) standards for the purpose.	and procedures fit the stated mission-based purposes.
Value for money	Maintenance or improvement of academic outcomes for the same (or declining) unit of resource. That is, ensure greater efficiency. Improve the process-experience of students. Concern that efficiency gains work in the opposite direction to quality improvement. Provide students with an academic experience to warrant the	Maintain or improve the output of generally 'employable' graduates for the same unit of resource. Ensure a continual or increasing supply of academic personnel. Provide students with an educational experience that increases competence, to ensure a return on investment.	Customer satisfaction analyses to assess process and outcomes. Students and other stakeholders are seen as 'paying customers'. Customer charters specify minimum levels of service (and facilities) that stakeholders can expect.	Relies heavily on periodic or ad hoc reviews of whether organisational structure is effective and efficient, often informed by management information (especially basic output statistics).

	investment.			
Transformation	Evaluation of the learning environment and processes. Assessment of students learning against explicit objectives. Formative and summative assessment is required. Transformative research standards are assessed in terms of impact in relation to objectives.	Provide students with enhanced skills and abilities that empower them to continue learning and to engage effectively with the complexities of the 'outside' world. Assessment of students' acquisition of transformative skills and their impact.	Emphasis on specification and assessment of standards of service and facilities that enable the process of student learning and the acquisition of transformative abilities.	Emphasis on organisational structure that encourages dialogue, teamwork and empowerment of the learner. Delegated responsibility for quality and standards. Innovation, responsiveness and 'trust' are prominent.

Source: Harvey (2002: 254).

Alternatively, perceptions regarding defining the quality concept can be grouped as follows, as per Green's (1994: 13-17) and Elassy's (2015: 252-254) classifications: the traditional concept of quality, quality as the conformance to specifications or standards, quality as effectiveness in achieving institutional goals, quality as fitness for purpose and quality as meeting customers' stated needs.

Considering the entirety of the listed sources, it can be deduced that all the aforementioned definitions, perspectives and standards of quality can be both opportune and detrimental to the implementation of a QA system within a HEI. This is especially true given that higher education encompasses an array of perceptions regarding quality, as different stakeholders are interested in different aspects of quality. Difference in perspectives is typically notable among the different groups of stakeholders (i.e. administrators, lecturers, students, researchers) and quality might not have the same meaning for all these groups (Elassy, 2015: 255).

Furthermore, various disciplines, activities or programmes may require an emphasis on different perspectives of quality. To illustrate, a college that is research-oriented might favour the value for money approach to quality, in order to optimize resource distribution, while prestigious universities that have stringent recruitment standards (i.e. Bologna, Cambridge, Harvard) might perceive quality as excellence.

Nonetheless, taking into consideration the most important aspects of QA [deliverance of a valuable product and ensuring participants' satisfaction], it can be stipulated that a comprehensive, multi-faceted definition of quality could be devised and introduced in HEIs in order to guarantee that no departments, objectives or stakeholders are neglected.

2.3. Quality Assurance in Higher Education

According to Glanville (2006, in Štimac and Katić, 2015: 582), QA is a "comprehensive term which generally includes all the policies, processes, activities and mechanisms by which quality assurance of higher education is acknowledged, sustained and developed". In like manner, Harvey and Green (1993: 20) state that QA does not regard the establishment of standards or specifications that measure quality, but rather is implemented in order to ensure that there are mechanisms enforced in order to ensure that the desired quality of the product is delivered to the consumer, regardless of the manner in which quality is delineated or assessed. Therefore, the purposes of QA consist of: "compliance, control, accountability and improvement" (Harvey, 2006: 1), to the extent that it ensures both the processes of preserving a university's standards are maintained, as well as that the students enrolled at the university experience the best deliverable service (Rahman and Al-Twaim, 2015: 30). For these reasons, the need for such a system is obvious, as without quality verifications there would be no distinguishing elements between a sub-standard service and a quality one, and sub-standard services could not be eliminated (Frazer, 1992: 10).

Furthermore, Lomas (2004) states that there are two approaches to improving quality: quality assurance and quality enhancement. On the one hand, QA is concerned with the offered products and services, and whether they conform to the imposed quality standards. Thus, quality assurance fulfils its broad purpose of ensuring that products and services are not, in any way, inadequate for delivery and that solely high quality products are presented to the customers. On the other hand, the National Unions of Students of

Europe (NUSE, 2002) perceive quality enhancement as a continuous transformational process that is dependent on competitive alterations in the learning and teaching process, which is directly associated with quality improvement. Yorke (1996, in Lomas, 2004: 158), argued that over time more attention has been given to a QA vision that emphasises assessment and accountability, rather than quality enhancement. Furthermore, while the QA approach concerns itself with both the past and the present delivery of quality products, in order to maintain an adequate and desired quality level, quality enhancement is concentrated on future prospects and aims to provide HEIs with long-term perspectives for the progress of quality and of the HE itself.

When discussing QA systems, it is important to take into consideration the various components that aid in the QA process, including quality control, quality audit and quality evaluation (Ngwira, 2016, Frazer, 1992). According to Frazer (1992: 10), quality control is the process that secures that the product complies with the minimum standards, quality audit refers to the verification of processes with the intention of asserting whether they are functioning within normal parameters (Frazer, 1992:11), while quality evaluation is the assessment of quality implementation by stakeholders (Ngwira, 2016).

2.3.1. Importance and Impact of Quality Assurance

The reasons why QA systems and processes, as well as the definition of quality might differ from country to country are evident given that the majority of higher education providers are individual governments, who "have a responsibility to society to ensure that what they 'buy' from higher education is acceptable and provides value for money" (Frazer, 1992:16), while also maintaining cultural heritage. However, QA systems are maintained so that the client (i.e. society) is reassured that HEIs provide the necessary products and services (Frazer, 1992:16). This concern is further developed by Frazer (1992: 16-17), who raises the question of public fund distribution, and whether more funding should be allocated to the departments that are prolific in HEIs, to reward their contribution and maintain their successful outcomes, or whether the government should allocate more funds to the departments that are struggling, in order to facilitate their growth to an "acceptable threshold standard". However, considering the fact that there is no compelling proof that the reward system is effective in guaranteeing continuous achievements, as well as the matter of depriving less successful departments of sufficient capital – it could possibly further damage the standards of quality offered by these

departments (Frazer, 1992:17). Moreover, due to the finite state of the available capital, difficulties emerge in such distribution and management situations, especially considering that accountability to the client needs to be invariably ensured, lest quality suffers and departments are shut down. In this situation, the EFQM excellence model (2003: 24) presents specific QA strategies (i.e. financial planning, management and reporting) efficient in solving budget management issues, reviewing the financial resources and preventing budgeting issues from surfacing.

Major Criticism
On the other hand, although the QA system is widely perceived as a beneficial system that yields good results, numerous experts bring forth valuable criticism that should be taken into account prior to entertaining the idea of QA.

For instance, Morley (2003: 92, 105) questions the purpose of QA, a system which is, for the most part, comprised of strategies that ensure a certain degree of conformity is maintained throughout the entirety of higher education providers, thus creating a culture of excellence that produces mediocrity (Morley, 2003: 162). Furthermore, Dew and Nearing (2004: 12) argue that QA has one critical fault, as it is not a system that promotes continuous improvement, but rather, establishes a common standard that does not facilitate the pursuit of excellence.

Even more so, Kis (2005: 33) questions QA systems in their entirety, arguing that the systems' inability to effectively provide guidance for their design and implementation may stem from the "lack of clarity about what the purpose of quality assurance should be, about the adequateness of diverse methods and instruments used by quality assurance mechanisms, or concerning the consequences of quality monitoring results". Kis' (2005) concerns come from the fact that efficiency in general in HE is difficult to quantify, and all QA methods seem to be equally beneficial and counterintuitive when perceived on a larger scale, as some institutions encounter complications, while others manage to introduce QA practices without any difficulties. In a similar manner, Leiber, Stensaker and Harvey (2015) argue that statistically, QA is introduced in HE due to various factors, and to appease a plethora of goals, yet the causality of this step is rarely taken into account. As a result, while QA policies may have the desired positive effects, they may also result in long-term negative effects that were not considered beforehand (Leiber, Stensaker and Harvey, 2015).

Furthermore, as Kis (2005: 33) argues, the efficiency of QA is particularly troublesome to estimate in cases where it is quickly introduced and therefore where the natural progression of HEIs without QA can no longer be observed, stating that "it is also difficult to know how the quality of education would have changed without the implementation of quality assurance processes". Therefore, by keeping in mind Stensaker's (2008) argument that QA procedures require an extensive degree of institutional transformation, it is difficult not to wonder if the same progression could have been achieved even without QA practices. If this is the case, it may, in consequence, render them counterproductive in the long run, given the fact that numerous internal policies and the institutional culture needs to undergo massive changes so that QA succeeds.

With this in mind, considering the rise in HE demand during the past thirty years (Lindqvist, 2007: 50-51), as well as the rapid expanse of higher education in terms of employees, information and customers, an argument is that it would be equally difficult and time consuming not to implement a generic QA system in HEIs, particularly when the institutions aim to be perceived as contemporary epicentres of learning. However, an issue recently discussed by Sadler (2017) is the discrepancy between what HEIs state to be the student-driven objectives prior to introducing QA systems, versus what practically tends to frequently occur after their implementation. To illustrate, Sadler (2017: 10-11) argues that HEIs initially argue in favour of QA systems on the basis of their initial – or perhaps ideal – purpose of introducing a qualitatively superior teaching and learning system that increases the students' results. In contrast, the more common and realistic outcome of QA systems equates to guaranteeing that the majority of students are provided a "good higher education environment and experience in the spirit of being student-focused, engaging, inclusive, and cultivating the students' sense of belonging" (Sadler, 2017: 11). As a result, the pursuit of excellence in a few individuals tends to be ignored in favour of the satisfaction with the mediocrity of the majority, Sadler (2017), Dew and Nearing (2004) explain.

2.3.2. Types of Quality Assurance

With regards to quality assurance, Neave (1991, in Billing, 2004: 114) concluded that its purpose is elusive, and that "there is no agreement on the purpose of quality assurance, save only as a resource allocation device or perhaps as a resource withdrawal device".

Campbell and Rozsnyai (2002: 26), on the other hand, argue that the higher education institutions' creation of more refined and efficient internal QA mechanisms is the catalyst that will shift the balance "from compliance to improvement", despite Morley's (2003) and Neave's (1991, in Billing, 2004) scepticism. Furthermore, Ng (2008: 112) states that the introduction of QA mechanisms in higher education will alleviate the concerns that accompany the education sector, such as funding, accountability, quality and managerial efficiency.

Westerheijden, Stensaker and Rosa (2007: 81) argue that "a basic distinction in quality assessment approaches is between mission-based and standards-based evaluation", thus delineating between internal and external quality assurance, two separate QA methods that have different objectives and that employ distinct procedures. However, internal and external QA are related, as external quality assessment "almost always drives internal quality assurance" (Westerheijden, Stensaker and Rosa, 2007: 81). Furthermore, Pennington and O'Neil (1994: 13) argue that in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning in higher education, and thus to advance the principle of education, both internal and external components need to be involved. Lastly, Campbell and Rozsnyai (2002: 26, 28-29) state that managing internal quality control and external quality assurance are the two important aspects of providing quality services.

This being said, internal quality assurance is based on monitoring all the activities performed, focusing on improvement and their relation with the quality aspect (Ngwira, 2016), while external quality assurance is based on either accreditation or visitations from an expert team, in order to fulfil legal obligations (Harvey and Askling, 2003).

Jeliazkova and Westerheijden (2001: 3) offer a model for QA which divides the system into five distinct phases that may occur chronologically and defines the role of QA according to each phase, by highlighting the problems that appear during each phase and describing the means through which both internal and external QA are achieved. The details of this model are presented below:

Table 3: Phases and Role of Quality Assurance

Phase	Problems	Role of QA	Internal Quality Review	External Quality Review
1	There are serious	To identify sub-	Achieved through	Based on

	doubts regarding educational standards	standard educational programmes	measuring performance standards and analysing descriptive reports	summative reports, accreditation, and the checking of national standards
2	There are doubts regarding the efficiency of a higher education institution or system	To create quality awareness and maintain public accountability	Based on strategic reporting regarding procedures and performance	Based on ranking of HEIs, identifying good practices
3	There are doubts over the aspects of innovation capacity and QA capacity of institutions	To focus on self-regulation and stimulate public accountability	Based on self-evaluation reports regarding procedures and performance	It is based on audit reports (to the institution and the state)
4	The educational institution wants to stimulate a sustainable quality culture in HEIs	To improve through self-regulation and public accountability	It is based on self-evaluative reports that employ SWOT analyses, benchmarking performance standards	It verifies and incorporates the data in public databanks
Upcoming challenges	Transparency in the higher education system is decreasing	Focused on market regulations	Performance indicators about products (knowledge and skills of graduates)	It is based on the publication of performance indicators and standardised testing of graduates

Source: Jeliazkova and Westerheijden (2001).

Furthermore, the figure below illustrates the connection between internal and external QA, quality standards and purpose of QA:

Figure 3: Internal and External Quality Assurance
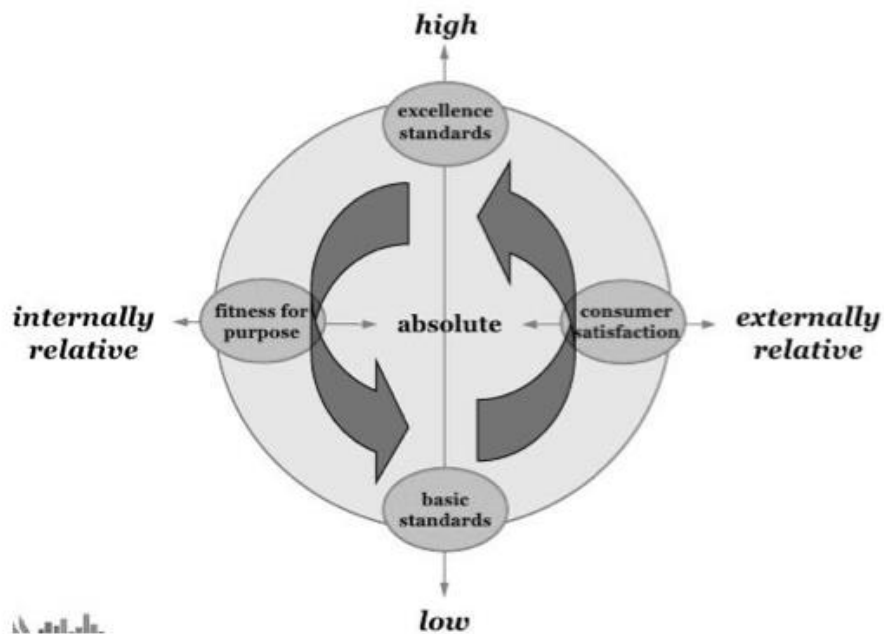
Source: Van Damme (2004: 133).

The figure presented above shows that internal quality assurance depends on fitness for purpose, while external quality assurance centres around consumer satisfaction (Van Damme, 2004).

2.3.2.1 Internal Quality Assurance

According to Cheng (2003: 203), internal QA is crucial in HEIs, as it is concerned with "improving the internal environment and processes such that the effectiveness of learning and teaching can be ensured to achieve the planned goals"; therefore, internal QA is employed to ensure that the main goal of higher education, to provide quality knowledge with efficiency, is maintained. At the same time, Fourie (2000: 51) addresses the issue of HEIs to develop and maintain an internal quality control practice, in order to compensate for higher education's "shift from quality control to quality assurance".

Stumbrys (2004: 161-162) divides the objectives of internal QA into four crucial categories:

- assisting with the enhancement of high quality services and with the attainment of perfect standards;

- providing stakeholders with reliable and exhaustive information regarding the quality of learning, the scientific achievements and management of a HEI;
- ensuring that the areas of performance that lack in quality are identified, and providing advantageous measures to improve the quality of the determined areas;
- guaranteeing the accountability of the HEI for the allocated state financial resources.

There are several procedures that are associated to internal QA, yet internal quality audits and self-evaluations are the most efficient. On the one hand, internal quality audits are employed to determine and ensure the personnel's dedication and consistency with implementing the necessary QA processes (Mail et al., 2014: 177). On the other hand, Ritchie's (2007: 86) assessment is that self-evaluations are utilised with the purpose of determining the manner in which "such self-critical questioning of practice and outcomes can inform decisions about how the situation can be improved for the benefit of pupils", or in the case of higher education, students.

2.3.2.2 External Quality Assurance

Morley (2003: 162) argues that standardisation aims to create excellence, yet delivers mediocrity, but Doherty (1997: 240) also asserts that while standards-based evaluations are vulnerable to the subjective nature of standards, a positive aspect of such an evaluation is the continuously shifting standardisation, which is influenced and raised by competition.

External QA is a process that emphasizes either accountability or continuous quality improvement (Campbell and Rozsnyai, 2002: 26) and is commonly implemented by independent agencies or organisations that "function as professional buffer organisations between public authorities and higher education institutions" (Martin and Stella, 2007: 20).

The procedures specific to external QA vary from country to country, and among HEIs. There are several procedures associated with external QA, such as quality control, external quality audits, external evaluation, accreditation and peer review.

To exemplify, external quality assurance can be based on external accreditation and visitations that aim to assess the quality of the programs and the product offered (Ngwira, 2016). In this situation, the visits are made by external specialists, who offer advice and

critique with regards a multitude of subjects, such as institutional policies, course design or teaching and learning evaluations (Wilger, 1997: 10), all of these issues being part of a single specialised branch. After the evaluation framework is accepted, the experts write their report, which is based on both oral and written assessments. The oral report is presented at the end of the visit and the written report is presented within a few months (Westerheijden, et al., 2007). Alternatively, external accreditation in the United States is performed by either non-governmental organisations or through specialised programmes (Campbell and Rozsnyai, 2002: 25). The process is undergone to assess whether HEIs or programmes have adequate objectives and conditions, and whether they are attaining said aspects (Wilger, 1997: 4).

Another process specific to external QA is external evaluation, which is utilised to examine the practices, policies and programmes of a HEI, in order to appraise the development and competence of said features (Le Menestrel, Walahoski and Mielke, 2014). This approach is favoured by HEIs as an alternative to internal evaluation due to the external evaluator's detached perspective, impartiality and commitment to efficiently performing the evaluation, which also implies a higher degree of credibility (Le Menestrel, Walahoski and Mielke, 2014: 64).

2.3.3. Alternate Models of QA for Higher Education

As presented in the aforementioned literature, quality assurance in Western nations began to be sought in the 1950s and 1960s, when the main focus was often placed on different ways of improving human capital through training and strengthening the organisational system. The idea of quality assurance is not new, yet numerous terminologies and methods have been used to identify and develop the application of both internal and external QA.

2.3.3.1. Hoshin Kanri

Hoshin Kanri is a strategic management approach that attempts to create a gap between the senior managers' set objectives and the routine operations of personnel, in order to enable the integration of said objectives in every work process (Tennant and Roberts, 2001: 287). The educating process is known as the "Lean Learning Cycle", and although it may differ from institution to institution, it maintains the same purpose, that is to

establish and implement a standardised approach that is easily understood, remembered and perceived by the entirety of personnel, so that each individual strives to relentlessly implement the institution's mission and vision into each work-related process that is undertaken (Charron et al., 2015: 148). Charron et al. (2015) state that in order for the "Lean Learning Cycle" to be effective, it must follow four crucial educational 'pillars'. These pillars comprise of topic selection, the identification process of the approved initial concepts; course objectives, the declaration of the learning expectations; course content – the creation of the content in a manner that ensures the personnel is familiar with the concepts, as well as with how to aptly employ them; and course delivery – the actual teaching and learning sessions that consist in well-organised classes focused on a frequent rewarding system (Charron et al., 2015: 149).

However, similarly to the TQM approach, the Hoshin Kanri QA method cannot be successful without a dedicated management body that creates and implements the institution's policies regarding the quality guarantee of the offered product, as well as continuously supervises the correct implementation of the employees' learnt strategies throughout the "Lean Learning Cycle", while also having the responsibility of correcting any mistakes that might appear (Kondo, 1998: 425-426). The greatest asset of the Hoshin Kanri approach is its receptivity to communication throughout the ranks of an organisation, making the mission and vision of the firm the essential goals of each individual, thus creating an office unity that is concentrated on maintaining a standardised level of quality and on eliminating errors (Asan and Tanyaş, 2007: 1000). Another element of the method is the creation of a Quality Circle (Hutchins, 2008: 188), a committee dedicated to assessing quality and presenting solutions to issues that might arise, yet the introduction of this circle creates a number of disadvantages. Most importantly, the exclusion of non-circle members from the QA verification process can cause alienation between themselves and those who belong to the circle, as management can show favouritism towards the latter category, with the former feeling excluded and less relevant in regards to the QA process, thus endangering the success of the Hoshin Kanri model (Hutchins, 2008: 207-208).

In the HE sector, Hoshin Kanri is seen as a controversial method of QA, as it has both positive and negative aspects. Considering the method's main objectives, to identify the areas that need improvement and to offer solutions (Hutchins, 2008: 188-189), the positive aspects that derive from the model consist of: creating a sense of unity between

the management and other employees, due to the shared objectives that are created in consensus (Ennals, 2015: 181); the utilisation of self-assessment to measure results and the deployment of a strategic plan that targets both individuals and routine activities throughout the institution (Roberts and Tennant, 2003: 83). On the other hand, Roberts and Tennant's (2003: 83) study into the implementation of Hoshin Kanri in a HEI revealed several management barriers, including: the inability to admit poor results or to identify the causes behind the setbacks, the failure to employ an analysis of the institution's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the impossibility to reach a consensus regarding the crucial procedures required to guarantee accomplishments. Lastly, it is important to take into account that this method is deeply embedded in Japan's unique cultural context where order, patience and dedication are paramount, which can insure the success of the method in Japan, but since the method is specifically tailored to suit Japanese institutions, its success cannot be guaranteed outside the country's standards (Roberts and Tennant, 2003). To conclude, in a similar fashion to other QA models, the Hoshin Kanri method is overly dependent on the management of an institution, which can either cause the unequivocal success or downfall of the model's implementation.

2.3.3.2. The International Organisation for Standardisation 9000

Developed in 1987, the ISO 9000 was created to standardise the TQM processes, by providing a framework that is based on systematic processes and approaches (Symonds, 1996). The ISO 9000 is a versatile model that is capable of adapting to any institution, regardless of type, size and the services or products offered, which provides the institution that adopts it with a "scientific quality assurance system and quality analysis tool which helps in analysing and improving quality of products and services" (Fengchun, Vogel and Zhaoyu, 2014: 87). Furthermore, the ISO 9000 model is a management tool that brings about "competitive advantages both via cost and via differentiation" and has the "potential to stimulate the company transition towards TQM" (Garcia-Miranda et al., 2000: 1-2). However, Clery (1993: 2) argued that the ISO 9000 model does not directly concern itself with management processes, customer satisfaction, financial status or the quality of the delivered product or services, and neither does it specify the methods of implementation, but rather, it ensures the existence and functionality of specific processes, such as processing, product design and management, planning, production and

evaluation. Therefore, the ISO 9000 is more bureaucratic in nature than other QA models and aims to provide the methods through which the preferred outcomes should be attained and maintained.

The benefits of certification through the ISO 9000 model are numerous. Lee's (1997) classification of ISO 9000's benefits was concluded after his study of the implementation of the model in countries from North America, Europe and Asia, and is comprised of: an improved team spirit, a diminished state of internal conflict, reduced wastage, reduced management time and an overall increase in efficiency throughout the institutions. Similarly, Brown and Van der Wiele's (1995) study of Australian businesses offered numerous improvements, in areas such as: quality awareness relating to both company and the product offered, management, customer satisfaction and relations, either the products or the services offered, a heightened sense of camaraderie and respect within the institution, as well as the respect from the company's competitors. In addition, Casadesus, Gimenez and Heras' (2001) research of the ISO 9000 model's implementation within Spanish institutions pointed towards several benefits, including an "improvement of the definition and standardisation of work procedures", an "improvement in the definition of the responsibilities and obligations of the workers", an "increased company confidence in their quality", an increase in internal commitment and "improved guidelines reducing improvisation" (Casadesus, Gimenez and Heras 2001: 329). Furthermore, Rabbitt and Bergh (1993: 13) presented twenty fundamental elements that comprise the ISO 9000 model, which include, but are not limited to, management responsibility through appropriate testing, inspection and control actions and equipment, creating a quality-oriented system that is enforced through internal quality audits and record-keeping, as well as the comprehensive training of employees to adhere to the QA processes.

A brief study of the list is enough to conclude that the ISO 9000 model is extremely dependent on both cost and duration of implementation (Halis and Oztas, 2002), as processes such as training, internal audits and constant examinations can seem overwhelming. Therefore, the duration and costs required are two of ISO 9000's most discouraging elements, as "depending on the current state of the organization's quality system, certification may take several thousand employee-hours and thousands of dollars" (Maguad and Krone, 2012: 31). Furthermore, there are other factors that can interfere with the correct implementation of the ISO 9000 model, such as lack of commitment from the senior management, poor organisation and planning for quality by the

institution, difficulty in understanding the characteristics and benefits of the model, the culture of a company that does not support individual competitiveness, and so on (Wenmoth and Dobbin, 1994, Maguad and Krone, 2012). This shows that the application of an ISO 9000 certificate helps only to improve continuing activities and working practices.

While the EFQM is a model that relies on a long-term commitment to excellence (Hides, Davies and Jackson, 2004: 196), the ISO 9000 does the opposite, as it is typically employed as a short-term strategy, which is usually perceived as a disadvantage in the HE context (Tambi, Ghazali and Yahya, 2008: 1003). Furthermore, Sartika's (2013: 987-988) study into the implementation of ISO 9000 in HEIs revealed the model's lack of guidance to creating a quality culture, a lack of procedures to guarantee the monitoring and evaluation processes, as well as the lack of responses following internal audits. However, the research also portrays the strengths of ISO 9000 in domains such as failure diagnosis, correcting the failure of students, curriculum design and record keeping (Sartika, 2013: 988). To conclude, although ISO 9000 can be aptly implemented to different industries and even though the model is currently employed in Saudi Arabian HEIs, it does not provide sufficient guidance for ensuring quality in higher education.

2.3.4. Internationalisation and Globalisation of HE

Given the suggested framework of the current study (i.e. the EFQM Excellence Model), the additional models of ensuring QA in HE previously discussed in this chapter (i.e. TQM, Hoshin Kanri and ISO 9000), as well as the context in which the case study is situated, it is also important to take into account the impact of internationalisation and globalisation in HE policies and QA reforms.

According to Altbach and Knight (2007: 290-291), internationalisation and globalisation are two different issues that impact HE in different ways. While globalisation has economic, political and societal ramifications, as it implies the growth of international labour markets, the use of English and of information technology (IT), internationalisation refers to an institution's personnel, curriculum and "the commercialization of international HE" (Altbach and Knight, 2007: 291). Zajda and Rust (2016: 1-2) argue that globalisation has recently become an all-encapsulating phenomenon that impacts culture, economy and politics, especially due to the

technological innovations of the past years. According to Held et al. (1999: 2), globalisation is the process of "widening, deepening and speeding up of world-wide interconnectedness". At the same time, internationalisation in HE is a process that implies making changes in existing HE policies, practices and perspectives, with the ultimate purpose of enriching the quality of services offered by an institution through the use of international alternatives (Ziguras, 2011). With this in mind, Mok (2011: 180-181) explains that the internationalisation of HE has recently gained popularity, given that enhancements in the HE sector seem to directly influence a country's population, economy and ranking in a global context.

The globalisation and internationalisation of HE can have several advantages, if implemented in a correct systematic manner. Globalisation can offer the possibility of expanding HE by creating international agreements between countries that pledge to offer educational, financial and social support to each other (Al-Ohali and Burdon, 2013). In addition, the standardisation of the knowledge, quality and services offered by HEIs, could thus allow individuals to pursue their studies in the preferred social and cultural environment, as exchange programmes become increasingly common (King, Marginson and Naidoo, 2011). Gibbs (2012: 241-242) notes that this standardisation, however, can be accompanied by the risk of eliminating diversity in the supply of education and it can be argued that a homogenous supply of knowledge, ideas and perspectives can become a detriment to innovation and research. Zajda and Rust (2016: 2) further argue that the globalisation and internationalisation of HE could impact deeply embedded assumptions related to how education is organised, systematised and produced, as well as the common understanding of what a curriculum is and how it should be constructed. To illustrate, as a result of internationalisation, Van Damme (2001: 417) found that universities may be required to undertake several activities or policies (i.e. broadening the curricula, regional networking, enhancement of research) that can have a negative impact on the institution's success and efficiency, if implemented poorly.

Nevertheless, some of the changes that have resulted from the globalisation of HE include the spread of QA within the industry, as well as the tendency to borrow foreign QA policies (Blanco-Ramirez and Berger, 2013: 89). As discussed in the previous sections, there is a wide variety of QA models that can be adopted by different countries, including the KSA. Although some of these models are not specialised in ensuring quality in HEIs, each of them could arguably be modified to suit the objectives, purposes and values of a

university (Sartika, 2013; Hutchins, 2008; Hart and Shoolbred, 1993; Jackson, 2001). In the case of the KSA, QA has been recently implemented and standardised, and the official body that evaluates QA standards has been adapted from different HE bodies and contexts like the UK's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). Since the creation of the NCAAA in 2004 (Darandari et al., 2009), the HE sector in the country has produced more research, more experts, has opened many more universities due to the increased demand, has gained financially and has experienced a boost in both curriculum and international partnerships (MoHE, 2013).

Saudi Arabian HEIs have become increasingly aware of both the benefits and the disadvantages of globalisation. According to Donn and Al-Manthri (2010: 102), the former has provided Saudi universities with the opportunity to evolve into educational centres that can employ the English language as a medium to promote regional and international research. Due to the use of the English language, HEIs in the KSA could thus potentially attract foreign students and investors, and could also adhere to the changing demands of the labour market by enhancing the curricula, resources and operations offered by both private and state institutions (Al-Ohali and Burdon, 2013: 161; Donn and Al-Manthri, 2010: 102). In addition, the increased interest in providing higher quality services worldwide has prompted the Saudi government to offer more varied training, to collaborate with other countries in creating more advanced technological programmes, as well as to invest a considerable budget into developing highly advanced science and technology universities (Al-Ohali and Burdon, 2013: 161-162). The Kingdom has further acknowledged the positive impact that globalisation of HE can have on foreign student enrolment, and thus on the competitive aspect of HE, which stems from the creation of acclaimed programmes and internationally recognised diplomas (Badry and Willoughby, 2016). This being said, the internationalisation of HE practices has also brought attention to the fact that international procedures do not follow the same values and cultural perspectives as the Gulf States, and the KSA in particular (Donn and Al-Manthri, 2010: 102). Therefore, the MoHE and HEIs have to first consider the implications of HE globalisation and internationalisation, and then adapt these standards to the cultural and religious context of the country. However, this approach can be a detriment to the implementation of globalised policies within Saudi universities. This is firstly, due to the lengthy process of establishing the acceptable norms, and secondly due to the fact that altering said norms may, in fact, lead to the implementation of policies that

do not actually increase the quality of Saudi HE, but rather simply aim to fulfil a sought-after standard that is presumed to be beneficial to Saudi HEIs (Badry and Willoughby, 2016: 208). To illustrate, internationalisation and student cross-border mobility is recognised by the MoHE (2013: 68-72) as an important emerging trend in HE, and the Kingdom has made great progress towards providing scholarships (both local and international) to Muslim students from varying countries. Although a great pursuit that needs to be a common practice of HEIs, the criteria for gaining a scholarship is sometimes too lenient, and scholarships are, at times, offered solely to meet a quota. This common practice, which is also encountered at KAU from time to time, negatively influences the budget of a HEI, budget that could otherwise be allotted to other important issues, such as research or training.

It seems evident that the spread of QA in the KSA has been influenced by the phenomena of HE globalisation and internationalisation, and the mixture of these two elements has resulted in policy borrowing, given the fact that the country (which had a less developed QA systems and newly established QA policies) has adapted to international quality standards in the HE sector. Although research shows that implementation of globalised practices and policies in the KSA could have, for the most part, positive ramifications in the quality of services provided (Al-Ohali and Burdon, 2013; Donn and Manthri, 2010; Badry and Willoughby, 2016), it is important to take into consideration all possible ramifications of policy borrowing in HE QA.

On the one hand, policy borrowing can have a tremendous impact on the implementation of QA, and on the quality of HE in general, as it provides the opportunity to follow an already tested and proven idea (Phillips and Ochs, 2004). As such, the HEI no longer needs to dedicate resources towards researching a successful practice, and can thus dedicate time and money towards fulfilling other goals. According to Phillips and Schweisfurth (2014: 46), policy borrowing occurs in three stages: the "identification of successful practice", followed by the "introduction into the home context" and "assimilation", the latter being the most complicated step. However, the success of the third stage is more easily attained if the first two stages are conducted in a thorough manner, and if the change is rationalised and explained prior to its implementation (Phillips and Schweisfurth, 2014). Additionally, given the fact that the policy has already been tested, observed and proved to be successful, it is safe to assume that the policy follows a model that can provide extensive guidance. As such, the policy may offer

solutions for issues that arise, while the existing results can serve as a benchmarking tool, as a means to compare and contrast the results from various HEIs, with the purpose of evaluating the policy's success within the new context (Portnoi, 2016).

On the other hand, if the policies have not been carefully considered beforehand, and have not been adapted to the local social, cultural, economic and political circumstances of the target country, or university, the borrowing of international policies could have a negative impact (Turbin, 2001, Rubenstein, 2006). However, Phillips and Schweisfurth (2014) and Portnoi (2016) argue that the chosen policies could also be ignored or resisted by the members of the staff, despite the institution's attempts to implement them. These stances may lead to conflict in the vision, mission and goals of various stakeholders. Alternatively, "stakeholders may reformulate them [the borrowed policies] in the local environment through vernacular globalization, leading to a policy that only vaguely resembles the one that was lent" (Portnoi, 2016: 148). These changes may have grave negative implications, especially in situations where problems arise after the implementation of the borrowed policy, as the staff may notice that the original solutions for said problems no longer apply. Another negative implication may be the staff's misunderstanding of the need to introduce the policy, and even the misunderstandings of the procedures surrounding it (Phillips and Ochs, 2004). Therefore, without proper training, the staff that is required to implement the foreign policies will fail in their attempt. This will result in a cumbersome process for all the stakeholders involved, and could even result in the unintentional decline in quality. All things considered, policy borrowing needs to be implemented in a systematic manner, by following a carefully constructed plan that takes into account the crucial necessary steps.

2.3.5. University Quality Culture

Alharbi (2015: 429) defines quality culture as "a set of shared, accepted, and integrated patterns of quality (often called principles of quality) to be found in the organizational cultures and the management systems of institutions". Gryna and Watson (2001) define quality culture as the sum of internal customs, convictions and behaviour regarding the concept of quality. Furthermore, Štimac and Katić (2015: 582) argue that the creation and development of an internal quality culture should be specific in its definition of quality-oriented perspectives and practices.

Loukkola and Zhang (2010: 9) further suggest the importance of an existing quality culture within a HEI, especially when employing QA processes, as internal quality cultures aid the personnel in acknowledging the context and realities of their institution, as well as help the institution achieve the external requirements for QA and certification. In addition, Hart and Shoolbred (1993: 22) argue that the nature of the quality culture within an organisation is the "less obvious but more crucial" element that maintains a healthy quality-oriented internal system, rather than the actual approach to QA that is adopted by an institution. In this regard, Mail et al. (2014: 176) advocate for the commitment of the personnel to an internal, prevailing understanding of quality culture, meaning the general values adopted by the members of the institution, so that the chosen QA model is successfully implemented. Furthermore, Hart and Shoolbred (1993: 23) say that in order for HEIs to efficiently implement and sustain QA systems, they need not only adopt the plans and processes that define the QA models, but also acknowledge the means through which the perceptions of quality culture within the higher education sector have changed, in order to maintain a modernised approach to QA that addresses the contemporary, dynamic needs of HE.

At the same time, Weber (2007: 27) argues that the necessity for a culture of quality to exist in higher education is "undeniable", and offers a list of criteria crucial to implementing a QA system that cultivates quality culture. The list refers to the QA procedure as a formative, future-oriented one that is based on specific aims, rather than pre-determined criteria, while matching the exceptional complexity of institutions of higher education and the services they provide and also mobilising institutions and the various stakeholders (Weber, 2007: 27). In like manner to Weber's (2007) classification of quality culture as an element that targets future endeavours, Owen (2013: 28) discusses the dynamic nature of quality culture, as quality is generally perceived as a feature of HEIs that is subjected to perpetual alteration and improvement, which implies that the culture of quality evolves alongside an institution's progress towards "a path of continuous improvement". For this reason, Owen (2013: 29) suggests that it is possible for quality culture in HEIs to never reach completion, but rather that its purpose is to forever be "emergent and responsive to changing environment realities". This is further propagated by the fact that HEIs are open systems, as Katz and Kahn (1978) argue, considering the fact that universities are influenced by and, in turn, influence the environment they belong to. Therefore, the evolution of quality culture in HEIs is not

only affected by the desire to offer high quality services to both internal and external stakeholders, but also by the tendency of open system organisations to depend on social innovation (Cummings and Worley, 2015, Loukkola and Zhang, 2010).

Furthermore, quality assessment principles and a clear quality culture are necessary to the beneficial activity of HEIs, as they enable the establishment of an internal and external unity of belief regarding the mission of a university, the standards of quality delivered by the institute and the means through which said standards are achieved (Hart and Shoolbred, 1993: 24, Manyaga, 2008: 171-173).

By the same token, Van Damme (2011) presents institutional quality culture as a combination of both internal and external conditions, including the commitment to quality, self-evaluation, the identification of good practices and obtaining feedback from all stakeholders. In addition, Danø and Stensaker (2009: 244-245) say that quality culture is not solely reliant on and relevant to the moments when quality assurance is examined by external organisations, but that it is also prevalent in these particular circumstances, as this is the time when the quality values in HEIs are confronted and analysed during practice. Hence, external quality assurance is employed not only to validate the quality standards of the university, but also to ensure that an enduring quality-oriented mentality exists within the evaluated HEIs (Danø and Stensaker, 2009). Regardless of approach, quality culture must become the primary interest of the personnel, if QA techniques and systems are to be successful (Mail et al., 2014: 176).

Particularly, Bundă and Baciu (2009: 74) argue that in a country where the development of a stable quality culture is at its inception, such as Romania, "the success in setting up a 'quality culture' is influenced by objective and subjective factors, by national and international trends", with emphasis on the latter. Similarly, Darandari et al. (2009: 41) and Alzamil's (2014) research indicates that a quality culture is yet to be instilled in the KSA and thus, Bundă and Baciu's (2009) suggestions can also be applied to the KSA, in an attempt to create a sustainable, national quality culture. Similarly, Hart and Shoolbred (1993: 26) argue that "a quality culture has to be flexible to survive", but that this flexibility cannot be achieved without a proper system of rewards and recognition for the employees, in order to encourage the changes directed towards the new quality culture. Therefore, the management of the institution will need to recognise and address the staff's attempts to fulfilling new goals and changing their approach to undertaking tasks,

so as to bolster the internal community's adherence to the desired cultural innovation (Hart and Shoolbred, 1993: 27).

2.3.6. Quality Assurance in the KSA: Organisational Change Issues

Green (1994: 11) drew attention to the fact that an abundance of HEIs are concerned with the expense involved in implementing the complex supervising QA system, which can be a reason for the spread of reticence regarding QA procedures within the KSA, where the system's implementation is relatively recent (i.e. in 2004) and has not yet had the time to cement its utility. As Albaqami (2015: 66) illustrates, the NCAAA announced in 2012 that merely 3 out of 33 universities in KSA had successfully implemented the national QA standards and were granted accreditation, while the rest of the universities encountered various internal obstacles.

With this in mind, there are several reasons behind the struggle to introduce a feasible QA system in KSA universities. For instance, the demand for education has swiftly risen within the country, and HEIs are attempting to respond to the increase in student numbers by employing experienced foreign personnel who have a difficult time adapting to national cultural norms (Onsman, 2011: 521), especially considering the fact that the QA systems within KSA universities are also adjusted to fit the cultural conditions and restrictions of the country (Darandari et al., 2009: 41).

Another issue that needs to be taken into account is the fact that introducing a QA system to a university implies that the institution needs to also undergo a rigorous process of organisational change, in order to adapt to the new policies and requirements for quality improvement (Al Hasani and Al Orimi, 2017). This is due to the fact that institutional changes prompted by a newly-introduced QA system in HEIs usually occurs at a wide-ranging level, and tends to target each and every institutional activity, policy, procedure, standard and stakeholder (Stensaker, 2008). More specifically, this process typically requires modifications in the university's mission, vision and objectives, in the management and leadership structures, in the quality evaluation methods and in all the services offered – including the teaching and learning methods, the student services, the funding and resources – which also impact research and development, while also

demanding changes within the organisational culture and community interactions (Halasz, n.d.). Even more so, although QA systems tend to provide a detailed guidance regarding how to undergo the necessary changes, they cannot guarantee success and they also tend to assume that these changes are easily introduced.

Furthermore, these issues can be met with additional barriers in the context of the KSA, especially taking into account all the recent strategic changes in education. To illustrate, the research conducted by Alhazemi, Rees and Hossain (2013) at KAU revealed that, while recent attempts have been made to implement organisational change in the institution, they have been met with considerable resistance from employees, while the management and leadership has also shown countless signs of inflexibility. Additionally, both KAU's employees and students have had a difficult time in trying to adapt to the newly-implemented institutional policies and practices, which resulted in drawn-out animosities and frustrations (Alhazemi, Rees and Hossain, 2013). However, this is not solely the case for the KSA. As Al Hasani and Al Orimi (2017: 2-4) argue, the failure to adapt to change is the main reason for the failure of QA systems worldwide, and this outcome can only be negated if an institution already possesses a readiness for change.

Nevertheless, the importance of QA systems is further argued by Yorke (1999), who posits their requirement, especially when considering a globalised economy that involves international and multi-cultural customer-provider relationships, such as higher education. Moreover, Yorke (1999: 14) emphasises the need for HEIs to implement a QA system that abides by the following purposes:

- the provision of information to the public and other interested parties about quality and standards;
- giving credibility to awards (and hence to award holders); and
- engendering confidence in purchasers that they will be making a worthwhile investment when they enrol in a programme.

Therefore, the goal of HEIs in KSA regarding QA should be similar to the one presented by Štimac and Katić (2015: 582): "to develop quality culture which indicates the change of attitudes and behaviour of all individuals included in the work of high education institutions", in order to guarantee the development of advantageous QA procedures that are adhered to by the entirety of stakeholders, who are essential to the creation, practice and progress of the internal QA system (Cullen et al., 2003: 6-7). In this regard, Alzamil

(2014: 133) advocates the introduction of an advertisement phase that targets the entirety of stakeholders, to instruct them on the advantages of utilising various methods of QA, such as evaluation and self-evaluation. This is known as the culture awareness initiative. Similarly, Yarbrough et al. (2011: 115) encourage HEIs to conduct "frequent and intense" practices that encourage a democratic expansion of the QA process through employing stakeholder feedback, an instrument that supports the implementation of successful QA practices.

According to Darandari et al. (2009: 41), the increasing demand for higher education and the growth in potential students precipitated the need to implement an efficient and equitable national accreditation system that promotes QA. The NCAAA (2011) standards provide the framework for implementing quality measures in every crucial aspect of a HEI, including research, management, teaching and learning, self-evaluation and so on, yet it also specifies that QA is first and foremost "an internal responsibility and depends very heavily on the commitment and support of all of those involved in administration, management, and teaching in an institution" (NCAAA, 2012a: 7). Therefore, in order for QA to prosper in the KAU, the existence of a definite quality culture must be secured, thus further supporting Alzamil's (2014: 133) previously-presented proposition regarding the culture awareness initiative. Ruben et al. (2007: 232) propose the introduction of an institutional culture that encourages, acknowledges and awards quality in all its forms, so that quality becomes the pursuit of both the institution and its personnel.

2.4. Quality Assurance Approaches and Processes

According to Woodhouse (1999: 30-34), there are three similar, yet distinct approaches to ensuring the correct implementation of QA: audit, assessment and accreditation. The quality audit (or a review) refers to the verification of whether an institution is attaining its objectives (Woodhouse, 1999: 30). It is an appraisal performed by an external party, in order to ascertain whether the QA and quality control (QC) processes are appropriate and functional (Frazer, 1992: 11). The quality assessment, or evaluation, is a procedure that measures the quality of an institution's outputs (Woodhouse, 1999: 31), in order to provide information that the decision makers can utilise to make appropriate future decisions regarding programmes or policies (Norris, 1990: 101). Lastly, accreditation verifies whether an institution meets certain requirements, or a status (Woodhouse, 1999:

32). Together, the processes verify the following five criteria necessary for the success of a HEI: objective relevance, sustainability of plans, conforming of actions, efficiency of actions and measurability of objectives (Woodhouse, 1999: 33). The specified methods can be implemented through the use of external examiners, as a means of ensuring a standardised evaluation approach for the personnel involved with the application of certain academic programmes or projects (Land and Gordon, 2013: 22).

In addition to the above-mentioned approaches, there are other various methods associated with QA, such as "self-assessment, document analysis, peer visits, inspection, stakeholder survey, direct intervention and proxy delegating" (Harvey, 2004: 211).

Self-assessment implies the capability of employing a critical attitude towards one's actions, attitude or performance, in order to assess the need for change and improvement for the benefit of stakeholders (Ritchie, 2007: 86). This being said, it is important to note the difference between self-assessment and self-evaluation. Self-assessment is a process that refers to the knowledge and competences gained by students, while self-evaluation is a procedure that aims to evaluate the success of a process, as well as gather information regarding the reasons behind a process' progress and enable the creation of solutions (MacBeath, 2005a: 58-59).

At its best, SA provides individuals with the opportunity to personally assess their performance, considering the insights each person has in respect to their capabilities. Hence, the benefit of high quality learning can be achieved; for instance, students who identify their flaws can investigate the concerns and proceed with the learning process more thoroughly (McMillan and Hearn, 2008). Secondly, skills development can also be enhanced by self-assessment, as the process enables individuals to explore their own interests and aspirations (Kitsantas, Reiser and Doster, 2004). Furthermore, the self-assessment procedure has a beneficial impact on students, according to Kitsantas, Reiser and Doster (2004: 270), as students who engage in this activity tend to surpass those who do not in several domains. Be it participation in group activities, application of logical and analytical skills, decision making with regards to selecting the most successful academic practices, or demonstrations of responsibility and involvement, the students who employ SE procedures exhibit a higher rate of success than the ones who are not self-critical. Thus, HEIs should provide opportunities for self-appraisal for all the

stakeholders involved in the teaching and learning process, in order to increase the quality of services provided.

Peer review is a method through which various academics, other than administrative personnel, are encouraged to actively participate in the decision-making process regarding programmes and projects (Frazer, 1992: 12). Peer review encourages unrestrained deliberation among employees, regardless of their position, allowing academics to offer their suggestions, exchange opinions and thus aids in creating a coherent quality culture; peer review can occur in an informal environment (Napier, Riazi and Jacenyik-Trawoger, 2014: 55).

Inspection is a method which takes place through the careful examination of performance by authorized officials, in order to assess the deficiencies that arise within an institution (Jain, 2001: 58), so that measures can be taken to minimise the discovered deficiencies, in an attempt to raise the quality of services offered.

Document analysis is a procedure through which performance is appraised and analysed by examining the documented work and its quality (Westerheijden, Stensaker and Rosa, 2007: 238).

Stakeholder survey is a performance measuring tool that implies the review of different stakeholders' attitudes towards the quality and success of certain programmes, projects or employees. In higher education, the most utilised type of stakeholder survey is student evaluation, which is utilised as feedback to enhance the teaching and learning process (Cowen, 1996: 88). It is a tool that ensures a open communication channel for the students and improves the relationship between the lecturers and the students (Komives and Woodard, 2003: 623).

Direct intervention is a method that implies a direct conversation between the administration and other employees, relating to work issues and practices, with the intention of improving employee performance enhancing the internal quality culture and ensuring the QA process is not inhibited by personal concerns (Harvey, 2004).

Proxy delegation is the method that collects the impression of employees in relation to performance of a person or programme without letting this person know any particular individual's impressions. This allows members to discuss performance freely (Coates, 2005).

Quality Monitors

The quality monitors for higher education evaluation are of two kinds, external and internal. The internal monitoring sources are the units of the institution, its sub committees, audit, review and faculty-based units, etc. while external evaluators come from the monitoring agencies, statutory and non-statutory units (Harvey, 2002). The purpose of the quality monitors is to ensure that students are offered the best quality in the forms of their learning and teaching (Harvey, 2002). Specifically, each and every publication of national standards represents and explains the set of standards that can be used in an educational setting, with the purpose of providing the guidelines for implementing, designing, improving and assessing the form of evaluation (Hoffman, 2003). The quality monitors evaluate mainly through self-assessment, peer evaluation and through statistical or performance indicators. The results of the evaluation are then presented in a report format and retained for consultation, with the scrutiny of the report being performed by external sources (Harvey, 2002).

This being said, according to Leca (1997, in Barbier, 1999: 15), evaluators should strive to create an "area of autonomy" for the evaluation, so that the process is detached from either political or administrative systems. Therefore, quality evaluators, or monitors, should opt for an impartial, yet involved attitude when conducting the evaluation, in order to construct a truthful report that generates practical conclusions. Nevertheless, even though evaluators do not advocate the political context behind the evaluation, the process is politically influenced regardless of the evaluator's position (Cronbach and Associates, 1980: 3). Similarly, Weiss (1993: 94) emphasises the idea that "evaluation is a rational enterprise that takes place in a political context", while further research suggests the fact that evaluators' duties are impeded by the politics of all the stakeholders involved, despite the evaluators' efforts to remain neutral, which ultimately endangers the QA practices (House, 2006: 121, Patton, 2008: 530-531).

2.4.1. Evaluation

In the 1960s, evaluation was, for the most part, seen as a method of supervising and improving social policies, as well as projects or programmes (Schwandt, 2002: 2). Since then it has become one of the most utilised QA processes, due to its ability to preserve quality assurance and initiate quality improvement (Wood and Dickinson, 2011: 4).

According to Woodhouse (1999: 32), evaluation is a process that "results in a grade, whether numeric, literal or descriptive", in order to assess the quality of outputs. The outputs of higher education are the services offered, be they related to internal stakeholders and the provision of adequate employment and benefits, or to external stakeholders, such as the supply of graduate labour; the supply of knowledge; the degrees awarded; the professionals trained; research and the discovery of new knowledge, which may lead to technological advances and patents (Cheslock et al., 2016: 368, Cave et al., 1997: 23-26).

Like Woodhouse (1999), Wood and Dickinson (2011: 4) define evaluation as a method that offers "judgement about the quality of a product, a process, an experience". In addition, Beeby (1977, in Wolf, 1990: 8) defined evaluation as "the systematic collection and interpretation of evidence, leading, as part of the process, to a judgement of value with a view to action", a definition that indicates the advanced planning efforts made to procure the information, as well as the importance of analysing the gathered data, in an attempt to understand the reasons behind the data and to resolve potential harmful evidence (Wolf, 1990: 8).

According to Marra (2000: 25), evaluation can be employed in order "to gain both cognitive and empirical insights that would feed future decisions and actions and at the same time, trigger an organizational learning process". To clarify, the insights gathered imply the perception of the methods utilised to manage resources and employ various QA techniques in a programme or institution, while analysing the existing evidence regarding the sustainability of a programme, as well as its design for different contexts and stakeholders (Marra, 2000: 24).

With regards to evaluation in the higher education sector, Wolf (1990: 10) describes it as a process through which the studied attributes are elected due to their representation of educational values, or objectives, which define what evaluators "seek to develop in learners as a result of exposing them to a set of educational experiences". This reinforces

the idea that evaluation in HEIs serves a specific purpose, that of indicating the implementation of scholarly objectives. To illustrate, evaluation is a diagnostic tool employed to assess the quality of the teaching and learning process, of research, of the services offered by a HEI and of the outcomes that emerge from the curricula and programmes employed at an institution, with the purpose of offering a comprehensive report of the institution's achievements, as well as to indicate the possible drawbacks (Materu, 2007: 3). Therefore, generally speaking, evaluation employed in the higher education sector is "the collection and use of information to make decisions about an educational program" (Cronbach, 2002: 235).

This being said, it is important to consider that while evaluation offers insight into the structure of programmes, curriculum and teaching methods, multiple QA mechanisms are typically not evaluated, as priority is placed on evaluating projects and people, rather than evaluating the entirety of the institution. As McKay and Kember (1999: 168) indicate, "even when evaluation does take place it is often of a fairly superficial kind which aims to fine tune an existing measure", instead of approaching the method in a more aggressive manner, which could devote effort to appraising costs and learning outcomes. Similarly, Højlund (2014: 26) says that while evaluation is employed to improve internal policy, it rarely manages to fulfil its purpose, as it typically reveals more pressing issues that need to be addressed.

As Van der Meer (1999: 387) observes, the purpose and objectives of evaluation can vary from institution to institution, yet the broad function of evaluation is "the improvement of the object evaluated", which can be either a policy or an institutional unit. Thus, when assessing the reasons to evaluate, it is important to consider evaluation as an opportunity to assess the programme planning and practices, as well as individuals (Hämäläinen, Pehu-Voima and Wahlén, 2001). Hence, evaluation can clarify what the benefits and deficiencies of a project or an employee are and how improvements in the existing techniques and programmes can be made, as continuous improvement works for the betterment of academic quality. As Hansson (2006: 159) states, "evaluations will have to be considered as a part of the strategy and culture of the organization both by individual members and by the organization itself", in order for evaluation to be successful. Furthermore, according to Marra (2000: 33-34), evaluation is most successful when the entirety of personnel relevant to the study is actively involved in designing the subject and interpreting the results obtained from the survey, as a "participatory style

enables people to share valuable information and analytical capacity". Consequently, the process delivers information that is relevant to the stakeholders, while the stakeholders improve their relations, their routine tasks and are more prone to implementing the necessary changes required, as revealed by evaluation.

Evaluation can refer to either an internal process, or to an external one. While internal evaluations are easier to implement, Le Menestrel, Walahoski and Mielke (2014: 64) argue that external evaluations are, due to the independence and impartiality of the evaluator, seen as more credible by the stakeholders. Furthermore, external evaluation can offer unique insight into the processes and programmes of an institution, as outside observers can easily identify bad practices and offer unique perspectives on what would normally be perceived as customary activities (Le Menestrel, Walahoski and Mielke, 2014: 66-68). However, House (1980: 252-254) suggests that evaluators cannot be completely impartial, regardless of their efforts, as they are influenced by personal convictions and values.

2.4.2 The Roles of Evaluation in HEIs

A distinction in QA evaluations can be made between mission-based evaluations and standards-based evaluations (Westerheijden, Stensaker and Rosa, 2007: 81). According to Liu (2016: 202), mission-based evaluations "respect the internal norms and capabilities of the evaluated institutions", and are achieved with the purpose of fulfilling an internal motivation. In contrast, standards-based evaluations are conducted to verify a HEIs 'fitness for purpose', by comparing it to external standards (Westerheijden, Stensaker and Rosa, 2007: 81).

Evaluation is often employed to assess the impact and feasibility of projects and programmes. According to Thackwray (1997: 102), project evaluation is a difficult, yet crucial step in guaranteeing institutional success, as it can offer insight into the successes and failures of the approach taken to implement said project, thus being a source of learning for the management. An efficient project evaluation addresses the needs of the programme, the performance deficits, the manner in which it was designed and delivered to the customers, the impact of the course, as well as whether the initial objectives have been fulfilled (Thackwray, 1997: 103).

2.4.3. Self-Evaluation

Self-evaluation was initially introduced as a standard for school improvement (Ritchie, 2007: 86) and is, at the present moment, a procedure employed in numerous institutions. Macbeath (2005b: 5) says that "it is part of a global movement in which power is being pushed down to school level while at the same time accountability […] assumes a high priority", especially considering the importance of the quality of information offered by HEIs.

According to Borich's (1990: 31) description of decision-oriented evaluations, self-evaluation can be categorised as such an evaluation due to the fact that it offers insight into the workings of programmes and capabilities of people, which influences the managers' decision regarding investing resources to said programmes and people. Furthermore, decision-oriented evaluations are considered to be perspectives that establish the conditions of decision making, rather than being specific methods employed to make decisions (Borich, 1990: 31). In this regard, SE is the process pertaining to QA that allows the management of a HEI to acknowledge the positive and negative aspects within the institution, and provides feedback concerning said aspects, with the purpose of advancing the quality output of the institution. Therefore, SE is not a technique that facilitates decision making, but rather, a procedure that offers the adequate parameters to making competent decisions.

In the words of MacBeath (2005a: 56), "self-evaluation is a process of discovery rather than a tedious adherence to a well-trodden trail", meaning that self-evaluation should be viewed as an opportunity to enhance quality, not as a repetition of previously uncovered methods of quality sustenance. Therefore, self-evaluation is closely connected with school improvement (Davies and Rudd, 2001), and its purpose is to usher in the progress of quality. For these reasons, as well as because of the particular nature of its requirements, self-evaluation is a mission-based evaluation (Liu, 2016: 202).

There is an important distinction to be made between institutional self-evaluation and teacher self-evaluation. On the one hand, institutional self-evaluation is the approach undertaken by a university in an attempt to understand whether protocols, policies and practices are efficient and whether they follow the institution's development plan (Adelman, 2005: 202). On the other hand, teacher self-evaluation refers to the process

employed by teachers to verify "the adequacy and effectiveness of their own knowledge, performance, beliefs, and effects for the purpose of self-improvement" (Airasian and Gullickson, 2006: 186).

The area in higher education where SE's impact is most prominent is in teaching and learning, as both the lecturers and the students are not only requested, but expected to invariably improve their performance and knowledge through the use of personal reflection (Pennington and O'Neil, 1994: 17). According to Ritchie (2007: 86), SE is vital in creating a self-critical mentality that challenges practices and results, with the purpose of enhancing the teaching experience for the benefit of students, so that the quality of knowledge distributed to students is perpetually increased, while lecturers are encouraged to enhance their proficiency by adhering to international standards of quality. Employing self-evaluation in teaching and learning offers the possibility of evaluating the institutional and course curriculum, as it not only targets the delivery of knowledge, but also the subjects and courses offered at an institution (Arend, 2009: 29). In this regard, evaluators can assess whether the curricula are relevant, efficient and in accordance with the stakeholder's desires, and can adapt it according to the feedback provided, thus enhancing the quality of services offered (Cheng, 2003).

This being said, the QAA standards (2016e: 9) indicate that an essential element to creating an efficient teaching and learning process is that HEIs provide a strategic approach that aims to create a prevalent understanding of the methods employed. This goal can be achieved through the SE procedure, as SE enables the stakeholders to engage in an honest, advantageous discussion that offers feedback to all stakeholders, in the pursuit of creating optimised conditions and offering quality services. With this intention, and as SE depends on "intelligent accountability", a HEI should be capable of providing regular information regarding its achievements and the impact of SE in the daily activities, conditions accomplished by inquiring about learning, achievement and development, involving all relevant stakeholders, providing conclusive evidence, benchmarking against the finest institutions, being indispensable to the administrative procedures and inducing progress (MacBeath, 2005b: 3).

To conclude, SE is a procedure that should be conducted regularly in order to maintain high levels of quality, in a simple, yet beneficial manner that does not interfere with other management or academic processes, not to fulfil the purpose of inspection, but rather, to

gather the feedback provided by stakeholders and enhance the services offered according to the needs of the community, as well as those of the individual (Ritchie, 2007: 87-88).

Challenges of Self-Evaluation

The most common challenge of self-evaluation is that the procedure lacks objectivity and that it lacks credibility. Furthermore, SE can generate unreliable information, as some of the interviewees answer untruthfully or in a biased manner to the queries, for various reasons. First, a lack of time, combined with an abundance of additional work leads to a lack of commitment to the SE process (Elassy, 2015: 253). Second, a misunderstanding of the purpose and benefits of certain SE procedures may cause respondents to overlook certain aspects crucial for the evaluation, be they intentional or not (Manyaga, 2008: 165). Third, lack of confidence in the SE procedure can also generate undesirable results, as some employees are inclined to either postpone or neglect the procedure entirely (Pennington and O'Neil, 1994: 17). Lastly, it is possible that the HEI does not prepare the personnel in the interest of creating a culture of quality self-evaluation. This can be caused by a lack of proper training prior to the procedure, by the administrative department's scepticism towards the SE process, which directly influences the academics, and it can also be caused by the repeated inability of the institution to address the issues revealed by SE, thus generating doubt regarding the procedure's relevance (Van der Meer, 1999, Ruben et al., 2007). This is to say, the enumerated causes that impede the process of SE are not solely attributed to academics, as they can affect students and administrators alike.

Prerequisites and Circumstances

Research suggests that there are numerous prerequisites or beneficial conditions that enhance the SE process. According to Frazer (1992: 18-19), three conditions crucial to

the successful implementation of SE are: external assistance from evaluation experts, employed to aid the person undertaking the procedure in becoming self-critical; SE-specific training, so that the stakeholders understand the importance, benefits and purpose of SE; and national or international standards, to indicate and provide the best practices for a comparison of quality. In addition, Ouston and Davies (1998) discovered that another favourable element to creating a positive experience during official evaluation procedures is a pre-existing, well-established SE culture within the institution, as HEIs that adopted a SE-oriented mentality prior to official evaluations were not only less intimidated by them, but also more confident in disputing the formal results and delivering a separate verdict. This being said, the introduction and adoption of a SE culture within a HEI is an ideal case, as numerous institutions struggle with QA procedures.

Rist (1994: 194-199) states that the success of SE is also influenced by the circumstances surrounding it, such as the timing of evaluation reports in regards to the phase of the process, programme or policy evaluated, while another impactful condition is the method employed to convey the obtained results to the decision makers (Rist, 1994: 200-203). Furthermore, Bubb and Earley (2008) argue that SE is successful and offers valuable feedback when it is a flexible, comprehensive and continuous process that is based on standardised criteria and is capable of celebrating differences.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Self-Evaluation

Self-evaluation offers numerous advantages to the students as well as to institutions, yet also entails some disadvantages, both of which are presented in detail below.

Advantages

In the first place, SE procedures should be established by experts, and introduced after a period of experimentation. The procedures "constitute the summary and abstraction of a variety of experiences and pedagogical knowledge suggesting sequences of occurrences and action backed up by a rationale", suggesting that the SE process should be thoroughly reflected upon and evaluated prior to its implementation at an institution (Kremer-Hayon, 1993: 43). Therefore, they act as a guideline that enables the attainment of quality.

Lyndal (1994: 109) argues that "the unique benefit of self-evaluation is the close involvement of teachers in the consideration of the effectiveness of their own teaching". Furthermore, all the participants in the evaluative process can openly communicate and work together toward improvement, due to their social and geographical proximity. This collaboration implies the establishment of trust among co-workers, as well as the restoration of lecturers' professional status (MacBeath, 2005b: 2). Furthermore, due to the fact that both the providers of knowledge and the decision makers partake in the evaluation process, and that the process is done without intermediaries, concerns are not only addressed at a faster pace, but they are also undertaken in a more impactful manner.

Le Menestrel, Walahoski and Mielke (2014: 64) argue that internal evaluations are more cost-effective than external ones, particularly when the purpose of the evaluation is to verify and improve existing programmes. Moreover, institutions can also improve the quality of their education by applying more demanding courses and techniques, if SE reveals deficiencies, as the correct application of the procedure provides immediate, long-term results (Ritchie and Dale, 2000). In addition, it is possible "to sacrifice short-term efficiencies to gain insight into and respond to novel problems along the way" (HMIe, 2008: 4). Another benefit of SE, according to MacBeath (2005b: 2), is that the evolution of the process can help uncover the location of the hidden capital in a HEI, in an attempt to redirect funds to improving competences.

To summarise, self-evaluation helps individuals and HEIs reveal both favourable and negative aspects and provides the instruments to overcoming obstacles, all the while assimilating new knowledge.

Disadvantages

On the other hand, SE procedures are created by educational experts and this can also be perilous to some people who employ them, as there is a tendency to believe that certain procedures are without flaws, and that they should not be improved upon, which can result in either the stagnation of academic quality, or exceedingly high expectations regarding the outcomes of SE (Kremer-Hayon, 1993: 43).

According to Ritchie and Dale (2000), the SE process is limited by the fact that its initial objectives are often unclear, estimated even, and that it occurs over an extended time period, thus impeding other procedures. Similarly, Marra's (2000) research into SE

reveals the discrepancy between the perceptions of evaluation among stakeholders, as the procedure required a certain duration to provide a conclusive feedback report, yet the programme had already undergone several changes, which ultimately rendered most of the report redundant. As Marra (2000: 28) states, "there is a disjuncture between the benefits desired by users in the short run and those promised by the evaluators, who are inclined to talk of indirect influences on decision making, of social enlightenment and of cumulative persuasiveness". This being said, if perceptions regarding the purpose of the SE procedure between stakeholders are not similar, the evaluation cannot be successful. Thus, there are discrepancies between the fast, accurate and relevant information desired by the decision-makers, and the slower pace of the SE process, which yields more equivocal results (Marra, 2000).

Such discrepancies can generate scepticism and perpetuate misconceptions relating to the usefulness of SE, which is another common impediment to the procedure, as stakeholders can either lack commitment, understanding or the enthusiasm to undertake SE (Ritchie and Dale, 2000). Therefore, the HE provider should aim to unify, clarify and meet the demands of all parties involved, so that the SE procedure is considered viable (Manyaga, 2008: 165).

Another disadvantage of SE is that it requires educating the students, the academics and the administrators on the purpose of the evaluation, its significance, as well as the techniques employed when performing SE. The process of training for SE is a tedious one, and implies additional funding for the procedure, and increases in the lecturers' workload, who are required to instruct students and offer guidance throughout the entire duration of the procedure (Elassy, 2015). Indeed, certain institutions are simply not capable of providing said resources, due to a shortage of staff, funding or time. In fact, if the training phase is not adequately achieved, both students and employees will consider themselves to be inadequately prepared for the evaluative procedures, which generates further confusion and aversion towards SE (Frazer, 1992: 18).

2.4.4. Accreditation

Accreditation in higher education is a QA process, according to which the operations and services of a programme or of the institution as a whole are assessed by an external authority, in order to determine whether or not the standardised criteria have been met

(Kristoffersen, 2007: 98). When the programme or institution has met the standards of the external authority, the agency grants the accredited status (Singh, 2010). According to Hande (2015: 31), accreditation serves two purposes: quality assurance, by determining the minimum quality standards required to fulfil the public demands; and quality improvement, as the process provides the necessary guidelines for institutional and programme improvement.

Barrow (1999: 33) characterises accreditation as the process established on the "collective demonstration that the components of the quality-management system are understood and will be applied in the field being examined". Typically, the process of accreditation consists of employing standards to evaluate the outcomes of a university, a comprehensive report that examines all aspects of the institution or the programme, as well as an inspection of the institution, conducted by an external group (Scriven, 2002: 269-271, Sagir, Goksoy and Ercan, 2014: 1605-1607). However, the process is not limited to the enumerated measures, as it can also employ mechanisms such as interviews, self-assessments and peer reviews.

Challenges of Accreditation

Although accreditation depends on the national context, and therefore specific to each country, Knight (2007: 139) argues that accreditation is employed by some institutions with the intention of "get[ting] name recognition and to increase enrolments", rather than to evaluate quality. This issue arises as a result of globalisation, as more and more students complete their studies in one country, and then move to another to work or continue studying. Thus, some providers of higher education aim to possess accreditation as a part of their campaign to promote the institution and its seemingly high quality programmes (Knight, 2007). One consequence, perhaps, is that the quality of services offered is diminished, as quality is no longer the top priority, while the stakeholder's opinion regarding the feasibility of accreditation is also negatively influenced, which leads to a general belief among internal and external stakeholders that accreditation is an official requirement that can be easily obtained, a chore, rather than a high standard of quality that assists HEIs in offering valuable services.

Another threat to achieving quality assurance accreditation is presented by Harvey and Williams (2010), who suggest that discrepancies between an internal quality evaluation, such as self-assessment, and the official evaluations aimed towards certification can cause

misunderstandings and the utilisation of erroneous approaches in verifying the quality of procedures and projects. Onsman (2010: 517), on the other hand, states that one of the challenges of evaluating academic outcomes and performance through accreditation can be poor communication between the HEIs' personnel, as the management may not properly transmit the necessary requirements to the employees, or the staff can misunderstand the methods of evaluation, as per Harvey and Williams' (2010) remark. This issue is more prominent in hostile or overly-hierarchical environments, where there is a prevailing gap of communication between administrative and academic staff. In this regard, Nakpodia (2009: 79-80) argues that senior managers should acknowledge and encourage an honest, continuous interaction between the staff, as the relationship among co-workers has a tremendous impact on the quality of services offered by the institution. For this reason, employee satisfaction needs to be taken into account, as it influences the quality of work and dedication, which can impact the personnel's inclination towards implementing projects that meet the accreditation standards (Westerheijden et al., 2007: 195-196). This beneficial interaction is further advanced through the utilisation of a transparent method of communicating relevant issues, such as the purpose of accreditation, the benefits of accreditation at an internal level and individual requirements (Hernon, Dugan and Schwartz, 2013: 83). Nonetheless, the deficit in communication can only momentarily impede the implementation of accreditation guidelines, rather than preventing the process completely (Onsman, 2010: 518).

Advantages and Disadvantages of Accreditation

Advantages

Kristoffersen's (2007) study of the application of accreditation in HEIs portrayed several benefits. One of the great advantages of accreditation is that it aims to benefit those it represents (i.e. the faculty and staff members), as it may provide training programmes and opportunities that encourage continuous improvement (Gaston, 2014: 42). Furthermore, the introduction and evaluation of institutions through national standards increases transparency of information about both the process itself and the quality provided by the institution (Kristoffersen's, 2007: 98). Transparency is a decisive element when evaluating quality, as it exposes the limitations encountered, be they related to the methodology, the design or the monitoring of a programme, thus granting the administrative team the ability to acknowledge and analyse faults in internal processes,

with the purpose of correcting them (Yarbrough et al., 2011: 140). Furthermore, transparency of results can benefit communication between the various stakeholders, as they share a common knowledge of both the strengths and the weaknesses surrounding internal processes, as well as a common ambition to revise potential detrimental actions or decisions (Hernon, Dugan and Schwartz, 2013: 83).

Secondly, accreditation offers stakeholders the possibility of judging a programme based on standardised academic perceptions of quality, with the purpose of comparing the 'good' concepts of quality with those exhibited by their own institution (Kristoffersen's, 2007: 98). Therefore, accreditation of professional programmes helps set and maintain professional standards, especially in technical domains. In addition, Kristoffersen (2007: 98) states that accreditation "could be a means to liberalise higher education by offering a control system in a less regulated market". However, this does not signify that the personnel of the institution should blindly rely on the indications provided by the national accreditation system, but rather that accreditation provides the instruments of analogy. As Knight (2007: 139-140) states, accreditation should not replace quality in becoming the purpose of an institution, but rather, should be employed in a manner similar to self-evaluation, in order to provide useful feedback, as well as possible variations for resolving quality-related concerns.

Disadvantages

Kristoffersen's (2007: 98) research into accreditation also revealed several disadvantages of using accreditation. Firstly, as previously discussed, accreditation can become the goal of an institution, rather than the procedure employed to assess quality, as the predetermined standards suggested by experts can hinder the processes dedicated to the continuous improvement of quality (Kristoffersen, 2007). According to Weber (2007: 28-29), one detriment to accreditation can be the casual granting of accreditation to programmes or universities that are not worthy of it. Like Knight (2007), Weber (2007: 29) discusses the various issues that might derive from the decreasing refusal of accreditation to newer institutions, as more and more HEIs receive general, institution-wide credentials, rather than individual programme accreditation, in order to compensate for the demand of internationally certified diplomas. However, this issue is dependent on the national body of accreditation, its standards and leniency, and can negatively impact the personnel of an institution in the sense that it encourages complacency and a decrease

in the delivery of quality products, as institutions tend to neglect innovation (Weber, 2007).

An equally important disadvantage of accreditation is the amount of resources required for it to be implemented and maintained, as accreditation is granted on a regular basis, typically every few years, in order to ensure that the quality level of the programme or of the institution has not decreased (Kristoffersen, 2007: 98). Therefore, both the institution seeking accreditation and the body that grants accreditation [the ministries] are required to dedicate a multitude of varying resources, including human resources, to perform the evaluations and inspections; temporal resources, as the institutions need to dedicate an extensive amount of time to reaching the quality standards required, which could impede on daily tasks; as well as financial resources, which may or may not be sufficient, given the necessity of dedicating funding to equally important processes or activities, such as research, internal quality assessments or to provide essential equipment (Scriven, 2002: 269-271, Sagir, Goksoy and Ercan, 2014: 1605-1607).

2.4.4.1. Accreditation in the KSA

Both quality assurance and national accreditation have been implemented in the KSA since 2004, meaning that they are still relatively new, compared with other countries. Prior to the establishment of the National Commission for Assessment and Academic Accreditation's (NCAAA) standards, HEIs were solely responsible for ensuring a high quality of services. This strategy was changed so that universities could pursue international standards (Darandari, et al., 2009: 42). This being said, the NCAAA (2011: 31) offers performance indicators in 11 areas of institutional activity, including: mission and objectives; governance and administration; management of QA and improvement; learning and teaching; student administration and support; learning resources; facilities and equipment; financial planning and management; employment processes; research; and institutional relationships with the community.

As stated in the *Accreditation Procedures* guidelines provided by the NCAAA (2015: 3), "accreditation of an institution or program is recognition of its quality". The process starts with the submission of an official letter requesting accreditation, which is directed at the NCAAA and is also accompanied by a filled-out application form (depending on whether an institution or a program is requesting accreditation), a registration contract and proof

that the registration fee has been paid in full (NCAAA, 2015). Once the program or institution is accepted to being the accreditation process, the management is provided official support through a national *Accreditation Management System* (AIMS), a guideline that offers all the necessary information regarding how accreditation can be achieved. To exemplify, AIMS has been designed to "provide web-based, internet access to current publications, templates, forms, and a data-bank", together with the provision of "archival information; for example, contact information, annual profile statistics, key performance indicators with benchmarking data, national aggregated statistics, past reports and evidence submitted, and other information that is useful for the Commission or Ministry of Education" (NCAAA, 2015: 5).

The AIMS dossier includes 19 requirements and an 8-step eligibility strategy that body seeking accreditation can use to ensure that it is following all the necessary procedures (NCAAA, 2015). More specifically, in order to be eligible for accreditation, HEIs need to ensure that the following 9 criteria are met:

a. Self Study Report (SSRI or SSRP). Initial draft, including KPIs Report.

b. Notations. Response to Notations Report, including rejoinders.

c. Self Evaluation Scales Report. If more than two years have passes since the initial Eligibility Requirements Checklist for institutions or for programs.

d. Program Specifications. Individual templates for all programs or representative samples for large public universities.

e. Annual Program Reports. Two consecutive sample reports for each program are required or for large public institutional representative samples.

f. Course Specifications. Individual template representative samples.

g. Course Reports. Individual template representative samples.

h. Field Experience Specifications. Two consecutive sample reports for each program are required or for large public institutional representative samples.

i. Field Experience Reports. Individual template representative samples.

j. A second report may be required.

k. Evaluation Surveys. Evaluation survey summaries for all stakeholders should be complete, including alumni and employer surveys (NCAAA, 2015: 6-7).

In addition to the pre-requisite steps and to ensuring that the above-mentioned criteria are met, the NCAAA delegates a Review Panel, the members being tasked with observation

and examination, the initial verdict being given based on their report, the *Review Panel Report* (RPR). This report is then conveyed to the NCAAA, which offers suggestions for necessary improvements, and the institution needs to ensure that they implement and document the introduction of these suggestions (NCAAA, 2015: 7-8). Lastly, the NCAAA verifies whether these changes have been implemented and maintained throughout an estimate 2 years period, at the end of which the NCAAA provides the institution with full accreditation, provisional (or conditional) accreditation or simply denies accreditation (NCAAA, 2015).

The Handbook for Quality Assurance and Accreditation (NCAAA, 2012a: 8) indicates that accreditation in the KSA is granted under two separate conditions, both of which require an elevated degree of programme management and planning. Firstly, programmes can receive provisional accreditation if they are evaluated prior to their completion, and if the NCAAA is positive the programme has all the necessary requirements for implementing the national QA standards, as well as the necessary resources to be completed (NCAAA, 2012a). Secondly, full accreditation is received when a programme is completed, submitted to evaluation and approved by the national accreditation body (NCAAA, 2012a). Full accreditation is granted for 7 years, while provisional accreditation is granted for up to 3 and a half years (NCAAA, 2015: 8). Both these stages require that the faculty approve the programmes beforehand, and Holmes (1993: 5-7) states that this could be one of the reasons why so few HEIs have accreditation.

Furthermore, according to the NCAAA (2011: 11), another important element reviewed during any accreditation process is the training programme provided by a HEI to its employees. Therefore, in order to guarantee and promote quality improvement, as well as receive accreditation, HEIs are required to develop courses in various domains, be they related to managerial, social or methodological competences (Bockelman, Reif and Frohlich, 2010: 164).

Lastly, the national accreditation system is not optimised, as a specialised body responsible for the accreditation process of technical colleges does not yet exist. Instead, each technical college is responsible for its accreditation process (Alzamil, 2014: 130). In this regard, the NCAAA (2012a) states that technical accreditation can only be granted based on the research performed, thus the national system attempts to encourage research advancement. Moreover, the last crucial steps in being granted accreditation require the

HEI to follow an administrative framework that ensures accountability, as well as providing support to initiatives that could improve the organisation and its policies (NCAAA, 2012a).

2.5. Analytical Framework

This section presents the analytical framework of the study, which was devised by gathering the key concepts delineated in the quality assurance literature. As discussed above, the HEIs are open systems that are dependent on external feedback and interact with their environment in unique ways (Lunenburg, 2010, Norris, 2007, Owen, 2013, Yorke, 2000, Katz and Kahn, 1978, Cummings and Worley, 2015, Mele, Pels and Polese, 2010, Daft, Murphy and Willmott, 2010, Scott and Davis, 2016). These interactions are portrayed below by employing the EFQM Excellence Model.

The QA process refers to the entirety of the tasks, policies, processes and mechanisms committed to the implementation of a viable quality assurance practice within a higher education institution (Glanville, 2006, in Štimac and Katić, 2015: 582). Quality assurance, and implicitly, quality enhancement, refers to the mechanisms through which the desired quality of product is delivered to the customers, by meeting the needs of the stakeholders, providing opportunities, verifying that all elements of QA, including evaluations, personnel and programmes, are in peak condition and improving the elements that are not (Lomas, 2004, Harvey and Green, 1993). Studies suggest that quality assurance is concerned with providing high quality services and knowledge to the clients in order to guarantee "value for money" (Frazer, 1992: 16). The employment of a QA process is perceived as a beneficial system that prevents problems, optimises management procedures and ensures institutional quality is maintained, by providing an adequate learning and research environment (Alharbi, 2015).

Quality culture – although there are many variations on the definition and purpose of quality (Harvey and Green, 1993, Harvey, 2006, Early, 1995, Green, 1994, Elassy, 2015), as well as numerous interpretations of quality among stakeholders (Anderson, 2006), quality culture refers to the commonly-accepted beliefs, standards, values, patterns and characteristics of both people and programmes (Alharbi, 2015, Gryna and Watson, 2001). The interest in quality culture stems from the desire to implement QA in a successful manner (Hart and Shoolbred, 1993, Mail et al., 2014), that is in accordance with the

views and involvement of all the stakeholders (Harvey and Green, 1993), as well as the pre-existing circumstances and organisational habits of the institution (Loukkola and Zhang, 2010: 9). According to Owen (2013: 28), quality culture is a dynamic component of QA, which needs to be perpetually revised and altered, in order to achieve institutional improvement.

EFQM Excellence Model

In 1991, the EFQM excellence model, which was employed to access the application of the European Quality award requirements, was developed by the European Foundation for Management Development and introduced in 1992 to be utilised by the general public (Hakes, 2007: 5). The EFQM model has been created through a selection of the best criteria from a variety of different business models and guidelines, in addition to an exhaustive consultation with prominent figures from the business sector, in order to reach a consensus of what were considered the best business procedures and solutions at that time (Hakes, 2007: 5). This being said, it is simplistic to conceive HEIs as normal businesses, as their product is purely based on knowledge and its tremendous impact on society, yet the EFQM excellence model's business-oriented framework has been adapted to fulfil the requirements and demands of HEIs (Cifuentes-Madrid, Couture and Llinàs-Audet, 2015: 136).

The EFQM model is a diagnostic tool for assessing the health of an organisation and transforming its overall performance (EFQM, 2003). Self-assessment of the organisation provides a balanced management of its priorities and future success in managing its resources (EFQM, 2003). It is important for organisations to allocate their resources successfully and effectively in order to develop a successful quality culture and realistic business plan for the management of its materials (Oakland, 1999).

The EFQM model starts from the argument that excellent outcomes regarding performance and stakeholders are achieved through managerial policies that target the institution's strategies, resources and stakeholders, and make use of nine criteria that are divided into "Enablers", which include: leadership, people, policy and strategy, partnerships and resources, processes; and "results", which include people results, customer results, society results and key performance results (Grigoroudis and Siskos, 2010: 60-61). The purpose of the enablers is to evaluate and determine whether the institution's approaches to achieving excellence are all-inclusive (EFQM, 2003: 8). To

exemplify, they assess operations pertaining to leadership, management of resources and process management, and whether these operations are "implemented together and in a coordinated fashion" (Calvo-Mora, Leal and Roldan, 2006: 101). However, taking into consideration Figure 3, it can be observed that the EFQM model perceives people as both enablers and results when measuring performance, as the personnel facilitates the teaching and learning process, yet is also a participant within certain quality assurance processes, such as audit and evaluation.

Figure 4: EFQM Enablers and Results
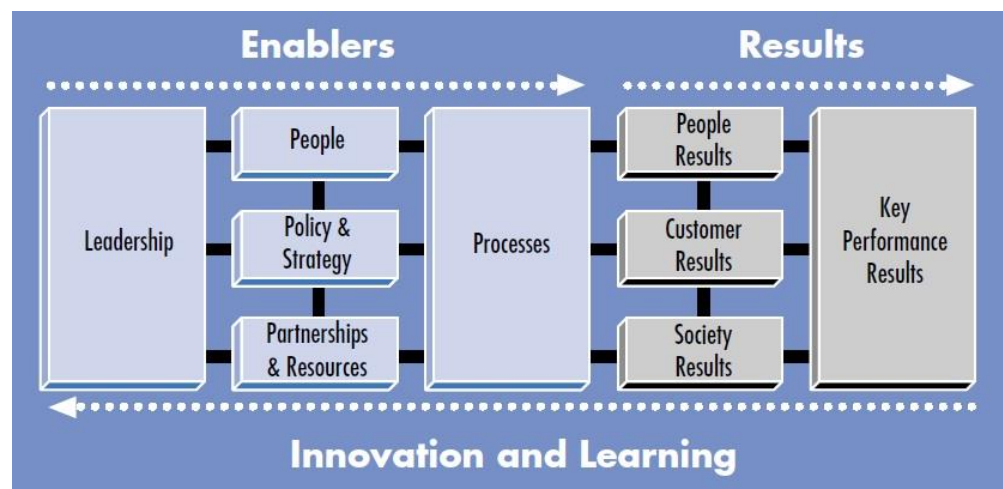
Source: EFQM (2003: 2).

The nine criteria that characterise the EFQM (2003) excellence model are presented below:

1. *Leadership* – the management is required to facilitate the attainment of the mission and vision of an institution, as well as to create organisational values and facilitate positive change in the pursuit of excellence (EFQM, 2003: 18).

Leadership is a crucial element in the implementation of quality assurance practices, as all the models and practices presented depend on the efficiency and dedication of the administrative personnel, the leader of the institution and the management practices (Tennant and Roberts, 2001, Williams, 1993, Meirovich and Romar, 2006, Owlia and Aspinwall, 1997, Hart and Shoolbred, 1993). Optimisation of QA systems is also dependent on, and varies according to, the various management styles of universities, meaning that QA practices differ from institution to institution due to both leadership and management. This implies that the administration of universities is required to be an apt

architect of a specific QA process in order to offer the community a high standard of services (Hernon, Dugan and Schwartz, 2013: 83). Furthermore, resource management is an imperative element in increasing the quality of services (Owlia and Aspinwall, 1997: 536-537), while the administrative staff needs to reward the employees in order to promote quality culture (Hart and Shoolbred, 1993: 27). However, leadership and management are the two most vulnerable elements when implementing a quality-oriented approach, as they are responsible for gathering, examining and addressing stakeholder feedback, in order to increase the quality of services (Borich, 1990: 31) but lack of proper guidance promotes scepticism and disbelief of QA, According to Calvo-Mora, Leal and Roldan (2006: 102), an effective and committed leadership has a positive influence in three other domains, which are people management, policy and strategy, and partnerships and resources.

2. *Policy and Strategy* − institutions are required to establish and follow a long-term strategic plan that takes into consideration the demands of the stakeholders. "Excellent Universities implement their mission and vision by developing a clear stakeholder focused strategy that takes account of the relevant Education sector and sector trends" (EFQM, 2003: 20).

Studies suggest that quality culture is a combination of internal and external beliefs that directly influence the mission, vision and objectives of a HEI, as well as the means through which quality standards are attained (Hart and Shoolbred, 1993, Manyaga, 2008, Van Damme, 2011). The planning phase is considered a crucial element of QA, as processes are developed in a manner that takes into consideration stakeholders' perceptions of quality, in order to ensure the satisfaction of stakeholders' needs (Hart and Shoolbred, 1993: 23). The processes, policy and strategies of a HEI can be regulated through different types of efficiency assessments, such as evaluations and audits. Internal audits are utilised to verify accountability, by allowing staff members to reflect on the impact of their courses (Morley, 2003: 53, Dew and Nearning, 2004: 169), while evaluation is a diagnostic tool that assesses the quality of services, in order to offer insights into the structure of different elements, with the purpose of influencing future decisions and actions taken to optimise QA processes (Wolf, 1990: 10, Marra, 2000: 24-25). Therefore, Calvo-Mora, Leal and Roldan (2006: 102) argue that, similarly to leadership, correct planning and implementation of policies and strategies positively influences people management, partnerships and resources, and process management.

Both policy and strategy need to take into consideration the present and future needs of the stakeholders (EFQM, 2003: 20).

3. *People* – in order for an organisation to be successful, it needs to acknowledge and facilitate the complete development of its personnel, so that they reach their maximum potential (EFQM, 2003: 22).

Calvo-Mora, Leal and Roldan (2006: 103) argue that people management has a positive influence on process management. The validity of this statement increases if one views people management as capable of enhancing personal skills and beliefs, which in turn improves the processes carried out by the individuals. For example, self-evaluation is a process that can be employed by both administrative and academic personnel, which provides the opportunity for personal criticism, with the purpose of identifying weaknesses and conceiving solutions to rectify said weaknesses, as it identifies the need of academic, personal or interpersonal growth (McMillan and Hearn, 2008, Kitsantas, Reiser and Doster, 2004). Furthermore, research shows that people exhibit an increase in satisfaction and dedication in environments where management is more lenient and appreciative of the staff's efforts (Weber and Dolgova-Dreyer, 2007, Westerheijden, Stensaker and Rosa, 2007: 196).

4. *Partnerships and resources* – organisations are required to create and clearly delineate a plan that considers and manages all the partnerships and important resources, including finance, equipment, technology and so on (EFQM, 2003: 24).

HEIs are required to employ and manage four types of resources: human, financial, physical and information resources, which are verified with the purpose of ensuring quality and satisfying the community's requirements (Lunenburg, 2010: 2-3). The creation of a plan that takes into account all potential partnerships and available resources highlights the efficiency and accountability of an institution (Green, 1994: 16, Stumbrys, 2004: 161). Calvo-Mora, Leal and Roldan (2006: 103) state that the correct management of partnerships and resources has a positive impact on process management, while Marra (2000: 25) argues that the efficiency of said resources can be ascertained through evaluation, a process that offers insights into the benefits or deficits of resource management, as well as the sustainability of programmes and curricula.

5. *Processes* – the entirety of internal and external processes needs to be meticulously established, managed, supervised and improved, so that the institution satisfies the stakeholders' requirements (EFQM, 2003: 26).

All processes need to be designed, managed and improved in such a way that identifies stakeholders, appraises their expectations and ensures stakeholder standards are attained. For this purpose, the processes can be analysed through various means, including evaluations, inspections and research, in order to ensure the quality of services offered, as well as the mission, vision and objectives are equivalent with the desires of the customers (Hamdatu, Siddiek and Al-Olyan, 2013: 106). For this purpose, higher education providers should engage all stakeholders in honest conversations that provide feedback from all sources, with the purpose of creating beneficial conditions and opportunities (MacBeath, 2005b: 3).

6. *Customer results* – the attainment of excellent results need to be enabled through a thorough assessment of the perceptions of external customers, through the implementation of performance indicators that monitor, predict and improve services (EFQM, 2003: 28).

According to Harvey and Green (1993: 20), customer satisfaction is paramount to ensuring quality and providing customers with the desired outcomes. The pursuit of excellence materialises from the creation of procedures that are assessed by the customers, as universities aim to redefine their services based on customer feedback, in order to ensure satisfaction and accountability (Kotler, 1985, in Fitsilis, 2010: 227). Since HEIs are open systems, they rely on feedback gathered from external sources (Katz and Kahn, 1978: 3, Daft, Murphy and Willmott, 2010: 14), in order to progress in the present competitive environment (Koslowski, 2006: 277). Similarly, QA is generally perceived as a system that relies on stakeholder feedback to be successful (Norris, 2007: 139, Yarbrough et al., 2011: 115).

7. *People results* – the perceptions of the personnel are also important, as they are the ones that facilitate the creation of the product and without their dedication, outstanding results cannot be attained (EFQM, 2003: 30).

Stakeholders – the study presents these two groups as people who have an interest and are directly involved in the implementation of quality assurance processes. They consist of

the lecturers and the students, who are crucial participants in the success of QA within a HEI, as the main constituents of the teaching and learning process. The lecturers are the suppliers of knowledge, the ones who preserve and can potentially enhance the quality of the teaching process through the utilisation of self-evaluation (Ritchie, 2007, Pennington and O'Neil, 1994), or by offering feedback with the purpose of improving internal practices and programmes (Norris, 1990, Frazer, 1992). The students are the recipients of knowledge, and are considered by many scholars to be the main customers of HEIs (Sallis, 2002, Sirvanci, 2004, Ahmed, 2006, Wiklund et al., 2003), yet some studies portray them as part of the process of delivering quality and argue that without the proper involvement of students, the quality of services delivered can suffer (Meirovich and Romar, 2006, Motwani and Kumar, 1997). The relationship between students and the academic personnel is important to the creation of a quality culture and to the implementation of a sustainable QA system (Harvey, 2002, Komives and Woodard, 2003).

8. *Society results* – institutions are advised to create and implement a monitoring system that allows the creators of the product to predict and alter their services in accordance with society's needs and requirements (EFQM, 2003: 32).

Higher education providers have a responsibility to offer high value services that are beneficial to and enhance society, while preserving a nation's heritage (Frazer, 1992: 16), which is the main reason why QA and the quality culture may differ from institution to institution. Nonetheless, the overall objective of QA is to reassure society that institutions are capable of providing the level of quality required.

9. *Key performance results* – be they financial or non-financial, key performance results are crucial to achieving excellent outcomes within an organisation, as they represent the strategies and policies employed. The results are then measured, monitored and improved, in order to assess the processes' outcomes (EFQM, 2003: 34).

Evaluation and audit are the two key elements that assess key performance results, as they offer insight into institutional outcomes (Hansson, 2006: 159), while the continuous monitoring and improvement of people, processes and attitudes are employed to ensure customer satisfaction, as well as to assess the efficiency of the institution.

These criteria help in the measurement and creation of value within the quality management. Furthermore, these fundamental factors also provide leadership and quality assurance for better management practices and the success of the organisation from the perspective of stakeholders as well as consumers. However, social responsibility is also incorporated in the model; this has a share in the success because it satisfies the community in providing socially responsible activities for the betterment of society (EFQM, 2003, Oakland, 1999).

The EFQM model's rationale suggests that "an appropriate definition and implementation of higher education institutions' policy and strategy, as well as the development of an appropriate organisational culture, may contribute to enhanced performance", with regards to the basic performances of HEIs: teaching, research and service (Westerheijden, Stensaker and Rosa, 2007: 196). Furthermore, EFQM's versatility regarding the sector it is employed in, the size of the institution that adopts the model, as well as the institution's experience, makes EFQM a suitable QA model for HEIs (Lyons, 2013: 171). For example, the EFQM proposes several types of approaches for implementing the model's self-assessment, such as questionnaires, charts, workshops, simulations, with each approach's resources, benefits and risks being acknowledged by the EFQM (2003). Jackson (2001: 45) argues that there is no best approach to introducing EFQM into an institution, and that its implementation needs to be situational, based on the institution's internal culture, management, resources and objectives, which is why it can achieve results in various environments.

All things considered, it is important to take into account the main disadvantages of the EFQM Excellence Model. According to McCabe (2001: 175), due to the intricacies of the model, people who do not have training in carrying out self-assessment by utilising the model's principles have a tendency to "improve everything immediately", which can be overwhelming and frustrating. Furthermore, it can be argued that the model is not specifically designed for education, and thus some features might need to be modified or adapted by the administration to fit the situation of HE. However, this only proves the versatility of the model, as the model is currently successfully employed in German HEIs (Sloane, 2008: 824, in Rauner and Maclean, 2008). As such, the management of institutions needs to train people in utilising EFQM, but also to create and commit to a plan that prioritises the most vulnerable issues.

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the various approaches to defining and thinking about quality, underpinned by different perceptions and encapsulated by terms such as exceptional, perfection, fitness for purpose, value for money and transformation (Harvey and Green, 1993). More importantly, Harvey (2006: 1) defines quality as the tool to enforcing the purposes of quality assurance. In the KSA, quality is perceived in a similar manner, yet the Kingdom urges institutions to create their own perceptions of quality, in accordance with institutional culture and habits (Darandari, 2009, Onsman, 2010). This approach, however, has generated complications, as internal stakeholders are unsure of what quality is and may be sceptical about employing QA processes. Therefore, Albaqami et al. (2015: 59) suggest that institutions need to dedicate more effort to exploring the various perceptions of quality among internal stakeholders, in an attempt to create a sustainable quality culture.

The EFQM excellence model (2003: 3) suggests the importance of ensuring quality in all processes of a HEI, through a stakeholder-focused approach that takes into consideration stakeholder feedback in the entirety of activities conducted by an institution. Anderson's (2006) assertion concerning the different perceptions of quality among stakeholders defends the idea that EFQM is a valid model of QA for HEIs, considering the importance the model places on stakeholder feedback. Additional QA models have been examined throughout this chapter, including Total Quality Management (Charantimath, 2011, Sallis, 2002, Morfaw, 2009), Hoshin Kanri (Tennant and Roberts, 2001, Charron et al., 2015) and ISO 9000 (Clery, 1993, Symonds, 1996), all of which were evaluated to assess their implementation in higher education. The research suggests that while all three models can be applied to higher education to a certain degree, they present impediments in the management department. Out of the three models, TQM proved to be the most comprehensive and the most efficient in ensuring quality in higher education.

In accordance with the analytical framework, the chapter also presented evaluation and accreditation as crucial processes of assessing quality, and discussed both positive and negative aspects pertaining to each process. The most notable aspects of evaluation are, from a positive perspective – the development of a critical perspective relating to both programmes and individuals (Kitsantas, Reiser and Doster, 2004) and the creation of

circumstances that enable quality improvement (Ritchie and Dale, 2000); and from a negative perspective – the creation of confusion, due to different perceptions of quality and evaluation among stakeholders (Marra, 2000). Similarly, accreditation promotes transparency and enables communication among stakeholders (Yarbrough et al., 2011, Kristoffersen's, 2007), while the disadvantages of accreditation include the tendency for complacency and the pursuit of accreditation, rather than that of quality (Weber, 2007, Knight, 2007).

According to the findings from the literature review, the management's dedication to QA procedures and a quality culture can indeed positively influence processes, programmes and personnel. This approach is particularly successful when both evaluation and accreditation are efficiently employed, as this allows the personnel to improve, thus contributing to the success of the HEI. Furthermore, the creation of a thorough management plan regarding resources and internal processes also positively influences the quality of results. Taking into consideration the various perceptions and expectations of external stakeholders ensures that excellent customer, people and society results are achieved. Moreover, monitoring of institutional processes, strategies and resources ensures that key performance results generate the desired quality outcomes. Therefore, the findings are in accordance with the specifications of the EFQM excellence model (2003) and demonstrate that a competent pursuit of quality in higher education requires all the afore-mentioned factors to be taken into consideration.

Chapter 3
Research and Methodology

Introduction

This research study was carried out to explore the nature of and conditions under which quality assurance processes are carried out in the women's section of King Abdulaziz University. The aim of this chapter is to depict the theoretical and practical approaches employed while conducting the research. As such, this section presents the ideas that influenced the design of the research, as well as the various methods used to collect and interpret the gathered data. The chapter intends to fulfil several objectives. First and foremost, it presents the study's qualitative characteristics, by arguing which approaches are better suited for the study, and by discussing the choices in the research design. Secondly, it depicts the practical strategies utilised in conducting the research by presenting the data collection process and the procedures associated with it; by describing the various instruments employed while conducting the research; by discussing ethical considerations and by presenting the choices pertinent to sampling. Thirdly, the chapter offers an in-depth discussion of the methods utilised to analyse the qualitative data. Lastly, the chapter presents and discusses the limitations of the project. Thus, the current chapter presents and analyses the research methodology pertaining to this study, in addition to offering the rationale behind the choices made by the researcher at all stages of the research.

3.1. Research Design

According to Parahoo (1997: 142), the research design involves the planning of "how, when and where" the data for the study is to be collected and analysed. Polit et al. (2001: 167) and Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016: 136) argue that research design is the

researcher's overall plan for testing the research hypothesis or answering the research questions. As such, the research questions from which the research objectives are derived, informs the methodological choices made by the researcher (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016: 137).

However, as De Vaus and de Vaus (2001: 9) argue, research design is not just a "work plan" or "structure" that describes the research project, and how research will be carried out and the data collection methods used; it also ensures reliability in relation to the research questions, by eliminating threats to the eventual research claims and by encouraging internal validity. Therefore, an appropriate research design and methods enables a researcher to obtain relevant evidence and thus, to obtain as clear answers as possible to the research questions, or as accurate a description as possible of the phenomenon (Rwegoshora, 2016: 88). What Denscombe (2007: 1) calls a 'safeguard against making elementary errors' is essential in the selection of research methodology, so care must be taken to choose the approach that is most suitable for the study being undertaken. It is not a case of 'one size fits all' and as Denscombe (2007: 134) states, 'none of the possible methods for data collection can be regarded as perfect and none can be regarded as utterly useless'. Thus, the correct choice of methodology and its application are essential, and must derive from the purpose of the research. For that, the researcher must be very familiar with all research methods, and the tools used in each to collect data, regardless of their previous research experience (Atawee, 2000).

The commonly used research designs are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed research, which encompasses both quantitative and qualitative methods. The researcher weighed all methods before deciding to choose a qualitative research design.

3.1.1. Qualitative Research

The qualitative approach places emphasis on qualities, processes, and meanings that are examinable or measurable by experiments, in order to ascertain quality, intensity, amount, or frequency (Schwandt, 1997). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argue that employing a qualitative approach is suitable for studies that aim to design a methodology that offers a contextualised depiction of social phenomena. Therefore, qualitative research is based on socially constructed reality (Creswell, 2003). Gubrium and Sankar (1994: 48) note that qualitative research is "inherently flexible and discovers details of subjects' ethno-

cultural realities", while Ritchie et al. (2013: 33) point out that qualitative research effectively captures delicate, sensitive, and intangible issues, social constructs, behaviours, and beliefs. In addition, it has the ability to develop a deeper theoretical understanding as it generates rich and all-inclusive data, allowing collection of information which brings out the particular perspectives of the participant (Rubin and Babbie, 2016: 230; Patton, 2002, Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). As Bryman (1988: 3) states, qualitative researchers can employ a more lenient approach when collecting primary data, which allows the participants to more openly express their opinions. As a result, the qualitative researcher may collect more subtle primary data and identify factors that would otherwise not be visible in quantitative research (Ritchie et al., 2013: 211). Thus, Mangal and Mangal (2013: 162) suggest that a qualitative design can effectively provide information on values, norms, attitudes, opinions, behaviours, beliefs, emotions, motivations, relationships, gender roles, ethnicity, systems, and social context of a particular group of participants "whose role in research may not be readily apparent". Therefore, qualitative research design permits in-depth understanding of issues and phenomena (Hancock et al., 1998:6).

Ritchie et al. (2013: 36) argue that while qualitative research studies uses small samples or few cases, it employs intensive interviews methods or in-depth analysis of the data to provide comprehensive account of events. As noted by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016: 145), Denzin and Lincoln (2003: 9-10) and Bryman (1988: 1), qualitative methodology involves techniques that generate or use non-numerical data, by collecting data through use of techniques such as interviews, and analysing data by procedures such as categorisation.

3.1.2. Rationale Behind the Qualitative Approach

When considering the choice of research design, the researcher struggled to decide the most appropriate approach, especially given that Middle Eastern research has been typically quantitative. On this subject, Clark (2006: 417) carried out a survey regarding qualitative studies, and concluded that "the literature on qualitative research methods largely focuses on democratic [countries] and not (…) the Middle East in particular". Given the culture shock posed by qualitative research, the researcher considered it crucial

to explore the potential methods employed to ensure that the research questions could be answered.

In order to decide between quantitative and qualitative approaches, the researcher proceeded to firstly contact the section for Planning and Development in the MoHE and KAU, to obtain some statistics about the women's section of KAU. However, given the fact that no reports or studies regarding the section at KAU could be shared due to the Kingdom's policy, the researcher considered Creswell's (2003: 22) suggestion that "if a concept or phenomenon needs to be understood because little research has been done on it, then it merits a qualitative approach".

Nevertheless, prior to deciding on the qualitative design, the research also considered the benefits of quantitative methods, which ultimately were deemed incapable of showcasing the breadth of the research aims and objectives. Traditional interpretations of quantitative approaches place emphasis on measuring and analysing the cause-effect relationship for variables in a study (Ritchie et al., 2013: 29). This implies that the main goal is to determine the existing relationship between variables and further establish the dependent and independent variables (Ritchie et al., 2013: 80). For the present study, quantitative research design would require the researcher to categorise the SE process, QA and academic accreditation as dependent or independent variables (Johnson and Christensen, 2008: 347). Notably, according to Bryman (2012), studies that assume this approach are either descriptive or experimental, while the data generated is typically numerical, for instance, using a questionnaire to collect data that can be presented in the form of graphs or statistical tables. Furthermore, as Skinner et al. (2014: 320) argue, applying quantitative research design is believed to give the researcher an advantage in identifying and isolating specific variables that are present in a study framework. Therefore, establishing their relationships, correlation, and causality is less complicated (Lichtman, 2012: 10). However, Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016: 472) note that the narrow conclusions that are achieved based on the statistical significance of the results, which are not significant in interpreting individual responses, also reduce the benefits of using the approach in social research. For this study, for instance, a quantitative field enquiry would have been very narrow and constrained in terms of answering the research issues, and this is why the qualitative approach has been chosen. More specifically, the researcher's aim was not only to identify whether a specific QA approach for Saudi higher education is efficient or whether it is preferred, but also to identify the specific

issues that accompany these QA approaches, and how people react to these issues. As such, the researcher wanted to identify the roots of the problems as perceived by individuals, so as to offer recommendations in an attempt to enhance the Saudi QA system, instead of simply determining whether something is successful.

Secondly, the researcher considered what Amaratunga et al. (2002: 19) state – that the qualitative approach "concentrates on words and observations to express reality and attempts to describe people in natural situations". Similarly, Creswell (2007: 37) argues that qualitative researchers have a tendency towards collecting data in the environment where the phenomena are experienced by the participants, and not in a manufactured environment. This approach was sought after by the researcher, who aimed to capture the behaviours, intentions and beliefs of the participants in a natural setting. In addition, Creswell (2007: 39) indicates that "the research process for qualitative researchers is emergent", thus several elements of the research can be subjected to change during the development of the study, including questions, forms of data collection, such as the number of participants interviewed. The purpose of qualitative research is to gather as much data as needed to become utmost informed about the subject and issues studies, which resonates with the general purpose of the researcher (Creswell, 2007: 39). In a similar manner, Charmaz (2006:14) describes qualitative research as a method that allows the researcher to add new pieces to the research puzzle or conjure new puzzles while gathering data, which can even occur later in the data analysis stage. Thus, the researcher also considered the flexibility of the qualitative approach when designing the research. As Maxwell (2012: 30) points out, qualitative research "has an inherent openness and flexibility that allows you to modify your design and focus during the research to pursue new discoveries and relationships".

Furthermore, the researcher also considered her previous professional experience in educational evaluation in the women's section of KAU, and has taken into account some of the negative opinions about the mechanics of evaluation, and the fears, hopes and obstacles that she encountered in her professional capacity at the university. Therefore, the researcher aimed to conduct a study that would help stakeholders, by promoting further studies on QA and the academic accreditation system, or to seek to repair and modify the current system. Due to the nature of this study, the research may also help the MoHE in KSA to see how the development of quality assurance systems can be further achieved.

Lastly, given that quantitative research is overwhelmingly the choice in Saudi academia, it is possible that this research represents a new paradigm for a new community and network for qualitative research in KSA.

For these reasons, the researcher considered qualitative research design and therefore, qualitative data collection methods such as field enquiry, documentation analysis and interviews. The researcher was more concerned with obtaining precise perspectives of the informants by identifying themes associated with self-evaluation processes at the University. The approach was also considered appropriate as it provides a more in-depth view of the situation, which would not be possible if numerical data was considered. As such, the researcher was in a position to express the real perspectives of the participants, because there was room to be immersed in a prevailing situation and thus achieving a better level of interaction with the informants.

3.2. Research Strategy – Methodology

Given the purpose of this study, which is to appraise whether the QA practices at KAU are effective, the researcher chose to conduct a qualitative study informed by the principles and processes of case study, on self-evaluation procedures and their impact on the institutional policies and on the stakeholders of the women's section of KAU.

3.2.1. Rationale behind Case Study as a Major Influence on the Study

According to Creswell (2013: 97), case study research is a qualitative approach employed to examine a case over time, by employing a variety of sources. Yin (2009: 26; 13) refers to the strategy as an in-depth inquiry into a subject or phenomenon that may involve different entities (i.e. a person, a group, an organisation, a change process or an event among others), and adds that case study research involves the description of "relationships that exist in reality, especially in a particular organisation". Similarly, Simons (2010) and Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) state that case studies are commonly employed to present material that is based on social phenomena or

organisational settings. Merriam (1998: 19) argues that the purpose of the case study is to gain a comprehensive understanding "of the situation and its meaning for those involved". Regarding the applicability of case study, some authors have argued that since it is carried out in a real-life setting or context, factual aspects of a phenomenon can be investigated (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016:184). On the other hand, a common criticism of case studies is that "they provide little basis for scientific generalization" (Yin, 2003:10).

All things considered, the rationale behind the researcher's choice of research strategy was influenced by all of the aforementioned characteristics. To illustrate, Yin's (2009) definition of the case study includes both the aim of the study to involve different entities within the same organisation, while Merriam's (1998) assertion of the purpose of the case study coincided with the researcher's aim to gain an in-depth understanding of the perspectives on the QA system in the women's section of KAU. Furthermore, case study seemed appropriate for the present study due to its ability to produce insights from comprehensive research in a real-life context of a phenomenon. It has been argued that case study allows for rich, empirical descriptions and expansion of theory to be achieved (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007: 28; Dubois and Gadde, 2002: 6; Yin, 2009: 23). From this point of view, a qualitative approach to case study provides an opportunity to explore, describe and interpret the application of QA through the perspectives of the study participants. In fact, this approach was selected due to the need for a deep understanding of the policies, applications and impact of QA, SE and academic accreditation of HEIs in the KSA. With regard to the research questions, the focus is on the factors that affect the preparation of HEIs for implementing QA and academic accreditation systems; the nature of quality assurance and academic accreditation policies and their implementation in the women's section at KAU in KSA; the factors shaping these policies, and how these factors affect preparation for this in HEIs in KSA. The researcher has no control over these phenomena, although the proximity of the researcher to the context of the case study is important (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). In this study, the researcher's proximity is integrally linked to the activities conducted by the researcher. Additionally, the researcher took into consideration the opinions of Al-Mutairi (2005), who argues that Saudi Arabian HE has been deeply influenced by globalisation and thus borrowed foreign research strategies. As a result, the "purely quantitative research, itself shaped by imported theories", urges the need for qualitative case studies

that provide reliable insight into institutional relationships and procedures (Al-Mutairi, 2005: 120). With this in mind, the researcher decided to supplement the gap in Saudi Arabian qualitative research, by conducting a study that is "based on contextual realities" (Al-Mutairi, 2005: 121).

In order to adhere to the crucial aspect of achieving a comprehensive understanding by employing several methods of data collection (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009), the researcher made use of both interviews and documents when gathering qualitative data. Thus, it was possible to obtain a broad picture and form a strong base, which led to the enhancement of the data and of the results, by triangulating the findings. The fieldwork concentrated on the context (i.e. the KAU women's section) for four months, followed by a two -month period of document collection and research conducted at the KAU, at the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) and at the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment in Saudi Arabia (NCAAA).

The choice to focus on the women's section of KAU stemmed from several reasons. First and foremost, the researcher is employed as a faculty member at the university and has developed a good working relationship with certain senior managers and faculty members, which enabled her to more easily conduct the interviews. Thus, the research was guided, conducted and managed from the university, which allowed the researcher to easily create a sample, contact the participants and observe the phenomena first hand. Secondly, the women's section is currently working on the implementation of SE, QA and academic accreditation policies from the MoHE, which is requesting that all faculties adopt these practices. Thus, the researcher could follow the proceedings and plans in this regard without interfering or bothering members of staff. Lastly, the HE system in KSA has a highly centralised policy application system and, although there could be elements which vary from one university to another, to a large extent this is uniform for most universities (El-Maghraby, 2011). This implies that the results are likely to be generalisable to a certain extent.

The details of the study carried out for this research are as follows:

• The women's section belongs to a public university, KAU - the largest university in KSA, and the research aim is to focus on QA in HEIs in the public sector.

• The chosen section intended to implement QA and SE standards, introduced in 2012, when this study was undertaken.

• The women's section of the KAU has less resources, faculties, students and staff than average universities or than male sections of Saudi universities, and these issues were considered when conducting the study, as they can be central to the introduction of SE and QA in general.

• The women's section was founded by the Vice Presidency for Development in 2004 (King Abdu-Aziz University, 2012).

• The Dean of the women's section encouraged the researcher to conduct the field study.

• The National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment in Saudi Arabia (NCAAA) in KSA recommended that the field study be conducted in this section of KAU.

• The section is located within the western region of the country, close to the researcher's home, and was thus easy to reach.

3.3. Data Collection

The specific methods used in the fieldwork were interviews and the collection of relevant documents, and were employed due to their usual inclusion in qualitative research strategy (Tellis, 1997). As with every method, both data collection through documentation and interviews have strengths and weaknesses. The table below presents said characteristics:

Table 4: Sources of Evidence - Strengths and Weaknesses

Source	Strengths	Weaknesses
Documentation	- Stable - can be reviewed repeatedly. - Unobtrusive - not created as a result of the case study. - Precise- contains exact names,	- Retrievability - can be low. - Biased selectivity if collection is incomplete. - Reporting bias reflects (unknown) bias of

	references and details of an event. - Broad coverage long span of time, many events and many settings.	authors. - Access may be deliberately blocked.
Interviews	- Targeted - focuses directly on case study topic. - Insightful- provides perceived casual inferences.	- Could be biased due to poorly constructed questions. - Response bias possible. - Possible inaccuracies due to poor recall. - Reflexivity = interviewee gives what interviewer wants to hear.

Source: Yin (2009: 102)

Following Yin's (2009) discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of interviews and documentation, the selection of these data collection methods for the present study was influenced by several reasons, including their relationship to the qualitative design of the research, versatility, richness of detail and ease of access. The two methods, along with the rationale behind choosing them, are further presented below.

3.3.1. Interviews

Traditionally, interviews have been defined as a communicative procedure that allows an investigator to 'extract' information from an individual or informant (Seidman, 2013; King and Horrocks, 2010). But participants typically influence the extracted information, as they interpret their environment based on their prior experiences and encounters about the phenomena being investigated. Therefore, interviews normally generate subjective,

explanatory outcomes or responses that are shaped by the experiences of the interviewees (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006: 319). As such, the main objective of qualitative interviewing is to offer alternative ways of understanding phenomena that cannot be observed directly; aspects like interviewees' behaviours, feelings, opinions, thoughts, or attitudes. As the present study assumes that the perspective of the respondents is meaningful, unique and identifiable, it was practical to use qualitative interviewing to obtain their perspective on the SE and QA processes in the women's section of KAU. Interviewers also affect the information offered, and are recognised as being active co-creators, with their respondents, of the knowledge produced during an interview (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995).

There are various classification systems for interview types fronted by qualitative researchers. The researcher chose semi-structured interviews due to their versatility and reliability (King and Horrocks, 2010). Seidman (2013) argues that in some cases, studies that adopt semi-structured interviews require the researcher to develop and make use of a predetermined question guide (interview guide) with questions and topics to be asked during the interview listed in a particular manner. However, the interview guide must be developed and utilised in a manner that does not manipulate the respondents (Seidman, 2013: 94). Furthermore, Patton (1990: 283) notes that the interviewer usually follows the interview guide though they are required to keep track of topical trajectories in the discussion that may be out of the interview guide questions, as long as they feel the digression is relevant or appropriate. Preparation of interviewers on how to follow relevant topics and inclusion of open-ended questions "provide the opportunity for identifying new ways of seeing and understanding the topic at hand" (Walsh and Wigens, 2003: 98). In addition, Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016: 392) suggest that it is generally desirable for the researcher to record the interviews on tape and later transcribe them, as it may be difficult to write notes capturing the participants' answers while actively engaging with the participants. This can obstruct interviewer and interviewee rapport development, unless the researcher has someone to take rapid notes during the interview. Lastly, Patton (1990: 281) and Cohen (2006) note also that semi-structured interviews provide the participants with the independence to express their views simply or in the terms they best understand. If done well, semi-structured interviews can provide reliable, distinctive qualitative data (Patton, 1990: 282).

Backett (1990) notes that the value of interviews lies in obtaining information that is otherwise difficult to access. The present study employed semi-structured interviews, which mainly focused on collecting detailed and comprehensive information on particular issues regarding SE procedures and their applications to quality assurance and academic accreditation in the women's section of KAU. Semi-structured interviews were considered appropriate for the present study, as they are carried out through focused, interactive communication.

The researcher's main concerns regarding the interviews were related to censorship in the KSA, especially after discussing access procedures with the head of the department of the Graduate Educational Studies programme where the researcher was employed, and which was the starting point for the access procedures that begun in 2012. In the event, the department was supportive of the possibility of carrying out a study within the university but also offered guidance that had to be taken into account during the implementation of the study, including guidance regarding the formulation of the interview questions. The head of the department stressed that the questions needed to be translated into Arabic, and not contain any religious or political aspects. As the official language in KSA is Arabic, the interview protocol had to be translated from English by the researcher and revised with the supervisor. The interviews took place in the Arabic language (mother tongue), as this approach enabled participants to give detailed, unobstructed verbal accounts. For the purposes of communication with a wider audience, numerous parts of the Arabic versions of the interviews were then translated into English.

For the present study, forty-two interviews with personnel from the women's section of KAU were conducted, whereby the interview questions were first written in English then translated into Arabic to allow for easier understanding by the participants. The objective of the interviews was to ensure a comprehensive representation of perceptions on the issues regarding the SE process and QA in the university. The interviews also endeavoured to maximise the range of data collected and to shed more light on responses to the research questions. The researcher conducted interviews using a semi–structured, interview guide approach, which proved challenging in the beginning. As noted by Walsh and Wigens (2003 p.97-98), it requires good interviewing skills, needs careful preparation to avoid leading or prescriptive questions, and can be time consuming. The questions of the study instrument were adapted from previous studies alongside personal experience (interview guide is shown in Table 5). The previously developed interview guide

permitted the researcher to flexibly and responsively deal with unanticipated discoveries occurring during the interviews.

The researcher asked the participants for permission to record the interviews through the use of a small recording device, a proposition accepted by the majority of interviewees (i.e. 37 out of 42), which thus offered the possibility of revision and repeated analysis. The recordings provided the opportunity to transcribe the interviews, which was done though an adjustment of the speed and by writing while listening. The majority of interviews took between two to three hours to transcribe. Each interview took on average one hour. Specifically, one of the forty-two interviews held, lasted for only twenty minutes, and four interviews lasted for two hours. However, the time spent while holding some interviews in the offices of the deans of colleges was more than two hours. This was because of constant interruptions caused by telephone calls, or staff entering for urgent requests to be signed. The researcher made use of these pauses as an opportunity to review the already obtained data, so as to be able to take up the thread again as seamlessly as possible.

Apart from the introductory closed questions, which provided insightful background on the interviewees, the interview questions were open-ended. Those which were meant to provide answers to the two research questions included the following predetermined items: current quality assurance and academic accreditation practices; the SE process; challenges facing quality assurance and academic accreditation system; communications; collaborative linkages with other organisations; planning; supporting staff on research; training for continuous improvement. The interview questions were first written in English and discussed with the supervisor, so the researcher benefited from his advice, and then translated into Arabic to be approved by the MoHE. The researcher of the present study developed the set of questions in advance, even though the interview was expected to be conversational, which enables the interviewer to give clarifications or skip questions that may seem redundant (Walsh and Wigens, 2003: 97-98). However, it was observed that not all the questions could be formulated beforehand; Menter et al. (2011: 133) indicate that some of the questions can be created during the interview, as it allows the interviewer and respondents the flexibility to discuss issues extensively or to further inquire into details, and thus consistent, comparable qualitative data can be achieved.

Table 5: Interview Guide

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1.   What are the mechanisms of quality control and accreditation that were in place at the women's section at KAU before NCAAA in 2004?

2.   What events led to the NCAAA being created as an independent body?

3.   How has the NCAAA been implementing its policies? (I will break this up into smaller questions: for example, over the 10 years of NCAAA work, what have been the main areas of focus? Have there been different foci in different periods?).

4.   What is the policy of KAU and NCAAA for QA in:

a.   Academic programmes?

b.   Teaching?

c.   Student learning and assessment?

d.   Research by faculty members?

e.   Administrative issues?

5.   What are the mechanisms, models, methods and procedures of QA and SE in the women's section of KAU?

6.   Who is putting the policy in place to ensure quality at KAU and NCAAA?

7.   In your opinion, what is the official position of the government to ensure the quality of HEIs? (This can be a probing question to raise other questions/issues).

8.   What are the factors that affect the development and implementation of QA, SE and accreditation in the women's section of KAU?

9.   What do you think are the most important difficulties and challenges in terms of improving the institutional quality of education?

10.   What do you think about SE, QA and accreditation and its applications in the women's section of KAU?

11.   How does the women's section at KAU assure quality of their education in terms of assessment tools; teaching; research, etc.?

12.   How do you think that students are affected by SE and QA practices?

13.   What are the factors that affect the development and implementation of SE, QA and accreditation in the women's section of KAU?

14.   What do you think are the most important difficulties and challenges in terms of improving the institutional quality of education?

15.   How do you think that the current SE and QA implementation could be improved?

16.   What are the roles of university support staff in the training of staff about SE, QA and accreditation system in the women's section of KAU?

17.   How many training courses have you managed or partaken in SE, QA and accreditation? (Subsequent questioning may involve the desired frequency of said courses)

18.   What do you think about the training provided and to what extent do these meet staff needs in the women's section of KAU?

19.   What are the issues in training provision and managing QA, SE and accreditation?

20.   What are the factors that affect the development and implementation of SE and QA in the women's section of KAU? (This can be a probing question that leads to inquiries relating to the quality culture)

21.   What is your impression of improvements and developments in the women's section of KAU?

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3.3.2. Documents

Documentation collection and analysis also formed part of the research, and the method can have both advantages and disadvantages (Appleton and Cowley, 1997; Yin, 2009). On the one side, official documents to be analysed are not biased by the data collection process, are usually free and easy to access, thus not adding to any costs, and the data can be collected relatively rapidly (Appleton and Cowley, 1997). Another argument for collecting data from documents is the versatility of the sources, which can range from official, public and personal documents, to reports made by lecturers, to visual artefacts

and even electronic sources (Markham, 2005; Harper, 2005). On the other hand, there is often a limit to the amount of data that is available, and documents may be either inaccurate or incomplete, irrelevant to the study context, or the access to said files can be deliberately blocked (Yin, 2009). In addition, Johnson (2002: 83) argues that some documentation is prone to being stored solely on hard copies in packed storage rooms that are either inaccessible to the public, or simply time-consuming and overall difficult to review without proper guidance. Lastly, Ary, Jacobs and Sorensen (2010: 443) argue that documents were not created with the purpose of contributing to research, and as such can be incomplete, or organised in a manner that is difficult to comprehend and interpret. However, it is important to take into consideration the main advantage of collecting data from documents, which is the historical perspective it provides to the research (Ponce and Pagan, 2016).

The researcher employed document analysis as a method to contextualise the research. The documents utilised ranged from governmental policies, plans, strategies and handbooks, to institutional reports and webpages concerning the NCAAA, KAU and the MoHE. According to May (1997), documents can offer valuable insights into what is being researched. To illustrate, the documentation analysed was useful in detailing the role, goal and standards of the KAU in regards to SE, QA and accreditation, as well as the national standards regarding QA in HEIs. For this purpose, the researcher reviewed various reports, documents, circulars and studies, all gathered during the researcher's stay in the KSA in 2012. This was when, following the advice from the supervisor, the researcher travelled to the KSA with the following objectives:

- To visit the Vice Presidency for Development in KAU. The researcher met with a Director of the relevant section and learned about the specific application of QA within the University, as well as about the training of educational leaders. In addition, the researcher also gathered valuable information regarding certain problems related to QA in HE from the viewpoint of the Ministry of Higher Education.
- To visit the Administration of Research and Studies in KAU in order to arrange future field work in the women's section of the University.
- To visit the library of KAU, where the researcher made copies of some relevant Arabic literature regarding QA in the KSA.

- To visit the KAU archive, where the researcher hoped to find reports on past SE, QA, student evaluations or staff trainings. Saudi Arabian custom and practice, however, does not allow the sharing of such information with other parties, regardless of whether it contains private information or not. The attempt proved unsuccessful.

- To apply to the King Faisal Centre for Research and Studies for the confirmation that the topic of the study is new and original.

- To contact the National Organization for Assessment and Accreditation and discuss the project to introduce QA standards in Saudi HEIs with officials, in order to find out what stage had been reached.

- To contact the section for Planning and Development in the Ministry of Higher Education and KAU, in order to obtain some statistics about KAU from the women's section. However, this endeavour proved unsuccessful, as the researcher could not find any compilation of data, reports or studies regarding the relevant section of KAU.

- To contact the library of the Ministry of Higher Education, where unfortunately books had to be searched manually, due to some problems with the database. The researcher asked the MoHE to make and send copies of some relevant texts, such as the *Current Status of Higher Education*.

Gaining access to the relevant documentation proved difficult and unsuccessful at times. Regardless, the attempt to obtain information from the MoHE was not as difficult as anticipated, as the librarians at the Ministry were keen on sharing non-private information that may assist in the improvement of the current QA and accreditation national system. More specifically, the assistant with who I spoke more pointed me to one document in particular that was beneficial to my research, and also informed me that the information in this document needed to be updated in the near future, and that it will be translated into English and uploaded online, as well. Said document was an older version of the MoHE's (2013) *Current Status of Higher Education*, which outlined a history of HE in the KSA, together with information regarding the types of HE and methods to provide HE, HE projects and programmes, research and development, as well as an international comparison and ranking of Saudi HE. I was allowed to make copies of this particular document, yet seeing how it was updated only one year after my travel to the KSA, and

taking into account that the previous status of HE included very little information regarding QA, I decided to use the newer version instead.

In addition to this document, I have had brief access to older documentation (i.e. annals and reports, the history of HE), meaning that I could only read them while I was at the institute. Nevertheless, having gone through some of the archives, I discovered that they were of very limited or no use to my research, due to several reasons. For instance, when searching for information before the introduction of QA in the KSA, I have found that very few documents discussed relevant issues, such as those outlined by the NCAAA that I have used to guide my research, others which contained more sensitive information (i.e. testimonies) and were not made available, while others were incomplete in their analysis and offered insufficient information, most of which was also outdated. An issue that I want to point out is that at the time when I went to do my research, the NCAAA had not yet introduced a standardised approach to the accreditation process, a process that eluded many of the documents and which was very briefly discussed overall. By the time I had completed my stay in the KSA in 2012, none of the institutions I visited could provide me with a detailed guideline on how accreditation functioned within HEIs, and the understanding of officials and teachers was very limited. Since then, however, the NCAAA has released a document in 2015 outlining the accreditation procedures, and this document has since shed light on many requirements.

Even more so, at the time of my visit, the KAU had not yet released the *Self Study Report* that was required by the NCAAA, and I found myself going through a limited number of documents in which some changes in the structure of the HEI were outlined. However, these records were superficial in nature and were clearly offered to me because of the lack of more specific information. After requesting more confidential documentation to the KAU board, I was refused access to them, since the majority included sensitive information that cannot be shared with the public. However, the administrative members at the women's section of the KAU informed me that a document would be released either one or two years after my visit in 2012, and they pointed out that they would send me this text once it was completed. In 2013, I had received the KAU's (2013a) *Institutional Self-Study Report* (SSR) in Arabic, and later that year the document has also been translated into English and shared on the institution's website. After having initially gone through the report, I felt at ease, since my trip to the university's archive had proven to be counterproductive and since the mentioned report addressed each and every one of

my concerns, in an extensive manner. As such, the KAU's SSR (2013a) has proven to be a pillar of knowledge in the current study.

With this in mind, it is of utmost importance to emphasise that in the KSA, internal documents are very rarely shared by institutions with the public. The decision to share reports or records depends entirely on the institution that possesses them, and it is very difficult to get access to such documentation, even if they are intended to be used for research. This being said, it is also important to take into account that the vast majority of the previously-mentioned information that the researcher came in contact with was written in Arabic, and the information was interpreted directly without translation, except for the documents that have been officially translated by each of the contacted institutions. This was due to the fact that many documents could only be accessed at the libraries or archives of the institutions, meaning that any photographs, scans or copies were mostly prohibited. In addition, the majority of said archives are being stored on hard copies exclusively, and having engaged in the process of examining them without knowing if they could contain any relevant information, the process proved to be extremely time-consuming. As a result, I tried to go through the documentation that was made available to me as quickly as possible, as the time period did not allow for an on-the-spot, in-depth examination of every report, record, archive and so on. In hindsight, this was a miscalculation from my part, as having been a teacher in the KSA I assumed that I could more easily procure such information, and that I could make copies or photos of what I needed and examine them at a later date.

This being said, the research also utilised several documents that are translated into English, and which are also available online, in the triangulation and interpretation of the data. When choosing the documents, the researcher took into consideration several aspects that needed to be attained. As such, the researcher aimed to gather information from relevant and secure sources that used accurate and contemporary data, to find documents that refer to Saudi higher education QA standards, and to the standards of KAU if possible, as well as to seek out documents that provide information that is relevant for the codes identified in the coding scheme created from the interviews (i.e. governance and administration, faculty and staff employment, teaching and learning,

student administration and support services, institutional relationships, QA management, objectives, mission and vision, resources and research.

As such, the following English documents have been examined and employed throughout the study to provide official information regarding QA in the KSA, to facilitate the process of triangulation and to offer a better understanding of the data gathered from the interviews:

– KAU's (2013a) *Institutional Self-Study Report (SSR);*
– NCAAA's *Handbook for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Saudi Arabia*, part 1, *The System for Quality Assurance and Accreditation* (NCAAA, 2012a);
– NCAAA's *Handbook for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Saudi Arabia*, part 2, the *Internal Quality Assurance Arrangements* (NCAAA, 2012b);
– NCAAA's *Handbook for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Saudi Arabia*, part 3, *External Reviews for Accreditation and Quality Assurance* (NCAAA, 2012c);
– NCAAA's (2015) *Accreditation Procedures: Step-by-Step;*
– NCAAA's (2009) *Standards for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions;*
– The MoHE's (2013) *Current Status of Higher Education.*

Among the above-mentioned documents, KAU's (2013a) *Institutional Self-Study Report*, which will be referred to as the KAU SSR throughout the study, is the most valuable and relevant document, as it depicts the university's own evaluation of all the elements that are also explored in this study. However, each of the listed documents provides additional information for several of the targeted subjects.

3.4. Sampling

Maxwell (2012: 87) and Thompson (2012: 1-4) argue that deciding the elements of a sample, such as where will the research be conducted, who will the researcher include and what are the criteria that determine the targeted population, is crucial in the creation of a study. In most cases, the sample size chosen is subject to considerations of the researcher, and is usually related to the purpose of the study (Sekaran and Bougie, 2011:

265). Sayre (2001) corroborates that besides the purpose of the study, the practicality and the reliability of the chosen case, as well as the available time and resources are some of the main considerations for sampling.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) indicate that qualitative studies, which have been found to largely permit the inquiry of simply a few selected cases or even just one case, may be limited in terms of breadth, but have unrestrained depth, attention to context and more detail, hence improving the depth of the study. With this in mind, qualitative research designs usually adopt purposeful sampling to limit the "trade-off between breadth and depth" (Patton, 2002: 227), and employ this tactic as a "strategic and purposeful selection of information-rich cases" (Patton, 2002: 231). Therefore, the choice of a single selected context, as in the present study, was admissible considering that the researcher endeavoured to give more attention to detail and context in the process of inquiry and to provide a depth which would not be achievable through quantitative research (Patton, 2002). As such, purposive sampling was chosen for this research in favour of probability sampling, as the former can encompass relevant and extensive inclusion and exclusion criteria with the aim of capturing the most meaningful information (Daniel, 2012: 87-88; Patton, 2002).

Purposive sampling, or purposeful sampling, was an integral component of the study's design, as it is typical of qualitative research, depending as it does on "informational, not statistical, considerations (...); its purpose is to maximise information, not facilitate generalisation" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 202). Lincoln and Guba (1985) further explain that generalisations can be achieved by maximising information collection, since purposeful sampling can allow for variance in the selection of the sample. Furthermore, "information–rich sources for in–depth data collection" can be identified with purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990:231). For the present study, the researcher's intention was to maximise the breadth of viewpoints and focus on specific topics, as the researcher aimed to obtain descriptions, categorisation, and refinement of the issues regarding the SE process and QA procedures existent within the university. Therefore, purposive sampling seemed appropriate, as the ultimate sample was chosen based on the considerations of the researcher. Specifically, the purposive sampling procedure adopted for this study considered the following: limited number of interviewers, as the researcher solely conducted the interviews; financial restrictions; geographic restrictions as the study was

to be done outside the UK, that is, in the KSA; and some degree of limited access to the respondents.

In addition, the researcher further identified inclusion and exclusion criteria based on the purpose of the research (Daniel 2012: 88). Denscombe (2005: 15) states that purposive sampling is applied to situations in which the researcher is familiar to the possible participants, events and locations, and thus deliberately makes the sampling choices based on the relevant criteria and on who could provide valuable data. Thus, the inclusion criteria were based on the candidate's role and involvement in QA, SE and accreditation. Only women were considered for the final thesis, as the research focused on the women's section of the university, thus the women that could participate in the study had to be employed in the women's section of KAU, and had to have experience with QA and SE procedures within the KAU. In addition, the researcher endeavoured to establish the knowledge, authority, and experience of the candidate on topical issues regarding self-evaluation process and quality assurance. Also very important was that the researcher assessed the willingness of the candidate to commit to debriefing interviews in the long term as the interviews were conducted over several meetings. The researcher conveniently chose to include Senior Leaders besides the Academic Staff and Support staff in the sample, having satisfactorily met aforesaid criteria and that they are the first line for applying policies, plans, or projects, and the introduction of QA in the context of Saudi Higher Education.

The researcher started by developing a list of individuals who could be categorised as possible interview candidates, considering the structure of the university and documentary evidence, which proved efficient in providing vital leads to particular interview candidates. The researcher then used the identified interviewees to suggest other possible candidates; specifically, the researcher identified the Senior Leader (SL), Dean of the Faculty, Heads of Academic Departments, Registrar, Administrative and Managerial workers related to QA, SE and accreditation, Academic Staff Members (ASM), Support Staff (SS) Librarians, and Technicians. The researcher also relied on the recommendations from the Dean of the Faculty, Heads of Academic Departments, Registrar, Administrative and Managerial workers related to AQA on the suggestions for other possible candidates. Table 6, below, shows the statistics and distribution of interviewees.

Table 6: Interview Statistics

Staff Category	No. of interviewees in Case Study
Senior Leaders	11
Academic Staff	21
Support staff	10
Total	**42**

A total of forty-two interviews were conducted with female participants, based on the research conducted and not indicative of any statistical elements. Initially, the researcher decided on twenty-one interviews, yet decided to double the amount after the coding process was initiated and several issues seemed to be insufficiently discussed.

3.4.1. Access to the Women's Section

First of all, in order to have access to the schools that make up the faculties, the researcher needed to apply to KAU for research permission. Having obtained official permission, the researcher considered that it would be easy to negotiate access to the sections with the principals, as contact with various people from the field-site had already been established. This network allowed the researcher to reach potential research participants. With this in mind, Silverman (2000) argues that access may benefit the researcher in providing appropriate and relevant data. The researcher considered especially valuable the contact made with one member who was the head of the Centre for Teaching & Learning Development (CTLD) in the women's section of KAU, although the researcher made important contacts with other faculty members to help obtain access to the section. However, the researcher was cautious about networking as, even though she is employed at KAU and the research is funded by KAU, the researcher does not have an administrative role in the university.

Furthermore, Smith (2004) emphasises that the development of trust with interviewees is an important and difficult issue, especially where the persons concerned have not met before, as the failure to develop confidence may lead interviewees to resort to saying

what they think the researcher wants to know. Therefore, access is the main criterion to determine the study's organisation, and it was of utmost importance for the researcher to gain the trust of the research participants. To achieve this, the researcher was open about the details and purpose of the research, and attempted to remain neutral at all times. This approach aided the researcher in building relationships of trust with the participants and also created grounds for reciprocity, as the majority of participants felt comfortable enough to answer sensitive questions.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethics are a key consideration for researchers to ensure proper conduct of their research (Patton, 2002: 552). While the design, methods and strategies used in the research improve its validity, the integrity of the research process is paramount and involves ethical considerations (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009: 331). Creswell (2014: 305) states that the researcher needs to be sensitive to the "rights, values and desires" of the participants while Miles and Huberman (1994: 25) have highlighted some of the ethical concerns applicable to a qualitative study that involves participants, which are: the potential harm and risk to the participants, the need for their informed consent, honesty and trust in conducting the research, privacy and confidentiality of the participants and responsible intervention by the researchers in the data collection process. In addition, ethical frameworks applicable to the researchers through their institutions also need to be respected for conducting ethical research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009: 160) and this research thus has been carried out after approval from the Ethics Committee of Research at the University of East Anglia.

The process of carrying out the research did not cause any harm, embarrassment or any other inconvenience to the participants in the research (Creswell, 2014: 305). Patton (2002: 408) has provided a checklist that can be used for handling ethical issues arising in a research. He particularly suggests the use of informed consent and a confidentiality clause for the interview process. All the participants in this research were told what the research purpose was in detail and were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. All the participants were given the introductory letter clearly stating the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to leave the research process at any stage of the

inquiry. The participants were further provided with detailed information about the research process and a clear statement about the purpose and scope of the project. They were also assured of the confidentiality of their identity in the research process. Confidentiality was assured through the use of participant numbers and not their real names when identifying their responses in the documents (Hatch, 2007: 174). This ensures that the responses cannot be associated with specific individuals by the readers of the report, thereby protecting the identity of the participants. Further, as suggested by Veal and Darcy (2014: 427), the recordings and transcriptions have been safely protected through use of password protected USB sticks to which only the researcher has access, and the information stored on the USB sticks was transferred on the researcher's private, password-secure laptop.

Cultural sensitivity has also been highlighted as an ethical issue (Silverman, 2000: 826). In this regard, the researcher ensured that the cultural and social norms acceptable to Saudi Arabian society were followed in conducting the research, specifically the processes that involved the participants signing documentation. In the Saudi research context, the signing of consent forms for example is alien and considered to be risky by the participants and second, is perceived as a sign of mistrust of their oral consent. However, the researcher also had to take into account the ethical regulations provided by the University of East Anglia (UEA), so participants were told that consent had to also be provided in writing. In order to take into account both these considerations, participants were provided with the consent sheet but were asked to sign the sheets not with their name, but with their allotted participant number. Even so, not all participants agreed to this. Similarly, for the participant information sheet, the participants were provided with the required details for the research process verbally, but no sheets were signed with their names, only with their participant number. The researcher obtained verbal consent of the interviewees' understanding and agreement to participate in the study. Another sensitive issue in Saudi culture is around recording the voices of Saudi women, and indeed, several participants refused to be recorded (i.e. 17 out of 42), while the remainder offered verbal consent for the interviews to be recorded. For the participants who did not agree to being recorded, the researcher took notes during the interviews. The collected data was immediately secured for analysis. The recordings, documentation and notes were kept secure on password protected USBs that was solely accessible to the researcher, were

later copied on a password-secure personal computer of the researcher, and all relevant data will be destroyed after UEA's evaluation of the research.

Patton (2002: 405) states that interviews are interventions and thus do affect those who participate in the process. Participants in an interview can feel the process to be intrusive and sometimes may reveal more than they intended and this requires an ethical framework to protect both interviewers and interviewees from such issues (Patton, 2002: 407). The researcher tried to be objective about the data collection process and restricted the interview to the research subject at hand, to prevent the interviewees from digressing into other subjects. However, at the same time, it was in the interest of the researcher to collect as much data as possible about their experiences with the self-evaluation process. The confidentiality clause however ensures that their personal details would not be shared with others. Patton (2002: 408) also suggests that participants should not be misled about the rewards and thus the participants were not promised any rewards for participating in the research.

3.6. Data Analysis

Hatch (2002:148) notes that qualitative data analysis techniques require research data to be organized in a manner that will allow the researcher to interpret the data through identification of themes, patterns and relationships. The analysis in turn helps the researchers to develop explanations and theories related to the research phenomenon. This approach was suitable due to the flexibility provided to the researcher in identifying the varied themes associated with the SE and QA processes at KAU.

The qualitative primary data was analysed through thematic analysis, an inductive approach that makes use of coding and theme identification to group the data in a relevant manner (King and Horrocks, 2010: 149-153). In order to successfully analyse the primary data, the following steps were taken: data organisation (i.e. transcription and translation), coding and theme identification, employment of codes and themes in analysis, triangulation of findings, pattern recognition to aid in organising the discussion and data interpretation in light of the research questions. As part of the analysis, a three- step process suggested by Miles and Huberman (2002: 20) was adopted during code

identification, involving the "reduction, display and then conclusion or verification" of the data. The raw data consisted of the interview transcripts that were unstructured and these were then subjected to several levels of reading and analysis to be able to identify the major and minor themes associated with self-evaluation processes at the university. This was achieved through several stages of coding and their further clustering into subcategories. Each coding stage presents various dilemmas related to interpretation of the codes and their interrelationships and the process thus brings rigour to the methodology (Goulding, 2002: 75). As a result of the three- step process, the research employed an inductive approach to analysing data, as the information gathered influenced the final codes and themes. The researcher chose to employ thematic analysis due to two reasons; firstly, as a means to accurately uncover the various perspectives, ideas and opinions of the participants; secondly, this type of data analysis permits the researcher to interpret the findings in a systematic manner (Grbich, 2013; Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012).

3.6.1. Data Transcription

Interviews with the senior management, administrative staff and the lecturers at KAU were recorded by the researcher to be able to accurately record and then transcribe the conversations. All the interviews were conducted in Arabic and thus special care was taken to ensure that the messages were not lost during the translation stage. Interviews were also transcribed at regular intervals preferably within the week to ensure that not only the verbal but also the non-verbal gestures as noted by the researcher were included in the transcript in the form of memos. The researcher did not correct any grammatical mistakes made during the conversation and transcribed the interviews verbatim. This was done to minimise the researcher bias, since the social, cultural and other characteristics of the researcher can lead to bias in the transcribing process and lead to errors (Hammersley, 2010: 554). Corbin and Strauss (2014: 44) also suggest that the transcription process enables the building of theoretical sensitivity in the analysis and provides the researcher with an opportunity to critique and then improve the interview process.

As suggested by Creswell (2014: 551) the transcriptions were also marked for the sources of data, as in individuals who gave the interviews, to ensure that the issues of authority and representation of the source of data would be clear during the final analysis.

Transcripts were also read several times to ensure that all the key issues were getting covered in the process and since data collection and transcription were happening simultaneously, new themes were also emerging throughout the transcription and analysis stages. On this, Merriam (2009: 166) also suggests that the researcher needs to be sensitive towards new issues identified through the research data and include the same later on in the analysis to ensure that all the key relationships and processes have been covered. The data analysis had thus begun along with the data collection where the researcher analysed the collected data at regular intervals to enable all the elements of theory to emerge during the process.

Merriam (2009:165) further states that in a qualitative research process, analysis begins and moves along with the data collection process rather than the linear, step-by-step process that may be followed in quantitative research. Here the researcher needs to continuously work towards identifying the insights and drawing hypotheses to be tested during the later stages of data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009: 165). The analysis was thus carried out along with the data collection where the future strategies for data collection were devised based on the preliminary analysis of the collected data. Further, while all the data was considered at all stages for carrying out further process, the data had to be winnowed to be able to focus on the elements that were most relevant to the research (Creswell, 2014: 548). The participants for instance sometimes drifted away from the main discussions and highlighted some other limitations of the university and its process that were not at all relevant to the self-evaluation process and thus were discarded at the analysis stage. However, Creswell (2014: 551) also suggest that researchers should move from specific to general levels of analysis and thus adequate care had to be taken to ensure that none of the important data was left behind in the analysis; for this reason, detailed notes were also kept.

According to Merriam (2009: 171), researchers failing to carry out the analysis on an on-going basis run a higher risk of collecting data that may be unfocused, voluminous and repetitive. Analysis and interpretations based on the collected data may also then generate the need to include additional data sources such as more participants or documents that might be needed for the researcher to make meaningful interpretations (Merriam, 2009: 173). The transcription of the interview recordings has thus been instrumental to the data analysis process, and this approach allowed the researcher to further supplement the amount of interviews conducted. Initially, the researcher conducted twenty-one

interviews in the women's section of KAU, yet continuous data transcription and analysis revealed that several subjects, such as research, administration and student evaluations, had not been captured in a comprehensive manner. As a result, the researcher chose to double the number of interviews and explicitly raised these issues during the second phase of interviewing.

Interview analysis also happened in parallel with document analysis since the key issues and themes emerging from the data had to be verified with the processes currently prevalent in the organisation. Any discrepancy was then noted in the form of a memo on the transcript to be later included in the final analysis. Once all the transcripts were in place, the available texts from interviews were categorised into major headings and then subjected to further analysis using manual coding techniques.

3.6.2. Coding Process

Data analysis is the most challenging aspect of qualitative research (Delamont, 1992: 370) and coding or categorising the data is the most important step in qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2014: 555). Given the fact that qualitative data is highly unstructured, and while some structure is provided during the transcription and initial organisation of data, coding is most crucial due to its role in connecting the key phenomena emerging out of the text and thus leading to the development of theory (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007: 161). While some of the key categories were forming during the data collection and transcription stages, reading the entire data together provided insights into the general tone of ideas as well as the overall depth of the data collected through the research.

Codes or categories are labels that are attached to the text collected during the research process and can be attached either to a sentence, paragraph or a huge chunk of text based on the interpretation of the researcher (Creswell, 2014: 555). For carrying out the coding, the options available to researchers include manual or electronic coding. The electronic option does provide the convenience of tagging and highlighting the text and thus makes the coding process more organised (Bergmann and Meier, 2004: 244-246). However, since in this research, the interview transcripts were created in Arabic language and not translated in their entirety, the themes needed to be identified from the Arabic text. Since none of the qualitative coding software provides coding support for the Arabic language, due to language issues and the desire to capture the themes from the Arabic text (Patton,

2002: 345), the researcher chose to carry out manual coding of the transcripts, an endeavour that slowed down the coding process.

Corbin and Strauss (2014: 373) suggest three stages of coding in a qualitative data analysis process. The first stage, open coding, involves categorisation of data into logical categories. As part of the open coding process, each line of the transcribed data was assigned a code like a contextual label and these codes were taken from the statements themselves. Corbin and Strauss (2014: 221) suggest that this process enables the researchers to test their assumptions about the research phenomenon and develop better understanding of the various actors and situational factors. Open coding was followed by focused coding, in which instead of individual lines, a group of lines was used to identify the dominant codes from the transcripts. These provided an overview of the research phenomenon in addition to the open coding that was more detailed. Open and focused coding was followed by axial coding in which the relationship between the various codes was identified to provide a holistic interpretation to the research transcript that was earlier coded in various parts (Corbin and Strauss, 2014: 156). Axial coding, however, can be very formal and thus the researcher also used theoretical coding, which is less formal and allows the researcher to form relationships between various subcategories that have been identified through the coding process (Charmaz, 2003: 95). The third stage is selective coding where the individual categories and their relationships are integrated to form a theory. Another name for an analysis process that uses coding is constant comparison analysis (Beeje, 2002: 392). While this process can be undertaken both deductively and inductively, the research has used a combination of both procedures, where some codes were identified in advance by constructing them from the secondary data, the researcher's personal knowledge and the research questions (a priori codes), while the remainder of the codes was developed from the collected data (emergent codes). Both types of codes are divided into more specific themes.

A priori codes:

    A) Factors that influence QA implementation
- Governance
- Administration
- Faculty and staff employment processes
- Teaching and learning

- The impact of self-evaluation

- Student administration and support services

- Institutional relationship with the community

- Management of quality assurance processes

Emergent codes:

B) Objectives, mission and vision

C) Resources

- Learning resources

- Facilities and equipment

- Financial planning and management

D) Research

3.6.3. Triangulation

Triangulation refers to the use of multiple sources of data to improve the quality of the research findings (Merriam, 2009: 166). These together ensure inclusion of multiple perspectives in the data collection process and thus the possibility of errors or misinterpretation can be reduced. Typically, triangulation fulfils the ethical need to validate the research findings through inclusion of varied sources of data that provide a better understanding of the research subject. Triangulation also increases confidence in the findings of the research due to the inclusion of multiple perspectives (Brannen, 2004: 314). Ritchie and Lewis (2003: 44) however point out that even though triangulation enables development of the broad picture, the certainty of the findings cannot be fully assured through this. However, multiple perspectives and triangulation still improve the validity of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014: 525).

Triangulation can be accomplished through various manners, and there are four common models of triangulation in research: methodological triangulation, data source triangulation, multiple researchers triangulation and theory triangulation (Patton, 1999).

Probably the most common type, the triangulation of methodological approaches typically involves a combination between qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis (Yeasmin and Rahman, 2012). As Patton (1999: 1193-1194) argues, the fundamental benefit of this approach is that "quantitative methods and

qualitative methods are used in a complementary fashion to answer different questions that do not easily come together to provide a single, well-integrated picture of the situation", thus effectively attempting to surpass the weaknesses of both methods. However, there are several disadvantages for employing this method, given that may take a long period of time (Knafl and Breitmayer, 1991), that researchers may not be capable of conducting both qualitative and quantitative research (Patton, 1999), or that it does not guarantee the desired effects if it is improperly implemented (Thurmond 2001).

Another common type of triangulation focuses on the sources from which the data is collected, and through the use of multiple methods, to verify "the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means within qualitative methods" (Patton, 1999: 1195). More specifically, for qualitative data triangulation, information should be collected through at least two methods, such as by employing various types of interviews (i.e. semi-structured, structured or unstructured), by collecting information from documents, by employing observations, and so on (Yeasmin and Rahman, 2012). Additionally, regarding primary data, the people who take part in interviews, surveys or questionnaires may be selected from different backgrounds or from different locations, in order to ensure that the findings are valid, and that comprehensive insight into a topic is gathered (Thurmond, 2001). Taking into account secondary data, the collection of a wide array of information can be done by considering various fields of study, locations (such as different countries, different institutions), or even at different times, so as to identify similarities and discrepancies (Knafl and Breitmayer, 1991). However, as Knafl and Breitmayer (1991) argue, this type of triangulation can be lengthy, and the large amount of gathered data would mean that an ample data analysis process also needs to be conducted if all of the information is to be taken into account.

The third type of triangulation refers to the involvement of multiple investigators in the collection and interpretation of data (Yeasmin and Rahman, 2012). While this type of triangulation may help overcome researcher bias (Patton, 1999: 1195), it can only be successful if the researchers have similar perspectives, objectives and understandings of the targeted phenomena (Thurmond, 2001). Any discrepancies in said factors may thus result in confusion and in a lack of research clarity.

Lastly, the fourth type of triangulation requires the employ of several theoretical perspectives when interpreting the chosen phenomena (Thurmond, 2001). It is a common

understanding that these perspectives need to be chosen from established theoretical frameworks (for instance, phenomenology, ethnography, and so on). However, Patton (1999: 1196) suggests that theoretical triangulation may also refer to the interpretation of data "from the perspective of various stakeholder positions within different theories of action about a program". Patton (1999: 1196-1197) continues to explain that stakeholders commonly "disagree about program purposes, goals, and means of attaining goals", and that "these differences represent different theories of action that cast findings in a different light". Similarly, Denzin (1989: 239-240) has argued that theoretical triangulation should concern itself with the interpretation of multiple "theoretical points of view". The triangulation case argued by Patton (1999) thus allows for a more thorough examination of data in a local setting, especially when seeking to pinpoint inconsistencies or to validate the actions taken within an institution.

Triangulation in the Current Study

The triangulation types that have been employed in the current study consist of the model for triangulation data based on theory, and the model regarding the sources of the data gathered.

Concerning the former triangulation model, the primary data that was collected through interviews, although collected from the same location (i.e. the women's section of KAU), it has been collected from 3 groups of stakeholders, with the goal of avoiding participant bias and revealing possible discrepancies. This allowed me to identify and examine the perspectives, understandings and experiences of various employees at KAU, who unsurprisingly offered different answers to numerous questions. I sincerely believe that, had I not contacted 3 different groups of KAU employees, I would have ended up with less reliable, less diverse and less realistic primary data. As an example, the managers at KAU have typically responded in a more optimistic manner to some questions, while the employees and lecturers have offered more critical answers. This discrepancy allowed me to further examine some issues (see for instance sec. 4.1.3. – I. Governance), which could have been disregarded or insufficiently explored under different circumstances.

Regarding the latter, the process of data source triangulation is present in the current study from two perspectives. Firstly, the secondary data has gone through all the elements of this process, as I have collected information from a wide variety of sources, including

peer-reviewed material from different time periods, sources (both individual and official) and worldwide locations. This allowed me to ensure that the secondary data is critical and diverse. Secondly, the researcher made use of two methods to gather primary information, respectively semi-structured interviews and documentation. In the research process, the data was collected through interviews conducted with employees at various levels in KAU and afterwards cross-checked with data from official documents, to ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings. As a result, the researcher was able to confirm or disprove the details surrounding the implementation of the SE process in the women's section of KAU in 2012, the lack of funding and research, issues relating to centralisation, QA standards and SE procedures, and so on. More specifically, the process of source triangulation started with an extensive examination of numerous official documents from the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) in the KSA, from the NCAAA and from the chosen HEI, the KAU. The researcher proceeded to systematically identify which of the documents that were made available could offer information that was relevant to the subject. It is important to note that not all of the documents used in this study have been identified at the time when I went to gather data in the KSA. Nevertheless, after examining various official documents throughout a three-year period (2012-2015), such as reports, records, archives, the researcher decided that 7 documents, which are outlined in Section 3.3.2. (Documents), were the most useful in both supporting and advancing the topic of QA in the KSA. To clarify, once I had concluded the interviews and commenced with their analysis, and especially once the coding process for the interviews had been finalised, I decided to also seek out the identified codes in the documents, as I believed that following them in the documentation analysis would allow me to further systematise my findings. In essence, I sought to find key words and phrases that were similar or relevant to the codes from the interviews, and once everything had been labelled, I began to verify the validity of the participants' answers by cross-checking them with information from the chosen documents. As a result, the findings chapter and each subsequent subchapter not only details the remarks given by the interview participants, but also features the official interpretations and observations of the MoHE, the KAU and the NCAAA.

3.6.4. Validity and Reliability

Validity of the research refers to the research process being able to get the information that is required to study the research phenomenon (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009: 273). Reliability, on the other hand, refers to the consistency with which the research procedure would be able to provide the same findings (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009: 274). Validity and reliability are a concern since the research results need to be conceptually sound to be able to add value to the knowledge on the research phenomenon (Marshall and Rossman, 2016: 262).

The validity and reliability of the research is influenced by the manner in which the research is conceptualised and then executed with regards to the collection, analysis and interpretation of the findings. While quantitative studies typically have a larger sample size that helps establish the validity and reliability of their findings, qualitative research does not use standardised instruments for collection of data, sample selection and typically, use a smaller sample size (Dey, 2003: 258). Further, qualitative research is more focused on the detailed meanings attached to the research phenomenon. Merriam (2009: 209) has suggested that constructs of validity and reliability applicable to quantitative research cannot be applied to the qualitative research, while others have emphasized the need to ensure trustworthiness of the data (Creswell, 2014: 564). Therefore, results need to be trustworthy and should be able to align with the truth as is desired by the users of the research theory, such as other researchers, practitioners or any other readers of the report (Merriam et al., 2009: 210).

Some of the concepts that have been applied to the research process include those suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2014) and Lincoln and Guba (1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985: 301-307) suggest the inclusion of multiple sources of data for triangulation and increasing trustworthiness. The researcher included both varied staff profiles and document analysis into the research to get varied perspectives on the research phenomenon and develop a theory that would apply to multiple levels at KAU. Other strategies suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2014: 46) were followed during the research process, including higher sensitivity towards the subjective biases that may be happening due to researcher's experience with the university, thereby limiting said biases from influencing the research theory. As suggested by Glaser (2001: 14), the researcher also included both positive and negative cases into the research to get varied perspectives on

the quality of the self-evaluation process at KAU, thereby gathering more sophisticated evidence of the research phenomenon.

Lincoln and Guba (1985: 323) suggest four key features should be included in the research in order to establish its trustworthiness. These are the credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability of the research.

Credibility is similar to internal validity and is indicative of the extent to which the results are believable. This is important because social reality is subjective and contextual and the validity may vary across different individuals, which in turn makes it difficult to have one reality for everyone (Regan-Smith, 2005, in Maxwell, 2012: 129). Some of the steps that can be taken for improving credibility include the use of negative cases and multiple sources of information, approaches that were adopted by the researcher. The credibility of this research's results was strengthened by the inclusion of individuals from varied levels at KAU with both positive and negative perspectives.

The second feature of the trustworthiness framework is dependability. Dependability refers to the ability of the research process to replicate the research findings and thus is similar to the construct of reliability (Merriam, 2009: 211). This further means that the findings should describe or include the impact of changes in the research context on the research findings. This is particularly important in the case of social research where varied contexts can result in changes in human behaviour and varied interpretations. Reliability of qualitative research thus becomes challenging due to the varied possible interpretations by different researchers in varied contexts. Merriam (2009: 211) thus suggests that the dependability of qualitative research can only be ensured through consistency between the data collected and its interpretation. Merriam (2009: 212) also suggests strategies that can improve dependability such as triangulation, peer examination, collaborative research, long-term observations, member checks and detailing the researcher biases that may be influencing the research findings. In this research triangulation with multiple sources of data and details on potential biases that might influence the interpretation of research findings provided the context in which the research data was interpreted.

The third feature of the trustworthiness framework is transferability, which means that the research results can be applied across research settings. Marshall and Rossman (2016: 109) suggest that transferability of the research can be improved through inclusion of

multiple and varied perspectives. Thus this research used multiple participants from various levels across KAU to be able to include their varied experiences of the self-evaluation process.

The last feature of the trustworthiness framework is confirmability of research findings, which indicates the objectivity of the study or the confirmation of the research findings when the same data is presented to another researcher. Seale (2002: 103) suggests that the confirmability of the research can be improved by maintaining an audit trail such as the transcripts, memos and coding that were used to reach the interpretations. Creswell (2014: 470) further suggests that qualitative data analysis strategies require close involvement of the researcher in the interpretation and thus the readers need to be convinced of the suitability of the process used to draw the conclusions. Thus, the analysis often includes some evidence of the collected data and its analysis such as quotes from the interviews. The analysis has thus been carried out through organisation of the transcripts and the other steps in the analysis process leading to the research findings.

3.7. Limitations

The research has been structured to ensure higher levels of validity and reliability and to minimise the limitations of the methodology. However, some of the limitations of the research are associated with the research design, strategy and methods of data collection and analysis.

Case studies are a suitable research method where a complex social phenomenon needs to be evaluated through inclusion of multiple types of variables (Merriam, 2009: 51). This method has limitations in terms of the validity, reliability and generalizability of the research findings (Merriam, 2009: 52). Stake (2005: 455) states that the results of the research can be interpreted for a different context if the researcher has transferred some of their personal meanings of the research situation to the readers, thus enabling them to apply the findings to their own context. He also states, however, that the findings can only be explained to an extent, since revealing too much information can also lead to concerns about the anonymity of the participants (Stake, 2005: 460). This research thus provides a detailed overview of the context in which the data has been analysed and detailed profiles of the participants as well as providing explanations about the dynamics of the case organisation as much as possible. However, even though the researcher has

endeavoured to provide as much vivid description of the research situation as possible, the generalisability to other contexts would be limited both by the explanation provided by the researcher and the ability of the readers to apply the findings to their own context (Merriam, 2009: 52).

The second limitation arises from the researcher bias influencing the research findings. Moreover, the process adopted to predict the quality levels of the SE process was largely subjective and thus dependent on the ability of the researcher to interpret the research phenomenon. While it is possible to reduce some of this bias through involvement of additional researchers, this research has been conducted by only one researcher who carried out all the interviews, transcription and interpretation (Goodyear et al., 2014: 205). Even though the researcher has tried to remain objective during the transcription, coding and interpretation, researcher bias cannot be entirely ruled out. However, during the data collection process, the researcher ensured that there is complete understanding of the perspective being provided by the participants through validation by the participants (Maxwell, 2012: 111). The other strategy adopted to minimise bias was high engagement with the collected data. Merriam (2009: 219) suggests that the researcher must ensure saturation in terms of the collected data and emerging findings to ensure that all the perspectives are grounded in the research data.

This limitation relates to the bias of insider research, as conducting research in a familiar setting can influence both the researcher and the respondents, due to existing familiarity and the relationships formed between co-workers (Mercer, 2007; Atkins and Wallace, 2012: 50-51). However, insider research can have certain benefits, such as the fact that access is more easily granted, the participants and the university as a whole, do not perceive the researcher as an intruder who will disrupt everyday tasks, the participants may be inclined to be more open in their answers, as they have shared knowledge and experience with the researcher (Atkins and Wallace, 2012: 49-50). In order to minimise bias and the negative connotations of insider research, the researcher informed the participants of the importance of collecting relevant, objective knowledge and tried to avoid unnecessary details by steering the conversations in the desired direction. The interview guide that was conducted prior to the start of the interviewing phase also proved to be a beneficial tool in minimising bias and familiarity.

Another limitation of the research can also be attributed to the research strategy, since the research was carried out in the women's section of KAU and thus the findings may not be representative of all Saudi universities. The researcher, however, has highlighted the factors that may result from the unique environment of the university and thus may also be applicable to other universities due to the social and cultural environment. In addition, HEIs in the KSA are part of a highly centralised system, as they depend on the MoHE and the NCAAA to implement SE and QA procedures. Thus, the generalisability of research findings, at least for national universities, is relatively high. The inclusion of negative cases that provide alternative explanations also improve the transferability of research findings since these cases highlight alternate perceptions of the participants regarding the research situation (Merriam, 2009: 219).

Although the research strategy adopted was a case study, the researcher failed to implement some of the theoretical knowledge accumulated in the planning phase. Stemming from the choice of research strategy, the researcher considers one of the limitations to have arisen with regards to collecting relevant documentation. In the KSA, document sharing is strictly controlled by institutions, and some of the reports and archives that could have been useful in triangulating the findings from the interviews were not made available to the researcher. In order to counteract the potential negative effects of this limitation, the researcher ensured that a wide variety of other sources were accessed. As such, the researcher contacted several institutions (i.e. the MoHE, the NCAAA, KAU) and various branches from said institutions (i.e. archives, library, administration), and procured all the documents that can be accessed by the public.

Another limitation is the potential for errors during the translation, transcription and coding processes manually carried out by the researcher (Merriam, 2009: 110). These errors can impact the overall theory development process and influence the research outcome. The researcher, however, ensured that errors were minimised through verification of the transcripts by simultaneously listening to the tapes and reading of the transcripts (Merriam, 2009: 110), while the meaning of the responses was guaranteed during translation due to the researcher's use of several English-Arabic, Arabic-English and English-English dictionaries. Coding errors were minimised through an iterative coding process in which the transcripts were read several times for higher assertions on the codes, as well as through the process of colour coding, which aided the researcher visually during the pattern identifying process (Corbin and Strauss, 2014: 216).

The last limitation concerns the development of this research as a case study, as it does not adhere to what is typically expected of a case study. As previously discussed, there were problems with accessing important documents that could have been used to deliver depth to the contextual information and there were issues with the researcher's lack of experience of some qualitative methods and processes (such as coding, transcription, translation), as well as an overall difficulty in defining what is a case study and what a case study would imply, given the researcher's limited knowledge and educational background. As previously stated, the preferred method of investigation in the KSA is the quantitative approach, yet this approach would not have aided the researcher in gathering and interpreting individual ideas, thoughts, opinions and behaviours. Thus, the researcher chose to conduct a qualitative study, and tried to create a case study in order to better organise and conduct the research. However, given these issues, it would be more accurate to describe the present research as a qualitative study situated in a particular context (the women's section of KAU), and informed by the case study approach and philosophy.

3.7.1. Difficulties Encountered during Interviewing

The researcher as interviewer encountered a number of problems both prior to and during the study at KAU, but these were the most important:

(1) Certain steps had to be followed in order to gain permission to conduct research in the King Abdulaziz University, the first of which was making a request via the internet to carry out the study in the women's section. The researcher waited for one month until the board of the Institute of Educational Graduate Studies considered, Vice Presidency for Graduate Studies and Scientific Research, approved this request. This was forwarded to all the other university departments and schools involved, who also gave their approval. Their decision was then communicated to the cultural attaché of Saudi Arabia in Britain to authorise the researcher's study trip to Saudi Arabia. This application process took one month and a half, which delayed the start of the field work.

(2) By the time the researcher was eventually able to begin this study, it was the end of the academic year in KSA. This meant that many faculty members were on leave, and those who were there were busy collating students' assessment results. However, the researcher was able to convince the participants to complete the interviews.

(3) There were several instances when the time arranged for an interview was not respected. For example, one interview with the head of a school that was scheduled for 11 a.m only began at 2:00 p.m. As time was limited, these delays were, to say the least, inconvenient.

(4) As the researcher had worked at KAU in the Institute of Educational Graduate Studies as a faculty member, she felt that she knew how to deal with other faculty members. Although the year working there before travelling to the UK to do post-graduate studies was short, it allowed the researcher to understand the university's sense of teaching to some extent. Something that the researcher had noticed was the fact that the faculty members did not like to use their free time to do any extra work. Therefore, as the interviews that would provide the data for the research had to be done during their free time, the researcher asked the participants in to choose the dates and times that were most convenient for them. However, as mentioned above, this was not always successful.

(5) Another aspect the researcher felt could have been a sensitive issue was the way in which she would introduce herself to participants. The researcher preferred to say "I am a graduate student carrying out research at King Abdulaziz University", as the researcher presumed it would make the participants feel more comfortable with participating in the interviews. This was because the first occasions when the researcher introduced herself as a researcher, there were some unexpected reactions from faculty members and other academics. This may be due to the impact of the term 'researcher' in some parts of Saudi society. From its meaning in Arabic, the term 'researcher' would seem more appropriate to refer to individuals who have at least three degrees, working either in the private or public sector. Moreover, the term seems to have a special meaning among Saudis in the field of education as it is assumed that a researcher will be either a foreigner or a person of middle age with much information to impart. This is illustrated by the researcher's experience with a secretary in the School of Arts and Humanities at KAU, where a meeting was scheduled. In the first instance, the participant considered the interviewer to be a student at the university and thus the researcher was asked to wait a significantly long period of time. Once the participant realised from the form that the researcher had been asked to fill in, that the researcher was, in fact, a faculty member, and also a post-graduate student in the UK carrying out research, the participant welcomed the researcher and took her contact information to schedule interviews, which had been the original

purpose of the visit. This might reflect the fact that written information carries more weight when it comes to getting others to believe what one says.

(6) Furthermore, the researcher noticed that many of the participants were not familiar with the culture of interviews, resulting in reluctance, and in some cases a refusal, to participate. For example, one of the participants stated: "I prefer the questionnaire than the interviews" (Interviewee 4), while another said: "I feel that you are like a police woman" (Interviewee 16).

(7) Another factor which affected the researcher's identity in the field is the fact that she is studying abroad. Before making the trip to KAU to conduct the research, this was not a consideration. It was only through fieldwork that the researcher realised how important it was to the participants. The researcher herself having to share her personal experience and answer numerous questions regarding study abroad, such as whether it was easier to study in the UK or within Saudi Arabia, how to get admission, how long was required to study English. For example, when one of the lecturers on the Diploma Programme in Education asked if the researcher advised her to study abroad, the researcher told her that being in a foreign country was not easy and that, once a student decides to go abroad, they have to pay attention to the fact that many things happen in a different way than in KSA.

(8) Moreover, assumptions were made regarding what living and studying in the UK qualified one to do. For example, a colleague currently studying in one of the English institutes in Saudi Arabia asked whether her English was at a suitable level for studying abroad; the researcher answered that it was very difficult to assess, as the researcher's expertise concerns Educational Evaluation, and not the English language, and that the researcher did not go to the UK to study how to judge the level of English.

(9) The researcher had to draw up a consent form to be signed by all the participants in the present study, informing them that their anonymity would be guaranteed. This meant that anonymity had to be preserved under all circumstances. For example, the Vice-Dean inquired about the way in which a specific faculty member had addressed the role of evaluation. Although the researcher had knowledge of this aspect, she did not make any comments because she felt that, as an impartial researcher, she could not scrutinise or inform on the faculty member's work. In addition, every time the researcher entered an office to meet a faculty member to hold an interview with her, the researcher explained

the purpose of the interview and title of the research. Therefore, the researcher could not give the Vice-Dean a report on how the faculty members saw the role of evaluation as it was not part of the researcher's mission at KAU. Consequently, the researcher found herself stating that the faculty members were doing their best in terms of evaluation.

3.8. Conclusion

To meet the aim of the present study, which was to analyse the QA practices currently employed at KAU in the KSA, the researcher conducted a case study on the SE processes and the impact of SE procedures on institutional policies and on the stakeholders of the women's section of KAU. The researcher aimed to understand the unique perspectives of individuals in relation to said objects.

The data collected consists of qualitative primary and qualitative secondary data, the primary data consisting of both interviews and document analysis. The researcher conducted forty-two interviews with individuals employed in the women's section of KAU, including senior staff members, lecturers and members of the support staff. The researcher employed purposive sampling in determining the interview participants, as this means of sampling allowed the use of comprehensive inclusion and exclusion criteria. Documents were collected from various institutions, including the KAU, the NCAAA and the MoHE, and were utilised to triangulate the findings from the interviews. In order to analyse the data, thematic analysis was used, which employs exhaustive coding and allowed the emergence of several relevant themes.

The main limitations of the study were identified as research bias due to it being insider research, the choice to conduct a case study and the data collection methods associated with it, especially the collection of relevant documentation, as well as the translation of the findings and the possibility of loss of meaning due to the language duality. However, the researcher took appropriate measures to guarantee that all possible limitations were minimised or avoided altogether.

Chapter 4
Findings and Discussion

Introduction

This chapter aims to critically analyse the rapport between the fundamental policies of self-evaluation procedures and their applications to quality assurance and academic accreditation within the women's section in KAU in KSA. The current chapter addresses three objectives. Firstly, it presents the findings regarding the impact of the self-evaluation process in the women's section of the King Abdulaziz University. Secondly, the chapter analyses the quality assurance system in the women's sections of the King Abdulaziz University, with regard to understanding the extent of variations concerning the importance of self-evaluation practices among employees. Finally, the chapter aims to assess the validity of the self-evaluation process employed to create awareness and quality modifications to the self-evaluation practices in the country, by evaluating stakeholder perceptions in relation to the impact of the self-evaluation procedure. In this regard, the chapter provides an extensive analysis of the 42 interviews conducted with staff in both administrative and senior management positions, in conjunction with interviews administered to academic members and support personnel. The findings from the interviews are discussed in light of relevant literature and the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment's Internal Quality Assurance Arrangements, which were presented and reviewed in the second chapter of the thesis. Given these objectives, the chapter comprises three major elements: an interpretation of the self-evaluation process, a comprehensive assessment of the interviews and a discussion of the findings.

4.1. Findings and Interpretations

4.1.1. Context

4.1.1.1. A Brief History of Quality Assurance at KAU

King Abdulaziz University was established in 1967, on behalf of Saudi Arabia's founder King Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, with the purpose of providing higher education in the western region of Saudi Arabia (KAU, 2010). In this regard, the university has been acknowledged in the local community as a pioneer in providing quality education for the Saudi women that attend it (KAU, 2010), which is one of the reasons why the women's section of the KAU was selected to be the focal element of this thesis. However, when assessing the quality of work provided by national institutions, being categorised as an innovator may not prove sufficient. This understanding instigates the idea that qualitative progress needs to be endorsed by continuous internal and external evaluations with regard to maintaining high levels of efficiency and effectiveness.

It is important to mention that prior to 2004, no official evaluation standard existed in the KSA (Darandari, et al., 2009: 40), and the formulation of this standard was neglected in the incipient years. Within the KAU, internal evaluations were regularly conducted by leading staff members, as one of the interviewees noted: "senior managers performed revisions of the mission and vision (i.e. of the KAU) periodically, to confirm the adopted or modified principles remained valid in light of changing circumstances", thus indicating that KAU staff felt they were cognisant of the need to remain true to the mission and vision articulation, in spite of a national evaluation protocol deficiency.

Filho and Brandli (2016: 264) argue that to meet the aspirations, interests and conditions of specific stakeholders, they need to be implicated in the process. Indeed, according to UNESCO's World Declaration on Higher Education of 1998:

> "The development of higher education (…) and the solution to the major challenges it faces, require the strong involvement not only of governments and of higher education institutions, but also of all stakeholders, (…) as well as a greater responsibility of higher education institutions towards society and accountability in the use of public and private, national or international resources" (UNESCO, 1998).

Nonetheless, despite the administrators' stated desire to promote a healthy environment for everyone, discussions with lecturers, as well as the researcher's own experience, attest to the fact that the stakeholders were either not involved, or contributed very little to the betterment of KAU's situation. To illustrate, it was very rare for families, students or business professionals to attend internal meetings, as the interviews revealed. Leading management personnel argued that either announcements via the University's websites or personal announcements from the Dean were sufficient in providing clarifications, as the women employed in the women's section at KAU "were explained their mission, vision and objectives through dedicated workshops", said one of the administrators (i.e. interviewee 8). Of course, providing clarifications is essential, but Cheng's (2003: 203) classification of quality assurance in education indicates that three stages need to be satisfied in order to render the QA process successful: internal, interface and future. While the administrators in the women's section of KAU followed internal quality processes, meaning the procedures that were already functioning within the university, both the second and third criteria were, for the most part, overlooked. Therefore, the institution seemed to be stagnating between the first and second stages, as it attempted to ensure stakeholder satisfaction without stakeholder involvement, thus relying on the same procedures designated to fulfil the first criterion, which should solely focus on guaranteeing internal quality.

The KAU administrators established that the male section of the university was expected to adhere to the principles of internal quality assurance and self-evaluation developed by the NCAAA in 2004. Although the women's section was founded concomitantly (KAU, 2010), it would be years before it was subjected to the same evaluation. Regardless of the delay, the women's section of the university adhered to the NCAAA principles at the time of this research, along with the male section, yet this discrepancy raises the question of motivation and whether the decision was enacted to confirm the viability of the national system or whether different, underlying social reasons were behind it. This will be further debated in the section of the chapter that interprets the findings.

According to the Quality Assurance System (QAS) regarding post-secondary education in the KSA and implemented in 2004, a three-stage quality assurance and accreditation system was developed to adapt and implement international standards to the entirety of inspections (Darandari, et al., 2009). Hereof, the system included specifications for 11

areas of activity, including: "a national qualifications framework that specifies generic standards of learning outcomes, and supporting materials such as key performance indicators, student surveys, self-evaluation scales, templates for programme plans and reports, and handbooks detailing quality assurance processes" (Darandari, et al., 2009: 42), thus ensuring that stakeholders were involved in local quality evaluations. However, the QAS cannot guarantee that universities following its principles achieve accreditation. According to Albaqami (2015: 59), the NCAAA conducted a study in 2007 to test whether universities had successfully implemented the QAS specifications and found that KAU was not able to change its performance according to the quality assurance practices. This was largely due to the personnel's preponderant dismissal of the QA practices suggested by the accreditation body. This resulted in NCAAA's refusal to grant credentials to the University.

Regardless of the copious amounts of literature pertaining to QA published internationally, studies presenting the situation in the KSA are scarce. Nonetheless, Alzamil (2014: 127) implies that the absence of an "independent accrediting body that is responsible for accreditation and quality assurance for technical education" within the KSA is one of the reasons leading to a deficit of external motivation. Thus, each university is responsible for its own accreditation process, especially given that KAU has several technical branches, such as the Faculty of Sciences, of Engineering, of Dentistry and so on. Harvey and Williams (2010) present another compelling reason for failing quality assurance certification, arguing there are differences in quality evaluations between accomplishing daily tasks and performing under the influence of quality assurance procedures. In accordance with this, Albaqami's (2015: 65-66) research of KAU's perception of quality concepts revealed that quality was perceived differently by almost all of the people interviewed; definitions ranged from performance improvement to increasing accountability, and even satisfying the customer's needs. Although every answer was satisfactory, the findings revealed a discrepancy of quality understanding, as the responses mainly seemed to indicate personal objectives, rather than a general agreement. This finding supports Elassy's (2015: 255) thoughts regarding the difference in perspective between different groups of stakeholders: "the identification of quality from the staff's perceptions could be completely different from the students' definitions, and it will not have the same meaning from the administrators' and researchers' perspectives". The interviews conducted at KAU suggest no explicit definitions of quality

exist within the university, an issue that may cause confusion. As Cullen et al. (2003: 6) state: "The key issue is the ability of the quality concept to facilitate the perspective of a range of stakeholders who have different conceptions of higher education", therefore to minimise the inconsistencies that might appear when evaluating qualitative concepts. To summarise, the different perspectives of stakeholders regarding QA terminology and concepts compromises the QA process in the women's section of KAU, and the introduction of an official description that addresses all perspectives could benefit the university.

As stated in the *Handbook for Quality Assurance and Accreditation* (NCAAA, 2012a: 7-8), accreditation is granted when either one of two conditions are met. A new programme can obtain provisional accreditation if an extensive plan for its establishment is presented to the NCAAA and if upon the plan's inspection, the commission is confident "that all the requirements for quality assurance that are described in the following sections will be met, and that sufficient resources, including staffing, facilities and equipment will be available as the institution progresses through its early stages of development" (NCAAA, 2012a: 8). This implies that a high degree of programme management needs to be employed, so that planning methods such as setting objectives, resource and budget management, strategy formulation, evaluation and risk management are not only aptly conceived, yet also adequately detailed. Nonetheless, important as the project development may be, a programme must be accepted by the faculty prior to its application to the NCAAA. Keeping this in mind, the interviews conducted within the women's section of KAU revealed that a number of women had proposed projects, only to be denied authorisation by the University's higher officials. When discussing centralisation, Holmes (1993) asserts that guidelines proposed by management can limit individual initiatives, such as research or project proposals. However, "a less open and more defensive 'procedure' is emerging as a component of the pending staff appraisal agenda" (Holmes, 1993: 7).

Full accreditation is granted upon completion of a programme submitted to evaluation and approved by the NCAAA (NCAAA, 2012a: 8). Full accreditation at KAU is granted to any course that has been efficiently planned, documented and tested in advance in order to satisfy the necessary budgeting, curriculum, training and staff requirements. However, the university does not document all proposed courses and programmes, so it is

impossible to determine the causes behind the rejection of said proposals. In other words, one cannot assess whether the proposals were rejected based on QA issues, or whether other problems existed. As a result, the university's management and staff cannot learn from their past mistakes, and thus cannot use this method of evaluation to improve their courses efficiently.

In addition to the constraints encountered, the interviews revealed severe administrative issues. In 2008, KAU established the Strategic Planning Department under the responsibility of the Vice President for Development in both female and male sections. The Vice Presidents were expected to regularly compile reports and forward them to the Ministry of Higher Education. However, a senior administrator within the women's department stated that the people involved did not submit their restructuring plans on a regular basis:

> "Since assuming a position in the quality management team, I have not found many systems or mechanisms for quality assurance and academic accreditation at the school, although the decision was made eight years ago to set up units for development and quality in every school at the university, and until now there is nothing".

Her declaration implies that while KAU aims to improve quality, the actions of some members of the administrative personnel negatively influence this goal.

This section has raised a few important issues related to the self-evaluation and quality assurance processes, such as how are the vision and mission of KAU perceived, what is the reason behind the stakeholders' non-involvement in QA, why were QA practices generally dismissed when the university was tested for accreditation and why were staff in the women's departments ignored when they tried to propose projects. The researcher will thoroughly present and examine all of the mentioned issues in the following subchapters, by providing illustrations from the interviews.

4.1.1.2. Introduction to Self-Evaluation at KAU

Self-evaluation (both institutional SE and individual SE) was first introduced at KAU in 2012, in both the female and male sections (KAU, 2013a). This decision was influenced

by the MoHE's and NCAAA's attempts to introduce an institutional SE process at a national level in HEIs, and the university closely followed the guidance provided in the 'Self Evaluation Scales for Higher Education Institutions' developed by the NCAAA (NCAAA, 2012a: 13). These SE scales are a set of eleven standards that must be examined, addressed and achieved by all institutions prior to the process of accreditation. According to the *Handbook for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Saudi Arabia*, part 1, the eleven standards are the following, divided in five groups (each group having a different goal):

A. Institutional Context

    1) Mission and objectives

    2) Government and administration

    3) Management of quality assurance and improvement

B. Quality of Learning and Teaching

    4) Learning and teaching

C. Support for Student Learning

    5) Student administration and support services

    6) Learning resources

D. Supporting Infrastructure

    7) Facilities and equipment

    8) Financial planning and management

    9) Employment processes

E. Community Contributions

    10) Research

    11) Institutional relationships with the community

Taken from: NCAAA (2012a: 13).

It is important to bear in mind that the NCAAA had previously presented these standards in 2009, albeit in a less comprehensive manner (NCAAA, 2009), and KAU had already taken some steps towards fulfilling the Commission's standards prior to their official release as the 'Self Evaluation Scales for HEIs' in 2011. To illustrate, both the researcher and some of the interviewees (i.e. 16 out of 42) are familiar with the university's attempt to enhance learning and teaching practices, the contribution to research, the mission, vision and objectives, as well as the institutional relationships with the community and

stakeholders since 2010. This information is also attested in the KAU Self-Study Report of 2013, in the section that details the 'Strategic Plan Summary 2010-2014' (KAU, 2013a: 22-30).

Prior to introducing the SE process at KAU, the NCAAA offered a variety of workshops, while also conducting several meetings with the administration to ensure the right steps were being taken to correctly conduct the evaluation (as confirmed by all senior managers interviewed). As a result, the university created several committees to design, oversee, analyse and document the introduction of SE into the women's department, including:

a) The Supreme Committee for Academic Accreditation;
b) The Institutional Self-Study Preparation Committee, which was tasked to supervise the training of the personnel with regards to the SE process;
c) Eleven committees, designed to ensure the KAU oversees the progress of each of the eleven national QA standards determined by the NCAAA;
d) The Review Committee of the Institutional Self-Study Report, created to supervise the reports from the eleven committees and compile them into a comprehensive form (KAU, 2013a: 13).

These committees were created in order to guarantee the efficiency and validity of the process, in accordance with NCAAA guidelines, as well as to introduce new internal benchmarking practices by comparing the performance indicators of past years, as well as by comparison with internationally acclaimed universities (KAU, 2013a; NCAAA, 2009; NCAAA, 2012a).

4.1.1.3. KAU's Institutional Self-Study Report of 2013

In order to monitor and evaluate the success of institutional and personal SE, KAU (2013a) conducted a self-study report (SSR) a year after the implementation of SE procedures. This report introduced SE elements, both institutional self-evaluation and individual self-evaluation, and targeted several important elements, such as budget allocation, research, teaching and learning, programme accreditation, as well as intellectual and social diversity (KAU, 2013a). However, the study did not provide information regarding the male and female sectors separately, and as such the self-study

report of 2013 cannot be utilised as a primary means to identify all the positive and negative issues within the women's section of KAU, but rather to depict the general issues in the university. Nonetheless, the KAU SSR (2013a) can be employed to understand the administrative circumstances surrounding numerous elements that have the same variants, such as the impact of SE and QA procedures, administrative and governance procedures that are common within the KAU, assessment methods, as well as programme development.

Most importantly, the relationships between the men and women's sections directly influences the governance and administration of the women's section of KAU, as the latter is supervised by a dean who reports to the rector of the institution (KAU, 2013a: 39). Furthermore, the University Council is formed of members from both female and male sections, yet all administrative procedures that occur within the women's section need to be reported to the male administration counterpart, and the SSR dedicates a segment to evaluating the relationship between the entirety of employees and students (KAU, 2013a: 38-39).

By evaluating the governance and administration, the report revealed that several elements crucial to ensuring favourable institutional outcomes needed improvement. To illustrate, both the governing body and the leadership of the university were deemed requiring amendments, as there were inadequacies in the implementation of institutional policies and procedures (KAU, 2013a: 40-41). According to the EFQM (2003: 26) excellence model, in order to ensure quality, internal processes need to be designed in a manner that takes into account the requirements of stakeholders, as well as continuously evaluated for relevance and efficiency. In addition, issues such as the administrative relationships between the male and female sections, research integrity and organisational climate were somewhat problematic, yet the overall planning process of the institution was lucrative (KAU, 2013a: 35-41). Calvo-Mora, Leal and Roldan (2006: 102) argue that leadership and the correct implementation of institutional policies are the most important factors in guaranteeing successful people and key-performance results. Keeping this in mind, the interviews conducted in the women's section of KAU confirmed that employees' opinions were divided between believing the current administration was efficient (14 out of 42 interviewees) and that it required numerous alterations (22 out of 42 interviewees). The remaining 6 interviewees refused to answer questions related to the

current administration of the women's section of KAU.

At the same time, the evaluation of the policies regarding quality assurance and management revealed that personnel in the institution was largely committed to quality improvement, and understood the scope of QA processes (KAU, 2013a: 47-48). However, individual forms of evaluation (e.g. self-assessment, student evaluation, teacher self-evaluation) were in need of a stricter standardised verification process, as coordination and clarity issues repeatedly surfaced during the accreditation process at KAU (KAU, 2013a: 54). It is important to note that the research conducted, for this project, at the women's section of KAU proves otherwise, as SE is in theory applied by all of the employees, yet in practice, it has been continuously ignored or postponed by a portion of KAU employees, administrators and academics alike. Thus, the interviews revealed that KAU employees either perceived the SE process as cumbersome and unnecessary (Interviewees 5, 7, 9, 26, 35), or simply did not understand what it entails (Interviewees 12, 24). In addition, some participants discussed the idea that SE was rarely utilised in their department, because it was not monitored and verified. As Interviewee 35 states, although they had hoped for changes after the introduction of QA, there had not been many improvements specifically because "Quality assurance practices, self-evaluation, accreditation, audits… they are all goals for the managers, not tools that can be used for improvement".

Furthermore, the KAU SSR showed the teaching and learning process as achieving high student learning outcomes and a high quality of teaching, yet programme development and stakeholder feedback necessitated further improvements, as contact with multiple groups of stakeholders, including students, institutions and employers, was not regularly maintained (KAU, 2013a: 57-73). This issue is attested by the interviews conducted in the women's section of KAU, which show that stakeholder feedback was, for the most part, not taken into account, as the majority of interviewees addressed this issue (28 out of 42). Smith and Abouammoh (2013a) argue that while the disregard for stakeholder feedback in Saudi universities can be attributed to the centralised government, the importance of feedback in an institution that intends to successfully apply QA procedures should not be underestimated. The process of SE is particularly dependent on feedback, as the process gathers the stakeholders' responses and uses them to improve the quality of policies, procedures and of the services offered (Borich, 1990, MacBeath, 2005a, 2005b, Cheng,

2003, Ritchie, 2007).

Another issue of particular importance revealed by the SSR is the fact that some lecturers at the university did not attend the training for developing programmes (KAU, 2013a: 73), which matches the results found from the researcher's interviews in the women's section of KAU. Even though the institution offers various training opportunities for academics, participation is scarce (Interviewees 1, 6, 22, 25). However, a more pressing matter is the lack of training for administrators, as well as the lack of training regarding QA measures (Interviewees 2, 13). While researching the QA procedures of Saudi Arabian HEIs, Alzamil (2014: 133) argues that introducing and enforcing QA and SE trainings can benefit the community, as it encourages the creation of a cohesive quality culture for all stakeholders. In addition, Bockelman, Reif and Frohlich (2010: 164) emphasise the need for a university to introduce a variety of courses that target all employees, which should provide the personnel with the opportunity to expand their knowledge in managerial, social and methodological competences.

Finally, the SSR shows that research had improved in the past years, as more funding was dedicated to it and more programmes were made available to the staff, although commercialisation of research was still in its incipient stage (KAU, 2013a: 93-95). At the same time, the findings from the interviews show that the improvements in research might only have applied to the male section of KAU, as the women's section suffered from a lack of funding due to prioritising the budget for the male sector (Interviewees 4, 30). Nonetheless, research conducted by women at KAU has increased (Interviewees 16, 28), although not at the same rate, as members of the women's section tend to be more involved with their assigned duties (Interviewees 26, 33). This being said, the importance of research is emphasised by numerous scholars (Woodhouse, 1999, Cheslock et al., 2016, Cave et al., 1997), as it can help increase the quality of academic outputs, as well as aid the teachers in expanding their knowledge, thus improving the teaching and learning process. Even more so, research is considered to be one of the most important objectives of higher education in the KSA, and has been for an extensive period of time (Althwaini, 2005, Ali, 1987). Therefore, given the global, national and local perceptions regarding research, the deficiencies identified in the women's section of KAU regarding this issue, need to be addressed.

4.1.1.4. Policy Borrowing at KAU

Internationalisation and globalisation of QA in the HE sector are two different issues with different implications for HE. The former impacts a HEI's curriculum, members of staff and commercial value, while the latter pertains to the social, economic and political aspects of HE (Altbach and Knight, 2007: 291). This is why several experts (Ziguras, 2011; Mok, 2011; King, Marginson and Naidoo, 2011) argue that when successfully implemented, both internationalisation and globalisation can increase the quality of services provided by a university, and contribute to the creation of a competitive and diverse HE sector.

The MoHE's 'Current Status of Higher Education' (MoHE, 2013: 68-70) addresses the issue of internationalisation and refers to it as "one of the most important trends in the developed world universities". The document presents the trend of internationalisation as an inclination towards several aspects, including globalisation, openness, policy borrowing, cultural exchange, faculty member diversity, academic and research participation in conferences and symposia (MoHE, 2013: 68). Overall, the report addresses the importance of creating a diverse and complex HE system in which students can travel between countries, change social and cultural settings without having to worry about a decrease in quality from HE providers. Locally, the KAU SSR (KAU, 2013a: 9) also addresses the 'Current Trends in HE' by referring to the globalisation of QA in HE as a means of creating a competitive educational environment that aids students, academics and researchers in their pursuit of personal and professional enhancement. According to the report (KAU, 2013a), the university strives to meet the emerging trends of QA in HE by adhering to international policies and standards. Thus, after examining both reports, the one created by the ministry (MoHE, 2013), and the one created by the university in question (KAU, 2013a), it can be surmised that Saudi HEIs (KAU included) aim to become more competitive in the international HE market by enhancing quality through policy borrowing.

Policy borrowing is a process that comes as a response to the globalisation and internationalisation of QA practices in the context of HE. More specifically, a country or a HEI that follows a less developed QA system will thus 'borrow' policies that are viewed as successful practices (Phillips and Ochs, 2004: 773-774). Policy borrowing is employed as a means to enhance existing QA practices, and can be one of the fastest and

more efficient ways of creating a quality culture within a HEI and increasing the quality of services offered by said institution (Donn and Manthri, 2010; Badry and Willoughby, 2016, Al-Ohali and Burdon, 2013).

Policy borrowing can have a positive impact on QA, if the HEIs extensively review the policies beforehand, and if the management of the institutions introduce the adopted policies in a slow, steady and systematic manner to members of staff. When introduced correctly, policy borrowing can provide HEIs with a framework of a successful QA model or practice, which can be followed without needing to dedicate time and resources towards testing and developing said model or practice (Phillips and Ochs, 2004). However, the borrowed policy may be altered and adapted to the social, cultural, political and economic circumstances of the institution in such a way that interferes with the policy's ability to deal with possible challenges (Turbin, 2001; Portnoi, 2016). In addition, staff may also ignore or resist the changes made as a result of policy borrowing, which results in an incomplete or faulty implementation, and may even result in the creation of a burdensome practice for all staff members (Phillips and Schweisfurth, 2014).

In the case of the women's section of KAU, the introduction of the SE process (both institutional SE and individual SE) as a result of policy borrowing had both positive and negative results. On the one hand, some senior leaders and academics (i.e. 13 out of 42 Interviewees: 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 10, 11, 14, 21, 22, 29, 32, 42) viewed SE as a necessary tool in enhancing the quality standard of the university, and argued that SE had improved the quality of research, teaching and learning, communication among faculty members and that it had helped in recreating the organisational structure for strategic planning and development. On the other hand, others (9 out of 42 Interviewees: 5, 7, 9, 12, 24, 26, 35, 37, 40) perceived SE as a cumbersome, unnecessary or poorly implemented procedure that did not aid quality enhancement, but rather, slowed down administrative procedures and the completion of personal goals, such as research, due to the increased paperwork and bureaucracy. The remaining 20 interviewees were neither for, nor against the SE did process and the majority (13 out of 20 interviewees) believe that a longer period of time needed to pass before they could accurately form an opinion based on the ramifications of implementing SE.

4.1.2. Coding Scheme

In order to better understand and discuss the findings, the answers that were similar in meaning or points raised were grouped together and patterns were identified to create a coding scheme. This step was essential in enabling the researcher to more aptly interpret the entirety of the data collected from the interviews, as well as to categorise it in a system that permits the information to be employed in an efficient and thorough manner.

The researcher merged together similar ideas, events and perspectives to form both initial codes that were derived from the list of research questions, as well as the researcher's personal knowledge gained from teaching at KAU (i.e. a priori codes) and codes that emerged during the data analysis (i.e. emergent codes), each being subsequently divided into more specific themes and sub-themes.

A priori codes:

A) Factors that influence QA implementation
  - Governance
  - Administration
  - Faculty and staff employment processes
  - Teaching and learning (self-evaluation impact)
  - Student administration and support services
  - Institutional relationship with the community
  - Management of quality assurance processes

Emergent codes:

B) Objectives, mission and vision
C) Resources
  - Learning resources
  - Facilities and equipment
  - Financial planning and management
D) Research

4.1.3. Factors that Influence QA Implementation

I. Governance

One of the main factors that influence the implementation of quality assurance in every institution is, without a doubt, the management of said institution. Smith and Abouammoh (2013a) discovered that HEIs in the KSA are governed by a centralised structure that is inclined to disregard the feedback of stakeholders, which directly impacts the efficiency of QA procedures, which function properly under a more decentralised structure. This section intends to illustrate the ways in which a centralised government, such as the one appointed at KAU, shapes and influences the sustainability of a well-implemented QA system.

The women's section of KAU is also governed by a centralised structure, meaning that the dean of the university is the leader and also that the entire education system is subordinate to the ministry. Firstly, it is important to clarify that although there are numerous people employed in senior management positions in the women's section at KAU, they themselves do not have the power to make decisions without the dean's authorisation, thus ensuring a rigid hierarchy. Ultimately, the dean is the only person in function that is capable of approving projects, implementing quality assurance routines, settling disputes and addressing concerns, and the dean also must inform the rector of the decisions taken in the women's section. As KAU (2013a: 39) describes it in the *Institutional Self-Study Report* (SSR), all academic programmes and specifications in the male and women's sections of KAU are identical, except for the governing structure, as the dean of the women's section reports to the rector of the university. Secondly, it is essential to consider the reason behind the centralised structure amongst the staff in the women's section of KAU from an official point of view. Badry and Willoughby (2016: 164) emphasise the influence of the Saudi Arabian MoHE in HEIs, as the Ministry decides and implements both the academic and administrative functions in a university, be it private or public, in order to guarantee that international QA standards are met. While the majority of the interviewees desisted from highlighting the Ministry's pervasive presence in almost all aspects of the administration, a few did explain their frustration with this aspect. This being said, five members within the senior management team agreed with the assertion that there was a need to decentralise and simplify the work processes, including the ubiquitous involvement of the Ministry, arguing "the Ministry's

reduced involvement would contribute to an improved bureaucratic process and enhanced efficiency" (Interviewee 6). Nonetheless, centralisation alone is not responsible for the obstacles in the system, as will be shown in subsequent sections.

With regard to centralisation, when assessing whether the staff understood the hierarchy of the university, only three employees (1 lecturer and 2 members of the supporting staff) were not aware of the extent of the dean's authority. A majority of employees (21) responded very briefly that: "The management prefers a centralised system in the women section of the institution". On the other hand, seven interviewees gave critical responses, emphasising KAU's administrative deficits. For example, Interviewee 15 shed light on one of the problems: "There is no evidence of policies and procedures to illustrate the internal systems necessary to deal with all areas of the core activities and procedures within the university", she said, quickly adding that "the management needs to better inform their employees on the internal policies". She was not alone in making reference to communication issues between administrative employees and the rest of the staff. As one lecturer clearly stated: "there is a serious need to bridge the communication gap between senior managers and the associated staff" (Interviewee 23). According to Nakpodia's (2009: 79-80) findings discussed in chapter 2, it is important that senior managers acknowledge the continuous interaction the personnel has with the institutional environment, and its impact on the degree of teaching, research and involvement. Moreover, given the fact that governance should takes into account the decision-making process, as well as the quality of outcomes, it is crucial that the people making decisions take into account the staff's agreement with said decisions, so that the desired outcomes are not hindered by internal conflict.

According to Norris (2007: 146), environments that employ a high level of surveillance and do not abound in trust, do not encourage innovation and learning, as a big portion of the employees' energy "has to be devoted to engineering and maintaining compliance with regulatory frameworks that adaptive or evolutionary change is rendered problematic". Therefore, centralised systems that require strict adherence and compliance are prone to creating coping behaviours in employees that ultimately hinder the QA process, as they produce a pretence of conformity. Thus, people do not accept QA, but rather pretend, in order to conform to internal regulations. In addition, centralisation tends to restrict the quality attained by individuals, as employees need to follow the imposed QA standards, as opposed to following their own quality-driven procedures attained

through self-evaluation. As Holmes (1993: 7) argues, this constraint implies that QA is changing from a "self- and close-peer review" to an increasingly formalised process. Therefore, the argument implies that a decentralisation of the quality evaluation of individual activities would be beneficial to the implementation of the QA procedures. Conversely, Ng's (2008: 123) research into the consequences of governmental decentralisation in Singapore suggest that this approach on its own managed to confuse the staff and complicate the local circumstances, as institutions "face a paradoxical trend of centralisation within a decentralisation paradigm. (…) Schools are therefore put in a position of having to think out of the box while doing well within the box", as the ministry of education empowered HEIs to have the opportunity to adapt within the internal structure, while continuously supervising the supply of quality services. Taking into account Norris' (2007), Ball's (2003) and Ng's (2008) discoveries, the researcher ascertained that an advantageous approach to the issue of centralisation within the women's section of KAU is the slight decentralisation of the internal government, which would ultimately promote the individual progress of all employees.

Another relevant outcome of the centralised administrative process is related to the workload upon the staff and employees. In this regard, there seemed to be two observations. One group attributed to the centralised procedure itself a needlessly heavy and unwieldy workload amongst employees. Alternatively, employees attributed the problem to the difficulty in selecting an effective manager and her work style in processing the tasks. The senior management complained about how the current workloads hindered their drives to bring about improvements in the process, which demonstrates how heavy workloads adversely affect everyone in the management hierarchy and process. Multiple employees seemed swamped by the amount of paperwork they are frequently required to process, including circulars, letters and assorted reports, which contribute to increasing the amount of labour expended. In this regard, the senior management agreed with the researcher's observations on the necessity to hire more support staff which would contribute to a restructuring of the processes and lead to higher levels of efficiency. Anderson's (2006, in Elassy, 2015) study regarding QA responses shows that differences in quality-related perceptions between stakeholders is a common issue when implementing a QA system, as academics are more inclined to disregard QA mechanisms: "for the academics, assuring quality involved resisting QA mechanisms because they believed that QA mechanisms imposed an additional workload burden but

failed to assure quality in a meaningful way" (Elassy, 2015: 253). This situation is similar to the one encountered in the women's section of KAU, as the majority of academics employed at KAU were concerned that certain QA procedures would encumber their ability to focus on teaching. Furthermore, some of the workers seemed to be bypassing the required minimum work to guarantee quality, which contributed to an unfair workload distribution. Thus, too may procedural steps and red-tape hinder the efficiency levels of the setup and work process. This issue is also succinctly addressed in KAU's SSR (2013a: 25; 119), in which the staff shortage within the women's university is acknowledged, thus further supporting the argument that the QA system introduced at the women's section of KAU did not take into consideration several deficits prior to its inauguration.

With this in mind, one can assess the first obstacle in promoting a QA-oriented system: communication, or the lack there of. As Weber and Dolgova-Dreyer (2007) suggest, in order to establish a healthy system that is based on effectiveness, values, responsibility and accountability, a governing authority needs to implement an internal structure that promotes "motivation, rather than external control" (Weber and Dolgova-Dreyer, 2007: 70). The situation at KAU is antithetic to this suggestion: control appears to be levied through continuous ambiguity, uncertainty even, directed towards the employees that do not occupy administrative positions. Taking into account the examples presented by the researcher and correlating the frequency with which interviews made reference to mistrust, it can be deduced that engagement was seldom promoted at KAU, as members of both administrative and academic staff who proposed projects or sporadic improvements of the organisational structure were frequently denied implementation of said proposals, with only a small minority (6 out of 42) of the people interviewed being authorised to execute their recommendations.

In this regard, the majority of lecturers (14 out of 21) pointed out that they were either not invited or very rarely invited to academic boards or decision-making meetings, as their demands or dissatisfactions were usually represented by the dean, thus further reinforcing his authority. Out of the fourteen people who addressed this issue, more than half (9) expressed their satisfaction with their representation, noting that their interests were usually acknowledged and addressed. This being said, it is important to take into account the wider socio-cultural context in the country, as well as the culture in the women's section of KAU, which is entirely subordinate to the men's section. With this in mind, an

interesting perspective is depicted in MoHE's (2013: 52) *Current Status of Higher Education*, which advocates for equity and equal opportunities for both genders, by solely discussing the opportunities and perspectives of students, and not referring to faculty employees. On the one hand, the ministry tries to offer equal opportunities for women, but does not take into consideration the missed opportunities of women employed in HEIs and who want to excel in management roles, and the interviews support the data gathered from the document.

Another issue is that the answers given might not be entirely true: 9 participants answered this question only very briefly before moving on to the next question. As such, while the interests of said lecturers are likely to be recognised and addressed by the dean, there is no way of ascertaining the extent to which these views reflect the situation at the time. These findings further illustrate the gap between the ideal communication circumstances, as presented by Weber and Dolgova-Dreyer (2007), and the situation existent at KAU, where the Dean is in control of the employees' interests, of deciding whether or not they are imperative, thus epitomising external control, which is exerted regardless of its efficiency.

At the same time, when asked about the factors that affect the development and implementation of an efficient QA system, the majority of administrative respondents (i.e. 8) addressed the need to reform the governing system. In this regard, a senior manager (Interviewee 7) explained how she managed to introduce, through her own initiative, multiple restructuring initiatives, which included detailing and drafting manuals, cataloguing the functions and responsibilities of individuals with the intent of a better internal organisation, regardless of the fact that there were no recommendations in this regard. Nonetheless, her initiatives prove that stakeholders other than the dean and the management can contribute towards the improvement of the QA system within KAU through their individual initiatives, given the right circumstances. Conversely, once the managers tried to implement some of the said initiatives, the centralised structure stalled the process, thus disrupting the possibility of any worthwhile improvements. To remedy the situation, one of the managers tried to present her concerns to the university's management, hoping for a change in the rigidity of the system. She encountered a hostile and dissenting environment, however, and was advised to simply ensure compliance with the official directives, and desist being preoccupied with ambitions of improving the system in a meaningful manner (Interviewee 7).

In theory, there are no barriers or obstructions to introducing initiatives and reforming the administrative system of KAU, other than the requirements that need to be achieved (i.e. 17 out of 42 interviewees). However, this does not coincide with the pervasive shortage of proposed initiatives, as other participants (i.e. 20 out of 42 interviewees) addressed the fact that theory and practice are often not equivalent. According to Interviewee 30, who was led to believe she would be part of the decision-making process: "I proposed that personal schedules and responsibilities need to be updated as soon as possible on an internal database or something similar, so that everyone can quickly know of any urgent changes and modify their schedule as a result". However, she was not allowed to modify the way in which such data is provided, and she stated that she was met with resentments based on her being employed at the university for less than three years: "The administrator said that the current system works fine and that it would be too demanding to ask this of the staff members in my department, then added that I need to gain more experience at the university before making suggestions" (Interviewee 30). The lecturer then proceeded to describe the system in her department, as not all departments share the same communication practices, and revealed that the method used to inform colleagues of sudden changes in schedule are announced via one or two telephone calls to the secretary and the senior manager of the department, who then informs the rest of the staff. Thus, although her proposed method of communication was more advantageous in that it would have enabled more immediate and pervasive spread of urgent information, it was met with resistance and resentment.

The NCAAA (2012b: 229; 2012c), in the *Handbook for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Saudi Arabia* (parts 2 and 3), suggests that in order to meet the standards for QA and accreditation, an institution must be governed by a framework that ensures administrative accountability, whilst providing suitable support for local initiatives that aim to improve the system. However, in practice, conflictual relationships undermine such aims. For example, the quarrelsome discussions between the managers from the women's section and the administrators from the male section portray the failures that may appear from a difference in perceptions. Interviewee 2 described the experience and its negative consequences:

"(the experience) left me utterly demotivated in trying to initiate any process towards improving the current status quo in any way. Despite my persistent efforts in discussing the changes with every new school head, I was consistently denied an

opportunity to implement my initiatives so as not to disturb the current status quo in any respect. Perhaps, a major reason for the reluctance in any way proceeding with the initiatives is because the current management perceives my initiatives to be destabilising to their perceptions of the elevated power they seem to be yielding upon their subordinates. Consequently, at the end of the day, the quality of work suffers."

The aforementioned instance is a demonstration of how the centralised power structure in the women section of KAU is stifling growth and improvement. As Profanter et al. (2010: 19) note, although reforms regarding women in education have generated many constructive transitions, leadership positions are still widely occupied by men, especially in public institutions. The women's section at KAU is an exception to the situation presented by Profanter et al. (2010), thus proving that the university has promoted the social and professional progress of women. Nonetheless, an enduring rigidity in the internal structure of the university encumbers project implementation, thus negatively impacting the QA process. A change in the general situation at KAU would necessitate administrative reform, in addition to the legislative innovations of the past decade.

The NCAAA's (2011: 7) standards for an effective QA system emphasise the importance of internal collaboration based on trust and on a perpetual commitment to quality. In order for this ideal collaboration to be achieved, trust and encouragement need to be advocated, yet the researcher's findings suggest that such standards are deficient within KAU, especially between the managers and the staff. In addition, a prevailing theme throughout the interview answers is the discrepancy between the doctrines suggested by the top management and their actual implementation. This discrepancy is illustrated in the top management's theoretical support for innovation and progress, while in practice withholding the support required to implement the necessary reforms. A member of academic staff noted: "We have been regularly told that changes are underway, but not much has improved in the last 8 years" (Interviewee 35). In this regard, the general consensus among managers was that decentralisation was a gimmick that delivered negligible practical benefits, as one senior manager commented:

"If it works, why change it? The centralised management of the university has consistently produced good results. The students, the employees and the managers are mostly happy. What good can come out of a different process that doesn't guarantee superior results?" (Interviewee 9).

The interviewee's scepticism is understandable, as there is no compelling evidence to suggest that QA processes indeed improve the structure or results of an institution, and especially considering the fact that KAU's implementation of QA processes in the women's section has generated an assortment of both beneficial and negative responses, as presented by the researcher in the entirety of this chapter. Additionally, Loukkola and Zhang (2010: 9) argue that the QA process is not universally delineated, yet rather hinges on a base set of activities that are defined and implemented in various ways throughout countries and institutions, which raises the question of reliability. Nonetheless, the manner in which Interviewee 9 addresses the issue also implies a certain degree of mistrust regarding the personnel's ability to adapt to new scenarios. However, as per Alzamil's (2014: 133) statements, this mistrust may be overcome through the introduction of proper self-evaluation training and advertisement that encourages the quality culture among the entirety of KAU's stakeholders, as a successful implementation of the QA process in an institution is dependent on the stakeholders' understanding of the evaluation procedures. Alzamil (2014) further argues that this advertisement phase is capable of achieving an increased level of trust between stakeholders, due to their joint participation: "Such a phase is a quality culture awareness initiative, in which various tools and approaches can be used to prepare the institute's staff and students for the self-evaluation, such as workshops, seminars, posters, pamphlets, unofficial meetings, and institute web site" (Alzamil, 2014: 133). Equally important is that the personnel at KAU understand that trust should be gained to not only facilitate communication and awareness, but that, as Norris (2007: 139) explained, the QA process relies heavily on trust due to the importance it places on feedback, so that an institution can assess the reliability and success of their essential features (i.e. practices, policies and curricula), and utilise the feedback collected to improve performance and behaviour.

Furthermore, Fusaro (2013: 408) explains that governance implies a certain degree of risk management, which can refer to operational, regulatory, reputational and financial risk management. From this point of view, the governance at KAU did not take into consideration the operational and regulatory risks that might stem from centralisation. Despite the management's reluctance to alter the internal governance, both the findings from this research and those of Westerheijden et al. (2007: 196) found that they rarely consider that centralisation implies that all decisions and processes, regardless of complexity, are subjected to a long bureaucratic process that impedes employee

satisfaction and hinders the achievement of results, therefore decreasing employee performance. Furthermore, even routine documentation requires approval from top management, which often contributes to delays in implementing meaningful and worthwhile decisions that could have contributed to the improvement of the environment, while optimising the quality assurance processes. These obstructions suggest that it is not QA implementation that needs to change but rather, there is a need for the university to encourage flexibility and independent decision-making.

As a result of centralisation, the previous QA system at KAU contributed to negatively affecting relations with external stakeholders, as well. One manager involved in the KAU QA ten years ago and commenting on the regarding the non-performance observed in the school level quality committees, complained that:

"Since the women's section had to synchronise all activities with the male section regarding any aspect, I put in a call to my counterpart at the man section, who requested I call back after at least an hour. Not receiving any input from my counterpart, I called them repeatedly. Thus, despite my persistent efforts, the actual implementation of the task was inadvertently delayed because of a lack of effective feedback from my male counterpart" (Interviewee 5).

To resolve the issue, she proposed to the senior management that the university initiated a process to independently handle minor issues since otherwise efficiency levels would decrease. Needless to say, her proposal was received with a level of mistrust and antagonism at the time. Although she was told her complaint would be discussed with senior administrators, she was advised to follow the university's system for the time being. The interviewee's complaint was not taken on board by KAU until several years later, by which time the system changed in line with her request, in that only important issues required the dean's approval.

This being said, a trust deficit seems to pervade KAU governance. According to Crookston (2012), one of the issues that undermine trust among employees is when those involved in a dialogue do not envision their conversational partners as persons, but rather perceive them solely by their assigned position within the institution. In order to build trust and ensure a more quality-driven environment, employees must acknowledge that their colleagues are "persons with genuine strengths that could lead them toward

productive life patterns, whether in the department or not" (Crookston, 2012: 38).

II. Administration

According to the NCAAA (2011), senior administrators are required to oversee an efficient employment of the institution's activities through a clear and decisive governance structure. Furthermore, "planning and management must occur within a framework of sound policies and regulations that ensure financial and administrative accountability, and provide an appropriate balance between coordinated planning and local initiative" (NCAAA, 2012b: 212). In addition to the NCAAA guidelines, the researcher consulted the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) excellence model for higher education, as it is one of the most successful frameworks for assessing administrative procedures in the context of QA implementation. As illustrated by the EFQM excellence model (2003: 5), management at a HEI needs to employ a set of complementary processes that are shaped to coincide with relevant proof of their success, therefore emphasizing the importance of continuous evaluations and feedback interpretation.

This being said, during the researcher's inquiries into how the administration at KAU is perceived by the employees, Interviewee 12 complained: "a vast majority of policies and procedures instilled are non-debatable in consideration of them originating from the NCAAA", thus suggesting her reluctance regarding the success of the NCAAA guidelines. Meanwhile, Interviewee 30 stated that although she was led to believe she would be a part of the decision-making processes, along with a considerable portion of the faculty and representatives from the local community, the decision making processes remained limited to senior management and the deans of schools, who made decisions that relied on mission and objectives. By contrast, the majority of quality assurance systems advocate the importance of stakeholder involvement in the delivery of quality. For instance, the Total Quality Management (TQM) system's primary objective "is to meet the needs and wants of its customers" (Sallis, 2002: 26), and higher education is, at its core, a service provider that has customers [the students and their parents], and is therefore subjected to similar standards. However, according to interviewees stakeholders are seldom involved in decision-making at KAU. This is not to suggest that stakeholders outside of KAU management should be consulted for every arrangement, but it is worth

remembering, as Sallis (2002) has argued, that customers have a deciding function, predominantly when seeking accreditation based on quality assurance procedures.

With regards to staff involvement, a slightly different picture emerged from interviews with senior management. Several interviewees (i.e. 6) stated that academic staff did participate frequently in the university's activities, including meetings and council, although they admit that involvement was restricted, as decisions are mostly settled by the leadership personnel. In this regard, the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation explicitly states that: "deliberative and democratic designs presume that the interests of all stakeholders and groups of stakeholders and the procedures that address them are dynamic. In keeping with this dynamism, sometimes inclusive procedures must be frequent and intense" (Yarbrough et al., 2011: 115). Furthermore, the practice of accumulating feedback must be done in a truthful manner intended to ultimately satisfy both the stakeholders' and the university's requirements: "Repeated opportunities and venues may be required for stakeholders to recognize the sincerity of the evaluators in seeking input" (Yarbrough et al., 2011: 115). Comparing the situations presented by Yarbrough et al. (2011) with findings from the interviews conducted in the women's section of KAU, it can be observed that the university does not grant stakeholders the extent of consideration required to create a feedback-oriented environment typical of quality assurance standards, thus hindering its ability to improve. Two other managers voiced similar concerns: "Some of them participate often, but when it comes to making decisions, the power lies within the administrative body" (Interviewee 1), while another seemed irritated by the thought: "They can come if they want, but the dean talks on their behalf in the interest of saving time and making their voices heard" (Interviewee 10), later adding: "It's in their (i.e. the lecturers') interest to let the dean present their requests, as nobody would take them seriously otherwise". The remainder of the interviewees did not make any comments apart from a general statement about decisions being carried out by the dean, after sessions of discussions with the executive board. It is unclear which party is accurate in their assumptions and why there are discrepancies between the different accounts. After further inquiries, the researcher discovered numerous instances of inconsistent or incomplete data, especially regarding stakeholder involvement in the decision-making process, indicating that communication between faculty personnel may be hindered due to social status and lack of trust.

According to Schloss and Cragg (2013: 134), "good communication is indispensable throughout the planning process and key to its success". A well-organised communication system not only guarantees progress, but also fosters good relationships among the personnel, leading to a good level of confidence and acceptance, which in turn positively influences responsibility and the execution of procedures. To illustrate, the Hoshin Kanri methodology (Kondo, 1998, Tennant and Roberts, 2001) proposes the implementation of the Delphi Technique, a method of research reliant on communication, which advocates a group communication process in which individuals are encouraged to provide truthful responses to important issues, thus potentially generating beneficial outcomes (Tennant and Roberts, 2001: 293-294). One of the advantages of the Delphi technique is that it can help create the conditions which foster both honesty and critical evaluation of the issues examined. Further, this technique can be helpful, especially due to it being dependent on the anonymity of the individuals engaged in the study, a crucial element that could break down the barriers observed at KAU. In regard to the secrecy and the reluctance to have open communication observed at KAU, the Delphi technique has potential benefits if the method were applied in lieu of the current feedback system, which is not only restricted, but also scarcely existent. As illustrated in this findings chapter, personnel at KAU is segregated as per their position, the tendency is to confide solely in their peers; it is rare for members of staff to overcome the barriers and relay their concerns or suggestions. It is also apparent that the majority, regardless of their position, is dissatisfied with the gap in communication. Under these circumstances, Nworie (2011: 27-28) argues that implementing the Delphi technique would be beneficial to all parties involved, notably regarding meaningful decisions, such as evaluating leadership, roles and responsibilities, as well as determining competency levels. However, although the Delphi technique offers several unequivocal advantages, particularly in terms of enabling a critical perspective, eliminating social judgement during the response phase and minimising the influence of opinion typical of direct conversations (Tennant and Roberts, 2001: 294-295), it may likewise present disadvantages that might ultimately hinder the process, if not properly performed. One of the disadvantages is the length of the process, as the technique "requires multiple rounds of iteration and feedback", creates an overwhelming amount of data for the conductors to analyse and can lead to participants wishing they had not got involved (Nworie, 2011: 28). When considering the situation at KAU where administrative staff does not feel sufficiently trained [according to the researcher's findings presented in the following section, entitled 'Faculty and Staff Employment

Processes'] this situation where people regret being involved could easily arise. At the same time, this can be easily avoided through the delegation of knowledgeable and experienced staff members. In the context of KAU, this concern could be addressed either through providing external training to staff members [as the majority of employees are encouraged to participate in trainings, be they external or internal], or by a thorough appraisal of targeted self-evaluations. Given these circumstances, the introduction of the Delphi technique at KAU could ultimately be beneficial to the Quality Assurance process in several ways: first, the communication gap concerning administrative decisions, addressed by the majority of the interviewees, could be filled; secondly, a portion of the feedback generated through this procedure could be used in improving the university's infrastructure and organisational system; lastly, the administrative staff would be given additional training, as well as a targeted self-evaluation that would present valuable knowledge concerning their personal beliefs.

The American Evaluation Association's Guiding Principles for Evaluators (AEA, 2004) is a model of methodological standards that emphasises the importance of maintaining integrity and honesty during the evaluation process, as lack of transparency hinders communication between stakeholders. Similarly, the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation advocates the use of transparency in the evaluation process, as it is essential to exposing "limitations of methodology, logic, design, and analysis" (Yarbrough et al., 2011: 140). When asked about the principles of fairness and transparency, the majority (i.e. 10) of senior managers interviewed stated that KAU upholds these principles and strives to disclose policies, programs and procedures in the utmost accurate and proper manner possible, in order to guarantee accessibility to both employees and the public. Although further comments were not made, an inconsistency was identified between these affirmations and the findings from the academic and support staff. Thus, although the administration is attempting to build credibility and create an ideal work environment, the interview data in this regard shows that the process is not working effectively.

Implementing TQM could improve KAU's administrative processes, as it is a system that strives for "continuous improvement using select tools, techniques, and training to guide decision making and to plan actions" (Sims and Sims, 1995: 1) and could therefore induce a sense of responsibility and purpose among the staff at KAU, through the development of perpetual methods of determining quality levels. Needless to say,

methods such as stakeholder feedback and involvement were already being employed at KAU if rather minimally when this research was undertaken. Such methods were viewed with scepticism, however, by managerial employees, as not all stakeholders at KAU were involved in the decision- making process, and their needs and expectations were not consistently satisfied. As Sims and Sims (1995: 8) argue, this is an essential step in implementing the TQM principles. Similarly, trust and communication are crucial when considering a quality-driven system such as TQM, as its success is reliant on both these characteristics, while the administrative system employed in the women's section of KAU did not appear to promote trust or communication.

III. Faculty and Staff Employment Processes

According to NCAAA's *Handbook for QA and accreditation* (2012a; 2012b: 239), one of the most important steps in implementing a reliable quality assurance system is a correctly defined recruitment process, which implies assembling personnel with proper qualifications, experience and accomplishments, in order to ensure a high quality academic community is created. KAU's *Self-Study Report* (KAU, 2013a: 115-117) also acknowledges the need for the university to follow strict rules during the employment process, as choosing lecturers directly impacts the quality of teaching and learning, as well as the QA practices as a whole.

The typical employment procedure for academic and support staff, according to KAU's documentation, is that the candidate completes an application form provided by the employer, provides copies of diplomas, degrees and experience, as well as medical and police reports that prove the candidate's legitimacy and ability to work. The majority of the participants mentioned KAU's strict policies and procedures regarding the recruitment mechanism. As one member of staff specified: "All university staff attend work under an employment contract that includes clear conditions about the working hours and systems in place at the university in terms of rights, duties, salary and vacation days" (Interviewee 26). Another member of the support staff mentioned the details provided in the job description: "It includes details about the working conditions and mentions all the equipment made available for each of the categories, according to the position assigned to the employee" (Interviewee 39). Several administrative staff

members who were interviewed confirmed that the employment process is a thorough process: "supervised by the Dean and the KAU President and the coordinators of the selection process" (Interviewee 4). Another administrative representative asserted that the employment process directly influences QA, and that the leaders of the women's section in KAU are therefore "committed to the adoption of quality assurance in the selection of faculty standards and to hiring people who are prioritised based on the areas of knowledge required, their academic experiences and their activity in the field of scientific research" (Interviewee 11). Similarly, another senior leader noted: "the university provides the necessary number of faculty members by accreditation standards and quality assurance in terms of the required number, diplomas and degrees, academic ranks and diversity in the sources of their access to scientific degrees" (Interviewee 1), a process that corresponds to NCAAA (2012a; 2012c) and QAA (2016a) guidelines. Furthermore, the majority of participants saw the QA system having had a positive influence on the recruitment process. As a result of the implementation of the QA system in the women's section of KAU, the requirements of the recruitment processes of both academic and management personnel had become more stringent, which has guaranteed a superior initial level of expertise among recently employed staff (KAU, 2013a).

Based on the information gained from the interviews, it would be normal to ascertain that the recruitment process employed at KAU is strict, and intended to lead to the employment of valuable individuals who will enhance quality assurance. In this regard, it is important to note Zhang et al.'s (2014: 206) findings, which state that employment in KSA is very restricted for women, who are "not adequately educated, trained and skilled for high profile jobs, such as banking and investment, IT or ICT", and are thus forced to seek employment in sectors such as education. As a result, there is an abundance of candidates and the expectation in the hiring process is that those who are not qualified for a certain position will not be accepted.

With regards to the employment process, key issues that arose during the current inquiry are as follows: an insufficient level of research activities among KAU lecturers; a lack of proper documentation regarding the mechanisms and requirements for selecting administrative personnel; a prevailing absence of administrative qualifications (such as degrees, diplomas or training) to attest their position within the university. Further inquiries revealed the nonexistence of documented procedures or self-evaluation forms concerning the performance evaluation of managerial staff, including heads of

departments, deans or other administrative employees. A compelling argument supporting the development of a superior self-evaluation system for administrative and governance staff is offered by Højlund (2014: 37), who states that "teaching methods and curricula are almost permanently scrutinized and debated in public and governments are forced to take action accordingly or in reaction to international benchmarking results". This is of particular importance, given that the curricula and teaching methods in the women's section of KAU are mainly devised and approved by the senior leaders and the dean, who require a tremendous level of academic understanding and proficiency, to ensure that their decisions positively impact the services offered by the university. It could be therefore beneficial to both senior leaders and the dean to undertake self-evaluation, as this is one of the methods of increasing quality standards of a university. All these issues need to be re-examined by the management of the women's section of KAU, as management staff can not only hinder the QA process, but can also negatively influence the general quality of work within an institution, especially considering that one of the NCAAA's main objectives is to monitor the levels of efficiency in the administrative sector (NCAAA, 2012a; MoHE, 2013).

In terms of the recruitment process, the employment guide for the women's section of KAU states that a lecturer is selected based on qualifications, experience and level of research. These requirements are specifically encouraged by the administrative staff interviewed in this research. On the other hand, from the interviews with lecturers, it would seem that research was not prioritised when employing staff, neither after their employment. As Interviewee 26 states, "I haven't made much progress with my research, as my main focus has always been teaching". 13 other academic staff interviewed shared this experience, acknowledging that their predominant objectives involved teaching, not furthering research – neither prior nor after their employment at KAU. And yet accreditation is granted based on research (NCAAA, 2012b), and indeed, the neglect of research advancement is one of the reasons why the women's section of the KAU had difficulty in obtaining credentials. Despite the QA program in the university which states that it is mandatory for lecturers to be engaged in active research, academic staff were not able to be research active.

Secondly, although there is a clearly defined process for evaluating and employing academic members, the interviews revealed that the process is not the same for administration staff. 3 of the senior leaders interviewed insisted there were definite

standards for the recruitment of administrators, one stating "the process is clearly written and referred to when considering candidates" (Interviewee 3), while another added: "the employers use a list of requirements to check who is qualified" (Interviewee 8). Yet the actual process or list utilised when evaluating administration applicants looked more like a recommendation than an official guideline. While some respondents tried to explain the process by using ambiguous language, such as "the recruiters are advised to review specific qualities" (Interviewee 4), one interviewee clarified the situation for administrative employment in the women's section of KAU:

"Of course there are specific requirements that are targeted for recruiting administrative members, such as experience and certification. The problem is that many candidates are not particularly qualified in this field. They do, however, have other diplomas or degrees, or have previously worked in the field, so sometimes not all requirements are considered" (Interviewee 6).

Interviewee 6 confirms Zhang et al.'s (2014: 206) findings regarding the generally lower level of qualifications among women in KSA when compared to men, and therefore also not being evaluated in the same style, or rather, not according to the standards their male counterparts are subjected to (7 out of 42 administrators). In addition, Zuhur (2011: 223) states that KSA has the "lowest female employment rate of any country" due to the fact that "the three necessary conditions of need, ability, and opportunity are not met", which is indicative of the situation at KAU, where experience sometimes obscures individual qualification.

When considering the QA process, Westerheijden et al. (2007: 195-196) found that employee satisfaction needs to be taken into account, as it can influence several important issues, starting with the dedication to one's work, which in turn influences the quality of the teaching and learning process, along with the desire to implement satisfying projects that meet accreditation standards, and the eventual inclination to undertake appropriate research. Therefore, when staff interviewees were asked whether their needs were being met, the majority of academic and support staff responded in the affirmative. Interviewee 41 was particularly pleased with the administrators' dedication to addressing issues she raised: "I have nothing to complain about. The problems I report are almost immediately fixed". In this regard, one of the senior leaders confirmed that they regularly supervised the level of employee satisfaction: "Senior management assigned the responsibility of

conducting a periodical reconnaissance to topics related to organisational climate, including things such as: the extent of job satisfaction, confidence in future development and a sense of participation in planning and development" (Interviewee 7). However, another manager (Interviewee 10) revealed that while self-evaluation questionnaires were utilised to verify satisfaction levels, the open-ended questions that require feedback were rarely or only very briefly answered, thus raising concern that criticism might not be openly expressed. Interviewees in this research raised a number of important questions (such as research, issues with the decision making process, or the delayed manner in implementing suggested changes), yet perhaps due to the aforementioned communication gap or trust issues, these concerns were not discussed in the self-evaluation questionnaires. Onsman (2010: 517) notes three main barriers to "implementing a networked set of systems to (…) monitor academic performance as well as evaluate academic outcomes whilst maintaining a (…) positive teaching environment for staff": the first is the communication skill possessed by those involved in the conversation; the second is people's reaction to authority, including the reticence to voice complaints to those who are of higher rank (Nevid and Rathus, 2016: 238). This certainly applies to KAU employees. Although this is a universal, it is most common among individuals who are already somewhat affected by social exclusion and seek integration (Chiasson and Tristan, 2012: 144). Given the status of women in KSA, as well as the hierarchy of authority prevalent within the university, as has already been discussed, it is possible that more vulnerable employees (i.e. newer, younger) are hampered either by a lack of communication skills, or by the innate predisposition to not question authority. Regardless of the reason, "it seems more likely that such barriers will only slow down the progress (of implementing accreditation guidelines) rather than derail it" (Onsman, 2010: 518).

This being said, TQM has an interdependent relationship with human resource management (HRM), which impacts the performance levels at an institution by improving employee satisfaction (Boselie and Van der Wiele, 2001: 2-3). Additionally, Ugboro and Obeng (2000: 248) argue that institutions that have employed TQM focused on guaranteeing QA satisfaction through procedures that endorse employee empowerment, by employing strategies "that strengthen employee's self-efficacy or confidence in accomplishing task objectives". These strategies include, but are not limited to, opportunities for career advancement, providing autonomy from bureaucratic

constraints and ensuring participation in the decision-making process. Thus, several scholars (Ugboro and Obeng, 2000: 250, Boselie and Van der Wiele, 2001: 4) note that employees are not only encouraged to participate in the successful implementation of QA processes – a decision that motivates the staff to produce quality services - but said participation can also increase the commitment, performance and retention levels of the personnel. Similarly, the EFQM excellence model perceives its personnel as both enablers and results, as they facilitate learning, yet are also customers, which is what makes their involvement in the QA process essential (EFQM, 2003: 22, 28). In reality, the situation in the women's section of KAU does not particularly encourage employee satisfaction, as the majority of lecturers are constrained by administrative procedures and their involvement in the decision-making process is limited. All things considered, the implementation of either EFQM or TQM could increase employee empowerment, which would ultimately improve customer satisfaction by ensuring quality services are provided.

Another crucial element taken into consideration when evaluating an institution for accreditation is the training program offered by the university (NCAAA, 2012a: 12; 2012c). In this regard, the findings from KAU indicate, at first glance, that such programmes exist and are applied: Interviewee 1's statement that "The university seeks to provide training opportunities for all new employees", was shared with two other members of management and also by fourteen of the academic interviewees. A detailed inspection proves this to be partially true, as the training program is once more divided between opportunities provided to lecturers and those provided to the administration personnel, as Interviewee 2 notes: "I have worked at the university for more than 25 years. From what I've seen, there have been many training opportunities for faculty members". The majority of respondents agreed with Interviewee 2, stating that training opportunities for academics had become more diverse and more frequent. Such was not the case for administration, as Interviewee 13 explained: "We see training advertisements almost monthly available to us (i.e. the professors), yet not one for the administration caught my eye in the past year, at least. I doubt they were not announced, I think there just weren't any lately".

This lack of administrative training has a number of consequences. Firstly, given the importance of project creation and implementation, Thackwray (1997: 101) argues that it would be ideal for staff to partake in project management trainings, as the deficiency of

this practice in higher education institutions is prone to "causing concern and confusion". Secondly, there are numerous relevant training programs available for administrative staff, such as methodological competence [regarding research methods and presentation techniques], self-confidence and social competence, and most importantly, management competence (Huisman and Pausits, 2010: 164), all providing essential information for administrators. The respondents' view that no such trainings had been recently organised suggests that the women's section of KAU neglects administrative needs, thereby undermining the effectiveness of the quality assurance process. This tendency is not restricted to KAU, as Thackwray (1997) found:

> "the traditional approach to the training and development of staff in HEIs has been (…) biased heavily in favour of provision for academic staff; (…) with inadequate resource available for professional preparation for functions other than research, ie for teaching and for administration and management" (Thackwray, 1997: 169).

According to Thackwray (1997), both administrative staff and lecturers are typically overlooked in higher education, while the researcher's findings suggest that KAU offers sufficient training for lecturers and research, but insufficient training for administration. Of the 21 academic staff interviewed, 16 either knew about training or had partaken in training, and the general evaluation was positive, as respondents gave a plethora of responses, such as: "The establishment of various training courses internally, with the encouragement of the university and its cadres, or by bringing in experts for this purpose has increased productivity" (Interviewee 22). Comments were also made about the opportunities for foreign academics: "The university provides opportunities for foreign faculty to participate in conferences and in training courses" (Interviewee 29). Over the past decade, the need to employ foreign academics has increased, as the university has sought to satisfy the demand for quality education, and local staff often lacked the experience and academic diversity offered by foreign lecturers, as discussed by 7 (out of 42) interviewees. KAU wanted to continue training foreign faculty members, as well as encouraging them to share their experience with Saudi lecturers in order to provide new information to local academics; the researcher had the chance to observe foreign lecturers actively participating in conferences and trainings.

Overall, the implementation of the QA program has changed the training opportunities available in the women's section of KAU in the sense that it has encouraged the

expansion of training courses to a variety of new areas, including self-evaluation courses, quality assurance for academics and quality evaluation. All things considered, the researcher found the training program effective in targeting the academic personnel but insufficient for management. According to the NCAAA (2012a; 2012b; 2012c) standards, it is imperative to have professional strategies in place to develop staff expertise, yet KAU offers such possibilities primarily to academic staff and neglects administrative staff and this is another probable impediment to obtaining accreditation. Nonetheless, although the training system is acclaimed by the interviewees, further investigations into the organisation of the process revealed it is not ideal, as records of participation are not kept systematically. An induction process for new teachers has also been successfully implemented at KAU, and was evaluated positively by respondents. One lecturer stated:

> "The women's section at KAU prepares new employees and includes them in direct exercises. The procedure lasts for three days, covering the mission of the university, its values, policies, guidelines and instructions for the systems of the university, as well as its facilities and programs" (Interviewee 11).

Another crucial element in assuring quality services in higher education is the existence of an efficient system for resolving conflicts and addressing complaints (NCAAA, 2012b: 239). According to KSA's Labour Laws, article 222 regarding labour disputes: "any complaint for violations taking place against the provisions of this Law, regulations and decisions thereof shall not be accepted after the expiry of twelve months from the date of the violation" (O'Kane, 2009: 94).

Although the KAU website does not have a 'complaints' category, the option of completing an online questionnaire is provided under the 'KAU President' category. Upon further inspection of the form (which includes proposals and specific nominations) and the President's personal remark, which addresses issues such as confidentiality and the strive for excellence, it can be concluded that, although it is not advertised as such, it is more or less intended as a complaint form (KAU, 2015). "Complaints and suggestions can be addressed to the President directly, if it is urgent, or by filling a questionnaire", said Interviewee 3.Several members of the support staff spoke of the process, confirming that there is indeed a functioning complaint system established within KAU: "there are questionnaires available to all employees at the secretary, we fill them and the issues are usually resolved within the month" (Interviewee 38). This being said, when resolving

complaints, a sense of urgency is important, so that the issues raised do not escalate in intensity or severity to the point where it undermines "the relationship between the student and their institution and consumes resource from the student, the institution" (BIS, 2011: 38). Therefore, the period of time within which a complaint is dealt with is crucial. If, as suggested by one respondent, minor complaints are resolved within the month, more severe issues may remain unresolved for an undesirably extended period. It is worth revisiting a previously discussed incident (as presented by Interviewee 5), regarding complaints addressed by the female staff that needed to be debated by the male staff and the requests were incessantly delayed, which led to the participant expressing a wider complaint/concern about the lack of independence in handling issues within the women's section, thus proving that if issued are not swiftly clarified, they will evolve into complications. At worst, this can lead to action (De Groof, Neave and Svec, 1998), as well as causing a deterioration in the relationships between the university and stakeholders, thus ultimately tarnishing the university's prestige.

Furthermore, although the majority of administrative staff stated they adhered to the principles of fairness and transparency, complaints with respect to conditions of employment and matters such as promotion, academic matters, or student appeals are rarely exposed to the public, as illustrated by Interviewee 24's comment: "We only find out about conflicts through discussions among ourselves, the management probably wants to portray an ideal environment for the students". In this regard, the NCAAA (2011: 239) advocates a fair and transparent approach in resolving conflicts involving faculty members and students, yet findings from the interviews indicate that such a practice does not exist at KAU, mainly due to the president's authority to decide whether the complaints are important enough to be publicly addressed. According to the QAA standards, HEIs that adhere to a QA program must have specific procedures for "handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities" (QAA, 2016e: 7), and these procedures need to be transparent, fair, timely and accessible to anyone, created with the purpose of enabling the enhancement of stakeholder satisfaction. Therefore, although KAU has a clear complaint procedure, it is not created in accordance with national or international standards of quality assurance, due to the length of the procedures, influenced by governance centralisation, as well as a lack of transparency.

IV. Teaching and Learning

Although the curriculum is one of the most important teaching instruments, as it allows for the student learning outcomes to be established, during the interviews, it became increasingly apparent that the stakeholders at KAU do not share a unified opinion with regards to the participants of the curriculum design. Three leading administrators stated that the alumni's beliefs were important: "the feedback from the alumni about the quality of the program contributes to a large extent in identifying strengths and weaknesses in the program and thus work on the development and improvement of the curriculum" (Interviewee 5), while four of them emphasised the importance of involving lecturers in the educational program's design process: "The participation of teachers in fulfilling the labour market's needs is important, in order to make sure that these academic programs are able to achieve the program's objectives, including the creation of applied, leadership, personal, ethical and scientific capacities" (Interviewee 11). Advocating the importance of an institution's accountability to stakeholders' expectations, Cheng (2003) argues that it is management that is responsible for investigating whether the needs of the stakeholders are being met by the delivered courses and programmes. Finally, the last four managers interviewed stressed that every stakeholder should be involved: "We must include all concerned parties when designing the curriculum, including students, faculty and alumni" (Interviewee 7), echoing the recommendations put forward by Cheng (2003).

Aside from different opinions regarding the importance of involving stakeholders, what the majority of participants agreed upon is that the curriculum and programs depend entirely on the approval of the Curriculum Committee at KAU, a local body responsible for reviews and evaluation of the curricula (KAU, 2013b). According to Interviewee 3, the process of designing a new program is led by a committee that considers two crucial requirements. Firstly, the director of the department is responsible for the preparation and guidance phases, she coordinates and supports all activities and members, while resolving conflicts. Furthermore, she is responsible for documenting the planning process for the development of new programs based on the National Authority for Evaluation and Accreditation models. Secondly, faculty members are responsible for harmonising the objectives of the programme and the NCAAA's *Self-Evaluation Scales for Higher Education Institutions* (NCAAA, 2012a; 2009), and afterwards, referring the matter to the

Curriculum Committee at King Abdulaziz University for consideration and verdict. Thus, the process implemented at KAU is, for the most part, in accordance with the NCAAA regulations. The exception is the limited involvement of stakeholders, a significant issue that the university needs to address, as there is no guarantee that teaching programs and schedules are being developed in accordance with best practice in terms of quality education.

According to the NCAAA (2012b: 232) standards, academic staff members are required to be not only qualified, but also have experience of teaching responsibilities. Similarly, the QAA (2016a) emphasises the importance of teacher qualification, range of skills and experience, all employed "to facilitate learning in the students they are interacting with, and to use approaches grounded in sound learning and teaching scholarship and practice" (QAA, 2016a: 15). As previously mentioned, from the interviews conducted at KAU, it would seem that academic staff at KAU were both experienced and sufficiently qualified, thus indicating that the university adheres to the principles of quality teaching and learning. Moreover, the implementation of postgraduate studies (i.e. Master's degree and Ph.D.) by the KAU Centre for Teaching and Learning Development that aims to further develop the capacities of academic faculty members within the women's section at KAU "was an important step taken by the university to help improve standards and efficiency" (Interviewee 23). In this regard, the KAU Centre for Teaching and Learning Development is one of the crucial pillars of the academic development process and through the organisation of forums, panel discussions and trainings; it ensures a continuous increase in the quality of teaching by providing novel techniques in the educational, technical and research fields (KAU, 2014).

In addition, the interview data demonstrates that KAU amends its academic strategies regularly, and that the university had publicised all measures implemented throughout the QA process of the past three years, including improved study plans, learning resources and development measures. The thorough revision of the system is reflected in the details of the study plan, on the altered topics within the course material, as well as on the current sources of learning and teaching in official publications. With regards to participation in the revision process of study plans in the women's section, all interviewees agreed that while deans, teachers, coordinators and managers were involved, students and other stakeholders did not participate in the review process directly, as there

are indirect channels available to them to express their views, such as conveying them to teachers.

A. Student Feedback through Student Evaluations

The researcher chose to question the respondents about the feedback provided by students and its impact on the QA system employed at KAU, with special regards to the importance of student feedback in the teaching and learning process (QAA, 2016a: 14; NCAAA, 2012a; 2012b). Student feedback is crucial in ensuring and enhancing quality in HEIs (Leckey and Neill, 2001). The QAA (2016d: 8) further emphasises the importance of student feedback: "Higher education providers create and maintain an environment within which students and staff engage in discussions that aim to bring about demonstrable enhancement of the educational experience". Therefore, the main role of student feedback is to improve the quality of services provided by a HEI. With this purpose in mind, student feedback may be employed in several ways: to assist lecturers in improving their teaching so that it is more responsive to student needs (Kember, Leung and Kwan, 2002); to improve the curriculum, the resources and the practices that support student learning; to provide information relating to the performance of individuals; and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the courses (Harvey, 2003).

Student feedback is advertised as being important at KAU, and is one of two evaluation instruments for lecturers, the other one being self-evaluation sheets (KAU, 2013). Student feedback is usually collected in the form of anonymous questionnaires at the end of the semester. It requires students to grade their teachers' performance, by addressing a range of academic and methodological questions pertaining to the lecturer and the curriculum, as well as to offer suggestions or disclose complaints. It is important to note that while the NCAAA (2012a; 2012b) and the MoHE (2013) offer general recommendations on what the questionnaires should aim to achieve, there are no standardised versions or examples of questionnaires, so every HEI needs to devise one. This has proven to be difficult for senior staff and administrators at KAU, especially when considering the various uses of student feedback, as the questionnaires do not refer to all important topics. The questionnaires do not include sections relating to administrative issues or resources allocated to the courses so the only way of giving feedback on these aspects is to use the two blank sections, which are suggestions and complaints (according to 18 out of 42 interviewees). This then undermines the process of ensuring quality, as Interviewee 3

points out: "If there are no dedicated sections for all issues that can influence a course, there is a big possibility that students forget to address these issues in the comment sections, and these issues will never be improved". Thus, it can be concluded that these questionnaires are not fit for purpose, in the sense that they do not include all crucial facets related to the quality of a course.

Once the questionnaires have been collated, the senior leaders evaluate and compare the results with previous evaluations. However, the results are not always disclosed to the faculty staff in their entirety, which is another flaw in employing student feedback. One of the interviewed senior members described instances when student feedback had been shared with other employees: "When faculty members earn achievements or add significant value to the institution or the community, they earn the university's gratitude and encouragement, along with a reward" (Interviewee 1). However, due to the secrecy that accompanies the results of student feedback, many of the teachers interviewed (i.e. 11 out of 21) expressed scepticism with regards to student feedback: "I believe that there are factors that lead to biased students in their evaluation for the performance of their teachers, represented in these factors: the extent of interest in the subject, the difficulty of the curriculum, expectancy in the exam grade, type of curriculum [compulsory – optional]", Interviewee 37 ascertained. Her concern was shared by the majority of management staff interviewed, who thought that "the student evaluations don't always depict reality" (Interviewee 4), and are typically "too diverse to create a reliable layout, which is why they are not always revealed to the academic staff" (Interviewee 9). Once again, issues around trust and communication regarding student feedback are revealed through the interview results, and student feedback can offer a comprehensive frame or foundation [or layout] that can be used to enhance the quality of education (QAA, 2016a; 2016d; Harvey, 2003; Leckey and Neill, 2001).

It appears that a significant portion of the problems within the women's section at KAU stem from either one or both of the following barriers: a lack of transparent communication and a trust deficit. In this situation, given the scepticism surrounding student feedback, some interviewees (13 out of 42) argued that management should consider releasing the results of student feedback to all staff members in order to strengthen relations between the employees at KAU and students, giving the latter a voice with which to offer suggestions, and thereby improving the reliability of the student

evaluation process. Ultimately, Leckey and Neill (2001) argue that disclosing student feedback would not only benefit the advancement of communication and confidence in the women's section at KAU, but would also guarantee that both students and lecturers understand their on-going involvement as beneficial to the university's progress in offering quality-oriented services. Similar views are shared by some of the interviewees (1, 2, 5, 7, 15, 29 40), as well as by the QAA (2016d: 7-8).

In terms of the usefulness of the student questionnaire being used at the time of this research, one of the interviewees who had access to the results (interviewee no. 12) said that "the criteria is not clear, accurate, or objective about the academic performance evaluation of faculty members", while Interviewee 14 recommended the adoption of: "…appropriate regulations to evaluate the performance of faculty members and courses effectively and in a highly efficient manner, as the reality of evaluating faculty member at some colleges irregularly lacks the standards that contribute to its development". Interviewee 27 identified reliability and accuracy as major issues, for example, the possible incompleteness of the data, the inconsistency of the results, and lack of clarity of some of the questions. The main advantage, in her view, was the disclosure relating to general opinions regarding the performance of faculty members. Thus, although collecting feedback from students is an important aspect of institutional SE and QA practices in general, the quality of the data obtained from the feedback is largely determined by the quality of the instruments and mechanisms used in the collection of said data (Harvey, 2003).

When examining the student evaluation process, the main issue raised by the academics (11 out of 21) is the lack of impartiality, making the process vulnerable to favouritism. In their evaluations, students have the freedom and the right to disclose any and all complaints regarding their professors. Cowen (1996: 88) argues that such evaluations "are employed as feedback in order to improve teaching", and as such, all feedback gathered from student evaluations is constructive feedback. When considering the results from KAU, however, it is understandable that lecturers, administrators and even students view student evaluations as being of limited value and thus importance, in SE and ensuring quality. Nonetheless, though feedback may be inaccurate and/or incomplete, student evaluations at KAU do provide this specific stakeholder group with the opportunity to express their opinions, and can be utilised to enhance the SE process,

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which is highly dependent on feedback (Airasian and Gullickson, 2006). Therefore, even if student evaluations do not yield the desired results, they can provide some insights into students' complaints and expectations in regard to the university, thus contributing to the progress of quality.

With regards to the usefulness of student evaluation, two main issues were raised in the previous section, the first being the lack of transparency. As intimated above, student evaluations are not presented to the lecturers in a comprehensive manner. There is also a general impression (expressed by the interviewees) that the questionnaires lack purpose and are not utilised effectively. According to Cowen (1996: 88), the importance of publishing results and meaningful impact the student evaluations yield should be acknowledged, as the stakeholders involved are thus more likely to appreciate the importance of collaborating towards a similar goal. Hernon et al. (2013: 83) clarify that: "genuine transparency is more than simple disclosure", arguing that the information disclosed should be presented in a simple, comprehensible format for all the stakeholders, so that no misunderstandings occur. Lastly, another important facet to consider when seeking accreditation, in addition to presenting coherent information, is specifying the institution's intentions regarding how the results will be utilised in order to augment the quality assurance process (Hernon et al., 2013: 83).

To conclude, the central issue with student feedback in the women's section of KAU is that the purpose of the questionnaire is open to misinterpretation by all stakeholders involved (administrators, lecturers and students), an issue that indeed stems from the lack of transparency. Since the administration does not share the results with the academics in their entirety, but rather only share the positive ones, the students do not believe their opinions matter and thus do not employ the necessary level of dedication towards conveying their opinion. Similarly, since the results are not shared, the lecturers tend to assume that the feedback offered by students is, for the most part, negative and biased, and that it does not offer valuable information. The combination of all these elements leads to a vicious circle of mistrust and indifference, so that the student evaluations cannot be used constructively to increase the quality of teaching and learning standards at KAU.

B. The Impact of the Self-Evaluation Process on Teaching and Learning

The self-evaluation (SE) process is not only important in effectively evaluating quality assurance standards. It also influences teaching and learning by fostering student improvement through critical personal evaluation. According to Ritchie (2007: 86), "the more significant purposes of self-evaluation relate to how such self-critical questioning of practice and outcomes can inform decisions about how the situation can be improved for the benefit of pupils".

When the SE process was introduced in the women's section of KAU, the majority of interviewees (i.e. 27) admitted feeling overwhelmed by the excessive procedures and their lack of experience in guaranteeing proper conduct of the quality assurance process: "Not everyone had a clear picture of how to work with self-evaluation and each college has its own work" (Interviewee 24).Another participant expressed being particularly concerned about its onset: "No one taught me how to start, there are no steps given, does it apply to all colleagues the same or different?". Such concerns about evaluation illustrate the lack of information available prior to the system's upgrade. Moreover, although this process was implemented in the male section of the KAU nearly a decade before its implementation at the women's section, no targeted trainings were created for the women employed at the university. Nonetheless, three administration exhibited enthusiasm for SE as the starting point for the integral adoption of the national quality assurance measures, stating: "Self-evaluation aims to promote and develop the educational process and quality control" (Interviewee 10) while another described it as "the first point of departure, but the basic step that is inevitable for the strategic planning process that ensures quality and improvement" (Interviewee 2). The difference of opinion among is probably indicative of the communication issues predominant within KAU. This impression was reinforced further inquiries into why the culture of self-evaluation was not pervasive throughout the university. Several participants attributed the issues to the abundance of KAU staff, as well as to the reluctance of some of them. Nonetheless, some employees, despite these obstacles, had succeeded in implementing the self-evaluation process, mainly due to the senior management's efforts to improve and spread the culture of self-evaluation in their departments. In discussions with senior managers, the researcher found that SE was referred to as an "evaluation of work according to

specified values, a process that helps to know the performance level of the educational process in order to achieve quality in the educational process" (Interviewee 1). A prolonged discussion with one of the participants [a faculty member specialised in teaching methods], regarding whether the timing of the implementation was favourable enough to impact the university at a meaningful level, revealed a number of concerns:

"In my experience, given the rapid technological changes, the application of the self-evaluation and quality assurance processes is an urgent requirement, as they help cope with changes early on. Academic Accreditation is the way to achieve comprehensive quality assurance, and is a catalyst to upgrade the educational process. The process of evaluating the quality assurance of the educational level of the university encourages those involved to acquire a distinctive personal identity based on key criteria. I believe that all institutions of higher education should adopt a quality assurance approach to work, especially since they have a variety of ways of doing this by seeking institutional accreditation. The time has come for change" (Interviewee 7).

The change anticipated by the interviewee presented itself in the form of a self-evaluation study carried out in 2012 under the supervision of the university's development agency in the women's section of KAU, which offered a comprehensive insight into initial attitudes regarding the self-evaluation process (KAU, 2013a). The majority of interviewees expressed their belief that the institutional SE process was useful, with one of the participants stating: "Considering the educational process and its development, helping to achieve quality assurance in education is important" (Interviewee 17), while another supplemented this idea by saying that "identifying points of excellence and challenge through the role that evaluation plays in the institutional performance of the University is in accordance with the standards of the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Evaluation" (Interviewee 32),thereby acknowledging the importance of both a successfully-implemented quality assurance method and of the NCAAA accreditation system. In addition, most participants admitted that although they found the process initially puzzling and had resisted engaging with it, the findings gathered from the incipient sessions would ultimately benefit the university by indicating obstacles and enabling employees to learn from their mistakes and avoid such issues in the future. A point highlighted by one of the participants was that the SE process in 2012 had included both institutional and individual SE, and that all members of the employees had taken part

in the evaluation process, including academic, administrative and support departments, with the purpose of generating positive changes.

Furthermore, the initial institutional SE process implemented in the women's section of KAU in 2012 helped uncover some realities within the institution, namely strengths and weaknesses that predominated at that time, thus aiding the development of both the internal structure and external relations by contributing to the revision and implementation of the university's development plan (KAU, 2013a). Interviewee 3 [a participant in the 2012 SE process] reflected that: "The self-evaluation process in the women's department helped redraw the organisational structure for strategic planning and organisational development of the university as a whole". Thus, although QA procedures were received with reticence by a large portion of the participants (i.e. 27 out of 42) employed at KAU, the introduction of self-evaluation triggered improvements in the university's QA system.

Another important consideration when assessing the applicability of SE is whether the process has a positive impact on quality assurance and improvement in terms of the teaching-learning process. According to Manyaga (2008: 165), quality assurance is an influential factor in ensuring institutional viability, and "the education and training provider should therefore strive to meet the demands of a wide range of interested parties whose satisfaction must be assured if the service is to be considered credible". Furthermore, the National Council for Technical Education (NACTE, 2003: 6) defines the quality assurance process as "the totality of systems, resources and information devoted to maintaining and improving the quality and standards of teaching, scholarship and research, and of students learning experience". In this regard, the majority of respondents in the women's section of KAU agreed that SE had an impact on quality assurance, as they had witnessed its potential to improve operations in branches such as accounting and the development director's office. Indeed, the majority of participants (i.e. 29) agreed that SE aided in evaluating the efficiency of each operation or project carried out by the university, by improving the level of professionalism among teachers after introducing a result-recognition method. One member of the academic staff stated: "self-evaluation created a common identity among faculty, administrators and senior management, through various agreements based on common goals and standards" (Interviewee 14). These findings suggest that a widely accepted SE system is capable of bridging communication gaps and trust deficits, due to its ability to establish a

standardised means of appraisal, which is based on common objectives, such as efficiency, accountability and cooperation. For example, one interviewee (no. 21) mentioned the SE process as having "developed a sense of responsibility on the part of many through the active participation of each of them", while an administrative employee stated that:

"The self-evaluation process it is an effective way to achieve the specified criteria and to strengthen and enhance the quality specifications, being based on the idea of the inevitability of change in favour of achieving the objectives. It supports the benefits and overcome the losses, encourages excellence and supports a continuous development of the various academic and administrative functions and programs at the university. It also supports their decision-making processes" (Interviewee 8).

Lastly, when asked whether the SE process had an impact on change, interviewee 42 answered: "Obviously it has had an excellent impact. There has been supportive cooperation, openness, and outstanding performance and improvement", as lecturers were encouraged to reconsider the standards of processes such as teaching and learning. The responses from the women's section of KAU echo Al-Homoud's (2007) findings in his research into the success of accreditation in Saudi Arabian HEIs, which highlighted the importance of achieving national accreditation standards through the employment of a SE system that continuously verifies and improves academic programmes. Similarly, Hamdi-Cherif (2011) emphasises the idea that Saudi universities or academic programmes that are more likely to receive accreditation are the ones that not only follow the criteria presented by the NCAAA, but ensure through thorough monitoring and evaluation techniques that said criteria are achieved. This being said, while some interviewees from the women's section of KAU were convinced of the benefits of SE, others remained sceptical, yet Al-Homoud's (2007) and Hamdi-Cherif's (2011) studies of the impact of SE on obtaining accreditation show that SE is not only required to achieving this goal, but also that it is possible to introduce such a process in the context of Saudi universities.

When asked to comment on the impact of SE on perceptions of quality, most interviewees (i.e. 35) agreed that SE had been successful in continuously enhancing the foundation for quality, change and purpose in the women's section at KAU. The general consensus among the participants was that, as one interviewee put it, "evaluation is judged on efficiency, the impact of the program, procedure or individual and the way that shapes

their judgment. And therefore can measure quality" (Interviewee 29). One senior staff member thought the process had had a significant impact on the quality of education at the university, as the women's section, "supported the process in achieving its objectives, and removed the obstacles hindered its course, especially since the process of self-evaluation seeks to ensure quality" (Interviewee 11). However, although a culture of self-evaluation exists within in the women's section, additional time and patience would be required for it to be considered beneficial, according to interviewee data presented in previous sections.

Keeping this in mind, some interviewees indicated that they knew about the practice of evaluation, having participated in the initial self-evaluation process in the women's section of KAU. From the interviews it was clear that some members of staff had recognised the possible benefits of implementing self-evaluation. Although four of the administrators who spoke of this did not distinguish between evaluation and self-evaluation, the general consensus seemed to be that there is no quality without self-evaluation, regardless of individual understanding. Furthermore, for some employees (i.e. 7), the practice of evaluation has become part of their routine, to the extent that they did not differentiate between continuous evaluation and formal self-evaluation procedures. A situation like this in which people associate practice with personal reflection, is an ideal one which every employee should aspire to, due to its potential to positively influence both the institutional environment and the individual. In this regard, senior leaders argued that the management sought to "integrate evaluation and quality in everyday activities" (Interviewee 6), in the hope that SE would become a culture embraced by the entirety of personnel employed at the women's section of KAU, so that when the official self-evaluation procedures were introduced, people would be prepared

Many responders (33) discussed the correlation between self-evaluation and quality assurance, stating that this system is the sole conceivable solution for the development of the university. They admitted to witnessing improvements in the teaching and learning procedures implemented at KAU when comparing the results of lecturers who applied the SE process and those who did not, as well as an increase in positive feedback from students to professors who used the SE mechanisms. As Pennington and O'Neil (1994: 17) advocate, in order to establish and maintain an efficient teaching and learning process, lecturers are required to continuously "reflect on their own practice with a view to improving it", which is precisely what occurred when the mandatory self-evaluating

process was introduced in the women's section of KAU. To illustrate, members of staff declared that since the implementation of SE in 2012, the faculty had progressively worked towards shaping an evaluation - driven mentality. As Interviewee 2 notes: "At the beginning of every academic year, the university works to satisfy each aspect of these concepts, by holding workshops every week on their mechanisms and applications, to ensure quality for staff and faculty members", confirming that the university provides training, but also that a large portion of the staff seeks to train to the highest level possible with mechanisms for quality assurance and evaluation procedures. In addition, a representative for the university students said, "We have quality assurance mechanisms in every school working through internal audits" (Interviewee 4). This being said, although the interviewees appeared to have a basic theoretical understanding of evaluation and quality assurance, from the evidence and information collected, it seems that their understanding of the mechanics and applications of quality assurance was limited. However, given the dedication of a significant portion of the personnel, as well as existing training courses related to QA and self-evaluation at KAU, it is possible that the situation will improve with time, especially considering that one of the elements required for the establishment of an efficient quality assurance and enhancement system is the staff's commitment to realising this objective (Pennington and O'Neil, 1994: 17).

Having spoken of SE in relation to KAU's employees, we now focus on students, since self-evaluation and self-assessment are not only beneficial to employees, but also to the students who employ them. Researchers Kitsantas, Reiser and Doster (2004: 270) found that: "Studies on the effect of self-evaluation during learning have shown that students who engage in such activities [i.e. self-assessment] typically outperform students who are not encouraged to do so". Similarly, McMillan and Hearn (2008) argue for the importance of introducing self-assessments in higher education, as the process provides students with the opportunity to critically assess their performance, strengths and weaknesses. In this regard, the interviews revealed that a self-assessment system for the students had yet to be implemented in the women's section of KAU.

And yet, a system of evaluating students is implemented at KAU: academics appraise the student's performance, which forms part of the student's portfolio, and which is then followed by a brief evaluation process conducted by members of the administrative staff. Finally, the students are given an information sheet summarising the staff's appraisals,

levels of performance and identifying areas that need improvement. According to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), student evaluation is utilised to promote learning and improve the learning process, yet it also is "the basis for reflection and dialogue between staff and students" (QAA, 2016a: 6). Furthermore, the evaluation of students is as important as teacher evaluation, as they both contribute to the success of teaching and learning practices, and should thus be done in a comprehensive manner. This can be achieved either through implementing a self-evaluation program for students that enables them to increase their level of performance, as argued by Kitsantas, Reiser and Doster (2004), or through a reform of the existing system, so that it is inclined towards promoting reflective conversations between students and lecturers.

Despite the many positive comments regarding the self-evaluation process, within the women's section of KAU, its implementation has been slow. Thus, although the NCAAA (2011) advocates individualised internal SE frameworks, it might be better for KAU to adopt an existing method of self-evaluation that has already proved successful. For example, the Malcom Baldrige model advocates several excellence requirements that could be beneficial to the instatement of a successful teaching and learning process at KAU. Firstly, the model emphasises the need to create social and environmental consciousness that utilises a comprehensive knowledge of the needs, expectations and satisfaction levels of the stakeholders (Ruben et al., 2007: 231). In this regard, KAU could benefit from the model, as it does not appear to have enough awareness of stakeholder needs, expectations and satisfaction levels. Secondly, the model may create "a workplace culture that encourages, recognizes, and rewards excellence, employee satisfaction, engagement, professional development, commitment, and pride; and synchronizes individual and organizational goals" (Ruben et al., 2007: 232). This approach of rewarding quality results could enable the creation of a teaching and learning system that relies on informative conclusions, as gathered from stakeholder feedback and involvement.

Lastly, although SE was also perceived as a successful evaluation process that made a positive contribution to quality assurance, throughout the entirety of the process, issues with the collection and use of student feedback, based on student evaluations, were not addressed. While members of staff believed that SE had contributed to quality enhancement, and while the KAU SSR (KAU, 2013a: 60-63) addresses the issues of course evaluation and teacher evaluation by use of student questionnaires, questions

related to course evaluation are brief, very few (i.e. 4 in total), and solely refer to issues such as whether the course is useful, appropriate in length, logically constructed and whether the textbooks are up to date. The absence of questions related to the content of the course, possible administrative issues or resource management issues for technical courses, shows that the questionnaires are not fit for purpose. As a result, although there was clearly a perception among members of staff interviewed for this research that SE had had a positive impact on teaching and learning, the impact is perhaps not as impressive and inclusive as advertised [both in the documents and by the interviewees].

V. Student Administration and Support Services

For a university to obtain accreditation, the management must ensure a proper system of student administration is employed, and that the system is maintained by national policies. Therefore, "student rights and responsibilities must be clearly defined and understood" (NCAAA, 2007), while issues such as admission, documentation, confidentiality, provision of support services and extra-curricular activities are also required to be reliable and pertinent. Comparing NCAAA guidelines with those of other QA bodies, such as the QAA in the UK, it seems there is a similar emphasis on HEIs needing to provide clear, comprehensive information about student-related procedures, such as recruitment, selection and admission of students (QAA, 2016c: 14). When comparing the NCAAA and QAA standards with the information gathered by the researcher from both the interviews and KAU's website, it can be asserted that KAU follows the requirements completely. The researcher found that extensive information regarding student admission is provided through brochures, at the general administration office, and all relevant information, for example details relating to electronic admissions, postgraduate studies and international scholarship admission, can also be found online.

In regards to the student admission procedures, the researcher found that candidates who choose to enrol in the women's section of KAU take the General Aptitude Test (GAT), as well as the Achievement Test designed by the National Centre for Evaluation in Higher Education (QIYAS) and separate vocational tests. The QIYAS is an independent association whose mission is to "provide comprehensive and integrated solutions that scientifically measure and evaluate knowledge, skills and aptitude with the purpose of

achieving fairness, maintaining quality and satisfying development needs" (QIYAS, 2016). In addition to these tests, an evaluation of the student's grade history may also increase the chances of admission, as one member of the senior staff notes: "They (i.e. the students) need to take the GAT, Achievement and vocational tests, but the grades obtained also have an impact on admission, as those with high grades will be prioritised" (Interviewee 4). Bawazeer (2015) came to a similar conclusion, when writing about students in Saudi Arabia who "become slaves to attaining good grades and the fear of losing them" (Bawazeer, 2015: 31, in Hamdan), adding that maintaining high grades then allows a student to enrol in one of the KSA's main universities, such as KAU. This system of pursuing high grades is implemented, yet while it may guarantee admittance to a university; it does not automatically lead to employment. Therefore, the university needs to secure a reliable system of evaluation, counselling and extra-curricular activities that further the student's opportunities. This is the reason why the NCAAA's (2011) quality assurance standards for student administration and support services have been deemed crucial in assessing whether a university should be granted accreditation, as well as the reason behind the researcher's interest in the matter.

Although high grades are ostensibly the key factor in the admission process, the system is not as transparent as it could be. For example, according to three of the interviewees, "the National Centre for Evaluation in Higher Education profits, as the student pays a financial fee to take the test" (Interviewee 25). Furthermore, one member of staff said "Students who exceed these tests are admitted in the academic programmes" (Interviewee 13), while another stated that : "A lot of people say that universities do not accept a large number of students under the free higher learning system, because they want the students enrolled in special education programs to pay money for them" (Interviewee 34), thus admitting that although there is a clear system to allow free academic education, students who do not pass the exams are still accepted into KAU (and other universities as well) for financial reasons. This is very likely to be the cause of some of the poor results regarding the lecturers' performance, as reported through the student evaluation system.

The student evaluation system implemented at KAU uses a statistical analysis of students' achievements, grades and rate of withdrawal, in individual subjects and classes, with the aim of determining which educational programmes are successful and the potential causes for a subject's failure. As previously discussed, students also complete a

questionnaire at the end of each semester with regard to teacher evaluation. Faculty members interviewed indicated that the evaluation process is an integral mechanism of the teaching-learning process, which follows each student's progress at each stage. In addition to evaluating the teachers, the students are invited to assess all the tools, forms and stages of the system, from the basic criteria adopted by KAU in women's section, in order to check the effectiveness of the learning process. Komives and Woodard (2003: 623) argue that the student evaluation can also be applied for the purpose of improvement. This is an approach utilised within the women's section at KAU, as lecturers supervise and develop it to ensure the quality of the curriculum and that other features of the educational process are continually improved. In the area of student evaluation, the process is intended to provide students with information regarding their level of performance and learning abilities, this being one of their incentives to learn and persevere. Finally, the student evaluation system also assists them in identifying their strengths and weaknesses, to help them identify educational programs and future careers that are consistent with their interests and abilities.

The leading managers interviewed confirmed that the concept of evaluation at KAU is not only perceived as a means of assessing student accomplishments, but also as an instrument to determine and evaluate other important facets of the student's objectives, as "lecturers provide brief report cards on each student's performance, while each student's portfolio is taken as a basis for their evaluation" (Interviewee 36). Considering the fixation of Saudi students to earn good grades, while momentarily disregarding their chances to be hired, it is admirable to note that KAU strives to implement a system that will ultimately benefit the student, given that the NCAAA standards advocate that universities enable "strong links between education providers and the professions and industries for which students are being prepared" (Almusallam, 2009:1).

Some faculty members added that this holistic evaluation, which includes academic, personal and social dimensions and even the evaluation process itself - can provide comprehensive information on the progress of students in all fields and skills. As one interviewee notes,

"Upgrading the quality of education requires improving the performance of all the elements of quality which are applied in the system, and these consist of: the student, the teacher, the educational program, curriculum, teaching methods and means, and all

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the different activities." (Interviewee 1).

Therefore, quality is achieved through several methods, such as the criteria upon which the evaluation is based, the efficiency of the evaluation process, and periodic reviews leading to the restructuring of the message and objectives of the women's section at KAU.

Another leading manager (Interviewee 7) pointed out that although the student evaluation system at KAU is effective, there is still room for improvement: "I think there should be several indicators to achieve the efficiency and integration of the self-evaluation and review process, both at the program level and at the enterprise level". After further discussion, she identified specific indicators as follows:

- An explicit and specific indicator based on the self- evaluation process for all items covered by the evaluation process.
- Organising the evaluation process in such a manner to ensure the improvement of student's level of learning, and to take advantage of the data provided by the evaluation process.
- An unambiguous evaluation process for all participants, followed by the use of the results in the optimisation process.
- Ensuring the participation of the various parties involved in the design and evaluation of educational programs (students – employers).
- Documented procedures for periodic review in educational programmes.
- Taking advantage of the self- evaluation reports and external examiners in the modernisation and development procedures.

By agreeing with these suggestions, some interviewees demonstrate having a clear understanding of the benefits of the student evaluation process, while suggestions and critiques provided by other members of staff show that there is a desire for continuous improvement within the university. At the same time, when Interviewee 7 was whether she had presented her suggestions to the heads of the administrative department, she admitted to having tried to persuade her superiors, to no avail; however, she also stated that she would continue to advocate for these changes.

In terms of the student record system, at KAU it consists of both physical and electronic documentation, but is "by no means available to anyone but the legal representatives of

each individual student and the senior administrative staff" (Interviewee 9). Upon further inquiry, the researcher discovered that each student record is a comprehensive document that includes valuable information, such as: the student admission records, personal student information, archived student records (including the subjects studied and the results obtained), medical files, transfer files, extracurricular activity, portfolios (where relevant), teacher evaluations and recommendations (if any), as well as a separate payment list managed by the financial department. Faculty members interviewed were aware, to some extent, of the comprehensive nature of student records, with some respondents praising the system judging it as not only being meticulously conceived, but also regularly updated: "every time new information is gathered, we assess if it is relevant and add it to the student files as soon as possible. This process is very important, as we have many students and would be overwhelmed otherwise" (Interviewee 2). When questioned about the systems employed to avoid or diminish errors emerging in the student records, the majority of interviewees responded that the student records are periodically revised and updated, with errors being corrected as soon as they are noticed, yet were unable to identify the specific methods utilised. The researcher discovered that there is no electronic program designed to search for discrepancies or inconsistencies in the student data, and that such complications are typically formally reported to the administration by either students or lecturers. Nonetheless, errors do not occur often and are solved within an acceptable amount of time once they are uncovered (i.e. several days, depending on the gravity of the error).

Lastly, extra-curricular activities for students stipulated in the NCAAA guideline (2011: 235) and their importance discussed, for example, by McNay (2006), are available in abundance at KAU. McNay's study (2006: 62) of the influence of these activities on students found that those "who spent more than 10 hours a week on extra-curricular activities were particularly likely to be more successful in their subsequent employment". Extra-curricular courses for students at KAU range from workshops involving the use of specialised electronic, to classes that teach the correct methods for writing research papers and conducting practical research. Additionally, KAU has a variety of clubs including social, literary, computer, scientific, theatre and economic clubs, as well as the Hope Club, which was created exclusively for people with special needs (KAU, 2014). Thus, it can be inferred that students in the women's section of KAU have the opportunity to partake in a variety of activities that are ultimately beneficial to them. The

majority of interviewees (31) stated, that enrolment in these workshops and clubs is high, and that they are appreciated by the students. However, as student files are classified and could not be accessed by the researcher, it is not possible to provide independent membership statistics or success rate of the available activities.

VI. Institutional Relationships with the Community

According to the NCAAA (2012a; 2012b; 2009), the process of implementing a dependable QA system in a higher education institution also relies on promoting and ensuring a favourable relationship between the university and the community, a process that needs to be acknowledged as an important responsibility to be upheld. With this intention, "facilities and services are made available to assist with community developments, teaching and other staff must be encouraged to be involved in the community and information about the institution and its activities made known" (NCAAA, 2012b: 242). Therefore, Ritchie (2007: 87-88) argues that the community should be involved in the progress of a HEI, by providing the institution with feedback regarding its academic needs. In this regard, Katz and Kahn (1978: 3) explain that the connect between institutional relationships, the community and QA lies in the fact that HEIs are open systems that depend on providing the desired services to the community, in order to fulfil the needs of the community, thus ensuring that quality results are attained. Therefore, the community's perceptions of the university should be continuously monitored, so that the institution succeeds in creating and implementing strategies that accommodate the community's understanding of the quality of services offered, as well as to maintain and improve the university's prestige.

In addition to the NCAAA principles, in reviewing the institutional connections with the community in the women's section of KAU, the researcher chose to further consider international models of best practice and methodological standards, such as the American Evaluation Association's Guiding Principles for Evaluators (AEA, 2004). The AEA principles concern responsibility for general and public welfare and state that in an institution that seeks to apply the QA process, evaluators must have a commitment to the public interest and levels of excellence offered by the higher education institution:

> "These obligations are especially important when evaluators are supported by publicly
> generated funds; but clear threats to the public good should never be ignored in any

evaluation. Because the public interest and good are rarely the same as the interests of any particular group (including those of the client or funder), evaluators will usually have to go beyond analysis of particular stakeholder interests and consider the welfare of society as a whole" (AEA, 2004).

With this in mind, KAU has attempted to promote educational and scientific research in both the men and women's sections over an extended period of time, even before the creation of the NCAAA, in order to distinguish the university from other universities in Saudi Arabia (28 out of 42 interviewees). When the message of KAU evolved, its interests intertwining with those of the community, the university expanded its functions and associated them with the concept of comprehensive development represented by the graduates. Therefore, KAU acknowledged that it is the duty of these graduates to contribute to the achievement of social and environmental development to meet the needs of all segments of society (11 out of 42 interviewees). As a result, community service and participation in the process was made a component of the development and function of the university. In a constant effort to improve its image, KAU entrusted this role to senior positions and specialised units, stated one senior manager (Interviewee 3). She went on to draw attention to the need for KAU to contribute to the development and continuous improvement of the community in various economic, social and political aspects through the development of scientific research, in order to efficiently accomplish its mission, by serving the interests of the government, the civil community and the institution. The university adheres to solving the problems society faces, and developing targets to include the duties and responsibilities entrusted to it, in service to society. Therefore, KAU is committed to documenting its mission, declaring its internal procedures to the academic society, and those of the external society, by preserving the stakeholders' interests, in accordance with AEA (2004) standards and NCAAA (2012a; 2012b) guidelines.

The educational aims in KAU's women's section are to provide staff training in both quantity and quality, as well as to provide the community with the expertise that contributes to its advancement. This requires openness to world cultures and the development of science and knowledge, in coordination with the stages of pre-university education, to build subjects that meet the requirements and needs of the community. Additionally, there has to be a comprehensive and periodic updating of the content of the curricula and of the capabilities of its graduates to deal with modern technology. As one

senior manager stated: "this requires the development of teaching methods that are able to deliver training and continuing education programs for the community in various specialties" (Interviewee 6).

In terms of research, linking research to the community can contribute to solving economic problems on the one hand, and overall development on the other. Thus, there is a need for a clear philosophy of research at KAU as the basis for a plan, starting from the undergraduate level, so that students can take part in discussing problems regarding community values, encouraging them to take an interest in cooperative learning to apply what they have learnt in their local community and improve the quality of life of its people. This is what KAU strives to do within the model program for professional development in the College of Education, where students learn to perform certain duties as members of teams serving schools with special needs' pupils, or in the provision of services within health or rehabilitation institutions (Interviewee 1). In order to contribute effectively to these endeavours, scientific research needs to be linked to the overall development plan and support the full coordination between social institutions and KAU in terms of academic and applied research. In the women's section of KAU a range of cultural and scientific agreements have been drawn up between the university and institutions of higher education and scientific research at regional and global levels, but these agreements are confined to technical colleges: pharmacy, science, information technology, nursing, engineering. Among these colleges, there are several scientific collaborations between the university and the productive and service sectors, which are associated to the pharmaceutical industry, health care, to the development of tools and means of learning, to the computerisation of administrative work, and to solving problems related to energy.

VII. Management of Quality Assurance Processes

The NCAAA (2011: 230) standards for quality assurance and management state that these processes "must be established to ensure that teaching and other staff and students are committed to improvement and regularly evaluate their own performance". As has already been discussed, student evaluations at KAU are conducted regularly, as students answer a list of questions relating to their educational experience, including inquiries into the teacher's performance, the programmes, resources and curricula, and administrative

issues such as student management and the support provided to students. However, as already indicated, student evaluations that target staff members are often disregarded due to their subjective nature, and thus are not entirely revealed to the public and to the lecturers who would benefit from this feedback. Instead, student feedback is grouped into key issues, which is then presented to the academic staff in meetings or in the form of brief documents, according to the majority of interviewees [31 out of 42]. As Airasian and Gullickson (2006) argue, SE is entirely dependent on stakeholder feedback, as it can change the mentality of those who actively employ it in a manner that not only improves the employees' abilities to determine best practices, but can also enhance the services offered by a HEI by creating a critical mentality in regards to internal policies and programmes. However, the issues encountered at KAU are not so much about persuading people of the merits of SE but about the actual mechanisms employed to conduct student evaluations, as the importance of this procedure is not emphasised at KAU in student training sessions for example.

Similarly to student feedback, the individual evaluations of students, as established by the academic staff, are only briefly transmitted to the students, in the form of evaluation summaries, which highlight the positive and negative features (19 out of 42 interviewees). There are little to no official individual discussions between students and teachers, in which the students would receive more extensive feedback. This process hinders the communication between the teacher and the learner, which further encourages students to submit biased evaluation reports. Therefore, the lack of a transparent exchange of feedback between lecturer and student, and vice-versa, creates a vicious cycle that prevents the existence of a reliable, quality-driven evaluation process. The issue of student evaluations is the same for both female and male sections of KAU, and the lack of communication between students and staff is noticeable (8 out of 42 interviewees). For example, students rated the academic and career counselling offered by the university as average, meaning students stated that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the service (KAU, 2013a: 82). The rating is indicative of the limited communication between various stakeholder groups of the university.

At the same time, Loukkola and Zhang (2010: 9) argue that since quality assurance is defined differently in HEIs, "adopting an all-encompassing approach derived from institutions' own strategic goals, fitting into their internal quality culture, while also fulfilling the external requirements for QA" is the best option. In this regard, the women's

section of KAU is driven by a QA system that tries to take into account both external and internal concerns, yet due to its recent implementation, clear regulations regarding all aspects that are influenced by QA have yet to be implemented. This issue is most apparent with the use of QA procedures such as teacher self-evaluation and student evaluation. Moreover, Cheng (2003: 205) emphasises that QA relies on "institutional monitoring and reporting to ensure no problems or deficiencies arising from its operation and structure", while the interviews revealed the difficulties of creating reliable evaluation, monitoring and reporting standards, especially in the research, funding and management sectors. In addition, Darandari et al. (2009: 45) found that "the Saudi quality system emphasises the development of teaching, learning and assessment using multiple strategies as a form of quality assurance and quality improvement", yet the respondents (i.e. 13 out of 42 interviewees) at KAU spoke of the scepticism with which almost half of the administrators at KAU view the self-evaluation procedures associated with teaching and learning. At the same time, staff in the women's section of KAU have become more open to both self-evaluation and quality assurance since the introduction of the QA system, which appears to be gradually yet steadily accepted by the entire internal community. El-Maghraby's (2011) study into the implementation of national QA procedures has offered valuable insight into the adoption of said procedures in universities that have a rich history. More explicitly, El-Maghraby (2011) found that members of well-developed HEIs are more likely to accept QA practices than those working in recently established institutions. This indicates that while numerous employees are still uncertain of the benefits of both institutional and personal self-evaluation, the importance of this and other QA processes is becoming increasingly recognised in the women's section of KAU, especially since the 2012 implementation of the process.

On the other hand, "quality must be assessed by reference to evidence based on indicators of performance and challenging external standards" (NCAAA, 2012b: 230), and it is the case that the women's section of KAU limits its external appraisal of QA implementation to national qualifications and results, which aren't particularly positive compared to international standards. Therefore, although the university is consistently situated at the top of the Research Performance Indicators Report issued by the King Abdul Aziz City for Science and Technology (KACST, 2013: 18, 24, 28), members of KAU's

management admit that these achievements are inferior when compared to international standards (Interviewees 1, 3, 4, 7) and that there is room for improvement.

The interview process for the purposes of this research benefitted the women's section of KAU in the sense that the issues raised in the interviews served as a stimulus for senior management, many of them realising how much still needed to be achieved in the area of quality assurance, to improve the QA processes. The researcher further asked the senior leaders with experience in QA at KAU about the role of the Ministry of Higher Education in the planning and development of quality assurance within the university. One respondent stated: "I do not know who sets up quality assurance policies and I have not received any official letters from the Ministry or the NCAAA throughout the period of my experience" (Interviewee 2), while another manager reported that: "There has been no external follow-up, only internal university development, and all the plans are a personal effort with no official encouragement, which puts a lot of pressure on us" (Interviewee 8). To put it differently, Doherty (1997: 240) ascertained that quality assurance is difficult to implement in HEIs because some quality methodologies do not take into account conflicting or different interests. This is one of the current drawbacks in the women's section of KAU, as the management, while guaranteeing the interests of the community as a whole, has had a tendency to disregard individual concerns (i.e. 13 out of 42 interviewees).

4.1.4. Objectives, Mission and Vision

When considering the implementation of quality assurance, one of the most important issues is the manner in which a higher learning institution defines its mission, vision and objectives, as these concepts are then employed in both external and internal communication with the stakeholders. Firstly, they shape the image of the university to the public and potential customers. Secondly, all internal procedures are influenced by the personnel's understanding of the mission, vision and objectives, which can subsequently impact the quality of work. For example, the Hoshin Kanri approach emphasises the importance of integrating an institution's mission and objectives into habitual activities: "The 'daily activities' incorporate not only operations, but also everything that is necessary for an organization's routine management of its mission" (Asan and Tanyaş, 2007: 1002). Furthermore, Asan and Tanyaş (2007: 1004) point out that the first step in implementing the Hoshin Kanri method in regards to quality assurance consists of

analysing and formulating objectives, "followed by setting the organization's vision and mission statements and strategies".

Conversely, as Hamdatu, Siddiek and Al-Olyan (2013: 106) argue, incorporating QA processes in educational institutions not only benefits the stakeholders, but also improves the mission of a university and enables the creation of a new vision of objectives within that university. However, this research ascertained that the mission and vision of the KAU are frequently misunderstood or unknown to the stakeholders. According to QAA standards (2016b: 7), an institution is required to "publish information that describes their mission, values and overall strategy", and the mission, vision and objective of KAU are indeed specified on the university's website, as follows:

Mission

Community Responsibility: Knowledge Development, Research, Innovation and Entrepreneurship

(KAU, 2015b)

Vision

World Class University with sustainability and community engagement

Objectives

- Developing standards of evaluation for student performance.
- High-quality research and development programs.
- Cultural contributions.
- Garnering the trust of society and the corporate world.
- Optimal investment of university resources and capabilities.

(KAU, 2015c)

Meanwhile, NCAAA asserts that "the institution's mission statement must clearly and appropriately define its principal purposes and priorities and be influential in guiding planning and action within the institution" (NCAAA, 2012b: 227). In this research, while most employees interviewed were aware that the university has an established mission,

vision and objectives, the majority (i.e. 28 out of 42) was unable to accurately state what they were. In addition, when asked to define the vision of KAU, one of the university's female officials (Interviewee 3) answered jokingly: "What vision? Is that the mission?", when she was asked to justify her comment, adding "of course KAU has a vision, the problem is that no one knows about it". The majority of participants were equally unclear about the significance of both mission and vision. However, several interviewees pointed out that the mission and vision were not very clearly conveyed and suggested that to combat misunderstandings: "We need the university to hold workshops and seminars to introduce the vision, objectives and mission, especially when a lot of academics and administrators feel they do not know a lot of details about them" (Interviewee 22).

In this regard, all three concepts, mission, vision and objectives, were formulated using broad and ambiguous language (i.e. community responsibility, optimal investment, sustainability, etc.). According to Manyaga (2008: 171-173), quality evaluation principles need to describe clearly the educational purposes that influence the students, to explain the self-assigned mission of the university and the vision that defines the institution, as well as formulating them in a comprehensive manner, therefore including all relevant programmes and components. KAU's mission, vision and objectives do not manage to offer suitable insight into any of the elements described by Manyaga (2008). Therefore, considering the purpose of quality assurance is to guarantee that the institution's mission and vision are fulfilled, it is nearly impossible to create criteria for quality control, given that KAU's mission and vision lack definition and clarity. As one participant asserted, "the management needs to apply quality measures more effectively in the review of the vision, mission and objectives, through the involvement of students, alumni and community groups in their evaluation" (Interviewee 40).

Furthermore, interviewees pointed out that the university withholds significant amounts of information from the wider academic community when reviewing the mission, vision and objectives of the university, the debate being predominantly confined to senior management. One member of the support personnel stated: "The presidential vision and mission should be modified to be the vision and message for all administrative units and support staff at the university" (Interviewee 18). When senior staff were asked about the same topics, they were reluctant to answer openly due to cultural reasons, since the university's mission, vision and objectives are determined by members of the men's

section of KAU, and although administrators from the women's section are invited to participate in the discussion, they rarely do so (6 out of 11 senior administrators). Similarly, the administrative members interviewed were reluctant to explain how the management selects the criteria for evaluating the mission and vision of the university, offering only vague responses, for example: "The mission and vision are created according to the senior staff's instructions" (Interviewee 5). In light of the researcher's discoveries, Shoolbred's (1993) argument regarding the need to reach a general consensus is very relevant. This consensus should be established by merging the administrators' suggestions with staff abilities, values and expectations in the creation of the mission, vision and objectives of the women's section of KAU. According to Shoolbred (1993: 24), "it is absolutely essential that values in higher education are made explicit and that there is both the unity of purpose and a unity of belief between those who write mission statements (…) and those who have to implement them", thus further emphasising that stakeholder feedback is crucial in every aspect of an institution, with particular attention to higher education institutions that adhere to the principles of quality assurance, lest discrepancies that disrupt operations occur between the internal stakeholders.

During the interviews, the researcher questioned senior administrative staff as to whether they referred to the university's mission, vision and objectives in the routine decision making process and discovered that all senior managers frequently utilise said concepts, although the majority (i.e. 8 out of 11) admitted to not adhering to the official definitions stipulated on the website, but rather, acted in accordance with a general understanding of the issues. As one of the participants declared: "the community does not use the official mission on a regular basis as a support for planning and policy decisions" (Interviewee 10). Another area of concern emerged when the researcher inquired about the frequency with which the mission, vision and objectives were revised. The majority of interviewees stated that this process occurs every five years, yet were incapable of offering examples of previous definitions of the mission or vision, despite of their employment history at KAU. This may indicate that these concepts have been consistently overlooked by the employees. One member of the senior staff proposed a solution: "Quality evaluation measures need to be implemented in the review of the vision, mission and objectives of the academic faculties and departments at the university, so that the periodical review is made every two years" (Interviewee 1).

Comparing Hamdatu, Siddiek and Al-Olyan's (2013) aforementioned statement with the findings from the interviews regarding KAU's mission and vision, it can be postulated that QA procedures should indeed establish a compelling connection with the university's mission and vision, as well as to the importance of stakeholders' involvement in the creation of that mission and vision, as these concepts will most likely not be adequately defined without the implementation of QA. According to the results obtained from the interviews, it can be concluded that there are shortcomings in the process of determining the mission, visions and objectives within the KAU. This is due to the methodology not being developed in a systematic manner and not hinging on specialised procedures governing the revision process. The participation of beneficiaries and the practical experience of staff also need to be embedded in these procedures. At the same time, it is encouraging to identify a desire to improve among KAU staff, as exemplified by this interviewee: "We need to establish mechanisms that investigate the implementation of the vision, mission and objectives of the university by the presidency requirements, and verify they conform with the overall application of the procedure" (Interviewee 31).

4.1.5. Resources

I. Learning Resources

The NCAAA standards stipulate: "learning resource materials and associated services must be adequate for the requirements of the program and the courses offered within it and accessible when required for students in the program" (NCAAA, 2012b: 197). Their utility is crucial in developing and sustaining the practices of the teaching and learning process, as a clear outline of the resources available influence the courses made available at any university, particularly in technical fields which involve practical activities as part of imparting disciplinary knowledge. It is up to academic staff to produce a comprehensive list of all the resources needed to run specific courses prior to the start of the academic year so that the university has sufficient time to procure and distribute the provisions among the classrooms.

The women's section of KAU implemented a clear methodology in planning for the development of material resources and that of the infrastructure, reflected in its2012 – 2016 Strategic Plan, as development projects were executed by female students

predominantly during this period. Furthermore, the methodology put in place was consistent with the university's mission, vision and objectives, in order to achieve an attractive learning environment by developing pertinent teaching and learning strategies that convey the necessary knowledge and practical skills to aid stakeholders. Therefore, the university established academic education centres in the women's section at university level, designed to support faculty members and students in learning activities. One lecturer described the training programme as providing: "diverse tools for courses, conferences, seminars and scientific sessions issued by the Arabic academia and at international levels" (Interviewee 31). In addition to an exhaustive planning process, the NCAAA standards advocate the evaluation of resources utilised from all involved stakeholders (NCAAA, 2012b: 197), in order to assess customer satisfaction and correctly appraise the areas that need improvement for subsequent years.

According to the EFQM excellence model for HEIs:

> "Excellent Universities plan and manage internal and external partnerships, suppliers and internal resources in order to support its policy and strategy and the effective operation of its processes. During planning and whilst managing partnerships and resources they balance the current and future needs of the University, the community and the environment" (EFQM, 2003: 25).

Therefore, the role of QA in improving teaching resources is that through quality planning, control and evaluations determine the areas where resources are abundant and where they are absent can be determined, thereby providing a log of existing resource distribution, which allows the management of the institution to improve resource allocation. In this regard, a course's strengths and weaknesses are evaluated through the student questionnaires which are completed towards the end of the academic year and an individual self-evaluation report from the lecturers. As described elsewhere, the students are asked to comment on the efficiency of both the educational substance and the resources employed in the courses they attend. A report with all this data is then compiled, and the data is compared to the data gathered at the end of the previous year. The university then makes modifications based on this report in terms of the resources offered (Interviewees 1, 3).

Another key point advocated by the NCAAA regarding learning resources is that

"specific requirements for reference material and on-line data sources and for computer terminals and assistance in using this equipment will vary according to the nature of the program and the approach to teaching" (NCAAA, 2012b: 197). To this effect, KAU offers both traditional and modern methods of communicating data or sharing information, as the library contains a section with computers available to the public, so that students can exchange documents, assignments, references and correspondence with the lecturers regarding varying courses, while all administrative and academic offices are also equipped with a multitude of computers to enable information trade. In this regard, one of KAU's strategic objectives at the time of the research was to convert all paper correspondence and documents into digital data.

II. Facilities and Equipment

According to the NCAAA, when evaluating facilities and equipment, the first consideration is whether there are enough and secondly, whether they are "available for the teaching and learning requirements of the program. Use of facilities and equipment should be monitored and regular evaluations of adequacy made through consultations with teaching and other staff and students" (NCAAA, 2012b: 198).

Interviewees were mostly extremely positive about facilities and equipment available in the women's section of KAU, indicating that an educational environment suitable for advancing the educational process was being provided, and illustrating KAU's efforts to expand its quality standards during the previous three years. However, providing an appropriate educational environment also involves creating a pleasant working atmosphere for the faculty staff and in this regard, there had been complaints about the quality and quantity of equipment allocated to the women's section of KAU. Interviewees pointed out that better equipment can decrease the time allocated to reports, examination and the incorporation of additional information into both student and personnel records, in addition to creating a more enjoyable learning experience for the students. In this regard, one lecturer confirmed that there had been an increase in the availability and diversity of teaching resources as a direct result of the university's aim to satisfy all standards for accreditation: "in the women's section at KAU there is diversity in teaching aids, such as the blackboard, digital projectors, smart boards, simulators and the e-

learning system. These methods are being developed, updated and increasing rapidly" (Interviewee 33). One manager commented: "The women's section at KAU provides each administrative office at least a computer and a printer, and in many offices there are computers for every employee" (Interviewee 8), thus enabling more efficient administrative and financial infrastructures, which positively affects QA practices. Furthermore, the university offers students who live on campus free and continuous access to the wireless network, regardless of location, as one participant stated: "The provision of online networks to share experiences with colleges and universities, and to link the various electronic libraries in local universities is very appreciated" (Interviewee 32). This decision was made with the purpose of increasing the quality of research for all interested parties.

Indeed, several members of the senior management team (5 out of 11) affirmed that the library building at the university had achieved accreditation and was held in high regard, due to the variety of study areas it provided along with a multitude of dedicated departments, as the library encompasses sections such as: the references hall, periodicals department, publications in foreign languages, a grand hall of Arabic publications, scientific databases departments and vast reading chambers with seating for substantial numbers (KAU, 2013a: 87). The researcher found that the university had been granted accreditation for achieving quality standards in terms of availability, abundance and variety of laboratories and technical equipment, specialised supervisors and laboratory technicians. Furthermore, the university is continuously expanding these laboratories (KAU, 2013a). If there was general satisfaction with the library facilities, this was not the case with classrooms. The majority of participants brought up the issue of overcrowding, an issue that could interfere with good QA practices concerning teaching and learning, pointing out that due to the large increase in the number of students, there was an urgent need to expand the classroom building.

III. Financial Planning and Management

In relation to the financial plans and management of programs within a university, the NCAAA stipulates that: "Financial resources must be sufficient for the effective delivery of the program. Program requirements must be made known sufficiently far in advance to

be considered in institutional budgeting" (NCAAA, 2012b: 199). According to the interviewees and internal records, in 2010, the Ministry of Higher Education of KSA focused on the development of creativity and excellence among faculty members at KAU through the installation of 32 initiatives programmes, in which around 1800 faculty members participated. Since then, the university has continued these initiatives with the support of the ministry for a value of up to nearly 10 million GBP, running more than 480 specialised training courses, of which 35 program have been implemented with the Centres of Excellence in international universities. These initiatives enabled faculty to benefit from international experiences and expertise of members, so as to help the improvement of the academic society and contribute to the development of scientific research, while at the same time increasing efficiency in achieving the extension programs among faculty members. Interviewees concurred with this account, with one interviewee noting: "The reality of scientific research at the university witnessed significant changes in the past few years, and doubled the university interest in scientific research and patents, while diversifying sources of income and spending on scientific research" (Interviewee 16).

In addition, the interviews revealed that over the past few years, the university had managed to gain support from investors and the private sector through scientific chairs. Thus the university achieved revenues from marketing their scientific research and innovations, succeeded in documenting hundreds of scientific research studies in the Global Research (2016) database, and even managed to aid researchers in publishing their research in internationally-acclaimed scientific journals, such as 'Nature', and 'Science' (6 out of 42 interviewees). As Interviewee 28 stated: "the results are positive indicators that even though our university did not originate on a strong structure for scientific research, this reality has changed recently, as the university is spending billions annually on scientific research". It is important to note that this sum was for both male and women's sections at KAU, and that there is a lack of gender equality with regards to budgetary allocation. As Interviewee 1 noted: "However, for the women's section, the financial support is very weak compared to the male department because budgetary powers are in the hands of senior management in the male section".

When asked whether there was an established committee involved in the strategic planning process, most of the respondents answered that several people were involved,

but that the academics' involvement is limited to complaints or suggestions that are not always addressed, as the planning process is mainly ensured by the management at KAU. The committee dedicated to developing and ensuring viable strategic planning consists of two parties. First, the Advisory Board for the President of the University supervises the coordination between the planning phase and the allocation of financial resources, so that budgeting is in accordance with the plans designed prior to the start of the academic year. Second, a group consisting of eight employees from the administration sector analyse subjects such as institutional research, analysis of financial resources, the development of the annual budget and of the emergency finances. Commenting upon the budgetary process employed at KAU, the interviewees expressed their general dissatisfaction, as the women's section of KAU had struggled with recurring economic issues in the past, and there had been financial shortages when it came to promoting research. At the same time, different officials continued to disregard individual budgeting for their departments, thus generating confusion in budget management due to unplanned solicitations that exceeded the projected emergency funds. Consequently, employees emphasised the need for KAU to introduce policies and mechanisms that demand individual department budget planning.

Nevertheless, the management of the women's section of KAU realised the importance of connecting the distribution of budget to their strategic plans, as per NCAAA indications: "Sufficient flexibility must be provided for effective management and responses to unexpected events and this flexibility must be combined with appropriate accountability and reporting mechanisms" (NCAAA, 2012b: 199), and in the past five years had successfully implemented strategies that more effectively ensured sufficient funding was available throughout the academic year. For example: "The women's section was no longer satisfied with the budgets allocated by the Ministry of Education, but has gotten additional support from the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology through its national plan for science, technology and innovation" (Interviewee 5). Since 2008, a more active strategic budget planning and management department had been established at KAU (KAU, 2013a).In this regard, while more than half of the respondents (27 out of 42) believed that the successful application of a strategic planning process was attainable, it could not be guaranteed in the future, as some concerns were expressed in regards to the process being poorly conceived and supervised. For example, issues were raised regarding the efficiency of management of information systems, which are not regularly

updated (Interviewees 3, 9, 14, 30); the efficiency of the organisational structure of the University, as centralisation also emerged as a significant issue (Interviewees 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 12, 15, 23, 30) and the availability and appropriate distribution of financial resources, as the women's section of KAU were allocated a considerably smaller budget for research and resources than the men's section (Interviewees 1, 2, 4, 9, 26, 28, 33).

In summary, the majority of interviewees agreed that more financial support was needed in the women's section of KAU, and that the centralisation of budgeting hindered the promotion of research: "We suffer from a lack of funding for research and activities in the women's section, and priority in the budget for the activities of the men's section" (Interviewee 4). Nevertheless, the participants generally agreed that the establishment of workshops, seminars and conference workshops [local, Arab, international] at the university, continuously stimulate the participation in the preparation, working papers, studies and research, as well as providing financial support to the members of that body (Interviewee 16). The introduction of the QA system was seen as having improved budget administration, as surveys of all internal practices revealed a lack of funding that needed alternative solutions, while the examinations helped improve resource distribution.

4.1.6. Research

In the KSA, the Ministry of Higher Education classifies research as one of the four main objectives of higher education, as it can contribute to the enhancement of living conditions (Althwaini, 2005). The NCAAA standards regarding research state: "All staff teaching higher education programs must be involved in sufficient appropriate scholarly activities to ensure they remain up to date with developments in their field, and those developments should be reflected in their teaching" (NCAAA, 2012b: 201). Moreover, research has been considered as one of the most important aspects of Saudi education for a lengthy period of time (Ali, 1987).

In the women's section of KAU, the university's system and educational foundations incorporate components of scientific research, including: support offered to supervise scientific research projects; regulations that encourage participation in regional and global specialised conferences; symposia and workshops within the university; training courses that target project implementation and research; research evaluation procedures and

assistance offered to oversee the publication of specialised international journals. Furthermore, the research performance of academic staff is evaluated through several methods, including international recognition of the work done in various domains, comparative benchmarking against the research done by similar institutions, both national and international, as well as a comparison with research carried out in previous years. A committee officially formed by KAU monitors and evaluates all programmes, reports and published literature, in order to assess whether the research findings are genuine and aptly conceived. Therefore, the research outputs of the institution are evaluated for importance and relevance, in an attempt to create reports of the institution's achievements (Materu, 2007: 3, Woodhouse, 1999, Cheslock et al., 2016).

Considering that "staff research contributions must be recognized and reflected in evaluation and promotion criteria" (NCAAA, 2012b: 201), the researcher inquired into whether there is a definite incentive and promotion system employed in the women's section of KAU, and discovered that academic members who carried out research projects and published research in international journals were rewarded and acclaimed in the university, while certain measures had been implemented so that research was promoted. A member of the internal self-evaluation committee declared that "the establishment of the scientific journal within the university was implemented for the dissemination of research, studies and working papers produced by the faculty members in the women's section at KAU" (Interviewee 28).Another participant noted that the interest in scientific research and publishing scientific papers had risen during recent years, after the official implementation of the self-evaluation system at KAU, as people were more inclined to self-improvement and to be committed to the progress of their work.

According to the QAA (2016f: 10), "higher education providers develop, implement and keep under review codes of practice for research degrees, which are widely applicable". In this regard, during the past few years several changes had been implemented in the area of research promotion, namely more training programs and informational methods, in order to address the rather low number of active researchers: "KAU's improved training system supports the conduct of research and studies emanating from the needs of the fields, while activating and employing results" (Interviewee 25). Therefore, the university was supportive of research projects and had amended its methodology in the research implementation process. The direct impact can be seen in the improvements

made in the field of scientific research. For example, several teams were established from different disciplines, such as the faculties of science and information technology, pharmacy, nursing, medicine and engineering, and the majority of the projects were designed to meet the needs of the local community. During the 2011-2013 period, the university launched a multitude of scientific conferences, workshops and scientific seminars. Support for attendance at scientific conferences and other research activities conducted at KAU has had a significant impact on the dissemination of knowledge, which in turn has attracted distinguished researchers from around the world, thus contributing to the promotion of the university at the local, regional and international levels.

According to the report issued by the King Abdul Aziz City for Science and Technology (KACST, 2013: 18) containing indicators in the Kingdom during the 2008 – 2012 period, KAU was ranked number 2 in terms of papers and publications. In this regard, the interviews reveal that the majority of publications were submitted by the male section of KAU, and that the situation in the women's section needs improvement, especially considering the importance expressed by the NCAAA regarding the involvement in research: "staff teaching in post graduate programs or supervising higher degree research students must be actively involved in research in their field" (NCAAA, 2012b: 201). Senior manager interviewees emphasised that the Strategic Plan is for KAU to become a distinguished research university by international standards, to develop Saudi society and elevate it to an academic society characterised by curiosity and a commitment to knowledge.

Another relevant factor when evaluating research processes is to examine whether student research is advocated and competently implemented, by assessing whether the "responsibilities and entitlements of students undertaking research degree programmes" (QAA, 2016f: 15) exist in practice and whether "clearly defined mechanisms for monitoring and supporting research student progress" (QAA, 2016f: 21) are present, including the appointment of competent and available supervisors to support the students' research evolution, as all these criteria contribute to a system that effectively encourages the delivery of quality services. In this regard, the interview data suggests that levels of student research in the women's section of KAU are far from satisfactory. Several participants emphasised the low levels of participation in research and scientific

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publications from both undergraduate and master degree students, despite the university's attempts to promote research projects and scientific methodology. As one lecturer stated: "the employment of scientific research in the development of study plans and academic programs at the university had very weak results" (Interviewee 33). On the other hand, one member of the administrative staff pointed out that although research promotion within the student community had not met its target [i.e. solely half of the students approached were interested in conducting research], the management at KAU tried to use student feedback to assess the areas that required replacement or modification, so as to improve the techniques and approaches deployed to attract students to research projects, as "the development of scientific research has the potential to broaden their horizons" (Interviewee 9). Correspondingly, whilst the implementation of the QA system according to the NCAAA standards in the women's section of KAU had not necessarily hindered the research process among students, nor did it bring about any improvement. Therefore, KAU needs to introduce a separate evaluation system dedicated to analysing its research procedures, such as that suggested by the QAA (2016f).

4.2. Brief Review of the Findings

This final section aims to compile, summarise and clarify the key findings in this chapter, by taking into consideration both the interview data and relevant documents and literature pertaining to the women's section of KAU, investigated throughout the entirety of this chapter.

The following key findings were identified:

- SE is a result of policy borrowing;
- SE is not a prevalent practice. SE is done in 'pockets', as some members of the personnel identify the advantages of SE, while others notice the disadvantages;
- Individual SE is perceived as a great tool in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning by many academics, while
- Institutional SE and QA procedures in general are viewed as burdensome by nearly half the participants, academics and administrators alike;

- SE (both institutional and individual SE) improved teaching and learning, strategic planning and development, staff employment and recruitment, resource distribution and research;

- Improper use of student feedback, scant consideration for stakeholder feedback in general, centralisation, mistrust and communication deficiencies, the lack of a congruent quality culture, poorly designed mission, vision and objectives and the lack of training emerged as the main issues that encumbered SE, QA and accreditation

The following sections further discuss these key findings, by addressing the advantages and disadvantages provided by the self-evaluation process after its implementation at KAU, the changes that emerged following the establishment of the self-evaluation process and perceptions relating to the QA processes in the university, in order to illustrate the impact of the self-evaluation process on quality assurance at KAU.

4.2.1. Advantages and Disadvantages of the Self-Evaluation Process

Undoubtedly, the introduction of the self-evaluation process in the women's section of KAU generated both positive and negative effects. Nevertheless, it is important to realise that while the advantages detected at KAU increase the quality of services provided, there are numerous disadvantages and obstacles to overcome.

Among the most significant and visible advantages of the SE process at KAU, is the improvement of the teaching and learning procedures through the promotion of critique. This improvement has been accomplished by lecturers (13 out of 42 interviewees) acknowledging that they must strive for continuous improvement, through research and through routine inspections of the curriculum, so that the university can guarantee a quality-oriented education that corresponds to contemporary international standards. At the same time, it is also clear that the teaching and learning process could be further improved through the establishment of a feedback-oriented strategy that can promote conversations between students and the personnel at KAU and address two significant obstacles, which are the limited communication between stakeholders at KAU and the

misuse of student feedback,. In addition, both teaching and learning and the management of the women's section of KAU could be enhanced through a rigorous implementation of SE for KAU's administrators, given that the research found requirements, for example, that employment requirements were ambiguous and that personal SE surveys were not used among managerial employees (i.e. the Dean and senior leaders), employees who play a central role in reviewing the university's curriculum. In addition, institutional SE positively influenced the strategic planning and development of the university, staff employment and recruitment practices, resource distribution and research, as the administration acknowledged the need to implement procedures that promote quality enhancement. Therefore, the SE process improves quality assurance, as it systematises internal administrative procedures more efficiently, it identifies obstacles in strategic planning and promotes collaboration.

However, the introduction of SE in the women's section of KAU also had adverse effects, mainly due to management techniques employed at the university on the one hand, and the attitudes of the people who were implicated in the process on the other. Both the QA and SE processes were seen by many of the administrative staff as not having a positive impact, but these were staff who had relied on outdated methods such as centralisation in order to guarantee success and who were reluctant to endorse change due to its long-term implications involving restructuring existing evaluation processes and QA systems (4 out of 42 interviewees). So although individual SE procedures were appreciated by lecturers, SE's potential impact was limited to the academic domain and did not extent to improving organisational strategies. Furthermore, this has been exacerbated by the general lack of experience among KAU staff members in applying the feedback gathered through self-evaluation and feeding it through to all departments that would benefit from the process, such as improving the communication between different stakeholders (i.e. 27 out 42 interviewees). However, at the time of writing, the university had started to introduce more training in order to address this issue. In addition, it is important to consider the number of people employed at KAU who participate in the QA process, which includes employees who do not often participate in QA-related workshops or trainings, such as administrative or support staff. Lastly, the interviews revealed that some members of staff (9 out of 42 interviewees thought that some QA practices (i.e. audits, institutional SE procedures, evaluations, student feedback) were improperly conceived or being applied incorrectly. This suggests that the SE process at KAU would

benefit from a re-examination in terms of its effectiveness and usefulness, so that the employees do not feel burdened by the frequency of the evaluations.

4.2.2. Changes Emerging from the SE Process

The implementation of the SE process in the women's section of KAU galvanised a culture of self-improvement, and as part of this, the number of trainings and workshops provided by the university vastly increased, as did collaborative courses between KAU and national or international universities. Furthermore, the governing staff recognised the importance of enhancing the teaching and learning process through facilitating individual progress. A significant majority of interviewees (29 out of 42) admitted that lecturers who implemented SE practices not only had better results in terms of improving their courses, as a result of a commitment to on-going improvement and attendance of various trainings, but also made progress in improving communication with both students and fellow employees.

The process not only improved the teaching and learning, through the promotion of research and communication between stakeholders, but also facilitated the creation of a better common identity among employees, who felt more connected than before through sharing similar standards and objectives (Interviewees 8, 11, 14, 21, 29). The general consensus among interviewees was that SE's impact was broad and comprehensive, as the process promotes cooperation, openness and performance improvement. The communication difficulties between different employees decreased, as the SE process established standardised evaluation criteria and created a new sense of unity that was non-existent in the women's section of KAU (20 out of 42 interviewees).

Lastly, since the introduction of the SE process, the governing system (led by the dean and senior managers) had become more lenient in allowing members of staff to recommend and initiate personal projects that aim to support the internal administration or otherwise alleviate the cumbersome administrative procedures that exist within the university. If in the past employees' initiatives were simply ignored, probably so as not to disturb the status quo, the situation had improved slightly, although obstacles remained (Interviewees 7, 30), and both lecturers and management had introduced several important changes to the curriculum and to the operations within the university, as a

result of the favourable circumstances that emerged during SE.

4.2.3. Perceptions Regarding the QA and SE Culture

While investigating staff perceptions of the QA process, the researcher identified a number of prevailing obstacles that hindered the implementation of said processes. Firstly, the fact that both 'quality' and QA are not clearly defined at KAU creates a discrepancy between the doctrines proposed by the senior management and their implementation. Innovation and improvement are advocated at KAU, yet no discernible assistance has been provided to promote such concepts. Therefore, academic staff (11 out of 21) expressed frustration that no administrative changes had been introduced in regards to innovation and improvement, although they had been repeatedly told that changes were being considered. Furthermore, the absence of standardised quality interpretations leads to a distorted use of the university's mission and vision, which exacerbated a lack of clarity (28 out of 42 interviewees). A majority of interviewees, for example, (i.e. 28 out of 42) stated that they employed their own understanding of mission and vision when undergoing evaluation or modifications, as opposed to applying the existing notions. Lastly, SE (with special regards to individual SE) was favourably received and well regarded by the academics due to its ability to promote self-improvement. On the other hand, the entirety of the QA process, in other words, both internal and external procedures currently employed at KAU (i.e. evaluations, assessment reports, self-assessments, audits, institutional and individual SE, student feedback, accreditation), was widely seen as burdensome, as the QA mechanisms involve individual staff members taking on numerous additional responsibilities and practices, and academics did not have the necessary training to implement said practices.

In addition, QA culture is hindered by difficulties in communication and the trust deficits that accompany those (15 out of 42 interviewees). One reason why the potential impact of SE and QA is not valued enough with regards to offering quality services is that the governing body of the women's section does not rely on stakeholder feedback, be it provided by personnel, students or other members of the community. The prevalence of mistrust between stakeholders also undermined the efficient implementation of both SE and QA processes, relying as they do on fairness and transparency to reveal the issues so

that they can be resolved (NCAAA, 2012a; 2012b; MoHE, 2013). Therefore, complaints were not exposed and employee satisfaction was not taken into account when administrative decisions were made.

Nevertheless, an understanding about the importance of consolidating a culture of self-evaluation (that is, the creation of comprehensive and widely-approved SE standards, beliefs and aims) and about its correlation to QA exists within the women's section of KAU. This is evident from the number of interviewees who acknowledged that these mechanisms are crucial to improving the services offered by the university. In this regard, the majority of academic staff interviewed (16 out of 21) seemed to have the qualification and the experience, and seemed eager to guarantee quality teaching and learning processes through SE, by regularly amending academic strategies in accordance with national and international standards. However, many academics and administrators (i.e. 19 out of 42) were doubtful that even a properly implemented SE process would have a positive impact. Overall, it would seem that SE is implemented in 'pockets', through individual initiatives, which are slowly increasing, and moving towards the creation of a culture of SE.

Initial reactions to the SE process among academics proves their commitment to offering quality services. Over half the participants (23 out of 42 interviewees) had immediately adopted such evaluations when SE was introduced to the women's section of KAU in 2012, and expressed the conviction that quality could not be achieved without a proper SE system (KAU, 2013a). Indeed, some staff members (7 out of 42 interviewees) had become so committed to assuring quality teaching through individual self-evaluation, that they not only employed these techniques in every assignment, but found it difficult to distinguish between personal evaluation and official SE policies. This is a practice that could ultimately lead to pockets of quality assurance within the university, as more staff members embrace the benefits of SE and QA methods. In this regard, the management of the women's section of KAU had attempted to devise a quality-oriented system that resonated with their employees, through the introduction of trainings related to QA and its benefits, as well as internal QA mechanisms in every department to ensure that such a system is maintained throughout the university.

To conclude this chapter which has drawn extensively on interviews with various staff members of KAU's women's section, the interviews demonstrate that although staff in

the women's section of KAU were on the whole willing to adhere to the principles of a QA system, more complex QA mechanisms, such as institutional SE, SE reports and student feedback, were not clearly understood by either academic or administrative staff (18 out of 42 interviewees). This issue has delayed the implementation of an efficient QA process. However, the situation is gradually changing, as increasingly more employees enlist in dedicated workshops and courses, while the perseverance of several staff members is shaping the QA and SE culture in the women's section of KAU.

4.2.4. Theoretical Implications of the Study

Taking into account previous literature on QA practices in Saudi universities, and especially considering the limited knowledge in this field, the study set out to explore how the newly implemented QA policies and procedures influence a less explored part of Saudi higher education: the Women's Sections. Existing QA studies conducted in the KSA do not only constitute a small number of papers, but are also quantitative in nature, and thus cannot accurately delve into specifics when discussing the successes or failures of the current national standards. The Saudi higher education system is expanding at a fast pace and the government aims to compete with international contenders, yet recent studies have not covered all relevant aspects of QA in the KSA. The study aimed to help bridge the gap in knowledge by offering insight into subjects that were explored in a limited manner, such as accreditation, self-evaluation, the impact of traditional internal policies and procedures on a modern approach to ensuring quality.

All things considered, the study has several contributions and implications to the quality assurance in higher education literature, as follows: first, it contributes to the deeper understanding of QA, SE and accreditation systems in Saudi HEIs; second, by exploring all facets of the women's section of King Abdulaziz University, the study offers extensive theoretical insight into the women's sections of Saudi universities, which have yet to be thoroughly explored; third, by evaluating several QA models, the study contributes to the knowledge regarding the benefits and detriments of introducing various QA policies and procedures in the higher education sector; fourth, it offers a thorough perspective on the creation and development of the 'quality culture' within an institution, which raises awareness to how internal policies and stakeholders influence QA procedures.

The choice of combining the chosen research aims, theoretical background, case study and the methodology proved fruitful, as the discoveries are not only comprehensive, but also unique and new. As such, the study discusses a plethora of unexplored or insufficiently explored topics of contemporary relevance to the higher education system in the KSA. For instance, usually studies regarding the KSA are quantitative, whereas this study is qualitative in nature, and this allowed the researcher to uncover and depict not only how the QA system functions in the KSA, but also managed to understand whether the current QA system is perceived as successful by employees of Saudi HEIs. Similarly, the study allowed for the depiction of what 42 employees view as unsatisfactory, unsuitable or otherwise difficult to implement in the Saudi higher education sector. Furthermore, since the study discussed several elements of QA, such as self-evaluation, accreditation, assessment, self-assessment and student evaluation, the study vastly contributes to the existing body of knowledge regarding QA implementation and success in Saudi HEIs. In addition, taking into account the fact that typically this body of knowledge doesn't specifically refer to women's sections of Saudi universities, the research uncovers knowledge from a new perspective.

Chapter 5
Conclusion and Implications

5.1. Objectives and Data Collection

The general aim of this thesis was to explore QA practices within the women's section of King Abdulaziz University (KAU) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KAU), by conducting a study on SE practices and their impact on institutional procedures and stakeholders. The study set out to address the existing research gap pertaining to the implementation of the SE process at a women's only Saudi university, with three objectives, namely: to interpret the circumstances surrounding the introduction of the SE process; to examine the impact of SE by analysing both the positive and negative results; to offer recommendations for the improvement of QA practices at KAU.

In order to achieve these objectives, three research questions were asked:

1. How does SE relate to QA in the women's section of KAU?
2. How do internal policies and procedures in the women's section of KAU influence QA and SE?
3. How does SE influence the stakeholders of KAU and university quality enhancement?

To answer the research questions, the researcher collected relevant information from institutional documents and conducted 42 semi-structured interviews with members of staff working in the women's section of KAU.

5.2. Research Findings

Prior to answering the research questions, it is crucial to define the terms self-evaluation, quality culture and self- evaluation culture in the context of the women's section of KAU.

Self- evaluation is a procedure employed in internal QA and is divided into two categories: institutional SE and individual SE (or lecturer SE).

The former refers to a process conducted by a HEI with the purpose of examining the efficiency, relevance, strengths and weaknesses of internal protocols, policies and practices (Adelman, 2005: 202). The latter is the process employed by members of personnel (especially lecturers) as a means to examine the adequacy, effectiveness and applicability of their specific knowledge, performance and beliefs, with the purpose of professional improvement (Airasian and Gullickson, 2006: 186).

Quality culture is a concept that incorporates the standards, characteristics, beliefs and objectives of stakeholders and programmes in relation to quality (Alharbi, 2015; Gryna and Watson, 2001). As such, the SE culture can be defined as the comprehensive and cohesive understanding of the standards, characteristics, aims and perceptions related to the SE process employed at a university.

5.2.1. *How does self-evaluation relate to quality assurance at the women's section of KAU?*

In order to answer the first research question, the study examined the relationship between the SE process and QA in the women's section of KAU. This relationship includes the manner in which the introduction of SE procedures promoted quality assurance and improvement, whether the SE procedures managed to ensure on-going quality practices and the manner in which SE shaped quality culture.

As discussed in chapter 2, quality assurance is a complex term that includes every policy, process, activity and mechanism employed by an institution to ensure that the desired quality of a product or service is delivered to the consumer (Glanville, 2006, in Štimac and Katić, 2015: 582). In this regard, the standards for an efficient QA system contained in NCAAA (2011: 7) indicate the advantages of employee interactions being based on trust, as well as of a shared commitment to quality. However, the researcher's findings show that in the women's section of KAU, trust is a scarce resource, especially between different groups of stakeholders (i.e. staff and students, managers and staff, etc.).

Regarding trust, the EFQM excellence model emphasises the need for leadership to "facilitate positive change in the pursuit of excellence" (EFQM, 2003: 18). Borich (1990: 31) suggests that both leadership and management are the two most vulnerable elements when implementing QA procedures, as belief and trust – in both QA and co-workers – is more likely to be attained through proper guidance. Furthermore, according to Crookston (2012: 38), trust can be difficult to acquire when co-workers – regardless of position – do not envision each other as people that are part of the same team, who have strengths and can help lead each other towards "productive life patterns". When asked whether they trust their co-workers, only two (out of 42) interviewees stated they trusted their co-workers completely, the majority (26 out of 42) gave an affirmative response, all be it with reservations, while the remainder stated that they did not trust their co-workers, arguing that while working together does provide a degree of trust, every employee ultimately pursues their personal interests.

In terms of engagement and commitment to change, the interviews show an inconsistency between the suggestions made by top management, and their implementation. One reason for the inconsistency is that members of other staff groups, who had agreed to engage in certain QA procedures (i.e. teacher self-evaluation), seldom implemented these procedures. Another reason is that managerial staff, who claimed to support innovation and recommendations, did not always provide the necessary leadership to facilitate change. For example, some participants complained that certain changes they were promised regarding decentralisation and internal QA reforms, did not materialize. Thus, although the self-evaluation process was welcomed in KAU as an approach to increase quality assurance in the university, it did not have an easy start, as inherent mistrust between individual members and the lack of adequate leadership resulted in an atmosphere in which SE results were challenged and contested.

Centralisation has always been seen as a burden by the interviewed lecturers at KAU, and the introduction of a standardised QA process and of institutional SE procedures served to highlight the disadvantages of the existing administrative structure. With this in mind, when asked to identify the obstacles preventing a successful QA policy, the majority of the administrative interviewees discussed the necessity of reforming the current governance, their concerns focused largely on the perceived rigidity of the centralised structure. According to Holmes (1993: 7), centralisation does not encourage research and project development; yet these are important elements not only in terms of QA policies,

but also in strengthening the quality of services offered and in obtaining accreditation. In this regard, several employees had attempted to advance a number of research programmes or projects, yet were denied authorisation by KAU officials. Of course, one cannot assume that all projects put forward merited authorisation, yet what interviewees objected to was that said projects were rejected without explanation or justification. As discussed in the analytical framework, a HEI's success is influenced by the dedication and development of the institution's personnel, who need to be incentivised to reach their maximum potential (EFQM, 2003: 22). Self-evaluation is an important element in achieving this goal, as it uncovers fallacies in the existing academic practice of the university, thus incentivising progress. However, although the SE procedures in place at KAU exposed deficiencies in terms of research and development, these deficiencies were not addressed in a way that enabled the progress of quality. For example, training had been introduced to encourage research, yet courses alone cannot guarantee positive results. In addition, the interview data revealed that resource allocation is still unsatisfactory in the women's section of KAU, as the section is allocated a smaller budget for equipment and research than its male counterpart.

People are typically more satisfied and dedicated to ensuring institutional QA in environments where the management is both sympathetic or lenient and appreciative of their efforts (Weber and Dolgova-Dreyer, 2007, Westerheijden, Stensaker and Rosa, 2007: 196). In the women's section of KAU, decision-making freedom is not attained due to the centralised government, while the lack of justification surrounding programme rejection is also detrimental to the employees. All programmes need to be first approved by the dean of the men's section of KAU but not all rejections by the dean are accompanied with justifications, which perpetuates communication problems and does not encourage the development of new programmes. The interviews revealed that staff in the women's section wanted to improve, yet because they were not involved in the decision-making process of programme approval – due to centralisation – they could not effectively do so. Rejection makes people feel unappreciated for their efforts, especially if no explanation is given for the rejection. Furthermore, some of the academics whose proposals were turned down were sceptical of both SE and QA, as they felt the processes were not designed to alleviate their predicament. As a result, employees described becoming demoralised and not attempting to devise other programmes. Other interviewees, however, did have success in introducing several restructuring initiatives

that optimised the performance of employees, thus suggesting that despite the disadvantages of centralisation, it is possible to develop projects based on self-evaluation reports that intend to enhance QA practices. Nonetheless, structural centralisation appears to be one of the main issues at KAU, the other being the communication gaps that accompany said structure.

Another important part of QA is employee satisfaction, as it directly influences the quality of the services offered, be they related to the teaching and learning process, to the management of resources and policies, to the creation of beneficial programmes and projects that can secure accreditation, or to the aspiration of undertaking research (Westerheijden et al., 2007: 195-196). Therefore, the researcher wanted to know how satisfied KAU's staff members were. Some lecturers were content, and they pointed out that the self-evaluation questionnaires can be used to review employee satisfaction. However, some managers raised the issue that SE questionnaires can also be biased instruments for measuring satisfaction. For example, questionnaires were often only partially completed and questions that requested feedback (as opposed to box ticking) were either only answered very briefly or ignored entirely. Furthermore, the majority of lecturers in the women's section of KAU do not partake in the decision-making process (according to 35 out of 42 interviewees) and are constrained by internal policies, thus lowering their satisfaction overall. Interviewees also discussed their dissatisfaction with fund allocations for research and department budget planning. Within these discussions, reference was made to the lack of open communication and the lack of constructive criticism, as well as the previously mentioned problem of mistrust. Interviewees saw these issues as obstacles to the effective application of SE and QA processes, which depend on fairness and transparency to discover and resolve problems.

I. Quality Culture through Self-Evaluation

According to Alharbi (2015), Gryna and Watson (2001), quality culture is a term that encompasses the general beliefs, standards and characteristics of stakeholders and programmes. Owen (2013: 28) presents quality culture as a dynamic component of QA, in that it encourages regular revisions and changes, in pursuit of improving the quality of an institution. Loukkola and Zhang (2010: 9) argue that the reason HEIs should adopt an

internal quality culture is because of the need to acknowledge both institutional habits and cultural circumstances.

Research shows that the definition of quality and the purpose of QA are perceived differently among stakeholders (Anderson, 2006, Harvey and Green, 1993, Elassy, 2015). Similarly, Albaqami's (2015: 65-66) research conducted at KAU confirms the diversity of perceptions about quality. Respondents in her research offered numerous interpretations of quality, such as customer satisfaction, performance improvement and increased accountability. Like Elassy (2015: 255), Albaqami discovered a relationship between definitions of quality and the role of an individual within the university, as different groups of stakeholders (i.e. researchers, administrators, students, academics) had different interpretations of quality and QA. Findings in this study are similar: there was no consensus about the meaning of quality, and neither quality nor QA were thought to be clearly defined in the KAU literature, resulting in a gap between the mission statement developed by the management and the implementation of said doctrines by the employees. This was found to result in misinterpretations and misuse of the university's mission, vision and objectives. Members of staff had different understandings, and several administrators admitted to applying their personal perceptions of the mission or vision into their daily tasks.

In this regards, the QA system at women's section of KAU has been set up to take into account general internal and external concerns, yet does not focus on developing a cohesive quality culture or promoting a common definition of quality. In contrast, in the EFQM model establishing an appropriate definition of quality is seen as a key element in facilitating the implementation of QA (Westerheijden, Stensaker and Rosa, 2007: 196). Indeed discrepancies in definitions of quality and a lack of acknowledgement of different viewpoints can have negative consequences on a HEI, such as the decrease in the quality of services offered (Marra, 2000).

One approach to creating a homogeneous quality culture is the use of the SE process. SE can be employed to verify the efficiency of existing enterprises, policies and processes, as well as to promote a quality culture within an institution. Furthermore, the versatility and complexity of a properly planned SE process allows a HEI to employ either institutional self-evaluations, which analyse the efficiency of internal protocols, policies and practices (Adelman, 2005: 202), or teacher self-evaluations, which monitor and review the quality

of teaching performance with the purpose of self-improvement (Airasian and Gullickson, 2006: 186). With this in mind, MacBeath (2005a: 56) suggests that SE should be a process of discovery and the creation of new opportunities, while too often it is more similar to a checklist of tasks. As such, SE should be viewed as a tool rather than a goal in itself.

According to this research's analytical framework, quality culture is an important element in the successful implementation of QA (Hart and Shoolbred, 1993, Mail et al., 2014). Furthermore, quality culture must be shaped in a manner that is consistent with stakeholders' perspectives in order to ensure cohesion and reduce misunderstandings (Harvey and Green, 1993). Both a quality culture and a SE culture, meaning the combined, comprehensive and cohesive understanding of the beliefs, aims and standards related to the SE process in the university, were taking shape, all be it slowly, in the women's section of KAU. A significant number of staff had attended SE training and some international standards were also adopted. However, this research also found that while some of the employees had adapted SE practices into their everyday activities and were confident in applying their knowledge to official visits from NCAAA representatives; a large number of staff were uncooperative or cooperated reluctantly (22 out of 42 interviewees).

The introduction of SE in the women's section of KAU has helped provide valuable information in regards to the university's policies and practices and has revealed certain flaws in the organisation and implementation of QA processes (such as the use of stakeholder feedback, approaches to institutional and individual SE, training), which have shaped the current quality standards of the university (KAU, 2013a; 24 out of 42 interviewees). From discussions with participants, it would seem that the introduction of SE in 2012 has had, for the most part, positive effects on the institution (i.e. in teaching and learning, research, faculty employment and management), as well as on the personnel (i.e. personal, professional and academic developments), despite initial confusion and reluctance to engage in the process. Prior to the introduction of SE, the women's section of KAU depended on several committees designed to oversee the administrative and academic procedures, yet the verification process, which consisted in audits and external evaluations, was not in accordance with the NCAAA (2012a; 2012c) guidelines. The introduction of self-evaluation has allowed the university to introduce new internal benchmarking practices, by comparing the annual performance indicators, in addition to

comparing the performance of the women's section with other universities (KAU, 2013a). Initial SE reports revealed the strengths and weaknesses of the women's section of KAU, and provided the foundation for developing more efficient internal policies, as well as more advantageous external collaborations. As one interviewee stated, the SE process did encourage a review of the university's strategic planning, thus triggering improvements in both organisational and QA processes. At the same time, the initial SE process raised issues regarding the quality culture that had not been previously considered, such as discrepancies in perceptions of quality and in the implementation of QA procedures.

This being said, KAU's interest in SE has mostly revolved around institutional self-evaluation, to the neglect of support for personal SE. A key obstacles has been a pervasive lack of transparency, such as the administration's refusal to share data gathered from the students' evaluations. Anderson (2006, in Elassy, 2015) discusses the importance of persuading the academic staff of the benefits of QA processes, including SE, finding that the majority of academics were concerned that QA mechanisms would encumber their daily teaching activities, by adding to their workload. Although nearly half of the lecturers interviewed for this research (19 out of 42) had not engaged with the process, the research also showed that academic personnel at KAU were gradually adopting a culture of self-evaluation.

At the time of this research, the SE process in the women's section of KAU consisted of both institutional SE and individual SE, which included examining central organisational and academic elements, such as administration, research, teaching and learning, accreditation, resource management and quality assurance. Thus, a rising culture of self-evaluation was found at KAU, and the interviews revealed that a portion of staff members were increasingly committed to quality enhancement – although this number is low. For example, the initial positive reaction of some academics to the SE processes reflects their commitment to providing quality services and improving the service offer. Indeed, in the initial stages of implementation, some members of staff adopted SE techniques into their daily routine, prior to the university urging them to do so (i.e. 4 out of 42 interviewees). This kind of engagement has contributed to the development of a quality culture and has helped to promote the benefits of SE to other employees (i.e. 7 out of 42 interviewees), even though reluctance persists. The adoption of SE influenced management to create a quality oriented practice that reinforced the practice of personal and institutional self-evaluation, and by providing specialised trainings and integrating QA mechanisms in

every department. Henceforth, increasing numbers of employees have been participating in courses, trainings and workshops. The SE process is considered – by some respondents from both administrative and academic staff (i.e. 15 out of 42) – to be one of the most positive internal changes in the promotion of quality and self-evaluation cultures, especially considering its potential to bring about positive changes. To exemplify, four members of the administration, as well as numerous other employees have adopted on-going self-evaluation into their routine, in order to improve both the quality of the services offered and their own expertise. Overall, interviewees concurred that self-evaluation is an important part of QA, and that the senior administration was committed to integrating SE in the daily activities of all employees (Interviewee 6), with the purpose of forming a culture of self-evaluation. A longer period of time will be needed for the quality and SE culture to spread to all members of staff.

II.   Quality Assurance through Self-Evaluation

Frazer (1992: 18-19) argues that there are three prerequisites to enhancing the SE process: employing the external assistance of experts, making use of international standards to supply the best standards of practice, and partaking in specific self-evaluation training, to clarify the purpose and importance of SE.

The majority of interviewees (33 out of 42) agreed that there is an indisputable rapport between self-evaluation and quality assurance, especially in the women's section of KAU. According to several respondents, SE is an approach that is most helpful in developing quality. In this regard, senior managers discussed their intentions of changing the SE processes, so that existing QA policies could also be improved. They also mentioned noticing an increase in lecturers' commitment to obtaining quality results since the implementation of SE processes.

Lyndal (1994: 109) argues that one benefit of the SE process is that it involves teachers in reviewing the effectiveness of the work they do. To illustrate, those lecturers interviewed who were using SE on an on-going basis confirmed that steady progress was being made in terms of the quality of teaching and learning, when comparing their students' results with those of previous years, as well as their own academic results (such as research). Furthermore, the administrative staff noticed differences in the teaching and learning

procedures adopted by lecturers who had embraced SE compared to those who were reluctant to engage. Differences included more favourable feedback from student evaluations, enhancement of the curriculum and a higher inclination towards research and personal improvement for the lecturers. According to Pennington and O'Neil (1994: 17), to maintain high levels of quality in teaching and learning, academics should strive to continuously improve their skills and knowledge by adopting a critical perspective towards their own practices.

Self-evaluation may help people become more conscious of their decisions, of their faults and competences, thus encouraging personal, interpersonal, academic and administrative growth (McMillan and Hearn, 2008, Kitsantas, Reiser and Doster, 2004). In the case of KAU, following the initial SE process, the management, recognising the utility of SE procedures, introduced SE trainings and workshops, with the aim of ensuring a high level of the quality of education by enhancing academic growth (Interviewee 2). As a result, an increasing number of employees were participating in on-going QA and SE training, in order to gain a better understanding of the specific quality- oriented procedures and regulations. The study's findings indicate that, through dedication and perseverance, some academics in the women's section of KAU were in the process of increasing quality standards, stakeholder satisfaction, as well as securing a sustainable culture of quality and SE. However, it is crucial to note that this was true for pockets of the university rather than being universally the case. A committed minority were endeavouring to introduce a new approach to and new direction for how QA practices are perceived at KAU. Thus, the rate of progress was slow, constrained by scepticism and simple non-engagement.

To conclude and summarise the findings from KAU, the relationship between quality assurance and self-evaluation refers to the idea that it is QA that is perceived as a goal in itself, while SE is seen as one a tool in attaining that goal. The introduction and on-going utilisation of SE within the women's section of the university produced both opportunities and impediments. Among the benefits of the SE process was an improvement in the teaching and learning process in the form of personal, professional and academic improvements for the lecturers, limited by the fact that student feedback was viewed as unnecessary. This in turn has led to the creation and promotion of a SE and self-critical culture. Teacher SE has helped too in creating a more research-oriented

mentality, as well as a more critical view of quality standards, thus ultimately increasing the quality of services offered. Furthermore, SE has improved QA assurance through a systemisation of administrative procedures, through generating valuable feedback about the obstacles to strategic planning. At the same time, SE has encumbered the QA process in the women's section of KAU as both institutional and personal SE are still viewed by some as procedures that are too time consuming. Moreover, lack of experience in utilising the feedback gathered through SE in some departments implies, to a certain degree, that the SE process is not useful enough to be maintained. This is particularly so for members of staff, who do not perceive the SE process as a valuable component of QA, but prefer to rely on external evaluations, audits and national accreditation for ensuring and improving quality.

5.2.2. *How do the internal policies and procedures at the women's section of KAU influence quality assurance and the self-evaluation process?*

Prior to addressing this research question, it is important to note current trends in QA practices in HE, and the fact that in recent years Saudi HE has come to recognise the benefits that may result from the globalisation and internationalisation of QA (Donn and Al-Manthri, 2010: 102; Al-Ohali and Burdon, 2013: 161-162; MoHE, 2013: 68-70; KAU, 2013a: 9). This has led to a pressure to internationalise HE in the KSA, as HEIs strive to become more competitive and diverse (Ziguras, 2011; King, Marginson and Naidoo, 2011). As a result, increasingly, Saudi universities are engaged in policy borrowing, especially with regards to QA- related issues which have been insufficiently explored in the KSA, such as SE, accreditation and administrative procedures. The introduction of SE in the women's section of KAU is a direct response to these trends. Although policy borrowing can have advantages, in that it involves using existing and tested frameworks for implementing a policy or practice, Turbin (2001) and Portnoi (2016) warn that if the original social, cultural, political and economic circumstances of the procedures are altered too much in order to fit new circumstances, policy borrowing may have dire consequences.

QA and SE at KAU have been influenced by its internal policies, some of which have been adapted to fit international practices. These policies refer to planning and monitoring, to the mission, vision and objectives, to centralisation, leadership and management, as well as to fairness and transparency, the recruitment process, and the training of employees.

I. Planning and Monitoring

The EFQM excellence model advocates the importance of establishing and following a long-term strategic plan that takes into account the present and future requests of various stakeholders (EFQM, 2003: 20). Perceived as crucial elements of QA, planning and monitoring ensures that the processes developed pay attention to stakeholder satisfaction (Hart and Shoolbred, 1993: 23).Furthermore, the process of planning and monitoring policies and strategies influences other important aspects, such as people management, process management and resource management (Calvo-Mora, Leal and Roldan, 2006: 102).

According to the EFQM model (2003: 5), management is expected to make use of a set of interdependent processes (i.e. planning, monitoring, reporting) whose objectives are to continuously ensure quality. Within all these processes, communication is key to creating a suitable plan and ensuring its success (Schloss and Cragg, 2013). Findings from the initial *Institutional Self-Study Report* (SSR) at the women's section of KAU revealed that, despite the difficulties encountered with leadership, the planning process was considered to be efficient by members of the university's administration when comparing it against key performance indicators (such as the process, financial and input indicators), especially regarding policy planning and student admissions (KAU, 2013a). Curricula planning is also perceived as advantageous by the majority of administrators, academics and students, yet the process does not involve all stakeholders.

In terms of financial planning, the Advisory Board for the President of the University oversees the coordination between planning and financial resources, while a group of eight administrators analyse the departments crucial to creating quality standards. Overall, the interviewees expressed their dissatisfaction with budget management, stating that while there is a definite organisation of funds, financial shortages are a regular occurrence and often limit the potential quality achievable in the women's section of

KAU. Interviewees argued that financial shortfalls came about because the people actively involved in research, teaching and learning were excluded from the planning process. Consequently, they emphasised the need for KAU to revise fund allocation policies, with the purpose of introducing individual department budget planning.

However, KAU SSR (KAU, 2013a) also indicated concerns regarding the adequate enforcement of institutional policies, due to the lack of well-established monitoring procedures. Furthermore, the report uncovered issues with implementing policies related to leadership, integrity, organisational climate and relationships between the men's and women's sections. As a borrowed policy, the different socio-cultural circumstances has obviously had a negative impact on the implementation and efficiency of SE, which is one of the reasons why SE is still perceived by some employees as useless or cumbersome, or is entirely misunderstood (22 out of 42 interviewees). Furthermore, according to the report (KAU, 2013a), the shortcomings encountered during the monitoring phase of SE allowed these issues to surface and linger, yet no proper arrangements were then put in place following on from the report, to address these issues, which has hindered the pursuit of QA. In addition, this research found that there had been difficulties with developing reliable monitoring and reporting standards in domains such as research, funding and management.

However, the results from the interviews also suggest that the women's section of KAU was regularly evaluating and improving its academic strategies through the introduction of both teacher and institutional SE process, thus positively influencing the teaching and learning process.

II.   Mission, Vision and Objectives

In higher education, the mission, vision and objectives are the pillars upon which the entirety of internal procedures − including QA and SE − are situated upon. They are employed in both external and internal relations, as they define the intentions of the university and influence the decision-making process. The EFQM model presents the mission and vision of a HEI as the instrument that enables the creation of a "stakeholder focused strategy" that acknowledges education sector trends (EFQM, 2003: 20). Due to the importance placed on stakeholder perceptions, a culture of quality is paramount in creating institutional standards, as a cohesive perception of institutional quality offers the

possibility of attaining optimal mission, vision and objectives (Hart and Shoolbred, 1993, Manyaga, 2008, Van Damme, 2011).

At the same time, the NCAAA standards for quality advocate the importance of developing clear and appropriate mission, vision and goals, as they are frequently employed in the planning process (NCAAA, 2012b: 227). Manyaga (2008: 171-173) states that these principles need to be formulated in such a way as to present educational purpose, self-assigned duties and defining concepts of the institution on the one hand, while also presenting the programmes relevant to attaining their objectives on the other. As discussed in chapter 4, KAU's mission, vision and objectives are perceived by many as too broad and ambiguous, and do not fulfil their purpose as portrayed by Manyaga (2008). As a result, many employees interviewed misunderstand or misused them, with some members of staff confusing mission and vision. Many interviewees believed that the majority of KAU employees were either entirely unaware of the existence of their institution having a mission and a vision, or misunderstood them, regardless of their position in the organisation. When asked to discuss the mission, vision and objectives and their usefulness in routine decision-making processes, senior administrators admitted that they either employed their own personal understanding, or a general understanding of either standard. It would appear that employees in the women's section of KAU did not use the official mission and vision to support planning and policy development (Interviewee 10), which had ultimately disrupted the development of a quality culture, as well as other QA processes, including SE.

Emphasising the importance of having a mission, a vision and goals, Hart and Shoolbred (1993: 24) suggest that institutional values need to be explicit and form a unity of purpose and belief between the people who create the statements and those who have to implement them. This sense of unity needs to be supported by feedback provided by all individuals participating in the implementation phase of the standards. This research found that while the mission, vision and objectives of the university had been revised, this revision process had not taken into account feedback, nor did the senior management inform the academic community of the discussions that took place as part of the revision process. As a result, misunderstandings between the two groups of people occurred regularly, especially in the application of QA procedures, as people tended to follow their own perceptions of the mission, vision and objectives (according to 28 out of 42 interviewees).

III. Centralisation

As discussed in chapter 4, governance in the women's section of KAU is centralised, with the Dean solely in charge of approving projects, settling disputes, addressing concerns and introducing QA mechanisms. Norris (2007: 146) argues that a highly centralised institution does not encourage innovation. Instead, its employees develop coping behaviours that hinder the implementation of favourable QA processes, leading to compliance and pretence of conformity to QA, rather than actively and willingly applying the procedure to their daily activities.

The bureaucratisation at KAU has had an impact on the workload of employees, leading to employees feeling overwhelmed. Increased workloads had a negative impact on the drive to develop reforms. At the same time, senior managers and the dean did not appear to take into consideration the operational and regulatory liabilities that a centralised system generates. For example, according to interviewees, routine documentation is also sent to the Dean for approval, contributing to an endless queue of pending paperwork and delaying the implementation of any meaningful decisions. They perceived the bureaucracy at KAU as reducing employee satisfaction and performance due to the frequent delays in achieving any results, and thus undermining the on-going implementation of QA practices.

IV. Leadership and Management

As illustrated by the EFQM excellence model, leadership ensures that QA practices are correctly implemented, by facilitating the achievement of the institutional mission and vision, and by developing internal policies that promote positive change (EFQM, 2003: 18, Tennant and Roberts, 2001, Meirovich and Romar, 2006). Similarly, in the KSA, senior administrators of HEIs are tasked with overseeing the implementation of internal activities by employing a precise governance framework consisting of reliable policies and regulations, in order to ensure institutional accountability, and stabilise planning and local initiatives (NCAAA, 2012b: 227). At the same time, leadership and management are responsible for gathering, assessing and implementing beneficial stakeholder feedback, with the goal of quality improvement (Borich, 1990: 31).

The interviews conducted in the women's section of KAU suggest that the leadership rarely takes into account stakeholder views during the decision-making process. According to Sallis (2002), customers have a decisive function in HEIs seeking accreditation. Yet the findings from KAU suggest that while various staff members can attend council meetings and boards, they are rarely invited to voice their opinions. At KAU, the dean is the one who assesses the feedback gathered from academics, decides what is of value, which then determines how much of the information is shared with whom. This means that potentially valuable feedback is missed, while stakeholder interests are not aptly evaluated, due to the sheer amount of issues that need to be addressed. Furthermore, the interviews revealed that a considerable proportion of the academics viewed the management of the university as an immovable department that rarely took into account the needs of its subordinates. This was reinforced by the reluctance with which senior manager interviewees responded to questions relating to academics' participation in the decision-making process. These differences in perceptions compounded the communication gap between groups of employees at KAU and hindered institutional SE. Overall, the lecturers' perceptions regarding leadership and management at KAU were divided: some thought the administration was carrying out its responsibilities efficiently while others complained about the management of people, of funds, of programmes and of policies.

V.   Fairness and Transparency

Given the importance of communication in the QA process, be it feedback or interactions between stakeholders, issues of fairness and transparency emerged in the process of policy implementation and SE. According to Yarbrough et al. (2011: 140), elements in the evaluation process like honest feedback are crucial for identifying shortcomings in the methodology, design and analysis of policies and programmes. Similarly, the EFQM model advocates stakeholder feedback on all internal policies, as it promotes the pursuit of excellence through stakeholder satisfaction (EFQM, 2003: 18).

This research has revealed significant differences in perceptions with regards to fairness and transparency. The lecturers thought management should communicate openly changes in policies, assessment of feedback and QA results. In contrast, the majority of senior managers thought that KAU upheld principles of fairness and transparency,

arguing that the institution shared important information regarding all programmes, policies and decisions in an accurate manner. Yet feedback from internal stakeholders was not taken into account, which indicates negligence and a difference in perceptions regarding the sharing of information. For example, student evaluations of their teachers were not fully disclosed but rather, grouped and edited so as to only portray positive feedback to the lecturers. In any case, the whole process was deemed unreliable by administrators due to the conflicting feedback. As a result, many important issues were not reflected in the institutional SE reports, suggesting that the SE process was not as comprehensive or constructive as it could have been.

Another example of differences in perceptions regarding fairness and transparency is the complaint and conflict settlement system employed at KAU. While both the KAU website and an on-campus office offer the possibility of addressing complaints, criticism is rarely conveyed to the employees, who typically find out about internal conflicts by conversing with their colleagues. Although the NCAAA (2011: 239) promotes complete disclosure when it comes to complaints, at KAU it is the dean and senior managers who decide whether to publicise the problems that occur. The secrecy surrounding complaints at KAU not only undermined the value and constructive use of stakeholder feedback, but also the fair and timely resolution of the conflict. This state of affairs had a significant negative impact on stakeholder satisfaction and QA processes.

VI.   Recruitment Process

Another vital element in implementing a reliable QA system is ensuring a suitable recruitment process exists within a HEI (NCAAA, 2012b: 239). The EFQM excellence model recommends the creation of positive people results based on the dedication and results of employees (EFQM, 2003: 30).

Since lecturers directly influence the success of the teaching and learning process, the recruitment procedures must ensure that potential candidates have the proper qualifications and experience. In this regard, the administration of the women's section at KAU recognised the importance of hiring the finest academics and were committed to using QA processes when selecting new employees (Interviewee 11). Indeed, the interviews revealed that the QA process and the recruitment process have worked interdependently at KAU. On the one side, the introduction of QA procedures and the SE

process had a positive influence on the recruitment process, as the requirements became more stringent, thus ensuring an increase in the initial level of academic expertise. The employment of qualified personnel has also improved the teaching and learning process and facilitated the development of the SE practices and quality culture.

VII. Employee Training

As with the recruitment process, enhancing employee qualifications and experience through trainings is beneficial to securing a durable QA system and institutional success (EFQM, 2003: 22). One of the means to facilitate staff development is by employing personal SE, so that individuals can identify their strengths and weaknesses and then take action to address the latter by pursuing academic, personal or interpersonal growth (McMillan and Hearn, 2008, Kitsantas, Reiser and Doster, 2004).

Thackwray (1997) argues that when it comes to training in HE, administrative and academic staff tend to be overlooked. However, this research found that through the implementation and utilisation of personal SE, the lecturers had been inspired to undertake professional training. Since the introduction of SE, KAU has organised a plethora of training courses directed towards the academics, which have included courses in research, interpersonal relations, communication, as well as courses about QA and SE, in order to promote the benefits of both processes. The majority of academic interviewees stated they were satisfied with the training offered and that participating in the courses had improved the quality of teaching through SE. The SE reports had recommended the need to strengthen employee training, and KAU responded by organising numerous courses for lecturers. On the other hand, training addressing administrative tasks was insufficient. Given that at KAU members of the management are involved in the assessment of the teaching methods and curricula, it is training dedicated to administrative members would have a significant positive impact. Thus, in order to guarantee the quality of services offered, additional trainings need to be introduced for administrators, so that the decisions they make positively impact the teaching and learning process.

5.2.3. *How does self-evaluation influence the stakeholders of KAU and university quality enhancement?*

I. The Impact of SE on the Stakeholders of KAU

Stakeholders are one of the most important elements of QA, as their feedback is crucial in determining the efficiency of the quality system adopted (Norris, 2007: 139, Frazer, 1992).At the same time, QA procedures are implemented to ensure stakeholder satisfaction (Ruben et al., 2007: 232, Hamdatu, Siddiek and Al-Olyan, 2013: 106).

According to the EFQM (2003) model an institution's pursuit of excellence can be ascertained by looking at the results that relate to its stakeholders, categorised as people results, customer results or society results.

People results refer to the development of the employees at a HEI, as they are the ones who facilitate the creation, assessment and progress of the services offered by an institution (EFQM, 2003: 30). Thus, the employees need to be provided with an optimal work environment that promotes the growth of individuals to a point where it becomes beneficial to the institution (EFQM, 2003: 22, Ritchie, 2007). Equally important is the relationship between academic staff and students, as it consolidates the institution's quality culture and promotes the sustainability of the QA system (Harvey, 2002, Komives and Woodard, 2003).

According to Pennington and O'Neil (1994: 17), continuous reflection on personal practice with the purpose of improving said practice is one of the bases of the teaching and learning process. The individual SE practices of committed academics at KAU contributed to the improvement of academic results, with lecturers introducing new teaching methods, techniques and technological resources. The interviews revealed that lecturers who adhered to the principles of SE managed to improve the quality of the teaching process, by increasing its efficiency and diversity. Thus, both students and lecturers became increasingly dedicated to obtaining better academic results. Most KAU employees who participated in the interviews (35 out of 42) acknowledged the impact of the SE process in reviewing and enhancing quality perspectives and the purpose of the institution. However, not all participants were willing to employ SE practices on a regular basis. Institutional SE in particular was seen as cumbersome or inadequately conceived

for the socio-cultural context of the university. Nevertheless, 14 out of the 21 academic participants had engaged in institutional SE, focusing on improving the quality of services offered as well as on eliminating the obstacles encountered in teaching and learning.

According to Harvey (2002) and Komives and Woodard (2003), the relationship between lecturers and students is invaluable to creating an inclusive quality culture and to developing a viable QA system. The individual SE practices employed at KAU succeeded to some extent in bridging the communication gap between lecturers and students, limited by the university's approach to student evaluations, which was to either ignore or not share them with the lecturers. SE also had a positive impact on the relationship between the academics and the administrators, as the process created a common identity among co-workers through referring to the same QA standards. Furthermore, other aspects of communication had marginally improved since the introduction of SE at the women's section of KAU, including cooperation and openness.

The SE procedures were also successful in enhancing research, as more and more academics acknowledged the importance of developing research projects and publishing academic papers in international journals. In addition, the women's section of KAU introduced a variety of training programmes that promoted the benefits of QA, SE, personal improvement through self-criticism and professional improvement through research, with the purpose of motivating the lecturers to excel in their field. Following the increased interest in research that followed the trainings, KAU established an internal scientific journal to monitor and document the increasing amount of specialised articles written by faculty members. At the time the research was carried out, research was perceived as one of the most efficient methods of achieving professional expertise and scientific conferences were regularly organised at the university.

Manyaga (2008: 165) argues that QA is not only useful in the assessment of institutional feasibility, but also that QA can positively impact a wide range of policies, processes and stakeholders. In this regard, the interviews revealed that many employees agreed that both QA and SE had had a positive impact on a variety of stakeholders and policies. For example, the implementation of SE improved administrative procedures in different departments, including accounting and the development director's office. A majority of participants (29 out of 42) praised the positive impact institutional SE had on assessing the efficiency levels of the institution's policies and programmes. Through actively

participating in institutional and personal SE, some employees developed a sense of responsibility and professionalism that was previously missing.

All things considered, the researcher found that the introduction of the SE process in the women's section of KAU had largely been beneficial in terms of developing staff skills, bridging communication gaps and fostering a more research-oriented attitude. The progress achieved at KAU is largely attributable to the academics who applied individual SE in their daily tasks, thus striving for continuous improvement of their academic, personal and interpersonal aptitudes. At the same time, while many participants agreed that institutional SE can be a positive process, some lecturers perceived the procedures of institutional SE as inadequate or burdensome, and thus did not engage with them.

Customer results take into account the perceptions and satisfaction levels of customers, in order to monitor, predict and improve services and policies (EFQM, 2003: 28). Students are considered the main customers of higher education, as they are the ones who pay for the services offered by the universities (Sallis, 2002, Sirvanci, 2004, Ahmed, 2006, Wiklund et al., 2003). As open systems, HEIs depend on external feedback for their success (Katz and Kahn, 1978: 3, Daft, Murphy and Willmott, 2010: 14). Thus, students are viewed as valuable participants in the QA process and their unique perspective on the programmes and procedures employed by a HEI can offer significant feedback that needs to be taken into account (Meirovich and Romar, 2006). More specifically, the feedback gathered from the 'customers' (i.e. students) can assist academics to enhance the quality of teaching, can be used to improve the curriculum, resources and practices that support student learning, and also to identify the strengths and weaknesses of courses and lecturers (Kember, Leung and Kwan, 2002; Harvey, 2003).

The manner in which student evaluation was being implemented in the women's section of KAU was found to be far from ideal. Firstly, feedback was gathered from students through questionnaires that were deemed not fit for purpose and some members of the personnel (i.e. 13 out of 42 interviewees) stated that student feedback is important for the university. Further inquiries into the process revealed that the administration does not impart the knowledge gathered from student evaluations equally with the members of the academic community. The lack of transparency meant lecturers were sceptical about the values of the exercise, perceiving students as not likely to answer the questions in a

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truthful, objective manner, and in any case, feedback gathered from student evaluations was rarely discussed with the entire staff. Furthermore, when negative feedback was distributed to lecturers, it was not acted upon, thus reinforcing the perception that student evaluations are unreliable or unproductive, which negatively influences the SE process, as they not only provide a succinct insight into students' expectations and satisfaction levels, but provide important information about the quality of learning resources and of different kinds of teaching, as well as identifying any recurrent problems with units, models, lectures, lecturers and the like which are obstacles to increasing quality of provision. To conclude, SE mainly impacts customer results from the perspective of the teachers who employ the SE procedures to their own practices in a manner that is relevant and beneficial for the students.

Society results refer to the process of taking into consideration society's needs and satisfaction with the institution, with the purpose of adapting and changing a university's internal policies and services to satisfy the demands from the community (EFQM, 2003: 32). According to Frazer (1992: 16) and the NCAAA (2011: 242) principles, HEIs have a responsibility to provide the community with relevant and beneficial services that reassure the stakeholders of the institution's value. In addition, open systems, part of HEIs' purpose is to fulfil the needs of society, so individual institutions must take these into account (Katz and Kahn, 1978: 3).

The researcher found that KAU had tried to satisfy the demands of the community prior to the implementation of the SE process by providing a variety of faculties that abounded in specialised equipment, qualified academics, well-designed programmes and numerous graduates. The institutional SE procedures raised awareness of the organisation's responsibility for the graduates, and the importance of their feedback in terms of recognising the changing issues and needs of society. To promote this goal, KAU introduced community responsibility and participation in social progress as essential features of the institution's mission. Acceptance of SE within KAU has been spreading slowly but steadily, with pockets of experience within the university, a trend which will lead to improvement, especially if the staff and the university accept the importance of involving all parties in quality assurance processes.

Furthermore, the SE process highlighted the connection between social progress and the research performed by students of KAU. The administration decided to develop and introduce a research culture among students, starting from undergraduates and set up programmes that involved students in discussions about community problems and social responsibility. For example, one programme for professional development taught students about the most common social concerns such as teaching and caring for children with special needs and providing service in the health industry and rehabilitation centres.

Moreover, KAU emphasises the link between scientific research and the development plan of the community, while supporting all possible planning or coordination between the community and the research conducted by the students or the academics. At the time of writing, KAU had numerous academic, cultural and scientific agreements with both national and international HEIs, stipulating that research and social feedback be shared between the members of said institutions. However, these were limited to the technical faculties, such as science, biology, IT, pharmacy, nursing and engineering. Nonetheless, the arrangements increased social involvement, as KAU students participated in the creation of new approaches in the pharmaceutical and healthcare industries, as well as in the development of solutions related to energy consumption.

II. Impact of SE on Quality Enhancement

The process of evaluation was previously considered to be a method employed to supervise policies, projects and programmes (Schwandt, 2002: 2) but has since developed into an approach to initiate and maintain quality enhancement (Wood and Dickinson, 2011: 4). Quality Enhancement (QE) is a process designed to anticipate problems and opportunities that a HEI might encounter, so that long-term perspectives regarding quality progress can be devised. Ideally, QE is a constant transformative process that relies on altering the teaching and learning process in a competitive manner (NUSE, 2002, Lomas, 2004). According to the EFQM model, several elements can contribute to enhancing quality in an institution: internal policies, the organisational quality culture and the development of research, teaching and learning (Westerheijden, Stensaker and Rosa, 2007: 196).

As previously mentioned, the introduction of SE has stimulated both the development of a more evolved quality culture and the creation of a self-evaluation culture. However, it is important to bear in mind that the SE process was solely an incentive towards a quality-driven institutional culture, rather than a complete achievement. More specifically, the misuse of student evaluations and on-going communication gaps have encumbered the creation of a cohesive culture of quality, thus the status of SE at KAU can be described as a work in progress rather than a completed achievement. In order to improve this situation, KAU launched a variety of training programmes, courses and workshops designed to motivate its staff to engage in the self-critical approach that characterises SE. It would seem from the interviews that people who attended these events seminars were more inclined to embrace these practices that stimulate continuous personal and academic growth. Individual SE has had an impact – albeit limited- on QE. By adopting SE, lecturers and administrators have been able to demonstrate their dedication to providing quality by continuously enhancing the quality of their academic practices.

In addition, the propagation of the SE process had, according to numerous interviewees, a beneficial impact on ensuring quality and the manner through which the administration perceives the improvement of quality. At the same time, since the introduction of SE, the foundations of quality, change and purpose at the university have been subjected to several reviews.SE, by analysing the strengths and weaknesses of each area of operation, has influenced the revision of institutional policies regarding research, teaching and learning, administration and academic training. Not all the shortcomings identified through the SE process have been addressed by the university but following the adoption of SE, KAU has improved its planning process, and although policy monitoring is still largely inadequate, senior managers recognise the need to refine the monitoring process to suit institutional quality enhancement.

At the same time, while the women's section of KAU has achieved a lot and the SE process has stimulated a movement towards a culture of quality, success at the time was limited to small pockets within the university, surrounded, it seems, by much resistance from a large proportion of employees.

5.3. Research Contribution

The present thesis is the only study that evaluates the implementation of SE in a women's section of a Saudi university (i.e. KAU), by taking into account all the standards issued

by the NCAAA. Although recent research has focused on QA practices in the KSA (i.e. Albaqami, 2015, El-Maghraby; 2011, Alruwaili, 2013, Onsman, 2011), few studies have focused on the impact of SE and on the development of a SE culture within Saudi universities (i.e. Darandari et al., 2009, Alzamil, 2014, Albaqami, 2015).The present study set out to bridge this research gap. Furthermore, the research has contributed to the existing body of knowledge about the industry by providing a qualitative study in a country that mostly employs quantitative research (Clark, 2006, Al-Mutairi, 2005). Lastly, the study aimed to introduce the versatility and potential benefits of the EFQM (2003) Excellence model, to the Saudi context, as it is a QA model that has not been previously considered in higher education in the KSA.

Given the purpose and scope of the research, this thesis can benefit a variety of stakeholders in the HE system. Firstly, the thesis presents the perceptions of administrators, lecturers and students in the women's section of KAU, and can thus inform decision-makers at KAU about SE's impact. Secondly, this study can be used by other Saudi universities who aim to introduce a SE system, as it details the opinions of stakeholders and presents the benefits and disadvantages of introducing such procedures. Thirdly, the MoHE in the KSA has aimed to revise the existing QA standards and requirements, and since the study offers a depiction of NCAAA's current standards in relation to SE, the findings can reveal the areas that could be improved. Lastly, the study may be employed by other scholars and experts as a means of understanding the intricacies of the implementation of SE in a Saudi university.

5.4. Practical Recommendations

A number of practical recommendations arise from this study of SE practices, QA procedures, internal policies and stakeholder interactions in the women's section of KAU. Given the circumstances encountered at KAU, the researcher suggests the following issues to would benefit the SE process and the progress of quality.

First and foremost, the women's section of KAU would benefit from the adoption of QA standards that are extensively researched prior to their implementation. More specifically, KAU and Saudi universities in general – as has been recommended elsewhere (Donn and

Al-Manthri, 2010, Al-Ohali and Burdon, 2013, Bardy and Willoughby, 2016) – should strive towards the creation of QA and SE standards that are suitable for the socio-cultural context of the KSA. These standards could be based on the EFQM excellence model, as it promotes a more efficient approach to management and the development of quality through feedback evaluation.

Equally important is for KAU to provide its employees with the optimal conditions that will foster self-improvement. For this reason, the researcher emphasises the need for the administration to openly present and discuss student feedback with the entirety of the staff, in order to encourage self-criticism and increase lecturer expertise. It is imperative that the staff of KAU understands the importance of student feedback, which needs to be honest and continually gathered (Leckey and Neill, 2001, Harvey 2003, Kember, Leung and Kwan, 2002). As such, the administrators of KAU need to work with the lecturers, as well as the students, towards building an open and secure channel of communication that is mutually respected and endorsed by all the people involved. To begin this process, a student evaluation questionnaire needs to be created that encompasses all the issues that impact the courses, including programme administration and budgeting which is especially important in technical programmes. Afterwards, it is crucial that the feedback gained from students is made available to the lecturers, and that it is discussed and taken into consideration during the planning stages. Thus, student feedback can be employed to enhance the teaching and learning process.

Moreover, considering the difficulties in communication encountered at KAU, it is recommended that the university not only ensures that it takes account of stakeholder feedback, but also to create opportunities to improve communication between different types of stakeholders (i.e. management-academics, management-students, academics-students). For example, the Hoshin Kanri method suggests the introduction of the Delphi Technique based on open group communication (Tennant and Roberts, 2001). The Delphi technique is predicated on honesty and critical evaluation, both of which would benefit the pursuit of quality at KAU. Most importantly, the leaders of KAU have stated their interest in promoting QA, yet their methods seem to be rooted in strategies that are no longer sustainable, and while the leaders want to ensure the progress of quality, there is a need for appropriate instruments that can address the issues of mistrust and dishonesty. Thus, the researcher believes that the adoption of the Delphi technique could provide the necessary conditions for creating QA methods that are based on open and honest debate.

Furthermore, the method also positively impacts the decision-making process, leadership and management, responsibility and determines competence levels among employees, with the goal of identifying training needs (Nworie, 2011).

In this regard, another way of improving the quality of services offered by the women's section of KAU would be to offer research training. Since the implementation of SE, research and development has increased significantly, yet the SE report also shows that the women's section falls short when compared to international standards. A culture of research is of utmost importance in the process of ensuring quality overall and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in particular (Woodhouse, 1999, Cheslock et al., 2016, Materu, 2007). The introduction of more varied courses and workshops for both faculty members and students could help the university to consolidate its credentials. For example, training courses and workshops could be developed for faculty members and students on how to prepare research project proposals and how to manage affiliated issues, such as budgeting, duration and resources. These trainings should include discussions about the importance of research, information about types of research, procedures regarding the creation of project proposals and management of research-affiliated topics (i.e. resources, objectives, risk management).Moreover, the introduction of scientific seminars within the various technical faculties would expedite the culture of research. The women's section of KAU could also strengthen its relationship with the community by encouraging research that addressees community issues, and by developing mechanisms that consolidate research published in international journals in order to improve and facilitate coordination with researchers at other universities and research centres.

Centralisation has been identified as a significant impediment to institutional SE at KAU.As this study has shown, employees tend to ignore SE procedures due to the amount of paperwork required. Although KAU has started to decentralise some of the less important procedures, centralisation is not an effective approach to institutional management. Thus, decentralisation to the department level would prove beneficial in decreasing bureaucracy and therefore allowing for more time to focus on QA, SE and individual progress. More specifically, the women's section would benefit from a higher level of autonomy in the decision-making process, especially with regards to localised administrative and budgeting decisions that do not absolutely depend on the dean's

approval (Holmes, 1993). Internal policies would be more efficient and less tedious for the employees as a result.

This research has also shown that at KAU, it is the lecturers who are most inclined to adopt the practices of personal self-evaluation and that the process has had positive results for those who have engaged in it. It is therefore recommended that KAU creates training programmes for administrative staff in order to encourage more engagement in similar procedures. In addition, given the evidence showing positive outcomes of student self-assessment in the learning process (Kitsantas, Reiser and Doster, 2004, McMillan and Hearn, 2008), the university could also introduce training to educate students about the value of self-assessment and the contribution they can make to improving the quality culture in KAU through the robust evaluation of courses and pedagogical practices.

Another area for improvement regards the mission and vision of KAU. The research findings suggest that there is widespread misunderstanding or ignorance, both of which contribute to confusion and difficulties in creating standardised institutional guidelines for QA practices.

It is therefore recommended that the university either clarifies the two concepts to the stakeholders, or changes them entirely. The former option could be accomplished through the creation of brief seminars that would explain the mission and vision to internal and external stakeholders. The latter option could also be easily accomplished, as the university amends its mission and vision every five years.

At the same time, the lack of a cohesive quality culture within the institution perpetuates misconceptions, interpretations and the impossibility of enhancing quality. The findings from the interviews show that, for the most part, every stakeholder has different perceptions of quality. These differences, along with the disregard for stakeholders' perceptions, creates a barrier between the design and the demand of the services offered, which encumbers QA and accreditation. According to Alzamil (2014: 133), mistrust in a HEI can be overcome through the establishment of QA trainings, as well as announcements that advocate the benefits of a shared quality culture among the stakeholders. These tactics, if connected to the initial recommendation, which is to develop individual QA standards specifically tailored to fit a Saudi university, can increase the staff's acceptance of QA and SE. Thus, staff would participate in common activities that would also have the purpose of raising awareness of the importance of

honest feedback within the QA process (Norris, 2007: 139), as the success and improvement of the services offered would depend on the gathered feedback. Defining and communicating quality to all stakeholders would improve communication and promote institutional cooperation through the pursuit of similar objectives.

5.5. Limitations, Suggestions for Future Research and Possible Generalisations

Given the variety and ambiguity of answers pertaining to several issues, it can be concluded that one of the shortcomings of this project was that it targeted the entirety of the women's section of King Abdulaziz University. As a result, numerous issues were highlighted, yet some were not able to be described in detail or pursued systematically in official documentation. In other words, the scope of the study was, on reflection, very broad and could have been more in-depth if it had focused on a narrower area of investigation. An alternative study of the SE process in the women's section of KAU could focus on impactful localised case studies that would facilitate the understanding of crucial issues such as centralisation or stakeholder implication in the planning and monitoring procedures.

This research of the introduction of SE in the women's section of KAU identified a number of actors that influenced the process, and these could not all be fully addressed. Two issues that emerged time and time again were a communication deficit and a tendency to disregard stakeholder feedback. The former contributes significantly to lowering employee satisfaction, compounds issues of trust and transparency, and is an obstacle to cooperation in pursuit of quality improvement. Secondly, stakeholder feedback is not taken into account in several areas that are central to the SE process, including student evaluations, programme development and research, as well as in budgetary planning and the general monitoring of institutional policies. Due to the complexity behind both these issues, the study was not able tackle either in sufficient depth. Furthermore, given that both SE and QA are processes that depend on trust and communication, the researcher believes that further investigation into these two issues

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process would be beneficial. Future research could also provide a better understanding of the justification for such actions, as well as provide a means to counteract them.

At the same time, future research would benefit from the collection of primary data through a variety of means, in order to offer further insight into the topic of SE at KAU. To illustrate, this study involved interviews with senior managers, academics and support staff, yet the interviews conducted with support staff did not reveal additional information. Given the fact that the interviews offered insight into the situation before and after the introduction of the SE process, future research could benefit from interviews with more experienced employees. Furthermore, the process of collecting institutional documentation highlighted three significant issues: a lack of diversity and abundance, the difficulty in collaborating with some providers, and the Saudi practice of not sharing certain documents. Thus, further research design should begin with a thorough investigation into potential documentation acquisition prior to the start of fieldwork.

Interviews with administrators and lecturers highlighted issues in relation to the use of student feedback. Given the role of students in the quality assurance process, students have invaluable and unique perspectives that the university's employees cannot provide. Thus, future research could benefit from interviewing a group of students selected from various faculties and levels of study. Similarly, a short questionnaire could be devised or a group interview conducted that focus on vital issues, such as teaching and learning, teacher-student interactions and the importance of student feedback.

The researcher did not expect quite as many impediments to implementing the SE process most notably, issues of communication between various stakeholders and lack of transparency. These emerged during the interviews and could not be ignored, resulting in the researcher raising unplanned questions which then could not be answered in insufficient depth. One way to conduct more in depth interviews would be the utilisation of spontaneous surveys that solely target the best and worst processes at the university. The answers obtained from this step could then be the basis for more focused questions in the interviews.

Putting to one side its limitations, this study has provided insights into the negative and the positive implications of introducing the SE process in the women's section of KAU. With regards to the possible generalisation of the study, it is limited by being a case study conducted in a woman's section of a Saudi university. This being said, research (Badry

and Willoughby, 2016, Smith and Abouammoh, 2013a, Al-Rasheed, 2010, Onsman, 2011) shows that the Saudi HE system employs similar administrative tactics, and that issues such as centralisation and limited communication are pervasive in the industry so it is likely that many of the findings from this study will be similar to other women's sections of other Saudi universities. Furthermore, the research is also a study of SE implementation in a country where QA is in the early stages of its infancy, and thus, the findings may be of relevance to any university relatively new to QA.

5.6. Conclusions

Through answering the research questions, this study has demonstrated that the introduction of the self-evaluation process in the women's section of KAU has had both positive and negative outcomes. From the literature, implementing SE is portrayed as easy yet its procedures have proven to be problematic for a large proportion of KAU employees. As a result, while SE has certainly provided valuable support to the QA system and to the progress of quality within KAU, it has also exposed and to some extent compounded pre-existing problems within the institution.

Given the recent introduction of QA in the KSA as a result of internationalisation, and the recent implementation of SE procedures in KAU as a result of policy borrowing, the research sought to provide insights into the impact of SE on internal policies, stakeholders and QA in general.

Albaqami (2015) concluded that the struggle Saudi universities have experienced with implementing and maintaining QA practices is due to several factors, which include: the lack of a cohesive quality culture; the growth of academic demand and the employment of foreign faculty members as a direct result; the university's struggle to achieve international quality standards and the difficulty in adapting foreign QA policies into the socio-cultural context of the KSA. Not surprisingly, in relation to policy borrowing, similar difficulties were found in KAU and all of the issues identified in Albaqami (2015) also emerged in this study of SE implementation at KAU, particularly with regards to the lack of a quality culture and the different socio-cultural circumstances that produce burdensome quality-related results. There are, however, some notable differences. The

current research has revealed further obstacles in the governance and administration sectors as well as highlighting the consistent neglect of stakeholder feedback, especially student evaluation.

The present study has also managed to portray some of the positive consequences of introducing SE in a Saudi university. For example, there have been improvements in teaching and learning (although limited because student evaluations have been ignored), and slight improvements in research, resource allocation and planning. This being said, despite communication deficits in the women's section of KAU, such as the lack of information transparency or the mistrust between various groups of stakeholders, the findings show that the adoption of the SE process at KAU has led to minor improvement in this area.

In this regard, Saudi universities that have yet to employ QA procedures can therefore look to this study to increase awareness of both the possible obstructions and benefits of the SE process, prior to implementation. Similarly, KAU could improve itsexisting self-evaluation strategy by adopting the recommendations provided in this study. Furthermore, through its recommendations, the research provides interested administrators with some solutions to overcoming difficulties, thus laying the foundations for achieving institutional excellence through quality improvement.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interim Consent from King Abdulaziz University (KAU)

Appendix 2: Interim Consent from King Abdulaziz University to the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA)

Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet (to be translated)

For heads of faculties, teaching staff and academic staff involved in administrative / managerial work related to QA and accreditation

Title of the Study:

The Evaluation of The Implementation of Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia, The case of the Women's Section of King Abdulaziz University.

Dear Participant:

You are invited to participate in this study. Please take the time to read the following information to understand the reasons for doing this research. Feel free to ask any questions.

You have been selected to participate in this study because you are a member at King Abdul-Aziz University, which is taking part in this study.

The Researcher:

I am currently researcher and member of staff at KAU.

The Duration of the Study:

This is study, which will last for three months. The researcher will spend the time at King Abdul-Aziz University to investigate the Implementation of Quality Assurance in the university. It will start in Jun 2013.

The Purpose of this Study:

The aim of this study is to investigate the Implementation of Quality Assurance in King Abdul-Aziz University as part of a doctoral study at the University of East Anglia (UEA).

Research Methods:

In order to explore the purpose of this study, the researcher depends on the data collection tool required, which is interview.

The interview will take approximately one an hour and will be held with the heads of faculties, teaching staff and academic staff involved in administrative / managerial work related to QA and accreditation. All interviews will take place at King Abdul-Aziz University and the data will be collected by audio recording, unless the participant does not give her/his consent, in which case the researcher will take notes. The interviews will not be filmed because of religious and cultural issues. I will give you a copy of the

questions in advance. The data will only be seen by my supervisor. I will save the data on my password-protected computer, transcribe it, and use the transcript as part of my research-data to complete my current research, whose title is The Implementation of Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia.

All participants would be anonymised in the transcript. The school would not be identifiable. The interview data, and all copies of the transcript, would not be accessible to anyone apart from myself, and would be deleted or destroyed at the successful conclusion of my current research.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. All information resulting from the research will be treated confidentially and individual names will not be used at any point, guaranteeing anonymity.

Concerns:

If you have any questions about this project, please contact me using the information below**.**

Name of the researcher:

Nawal Mohammed Alzahrani.

Contact information:

School of Education and Lifelong Learning

University of East Anglia

Norwich

NR4 7TJ

E-mail: N.Al-zahrani@uea.ac.uk

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If you have any questions or complaints about any aspect of the research, please feel free to contact my supervisor Professor Nigel Norris on 0044 (0)1603 59 3575 or by email on N.Norris@uea.ac.uk at the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ.

Thank you for your kind cooperation

Appendix 4: Consent Form

Title of the Research:

The Evaluation The Implementation of Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia, The case of the Women's Section of King Abdulaziz University.

Please read the following instructions carefully and if you need any clarification do not hesitate to ask:

_____

I agree to take part in this above research, and I am willing to: (please tick all those that apply)

- be interviewed by the researcher.   Yes / No

- have my interview recorded.   Yes / No

- participate in this research for three months.   Yes / No

The information I provide: (please tick all those that apply)

- could be used by other researchers as long as my name is removed.
  Yes / No

- could be used by the researcher for another project.
  Yes / No

- can only be used in this study.
  Yes / No

I understand that the information I give is confidential and my identity is protected, and that all the information I give will be used for educational and academic uses only.

Name of participant: ……………………………………………………..

Signature: …………………………………………………….

Date: ……………………………………………………

Appendix 5: Interview Questions

1.   What are the mechanisms of quality control and accreditation that were in place at the women's section at KAU before NCAAA in 2004?

2.   What events led to the NCAAA being created as an independent body?

3.   How has the NCAAA been implementing its policies? (I will break this up into smaller questions: for example, over the 10 years of NCAAA work, what have been the main areas of focus? Have there been different foci in different periods?).

4.   What is the policy of KAU and NCAAA for QA in:

    a) Governance
    b) Administration
    c) Faculty and staff employment processes
    d) Teaching and learning
    e) The impact of self-evaluation
    f) Student administration and support services
    g) Institutional relationship with the community
    h) Management of quality assurance processes
    i) Objectives, mission and vision
    j) Resources
    k) Learning resources
    l) Facilities and equipment
    m) Financial planning and management
    n) Research

5.   What are the mechanisms, models, methods and procedures of QA and SE in the women's section of KAU?

6.   Who is putting the policy in place to ensure quality at KAU and NCAAA?

7.   In your opinion, what is the official position of the government to ensure the quality of the HEIs? (This can be a probing question to raise other questions/issues).

8.   What are the factors that affect the development and implementation of QA, SE and accreditation in the women's section of KAU?

9.   What do you think are the most important difficulties and challenges in terms of improving the institutional quality of education?

10.   What do you think about SE, QA and accreditation and its applications in the women's section of KAU?

11.   How does the women's section at KAU assure quality of their education in terms of assessment tools; teaching; research, etc.?

12.   How do you think that students are affected by SE and QA practices?

13.   What are the factors that affect the development and implementation of SE, QA and accreditation in the women's section of KAU?

14.   What do you think are the most important difficulties and challenges in terms of improving the institutional quality of education?

15.   What do you think that the current SE and QA implementation could be improved?

16.   How are the roles of university support staff in the training of staff about SE, QA and accreditation system in the women's section of KAU?

17.   How many training courses have you managed or partaken in SE, QA and accreditation? (Subsequent questioning may involve the desired frequency of said courses)

18.   What do you think about the training provided and to what extent do these meet staff needs in the women's section of KAU?

19.   What are the issues in training provision and managing about QA, SE and accreditation system?

20.   What are the factors that affect the development and implementation of SE and QA in the women's section of KAU? (This can be a probing question that leads to inquiries relating to the quality culture)

21.   What is your impression of improvements and developments in the women's section of KAU?