

Building Congruence Between Internal Quality Assurance and External Quality Assessment: The Algerian Experience*

İç Kalite Güvencesi ve Dış Kalite Değerlendirmesi Arasındaki Uyumun Sağlanması: Cezayir Deneyimi*

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ABSTRACT

The Algerian higher education system has been undergoing a strong change that can be compared to a revolution to its structures, schemes, procedures ever since 2004: a date that corresponds to the launching of the 'Licence-Master-Doctorate' or 'LMD' reform. Not least of these procedures is the erection of a Quality system that started in 2010. Yet, one of the difficulties the implementation of the LMD system experienced, was due to the policy of slow and progressive setting up of new LMD learning schemes by universities from 2004 up to 2010 (date of last issued LMD training programs). The fact that universities were not forced to enter the new scheme was somehow detrimental to the overall policy's coherence and advancement. Indeed, it took time for universities to switch from a dual system of university programs (old and LMD systems offered to freshmen) to a single frame, namely that of the LMD. The concern for Quality was then on the Ministry's agenda from 2008 first through an international conference on Quality Assurance that was held in Algiers under the aegis of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. Part of the ministry's strategic plan scheduled to go until 2030, is the procedure aiming at a quality system that consists of the following components: the LMD training package, the national qualifications framework, the quality assurance system, the quality assurance frame of reference, the national standards, and the key performance indicators.

Keywords: Internal quality assurance, External quality assessment, Congruence, University programs, Training

ÖZ

Cezayir yükseköğretim sistemi, 'Lisans-Master-Doktora' veya kısaca LMD reformununun başladığı tarihe karşılık gelen- 2004 yılından bu yana yapılanması, düzeni ve prosedürleri bakımından bir devrim ile kıyaslanabilecek güçlü bir değişim geçirmektedir. Bu prosedürlerin hepsi, 2010 yılında başlayan bir kalite sisteminin inşasını oluşturmaktadır. Buna rağmen, LMD sisteminin uygulanmasında yaşanan zorluklardan biri, üniversitelerin yeni LMD öğrenme şemalarını 2004'ten 2010'a (son yayınlanan LMD eğitim programlarının tarihi) kadar yavaş ve aşamalı olarak kurma politikası nedeniyle yaşandı. Üniversitelerin yeni düzene katılmak zorunda tutulmaması, genel politikanın tutarlılığı ve gelişmesi açısından olumsuz oldu. Gerçekten de, ikili bir üniversite programı sisteminden (birinci sınıf öğrencilerine uygulanan eski sistem ve LMD sistemi) tek bir çerçeveye -yani LMD'ye- geçiş üniversiteler açısından zaman alıcı oldu. Kaliteye olan ilgi, daha sonra ilk olarak Yükseköğretim ve Bilimsel Araştırma Bakanlığı himayesi altında Cezayir'de düzenlenen Kalite Güvencesi konulu uluslararası bir konferans aracılığıyla 2008'den itibaren Bakanlığın gündeminde oldu. Bakanlığın 2030 yılına kadar olan stratejik planının bir parçası, şu bileşenlerden oluşan bir kalite sistemini hedef almaktadır: LMD eğitim paketi, ulusal yeterlilikler çerçevesi, kalite güvence sistemi, referans kalite güvence çerçevesi, ulusal standartlar ve temel performans göstergeleri.

Anahtar Sözcükler: İç kalite güvencesi, Dış kalite değerlendirme, Uyum, Üniversite programları, Eğitim

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BACKGROUND

The Algerian higher education system has been undergoing a strong change that can be compared to a revolution to its structures, schemes, procedures ever since 2004: a date that relates to the launching of the LMD reform. Not least of these procedures is the erection of a Quality System that started being built in 2010. Yet, one of the difficulties the implementation of the LMD system experienced, was due to the slow and progressive setting-up of new LMD learning schemes by universities from 2004 up to 2010 (date of last issued LMD training programmes). The fact that universities were not forced to enter the new scheme was somehow detrimental to the overall policy's coherence and advancement. Indeed, it took some time for several universities to switch from a two-pillar system of university programmes (old and LMD systems offered to freshmen) to a single frame, namely that of the LMD.

The concern for quality was more explicitly mentioned on the Ministry's agenda from 2008 first through an international conference on quality assurance (QA)¹ that was held in Algiers under the aegis of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MoHESR). This follows Instruction N°01 of January 27th, 2008 of the Chief of Government. Also, part of the ministry's strategic plan scheduled to go until 2030, is the procedure aiming at a quality system that consists of the following components: the LMD training package, the national qualifications framework, the quality assurance system, the quality assurance frame of reference, the national standards, and the key performance indicators². Quality assurance is understood by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (<https://www.mesrs.dz/assurance-qualite1>) as "the set of means by which an establishment can guarantee with confidence and certainty that the standards and the quality of education it provides are maintained and improved" (my translation).

METHOD: THE FIRST STEPS (from 2010)

What was urgent in the agenda of the Ministry was the establishment of an ad hoc committee for the implementation of QA in Higher Education (CIAQES)³ the aim of which was to lay the ground for the preparation of what was considered to be the basis, i.e., the launching of internal quality assurance. The roadmap was as follows:

- Elaborate and monitor a programme of implementation of a system of QA in higher education (HG).
- Establish a national frame of reference, of norms and criteria in accordance with international standards (to build congruence)

- Apply a programme of information towards the target groups (already done) and organize a training plan for the QA coordinators (action finished).
- Organise operations of self-assessment of a pilot group of universities (which will start soon).
- Ensure a strategic monitoring (measures and responsibilities) in the sector of QA.
- Help gather the elements for the definition of a national policy and a model of QA and prepare the conditions for the setting up of an agency in charge of the implementation of this policy (concern for the overall congruence between internal quality assurance (IQA), and external quality assurance (EQA)).⁴

The whole procedure of Quality Assurance was based on a definition that approximates what the ASEAN University Network Quality-Assurance (2004, p. 20) posits: « *quality assurance can be described as the systematic, structured and continuous attention to quality in terms of quality maintenance and improvement* ». The other means was the design of a Quality system that had as a main feature the congruence of the whole: i.e., the close relationship between the various means, actions, procedures, results and the likes. The bodies that have been involved are clearly well-designed and have defined objectives to attain. The present system, not entirely achieved, started in the early 2000 with the work of a National Committee for Reform that included all three cycles: primary, secondary and tertiary. All actions have had to face problems of time, as this is the major flaw. In fact, it is more a cultural drawback. Time has always been the variable that has not been taken into consideration too seriously. That, at the end, has influenced the success of the whole enterprise. The following diagram shows the various steps, bodies and actions that were salient in the whole undertaking (Table 1).

DISCUSSION

The aforementioned quality system leads to two quality assurances: the internal (the one that is being taken care of at the moment) and the external, which have many common grounds but also differing ones. Besides, if many universities have undergone External Evaluation procedures on their own; very few have made a consistent systematic internal evaluation. This has changed today. In any case, IQA and EQA are part and parcel of the Ministry' Strategic Plan. The latter demands:

- More and more conformity, standardization and harmonization
- Universities to ensure minimum level of quality in institutions and programmes

¹ "Quality assurance: an all-embracing term referring to an on-going, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) the quality of a higher education system, institutions, or programmes". (Vlăsceanu et al. Bucharest 2007).

² Key Performance Indicators: A Guide for Assessment and Quality Enhancement for Universities in the Islamic World. ICMHESR-EO/2011/2.1.

³ Decree n° 167 May 31st, 2010: Article 1: A national committee is set up in charge of the elaboration and the follow-up of the implementation of a system of quality assurance in the sector of higher education and scientific research.

⁴ "External quality assurance refers to quality assurance systems operated by outsiders (such as governments or accreditation agencies). Internal quality assurance refers to quality assurance systems set up and operated by the institution itself". (Boele E. B., 2007; p.11).

- IQA and EQA be part of short as well as long-term goals
- HE institutions be more aware of internationalization of HE

Quality assurance is therefore a newly-introduced trend in the universities' panorama, and so are IQA and EQA. However, a good many universities are embarking on IQA in order to keep up with the demands of the Ministry. Understanding that *"The internal quality systems are aimed at enabling the institutions to manage and control their quality-related core activities. That is, a way in which to organise the institution based on the processes, planning, documentation and resources used to meet the quality objectives and, consequently, foster continuous improvement of the service provided"* (de la Rosa González, 2008), this indeed has been everybody's wish: continuous improvement.

Furthermore, our hypothesis is that there should more than a close link between IQA and EQA, which has not been the case worldwide. Many countries practice either one. Very few have introduced both. Nevertheless, it is our belief that there should be a 'continuum' between both.

As we see it in Figure 1, there are many areas that agree with one another in IQA and EQA. They can be found in both sets:

1. The context/the conditions
2. Their aim(s)
3. Their means/tools
4. Their processes/procedures/mechanisms
5. Their results

However, in Algeria, only the second process has seen the light. Indeed, though both are linked by their concern for quality they differ in the time-span they deal in. Though IQA is more a short-term project, it is lagging slightly behind the other process. Placed within their environments one understands that IQA and EQA do not take place in alien territories but rather common environments where we think Quality Culture⁵ is nearly non-existent and on the other hand, there is a real lack of organizational culture. As is understood, IQA aims at *"assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining and improving quality"* of systems, institutions and programmes while EQA is more concerned about *"assuring quality"* of institutions and programmes. Therefore, one sees that both entities are in keeping with one another because of their shared vision: the improvement of the quality level of certain results, processes or procedures. The environment is then a common feature in both systems, and as such can help IQA and EQA to share the same evaluation results. They are also based on common principles: self-evaluation procedures, QA activities, written feedback, and absence of conflict of interest and of course appeal mechanisms in case of misunderstandings.

Both IQA and EQA are mechanisms of regulation from different initiators, but aim at: accountability of stakeholders and improvement of actions and practices. Because undertaken from two different perspectives, IQA deals from a micro level (within the university) while EQA can work both at the micro and macro levels (between establishments or at a supranational angle) which assess the strengths and weaknesses of the internal QA framework.

Table 1: The Quality System

Measures/Outcomes/Activities	Resources/Responsibilities	Set Schedule
The LMD Training Package	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task Force on the Reform of HE 2002-2003 • National Conference of Universities • National Accreditation Committee (CNH), 2005 • National Committee for the follow-up of the Reform, 2007 • National Pedagogical Committees (CPND), 2011 	2002-2004
The National Qualifications Frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Accreditation Committee (CNH) 	forthcoming
The Quality Assurance System	ad hoc Committee for the Implementation of Quality Assurance in H.E (CIAQES)	Started in 2008
The Quality Assurance Frame of Reference (AQI-UMED)	ad hoc Committee for the Implementation of Quality Assurance in H.E (CIAQES)	Started in 2010 forthcoming
The National Quality Standards	National Pedagogical Committee of Field of Training (CPND)	forthcoming
The Key Performance Indicators (KPI)	ICMHESR (Saudi Arabia, 2011) National Evaluation Committee (CNEVAL)	published Oct. 2011 adaptation forthcoming

⁵ "A tool for asking questions about how things work, how institutions function, who they relate to, and how they see themselves". <http://www.eqavet.eu/qa/gns/glossary/q/quality-culture.aspx>.

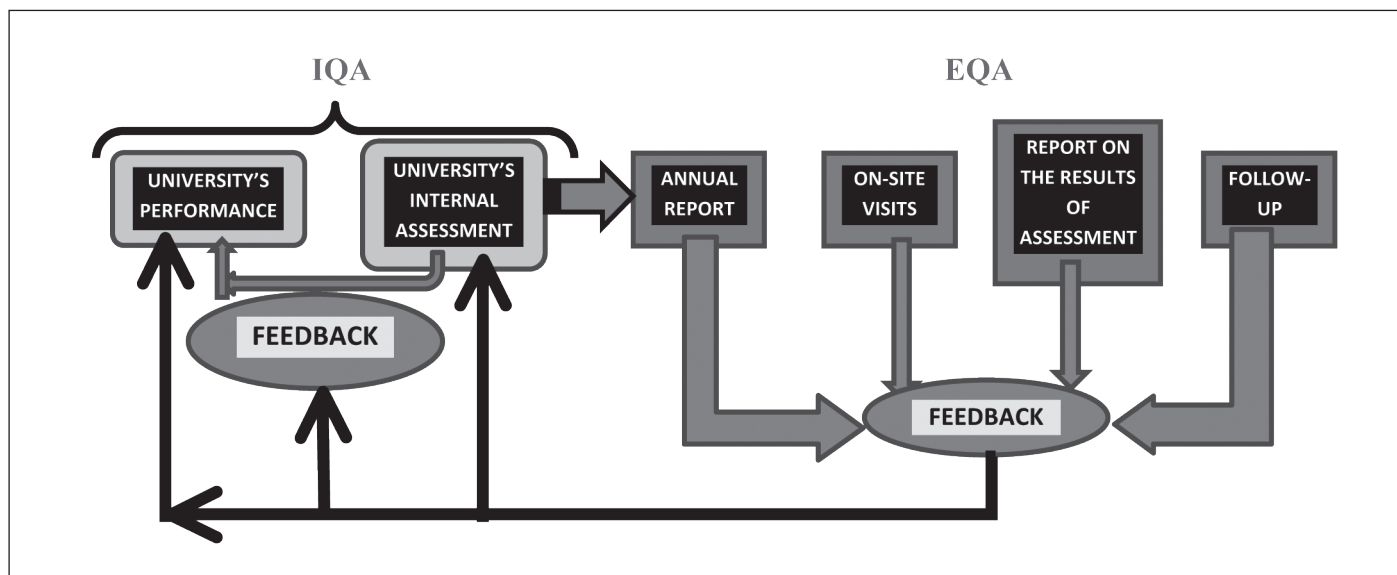


Figure 1: The 'Continuum' between IQA and EQA.

As for the means and tools used in both instances, there is a certain convergence in the methods used (self-evaluation, evaluation by the peers, on-site visits). Either one produces it or uses the evaluation report. The harmonious feature that can link both processes can also be found within their own processes, the procedures they use or the mechanisms they employ. Thus identical processes are involved in IQA and much as EQA, namely, the gathering, evaluating, reviewing and using the same information or data. Both systems take into consideration for assessing quality, the triptych: *input* (the students; the curriculum; the staff; the facilities; the infrastructures and the resources), *processes* (teaching/learning; teacher-student relationship; student support in learning; evaluation, research, administration/governance) and *output* (employable students?). Both systems are criterion-based, i.e., the evaluation they tackle is built on a number of criteria that comprise intent and a standard to measure the degree of realization of the intent. Finally, both IQA and EQA possess the same qualities: transparency and realism.

If undertaken by the same educational entity, IQA and EQA need to be compatible with one another, since their actions are complementary otherwise the whole procedure will be counterproductive: one (IQA) is the prerequisite of the other (EQA). However, EQA is being disputed worldwide because it is too heavy, expensive, and, that is too problematic: bureaucratic. Nevertheless, what is undisputed is the need for the presence of a strong and stable internal quality culture without which any of the components of the Quality Assurance system would be incomplete and inefficient.

In order to achieve coherence between the different factors of HE change, it has been felt that from the start the different

bodies involved in the QA system must build and strengthen *congruence* between the elements of the QA system. In particular, the two main tools that will be used soon: the frame of reference AQI-UMED⁶, and the Key Performance Indicators (KPI). This would be the best response to the ecological validity of the whole system, without it HE will be unstable. On the other hand, KPI is more concerned with harmonisation between universities of the Islamic World, decided by ministers of HE in the Islamic World.

CONCLUSION

One should not forget that the whole process of building a congruent system of Quality will take some time before it will be visible and fully functional. Besides, the Ministry of HE has been developing its Strategy 2030 in which both IQA and EQA are scheduled for different timings, hence the concern for their congruence. The Strategic Plan exists and it is stated in terms of mid and long-term objectives and realisations, with on the one hand: A frame of references (of training, of occupations), adequate self-evaluation methodologies, a national proper qualifications framework, and on the other hand: modes of governance of establishments to satisfy the exigencies of Quality, adequate preparation of students to the challenges of the professional world, the reduction of the gap between university formation and the professional world, and finally, legibility of national degrees. The latter problem is to be addressed seriously. However, all this must be reinforced with more coherence, and more congruence between the parts of the system, in terms of its operability, reliability, and systemic vision, in order to build a more harmonious system of HE.

⁶ AQI-UMED project: aims at developing IQA in universities of the Mediterranean to improve quality and cogency between these countries: emphasis is put on internal assessment, and improvement of governance.

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