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The  
British University  
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**An assessment of the effectiveness of the current higher  
education quality assurance systems for raising higher  
education standards in the UAE**

تقييم فعالية أنظمة ضمان جودة التعليم العالي الحالية لرفع معايير التعليم العالي في  
دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة

by

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**Dissertation submitted in fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
MASTER OF EDUCATION**

at

**The British University in Dubai**

**November 2020**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The research aimed to assess the effectiveness of higher education quality assurance systems in the UAE, and toward this, an evaluation of the quality assurance process and exploration of the gaps and challenges in quality assurance in higher education was undertaken. Additionally, the research also aimed to propose recommendations for a quality assurance framework assessing and assuring high-quality standards for the higher education institutions in the UAE. The research was conducted by collecting data from students in the form of surveys (653) and from the interviews of managers (8) and teachers (2) of two universities in the UAE. The findings indicated that students from both universities perceived their quality assurance to be good, though, students from the private university rated their college higher on all quality parameters. The interviews revealed that both managers and teachers perceived a scope for improving quality assurance at both the colleges, though they differed on what needed to be improved. The managers suggested improvements in teachers' teaching styles and motivations for self-development, while the teachers suggested aligning curriculum with industry needs, keeping students motivated and instilling better discipline and stringent assessment methods for students. The findings led to recommendations for policy making to re-design curriculum, formalize quality assurance and developing teachers; as well as education practice to be made more student-focused, aligned with industry needs, and encouraging students toward hard-work and discipline.

## ملخص الدراسة

يهدف البحث إلى تقييم فعالية أنظمة ضمان جودة التعليم العالي في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة ، ومن أجل ذلك ، تم إجراء تقييم لعملية ضمان الجودة واستكشاف الفجوات والتحديات في ضمان الجودة في التعليم العالي. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، يهدف البحث أيضًا إلى اقتراح توصيات لإطار ضمان الجودة لتقييم وضمان معايير عالية الجودة لمؤسسات التعليم العالي في الإمارات العربية المتحدة. وقد تم إجراء البحث من خلال جمع البيانات من الطلاب من خلال استبيانات (653) ومقابلات مع مديري (2) وأساتذة (8) لجامعتين في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة. أشارت النتائج إلى أن الطلاب من الجامعتين يرون أن ضمان الجودة جيد ، على الرغم من أن الطلاب من الجامعة الخاصة صنفوا كليتهم أعلى في جميع معايير الجودة. كشفت المقابلات أن كلاً من المديرين والأساتذة أدركوا وجود مجال لتحسين ضمان الجودة في الكليات، على الرغم من اختلافهم بشأن ما يلزم تحسينه. اقترح المديرون إدخال تحسينات على أساليب تدريس الأساتذة وتشجيعهم لتطوير الذات، بينما اقترح الأساتذة مواءمة المناهج الدراسية مع احتياجات الصناعة، مما يحفز الطلاب ويغرس نظامًا أفضل وأساليب تقييم صارمة للطلاب. بناء على النتائج تم اقتراح توصيات لصانعي السياسات التعليمية لإعادة تصميم المناهج وإضفاء الطابع الرسمي على ضمان الجودة وتطوير الأساتذة؛ بالإضافة إلى توصيات تتعلق بالممارسة التعليمية بما يجعلها أكثر تركيزًا على الطلاب، وأكثر مواكبة مع احتياجات الصناعة، مع تشجيع الطلاب على العمل الجاد والانضباط.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my professors, Prof. David Solomon, Prof. Hill Christopher, Dr. Tendai Charles, Dr. Ayyash Emad, and my advisor, Prof. Abdulai Abukari for their tireless guidance and support in helping me to complete my paper.

I would also like to give my greatest thanks to my dear parents— my mother Mouza and my father Mohammed—without whose lifetime support and love I could never have finished this work.

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# **Chapter 1**

## **1.1 Background Context of Research**

Many scholars have studied the correlation between education and quality management. A study by Soomro & Ahmed (2012) found that education is a service and its quality management is a complex subject. Quality requires the assessment of the service quality but also of the cultural influence as well as the opinion of multiple stakeholders in different fields (Soomro & Ahmed, 2012). Studies have developed many methods to assess the quality of higher education. These approaches include TQM (Al Tasheh, 2013; Rabah, 2015) and HedPerf (Higher Education Performance Management) and SERVQUAL (Service Quality) as stated by research (Purwanto, Noor & Kusumawati, 2020). Higher Education Institutes take into account many factors like costs and strategies before adopting any assessment approach (Zanqar, Khatibi, Azam and Tham, 2019). Studies have shown the quality management is a very important issue in higher education because education has a direct influence on the economic and intellectual growth of the country (Rawazik & Carroll, 2009; Al-Balla, 2010).

## **1.2 Higher Education Quality in the UAE**

As per the World Economic Forum's Competitiveness Report, Higher education institutions in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have been highly ranked for achieving quality indicators on the global level (World Economic Forum 2019). On the contrary, some researchers and authors have questioned the quality of graduates, higher education standards, and involvement in the research sector in the UAE (Ashour and Fatima, 2016). Scholars have also argued that the UAE's varied

economic growth and modernization have affected the policies concerning the quality management of higher education institutions. Recent developments in the UAE's knowledge-based economy have also led to the establishment of many new higher education institutions. There is a need to discuss the quality management schemes and its complexities for graduates as well as the quality of teaching facilities concerning the UAE's knowledge-driven economy (Pillay & Kimber, 2009). The Ministry of Education of the UAE has also established the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) to check the licensure of the higher education institutes and promote educational excellence in diversified fields (Ashour, 2017). The main aim of CAA is to ensure that the standards of higher education in the UAE must meet the international norms. There is no doubt that the accreditation and licensure of higher education programs provide high measures of quality education and also acknowledge the global standards for higher education institutes for constant growth and improved study structure (Tamim & Colburn, 2019; Tezcan-Unal, Winston & Qualter, 2018). Hence, it can be said that the graduates and students in the UAE are provided with certain standards of higher education as set up by the Ministry of Education of the UAE. The main objective should be the quality management of such standards and accreditations.

### **1.3 Problems in the UAE**

The quality of graduates and scholars from higher education institutes in the UAE has been questioned by many researchers. Many factors have influenced this argument that is discussed in many research studies. After gaining independence from British-Trucial states in 1971, the UAE is governed as a federal monarchy constituting seven emirates (Engin, 2017). The local economy has changed drastically from simple trading to a much-diversified global business context (Khalaf,

2002). Expatriates from different countries have settled in the UAE during this transformation period as a workforce to build a newly formed nation and modernized infrastructure. As per government policies, only UAE nationals are eligible for free public (higher) education (Tezcan-Unal.B.,2019). The cultural background of the UAE has also impacted the quality of higher education institutions (Ashour, 2017). The country may be moving towards a new era, yet its cultural traditions are deeply rooted in Islamic beliefs and practices. Hence, many issues have arisen due to Western educational norms clashing with native Arabian cultural tradition and religious influence over the choice of career (Solloway, 2016). The UAE is also facing one major issue which is the involvement of females in the workforce. The percentage of females in higher education institutions is way higher than the percentage of women employees in the public and private sectors in the UAE (Wang & Kassam, 2016). This shows that the career choices of women in the UAE are largely influenced by traditional and cultural roles they are expected to prioritize. The UAE has taken steps to increase the employability of its graduates by introducing various Quality Assurance schemes to develop broader skills and traits for their future employment.

The proposed study assesses various strategies that have been developed to assure quality management in higher education institutes and their effectiveness in raising the standards of higher education in the UAE.

#### **1.4 Research Aims**

Main Aim - To assess the effectiveness of current higher education quality assurance systems for raising higher education standards in two colleges of higher education in the UAE.

## **1.5 Research Objectives**

- To understand and evaluate the Quality Assurance Process in Higher Education in two colleges of higher education in the UAE.
- To explore the opportunities and challenges in Quality Standards of Higher Education as perceived by the students, professors, and administrators regarding higher education quality assurance processes in two colleges of higher education in the UAE.
- To propose a quality assurance framework and resource materials for assessing and assuring high-quality standards for the higher education institutions in two colleges of higher education in the UAE.

## **1.6 Research Questions**

Main Research Question - Does the current quality assurance system in higher education institutions in the UAE lead to high-quality educational standards in the UAE?

Sub questions:

How is quality assurance maintained in higher education institutions in the UAE?

What are the perceptions of students, professors, and administrators regarding higher education quality assurance processes related opportunities and challenges in the UAE?

How can the gaps be filled, and challenges overcome to ensure high-quality education standards in the higher education institutions in the UAE?

## **1.7 Importance of research**

The research provides a broader outlook to distinguish between the problems which already exist in the society due to cultural and traditional background as well the issues which have raised due to the ineffectiveness of the quality assurance schemes. This research also highlights the importance of high-quality standards for higher education institutes. It will help to produce better graduates so that the UAE may have a higher employable workforce. The quality standards mentioned in the research tend towards western higher education standards which may likely help to create a workforce and research pool as per global requirements. This will significantly increase the quality of academics and may help to improve the pace of the knowledge-based economy of the UAE (Bowers, 2017). There are many higher education institutes in the UAE where students from other countries mostly South Asian, have been enrolled in large numbers. If the quality management in such institutes is assured at global standards, these institutions may make UAE as the educational hub for many countries. It will boost up the educational economy as well as increase the exposure of the national students and graduates (Wilkins, 2010). This research, therefore, focusses on high standards of quality management in the higher education sector in the UAE.

## **1.8 Methods Used**

The proposed research adopts a mixed approach of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies for the collection of data and its evaluation. As per the qualitative approach, the research includes interviews with the teaching staff like professors as well as the administrative bodies. These interviews have been carried in a structured pattern in one public and one private university in the UAE. These universities were selected in a purposive or judgmental sampling method, based on

the researchers' contacts in the two locations, which helped in getting permissions for the research. Five teachers or participants were included from each university, so the sample size was 10. With the help of these interviews, the research aims to have a better understanding of the opinions, feelings and, outlook of the participants regarding the need for quality assurance in the higher education system as well as the quality management system which is currently existing in their institutes. The research hence focuses on the various practices and policies adopted by higher education institutes to assure high standards of quality education in the UAE. The other aim of the research is to collect data from the current students and graduates from the public and private institutes as per the quantitative approach. The students were selected randomly by placing a request for participation in the two universities' notice board requesting interested people to contact the researcher. About 38 students participated in the research. This included surveys aiming to collect quantifiable data based on the opinions and attitudes of the students regarding the quality standards of higher education in the UAE. The findings from the data collected through surveys and interviews using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies will be merged to develop the answers for the research aims.

## **1.9 Outline of Work**

Chapter 1 gives a general introduction about the background of the study, research aims, and methodologies adopted to answer the various questions generated during research. The scope and significance of the research are very vast, and its objectives are briefly discussed in the introduction. Further, Chapter 2 presents a literature review presented that discusses the various findings of many researchers through a critical review of the existing literature on higher education standards in the UAE and global market needs. It also focused on the advanced skills required to meet up with the

rising global standards as well as for the growing UAE economic market. Chapter 3 is the research methodology that includes a thorough discussion and presentation of the research approach and the design adopted to carry out the empirical study of the research subject. The Chapter 4 consists of the findings from the analysis of the data collected through surveys and interviews of the students as well as the teachers. Chapter 5 or Discussion provides a relevant discussion where the findings of the research are merged to develop a broader concept which is relevant to the aim of the research and within the context of other existing researches and studies. The final chapter is Chapter 6 or Conclusions where conclusions are drawn from the findings of the research focuses on the practical aspects of the discussions made in the study and the academic implications of the arguments made. Further, the study also recommends various measures to ensure quality management in the higher education sector in the UAE.

### **1.10 Summary**

The research points out various important factors that influence the quality assurance of higher education institutes in the UAE. The infrastructural and economic developments in the UAE are in the need of graduates and scholars in its workforce who are skillful as per global standards. Hence, the country needs better quality assurance schemes and policies to ensure that the students and graduates from these higher educational institutes are provided with better skills and knowledge so that they may fit into rising global standards. Moreover, the cultural background and traditions also influence the quality management of the higher education system. It affects the nature of skills which the students are opting for and also the gender balance in the workforce. The study

summarizes the complexities and policy reformation that are needed to uplift the quality of higher education in the UAE



## **CHAPTER 2 - Literature Review**

### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents a review of literature on the topic of quality assurance in higher education. In keeping with the research questions and objectives, the chapter explored existing literature on the concept and understanding of quality assurance in higher education, measurement of quality, quality assurance policy followed by the UAE, challenges faced by higher education in the UAE and international standards in quality assurance and management. The review of literature is aimed at understanding the current situation and providing a context to the findings from the current research.

### **2.2 Quality Assurance in Higher Education**

According to Soomro & Ahmed (2012), quality assurance and management is a complex subject when it comes to the service sector, especially education. Quality requires the assessment of the service quality but also of the cultural influence as well as the opinion of multiple stakeholders in different fields (Soomro & Ahmed, 2012). There are however many methods to assess the quality of higher education. These approaches include TQM (Total Quality Management), HedPerf (Higher Education Performance Management) and SERVQUAL (Service Quality) (Purwanto, Noor & Kusumawati, 2020). These methods of quality assurance are time consuming and costly also, so, higher education institutes take into account many factors like costs and their end objectives and strategies before adopting any assessment approach. Nevertheless, quality management is a very important issue in higher education because education has a direct influence

on the economic and intellectual growth of the country (Rawazik & Carroll, 2009). Some of the factors that form the basis of quality in higher education institutions include - quality of leadership, engagement of people, decision-making abilities, continuous improvement, and quality and relationship management. As per Fawzia (2010) there are some key representatives of a good quality education, and these include staff and faculty quality, the quality of students enrolled, and most importantly, curriculum quality. These also include the quality of infrastructure, management and governance quality, and finally accountability quality. Next, we look at the measurement of quality in higher education.

### **2.3 How is quality measured in Higher Education?**

Scholars have defined quality assessment in education as the process that ensures the delivery of quality education as per international standards. These standards should assure that the education imparted in the educational organizations must not only possess high quality in its degree courses but also should have a quality curriculum and educational outcomes like employability and skill development. The educational standards in the Middle East countries and specifically in the UAE are developing at a substantial rate (Badry, 2019). It is therefore a need of the hour to develop policies and frameworks which can govern and maintain the quality of higher education which is imparted in the higher education institutions. Research has shown that higher education institutes should focus on the quality of their degree programs and develop their curriculums as per the market needs so that the employability skills in the graduates can be developed (Rajan and Pandita, 2019).

As per discussions by experts in the UNESCO's World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE) in 2009, challenges in higher education include quality assurance, the academic professionalism, and teacher performance (Commonwealth of Learning, 2011).

Most commonly used indicators that higher education institutes use for quality assurance include - quality of teaching and learning, adoption of innovative methods for teaching, development of faculty and researches, evaluation of infrastructure, and learning resources and the quality of the interface. The progress of students is also monitored periodically, and leadership and governance quality assurance done, as part of quality assurance. Besides all these factors to assess the quality of education, Soomro & Ahmad (2012) state that the most important element to improve the quality of education is the teachers and teaching practices. Thus, the quality assessment must consider the quality of achievement of students as well as teachers, the employability of the graduates in the job market, governing staff, the infrastructure of the institutes, curriculum, and finally learning outcomes.

It was suggested by many scholars that quality can be managed by the Total Quality Management (TQM) approach. Many researchers have found that quality in higher education is well-managed by following the principles of TQM (Azam and Moha Asri, 2015; Tham et al., 2017; Udriyah et al., 2019; Ghnaim, 2013) or SERVQUAL (Haque et al., 2014; Rachmawati et al., 2019; Tarofder et al., 2019). However, individual institutes employ different methods for quality assurance, some based on formal quality assessment scales and some, simple questionnaires provided to the students and people related to the governance of the institution (Udriyah et al., 2019). A study by Fatima (2019) states that data collection for quality assurance through questionnaires is one of the most

interactive methods. Some other methods include Focus group analysis, depth interviews, benchmarking, peer reviews, student feedbacks, fishbone analysis, checklist and other statistical methods like control charts, Pareto diagrams, histograms and scatter charts (Al-Amri, Jani and Zubairi, 2015).

## **2.4 Overview of quality assurance strategies in the UAE**

The UAE government is making progressive developments to ensure the quality standards of higher education institutes in the country. Besides having strategies to increase the graduation rate in the country, it is of utmost importance to maintain and govern the quality assurance system of higher education. As per the current strategic plan for higher education, the UAE has planned to raise the graduation rate to 98 percent in the year 2017-21 from 96 percent of 2016 (Embassy of The United Arab Emirates, 2019).

The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHESR) has been appointed by the UAE government with the purpose of develop policies and strategies for all the higher education institutes. Some Emirates also have their local regulating bodies to serve the same purpose in their territory. Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) which is governed by MHESR is established which is responsible for the accreditation of all the higher education institutes and universities in the UAE. Accreditation process is a primary approach to quality assessment of all institutes of higher education, according to the Ministry of Education, UAE (Mansour and Jakka, 2013). There are few foreign Universities located in the Emirate of Dubai that are governed by the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA). These Universities are accredited in

their local countries and are termed as free-zone Universities. The academic system of free-zone Universities is similar to the main campuses in their home countries e.g., America, India, Britain, and Pakistan, etc.

The KHDA governs a University Quality Assurance International Board (UQAIB) which is a direct member of the global body called International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). The UQAIB regulates the quality assurance policies in the branch campuses of the foreign Universities in the UAE. According to KHDA, quality assurance policy is implemented through a validation model that helps in assessing if the program delivered in the UAE campus of the international university matches the one delivered in the home location of the university (KHDA, 2020).

A governing body like CAA has been established in the Abu Dhabi Emirate called as Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC). The ADEC follows a policy of evidence-based assessment of fitness-of-purpose of the educational institute, where the purpose is defined as alignment with the country's strategic priorities in the context of its socio-economic and cultural needs (ADEC, 2020).

The UAE has developed itself as one of the prime markets in the higher education sector and it becomes a prime need of the nation to maintain the global quality standards of education at every level. As per a report by CAA, agencies like KHDA and ADEC are established under the mission to ensure high academic standards and quality management through effective policies and operations (CAA, 2012). Moreover, these agencies are also responsible for making reforms in the educational sector while considering the local culture and traditional background of the country.

These reforms include future strategies that have to be implemented according to future trends in the education market.

Research done by Tamim (2018) clearly states that licensure and accreditation of higher education programs provide higher standards of education by improving quality parameters and also improves the country's presence in the international higher education profiles. KHDA provides data based on a survey that 62 institutions are imparting higher education in the UAE including 24 free-zone Universities in the year 2017 (KHDA, 2017). These institutes are accredited and licensed by agencies under CAA and are more than 100 licensed higher education institutes imparting education to a population of 9.54 million only.

## **2.5 Challenges to quality assurance in the UAE**

Researchers have questioned the quality of graduates and scholars from higher education institutes in the UAE. According to Bunoti (2011), many factors challenge the quality of higher education. They include elements like economic factors, political factors, and socio-cultural influence, quality of students and faculty, and administrative factors. Researches and discussions suggest that these challenges and issues should be dealt with concerning to the current position of the UAE in the education sector as well as economic transformation. As per Jessop (2017), the global economy is moving towards a more knowledge-based economy which has made the education sector more competitive. Badry (2019) state that a more progressive approach is needed for enrolment and recruitment of international students in the UAE as the nation possess diverse socio-cultural and demographics.

As per Kirk (2010), the model of the higher education system in the UAE is based on a modern Western education system where the delivery of education to the students is mainly Eurocentric or English-language base by mostly Western and/or Western-trained teachers. It raises serious social and cultural concerns in the UAE. Solloway (2016) in a study says that English is seen as a potential threat to cultural integrity in the UAE. Moreover, the Emirati students believe that English proficiency is necessary for the current economic scenario, but they choose Arab as a medium for academic studies. There becomes a conflict in the choices and preferences that hampers the quality of education in the UAE.

It has also been established that the higher education system and the workplace market should come together to increase the employability of the graduates and meet the market demands. The McKinsey Global Institute (2017) states that only 22 percent of the students in the UAE believe that their education is in accordance with the growing needs of the global job market. The graduates are lacking in 21<sup>st</sup> century skills which makes them less suitable for the present workplace scenario. As per a study by Hvidt, (2016), there is a considerable difference between the job market demands and the academic preferences of the UAE students. A large number of students are enrolled in social sciences programs summing to 67 percent in private and 56 percent in government universities. Research by Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Authority (FCSA, 2017) shows that the number of students preferring subjects like engineering and information technology in the UAE is very less and this shows that awareness among the graduates about the economic and market needs is lacking in the country.

However, as per the UAE's National Higher Education Strategy 2030, the government is developing policies to strengthen the accreditation structure and standards through increasing research inputs. Its main aim is to modify the current education curriculum following the growing workplace sector and increase the employment rate of the graduates.

## **2.6 What other countries use to be more effective?**

The National Unions of Students of Europe (National Unions of Students of Europe, 2018) has recommended some important factors that govern the assessment of the quality of education in higher institutes. The most important factor is the control of quality which acknowledges the operations and procedures of the accreditation of the institutes through formal and informal verifications that determine the standards of the education policies. Next, it recommends the enhancement of quality under which continuous development and improvement of the institutional provision quality is thoroughly assessed. It also includes activities and procedures adopted by the higher education institutes to ensure quality education as per the standards (National Unions of Students of Europe, 2018). The NUSE also suggests the importance of The Assessment of Quality referring to the external procedures to evaluate the quality of experience of the students and teachers both. It looks after the evaluation body which is governing the quality assessment of the institutes. Finally, the NUSE recommends the assessment of The Culture of Quality which accounts for creating and maintaining internal high quality in the educational organizations by assessing the educational techniques, implementation, and outcomes. Quality culture acknowledges the capacity of the education program to ensure the quality of the institution regularly (National Unions of Students of Europe, 2018).



Imam (2015) studied the global requirements of the quality education corresponding to the industrial demands. As per the study, there is a need to create a culture of quality and to ensure global standards by establishing quality as an important principle in any process. The study also suggests that the need of the students and advancements in academics must be entertained on a priority basis. Also, there is a need to create a balance between the industrial demands and employability of the graduates by considering social and economic trends and ensuring high quality as an integral part of the academic system.

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, The Ministry of Education governs the policies which ensure the quality management of the higher education in the private institutes through academic and administrative reports. Specialized committees visit these private institutions periodically to determine the progress of the quality management system and the outcomes (Private Higher Education Report KSA, 2015). The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has also established The National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAA) which looks after the standards of accreditation criteria and quality assessment of the offered programs of the educational institutes in the KSA.

In general, most of the countries have adopted a basic framework for quality assurance and accreditation of the higher education institutes and universities in their countries. These frameworks have been developed with a comprehensive layout to meet the job market demands and the countries' social and economic situations. Most importantly, the quality assurance agencies

ensure that future demands of the global workplace market are fulfilled by the implementation of the right educational reform policies and strategies as per the nation's present scenario.

## **2.7 Summary**

This chapter gave a review of literature as related to the concept of quality assurance in higher education and the factors like infrastructure, teacher quality, curriculum, and teaching methods. Additionally, the chapter discussed quality measurement tools that are used in higher education, like TQM and Servqual, and individual assessment methods like interviews, surveys, checklists, Pareto diagrams and numerous others. The chapter also discussed the policies related to quality assurance in the UAE and provided an overview of the roles played by the Ministry of Education, ADEC and KHDA in establishing protocols and standards for quality assessment. It also touched upon the challenges faced by institutes in higher education like low quality student enrolment, language and cultural related problems in imparting Western education in English, and uneven male to female ratio of graduates. The chapter finally discussed some international standards of quality assurance followed in Europe and the Middle East.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter gives an overview of the research design, research methods and data collection and analysis that was done. The chapter gives details about the process through which data was collected and then analyzed. It gives information about how the research questions were answered and objectives met.

### **3.2 Research Philosophy**

It is important to talk about the philosophy that supports this research study. As the main research aim was to assess the effectiveness of current higher education quality assurance systems for raising higher education standards in the UAE, it was important to first study and understand the current systems of quality assurance. This research was therefore descriptive study that aimed to study and describe the current situations. However, as such a study was not possible by the researcher to do on his own, it was needed that people who worked in the higher education system were used to get the needed information. In this case, the point of view of the people like management and administration people who decide on the curriculum and quality assurance systems, the teachers who are involved in quality measurement, and the students who experience the education, was important. When the opinions of research participants are important, then the research philosophy suited is that of phenomenology (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Phenomenological approach allows the opinions and perceptions of the participants, who are involved with the situation, to be obtained within the context, and as such, it gives a comprehensive insight about the situation

(Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). With this philosophical position, the selection of the research methods is done so as to obtain maximum information from the participants. This is likely to be not possible by survey methods alone, so, qualitative methods like interviews are also added to the methodology (van Manen & Adams 2010). These methods are discussed in more detail in the next section.

### **3.3 Research Approach or Research Design**

This research used a mixed method approach. This means that it used both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative methods have the benefit that they can get data from a large sample quickly and with accuracy, but their limitation is that the responses are very limited in nature (Kumar, 2019). Qualitative methods, on the other hand, give a lot of good information in detail, but they are very time consuming and they can be subjective (Queirós, 2017). By using a mixed method, with both quantitative and qualitative methods, the study was able to reduce any limitations and add more value. A smaller number of interviews (which is a limitation of the qualitative method) could be conducted, but they provided in depth information, as opposed to the surveys (Queirós, Faria and Almeida, 2017). On the other hand, surveys, which suffer from the limitation of not getting in-depth answers, allowed a large number of students to give their opinions on the subject. As such, the mixed method provided benefits that overcame dis-advantages of any one method (Queirós, Faria and Almeida, 2017). So, for the quantitative part of the study, surveys were done using students and for the qualitative part of the study, interviews were done with teachers and people from the management in the colleges of higher education in the UAE. The surveys helped in getting information from the students about their perceptions regarding the

quality assurance system and its effectiveness. The interviews provided a lot of data from the teachers and management but also gave more information in the form of contextual cues like body language, face expression and voice inflexion. The following section gives more detailed account of how the data was collected in the two methods.

### **3.4 Data Collection Process**

#### ***Sampling***

The data collection process started first by deciding the sample selection process. For the quantitative survey, a random sampling method was used. This method is good to make sure that any person from the target population has an equal chance of inclusion in the sample (Arigo et al., 2018). This way, the sample is more representative, and its findings are more credible and can be allied to the population (Kumar, 2019). The target population was students who were enrolled in one public and one private university in the UAE. This population was approached through social media platform like Facebook. The researcher posted a request for anyone who was a student of higher education in the two selected universities in the UAE, to contact if interested in research participation. About 350 people contacted, and after some screening for age and college enrollment, the study included 190 students in the survey. These students were sent a link to the survey, but before that they also were asked to give their voluntary consent for participation. The details of the voluntary consent are given in another section, research ethics, later in the chapter.

Next, the qualitative sample was developed more in a non-random manner. This method to sample selection is used when there are restrictions like lack of resources to conduct many interviews or

with people from many different locations (Qu and Dumay, 2011). Also, it is possible that many institutions of higher education may not give consent for their teachers or their management to participate in the research. For this reason, a judgmental sampling method was used and only two colleges were decided to be included, one of which was a private college and the other was a public college. By using both private and public college it was expected that data can be compared to see how quality assurance was being done in the two sectors. The two colleges were contacted by the researcher to seek permission for interviewing its teachers and people from the management. The college provided names of five people each who could participate. So, the sample for the interviews included 10 people. The following Table 1 shows the interview sample details:

**Table 1: Interview Participants**

	<b>Public College of Higher Education</b>	<b>Private College of Higher Education</b>
Teachers	4	4
Management	1	1

Once the list of participants was finalized, the researcher contacted each of them to fix the time and location of interviews. Also, before starting the interviews, the participants were sent an informed consent form to sign. Once the formalities were done, a schedule was followed to conduct interviews. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour and all five interviews were conducted in one month's duration.

### ***Data Collection Instrument***

The survey had questions about the quality of teachers, content, teaching methods, location and infrastructure, resources, management, and the prospects of getting a good job in future. This questionnaire was in the form of a Likert-style scale, with the students required to choose one out of the five given responses (Maxwell, 2013). These responses ranged from strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree to strongly disagree with each statement about quality assurance at the college. Once the students had completed the survey, the data was obtained for analysis.

During the interviews, the researcher used a semi-structured questionnaire that included questions about quality assurance system used in the college, how the participants perceived it, and if they had any suggestions about improving it. These questionnaires allowed the researcher to add or delete a question and to explore further as needed (Green, Camilli & Elmore, 2012).

### ***Data Analysis***

The analysis was done by scoring all the students individually to assess their total scores, and then collectively on each individual question so as to get the average score for each question.

The interview data was analyzed using a manual thematic content analysis process (Qu and Dumay, 2011). All the interview transcripts were read individually, and then collectively for each question to compare and contrast the respondent's answers and to arrive at a theme in the response. Finally, the findings from the students' survey and those from the thematic content analysis of the teachers and management interviews were combined to arrive at the answers to the research question.

### **3.5 Research Ethics**

The research was conducted ethically and followed all ethics related protocols. These included firstly, ensuring that ethics approval was taken from the university. Then a voluntary consent form was developed for the participants, that gave them information regarding the purpose of the research, how the collected data would be used in the research and the right of the participants. These rights included the right to leave the research at any time and to participate only if they voluntary wanted to participate. This informed consent form was important to make sure that the participants were aware of what was involved and that they agreed to participate of their own will. Also, ethics required that all data collected was kept confidential and safe with the researcher (Brittain et al., 2020), and for this, the researcher kept all the survey data on the laptop that was password protected and all interview transcripts were kept locked in the desk. Other ethics concern is regarding privacy of the participants (Brittain et al., 2020), and this was done by not sharing the contact details of the participants with anyone. Also, all participants were safe and secure and comfortable during the data collection activity, which is also a part of ethical consideration (Arigo et al., 2018). They were kept anonymous and never linked with any of their responses.

### **3.6 Research Validity and Reliability**

The research was conducted with honesty and by following these ethical considerations, and as such the research credibility and validity was maintained. The research questionnaire was developed based on literature review insights, and by basing all research questions on the work of previous scholars who had worked in the field of quality assurance (Green, Camilli, & Elmore,



2012). Also, all analysis was conducted carefully ensuring accuracy. The participants were suited for the research and as such, the scope of applicability of the research findings was high.

### ***Limitations***

The limitation of the research was that not all interviews could be conducted face to face, and some were conducted on telephone, which limited the researcher from gathering contextual information like body language cues. Then the participants of the survey did the survey on their own without any monitoring from the researcher, which could mean that they may have not answered truthfully, or they may have answered randomly, thus reducing the credibility of the findings. Another limitation is the lack of any pilot testing of the survey or the interview questions, which could have added to the reliability of the research (Arigo et al., 2018)

### **3.7 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the research methodology adopted for the study. It discussed the research philosophy behind phenomenological approach and descriptive study. It also discussed the mixed methods of surveys and interviews that were used. It elaborated upon the sample size for each part of the research, with survey participants being 190 (students) in number and interview participants 10 (teachers and management). It discussed the online data collection via survey instrument and the face to face interview methods used, and the scoring method for quantitative data analysis and the thematic content analysis method for qualitative analysis. Finally, it gave information regarding ethics, validity and limitations.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings from the survey of students from the two universities, 103 from Dubai University and 450 from the UAE University. Next, the chapter discusses the themes that emerged from the analysis of the interviews of the teachers (4 each from the two universities) and managers (1 each from the two universities). The findings are analyzed for individual Universities, will be discussed in more detail and comparative manner in the next chapter.

### **4.2 Findings from Student Surveys**

The students survey data for the two colleges was analyzed separately, in order to present a comparative picture of the two colleges.

#### **4.2.1 Dubai University Student Survey**

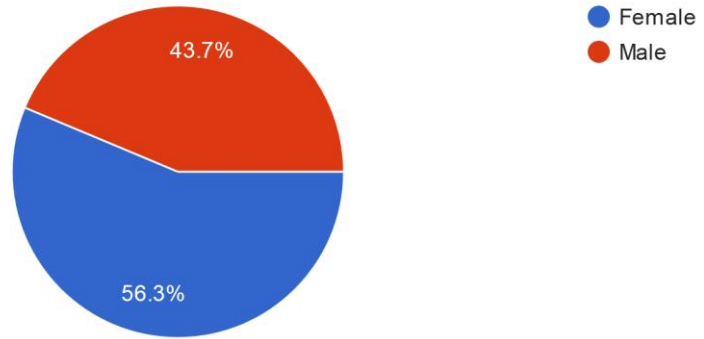
A total of 103 students participated in the survey and gave their perceptions regarding quality assurance at the university. The following sections give details about the demographic make-up of the sample and the responses.

##### **4.2.1.1 Demographic Profile**

The following Figures 4.1a, 4.2a and 4.3a show the Dubai University survey included a slightly larger number of female students, at 56.3% (43.7% male), with a majority of participants falling in the ages between 23 and 24 years. Also, over 3/4th of the participants were foreign nationals.

1. Gender?

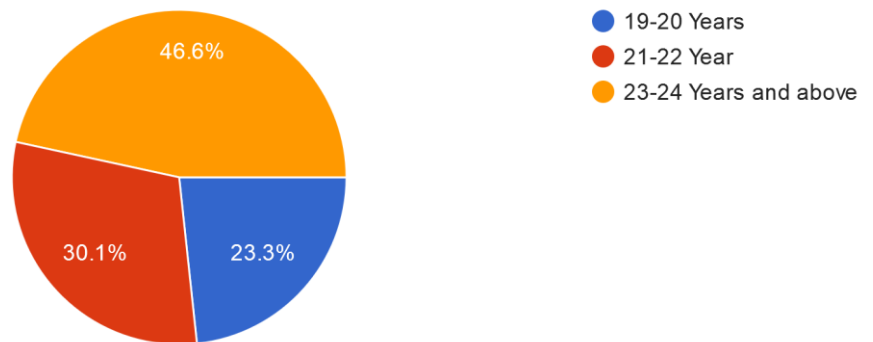
103 responses



*Figure 4.1a: Gender of Participants*

2. Age?

103 responses



*Figure 4.2a: Age of Participants*

### 3. Citizenship:

103 responses

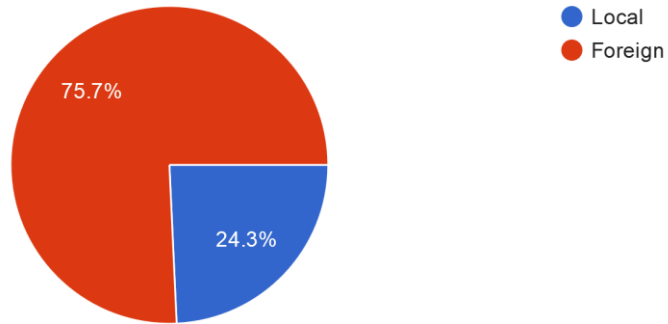


Figure 4.3a: Citizenship of Participants

#### 4.2.1.2 Quality Assurance at Dubai University

##### a. Teachers apply Innovation in Teaching

It is evident from the responses that almost 92.2% of the students believed or strongly believed that their teachers were innovative when it came to teaching methods.

#### 4. Your teachers apply innovation in teaching

103 responses

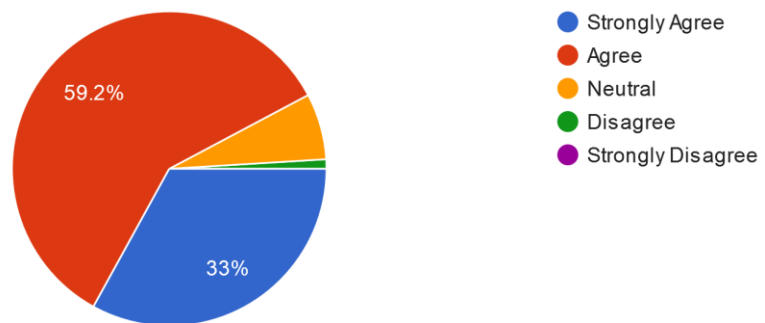
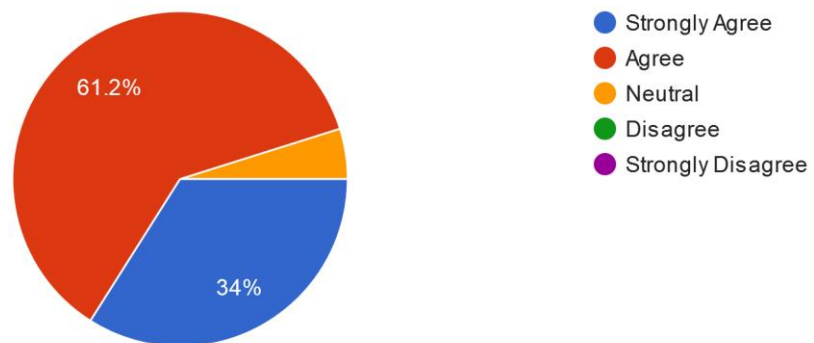


Figure 4.4a: Teachers apply Innovation in Teaching

### **b. Teachers Use Teaching Aids**

Almost a similar response was found as in the case of teachers being innovative, and 95.2% of the students perceived that their teachers were using creative means of delivering lectures using audio-visual aids, smart screens and models.

5. Teachers use teaching-aids like audio-visuals, models, and smart screens in class  
103 responses



*Figure 4.5a: Teachers Use Teaching Aids*

### **c. Regular Tests and Assignments in class**

Responses were slightly less optimistic when it came to answering questions on regular tests and class assignments; as the following Figure 4.6a highlights, 91.3% believed that they had tests and assignments regularly, but 7.8% were not sure which way to answer. However, till now, there appears to be a consensus among majority of students regarding teachers' innovative methods, use of aids and class assignments.

6. You have regular tests and assignments in class

103 responses

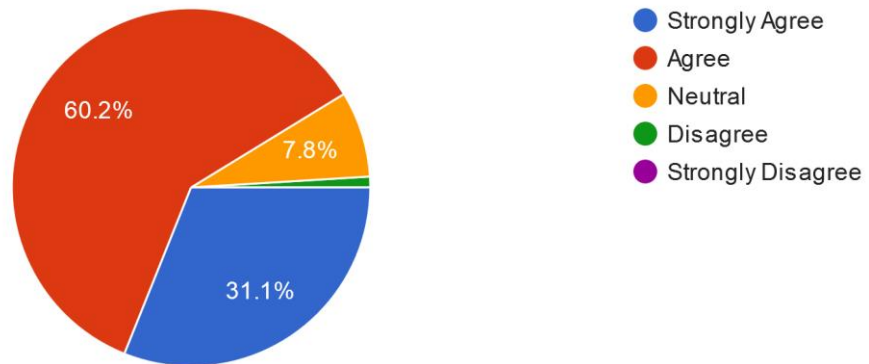


Figure 4.6a: Regular Tests and Assignments in class

#### d. Teachers act as Mentors

As in the case of previous responses, a large majority of students (92.2%) believed that their teachers were also their mentors (see Figure 4.7a)

7. Teachers act as mentors

103 responses

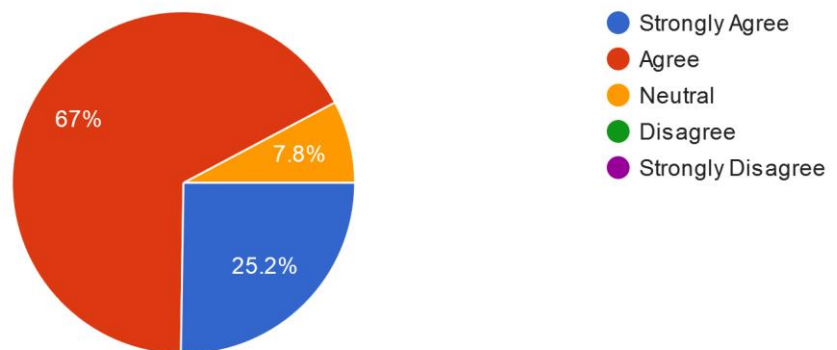


Figure 4.7a: Teachers act as Mentors

### e. Teachers Attend Seminars, Workshops and Write Papers

There was a slight change in the way students responded to this question, as a larger percentage (10.7%) than on any of the previous questions opted to choose 'neutral' response. However, still, 89.3% thought that their teachers had the opportunity for self-development and career progression.

#### 8. Your teachers get chance to attend seminars, workshops and write research papers

103 responses

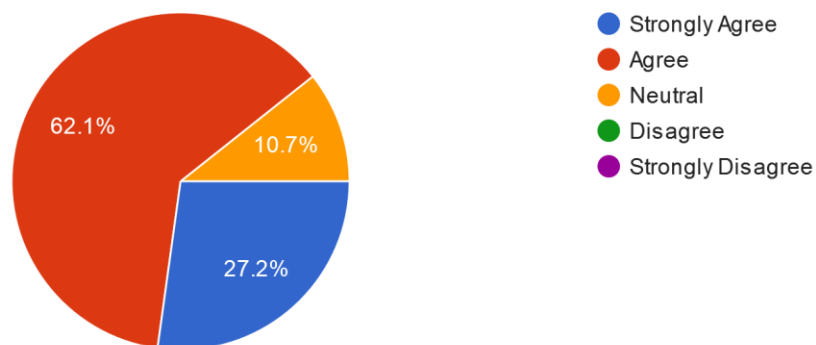


Figure 4.8a: Teachers Attend Seminars, Workshops and Write Papers

### f. Class Participation in Community Activity

The research revealed that only 81.6% of respondents believed that their teachers had opportunities for attending seminars and workshops or were writing papers toward their career growth. However, this percentage was low, probably due to the fact that students may not be aware of their teachers' activities fully.

81.6% of respondents also believed that their class participated in community networking activities. However, it is interesting to note that 15.5% of respondents did not have an accurate idea if their

class participated in such activities or not. It is unusual response as community activities, if conducted, would be physically experiential and notable, and there may be no reason why students may not perceive.

9. Your class gets to participate in community networking activities

103 responses

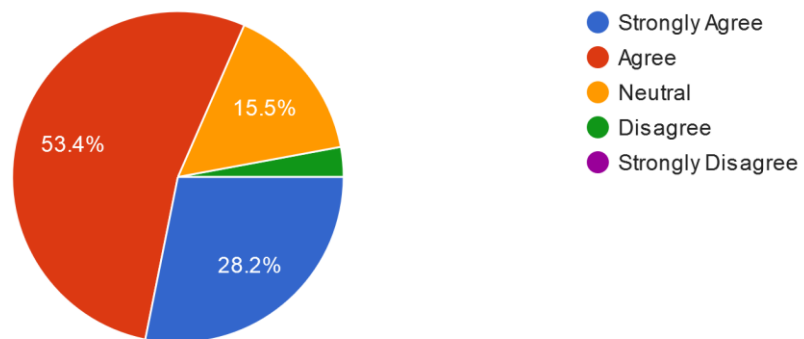


Figure 4.9a: Class Participation in Community Activity

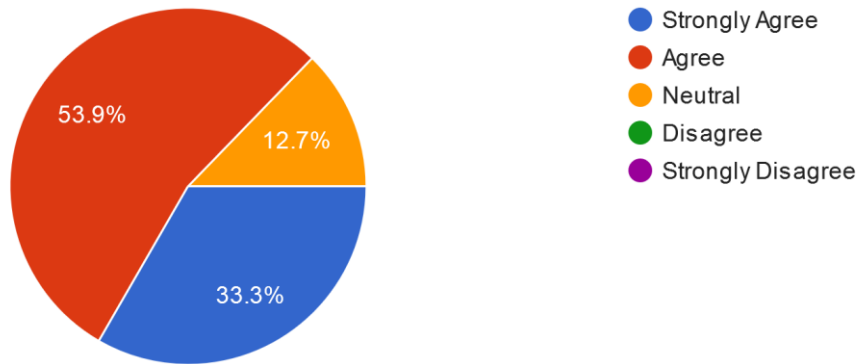
**g. Collaboration with other Colleges or Industry**

86.9% students reported that they had opportunities to collaborate with other colleges or industry. Also, as in the case of the previous response, 12.7% did not know if this was happening or not, which is unusual response in this case as collaboration with external colleges or industry players would be a visible and tangible activity that can be easily identified for what it is.



10. Your college encourages collaboration with other colleges or industry

102 responses



*Figure 4.10a: Collaboration with other Colleges or Industry*

**h. Good College Infrastructure**

As part of quality assurance criteria, the research also required that the respondents give their perceptions about the infrastructure of their college. It is seen from the following Figure 4.11a, that 87.9% of the students believed that the college had good infrastructure inclusive of auditoriums, classrooms, seminar rooms and sports area, as well as availability of computers and Internet.

11. Your college has good infrastructure like computers, internet, library, auditoriums, seminar rooms, classrooms, and sports areas.

103 responses

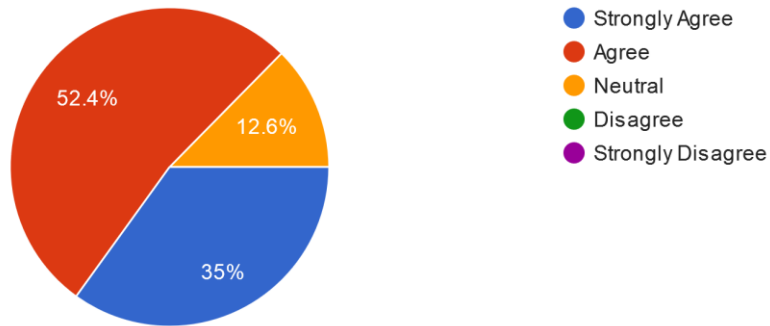


Figure 4.11a: Good College Infrastructure

### i. Skill Development Aligned with Future Job Needs

87.4% of the respondents also believed that they were learning the skills in the college that could help them succeed in future jobs (Figure 4.12a below).

12. Your college helps you develop skills that will be needed in your future jobs

103 responses

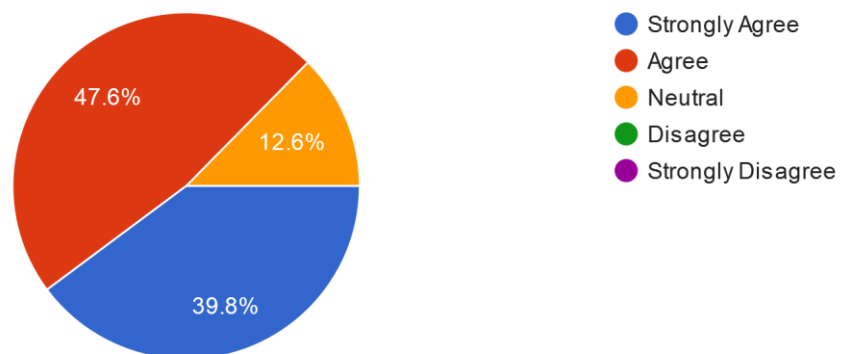
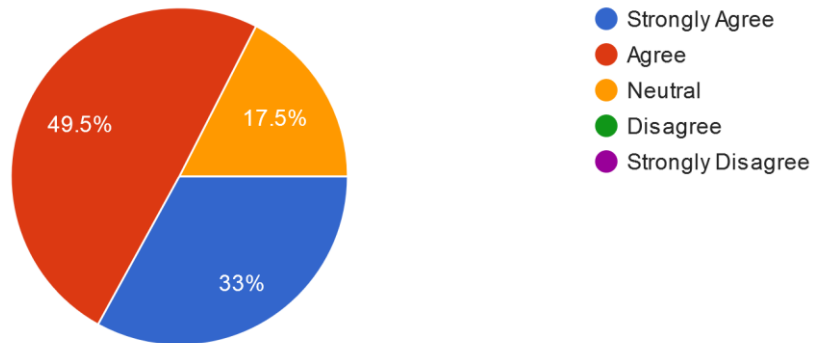


Figure 4.12a: Skill Development Aligned with Future Job Needs

### **j. Student Participation in Quality Assurance of the College**

82.5% of the students thought that they were included in quality assurance related activities like giving feedback and suggestions

13. You are involved in quality assurance of your college by giving feedback and suggestions  
103 responses



*Figure 4.13a: Student Participation in Quality Assurance of the College*

### **k. Student Satisfaction Measurement by the College**

Only 62.3% of the students reported that they were asked to take any satisfaction survey by the college. This is the lowest percentage for the entire survey, and indicates a gap in the college in assessing customer satisfaction.

14. You are asked to do student satisfaction surveys about your experience in the college  
102 responses

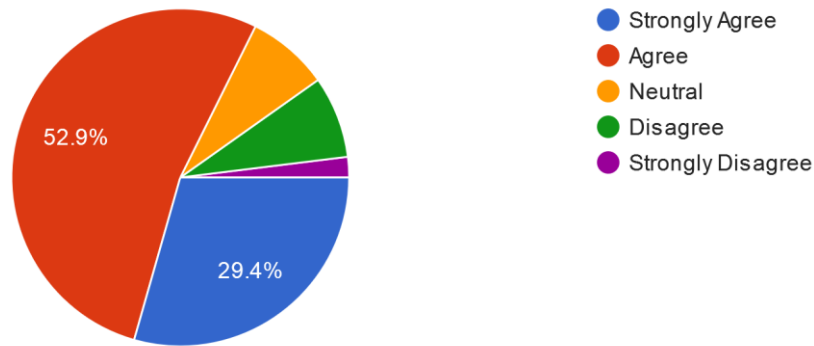


Figure 4.14a: Student Satisfaction Measurement by the College

## 4.2.2 The UAE University Survey Findings

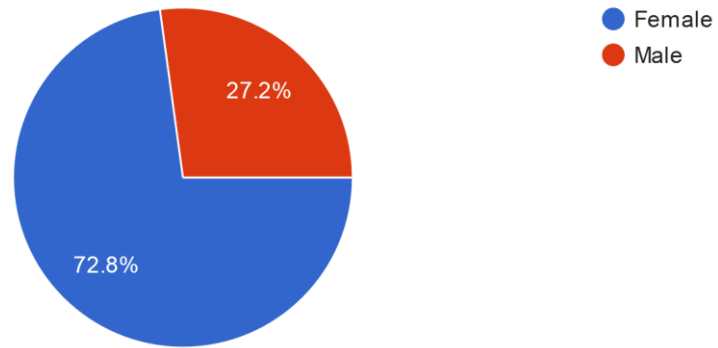
A total of 450 students participated in the survey and gave their perceptions regarding quality assurance at the UAE University. The following sections give details about the demographic make-up of the sample and the responses.

### 4.2.2.1 Demographic Profile

The UAE University had a substantial number of more female participants, at 72.8% as opposed to only 27.2% of male (see Figure 4.1b). The research findings, can therefore, be more representative of female students' perceptions. In this sample, the majority of the students were below 19 years of age (see Figure 4.2b). Also, 89.9% of students were UAE citizens (Figure 4.3b)

### 1. Gender?

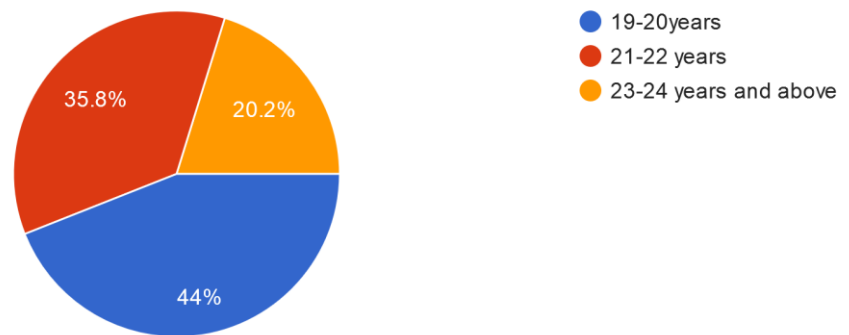
449 responses



*Figure 4.1b: Gender of Participants*

### 2. Age?

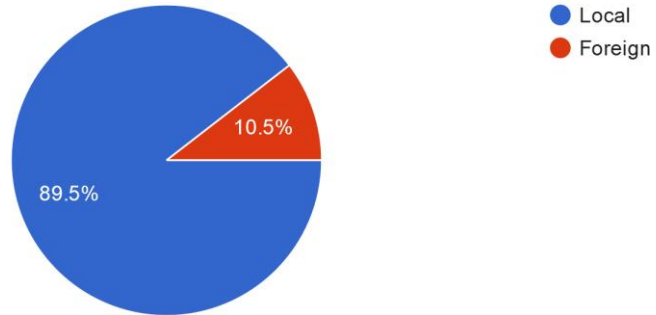
450 responses



*Figure 4.2b: Age of Participants*

### 3. Citizenship:

449 responses



#### 4.3b Quality Assurance at Dubai University

##### a. Teachers apply innovation in teaching

The survey from the UAE University indicated that only 69.8% of the students believed that their teachers were using any innovation in teaching; also, it is noted that a large number of respondents, 22.8% refrained from giving a clear answer on the subject.

### 4. Your teachers apply innovation in teaching

447 responses

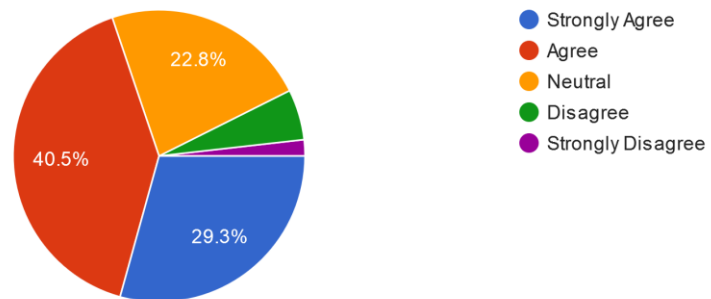


Figure 4.4b: Teachers apply Innovation in Teaching

### b. Teachers Use Teaching Aids

82.5% of the students believed that the teachers were using teaching aids including audio-visual devices, models and smart screens for teaching.

5. Teachers use teaching-aids like audio-visuals, models, and smart screens in class  
451 responses

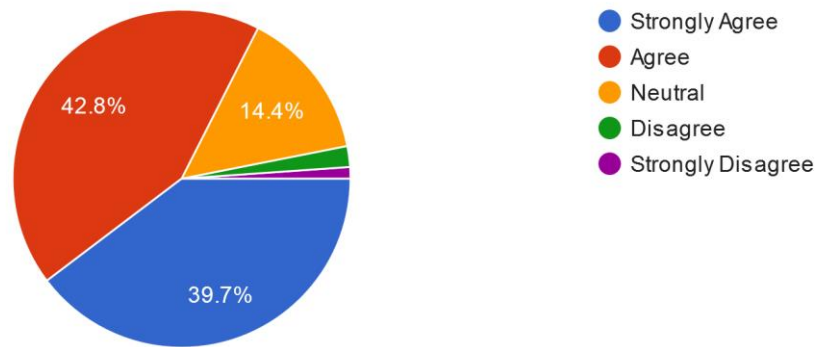


Figure 4.5b: Teachers Use Teaching Aids

### c. Regular Tests and Assignments in class

Only 76% of the respondents stated that they had regular tests or assignments in class; 18% refrained from commenting, which indicates that probably, 6% did not agree with the statement. It is also likely, that the 18% chose neutral as they wanted to be discrete.

6. You have regular tests and assignments in class

449 responses

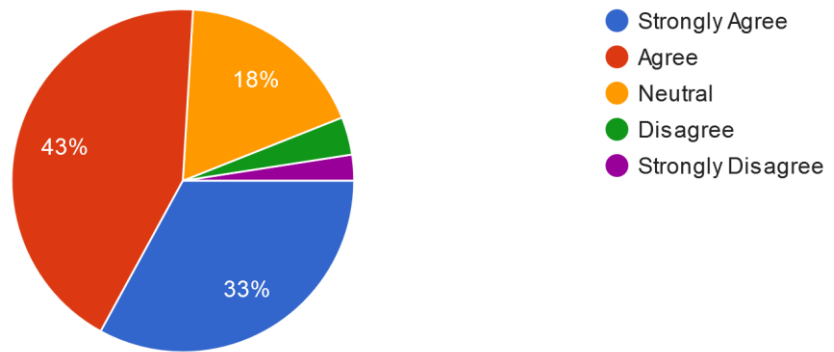


Figure 4.6b: Regular Tests and Assignments in class

**d. Teachers act as Mentors**

67.1%, which is much lower percentage than the trend on the previous responses, believed that they had teachers that acted as mentors. Also, it needs to be noted that a large percentage of respondents, 27.4% chose to say 'neutral' as their response, which may be indicative of their disagreement on the statement but in a discreet manner.

7. Teachers act as mentors

446 responses

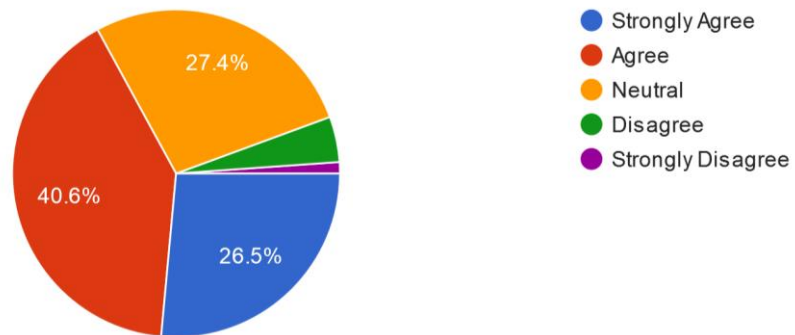


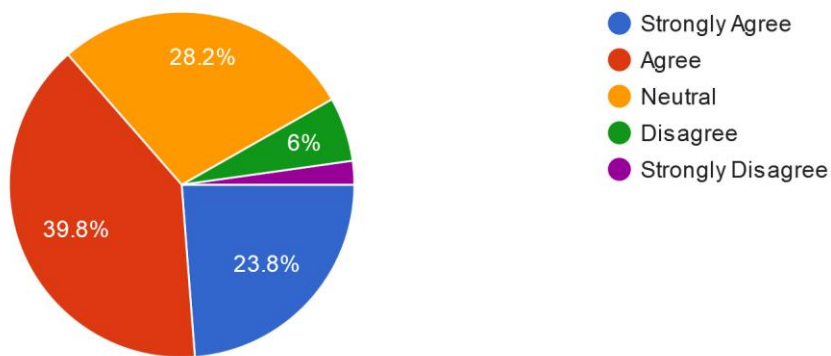
Figure 4.7b: Teachers act as Mentors



**e. Teachers Attend Seminars, Workshops and Write Papers**

60.4% of the respondents believed that their teachers had adequate opportunities to attend seminars or participate in workshops or write research papers for publications. This is again a very low percentage and coupled with the 28.2% of the students who stated 'neutral' as their answer, can imply that the teachers were not getting sufficient opportunities in the college. It may, however, also mean, that students were not really aware about the teachers' activities.

8. Your teachers get chance to attend seminars, workshops and write research papers  
450 responses



*Figure 4.8b: Teachers Attend Seminars, Workshops and Write Papers*

**f. Class Participation in Community Activity**

Again, 64.8% of students only believed that they participated in community activities, while 25% refrained from agreeing or disagreeing with the statement. These findings can mean that there were a smaller number of such opportunities, or inadequate opportunities for students to participate in community activities.

9. Your class gets to participate in community networking activities

444 responses

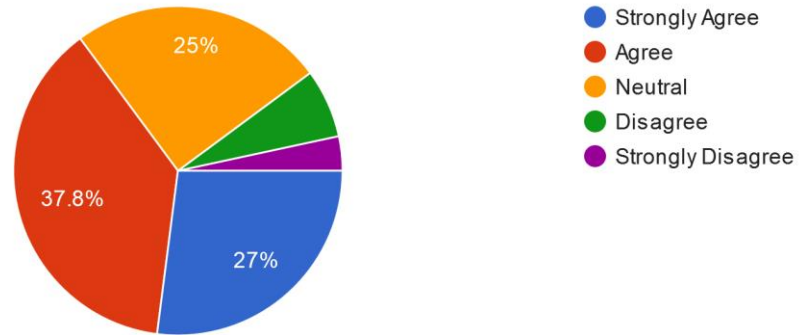


Figure 4.9b: Class Participation in Community Activity

**g. Collaboration with other Colleges or Industry**

Similar to the perceptions on class participation in community activity 63.2% of the students perceived that their college encouraged collaboration with other colleges or industry, while a large number, 27.8% stated 'neutral' as their answer. These findings are strongly indicative of the fact that there is a likelihood of the college not indulging in such activities adequately.

10. Your college encourages collaboration with other colleges or industry  
443 responses

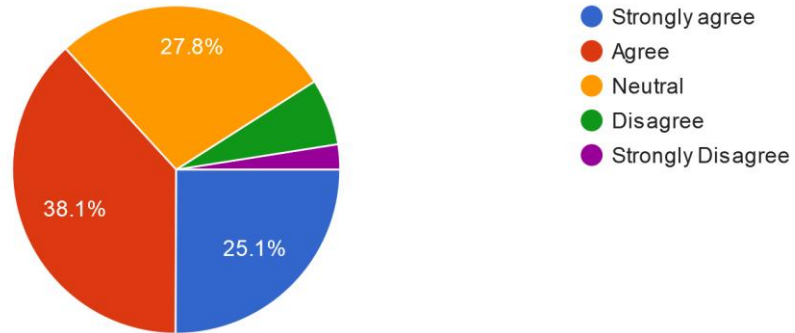


Figure 4.10b: Collaboration with other Colleges or Industry

#### **h. Good College Infrastructure**

A larger number, 80% of the respondents stated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that their college had good infrastructure and facilities.

11. Your college has good infrastructure like computers, internet, library, auditoriums, seminar rooms, classrooms, and sports areas.  
446 responses

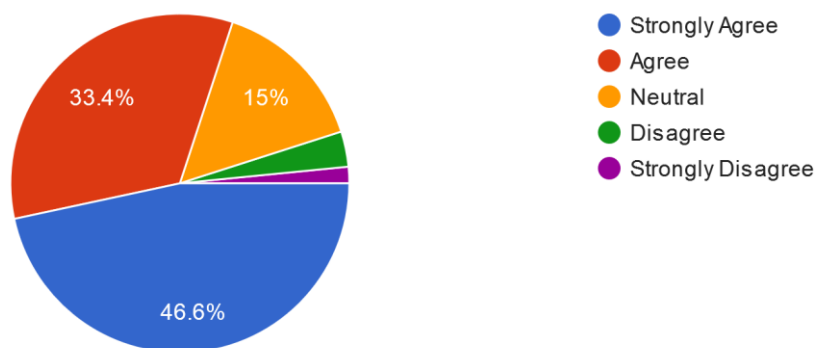
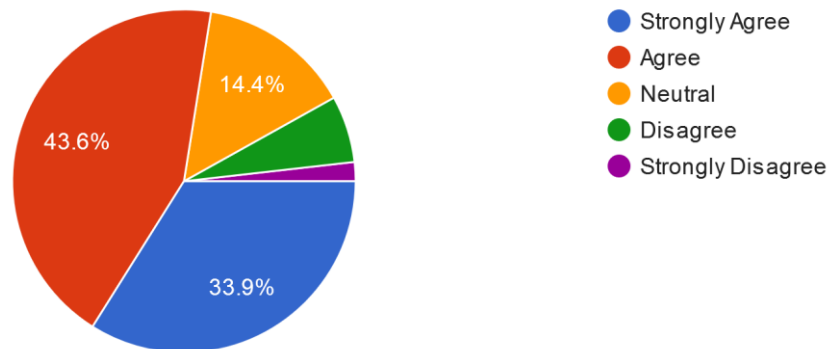


Figure 4.11b: Good College Infrastructure

### **i. Skill Development Aligned with Future Job Needs**

77.5% of students were confident that the college was teaching them the skills that they will use in their future jobs to be successful. About 14.4% however, stated 'neutral' as an answer, which could be the result of their ignorance about what skills may be needed in future jobs, or it could be an expression of their reservations about the college's ability to teach them.

12. Your college helps you develop skills that will be needed in your future jobs  
445 responses

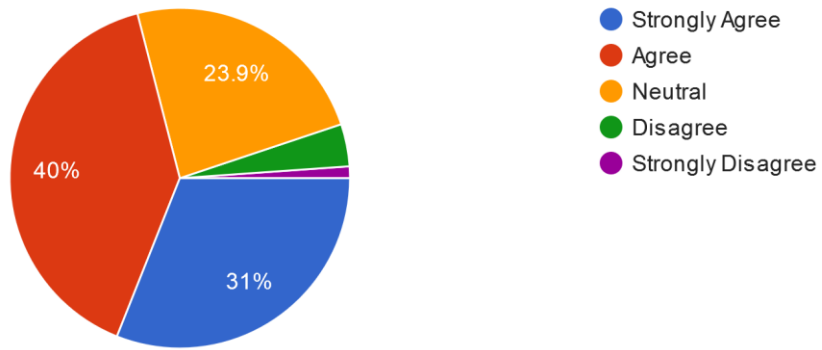


*Figure 4.12b: Skill Development Aligned with Future Job Needs*

### **j. Student Participation in Quality Assurance of the College**

When it came to students' participation in quality assurance, 71% of the students expressed their agreement that they participated, though a large number, more than on any previous responses, mentioned 'neutral' as the answer.

13. You are involved in quality assurance of your college by giving feedback and suggestions  
448 responses

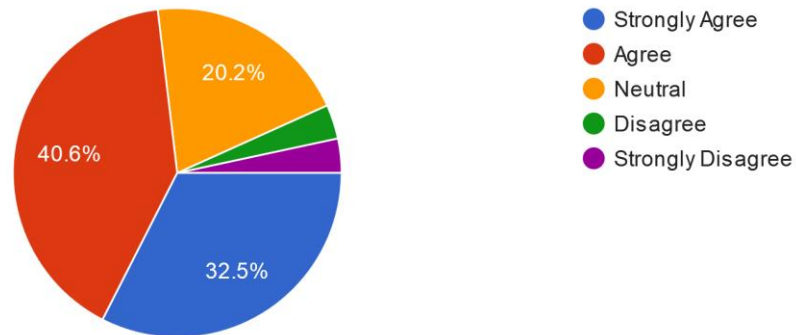


*Figure 4.13b: Student Participation in Quality Assurance of the College*

#### **k. Student Satisfaction Measurement by the College**

73.1% of the students believed that they were asked to do a student satisfaction survey, while 20.2% did not chose to answer definitely. These findings may indicate that either some of the students were not aware of what student satisfaction surveys were, or that they did not want to say forthright that the college did not ask them to complete any such surveys.

14. You are asked to do student satisfaction surveys about your experience in the college  
446 responses



*Figure 4.14b: Student Satisfaction Measurement by the College*

### **4.3 Findings from Teachers Interviews**

A total of 8 teachers were interviewed for the research, 4 from the UAE University and 4 from the Dubai University. The following themes emerged from the thematic content analysis of the responses. Unlike the survey responses, that were analyzed separately from the two colleges, the responses from the teachers from the two universities are discussed as a whole, because of the lower number of interview participants.

#### **a. Quality Control Policy and Frequency of Quality Assurance Employed by the College**

There was some confusion about the existence of any quality assurance policy in the college. Half the interviewees stated that there was no policy that they were aware of, while, other half mentioned the quality policy was restricted to the criteria for teachers to have SCOPUS research publications

that are high quality and peer reviewed. Also, one interviewee mentioned that the policy was, "*We must meet international standards.*"

Additionally, 6 out of the 8 participants mentioned that the college had a formal system of evaluation of the educational quality but did not mention what it was. One respondent also cleared that reviews were conducted bi-annually in a formal manner. Another stated that he was not aware of any formal quality assurance process in the University.

**b. Quality Control Method Employed by the College**

Some of the methods used for evaluation were reported as:

Quality Assurance Office that evaluated quality of teaching, services practices and research publications of teachers
Evaluation and assessment of Productivity of teachers (which again, could mean productivity in terms of publications, services and quality of teaching).
Non-formal methods were used as teaching could not be assessed in any standardized manner.

However, one teacher mentioned something unique - that all teachers were presenting students with and assessing them on tests and assignments in a random manner (and not as part of formal curriculum delivery), which made it difficult to compare the performance of either teachers or students.

Next, questions were aimed at exploring the quality of teaching methods or approaches employed by the teachers. Some of the themes that emerged were:

**c. Teachers apply Innovation in Teaching**

There was a consensus among teachers from both the colleges that they used innovation in teaching.

Some of the examples of innovation in teaching that were mentioned were:

Real life teaching  For example, "In grammar class I have them do things like go out and collect information, speak to people and observe them and then they have to make reports using the appropriate grammar"
I use technology,
Group work and independent work
Presentations

It needs to be noted that all 8 teachers believed that they were using innovation in teaching, but most of them mentioned using technological aids as an example of this innovation. It is possible that teachers' perceptions about their innovativeness may not be an accurate or factual representation of the reality.



#### **d. Teachers Use Teaching Aids**

Some of the teaching aids mentioned by the teachers included, audio-visual aids, smart screens, posters, PowerPoint, and Blackboard. One of the teachers also mentioned using abstract models, *"I don't use models (except abstract models) but I do use audio-visuals, smart screens, and posters."*

However, there appeared to be a unanimous agreement among all the 8 teachers, irrespective of their colleges, about their use of teaching aids.

#### **e. Regular Tests and Assignments in class**

All the teachers mentioned that they used some form of assessments, including, formal tests, quizzes and assignments. Additionally, teachers also mentioned taking quizzes in class to test students' comprehension skills, but such quizzes were not counted toward the class grades. The trend in responses from the UAE University indicates that there is no formal or standardized curriculum-based assessment process for the students, and teachers adopt ad hoc and diverse ways of giving grades. However, in the case of the Dubai University, the teachers mentioned bi-annual examinations that form the basis of the promotional system.

#### **f. Teachers act as Mentors**

None of the teachers from the UAE University mentioned about a formal mentoring program, but all of them acknowledged that they were ready to mentor or provide career guidance to the students who sought it.

For example, in the words of one of the teachers, *"I will be available if the students ask for it"*.

However, all 4 teachers from the Dubai University said that while there was no formal mentorship program, they liked to support students. One of the teachers mentioned that: *"I am always helping students with counseling about their careers"*.

These findings indicate that either the teachers did not fully grasp the concept of mentoring the students (as it does not mean just restricting counseling and support for career related aspects), or they did not really work as mentors.

#### **g. Teachers Attend Seminars, Workshops and Write Papers**

All the respondents from both the Universities stated that they wrote research papers and attended seminars. One teacher from the Dubai University mentioned, *"It (writing papers) was an integral part of the teachers' job"*.

However, it was also observed by most teachers that these activities were not a formal requirement.

6 out of the 8 interviewed teachers mentioned attending conferences and doing workshops along with writing papers, but two respondents stated categorically that he only wrote papers.

These findings indicate that most teachers were indulging in development activities at both the universities, either as part of their endeavor to improve themselves, or simply to ensure that the University rates them high.

#### **h. Class Participation in Community Activity**

Community participation was mentioned as allowing students to attend local seminars and conferences or to encourage them to participate in internship programs. However, only 2 teachers from the UAE University mentioned this, while the other two denied the existence of any such participation of their students. Further, one teacher expressed willingness to undertake such initiatives if given a chance in future.

The Dubai University teachers too believed that their students participated in local community events, but in an informal manner mostly. However, one teacher from this university mention that:

*"Our students do a lot of field work and assignments that require them to move in the local area and meet people..."*

#### **i. Collaboration with other Colleges or Industry**

All the participants mentioned that collaboration with other colleges or industry was a priority for their colleges. This collaboration was undertaken through exchange programs, with the industry and with other universities. Additionally, one respondent mentioned that,

*"...collaboration with other colleges and industry was one of the key performance indicators for the college."*

#### **j. Good College Infrastructure**

There was a unanimous agreement on the fact, from the teachers from both the colleges, that the infrastructure of the college was excellent with all the facilities and amenities of an international standard.

#### **k. Skill Development Aligned with Future Job Needs**

All the respondents believed that the college was teaching skills, either to a small extent or predominantly, toward enabling the students to succeed in their future jobs. According to one teacher, *"Yes, we integrate transferable, 21st Century skills into the curriculum, which will help students in their future careers."*

However, there was also an underlying current that was detected from the responses, which indicated that the college pursued other goals than preparing students for the job market. In the words of one of the respondents, *"Yes, although a university is more geared toward other aspects of education than simply providing employment skills"*.

Additionally, it was disturbing to note the revelation from one of the teachers, about the college being too soft on the students in promoting and graduating them. For example, the teacher stated that, *"The problem is, they are taught those skills, but they don't acquire them because of the easy system of passing and the fact that the skills are not very practical."*

#### **l. Teacher Participation in Quality Assurance of the College**

Quality Assurance was apparently not undertaken with teachers' involvement at the Dubai University, though, for the UAE University, the teachers' responses ranged between never and

sometimes. One teacher considered participation in different committees as his contribution to the college's quality assurance program.

**j. Effectiveness of the Quality Assurance Program Used by the College**

Only one respondent, from the Dubai University, was confident that the quality assurance program of the university was effective and adequate, while the remaining respondents, all from the UAE University, believed that it was not so. Some of the responses show the teachers' opinion accurately:

*"Not really. Quality assurance is all about whether the students are actually benefitting from their learning. They need to focus more on whether the students are actually learning the material in a useful, practical way. Is the material useful and do they know how to use it on their own when they are out of the classroom?"*

and

*"They are effective but more needs to be done in terms of preparing students for college/university since many of the students struggle with English"*

**k. Suggestions for Improving Quality Assurance**

The respondents gave several suggestions like:

Student must produce and create not absorb
--

Improve the English and math skills of the students
---

Now that teaching is taking place online, we need to ensure that online teaching is being observed and being delivered in the most effective ways.
--

It needs to be noted that most of the suggestions for quality assurance from teachers were restricted to monitoring or changing students' skills or abilities, rather than toward any change in curriculum, teaching method or pedagogy.

#### **4.4 Findings from Administrators Interviews**

Only one manager was interviewed, from the Dubai University, and 1 from the UAE University. However, the implications of the findings will be discussed in the context of the overall research in the next chapter.

The manager acknowledged that quality assurance was performed in a formal, structured manner, and was part of the CAA and Accreditation system.

Some of the Methods that were used in the college for quality assurance were mentioned as:

a. The employee's (teachers and other staff) performance and professional accomplishments. In terms of frequency, magnitude, and relative superiority of these achievements.
--

b. Their cooperation with the internal (management and colleagues) and external environment (students) of the University.
c. Their initiative-taking and innovative ideas that can contribute to productivity and improving the University's services
d. Leadership and management skills
e. Participation in diverse activities of the University
f. Their willingness to learn new skills and self-development through taking additional courses, attending lectures and seminars and learning from the experience of colleagues
g. Job commitment and record of any prior job violations

It needs to be noted that the managers' understanding of quality assurance seems to be restricted to personnel management alone; though, in the context of educational institution, several other aspects are taken into consideration. As such, the interviewer probed further with more specific questions around the quality assurance criteria.

### **Teachers apply Innovation in Teaching**

One manager (Dubai University) mentioned that the teachers at the college were encouraged to use their own innovative thinking in making teaching more engaging and effective. However, the manager did not mention any specific instances of how the teachers were using innovation in teaching.

The UAE University manager, however, stated that the teachers were expected to follow a standard curriculum that was part of the regular teaching method.

### **Teachers Use Teaching Aids**

The response indicated that the teachers had access to a multitude of resources and aids in the form of technology resources, library resources and offline content and models that they can use for teaching. Both the colleges appeared to encourage teachers to make use of additional aids to make teaching more comprehensive and based on listening, doing, and seeing, rather than just seeing.

### **Regular Tests and Assignments in class**

According to the UAE University manager, regular tests were conducted by teachers but as per the teachers' discretion. The manager did not elaborate further if the college had a formal exam or semester test system that was followed. On the other hand, the manager from the Dubai University mentioned bi-annual exams. The findings reveal a contrast in the approaches to student assessment between the two colleges.

### **Teachers act as Mentors**

The manager from the UAE University indicated that the college liked the teachers to act as mentors, but, more often than not, teachers were not doing this. The college did not include academic mentorship as a formal position or required the teachers to become mentors, so it was largely a voluntary activity that the teachers could undertake if they wanted.

It needs to be noted that the responses from both the managers were similar when it came to their perceptions about teachers acting as mentors. However, the Dubai University Manager mentioned:



*"All our teachers are highly experienced, and I think, they mentor the students already...it's part of their responsibility that they take seriously"*

### **Teachers Attend Seminars, Workshops and Write Papers**

The college encouraged students to participate in these activities, and the teachers had also mentioned the same trend as they believed that publishing papers and participating in seminars was an essential part of their jobs. However, according to both the managers, these activities were not part of a formal job requirement but, it was implied that teachers must invest time in them if they wanted to get good performance appraisal. The teachers' self-development and willingness to learn was considered a plus point for their career growth.

### **Class Participation in Community Activity**

For community participation, the manager from the UAE University stated that:

*"... the students have a very strong relationship/participation in community networking activities plus the students have strong relationship between the UAEU Campus and the community services."*

The response indicates that the college has a formal system that encouraged students to participate in community related activities.

Similarly, for the Dubai University, the manager believed that the college had strong linkages with the local community with students going on field trips and doing assignments that required them to survey locally.

### **Collaboration with other Colleges or Industry**

According to the manager at the Dubai University, the college has a history of linkages with the industry in the form of job internship programs, industrial visits and trainee programs. Additionally, the college shares students through exchange programs with other universities.

However, from the UAE University,

### **Good College Infrastructure**

The manager mentioned that the Dubai University had excellent infrastructure that matched any International standard.

### **Skill Development Aligned with Future Job Needs**

The response to this question was interesting, as one manager indicated that the college was committed to developing the skills that are needed for future jobs, but, if the students did not possess them, it was their failure to take advantage of the opportunity. This attitude of the manager underscores a lack of accountability and probably shifting responsibility. However, the other manager believed that the college was teaching the skills adequately.

### **Management Participation in and Satisfaction with Quality Assurance of the College**

The managers expressed satisfaction with the approach to quality assurance that was undertaken at the college. They also mentioned that the management was actively involved in conducting the assessment of quality.

### **Suggestions for Improving Quality Assurance**

Some of the suggestions made by the manager included the following:

Regular inspection of teachers' performance
Conducting Regular Tests for students
Taking inputs from the students or their families
Taking feedback from the industry

### **4.5 Summary**

The chapter presented the findings obtained from the two surveys that were conducted at two universities with students. It also included findings from the eight interviews of teachers and two managers from the two universities. The survey findings showed a basic difference in the responses between the two sets of participants, with the Dubai University students being more confident about their quality assurance than the UAE University students. The teachers' responses also showed a similar trend between the colleges, though, overall it was observed that both of the colleges were not undertaking a formal quality assurance program, instead, they were using random criteria like teachers' publications and college infrastructure as quality criteria for evaluating themselves. The next chapter discusses the findings in the context of the research aims and objectives, and also positions them within the existing literature.

## **Chapter 5 - Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction and Overview of Research**

The findings presented in Chapter 4 are merged and discussed together, so that a complete picture is obtained about the current situation related to quality assurance at higher education in the UAE. The data was collected from two universities, and a total of 653 students participated in the survey. Also, 8 teachers and two managers were included in the interviews. This chapter presents a discussion of the merged findings structured around the research objectives:

#### ***Research Objectives***

- To understand and evaluate the Quality Assurance Process in Higher Education in the UAE
- To explore the gaps and challenges in Quality Standards of Higher Education as perceived by the students, professors, and administrators regarding higher education quality assurance processes in the UAE.
- To propose a quality assurance framework and resource materials for assessing and assuring high-quality standards for the higher education institutions in the UAE

As such, the next section (Section 5.2) discusses the findings in terms of an evaluation of the quality assurance process in higher education in the UAE, followed by an exploration of the gaps and challenges related to quality management at the colleges covered in Section 5.3. Finally, the chapter discusses the recommendations that can inform a quality assurance framework in Section 5.4.

## 5.2 Evaluation of Quality Assurance

(Research Objective 1 - To understand and evaluate the Quality Assurance Process in Higher Education in the UAE)

The survey findings revealed a contrast between the two universities, the private university appeared to have a better image in the eyes of the students regarding its quality assurance, when compared to the public university, as shown in the Table 5.1 below. It can be observed that on all parameters related to quality assurance, the private university students appeared to be more in agreement with the universities policies, teaching methodologies, alignment with job market needs and other factors as noted in Table 5.1.

The following Table 5.1 presents the findings from the two students' surveys and reflects on the quality assurance of the two universities.

**Table 5.1: Summary of Findings from Students' Survey**

	<b>Dubai University</b>	<b>The UAE University</b>
Teachers apply innovation in teaching	92.2%	69.8%
Teachers Use Teaching Aids	95.2%	82.5%
Regular Tests and Assignments in class	91.3%	76%
Teachers act as Mentors	92.2%	67.1%,

	<b>Dubai University</b>	<b>The UAE University</b>
Teachers Attend Seminars, Workshops and Write Papers	89.3%	60.4%
Class Participation in Community Activity	81.6%	64.8%
Collaboration with other Colleges or Industry	86.9%	63.2%
Good College Infrastructure	87.9%	80%
Skill Development Aligned with Future Job Needs	87.4%	77.5%
Student Participation in Quality Assurance of the College	82.5%	71%
Student Satisfaction Measurement by the College	62.3%	73.1%

It is interesting to note that there is a substantial difference in the make-up of the two samples. The differences in the sample make up, may account for some of the differences in the answers. For example, the Dubai University students are largely foreign nationals, and over 23 years of age, while the UAE University students are predominantly locals and slightly under 19. What's more notable is that the UAE University has a large majority of female students, while Dubai University has an almost even distribution between genders. The responses are therefore from a very diverse group of students in comparison to each other, and it is likely that the responses are tainted by their citizenship or gender attributes.

It is possible that the local Emirati students, and predominantly female students of the UAE University, have a higher expectation from their university, which could be the reason that they have scored university's performance on quality factors rather low. On the other hand, it is also equally possible that the UAE University indeed has somewhat lower score on quality assurance related performance in comparison to the Dubai University. No similar research has been undertaken previously, so, the findings need to be repeated using more research. However, it needs to be noted that in the case of self-report surveys, there is likelihood for personal bias or lack of fact-checking, and the answers may reflect more on the students' personal attributes rather than on objective facts related to quality assurance at either of the colleges.

Nevertheless, it is evident from the findings that most students, from both the universities, believed that the university was providing quality education, as seen from the above Table 5.1. The above table contains the list of factors that have been identified in literature as essential to quality assurance (), and as such, students' positive perceptions around them indicate that they were largely satisfied with the quality assurance process or standards of their respective colleges. The following sections discuss the students survey and the interview findings together to develop the themes that emerged around quality assurance at the two universities.

### **5.2.1 Quality Assurance: Innovation in Teaching**

Innovation in teaching is one of the important criteria that are used by accreditation agencies across the world for higher education quality assessment (Shibli, 2008). A higher education institute is

expected to provide a stimulating environment for the students so that they are challenged and get opportunities for growth. It is expected that teachers apply innovative methods and approaches using both pedagogical guidance and hands-on experience to create learning opportunities for students (Mansour and Jakka, 2013). In the context of the two universities included in the research, it was observed that all of the 8 teachers believed that they used innovative approaches, and it was supported by the responses of the students (92.2% from the Dubai University and 69.8% from the UAE University), that the teachers were perceived as using innovation in teaching. However, it was also observed that the manager from the UAE University did not agree about this, and instead mentioned that the teachers followed more or less a standardized teaching approach. This was also substantiated by the fact that almost 30% of the UAE University students did not think that their teachers were using innovation in teaching. A conclusion that can be drawn here is that it is likely that at the Dubai University, teachers were more inspired and encouraged to use innovation, while at the UAE University, they were probably required to follow a stricter protocol

### **5.2.2 Quality Assurance: Teachers Use Teaching Aids**

The availability of teaching aids in the form of ICT tools (computers, Internet access smart screens, smart blackboards, audio-visual devices, online assignment submission platforms), is considered as an essential part of higher education quality (Badry, 2019). In today's educational space, access to online and offline resources, in the form of reading content, models, simulations, and at times role playing online games, are considered as adding value to the learning experience (Fawzia, 2010). In the context of the current research, it was seen that most students were in agreement about the teachers' use of teaching aids (95.2% from the Dubai University and 82.5% from the UAE



University). This was also confirmed by the managers from both the universities, as well as by all the 8 teachers who participated in the interviews. The conclusion that can be drawn is that both the colleges appeared to be well equipped with teaching aids, and that the teachers were inspired to use them in their lessons and lectures. Owing to the fact that literature has identified the use of teaching aids and multi-media resources as contributing to quality education, indicates that the two colleges were well covered on this point.

### **5.2.3 Quality Assurance: Regular Tests and Assignments in class**

A large amount of research exists that has supported the positive impact of regular tests and assignments on students' academic outcomes (Solloway, 2016), and as such, higher educational institutes are expected to follow a regular pattern of assessments and formal evaluations or grading for the students (Mansour and Jakka, 2013). Accreditation is often dependent upon, among other factors, on the college's system of performance management for students (Fatima, 2019). Quality assurance at higher education institutes therefore entails that the students are subjected to regular and relevant assessments that can form the basis of feedback and further development (Shibli, 2008). However, the current research has revealed several interesting points, which, need to be understood within the context of the UAE and its history of primary and secondary education. For example, it was noted that 91.3% of the students from the Dubai University believed they were undergoing regular tests and assessments, but only 76% of the UAE University students believed the same. This is supported by the teachers' responses as well, the Dubai University teachers mentioned bi-annual formal exams in addition to the informal assessments, while the UAE University teachers as well as the manager mentioned only informal assessments throughout the

session. The underlying reason for this difference in the two universities could be because of the differences in the students who enrolled. For example, the Dubai University largely has foreign nationals or Emirati's from parents living abroad, and as such, these students arrive after completing formal education outside of the UAE. On the other hand, the UAE students are primarily native Emiratis, who may or may not have been through a formal educational process as the enrollment norms in higher education are much relaxed in the country (Solloway, 2016). The local Emirati students may not be in a position to undergo rigorous assessment process, and as such, the University may eschew the process of formal grading to ensure that they graduate.

#### **5.2.4 Quality Assurance: Teachers act as Mentors**

Quality of education is not only dependent upon the availability of factors like teaching aids, quality of teachers, formal assessments etc., but also on the ability of the teachers to forge bonds with students and give them the needed guidance and support. 92% of the students of the Dubai University believed that their teachers did act as mentors, but only 67.1% of the students from the UAE University believed the same of their teachers. This is corroborated by the managers' responses, where the Dubai University was reported as having teachers who acted as mentors naturally, while the UAE University teachers were perceived as reluctant to engage with students as their mentors. This finding was also supported from the responses of the teachers, where, only the Dubai University teachers mentioned taking initiatives to mentor students. While it is not evident why there may be a difference in the approaches of the teachers from the two universities, as the current study did not include any exploration of the two universities' teachers' past experiences, ethnicity, or qualifications. However, it can be presumed that at the UAE University,

a natural barrier to teachers being mentors could be the fact that most teachers are male and students, females, and working closely or after college hours with female students may not be encouraged by the management. Also, it is likely that the female Emirati students may be hesitant to become mentees of male teachers due to their cultural underpinnings (Soomro & Ahmed, 2012), or they may be prevented by their families from spending too much time or focus on their education (Soomro & Ahmed, 2012).

### **5.2.5 Quality Assurance: Teachers Attend Seminars, Workshops and Write Papers**

Quality assurance at higher education is linked with the quality of teachers, which in turn is assessed on the basis of teachers' accomplishments, like number of papers published in peer-reviewed journals, number of times papers cited, number of additional certifications or qualifications attained, seminars and workshops attended (Badry, 2019). The underlying assumption for using teachers' accomplishments as a quality assurance criteria is that teachers are required to stay abreast of developments in their subjects as well as educational field and are eager to learn and develop themselves (Shibli, 2008). In the context of the current study, it is interesting to note that all teachers believed that they were writing papers and indulging in some self-development activities like attending seminars or workshops, but, the same may not be completely apparent to the students. For example, in the case of the UAE University, only 60.4% of the students thought that their teachers wrote papers or attended seminars and workshops - the responses could be attributed either to the students' ignorance about their teachers' activities and schedules, or to a possibility that the teachers were not indulging in these activities. However, the managers from

both the universities were confident that their teachers were aware of how undertaking publication initiatives or attending seminars was linked with their career growths.

### **5.2.6 Quality Assurance: Class Participation in Community Activity**

In more recent times, community engagement has been hailed as a quality criterion for both industry as well as educational institutes (Badry, 2019). Community engagement allows for a more rounded development of the students and develops their interpersonal skills as well as cultural sensitivity (ADEC, 2020). It was seen from the students' responses that more of the Dubai University students (81.6%) were confident about undertaking activities with community, while only 64.8% of the UAE University students reported the same. The findings, when read within the context of the responses from the teachers, make more sense, as the teachers as well as the manager from the Dubai University mentioned field trips and group assignments that required students to go out and interact in the local community. On the other hand, the teachers from the UAE University mostly denied existence of such activities. However, the manager from the UAE University was optimistic that their students had close community ties. The reason for such responses can be found, again, in the difference in the make of students in the two universities. The Dubai University students being primarily foreign, are likely to be encouraged to interact with the local community, while, the UAE students, being mostly Emirati, are expected to already have ties in the local community.

### **5.2.7 Quality Assurance: Collaboration with other Colleges or Industry**

Another criteria found in literature related to quality assurance of higher education institutes is about the college's ability to forge partnerships with the industry and other institutes that could

enable their students to obtain hands-on experience and have a more rounded education (Mansour and Jakka, 2013). In the context of the current research, it was evident that both the teachers and the managers from the two universities were aware of the importance of such collaboration, and were confident that their colleges indeed had linkages with the industry that enabled students to get internships or with other universities that helped the students to go on college exchange programs. However, the responses from the students were not completely conforming with the trend in responses by the teachers and managers, as only 63.2% of the UAE students and 86.9% of the Dubai University students believed that they were participating in any such programs. The reasons for this are not clear and may warrant further exploration. It can be possible that the teachers and the managers wanted to save face and hence replied more positively than the facts allow.

#### **5.2.8 Quality Assurance: Good College Infrastructure**

Higher educational institutes build their reputation on their resources and infrastructure, and invest heavily in order to develop a state of the art appearance to attract students as well as get high rating on quality (Udriyah et al., 2019). Even for accreditation, the colleges have to complete a checklist of facilities or amenities before qualifying. Infrastructure is the first source of impression, as it is visible, tangible and can be assessed objectively, unlike the education service quality that is difficult to fathom at the onset (Shibli, 2008). There appeared to be an all around consensus among the teachers and the managers that the college infrastructure was excellent. However, again, some of the students (0% from the UAE University and about 12% from the Dubai University) did not think this to be a fact. College infrastructure is however a tangible aspect and there cannot be a

doubt about its existence (on non-existence), and as such, it is likely that some of the students either expected much more from their college, or did not understand the concept.

### **5.2.9 Quality Assurance: Skill Development Aligned with Future Job Needs**

A criteria of quality education is that it prepares graduates with the skills, attitudes and capabilities that are useful in the context of their real and practical lives as professionals and executives (Jessop, 2017). The Dubai University students (87.4%) and the UAE University students (77.5%) were confident that they possessed these skills. However, these findings are in contrast with the existing literature, as a McKinsey Global Institute (2017) report mentions less than 22% of all UAE higher education students were satisfied that their institutes were teaching skills that are aligned with their future jobs. It is possible that the students' perceptions in the current research which used a self-report survey, were not completely honest or accurate, as in the teachers' interviews, too, it was evident that some teachers believed that the college was not adequately focused on this task. It appeared that the colleges were more focused on attracting students through excellent infrastructure, but then they allowed easy graduation without real learning (Badry, 2019). This is a disturbing finding, as it would mean that higher education in the UAE was feeding a large number of graduates that may not be fully prepared to function in a competitive work environment. Further, the managers' attitude was found to be rather negative toward the students, as they insinuated that the problem could be that it was the students who were either not interested in or capable of learning the skills aligned with future job needs. These findings are noteworthy and warrant further exploration, as the sole purpose of higher education, ideally should be, to prepare graduates for future challenges; and this seemed to be lacking in this case.

### **5.2.10 Quality Assurance: Stakeholders' Participation in Quality Assurance of the College**

While quality assurance criteria may not explicitly consider stakeholders participation in quality assurance activities, it is considered as a good practice for higher education institutes to have teachers and students give feedback and evaluation of the educational quality (Udriyah et al., 2019). The survey of the students revealed that there were more Dubai University students (82.5%) who appeared to have participated in quality assurance of their college, in comparison to the UAE University students (71%). In the context of the teachers, none of the Dubai University participants mentioned being a part of the quality assurance program or giving feedback on the quality of the college, while the UAE University teachers believed that they participated in such activity at times. The managers from both the universities, however, expressed satisfaction at their participation in the quality assurance of their respective colleges.

### **5.3 Gaps in Quality Assurance - Effectiveness of the Quality Assurance Program Used by the College**

*(Research Objectives 2 - To explore the gaps and challenges in Quality Standards of Higher Education as perceived by the students, professors, and administrators regarding higher education quality assurance processes in the UAE)*

It is to be noted that none of the teachers, from either university, felt that the quality assurance program of their colleges was adequate or effective completely. This was, however, contrasted by

the managers, who believed that the quality assurance was well done in their colleges. It is also interesting to note that the students, even at the Dubai University, were not satisfied with the quality assurance at the colleges as they were not allowed to give any feedback. However, the UAE University students were likely to provide feedback on their satisfaction, which was an essential part of quality assurance. These findings indicate that quality assurance is probably not done in a standard or explicit manner, and that there is no well laid out set of criteria at the universities to assess quality or manage it. Most of the approaches mentioned in the interviews related to quality assurance were about improving teachers' motivations (as managers mention it being the responsibility of the teachers to improve themselves, learn and invest in loyalty to the college), or about improving the attitude of the students (as mentioned by the teachers in the interview that the students fail to make use of the opportunities given to them). These perceptions may be applicable for quality improvement to a certain extent (Tamim, 2018), but there appeared to be more gaps in terms of standard quality assurance or management - as there was evident a need that the students learning was not being assessed adequately and students were probably allowed to graduate in an easy manner.

#### **5.4 Suggestions for Improving Quality Assurance**

*(Research Objectives 3 -To propose a quality assurance framework and resource materials for assessing and assuring high-quality standards for the higher education institutions in the UAE)*

Most of the suggestions that came from the teachers were related to the students development, in the form of their Math and English skills, or enabling them to learn in a manner that they can apply their learning. These suggestions may be useful for improving quality of education, but only in a



limited capacity, as more organic and substantial changes are warranted (Solloway, 2016). On the other hand, the managers suggestions related to improvement of and inspection of teachers' performance, which can help in establishing standards of teaching and lay down formal control mechanisms for quality management (Kirk,2010). Additionally, taking inputs from the student families, industry as well as preparing the students better were cited as leading to better quality assurance, and are also included in the suggestions made in literature (Fatima, 2019). These suggestions are however more related to making minor adjustments, while there may be a need for major strategic changes in the Universities that need to be addressed, like, improving the teaching methodology, standardizing both teaching and assessment, enabling teacher development, and making students' learning relevant to the challenges of the modern day workplaces (Udriyah et al., 2019). Both the Universities need to reset their goals and priorities developing students capabilities and skills that helped them perform well in their future jobs; and with this objective, to align all resources and teaching calibre toward meeting them.

## **5.5 Summary**

The chapter discussed the findings in the light of the research objectives and found that students from both the university believed that quality assurance was being undertaken adequately, by agreeing upon the existence of all the criteria that are involved in quality assurance of higher education, like teachers using innovation in teaching, teachers using teaching aids, teachers acting as mentors, use of regular assessments, teachers attending seminars and writing papers, participation in community activities, linkages with other colleges and industry, alignment of teaching with industry needs, and feedback from all stakeholders. However, the findings were

contested by the revelations from the teachers interviews, where, though most teachers agreed on their own abilities (like teaching using innovation, using teaching aids, acting as mentors, using assessments), but, expressed reservations about the college regarding its teachings being aligned with the job needs, or linkages with the community, industry or other colleges or even about feedback related to quality management from all stakeholders. Thus teachers' interviews revealed gaps in quality assurance from the college's side. On the other hand, the managers' interviews largely revealed gaps in teachers' performance or motivations and attributed any lack of quality to the teachers and the students. These findings therefore indicate at gaps in current quality assurance and make a case for developing a framework for quality management, control and assurance for the higher educational institutes in the UAE. The next chapter gives an overview of the research findings in terms of the answers obtained for research questions, and also develops a set of recommendations that can be used to develop a standardized, structured, and comprehensive approach to quality assurance for higher education in the UAE.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This is the final chapter of the research and it bring together the research aims and questions connecting them with the findings obtained by the study. It also specifically answers the research questions using discussion and analysis conducted in previous chapter. It also presents a discussion of the research limitations and develops recommendations for both future research and academic practice as well as for policy and strategy development at the higher education institutes.

### **6.2 Overview of Research**

The main aim of the research was to assess the effectiveness of current higher education quality assurance systems for raising higher education standards in the UAE. More specifically, the research objectives were set as –

- *To understand and evaluate the Quality Assurance Process in Higher Education in the UAE*
- *To explore the gaps and challenges in Quality Standards of Higher Education as perceived by the students, professors, and administrators regarding higher education quality assurance processes in the UAE.*

Toward the achievement of the above two objectives data was collected from students in the form of surveys (653) and from the interviews of managers (8) and teachers (2). The objectives were achieved by understanding the perceptions about quality assurance process and its effectiveness as

well as challenges, as perceived by the people who are involved in the situation. The data collection methods were selected based on the presumption that the people who are involved in the situation or in some way linked with the context of the research topic are likely to provide relevant, credible and useful information - a presumption that is backed by the phenomenological stance adopted for this research.

Next, the final research objective of, *To propose a quality assurance framework and resource materials for assessing and assuring high-quality standards for the higher education institutions in the UAE*, was attained through the interviews of administrators and managers as well as available literature on quality assurance in Higher Education.

### **6.3 Summary of Findings**

The research collected data to find answers to the research questions, which were all successfully answered. For example, the first research question, *'Does the current quality assurance system in higher education institutions in the UAE lead to high-quality educational standards in the UAE?'* was answered in a tentative manner only, as the findings indicate that there was no consistent or formal quality assurance being undertaken, and that the students probably lacked the skills needed in the job market. These findings indicate toward a need for both practice and policy changes in the two universities.

Next, the research question, *'How is quality assurance maintained in higher education institutions in the UAE?'* was answered by merging the findings from the surveys and the interviews. It was

found that at the moment, there was probably, only accreditation related formal assessment undertaken, so, if the college had met the accreditation criteria, it is considered to be doing quality assurance. No other formal or standard, or even regular scheduled quality assurance was being done at the colleges. However, this did not mean that the college administration was not monitoring quality of education, as was revealed by the managers. Monitoring the teachers and allowing the students to give feedback on the college and the teachers were some of the ways the research revealed that quality assurance was being undertaken. However, in spite of there being a substantial amount of literature and practice evidence on quality assurance in higher education (), the fact that the two colleges under study did not include a formal and scheduled quality assurance framework, calls out for some changes in policy making.

The next research question, *'What are the perceptions of students, professors, and administrators regarding higher education quality assurance processes in the UAE?'* was answered in an indefinite manner, as both the surveys and the interviews did not provide straight or conclusive answers. It was evident from the surveys, that on factors related to quality assurance - like availability of infrastructure and facilities, teachers' innovativeness and usage of teaching aid, linkages with industry, community and other colleges -, the students of the private university rated their college better than those from the public university. Additionally, for both the universities, the managers and the teachers believed that the quality assurance could be improved, though, they suggested very tainted perceptions about what needed to be changed, as discussed under the next research question.

For the research question, *'What are the gaps in current procedures used for quality assurance in higher education in the UAE?'*, as mentioned above, the managers indicated toward gaps in teachers' performance, while the teachers underscored gaps in the college's approach or the students' abilities or motivations. It appeared that there was a lack of self-reflection or critical understanding of the situation, though, some of the teachers did provide useful insights about the gaps, like, suggesting that the enrollment criteria as well as graduation criteria need to be tightened by the college. Additional suggestions included enabling the students to develop critical thinking skills, and application of their learning in real life scenarios. The managers mentioned the need for teachers to continuously improve themselves. However, it was evident from the research findings that both the colleges lacked in a formal and structured framework that could help in tracking, monitoring as well as managing quality of the entire educational output.

These gaps, therefore, led to the final research question, *'How can the gaps be filled, and challenges overcome to ensure high-quality education standards in the higher education institutions in the UAE.'* This question can be answered using the vast literature available in the context of quality assurance for higher education and some of the suggestions obtained from the interviews. A standard framework for quality assurance is recommended and discussed in the next section.

#### **6.4. Recommendations for Higher Education**

Quality assurance needs to be undertaken in a formal and structured manner, to ensure consistent quality as well as continuous improvement. Some of the recommendations that are made toward quality assurance framework for education practice and policy are discussed below:

## **Policy Making**

- Both the Universities are recommended to realign their goals and priorities toward developing students' capabilities and skills. The policy-making therefore needs to ensure that the curriculum is designed with the students' learning and skill development as the focus, and that the colleges have adequate insights about industry and formulate curriculums that are aligned with industry needs.
- Policies need to be directed toward developing the teachers adequately, as quality of teachers is essential to quality assurance. An essential part of quality assurance framework is enabling teacher development, which should include giving opportunities for self-development to the teachers, and ensuring that they are able to mentor and guide students well.

Another essential dimension of quality assurance is linked to the infrastructure and resource availability of the universities, and it is noted that the participant universities are already well-endowed in this regard, so no specific recommendations are made, other than just ensuring that the colleges continue to invest in providing a suitable and encouraging ambience and facilities to its students.

## **Education Practice**

- Ensure that quality assurance includes strategies for improving the teaching methodology. The students need to be taught skills that are relevant in the job markets, as well as the skills that will equip them to deal with future challenges. Teaching methodologies should target

developing not only subject skills but also critical thinking, creativity, team working, cultural sensitivity, and problem solving.

- Ensure that teaching is conducted in a standardized manner, rather than at the sole discretion of the teachers.
- Additionally, it is recommended that formal assessments be made mandatory and these should include testing both subject learning as well as application of learning in real life situations. Students need to be made to understand that hard work and dedication in studies are linked with future job success.
- While some of the participants had mentioned that the universities had linkages both with the industry and other colleges, it is recommended that these linkages should be further formalized. Especially, in the context of industry relationships, so that the students get a first hand exposure of what to expect in their futures.

## **6.5 Research Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

The research suffered from the limitation that only two universities were included in the study, and a small interview sample of teachers and managers was included. Future researchers are recommended to use a larger pool of colleges as well as interview participants.

Another limitation of the research was that no independent observation or assessment was undertaken by the researcher to assess the quality assurance process or current quality of education in the two colleges; instead, the research relies on the self-reported information from all the participants, which has a small chance of being biased, or incomplete information as participants



may be hesitant to give honest answers. Future research is therefore recommended to develop a framework for understanding and assessing quality assurance of higher education institutes in more objective manner.

## **6.6 Conclusions**

The chapter provided an overview of the research including the research objectives and methodology. It also summarized the research findings and provided answers to the research questions. It presented a set of recommendations for improving quality assurance and also underlined several recommendations for future research on quality assurance in higher education in the UAE. The universities that participated in the research are likely to benefit from the findings as these shed light on the gaps and recommend making changes for improvement.

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