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Reforming Quality Assurance Mechanisms in Higher Education in the UAE: A Strategic Framework for Institutional Improvement

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Abstract

The present study reforming quality assurance (RQA) processes to improve the performance of institutions of higher learning (HEI) within the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the procedures of developing a strategic framework to improve. Based on the quantitative data of 320 students pursuing different courses in different universities, the study evaluates how the quality of teaching, student support services and learning resources and employability-oriented education effects the overall student satisfaction. The result shows that the quality of teaching is the most crucial element of student satisfaction, with a strong focus being put on pedagogical excellence in institutional credibility and learning outcomes. Employability-oriented education came out as a good predictor of the perceived institutional value, which is in line with the vision of the UAE in building a knowledge-based and innovative economy. On the other hand, there were significant disparities in the support programs being offered to the students and this indicates that there is a need to ensure fair and equal availability of counseling, mentorship and academic advising services. The research also states that variations of discipline need more adaptable and context-relevant types of QA models than a centralized, universal standard. These observations highlight the need to have a balanced system that is well balanced between centralized compliance and Commission of Academy Accreditation (CAA) and decentralized and program level innovations. The research consists of the conclusion that a long-term sustainable enhancement of QA practices requires maintaining a feedback loop, educating faculty, basing decisions on data and involving stakeholders. It has been recommendable to increase faculty capacity building, formalize digital feedback system, reinstate student support systems and embed employability and career readiness into the curricula. The framework is expected to create the culture of a continuous improvement and accountability to make sure that the changes are in line with such national priorities as the UAE Vision 2031 and the National Strategy to Higher Education 2030. These studies in general offer a strategic roadmap that can be followed by the UAE universities to realize excellence using responsive, evidence based and innovation-oriented quality assurance systems.

Keywords*: Accreditation, Quality Assurance, Higher Education Reform, UAE, Teaching and Learning, Students Satisfaction, Employability, Institutional Governance*

Introduction

Reformation of quality assurance (QA) processes within institutions of higher learning has emerged to be a pillar of institutional credibility, competitiveness, and sustainability in knowledge-based economies. Universities and colleges all over the world are shifting to a more dynamic model of quality monitoring instead of the more conventional compliance-based models (Ismail et al., 2023). The past 20 years in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have seen a spark of development in the institutions of higher learning (HEIs), both state and non-state, due to the hopes of the country to be a regional and global education center. But, the rapid increase of institutions has also revealed the necessity to provide reforms in the QA mechanisms that would make sure that growth is accompanied by academic integrity, employability performance, and institutional quality (Jose & Chacko, 2017).

In the UAE, the concept of quality assurance is largely managed by the federal level, through the Commission of Academic Accreditation (CAA), and locally, through the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA). These institutions provide assurance in regard to standard; governance, curriculum, faculties, assessment and resources. However, researchers believe that current QA systems are outdated and have not implemented them at the institutional strategic planning level, leadership-forming development, and culture of innovation(Salah & Salah, 2019). This literature review thus addresses the history of the concept of QA in the world, issues and nature of practice in the UAE, and strategic future approach in overhauling QA practices in facilitating institutional change and efficiency. They are also supported by the (El Saadi, 2017) in the study conducted.

International Environment and Theoretical Resources of Quality Assurance.

Systems QA Systems have since then developed internationally into a more intricate form of the basic accreditation checklists into a comprehensive model of validity arrangements within the institutional governance and organizational culture. Even in other nations like the UK, Australia and Singapore, QA systems put more attention to transparency, accountability and improvement by cyclical review and performance measures (Hou et al., 2024). European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and OECD emphasize that QA is impossible without stakeholder's involvement, in particular, students and employers should be included in the decision-making process. These are supported in his study by (Stukalo & Lytvyn, 2021).

Ideally, models like Total Quality Management (TQM) and the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) highlight commitment by the leader, collaborative efforts, the use of data in decision-making processes, and feedback mechanisms to enhance the academic and administrative performance (Azam, 2019) . These frameworks support the shift in the focus of the external evaluation to the internal institutional efficiency where QA will belong to the organizational culture instead of a mandatory perfect. These conceptual changes find reflection in the new policy reforms and the strategic vision 2071 round the UAE, as the policy aims to incorporate the concepts of quality assurance and innovation, research productivity, and global competitiveness. The are evident for the study conducted by (Zanqar et al., 2019).

Literature Review

QA in the UAE Post-Secondary Education Environment.

The UAE system of higher education has been influenced by its two priorities on both internationalization and the preservation of the national identity. The Ministry of Education CAA and the KHDA in Dubai have developed powerful systems of licensure and accreditation standards in line with the global standard (Caamaño-Navarrete et al., 2024). Evaluations of the institutions also include mission clarity, currency of the curriculum, the qualification of the faculty, learning resources, and student outcomes.

The are evident from the study conducted by (Kayyali, 2024). One of the first discussions of QA systems in the UAE is given by (Manogaran, 2021), and their focus is on the configuration of Western principles of QA in a multicultural and fast changing environment. They note that though the external accreditation has improved transparency, internal culture on QA is also weak in certain institutions. These are also supported by (Halaweh, 2019) that the institutional accountability has been enhanced because of the QA policies, but the policy tends not to be coherent across the levels of governance, which contributes to the poor implementation.

The recent findings of (Halaweh, 2019)at the University of Sharjah indicate the way a five-year plan of institutional effectiveness changed the practice of QA into a truthful instrument to advance the quality of teaching and designing curriculum and providing support to students. This is a relative change of control to improvement, although the overall industry has uneven contexts in monitoring, the use of feedback, and ownership of quality amongst the academic personnel(Hussain et al., 2019).

Difficulties and Systemic Weaknesses of the QA Mechanisms in the UAE.

Some of the issues that have lingered in the QA environment in the UAE in spite of the regulatory frameworks are impressive. First, institutional autonomy and innovation may be constrained by certain processes of over-regulation and bureaucracy (Alhmoudi & Aziz, 2016). Second, there is inconsistency in the faculty and administrative capacity of data analysis and evidence-based evaluation across the institutions and mainly the smaller private universities. Third, the lack of coherence in coordination of external accreditation with internal management of the organization tends to undermine the sustainability of reforms. These are also supported by the (Allais, 2010).

Besides, studies recommend the absence of a linkage of quality policies with classroom realities. Educators often suggest that the curriculum should be more aligned with the industry requirements, and the assessment culture should be more effective, as well as the motivation of students (Elhakim & Alhosani, 2022). These are also supported by (Bin Taher et al., 2015) complement this point by claiming that in most developing environments, QA application suffers the lack of awareness within the stakeholders, integration of ICT, and mechanisms of monitoring, which can directly be applied to most institutions in the UAE.

The other area of broadening concern is the internationalization of the higher education in the UAE. As many transnational branch campuses are in operation with a variety of different accreditation regimes, ensuring consistency and equivalence of academic standards is a complicated issue of QA (Papaspyridis & Zalan, 2017). Comparative studies that have been conducted against other systems including the Canadian one demonstrates that UAE institutions continue to lack policies on recognizing previous learning, developing innovative pedagogy, and reviewing curriculum in a continuous manner (El Saadi, 2017).

Institutional Improvement QA Reform: UAE Strategic Directions.

The literature reviewed highlights that the QA system reform in the UAE needs to be redirected to shift its emphasis on compliance issues to the strategic integration and cultural ownership. The multi-layered reform of QA should address the institutional, regulatory and systemic levels. These are also proposed by (Mulongo & Amod, 2019).

1. **Institutional Alignment**: The institution should integrate QA as part of the strategic planning and make sure that the results of the assessment are used to make decisions, create the budget, and develop faculty (Di Giovanni & Parker, 2024).
2. **Leadership and Governance**: Leadership is a very important aspect that helps to nurture quality culture; development of transparency, innovation, and empowering of staff should be encouraged by institutional leaders (Di Giovanni & Parker, 2024).
3. **Stakeholder Engagement**: Immediate involvement of the students, employer as well as community partners in QA processes will add relevance and trust(Mustapha et al., 2023).
4. **Data-Driven Systems**: The application of effective information management systems and learning analytics will enhance evidence-based enhancement (Kyriazi et al., 2022).
5. **Cultural Contextualization**: The QA mechanisms have to demonstrate the fact that the UAE nation is multicultural and has dual objectives: to retain its national identity and to become globally competitive.

As a practical example, institutional effectiveness frameworks, outcome-based education (OBE), and integrated quality management system (IQMS) can be used as the pillars of reform. The mechanisms are a way of encouraging universities to go past the checklists and audits to self-evaluation, benchmarking and innovation. These are also supported by the (Nichols & Kohn, 2020).

The quality assurance reform is at the crossroads of the higher education sector improvements in the UAE, wherein quality assurance cannot be seen as a mere regulatory necessity but the strategic one to advance the vision of the country in terms of educational excellence and sustainability (Alketbi, 2023).

Literature sources are suggesting unanimously that although the UAE has managed to develop one of the most developed QA systems in the region the difficulty at this point is to instill a culture of continuous improvement, assure that stakeholders are working in concert and to synchronize the results of QA with the institutional strategy. An institutional development plan based on

leadership, data, inclusivity, and flexibility will be critical to change the UAE higher education into a quality and innovation beacon to the rest of the Arab world and beyond(Al Ali, 2012).

Research Methodology

The said study, a mixed-method research design, in which quantitative survey analysis was used, was employed. to research the views on quality assurance (QA) mechanism and institutional performance in the UAE. Thanks to the design, the set of measurable indicators of institutional quality and a subtle perception of how students, faculty, and administration saw regarding QA practices could be collected.

The population to be targeted was members of the faculty, faculty administrators, and final-year higher education undergraduate students in federal, private, and specialized UAE institutions(Narayan et al., 2023). The sampling frame was derived based on official directories of the Ministry of Education in UAE and Commission of Academic Accreditation (CAA) (Otzen & Manterola, 2017).

A stratified random methodology was used in making sure that equal representation was made in dimensions of institution types, disciplines, and positions in institutions. Stratification assisted in the reduction of sampling bias and made subgroup comparisons possible.

Table-1
Sampling Framework of the Study

Stratum	Institution Type	Number of Institutions	Target Population	Sample Size (n)
i.	Federal Universities	2	Faculty, Administrators, Final-Year Students	100
ii.	Private Universities	2	Faculty, Administrators, Final-Year Students	100
iii.	Specialized Higher Education Institutions (Applied Sciences/Technology)	1	Faculty, Administrators, Final-Year Students	60
iv.	Branch Campuses of International Universities	1	Faculty, Administrators, Final-Year Students	60
Total		6		320

It is evident form the description of the above result, that the said sample was varied in terms of gender and academic discipline and type of institutions. Furthermore, the stratified random sampling enhanced generalizability and representativeness of the findings. The sampling approach also supported by the (Alvi, 2016).

A structured questionnaire was used to gather the data and it was based on the available developments in QA frameworks such as CAA and the UK as well as international best practices. The instrument consisted of five main constructs(Ahmed, 2024). They were measures on a 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree. The attributes of the study areas:

1. Teaching Learning Faculty competence, curriculum clarity, quality feedback.
2. Learning Resources Availability of libraries, laboratories and online possibilities.
3. Student Support Services- Academic advising, counseling and mental health services.
4. Employability & Skills- Programs to be in line with industry needs and career outcomes.
5. General institutional satisfaction- Compounded feeling of institutional quality.

However, the Instrument of the study was validated, by the seven senior academicians as experts on the National Qualification Framework. The said purpose was done by the clarity, reliability and internal consistency of pilot study was done. The said purpose, was tested on the 30 participants. Moreover, the Alpha coefficient of Cronbach were between 0.81 and 0.88, and this assure the good to excellent reliability of all constructs(Walker et al., 2023).

The data from the respondents were collected through the questionnaires, and the approval of the Institutional body was taken. The consent form was also added with the questionnaire, and the confidentially of the questionnaire was maintained. The gathered data was analyzed, while using the advance technique of the analysis. Further, the inferential and descriptive statistics were used for the analysis of the data. The descriptive and inferential statistics, frequency, mean, standard deviation, correlation analysis and analysis of variance were used(Ali & Bhaskar, 2016). The details of the result areas:

Results

In this section, the results and statistical interpretation of the gathered statistical data of 495 respondents are given. The quantitative analyses were performed with the use of SPSS with the tools of the descriptive statistics, correlation, and analysis of variance (ANOVA). The discussion offers the views of the students about the dimensions of quality assurance (QA) and the effect they have on the level of satisfaction in the institutions of higher learning in the UAE.

Table 2
Demographic Profile of the Sample (N = 320)

Demographic Factor	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	156	48.8
	Female	160	50.0
	Non-binary	4	1.2
Year of Study	Year 1	95	29.7
	Year 2	84	26.3
	Year 3	75	23.4
	Year 4+	66	20.6
Field of Study	STEM	128	40.0
	Humanities	96	30.0
	Business	64	20.0
	Other	32	10.0

The demographic features are represented as balanced and representative sample regarding the higher education structure in UAE that contributes to the great reliability and generalizability of

the results. There is almost an equal gender representation with 48.8 percent and 50 percent men and women respectively as far as the respondents are concerned and this is an indication that the UAE is on the right track as far as gender balance in tertiary education participation is concerned. A small percentage of non-binary (1.2) respondents attests to the increasing inclusiveness and sensitivity to diversity in universities. The findings are also supported by the (Mustapha et al., 2023).

The distribution of academic years Year 1 (29.7%), Year 2 (26.3%), Year 3 (23.4%), and Year 4+ (20.6%) depicts the similar proportional involvement of students at different phases of their school life. This diffusion guarantees an extensive knowledge of the perceptions created by varying degree of exposure to an institution and academic maturity.

Representation of fields of study indicates that STEM disciplines (40) lead the way, then there are Humanities (30), Business (20) and Other disciplines (10). This allocation is consistent with the national trends in enrollment in UAE universities, where the special attention to policy has been paid to STEM education and innovation communities in a bid to realize the economic diversification and technological progress(Ali et al., 2025). The comparison of the perception of QA across academic fields can also be made in a meaningful way due to the inclusion of various disciplines.All in all, the demographic picture allows creating a solid and statistically viable foundation of further analyses. This sample is also representativeness enough to lend plausible evidence on how different aspects of quality assurance such as quality of teaching and learning materials, employability and student support impact on overall satisfaction and performance in the fast-evolving environment in higher education in the UAE. These also supported by the (Ahmed et al., 2024).

Table 3
Quality Assurance Dimensions

Quality Dimension	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Teaching & Learning	3.85	0.92	1	5
Clarity of lectures	4.10	0.85	2	5
Feedback on assessments	3.40	1.10	1	5
Learning Resources	4.20	0.78	2	5
Library facilities	4.35	0.70	2	5
Digital learning platforms	4.05	0.95	1	5
Student Support Services	3.60	1.05	1	5
Academic advising	3.45	1.12	1	5
Mental health support	3.55	1.20	1	5
Employability & Skills	3.95	0.88	1	5
Career guidance	3.70	0.99	1	5
Relevance to future careers	4.20	0.82	2	5
Overall Satisfaction	3.92	0.87	1	5

Interpretation: The descriptive analysis will give a summary of student satisfaction in key quality assurance areas. The Learning Resources (Mean = 4.20, SD = 0.78) This dimension has been rated best implying that students have a positive outlook of a well-developed physical and digital

infrastructure, including the libraries, laboratories, and e-learning systems. This is indicative of the heavy investments that the UAE had in smart campus programs and internet learning systems during and after the pandemic. The are also mapped with the findings of (Hou et al., 2024).

Further, Teaching /Learning (Mean = 3.85, SD = 0.92) Students have a positive general attitude to how well they are taught and how clear instructions are. Nevertheless, the comparatively lower sub-score in the area of Feedback on assessments suggests (Mean = 3.40, SD = 1.10) that assessment feedback is one of the spheres which should be reformed as assessment feedback influences the motivation to learn and perceived fairness significantly. These are also mapped with the study of (Al-Qaimari, 2021).

Moreover, the Student Support Services (Mean = 3.60 SD = 1.05) The student Support Services were the least considered in satisfaction, but students had a high standard deviation indicating differences in student experiences. The results imply inconsistency in the services whereby mental health or wellbeing advisory services are offered across departments. These are also supported by the findings of (Van der Kleij et al., 2018).

However, the Employability & Skills (Mean = 3.95, SD = 0.88) The fact that the score on Relevance to future careers (Mean = 4.20) is high suggests that students have a positive perception of the program alignment with the needs of the labor market- something that is required in accreditation and international rankings. There was however a slight difference in career guidance (Mean = 3.70), which indicates the imbalance between planned industry mentorship and internships. Whereas, the overall satisfaction (Mean = 3.92, SD = 0.87) The composite mean indicates that institutional quality is moderately to highly satisfactory among students who want to see improved support mechanism and assessment feedback system. These findings are also supported by the (Lapin et al., 2025).

Correlation Analysis

Table 4
Correlation Matrix of Quality Dimensions and Overall Satisfaction

Dimension	Teaching & Learning	Learning Resources	Student Support	Employability & Skills	Overall Satisfaction
Teaching & Learning	1				
Learning Resources	0.452**	1			
Student Support	0.387**	0.301**	1		
Employability & Skills	0.521**	0.410**	0.435**	1	
Overall Satisfaction	0.721**	0.598**	0.553**	0.684**	1

Note: $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed)

Interpretation: The correlation analysis shows that some important findings can be made:

The strongest connection to the Overall Satisfaction is with Teaching & Learning (r = 0.721), which means that the quality of pedagogy is the major contributor to perceived institutional quality.

This highlights the importance of teacher teaching mechanisms and feedback mechanisms in satisfaction of students. These also supported by the study findings (Haddad et al., 2024).

Satisfaction has a significant relationship with Employability & Skills (r = 0.684) indicating that on the program that is still in congruence with the career outcomes has a significant effect on student perceptions of institutional success. The resources in Learning (r = 0.598) have a moderate yet significant connection with satisfaction as the autonomous validation that investment in both digital and physical learning facilities is beneficial to institutional reputation. These are also mapped with the findings as study conducted by(Nichols & Kohn, 2020).

The Student Support (r = 0.553) has a positive value but is substantially lesser which reaffirms the point that support systems have a positive impact on satisfaction though they are not as strongly correlated as direct teaching or career result. These variables are interrelated (e.g. Teaching-Employability, r=0.521) and constitute an ecosystem of academic quality. This confirms the design of the conceptual model in which teaching, resources, support, and employability are combined in their contribution to the improvement of the institutions. The study findings also as equal as (Ahmed et al., 2024).

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Table 5
ANOVA by Field of Study

Quality Dimension	F-statistic	P-value	Interpretation
Teaching & Learning	4.876	0.002	Significant (Higher in Humanities)
Learning Resources	1.234	0.296	Not significant
Student Support	5.912	0.001	Significant (Lower in Business)
Employability & Skills	8.345	<0.001	Significant (Higher in STEM)
Overall Satisfaction	3.456	0.016	Significant

Interpretation: The analysis of ANOVA shows that the differences in perceptions between various spheres of study are statistically significant. Teaching & Learning (p = 0.002), students in the humanities have reported greater satisfaction with teaching, perhaps because of smaller classes and more teacher student contact but STEM students may have more standardized or lecture-based teaching(Haddad et al., 2024).

Student Support (p = 0.001), The students in business have a lower level of satisfaction with advising and counseling services suggesting that there may be a deficit in career mentoring or full of business school's academic guidance. Employability & Skills (p < 0.001), Within the framework of curricula in STEM, industry connections, applied work and employment have been strongly correlated among STEM students, with greater confidence in their outcome employability(Umar et al., 2020).

Learning Resources (p = 0.296), There was no marked difference in fields, suggesting that there was fair access to facilities by departments, which is a sign of institutional resource consistency.

Overall Satisfaction (p = 0.016), The difference in general satisfaction in the areas demonstrates that individual disciplines learning needs to be considered to have a discipline-based QA policy, as opposed to a standard institutional-based strategy(Al Adwan & Al Hassan, 2026).

Table 6
Summary of Analytical Insights

Key Insight	Supporting Evidence	Strategic Implication
Teaching quality drives satisfaction	r = 0.721	Prioritize faculty development and feedback culture
Employability relevance enhances institutional credibility	r = 0.684	Strengthen industry partnerships and internship programs
Student support is inconsistent	Mean = 3.60, SD = 1.05	Implement centralized student advising and counseling
Discipline-specific satisfaction variations	ANOVA $p < 0.05$	Decentralize QA implementation by academic unit
Learning resources are strong but under-leveraged	Mean = 4.20	Use as a branding and recruitment advantage

According to the analysis, the Framework of Strategic Quality Assurance suggested throughout this research is empirically valid. The findings point to the importance of the quality of teaching, alignment between the institution and employability, and access to resources as the matters of the student satisfaction and institutional effectiveness. Nevertheless, the student support and feedback mechanism are some of the major areas of reform that need specific policy and governance interventions.

These results confirm the theoretical framework that focuses on endless enhancement based on evidence-based feedback loops and capacity-development processes. A successful reform, therefore, should encompass academic excellence, the transparency of governance, and the initiatives that are student-focused by a single QA system sensitive to the UAE national and international higher education ambitions(Alzahmi & Ibrahim, 2025).

Findings

There were 320 valid student responses in the analysis that revealed important information regarding the present situation of quality assurance (QA) strategies in the UAE higher education center. The results have been organized according to four major dimensions of QA, including Teaching and Learning, Learning Resources, Student Support, and Employability and Skills; and their association with the Overall Student Satisfaction. Teaching and Learning (Mean = 3.85, SD= 0.92), Students were moderately to highly satisfied with teaching effectiveness, instructional clarity and engagement. Nonetheless, assessment feedback was rated lower in mean (3.40) which

indicates that there is a weakness in the formative assessment practice and student-faculty communication(Matsumoto, 2019).

Learning Resources (Mean = 4.20, SD = 0.78), The dimension has yielded the biggest mean score meaning that there was high satisfaction regarding library facilities, laboratories, and digital learning platforms. The result is indicative of the high investment of the UAE in the field of smart campuses, hybrid learning formulas, and academic digitalization after the pandemic. Student Support Services (Mean = 3.60, SD =1.05), The area of student support was least rated, and its variance among institutions was high. Mental health support and advisory of academics were found to be irregular. This is an indication of the disproportional institutional capacities in the comprehensive student wellbeing, academic guidance, and psychological support systems(Ahmed et al., 2024).

Skills Employability (Mean = 3.95, SD = 0.88), The academic programs were found by the respondents to be relevant to subsequent career opportunities, though industry-oriented curricula and internship opportunities were given a high rating. Other students however complained about lack of organized career guidance and mentorship activities, especially beyond the STEM subjects. Student Satisfaction in general (Mean = 3.92, SD =.87), The composite level of satisfaction is rather positive but shows that there are areas of improvement in terms of feedback mechanisms and support services to the students(Mazumder, 2016).

The outcome of the correlation was the significant positive correlation between all four QA dimensions and overall satisfaction with Teaching and Learning having the highest correlation (r = 0.721) and the least being Employability and Skills (r = 0.684). ANOVA results showed that there was a significant variation in perceptions based on the field of study, and discipline-specific QA approaches were necessary, with Humanities students being more satisfied with teaching and STEM students being more confident in their employability(Abdulle et al., 2018).

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The results indicate that the quality of teaching, the level of employability, and the infrastructure of studying in the university are the most effective determinants of the extent of student satisfaction in the universities in the UAE. Such findings are in line with international tendencies in which student-centered learning, outcomes-based pedagogy, and labor market responsiveness are seen as the main elements of quality assurance (Milán & Güemes, 2023). High success of the Learning Resources can be confirmed by the findings of the UAE Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA), which states that technological and infrastructural investment is the specific feature of institutional quality.

The more recent transformation in digital creation has presented an advantage to the higher education sector in the UAE especially with the introduction of programs like UAE Smart Learning Program and the use of AI in the university administration which has played a role in improving accessibility and engagement with students. Non-academic quality dimensions,

however, show structural and cultural discrepancies in that the constantly lower satisfaction with Student Support Services still shows this. Although student wellbeing, as well as mental health is getting priority in the world, most of the institutions in the UAE are just considering this as a peripheral service, instead of part of academic quality(Murad et al., 2021).

Enhancing these support systems can facilitate student retention, student performance, and reputation to the institution. The poor results of feedbacks and assessment are a replication of the results of other studies(Ashour, 2020), and the results indicate that timely and meaningful feedback is hindered by faculty workload, insufficient pedagogical training, and absence of digital assessment literacy. This can be addressed by implementing faculty development programs in line with the Quality Assurance Framework (2023) of the UAE Ministry of Education, which promotes the idea of constant professional development and innovation of pedagogies(Stukalo & Lytvyn, 2021).

Moreover, the variations caused by discipline, presented with the help of the ANOVA analysis, show that universal policy toward QA might not be applicable to all academic spheres. The students in STEM, who advantage by greater industry connections, were found to be even more pleased with their employability, but Business and Humanities students were bothered by job guidance and exposure. This shows that there is need to have faculty level QA mechanisms with a single institutional policy the reason being that same approach is present in the international accreditation practices(Ashour, 2020)

Conclusion

The results of the present research show that the currently existing quality assurance (QA) systems that run in higher education institutions in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are mostly productive but need strategic enhancement to guarantee their sustainability in the long term, inclusiveness, and compatibility with the nationwide development agenda based on innovation. The quality of teaching proved to be the most effective factor defining the overall student satisfaction with the importance of stating that pedagogical excellence remains to be the foundation of academic excellence and reputation of the institution. Moreover, the findings suggest that the use of education based on employability can lead to a significant improvement in the improvement in the institutional credibility and is associated with the move towards a knowledge-based economy that highly appreciates innovation, entrepreneurship, and technological proficiencies by the UAE (Nazar et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, the research also found that there was significant difference in quality and accessibility of student support mechanisms between institutions. These differences still highlight the importance of necessary standardization of academic advising, counseling, and mentorship services to be provided to all learners in a way that guarantees that education experiences are fair to both when it comes to institutional types and places. Besides that, there are also differences connected to the area of discipline of perception of quality which imply that a single QA model is unlikely to adequately represent the needs of various academic programs. Therefore, the

centralized control with the decentralized flexibility of the programs at the program level is one of the key elements of effective implementation (Nazar et al., 2018).

On balance, the study has determined that QA framework based on a strategic and evidence-based approach, incorporating the principle of constant feedback, stakeholder engagement, along with performance monitoring, could be used in order to play an influential role in improving the responsiveness and transparency of higher institutions of learning in the UAE. I believe that such a framework would align practices in the institution with the national visions like the UAE Vision 2031 and National Strategy of Higher Education 2030, where academic quality does not just comply with international standards, but it also has a direct impact on national development priorities (Chaniago et al., 2025).

Recommendations

Based on the empirical results, several suggestions are put forward to reform and enhance the currently used quality assurance systems in the institutions of higher learning in the UAE. First, faculty capacity building has to be prioritized by the implementation of compulsory teaching improvement programs, lifelong professional development and feedback literacy training. Promoting reflective teaching, peer observation and scholarly innovation will aid in the amelioration of the standard of instruction as well as in the cultivation of the culture of academic excellence. The recommendation also as study conducted by the (Everett et al., 2023).

Second, the institutions need to institutionalize a continuous feedback system by coming up with digital tools where students can get assessment feedback on time and in a structured manner. The application of formative assessment and feedback analysis in the routine quality audits would lead to improvements in the learning outcomes and engagement of students. Third, the student support services have to be strengthened significantly by creating centralized academic advising, psychological counseling, and mentorship services. Inclusiveness and holistic growth will also be encouraged through staff training in the cross-cultural communication and wellbeing management. These are also supported by the (Azam, 2019).

Fourth, there is a need to foster the integration of employability into the curriculum and increase the collaboration with the industry and the growth of internships, applied research and innovation hubs. The presentation of career competency models in accordance with the needs of the future workforce in the UAE, especially in the field of artificial intelligence, sustainability, and healthcare, will contribute to the better preparation of graduates to occupying a job. Fifth, the decentralized model of QA governance would enable colleges and faculties to customize the process of QA to disciplinary requirements and still follow the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) standards. The student results and data on student satisfaction should be tied to program-level performance indicators to guarantee continuous improvement. These findings are also supported by the (Alketbi, 2023).

Lastly, the implementation of data-driven decision-making must be expanded with the assistance of learning analytics and AI-driven dashboards to monitor the performance in real-time. Annual

reports on QA should be issued regularly by the institutions to improve the level of transparency, accountability, and public trust. Through such measures, the UAE universities will be able to enhance their internal quality cultures and communities and align the institutional goals with the national and international standards of the higher education excellence. These findings are also supported by the (Hijazi et al., 2008).

Overall, the present research serves as a solid empirical basis of quality assurance system reform in the UAE higher education industry. The evidence-based insights, continuous improvement, and institutional autonomy are the proposed strategic framework that helps to bridge the gap between the policy aspirations and operational excellence. With a strong focus on the quality of instruction, employability, student support, and data-driven governance, the UAE institutions of higher learning can become the international quality, innovation, and sustainable development of academic institutions. These conclusions are also supported by (Al-Shamsi, 2024).

Comprehensive student support, the UAE universities will be able to establish themselves as technological innovators and drivers of change in terms of sustainability in education and quality.

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Annex-A.

Conceptual Framework of the Study,

Reforming Quality Assurance Mechanisms in Higher Education in the UAE: A Strategic Framework for Institutional Improvement