

Internal Quality Assurance Practices: The Case of Gondar University

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Abstract

This study examines the internal quality assurance (IQA) practices at Gondar University, one of Ethiopia's oldest and largest public universities. Despite its long history dating back to 1954 as a public health training institution, the university has faced challenges in institutionalizing a comprehensive Quality Assurance system. The establishment of the Education Quality Assurance and Audit Directorate (EQAAD) in 2003 marked a significant step towards formalizing Internal Quality Assurance processes. Through qualitative data collected via interviews and document analysis, this research explores the achievements, key focus areas, challenges, and gaps in the university's Quality Assurance framework. Among its accomplishments are the development of the Education Quality Improvement Package (EQIP), hosting national QA conferences, conducting graduate tracer studies, and implementing self-audits and program evaluations. However, the study reveals systemic challenges including limited staffing capacity, insufficient financial resources, inconsistent implementation of QA procedures, and minimal involvement of top management and academic staff in routine QA activities. Structural and procedural weaknesses such as unclear leadership roles, lack of reward mechanisms, and under emphasis on research and community engagement

were also identified. The findings highlight the need for stakeholder engagement, policy innovation, and resource mobilization to strengthen the QA culture. The study concludes that while Gondar University has laid a foundation for quality enhancement, sustained institutional commitment is essential for meaningful improvement.

Keywords: Internal Quality Assurance, Higher Education, Quality Policy, Educational Standards, Institutional Evaluation

INTRODUCTION

Gondar University stands as one of Ethiopia's oldest and most respected institutions of higher learning. Established initially in 1954 as the Public Health College and Training Centre (PHC&TC), it was founded in response to the severe public health challenges that plagued the country during the 1940s and early 1950s. The institution was conceived with a clear mission: to train middle-level health professionals through a team-based, community-oriented approach to education—a model that emphasized practical relevance and societal impact. For its first six years, the college operated under the auspices of the Ministry of Health before gradually expanding its mandate and affiliations.

A major transformation occurred in 1978 following a bilateral agreement between Karl Marx University in Germany and Addis Ababa University, which led to the establishment of a formal medical faculty at the Gondar College of Public Health and Training Centre. This collaboration marked a turning point in the institution's history, facilitating the introduction of modern medical education and laying the groundwork for future academic diversification. By 1988, the institution had been renamed the Gondar College of Medical Sciences, and by 1992, it gained full autonomy from Addis Ababa University, signaling a new phase of institutional development.

In 2004, the institution officially attained university status and became known as the Gondar University—a milestone that reflected decades of academic growth and national recognition. Today, the university offers a wide range of academic programs, including 87 undergraduate, 138 graduate, and 29 PhD programs. It is organized across eleven academic units, five campuses, four colleges, two faculties, and three schools. With over 8,300 staff members and more than 45,000 enrolled students, it ranks among the

largest universities in Ethiopia, playing a critical role in the country's educational, research, and community service landscape.

Despite its long-standing contributions to Ethiopian society, the Gonder University has faced persistent challenges in implementing a coherent and comprehensive internal quality assurance (IQA) system. Historically, efforts to enhance, assure, and audit quality have lacked systematic implementation across input, process, output, and outcome levels (EQIP, 2016). However, with the passage of the Higher Education Proclamation and the establishment of the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) in 2003, the university began taking significant steps toward institutionalizing quality assurance mechanisms.

Quality assurance (QA) in higher education refers to the systematic processes used to evaluate and improve the standards of teaching, learning, research, and administrative services (Al-Omari, 2022; Meisuri et al., 2024). QA systems are essential for ensuring that institutions meet both national and international benchmarks of excellence and remain responsive to evolving educational and labor market demands (Williams & Harvet, 2015). Internal quality assurance, in particular, plays a vital role in fostering a culture of continuous improvement by embedding quality-enhancing practices within the institutional framework.

To this end, the Gonder University established the Education Quality Assurance and Audit Directorate (EQAAD) in 2003/2004, aligning itself with national mandates and global best practices in higher education governance. EQAAD was tasked with developing and implementing quality policies, conducting self-audits, organizing conferences, and preparing strategic documents such as the Education Quality Improvement Package (EQIP). These initiatives aimed to enhance accountability, improve program relevance, and ensure alignment with societal needs.

However, despite these efforts, several challenges persist. Interviews with key personnel within EQAAD revealed issues such as limited staffing capacity, insufficient financial resources, inconsistent implementation of QA procedures, and a lack of active involvement from top management and academic staff in routine quality assurance activities. Furthermore, while the university has made strides in academic quality assurance, areas such as research and community engagement remain under-prioritized in practice.

This study explores the internal quality assurance practices at the Gonder University, examining how the institution aligns its QA initiatives with national directives

and global frameworks. Drawing on qualitative data collected through interviews and document analysis, the research assesses the achievements, challenges, and prospects of IQA at the university. It also highlights the need for structural reforms, stakeholder engagement, and policy innovation to foster a sustainable culture of quality in higher education.

By critically analyzing the experiences and lessons learned from the Gonder University, this study contributes to broader discussions on quality assurance in higher education institutions in Ethiopia and similar contexts. It underscores the importance of integrating QA into the core functions of the university—not merely as a compliance mechanism, but as a strategic tool for institutional excellence and societal transformation.

Literature Review

Quality in higher education refers to the standards and outcomes of educational processes, while quality assurance (QA) encompasses the systematic measures taken to ensure these standards are met and maintained. The importance of QA has grown significantly, with institutions adopting various frameworks to enhance educational quality and accountability.

Quality in higher education refers to the degree of alignment between educational services and established requirements, while quality assurance involves systematic efforts to enhance service delivery, ensuring that educational outcomes meet student expectations and labor market needs (Al-Omari, 2022). Quality in higher education is often defined by the effectiveness of teaching, learning outcomes, and the overall educational experience provided to students. It encompasses various dimensions, including curriculum relevance, faculty qualifications, and student support services (Meisuri et al., 2024). Quality in higher education refers to the standards and effectiveness of academic programs, while quality assurance encompasses systematic processes to evaluate and enhance these standards. It has evolved into a professionalized, internationally networked activity since the 1980s, addressing complex challenges (Williams & Harvet, 2015).

Quality Assurance is crucial for maintaining institutional accountability and enhancing the reputation of higher education. It helps institutions align with national and international standards, thereby improving competitiveness (Chalmers & Johnson, 2012; Deherty, 2012). The Quality Assurance process involves continuous monitoring, evaluation, and improvement, ensuring that educational offerings meet the needs of students and the job market (Meisuri et al., 2024). While the focus on quality and Quality

Assurance in higher education is essential for institutional success, it can also lead to tensions among faculty and administration regarding accountability and the perceived bureaucratic nature of Quality Assurance processes (Doherty, 2012).

Quality Assurance systems are structured processes that institutions implement to monitor and improve educational quality. These systems can be internal (within the institution) or external regulated by governmental bodies (Meisuri et al., 2024; Baker, 2024). For example, Australia employs the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) to oversee and ensure quality across higher education institutions (Baker, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach will be used in this research. Qualitative research is the type of research that finds out about people's experiences. It helps us understand what is important for people (Silverman, 2020). The qualitative research approach is selected for this research for the reason that it gives an in-depth treatment of the research problem. Case study design was used in this study.

Qualitative data are composed of field notes, interview transcripts, photographic documents, audio recordings, film, audio-visual records, and other data that are readily available to investigators and the general public (Silverman & Patterson, 2021). This study will use both primary and secondary data sources. The primary sources of data for this study were internal quality assurance offices at Gonder University. The secondary data sources for this study will be policy documents and internal quality assurance guidelines. The data gathering instrument for this study was interview.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of findings data triangulation should be used. Additionally, interpretation should be validated with participants or colleagues through member checking or peer debriefing (Ali et al., 2024). To this effect, triangulation by using several data sources and data validation was made through participant checking of data and debriefing.

Data analysis is a systematic search for meaning. It is a way to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to others. Analysis means organizing and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories. It often involves synthesis, evaluation, interpretation,

categorization, hypothesizing, comparison, and pattern finding (Hatch, 2023). To this effect, narrative analysis was used to analyze interview transcripts.

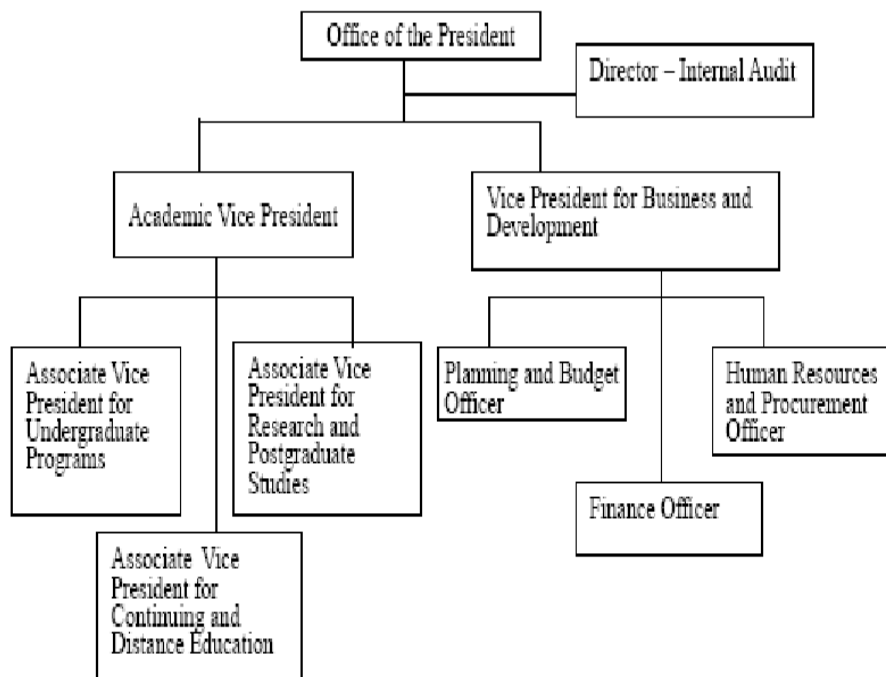
Ethical research is essential because it protects participants, researchers, and society (Poht, 2020). At its simplest research ethics can be defined as the responsibility of the researcher toward others, including society broadly, other scholars, and most importantly, those whose attitudes, behaviors, and experience we are studying. Central to research ethics is the intention to protect the human subjects who provide data for the study (Salmons, 2021). To abide by the ethical principles of the research undertaking, first, the researchers attempted to have informed consent; respondents must agree to participate in the research undertaking. The second is confidentiality because respondents are sharing information. This was done by anonymity data and securely storing research materials. The third is the research participants were informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. Moreover, honesty and truthfulness in presenting the data also were considered.

RESULTS

Overview of Gondar University Quality Assurance Practice

In six decades of academic, research and community service journey of the university, the issue of quality enhancement, assurance and audit has not been done in a systematic and organized manner. Notwithstanding the fact that Gondar University has produced renowned professionals, the issue of quality has not been done through a system that had to be created for enhancing, assuring and auditing quality at all levels spanning from input, process, output and outcome (Gonder University, EQIP, 2016). The University gave attention about quality system strengthening starting from Higher Education Proclamation passed mandating Ethiopian Universities to start and work on quality by establishing a quality assurance and audit system.

Below is the organization chart of Gondar University. In the organization structure the Internal Quality Assurance body is under the president's office.



Education Quality Assurance and Audit Directorate (EQAAD)

The Education Quality Assurance and Audit Directorate is established in the year 2003/2004 after the establishment of the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) in 2003.

Mission, Vision, Motto and Values of EQAAD

Mission

The mission of EQAAD is to enhance the quality of teaching-learning, research, outreach and administrative services, and ensure the relevance of programs in solving societal problems.

Vision

Vision is to be the top ranked higher learning institution in Ethiopia by 2020.

Motto

Quality is a dynamic target that we have to follow constantly!!!

Core Values

- Quality First: Quality should be the university's distinguishing mark and should not be compromised at all levels.
- Quality in all: As quality is the core mission, it should be addressed in our major pillars of teaching/learning, research, community engagements, and support services.

- Sound professional and ethical standards: we comply with legal, social and professional ethics, principles and norms.
- Collaboration and team work: Enhancing unity and forming cohesive teams determines our future success. We, therefore, value solidarity and encourage team work in our undertakings.
- Invention and innovation: Quality as witnessed by creativity and innovation in the higher education industry, we value them to respond to the ever dynamic needs of the community.
- Care for Staff: Our success is based on attracting, hiring, developing and retaining competent professionals and committed staff.
- Quality customer service: we believe that providing quality service to our customers gives them the king's position.

This shows that the Gonder University Education Quality Assurance and Audit Directorate try to address the majorly quality concern in the Vision, Mission, Values and Motto of the directorate.

Functions of the Education Quality Assurance and Audit Directorate

The Education Quality Assurance and Audit Directorate at Gonder University has the following functions:

- Performing quality self-audit
- Conducting conferences to create a culture of quality education
- Conducting graduate tracer study
- Preparation of quality assurance policy
- preparation of quality assurance packages
- preparation of quality standards at department level
- Performing program evaluation
- Offering trainings that enhance quality teaching and learning
- Conducting teacher performance evaluation

Education Quality Improvement Package

The Federal Ministry of Education has made a critical evaluation on the current state of quality of education in higher education institutions and has made it one of the top priority agenda. The administrative board and the top management of Gonder University have given directions for the Education Quality Assurance and Audit Directorate

(EQAAD) to develop an educational quality improvement package (EQIP) of the university.

The EQIP has, therefore, the following fundamental justifications.

- The administrative board has taken the education quality issue one of its top priorities. Preparation of such a strategic document on quality will give the board and the university management to support, supervises, and evaluate improvement at all levels (i.e. input, process, output and outcome).
- Colleges/faculties/schools and their respective departments, programs and units do not have a systematic framework on improving and enhancing quality of education thus far. This package developed at the corporate level in which college/faculty/school education quality coordinators are members of the task force will then be cascaded to each level for the proper implementation, follow up and evaluation.
- Securing input is a priority at all levels. Hiring desired professionals with certain academic qualification, procuring various educational materials such as books, equipment, chemicals, reagents and other devices is not an easy venture even when the financial resource is secured. This document will enable each the concerned bodies to make the necessary preparations to overcome this challenge if quality education has to be improved.
- Eventually, if the document is cascaded in all the pillars such as teaching/learning, research, community service and governance of the university, quality culture will flourish among the university community and our stakeholders.

Key Areas and Quality Aspects

There are seven key areas and thirty two quality aspects of quality assessment in in which the University Quality Assurance and Audit Directorate aspires to focus which includes:-

Key area 1: Governance, Leadership and Internationalization which includes nine quality aspect such as Institutional Mission and Vision (QA 1); Academic Calendar(QA 2); Policy, Legal Framework and Strategic Plan (QA 3); Professional Code of Conduct (QA 4); Academic Quality Management (QA 5); Financial Governance (QA 6); Benchmarking (QA 7); Partnership (QA 8) and Internationalization (QA 9)

Key area 2: Learning Resources includes Physical Infrastructure (QA 10) and Instructional Infrastructure (QA 11)

Key area 3: Human Capital includes Staff Recruitment and Transfer (QA 12), Induction/ Orientation (QA 13), Staff Development (QA 14), Staff Appraisal (QA 15), Academic Staff Quality (QA 16), Academic Staff Promotion (QA 17), Staff Appointment (QA 18) and Staff Retention (QA 19)

Key area 4: Curriculum Design and Revision which includes Curriculum Design and Development (QA 20) and Curriculum Revision (QA 21)

Key area 5: Teaching/Learning and Assessment which includes Teaching Quality (QA 22) and Assessment of Students' Learning (QA 23)

Key area 6: Student Admission and Progression includes Student Entry Behavior and Admission (QA 24); Feedback Mechanism (QA 25); Diagnosis and Remedial Program (QA 26); Guidance and Counseling Service (QA 27); Social, Cultural and Leisure Activities (QA 28) and System Efficiency (QA 29)

Key area 7: Research, Community Engagement and Technology Transfer includes Research and Development (QA 30), Community Engagement (QA 31) and Technology Transfer University-Industry Linkage (QA 32)

The Education Quality Improvement Package of the University also clearly describes the description, improvement strategies and quality indicators for each the above seven key areas. Similarly, for each the seven key areas quality assessment the Target Group, methods and tools of assessment, source of information and responsible body.

Interview Response of Gondar University EQAAD

Interview questions asked for Education Quality Assurance and Audit Directorate Director

1. Could you please tell us about the background, achievement and challenges of EQAA at Gondar University?
2. What are the key focus areas, challenges and prospects of EQAA directorate?

The researchers conducted phone interview on June 13, 2023 at 8:45 pm with the University directorate director of Education Quality Assurance and Audit via phone interview. The researchers asked the director to tell about the background and prospects of EQAA of Gondar University. The director replied that the directorate was established after establishment of higher education relevance and quality agency (HERQA) in 2003/2004.

The director stated some of their achievements including hosting national quality assurance conference, conducting graduate tracer, publishing QA policy and education quality improvement package, conducting institutional quality self-audit, administering selective program evaluation and HDP implementation assessment and establishing academic development and resource centers.

The director disclosed that there are different challenges that they have faced in the past 20 years, despite great achievements. Some of the main challenges are lack of expertise and less top management involvement commitment to IQA. Moreover, constraint in financial resources to run internal quality review and inconsistency were among the challenges mentioned by the director.

The researchers also asked the director about the internal quality assurance key focus areas of the university. The director replied that, some of them are program, student service, research and community engagement are the major quality assurance focuses of EQAA directorate. According to the director these four focus areas encompasses the overall activities of the university. However, he admitted that they have focused on academic issues only due to few numbers of staff and lack of expertise in the area. As the director replied Gonder University has two years periodic review plan, although it is not practical due to budget constraints. The director added that, IQA has become the victim of grade 12 university entrance exam expense as the budget was not reimbursed by MoE.

The director also said that they have shared local experience with Bahirdar University, Hawasa University, Admass University and HERQA when Mr. Tesfaye Teshome was the director. The director also added that they share international experience with UK Psychology Society and incorporated best practices in the training manual given to internal assessment committee formulated from each college experienced staff members.

According to the director Gonder University amended the 10 focus areas of Education and Training Agency (ETA), the former HERQA with 7 key areas after conducting SWOT analysis and published the guideline on March 2016. The director asserted that the key areas are replications of national quality aspect and strategy that include governance, leadership and internationalization; learning resources; learning assessment; human capital; curriculum and program revision; research and community engagement and students student admission. Besides, the QA model national quality assurance of ETA.

The following are interview questions asked for Education Quality Assurance and Audit Officers:

1. Do the top management actively involved in routine internal quality assurance practice?
2. Is there any guideline or policy that helps to govern the internal quality assurance practice of the university?
3. What are roles of each officer in the directorate?

The researchers asked the quality assurance officer, about the involvement of presidents' college deans, directors' and head of departments in quality assurance routine practices. The officer replied that the internal quality assurance was not considered to be a day to day activity. Moreover, he added that the academia perceives it as a sole duty given to the directorate office, so no one wants to engage in such tedious routine task. Furthermore, he asserted that the top management has a positive attitude towards quality, but lacks direct involvement and commitment. He described the situation as "They always delegate subordinates whenever we request their involvements." According to the officer, their direct engagement in quality assurance practice could enhance the university's service delivery and help to improve standards that in return boost the status of the university in general.

Another interviewee stated that there is internal quality assurance policy and few guidelines that are used to govern quality assurance and audit practices in the university. As the second interviewee the problem is on the actual implementation of policy and guidelines. From the reply, it could be deduced that the top management and the academia did not consider their part in quality assurance into account either due to ignorance or carelessness. In general, the key focus areas of EQAA that the university aspires to accomplish and major prospects are incorporated in the strategic plan of the university. However, the implementation lacks university presidents' commitment and adequate follow up.

As the third interviewee, the EQAA Directorate has four staff members director one officers who works on education quality and the other delegated on teachers' professional development mainly on scholarship. She added that the admin staff was assigned to follow up academic quality, but currently works on coordinating training including inductions and Higher Diploma Program (HDP). According to the third interviewee, the QA cell reaches to the college level with one coordinator and the sole

work of EQAA is on academic matters only. This shows that community engagement and research were not given due attention.

Generally, hosting national quality assurance conference, conducting institutional quality self-audit, conducting graduate tracer, publishing QA policy and education quality improvement package, administering selective program evaluation and HDP implementation assessment and establishing academic development and resource centers are some of the strengths of Gonder University EQAA Directorate. Conversely, few number of staff members at the directorate office and only one coordinator at each college level shows that they could not manage and maintain quality. Therefore, less regard given to the role of community engagement and research in IQA practice; lack of expertise and less top management involvement commitment to IQA; financial problems to run internal quality review and inconsistency of IQA practices are some of the challenges identified by the researchers in the internal quality assurance practices of Gonder University.

Achievements of Internal Quality Assurance and Audit of Gonder University

Some of the major achievements of the directorate include:

- Six National Conferences on Quality Education were initiated, organized and hosted for six consecutive years (from 2013/14 to 2018/19).
- A graduate tracer study was conducted and published by collecting data from alumni, peers and employers.
- A curriculum policy, a students' assessment policy and a quality assurance policy have been prepared and published.
- The first 'Education Quality Improvement Package' was developed and published.
- The institutional quality self-audit was conducted.
- Department level program standards were developed for some departments
- Program Evaluations were made for selected programs
- HDP implementation Assessment was conducted
- Various capacity development trainings such as induction and advanced pedagogical trainings to newly hired teachers and expatriate staffs have been regularly given.
- HDP training is being organized and run at each year with more than 300 candidates per year.
- Various short term trainings have been given for the academic staffs

- Five Academic Development and Resource Centers (ADRC) have been made under each campus.
- Curriculum development procedures are being seriously followed for all levels of studies
- Program and course ownership issues are being discussed and settled with other actors
- Teachers' performance evaluation results are being aggregated at institutional level to use them for further intervention.

Good Practices of Internal Quality Assurance of Gonder University

- The University prepared Education Quality Improvement Package to enhance the quality of teaching-learning, research, outreach and administrative services, and ensure the relevance of programs in solving societal problems.;
- The guideline document clearly indicate the Scope of the assessment, Focus areas, Improvement Strategies, Quality Indicators, Target Group of assessment, Methods & Tools of Assessment, Source of Information and Responsible Body;
- The guideline was prepared by conducting SWOT analysis/Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat/ of the University;
- The scope of the Education Quality Improvement Package directly matches with the Mission of the University i.e. Education, Community Service and Research were appropriately addressed in the document.

Gaps in the Internal Quality Assurance of Gonder University

- **Assessment Team Formulation:-** The guideline indicates but when we compare with another countries experience there is no clear demarcation on the duties and responsibilities of each team and also who is in charge of overall leadership of quality assurance regarding quality assessment is not clearly mentioned;
- **Assessment Duration:** There is no clear cut time frame on the guideline regarding the assessment period;
- **Reward and punishment mechanism:** The University Education Quality Improvement Package has no any point regarding mechanisms to award those performing best and/or to make accountable those not performing as per the guideline;
- There are no step by step description how the assessment will be conducted i.e. who leads the team who will plan and report for whom;

- Relationship between the University quality assurance and external quality assurance HERQA/ETA/ not clearly mentioned on the guideline;
- The Education Quality Assurance and Audit Directorate of Gondar University describes there were major achievements of the directorate office which were information posted on the website but there were no evidence documents posted on the website related to the information;

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study reveal that Gondar University's internal quality assurance (IQA) practices reflect both commendable efforts and significant challenges in aligning its educational systems with national and international standards. While the university has established formal structures, policies, and initiatives to enhance quality across teaching, research, and community engagement, systemic gaps in implementation, resource allocation, and stakeholder engagement persist. This discussion contextualizes these findings within the broader literature on quality assurance (QA) in higher education, highlighting achievements, unresolved challenges, and implications for institutional improvement.

Achievements in Internal Quality Assurance

Gondar University's commitment to quality is evident in its institutional structures and proactive initiatives. The establishment of the Education Quality Assurance and Audit Directorate (EQAAD) in 2003/2004 marked a pivotal step toward formalizing QA processes. This aligns with global trends where dedicated QA bodies are critical for monitoring educational standards (Baker, 2024). EQAAD's achievements, such as hosting six national QA conferences (2013–2019), conducting graduate tracer studies, and developing an Education Quality Improvement Package (EQIP), demonstrate a strategic focus on accountability and stakeholder engagement. These efforts resonate with Al-Omari's (2022) assertion that QA frameworks must prioritize alignment with labour market needs and societal expectations.

The development of the EQIP, informed by a SWOT analysis, underscores the university's attempt to tailor QA practices to its unique context. By integrating governance, curriculum design, human capital, and research as key focus areas, Gondar University aligns with Meisuri et al.'s (2024) emphasis on holistic QA systems that address multidimensional

institutional functions. Furthermore, the publication of policies on curriculum development, student assessment, and QA itself reflects adherence to standardized procedures—a practice lauded in the literature for ensuring consistency (Williams & Harvet, 2015).

Notably, the university's emphasis on capacity-building initiatives, such as pedagogical training for staff and the establishment of Academic Development and Resource Centers (ADRCs), highlights its recognition of faculty development as a cornerstone of quality education. This mirrors global best practices, where continuous professional development is linked to improved teaching outcomes (Hatch, 2023). Additionally, the institutional self-audit and selective program evaluations indicate a commitment to transparency and evidence-based decision-making, which are vital for fostering a culture of quality (Chalmers & Johnson, 2012).

Challenges in Implementation and Governance

Despite these achievements, several systemic challenges undermine the effectiveness of Gondar University's QA practices. First, the lack of expertise and inadequate staffing in EQAAD—only four personnel, including one director and two officers—limit its capacity to address complex QA demands. This resonates with Deherty's (2012) critique of QA systems in resource-constrained institutions, where understaffing leads to superficial compliance rather than substantive improvement. The reliance on a single coordinator per college further exacerbates this issue, leaving critical areas like research and community engagement under prioritized.

Second, the limited involvement of top management and faculty in routine QA activities reflects disconnect between policy and practice. While senior leadership espouses a “quality-first” ethos in mission statements, their delegation of QA tasks to the directorate perpetuates a culture where quality is seen as a bureaucratic obligation rather than a shared responsibility. This mirrors Doherty's (2012) observation that faculty often resist QA processes perceived as externally imposed, leading to tensions between administrative mandates and academic autonomy. The absence of a reward or accountability mechanism for QA performance compounds this issue, as highlighted in the EQIP gaps. Without incentives for compliance or consequences for negligence, stakeholders lack motivation to engage meaningfully with QA initiatives.

Third, financial constraints severely hamper QA activities. The directorate's reliance on erratic funding—from the Ministry of Education (MoE) and redirected budgets for

grade 12 university entrance exams—limits its ability to conduct periodic reviews or sustain capacity-building programs. This aligns with Salmons' (2021) argument that QA systems in low-resource settings often struggle due to inconsistent funding, resulting in fragmented and reactive measures. For instance, the university's biennial review plan remains unimplemented due to budgetary limitations, undermining long-term strategic planning.

Structural and Procedural Gaps

The study also identifies procedural weaknesses in Gondar University's QA framework. The EQIP guidelines lack clarity on roles, timelines, and leadership structures during assessments, creating ambiguity in implementation. For example, there is no explicit delineation of responsibilities for assessment teams or a clear chain of command, which could lead to inefficiencies. This contrasts with TEQSA's structured approach in Australia, where standardized protocols ensure accountability and consistency (Baker, 2024). Similarly, the absence of mechanisms to integrate external QA (e.g., HERQA) into internal processes weakens synergies between institutional and national oversight bodies.

Moreover, the university's focus on academic matters at the expense of research and community engagement reveals a misalignment with its tripartite mission of education, research, and service. While the EQIP nominally includes these pillars, interviewees noted that QA activities disproportionately prioritize teaching and curriculum design. This neglect of research and community outreach contradicts global QA frameworks, which increasingly emphasize the societal impact of higher education (Meisuri et al., 2024).

Implications for Institutional Improvement

The findings underscore the need for a paradigm shift from compliance-driven QA to a culture of continuous improvement. To address staffing shortages, the university must invest in hiring specialized QA personnel and decentralizing responsibilities to college-level coordinators. Training programs for faculty and administrators could foster shared ownership of QA, reducing reliance on the directorate alone.

Financial sustainability is another critical area. The university should explore partnerships with industry and international organizations to diversify funding sources, as recommended by Williams and Harvet (2015). Additionally, integrating QA metrics into performance evaluations for staff and departments could incentivize participation, addressing the current lack of accountability.

Procedurally, revising the EQIP to include explicit timelines, leadership roles, and reward systems would enhance clarity and execution. Strengthening ties with HERQA

could also ensure alignment with national standards while leveraging external expertise for institutional audits. Finally, expanding QA focus to include research and community engagement would better reflect the university's mission and societal role.

CONCLUSION

Gondar University's QA journey exemplifies the complexities of implementing quality frameworks in resource-limited settings. While its achievements in policy development, capacity-building, and stakeholder engagement are laudable, systemic challenges—including under-resourcing, top-down governance, and procedural ambiguities—require urgent attention. Addressing these issues demands a multifaceted approach that prioritizes stakeholder collaboration, financial innovation, and structural reforms. By doing so, the university can transition from a compliance-oriented model to a dynamic, quality-driven institution capable of meeting Ethiopia's evolving educational and societal needs.

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