

Subject	External Quality Assurance
Module	Networks Of External Quality Agencies
Topic	3.9 Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

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1. Introduction



This topic discusses the formation of the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE). You will learn about challenges encountered by the founders and planners of this QA network. The topic also highlights concerns in the Arab region about the emergence of multiple QA networks.

Objectives: Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE)

Upon completion of this topic, you should be able to

- identify the reasons that led to the development of an QA network in the Arab region
- identify the mission, goals and methodology of ANQAHE
- describe the challenges in establishing a QA network as identified by Badrawi (2007)
- discuss how the emergence of multiple networks within the Arab region is an issue of concern

2. Establishment of an Arab Network

As in Asia, the countries of the Arab region vary in their definition of quality, their choice of a system of QA or accreditation, and the methodology, scope and function of the QA bodies. This has created a chicken and egg situation: while it has been no mean feat to establish a QA network, a network would have been a good mechanism for dealing with the more contentious issues.

Specifically, an Arab network was needed to:

- Exchange information about QA
- Construct new QA organizations, using shared wisdom
- Build up institutional and academic standards
- Disseminate good practice in QA
- Strengthen liaison between QA bodies in the different countries

The driving force behind the establishment of an Arab network was:

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- A desire to improve quality in higher education in the Arab region
- Globalisation and the open labour market in other countries
- The existence of regional QA networks around the world
- Fast emerging QA organisations and regional networks
- The presence of an international QA and accreditation network
- The recommendations of international organisations that deal with higher education
- The desire and perseverance of QA experts and directors in some Arab countries to work cooperatively to strengthen the links between them.

The idea of establishing an Arab network was conceived during a 2004 conference in Cairo. Many Arab countries were invited to address the QA issues of their respective countries. There was a round table discussion on how their QA bodies might work together, leading to three possible scenarios: The first was to create a network; the second to start an NGO for QA; and the third to develop a commission for QA and accreditation in Arab higher education institutions (HEIs). The consensus, reached in 2005, was to establish an Arab network for QA and accreditation.

The Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE) was launched in June 2007 with agreement on its constitution, name and board members. ANQAHE is now an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organization, established in association with INQAAHE. ANQAHE works in connection with the Association of Arab Universities (AAU). It is a legally-constituted, non-profit, non-governmental organisation with more than 190 HEI members in the Arab world.

Mission, Goals and Methodology of ANQAHE

Mission

The mission of ANQAHE is "To ensure and strengthen QA in higher education institutions and to enhance collaboration between similar QA organisations in the Arab states as well as to develop cooperation with other regional and international QA networks."

Goals

The goals of ANQAHE are

- to support and enhance QA organizations in the Arab region;
- to establish a mechanism of cooperation in the field of QA in higher education in the Arab countries;
- to initiate and sustain regional and international cooperation in QA in higher education;
- to exchange information on QA in higher education; and
- to develop a system for capacity-building QA bodies in the Arab region.

Methodology

The methodology agreed upon in the constitution of the ANQAHE is:

1. Dissemination of information through the network's website, newsletters, documents, journals and books, either in paper or electronic form.
2. Reference from the databases, good practice and resources of other regional and international networks.
3. Organisation of seminars, workshops and conferences on regional and sub-regional levels.
4. Exchange visits for reviewers and experts working in the field of higher education QA.

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5. Assisting in mutual recognition between the different QA bodies of the Arab region.
6. Other appropriate means as determined by the General Council or the Board.

3. Establishing a QA Network

In a 2007 presentation at a UNESCO Conference in Tanzania, Dr. Nadia Badrawi identified a number of challenges that were encountered in the formation of a QA network (see Badrawi, 2007). The essence of these, which provides useful pointers in the establishment of any network, is as follows.

1. Identification of the region

The first challenge was whether to identify the region according to language, geographic location or the system of education.

- A first option was to include all 22 Arabic-speaking countries. (Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Moon Islands, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Somali, Sudan, Syria, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.)
- A second option was to widen the scope to include the entire Middle East - North Africa (MENA) region, adding two or three developed countries in the field of education.

The first option was chosen, although it was noted that elsewhere there are instances of countries being members of more than one region (for example ENQA and CEEN). Egypt for example is eligible to belong to the African, Middle East / North Africa (MENA) or Arab regions. (Note: The ENQA and CEEN example is not so clear. They differ in type, focus, activities, scale, and inclusiveness, ENQA being larger and more inclusive)

2. Small scale representation of all the countries in a given region

Representation by the QA bodies of the Arab countries is not high at this point. Only 12 of the 22 bodies have been engaged in the process so far and not all of these have participated in every meeting at the same time. The network's action plan will need full engagement of the QA bodies of the 22 member countries.

3. Diversity (or absence) of a concept of QA in different countries

At the time of writing, Badrawi noted that five of the Arab speaking countries have semiautonomous bodies for QA: Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates. Other countries were due to establish semiautonomous or independent agencies for QA, which has happened in a number of cases. Most of the countries have a unit in the ministry of higher education to oversee QA and accreditation. Some countries only perform QA and accreditation for private, profit-making, institutions while others do so for both public and private institutions. There are countries that conduct institutional QA and accreditation while others are limited to program accreditation. Some countries use imported international systems while others have developed national models of QA. But there are also some countries in the region that remain inactive in the field of QA and accreditation. This poses a real challenge when membership approval is needed. The issue is whether membership should be restricted to QA agencies that follow international guidelines or whether regional guidelines suited to the diversity of the Arab systems should be developed.

4. Financial constraints

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Starting a network without seed funds was difficult. Funds were needed to start a network and to include as many of the QA bodies and countries as possible. This would have allowed these bodies to be visited, or to meet for constructive discussion. Some donations were obtained, and a World Bank grant under GIQAC was made available from 2008.

The presence of a financial structure was also an important point. The decision to affiliate with the Association of Arab Universities and to use their established financial unit (with a separate bank account) solved this problem.

5. Lack of professional QA expertise


The core members were the QA units in the national ministries of higher education. However, many of these units were either short on experience or simply had never worked in QA. Thus, an early priority of the Arab network was to develop a capacity-building plan to improve the professional expertise of the agencies.

6. Communication deficiencies with the QA bodies in different countries

A lack of communication with the various QA bodies posed another challenge. While some of the Arab countries' QA bodies have websites with the essential names and email addresses, information was not always up to date and many of the emails went unanswered. Others have no website at all. It therefore takes a significant effort to identify the responsible colleague in each country and an even greater effort to ensure that this person's data is kept up to date.

7. Political intervention and domination of the state-owned institutions

In many Arab countries the majority of HEIs are public and as such are owned by the state. They are regulated, dominated and financed by the ministries of higher education. The ministries of higher education fulfil the role of both service providers and evaluators. There is, therefore, considerable political pressure on the institutions and QA bodies. There is no competition between institutions in student admission, staff recruitment, student support or quality standards. In some cases there is political intervention and resistance from higher authorities. The private higher education institutions are also regulated and dominated by the ministries of higher education. Thus political influence competes with QA within HEIs.

 **Note**

We learned of one Arab jurisdiction in which private institutions could choose to operate in adjoining regulated or unregulated zones. The students in the unregulated institutions were part of the general population and, upon graduation, would enter of the national labor market.

8. Should the network be governmental or independent?

The majority of the 22 Arab countries do not have an independent body for QA. Therefore, if the QA bodies, HEIs, and the network are all more or less governmental, political influence will be significant. ANQAHE was therefore established as a non-governmental entity, but the members are the QA bodies, of which most of them are extensions of government. It is a challenge to ANQAHE to maintain a balance between governmental and non-governmental issues. The balance between the governmental and non-governmental bodies is a central issue that should be studied by the network. The decision to be affiliated with a non-governmental organisation that deals with private or public higher education

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institutions, like the Association of Arab universities, has helped to partially resolve this problem.

4. Discussion

Discussion: Success of QA Networks

Consider the following questions:

- How would you measure the success of a network?
- Choose a QA network and look for evidence that it has successfully achieved its stated objectives. Does the network publish some kind of annual summary; if so, what does it see as accomplishments? Does the network provide a list of its publications and documents, or useful links to sources of QA-related information? Give your estimate of how useful this information would be to practitioners.

5. Other Networks

The emergence of multiple similarly-named networks for the same region is a very live issue. The primary reason for this is that the business of QA and accreditation in the Arab region is flourishing. Both profit- and non-profit organisations have an interest in hatching networks to create a market in this field. The establishment of ANQAHE followed on plans to develop various networks, including one based on the Gulf Co-operation Council (2004) and another mooted by Jordan. Even as ANQAHE was being formed, the Arab Quality Assurance & Accreditation Network (AQAAN) was established under Belgian law, avowedly to avoid political interference from any Arab government. Although it is called a network, its objectives define it primarily as a quality agency that intends to perform certification, accreditation, and related functions.

The growth of further networks is a new challenge for the region as it tries to establish its QA arrangements. Further networks are hatching in other regions within the sphere of existing networks (e.g., Central Asia and South-East Asia). There are concerns about their rationale and operational structure, as well as their experience, credibility, and ability to perform the tasks essential to the sustainability of any such enterprise.

6. Summary

This topic covered the following main points:

- ANQAHE was established in June 2007 as a non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with the following aims:
 - Exchange of information about QA
 - Construct new QA organisations
 - Development of institutional and academic standards
 - Dissemination of good practices in QA
 - Strengthening of liaison between QA bodies in different countries
- The establishment of ANQAHE came with challenges. The following are some of the challenges encountered in reaching this level of achievement, as identified by Badrawi (2007):
 - Identification of the region
 - Small scale representation of countries in a given region
 - Variation (or absence) of a QA concept in different countries
 - Financial constraints
 - Lack of professional QA expertise

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- Communication deficiencies with the QA bodies in different countries
- Political intervention and domination of the state-owned institutions
- Decision: should the network be governmental or independent?
- **The Badrawi article is important and useful reading.**
- The emergence of multiple networks with the same name for the same region is a new challenge for the Arab region as it establishes its QA arrangements. It is important to establish the experience and credibility of the structure and the activities of any network to ensure its sustainability.

References

Badrawi, N. (2007). *Challenges of an emerging quality assurance network*, UNESCO Conference, Tanzania.