

**German and Saudi Arabian Higher Education Accreditation Systems**  
**New-Institutionalist Perspectives and Vertical Case Studies**

Doctoral Thesis  
in order to obtain the title of Doctor  
from the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences  
at the University of Tübingen

presented by  
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of Riyadh

Tübingen  
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## Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to my family, my husband, and my kids.

For about nine years, I have been in the faraway land of Tübingen, Germany, while I was undertaking this study. As a daughter, a wife, and a sister, I am mindful of not being available to share in many life moments.

My beloved parents: your words of encouragement and push for tenacity ring in my ears.

My loving husband: your support will be always appreciated, without you none of this will be possible.

My lovely sisters and brothers: you have never left my side and were very special.

I will always appreciate all that you have done.

My wonderful children, Amal and Fahad: my companions on this journey who experienced with me the hardships, day and night. Both of you have been my best cheerleaders.

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## **Abstract**

The current research is classified as an international comparative educational study. The research's central concern is providing a better understanding for the spreading worldwide quality assurance and accreditation practices in higher education sectors. Through the lens of new-institutional theory, this study aims to illustrate the agendas behind their adoption and how these practices were integrated and implemented in higher education institutions. German and Saudi Arabian higher education institutions represent cases in which this phenomenon can be analyzed to provide explanations for its expansion and application worldwide. This research investigates the reasons behind the adoption of quality assurance and accreditation practices in both countries and the ways in which these educational reforms are implemented, as well as how to explain the differences between these two cases in this regard.

The first part of this research identifies the local systems of quality assurance and accreditation of higher education in Germany and Saudi Arabia. In its second part, the applied study, this research includes two vertical case studies of the literature and policy documents of German and Saudi higher education systems regarding application of these procedures as well as expert interviews from these countries.

The research found that the different relationships and events at each level of the quality assurance and accreditation phenomena (macro-meso-micro) and in the different directions of the two case studies (transversal-vertical-horizontal) contributed to creating the changes and reforms in both higher education systems. The research provided a significant degree of evidence-based understanding from the two cases relating to the different aspects of the research's theory perspectives, i.e., the new-institutional perspectives. The place of the phenomena and its contributions in dissemination, the role of international organizations in this reform, the effect of seeking international legitimacy in encouraging the local change, and the different policy makers' resources affect the national reforms in Germany and Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the different local meanings of this global phenomenon in Germany and Saudi Arabia are affected by the respective context's culture, norms, and political structures.

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# Chapter 1

## Background

### 1.1 Introduction

During the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, higher education worldwide experienced a qualitative leap in its nature and functions. During this era, higher levels of learning for young people became seen as a vital means to advance the economical and societal future and to develop national competitiveness. In the knowledge age, human resources are seen as the engine of nations' development. As the main producers of knowledge, human resources are more vital than even financial resources. This leads to the creation of a different relationship between this kind of education and societies. This new status of higher education, which is internationally accepted as a key index of a nation's development, also forced it to face a number of challenges. These include the increasing demand for higher education which explains the expansion of its institutions, seen in the remarkable changes that have occurred over the last 15 years in the number of higher education institutions worldwide. Additional challenges include privatization and trade in higher education institutions and the fast growth of knowledge and technology development. As a result, diversity and quality of higher education became key demands for this sector to achieve its desired objectives.

Related to this, higher education policymakers all over the world have been under big pressure in their attempts to overcome these challenges and problems and to find and adopt successful structures and management procedures in national higher education policy. It has become a common belief among policymakers that all activities and approaches of higher education institutions need to be managed and systematically evaluated to improve their performance. The expansion, diversification, and privatization of higher education have generated great interest regarding regulation and quality assurance in higher education across national borders.

Currently, a respective national higher education system is an integral part of the global higher education system. It has to demonstrate its global dimension through an effective



participation in knowledge exchanging and international research projects and be a comparable institution for students and staff mobility while at the same time maintaining its identity and its social and cultural characteristics. Consequently, quality of the higher education process and its output is one of the most important concerns, and many questions about the way to ensure quality evaluation, assessment, improvement, management, and recognition have been prioritized across higher education's agenda internationally and regionally.

Since the late 1980s, research indicates an increasing concern in quality management, and its related issues in the higher education sector at international, regional and national levels. Moreover, most higher education systems in developed and developing countries have been a subject of national reform that includes the introduction of quality and recognition procedures in their higher education policy. There is worldwide agreement on this education policy change, similarity in its frameworks, and a strong belief in its benefits. In Western Europe, higher education systems are undergoing national development to reach out to the European Higher Education Area and ensure the quality of their processes and outcomes as part of the Bologna Declaration (1999), which represented a process for national external quality assurance that combines all European Union countries.<sup>1</sup>

In the German context, the Federal Minister for Education and Research in April 1999 launched her first declaration in which she called for what she named "Mut zur Veraenderung," which means "courage to change," involving the need to restructure the higher education system because of several considerable flaws (crises) it suffers from that require extensive reform in different areas in the system. One of the suggested changes is regular evaluation of higher education to ensure accountability, support autonomy, and enhance the competition and creativity among institutions (German Federal Ministry of Education and Research [BMBF], 1999).

At the same time, individual countries are influenced by these international trends and then moving to restructure their higher education systems to take advantage of these kinds of practices. During the same period and despite fundamental differences both in the culture and

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<sup>1</sup> European higher education policy in general has shifted from the traditional view of higher education in economic terms to a broader understanding of its cultural significance in terms of the overall development of society. See (in German) Becker & Primova (2009).

system of higher education, quality assurance and higher education accreditation also became valued in Saudi Arabia. As in the German higher education system, accreditation was implemented as a quality assurance procedure in the Saudi national development plan for 1995 through 2000, which was put forward as a solution to eliminate problems in the higher education sector appearing at that time.

The present study seeks to fill the need to discover mechanisms underlying the process of policy formation until it becomes an international trend and how the national systems, with different backgrounds and educational structures, integrate these kinds of policies at their organizational levels. This is a research area that has hardly been explored until now.

This study will illustrate this education policy change by tracking the formation processes in different places of the world. The current study aims to explore the mechanism underlying the formation and adoption for the worldwide spreading phenomenon of accreditation. German and Saudi higher educations' recent reforms in regards to introducing accreditation procedures in their national higher education policy are the two cases for the study. Reforms in both these countries reflect consequences of different national and international challenges and have gone through multiple steps and levels.

## **1.2 The notion of quality in higher education**

The term *quality* is regarded as an old concept but recently became a main focus of management science. The emergence of quality as a central branch of management science goes all the way back to the post-World-War II period, when Japan applied the basics of quality management in the industry field, resulting in great success, and this was followed in the United States in the 1950s. Then it was adopted in fields such as health care and education in many countries around the world (Berman & West, 1995). In the 1970s and 1980s, quality assurance was starting to be implemented as a management procedure in higher education institutions, at first in the USA, and then this was imitated in West Europe around 1984 (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007). As mentioned, the concern about quality assurance in higher education arose as a result of the changes which happened in the nature of the organizational aspects of higher education institutions worldwide. The need for adopting a new form of organization has become an urgent requirement for universities, on the one hand, to maintain

their independence or autonomy, cohesion, and structure, and on the other hand, to meet the needs of societies (Clark, 1998; Davies, 1997).

However, in the latter part of the twentieth century, when it was linked with new mechanisms and methodologies, quality assurance started to take a new form, becoming seen as something that could be managed and pro-actively improved. Nowadays it has become a fundamental value in the field of higher education, although it is a broad and diverse concept which is difficult to explain in one single definition. The term *quality* in higher education can be classified into five different meanings, as shown in Table 1, that represent stakeholders' views on quality, with Harvey and Green (1993) contending that "this is not a different perspective on the same thing but different perspectives on different things with the same label" (p. 10). It is worth mentioning that all five classifications are appropriate to higher education but vary according to what the interest is.

**Table 1. Harvey and Green's Classification of Quality (1993)\***

<b>Classification</b>	<b>Brief Explanation</b>
Quality and objectives, fitness for purpose	An institution has quality when it achieves its objectives, including its mission orientation and consumer orientation.
Quality and standards, excellence	Pre-described standards are used to evaluate the provided services by the institutions.
Quality and perfection	There is a lack of error in work performance and provided services with consistency and error-free attributes.
Quality and appropriate "value for money"	Needs and expectations of the beneficiaries are fulfilled.
Quality and transformation	The nature of quality (necessarily) includes a change from a current status to an ideal end status.

\*Source: Harvey, L., and Green, D. (1993).

The literature exposes four major conceptualizations of quality in higher education compatible with the aforementioned quality classification by Harvey and Green (1993). There is a divergence of researchers' viewpoints about ways of thinking about quality. The work of Lomas (2002) on a group of senior managers in higher education institutions shows that fitness for purpose and transformation seems to be the two most adequate definitions of quality. However, according to Watty (2003), the image of quality as perfection is not appropriate since higher education does not aim to produce defect free graduates.

Table (2) shows the work of Schindler, Welzant, Puls-Elvidge, and L. Crawford (2015), they listed four conceptualizations of quality in higher education which offered by literature and consist with Harvey and Green's Classification of Quality (1993). The concepts are: purposeful, exceptional, transformative and accountable.

**Table 2. The quality meaning in higher education\***

Classifications	Definitions
Purposeful	Higher education organizations' operations and services are based on a clearly formulated statement of purpose or specific requirements and criteria in line with accreditation or governmental standards.
Exceptional	Higher education organizations' operations and services maintain high standards, resulting in a reputation for excellence.
Transformative	Higher education organizations' operations and services achieve improvements in the three aspects of student learning (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor) as well as in personal and professional development.
Accountable	Accurate and error-free educational products and services are delivered reliably.

\* Schindler, L., Puls-Elvidge, S., Welzant, H., & Crawford, L. (2015).

In other words, the definitions of quality in higher education are centered on two main ideas. The first idea deals with meeting pre-determined standards by the state or an

accreditation agency, while the other idea focuses on the meaning of accountability and transparency for the stakeholders (Schindler et al, 2015).

Moreover, the quality standards in higher education are classified in two main orientations regarding the inputs and the outputs. Four central standards categories for quality in higher education three standards categories are concerning the desired inputs have been identified: administrative, structural performance and student support standards. Moreover, the other standards categories are standards of the required outputs are represented in students' performance standards.

Quality assurance is defined in the World Declaration of Higher Education in Article 11, which was published by the United Nations (1998), as a multidimensional concept, which should embrace all its functions and activities. These include teaching and academic programs, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, faculties, equipment, services for the community, and the academic environment.

Finally, quality assurance in higher education refers to the way an institution provides a certain guarantee that its educational services and environment meet the preset standards for the quality of higher education institutions. It aims to evaluate the elements of the learning environment (content of programs, learning opportunities, and facilities) to make sure that they adequately fulfill their purpose (ESG, 2015). Such activities seek to promote greater trust in the higher education institution's efficiency. The central focus of quality assurance activities is on accountability and enhancement (ESG, 2015).

In higher education, quality is, in each instance, a major principle, and it is as old as this type of education. The procedures that represent quality assurance and accreditation in higher education institutions are inveterate ones, whereas the establishment of new higher education institutions and new study programs are associated with the agreement of the highest authorities. In Europe these procedures could be dated back to 1347 when the University of Prague was established (Erichsen, 2000). Since that time, higher authority approval (Pope, Emperor, and State) has been a major demand for universities being established or study programs opening and should be done in line with the authority's requirements and conditions.

The State's task was the bureaucratically controlled procedures that were applied in assuring the effectiveness and quality of higher education institutions until the 1970s. Then higher education institutions were driven to undertake major reforms in their structures and activities which resulted in higher education approval no longer being a state responsibility, instead carried out by "new established supra-national organizations" for accreditation and quality assurance agencies. This political change mainly refers to a shift of power as a result of keeping pace with the new trend in public management based primarily on consumer demands and aims to achieve uniformity in higher education providers at the international and regional levels, as seen in Europe. This reform of integrating external quality evaluation such as the accreditation framework in the national policy was rapidly introduced in all European countries: in 1998, six countries out of twenty established accreditation systems, and by 2003 all of them (except Greece and Denmark) had implemented accreditation procedures (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007).

### **1.3 Accreditation in higher education**

The system of accreditation is a process that cannot be separated from the concepts *quality, audit, assessment, or standards monitoring*, such as, for example, external evaluation. Accreditation in higher education is a procedure for external evaluation of the quality in higher education institutions or study programs. It is a recognition process aimed at ensuring that the higher education institution is committed to assurance and improvement of quality. This procedure is carried out by national bodies or non-profit organizations established for this purpose, ending with an approval of status, legitimacy, or appropriateness of an institution or program (Eaton, 2009, 81). In addition to that, the accreditation statement should be taken in light of transparent, agreed upon, pre-defined standards (Sursock, 1999). As noted, globalization, privatization, student and staff mobility, and professionalization all create an urgent need and strong pressure on higher education systems worldwide to adopt qualification standards as well as a comparable system of external quality assurance.

Nations have adopted various processes and practices for the assurance of quality of the education provided. The frameworks of accreditation and their approach are different from country to country even within one region. The United States has the oldest tradition in

accreditation (Damme, 2002). Its accreditation system was developed in the late nineteenth century as a tool intended to achieve accountability on the federal level (Adelman & Silver, 1990). The reason was a need to establish regulatory standards, arising from the confusing and disorganized situation that prevailed in the United States higher education sector at that time.

In European countries there is no comparable pattern for accreditation systems. They differ among themselves. The areas of variation, as outlined by Schwarz and Westerheijden (2007), include the kind of accreditation procedure. Some countries, such as Austria, have accreditation processes just for study programs, while others have them for all programs and all institutions as is the case in Hungary. Another area of variation is the kind of organization which carries out the accreditation process. Some, such as Germany and Spain as well as Saudi Arabia, rely on independent organization such as supra-national agencies, while others have discipline-specific bodies for each professional area as seen in Ireland. In some cases, the Ministry of Higher education is the accreditation body as in Finland. Other areas of variation include the methods of accreditation systems and the evaluation process (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007).

Essentially, the accreditation process is distinguished from other external quality assurance processes, such as assessment or audit, by its function to achieve monitoring over the sector. Moreover, the accreditation process includes compliance and indirect accountability (Di Nauta et al., 2004).

#### **1.4 Previous studies**

Very few studies have been published concerning accreditation in German and Saudi higher education. By reviewing those which have been conducted in this area, two kinds of research areas are found. The first is research that studied the accreditation organizations, regulation and methodology within countries. The second is research that studied cases of quality assurance experiences, standards, and effectiveness in specific college or study programs. This research reviews these studies, their objectives, methods, and results, in the order of their date of publication.

##### **1.4.1. Studies about accreditation in German higher education**

In this section, important contributions to German research in terms of quality assurance and accreditation systems is summarized in chronological order from 2008 to the

present day. In her 2008 study, Serrano-Velarde shed light on the economical dimension of quality assurance. She addressed the emergence and the formation of the quality assurance agencies as a new organizational change in Germany and the impact of these on the national and international agencies market. Her research uses historical description to trace the origin and formation process for these agencies and how they affected universities within the context of the economic system. Furthermore, Serrano-Velarde (2008) examines how institutional settings limit quality assurance provisions and how such limitation impacts the economic competitiveness of agencies. Moving from German accreditation agencies to the quality of study programs, Grendel and Rosenbusch (2010) introduced and explained a new possibility for German universities to have all their study programs accredited through "system accreditation," an innovative alternative to program accreditation pioneered by the Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz. Based on the Mainz model, they discuss how system accreditation might help develop study programs and make improvements in quality assurance. On the other hand, the major challenges facing system accreditation are also addressed as it seeks to establish an integrated approach, a firm evidence base, and effective evaluations.

While Grendel and Rosenbusch focused on the University of Mainz, Frank, Kurth & Mironowicz (2012) conducted a comparison between systems in different countries. Specifically, they address how quality assurance and accreditation for professional degrees are dealt with in the United Kingdom, Poland, and Germany. In urban, regional, and spatial planning, various schemes demonstrate a great deal of variation in stakeholder influence and professional involvement in accreditation. Although bringing curricula closer in line with professional standards promises greater relevance and recognition at the national level, it does not necessarily result in improved degree portability within Europe. Therefore, this study proposes international or pan-European professional accreditation, but this is far from becoming a reality.

At the *Länder* level, Suchanek, Pietzonka, Künzel and Futterer (2012) considered the effects of accreditation in terms of study program quality assurance and reform in Lower Saxony. They analyzed 1,380 accreditation decisions made in this German federal state between July 2004 and December 2009. They also interviewed experts from the state's 36



higher education institutions to help clarify the extent accreditation really helps them reach their quality assurance goals.

The aforementioned study focuses on clear, easily measurable, and enforceable quality criteria. However, their work in document analysis demonstrates that some of these quality criteria are difficult to measure on the basis of program accreditation. In addition, in many cases accreditation documents may be prepared with the sole goal of being accredited, with teaching and learning appearing different on paper but fundamentally unchanged.

Nevertheless, this study shows that to some extent program accreditation has in fact succeeded in reforming study programs in Germany, as new study systems can only be implemented if structural standards are actually enforced. On the other hand, even though higher education institutions are required to meet threshold standards, program accreditation process does not guarantee that these programs will have a continuous quality improvement process.

The study gives the fact that this approach is incapable of getting rid of organizational discrepancies between social structure and semantics as the reason for this. What is written in the documents is different from what actually happens on an operational level. The newly established agencies do not have enough experience or means to effectively check to what extent changes truly improve the process of teaching and learning. As accreditation criteria are complicated and detailed, they can be misunderstood and must be clarified with counseling, which the agencies themselves cannot cover. In addition, academics frequently are hesitant to accept what they perceive as an unnecessary and cumbersome extra workload. The key factor is that neither program accreditation nor system accreditation offers clear incentives for quality reforms. The study shows that 35% of reform managers think that a successful quality assurance system should provide for the autonomy of higher education institutions. However, although higher education institutions are responsible for themselves, the whole system of quality assurance is questionable if it does not subject these entities to periodic external evaluation to continuously improve their quality.

Another area of research focuses concern on accreditation agencies and institutional autonomy. This is addressed by Serrano-Velarde's (2014) study which deals with the efforts of

German accreditation agencies to maintain as much autonomy as possible. Her paper is a qualitative study based on archival data and more than 70 interviews. Based on new-institutional theory, she contends that quality assurance agencies seek to gain a stronger position in their respective countries by politically establishing themselves at the European level. Despite numerous institutional and political barriers at the national level, these institutions have managed to attain political clout through the Bologna Process.

This study shows the difficulties of agencies maintaining their autonomy in this environment where indirect steering methods are used in governing higher education (e.g., competition-based funding formulas, benchmarking or contracting). Moreover, accreditation agencies, which are a new form of monitoring, are regulated inconsistently and are viewed with suspicion by academics. The researcher in this study conducts analyses on different levels, allowing a complete historical tracing of this multi-leveled phenomenon of accreditation agencies. Furthermore, this study portrays the contradictions inherent in the Bologna Process, which essentially gives mandates to Bologna members without institutionalizing these structures nationally, leading to failure actually correcting power imbalances of these agencies at the national level. As a result, this study points out that more comparative research is needed in this regard. It also raises the question of whether standardization as a result of globalization can even be maintained in higher education institutions.

Between 2015 and 2016, a number of international comparative studies were conducted. The first of these was the study by Olga Chorna in 2015 which examined the current state of quality assurance systems in German and Ukrainian universities. She conducted a multi-level comparative study of actors in these two countries. Moreover, she estimated the influence ration of state administration on education as well as quality agencies on quality assurance procedures. She also applied comparative analysis and used the university world rankings. She compared the components and levels of these two countries' systems of quality assurance and examined how they have used international experience to improve their own national systems, an aspect that could be a key in creating the European Higher Education Area. Finally, she addressed the high international reputation of German universities and their quality

monitoring systems, as reflected in world rankings, and suggested that German experience in quality assurance could provide a model for Ukraine.

Other countries of comparison are taken into account by Bejan, Janatuinen, Jurvelin, Klöpping, Malinen, Minke & Vacare-anu (2015). This study was conducted on German, Finnish, and Romanian quality assurance systems. It aimed to address the main characteristics of these systems regarding students, teaching staff, and quality managers, while taking their expectations and observed impacts, whether intended or not, into consideration. All the institutions reviewed in this study already demonstrated some means for impact analysis of quality assurance and were using them along with both internal and external quality assurance procedures. This study also analyzed the revised *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, showing that the European institutions in this sample are effectively working on their new reforms regarding quality monitoring. On the other hand, there are also areas that could be improved and examined more in-depth, such as quality policies and systematic methodologies of impact evaluation.

Yet another three-country comparison was carried out by Damian, Grifoll, and Rigbers (2016). These three experts studied the different national quality assurance systems in Romania, Spain, and Germany. The quality approaches and the activities of impact analysis of quality assurance agencies were analyzed by using a strategic perspective. This study indicated similarities in methodologies and structures in these cases of study. Nevertheless, the sample agencies have not yet introduced any systematic impact evaluation of quality assurance as demanded by the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. Therefore, the authors suggest that quality assurance interventions in higher education institutions ought to be an essential aspect of the agencies' activities, which in turn would become more transparent and be easier to improve in a systematic way. According to this research, impact evaluation skills are essential, and staff and peers with both methodological knowledge and practical competence in project and conflict management are needed.

Finally, a comparative study focusing on the quality management practices within Germany itself was provided by Golowko, Kopia, Geldmacher, Förster-Pastor (2017). Their

research addresses the current situation at German private universities. This study illustrates institutionalizing structures as well as tools and procedures, especially regarding evaluations and institutional responses to them. Moreover, a system of categories of internal and external quality assurance characteristics is formed on the basis of a literature review. This study follows Mayring's quantitative content analysis approach (2000). The study's results show that all private higher education institutions have each introduced different quality assurance systems of their own, which also differ greatly from the state universities. A significant problem is the lack of internal and external transparency in quality management.

In reviewing these nine German studies, their topics may be classified in three main streams. The majority (five) consist of internationally comparative research on the quality assurance and accreditation system. These include Frank et al. (2012), Chorna (2015), Bejan et al. (2015), Damian et al. (2016), and Golowko et al. (2017). In addition, these comparative studies are conducted on the European level, with one of them conducted on the German organizational level, but no study compares the German quality assurance and accreditation system with another international non-European country.

The second stream of the reviewed studies focuses on the German accreditation system. System accreditation was the concern of Grendel and Rosenbusch (2010). The other by Suchanek et al. (2012) explored the impact of this new policy on the German study programs reform.

The third group of the reviewed studies includes two studies both by Serrano-Velarde (2008, 2014) and focuses on the area of accreditation agencies area. Her first study (2008) examined these agencies as a new organizational change in Germany and their impact on the national and international agencies market. In 2014, she explored the efforts of German accreditation agencies to maintain as much autonomy as possible. From new-institutional theory, she contended that quality assurance agencies seek to gain a stronger position in their respective countries by politically establishing themselves at the European level.

#### **1.4.2 Studies about accreditation in Saudi higher education**

This section covers the significant recent Saudi research in the area of quality assurance and accreditation systems from 2002 to the present day. The studies are reviewed in a chronological order.

The first study conducted in 2002 by Brahmin illustrates the procedures of evaluating the quality of Saudi private higher education institutions. It analyzed the case of Prince Sultan College in Riyadh. The study aimed to explore common procedures of quality evaluation in private higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia, of which there were four colleges at that time. Then the study moved to find the most appropriate procedure for Prince Sultan College. At the end this study presented a proposed model to accomplish this. The study found that the procedure of academic accreditation which involves quality criteria and self-assessment is the most effective way for achieving quality in private higher education institutions.

While Brahmin focused on the Saudi private higher education institutions and used a case study approach, Darandari and Hoke (2007) analyzed the Saudi experience of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education institutions. The study aimed at addressing the current procedures concerning quality assurance and evaluation in Saudi universities, while identifying the needs for improving and enlarging these procedures and the obstacles facing these processes, ending by offering some possible solutions for that situation. Questionnaires and interviews were applied to the study's sample, which included the staff involved in quality assurance procedures in Saudi universities. The study's results showed great differences in the level of applying quality assurance procedures and evaluation activities in Saudi universities. Moreover, some universities did not apply any quality assurance or evaluation procedures. The most important obstacle to application identified was the lack of well trained staff in quality assurance procedures. The study recommended a national project for training the academic staff and administrators, individually modeled on the needs of each college and university.

The connection between student performance and accreditation criteria was covered in the master's thesis of Al-Badry in (2008). She studied the status of performance of women's faculties in the Jazan Area in light of accreditation norms. The study provided an overview of the literature clarifying accreditation meaning, aims, and application requirements. Then it

identified the norms expected for application, expected difficulties, and application suggestions in Saudi education in general. The study recognized statistical differences between average responses in the study sample regarding all the aforementioned issues and others in women's faculties, taking the following variables into consideration: gender, academic degree, place of work, type of work, years of duty, and training courses.

Moreover, the study suggested a conception for activation mechanisms for academic accreditation system application in women's faculties in Saudi universities. The researcher used the comparative approach and a questionnaire as a tool for collecting data and information for the case study of the faculty of women's in Jazan University. The study arrived at several results, including intermediate statistical values for most issues and higher ones for the clarity of policies and procedures in the admission and registration process. Lower values were noted for quality culture, preparing students for the labor market, and using electronic administration. This study recommended the establishment of an evaluation and academic accreditation committee for women's faculties as a branch of an international organization in this field. It also recommended a national prize for academic accreditation in higher education institutions.

In 2011, an exploratory study by Al-Shihri aimed to explore the extent to which National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA) standards were met in the preparation year of King Saud University in Riyadh. The study's sample included students and academic staff of this program. This research followed the descriptive approach and used questionnaires for data collection. This study found that these NCAAA standards for the study program were met to a very high statistical degree, while the standards for educational environment were met to an intermediate statistical degree. Furthermore, this study recommended the NCAAA provide a model for a preparation year at the universities and give the academic staff more opportunities to participate in the academic decision-making process.

The requirements and problems of applying accreditation systems were identified by Hakami (2012). This study aimed at recognizing the organizational, educational, and human obstacles to achieving accreditation in the faculty of education at King Khalid University, also providing methods and assistance for overcoming these obstacles from the point of view of the

faculty. This study followed a descriptive analytical method with a questionnaire as its study tool. Fifty faculty members constituted the study's sample. Based on their responses, this study concluded that there is generally high agreement on both the obstacles in place and the methods of overcoming them. Moreover, the researcher makes several recommendations, including finding ways to spread a culture of accreditation among faculty, staff, and students.

Another exploratory case study was undertaken by Al-Dail in 2013, aiming to identify the current status of adopting the accreditation criteria of NCAAA. Moreover, the study sought to identify the obstacles to adoption and suggestions for improvement. The study's sample included 432 deans, assistant deans, and department heads at medical science colleges in Saudi Arabia. The questionnaires were used to collect data regarding their opinions on these different issues. The data reviewed the different accreditation procedures for medical science colleges in some advanced countries to assist in creating an appropriate Saudi academic accreditation model for medical science colleges. As a result of the data analysis and advanced countries' previous experience, the researcher designed a model for medical college accreditation and recommended the establishment of an accreditation agency for medical science colleges.

The study by Al-Hoqail in 2014 aspired to examine the role of accreditation in improving performance. At Al-Majmaah University, the effect of the accreditation standards in improving academic staff performance was studied. Academic staff in all colleges of the university were the study's sample. This study applied questionnaires for data collection and a statistical approach for data analysis. This study concluded that the standards play a role in improving the academic staff's performance to an intermediate degree. There were many obstacles facing the adoption of accreditation standards. In addition, the study proposed several suggestions for improving the academic staff's performance, such as decreasing the workload for the academic staff and improving the resources and means for teaching processes as well as increasing the national and international level of cooperation.

Finally, in 2014, Al-Omary in his doctoral thesis investigated rationality versus institutionalism in the adoption of the academic accreditation system in Saudi universities. Academic staff members of three public universities in Riyadh and Jeddah were the study sample. This study followed a mixed methods research approach, including qualitative

(interviews and questionnaires) and quantitative (statistics) approaches, with expert interviews and questionnaires used as study tools. The theoretical framework of this study included rationality theories in administration and new institutionalism theory. The study found rational motivations and institutional motivations for academic accreditation adoption: the faculty members responsible for academic accreditation at these universities believed that rational motivation played a greater role in this adoption, while academic managers saw the great influence of institutional motivations in this adoption. The study recommended leadership in public universities adopt a more rational approach when adopting an academic accreditation system.

Looking across the eight previously discussed Saudi studies, their topics centered on the following:

1. The majority of these studies (five) were exploratory and aimed at identifying the status of applying NCAAA accreditation standards and the experience of some Saudi higher education organizations in this area. Dandri and Hawk (2007) analyzed the Saudi experience of these practices in the higher education sector in general. Al-Shihri (2011) explored the extent to which NCAAA standards were met in the King Saud University. Hakami (2012) identified the requirements and problems of applying an accreditation system at King Khalid University, and, in a fourth study, Al-Dail (2013) aimed to identifying the current status of adopting the accreditation criteria of NCAAA. One more study, the fifth one of this group, covered the quality assurance and accreditation practices in the private higher education sector (Brahmin, 2002).
2. The second group of the Saudi studies linked the adoption of these practices with the improving performance. One studied the academic performance of the students in connection with these practices being introduced (Al-Badri, 2008), and the other one examined improvements of the academic staff performance after this adoption (Al-Hoqail, 2014).



3. The last study (Al-Omary, 2014) dealt with the different motivations behind this adoption at the level of higher education organizations by investigating rationality versus institutionalism.

### **1.5 Comments on previous studies**

The review of previous studies shows diversity in the studies' topics. All studies were conducted in a higher education sector. The majority (five) of the German studies are international comparisons of quality assurance and accreditation systems, while the majority of the Saudi studies (five) are aimed at identifying the status of applying NCAAA accreditation standards and the experience of Saudi higher education organization in this area. Moreover, there is no Saudi study conducted on the international comparative educational area of quality assurance and accreditation systems.

All studies in both countries were applied at one level. Some of the studies were applied at the national level and others at the organizational level. An exception was the study of Chorna (2015) on German and Ukrainian universities, which involved a multi-level study including national and organizational levels. In addition, one study was conducted at the state level, while another study was done on the agencies of accreditation. Half of the German studies dealt with the national accreditation system in Germany in comparison to some European countries (Bejan et al., 2015; Chorna, 2015; Damian et al., 2016; Frank et al., 2012). The case study approach and comparative study were the main approaches used, besides interviewing experts.

There is a similarity in the theoretical framework and research approach used for the German study of Serrano-Velarde (2014) on German accreditation agencies and the Saudi study of Al-Omary (2014) on the motivations of applying academic accreditation in Saudi universities. They were based on neo-institutional theory and used archived data and expert interviews.

No study involved multi-level analyses starting from the international level and ending at the organizational level, as seen with a vertical case study approach. Moreover, no study was conducted on the German accreditation system in comparison to other non-European national accreditation systems. Furthermore, there were no comparative studies done between the Saudi accreditation system and any other national accreditation system.

## **1.6 The importance of this study**

The current study examines the process of education policy formation. It demonstrates how education policy is shaped by different actors at different levels. This study aspires to contribute to an understanding of mechanisms underlying education policy formation, an area that is underexplored in the sociological study of educational systems (see Johnston, 2014; Walters, 2011).

It traces the origin and historical development of accreditation phenomenon as well as explores the agendas that drove this education policy change within national higher education systems. It will do so by studying multi-level integration of this new international trend in higher education into the national and then organizational level. As indicated earlier, no previous research has been undertaken in this regard.

In particular, this study explores when an issue becomes salient in the education policy realm, where policy ideas and practices come from, and how they become viable alternatives. It also addresses which national and local components influence which ideas and practices so that they become institutionalized in national policies and regulations. This study examines the interaction of global policy trends with the dynamics of legitimacy struggles in a policy domain to transform education policy over time. A study of this nature, combining new-institutionalism with a vertical case study perspective, has not been conducted before now.

## **1.7 Problem statement and research questions**

The central concern of this study is to provide a better understanding for the accreditation practices spreading worldwide. Through the lenses of new-institutional theory, this study aims to illustrate the agendas behind their adoption and how these practices were integrated and implemented in higher education institutions.

German and Saudi Arabian higher education institutions are two models for the educational reform that recently occurred with regard to applying academic accreditation practices. They also present clear cases of attempting systemic reform in higher education, as demonstrated through the wide array of policies developed and implemented during the period from 1998 to 2016. As two countries from different policy and cultural backgrounds, western and non-western systems, they have various agendas and strategies in their higher education

institutions and organizational levels. They represent cases in which this phenomenon can be analyzed to provide explanations for its expansion and application worldwide.

Therefore, the problem statement of this study can be identified, which is to investigate the reasons behind the adoption of accreditation practices in German and Saudi higher education institutions and the ways in which these educational reforms are implemented, as well as how to explain the differences between these two cases in this regard. For a complete analysis of the problem of the study, the problem statement can be divided into three questions. The first question of the study refers to the conceptual framework by developing knowledge on academic accreditation practices as used in higher education institutions.

*RQ1: What are the current accreditation systems in German and Saudi higher education institutions?*

The study will answer this question by reviewing the conceptual literature to provide definitions and explanation for the concepts, elements, and processes of accreditation in higher education institutions. This step will be followed by analyses of the models of German and Saudi accreditations procedures and processes that are addressed by Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (ACQUIN) in Germany and National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA) in Saudi Arabia.

The second part of the study addresses the questions of “why” and “how,” centering around identifying the reasons and motivations which have driven the education policy reforms. These include the adoption of accreditation practices in German and Saudi higher education institutions using the idea of policy diffusion, new-institutional perspectives, and vertical case study approach, which are considered to provide a useful approach in framing comparative educational research to understand these policy reforms. The research questions that guide this part can be formulated as follows:

*RQ2: Why were the academic accreditation practices adopted in higher education institutions reform chosen in both of Germany and Saudi Arabia?*

*SQ3: How do German and Saudi higher education institutions differ in the adoption and implementation of the academic accreditation practices?*

The third part represents the empirical investigation of accreditation practices implemented at the institutional level. This practical part of the study illustrates the differences between German and Saudi higher education institutions in their respective adoption of accreditation practices and gives explanations for these differences.

The current research is classified as an international comparative educational study. It involves comparative analysis of German and Saudi contexts and policies of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education in order to attempt to provide understanding of policy formation and improvement. This study does not aim to explore the effectiveness of this policy or how good it is. Rather, it only features the process of policy decision-making and adoption. It involves a consideration of contextual factors that affect the application of quality assurance and accreditation in the two cases of study.

As indicated by study question 1, the research identifies the local systems of quality assurance and accreditation of higher education in Germany and Saudi Arabia. In its second part, the applied study, this research will elaborate on questions 2 and 3 by conducting two case studies of German and Saudi higher education systems in applying these procedures. Similarly, this study heeds the guidance provided by the literature on comparative education regarding world culture theory, new-institutional perspective, and policy diffusion as well as the vertical case study for creating the research's theoretical and methodological framework.

### **1.8 Case selection**

This study includes multiple vertical case studies. It aspires to provide insight into the adoption of accreditation in higher education by studying two different systems, the German and the Saudi ones, as instrumental cases. As demonstrated by Stake Denzin Lincoln (2013), instrumental cases are studied to obtain a better understanding of an issue or a phenomenon. According to Yin (2009), the design of this kind of study is based on the idea of replicating the research procedures for each case of study. Therefore, in the case of this research comprised of multiple cases, the focus of the selection strategy is on external validity of the case inquiry.

The replication logic inherent in multiple case studies makes it possible for findings to be generalized and is, therefore, essential (Creswell, 1994; Yin, 1994). The case study selection of the current research is grounded in a variety of cases and opportunities to learn about the

phenomenon (Lincoln, 2013). The two countries were selected due to my own experience as a Saudi instructor having taught for some years according to Saudi education policy in a Saudi university and then as a long-term doctoral student living in Germany and actively speaking German.

As previously discussed, the issue of higher education quality and evaluation has been under focus in the last decade and experienced many similar attempts of improvement internationally. This sparked this study's questions in order to provide a better understanding of this global higher education policy change. Saudi Arabia, as a Middle Eastern country, and Germany, as a western European country, represent two countries with very different regional, political, cultural, and economic backgrounds, and both have recently (1995) introduced accreditation terms or phenomena in their higher education reforms.

Regional comparisons generally include the underlying assumption that there are common features that serve educational research and distinguish different regions from each other (Bray & Thomas, 1995). From the researcher's point of view, choosing these countries to be the research case studies, as a cross-regional comparison, will enrich the research interpretations by helping understand the policy formation process of accreditation procedures in different situations. Thus, comparing them will provide an attempt to explain how education policy is formed and spread worldwide.

### **1.9 Limitations of the study**

**Topic limits:** This research focuses on quality assurance and accreditation in relation to programs, teaching, and learning. It does not include quality assurance and accreditation in relation to research. The study examines the policy formation process of the accreditation systems in both countries. In addition, the study involves a study of Tuebingen University's case in regard to applying quality assurance and accreditation systems. **Time limits:** This study traces the accreditation system from its origins up until the year of this study's completion, 2017. **Spatial limits:** Germany and Saudi Arabia are the countries of this study.

### **1.10 Structure of the thesis**

Following this introductory Chapter one, which has provided the introduction of this study and the background to the study's main issues as well as discussed the previous studies on the accreditation system in Germany and Saudi Arabia, the thesis is organized into five additional chapters. Each chapter discusses a major issue related to quality assurance and accreditation in higher education and is sub-divided into sections, which further explain particular issues related to the major topic.

Chapter two provides a literature review to address conceptual issues and approaches to quality assurance and accreditation in higher education. Chapter three is considered an introduction to the fifth chapter's empirical study by providing an overview of higher education systems in Germany and Saudi Arabia. Chapter four discusses the theoretical perspective and provides the conceptual framework for this study and then reviews the methodology used and followed in the fifth chapter. The empirical part of the study is addressed in vertical case studies of German and Saudi accreditation systems in higher education and the expert interviews presented in Chapter 5. Chapter 6, the final chapter of discussion, is where the findings of the empirical study are discussed with regards to the study's questions and theoretical framework.

In conclusion, this introductory chapter has provided the background for the idea of quality and accreditation in higher education and the previous studies in this area, as well as the statement of this research and its importance. Before the theoretical, conceptual, and empirical aspects of this research are explored in Chapters 3 through 6, the following chapter considers concepts and approaches of quality assurance and accreditation with a literature review.

## Chapter 2

### Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter comes as the second part of this thesis. It sets the stage for the major issue to be analyzed and addresses conceptual issues and approaches to quality assurance and accreditation in higher education based on a literature review. In the first part of this chapter, quality assurance in higher education is presented. Historical background, concepts, goals, characteristics, and elements regarding higher education quality management are presented and discussed using literature from the international and regional levels published by UNESCO, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), and the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE) as well as other European and Arabian literature. In the second part of this chapter, accreditation, the commonly adopted mechanism of external quality assurance, is the subject of literature review. This section provides an overview of its historical background, definition, types, concepts, aspects, and mechanisms.

#### 2.2 Quality Assurance

##### 2.2.1 Historical background of quality in education

Quality of education was mentioned in 1377 in the *Muqaddimah*, translated as *Introduction*, of the Arabic Islamic historiographer and historian Ibn Khaldun, who put forward his definition of the quality of education through his view of education being a trade. This trade had its own conditions and standards which had to be provided and maintained through study, practice, and research. Thus Ibn Khaldun denies random actions and improvising with regard to the educational process, connecting the quality of the education system with the formation of the teacher and learner. Learning depends on the quality of education and the adequacy of the teacher, and they impact each other in a direct up and down relationship. The most important concepts of quality in education can be identified with Ibn Khaldun's points:

- Education is a craft and an industry; it has standards, methods and conditions.
  - There are necessary competencies for the professor.
  - There is freedom for the learner to choose what he wants.
  - The quality of education means giving the opportunity to think in order to be active.
  - The quality of education is to reduce the gap between the student and his teacher.
- Education is above all human relations between the teacher and the learner. (Morjeen, 2016)

The term *quality* in general is regarded as an old concept but recently became a main task of management science. This development in the concept of quality is explained in three stages:

1. Examination: ensure the compatibility of the product or service with pre-described standards to avoid defects.
2. Quality control: focus on processes of production to ensure the products meet the pre-described standards.
3. Quality assurance: focus on how to prevent the error by creating standards for products with strict restrictions on these standards. (Al-Alfy, 2011)

The emergence of quality as a central branch of management science goes all the way back to the post-World-War II period, when Japan applied the basics of quality management in the industry field, resulting in great success, which was followed by the United States in the 1950s. Then it was adopted in fields such as health care and education in many countries around the world (Nair, Webster and Mertove, 2010). In the 1970s and 1980s, quality assurance was starting to be implemented as a management procedure in higher education institutions, at first in the United States (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007). It was first applied in Europe, particularly western Europe, around 1984 (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007).

The concern about quality in higher education arose as a result of the changes which happened in the nature of organizational aspects of the higher education institutions worldwide. The need to adopt a new form of organization has become an urgent requirement for universities, on the one hand, to maintain their independence, cohesion, and structure, and



on the other hand, to meet the needs of societies (Clark, 1998; Davies, 1997). Global fundamental changes such as globalization, information and communications technology (ICT), socio-political transformations, lifelong learning, and the knowledge-based society force higher education to manage them and make a commitment to the sector's new, central position in the modern society. All of these changes have led to more interest in such a system to ensure universities' credibility as a provider of quality services to improve processes and efficiency and to enable them to compete.

### **2.2.2 The concept of quality in higher education**

Quality is an ancient concept, regarded as an "ineffable abstraction" until the end of the twentieth century (Csizmadia, 2006). The concept of quality at universities goes all the way back to the Middle Ages and has always been highly valued in academia as part of its ethos (Rose & Amaral, 2007). Moreover, the specific mechanisms of quality control developed in unique ways depending on the particular medieval university and its own political and historical circumstances. By the thirteenth century, two different standard mechanisms of quality assessment had been established. On one hand, the French model was based on external control of quality assurance, with an outside authority keeping institutions accountable. On the other hand, the English model was based on peer review and relied on a community of fellows to conduct assessments (Vught Van, 1995).

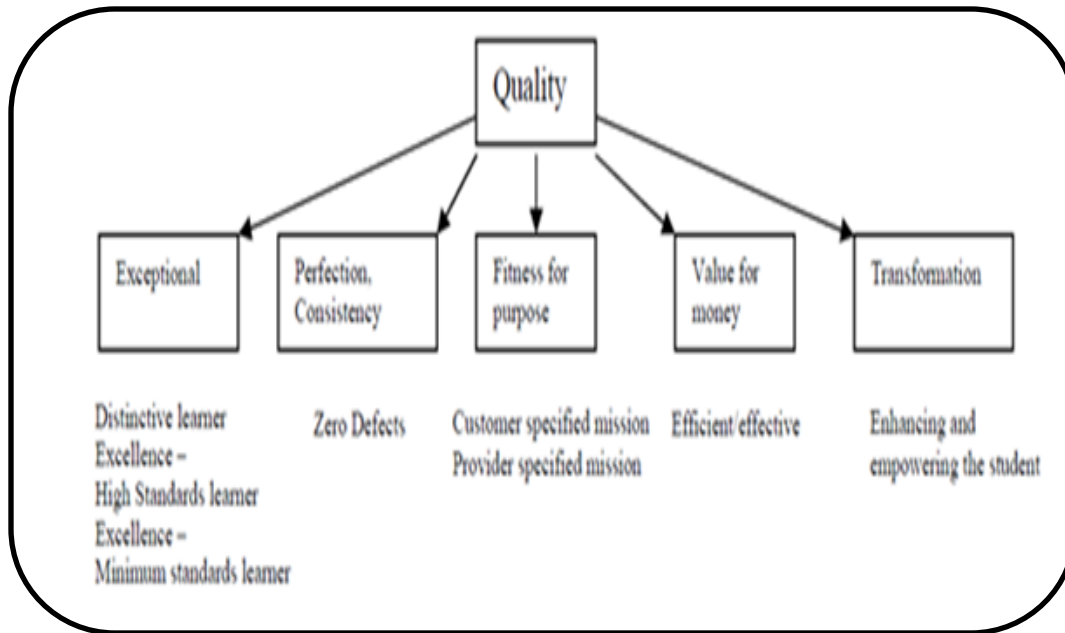
Governments' interests in the quality of higher education arose in the early nineteenth century in connection with their role in financing higher education and governing its legal and administrative organization (Neave, 1988). However, in the latter part of the twentieth century, when quality in higher education was linked with new mechanisms and methodologies, it started to take a new form, becoming seen as something that could be managed and proactively improved. This new idea took root primarily in Europe as part of the transition from centralized state regulation to state facilitation and aid for autonomous higher education institutions (Neave & Van Vught, 1991). Hence, the traditional model of state universities, which had been under strict state control, became increasingly market-oriented (Gornitzka & Maasen, 2000). Today, as a result of society being increasingly knowledge-based and financially responsible for higher education, institutions of higher education have become ever more

connected with the state and society, leading to a demand for a new mechanism to maintain academic autonomy and accountability to society (Pellert, 1999).

In the eighties, quality assurance agencies were first initiated and interest in them emerged in the educational policies as a main objective and an important procedure in higher education worldwide, and then, in the nineties, they became a primary focus of higher education institutions (Damme, 2002). Nevertheless, prior to the 1990s, different approaches to quality assurance in higher education were adopted. For example, the United Kingdom and other Commonwealth countries relied on the external examiner system, whereas the United States used the accreditation system. Many countries in Europe, as well as Saudi Arabia, relied on government ministerial control. Since the far-reaching changes in the 1990s, which have been called the decade of quality in higher education, higher education institutions have been required to prove the quality of their activities and processes using predetermined indicators or standards to meet government demands for value-for-money and fitness-for-purpose (Bernhard, 2012).

Nowadays, quality has become a fundamental value in the field of higher education, although it is a broad and branching concept which is difficult to explain in one single definition. The concept of quality is difficult to define, especially in the context of higher education institutions where there is a wide autonomy to determine individual institutions' vision and mission. The problem that confronts concerned people is that there is no one consistent definition, purpose, or method of quality assurance in higher education. Thus, the concepts of quality and quality assurance as used in the higher education literature are complex and wide open.

**Figure 1. Definition for quality**



Source: Watty, 2003 p.215.

There is a divergence in researchers' viewpoints about ways of thinking about quality Figure 1. The work of Lomas (2002) on a group of senior managers in higher education institutions shows that fitness for purpose and transformation seems to be the two most adequate definitions of quality. As Ball (1985) the prevailing definition of quality is fitness for purpose with an emphasis on its many subjective dimensions, thus equating quality with flexibility this suggested that quality only has meaning in relation to the purpose of the product or service.

Hence, this concept corresponds to management ideas needing to be launched as universal instruments in order to be well-spread. However, the universal problem that quality is supposed to solve is not identified.

Barnett (1992) identifies two definitions of quality in higher education. The first is the underlying concept of innate value in academic instruction and intellectual property independent of the outcomes. The second definition, which fits with most quality assurance systems in higher education around the world, is about performance. This concept portrays the

higher education process with inputs and outputs as a production process, whereby performance indicators are used to measure the performance level.

Other researchers go on to say that quality in higher education, which is described as a public management field, has two main aspects. As Pollitt and Bouckaert (1995) illustrate, there are only two major theoretical perspectives on quality:

1. The output-oriented view includes terms such as value for money, stakeholder satisfaction, and zero error. With this view of quality, there will be political changes to improve public services using new management approaches. These emphasize the deregulation of public services, greater managerial discretion, the introduction of market mechanisms, and a focus on stakeholders' needs and satisfaction.
2. The process-oriented view embraces quality as transformative, which serves organizational learning and improvement. It should be focused on internal processes and stakeholders within higher education institutions and exclude the impact of external products and stakeholder orientation.

The output definition of quality is considered a result of the "New Right" political movement of the 1980s and 1990s, which called for restructuring public services and an emphasis on customer needs, and promoted market and quasi-market mechanisms (Tuckman, 1994). In this case, the definition of quality became giving customers exactly what they want (Tuckman, 1994).

In addition, as Schindler Schindler, Puls-Elvidge, Welzant & Crawford (2015) state, quality in higher education is conceptualized in four general ways: quality as purposeful, transformative, exceptional and accountable. Moreover, three mechanisms to quality assurance were identified early on in the work of Dill (1992). The first one is the reputational approach, in which peer review assesses the quality of programs and institutions. The second one is the student outcome approach, which is based on student achievements while attending higher education and also afterwards (career, earnings, etc.), as measured by outcome indicators. The last one is the total quality (management) approach, which emphasizes far-reaching participation, client orientation, organizational learning, and coordination.

In short, the difference in researchers' viewpoints on the concept of quality may be due to the multiplicity of its aspects and forms as well as its many uses in different areas. Quality, being a complex term, mainly emerges from interpersonal interaction in the learning environment (ESG, 2015).

The determination of quality assurance's key issues is the accrediting agency's responsibility. When looking at any accreditation review mechanism, a single definition for quality cannot be found. Instead, different criteria in different areas for quality in higher education are found, and these reflect the preference of different stakeholders.

In the last few decades, institutional quality assurance procedures have appeared in leading "handbooks" on the issue of quality and reform in higher education. As shown in studies, institutional quality assurance has been used in various ways, such as in strengthening the connection between higher education and industry, initiating cultural changes, and making downsizing operations smoother (Fahlén, Liuhanen, Petersson, Stensaker, 2000). There is remarkable divergence in quality assurance procedures, even between countries in the same geographic region and with similar economic, political, and cultural foundations. Examples include the Nordic countries (Smeby & Stensaker, 1999) and Latin America (Kells, 1995).

The divergence seen among quality assurance systems seems to be the prevailing one (Dill, 2000). The areas of variation between national quality assurance and accreditation systems include: (1) the concept of quality and how it is defined in each system, (2) the objectives of using quality assurance, its purpose and functions, i.e., improvement, evaluation, accountability and transparency, steering and funding, accreditation and recognition, (3) the methods and procedures of quality assurance and accreditation, (4) the responsible agency or unit for carrying out and regulating the quality assurance process and stakeholders, and (5) the nature (voluntary or compulsory), the specifics (programs or institutions), and the focus (research or on teaching and learning) of the quality assurance system (Harman, 1998; Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994). Hence, the capacity of a quality assurance and accreditation system to be effective in managing higher education is limited to its own environment by its local characteristics.

Some varied factors could explain the situation of higher education in the last twenty years, which were behind the quality assurance movement in higher education at that time. (Higher education developments, and especially the cases of German and Saudi higher education systems, will be discussed in detail in the first part of Chapter 3.) First, academic standards could potentially fall as the number of students in higher education grows rapidly. Second, as businesses and professional bodies have noted, traditional higher education institutions and their management procedures have lost their effectiveness to keep up with the needs of modern labor markets in an economy shaped by competition and transformation. Third, financial limitations have resulted in less government funding per student as well as an emphasis on increased efficiency. Fourth, demand for increased public accountability has forced institutions to subject themselves to an “evaluative state” (Neave, 1988, p.14). Fifth, the nature of the higher education environment became more competitive as a result of greater mobility of both students and academics as well as the privatization of higher education. Finally, greater transparency became a public priority, especially regarding quality levels, leading some countries to commercial publication of various rankings (Damme, 2002).

The international phenomenon of quality assurance in higher education is a subject of three main developments, including regional recognition of quality assurance, increased competition, and a need for mutual international recognition Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA, 2007). The quality assurance system implements three different approaches to quality in higher education accreditation, assessment, and audit. The context of an educational system and its culture determines which kind of approach – whether one or more – is suitable for adoption (Woodhouse, 1999). Accreditation and evaluation have different approaches but both include assessment and audit. The focus of accreditation and assessment is the quality of teaching and learning; however, the approach of audit is used by a higher education institution in internal management procedures to achieve its objectives (Kis, 2005).

In the context of the worldwide phenomenon of accreditation and quality assurance in higher education, many concerns arise regarding cultural differences and the potential threat of a uniform model of accreditation being universally imposed. The international adoption process of the Anglo-Saxon accreditation procedures, due to their perceived success in their own

countries of origin, could end up being largely mimetic. That is, it could be simply imported as an imitation without any deeper rooting in the historical background and culture in other countries and could also propagate an imperialistic relationship of cultural dependency (Damme, 2002).

Nowadays, the functions of quality assurance procedures have ceded their two old uses, improvement and accountability, to more complex functions as a result of a number of changes. For example, markets are being used for service regulation, while the academic world has become more proletarian and less elite. In addition, New Public Management theories, globalization, and supranational agencies have been making an ever stronger impact on higher education (Amaral, 2007).

These changes are marked by a few important shifts. First, the university's role has become less cultural and more economic. Second, less trust is being put in quality assurance systems that may be connected with the institutions themselves, while more trust is being placed in independent accreditation agencies. Third, the quality systems have become more international (Amaral, 2007).

### **2.2.3 Quality management**

Quality assurance, quality management and quality improvement are three different concepts, although in some contexts, especially German-speaking countries, quality management and quality improvement are used as synonyms (Kegelmann, 1994). Avram and Avram (2011) explain that quality management in higher education means appointing a higher education institution to lead responsibly to reach objectives and implement strategies that lead to improvement, encourage staff to give their best performance by empowering each employee, organize all activities including teaching and research activities to achieve the stakeholders' objectives, and establish an assessment system to improve institutional processes.

Quality management is a system that includes all activities for defining, designing, assessing, monitoring, achieving and improving the quality of an organization. Within the organization there are different management systems operating in parallel, including, for example, quality management, financial management, and risk management. The main

function of quality management is often divided into accountability and improvement. Thus, part of the management system features tracking the policies, systems, and processes designed and implemented in an organization. This is done in order to coordinate, review, and ensure that the organization's performance goes in line with its set goals and at the same time ensure its improvement. The quality management system includes the systematic recording of the established quality management procedures, measures, and instruments, each related to individual or multiple processes of an organization.

#### **2.2.4 Quality assurance**

The *Quality Assurance Glossary of Higher Education*, which was issued by the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, states that quality assurance is a set of features that accurately and comprehensively reflect the essence and condition of the educational process, including all its dimensions of inputs, processes, outputs, and feedback, to achieve the desired goals for the benefit of all (ANQAHE, 2009). In the end, the quality assurance procedures, with all their aspects, guarantee that academic standards are being upheld in the program, institution, or system, and inform the educational community and the public of this status (Woodhouse, 1999).

The quality assurance system includes all activities that serve to maintain the quality of a particular undertaking. Quality assurance activities can be used as measures and instruments designed in the context of quality management, but they can also be implemented without being embedded in a Quality Management System (Accreditation Council, 2013). Quality assurance in higher education refers to the way an institution provides a certain guarantee that its educational services and environment meet the preset standards for quality of higher education institutions. It aims to evaluate the elements of the learning environment (content of programs, learning opportunities, and facilities) to make sure that they adequately fulfill their purpose (ESG, 2015).

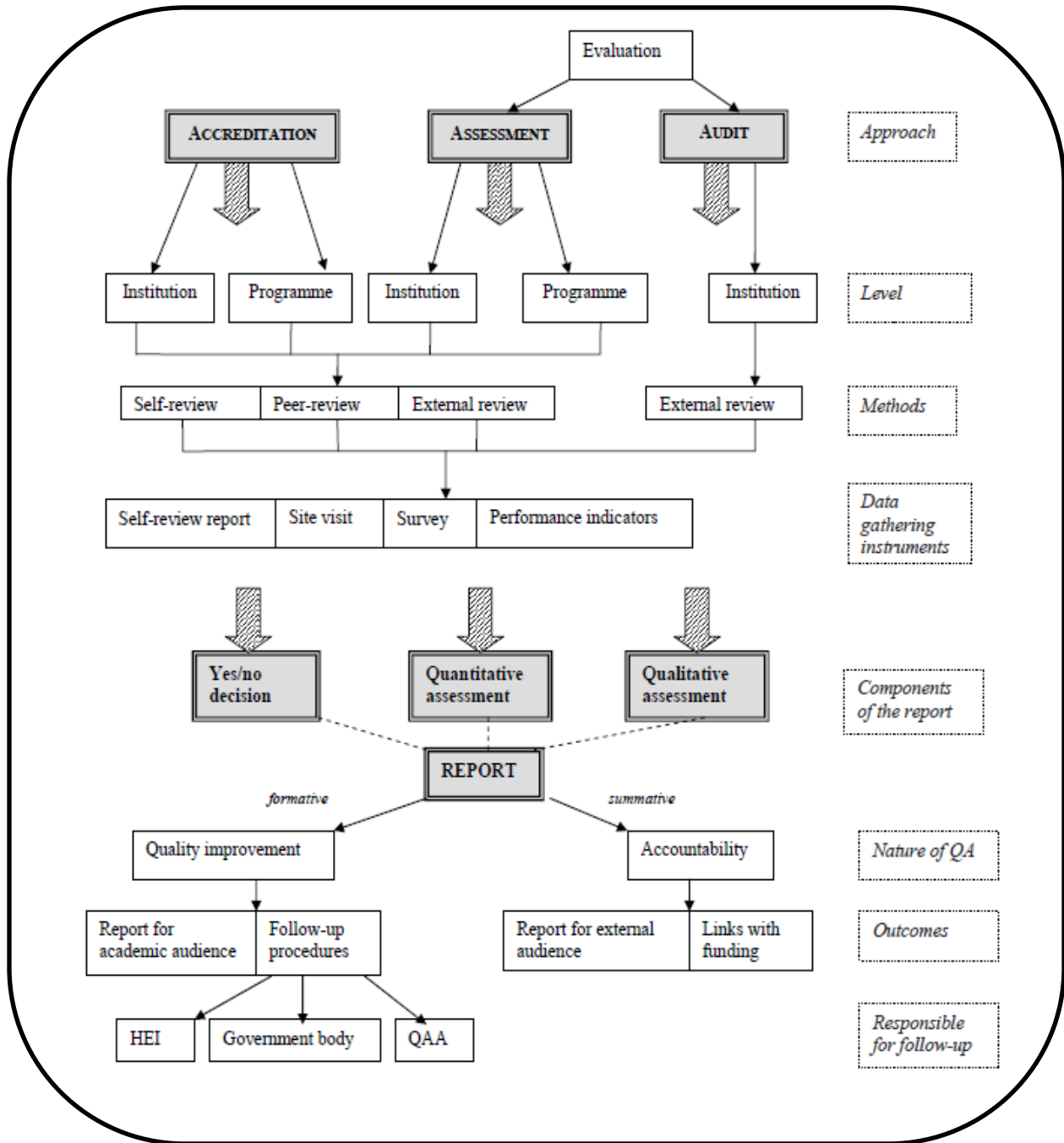
In Figure 2, Kis (2005) emphasizes the current practices and mechanisms of the quality assurance system: accreditation, assessment, and audit. The accreditation mechanism is going to be defined and analyzed in detailed in the second part of this chapter. Assessment and audit



are both evaluation processes. Assessment is a process ending with scaled results regarding a program or institution's quality. These are more detailed than accreditation's binary results (Dill, 2000). Assessment is about a quantitative evaluation of outputs, whereas a quality audit is about achieving the objectives set by the institution itself and the effectiveness of institutional processes (Woodhouse, 1999). In Western Europe, the first implemented mechanism of quality assurance was in the form of evaluation, not accreditation, at a study program level to provide detailed information for the purpose of accountability or improvement (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007). Ownership of the evaluation system of higher education influences the effect of the procedures' results on the governmental decision-making process. More precisely, state-sponsored evaluation procedures will have a more direct impact compared to institution/profession-sponsored procedures, and the latter could potentially have no impact at all (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007).

The quality assurance systems' objectives are diverse. Four central objectives are determined by Weusthof and Frederiks (1997): accountability, quality improvement, validation, and information. Accountability denotes informing the higher education institution and the public, on the one hand, about the quality of the higher education institution's performance and output, and, on the other hand, about the validation of higher education, which is

Figure 2. Elements of quality assurance system in higher education



Source: (Kis, 2005, p.41)

something accreditation is also supposed to do. In contrast, to accountability enhancement indicates giving recommendations on what might be improved. There is, thus, a very close connection between quality assurance and quality enhancement (ESG, 2015; Vroeijenstijn, 1989).

The last function of quality assurance systems is information, which occurs at the international level and represents one of the main agendas of the Bologna Process. Information is intimately related to transparency and helps stakeholders make informed decisions (Weusthof & Frederiks, 1997).

The quality assurance procedures of evaluation or accreditation can be applied to a small unit such as a study program or at the faculty level. The result of these procedures would be related to the individual study program and would provide details for development or accountability. Alternatively, if a higher education institution as a whole is evaluated, meaning at the institutional level and especially its quality assurance management system and arrangements, the results prove the valid status of this institution (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007).

### **2.2.5 Features of a quality assurance system**

There are several main features of the quality assurance system in higher education institutions that should be achieved to gain a sustained quality of education.

1. **Organizational reform:** Applying the quality assurance system requires organizational change to inspire the organization with the culture of quality and solve problems in its application. Moreover, the different activities of the quality management system (control, assurance, and assessments) are only truly meaningful when there is a clear, direct connection to ongoing improvement. (Colling & Harvey, 1995)

2. **Participation and support:**

The teaching staff and students have to actively participate in the quality assurance activities for these to be meaningful in the institution's daily operations and for a genuine improvement in quality to be felt. (Colling & Harvey, 1995)

#### 4. Totalitarianism:

The quality assurance system consists of several stages: planning, implementation, assessment and accreditation. All these stages have the same importance in the quality assurance system, with none of them being a focus without consideration of the others.

#### 4. Cooperation:

The members of the organization must work in accordance with the team work principle.

#### 5. Prevention:

A preventive strategy aims to prevent error from the beginning by making sure that members understand their roles and responsibilities in the organization.

#### 6. Shared Vision:

The organization's orientation must be unified as a whole in order to prevent work from being duplicated. (Alalfy, 2011),(Fahmy,2007)

### **2.3 Accreditation in higher education**

#### **2.3.1 Emergence of accreditation**

The procedures embodying the essential meaning of accreditation in European higher education institutions are inveterate ones. They could be dated back to 1347 when the University of Prague was established (Eriches, 2000). Since that time, higher authority approval (Pope, Emperor) has been a major demand for universities being established or study programs opening.

As discussed above, a growing concern internationally for quality and standards in higher education started at the end of the 1990s as a result of conditions (massification, diversification, privatization, and internationalization) and agendas that appeared over the last century. These required accountability at the national levels worldwide, leading to the establishment of national quality assurance systems and quality agencies (Newton, 2007).

Moreover, the nature of each higher education system affects its new quality assurance procedures and agencies. For example, in Finland and Saudi Arabia, one national agency was established, while in Germany, where political and cultural variations co-exist, many agencies with different responsibilities were established (Bernhard, 2012). In addition, these quality

assurance systems have varied mechanisms (internal or external procedures, accreditation, quality audits, etc.) to ensure the quality of their higher education programs and institutions.

Accreditation is regarded as the oldest and most common mechanism of quality assurance in higher education institutions. The oldest tradition of accreditation is in the United States, where it developed in the late nineteenth century as a tool intended to achieve accountability on the federal level. In 1952, accreditation entered the federal governmental policies with the Act of Higher Education, and in 1990, it became a prime procedure for evaluating a program or institution to maintain a minimum of pre-determined standards of quality evaluation (Adelman, 1992). Afterwards, accreditation spread throughout Latin America and Eastern Europe, and, in the 1980s, also reached India and then European Union countries with the Bologna Process (Fraser, 1994). The needs for establishing regulatory standards in the United States, arising from the confusing and disorganized situation that prevailed in the higher education sector at that time, are summarized as follows:

1. There was no federal ministry or national system of public higher education, though private colleges and universities were prevalent.
2. As a result, the quality assurance system at that time was not centralized or well-connected.
3. Each state was responsible for organizing and supporting its own public institutions, and there were differences among states in their definitions and means of evaluating "quality."
4. At the same time, independent accreditation agencies had the task of assuring the quality of all types of higher education institutions in line with federal regulations (Newton, 2007).

If this situation, which was becoming increasingly confusing and disorganized, had not been dealt with by the institutions, the government would most likely have had to regulate it (Kells, 1989). Before this could happen, colleges and universities attempted to solve the problem themselves by creating a system of accreditation.

### **2.3.2 The concept of accreditation in higher education**

The term of accreditation comes from the Latin word *accredo*, which means to “give credit or acknowledgement” (Vries, Feilzer, Gundlach & Simons, 2010, p.14). A number of countries follow the definition of accreditation, which states that “accreditation is the outcome of a process by which a governmental, parastatal or private body (accreditation agency) evaluates the quality of a higher education institution as a whole or a specific higher education program/course in order to formally recognize it as having met certain predetermined criteria or standards and a quality label” (Sanyal & Martin, 2007, p. 6).

In short, accreditation is a recognition system in which an independent body acknowledges an institution or a program for meeting predefined criteria indicating quality. Typically, this official recognition confers a seal valid for a set time period (Seto & Wells, 2007).

### **2.3.3 Accreditation and quality assurance systems**

Accreditation as a management tool features two components: evaluation and approval. The central aims of accreditation are to assure and improve the quality through an evaluation process (quality assurance), including self-regulation, and to approve whether an institution qualifies for a certificate status by submitting it to peer and professional review (external quality assurance). The accrediting agencies have developed procedures and standards as guidelines for institutions in their processes for quality assurance and improvement. These standards are used by peer reviewers as evaluation criteria to judge and give recommendations. Now, in many countries (e.g., Germany, Austria, Norway, and Saudi Arabia), the basis for quality systems is accreditation, not quality assessment. Some other countries that strongly protect institutional autonomy from state control already have a longer tradition of relying on accreditation systems to assure quality (Kohoutek, 2009, p.22)

### **2.3.4 The benefits of accreditation**

Accreditation offers numerous benefits to institutions. It enables them to:

- Maintain and improve quality in higher education institutions by upholding standard requirements for the level of quality.
- Have a strong incentive to improve and develop the quality of their management systems and programs.

- Foster a regional and national exchange of expertise on higher education quality.
- Achieve the academic objectives of higher education.
- Protect higher education institutions from politicization.
- Provide for the needs and interests of society. (CHEA cited in Bogue & Hall, 2003).
- Help institutions to expand enrollment and graduation rates and use financial support more efficiently (Wolff, 2005).

### **2.3.5 Accreditation procedures**

The accreditation procedures generally follow these steps:

- An internal self-study is conducted at the institution in accordance with the accrediting body's standards.
- The evidence is evaluated by a group of peers selected by the accrediting body.
- In an on-site visit, faculty and staff are interviewed.
- An assessment report is written by peers and given to the commission (a group of peer faculty and professionals) of the accrediting body. (CHEA cited in Bogue & Hall, 2003).
- Following set guidelines, an evaluation and a judgment about the institution's quality level are made by the accrediting body. The institution is informed as to whether or not it will receive the accreditation seal. (CHEA cited in Bogue & Hall, 2003).
- While details may vary depending on the accrediting body, the accreditation procedures require institutions to evaluate their goals, policies, management system, and accomplishments. Then, in light of the advice and suggestions given by the visiting team, institutions must develop strategies for improvement and sustain continuous self-evaluation (Bogue & Hall, 2003).
- The accreditation seal can last from five to ten years. During this period, the institution's system can be re-evaluated by the accrediting body if any substantial changes have taken place (Bogue & Hall, 2003; Rhoades & Sporn, 2002).

### **2.3.6 Types of accreditation**

Two types of accreditation exist, and they are outlined in the following paragraphs. An additional type unique to the United States is the regional accreditation.

**2.3.6.1 Institutional accreditation** deals with the all higher education institutions, as a kind of higher education institution quality recognition once it is confirmed that all goals are achieved successfully. It is a preliminary step necessary to make sure that the institution has human capabilities and resources which are needed to implement its future plans. This is done by evaluating staff credentials, research productivity, and learning outcomes and resources in keeping with pre-set standards. The result is that the institution receives an accreditation seal from an independent agency for a set period of time.

**2.3.6.2 Specialized accreditation** deals with a specific unit or program (i.e., law, medicine, chiropractic, computer science) by evaluating its curriculum and course content, in keeping with pre-set standards. The result is that the program receives an accreditation seal from an independent agency for a set period of time.

**2.3.6.3 Regional accreditation (United States)** which as mentioned is unique to the United States, is undertaken by an accreditation agency responsible for a specific geographic region. Altogether, there are six such accrediting commissions, each generally covering three or more states.

An additional type available is professional or specialized accreditation, which is an evaluation procedure for accrediting study programs in line with professional standards to assure effectiveness in graduating well- prepared individuals for the labor market and easing their access to appropriate jobs (Eaton, 2003).

Having reviewed the historical background, definitions and other aspects of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education in general, the first step in the theoretical background preparation is complete. For the second preparatory step, the next chapter moves on to consider the entire higher education system in Germany and Saudi Arabia.



## Chapter 3

### Higher education systems in Germany and Saudi Arabia

#### 3.1 Introduction

This third chapter provides an introduction to the fifth chapter's empirical study by providing an overview of higher education systems in Germany and Saudi Arabia. This includes the history, governance systems, policies, characteristics, and recent changes in these systems.

#### 3.2 Higher education in Germany

##### 3.2.1 History

German higher education has a very long tradition of regional control. Even today, the chief responsibility for regulating higher education continues to fall primarily in the hands of the respective states (*Länder*). On the other hand, there is also a strong tradition of establishing cooperation similarities in German higher education in general.

The first German universities were established as early as the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, sustaining internationally respected reputations ever since. Within late medieval and early modern feudalism, German universities were generally regulated independently within their respective kingdoms. This federalist system was constitutionally established in the German Empire (1871-1918) and in the ensuing Weimar Republic (1919-1933). In the aftermath of the Second World War and the division of West and East Germany, this historic principle of federalism was re-confirmed in 1949 by the Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*) of West Germany, whereas East Germany abolished the traditional states, establishing several districts under a more centralized government.

Higher education was not completely restructured after World War II, but it became based on the model adopted from the Weimar Republic (Fuehr & Furck, 1998). Also in the period between 1933 and 1946, higher education institutions were officially granted a constitutional right to freedom in research and teaching as well as self-administration (Wentzel, 2011).

In Western Germany, the population increase of the 1950s brought a greater demand than ever before for higher education, which led to higher education institutions being expanded. In 1957, it resulted further in the establishment of the science council (*Wissenschaftsrat*). This advisory board of the *Bund* and *Länder* assumed a central role in planning and extending the higher education sector (Fuehr & Furck, 1998), and by the end of 1960s facilitated a doubling of higher education teaching capacity (Wenzel, 2011). A Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (*Kultusministerkonferenz*) was established as well to promote coordination and cooperation between the different *Länder* (Lohmar & Eckhardt, 2015, 11).

At the end of the 1960s, the introduction of *Fachhochschulen*, which are considered to be universities of applied science, represented a major development in the German higher education system. These institutions focus on applying theoretical skills in real-world occupations, in contrast to traditional universities, which teach on a more abstract and highly theoretical level.

As part of German reunification, five East German *Länder* were reestablished and incorporated into the Federal Republic of Germany in 1990. Since then, Germany has been made up of 16 *Länder*, each with its own independent Ministry of Education responsible for regulating the higher education institutions in the respective state. The Treaty of Unification from 1990 also establishes a common foundation for education that includes principles for common, comparable higher education structures throughout Germany. This is meant to ensure similarities in higher education between the different states, although each still maintains a high degree of autonomy in structuring and regulating its own higher education system (Lohmar & Eckhardt, 2015, 11-13).

### **3.2.2 Types of higher education institutions**

There are currently three distinct types of official higher education institutions in Germany. First there are the traditional universities (*Universitäten*) and equivalent research institutions devoted to technical research, pedagogy, or theological studies (*Technische Hochschulen, Pädagogische Hochschulen, Theologische Hochschulen*) focus on academic and scientific research, and These have the exclusive right to award doctoral degrees. Next are the

colleges of art and music (*Kunsthochschulen* and *Musikhochschulen*) that focus on training for various professions related to arts, media, or music. Finally, there are the universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*), which were first established in Germany in 1970/1971, and these are practice-oriented institutions featuring practical training and work experience as an integral component of higher education.

However, not only do these three kinds of higher education institutions differ with regard to subjects and degrees, but they also differ concerning their particular legal status and rights (Huenfner, 2003). The most significant distinction between traditional universities and universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*) remains that only the former can award doctoral degrees. However, new possibilities are opening up, as now a master's graduate from a Fachhochschule can enroll in a doctoral program at a traditional university (Bode, 2016).

In addition to these three standard categories, there are also various state-recognized professional academies (*Studienakademien*) and vocational schools (*Berufsakademien*) outside of the mainstream German higher education system (Huefner, 2003). There are also higher education institutions with restricted access, including military academies and institutions for government administration, as well as other higher education institutions, such as those run by churches (Lohmar, Eckhardt, 2015, 149-150, 56-57).

In Germany for the year 2015/16, there were 399 higher education institutions, 121 universities, 220 universities of applied science, and 58 colleges of arts and music (HRK, 2015). There were 17,731 study programs, with 2.76 million students enrolled (HRK, 2015). There has been a clear trend towards growing numbers of students in the last 35 years (Higher Education Compass, 2003 in Schwarz and Westerheijden, 2007).

### **3.2.3 Recent reforms and changes in the German higher education sector**

#### **- The autonomy of higher education organizations**

Since the late 1990s, German higher education has been undergoing long term change. In the twenty-first century, the autonomy of higher education organizations has been increased, so that each organization is responsible for drawing and planning its objectives, strategic profile, and improvement plans. The universities differ from each other in achieving this change. Moreover, the performance standards applied in the higher education funding

system help motivate higher education organizations to improve their own strategic plans in order to secure state funding. As German universities have also become increasingly competitive for additional third-party funding, a change from public administrative to a new management model has come about (Ganseuer & Pistor, 2017).

- **The Bologna process**

The Bologna Process represents a substantial reform in the German higher education area. It introduced the bachelor-master track of study programs, replacing the old system (magister-diploma) by 2010. This reform aimed at maintaining the comparability of higher education degrees as a requirement to integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The long duration of study programs in Germany was regarded as a problem compared to those of other countries, and this situation could be solved through applying this reform.

Following analyses and discussions promoted by stakeholders in the Bologna Process in 2010, the Bologna Process has been increasingly implemented in Germany. In addition to officially noted improvements in communication between lawmakers and higher education institutions as well as framework amendments, more attention has been given to standards for teaching quality since then. In 2010 the Standing Conference also amended the common structural guidelines for accrediting bachelor and master programs throughout all the *Länder*. Since then, the *Länder* have increasingly complied with these standards and sought accreditation accordingly (Lohmar & Eckhardt, 2015, 299). Also in 2010 the Teaching Quality Pact (*Qualitätspakt Lehre*) ensured that higher education institutions are given more support in improving their teaching quality. This pact offers training support at all staff levels, while the details are tailored to regional and local needs (Lohmar & Eckhardt, 2015, 299-300). Since 2013, there have been wide-reaching surveys about how the Bologna reforms are being implemented, as well as specific official recommendations. These have been carried out by the working group on European Study Reform (*Europäische Studienreform*) of the German Rectors' Conference (*Hochschulrektorenkonferenz*).

- **The Initiative for Excellence (*Exzellenzinitiative*)**

The Initiative for Excellence (*Exzellenzinitiative*) is one of the major reforms in the German higher education system. In 2004, the idea of this initiative has been developed from

German politics and scientists, in 2005 the initiative of Excellence were decided on by the Federal and Länder governments (DFG & BMBF, 2013). It is considered to be the first effort in the process of achieving excellence and diversity by institutionalization and stratification of the higher education system (Hornbostel, Simon & Heise, 2008). Before this initiative, the German higher education system had been distinguished by its great equity and unity in teaching and research among higher education institutions (Hartmann, 2006). Though the initiative aims to develop higher education in general, its critics claim that in reality it prioritizes university research above all else and widens the divide between research and teaching while promoting competition in research between universities. The initiative's stated objective is to create a diverse university landscape, featuring a smaller upper level of top universities that produce excellent research outcomes.

Moreover, the Excellence Initiative aims explicitly at maintaining and continuously improving the high reputation of German research, especially for innovation in the sciences. Competition is intended to create a greater distance between German higher education institutions in terms of academic excellence, with a small number of elite research institutions at the top that can compete internationally. This reform marks a great transformation in the path that German policy seeks to follow (Wentzel, 2011). In many German higher education institutions, rapid structural changes were driven by the strong desire to be accepted as an "elite" institution in the 2005 and 2010 bidding rounds for the German Excellence Initiative. Funding for this initiative reached €1.9 billion between 2006 and 2012, and €2.7 billion for 2012 to 2017 (DFG & BMBF, 2013).

#### - **Higher Education Pact 2020**

The Federal Republic and the *Länder* are working together within the framework of the Higher Education Pact 2020. One of its provisions is a needs-based expansion of higher-education enrollment. In response to the dramatic increase in student enrollment, the federal government is providing 7 billion euros to help universities meet these increased demands, while the Länder are matching this amount. The Higher Education Pact 2020 also promotes study courses that focus on developing practical and vocational skills. A key program towards this end is the competition "Getting ahead through education: Open higher education

institutions" (*Aufstieg durch Bildung: Offene Hochschulen 2008*). Up to 250 million euros have been planned to support this competition through the year 2020 (Lohmar & Eckhardt, 2015, 300).

#### - **The tuition fees**

The introduction of tuition fees for state universities was finally permitted in 2005 by the Federal Constitutional Court, overturning the previous restrictions of the federal framework legislation for higher education. Today, tuition fee amounts and regulations may vary widely between the *Länder*, but after an initial expansion, they have been rescinded to a large extent, so that since 2014 it has again been possible to study without paying tuition in all German states. Tuition fees may still apply for master's students, long-term students, and many international students. However, tuition fees are automatically waived for international students from the European Union and European Economic Area, doctoral students, students from institutions with partnership agreements, and non-Germans who completed their *Abitur* as well as all applicable higher education qualifications entirely in Germany (Das Innenministeriums Baden-Württemberg, 2017).

As a result of the previous reforms of the Bologna Process and the Excellence Initiative, the selection of students has also changed significantly along with the federalism reform empowering the *Länder* regards to higher education. German universities are legally required to accept first-degree students who meet the basic entrance requirements, but now with the bachelor-master system, universities can be more selective of new master students, who after completion of a bachelor degree no longer count as first-degree students. In addition, universities operating under the Excellence Initiative experience an increase in applicants along with the corresponding need to be more selective among these individuals (Wentzel, 2011).

### **3.2.4 German higher education policy**

The Basic Law grants the federal government responsibility in the following areas:

- Admissions and degrees at higher education institutions, though the *Länder* may, however, make their own laws that modify or even contradict general federal laws in this regard;
- Financial assistance for students;

- Scientific and academic research promotion as well as promotion of researchers;
- Regulations on entrance to legal, medical, and paramedical professions;
- Measures promoting employment and occupational and labor market research.

Furthermore, the German Basic Law guarantees some basic principles that apply to higher education throughout Germany. These include the freedom of scientific and scholarly research and art (Art. 5, Paragraph 3) as well as the free choice of profession and of the location for being trained (Art. 12, Paragraph 1). Specific government powers and responsibilities, however, are not federally controlled but belong to the individual governments of the respective *Länder* (Lohmar & Eckhardt, 2015, 24).

In addition, the Federation and the *Länder* may agree on cooperating in constructing facilities at higher education institutions as well as in promoting research and scientific projects at higher education institutions, though agreements in the latter regard require the consent of all the *Länder*. Such “joint tasks” (*Gemeinschaftsaufgaben*) are permitted under Article 91b, Paragraph 1 of the Basic Law in the context of mutual agreement in a Joint Science Conference (*Gemeinsame Wissenschaftskonferenz*). Moreover, Paragraph 2 permits agreements between the Federation and *Länder* in cooperating in the assessment of educational system performance in international comparison as well as in preparing related reports and recommendations (Lohmar & Eckhardt, 2015, 23-24).

While general agreements concerning quality assurance goals and standards may be reached between the Federation and the *Länder* as in the Framework Act for Higher Education, it is ultimately the *Länder* that are responsible for applying quality assurance and for making the final determination as to whether an institution or program will be recognized by the state. The respective higher education laws (*Hochschulgesetze*) of the *Länder* may vary in their specific requirements and govern what standards must be met in higher education in the respective German state (Lohmar & Eckhardt, 2015, 36).

### **3.2.5 Governance in German higher education institutions**

Governance process in higher education includes formal and informal exercise of authority under laws, policies and rules that articulate the rights and responsibilities of various actors, including the rules by which they interact (Hirsch & Weber, 2001). Governance is the

process within an institution that ends with making decisions regarding policies and regulations, mission and objectives achievement, and progress monitoring (*Oxford University Gazette*, 2006).

National systems differ substantially in the ways that their higher education institutions are governed as a result of different governmental policies, culture, resources, and funding. The literature features several different conceptual models of governance, such as collegial, bureaucratic, political, organized anarchy, professional and, more recently, the entrepreneurial university, service university, enterprise university, corporate-managerial university and so on (Meek, 2009). There are three common governance models. The first and most commonly used one is an internal-self-governance system which is the academic governance model (Birnbaum, 1991). External control appears in the other two models, the state-centered model and the market-centered model (Currie, 2005).

The German higher education system is governed through decentralized and centralized models, in parallel, with the decentralized model being applied at the national level and the centralized model in the context of each *Land*. In the German legal system, the *Länder* retain legislative rights themselves except when the German Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*) specifically gives legislative authority to the Federation. Administration of higher education, like education in general, falls primarily under the responsibility of the *Länder*, which in turn have extensive regulations concerning higher education in their own constitutions. The *Länder* are also responsible for payments and pensions for professors and other civil servants (Lohmar & Eckhardt, 2015).

The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (*Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung*), or BMBF, was formed in 1969, and it was originally called the Federal Ministry of Education and Science when the Basic Law (*Grundgesetz* – R1) was amended to give the Federation additional educational responsibilities. In 1994, it was merged with the Federal Ministry of Research and Technology. The Federation and *Länder* consult with each other in the *Bundesrat*, the Joint Science Conference (*Gemeinsame Wissenschaftskonferenz*), the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (*Kultusministerkonferenz*), and the Science Council (*Wissenschaftsrat*) (Lohmar & Eckhardt, 2015, 40).



The BMBF is organized according to one Central Directorate-General and in the following seven Directorates-General:

1. Strategies and Policy Issues
2. European and International Cooperation in Education and Research
3. Vocational Training/Lifelong Learning
4. Science System
5. Key Technologies – Research for Innovation
6. Life Sciences – Research for Health
7. Provision for the Future – Basic and Sustainability Research

([www.bmbf.de](http://www.bmbf.de), 2017)

Although legislation and administration of the higher education system are primarily controlled by the *Länder*, they coordinate their respective systems through the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* in the Federal Republic of Germany (*Kultusministerkonferenz*), which was founded in 1948. The Standing Conference facilitates agreements between the *Länder* regarding higher education and research on matters of supra-regional importance. Depending on content, its resolutions can be adopted either unanimously, with a qualified majority, or with a simple majority. It is important to note that the resolutions have the status of recommendations, which the Ministers agree to promote in their respective *Länder*. They only become law once the parliaments of the *Länder* enact them as such (Lohmar & Eckhardt, 2015, 41). In 1999, the *Länder* in the Standing Conference came to an agreement to collaborate more in creating qualitative standards. At the same time, keeping specific formal regulations to a minimum has not only preserved a sense of diversity between the *Länder* but has also encouraged competition between them as they individually seek to demonstrate the high quality standards upheld in their respective federal states (Lohmar & Eckhardt, 2015, 42).

Since the 1950s, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, the Association of Institutions of Higher Education, and the German Rectors' Conference (*Hochschulrektorenkonferenz*) have been able to facilitate cooperation between the government and self-administrating higher education institutions. Since the 1990s the need for

structural reforms in higher education has been dealt with increasingly, while a strict differentiation between studies for academics and non-academic professions has been continually emphasized. This discussion includes an emphasis on the practice-oriented *Fachhochschulen*, which should be expanded to eventually take 40 percent of higher education applicants (Lohmar & Eckhardt, 2015, 43).

Recently, the Standing Conference also dealt extensively with promoting excellence initiatives, furthering the Bologna Process, defining structural guidelines for study programs, and continuing to develop the system of study course accreditation in line with nation-wide quality assurance. That is, the Standing Conference determines common guidelines for quality assurance in teaching across the *Länder* (www.kmk.org, 2017). Federalism Reform I, issued in 2006, included defining the joint task “Promotion of Research” and strengthening trans-regional aspects of the joint task “Expansion and Construction of Higher Education Institutions and University Clinics.” For addressing such joint tasks, the *Länder* and the Federation have a Joint Science Conference (*Gemeinsame Wissenschaftskonferenz*) composed of ministers and senators of the Federation and *Länder*. It deals with research funding as well as policy strategies for science and research (Lohmar & Eckhardt, 2015, 44).

As permitted by the Basic Law (Article 91b, Paragraph 2), the Federation and the *Länder* can agree to cooperate in assessing higher educational systems in the context of international comparison, as well as in issuing reports and recommendations. These issues are discussed in meetings of the Federal Minister of Education and Research and the ministers and senators of the *Länder* responsible for education. With regard to higher education exclusively, the Science Council (*Wissenschaftsrat*), which was established in 1957, makes recommendations for structural development and content in higher education as well as for jointly constructing facilities at higher education institutions (Lohmar & Eckhardt, 2015, 44-45).

As higher education institutions maintain a constitutional right to autonomy in teaching and research (Basic Law, Art. 5, Paragraph 3), they have primary responsibility over their own budget, finances, and personnel. On the other hand, these issues are also overseen by the respective *Land* government, which has legal supervision (*Rechtsaufsicht*) and even limited academic supervision (*Fachaufsicht*) over its higher education institutions. The latter must

inform the *Land* government about study regulations (*Studienordnungen*) for all courses of study as well as regulations for examinations (*Prüfungsordnungen*) and may even need to have them approved. Courses of study that lead to a state examination (*Staatsprüfung*) are issued in close agreement with the *Land* government or are even drafted by it (Lohmar & Eckhardt, 2015, 53).

In 1998, the requirement for an accreditation procedure, in addition to the standard state approval, for new bachelor's and master's degrees was accepted by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs. Accordingly, an independent Accreditation Council (*Akkreditierungsrat*), which acts for all the *Länder*, commissions agencies to carry out the accreditation process. Moreover, since 2005, the Accreditation Council has been acting under the Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Courses in Germany (*Stiftung zur Akkreditierung von Studiengängen in Deutschland*). This development has gone hand in hand with greater autonomy and less government control. In 2006, the Federation's legal oversight over the framework legislation for higher education was repealed (Federalism Reform I), thus giving more control over reforming and administering higher education to the *Länder*, but also to the higher education institutions themselves, which are increasingly enacting their own reforms autonomously (Lohmar & Eckhardt, 2015,54).

### **3.2.6 The authority levels of governance in higher education institutions**

Following the amendment of the Framework Act for Higher Education in 1998, the *Länder* have had greater diversity and independence in administering higher education. Furthermore, shifting responsibility to the individual higher education institutions has empowered governing boards and department heads, who are now encouraged to develop and reform their own higher education institution instead of simply following uniform regulations handed down from the state (Lohmar & Eckhardt ,2015,58).

Higher education institutions are governed by a rector or president or by a corresponding body. The rector must have completed higher education as well as have career experience in academic affairs or administration, and is selected either from the professors at the institution or from external applicants. In addition, the budget is overseen by the chancellor, the most senior administrative officer. Moreover, in almost all the *Länder*, higher

education institutions are supported by higher education councils (*Hochschulrat*) or boards of trustees (*Kuratorium*). These are composed of external experts from industry or other academic institutions who offer advice and recommendations. These councils can also take part in decisions about the budget or development plans for the higher education institution. In some *Länder*, they may even have a veto right (Lohmar & Eckhardt, 2015, 58, 63).

Within a German higher educational institution, the basic organizational unit is the department (*Fachbereich*), which some *Länder* refer to as a faculty (*Fakultät*). It assumes responsibility for research and teaching, as well as for ensuring the capability of its members and establishments to carry out duties. In recent years, the dean (*Dekan*), the professor who chairs the department (*Fachbereich*) council, has gained greater rights in supervising the other professors to make sure that teaching and examination requirements are fulfilled (Lohmar & Eckhardt, 2015, 58-59).

A German higher education organization is run through multiple managing structures. A full-time president or rector governs from the top level of the higher education organization. An elected committee made up of a president, a vice president, and a chancellor or chief administrator can also fulfill this role. On the next highest level, the chancellor assumes responsibility for administration tasks and the budget. At the faculty level, the academic decision-making process goes through faculty councils at the decentral level and through the senate and assembly at the central level (Hartwig, 2004).

Higher education institutions form their own basic constitutions (*Grundordnungen*), which require approval by the Ministry of Education or Ministry of Science and Research in their respective *Land*. The process for making decisions regarding the basic constitution and electing the governing board for the higher education institution depends on the laws of each *Land*. They may be made by the senate of the higher education institution, the council or board of trustees, or by another body in which staff and students are represented. Vocational schools (*Berufsakademien*), which are exempted from the Framework Act for Higher Education and follow instead the special laws made for them in the *Länder*, are typically headed by a director, a board of trustees, and expert committees (Lohmar & Eckhardt, 2015, 59).

Both the Framework Act for Higher Education and the laws of the *Länder* ensure that institutions of higher education include everyone whose main employment is at the institution as well as all matriculated students in making decisions. Central bodies are formed to facilitate communication and cooperation between four distinct groups with their own representatives, including (1) tenured professors, (2) students, (3) academic staff, and (4) other staff members. The groups participate in decision-making according to their position and how they are affected by the issue in question. With regard to bodies that make decisions on teaching matters, full professors invariably maintain at least half of the votes, except when it comes to teaching evaluations, where students have more say. Students normally establish student bodies (*Studierendenschaften*) and elect representatives for student parliaments and committees to represent student interests. Vocational schools (*Berufsakademien*), which are subject to different laws, feature committees representing the director, the instructors, training establishments, and the students (Lohmar & Eckhardt, 2015, 61-62).

### **3.2.7 Governance changes in German higher education institutions**

All German bachelor's and master's programs must be accredited, and this entails a process involving extensive self-review and external review with experts visiting in cycles of five or seven years to re-accredit the program. Since 2008, German higher education institutions have had the option of maintaining more autonomy and control by becoming system accredited. In this case, the entire quality assurance system of the higher education institution is subjected to external review and finally accredited as being competent to ensure quality standards in its own programs and accredit its new courses of study itself (Harris-Huermann, 1, 2016).

In the context of efforts made towards system accreditation, German higher education institutions have used their increased autonomy to develop a variety of different models for governance. At the University of Constance in Baden-Württemberg, for instance, which was system-accredited in 2014, the Rector maintains direct control over accreditation while being advised every four years by a small committee that he sets up (Harris-Huermann, 2016). The University of Frankfurt followed a modified version of this leader-accreditation model but put

control not into the hands of one person, but a small internal accreditation committee composed of professors, staff, and students (Harris-Huermann, 2016).

This top-down approach stands in contrast to the de-centralized model exemplified by the University of Mainz, which in 2011 became the first German institution of higher education to be system accredited. In accord with the specific higher education laws of Rheinland-Palatinate, the University of Mainz requires new programs to be peer-reviewed before being introduced and maintains a Center for Quality Assurance and Development, which grants accreditations while also being subject to review itself by an advisory board (*Beirat*). At the University of Regensburg (Bavaria), which was system-accredited in 2015, an “external” working committee, in which the university chancellor only has “guest” status, assumes responsibility for accreditation. Although it works externally on behalf of the university, this commission also includes some professors and students from the university among its members (Harris-Huermann, 2016). An extremely de-centralized model has been established at the University of Applied Sciences in Berlin, which was system-accredited in 2014. In this model, Advisory Working Committees are set up for each individual degree, forming “mini accreditation agencies” consisting of four members each, one with professional experience, two external subject experts, and one student (Harris-Huermann, 2016).

On the whole, governance in higher education in Germany is becoming more diversified, ranging from top-down approaches to highly de-centralized ones, depending on the laws of the various *Länder* as well as the goals and vision of the respective institutions of higher education. This diversity and the changes taking place are closely linked with efforts to establish accreditation.

The German higher education system is described as decentralized and centralized at the same time. It is decentralized concerning the federal (national) level and centralized in regard to each *Land*. The funding of German higher education institutions is *Länder* responsibility, as since the national reform, the respective federal state provides financial support for higher education institutions in the research and science area. The tuition fees which were recently introduced could be considered as a main finance resource for higher education institutions.

### **3.3 Higher education system in Saudi Arabia**

#### **3.3.1 History**

Reviewing the history of Saudi higher education shows that there are six main characteristics for this system: a short history as the first university opened in 1957; tremendous growth in the last ten years (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013); the centralized support and control system; full financial support from the government (free education); a focus on teaching the Islamic religion; and a policy of separating males and females (Smith & Abouammah, 2013).

The history of higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia is divided into five phases. These are explained in the sections which follow.

##### **3.3.1.1 Pre-formal education**

Before the institutionalization of the higher education sector, there were a number of informal higher education options in Saudi regions with variation in levels offered for certain majors such as Arabic language, religion and education science. In Makka, Al-Madina, and Al-Monaourah, such education options were featured due to their historic and religious status, and students and teachers worldwide flocked to programs offered there. This explains the early interest and the desire to organize higher education in these cities.

##### **3.3.1.2 The institutionalization of the higher education sector (1926-1949)**

The year 1926 marks the actual beginning of the organization of the higher education sector in Saudi Arabia with establishment of the Knowledge Directorate. This directorate had the responsibility of organizing, planning, and establishing the public and higher education institutions. It started by establishing modern schools in different Saudi cities. The existence of organized education seminars in Saudi cities before that time was followed by the establishment of the official higher education institutes in Saudi regions, which paved the way for establishing modern higher education institutions.

The nucleus of higher education is represented in the preparation step in 1928 with establishment of the scholarship affairs committee, which sent 14 students to study different majors at the University in Egypt in 1928. Then as the next step a high school for scholarship preparation opened in 1936 in Makkah and lasted three years (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012). It aimed to prepare the high school students using a modern school model to continue

their scholarship in the faculties of medicine, engineering, agriculture, and art in Egypt, Lebanon, United State and some European countries (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012, Al-Mohizai, 2009).

### **3.3.1.3 Establishment phase (1949-1960)**

This was followed by the establishment of four colleges as the first building blocks of the Saudi higher education. The first one, the College of Sharia in Makkah, was established in 1949, with the Teachers' College in Makkah following in 1946. Then in 1953 and 1954, Sharia College and Teachers' College were founded, respectively, in Riyadh.

In 1954, the Ministry of Knowledge was established to oversee public and higher education issues. It developed and oversaw these colleges and the scholarship programs. The goal of sending scholarship students abroad was to fulfill the need of the country in science and applied disciplines, while the religion and education disciplines were taught within the country to be in line with the religion and cultural context. As a result of the expansion in the dissemination in public school establishment in all the country's regions, there was a growing demand for qualified teaching skills to fulfil the needs in all school stages. This led to continuation in establishing higher education institutions to serve this need. At the end of this phase, the Ministry of Knowledge adopted the established of the first modern Saudi university. King Saud University was founded in 1957 in Riyadh, and it included four colleges: the College of Literature, College of Science, College of Administrative Sciences, and College of Pharmacy (Education Ministry, 2012).

### **3.3.1.4 Expansion phase (1961-1980)**

This phase represents the expansion in establishing universities in the country regions. In this period, six universities in the big cities were established: Islamic University in AlMadinah Almunawarah in 1961, King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah in 1968, Al-Immam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University in Riyadh in 1974, King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM) in Dhahran and King Faisal University in Al-Ahsa in 1975, and Umm AL-Qura University in Makkah in 1980. These universities included 58 colleges and faculties. Later some of these universities opened branches in other cities. This phase is characterized by the diversity of



education, with a number of teacher colleges were established in the big cities of the country (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012).

### **3.3.1.5 Comprehensiveness phase (1981-2012)**

Proceeding from the principle of availability of equal opportunities of higher education for the sons of the homeland in all cities and villages, without resorting to big cities, the higher education policy in this phase aimed at spreading higher education institutions in all the country's regions. Universities and colleges were founded in 80 provinces with a variety of disciplines to meet the needs of the labor market and development plans. This phase started with the establishment of King Khalid University in Abha in 1981 and ended with the approval decision to establish The Saudi Electronic University in 2011.

In 1994 the problem of providing university access for all became apparent, which required expanding the establishment of governmental colleges and universities and starting to open private higher education institutions. The Saudi higher education sector is described as a development achieved in a short period in both governmental and private institutions. In 2016 the number of higher education organization reached 66, 28 state universities, 30 private universities and colleges and 8 colleges and institute for vocational education, with 1,622,441 students enrolled in them (Education Ministry, 2016).

The most important feature of the growing and development phase in the higher education sector in Saudi Arabia is the size of gains made in the higher education of women. In 1970 there were seven women students in higher education. In 2011 the number of women students in higher education reached 700,000, which represents 60% of the total enrollment in higher education institutions.

Table 3 below shows the growth in the higher education institutions in the last two decades.

**Table 3. The growth in the Saudi higher education sector in the last two decades**

Year	Universities			Colleges			Faculties		
	State	Private	Total	State	Private	Total	State	Private	Total
<b>1989</b>	7	0	<b>7</b>	83	0	<b>83</b>	410	0	<b>410</b>
<b>1999</b>	8	2	<b>10</b>	203	6	<b>209</b>	644	9	<b>653</b>
<b>2012</b>	25	8	<b>33</b>	498	45	<b>543</b>	2277	116	<b>2393</b>
<b>2017</b>	28	10	<b>38</b>	*	*	*	*	*	*

(\*) the information is not available.

Sources: Statistical information on higher education institutions from: - Ministry of education, Higher Education Statistics (1400- 1415), <https://www.moe.gov.sa> - Ministry of education, Higher Education Statistics (1416-1430), <https://www.moe.gov.sa>. - General Authority of Statistics (<https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/3218>, 2017).

However, this number of higher education organizations is not sufficient to serve a population of 31 million in a country that seeks to begin a national transition in 2020 and aspires to achieve its vision by 2030.<sup>2</sup> It is necessary to push for an increase in the number of universities, allow international universities to open branches in the country, and sell academic services in some specializations.

<sup>2</sup> "Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030" is a national plan that aims to enhance the development process for the Saudi economy through developing all sectors by reducing Saudi Arabia's dependence on oil, diversifying its economy, and developing service sectors such as health, education, infrastructure, recreation, and tourism. The plan's details were announced on April 25, 2016 by Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman. It represents a roadmap and methodology for achieving this aim, by identifying the general directions, policies, goals, and objectives of the Kingdom. As a result of this new vision some ministries, institutions, and government entities are subject to ongoing restructuring processes to prepare them for this stage. The plan includes 80 projects, each costing between \$3.7 million and \$20 million. The Council of Ministers tasked the Council of Economic and Development Affairs with implementing and establishing mechanisms and measures necessary for "Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030" (<http://vision2030.gov.sa/en>, 2017).

### **3.3.2 Reform and development plans**

In 2007 King Abdullah Ibn Abdul-Aziz launched an initiative to develop the education sector, for both public and higher education. With regard to higher education, this initiative paid attention to its future through the “Afaq” project.

The Ministry of Education has implemented this national project for higher education to set up a plan based on strategic planning methods and mechanisms. This project is a 25-year strategic development plan for the transition process to the knowledge-based economy era, setting the vision, mission, strategic dimensions, and a practical implementation mechanism. This project’s objectives are to maintain the quality of higher education and to invest prudently in human resources. Moreover, one of the important issues included in this project for achieving its goals in preparing for the next era is quality control and developing quality culture in public education institutions and higher education institutions.

### **3.3.3 Types and stages of higher education organization**

Higher education institutions include all educational institutions public and private colleges and universities that provide a kind of post-secondary education, starting from an intermediate diploma and ending with a PhD.

- 1- Higher education organization offer Diploma, a two or three year diploma, and 50% of their educational credits are practical training. They were established to expand the national workforce and provide the governmental and private sectors with qualified technicians in several technical disciplines and community service disciplines. This serves the need of the national development plans’ objectives. The number of these institutions has reached 40 technical colleges in different Saudi regions. Some of their disciplines are: Electronics and Telecommunications, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning, Vehicles and Heavy Equipment, Bank Management, and Food Processing. There are 26 higher technical institutes for women, and some of their disciplines are: Accounting and Computer Science, Technical Support, Cosmetology, and Production and Costume Design.
- 2- Universities offer Bachelor degree, the second type of post-secondary education. Its duration is between four to five years of study according to the specialization. Students

study in a specialized field ending with receipt of a certificate that entitles them to work in the labor market. Saudi universities offer about 2,029 bachelor study programs.

3- Higher education organizations offer graduate studies

- a. The post-bachelor stage is an advanced stage in studying scientific disciplines or the humanities. Graduate studies include three different degrees: higher diploma, master, PhD and the fellowship degree.
- b. The degree of higher diploma: The study for this degree lasts one to two years, and the study system is similar to the bachelor system. Small research or a project at the end is required.
- c. Master's degree: The regulation of Saudi universities states that there are two systems for the master's degree studies. The number of courses required is either not less than 24 teaching units in addition to the master's thesis, or in some professional disciplines the number of courses will not be less than 42 teaching units, including a research project which equals three teaching units.
- d. PhD degree: As the regulation of Saudi universities requires, there are two systems for this degree. According to their respective discipline, doctoral students will either complete study courses not less than 30 teaching units in addition to the PhD thesis or the PhD thesis and some courses not less than 12 teaching units.
- e. The fellowship degree is a professional degree specifically in medicine awarded to the bachelor graduate after a study period of 4 to 6 years in one of the medicine sub-specializations. (Ministry of Higher Education. 2012)

### **3.3.4 Saudi higher education policy**

The education policy document was issued in 1970, as an official declaration from the state for its orientation in its education system. This document provides the principles and foundations which underlie the educational system pathway. It also describes the role ascribed to it in the care of children and preparing youth for life. It does so by providing them with facts, concepts, skills, attitudes, and values, which enable them to achieve the best for themselves in their lives and their future. The Saudi education policy document includes the state vision to

achieve the aspirations of the community about the education system. It is the essential guide to the educational institutions in Saudi society.

In the first paragraph, the Saudi education policy document states the general principles underlying the educational system. All of them grew out of Islam's vision for humans, science, and life. These include: stressing the duty of knowledge-seeking and knowledge dissemination and facilitation; equality in the right to education for both genders; interaction with various world civilizations; and the ability to benefit from all kinds of knowledge and science.

### **3.3.5 Governance in Saudi higher education institutions**

In Saudi Arabia the society sees higher education as a right; on the other hand, the government understands its own responsibility in funding higher education as a central aspect of the National 5-year Development plans. The vitality of this sector to the country is evident in how it is governed. The process is chaired by the King of Saudi Arabia. The decision-making process follows a clear hierarchical model of authority. Moreover, Saudi public higher education institutions are fully operated and financially supported by the government. Private universities are also subject to strict regulations, as the government seeks to achieve outcomes with quality and diversity to match the development plan objectives and the labor market needs.

### **3.3.6 The authority levels for implementing and overseeing the higher education institutions**

The higher education system and its policies are implemented and overseen by three entities at the national level.

#### **1. The Council of Higher Education:**

The growth of the Saudi higher education sector and the diversity in this field and its systems worldwide required establishing an independent modern authority for evaluating the past of this system and planning the future for it while benefiting from the international experiences and trends in this area. In 1994 the Council of Higher Education was founded which represented a big shift in how higher education is governed. It is considered to be the highest decision-making authority (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012). This council is headed by the King of Saudi Arabia and consists

of the Ministers of Education, Finance, Economy and Planning, Labor, and Social Affairs, as well as the presidents of public universities.

The council's responsibilities include governing and supervising the higher education system, as well as making rules and regulations. It also monitors the process of establishing new institutions and programs (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012; Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). One of its first achievements was issuing some important regulations in order to organize the academic work in Saudi higher education institutions regarding the following: finance, educational process, exams and evaluation, teaching staff, higher education programs, scholarship, and training programs, in addition to other important organization regulations.

## 2. The Ministry Education:

Before the founding of the Ministry of Higher Education(now called the Education Ministry), the responsibility of regulating and overseeing higher education institutions was with the Knowledge Ministry specifically the Higher Education Administration, which was founded in 1960. In 1975 the Ministry of Higher Education was established to take over these responsibilities. Since the establishment of the Council of Higher Education in 1994 the Ministry has ensured the implementation of its decisions, policies, and responses for the operation and quality of all Saudi universities (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013).

## 3. The organizational level:

The presidents on this level are nominated to serve at Saudi universities by the Ministry of Education and are appointed by the King of Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the president's authority is restricted to operational and logistic concerns. Other decisions in regard to academic issues and strategical directions must be made by the university's various councils (Al-Essa & Smith, 2013).

### **3.3.7 Women's higher education in Saudi Arabia**

The right to education for both genders with equal opportunities is a major priority of Saudi education policy. Particularly, girls' education in Saudi Arabia has distinctive characteristics. First, responding to women's social status in Saudi Arabia, Article 155 of the

Saudi education policy states a required separation of males and females at all education levels and institutions, except for nursery schools, kindergartens, some private elementary schools, and some medical schools in universities. Second, the progress of women's education could be described as a short period (50 years) with enormous expansion that included qualitative leaps in achievement.

Before officially starting, girls' education was carried out in two ways. There were individual efforts by some teachers who opened small informal schools in their houses or in the mosques to teach neighborhood children. These kinds of schools were called *Ktateeb* and played a big and vital role in the girls' education by teaching them reading, writing, and mathematics. *Katateeb* were diffused throughout most of the Saudis' cities and villages. There were also private schools in the big Saudi cities such as Riyadh, Makkah, Jeddah, and Dammam.

Finally, in 1959, an important step was taken – public education for girls was launched and public state schools for girls were opened, 30 years after the formal start of boys' education in 1926 due to the customs and traditions at that time. This was followed by the founding of the General Presidency of Girls' Education in 1960 for the aim of overseeing, managing, and opening girls' public and higher education institutions. This Presidency lasted until 2003, when the education of boys and girls came under one umbrella by attaching the General Presidency of Girls' Education to the Ministry of Knowledge and changing the name to the Ministry of Education (Al-Aqeel, 2005).

The Presidency's work began with the opening of 15 primary schools and one teacher training institute with a total number of 5,180 students. Girls' schools use the same curriculum as in the boys' schools with some variation regarding subjects in home economics and physical education (Smith & Aboummoh, 2013). Within six years, the number of students reached 51,000, and by the mid-1970s, about half of all Saudi girls attended school. Moreover, the first enrollment of Saudi women in universities was in 1961/1962 as part-time students in King Saud University in Riyadh at the College of Arts and Administrative Science (Jamjoom & Kelly, 2013). Furthermore, this was followed by opening part-time programs for women in King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah in 1967 and Imam Mohamed ibn Saud Islamic University in Riyadh in 1968. Then in 1970 the first women's college was established in Riyadh, followed by the opening of

more than 100 women's colleges all over the kingdom. Finally, in the early 1980s, all Saudi girls had educational opportunities, and young women were already enrolled in the universities and graduating from them (Almunajjed, 2009). In 2001 there were more than 200,000 students enrolled within these colleges (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012) and the increasing number of women at universities continued until it reached 60% of the total number (Jamjoom & Kelly, 2013).

In 2006 the 23 women's colleges were combined to create Riyadh Women's University, renamed in 2008 for Princess Nora Bent Abdul Rahman, representing the largest-scale move so far. This royal decree was followed by an additional one in 2007, which agreed on the establishment of some faculties such as Pharmacy, Nursing, Computer and Information Science, Business and Management, Physical Therapy, and Kindergartens (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012).

Statistics show an impressive growth in the rate of women's enrollment in Saudi universities between 1990 and 2004, which is described as one of the highest growth rates worldwide, reaching 512% in contrast to the men's enrollment growth rate of 339%. The growth rate in women's enrollment in graduate studies in Saudi higher education institutions is 48%, among the highest in the world, whereas in the United States and Western European it is 50%. (Jamjoom & Kelly, 2013). In 2014, the number of freshmen women reached 46%, while the women represented 52% of the total university student population and 26% of the total scholarship students. In addition, at the Saudi universities, the women constituted 41% of faculty at academic colleges and universities (Ministry of Higher Education, 2014).

### **3.3.8 The recent changes in Saudi higher education institutions**

By tracing the changes in the governance model of the Saudi higher education sector, a better understanding of the current changes and decisions is gained. The main goals of most governance reform are to get rid of the problems posed by old university structures, such as bureaucracy, rigidity, inefficiency, and excessive regulation (Al-Essa & Smith, 2013). The current Saudi reforms in higher education governance could be described as similar to the United States practices, especially in the area of privatization and interest in accountability and quality (Smith & Aboummoh, 2013). As mentioned, Saudi higher education institutions are governed in



a centralized way with a bureaucratic nature in terms of their authority and governmental funding. Nowadays, several problems in higher education systems are caused by centralization and bureaucratic governance. This governance model could be seen as a hindrance for higher education institutions to keep up with the latest international developments in higher education.

Shifts in the Saudi higher education governance model became a requirement as a result of all recent changes such as privatization and excellence. Replacing the centralization and heavy regulations with autonomy and liberalized regulations is needed in the Saudi higher education system. Some efforts on the way to change have been achieved by the Ministry of Higher Education, including:

- The announcement of absolute autonomy for the recently established research university, King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in 2009, which allows it to practice its process to attract, recruit, and retain international level without any government intervention.
- The adoption of a new policy calling for the promotion of excellence and innovation among higher education institutions. Each university has to outline its own mission and purpose that leads to more autonomy.
- The establishment of an independent higher education quality assurance agency, the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA).

Nevertheless, Saudi universities still need much greater autonomy over all their activities, including allocating resources and achieving quality of teaching, learning, and research.

- **Student overseas scholarship programs:**

These are some of the most important strategies that have been used by the Saudi state as a convenient alternative to establish and improve the higher education system and other governmental sectors to face the increasing student numbers. The first step in the Saudi's overseas scholarship programs took place in the preparation phase of the Saudi higher education system more than 80 years ago, before the establishment of the first Saudi university. This occurred in 1927 when high school graduates were sent to Egypt, a country with the same language and religion, to continue their university studies (Bukhari & Denman, 2013).

When the program showed satisfying results, the second and third groups of students were sent to England and Italy to study management of wireless communication and aviation. These groups of students returned back as qualified graduates and participated in the establishment of Saudi Arabia's air transportation system (Ministry of Higher Education, 2013). Other groups were sent to Switzerland and Turkey to study engineering, law, and political science. It should be noted that a special school with international staff was established in 1936, aiming to prepare students who received places in the scholarship programs (Ministry of Higher Education, 2013). The student overseas scholarship programs have been organized through one governmental department since inception. This department used to belong to the Ministry of Knowledge (the Ministry of Education), until 1976 when it was integrated into the Ministry of Higher Education.

The Saudi experience in this area started with initial attempts in similar environments achieving success. As a solution to solve some problems that appeared at that time and to help these programs to achieve the desired goals, a national school to prepare students was established, followed by more expanded attempts in international environments. That took place in the period between (1927-1953), which represented the foundation stage of the Saudi overseas scholarship programs.

These kinds of programs aim to develop Saudi human resources and prepare academics and scientists by giving them the chance to continue their undergraduate and postgraduate studies in many of the most famous universities in the world. At the beginning of the scholarship programs, their focus was on postgraduate students, after the establishment of the first Saudi university, King Saud University, in 1957. In the period between 1954 and 2004, the state expanded the establishment of the national higher education institutions that provide undergraduate programs for Saudi students. The number of these universities increased from 3 in 1957 to 24 in 2011. From the beginning until now the overseas scholarship study programs have gone in line with the Saudi higher education policy and objectives to fulfil the need of the five-year development plans and to take into account the benefits from successful international experiences to improve the national higher education system and foster international workforce competence for Saudi nationals.

Since 2005 there has been high growth in the number of student in overseas scholarship programs. In 2011, there were over 120,000 Saudi scholarship students (Indicators of Saudi Higher Education Sector, 2011). In 2014 there were more than 150,000 Saudi students in 30 countries, and about 25% of them were women (Al-Anqari, 2014). Most of these students studied in English-speaking countries, with more than 124,000 students in the United States, followed by Britain, Canada, and Australia. The establishment of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) in May 2005 marks the beginning of the expansion period of overseas scholarship programs which extends to the present day. This program is described as the biggest nation-state scholarship program (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012).

This enormous expanding in the overseas scholarship programs required creation of a suitable managing system. This encouraged the Ministry of Higher Education to establish an administration structure consisting of 34 cultural missions which are located in Saudi embassies and supported by academic and administrative staff. Included was the creation of the electronic system for better communication between the student, the state, and the educational institution.

**- Research and knowledge production in the Saudi Higher Education sector:**

In the mid-2000s, the Saudi initiation strategy to promote research production was launched as a central concern of the National Development Plan. For this the Ministry of Higher Education has founded scientific research centers, technology incubators, and research parks, and more funding resources to support research have been assigned. On one hand, in the Saudi universities, the Deanship of Scientific Research (DSR) is the responsible organ to support and manage the institution-based research and projects submitted by academic staff. Some universities conduct external research consultancies, and others assign part of their funds for industry-based research chairs or to attract high-profile international researchers to guide their research teams. All these actions are carried out in order to achieve a better research output and good university reputation.

On the other hand, government-based research is a subject of attention and support by the Saudi state. The government has made some efforts to encourage research, such as launching the National Science, Technology and Innovation Strategic Plan (NSTIP), which aims

to create science and technology infrastructure needed to be an advanced knowledge-based economy. The heart of this plan is King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology tasked with outlining a national policy for developing science and technology, drafting and evaluating the strategy of implementation as well as coordinating the different efforts made by the governmental and scientific institutions and agencies to achieve the plan's goals. The targeted research areas are energy, technology of water, oil and gas, nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology, petrochemicals, environment and advanced materials, and space and aeronautics.

- The founding of the National Center of Assessment in Higher Education occurred in 2000, which coincided with changes in the admission policy. This center aims to design and conduct national assessment exams to determine the student's abilities and skills and their educational achievement. These test results, together with the high school diploma, are used as a standard requirement for college admission.

- The Centers of Research Excellence founded in some Saudi universities focus on research areas such as petroleum and petrochemicals, corrosion, Islamic banking and finance, and renewable energy.

- Cooperation between universities and the industry sector on research projects has been encouraged through establishment of a number of science parks or "techno valleys" on some universities campuses in Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dhahran. This effort has showed good results in increasing industrial projects and publications.

### **3.4 German and Saudi higher education systems**

As mentioned previously, the case studies for this research have quite different historical, cultural, and structural scopes in the area of higher education organizations. Table 4 provides a brief comparison between the two cases in some aspects.

**Table 4. Comparison between German and Saudi higher education systems**

<b>Higher education system</b>	<b>Germany</b>	<b>Saudi Arabia</b>
<b>History</b>	Long history of formal university back to the fourteenth and fifteenth century	Short history, with the establishment of first university in 1949. There was a long previous history of informal universities.
<b>The expansion of this sector</b>	In the 1950s	First period of expansion (1961 – 1980) Second tremendous growth in 2012
<b>The current size (2015/ 2016)</b>	427 higher education organizations, with 2.76 million students	66 higher education organization, with 1,622,441 students
<b>Types and degrees of higher education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Traditional universities</li> <li>- Universities of applied sciences (<i>Fachhochschulen</i>)</li> <li>- Colleges of art and music</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Diploma with practical training</li> <li>- Universities (Bachelor’s, Master’s, PhD)</li> </ul>
<b>The governance system</b>	The Länder are responsible for governing this sector. Decentralized governance system at the national level (The Federal Ministry of Education and Research) and centralized at each Land level. Each Land has a Minister of	A centralized system with a bureaucratic nature. Three levels of authority: the Council of Higher Education, the Ministry of Education, and the organizational level, with restricted authority to operational and logistic

	Education and Cultural Affairs. The level of higher education organization has greater autonomy.	concerns.
<b>International and regional organizations</b>	Under the clear influence of international and regional agencies (the EU – OECD)	Not affiliated with any international or regional organizations

Despite the abovementioned differences, it can be concluded that both countries have been undergoing reforms and changes in some common areas, such as a needs-based expansion of higher education enrollment in response to the dramatic increase in student enrollment, the introduction of privatization, efforts to improve excellence, and interest in accountability and quality in higher education. In conclusion, with this clear image of the German and Saudi higher education systems provided in this chapter, alongside the second chapter’s portrayal of quality assurance and accreditation practices and systems, the background foundation is complete. The theoretical framework and methodology of this study are laid out in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4

### Theoretical Framework

#### 4.1 Introduction

In its first part, this chapter will present a discussion about the theoretical perspectives which draw the major lines in this research's framework regarding the adoption of quality assurance and accreditation practices in German and Saudi Arabian higher education institutions. These practices are very recent policy changes that offer a new domain for understanding and interpreting policy formation and development in higher education institutions, in light of world culture theory, policy diffusion, and new-institutional perspectives and by through use of the vertical case study approach. This study is rooted in comparative education research that studies the effect of globalization on education and the roles of different actors and conditions at different levels on new education policy adoption and development, and it provides a new contribution to this literature.

In its second part, this chapter sets out the specifics of this study and its design, data selection, collection, and analysis. It discusses methodological considerations in relation to the vertical case study strategy used in this study and the reasons for selecting this strategy to collect and analyze the data. The third section of this chapter provides the specific qualitative approaches for the study: documents review and expert interviews.

The study demonstrates a descriptive-interpretive nature in its first part about the accreditation system in both countries of study by using information from policies documents, handbooks, and reports. For the empirical study, the second part, vertical case study was applied for Germany and Saudi Arabia and expert interviews were conducted with members of accreditation councils, accreditation agencies, and quality assurance and accreditation centers in several universities in Germany and Saudi Arabia.

### **4.3 International comparative higher education**

International comparative higher education is a field of study and research that involves multiple scientific disciplines. The researchers in this field explore and analyze the differences between two or more local and global context and cultures in a particular area, such as tertiary education, its implementation, and management. This research field has to do with the question of the contingency of education. It answers questions about how education is practiced and institutionalized in an experimental way in “real life” (Amos & Parreira do Amaral, 2015). The researchers in this area analyze national and international cases, and then carry out a comparative analysis. Such actions are intended to clearly show the variables influencing aspects in operating and adopting education procedures and policies by clarifying the similarities and differences in different environments under diverse conditions (Kubow and Fossum, 2007).

Studying a phenomenon or searching for a solution for local problems requires the researcher in this field to connect the national features, culture, social values, and principles and then extract the similarities and differences between the contexts of studies (Dede & Baskan, 2011). Therefore, illustrating and describing each feature in each case study is considered an essential step in doing the analyses and then the comparison (Goodrick, 2014).

International comparative education serves a number of research aims such as studying policy making processes at the national and international levels and the studying of the changing in national and international education systems, as the result of social transformation processes (Amos & Parreira do Amaral, 2015).

Schriewer (2000) emphasized the need for more extensive research in education. Most importantly, this includes the area of processes, agents, content, global diffusion, national transformation, adoption and interpretation of models and policies. In addition, Schriewer (2000) stressed the need for cross-national and cross-cultural research from non-Western intellectual standpoints.

The above indicates that the current research fits into the field of international comparative education. It explores and analyzes the differences between two nations the researcher’s home country and Germany, and two different cultures in viewing, implementing, and managing



quality assurance and accreditation practices in their higher education institutions. This research tries to examine how these practices are performed and institutionalized in these two countries, by considering events and initiative that occurred in each. This is followed by carrying out a comparative analysis between them. Finally, the similarities and differences in operating and adopting the quality assurance and accreditation system in these different environments are detected, as are the diverse conditions and varied influencing aspects.

#### **4.3 Building the conceptual framework**

The mechanisms of how educational policies are formatted and developed and which actions and situations accompany them is a research area still in need of being explored and studied by sociologists of educational systems (Johnston, 2014). Two different groups of studies and literature have begun to try to explain this issue. The first group of literature basically deals with this topic by using the world culture theory and concept of policy diffusion (Schofer and McEneaney 2003). The second group of literature uses organizational and institutional lenses to suggest that ideas are the main driver for institutional changes and explaining education policy formation in light of struggles over legitimacy, authority, status, and prestige. This perspective links two levels of analysis: it stresses studying the mutual impact of the micro context on the formulation of education policy at the macro level (Wiseman & Chase-Mayoral, 2014).

The research that follows, which is located in the vertical case studies area, aspires to illustrate the reasons promoting the idea of adoption accreditation procedures in higher education systems and analyze the mechanisms of creating and developing accreditation systems in the countries. Policy diffusion and new institutional perspectives both deal with the process of policy diffusion and what drives institutional change. They suggest that the institutional process of change occurs under the influence of the diffusion of ideas and policy, and is not necessarily linked to the institutional settings.

This leads to address of the following issues. First of all, the research seeks to clarify where the idea of adopting accreditation policy and practices comes from. It also poses questions as to when and why the quality assurance and accreditation practices entered the national education policy as well as what the local situations and circumstances at that time were. Moreover, this research asks how quality assurance and accreditation policy and

practices became new procedures ready to be used and introduced in the national policy, as well as what national elements influenced the process of selecting these procedures within national education policies.

This study will therefore address the following research questions. These questions will each be divided into sub-questions, to facilitate clear and precise answers to the different sub-issues inherent in them.

- 1- *What are the current accreditation systems in German and Saudi higher education institutions?*

**Table 5. The sub-questions for the first research question**

Study Question	Sub-Questions
1. What are the current quality assurance and accreditation systems in German and Saudi higher education institutions?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What is the current German quality assurance and accreditation system?</li> <li>b. What is the current Saudi quality assurance and accreditation system?</li> </ol>

The study will answer this question in table 5 by reviewing national policy documents, agencies' guidelines, and handbooks the models of German and Saudi quality assurance and accreditations procedures and processes considered in this research are addressed by Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (ACQUIN) in Germany and National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NACCC) in Saudi Arabia.

The second part of the research, shown in Table 6, is the empirical part that addresses the question of "why" and "how," which will be answered by conducting the vertical case study and expert interviews.

**Table 6. The sub-questions for the second and third research questions**

Study Questions	Sub-Questions
<p>2. Why were the quality assurance and accreditation practices adopted in higher education institution reform in both Germany and Saudi Arabia?</p>	<p>a. When and from where did this idea enter the national policy?</p> <p>b. What were the local situations?</p> <p>c. What drove the policy change?</p>
<p>3. How do German and Saudi higher education sectors differ in their adoption and implementation of the academic accreditation practices?</p>	<p>a. What were the perspectives/orientations that influenced the formation process of the national accreditation framework?</p> <p>b. How did they become new procedures ready to be used and introduced in the national policy?</p>

Further elaborations on these questions and their sub-questions as well as how as they relate to the theoretical framework and methodology will be provided later in this chapter. (See the vertical case study).

#### **4.4 New-institutional theory**

In the comparative education studies arena, many attempts have been made to provide deeper understanding on policy diffusion worldwide and globalization's impact on education. Moreover, several different perspectives and theories have been used in creating frameworks for these studies. Over the last ten years, large numbers of these studies' frameworks have centered on the world culture theory and new institutionalist perspective which was launched by the sociologist John W. Meyer and his colleagues in Stanford University.

The year 1977 marks the date when the new institutionalism began to be applied in organizational studies. It is the year in which John Meyer set out many of the central elements of the new institutional theory in educational studies (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). This concept, referred to as sociological institutionalism or "new-institutionalism," has had an impact on sociology and education, in particular on research dealing with trans-national and global social changes. Different aspects of sociological institutionalism, known as world polity theory, world culture theory, and the new-institutional perspective on the global system, have been used by researchers on the role of global institutions and culture in the actions of nation-states, organizations, and individuals worldwide to create a theoretical and empirical framework. Rowan and Meyer (1977) and Zucker (1977) also pointed to the role of culture and knowledge in institutional analysis.

#### **4.5 World culture theory, new- institutional perspective and policy diffusion**

The following section provides an overview of the concepts and assumptions of this approach and the elements used in this study.

##### **4.5.1 World culture theory**

In the 1970s and 1980s, world culture theory arose at Stanford University under John W. Meyer as a framework for understanding the global diffusion of schools (Meyer, 1971, 1977; with Brian Rowan (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). This theory proposes that educational diffusion came about due to the current world trends and tendencies impacting all states globally, rather than due to local or national political, economic, and social factors (Meyer et al. 1977). The concept known as world culture theory or world polity perspective belongs to the varied field of new-institutional theory. These cultural foundations are thought to be universal and to impact

organizations of various fields and locations similarly. Comparable rationalized elements can be observed increasingly in religious and governmental institutions, universities, and private businesses.

World culture theory stresses the role of globalization in national educational policies and structures formation, as a result of the diffusion process for educational models and ideas. This theory has invited researchers to explain these global changes by studying the role of global institutions and international organizations in the diffusion process of educational models. Meyer and Rowan (1977) explained, particularly from a macro perspective, the isomorphism in the organizational structure as a result of legitimacy-seeking in modern society; that is, the organization has to comply with the requirements of the external rationalized myths. Meyer and Rowan (1977) define myths as commonly agreed upon cultural ideals that prescribe acceptable behavior for individuals as well as for larger groups and institutions based on models and scripts. The world culture theory sees these myths as providing models and ideas for society and citizen, thus fulfilling an important societal function and legitimizing local society in line with global society's orientation.

According to this theory, the world society, including international organizations and models, has historically been built up to institutionalize cultural models and perpetuate a global culture (Schofer, Hironaka, Frank, & Longhofer, 2012). Moreover, one of Meyer's students, Robert Arno, promoted using world-systems analysis as an essential basis for discerning and interpreting worldwide educational trends and studying the top-down process of policy diffusion, which carries global models and discourses to the nation-state (Arno, 1980).

The education sector is considered to be a vital means for offering the tools for a nation to achieve progress and justice in legitimated and scripted patterns. In light of how strongly the world education culture has established itself, all kinds of principles, policies, and expertise are closely linked to this culture (Meyer & Ramirez, 2012). On the other hand, the policies that are well known internationally as a result of their global adoption tend to be more favorably selected by the policy decision makers (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004).

The world culture theory has been used in two different areas of research: studying and determining the globalized models and trends in education and exploring how the local

meanings for the global norms are divergent (see Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Schriewer 2011; Steiner-Khamsi 2004). The world culture offers a framework for scholarship for explaining how certain so-called “global norms” spread worldwide. Bray and Thomas (1995) also emphasize that when a study applies multi-level analysis it provides “complete and balanced understanding” of the subject of study. Along the same lines, Schriewer (2000) contends that the basic premises of world culture are both essentially valid, and that a more complete picture of education phenomena could be created by combining insights about the massive international nature of globalization with observations on micro-level conflicts and resistance.

The current study based on world culture theory explores in one aspect how the macro-structures of the supranational can shape the socio-political environment of quality assurance and accreditation policy at the national level both in the phases of adoption and implementation. It also examines how local conditions and factors exert effects at each level. As Zucker (1977) this research will apply macro-level institutionalism in studying the world society identifying the common norms and similar structures of the quality assurance and accreditation practices and on the other hand, the research by applying the micro-level institutionalism seeks to detect the different parallel reaction made by two meso- micro contexts to these global trends which led to the divers isomorphism.

In general, from a new institutionalist perspective, an institutional environment or social context is given more attention than the individual social actors in shaping actions or changes (Schofer et al, 2012). New institutionalism clarifies the contributions of the external environment in structuring social organization. The external environment does this by offering organizational patterns that include formal structures and policies, thus leading to more legitimacy for the organization in the local and global context (Powell & Bromley, 2013). It sees local environments as having indirect influence on the process of modeling their educational organizations. The new-institutional perspective stresses that the environment influences the conceptualization of an organization (rules, behavior, structures, routines, myths, and taken-for-granted assumptions), which leads to greater uniformity within educational systems worldwide (Baker & LeTendre, 2005). It also continues to influence reforms to adopt new

policies and programs and apply new procedures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

On the other hand, the culture of the particular context represented in its norms, expectations, and practices still plays a role in keeping a certain level of variation on both a micro-level and meso-level. In other words, even though Western countries such as Germany and non-Western countries such as Saudi Arabia are all able to structure their education policy and system in line with a Western model, they still maintain important aspects of their own respective culture.

#### **4.5.2 Isomorphism and legitimacy**

Isomorphism refers to the process of causing one unit to become like other units in comparable environments (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In other words, as Wiseman, Astiz & Baker (p.11, 2013) “isomorphism is a process of becoming similar in spite of conditions that would otherwise suggest diversity”

On one hand, isomorphism is seen in the parallel development of the societies, when they tend to develop in parallel ways so that they become increasingly similar in terms of their structures and processes (Kerr, 1983) On the other hand, while isomorphism includes developing common structures and practices, it does not lead to complete homogenization (Wiseman & Chase-Mayoral, 2014). And if the homogeneity occurred that will be on a limited scale “in the pieces of an educational system or school rather than in the system as a whole” (Wiseman, Astiz, Baker, P.6, 2013).

Moreover, national differences in cultural, political, and economic contexts persist, reflecting convergent diversity amid varieties of capitalism (Hall and Soskice, 2001). At the same time, researchers have noted a large degree of diversity in the mechanisms of shaping diffused policies (Campbell 1998, 2004; Dale, 1999; Johnston, 2014). Meyer and Ramirez (2012) conclude that basic educational systems are characterized by the spread of common structures and practices resulting in isomorphism. Nevertheless, the necessity to compare is the starting point for the entire formation and operation processes of macro-level phenomena (Wiseman & Chase-Mayoral, 2014).

To provide a clear understanding of policy change, it is necessary to study both the larger context of change and the various local contexts with their actors in their particular circumstances (Boyle, Songora, & Foss, 2001; Burstein, 1991). Moreover, the roles of national institutions, which have adopted these policies successfully, should be taken into account as well as their influences on policy diffusion.

From a new institutional perspective, when an organization models its structure to be in line with the views of its institutional environment, this will lend it legitimacy and increase its chances of survival (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Through the lens of new-institutionalism, the stability and survival of an organization are best secured by legitimacy. In the study of policy formation, paying attention to analyzing the struggles over legitimacy is considered to be a useful step. These legitimacy struggles affect how changes come into play and how tightly they are regulated. They also affect whether and how specific changes will have a wide-reaching impact (see Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Therefore, legitimacy struggles are decisive in settling which ideas and practices establish themselves in national policy.

One of the central concepts of new institutionalism is that environmental pressures force the organizations to behave in a way that proves their accordance (isomorphic pressures).

According to DiMaggio and Powell there are two types of isomorphism: competitive and institutional (1983, p. 149).

#### **4.5.3 Sources of isomorphism**

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) illustrated three sources of isomorphism: coercive, normative, and mimetic. Organizations become increasingly similar to each other through these three different mechanisms of the institutional isomorphism. The coercive isomorphic mechanism results from the external environmental pressures which effect the organization through the cultural expectations of its society or by a wider organization that controls and supports its structures and strategies (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). In other words, coercive pressures include political/legal influences and legitimacy-seeking. The normative isomorphic mechanism includes the pressures that stem from professionalization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). The mimetic isomorphic mechanism results from unclear goals or an uncertain



environment, as these pressures force the organizations to mimic other organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). These different pressures (coercive, mimetic and normative) are each responsible in their own way for the homogeneity within an organizational field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991).

The work of DiMaggio and Powell (1983) shifted the explanation of isomorphism from the societal level to the organizational level; mimetic isomorphism was the central focus of their work. They brought explanations of the causal force underlining the processes of diffusion and isomorphism by specifying channels through which ideas and structures flowed. A new empirical analytical approach opened up when they stressed that cultural rationalization leads to irrational organizational decisions that occur in a mimetic manner.

Together, coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures can contribute to an emergent norm regarding institutional structures and procedures and the implementation of reforms. This explains the benefits of using these perspectives in this study, which aspires to provide better understanding of the accreditation practices and their implementation in higher education institutions.

#### **4.5.4 The new ideas and the de-legitimation**

The new institutional changes that are driven by the wider environment or diffuse into the global education policy area are considered as available solutions for different problems that face the institutions. At the same time, they undermine the validity of existing models and procedures. That means that in the presence of these new ideas the current structure of the institution is seen as unstable and needs to be replaced.

Wiseman and Chase-Mayoral (2014) explain that applying new institutional theory in the comparative and international education research area indicates that new research in this field should consider both globalization and contextualization. Moreover, they conclude that these two forces represent the alleged opposition between the micro and macro levels within the framework of new institutionalism. While the latter has been accused of being restricted to analyzing the conditions behind changes and reforms in educational institutions at the macro level, in reality it serves to provide a comprehensive understanding for multi-level phenomena. Nevertheless, the ongoing criticism labeling new institutionalism as a solely macro-level theory

demands more research demonstrating its usefulness in understanding of the micro- level's influence on macro level phenomena in education (Wiseman & Chase-Mayoral, 2014).

#### **4.5.6 The global diffusion of policy and policy formation**

Policy diffusion, policy convergence, policy transfer, and policy networks are various names referring to the same concept of policy diffusion, which is the process of integrating previously known policies and procedures into institutional structures at different places and/or times (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996). This perspective suggests that, when policymakers are developing the national policy, their choices are based on a limited set of currently applicable policy ideas and procedures that are offered by countries or international agencies (Abbott, 1997; Béland, 2005; Burstein, 1991; Cloutier & Langley 2013).

In addition, with regard to policy diffusion agents, individuals are effective in their own right, though in a different manner than organizations (Page, 2000). This study is based on Page's (2000) overview of the policy transfer literature. He mentioned that analyzing the core elements of policy transfer does not demand a strong theoretical background, but can be described with everyday terminology. According to Page (2000), the basic variables in studying policy diffusion are "who, what, how, where, and why". "What?" includes which policy or procedures were transferred. "Why?" refers to the reasons behind these policy reforms. "Who?" identifies the actors who carry out the transfer. "When?" defines the timeframe, and "how?" analyzes the mechanism of this reform. The study tries to illustrate the patterns by which practices regarding academic accreditation spread to German and Saudi higher education systems. It also aims to understand the distinctive political, administrative, social, economic, or cultural conditions that sustain cross-national policy differences.

#### **4.6 The nature of the new-institutional approach in analyzing education phenomena and comparative education research (Wiseman, Astiz and Baker, 2013)**

Institutional theory has multiple aspects that contribute to our understanding of the changes that occur in the different fields such as economics, sociology, and political science (Scott, 1987; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). In light of the perspectives described above, we could say that this perspective's distinctive nature is described as the sociological version of new-

institutionalism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). It clarifies that organizations' response to their environmental pressures occurs in a formal process of symbolic stages.

The new-institutional theory can be seen as offering clear advantages for framing comparative education research. First, according to new-institutionalism, the institutionalization process does not take place primarily at the level of individuals or organizations, but on the higher level of an entire sector or society (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991,). Furthermore, irrationality is found in the education system itself "in macro-level, non-local sectors, institutions, culture and environments." At the same time, it does not take into account the different conflicting interests and outcomes in the educational environment (Schofer et al., 2012).

Wiseman, Astiz and Baker (2013) find the unique nature of the new-institutional perspectives to provide a useful foundation for approaching comparative education research. He explains that transnational space is the place where different ideologies (social, political, and economic) shape national decisions regarding policies and practices for countries throughout the world. In addition, this perspective offers a conceptual advantage for the research framework by focusing on cultural and contextual conflicts in the educational institutions rather than on aspects that are rationally-bounded.

As a second advantage, this perspective emphasizes the impact of legitimacy-seeking and shared expectations much more than it emphasizes vested interests in political tradeoffs and alliances (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). When a higher education institution includes, for example, quality management and accreditation practices in its policy reforms, it placates stakeholders' concerns by showing greater accountability, thus helping it to earn a good reputation and a better impression. The involvement with international or national organizations of accreditation practices – even if more on paper than in practice – would legitimize this higher education organization. The implementation of accreditation practices in this case might be described as "symbolically mediated change processes," and the best way to know this process well is to explore the "action-motivation reasons" behind attempts to solve problems in everyday life (Dunn, 1993, p. 259).

According to researchers who base their investigation on new institutional perspectives, forces of “convergence” create greater structural uniformity in education, politics, and economics on the national and international levels (Astiz, 1999; 2006 Jakobi, 2009; Leuze, Martens, & Rusconi, 2007; Wiseman & Baker, 2013). As institutional perspectives value developments and different phenomena over time, their analyses of educational changes stress stability, isomorphism, and homogeneity, and thus offer more complete accounts.

A third advantage is that the new- institutional perspectives are considered to provide a solid framework for empirically analyzing and explaining the globalization and legitimization of educational structure (Astiz, 2006; Ramirez & Meyer, 1981; Wiseman & Baker, 2006). In comparative education research, this theory provides new kinds of interpretations by shedding light on factors that were unknown before (Jepperson, 2002). Some examples include the uniformity of education worldwide, the isomorphic change in education, the distinctions between different schools in the same nation, and the impact of education.

The world society perspectives enable the comparative researchers to explore “the unique and surprising ways that contemporary norms and expectations about school and society are shared across otherwise culturally diverse and original communities” and to explore the different drivers behind the change at the levels of individual, organisational and institutional. It is also about recognising that power and economic transactions are not the only forces driving changes (Wiseman, Astiz & Baker, p.7, 2013)

As can be seen, the new- institutional perspective allows this study to give an explanation for the action-making process on the transnational level and for the motivations and conditions that enforce these changes in the two cases of this study and guides analysis of the adoption processes of the accreditation practices in their higher education institutions and organizations.

#### **4.7 Theoretical framework, study paradigm, and the study's questions**

This part uses the theories and perspectives that are mentioned above (world culture theory, policy diffusion, and the new-institutionalism perspective) to draw up a conceptual framework to apply to the study's questions. At first, it would be appropriate to briefly summarize these concepts again.

From a macro perspective, the world culture theory emphasizes the role of globalization in the national educational policies and structure formation as a result of the diffusion process for educational models and ideas such as quality assurance of higher education and accreditation, which leads to isomorphism in education policy and structure worldwide. Diffusion comes about through the current world trends and tendencies impacting all states globally, rather than local or national political, economic, and social factors (Meyer et al. 1977, 255).

World system analysis is an essential basis for discerning and interpreting worldwide educational trends (Arnone, 1980) and studying the top-down process of policy diffusion, which carries global models and discourses to the national state. On the other hand, countries, international organizations, and professional elites are regarded as the source of ideas and practices which are transported into national policy carried by networks of politicians, professionals, and scientists (Dobbin, Simmons, & Garrett, 2007; Fourcade-Gourinchas & Babb, 2002; Haas, 1992; Hironaka, 2014; Strang & Meyer, 1993). For studying the top-down policy diffusion process, Page (2000) determines the basic variables, as follows: "What?" includes which policies or procedures were transferred (the procedure of quality assurance and accreditation); "Why?" refers to the reasons behind these policy reforms which are about the local conditions and situations as well as the effect of the international trends and orientations; "Who?" identifies the actors who carry out the transfer; "When?" defines the timeframe; and "How?" analyzes the mechanism of this reform.

From a new institutional point of view, shifting the focus from the international level to the institutional level explains the institutions' behavior in integrating structures and policies which are predetermined by their wider environment as searching for legitimacy. The concept of isomorphism (convergence) treats the way institutions adopt innovations, such as quality

assurance and accreditation practices, as response to environmental pressures, to achieve competitiveness and legitimacy. In the work of DiMaggio and Powell (1983), an explanation of the causal force underlining the processes of diffusion and isomorphism was identified by specifying channels through which ideas and structures flowed. Coercive forces were found to stem from political or legal influences and the search for legitimacy. Mimetic forces were found to result from standard responses to uncertainty, and normative forces were found to be associated with professionalization and shared understanding of practices.

The second question of the study is the first empirical question. It asks why the quality assurance and accreditation practices were adopted in higher education institutions' reforms in both Germany and Saudi Arabia.

First of all, the source of this idea should be ascertained, followed by the way of moving this idea to the national context, which was the situation when it entered the policy making area. From the world culture theory point of view, the world culture system, which includes international agencies and models and scripts, plays a vital role in providing the national education policymakers with the idea of adopting quality assurance and accreditation in higher education. This idea is regarded as a global trend and at the same time as fulfilling an important management and educational function in the national higher education system, leading to the legitimization of the local higher education institutions in line with the global higher education orientation. This theory also indicates that this process of policy diffusion leads to isomorphism in education policy and structure worldwide, seen in Germany and Saudi Arabia.

Table 7 below provides suggested answers in line with the theoretical framework for each sub-question of study question 2, why were the quality assurance and accreditation practices adopted in higher education institution reform in both Germany and Saudi Arabia?

**Table 7. The suggested answers for the sub-questions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> research question**

<b>Sub-Questions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Study Question</b>	<b>Suggested Answers based on the Theoretical Framework</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Where did the idea come from?</li> <li>b. When and why did it enter the national policy?</li> <li>c. What drove the policy change?</li> <li>d. What were the local situations?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The world culture system (models and scripts provided by international agencies)</li> <li>- As a global trend to fulfilling local functions</li> <li>- Legitimacy seeking</li> <li>- Seeking a solution for the local problems and needs which is imposed by the global trend</li> </ul>

In light of the study's theoretical framework, we can assume the answer to the third study question: How do German and Saudi higher education institutions differ in the adoption and implementation of the quality assurance and accreditation practices? Table 8. They differ as follows: the adoption of quality assurance and accreditation system in Saudi Arabia and Germany occurred after a policy diffusion process, the ideas and practices were transported into the national policy from other countries or international organizations by networks of politicians or professionals. In addition, the theoretical framework illustrates the causal force underlining the processes of policy diffusion and isomorphism, while there are three suggested channels through which ideas and structures flow: coercive, normative, and mimetic. Hence these steps took place in different ways and through different actors in the two countries of study. Moreover, Western countries such as Germany and non-Western countries such as Saudi Arabia adopt the quality assurance and accreditation practices in line with global trends, yet they still maintain important aspects of their own respective culture represented in the norms and expectations. Hence, they have a certain level of variation on both a micro-level and meso-level in their implementation of these practices.

**Table 8. The suggested answers for the sub-questions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> research question**

Sub-Questions of the 3 <sup>rd</sup> Study Question	Suggested Answers based on the Theoretical Framework
<p>a. What were the perspectives/orientations that influenced the formation process of the national accreditation framework?</p> <p>b. How did they become new procedures ready to be used and introduced in the national policy?</p>	<p>-Political/legal pressure- professionalization pressure- mimicking other organizations</p> <p>- By formation, putting them in line with the local norms and expectations</p>

The aforementioned insights and suggestions of world culture theory, policy diffusion, and new-institutionalism provide a model linking macro-meso-micro levels, macro and the local and organizational mechanisms. The social phenomenon can be well investigated by studying its multi-level perspectives (i.e., macro: global and world system, meso: national higher education systems and the policy formation processes, and micro: universities).

Another aspect to developing and applying new institutionalism in comparative education involves the discussion about the significance and influence of both globalization and contextualization. While globalization is clearly linked with new institutionalism and its research, contextualization is equally significant and should remain in view as well (Wiseman and Chase-Mayoral, 2014).

In order to investigate the social phenomenon and provide a clear image for it, it is important to analyze it not only at one level but using a multi-level perspective. In order to obtain an integrated and balanced understanding of the research's subject (the adoption of quality assurance and accreditation system), multilevel comparative analysis is an urgent requirement (Bray and Thomas, 1995). Consequently, Bray and Thomas (1995) stress the value of multilevel comparative research. They find that, although comparative education researchers generally exhibit a solid grasp of macro-level phenomenon, they are less experienced with micro- level



researchers' tools and perspectives (Bray & Thomas, 1995). On the other hand, the micro context often ends up fulfilling a normative function, despite being seen as outside of macro-level normative isomorphism. Each of these levels depends on the other one.

This explains the selection of the vertical case study to be the overall paradigm of the current study. By principally drawing on this research paradigm, this approach means treating the research problem as a complex one with several sites by not by only focusing on local actors and relations, but by seeing it as the result of different intertwined relations and networks at the global and local levels (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2006).

#### **4.8 The study paradigm**

##### **4.8.1 Vertical case study approach (VCS) in studying education policy**

The overall paradigm of the current study draws principally on Vertical Case Study (VCS) which is a sociocultural approach suggested by Bartlett and Vavrus (2014) for studying education policy due to its effectiveness in discovering the process of policy formation and improvement and the different powers at different levels that affect this process. Moreover, they explain that the VCS approach is grounded in detecting a cross procedure or combinations of relations which spread at local, national, and global levels. It involves the idea of studying processes of education policy and procedure creation and the experience of a particular system through focusing on the effects and the relations of cultural, historical, and political contexts.] (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2006).

In defining the context, Vavrus and Bartlett (2006) do not simply construct locally situated accounts, but rather they view the local as a meeting point for complex networks and social relations with a global locus. Therefore, this approach is characterized by its treatment of three aspects in studying a phenomenon: transversal, vertical and horizontal. The vertical aspect demands focusing on three levels that model the verticality of comparing micro-, meso-, and macro-levels (see also Bray and Thomas 1995) in terms of “concomitant commitment to micro-level understanding and to macro- level analysis” (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2006, p. 96).

In addition, the study of local education policy formation and development is meaningful and valuable when it is done while taking into consideration the transversal aspect, exploring the national as well as the international conditions, analyzing the social framework,

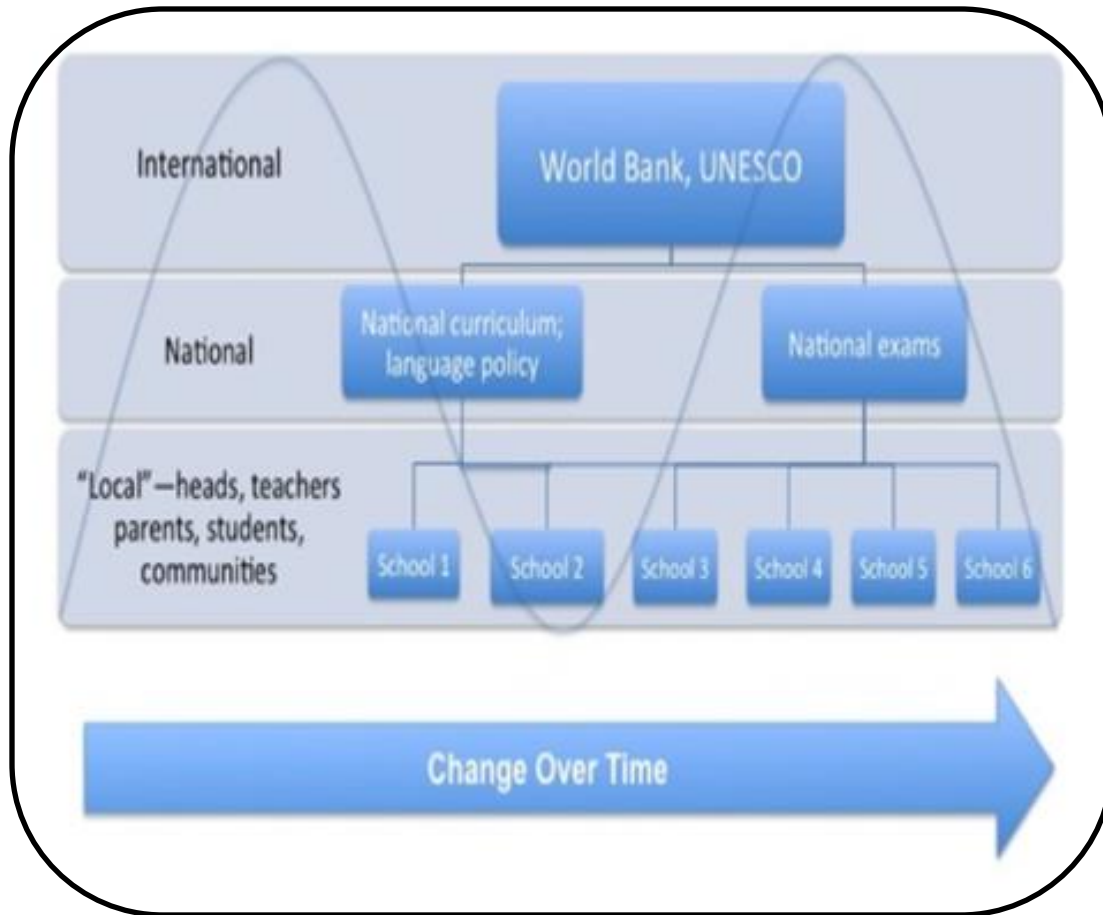
and tracing the historical changes and formation processes of the current practices across time and space. Here this includes illustrating the interaction between the different sectors of each level – economic sociocultural, and political – and their agendas that affect the formation process of the accreditation policy.

The horizontal aspect is about the local agendas and goals behind the new change which differ according to the economic, sociocultural, and political conditions (Arnove, 2005). On the other hand, this aspect underlines the importance of comparing the same policy and practices in different locations, by applying comparative case studies for analyzing the phenomenon in different contexts to examine the local meaning for the global trend and the effect of the cultural norms and local on it. Figure 3.

In accordance with this approach, the current study is going to analyze the cases of German and Saudi accreditation systems through the three aspects of the vertical case study approach. For the transversal aspect the analysis will be done by tracing the global changes (historical, social, economical) that lead to the demand and formation of these practices. This analysis involves looking at the vertical aspect, there is the overall analysis of the three levels, the local, national, and international, as well as their situation and role in shaping the new policy of accreditation in higher education. In this study the horizontal aspect will be applied by conducting a comparative step for the formation and the adoption of these practices in Germany and Saudi Arabia.

In each case study of this research, the different or varied roles which were played by different actors in the adoption and development of accreditation practices in the three camps of policy creation and development are analyzed. The global camp includes those involved in globalization and policy diffusion, such as UNESCO, the EU, and the Council of Europe. The national camp includes actors involved in the policy making process and circumstance. The university camp includes those involved at the university level. That is followed by a comparison of the creation of these two systems in the two different contexts. The comparison will be done historically to provide complete understanding of the emergence of this phenomenon.

Figure 3. Multi- Site Vertical Case Study based on Bartlett and Vavrus (2014)



Source: (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2014)

#### 4.8.2 The study's questions at the vertical case study's level

In this part, the importance of VCS aspects in relation to the study questions is determined.

- **The transversal aspect:**

Using this axis of the vertical case study of German and Saudi adoption of quality assurance and accreditation systems, the international conditions of higher education and the historical changes and transformation process that happened globally in the nature, importance, and objectives of higher education, leading to the formation of quality assurance and accreditation policy, will be illustrated. The aim is to explore the conditions that affect this process across time and space and also to provide a complete understanding of the emergence and improvement of these procedures globally. This aspect will participate in answering the second question by exploring the origin and improvement of these practices so it became global trend grant legitimacy and then how they entered the national policymaking area. A literature review will be conducted to achieve this purpose.

- **The vertical aspect:**

The second research question is RQ 2 *Why were the quality assurance and accreditation practices adopted in higher education institution reforms in both Germany and Saudi Arabia?* With reference to the theoretical framework of the study, international organizations are considered providers for models and ideals for nations in their political changes and reforms. On the other hand following these ideas and models will grant legitimacy for local organizations. This study will first examine the international level to explore its impact on the national adoption of these new practices by identifying the source of the idea of adopting a quality assurance and accreditation system as an action for legitimacy seeking in Germany and Saudi Arabia. Then the study will determine the place and timeline of the formation process of these practices at the international level and the role of the international agencies in the German and Saudi adoption of these practices.

The study will continue answering the second part of the second study question about the drivers of this policy changes and the local situation at that time by seeking for the reasons and conditions at the national level which resulted in the need for a new policy adoption. Then it will trace the diffusion process and determine through which one of the three channels

(coercive, normative, and mimetic) the ideas and structures flowed to arrive at the national context, and the main carriers and conditions coinciding with that channel in each country.

This will be followed by answering the third question of the research RQ *How do German and Saudi higher education sectors differ in their adoption and implementation of the academic accreditation practices?* By spotting the formation process of the national quality assurance and accreditation systems in both countries, the elements that affect this process (culture, norms, and needs) and how these practices were integrated into the higher education system.

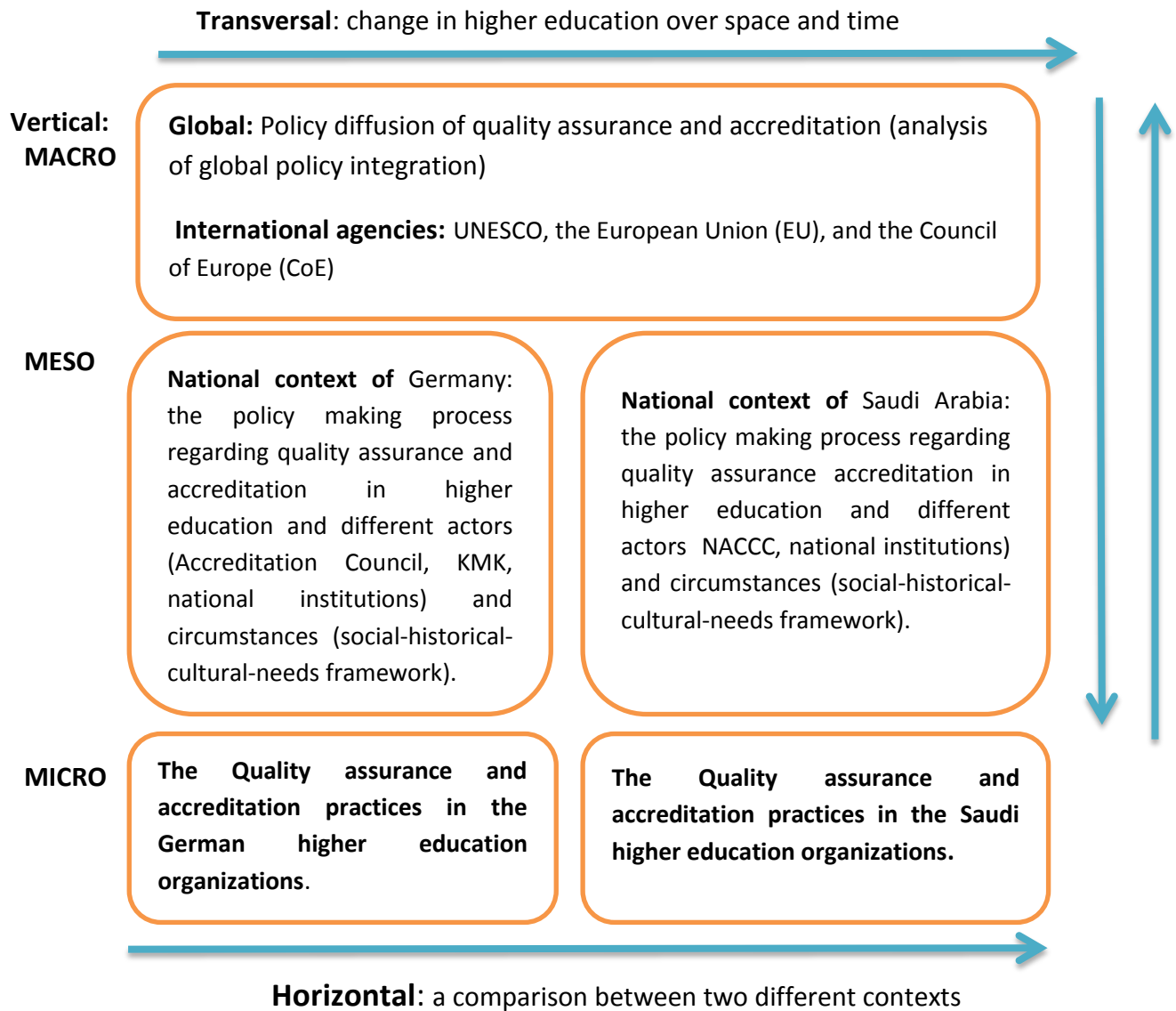
At the organizational level, this involves studying three main issues of applying quality assurance and the accreditation system in German and Saudi higher education organizations, the requirements, problems, and benefits of these practices. The research data about these issues were collected through the experts' interview only.

- **The horizontal aspect:**

With this axis, the study will conduct a comparison of these practices of quality assurance and accreditation in two different contexts of the German and Saudi higher education systems. Using comparative case studies to analyze this phenomenon, this aims to examine the local meaning for the global trend and the effect of culture, norms, and needs on it, which explains the variation.

Figure 4 provides a visual model of the research vertical case study with its different axes, levels, and relationships. The two arrows on the right side of this figure stand for the mutual relationship of the three levels. The impact of macro level educational phenomena on the micro- level and on the other hand the micro- level actions which affect educational policies on the meso and macro level.

**Figure 4. Visual model of the vertical case study**



#### 4.9 Qualitative approach

This study follows the qualitative research approach, which is a research procedure that aims to inquire and provide more understanding for a problem or a phenomenon in a social or a human context based on open-ended questions and on creating a verbal picture describing the details and information from different resources in the real environment (Creswell, 2014).

Qualitative research, according to Van Maanen (1979), is “an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world” (p. 520). Qualitative research expresses individual perspectives on different phenomena or problems by collecting data from people, records, or documents, and then interpreting the data’s entire meaning.

The qualitative approach is principally beneficial in exploring the meaning of actions based on people’s opinions, which are rooted in their own experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This study seeks to discover the academic accreditation phenomenon in higher education and to provide more understanding from people’s points of view and documents in this field. The current research aspires to explore the reason why this system is being adopted and how this idea was improved in each country of study.

This research approach is suitable for these aims for several reasons. First, the main purpose of using the qualitative approach is to explore (Stake, 1995). Moreover, its questions are centered around how or what, so it provides the researcher with a deep and clear understanding of the actual situation and details related to the issue (Patton, 1990; Seidman, 1998). Second, qualitative research methods are considered the best approach for discovering phenomena in their original environment (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) and gaining more understanding for social processes in context (Esterberg, 2002). It occurs in the real environment and detects observations in the processes in it; it is composed of explanation and practices, which makes the whole image clearer (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Third, the majority of these kinds of research approaches are interpretive research, there is no one explanation or fact behind an action or event and it is given by society, while the role of researchers is to create this fact (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Those reasons require the researcher to engage in effective participation in the study, assuming the central role (Creswell, 2005).

This study is applied to accreditation councils and agencies and higher education organizations and focuses on the experts’ experiences in this area to address the reasons behind the adoption and ways of improving these systems in the two countries of study. In this study, the researcher plays the key role in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data (Stake,

1995). The qualitative research is based mainly on this role, i.e., on the “sequence of representations connecting the parts to the whole” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.6)

In the last couple of decades, qualitative research has been on the rise, and it provides a framework for dealing with questions in the area of education (Prasade, 2005): Moreover, the “qualitative turn” in the social sciences has resulted in a plethora of non-statistical research as well as many suggestions on how different kinds of methodologies can be applied in it. This research applies a multi-method approach, which provides an in-depth understanding of the issues of study by using triangulation. Therefore, this study’s basic research paradigm model depends on various information sources and instruments. Flick (2002) contends that when a single study combines several methods, multiple sources, perspectives, and observers in its inquiry, this results in a strategy that enriches, broadens, and deepens the inquiry (p. 229). Along the same lines, Patton (1990) sees the benefits of using multiple sources of data in providing more possibilities to check and confirm the findings from different angles.

Data and information from documents and interviews were combined to generate a complete image and a clear timeline of the formation and development processes as well as the coinciding conditions, relationships, and actors. Qualitative research methods used in this study for data collection included: 1) analysis of governmental papers and resolutions, national records, and education policy declarations on quality assurance and accreditation and 2) semi-structured Interviews with experts in this field at different field sites.

#### **4.10 Study data and methodology approaches**

This study is comprised of two vertical case studies of Saudi and German accreditation systems. In order to collect the empirical study data in the vertical and horizontal axes, two different methodological approaches were used: documents analysis and expert interviews. These are described in detail below.

##### **4.10.1 Documents review**

According to Creswell (2005), documents are considered to be a valuable source of information in qualitative research. They are one of the most well-known sources that provide an effective means to help the researcher in exploring the meaning and the different aspects regarding a research phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study the origin of the idea



of quality assurance and accreditation practices in each system will be traced and the conditions and different actors of the formation processes will be analyzed at the three levels of the phenomenon. Attention was paid to selecting and reviewing documents that would provide a clear description for the vertical case study of the research process at its three levels. These documents provided information on policy formation regarding quality assurance and accreditation system at the international level, its different actors and conditions, the reasons behind their adoption, and how they were established and improved in their current form at the national level as well as the current quality assurance and accreditation systems in both countries.

The documents reviewed in this stage consist of international declarations, governmental resolutions, and national agency guides and handbooks relating to the topic of quality assurance and accreditation. This research includes three levels of documents analysis: international, national, and organizational. In general, for each document, an explanation for its context, background on motivations or conditions impacting its formation, and whether it was in response to another meeting's document or report on a specific issue are provided.

For the international level, with reference to the theoretical framework of the study, this stage of document analysis identifies which international organizations have a direct effect on the adoption of quality assurance and accreditation practices in Saudi and German higher education institutions. Then their main documents containing recommendations and models for nations in this concern are analyzed to identify the actors and main conditions of this policy formation of these practices. The source of the documents of this stage are UNESCO, the OECD, CHEA, The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education INQAAHE, the EU, the European Council of Ministers, ENQA, and the Arab Conference of Higher Education Ministers.

At the national level, considering the research theoretical framework, in this stage of documents analysis includes selection of national documents in which quality assurance and accreditation ideas in the policy making area first appear as well as selection of the first national resolutions and documents for the adoption of quality assurance and accreditation practices. Finally, national agencies' documents and handbooks for the current procedures are

analyzed. At this level, documents from the Saudi Ministry of Education, National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA), Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (*Kultusministerkonferenz*) (KMK), German Rectors' Conference (*Hochschulrektorenkonferenz*) (HRK), and Accreditation Council (*Akkreditierungsrat*) are used as sources.

For the organizational level, the research examines the internal quality assurance and accreditation system of Tuebingen University as the organizational unit to explore how these practices were implemented at this level. Reports and documents from Tuebingen University are reviewed to accomplish this.

In the German context, there is no single source for the documents that meet the needs of this study's questions with regard to education policy formation. The German documents include government declarations and government announcements of actions. In the Saudi context, national development plans and national record for higher education are chosen.

#### **4.10.2 Interviews**

Qualitative research interviews aim to provide more understanding of the different matters of daily life from the concerned persons' points of view and experiences. In the case of this study, they also aim to explore different aspects of the accreditation adoption process from experts who have been personally involved in it. This was done by asking semi-structured questions on certain topics in line with the interview guide, which contains some prepared questions. The conversation was recorded transcribed, and then subjected to interpretation and analysis (Kvale, 1996).

Interviewing expert people in key positions at the NCAAA, the German Accreditation Council and at accreditation agencies and universities' quality assurance deans in some Saudi and German universities represents the second methodology approach in this research. This step attempts to gain more clarification of documents or add additional information which was not included in the documents. By using the interviews, each interviewee's opinion on the origin of accreditation in the system is explored, including his point of view on the reasons of its adoption and conditions that affected it.

Based on each interviewee's own experience, ways this system was improved are identified. Understanding the timeline and development of events from the actors' points of view was a focus. As well as, the organizational level of adoption: the requirements, problems and benefits will be investigated through the interviews. To complement the documents' data, interviews were conducted with key members in the policymaking process. Six Saudi experts from the national level (NCAAA) and from the organizational level of universities, selected due to their long experience playing an important role in the formation process of the accreditation system in the Saudi higher education sector, were interviewed. Three German experts were interviewed. They were selected from three different levels: the national level represented by a member with one of the longest experiences in the German Accreditation Council, the agencies level represented by an expert from Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute –AQUIN, and the organizational level represented by the head of the Center of Quality Assurance at Tuebingen University.

Analysis of the interviews was integral to provide a complete image about the policy formation. First, they permitted questions about daily life and their own personal experiences, lacking in the documents. Second, they candidly offered their own opinions and points of view in a way that official documents did not. Third, and of particular importance, the interviews illustrated the controversies at play in the process of policy formation.

#### **4.10.2.1 The use of interviews**

Using the interview method to obtain information is a feature of the current era, and its societies are described as interview society (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2013), an interview is an interaction of negotiation. Therefore, an interview concentrates on working to create an image of order in daily life.

The aim of using the interview method in this study is to collect information and enquiry and explain information from literature about the adoption processes of accreditation (e.g., the reasons and conditions of this adoption and how it was improved in each country) from experts who were involved at least in part of these reforms and adoptions. This allows meanings to be checked and topics to be investigated more deeply. In addition, people in key positions are the best resources for the information sought in this research. Any other method, such as a written

survey administered widely, would not obtain the desired information in the same way as the interview method. Moreover, interviews include two-way communication and provide the possibility to ask supplementary questions to clarify or inquire about some interviewees' statements or answers (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

One of the most important advantages of the interview method is the rate and quality of participants' responses (Oppenheim, 1992). The experts' participation in a verbal way in this method as compared to the other methods such as a standard survey questionnaire plays a big role in their response. Interview provides access to more information about the subject of the study and enables handling more difficult and open-ended questions.

#### **4.10.2.2 Interview process in Saudi Arabia**

This process took place in Riyadh during the time between August and December 2015. At the beginning, the Assistant Secretary General for Quality & Accreditation of NCAAA was contacted and told about the research and my desire to interview experts in the area of the Saudi accreditation system in different positions and levels. Then he provided a list of suggested names and contact data. From this list, four experts within NQAAA in the group with the longest experience in this system were selected. In addition, four quality assurance deans in different universities were chosen and contacted. It was only possible to interview two of them.

#### **4.10.2.3 Interview process in Germany**

The process of interviewing German experts went differently than in Saudi Arabia. The interviews took place in Tuebingen, Bonn, and Bayreuth.

All of the interviews were conducted face to face in each interviewee's office in Riyadh, Tübingen, Bonn and Bayreuth. The interviews were taped, and some notes were taken during the interviews and later.

This chapter has established the theory and methods in relation to the study questions. These questions will be answered in the next chapter, in which the empirical study is applied in line with the previously discussed theory and using the methods laid out in this chapter.

## Chapter 5

### The empirical studies

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter, the fifth one in this thesis, constitutes the empirical studies. It contains two parts, each divided into two sections. The first part focuses on the vertical case study of the accreditation system of higher education in Germany and Saudi Arabia by using literature and documents review. The second part represents the review and analyses of interviews with German and Saudi experts in regard to the adoption of the accreditation system in their higher education institutions.

#### 5.2 The vertical case study of accreditation systems in German and Saudi higher education: Literature and documents review

As mentioned in Chapter 2, this research aims at analyzing accreditation systems in German and Saudi higher education systems. This is carried out by applying the vertical case study (VCS) approach which is considered an effective approach in discovering the process of policy formation and improvement and illustrating the different powers at different levels that affect this process. The VCS approach is grounded in detecting cross procedures or combinations of relations which spread at the local, national, and global levels. In particular, this research traces the formation processes of the policy of accreditation in German and Saudi higher education at three levels: the global, the national, and the organizational levels. It focuses, thereby, on the effects and the relations of cultural, historical, and political contexts on these formation processes.

At the global level, this research will analyze the policy diffusion and the global policy integration of quality assurance and accreditation in the context of German and Saudi higher education systems. This analysis involves consideration of the role of international agencies in this policy diffusion and integration such as: UNESCO, the European Union (EU), and the Council of Europe (COE). In addition, the policy making process regarding quality assurance and accreditation at the national level of German and Saudi higher education institutions and the

different actors and circumstances (social- historical- economic) that affect these processes are analyzed in this research. The last part of the vertical case study is the organizational level which includes analyzing universities' adoption processes and experiences of quality assurance and accreditation in Germany and Saudi Arabia.

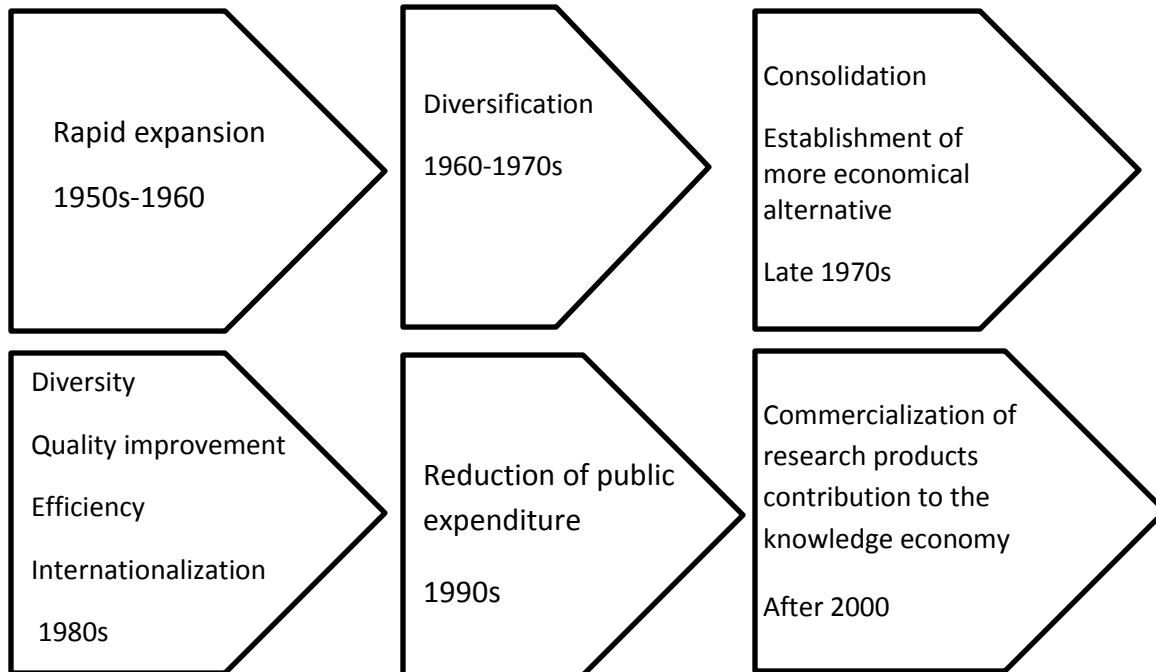
The horizontal axis of the VCS approach has the notion of comparing the similar policies which have resulted from social processes in different places (Massey, 2005) and these policies associate with each other at the same time in a complicated way (Tsing, 2005).

### **5.3 The transversal axis of this vertical case study: The recent international changes in the nature and structures of higher education:**

With the transversal aspect of the VCS approach, the study focuses on exploring the temporal sequences and conditions in different places of creating educational practices and policies in regard to quality assurance and accreditation in higher education area. Moreover, this axis stresses studying the globalizing processes at the different levels and how people and policies relate to each other within these processes (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2014).

The current ongoing social, economic, and scientific changes worldwide put higher education institutions under heavy stress and pressure. The qualitative transformation in our view of universities and knowledge was one of the most important movements at the end of the last century. The immense transformation in the twenty-first century that has affected universities includes growth in knowledge about society and the economy, changes in technological advances, communication and travel, the spread of information technologies, globalization and privatization of higher education (Ginkel, 2003). These developments not only impact the nature and aims of higher education, but also how knowledge, systems, practices, and ideas are transferred and transmitted. Moreover, globalization's role in these changes is varied in the transformational process in higher education systems worldwide. These previously mentioned changes occurred in different stages between the 1950s and the twenty-first century. Figure 5 illustrates these changes in each.

**Figure 5. Changes in higher education (1950s-post 2000)**



Source: Bernhard, 2009 as cited in Bernhard, 2012.

The discussion continues with an examination of major changes in higher education worldwide that resulted in a demand for introducing a new management and governance procedure by policy exchange or borrowing or even inspiration. It focuses on the trends of (1) globalization and internationalization, (2) diversification, and (3) widening access to higher education (massification), which led to (4) privatization.

### **5.3.1 Globalization and internationalization**

Globalization and internationalization is a change influencing all sectors in modern societies, as even national economies and cultures become globalized. All life activities have become increasingly organized and regulated around complicated and overlapping ideas and views. Moreover, globalization and the new information technology are both leading to a revolution in the nature of work and the production of services and goods, relations among nations, and even local culture.

Globalization led to the removal of barriers or borders between nations; hence, there are no limits for competition, investment, production, and innovation. On the international level, there is a linking and expansion of human activities across regions and continents, not just within a single nation or regional context. This globalization process is affecting higher education institutions too (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2012). These institutions are characterized by their vital role in creating and developing global knowledge and science. Higher education institutions are responsible for creating and restructuring the global context and removing barriers and formatting a common framework for their activities and enhancing the cooperation between them (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

Globalization and internationalization in higher education are two different concepts. Globalization promotes competition and the conception of higher education as something tradeable rather than as a public good, whereas internationalization is rooted in the values of quality and excellence as well as the long-standing tradition of international cooperation and mobility (Vught, Wende & Westerheijden, 2002). Internationalization is this process of reorientation. The internationalization of higher education is one of the ways in which a country responds to the demands of globalization. Thus, the relation between globalization and internationalization is the cause and the effect in response (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2012). The globalization process in higher education includes two main trends:

- The first trend concern trends in cross border activities and operations such as student and staff mobility, cooperative research activities, and teaching and learning foreign languages.
- The second trend involves obtaining global functions and content of local higher education institutions. (Wende, 1997)

The globalization and institutionalization processes affect higher education institutions by shedding light on some changes such as improvements for old devices and adoption of new procedures which should be maintained to help the higher education institutions to integrate at the international level and participate in solving their common problems (McBurnie as cited in Uvali'c-Trumbi'c, 2002).



### **5.3.2 Widening access to higher education (Massification)**

From the late twentieth century until now, the quantitative change of adults' education has been considered as one of the most distinctive characteristics of this era. After World War II, higher education was no longer confined to a particular group in societies. The increasing number of people in this student age group across all countries and its consequence, the expansion of organizations providing their education, is a common change observed all over the world. The expansion of the higher education sector occurred first in United States in the 1920s, followed by European countries in the 1960s, some Asian countries in the 1970s, and most recently developing countries which have had the most excessive expansion (Scott, 1998). In the twentieth century, worldwide there were about 500,000 students in higher education institutions, whereas in 2000 there were around 100 million students, representing about 20% of the relevant age cohort (Schofer & Meyer, 2005). Since that time the ongoing expansion process has increased the students' number to about 53%, meaning that more than 150 million students are enrolled globally in higher education organizations (Bernhard, 2012).

Three different classifications of higher education systems in regard to students' enrollment number are mentioned by (Trow, 1974). First, student enrollment around 5% of the age group represents the elite higher education system where the students are homogeneous and have very high academic standards and the role of universities is to prepare students for high positions in the society. Second, student enrollment increased to reach 15% to 20% leads to establishment of new higher education organizations with different structures, governance, standards, groups of students, and quality (Trow, 1974). Third, student enrollment at more than 50% of the age group results in great changes in this sector regarding structures and mentalities corresponding to mass access to new information technologies (Trow, 1974).

These changes and growth represent a global phenomenon, resulting in knowledge and learners changing and becoming diverse (Bernhard, 2012). This has led to an enormous demand on higher education organizations, and hence has caused problems regarding the expansion of the higher education sector, its governance, and its structures. The global phenomenon of widening access of higher education put countries under an ongoing pressure and a great challenge to meet this need. This has resulted in different reforms in higher education sectors'

structures, objectives, and policies, including the introduction of tuition fees. As a result of these difficulties, there was an establishment of agencies aimed at ensuring the efficiency of higher education institutions to meet national needs and objectives and to divide up resources and specific responsibilities (Altbach, 1999). Yet, the pressures of massification and its attendant problems mean that academics now have increasingly demanding roles to improve student learning, particularly in systems ravaged by a paucity of resources.

### **5.3.3 Diversification in higher education**

The growth of higher education was a most effective solution for the problem of increasing student numbers; this growth is seen as a cause of increased diversity in general within this sector (Clark, 1983; Trow, 1974). This idea of “expansion and diversification” means that having more higher education institutions accepting greater numbers of students leads to greater variety in the student population regarding motivations, talents, needs, and career goals. This new diversity was addressed by introducing new kinds of institutions of higher education.

Different kinds of diversity have appeared over the last few decades, with special focus being put upon a small number of formal aspects of diversity: (a) types of institutions and programs (e.g., universities versus universities of applied science (*Fachhochschulen*)) and (b) levels of programs and degrees (e.g., bachelor, master, and doctoral programs). Other kinds of diversity regarding informal aspects have arisen. These include both vertical aspects of informal diversity (i.e., quality, excellence) and horizontal ones (i.e., profile of an organization). Debates about formal and informal diversity generally include institutions of higher education as formative centers of diversity.

The history of diversity issues in the European higher education area and the debates and developments on this has gone through three different phases, as described by Teichler (2007):

1. 1960s-1970s: The diversity in this period centered on the idea of higher education organizations’ types and programs. The 1960s marked the beginning of diversification as a main aspect of higher education in the European context. For example, in the United Kingdom polytechnics were established, as were

universities of applied science (*Fachhochschulen*) in Germany and university institutes of technology (*Institutes universitaires de technologie*) in France. These models at first gave the impression that institutional diversification was a central feature of higher education in Europe and that such multi-type structures would be established around the world (Teichler,2004).

2. Late 1970s – mid 1990s: Vertical diversity in one higher education sector was the major idea at that time.
3. Mid 1990s – today: Diversity in higher education institutions is perceived as being embedded supra-nationally, globally and Europe-wide, and changes to the regulatory system are attributed a prominent influence.

There were major variations in views about the targeted ideal of diversity in terms of how heterogeneous diversity should be, whether it should be organized intra-institutionally, how sharply differences and categories should be delineated, how formal or informal diversification elements might best promote diversity, and whether vertical or horizontal diversity can be observed. Moreover, central policy concerns shifted focus from education and economic growth to equal opportunity and graduate employment issues (Teichler, 2004).

#### **5.3.4 Privatization**

The phenomenon of privatization in higher education is tightly linked to the trend towards marketization in all sectors of today's society, and the term *private university* is often mentioned. As mentioned above, the phenomenon of privatization has been associated with the increasing students' numbers and the demand of more and diverse higher education organizations. The current situation imposes privatization for higher education; in particular, state mass higher education organizations cannot face the enormity of students' access to the universities (Peachar & Trowler, 2001). One third of the student population globally is enrolled in private higher education organizations (Bernhard, 2012). Over the last 20 years, the privatization of higher education has started to be established in almost all countries around the globe (Levy, 2008).

Private higher education organizations have a long-established tradition in the United States as well as in Latin America, Asia, and Western Europe, but in central and eastern Europe

they did not take hold until after the fall of the communist regimes at the end of the twentieth century (Duzcmal, 2006). Now the process of privatizing higher education is progressing very rapidly.

Privatization in its simple meaning refers to the shift from public funding of higher education and its activities to private payment responsibility. Privatization features increases in private funding and in centralization in the decision-making process, as well as decreases in faculty autonomy and standardized academic norms. Aspects of privatization include the development and expansion of private institutions, increased reliance of public institutions on private funding, and the operation of the institutions in a businesslike manner (Johnstone, 2004).

Higher education sectors are classified regarding their public-private systems as follows: (a) large public higher education institutions with only limited private aspects (b) higher education institutions with both private and public organizations represented equally, (c) higher education institutions with mass private organizations and only limited public ones (Geiger, 1986).

Privatization processes in higher education affect traditional higher education institutions by putting them under greater pressure to be run more efficiently and take into account stakeholders' goals, interests, and marketing opportunities. This process could negatively affect the traditional culture of higher education institutions by replacing older practices with business management procedures. The fact that the market drives efforts to increase diversity, control payroll, and revenue and passes costs on to consumers is exemplified in contracting out services and restructuring workforces. To achieve the quality and uniformity between private and public organizations within a national higher education sector, uniform standards for curriculum, teaching, research, and organization of the study process should be applied. Moreover, to carry out this mission of ensuring the uniform quality of higher education, the state has to introduce procedures for licensing and accreditation.

The current status of today's society is described as a knowledge-based one where the development of most nations' economies is based on knowledge and innovation progress. This imposes the need for well skilled people and knowledge production at each national level and

creates competition between nations. Hence, the role of higher education institutions is either to prepare this work force or to produce the knowledge and research. As a result, countries face a great challenge and problems, leading to needs for political and structural changes. Each country responds to its local situation by providing selected solutions and changes. There is an undeniable fact that there is an effect of dominant trends and perception in each nation's political changes or reforms. All the previously discussed ongoing changes and developments (massification, diversification, privatization, and internationalization) in higher education emphasize the globally increasing concern about quality assurance procedures for accountability and improvement, hence the need for the founding of national agencies to carry out these tasks.

Moreover, another motivating force behind integrating or improving quality assurance procedures in a higher education policy is media and press. The issue of university rankings in the press and the information about higher education organizations and researchers make these magazines a focus of attention and best-sellers (Stephenson & Yorke, 1998). On the other hand, the internationally issued reports and magazines from international organizations such as OECD's annual *Education at a Glance*, and the EU's recent "Open Co-ordination Mechanism" lead to more competition among countries with regard to quality standards and accreditation (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007).

#### **5.4 The vertical axis of this case study: international-national-organizational levels: The issue of quality assurance and accreditation at the international level**

The vertical axis in the vertical case study approach, as defined by Paulston and LeRoy (1982), is about the birthplace of the new policy at the top or the bottom, whether it is at the international level, national context, or as a result of local tendencies.

As discussed in chapter 3, after its great success in the industrial sector, quality assurance was first applied to the higher education sector in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s. In the late nineteenth century, the accreditation system was developed in the United States, and several patterns of quality assurance mechanisms appeared at that time, such as the external examiner system in the UK. The worldwide formation process of quality assurance and accreditation practices involves a large degree of copying models and policy transfer

processes. Because of its long history in this area, the American model of accreditation has been mimicked by many higher education institutions to establish their national accreditation systems in European countries and some Arab countries. In the 1990s, there was a significant global borrowing trend for policy and practices in regard to evaluation and accreditation procedures (Robertson & Waltman, 1992), and the role model in most borrowing cases was the American accreditation system. It could be said the European Higher Education Area uses the American quality assurance system as an example and guide in the formation of these practices in this area. On the other hand, the distinctive feature of the system, which is its voluntary and independent nature, has been changed in the borrowing countries, to become either governmental policy or a procedure carried out by an independent national apparatus or agency. In addition, the copied practices are subject to several changes in the adoption process to be more suitable and effective in its new context. As a policy, the borrowing practices should be in a form to suit the standing local policies and framework of higher education sector (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007).

#### **5.4.1 UNESCO role in the international agenda of quality assurance and accreditation**

UNESCO is regarded as a United Nations organization which has a direct role in higher education. About 194 countries are influenced directly by UNESCO in their ministries and agencies. That gives UNESCO a vital place to reach its mission in reforming and improving higher education sectors.

At the international level the quality of higher education has been of interest to organizations such as UNESCO which has a long history in this regard. In order to prepare for the twenty-first century, a great amount of work has been done by UNESCO to meet the higher education demands of this new century. Towards this end, UNESCO convened the World Conference on Higher Education (UNESCO, Paris, 5-9 October 1998), which came after a preparation phase including a series of five regional conferences around the world between November 1996 through March 1998, in order to find out and discuss the higher education situation. The European conference took place in Palermo, Italy, 25-27 September 1997 and was co-hosted with the Association of European Universities. The last one for Arab States was held in Beirut, Lebanon, in the period between 2-6 March 1998.

The World Conference on Higher Education stressed the necessity of renewing and re-starting higher education, both at institutional and organizational levels. It concluded with two important documents – the *World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century: Vision and Action* and the *Framework for Priority Action for Change and Development of Higher Education*. These outlined the higher education political changes and reforms as well as the principles and basic concepts behind them. They were also inspired by similar documents that had already been used at the regional level, which demonstrates the important role that regional documents play in shaping international policy.

The *Declaration* started with stressing the vital role played by higher education institutions to meet the demands of the new century. These were valued as the most important device in developing individuals, societies, and countries as well as in creating an economical and sociocultural future, reducing the gap between countries and opening up new horizons for cooperation among nations. Then the *Declaration* moved to emphasize the obstacles and challenges that face higher education institutions, such as financial resources, higher learning opportunities, staff and training improvement, and challenges regarding technology and knowledge. Among these challenges the *Declaration* mentions maintaining quality in teaching, research, and services, ensuring the convenience of study programs, and creating areas of cooperation at the international level. For these reasons, the *Declaration* called for “the most radical change and renewal it has ever been required to undertake” (p.1). Along these lines, the text of this *Declaration* contains in 17 articles an explanation for the mission and functions of higher education in this century, its new vision, and a plan to move from vision to action. In article 11, this *Declaration* referred to a qualitative evaluation in higher education as an action that should be undertaken within the national higher education reform. It provided an elaboration on the meaning of this policy and different related aspects and then a basic definition for its procedures.

This document provided a clarification of the nature of the policy of quality in higher education sector and how it was to be applied on the ground. It stated that all components and activities of this sector must be subject to the quality assurance process. Thus, the state had to establish a national device to carry out this process and set internationally recognized

standards for the teaching process, academic programs, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, facilities, equipment, services to the community, and the academic environment. The mechanism of conducting this process was directed to feature internal self-evaluation as well as transparent external review by independent specialists, ideally with international expertise. This document continued to affirm the importance of maintaining local, national, and regional diversity by retaining the characteristics of each national higher education system and activating its role in international cooperation.

This *Declaration* affected the national reform of higher education in all countries worldwide. It provided a road map for national transformation processes that should be undertaken to develop and modernize higher education for the new century. In the Saudi case, through their participation in the UNESCO World Conference and their signing of the *Declaration*, the idea of adopting accreditation procedures entered the national policy making area. Since this conference, the issue of accreditation and quality assurance has been the focus of several UNESCO initiatives. These include: 1) the establishment of the UNESCO Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and Recognition of Qualifications, 2) the development of UNESCO/OECD guidelines on “Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education,” and 3) the revision of regional conventions on recognition of qualifications.

#### **5.4.1.1 The Global Forum series on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications**

The establishment of this forum is considered part of the UNESCO’s preparation of countries for facing and solving the challenges and problems that have appeared in this century of globalization, taking into account countries’ capacities to comply with the requirements for adopting accreditation and quality assurance procedures. This was done as a result of the increasing international requests that UNESCO take a more active role in the area of higher education quality, which seemed to be in high demand after the different transformation processes that emerged globally.

UNESCO held the first global forum, “Globalization and Higher Education,” in Paris, 17-18 October 2002. Its objective was to propose an action plan to the Director-General of UNESCO in the period 2004-2005 for implementation. The central points of this forum were to



foster the regional agreements for facing the new challenge and form national and regional bases of quality assurance and accreditation practices and frameworks that could lead to evaluating and developing higher education institutions. This forum stressed the need for building capacity at the national and regional levels for quality assurance and accreditation practices according to an international framework, done gradually and parallel to transparency and information activities/projects in progress.

The following organizations were partners in the UNESCO First Global Forum: CHEA, INQAAHE, International Association of University Presidents (IAUP), OECD and the UNESCO Secretariat (Headquarters and Field). UNESCO aimed at the formation of international guidelines for developing nation's higher education policies. The efforts of the UNESCO/OECD in the preparation of guidelines for quality in higher education are regarded as a critical step in the journey of developing higher education systems worldwide.

Two years later, on 28-29 June 2004, the Second UNESCO Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education was held in Paris. It was a meeting of experts from different kinds of higher education institutions and stakeholders, with 240 participants from over 80 UNESCO member states representing ministries of education and institutions of higher education from all UNESCO regions. In addition, the presidents from five of the six regional committees in charge of application of the UNESCO conventions on the recognition of qualifications in higher education in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, the Arab States, the Mediterranean, the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention for the Europe Region, and North America (the Lisbon Recognition Convention) also attended. Moreover, international organizations including the Council of Europe, the European Commission, the OECD, the United Nations University and the World Bank participated in the forum. In addition, NGOs and student representatives took part.

The Second Forum aimed to create an area of discussion about issues of international quality assurance, accreditation, the recognition of qualifications, and connections with current frameworks at that time. As one of its main objectives, this forum sought to format a plan to improve the capacity and partnership in this area. The regional developments that were undertaken after the first forum were subject to revision and discussion in order to draw a

framework for building the capacity of quality assurance and accreditation in other regions and nations and to be included in the UNESCO/OECD guidelines on quality in cross-border provisions of higher education. This was intended in the end to become a global agreed-upon framework for the implementation of quality assurance.

The Second Global Forum touched on the need of regional assessment studies for improving processes of quality between June and December 2004 for all regions. The results of these studies were to be used by UNESCO as a foundation for guideline formation processes in building the capacity in quality assurance and accreditation. This represented a part of UNESCO's mission in aiding higher education systems in developing their policies.

This was followed by the third part of the global forum series on international quality assurance, accreditation and the recognition of qualifications in higher education which was organized in Africa on 13-14 September 2007. Its main focus was "Learners and New Higher Education Spaces: Challenges for Quality Assurance and the Recognition of Qualifications." While it aimed at addressing the needs and developments in sub-Saharan Africa, at the same time it kept its mission to provide a platform for a global policy debate and discussion on international quality assurance, accreditation, and the recognition of qualifications in higher education. The objectives of this global forum were centered on: 1) revising UNESCO's activities in the period 2002 through 2007 in regard to the issue of international quality assurance, accreditation, and the recognition of qualifications; 2) addressing the challenges facing quality assurance and accreditation in regard to learners' needs and perspectives; 3) identifying the challenges resulting from globalization and knowledge societies; and 4) planning for the next UNESCO action.

#### **5.4.1.2 UNESCO and the OECD**

The OECD is a key institution in illuminating reforms in higher education as well as in offering guidance for them. It plays a special role in research, facilitating debates, and offering standards and advice in response to member states' needs, but it cannot make legal pronouncements.

Many changes resulted in higher education concerning its providers (privatization) and models as well as the increased mobility of staff and students, which prompted concerns about

quality, standards, and recognition. UNESCO and OECD cooperated in developing the *Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education* in (2005). It is an international framework that aims at informing students and other stakeholders about low quality providers and continuing to improve the quality of cross-border higher education. These *Guidelines* explain strategies for cooperation between policy makers, higher education organizations, student bodies, quality assurance and accreditation bodies, and other stakeholders. Central emphasis is put on mutual responsibility and respect for higher education system diversity.

#### **5.4.1.3 UNESCO and the World Bank**

A Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity (GIQAC) was launched in 2007 as a joint initiative by the World Bank and UNESCO. GIQAC aims to improve the capacity for quality assurance in higher education in developing and transition countries. GIQAC supports emerging and existing quality assurance systems and provides the framework to the global and regional higher education community in their efforts to foster a culture of quality by encouraging the cooperation and mutual understanding across global and regional agencies and exchanging experiences and good practices regarding quality assurance practices. The UNESCO Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications and the UNESCO/OECD *Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education* formed the basis for this initiative.

A number of regional and inter-regional quality assurances agencies are responsible for the implementation of this initiative and take part in its activities. The implementing networks are: International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE) on behalf of the Arab States region, and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) on behalf of the Balkans and Central Asia. GIQAC encourages the following actions:

1. Establishment of bodies providing information on quality assurance practices in different languages, including the publication, storage, and spread of updated information at the international level;
2. Improvement of other internet-based quality assurance tools for sharing information and increasing capacity;

3. Calls for global cooperation in discussion groups for central issues regarding quality assurance;
4. Offers of regional seminars for increasing quality assurance capacity;
5. Dialogue about quality assurance policies for countries that do not have these practices;
6. Preparation of practitioners in the quality assurance field by holding seminars for external reviewers and encouraging exchange between international experts.

This initiative has succeeded in enhancing quality assurance bodies and equipping experts to promote quality assurance in their home countries. It has led to global cooperation and understanding (*Concepción Pijano, President, APQN Unesco in Uvalić-Trumbić, 2011*).

#### **5.4.2 International agencies for quality assurance and accreditation**

At the international level there is no international comprehensive list or database of the quality assurance and accreditation agencies. Some efforts were made to achieve this purpose, such as the founding of the Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and INQAAHE.

CHEA is a United States association of 3,000 higher education institutions and 60 accreditation organizations, which makes it the largest organization in the United States in terms of membership. It promotes internal quality systems as a self-regulation through accreditation. Its governing board of 20 members includes college and university presidents, institutional representatives, and public members. The group could be considered as a body providing “international databases” of quality assurance and accreditation agencies and systems. It plays a big role in the international debate on accreditation and quality assurance through its International Quality Group.

The INQAAHE, on the other hand, is a world-wide association considered to be the most influential with its worldwide membership of nearly 300 quality assurance organizations. INQAAHE provides a lot of activities and services for its members, such as conferences, forums, projects, funding, a journal, and database. Moreover, INQAAHE has put together a project for gathering information in a database about its members’ quality assurance activities, methods, and standards around the world. This database is available on the association’s webpage

(<http://www.inqaahe.org/>) and provides comprehensive information about different national quality assurance systems.

A third international network that plays a major role in providing mutual understanding and improvement of quality processes and standards is the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). ENQA's role and activities are discussed further in the coming pages.

### **5.5 The issue of quality assurance and accreditation at the European level**

Starting as early as the thirteenth century, two different kinds of quality assessment approaches were being applied (Rosa & Amaral, 2007). The extrinsic, accountability approach in France placed control into the hands of an external authority, whereas the intrinsic, self-governing approach in England assessed quality by peer review. While the latter, intrinsic model has prevailed in academia for centuries, the extrinsic approach only experienced a brief revival in the 1980s (Liaison Committee of Rectors Conferences, 1993). The current demand for "quality" in higher education appeared in Western Europe in the mid-1980s. In large European universities, the quality of teaching and research has been a component of daily action, and it has been maintained without an outline of standards and procedures for an official quality assurance system with reputation always based on recommendations from individuals, institutes, and other universities (Kovač et al., 2009).

In 1989, the quality assessment approaches in the western European countries were controlled and applied by state bureaucracy. On the other hand, the essential meaning of accreditation is not a new trend in the European universities, but it is an old tradition that goes back to 1347, to the establishment of the University of Prague. Since that time, the opening of universities and the introduction of new programs has needed to be approved by the highest authority of that time (the Pope or the Emperor), while now governmental approval is required for both governmental or private higher education institutions (Erichsen, 2000).

In Central and Eastern European countries, the political transformation after 1989 also led to accreditation efforts (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007). The change in the higher education system from elite to a mass system and the increasing number of students and diversity resulted in an urgent need for a new management tool to achieve quality and

accountability in higher education institutions. The shift to United States-inspired accreditation after 1989 was an important turning point in the reforming process of quality assurance policy in higher education institutions at that time. In the Central and Eastern European countries, the re-orientation of the higher education system from the privileged few to the masses was the turning point for the concern about quality. This was influenced by events outside the region and supported by supranational bodies (World Bank, OECD, and European Union) and foreign advisors (Brennan, 2005). The changes in approaching quality in higher education at that time were thus closely connected with a larger transformation of higher education in general and its new role in society (Brennan & Shah, 2001).

Developments with a direct impact on the environment of the higher education institutions were marked by the dramatic development of new technologies, the diversity of knowledge, the establishment of new universities, the introduction of new study programs, and the privatization in the higher education sector. These changes led to a need for a reform in the nature of the administrative system in the university to fulfill its new roles in the world of knowledge and in society. In the modern university, the establishment of the quality assurance system was fundamental for the new management processes (Kovač et al., 2009).

In the early 1990s the number of European countries which had introduced quality assurance system activities at a supra-institutional level was still low, representing less than half of the EU members, while all countries except Greece had started some form of assessment at the supra-institutional level by 2003. This means that the development of the quality assurance system in Europe can be described as a fast process (Schwarz & Westerheijdem, 2007). Moreover, the culture of higher education institutions determined the instruments and procedures of the quality assurance system in each respective countries. In general, however, the European quality assurance system has main elements in common, including internal self-evaluation, on-site visits, peer review, and reports publishing (Thune, 2002).

In 1991 the European Council of Ministers decided to carry out European pilot projects in the quality assurance area. The first step was to apply a survey about quality assurance procedures in the countries with quality assurance systems. The results showed that these kinds of procedures for external quality assurance were introduced only in small numbers in

member countries. This result stressed the need for more pilot projects in quality assurance to evaluate teaching and learning processes in some disciplines. This was done by using a standardized process for evaluation. The main objectives of these pilot projects were to increase the international attention paid to evaluation in European higher education, improve the evaluation procedures at the national level, exchange different experiences in this area, and pass on a European dimension to evaluation.

The project included several elements in its approach which were used in the countries that had quality assurance systems at the time of conducting the project. These elements included independent quality evaluation processes and methods with self-governing systems, self-assessment practices, a peer review group and site visits for external assessment and a published evaluation report. Moreover, all these elements were used after that as a part of the European Council Recommendation on European Cooperation in Quality Assurance in Higher Education on 24 September 1998 and have continued to be adopted until now in the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*.

In December 1995, the recommendations of the projects were announced, which affirmed the benefit of the exchange of information and the need for continuing this through founding of an organization for information and experience exchange. Hence, this was the first step toward creating a network for quality assurance at the European level. With this goal in mind, the European Commission and the advisory group of experts worked together to establish a formal network in quality assurance. The European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA) was founded in 2000. The ESG acts almost as a handbook for quality assurance procedures in higher education. Its main concept is higher education quality that takes student, employer, and societal interests into account, as well as higher institution autonomy and appropriate external quality assurance procedures.

Before the establishment of ENQA, which plays a vital role as a loose network responsible for the cooperation and exchanging of information and experience between member countries, numerous efforts were made such as the Sorbonne (1998) and Bologna (1999) Declarations which affected the issue of quality assurance and its networks. The Sorbonne Joint Declaration was signed in Paris at the Sorbonne on 25 May 1998 by Ministers of

Higher Education of four European countries, France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom, one year before the Bologna declaration. It was a joint declaration on the harmonization of the structure of the European higher education system looking for an "open European area for higher learning". The Declaration's central goal was to unify the European Higher Education Area under a common model, facilitating student mobility through transferable credits (e.g., ECTS points) and semesters, as well as teaching staff mobility. It also intended to ensure that the first cycle degree is internationally recognized and that qualifications would be promoted in connection with the job market (Sorbonne Joint Declaratio, 1998).

Throughout Europe, the Bologna Declaration of the European Union Ministers of Education in June 1999 generated a starting point of transformation processes in European higher education institutions for creating the European Higher Education Area by 2010. It was signed by 29 ministers responsible for higher education. Forty-five members agreed on this perspective of creating a higher education area. One of this Declaration's main objectives was to achieve competitive, transparent, diversified, and absolute autonomy for European higher education institutions (the Bologna Declaration, 1999). That entailed having high quality in higher education to maintain regional and international sustainable socio-economic developments (Sorbonne Declaration, 1998). This required the adoption of new mechanisms (quality assurance and accreditation) for attaining the quality and accountability of these sectors. As a result, one of this Declaration's objectives was to generate the European framework for recognition in the European Higher Education Area.

These transformation processes brought a great demand for changing institutional autonomy from a decentralized to a more integrated form of organization as has happened in many countries since 1999. The higher education institutions also saw the need to adopt an adequate internal organization linked with external governance for a guarantee of the decision-making quality (Fischer-Bluhm, 2007). Implementing a quality assurance system in the higher education institutions was the main aim of the Bologna Process. The reasons for the interest in such a system in European countries was, on the one hand, that the decision makers aspired to increase and ease the students' and staff's mobility while also making the system more competitive and more attractive to students worldwide. On the other hand, there was a need



to ensure the quality of the learning process by undergoing rapid changes towards a mass system of higher education (Kehm, 2006).

Two years after the Bologna Declaration, the first Bologna follow-up conference was held in Prague on 19 May 2001 with participants from 32 higher education ministries, who evaluated the progress in achieving the European Higher Education Area by 2010 and then suggested further processes to reach this aim. One of these processes was “Promotion of European Cooperation in Quality Assurance” because of the importance of quality assurance procedures in achieving the equivalence of standards and qualifications in the European Higher Education Area (Ministerial Conference, 2001). This need was addressed by entrusting the ENQA with the responsibility to direct the course of quality assurance in Bologna countries (Schwarz and Westerheijden, 2007). In this meeting, the ministries called for cooperation between European quality assurance bodies and sharing of the best practices of evaluation and accreditation. They also called for establishing a common framework of reference and for disseminating best practices in quality assurance through cooperation between ENQA and other national quality assurance bodies. ENQA’s role, however, was limited to defining a common framework and standards for quality assurance, while national governments maintained control over implementing it in their own systems.

In Berlin in 2003, the issue of quality assurance in European higher education became one of the top subjects of the Bologna Process, and the Conference of Higher Education Ministers emphasized that the foundation of the academic system’s accountability is each institution assuming ultimate responsibility for quality assurance in keeping with the national quality framework (Ministerial Conference, 2003). The growing demand for university autonomy with a large degree of diversity leads to the emergence of an urgent requirement for creation of a strong system of control and standards to evaluate and assure the quality of the results. This is described as a prerequisite for encouraging internal quality (Amaral, 2007). The European quality community was discussed for the first time in the congress of higher education ministers in Berlin in 2003. The ministers issued and signed the Berlin communique, requesting universities to form a common quality assurance framework (featuring uniform standards, procedures, and indicators); moreover, all signing states were asked to form their

own national accreditation framework by 2005 (Ministerial Conference, 2005). ENQA and its members were asked to cooperate with the European University Association (EUA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB) in the preparation of a European agreed quality assurance framework (standards, procedures, and guidelines) and to identify appropriate external quality assurance procedures. This work was to be presented and discussed through the Follow-up Group to Ministers in 2005 (Ministerial Conference, 2005).

Hence, the member countries of the Bologna Declaration were influenced, and they started establishing their national quality assurance procedures in different ways and with different levels of progress in each country. At that time there was no international organization to gather and encourage the efforts for implementing quality assurance and accreditation on the Arab states level. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 3 the terms, such as *quality assurance* and *accreditation* are very new in this area, and a lot of European countries do not have any history in these practices. For instance, these issues are new in Germany. On the other hand, the objectives of development reform for maintaining modernity, accountability and international attractiveness in German higher education at that time coincided with the Bologna Declaration's objectives (KMK, HRK & BMBF, 2002).

The development of quality in the higher education institutions within European countries is one of five EUA priorities (2009-2019), listed here, which were mentioned at Ministerial Conference (2009) of higher education ministries in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve to establish the priorities for the European Higher Education Area until 2020:

1. Achieving quality is one of the focal points of the Bologna reform. The higher organization is responsible for its quality with agency supporting. It has to strengthen its internal quality and inspire its environment with a quality culture, which demonstrates public accountability. Learning outcomes and communication are vital roles in this framework. Thus, a greater variety of missions, profiles, and activities of HEIs will appear.

2. Unification and inter-connection of the accomplishments of the Bologna Process therefore confirm that the reform brings about qualitative, sustainable improvement rather than an only superficial kind.
3. Encourage cooperation within European countries.
4. Focus on lifelong learning.
5. Keeping on planning for further improvements and reforms in the future with participation from the academic community.

The focus of quality review is a big issue of discussion and differs significantly among Western European countries. The study programs are the focal point of quality review in Denmark, the Netherlands and Portugal, while in Germany the institutional level is generally most central. Moreover, both institutional reviews as well as program reviews are considered essential in France, the United Kingdom and Ireland. (El-Khawas et al., 1998).

#### **5.5.1 The formation process of European quality assurance procedures in higher education sectors**

At the European level, the policy of higher education in the European countries is a national matter that includes legislation related to quality assurance and accreditation. The Bologna Process does not butt into national higher education policies, and progress in the countries' efforts in achieving the European Higher Education Area relies on the harmony and cooperation between the members, which cannot be obtained through force. Quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area has faced a big challenge because of the complete absence of these practices at the national level. Each national higher education system has had to develop its own policies and administrations in this regard (HRK, 2007).

From on the above discussed actions and declarations, it could be concluded that the creation of the European Higher Education Area drove the need for a quality assurance system to be created quickly. On the one hand, the higher education systems in Europe are defined by a variety of socio-cultural and educational traditions, political systems, languages, aspirations, expectations, and levels of state interference, especially in public institutions (ESG, 2015). One of the essential drivers of the Bologna Process was the quality of higher education. Hence,

quality assurance and accreditation practices are critical requirements for creating the European Higher Education Area.

The first action taken to formulate European quality assurance was at the national level. By requesting each member country to establish its national quality assurance system, the quality of higher education became one of the important national goals. The foundation of the academic system's accountability is each institution assuming ultimate responsibility for quality assurance in keeping with the national quality framework (Ministerial Conference, 2003). As a second action, the need for developing a European network for international harmony and effective cooperation between member countries appeared. Each higher education institution needed to adopt an adequate internal quality assurance system linked with external governance for a guarantee of the decision-making quality (Fischer-Bluhm, 2007). Hence, a common framework of standards and procedures for quality and accreditation had to be defined. The commonly approved European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for quality assurance and peer reviewing were an urgent demand at that phase. The works of quality assurance agencies within Europe had to be unified at national and international levels (HRK, 2004).

#### **5.5.2 European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for quality assurance in higher education**

The ESG, which were developed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and adopted in 2005 in Bergen, are considered to be reference documents for institutions and quality assurance agencies for internal and external quality assurance systems in higher education and have been a strong factor for changes in relation to quality assurance (ESG, 2005). In 2012, resulting from the ongoing changes, the Ministerial Communiqué called for cooperation work for revising and improving the ESG "to improve their clarity, applicability and usefulness, including their scope" (Minstrel Conference, 2012,2). The E4 Group (ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE), in cooperation with Education International (EI), Business Europe and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), worked together to prepare an initial proposal for a revised ESG (Ministerial Conference, 2012).

These standards are not quality standards and do not explain how to apply quality assurance processes; however, they offer guidance for internal and external quality assurance

in higher education institutions to gain an effective quality provision and better learning environment. The central attention of these standards is placed on the quality assurance of learning and teaching in higher education, while other institutional activities, such as research and governance, are evaluated and improved through other policies and processes which are pre-determined in each institution (ESG, 2015).

The purpose of the ESG is as follows:

- To set a common framework for the learning and teaching quality assurance systems at European, national, and institutional levels;
- To enable the assurance and improvement of quality of higher education in the European higher education area;
- To promote mutual trust, supporting easy recognition and mobility within and across national borders
- To provide information on quality assurance in the EHEA. (ESG, 2015)

The standards and guidelines have been set to cover three interrelated areas which form together the quality assurance framework in European higher education:

1. Internal quality assurance
2. External quality assurance
3. Quality assurance agencies

The first group of standards and guidelines, for internal quality assurance, covers these elements:

1. Policy and procedures for quality assurance:

The institution has to develop an official policy and procedures for quality, set standards for its study programs, and apply a strategy for continuous and enhanced quality to achieve a culture of quality in its work. There should be a role for students and other stakeholders in the implementation of this policy and procedures.

2. Design and approval of programs:

The institution has to develop an official mechanism in order to approve, monitor, and review its programs regularly.

3. Student-centered learning, teaching, and assessment:

The institution has to design its study programs and its outcome assessments in a way that involves and encourages the participation of students in the learning process.

4. Student admission, progression, recognition, and certification:

The institution has to set and apply pre-determined and published rules and regulations for all student stages in the university journey including those for admission, progression, recognition and certification.

5. Teaching staff:

The institution has to adopt procedures which assure that the teaching staff is certified and competent to carry out their tasks in the learning process.

6. Learning resources and student support:

The institution has to provide the learning and teaching activities for each study program with appropriate sources of funding.

7. Information management:

The institution should have a system for collecting, analyzing, and using related information in managing the study programs and other activities effectively.

8. Public information:

The institution should periodically publish information on its activities and programs in a well-aimed, evident, up-to date, reachable and objective form.

9. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programs:

The institution has to develop and apply its own procedures to regularly examine and re-assess its programs. It should thus (1) make sure that it reaches its own goals and fulfills its expected role in meeting the needs of students and society and (2) continuously improve the program based on these assessments.

10. Cyclical external quality assurance:

The institution has to apply for a periodic external quality assurance procedure in keeping with the ESG.

The second group of standards and guidelines, for external quality assurance, revolves around the following elements:

1. Consideration of internal quality assurance:

The external quality assurance process has the task to assess the efficiency of the internal quality assurance system in keeping with the ESG, which are described in the first group.

2. Designing methodologies fit for purpose

It is important for external quality assurance to be constructed by the policy makers in an appropriate manner so that it will be able to reach the aims in view, respect any regulations, and sustain a process of improvement.

3. Implementing processes:

It is important for external quality assurance to be useful, reliable, pre-defined, applied consistently, and published. The implementing process consists of some form of self-assessment, an external assessment which includes a site visit, a report based on the external assessment, and a consistent follow-up.

4. Peer-review experts:

External quality assurance should be applied by groups of external experts that include at least one student member.

5. Criteria for outcomes:

Regardless of whether a formal decision is made, it is important for external quality assurance outcomes or results to be founded on published criteria that are clearly defined and consistently applied.

6. Reporting:

It is important for the external quality assurance process results – as well as any decisions connected with them – be published in the experts' complete reports, making them available to the academic community, partners, and others.

7. Complaints and appeals:

It is important for external quality assurance processes to include a clearly defined outline of procedures for dealing with complaints and appeals and to inform the institutions about this appropriately.

The third group of standards and guidelines, for quality assurance agencies, is centered on the following aspects:

1. Activities, policies, and processes for quality assurance:

The agencies' regulations should be based on the ESG for external quality assurance. Their published mission statement should include clearly defined aims and goals, which should be meaningful in the daily activities of the agency, and should encourage stakeholders to participate actively.

2. Official status:

Quality assurance agencies have to be legally and officially acknowledged as such by public policy makers.

3. Independence:

Agencies have to operate on their own, taking complete responsibility for their actions and remaining free from outside influence.

4. Thematic analysis:

The results of agencies' actions have to be described and published at regular intervals.

5. Resources:

Sufficient, suitable staff and finances have to be available for agencies' activities.

6. Internal quality assurance and professional conduct:

Internal quality assurance procedures have to be established by agencies to document and improve the quality and transparency of their work.

7. Cyclical external review of agencies:

At least once every five years, agencies have to be re-certified by an external review to confirm that they still comply with the ESG.

### **5.5.3 The aspects of managing quality assurance in European higher education**

The growing demand for university autonomy with a large degree of diversity leads to the emergence of an urgent requirement for creation of a strong system of control and standards to evaluate and assure the quality of the results, described as a prerequisite for encouraging internal quality (Amaral, 2007). This means that for institutional autonomy there



must be a change from a decentralized to a more integrated form of organization as has happened in many countries since 1999. The higher education institutions also need to adopt an adequate internal organization linked with external governance for a guarantee of the decision-making quality (Fischer-Bluhm, 2007).

- **Managing quality assurance**

Quality assurance in higher education institutions must be applied through a suitable managerial body. In light of complex and constant changes in the environment, decisions need to be made quickly in order to continuously adapt, thus making it all the more important to have a competent managerial body and leadership (Brennan & Shah, 2001). Higher education institution will function better by operating in balance of internal and external quality. This means higher education institutions should carry on a productive discussion with policy makers (Tavenas, 2003). There is a correlation between an institution's autonomy and the effectiveness of its internal quality mechanism or device. A self-governing university practices internal quality assurance activities while being almost devoid of appearances of bureaucracy and, at the same time, more focused on improvement than on controlling. On the other hand, a non-independent university practices less impactful quality assurance activities in the scope of accreditation (EUA, 2005). In higher education institutions, the activities of the quality assurance unit should include systems for information management, performance management, and resource management. For the improvement of the quality assurance system, the higher education institution needs national and international cooperation and information exchange in this area (Fischer-Bluhm, 2007).

- **Human resources**

The quality culture cannot be a part of an organization in an absence of effective participation from the academic and administrative staff. Unlike in the industrial world, where the management is responsible for quality, in a university the faculty itself must ensure quality, generally doing so in a non-administrative way and out of a sense of professional commitment. Internal quality assurance processes require both external participants and internal professionals to be active (Gaither, 1998). For this reason, all European higher education institutions tend to encourage staff improvement through different ways, such as courses and

workshops, for their roles in the internal quality assurance process. The first stage of applying internal quality assurance includes measures for staff development.

External quality requires motivated staff members to each perform their own responsibilities in a mutually supportive manner, thus improving the quality of higher education's outcomes (Papadimitriou, 2011). The European Higher Education Area EHEA raises the competition among professors in this area which means the higher education institutions look for catching the best employees for their administrative and academic departments.

- **Students**

Student-centered institutions are one of the Bologna Process concerns maintained by students learning outcomes. The learning outcomes are a main factor for drawing and planning the curricula and evaluating the study programs. The students should graduate in an appropriate manner (personal quality, core skills, process skills), meeting the requirements of the labor market. Student services have recently become an investment field for higher education institutions (Fischer-Bluhm, 2007). On the one hand, higher education institutions take advantage of their students' talents and knowledge in their activities, such as by encouraging them in the process of making decisions. On the other hand, the students can get ECTS or financial credits for their participation.

- **External stakeholders**

The groups of external stakeholders in (EUA, 2005), include:

- National and regional government and legislative bodies
- Professional and statutory bodies
- Employers and industry
- Future students, graduates, and parents
- Collaborative and partner institutions.

As a result of effective participation of external stakeholders in higher education management processes, such as decision-making, evaluating activities, curricula planning, and testing, the higher education institution gains more confidence and promotes its graduates in the labor market (Vettori, Lueger and Knassmüller, 2007).

- **Internationalization**

Making student and staff mobility easier is one of the main results of the realization of the EHEA, which means increasing higher education institutions' internal competition. This requires the higher education institutions to work more for approaches which involve academic staff participation to promote their institutions at the national level (EUA, 2005). Another side of internationalization is the joint and trans-international programs, implemented when a higher education institution awards degrees together with a higher education institution in another country or through coordination of a program abroad. All these new higher education institution activities require guarantee through adequate quality assurance mechanisms.

#### **5.5.4 Quality assurance agencies in European countries**

Quality assurance agencies have an important and vital place in the European higher education system, playing large and different roles at the national level. They can be classified as below (Costes, Crozier, Cullen, Grifoll, Harris, Helle, Hopbach, Kekäläinen, Knezevic, Sits & Sohm, 2008):

- Higher education systems with regional agencies (Spain)
- Higher education systems with customized (specialized) agencies for different types of higher education institutions (Austria)
- Higher education systems with accreditation council supervises and regulates (competing) agencies (Germany)
- Higher education systems with international agencies (Netherlands and Flanders).

#### **5.6 The issue of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education at the Arab international level**

In the late nineties, concerns about quality assurance and accreditation first arose in some Arab countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Arab Emirates (Al-Baker, 2001)(Makroom, 1996).

With regard to these countries, it can be said that some quality assurance and accreditation systems are in place, and some are under construction. This is indicated by a UNESCO report (Khahlel, 2011), which classifies the Arab countries in this field as follows:

1. The actual application stage: Jordan is the only Arab state that exceeded the preparation stage of accreditation procedures and criteria in higher education to the stage of an actual application.
2. The application stage: Arab countries that have begun the application stage include: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Palestine, and Lebanon.
3. This section is for the Arab countries that have not started the application stage, which includes the rest of the Arab countries that have not been mentioned before.

Today, throughout the entire Arab region external quality assurance systems are based on common methods adopted from Europe, the United Kingdom, or the United States. As higher education has become more international (e.g., joint degrees, student exchanges, open and distance learning, overseas campuses), it has become increasingly important to work together internationally in terms of quality assurance.

At the international level of Arab states, the issue of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education appeared first during the UNESCO Arab Regional Conference on Higher Education, which was held in 1998 in Beirut, Lebanon. The conference shed light on this issue, as one of the main principle reforms that should occur in Arab higher education sectors. It stressed the need for creating quality assurance procedures for Higher Education in each country, meeting the national needs, and keeping in line with the orientation at the global as well as the regional level (Arab Regional Conference on Higher Education, Beirut, 1998).

In 1999 in Riyadh, quality assurance in higher education was a focus of the Association of Arab Universities' attention at the Seventh Conference of Higher Education Ministries in Arab Countries. This association was an initiative that was launched by The Cultural Department of the League of Arab States<sup>3</sup> in 1964 for establishing an organization aimed at supporting and coordinating the work of Arab universities. Twenty-six Saudi universities are members in this association ([www.aaru.ju.edu.jo](http://www.aaru.ju.edu.jo)). The concerns about quality in Arab higher education in this conference was a result of the major developments and transformation processes in the Arab

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<sup>3</sup> The League of Arab States is a regional organization for Arab countries from North Africa and Asia. It was founded in Cairo on 22 March 1945 with six members: Kingdom of Egypt, Kingdom of Iraq, Transjordan (renamed Jordan in 1949), Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. Yemen joined as a member on 5 May 1945. Now the League includes 22 country members.

region which included the expansion of universities, the increasing number of students (massification), the demand of the private sector to invest in higher education (privatization), and the emergence of new kinds of education such as distance education (diversification). The Association of Arab Universities felt the urgent need to control the quality of higher education in order to ensure its efficiency under these new transformation processes, globalization, and open markets. It saw the necessity of adopting self-assessment and external evaluation procedures in the Arab universities. These procedures ensure their efficiency and credibility and enable them to carry out their mission in education, scientific research, and community service. They also support their competitive place among universities at the global level and achieve the confidence of the community and other educational institutions.

For these goals the General Secretariat of the Association of Arab Universities prepared a project that was approved by the League of Arab States in 1999. In 2001, that was followed by the establishment of an office in the General Secretariat of the Association of Arab Universities to coordinate the evaluation and accreditation procedures of the Arab universities and their programs. A group of experts in higher education systems was selected as a committee for this office. In 2003, this committee launched its first handbook of self-assessment and external evaluation of Arab universities, which was circulated to the Arab universities members of the association.

Quality assurance in higher education has continued as a critical topic in the conferences of higher education ministries in Arab countries in throughout 2003-/2005 and 2006/2008. At the time of the conference in 2003, there was an increasing need for an independent Arab body concerned with ensuring the quality of higher education and excellence of its outputs, which had become clear in view of the development of the concept of quality and accreditation and gaining increasing interest on the Arab and global level.

The General Secretariat of the Association prepared the project for establishing the Council of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in 2007 as an independent nonprofit organization. This council aims to improve the quality of higher education in the Arab world by providing efforts related to quality assurance and accreditation, in order to improve efficiency of education, capacity-building for quality assurance and accreditation procedures, exchange of

experiences, and awareness about quality in the Arab region. The council launched five handbooks for quality assurance and accreditation in 2008, 2009, and 2013 for Arab universities to use in their adoption of these procedures. These handbooks are considered as a basic guide for evaluating and accrediting academic programs in Arab educational institutions. Their contents reflect the role of the Council of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in the Association in assisting those institutions, improving the quality and guaranteeing the academic skills. These guides contain information on the quality assurance of academic programs defined by the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council, which sets a minimum for the expected standards of graduates, which were set in line with international standards, and at the same time in a manner that suits the Arab environment and its specificity. Moreover, since 2007 the council has held a number of workshops, seminars and conferences in the field of quality assurance and accreditation in order to spread the culture of quality and provide technical support in this area for member universities.

All these efforts over the past years have resulted in the adoption of quality assurance and accreditation procedures in ten Arab countries (Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Sudan, Oman, Palestine, Kuwait, Libya, and Egypt) by establishing national bodies for quality assurance and accreditation in their higher education sectors.

### **5.7 The issue of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education at the European and the Arab international levels**

It can be concluded that concrete efforts in the issue of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education at the European and the Arab international levels started at two different time points. In the European context in 1991, the first action was taken, the pilot projects in quality assurance which were decided on by the European Council of Ministers. By contrast, the first action at the Arab international level was in 1999 when this issue was a concern of the Association of Arab Universities and resulted in the founding of an office in the General Secretariat of the Association of Arab Universities in 2001 to coordinate the evaluation and accreditation procedures in Arab universities.

It is also notable that efforts at the European international level were at the level of Ministers of Education in the European Union and resulted in signed agreements and declarations. At the

same time, they paved the way for the quality assurance and accreditation issue in the Bologna Process to create the European Higher Education Area. Binding agreements and declarations to encourage the adoption of quality assurance and accreditation practices at this level have no parallel in Arab countries. On the other hand, the European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA) which was established in 2000 has a direct influence on the creation and the adoption of quality assurance systems in the member countries of the Bologna Process. It is considered as a guide for higher education quality assurance and covers the European *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG), playing a vital role in the exchange of experiences and information in this regard. By contrast, the Council of Quality Assurance and Accreditation for Arab Universities which was established in 2007 has no direct impact on improving and adopting quality assurance and accreditation systems in the Arab states.

## **5.8 Quality assurance and accreditation practices in higher education sector at the national level of German**

### **Background**

In 1968 the student movement occurred which shed light on teaching and learning and focused greater attention on it. As a result of the students' protests, some evaluation practices involve the meaning of quality assurance were introduced in reforming German higher education to improve its structure and content. However, despite the initial enthusiasm, these ideas fell out of fashion in the 1980s, before being revived as part of the Bologna agenda (Ganseuer & Pistor, 2017).

In the nineteenth century, there were a number of policies and procedures regarding scholarship, research, and professionalism which maintained during that time a high standard of quality in higher education organization, such as a governmental budget for higher education, uniform standards for teaching and research, academic freedom, informal ranking and academic competition between universities, high reputations and standing of professors at German universities (Bernhard, 2012). The Science Council (*Wissenschaftsrat*) was authorized to review research from former East Germany and recommend steps to improve its quality,

which were in turn taken (Stucke, 2006), and the Council continued its role in the evaluation procedures which are explained later.

These evaluations resulted in an ongoing discussion in the 1970s and 1980s about reforms for improving the teaching process (Serrano-Velarde, 2008). However, until the 1990s, there was a complete absence of the “quality assurance” phrase regarding higher education in the scientific discourse (Bernhard, 2012). On the other hand, in the political discourse, it was used and given attention, not because of the quality issue itself, but because of the unification issue and the efficiency of performance (de Rudder, 1994). This absence could be explained, according to de Rudder, by these reasons: the existence of peer-review procedures at that time, the absolute responsibility of students in universities for their study, and the rate of unemployment at that time was not worrisome.

Before the adoption of the current quality assurance and accreditation procedures, the quality of higher education contents and regulations were maintained by the Länder via licensing programs and defined exam requirements under the framework regulations for studies and examinations (*Rahmenprüfungsordnungen*), which took such a long time to create and implement that they were frequently outdated by the time they took effect.

Moreover, until 1998, the (framework regulations for studies and examinations), which were national, subject-specific curriculum frameworks, had worked as bases for acknowledgment processes of all new higher education degree programs; this was a kind of approval system for study programs and exams regulations and requirements (Witte, 2008). This approval system’s framework and procedures passed through a long stage of formation. Hence, when it was ready for application, it was ineffective as a result of the new change in the study programs which interacted at an international level (Akkreditierungsrat, 2002 in Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007). An institutionalized system formed the foundation for maintaining higher education quality at that time, featuring high selectivity of students and the role of professors in preparing students to pass their state exams (de Rudder, 1994). Although other countries had begun to assure quality in teaching with the aid of evaluation results, Germany still used the older method of focusing on gaining state approval of exam regulations.



In the wake of increased sensitivity to the advantages of quality assurance and international developments, as well as new conditions that appeared at that period seen in the massive increase of student numbers leading to insufficiency in financial and human resources (de Rudder, 1994), Germany experienced a paradigm shift that started in the mid-1990s with the introduction of evaluation processes promoted by the HRK and Science Council (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007). In 1994 Germany participated in the European pilot project in quality assurance, "Evaluation Quality of Higher Education." This project required to apply new evaluation and assessment procedures, and different evaluation processes were implemented in some of German Länder (de Rudder, 1994). These processes were intended to help make higher education institutions more transparent and self-reliant as well as to promote quality assurance measures and improve the international image of German higher education (Wolf, 2002). The main idea of these evaluation procedures was to point out the weaknesses and strengths of an organization in order to consequently assure and improve the quality in a systematic way (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007).

Between 1995 and 2000, the Science Council (*Wissenschaftsrat*) played a vital role in the evaluation and assessment processes in the German higher education system, where it completed a number of evaluation processes for funding reasons, improved evaluation procedures for research institutions concerning research funding, and carried out accreditation processes for private higher education organizations (Bartz, 2007; Stucke, 2006). Since the launch of the Initiative for Excellence (*Exzellenzinitiative*) (DFG & BMBF, 2013) in research (see chapter 4), the Science Council (*Wissenschaftsrat*) has been a partner alongside German Research Foundation (*Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft*) (DFG) in implementing this. Three different approaches of evaluation appeared: internal evaluation procedures, evaluation by networks of higher education institutions (*Verbund* agencies), and evaluation by regional agencies (Serrano- Velarde, 2008). However, while important steps were taken to improve the quality of education at that time, a comprehensive system of accreditation was not introduced until the Sorbone Declaration in 1998 (Kehm, 2006).

In Germany there is no single assessment system at the national level, as the responsibility of operation and funding higher education institution lies with the Länder. These

Länder, in turn, implement the Higher Education Framework Act determined by the federal government (*Bund*). The federal government has integrated the assessment task with the Higher Education Framework Act, leading the different Länder to include it within their own Higher Education Framework Acts. Various systems of evaluation have existed on the level of the 16 Länder over the last 20 years (Hatwig, 2003). For this reason, some researchers trace the German quality assurance evaluation system all the way back to the 1980s (Bernardini & Ruffilli, 2006).

For years before the founding of the German accreditation system, other quality assurance mechanisms for teaching and students were carried out by the higher education organizations. They required evaluation of the quality of teaching through reformed students' questionnaires for each class (Kehm, 2006).

### **5.8.1 The formation of the current German quality assurance system**

The series of declarations at the European level – Sorbonne (1998), Bologna (1999) and Prague Communiqué (2001) – have strengthened the demand for further expansion of international quality standards and a corresponding responsibility in science and research. A three-year study time period (bachelor's – master's – doctoral degrees) was then initiated as a starting phase of internationalization of higher education in Germany, which has actively promoted the issue of quality. Specifically, accreditation procedures were considered to be necessary to ensure the comparability and quality of teaching and study programs degrees as an external quality assurance mechanism.

The changes in the German Higher Education Act (*Hochschulrahmengesetz* or *HRG*) of 20 August 1998 represented the introduction of “two main cycles,” bachelor's and master's degrees, as a part of the transition process to the European Higher Education Area, leading to the adoption of many trends at the European level. At the beginning, the German higher education organizations had the right to introduce these new programs in a trial phase before becoming standard as part of internationally acknowledged bachelor's and master's degree programs. This change placed the scientific establishment in a critical position through its vital role in developing and assuring the quality of these newly introduced programs and raising the international quality. As a consequence, this recent structural change paved the way for the

HRK and the KMK to establish an accreditation system for these new “two main cycle” programs as a necessity for a quicker and more flexible procedure for quality assurance. This was synchronized with a shift in authority in regard to achieving transparency and quality standards in higher education in order to lower the system of detailed state control and provide the higher education organizations with more autonomy by giving the Accreditation Council (*Akkreditierungsrat’s*) responsibility as the main accreditation body.

In the Resolution of the 185<sup>th</sup> plenary session of the HRK of 6 July 1998, the process of accreditation was introduced for newly introduced bachelor’s and master’s programs. This resolution shed light on the quality assurance in the higher education sector at that time. It started by explaining the current procedures for quality assurance in study programs which had been secured by state-run establishment of higher education institutions and structural decision-making as well as by the ministers’ critical roles in withholding or granting approval, calling professors, and securing funding. This resolution explained that the transnational comparability of study courses and degrees ensures the mobility of students and the mutual recognition of degrees as established by the framework agreement of the Länder, according to § 9 HRG. By means of standardized final examination requirements, a uniform higher education system, in line with international standards, was secured throughout Germany.

As the Resolution of the 185<sup>th</sup> plenary session of the HRK on 6 July 1998 explained, the German higher education system experienced at that time a new transitions process and conditions represented in the changes that resulted from the introduction of the new study cycles (bachelor-master), the expansion of the tertiary sector, the changes in the professional world, and the increasing international integration in the field of higher education. This resolution mentioned the international, successful examples of quality assurance and accreditation, which generally were implemented independently from the state but also in cooperation with it. Explicit models included the long-established systems in the United States and France, as well as the regulations in Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland and Argentina. Another demand issue was stated in the resolution, which resulted from the current era of globalization: the need to make graduates from German higher education institutions more competitive in the international job market. It thus proposed seeking recognition from international

accreditation agencies and institutions as well as increasing competition between higher education institutions in Germany, especially in subject areas in which enrollments had been declining.

In 2003 in Berlin, the European Ministers of Higher Education issued and signed the Berlin Communiqué, requesting universities to form a common quality assurance framework featuring uniform standards, procedures, and indicators; moreover, all signing states were asked to form their own national accreditation frameworks by 2005. Since that time, Germany has been especially progressive in meeting these requests, being one of the first two countries – along with Denmark – to draft a qualification framework, which was set up in line with the European Quality Framework. In this light, the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations might be seen as generating outside pressure in order to overcome initial internal resistance (Van der Wende & Westerheijden, 2001). On the other hand, internal pressure resulted from the several required reforms which were brought by the Bologna Declaration, such as the introduction of the new study track (bachelor's-master's) which were synchronized with the growing need for more autonomy for German higher education organizations.

### **5.8.2 The first phase of the German accreditation system (1998-2001)**

The first phase of creating the accreditation system started with the concrete step of implementing the evaluation and accreditation system in Germany which was taken by founding the Accreditation Council (*Akkreditierungsrat*) in 1998. The Conference of the Ministers of Education and the Conference Rectors agreed to establish the Accreditation Council as part of the Conference of the Ministers of Education (KMK & HRK, 1998). This Council operated in its first three years under testing in a 3-year pilot-project phase. The program accreditation for newly implemented bachelor's and master's study programs was first introduced in this phase. Thus, this phase aimed at guaranteeing the quality, transparency, and comparability of these programs (Accreditation Council, 2011). For this purpose, the state-level traditional process for regulating and approving the quality of study programs was changed and replaced by the accreditation process with a general and flexible framework carried out by non-governmental organizations (Accreditation Council, 2011). This period of Council work was a subject for the evaluation process by a group of international experts. From the beginning of its

establishment until 2003, the Accreditation Council was involved in accreditation of bachelor's and master's degree programs. As a consequence, this period provided a valuable source for pilot schemes and field knowledge (Schade, 2005).

### **5.8.3 The second phase of the German accreditation system after 2003**

In 2005, the Accreditation Council became a foundation in a legal sense. However, the system was at that time not in its final basis and form yet (Accreditation Council, 2013). In this phase, the fundamental features of the German accreditation system were put into place. With this important change, the Länder endowed the Foundation with the responsibility of quality assurance regulation. In 2003, the Länder agreed on the Common Structural Guidelines for the accreditation of study programs in order to obtain similarity in the national quality standards; however, the Länder still have differences between their higher education program structures. These mutual quality assurance standards and guidelines were also created in line with the ESGs since their adoption in 2005. Moreover, these national guidelines were a subject of revision several times to keep up with the new developments with last time being in February 2010 (Accreditation Council, 2013). Other features were determined in this phase: the quality assurance procedure is about teaching and learning and not for the research area, and doctoral programs are not subject to accreditation.

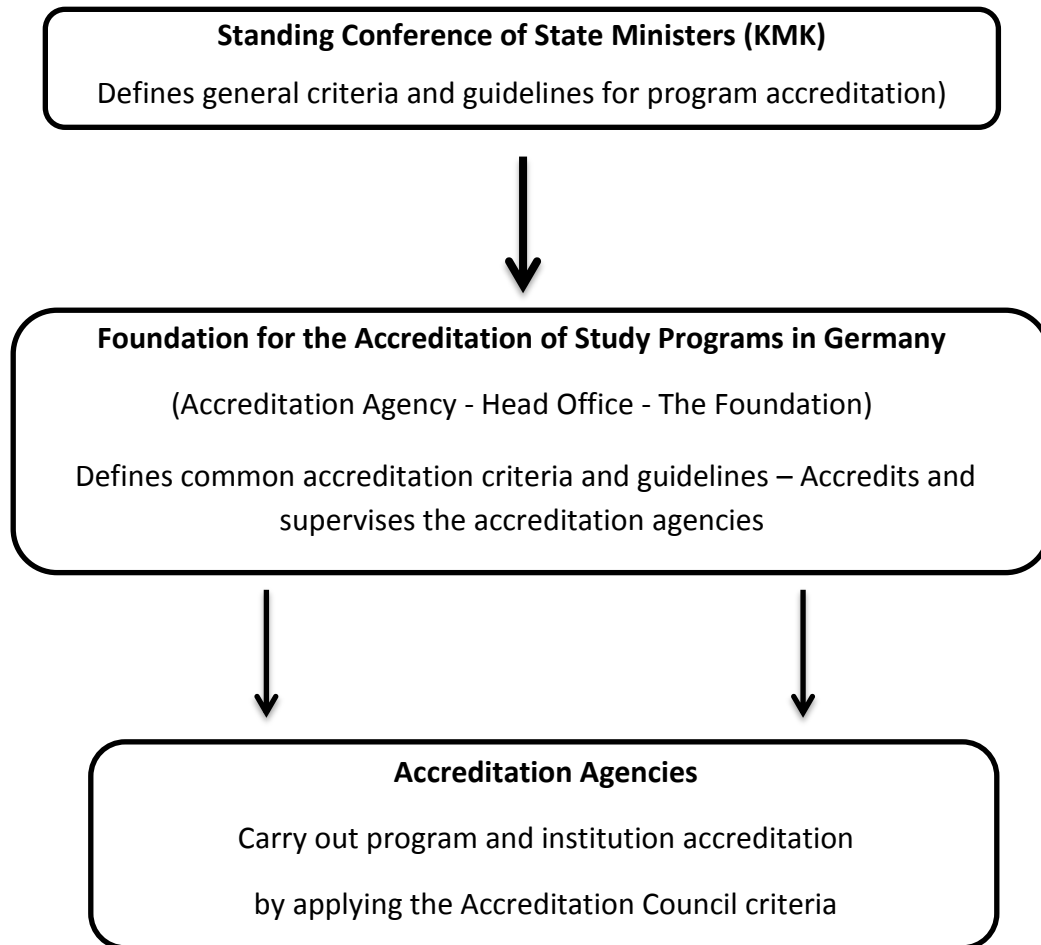
Before describing the German quality assurance and accreditation system again, the research points to the main structure of the German higher education system which affected the formation process of the current structure of the quality assurance and accreditation system. As a federal country the higher education governing process is two levels: federal and regional. The federal government creates and features a common framework, structures, and rules. The Länder are responsible for defining the operation and implementation processes for most education issues, such as the implementation of the Bologna Process, which explains the differences between them in this concern. Another important body in German higher education governance is the KMK which keeps a level of coordination between the Länder. In the area of quality assurance and internationalization as well as with the issue of "excellence," the KMK plays a more effective role in achieving a level of coherence and coordinating between the

Länder systems. Both national and regional levels (via the KMK) together appear internationally in representing German educational issues (Accreditation Council, 2013).

#### **5.8.4 The allocation of accreditation in the German higher education system**

The German accreditation system is composed of two levels as a meta-accreditation system (Accreditation Council, 2013), and above these two levels is the KMK, which enact general regulations for the new adoption policies regarding quality assurance and accreditation (KMK, 2010). The German accreditation system with the meta-accreditation units is regarded as a single entity among European countries (Accreditation Council, 2013). Thus, the system consists of three levels of authority: after the Standing Conference of State Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK); comes the Accreditation Council, which is considered to be the main body responsible for binding guidelines and regulations for the accreditation agencies which represent the third level of authority. The Accreditation Council also sets the standards that agencies have to meet for gaining the status of authorized bodies to accredit organizations and programs, and it monitors the accreditation processes of these agencies (Accreditation Council, 2016). The third level of authority the accreditation agencies, which have to be first accredited by the Accreditation Council. Then they become the institutions in charge of applying accreditation processes, i.e., the external evaluation of higher education institutions, as shown in Figure 6. Besides their roles in carrying out the accreditation procedures, they play a vital role as authoritative references in the accountability of higher education by providing the state with information to use in funding and resource distribution (Serrano-Velarde, 2008).

**Figure 6: The German accreditation system**



Concerning the governance in higher education, there are three different models: market-oriented, corporatist and centralist. The system of accreditation in Germany is regarded as a market-oriented model, with the quality assurance procedures occurring in a basically liberal framework and provided by a number of competing autonomous quality assurance agencies. In this governance model, the regulation and the framework for the whole process and agency's work are a central body responsibility of the Accreditation Council (Serrano-Velarde, 2014).

In 2016, a change occurred in the accreditation authority. The German Federal Constitutional Court (*Bundesverfassungsgericht*) issued an impactful decision concerning

accreditation. The Federal Constitutional Court bears the responsibility of protecting German constitutional rights and can declare laws to be unconstitutional. In its pronouncement, it emphasized the right to “academic freedom” guaranteed to state-recognized universities in Germany and determined that this right was threatened if central decisions about the accreditation of study programs were left up to third-party agencies. The problem was that they effectively forced universities to modify their teaching content and examination frameworks according to the agencies’ own demands and requirements, which had not specifically been clarified by law. The Court determined further that such empowerment of agencies at the expense of universities’ own academic freedom was not justified by appeals to comply with the Bologna Process because the Bologna Declaration itself emphasized the need for the respective states, and not agencies, to take responsibility for their own education reforms. Therefore, the Court concluded that, while accreditation requirements do not necessarily interfere with academic freedom, giving agencies a free hand to dictate the requirements does. On the other hand, the Court ruled that it is permissible for state legislatures to establish legal accreditation requirements in their respective Länder. The Court granted the states time to change their reliance on agencies to self-reliance, giving them until 31 December 2017 (Bundesverfassungsgericht, 2016).

#### **5.8.5 The first level of the German accreditation system: the Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programs in Germany**

The German Accreditation Council is considered to be the main body responsible for making decisions in the Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programs in Germany (HRH, Resolution of the 185th plenary of 6 July 1998).

In 2005 the Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Courses in Germany was officially established (The Land Parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia, 2005). The Foundation is responsible for the:

1. Accreditation and re-accreditation of accreditation agencies.
2. Selection common guidelines include the Länder particular structures for creating guidelines for the accreditation Agencies.
3. Regulation the accreditation procedures and criteria and period of accreditation.



#### 4. Monitoring of the work of accreditation agencies.

This foundation consists of three departments: the Accreditation Council, the Board, and the Foundation Council (The Land Parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia, 2005).

##### **a. The Board**

This organ of the foundation is responsible for making the decisions of the Accreditation Council. It also guides and manages the procedural responsibilities of the Foundation, unless the Accreditation Council has declared itself responsible for a specific area of business or a particular case. The Board consists of the Chairman of the Accreditation Council, the Vice-Chairman of the Accreditation Council, and the Managing Director of the Foundation.

##### **b. The Foundation Council**

The major role of the Foundation Council is to make sure that the Foundation's management by the Accreditation Council and Board fulfills legal and economic regulations. It is made up of eleven members besides the Chairman and Vice-Chairman: five representatives from the German Rectors' Conference and six representatives from the Länder. They are chosen jointly by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder and the German Rectors' Conference for a period of four years.

##### **c. The Accreditation Council**

This organ is the central decision-making body of the Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programs in Germany. The accreditation council is responsible for: accrediting and re-accrediting the accreditation agencies, defining the standards of quality applied to study programs and internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions and agencies, and coordinating and organizing the accreditation procedures implemented by the agencies. It is made up of sixteen members. They are chosen jointly by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder and the German Rectors' Conference, serving four-year terms. Beside the Chairman, the Accreditation Council members include: four higher education representatives, five representatives of the Länder, five representatives of Professional Practice, two students, two foreign experts, and one representative from the accreditation agencies (in a consultative capacity) (The Land Parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia, 2005).

The German Accreditation Council is a member of the international accreditation organizations and agencies. Being a member brings international recognition for the Accreditation Council work and enhancement to the international cooperation and exchange with these agencies. This action also seeks to reinforce a mutual understanding of quality assurance systems, in order to apply comparable criteria, methods, and standards, thus achieving mutual recognition of qualifications and subsequently student mobility. Other international accreditation bodies include the International Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). Moreover, the Accreditation Council has reached agreements with quality assurance institutions in Japan (the National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement of Higher Education or NIAD-UE), the United States (CHEA International Quality Group or CIQG), and Chile (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación or CNA-Chile).

#### **5.8.6 The second level of the German accreditation council: the accreditation agencies**

The agencies which are accredited by the Accreditation Council represent this level of the German accreditation system (Kehm, 2005). The accreditation process of an agency starts with putting forward its institutional profile for the Accreditation Council which, in turn, according to a review report makes its decision expressed in one of three statements: accreditation or no accreditation or conditional accreditation for the agency. Moreover, the accreditation seal for agencies is for a period between three and five years.

The required standards for accreditation agencies include:

- 1- Independence from the state, higher education institutions, association of faculties and disciplines, professional associations, and businesses.
- 2- The appropriate setting for carrying out their mission such as: staff, funding, and facilities, including members from higher education institutions and members from the professional workforce who have the right to participate in the decision-making process of accreditation.
- 3- Provision of non-profit and performance accreditation activities for all types of higher education institutions.
- 4- Status as a “legal entity” that includes a member of the Accreditation Council with the last word on any decision related to accreditation.

- 5- Application of the the accreditation framework (criteria, standards, procedures) which has been developed by the Accreditation Council, thus officially granting the accreditation seal.
- 6- Proof of the transparency and comprehensibility in all processes and procedures for program and institution accreditation.
- 7- Responsibility for an active connection with the Accreditation Council (*Akkreditierungsrat*) to inform it about the accrediting status of programs and institutions mentioned in the annual activity report.
- 8- A combination of national and international skills and strengths in evaluating the provisional qualification of the accreditation agencies as well as in recruiting experts and planning assessment procedures. (Accreditation Council, 2002).

The first work of the Accreditation Council (*Akkreditierungsrat*) in agencies' accreditation was during its first testing stage of three years. During that period, the Accreditation Council (*Akkreditierungsrat*) accredited six agencies in subject and region-specific areas (Witte, 2008). In 1995, the first evaluation tasks were carried out by the newly established accreditation agencies (Bernardini & Ruffilli, 2006).

The agencies are responsible for the accreditation of study programs and institutions in Germany. The German higher education institutions have the right to be awarded an additional accreditation certificate conferring an extra quality status for specific study programs by international agencies (Kehm, 2006).

The basic procedural rules for this accreditation process dictate that, before the agency makes an application of accreditation, it must reserve a variety of information from the Accreditation Council's head office about contents, standards, the next steps, and estimated fees. The agency provides the application and rationale to clarify whether it has certain areas of specialization, whether it aims for program or system accreditation, and whether it also hopes that the review will help it be accepted by ENQA and EQAR. The agency also hands over a self-evaluation report documenting its actions and its compliance with criteria. If a re-accreditation is being applied for, then the agency also discusses its development since the last accreditation.

The Accreditation Council appoints a review panel, generally made up of five peer reviewers as well as members representing academia, students, and professional practice. At

least one foreign member is included as well. The Accreditation Council also appoints one of the members to chair the panel. It is committed to fairness towards the agency and considers any objections the agency might have to the appointed peer reviewers but does not grant the agency any veto right. The review panel members are prepared by the Accreditation Council for their role as external peer reviewers as well as for accreditation processes, discussions, and review reports. The foundation's head office is available for any additional support.

The basis for the agency assessment includes the agency's self-evaluation, a report from the agency about its work in the last accreditation term, an agency site visit including taking part in a final decision meeting for applications and accreditation. The review also includes separate discussions with management, employees, experts, and other relevant parties as well as the Accreditation Council's assessment. Moreover, the review report includes a decision on fulfillment of the standards and criteria, evaluated as "fully compliant," "substantially compliant," "partially compliant," and "non-compliant." The review panel may first have a hearing with the Accreditation Council to deal with any questions, giving the agency the opportunity to review and comment on the report. After considering the agency's statement, the Accreditation Council issues a final decision and publishes it together with the self-evaluation report, the review report including the peer-reviewers' names, and the agency's statement. The Accreditation Council must justify and clearly explain its decisions.

An accreditation decision applies to authorization for carrying out program and/or system accreditation and can be limited to certain areas. If there are problems that can reasonably be corrected within nine months, the agency is accredited with conditions. Otherwise, accreditation is denied, or possibly suspended, along with recommendations. In the case of successful accreditation, validity is only for a five-year period, following the date that the decision takes effect. Accreditation can be extended for up to two years further on a case-by-case basis. In such an event, the next accreditation period is shortened (Accreditation Council, 2016). Ten accreditation agencies are currently approved to assign the quality seal of the Accreditation Council as the Accreditation Council web page (<http://www.akkreditierungsrat.de>):

- 1- Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (ACQUIN) in Bavaria.
- 2- Accreditation Agency for Study Programs in Health and Social Sciences (AHPGS) in Freiburg.
- 3- Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Canonical Study Programs (AKAST) in Frankfurt Sankt Georgen.
- 4- Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria).
- 5- Agency for Quality Assurance by Accreditation of Study Programs (AQAS) in Cologne.
- 6- Accreditation Agency for Degree Programs in Engineering, Informatics/Computer Science, the Natural Sciences and Mathematics (ASIIN) in Düsseldorf.
- 7- Evaluation Agency Baden-Württemberg (evalag) in Mannheim.
- 8- Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (FIBAA) The foundation is in Zurich, the main office is in Bonn.
- 9- Swiss Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (AAQ) in Bern.
- 10- Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency Hannover (ZEVA).

### **5.8.7 Types of Accreditation in Germany**

#### **5.8.7.1 Study program accreditation**

The introduction of the program accreditation procedures was in 1998. As a result, accreditation is mandatory for establishing new bachelor's and master's study programs. Then in 2003 program accreditation became obligatory for bachelor's and master's programs in all of Germany (Accreditation Council, 2013).

There are eleven criteria for program accreditation:

- 1- The Qualification Objectives include scientific or artistic qualification, competence for employment and society, and personality development.
- 2- The compatibility of the Study Program Concepts with the System of Studies regarding: the Framework of Qualification for German Degrees, the requirements of the Common Structural Guidelines of the Länder for the Accreditation for Bachelor and Master's Study Programs of 10 October 2003 in the respective valid version, and Länder-specific structural guidelines for the accreditation for bachelor's and master's study programs.
- 3- The Study Program Concept involves the imparting of specialized knowledge and interdisciplinary knowledge as well as technical procedural and generic competences.

- 4- The academic feasibility guarantee through consideration of the expected entry qualifications, an appropriate curriculum design, information on the student workload, and corresponding offers of support as well as technical and interdisciplinary course guidance.
- 5- Examination System to be drawn in a form to measure the obtained objectives.
- 6- Program-related Cooperation to guarantee the quality of the study program concept, implemented in part by other organizations.
- 7- The program facilities to assure the adequate qualitative and quantitative facilities with regard to personnel, materials, and space.
- 8- Transparency and documentation to document and publish all study program information in regard to the prerequisites for admittance, the study program's courses, and examination requirements.
- 9- Quality assurance and further development in light of valuation results, studies of the students' work-load, academic accomplishment, and the whereabouts of the graduates.
- 10- Study programs with a special profile demand application of the accreditation procedures and criteria, taking into account these requirements.
- 11- Gender Justice and Equal Opportunities to be guaranteed in some cases, such as when students have health impairments, students having children, foreign students, students with a migration background and/or from so-called educationally disadvantaged classes. These must be at the level of the study program (Accreditation Council, 2013).

The process of study program accreditation is described as follows:

- 1- Dealing with study programs for Bachelor and Master Degrees from state and private Higher Education Institutions in Germany.
- 2- Keeping in line with The Criteria for the Accreditation of Study Programs which given by the Accreditation Council.
- 3- Based on the peer review principle.
- 4- Carried out by an evaluation group made up of representatives of Higher Education Institutions and of representatives of the profession, all of them being appointed by the selected agency which is accredited by the Accreditation Council.

- 5- Including an on-site visit of the institution and on-site interviews with the management of the higher education institution, teaching staff and students by the evaluators.
- 6- Evaluating the study program's profile and its academic focus.
- 7- Ending up with a report of peer reviewers' recommendations on the accreditation process of the study program.
- 8- According to the Accreditation Council's decision-making rules, the accreditation agency will decide based on the peer reviewers report about the program accreditation process either the Accreditation of Study Programs, for a limited period for duration of seven years, with or without conditions, or with the process being abandoned or the accreditation being rejected.
- 9- Publishing the accreditation agency positive decision regarding the study program accreditation process, moreover the experts' names and their report in the Accreditation Council database. In the case of a negative decision there will be no publishing; the agency will provide the Accreditation Council with a notification. (Accreditation Council, 2013).

The process of program accreditation in Germany was regarded as a dilemma in higher education reform after the Bologna Process (Kehm, 2006) and faced over the past years more and more criticisms, summarized as:

- 1- A lack of accreditation agencies and sufficient numbers of peers and experts to get involved in the process.
- 2- Program accreditation charging the universities high prices. (For example, one program up for accreditation cost one million euros or more.)
- 3- Program accreditation contributing to developing the program itself and not paying any attention to other quality assurance procedures or the improvement of the university.(Kehm, 2006)

This critical debate among actors in the German accreditation sector since 2004/2005 has driven the question of whether different approaches to accrediting programs might be better suited to solving problems in higher education institutions than the current program accreditation system (Grendel & Rosenbusch, 2010).

### **5.8.7.2 Cluster accreditation**

In the German accreditation system, another type of program accreditation has emerged: the cluster accreditation. This form of accreditation means a number of comparable study programs from a higher education organization (i.e., teachers' education programs in foreign language studies) are accredited in one process by the same agency, which in turn saves the university time and money (Accreditation Council, 2013).

The program accreditation process encourages development within the higher education organization of its structures and procedures to support program accreditation. The program accreditation process enhances the development of internal quality assurance structures. Some program accreditation requirements participated in the development of internal quality assurance structure such as students' feedback in student course evaluations, graduate tracer studies, and tools to measure students' workload (Accreditation Council, 2013).

### **5.8.7.3 System accreditation**

In December 2007 after ten years of applying program accreditation, a new accreditation approach was introduced in the German accreditation framework (KMK, 2007). The system accreditation was the most seriously considered option among alternative approaches for program accreditation. The reason for this was the nature of this system. This approach accredits the internal quality management system of the higher education institution while the task of program accreditation lies with the quality assurance unit in the higher education institution, even though they have similar approaches. It is a further development in the existing process of the study program accreditation, simplifying the process and reducing the workload for the higher education institutions. Both types of accreditation coexist, and the higher education institution can select one of them.

The central mechanism of the system accreditation is that the higher education institution must demonstrate its own ability to ensure that its system and study programs consistently meet the criteria. The main focus of this procedure is the internal quality assurance system in the area of teaching and learning of the higher education organization. The evaluation process is conducted to assess the appropriateness of the teaching and learning



structures and processes and their effectiveness in achieving the qualification objectives and guaranteeing high quality of the study programs. The higher education internal quality assurance system is evaluated using three different measures: ESG, KMK, and the criteria of the Accreditation Council being applied. Once this has been confirmed, the higher education institution is legally considered competent to approve study programs established within its accredited system, meaning these are accredited as well (Accreditation Council, 2013).

The requirements of the internal quality management and quality assurance systems to be accredited are explained in six criteria, which means there is no one prescribed design for it. It is the higher education institution's responsibility to build its own internal quality assurance system in light of these criteria (Accreditation Council, 2013). The criteria are as follows, according to the Accreditation Council (Accreditation Council, 2013):

**Criterion 1: Qualification goals**

The higher education institution has specified and published a training profile both for the institution as a whole and for its individual study programs. Its qualification goals should be continuously re-evaluated as a fundamental part of its overall strategy for improvement.

**Criterion 2: Internal management systems in teaching and learning**

The higher education institution has to operate its teaching and learning activities through a suitable management system, assuring that its qualification goals for study programs and the criteria for the accreditation of study programs are consistently applied. All actions carried out by the institution should be planned and coordinated within a clearly defined framework of procedures and structures.

**Criterion 3: Internal quality assurance system**

As a requirement of the ESG, the quality assurance in teaching and learning has to be a fundamental concept in the higher education institution. The higher education institution should have human and financial resources to assure sustainability and evaluate mechanisms for its internal quality assurance system, thus guaranteeing its effectiveness in assuring and improving the quality of teaching and learning.

**Criterion 4: Reporting system and Data Collection**

The higher education organization has available an internal reporting system which documents the structures and processes in the development and implementation of study programs as well as the structures, processes, and measures of quality assurance, their results, and effects. A basic assumption of the system accreditation is, however, the idea that the higher education institution, which takes over the responsibility for the quality assurance to a great extent, has the necessary structural prerequisites for this. For this reason, the higher education organization regularly reassure themselves as to whether or not they achieve their goals effectively and efficiently. For this, there is the ability at any time to present evidence with regard to each study program which was and is used in the declared internal and external quality assurance system, from the planning to the implementation and monitoring as well as the optimization phase.

**Criterion 5: Responsibility**

The decision process, competencies, and responsibilities in the management system for teaching and learning and in the internal quality assurance system are clearly defined and published university-wide.

**Criterion 6: Documentation**

The higher education institution informs the responsible committee for teaching and learning, and additionally the public and stakeholders, at least once a year in a suitable way about processes and results of the quality assurance measures in the area of teaching and learning.

**Criterion 7: Cooperation**

This criterion is about study programs which are implemented in a higher education organization by cooperating with another organization (local or foreign). This criterion guarantees the quality of this study program and its continuing improvement. A required agreement describes the type and area of this cooperation.

The procedures for this type of accreditation are, in principle, quite similar to the program accreditation procedure, but with a few essential differences. According to the Accreditation Council (Accreditation Council, 2013), the system accreditation process:

- 1- Is multi-step, based on the principle of peer review with at least one international member;
- 2- Consists of a site visit by the agency and at least two peer reviewers;
- 3- Is based on the Rules for the accreditation of study programs and system accreditation;
- 4- Includes seven criteria for system accreditation, which are guidelines for the internal quality assurance systems of German higher education institutions;
- 5- Works on the internal quality assurance system of a higher education institution;
- 6- Reviews the university's documentation regarding its internal quality assurance system, and the site visits, the peer reviewers' evaluation of how the IQA system works and whether it meets the 11 criteria applied in program accreditation;
- 7- Applies to different steps with a program random sample subject to additional peer review and a feature random sample in which the peer reviewers assess the application of one of the seven criteria for system accreditation to all universities' study programs;
- 8- Reviews teaching and learning structures and processes to determine whether they ensure the achievement of the learning outcomes and a high quality of courses;
- 9- Evaluates the internal quality management system of higher education in light of the ESG, the requirements of the KMK, and the criteria listed by the Accreditation Council application;
- 10- Has the consequence that all programs that have passed through the quality management system for the higher education institution must be certified for the period of accreditation and bear the quality seal of the Foundation;
- 11- Awarded with or without conditions or it can be withheld, with renewal required after a period of six year for the first accreditation then after eight years.

Grendel and Rosenbusch (2010) have mentioned the main advantages of system accreditation are its enhancing the university's autonomy in developing a competitive profile, including all university management goals (university development plans, research quality, organizational development) in the quality assurance process, and integrating the quality assurance and development instruments into a comprehensive quality management system for study programs.

System accreditation procedures go in three phases as the Rules for the Accreditation of Study Programs and for system accreditation (Accreditation Council, 2013):

### **First phase-Required documentation**

A higher education institution selects an accreditation agency and then sends an application for accreditation in keeping with the requirements given, including a short report on the body's internal management and decision-making structures, the outline of the institution, and its study programs. The report sheds light on quality goals and the system of internal quality assurance, as well as on the running of the quality assurance and development processes in the field of teaching and learning. (Some German States require the application's suitability concerning that state's higher education plans to be evaluated by the responsible (Kehm, 2013). The report should involve an expression of views held by a group of students representing the university. The report for a re-accreditation process should include a review of the reform's measures of quality insufficiency. The university passes on documents that are already available and that were not prepared especially for the accreditation process.

### **Second phase-Review process**

The agency carries out a preliminary assessment for the application, determining whether it is complete and whether the study program in question is structured in line with the basic requirements. Then the agency proposes costs and a time plan for the accreditation process. This phase consists of two steps, beginning after the higher education institution's approval of the proposed cost. The main elements of the review process are the management systems and quality assurance systems and evaluation of their effectiveness through different kinds of features and program samples. This review includes three site visits.

The application is examined in more detail by a proposed audit team and then by suggested (expert peer) reviewers in an on-site visit. The latter group consists of three members with experience in the field of higher education governance and internal university quality assurance, a student member with experience in university self-management and accreditation, and a member of the professional practice of each study program. In addition, one member of the expert group should have experience in university administration, designing

study programs, and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. Also a member of the expert group should come from abroad.

The central role of the experts for the quality of the accreditation processes corresponds to the emphasis on the necessity of preparing the panel members for the process. Only panel members who exactly know their responsibilities and functions of the process regulations and evaluation criteria can guarantee a regular and qualitatively high-quality appraisal. It is true that the terminology “preparation” absolutely allows for interpretation. A restriction in the preparation for sending relevant resolutions and documents may hardly, however, be enough. Correct role behavior plays just as big a role, in order to rule out, as far as possible, a classical problem of every review by experts – an appraisal using individual standards. The impartiality of the experts, after all, is an indispensable standard of accreditation processes. The agency has to guarantee in the very least that they can achieve this.

### **Two site visits**

Evaluation of the internal quality assurance system in a higher education institution for study programs accreditation and system accreditation comprises a total of two visits. In the first site visit, the expert peer group collects information on the university and its management system. It examines whether the documents are valid and complete and determines which further documents are needed for the second site visit. In the second site visit, the expert peer group analyzes the documents and applies the feature sample. It discusses them with the higher education institution management, the administrative staff, officers responsible for equal opportunities and for quality assurance, and representatives of the teachers and students. These activities are included in a report and offered to the expert peer groups of the program samples.

### **Random samples**

The purpose of the sample is to verify whether the peer-reviewed quality assurance system’s intended results actually occur at program level and whether quality is thus guaranteed in teaching and learning. In particular, whether possible quality problems that are found in the program and characteristic sample have a systemic cause is examined. The central question of the system accreditation is the effectiveness of the management and quality

assurance systems and, as a result, its suitability for the guarantee of high quality and the compliance with formal guidelines for study programs.

Besides the review on a systemic level, two process elements also serve to answer the question on the study program level, the feature random sample and the program random sample. The feature random sample especially serves to help with the compliance with the accreditation criteria for the accreditation of study programs in all study programs of the university. The objects of the attribute random sampling can be, in particular, the modularization concept of the university, the system of awarding ECTS points, the examination system, etc. The program random sample is comprised of detailed reviews of 15% of the study programs as a second random sample for the review of the effectiveness of the control systems and quality assurance systems also applies, namely, to the study program level. Its direction is, however, not horizontal but vertical. Instead of checking selected attributes of the study program design over all the study programs, all attributes are always checked based on a study program.

### **The third phase-Report and decision**

The panel prepares, based on consideration of the outcomes of the program random samples and participation of the chairs of the expert groups for the program random samples, a final report with a resolution recommendation for the final accreditation decision. The results of the two random samples play an important role in the review. The core question asks which conclusions can be drawn from the results of the random samples on the functions of the quality assurance systems. Only when the review yields that the management and quality assurance system is causally responsible for high quality in study programs and their compliance with the formal guidelines, namely, that the system “shows effects,” can it also be accredited.

The process of system accreditation leads to a decision of the “classical” type for accreditation processes because a decision can only be positive or negative. Then the decision is published.

### **The consequences of the accreditation procedures**

A positive system accreditation certifies that the university has a suitable quality assurance system in the area of teaching and learning to guarantee the achievement of the qualification goals and the quality standards of its study programs. Study programs set up after the system accreditation or which were already the subject of internal quality assurance according to the guidelines of the accredited systems are, therefore, accredited. A higher education institution that fails in the process has to get accreditation for its programs by way of program accreditation.

## **5.9 Quality assurance and accreditation practices in higher education sector at the national level of Saudi Arabia**

### **Background**

At the beginning, interest in quality assurance in the Saudi higher education sector was shown in individual initiatives by some educational programs and colleges in some higher education organizations. In the eighties, some colleges adopted quality standards in their programs. King Saud University in Riyadh and King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM) in Dhahran adopted quality assurance procedures in their engineering and computer programs, then applied for accreditation by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology ABET,<sup>4</sup> and obtained it (Mjeed & Al-Zaiat, 2008). This was followed in the 1990s by a new form of individual initiatives, with some universities, such as King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, founding quality assurance centers within their organizational structures. These centers developed to become academic development deanships, as in the case of KFUPM. Moreover, some efforts were made by universities to ensure the quality of the outputs of their educational programs. Many universities, such as KFUPM and King Faisal University, developed acceptance tests for applicants. In addition, at that time, most Saudi universities used assessment questionnaires at the end of each semester to evaluate teachers and curriculum, but use of their results was very limited because of the absence of integrated quality assurance systems.

In general, there was no integrated national system for quality assurance and accreditation, but there were initiatives and individual efforts from some universities and educational programs to apply quality standards and seek accreditation from international agencies. These efforts varied from one educational organization to another.

### **5.9.1 The quality of higher education institutions in Saudi Arabian National Development Plans (1995-2018)**

In the Saudi context, the national development plans are governmental documents published by the Ministry of Economy and Planning. The National Development Plan (NDP) is a strategic document issued every five years. It includes Saudi Arabia's economic and social

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<sup>4</sup> The Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) is a United States accreditation body, founded in 1932. It accredits college and university programs in the disciplines of applied and natural science, computing, engineering and engineering technology at the associate, bachelor's and master's degree levels (<http://www.abet.org/>).



development strategies and development goals in five years. The plans are designed to respond to national priorities, according to local and international variables, in addition to being used as a measure to monitor the effectiveness of implementation with the relevant authorities. These governmental documents are considered to be a report reflecting the current situation (achievements, problems, and challenges) and the governmental opinion about the different issues and their future plans. For these reasons, these plans are very useful documents in serving the research purposes.

These plans consist of two parts. The first part is the plan document, which includes a summary of the development process of the last plan and its achievement, the current situation and problems, the general objectives for the coming period, and the proposed policies and programs for developing different sectors. The second part is the operational plan. It includes plans for each governmental sector's program of work, general objectives, policies, programs, and projects proposed to achieve these objectives, as well as the financial allocations and manpower and the timetable for implementation.

This section reviews the Saudi plans to trace the entrance of this policy to the Saudi educational policy and what the reasons and conditions were at that time. For the time between 1995 and 2015, starting from the Sixth Development Plan (where the accreditation was mentioned for the first time) and ending with the ninth one, this research goes through these four national development plans, and especially the part on higher education, to portray the new policy and reform concerning the adoption of quality assurance and accreditation procedures in the Saudi higher education sector.

### **The Sixth National Development Plan (1995-2000)**

The accreditation system was introduced for the first time in this development plan, as a solution for the universities' problems in that period. Between 1990 and 1995, represented in the Fifth Development Plan, several changes occurred in Saudi higher education institutions. One of them was the expansion of post-graduate studies (massification). In some higher institutions, this was not adequately planned or prepared for. However, some of the other higher education institutions which had the appropriate capabilities abstained from this reform. Thus, the Sixth Development Plan stressed the need for an internal (national) and external

(international) accreditation system for evaluating the existing programs and monitoring the establishment of new ones to be in line with relevant resources and standards and recognized internationally. The strategy of the Sixth Development Plan for higher education included, as a second point, raising the quality and efficiency of higher education institutions in order to improve the standard and the content of the educational process.

#### **The Seventh National Development Plan (2000-2005)**

This plan described the situation of higher education institutions in the period of the Sixth Development Plan, indicating that who suffered from the problem of the decline in their internal and external efficiency. That was shown by the discord between the labor market's qualifications and the qualifications of graduates, as well as the increase in the number of years students spent in the universities. With the seventh national development plan, all of this led to an urgent need for procedures which could improve the efficiency of the higher education institutions. In 2000, the National Center of Assessment in Higher Education was founded, which coincided with changes in the admission policies. This center aimed to design and conduct national assessment exams to assess the students' abilities and skills and their educational achievement. These test results, together with the high school diploma, are used as a standard requirement for college admission.

#### **The Eighth National Development Plan (2005-2010)**

This development plan included the importance of quality assurance and academic accreditation procedures as important tools required to achieve the national policy for science, technology, and innovation. Moreover, this development plan mentioned that in the previous period of the Seventh Development Plan (1999-2004), there was a growing interest shown by the Saudi higher education institutions in internal and external evaluation. As a result, some universities' programs were evaluated according to national or international standards. In addition, some universities tried to get program accreditation, especially for engineering and medicine, from international associations. This plan suggested significant growth in the coming years in this trend due to the royal approval establishing the National Commission for Assessment and Academic Accreditation (NCAAA) in 2003. The foundation of this commission came as a result of the recent obstacles and the need for achieving quality of higher education

outputs and continues with developments for this sector to cope with global trends (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012).

### **The Ninth National Development Plan (2010-2015)**

This development plan described the quality of education as an important issue and a concern of officers and those interested in higher education issues in this period. It acknowledged that the efforts of the higher education ministry and higher education institutions have contributed to improving the quality of the educational process. This led to high scores at Saudi universities, which led them to obtain advanced places in university world ranking such as Shanghai. Nevertheless, some other Saudi higher education institutions remained sub-standard and cannot compete at all, indicating the disparity in the Saudi higher education institution quality level. This situation demands continued efforts for making improvements as a main goal of this development plan (Ministry of Economic and Planning, the ninth National plans, 2010).

#### **5.9.2 The formation of Saudi quality assurance and accreditation system: The establishment of the National Commission of Assessment and Academic Accreditation (NCAAA)**

The most important action and the first effective step in the adoption process of the evaluation and accreditation system is represented in the establishment of the National Commission of Assessment and Academic Accreditation (NCAAA) in 2003. This commission, in keeping with its by-laws, is in charge of implementing internal and external quality assurance procedures in the Saudi higher education sector, which includes all public and private postsecondary institutions and all postsecondary programs, other than military education. It is responsible for creating the quality standards and conducting program and institution accreditation procedures. The NCAAA is obligated to a plan for supporting, encouraging, and evaluating the quality assurance practices in these organizations to guarantee the quality of student learning, management processes, and services provided in these organizations and their equality to international standards. The Saudi quality assurance and accreditation system follows a centralist model, where the quality assurance is carried out and arranged through one national agency (Serrano-Velarde, 2014). Moreover, the NCAAA is a full member in the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).

The main objectives for establishing this commission are improving the quality of private and public higher education organizations in Saudi Arabia, guiding them to respond to the national strategic priorities; creating performance standards for evaluation, which coincide with the global standards, adjusting the quality of new programs and evaluating ongoing programs; and ensuring transparency and accountability in this sector. The main tasks to maintain these objectives are:

- the establishment of rules, standards, and procedures for academic evaluation and accreditation and formulation of regulations to ensure their application in different higher education organizations;
- the determination of the standards and frameworks for practicing academic work, such as teaching and training, by drafting regulations to ensure their application in different academic organizations and preparing regulations for supervising these professions;
- the accreditation of new higher education organizations, such as universities, colleges, institutes, their colleges, specialties, and academic plans;
- periodic review, evaluation, and accreditation of existing higher education organizations, their colleges, and academic plans;
- coordination of national accreditation in higher education by international agencies;
- publication of the data and information related to the accreditation system. (NCAAA, 2015).

The NCAAA consists of 17 members including the Minister of Education as a president, the undersecretary of the Ministry of Education, six members from higher education organizations' faculty/staff, a member from a private higher education organization, three members from the business sector, two members from the public higher education organizations, one member each from the Saudi Commission for Medical Specialties, the Saudi Commission for the Engineers, and the Saudi Organization for Certified Public Accountants. A general secretary is appointed from the staff members of higher education organizations' faculties ( Higher Education Council. 2003).

### **5.9.3 The first stage of the formation process of the Saudi accreditation system**

The Saudi accreditation system went through three stages of formation. The first was a stage of implementation. This was the foundation step, which included setting the standards and procedures of the quality assurance and accreditation system. In this stage the official documents were issued and reviewed in many different ways. In the preparation phase of these standards and procedures, the NCAAA consulted experts from Saudi higher education organizations and a number of international experts from countries with long experience in this regard. This action aimed at exploring the local status and needs of the higher education system and at the same time the example of the international quality assurance and accreditation models. That followed by creating the quality assurance and accreditation practices and standards by using the collected information about the local needs and international models.

During this phase these standards were used in training programs, exploratory studies, and as tools to assess the private colleges in order to qualify them for the scholarship program. The standards were also used for several years in higher education institutions in initial self-assessments. During this period, standards documents were continuously amended and some modifications and additions were carried out. As a final step, the Commission, a distinguished group of top international consultants, revised the final form of the documents, expressed their opinions and agreed unanimously on the final documents of accreditation standards (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012).

### **5.9.4 The second stage of implementation process of the Saudi accreditation system**

This was a transition stage, which was designed to take in to account the situation of the higher education organizations at that time. It aimed at assessing these organizations in their efforts to found internal quality assurance systems by providing training programs and technical support to these organizations. This stage also included completing the preparations for the introduction of external assessments by international experts accompanied by local experts to localize expertise in this area. During this stage, many training programs were designed and implemented inside and outside Saudi Arabia in order to promote and spread the culture of quality and introduce the quality assurance system and accreditation system to the officials concerned and faculty members of the higher education organizations. These training programs

also aimed to support organizations of higher education to prepare for the assessments and accreditation, done by the commission in its third stage (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012).

#### **5.9.5 The third stage of implementation process of the Saudi accreditation system**

This stage was the final stage of completing the implementation of the accreditation system of all higher education organizations. In this stage, most higher education organizations applied internal quality assurance procedures. That was followed by the strategic plan for the period between 2007 to 2011 which had six objectives:

- 1- To work on implementing internal quality assurance procedures in all higher education organizations;
- 2- To continue providing the higher education organizations with training, as well as supporting and providing information and a database in their implementation of internal quality assurance procedures;
- 3- To develop quality standards for different types of higher education such as distance learning and technical and vocational education;
- 4- To conduct developmental institutional accreditation for all higher education organizations;
- 5- To conduct program accreditation for at least three majors in all higher education organizations;
- 6- To strengthen the cooperation with international bodies for quality assurance and accreditation for consulting and information.(Ministry of Higher Education. 2012)

In this period the commission issued a number of regulations and frameworks for the accreditation procedures including:

- 1- documents of performance quality standards in four chapters: quality standards for institutions, quality standards for education programs, self-assessment scales for institutions, and a self-assessment scale for study programs;
- 2- the National Qualifications Framework which specified foundational standards of learning outcomes for each level of qualifications;
- 3- a guide for quality assurance and accreditation in three parts: Standards and Processes for Quality Assurance and Accreditation, Internal Quality Assurance, and

External Reviews for Accreditation and Quality Assurance. (This guide explained the whole accreditation procedure in Saudi higher education.) (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012).

#### **5.9.6 The accreditation's standards**

The NCAAA formulated eleven standards to be used by the reviewers in the assessment of higher education organizations to be accredited and by the organizations themselves to create their internal quality assurance systems. The standards are generally considered good practices in postsecondary institutions. The standards are described in two documents, *Standards for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education Institutions* and *Standards for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education Programs*. Two companion documents were provided to help higher education organizations and those responsible for applying programs in evaluating their performance in relation to the standards. These are the *Self Evaluation Scales for Higher Education Institutions* and the *Self Evaluation Scales for Higher Education Programs*.

The eleven standards are applied for both institutions and programs but in different ways. The standards are presented in five groups (NCAAA, 2015):

##### **The first group of standards is about the Institutional Context:**

- 1) The institution's mission and objectives should be formulated in a clear form and reflected in the institution's plans and actions.
- 2) The governance and administration bodies work in effective leadership and develop the institution's policy, processes, and structures. Their activities in planning and management must occur within a framework to ensure financial and administrative accountability.
- 3) The institution's management of quality assurance and improvement system is for all institutions' sections, involves all of its planning and administrative processes, and with evaluating processes for inputs, processes, and outcomes with a particular focus on outcomes as well as staff and students improving and evaluating.

**The second group of standards is about the quality of learning and teaching**

4) The learning and teaching quality for all study programs is ensured through an effective system and against high standards of learning and teaching through initial approvals, monitoring of performance, and provision of institution-wide support services. Moreover, student learning outcomes should be compatible with the National Qualifications Framework and, for professional programs, requirements for employment or professional practice. Teaching staff must be appropriately qualified and experienced for their particular teaching responsibilities, use teaching strategies suitable for different kinds of learning outcomes, and participate in activities to improve their teaching effectiveness. Teaching quality and the effectiveness of programs must be evaluated through student assessments and graduate and employer surveys, with feedback used as a basis for plans for improvement.

**The third group of standards is about support for student learning**

5) Student administration and support services and the admissions mechanisms must be effective and fair. Students' rights and responsibilities must be clearly defined and understood, with transparent and fair procedures available for discipline and appeals. Mechanisms for academic advice, counselling, and support services must be accessible and responsive to student needs. Support services for students must go beyond formal academic requirements and include extracurricular provisions for religious, cultural, sporting, and other activities relevant to the needs of the student body.

6) Learning resources are available which meet the particular requirements of the institution's programs and provided at an adequate level, including libraries and provisions for access to electronic and other reference material. Library and associated information technology facilities must be accessible at times to support independent learning, with assistance provided in finding material required. Facilities must be provided for individual and group study in an environment conducive to effective investigations and research. The services must be evaluated and should be improved in response to systematic feedback from teaching staff and students.



**The fourth group of standards is about supporting infrastructure**

7) Facilities and equipment must be available to meet the study programs' requirements and offer a safe and healthy environment for high quality education. By observing the use of the facilities and using the results of user surveys, improvements should be made.

8) Adequate financial resources for the programs and services offered must be available and efficiently managed in keeping with program requirements and institutional priorities. Budgetary processes should allow for long-term planning over at least a three-year period. Effective systems must be used for budgeting, financial delegations, and accountability, providing flexibility for managers at different levels in the institution combined with institutional oversight and effective risk management.

9) Teaching and other staff must have the qualifications and experience for performing their responsibilities effectively, and their performance should be the subject of a periodic evaluation and development strategies to ensure continuing improvement in the expertise of teaching and other staff.

**The fifth group of standards is about the community contributions**

10) Research at the institution must adopt a research strategy which is compatible with its mission and objectives. All staff teaching higher education programs must be involved in research activities to ensure they remain up to date with developments in their field, and those developments should be reflected in their teaching. Teaching staff must participate in research in their field in addition to their work in teaching postgraduate programs or supervising postgraduate students' research. The availability of adequate facilities and equipment to serve the research activities should be maintained. The teaching staff must be encouraged to pursue research interests and to publish the results of that research. Their research contributions must be recognized and reflected in evaluation and promotion criteria. The research output of the institution must be monitored, reported, and benchmarked against that of other similar institutions. Clear and equitable policies must be established for ownership and commercialization of intellectual property.

11) Institutional relationships with the community and contributions to the community are important institutional responsibilities. Community development should be assisted by providing facilities and services and by the participation of teaching and other staff.

In institutional accreditation, the assessment includes performance in relation to all of these areas regarding the institution as a whole, in addition to including an overview of programs across the institution. For program accreditation, the assessment process is for each standard considered from the perspective of the particular program under review, with special emphasis on standards 3 and 4.

#### **5.9.7 The internal quality assurance system**

The Saudi quality assurance and accreditation system requires the existing higher education organizations to integrate comprehensive internal quality assurance practices as a part of all their structures and policies. Moreover, the abovementioned standards have to be maintained and applied in structuring the internal quality assurance system.

In the case of a new higher education organization being established, these practices should be a part of its plans. The higher education organizations are expected to conduct detailed reporting procedures including plans and processes in relation to its mission and goals and reviews of its operations and monitoring processes. These actions provide essential mechanisms to help the organization in evaluating itself and are a fundamental required for external evaluation by the NCAAA. In addition, the organization is responsible for a self-assessment process using appropriate performance indicators such as the standards provided by the Commission.

#### **5.9.8 The external quality assurance system**

In the Saudi higher education sector, the external quality assurance procedures established by the NCAAA is for accreditation of institutions and programs against predetermined quality standards. For the existing public and private higher education organizations, the evaluation process is carried out by trained and experienced reviewers from the NCAAA. They review the organizations' documents and conduct a site visit and then come up with recommendations to the Commission (NCAAA, 2015).

In the case of new higher education organizations, on the one hand the establishment of a public higher education organization, the proposal of the organization establishment is prepared to meet the requirements of the Ministry of Education. Then it is the subject of review by the Education Ministry. These kinds of organizations do not need for an initial license to be established. Moreover, the NCAAA should be provided with the organization's internal quality assurance procedures and its study programs within the first three years of its operation. The evaluation of accreditation will be done when the first group of students has graduated, and once the organization has completed its first self-evaluation.

On the other hand, for the establishment of private higher education organizations, these kinds of organizations need a license to be established after a reviewing process is carried out by the Ministry of Education as well as NCAAA. In this process, the proposal of this organization and its first activities and the plans for further development are assessed. This evaluation aims at determining whether the plans are likely to satisfy the required standards, whether the programs will meet accreditation requirements, and whether the plans also meet the standards established by the relevant ministry. This process ends with issuing the operation license for the organization.

In the newly established public higher education organization, the accreditation procedures and evaluation are carried out when the first group of students complete their studies. In general, the evaluation processes for institutions and of programs are similar to each other. The institution accreditation process treats all organization's activities and the quality of them, including their programs, facilities, and services to support them, whereas the program accreditation process deals with a specific program in more detail regarding the sub-standards of teaching and learning for this program (NCAAA, 2015).

#### **5.9.9 The application of the quality assurance accreditation system**

In the Saudi higher education sector, the transition to these procedures is supported by NCAAA. Both organizations and programs are encouraged to apply internal quality assurance processes. Moreover, the NCAAA assists the transition processes by offering training and advice (NCAAA, 2015).

The decision about the quality of an organization or program is based on evidence. This evidence is considered confirmation about the information that will lead the decision-making process. Thus, the higher education organization has to identify in advance of its plans for applying an internal quality assurance system which kind of evidence it will adopt and provide. The external reviewers use this evidence which produced during the organization self-evaluation process to verify the conclusions of the report made by an organization. This often involves consideration of evidence that goes beyond the performance indicators that have been selected by the institution. One of the ways to create evidence is to use performance indicators to assess or confirm. The NCAAA provides 33 key performance indicators which can be used for this purpose (NCAAA, 2015).

#### **5.9.10 The requirements for the internal quality assurance system**

The NCAAA explains the main requirements of a higher education organization for an effective internal quality assurance system. The commitment and support from the organization's leaders across the different levels on the issue of quality is seen as a vital factor for an effective quality assurance system. The leaders are not only the ones who encourage the effective quality assurance system: the commitment to quality has to be disseminated with each individual teaching staff and among other staff. Each unit and each member evaluates its own performance and plans for its improvement (NCAAA, 2015).

Appropriate organizational arrangements should be made in the higher education organization structure to be ready for the application of the quality assurance and accreditation system. The NCAAA has drawn up an outline to be followed for the higher education organizations' structuring of plans for the internal quality assurance system. This outline includes:

- Establishment of a quality center with several responsibilities regarding the quality assurance system;
- Appointment of a Quality Director;
- Formation of a Quality Committee including members from all university units, including both colleges and other functional areas, to participate with the quality center in planning and applying the quality assurance system;

- Involvement of all organizational units and members in the quality assurance system through performance monitoring, planning of improvements, and implementation;
- Performance monitoring through yearly assessment processes.

#### **5.9.11 The developmental accreditation and the full accreditation procedures**

The NCAAA provides a developmental accreditation for both organizations and programs. The main idea of this accreditation is to apply the NCAAA accreditation standards, processes, and protocols as a development guide. In this accreditation, an organization or a program uses the NCAAA standards, sub-standards, best practices, templates, and processes for its plans, designs, and improvement. This could be followed by asking for a mock accreditation review and site visit.

All these activities are similar to full accreditation procedures except there is no accreditation decision. Moreover, recommendations are provided for the next stage. The developmental accreditation results in a number of benefits for the organization and the program, thorough applying the accreditation process for developmental accreditation the organization will design build and improve according to the NCAAA standards, sub-standards, best practices, templates, and processes. Thus the main idea of this action is to use the NCAAA accreditation procedures and standards as a development pattern .A full accreditation is awarded by the NCAAA when its standards have been met for a seven-year period. After this period, a further independent evaluation by the NCAAA occurs to certify that the institution and its programs are continuing with developments and quality is being maintained.

This provides the vertical case study of the quality assurance and accreditation system in both Germany and Saudi Arabia, starting with the international level of this phenomenon and ending with the current systems in these two countries. This review from different literature and policy documents provides information and data that will be used with the following section of experts' interviews in answering the research questions in last part of the research and drawing the whole image about the phenomenon of quality assurance and accreditation in the two countries.

### **5.10 The expert interviews**

As noted in Chapter Three, this research uses expert interviews from Germany and Saudi Arabia in collecting part of its data. The interviews were arranged around the second and third research questions relating to the adoption and improving of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education in the study's countries, shown in Table 6 and 7. This step was taken to address the study sub-questions for RQ 2 and 3. Additional information was obtained from the documents and websites of the institutions.

The interview data collection in both countries of the study focused mainly on identification of the different aspects of the adoption of accreditation systems from the concerned person's point of view and experience through their personal involvement in it. Experts were asked to respond to semi-structured questions that were designed to elicit their views on the adoption and formation processes of quality assurance and accreditation for the education provided in the higher education sectors in Germany and Saudi Arabia. They were also asked to discuss the history of quality and the reasons behind this adoption, ways of improving current practices, and their characteristics.

In response to the interview questions, seven major themes emerged:

- Personal information about the experts and their experience in this field. This issue is not connected to the adoption process itself, but it gains importance by showing the value of the participants' answers.
- Historical extension of the meaning of quality and accreditation in each higher education sector.
- The source and evolution of the idea of applying quality assurance and accreditation.
- The reasons behind this new policy adoption and the accompanying circumstances.
- The formation process of the current quality and accreditation practices and the required changes in the whole system of higher education.
- The application processes of these practices and requirements as well as obstacles, costs, and benefits.

- The experts' opinion on the result of applying these practices, which could lead to modeling all higher education systems around the world in one mold, and the issue of keeping the distinctive cultural differences and creativity.

This chapter is organized according to these themes.

### **5.10.1 The personal information of the experts**

#### **a. The German experts**

Three German experts were interviewed: the head of the Center for Evaluation and Quality Assurance in a public German university, which is one of Europe's oldest universities, the managing director of the German Accreditation Council, and the managing director of an accreditation agency, which performs accreditation for all types of higher education institutions with all types of programs and disciplines. In regard to their experience, the longest experience of these experts was 18 years, followed by 10 years and then nine years.

#### **b. The Saudi experts**

Conversely, six Saudi experts were interviewed, selected due to their long experience playing an important role in the formation process of the accreditation system in Saudi institutions of higher education, especially the experts from the NCAAA. The majority of the experts (4) were counselors in the Saudi NCAAA, while one expert was the dean of quality assurance in one of Riyadh's prominent public universities and another expert was dean of quality assurance and academic accreditation in one of Riyadh's private universities. With regard to the experts' previous experience in the field of accreditation and quality assurance procedures, the majority of the study experts (3) started working in this field about 10 years ago, while three of them have different numbers of experience years (14 years, 13 years, and 7 years). The longest experiences belong to the counselors in NCAAA: (14 years and 13 years), whereas the shortest period of experience was 7 years.

### **5.10.2 The quality culture and control in higher education**

The two countries' experts stress that the word *quality* was almost not existent in the higher education sectors. Moreover, all experts agreed on the absence of a nucleus of quality assurance and accreditation practices in their higher education sectors in the time before their

official adoption. The following sections give more detailed information on the previous practices reflecting quality control for each context.

**a. The German context**

These experts were considering the previous quality control in higher education before the adoption of current quality assurance and accreditation practices represented in a direct state control by the mandatory approving for each study track and new universities. One expert mentioned that for the universities’ staffs their degrees are the main standard for assuring the quality of their work. Another expert saw that the peer review process was a quite common procedure for funding and publication in many scientific contexts. These views are presented in Table 9.

**Table 9. The previous quality control procedures in German higher education system**

The quality control procedures in higher education were:	Number of experts
The state approval for study tracks and for the establishment of new universities, which would not be checked again. It was a direct control.	3
The qualification of the university staff is their second degree with some experience which qualify him at a good standard.	1
The peer review procedure, which has been quite common in research funding since 1920, but not in studying and teaching.	1

**b. The Saudi experts**

Table 10 below explains the quality control meaning in Saudi higher education before the adoption of the current procedures. Three experts agreed that quality means a staff member does his best to work well. One expert saw that quality control in higher education was maintained through state approved descriptions for every subject and their objectives. The comment of two experts was that there was no quality culture in the higher education sector.



**Table 10. The previous quality control procedures in Saudi higher education system**

<b>Quality control in higher education was:</b>	<b>Number of experts</b>
The staff member does his best to work well.	3
Descriptions for every subject and their objectives.	1
No quality culture in higher education.	2

### **5.10.3 Where the idea of this adoption came from**

#### **a. The German case**

As can be derived from the table 11 below, two experts believed that the idea of adopting quality assurance and accreditation practices came after the Bologna Process, while one expert found the main issues in quality assurance had been developed and put partly into practice before 1999 and before the Bologna Process. In the 1990s, many projects were introduced for “evaluation of studying and teaching”. Then, these became encompassed by the system of accreditation because of the need of the ministries to get this formal approval. One expert saw the source of this adoption as the Americans’ long and successful experience in the accreditation system. Other conditions and reasons were suggested by the experts which were: the national problems in higher education appeared at that time and required a solution imposed by a global trend and internationalization in higher education.

**Table 11. Where the idea of this adoption in the German higher education came from**

<b>The conditions behind the introduction of quality assurance and accreditation practices:</b>	<b>Number of experts</b>
The Bologna Process	2
The long American experience in accreditation as a mimetic model	1
The global debate about quality in higher education as a solution for higher education problems	1
The “evaluation of studying and teaching” projects in the 1990s, which became encompassed by system of accreditation	1
Internationalization in higher education	1

**b. The Saudi case**

The table 12 below shows the conditions and reasons behind the entrance of quality assurance and accreditation practices into the higher education sector. Four experts saw changes in the higher education landscape such as the increasing student numbers and expansion of the higher education sector behind the demand for adopting new management practices. Three experts stressed the role played by globalization and internationalization in this adoption. The issues of quality of the outcomes and the funding of higher education organizations were named by the same number of experts as a critical reason. Also the adoption of quality assurance and accreditation practices was a part of the influence of the transparency and accountability trend in higher education situations at the international level by international agencies such as UNESCO, in the opinion of two experts. Moreover, the effect of international interactions between Saudi and American and Canadian universities, especially in the area of scholarship students, and the the effect of the international accreditation agencies were mentioned in this regard by one expert.

**Table 12. Where the idea of this adoption in the Saudi higher education system came from**

<b>The conditions behind the introduction of these :</b>	<b>Number of experts</b>
The transition processes at that time, which included increases in student numbers and expansion of the higher education sector, leading to a need for new management practices	4
Globalization and internationalization as a global trend in higher education	3
The issues of outcome quality and funding	3
Increases in the transparency in the higher education situation at the national level and improvements in the international transparency and accountability, as well as follow up and questioning from international organizations (UNESCO reports)	2
Competition between local universities in graduating students with skills fit for local and international competition	2
The interaction between Saudi universities and American and Canadian universities which had applied these practices	1
The influence of international accreditation agencies and universities' world rankings	1

#### **5.10.4 The role of the international agencies in this adoption**

##### **a. The German case**

German experts, as shown in Table 13, differed regarding the role of international agencies in the adoption of quality assurance and accreditation practices in higher education. Two of them believe in the role of international agencies (ENQA) in this adoption, while one saw the role as closer to zero.

**Table 13. The role of international agencies in the adoption of German quality assurance and accreditation system**

<b>The role of international agencies:</b>	<b>Number of experts</b>
Leading role of ENQA and the GSE	2
No substantial and direct role for international institutions	1

**b. The Saudi case**

As noticeable from the table 14 below, the majority of the experts (2) saw the lack of substantial and direct roles of international organizations and agencies. The same number of experts saw UNESCO’s role and its plan to achieve sustainable development as affecting the national policy’s decision-making area. An equal number of experts saw the role of the international accreditation agencies and the role of the international universities in the birth of this adoption, with one expert for each.

**Table 14. The role of international agencies in the adoption of Saudi quality assurance and accreditation system**

<b>The role of international agencies:</b>	<b>Number of experts</b>
No substantial and direct role for international institutions	2
The international accreditation agencies	1
UNESCO and its role in achieving sustainable development in higher education	2
International universities	1

**5.10.5 The reasons that drove higher education organizations to adopt the procedures of quality assurance and accreditation**

**a. The German case**

The three German experts confirm the mandatory nature of applying these procedures.

**b. The Saudi case**

As evident from the table below, when the experts were asked about their opinions regarding the reasons driving higher education organization to apply these procedures, the majority of them saw the Saudi higher education organizations as having applied the quality assurance and academic accreditation system due to the competition between the different universities to achieve leadership, excellence, and students’ recruitment. They also believed that the Saudi higher education institutions applied the academic accreditation system only to save face for the educational organizations and their status. There were further different reasons listed by the experts, which included: a directive imposed by globalization and local needs, the need to narrow the gap between the Saudi universities’ students and their colleagues in international universities to which they were sent to complete their studies, a prerequisite for graduates to continue their studies abroad, a desire to be amongst the international classifications, a prerequisite for graduates to continue their studies abroad, an order by the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education, a prerequisite for the vision of King Abdullah for the knowledge society 2020, which had a significant role in this direction.

**Table 15. The reasons drove Saudi higher education organizations to adopt quality assurance and accreditation procedures**

<b>The reasons:</b>	<b>Number of experts</b>
A direction imposed by the global and domestic competition	1
A willingness to enter international classifications	1
A prerequisite for scholarships	1
Narrowing the level gap between Saudi scholarship students at international universities and the other students there	1
Competition between universities for leadership, excellence, and students’ recruitment	4
To maintain the institution’s reputation and status	3
A prerequisite from the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education	2

To achieve King Abdullah’s vision for the knowledge society 2020	1
To enhance and upgrade the educational process	1

### 5.10.6 The motivation behind the adoption of quality assurance and accreditation practices

#### a. The German case

In this question, five motivations encouraging the higher education organizations to adopt the practices of quality assurance and accreditation were suggested, and the experts were asked their opinions about the role played by these motivations. As can be derived from the table below, the German experts gave their opinions on the suggested motivations behind the adoption of quality assurance and accreditation practices. Two experts considered gaining legitimacy as the main motivations encouraging this adoption. Other motivations, given by one expert each, included: the cultural expectations of society, copying what were publicly known as the best practices from other organizations, and the influences of wider international agencies. The professionalization pressure played no role in this adoption in the experts’ opinions.

**Table 16. The motivation encouraging German higher education organizations to adopt the practices of quality assurance and accreditation**

<b>The suggested motivations:</b>	<b>Number of experts</b>
The cultural expectations of the society	1
To gain legitimacy	2
As a result of copying what were publicly known as the best practices from other organizations	1
Professionalization pressure	0
The influences of wider organizations or international agencies that controlled and supported the educational structures and strategies	1

### **b. The Saudi case**

As seen from the table below, the majority of the Saudi experts believed that there were three prime motives for a higher education organization to apply the quality assurance system and accreditation. These were the cultural expectations of the society, the addition of legitimacy to the higher education organization, and a willingness to apply well known practices as publicized by international organizations. Four experts saw the desire to add professionalism to the educational process as a motive for this adoption. Two experts considered this adoption as being due to the influence of the international organizations and agencies.

**Table 17. The motivation encouraging Saudi higher education organizations to adopt the practices of quality assurance and accreditation**

<b>The suggested motivations:</b>	<b>Number of experts</b>
The cultural expectations of the society.	5
To gain legitimacy	5
As a result of copying what were publicly known as the best practices from other organizations	5
Professionalization pressure	4
The influences of wider organizations or international agencies that control and support the educational structures and strategies	2

### **5.10.7 The formation process of accreditation practices in higher education institutions**

#### **a. The German case**

The development process of the current German higher education accreditation system from the experts' point of view went through different actions. First, in 1999, the law for applying accreditation was created, which required the establishment of the Accreditation Council. Then the agencies were founded. Afterwards, they noticed in 2007 or 2008 that there was no legal basis, so they established a legal basis for the whole system for the Accreditation Council. At the European level, an experts' committee set up the common criteria, the European Standards and Guidelines, which were then reflected in the national accreditation

criteria. At the same time, German experts looked at how the procedures should be developed. There was involvement by external peers, scientific peers and the entire state. They also looked at other countries, at what was done there, but there was no clear role from other international agencies. However, the British agency came to Germany as a consultant for the German Accreditation Council.

**b. The Saudi case**

For this part, the experts, especially those with the longest experiences in the NCAAA, were asked about the procedures for improving the current accreditation system. This process took several steps, starting with reviewing international accreditation systems, in particular the American, British, and Australian models. Next, the status of higher education institutions at the time was a subject for study to identify their problems and needs. In light of the previous two steps, the national accreditation and quality assurance system was built. That was followed by a number of preparation steps including: training the local experts by international experts (Americans, Australians, British) to take control over these practices, conducting seminars to discuss and explain these practices, conducting annual visits to international universities to review their successful experiences both in institutional accreditation and program accreditation, and developing new administrative structures and job titles in the administrative structures of the universities.

**5.10.8 The required restructuring for establishing quality assurance and an accreditation system**

**a. The German case**

German experts mentioned common required changes in order to adopt quality assurance practices, which were establishing a quality assurance system with personnel and restructuring the administrative system.

**b. The Saudi case**

The experts agreed on some common required changes which occurred in order to establish the quality assurance system. These included the number of credit hours in some programs, the curriculum and its content, development of women's departments, creation of the new job title "Dean of Quality".



### 5.10.9 The similarity of the accreditation practices in Saudi/German HEIs to other national accreditation practices

#### a. The German case

Two experts believed the German quality assurance and accreditation practices were similar to other national practices, as shown in the table below. One of these experts said this applied at least to the European systems, while one expert did not see this similarity between the German system and other national systems in this area.

**Table 18. The similarity of the German quality assurance and accreditation practices to other national accreditation practices**

Is there similarity of these practices to other national practices?	Number of experts
Yes	2
No	1

#### b. The Saudi case

According to the table below, the majority of the experts found a similarity between the Saudi quality assurance and accreditation system and the other national systems, whereas two of the experts found no similarity in this regard.

**Table 19. The similarity of the Saudi quality assurance and accreditation practices to other national accreditation practices**

Is there similarity of these practices to other national practices?	Number of experts
Yes	4
No	2

### 5.10.10 The main aspects characterizing these practices in the higher education sectors

#### a. The German case

This table below draws on the main characteristics of the German quality assurance and accreditation practices. The experts listed four of them: the German system has two levels with the accreditation council and the meta-accreditation agencies; the accreditation criteria are

broadly formulated; the system is about solving problems; and the formal state approval still works in the ministries' approval of a curriculum.

**Table 20. The main characteristics of these practices in German higher education sectors**

The main characteristics are:	Number of experts
Two level system with meta-accreditation agencies	1
The accreditation criteria are less detailed	1
The system is about solving problems	1
German ministries are still very interested in the approval of a curriculum and this directly stems from the formal state approval	1

**b. The Saudi case**

The experts in the study determined which characteristics distinguished the Saudi quality assurance and accreditation system. The characteristics of this system were: the relevance of this system to the local context and culture by including Islamic and Arab identity and meeting the requirements of the local labor market, its comprehensive model by including different aspects from a number of international models, and its structure as a centralized system having one body to guide and supervise these practices. The last characteristic of the Saudi system was “developing accreditation,” not ending with a credit certificate or result, but rather with recommendations. If these were met within the one-year grace period, accreditation was granted.

**Table 21. The main characteristics of these practices in Saudi higher education sector**

<b>The main characteristics are:</b>	<b>Number of experts</b>
Its adaptability to the Islamic and Arab identity distinguish the Saudi culture and corresponds to the demands of the local labor market	5
The Saudi accreditation system is a comprehensive one for different international models.	2
The step of “Developing accreditation”	1
The existence of one body to guide and supervise these practices.	1

#### **5.10.11 The requirements of applying quality assurance and accreditation systems**

##### **a. The German case**

The German experts agreed with the requirements for applying quality assurance and accreditation procedures, shown in the table below. Two experts stressed the importance of the commitment to quality, especially from the university leaders, in applying these new procedures. Human resources, a suitable administration structure, and adequate financial resources were the other main requirements.

**Table 22. The requirements of applying quality assurance and accreditation system in the German case**

<b>The requirements are:</b>	<b>Number of experts</b>
A commitment to quality, especially from the university leaders	2
Human resources	1
Administration structures	1
Financial resources	1

### **b. The Saudi case**

This table below shows the experts' opinions on the main requirements for an organization to establish its internal quality assurance system. Four experts expressed the need of learning and training programs for the organization's staff and to disseminate the culture of quality. The human and financial resources were seen as important requirements by three experts. In the opinion of two experts, these practices needed a time plan and sufficient efforts to be adopted.

**Table 23. The requirements of applying quality assurance and accreditation system in the Saudi case**

<b>The requirements are:</b>	<b>Number of experts</b>
Continuous seminars and workshops to explain the application of these practices and disseminate the culture of quality	4
Human resources	3
Financial resources	3
Time	2
Effort	2

### **5.10.12 The main problems of applying quality assurance and accreditation system**

#### **a. The German case**

The table below provides the critical problems facing the application of these procedures in the German higher education sector. Three experts agreed on the resistance of academic staff and university leaders against change as a main obstacle to this application. Other obstacles were mentioned: rejecting the documentation procedures, the high cost of the accreditation process, the large number of study tracks, and finally the poor understanding of the quality assurance procedure and its conflict with professors' freedoms.

**Table 24. The main problems of applying these practices in the German case**

<b>The problems are:</b>	<b>Number of experts</b>
Resistance to change	3
Rejecting the documentation procedures	1
The high cost	1
The large number of study tracks	1
A poor understanding of the quality assurance procedure and its conflict with professors' freedoms	1

**b. The Saudi case**

The table below explains the most apparent problems facing the application of the quality assurance and accreditation system in the Saudi higher education organizations. There is unanimous agreement by the experts on the resistance to change and the lack of quality culture, as well as the lack of understanding the concept of quality assurance, its practices, and how it is applied as main problems facing this adoption. The leaders and the high authority in a higher education organization play an important role in the successful implementation of these practice. Hence, five experts considered the ineffective role played by one of these two bodies hindering this adoption. The lack of administrative staff and trained human resources and the fear of accountability and transparency were two main problems mentioned by two experts. One expert saw the focus on the documentation process without activating the work on the ground as one of the problems facing the application of these practices.

**Table 25. The main problems of applying these practices in the Saudi case**

<b>The problems are:</b>	<b>Number of experts</b>
Resistance to change	6
Lack of quality culture and lack of understanding the concept of quality assurance, its practices, and how to apply it	6
A weak role played by leaders of the organization and lack of support from higher authority	5
Lack of administrative staff and trained human resources	2
Fear of accountability and transparency	2
Paying attention to the documentation process but not to activating it in reality	1

### **5.10.13 The benefits of applying the quality assurance and accreditation system**

#### **a. The German case**

The table 26 below explains the benefits of applying quality assurance and accreditation procedures which were listed by the German experts. For this, two experts saw improvements in the quality of the education process through these procedures. Four more benefits have been maintained from this adoption. These practices help in finding the problems and suitable solutions for them, achieving more autonomy for the higher education organizations, continuing improvement, and bringing new ideas from outside the organization context.

**Table 26. The benefits of applying the quality assurance and accreditation system in the German case**

<b>The benefits are:</b>	<b>Number of experts</b>
Improving the quality of the education process	2
Finding the problems and helping in solving them	1
Achieving the autonomy of higher education	1
Continuously improving	1
Getting new ideas from outside the organization (external review) to be better	1

**b. The Saudi case**

This table 27 below summarizes the benefits arising from the adoption of these practices according to the experts of the study. All of them agreed on the role of these practices in organizing and improving the educational process and the outputs, and five experts stressed its effectiveness in developing the teaching methods, assessment methods, and learning resources. Other benefits, such as maintaining students' rights, helping universities to know their weak points and strengthening them as well as identifying and solving problems, and increasing transparency and accountability, were considered important by two experts each. These practices have contributed to developing women's sections in the universities and helping scientific research to thrive from the point of view of one expert each.

**Table 27. The benefits of applying the quality assurance and accreditation system in the Saudi case**

<b>The benefits are:</b>	<b>Number of experts</b>
Organizing and improving the educational process and its outputs	6
Developing the teaching methods, assessment methods, and learning resources	5
Maintaining the students' rights	2
Helping universities to know their weak points and strengthening them, as well as identifying and solving problems	2
Increasing transparency and accountability	2
Developing women's sections in universities	1
Helping scientific research to thrive	1

#### **5.10.14 The adoption of the quality assurance and accreditation systems, standardization, creativity, and innovation**

As a last question, experts were asked about their opinions on adoption of the quality assurance and accreditation practices, asking if it will lead to similarity in higher education institutions worldwide in a way that negates the individual characteristics of each nation to limit and isolate the institution from its respective society.

##### **a. The German case**

The German experts were also opponents of this idea and their opinions are summarized in the table below. In this table 28, all three German experts considered these practices as a broad framework that will not lead to standardization, which allows for a lot of different details in each country and reflection of the culture of it. They kept explaining their opinions. One expert said these practices are similar forms, but they are implemented in a largely different way reflecting each national tradition. Another expert commented that the accreditation criteria are about the structure of the program and not its contents, hence placing no limitation on creativity and innovation. The last expert argued that the external quality



assurance is aware of local and regional requirements, and it is an instrument to control universities in a specific way.

**Table 28. German experts’ opinion on the adoption of the quality assurance and accreditation system, standardization, creativity, and innovation**

Their opinions are:	Number of experts
It is a broad framework which will not lead to standardization, and the details are really different in each country and reflect the culture.	3
They are similar forms with a large variation in the implementation, which reflect national traditions.	1
The criteria are about the structure of the program, not its contents, and hence place no limitation on creativity and innovation.	1
The external quality assurance is aware of local and regional requirements, and it is an instrument to control universities in a specific way.	1

**b. The Saudi case**

All experts did not agree on this and their explanations are given in the following table 29. The six Saudi experts considered that the accreditation requirements for programs and institutions are only a framework for controlling and organizing the educational process and solving existing problems. They require a minimum of standards which can be exceeded to achieve creativity and excellence. Two experts added more to explain a part of the accreditation criteria: a criterion of the accreditation system requiring the organization to specify what distinguishes its graduates from others. Two other experts talked about the nature of these practices in general, saying the quality assurance and accreditation practices differ from one country to the other, according to the local system and culture. The Saudi practices in this area focus on the emotional side of their criteria, placing emphasis on the values and morals of the Saudi society.

**Table 29. Saudi experts' opinion on the adoption of the quality assurance and accreditation system, standardization, creativity, and innovation**

<b>Their opinions are:</b>	<b>Number of experts</b>
The accreditation requirements for programs and organizations are only a framework for controlling and organizing the educational process and solving existing problems. They require a minimum of standards which can be exceeded to achieve creativity and excellence.	6
There is a criterion of the accreditation system that requires the organization to specify what distinguishes its graduates from others.	2
These practices differ from one country to the other, according to the local system and culture. The Saudi practices in this area focus on the emotional side of their criteria, emphasizing the values and morals of the Saudi society.	2

This concludes the empirical study, which consisted of the vertical case study of quality assurance and accreditation in Germany and Saudi Arabia as well as the interviews of experts in this area from both of these countries. The following chapter will discuss the results of this empirical study and reflect on them in connection with the theoretical assumptions for the study questions.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Findings, Integration, and Conclusion**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

As a scholarship doctoral student, I had the opportunity to live and complete my studies in another context, Germany, with a completely different culture and system, especially the higher education system. This experience made me a person who makes comparisons in various aspects of daily life and different cultures and systems. The recent interest regarding the guarantee for quality of the educational processes and their outputs in the higher education sectors in my country, Saudi Arabia, and in Germany, which was followed by the introduction of quality assurance and accreditation practices, encouraged my personal choice to conduct this research.

This study traces the origin and the formation processes as well as the conditions associated with these new educational policy changes. The literature on new institutional perspectives, the vertical case study approach, and the expert interview method was explored to help in developing the study framework and paradigm, which assists in understanding the development of this global trend. In this concluding chapter of this study, the findings are presented and discussed.

This chapter has two main sections. The first one overviews the study's findings in relation to its questions in the two case studies of the research. The second one contains a comparative discussion of the findings in a final conclusion.

#### **6.2 Overview of the study findings**

The findings result from reviewing literature and political documents and interviewing experts to address the empirical study's questions. The first question of the empirical study, which represents the second research question, is about the origin of these practices: RQ 2 *Why were the quality assurance and accreditation practices adopted in higher education*

*institution reform in both Germany and Saudi Arabia?* This question includes three sub-questions:

- a. When and from where did this idea enter the national policy?
- b. What were the local situations?
- c. What drove the policy change?

The second question concerns the development of the current quality assurance and accreditation practices: RQ 3: *How do German and Saudi higher education institutions differ in their implementation of the quality assurance and accreditation practices?* This is addressed in two sub-questions:

- a. What were the perspectives/orientations that influenced the formation process of the national accreditation framework?
- b. How did they become new procedures ready to be used and introduced in the national policy?

This section gives a review of the findings in relation to each sub-question. This is provided in three sections. First, the assumed answer which was provided by the research framework is presented. Second, answers to the question from the vertical case study as well as from the expert interviews are presented for Germany and then Saudi Arabia. Finally, under the heading Integration, these two sections are brought together, discussing the assumed answer and the resulting answer from the research methods for both countries.

### **6.3 Findings review for the second research question**

The first part of the findings brings all pieces together for the sub-questions of the second research question, RQ 2: *Why were the quality assurance and accreditation practices adopted in higher education institution reform in both Germany and Saudi Arabia?* Table 30. Each of them offers a part of the image that draws an explanation for why the quality assurance and accreditation practices were adopted in higher education institution reform in both Germany and Saudi Arabia.

**Table 30. The sub-questions of the second research question and their suggested answers**

Sub-questions of the second research question	The suggested answers from the research theoretical framework
a. When and from where did this idea enter the national policy?	- From the world culture system; models and scripts provided by international agencies as a global trend to fulfill local functions.
b. What were the local situations?	- Seeking a solution for the local problems and needs. This solution is provided by the global orientation.
c. What drove the policy change?	- Legitimacy-seeking.

**6.3.1 The first sub-question of the second research question: When and from where did this idea enter the national policy?**

It is worthwhile to start looking for the timeline of integrating these practices into the local educational policy and for their source. The theoretical framework of the study, the world culture theory point of view, assumes that the idea of integrating the policy of quality assurance and accreditation in German and Saudi higher education systems came from the effect of the world culture system as models and scripts provided by international agencies.

**6.3.1.1 Germany**

**a. The vertical case study**

To elaborate on this question this issue is detected at the national level, and then it linked to the international level.

At the national level, the literature showed the first action in the education policy change concerning the quality of higher education, which paved the way for further actions in the formation process of the current quality assurance and accreditation system, was in the mid-1990s; this change was represented in the recommendation that was launched by the HRK and Science Council (*Wissenschaftsrat*) to introduce the evaluation procedures in all German Länder (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007). This was followed by a series of reforms that led to

the current quality assurance and accreditation system. A radical important reform was taken when for the first time the quality assurance in the higher education was illuminated on 6 July 1998 (HRK) by the introduction of the accreditation process. Next, an important action was taken in 2003 when Germany started to form a quality assurance framework.

By linking this educational policy changes with the international level, the main source of all the above-mentioned changes and reforms is found to be the European international level. The Pilot Projects, which were decided on and carried out by the European Council of Ministers in the quality assurance area in 1991, were followed by German participation in 1994 in the pilot project for quality assurance, "Evaluation Quality of Higher Education." After this participation the new policy regarding higher education evaluation was launched in the German higher education sector. Moreover, the procedures of the evaluation processes have main objectives and concepts (See Chapter 5), which were stated by the European Council. The other important step taken as a next action was the introduction of the accreditation process in 1998. After that was the formation of the German qualification framework. These actions can be clearly identified as responses to an outside pressure generated by the declarations of the Sorbonne, Bologna process, and the Berlin committee. Moreover, the main scripts and standards of procedures were formatted in line with the European qualification framework and standards.

#### **b. The expert interviews**

Analysis of the German experts interviews is compatible with the result of the documents review of the vertical case study in answering this question. Analysis finds the origin of the idea of adopting quality assurance and accreditation is the international and global level. All of the experts saw the European level as the main driver, starting from the "evaluation of studying and teaching" projects in the 1990s, and then to accreditation due to the Bologna Process. They also mentioned other international impacts made by the global debate about quality in higher education and the long American experience in accreditation.

Moreover, when asked about the role of international organizations in this adoption, two experts stressed the leading and direct role of ENQA and the European standards and guidelines in the adoption of the German quality assurance and accreditation system, whereas

one expert found no direct impact from an international agency. He illustrated the long debate that was held by the higher education policy makers on the efficiency of this sector and the need for finding new managing practices to overcome some problems that appeared by using the international success models which serve in solving these problems.

### **5.3.1.2 Saudi Arabia**

#### **a. The vertical case study**

At the national level, the education policy change in regard to quality assurance and accreditation was shown first as individual efforts at the organizational level in the 1980s. At that time, two different actions occurred. First, two leading public universities adopted an internal quality assurance system and quality standards in some of their study programs, and then they obtained accreditation from an international accreditation agency (Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET). Second, in the 1990s, other individual initiatives happened and organization structural changes occurred when some public universities founded quality assurance centers as part of the university administrative structure for an internal quality assurance system. The introduction of a quality assurance and accreditation system on the national level was in 1995, with the Sixth National Development Plan.

The role of the international level in the origin of the first adoption of quality assurance and accreditation practices in the Saudi higher education sector is observable. As noted above, this adoption was started individually by some public universities. Moreover, this individual adoption affected the national introduction of these practices. The Eighth National Development Plan that was mentioned as an indicator suggested significant growth in this trend and encouraged the following royal approval of establishing the National Commission for Assessment and Academic Accreditation (NCAAA) in 2003. Thus, on the one hand, the success of the United States accreditation model in solving their higher education problems turned other nations' attention towards mimicking it or developing other patterns for quality assurance in higher education. On the other hand, the effect of the United States accreditation model on the Saudi higher education sector can be observed, first, on an organizational level when some public universities made efforts to adopt the United States accreditation agency's quality standards, and then some of their study programs were accredited by this agency ABET.

Second, the structural changes in some universities brought about by founding an internal quality assurance system before being nationally adopted are also seen as an impact of the United States accreditation model. Bearing in mind, these international accredited programs and the universities with internal quality assurance systems had a strong influence on the establishment of the NCAAA, which is responsible for quality assurance and accreditation in Saudi Arabia.

When the national introduction of the quality assurance and accreditation practices in the Sixth National Development Plan in 1995 is traced, the main argument which was stated for this introduction was the demand for an accreditation system that achieves international recognition for Saudi higher education organization. Hence the role played by the international level to gain legitimacy is remarkable.

#### **b. The expert interviews**

The Saudi experts explained the idea of these reforms were due to a number of circumstances at that time. They referred to several problems that appeared regarding the efficiency and the quality of higher education outcomes, which demanded structural and managing reform by adopting new practices, hence the interaction between Saudi universities on one hand and United States universities and accreditation agencies on the other hand as these practices entered the policy making area. Some of the experts who participated in the formation of the current accreditation system considered the transparency and accountability of higher education at the international level, or more accurately the role played by UNESCO and university rankings as the main source of this adoption. Subsequently, it can be determined that explanations of the experts on this question agree with conclusions from the vertical case study documents review. The experts also add different aspects about the role of the international agencies in this adoption and confirm the role of different international organizations, UNESCO, accreditation agencies and universities out said Saudi Arabia.

#### **5.3.1.3 Integration**

As discussed in Chapter 4, the research theoretical framework is based on the world culture theory which emphasizes the role of globalization in the national educational policies' changes and structural reforms as a result of the diffusion process for educational models and



ideas, such as quality assurance of higher education and accreditation. The world system contains trends and tendencies that impact all countries (Meyer et al., 1977). Moreover, these global trends (models and scripts) are transferred into national policy by networks of politicians, professionals, and scientists from the world system (countries, international organizations, and professional elites) (Strang & Meyer, 1993). This idea is regarded as a global trend and at the same time as fulfilling an important management and educational function in the national higher education system.

By looking at the cases of Germany and Saudi Arabia in this regard from the vertical case study approach and expert interviews, both adopted these practices as a result of the world system. In Germany, its reforms and changes regarding the application of quality assurance and accreditation practices came in the first place as an international demand, resulting from several international declarations from the Sorbonne (1998), Bologna (1999), and Berlin (2003), and the international success models played a role as well. In 1998 in Paris, by signing the Sorbonne agreement, Claude Allegre, French Minister for Education, asserted the need for imitating the United States system in the education qualifications in the European region as well as for keeping European graduates from moving to the United States to maintain a knowledge-based economy (Ravinet, 2008).

Moreover, the Bologna membership is determined mainly on the countries that are signatories to the Lisbon Convention (1997). They included the United States, Canada, and Australia, via UNESCO's definition of Europe (United States and Canada signed in 1975, Australia in 1986) (Hartmann, 2008). Furthermore, these members, and especially the United States, participated in the creation of the Bologna Process first draft (Hartmann, 2008). Later in 2003, the Council of Europe's European Cultural Convention excluded the United States, Canada and Australia.

In Saudi Arabia the effect of the international level was different and there was no direct effect through regional agencies or agreements, although there was a concern about quality in higher education at the Arab level. Controversy around this issue had been discussed since 1999 at of the Association of Arab Universities and the introduction of quality assurance was a recommended reform for the Arab higher education system, resulting from major

developments and transformation processes in the area. These included the expansion of universities, the increasing number of students (massification), the demand of the private sector to invest in higher education (privatization), and the emergence of new kinds of education such as distance education (diversification). There has been an urgent need to ensure the efficiency and credibility of Arab universities and enable them to carry out their mission in education, scientific research, and community service and to be competitive among international universities.

In addition, the Council of Quality Assurance and Accreditation, which was established in 2007, and, before that the higher education committee which was established in 2001, have not had the empowerment authority to translate the recommendations and reforms regarding introducing quality assurance and accreditation practices in higher education sectors Through formal agreements as was the case in European countries. This leads to the consideration that the global organization (UNESCO), the United States accreditation system, and the universities outside Saudi Arabia which have applied these practices and at the same time they are in cooperation with Saudi universities have a direct impact on applying the reforms regarding quality assurance and accreditation practices in higher education.

### **6.3.2 The second sub-question of the second research question: What were the local situations at that time when this reform occurred?**

It is necessary to know the local situation at that time when these reforms occurred. The theoretical perspectives of the current research suggest local problems and needs which demand solution-seeking that is imposed by the global orientation and keeps going on with the international trends. That is what is examined from the vertical case study and expert interviews data.

#### **6.3.2.1 Germany**

##### **a. The vertical case study**

The literature shows that, until 1998, the regulation, structures, and content of higher education were maintained through a state approval system framework and procedures which pass through a long stage of formation; hence, when it is ready for application, it is ineffective as a result of the new change in the study programs which interact with other study programs

outside Germany (Akkreditierungsrat, 2002 in Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2007). This was an old method focused on gaining state approval of program contents and exam regulations which did not keep up with the global changes in the higher education sectors, whereas other countries were applying modern management systems to assure the quality of the educational processes in these sectors. New conditions had also appeared during this period. The introduction of the evaluation procedures in all of Germany was the result of a demand for achieving more efficiency in the usage of the financial and human resources, which was a critical concern resulting from the massive increase in students' numbers, as well as the goal of achieving transparency in this sector (de Rudder, 1994). In addition, there was interest in improving higher education organizations' profiles and competitive standings through this policy (Wolf, 2002).

At the European level, the situation of the higher education sectors was described as having perceived global pressures, deficits of national higher education systems, and tensions between national governments and European interests regarding the competence for policy development in higher education (Charlier & Croché, 2008). All these factors together drove the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations. Internal pressure resulted from the several required reforms which were demanded by the Bologna Declaration, such as the introduction of the new bachelor-master study track, which were synchronized with the growing need for more autonomy for German higher education organizations. The autonomy of higher education organizations in the German context was regarded as an urgent need to allow each organization to take responsibility in drawing and planning its objectives, strategic profiles, and improvement plans to keep pace with the rapid global changes in the professional and scientific sectors. This change was initiated as a starting phase of internationalization of higher education in Germany, which has actively promoted the issue of quality. Specifically, accreditation procedures were considered to be necessary to ensure the comparability and the quality of teaching and of study program degrees, as an external quality assurance mechanism.

The Resolution of the 185<sup>th</sup> plenary session on 6 July 1998 (HRK) explained the introduction of the reforms regarding quality assurance and accreditation by mentioning the new transitions process represented in: the changes that resulted from the introduction of the

new study cycles (bachelor-master), the expansion of the tertiary sector, and the changes in the professional world.

#### **b. The expert interviews**

The experts in this regard emphasized the local situation at that time which was represented in the traditional state approval system. This became a minor system for study programs and academic staff in this era; this state approval took a long time and would not be checked again by second re-approval procedures. Another expert explained the current situation in the following way:

This system worked within the higher education system at a time when there weren't so many universities and study programs. So, there could be quite mostly administrative issues, directly controlled. The need for making reforms in higher education and tracing its problems went through a very long discussion. On the other hand, it was also because the evolving of the sciences at universities wanted to offer innovative programs. And then the ministries got problems because they had sterilized methods to get their approval. And innovative programs didn't fit into these methods. So, also from science and the professors themselves, they wanted to have an instrument to get new and innovative programs approved. This was also very important to find a way for this new idea about quality assurance and accreditation. They looked into other countries and how they deal with things. So then, the idea of accreditation seemed quite fitting, to have a new idea, a new instrument to deal with the known problems at home. So, it quite came together.

Again, the local situation featured old state approval methods and did not fit into the current global situation, where very quick changes and improvement, especially in study programs, need to be maintained.

#### **6.3.2.2 Saudi Arabia**

##### **a. The vertical case study**

By analyzing the Sixth National Development Plan, the vertical case study shows that in the period (1990-1995) several conditions appeared during that time. One of them was the expansion of post-graduate studies (massification). Others included an urgent need for a new

procedure for evaluating the existing study programs and monitoring the establishment of new ones to be in line with relevant resources and the quality standards and, to be recognized internationally, the need for increasing the efficiency of higher education institutions in order to improve the educational process and outcomes. That was followed by the Seventh National Development Plan which explains the situation between the years (1995-2000), when there was a decline in the internal and external efficiency of higher education organizations. That was represented in the increasing number of years spent by students in the universities in addition to the discord between the labor market's qualifications and graduate qualifications. This imposed the need for new management procedures to evaluate and improve the efficiency of this sector.

#### **b. The expert interviews**

The analysis of the Saudi experts' interviews confirmed what we had found in the vertical case study. They described the status of the higher education sector at that time as suffering from some problems: The transition processes in this sector appeared in the student numbers increasing, hence the expansion of the higher education sector. The issue of efficiency, and the quality of the outcomes all demanded an administration reform and adoption of new management practices to solve these problems.

#### **6.3.2.3 Integration**

The theoretical perspectives of the current research suggest the existence of local problems and needs in the local organizations which demand seeking a solution that is imposed by the global orientations and continues with the international trends. As Meyer and Rowan (1977) state, the organization has to comply with the requirements of the external rationalized myths. They define myths as commonly agreed upon cultural ideals that prescribe acceptable behavior for individuals as well as for larger groups and institutions based on models and scripts. The world culture theory sees these myths as providing models and ideas which are considered as the ideal for the nation-state and the citizen, thus fulfilling an important societal function and legitimizing local society in line with global society's orientation.

In both cases of the study the adoption of quality assurance and accreditation practices came about as a number of transformation processes and different changes in the nature of

their higher education systems. In Germany as well as in Saudi Arabia, the higher education systems had suffered from the inability of the old administrative and approval systems to keep up with the rapid changes in the scientific and the professional worlds and to overcome the problems that had appeared at that time, which were the increasing student numbers and the growth of these sectors, their efficiency, and the quality of their outputs. In both countries the nature of the higher education sectors had been changed, leading to a large debate about critical reforms that should be maintained. This debate led to a search for globally well-known practices according to their success in other countries in this sector.

### **6.3.3 The third sub-question of the second research question: What drove the policy change?**

This question seeks to explore the motivations behind the adoption of the new practices regarding quality assurance and accreditation in higher education. From a new institutional perspective, when an institution models its structure to be in line with the views of its wider environment, this will lend it legitimacy and increase its chances of survival (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The theoretical framework of this research specifies legitimacy-seeking as the main driver behind the adoption of a new policy or reform. In other words, the institutions' behavior in developing and improving is explained in a way that enables the recognition of their goals as well as their own preservation in an ever-changing environment. The following section explains legitimacy-seeking as the main driver for these reforms in the study cases.

#### **6.3.3.1 Germany**

##### **a. The vertical case study**

Adoption of quality assurance and accreditation practices in the German higher education sector, as previously discussed, not only earned first place recognition in the European higher education area, but went beyond that to become globally recognized. The Resolution of the 185<sup>th</sup> plenary session on 6 July 1998 (HRK) stressed the increasing international integration in the field of higher education, which demanded making graduates from German higher education institutions more competitive in the international job market. It thus proposed seeking recognition from international agencies and institutions.

### **b. The expert interviews**

The German experts agreed that the application of the quality assurance and accreditation system was a mandatory reform and was necessitated by the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area.

#### **6.3.3.2 Saudi Arabia**

##### **a. The vertical case study**

In the Saudi context, the Sixth National Development Plan stated the need for this reform to achieve international recognition for the Saudi universities and graduates. In addition, the foundation of the NCAAA in 2003 came as a result of the recent obstacles and the need for achieving quality of higher education outputs and continued developments for this sector to cope with global trends (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012).

##### **b. The expert interviews**

Analyzing the Saudi experts' interviews shows the main drivers for the adoption of quality assurance and accreditation practices included seeking recognition and legitimacy. At the global level, following a globally imposed direction for competition represented a willingness of this sector to enter the international classifications. On the other hand, at the international cooperation level, it was a prerequisite for scholarships as well as a tool to narrow the level gap between Saudi scholarship students at international universities and the other students there.

#### **6.3.3.3 Integration**

The research's assumptions pre-determine gaining legitimacy and recognition and increasing the chance of survival in the wider environment or recognition by other nations as the main drivers for the adoption of quality assurance and accreditation practices. According to the vertical case study, Germany, by adopting its quality assurance and accreditation system, legitimates its higher education sector at the European level and with the international agencies and institutions, too. The German experts also elaborated on the necessity of this reform after engaging in the Bologna Process and its reform process as a change driven in response to global political and economic pressures to reach the European higher education sector and achieving internationalization and modernization for these sectors.

According to the Saudi vertical case study achieving international recognition for Saudi students and universities was a critical aim of adopting a quality assurance and accreditation system. Similarly, the Saudi experts saw this reform as motivated by the desire to obtain global recognition and to enter the world classifications, as well as to cooperate with international universities.

From an international perspective, facilitating the comparability of a higher education system and achieving mutual trust in its national quality assurance system is in particular an important discourse in both countries for their recent reforms. This reform eases the recognition of qualifications and study periods between one country and another, which in turn supports the mobility of students and graduates. In the German case, within and towards the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), improving the recognition of qualifications of foreign graduates may further facilitate the mobility of the best talent towards the EHEA. In the Saudi case, the scholarship projects and the international cooperation between Saudi universities and international ones in the United States and Canada deepens bonds with North America.

#### 6.4 Findings review for the third research question

The next section is the second part of the findings which provides a review of the findings for the sub-questions of the third research question Table 31. Each of them offers a part of the image that draws an explanation for Q3: *how do German and Saudi higher education institutions differ in the adoption and implementation the academic accreditation practices?*

**Table 31. The sub-questions of the third research question and their suggested answers**

Sub-questions of the third research question	The suggested answers from the research theoretical framework
a. What were the perspectives/orientations that influenced the formation process of the national accreditation framework?	- Political/legal pressure; Professionalization pressure; Mimicking other organizations.
b. How did they become new procedures ready to be used and introduced in the national	- Creating the local practices by putting them in line with the local norm and expectations.



policy?	
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**6.4.1 The first sub-question of the third research question: What were the perspectives-orientations that influenced the formation process of the national accreditation framework?**

This question seeks to spot the differences between Germany and Saudi Arabia in their adoption and implementation of quality assurance and accreditation systems. To provide a complete image, the research first identifies the different perspectives and orientations in both contexts that affected the formation processes of the national quality assurance and accreditation frameworks.

The theoretical framework of the current study provides an explanation for the development processes of structures, practices, and policies. To build legitimacy for a national higher education sector, the theoretical framework emphasizes the importance of following international principles for quality assurance in the creation of a new quality assurance and accreditation system. The diffusion processes of the international quality assurance and accreditation structures and procedures as a new reform occurred in the higher education sectors in light of three different causal forces: coercive, normative, and mimetic.

The coercive isomorphic mechanism includes political/legal pressure and results from external environmental pressures, which affect the organization by the cultural expectations of its society or by a wider organization that controls and supports its structures and strategies (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). The normative isomorphic mechanism includes the pressures that stem from professionalization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). The mimetic isomorphic mechanism results from unclear goals or an uncertain environment, as these pressures force the organizations to mimic other organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991).

### **6.4.1.1 Germany**

#### **a. The vertical case study**

From the literature and documents reviewed in the vertical case study, the German quality assurance and accreditation practices were developed according to the international level of the European Higher Education Area. On the other hand, the national or the Länder requirements and conditions, economy, and politics also play a role in shaping these policies structures, and standards. Thus, the German quality assurance and accreditation system (procedures and standards) is a comprehensive one. The creation processes of this system aimed at achieving: 1- the (ESG), 2- the guidelines set by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder (also known as the Standing Conference) and 3- the Accreditation Council criteria (Resolution of the Accreditation Council, 2013). Thus the assessment of teaching and learning processes will be done against these three.

The ESG was developed by the ENQA and adopted in 2005 in Bergen. The ENQA was founded in 2000. Since that time, it has played a vital role in cooperation and in exchanging information and experiences between member countries in the quality assurance and accreditation area. The ESG is considered to be a reference and guidance document for the German higher education sector in the formation processes for the internal and external quality assurance systems and accreditation agencies. The importance of these standards comes from setting a common framework for the learning and teaching quality assurance systems at European, national, and institutional levels and enabling the assurance and improvement of quality of higher education in the EHEA. Hence, these standards promote mutual trust and support recognition and mobility within and across national borders (ESG, 2015).

#### **b. The expert interviews**

The German experts stressed that the ESG provided guidance for creating the national accreditation framework and standards, which is comparable with what the research found from the documents reviews. The experts also mentioned to international external peers participated in the formation processes for the German system. At the same time, the German experts referred to a revising step for other international systems of quality assurance and

accreditation to see how the procedures should be developed. The British agency was a consultant for the German accreditation council.

#### **6.4.1.2 Saudi Arabia**

##### **a. The vertical case study**

In the Saudi context, the NCAAA documents show that in the preparation phase of the quality assurance and accreditation standards and procedures the NCAAA group consulted a number of international experts in this area from countries with long experience in this regard and national experts from the Saudi higher education organizations. They cooperated in the formation of the Saudi quality assurance and accreditation standards and procedures, in line with the local conditions and needs and international models. Moreover, a distinguished group of international consultants revised the final form of the national system of quality assurance and accreditation and expressed their opinions and agreed unanimously. This group of experts included members from the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia, and the United Arab Emirates.

##### **b. The expert interviews**

The Saudi experts' opinions are consistent with what has been drawn from the documents review. The Saudi experts, especially those with the longest experiences in the NCAAA, talked about the procedures for improving the current quality assurance and accreditation system. This process took several steps, starting with reviewing international accreditation systems, in particular the United States, British, and Australian models. Next, the status of higher education institutions at the time was a subject for study to identify their problems and needs. In light of the previous two steps, the national accreditation and quality assurance system was built. That was followed by a number of preparation steps including: training the local experts by international experts from United States, United Kingdom and Australia) to take control over these practices, conducting seminars to discuss and explain these practices, conducting annual visits to international universities to stand on their successful experiences both in institutional accreditation and program accreditation, and developing new administrative structures and job titles in the administrative structures of the universities.

### **6.4.1.3 Integration**

In this section, the research seeks to answer the question about the perspectives and orientations that influenced the formation process of the national quality assurance and accreditation framework in Germany and Saudi Arabia. In general, the research theoretically considers the development processes of structures, practices, and policies. These are seen as seeking, first, ways to build legitimacy for the national higher education sector by following international principles for quality assurance and accreditation in the creation of a national quality assurance and accreditation system.

By applying theoretical perceptions on the aforementioned findings from document reviews and experts interviews about the formation and improvement processes of the German and Saudi quality assurance and accreditation systems, the research reaches several conclusions. In the German case study, the long period reforms in the higher education sector regarding quality assurance and accreditation system have been taken under the framework of the EHEA. Moreover, the German quality assurance and accreditation framework has been improved and formatted by using the (ESG). This leads to the detection of mechanisms for the isomorphism change regarding these practices in the case of Germany. Political/legal pressure was imposed by the European higher education area and especially ENQA.

On the other hand, the work of the German accreditation council, in order to gain legitimacy as a member of ENQA, was subject to regulated evaluation over a period of five years. The evaluation procedure aims at assessing compliance of the foundation with the national requirements as the cultural expectations of its society and international requirements representing the wider organization that controls and supports its structures and strategies. The evaluation occurred against national and international evaluation standards: the European Standards and Guidelines, as a core requirement for membership in the ENQA, as well as its legal obligations and the tasks defined by the KMK, including the recommendations made for the improvement of the system. In addition, the ESG was created by the member countries and was tried out on a national basis in the participating countries (Bergen, 2005). This in turn confirms the role of the meso level and micro- level in shaping international policies and structures.

The research also observed in the German case a mimetic isomorphic mechanism. This appears in the accompanying of international external peers in the formation processes for the German system. It is also appears in the revising steps for other international systems of quality assurance and accreditation.

The normative isomorphic mechanism is represented in consulting the British agency in the phase of creation. At that time Germany was uncertain about these practices and standards and how to create the national quality assurance and accreditation system which led to mimicking other countries which have a long experience in this regard such as Britain.

In the Saudi case, the research tried to identify whether the introduction of these practices was because of pressures experienced from powerful organizations that have authority in the wider environment. UNESCO and other United States and Canadian universities where the Saudi students continue their studies caused legally explicit pressure to introduce these practices on the national level, while other pressures were caused by the cultural expectations of the higher education organizations and the society. Moreover, the Saudi public universities which adopted these practices as individual initiatives showed interest in having a national quality assurance and accreditation framework. In the Saudi case, the mimetic isomorphic mechanisms come from unclear goals or an uncertain environment, as these pressures force the organizations to mimic other organizations. The pressures came from internal circumstances represented in the efficiency of higher education organizations and the practices shown by these organizations themselves.

The mimetic mechanism can also be observed clearly in the perpetration of the Saudi quality assurance and accreditation step which was impacted by revising other nationally successful quality assurance and accreditation models. The mimetic isomorphic mechanism appeared at the organizational level. Some public universities were working in cooperation with United States and Canadian universities while at the same time operating in an environment that had no clear basis or goals regarding the quality assurance and accreditation practices. That all led to transfer these practices and standards in a mimicking way from their home universities in the United State to the Saudi universities.

In the same phase a normative mechanism was identified in the consulting of international experts in the quality assurance and accreditation practices while creating and revising the Saudi quality assurance and accreditation framework.

#### **6.4.2 The second sub-question of the third research question: How did the quality assurance and accreditation practices become new procedures ready to be used and introduced in the national policy?**

After exploring the perspectives and orientations that influenced the formation process of the national accreditation framework in Germany and Saudi Arabia, and in order to provide a complete meaning of the third question, the research moves to detect the formation process and the local meaning and operation steps of these global phenomenon. The research's theoretical framework realizes that these practices were differently integrated in the two contexts. The national practices were formatted within the local culture, circumstances, and conditions to achieve national norms and expectations. Hence, a certain level of variation for the globally shared norms and structures on both a micro-level and meso-level are observed. The research suggests that even though Western countries such as Germany and non-Western countries such as Saudi Arabia are all able to structure their education policy and system in line with a Western model, they still maintain important aspects of their own respective culture. In this part, the research aims to draw a picture for both cases of how these practices are integrated in their local contexts.

##### **6.4.2.1 Germany**

###### **a. The vertical case study**

In the German case, the introduction of quality assurance and accreditation practices was first intended for the newly introduced “two main cycles” of bachelor and master programs as a part of the transition process to the European Higher Education Area. It aimed at achieving quality, transparency, and comparability of these bachelor and master degree programs. At the beginning of this change, the higher education organizations were required to play a vital role in developing and assuring the quality of these programs. As a first action, the Accreditation Council was set up by KMK and HRK to organize these procedures. The first concrete step to implement an accreditation system in Germany was taken by founding the Federal Council of

Accreditation (*Akkreditierungsrat*) in 1998 in a three-year pilot project. At the beginning of its establishment until 2003 the Accreditation Council was involved in the accreditation of bachelor and master degree programs. As a consequence, this period provided a valuable source for pilot schemes and field knowledge. In 2004, the Accreditation Council became a foundation in a legal sense.

The newly introduced quality assurance and accreditation procedures have to be aligned with the local needs and conditions by maintaining the guidelines of KMK and the criteria of the Accreditation Council. They also have to be in line with the whole administrative system and structure of the German higher education, by keeping state approval and adopting the meta-accreditation system. On one hand, the separated state approval and the accreditation system works as follows: the State Ministry approval for every new degree program addresses three areas: the adequacy of resources for the new program, the compatibility of the new program with the state higher education plan, and cohesion to the state rules and regulations. On the other hand, the accreditation procedures aim at assuring the quality of the educational processes and the relevance of their outputs with the labor market. The accreditation system is not considered as a substitute for the state approval of curricula altogether.

The German accreditation system was created as a meta-accreditation system operating at two levels: the Accreditation Council and the accreditation agencies. The Accreditation Council is responsible for defining the standards, procedures and criteria for the accreditation system. It is also regarded as the main responsible authority for formatting the guidelines and regulations framework for the accreditation agencies as well as for accrediting the accreditation agencies and monitoring the accreditation processes operated by these agencies (Accreditation Council, 2010). The accreditation agencies have been established on the regional level either by the federal states or by associations of universities, which in turn are responsible for carrying out accreditation procedures for higher education organizations. In the German regions, there are six accreditation agencies for system and program accreditation.

The Accreditation Council is also responsible for representing and introducing the German accreditation system at the international level, to be recognized as well as compared to

the other international accreditation systems. For this purpose, the accreditation council seeks agreements and recognition from international accreditation institutions and organizations. Accordingly, it is a member of INQAAHE, ENQA, ECA, and the network of accreditation institutions of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.

The German accreditation system was formatted to work with the German federal system with the responsibility framework of the Federal Government to guarantee actual responsibility of the Länder for all matters in the field of education. Thereby, the KMK is the highest authority above the two accreditation levels. It makes laws and general regulations for the new adoption policies regarding quality assurance and accreditation (KMK, 2010).

The German accreditation system's framework and regulations reflect the traditional German higher education system and its uniqueness. The centralized governance model is clearly apparent in the structure of the accreditation system. The Accreditation Council is dominated by KMK policies and is financed by it as well. The Accreditation Council is not independent and has no right to decide about the accreditation procedures, structures, and regulations and cannot accredit study programs without the state representatives' approval. It is responsible for the activation of the KMK resolutions by transferring them into regulations and frameworks for the work of the accreditation agencies. In addition, KMK representatives make up more than half of the members of the steering committee of the Accreditation Council.

On the other hand, the second level of the accreditation system is comprised of the accreditation agencies even though they are non-profit organizations, and they charge only the incurred cost of the accreditation procedures. They create an accreditation market in Germany, however, in which they contend for customers. Thus, the German accreditation system follows the market-oriented model.

The accreditation criteria were formulated using seven broad points. There are no details or one described design for the internal quality assurance, but the higher education institutions are responsible for building their own internal quality assurance system in light of these criteria. The criteria cover qualification objectives, internal management systems in



teaching and learning, internal quality assurance systems, reporting systems and data collection, responsibilities, documentation, and cooperation.

The quality concept “fitness for purpose” is the one on which the German quality assurance and accreditation system is founded. “The underlying quality assessment takes into account the intended learning outcomes of a program identified and made transparent by the higher education institution as well as the question, if the proposed study concept is likely to achieve the valid learning outcomes” (Bartz, 2015, p. 11). Thus, the German quality assurance and accreditation follow Harvey and Green’s Classification of Quality (1993) that states an institution has quality when it achieves its objectives, including its mission orientation and consumer orientation, which is called “fitness for purpose”.

Another special feature of the German accreditation system concerns the master programs that are offered by universities and universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*). All master programs’ accreditation applications have to be classified as being “research oriented” or “application oriented,” and both kinds of higher education organizations offer these two types of master programs. Moreover, in the technical universities in some of their disciplines they do not offer bachelor degrees, only granting master degrees. In this case, after three years of study in these programs, students are given a bachelor degree but not recognized as properly trained engineers who completed the full study period.

Another specificity of the accreditation system at the master programs level is the two additional different classifications of master programs. When a master program directly follows a bachelor program in the same subject, the students have the right to continue their studies in this master program after finishing their first degree. As a continuing academic education called “consecutive.” Most of them are the old traditional study tracks that were just divided up into two periods with some changes in the curriculum. The other kind is a “stand alone” master program which is represented in the newly developed programs as newly emerged sciences in particular disciplines, and they are not just continuations of bachelor programs.

#### **b. The expert interviews**

The German experts listed four main characteristics of the German quality assurance and accreditation system which made them compatible with the higher education

administrative and structural features. This system was introduced first to solve problems of applying the new study tracks. The German quality assurance and accreditation system is a two-level system with meta-accreditation agencies. The accreditation criteria are broadly formulated with less detail. Moreover, German ministries are still very interested in the approval of a curriculum, and this directly stems from the formal state approval.

#### **6.4.2.2 Saudi Arabia**

##### **a. The vertical case study**

In the Saudi case the creation of the quality assurance and accreditation system was started by the establishment of the NCAAA. It follows a centralist model, where the quality assurance is carried out and arranged through one national agency. The NCAAA defines the quality standards and procedures and conducts program and institution accreditation procedures. The commission is obligated to a plan for supporting, encouraging, and evaluating the quality assurance practices in these organizations to guarantee the quality of student learning, management processes, and services provided in these organizations and their equality to international standards.

The accreditation criteria include eleven standards which were created in a comprehensive and detailed form. They were improved in light of three aspects: the local higher education organizations' status and their needs, international standards and accreditation models, as well as the *Guidelines of Good Practice of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education* ([www.inqaahe.org](http://www.inqaahe.org)). Just as in Harvey and Green's Classification of Quality (1993) the standards are based on the quality concept of the quality and standards "excellence": good practices and what are generally considered good practices in higher education institutions.

The quality standards are divided into five groups: Institutional Context, Quality of Learning and Teaching, Support for Student Learning, Supporting Infrastructure, and Community Contributions. These are used by the higher education organizations in their internal quality assurance systems and processes. On the other hand, they are evaluated against those standards by the external reviewers in the accreditation procedures. The same

standards are be used for both institution and program accreditations so they are applied differently in each evaluation context.

The NCAAA accredits new private higher education organizations, higher education institutions based in other countries wishing to operate in Saudi Arabia, new public universities established from the beginning or formed from existing public colleges or campuses, and existing public universities and private universities and colleges. An initial accreditation (license) is not required for newly established public universities; plans for these universities must be prepared to meet the requirements of the Ministry of Education and the Higher Council of Education and these plans then are checked by the Ministry. On the other hand, within the first three years of the new public university's operation, its plan for the quality assurance arrangements in the institution and the programs to be offered should be submitted to the NCAAA. Then, after the graduation of the first group of students, the university prepares a self-study for the NCAAA which carries out an evaluation process of the institution and the initial programs to accredit this university.

In addition, the NCAAA accreditation system applies a procedure of "improving evaluation" for the existing public universities in the transition to the internal quality assurance and accreditation. This procedure focuses on helping organizations identify where they need to be developed and advising them on issues to consider in preparation for the next evaluation. Accreditation approval can be either temporary or permanent, depending on the stage at which the institution has developed quality assurance procedures.

#### **b. The expert interviews**

The Saudi experts point out four distinct characteristics of the Saudi quality assurance and accreditation system making it suitable for the local environment. Three of them include its relevance to the local context and culture by including the Islamic and Arabic identity and its meeting the requirements of the local labor market, its comprehensive model for a number of international models, and its structure as a centralized system having one body to guide and supervise these practices. The last characteristic of the Saudi system is "Developmental accreditation," not ending with a credit certificate or result, but rather with recommendations. If these are met within the one-year grace period, accreditation is granted.

### 6.4.2.3 Integration

The research's theoretical framework sees the local culture, circumstances, and conditions as main factors defining the national practices for quality assurance and accreditation to achieve the national norms and expectations. Thus, the current research observed differences between the German and the Saudi quality assurance and accreditation systems. The globally shared norms and structures are translated differently on the meso-level and the micro-level.

### 6.5 The differences between Germany and Saudi Arabia in applying accreditation procedures

Drawing from the abovementioned points, both Germany and Saudi Arabia apply internal quality assurance and accreditation as an external quality assurance, but they differ in the concepts, structures, administrative systems, criteria and procedures. The following table 32 summarizes the differences between the two systems.

**Table 32. The differences between Germany and Saudi Arabia in applying accreditation procedures.**

<b>Category</b>	<b>The German case</b>	<b>The Saudi case</b>
<b>Year of establishment</b>	-In 1998 three years pilot project -Then officially in 2004	-In 2004
<b>The structure</b>	-A meta-accreditation system operating on two levels -Accreditation Council and the accreditation agencies Market-oriented model	-One centralized accreditation commission as an independent authority
<b>The relation between the accreditation body and the higher education ministry</b>	-Accreditation Council is dominated by KMK policies and financed by it as well -Not independent and has no right to decide about the accreditation	- Accreditation Council is regulated by the Higher Council of Education -Its work is separate from the Ministries and other

	procedures, structures, and regulations or about accrediting study programs without the state representatives' approval.	government agencies.
<b>The tasks of the accreditation body</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Defining the criteria, procedures for the accreditation system</li> <li>- Formatting the guidelines and regulations framework for accreditation agencies</li> <li>- Accrediting the accreditation agencies and monitoring the accreditation processes operated by them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creating the quality standards and accreditation procedures for the public and private higher education organizations</li> <li>- Conducting program and institution accreditation procedures</li> <li>- Supporting higher education organizations in implementing internal quality assurance procedures (developmental accreditation)</li> </ul>
<b>Mandatory or optional procedures</b>	Accreditation is mandatory for German higher education organizations.	The NCAAA expects and encourages higher education organizations to establish internal quality assurance systems that ensure high levels of quality.

<b>The quality concept<sup>a</sup></b>	Fitness for purpose	Quality and standards, “excellence”
<b>The criteria or standards to reflect</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-The national qualification objectives</li> <li>-The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG)</li> <li>- The guidelines of KMK</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-The local higher education organizations’ status and their needs</li> <li>-International success standards and accreditation models</li> <li><b>-The Guidelines of Good Practice of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE)</b></li> </ul>
<b>The criteria/ standards</b>	Seven broad criteria	Eleven standards divided into five groups
<b>The accreditation period</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For agencies: 3-5 years</li> <li>For universities: 6-8 years</li> </ul>	For universities: 7 years.

<sup>a</sup> Classification of Quality from Harvey & Green, 1993

## 6.6 Quality assurance and accreditation system at the organizational level

The research data about the adoption of these practices at the organizational level in general were collected through the experts’ interview and based around three main issues, the requirements, problems, and benefits of applying quality assurance and the accreditation system.

### 6.6.1 Germany

In the German case, the experts agreed with the requirements for applying quality assurance and the accreditation system in the German universities. The most important issue was the commitment to quality, especially from the university leaders, in applying these new procedures. Human resources and adequate financial resources, as well as a suitable

administration structure, were regarded as other important requirements for applying this system.

The problems facing the implementation of the quality assurance and accreditation system are the resistance of academic staff and university leaders to change, rejection of the documentation procedures, the high cost of the accreditation process, the large number of study tracks, and, finally, the poor understanding of the quality assurance procedures and their perceived conflict with professors' freedom. On the other hand, the benefits of applying the quality assurance and accreditation system, according to the German experts, are the remarkable improvements in the quality of the education process, these practices' help in detecting the problem areas in the higher education organization and finding suitable solutions for them, the ability to achieve more autonomy for the higher education organizations, and continuation in improving process and bringing new ideas from outside the organization context.

#### **6.6.2 Saudi Arabia**

As the Saudi experts point out, the main requirements for an organization to establish its internal quality assurance system are learning and training programs for the organization's staff, dissemination of the culture of quality, human and financial resources, a time plan, and sufficient efforts to be adopted. On the other hand, the experts give the most apparent problems facing the application of the quality assurance and accreditation system in the Saudi higher education organizations as the resistance to change and the lack of quality culture, as well as the lack of understanding of the concept of quality assurance, its practices, and how it is applied. The leaders and the high authority in a higher education organization play an important role in the successful implementation of these practices. Hence, five experts considered the ineffective role played by the university leader and the high authority, the lack of administrative staff and trained human resources, as well as the fear of accountability and transparency of the documentation process without activating work on the ground, as among the problems facing the application of these practices.

The benefits arising from the adoption of these practices in the Saudi case according to the Saudi experts include the organization and improvement of the educational process and its

outputs and effectiveness in developing teaching methods, assessment methods, and learning resources. Other benefits such as maintaining students' rights, helping universities to know their weak points, and strengthening them, as well as identifying and solving problems and increasing transparency and accountability, were considered important by two experts each. These practices have contributed towards developing women's sections in the universities and helping scientific research to thrive from the point of view of one expert each.

### **6.6.3 Integration**

At the organizational levels in the German and the Saudi higher education sectors, the research collected information about the requirements, problems, and benefits of applying quality assurance and accreditation systems. Regarding the main requirements, experts from the two countries agreed that disseminating the culture of quality in the higher education organization created the commitment to quality from the leaders and staff, leading them to participate in this system with sufficient efforts. Experts from the two countries also agreed on the importance of trained human resources through offering learning and training programs and adequate financial resources. In terms of problems, German and Saudi higher education organizations face the same problem of the resistance of academic staff and university leaders to change and the documentation process, as well as a lack of understanding for the concept of quality assurance and the procedures of the system. Both the German and the Saudi quality assurance and accreditation systems led to a number of improvements in the educational process (teaching methods, learning resources, and assessment methods) and its output, the identification of problems and their solutions, and the gathering of new ideas from outside the organization context.

### **6.7 Conclusion**

A number of insights have been produced regarding quality assurance and accreditation systems as a global phenomenon. This research in the comparative education field has used the new-institutional theory and its different aspects in studying this global change and generating evidence based understanding for both the theory's aspects and the phenomenon.

By studying the transversal aspect of the research issue, the research concludes that quality is a basic concept of education and is as old as education. In both cultures, the quality of education



is regarded as an ancient concept in the European universities going all the way back to the Middle Ages and has always been highly valued in academia as part of its ethos (Rose & Amaral, 2007). Moreover, since the establishment of Prague University in 1347, authority approval (Pope, Emperor) has been a major demand for universities being established or opening study programs (Eriches, 2000). In Arabic Islamic history, quality of education was mentioned by Ibn Khaldun in 1377 in his definition of education as being a trade. This trade is not a random action, but rather it has special conditions and needs to identify the main concepts, standards, and requirements of education quality.

Different models and structures of quality assurance in higher education have been developed world-wide over time, starting with the state approval of study structures and curriculum, then to peer reviews, and ending with external assessment. The arising changes in the nature of higher education starting from 1950s until now (massification, diversification, privatization, and internationalization), have demanded a change and reform in higher education's traditional management structure and system to suit its new position and to achieve nations' desired objectives. In the 1980s and 1990s changes in the nature of higher education sectors have been remarkable. These have included the enormous demand of higher education providers to meet the increased student numbers and then the emergence of its diversity. The higher education sector has also been a subject of marketization as a part of societies moving with these trends. On the other hand, privatization of this sector has been considered as a solution for facing the enormous student access to the universities. These trends led to problems regarding universities' governance, structures, and funding.

At first, in the United States a confusing and disorganized situation, including massification, privatization, and the absence of a centralized or well-connected quality assurance system, prevailed in the higher education sector requiring the establishment of regulatory standards. In 1952, accreditation entered the federal governmental policies with the Act of Higher Education, and in 1990, it became a prime procedure for evaluating a program or institution to maintain a minimum of pre-determined standards of quality evaluation (Adelman, 1992).

After success in achieving goals and solving problems in many countries starting with the United States, France, and the United Kingdom, the quality assurance and accreditation practices became a global trend. International organizations and agencies promoted these practices and models as required reforms that should be maintained in the higher education sectors worldwide. The success of a model or policy in a meso or micro unit in one context made it possible for it to become a global trend, aided by international organizations' efforts. These international organizations play varied roles in encouraging countries to adopt these new practices by conducting conferences and agreements, disseminating a common concept and frameworks for these changes and reforms, and expressing their effectiveness in rationalized use of the available resources and in the educational processes improvement and in their outputs, and linking them to labor market needs. On the other hand, quality assurance and accreditation in higher education have gained especial importance due to the recently realized fact about the relationship between quality of higher education and nation's economic development and success, based on more qualified individuals and more knowledge production, which eases student mobility, attracts the prominent students, and creates knowledge-based societies.

At the international level, UNESCO has played an effective role in shedding light on the quality assurance and accreditation practices by offering them as a required reform for higher education institutions in this century, and then continuing to improving common concepts and frameworks for them in the world regions. The research found a direct impact of this action on the case of Saudi Arabia in its adoption of quality assurance and accreditation in the higher education sector. On the other hand, in the German case, the European international level had a direct impact on the adoption of quality assurance and accreditation in Sorbonne (1998), Bologna (1999), and Berlin (2003).

The United States has also affected the dissemination of the global phenomena of quality assurance and accreditation in both cases of the study, which in turn confirmed the role played by the place originating the new models or policies (micro- level) in promoting them, first in the European area with the participation of the United States members in the creation of the Bologna Process first draft during the Lisbon Convention (1997). The next year in Sorbonne, the

United State system in the Education Qualifications was an example to be followed in the European region (Hartmann, 2008). The situation of Saudi scholarship students who continued their studies in American universities and were supposed to graduate from Saudi recognized programs led in turn to the adoption of quality assurance and accreditation system at the level of higher education organizations before being adopted at the national level.

Student mobility, internationalization, and the new information technology in higher education had a direct and effective impact on the issue of adopting quality assurance and accreditation practices and achieving international recognition for the local higher education system. The current research detected this in both countries in two different ways. In the case of Germany, the introduction of quality assurance and accreditation system is a main goal to achieve the EHEA and obtain staff and student mobility within this area. In the Saudi context, this effect occurred first at the organizational level when some higher education organizations or even some of their colleges adopted these practices as a demand imposed by the Saudi scholarship students in the United States.

This research produced additional insight by highlighting the local meaning and formation processes of these practices in the case of Germany and Saudi Arabia. The two countries sought first to build legitimacy for the national higher education sector by following international principles for quality assurance and accreditation in the creation of national quality assurance and accreditation systems. Political pressure was identified in the two cases. In Germany, it resulted due to the framework of the EHEA first affecting the German quality assurance and accreditation framework and requiring it to be improved and formatted by using the ESG and seeking recognition by ENQA, representing coercive mechanisms for the isomorphism regarding these practices. In the Saudi case, UNESCO and other United States and Canadian universities where Saudi students continue their studies caused explicit legal pressure to introduce these practices. Other legal pressure was caused by the cultural expectations of the higher education organizations, especially the Saudi public universities which adopted these practices as individual initiatives, thus showing their interest in having a national quality assurance and accreditation framework.

A notable difference in the adoption of quality assurance and accreditation systems in the two countries is that the German system was formatted and created within and as a result of the EHEA whereas the Saudi system was impacted by the United States system in its introduction and also formation. This clearly indicates a major effort by the NCAAA to seek foreign influences and global legitimacy of the Saudi higher education system.

The research also observed mimetic and normative isomorphic mechanisms in the study cases as seen in their formation processes of quality assurance and accreditation systems that included revising other international systems and models, involving international external peers and consultation of international experts on the standards and procedures as well as revision of the final frameworks in accordance with their advice. In the Saudi case, a mimetic isomorphic mechanism appeared at the organizational level in some public universities which were in cooperation with United States and Canadian universities as a result of being in an environment that had no clear bases or goals regarding these practices. These practices and standards were transferred in a similar way from their home universities to these universities.

On the other hand, this research found events occurred at the meso and micro level in shaping the international policies and structures of quality assurance and accreditation in the German and Saudi contexts. On the European level, the ESG was created by the member countries of the Bologna Process and were tried out on a national basis in the participating countries, with Germany among them (Ministerial Conference, 2005). In the Saudi case, at the micro- level, the individual initiatives made by some public universities encouraged and impacted the meso level of the national adoption of these practices and provided the policy makers with preliminary information, structures, and feedback that assisted them in creating the national framework for these practices.

The quality assurance and accreditation system is differently adopted and implemented in both countries. The culture, characteristics, situations, problems and policy of the national higher education systems led to diversity in the two quality assurance and accreditation systems in their concepts, structures, criteria, regulations, and procedures. The two systems were created in different structures. The German one is a two-level system, KMK is the highest authority above the accreditation system, which reflects the structure of the German higher

education system as a federal system. The Saudi model has one center with an independent authority, reflecting the centralization of higher education. The two systems follow two different quality concepts, and their criteria and standards were differently formulated and explained. At the organizational level, the research finds common requirements and problems for the adoption of the quality assurance and accreditation systems and similarity in the benefits obtained from them.

Summing all this up, the different relations and events at each level of the quality assurance and accreditation phenomena (macro-meso-micro) and in the different directions of the two case studies (transversal-vertical-horizontal) participated in creating the changes and reforms in both higher education systems. The research provided a significant degree of evidence based understanding from the two cases relating to the different aspects of the research's theory perspectives, i.e., the new-institutional perspectives. The place of the phenomena and its contributions in dissemination, the role of international organizations in this reform, the effect of seeking international legitimacy in encouraging the local change, and the different pressure makers' resources affect the national reforms in Germany and Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the different local meanings of this global phenomenon in Germany and Saudi Arabia are affected by the contexts' cultures, norms, and political structures.

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