Philippine Education Research Journal
Enriching the discussion.
Improving Philippine education.

June 2025, volume 2025, number 1, pages 41–55
ISSN 3028-2616 (Online) · CC BY NC ND
Refereed Article

Developing an internal quality assurance model: The case of two Philippine private universities

Lucila R. Calairo[1]*

Structured abstract

Background: The implementation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Quality Assurance Framework (AQAF) subsequently brought about directives from the Commission on Higher Education of the Philippines to establish internal quality assurance (IQA) systems in higher education institutions (HEIs). With this, the ten AQAF principles on IQA are expected to guide the IQA systems of HEIs.

Purpose: Examine the institutional profile of the participating Lasallian institutions and the extent to which they have implemented the AQAF IQA principles; identify the strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities of their IQA systems; and, drawing from their best practices, propose an IQA model.

Participants: The participants for the survey and interviews were administrators from two Lasallian HEIs that were selected based on a set of criteria.

Research design: The study used a mixed methods approach particularly the multi-case study methodology and descriptive statistics.

Data collection and analysis: Desk research, a quantitative survey, and qualitative interviews were done to collect data. The IQA systems of the participating institutions were studied using the AQAF IQA principles as the paradigm. SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis was also done.

Findings: Findings showed that the participating institutions have established IQA systems influenced by their operational and organizational culture, and they have advanced levels of implementation of the ten AQAF principles. The SWOT analysis further showed that their autonomy, top management support and leadership, stakeholder participation and involvement, functional IQA structures and processes, and IQA instruments such as monitoring and evaluation tools, all play important roles in their IQA systems implementation. From the findings, an IQA model for Lasallian HEIs was formulated.

Recommendations: Results of the study can be used to inform the status of the IQA systems of the participating institutions, other Lasallian HEIs, and even other HEIs in the country. These can serve as useful inputs for another round of planning and implementation that should involve going back to the Lasallian guiding principles as foundation and going back to the institution's mission and vision.

Keywords

ASEAN quality assurance framework, quality assurance, quality development, quality assurance model, higher education

[1]*De La Salle University-Dasmariñas, Philippines* https://orcid.org/0009-0006-6842-1874
***Corresponding author**: lrcalairo@dlsud.edu.ph

Introduction

Higher education institutions (HEIs) worldwide are expanding and becoming increasingly diverse. With this growth comes the need to ensure the quality of educational programs and services, addressing concerns of accountability, competitiveness, and reputation (Groen, 2017; Kis, 2005; Martin & Emeran, 2017). Over the past two decades, 'quality' and 'quality assurance' have become key concepts in the education sector (Vettori, 2012).

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) integration, fully implemented in 2015, further emphasized the need to harmonize higher education quality standards to create a common space and establish a zone of trust (Fahmi, 2016). This common space focuses on shared, collaborative frameworks that promote the harmonization and integration of higher education systems across member countries. The increasing cross-border mobility of students, professionals, and services further underscores the importance of maintaining globally recognized quality standards. In response, the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework (AQAF) was implemented to support these objectives.

Background

The AQAF consists of four interrelated quadrants. The first is external quality assurance (EQA) agencies that help HEIs maintain the quality of their academic programs and services. EQA refers to the process by which an external body evaluates an educational institution, program, or system to ensure that it meets predefined quality standards. It is typically conducted by accrediting agencies, regulatory bodies, or quality assurance organizations to maintain and enhance educational quality, accountability, and continuous improvement. The second is the EQA processes referring to the systems and standards utilized by EQA bodies to support their functions. The third is internal quality assurance (IQA) which establishes that the responsibility for quality rests on the HEIs themselves. The last one is the national qualification framework, a structured system that classifies and standardizes qualifications based on learning outcomes, competency levels, and pathways for education, training, and employment. The Philippine Qualifications Reference Framework provides a common reference for recognizing and comparing qualifications across different education and training systems (ASEAN Quality Assurance Network, 2016). In addition, the AQAF established ten general principles for each quadrant to guide implementation in the ASEAN member states.

This paper focuses on the third quadrant—the IQA in HEIs referring to the systems, processes, and mechanisms initiated and implemented by the educational institution itself to ensure and enhance the quality of its academic programs, governance, and support services. IQA consequently supports EQA undertakings and also serves as the backbone for the attainment of qualifications required by national qualifications frameworks (Elken & Stensaker, 2018; Martin & Emeran, 2017).

As the AQAF implementation eventually resonated in quality assurance initiatives in every ASEAN member state, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) issued CHED Memorandum Order 46 series of 2012, otherwise known as Policy Standard to Enhance Quality Assurance (QA) in Philippine Higher Education Through an Outcomes-Based and Typology-Based QA. Among other things, CMO 46 contains requirements for horizontal and vertical typologies, renewed focus on quality assurance including accreditation and international certification of programs, and the need for HEIs to establish their IQA systems to support the teaching-learning processes (Commission on Higher Education, 2012). Commission on Higher Education (2017) also initiated the Institutional Sustainability Assessment among HEIs, a measure that involves components of the quality process such as planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating of initiatives and eventually looks at outputs and outcomes of HEI functions and processes. On the other hand, EQA requirements eventually included criteria on IQA as can be seen in the instruments of the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (PAASCU) and the ASEAN University-Quality Assurance (AUN-QA) which figure prominently in the EQA directions of Philippine HEIs.

Quality assurance in Philippine HEIs is a multi-layered system designed to uphold and enhance academic standards, institutional governance, and student learning outcomes. It is governed by both regulatory and voluntary mechanisms, with CHED overseeing policies and program compliance through its Outcomes-Based QA framework. Additionally, HEIs undergo program and institutional accreditation with EQA bodies like PAASCU. These accrediting bodies assess institutions based on faculty qualifications, curriculum relevance, research productivity, student services, and institutional sustainability.

Beyond national accreditation, Philippine HEIs also engage in international quality assurance initiatives, such as assessments with AUN-QA and global accreditation agencies, to benchmark against international standards. Many institutions integrate IQA mechanisms, including program reviews, continuous improvement plans, and faculty development programs. However, challenges remain, such as resource constraints, uneven QA implementation across regions, and balancing regulatory compliance with institutional innovation.

With recent developments in quality assurance, HEIs have increasingly focused on establishing and strengthening their IQA systems, though these efforts remain largely influenced by EQA requirements. This trend is reflected in the limited QA studies in the Philippines, which have primarily examined CHED regulations as a QA framework, the benefits of accreditation and certification, program review, and the role of accrediting agencies (Dotong & Laguador, 2015; Ruiz & Junio-Sabio, 2012; Sipacio, 2015). Florida and Quinto (2015), on the other hand, analyzed the quality standards used by Times Higher Education rankings to determine why Philippine HEIs lag behind. More recently, Villaroman (2024) proposed a QA framework for a Philippine university, emphasizing commitment, accountability, progress and improvement, and excellence. Miranda and Reyes-Chua (2021) discussed best QA practices among selected Philippine HEIs using the Malcolm Baldridge framework highlighting the crucial roles of quality managers, faculty, and staff. However, no local study has yet examined IQA as focused on the quality initiatives of HEIs alone or on IQA principles within the context of the AQAF, independent of EQA requirements.

The above claim is supported by the findings of the study of Niedermeier and Pohlenz (2016), commissioned by the European Union Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region (EU SHARE) program, that assessed the state of QA in ASEAN HEIs. Their research exam-

ined existing QA policies, frameworks, and practices across ASEAN member states, identified key challenges in implementing and harmonizing QA systems, and assessed the institutional and regional needs for enhancing quality assurance mechanisms (SHARE, 2017). The study showed that many stakeholders, particularly those working in QA agencies and HEIs, are not aware of regional initiatives and their implications at institutional level (Niedermeier & Pohlenz, 2016). As a response, this study aims to provide HEIs with a platform to assess the status of their IQA systems in relation to the AQAF principles. Given that fostering a shared understanding of QA processes in the region is a core objective of the AQAF, this study seeks to contribute to that goal by offering insights that support alignment.

Statement of the problem

General: The study aims to develop an IQA model for Lasallian HEIs in the Philippines which is aligned with the AQAF IQA principles.

Specifically, this study aims to address the following questions:

1. What is the institutional profile of the two participating institutions in terms of:
   a. IQA structures
   b. IQA programs
   c. IQA resources
   d. Accreditation profile
2. What are the levels of implementation of the IQA systems of the two Lasallian HEIs vis-à-vis the ten AQAF IQA principles, to wit:
   a. The institution has a primary responsibility for quality.
   b. Quality assurance promotes the balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability.
   c. Quality assurance is a participatory and cooperative process across all levels incorporating involvement of academic staff, students, and other stakeholders.
   d. A quality culture underpins all institutional activities including teaching, learning, research, services, and management.
   e. A structured and functional IQA system with clearly defined responsibilities is established.
   f. The quality system is promulgated and supported by the top management to ensure effective implementation and sustainability.
   g. Sufficient resources for establishing and maintaining an effective quality system within the institution should be provided.
   h. The institution should have formal mechanisms for approval, periodic review, and monitoring of programs and awards.
   i. Quality is regularly monitored and reviewed for purposes of continuous improvement at all levels.
   j. Relevant and current information about the institution, its programs, achievements, and quality processes is accessible to the public.
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the IQA systems of the participating institutions? What are their opportunities and threats?
4. What key points can be derived from the results of specific objectives 1 to 3 which can serve as bases for developing the proposed IQA model for Lasallian HEIs?

It is the assumption of this study that HEIs in the country may learn from the case of Lasallian HEIs. Quality assurance is deeply embedded in the organizational culture of Lasallian HEIs as it is inherent in their entire educational mission. The Principles of Lasallian Education in the Philippines contained in the *Guiding Principles of the Philippine Lasallian Family* (2003) emphasized "commitment to excellence to be of greater service to God and the country." These principles, a result of years of reflection on Lasallian identity and mission, guide the whole teaching and learning processes, research endeavors, and community engagements of all Lasallian institutions in the country. This document summed up the guiding principles by stating that Lasallian educators "aspire to create educational works of quality that will be signs of God's Kingdom and instruments of salvation" (*Guiding Principles of the Philippine Lasallian Family*, 2003).

Finally, this research responds to the EU SHARE report on the AQAF that indicated the need for HEIs of ASEAN member states to understand better their roles and the implications of the AQAF on the HEI level (Bateman & Dyson, 2018). Ultimately, it is hoped that a deeper understanding of HEIs' roles in aligning with the AQAF will lead to greater clarity on quality assurance processes and mechanisms. This, in turn, will help ensure that academic program qualifications are comparable with those of HEIs across the ASEAN region. After all, the overarching goal is to enhance the comparability of qualifications and promote the mobility of students, professionals, and services within ASEAN and beyond.

Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze the IQA systems of the participating HEIs in relation to the AQAF. The study utilized a combination of descriptive-analytic multi-case study methodology, SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis, document analysis, surveys, and semi-structured interviews to provide a comprehensive assessment of IQA implementation.

Research design

For the qualitative component, a descriptive-analytic multi-case study methodology was used to present institutional profiles and assess the level of implementation of the ten AQAF IQA principles. The interlevel dynamics approach of Coghlan and Rashford (2006) was applied to examine the interplay between different levels of IQA implementation. A SWOT analysis was conducted to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the IQA systems in the participating institutions.

For the quantitative component, descriptive statistics were utilized to assess the level of IQA implementation based on the ten AQAF IQA principles. Inferential statistics were not employed, as IQA is a targeted, management-driven undertaking rather than a standard function of all members of the academic community. Additionally, inferential statistical analysis was beyond the scope and objectives of this study.

Data collection began with a survey administered to all target administrator respondents, with items based on the AQAF IQA principles. Following the survey, document analysis was conducted, focusing on strategic and operational plans, academic program review and enhancement, stakeholder involvement, resource allocation, and the utilization of evaluation data, among other key areas. Next, interviews were carried out to further clarify survey findings and validate insights from document analysis. Interviewees were selected based on their key roles in IQA implementation, ensuring alignment with the AQAF principles. For instance, college deans and department chairs were chosen as they oversee program development, review, and continuous improvement.

Participants of the study

The study involved two Lasallian HEIs in the Philippines, anonymized as University A and University B to comply with data privacy requirements. These institutions were selected based on three criteria: (a) their autonomous and university status as recognized by CHED, (b) their institutional accreditation granted by an accrediting agency or an equivalent status such as the Institutional Quality Assurance Monitoring and Evaluation (IQuAME) or the Institutional Sustainability Assessment (ISA), and (c) their overall quality assurance profile, particularly their engagement in QA processes. It was determined that these two institutions represent the diversity of Lasallian HEIs based on their profiles and geographical locations—one representing the Lasallian HEIs in Luzon, and the other representing those in the Visayas and Mindanao regions. Lasallian HEIs without autonomous status or an adequate program accreditation profile were not considered for participation in the study.

Participants for the survey and interviews included college deans, department chairs, selected directors engaged in formulating plans and implementing programs, vice chancellors, and the Brother Presidents of the institutions. The survey was administered to HEI administrators, as they are the key planners and implementers of IQA systems. Interviews were conducted with purposefully selected administrators to ensure representation across different management and operational levels.

Research instruments

Three data collection methods were employed: document analysis, a survey questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews. Institutional QA documents from the Quality Assurance Offices of the participating institutions were analyzed, with additional documents requested online due to pandemic-related restrictions during data collection.

The survey questionnaire consisted of 40 items, developed based on the AQAF IQA principles as outlined in the EU SHARE Guidelines for Institutional Assessments (ASEAN Quality Assurance Network, n.d.). Each principle had three to six items, depending on its scope and components. The items used this 5-point Likert scale: 1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-slightly agree, 4-agree, 5-strongly agree.

The survey underwent expert validation by three statisticians and two quality assurance experts, resulting in refinements in item construction and scale descriptors. A pilot test was conducted with ten administrators from University A to ensure clarity and readability, leading to minor revisions in wording.

For the qualitative component, semi-structured interview questions were developed based on the EU SHARE Guidelines. These guidelines were used when the AQAF was pilot tested in assessing the IQA systems of institutions in the ASEAN region. Each interviewee received a tailored set of questions depending on their administrative role in IQA planning, implementation, and monitoring. The interviews covered various aspects of IQA, including policies, plans, strategies, quality management systems, resource allocation, stakeholder involvement, organizational structures, and the functions and responsibilities of QA staff.

Informed consent and ethical considerations

The study adhered to ethical research guidelines, ensuring informed consent and data confidentiality. Survey respondents provided consent through the Google survey form introduction, while interview participants gave consent via individual emails before scheduling. Ethics approval was secured from the Ethics Review Offices of the participating institutions. Anonymity was maintained by removing identifying information from transcripts and reports. Interviews were conducted via an online platform, and video recordings and survey data were sched-

uled for deletion three months after completion of the study, in line with institutional policies.

Data analysis and interpretation

For the quantitative analysis, survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, particularly frequency count, mean, and standard deviation. The Level of Implementation Model of Bateman and Coles (2017) was applied to classify IQA implementation into five levels: 1-emerging, 2-entry, 3-intermediate, 4-advanced, and 5-mature.

For the qualitative analysis, content analysis (Merriam, 1998) was used to examine institutional profiles, interview transcripts, and documents. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed through coding to identify emerging themes (Creswell, 2014). Data were categorized based on the research questions and conceptual framework, with more detailed codes developed as necessary. To ensure accuracy and credibility, a member-checking process was conducted by presenting coding results to interviewees for validation.

The IQA model for Lasallian HEIs was developed drawing from the outcomes of the case studies of the participating institutions. The model development was informed by the works of Ehlers on quality literacy (Ehlers, 2007) and participative model for quality development (Ehlers, 2009), and the concepts of 'quality work' of Elken and Stensaker (2018) and 'quality practice' of Mårtensson et al. (2014).

To further refine the study's findings, the proposed IQA model was presented to three vice chancellors, three QA personnel, two deans, and two directors from the participating institutions. Additionally, the model was reviewed by two EQA experts, whose feedback led to refinements in certain components before finalization.

Results and discussion

Institutional profile of participating institutions

The profile of the participating institutions is discussed here based on their IQA structures, IQA programs, IQA resources, and accreditation profile.

Both University A and University B have established IQA systems that are anchored on their own operation and organizational culture. Both have IQA units that operate under the Office of the University President, and work hand in hand with the strategic management team of the institution. The director of the QA unit sits in all decision-making councils of the institution, a set-up which shows that the QA unit gets to participate in policy review and formulation which aims to further improve processes and services. For their IQA programs, both universities are heavily engaged in self-assessment activities mainly to prepare for accreditation visits. For this, University A's QA unit takes charge of planning, monitoring, and coordination with all university units especially with the academics division. In University B, QA programs are largely handled by the leadership of the academic affairs division and coordinated with the QA unit.

Both universities have initial attempts at establishing information management systems to support QA programs. Efficient systems have yet to be put in place so that storage, retrieval, and reports generation can be possible. Capacity-building programs are also part of QA programs in which the QA unit of University A has already made a head start considering that the unit was established earlier than that of University B. The latter relies on external training programs for its academic leaders with QA functions.

Furthermore, it was observed that the established councils and committees, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, facilitate discussions on IQA priorities for the academic community at both University A and University B. Additionally, both institutions have implemented IQA processes and instruments to monitor and evaluate IQA practices and activities. These processes are marked by stakeholder participation and engagement, though to varying degrees. To support the implementation of IQA programs, human, financial, and material resources are allocated based on priorities. While certain resources, such as IT infrastructure, require improvement, both institutions effectively leverage available resources to achieve the most productive outcomes possible.

Both participating institutions are maintaining their autonomous and university statuses with CHED and the level 4 accreditation status of their core programs with PAASCU. Several other graduate and undergraduate programs have achieved different levels of accreditation status.

Overall implementation of the ten IQA principles

Tables 1 and 2 present the summaries of the implementation of the ten IQA principles by the participating institutions. With data on mean, standard deviation, rank, and verbal interpretation, these tables also bring attention to the strengths and weaknesses of the institutions' IQA systems.

Ranked number 1 and the only IQA principle that was assessed to be in a mature level of implementation is the item "The institution has a primary responsibility for quality." The determination of the institution in this area is reflected in the manner by which quality initiatives have been integrated in the goals, structures, policies, and processes of the institution. This is aligned with the findings of Manatos et al. (2018) that successful integration of quality management systems requires alignment with the university's strategic goals and objectives. The study suggests that universities should ensure that their quality management practices support teaching, learning,

Table 1. Summary of University A's level of implementation of the ten IQA principles

	IQA Principle	Mean	SD	Rank	Verbal interpretation
1	The institution has a primary responsibility for quality.	4.54	0.7019	1	Mature
2	Quality assurance promotes the balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability.	4.29	0.7408	3	Advanced
3	Quality assurance is a participatory and cooperative process across all levels incorporating involvement of academic staff, students, and other stakeholders.	4.14	0.8239	9	Advanced
4	A quality culture underpins all institutional activities including teaching, learning, research, services, and management.	4.18	0.7565	6	Advanced
5	A structured and functional IQA system with clearly defined responsibilities is established.	3.98	0.7930	10	Advanced
6	The quality system is promulgated and supported by the top management to ensure effective implementation and sustainability.	4.28	0.7493	4	Advanced
7	Sufficient resources for establishing and maintaining an effective quality system within the institution should be provided.	4.14	0.7441	8	Advanced
8	The institution should have formal mechanisms for approval, periodic review, and monitoring of programs and awards.	4.22	0.7872	5	Advanced
9	Quality is regularly monitored and reviewed for purposes of continuous improvement at all levels.	4.34	0.7613	2	Advanced
10	Relevant and current information about the institution, its programs, achievements, and quality processes is accessible to the public.	4.16	0.7951	7	Advanced
	Overall	4.23	0.1483		Advanced

research, and extension activities.

Ranked number 2 is the IQA principle "Quality is regularly monitored and reviewed for purposes of continuous improvement at all levels." Generally, review and monitoring were driven by regulatory and accreditation requirements but this has also brought forth internal processes that drive continuous improvement in teaching and learning, research, engagement, student support, and facilities. This is supported by Elken and Stensaker (2018) who promote a reflective practice of meaningful monitoring and continuous improvement that is carried out by actors in the different levels of operation. They argue that these processes should not be driven by external standards, but by commitment to excellence and idealism.

In rank number 3 is the IQA principle "Quality assurance promotes the balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability." University A is autonomous and therefore enjoys a degree of autonomy, meaning it is not strictly regulated by CHED. This autonomy has empowered the institution to innovate its programs in response to emerging developments, better preparing graduates for the workforce. At the same time, accountability is ensured through the implementation of QA policies and processes, which safeguard the quality of teaching, research, and community extension activities. Additionally, regional and national development needs are carefully considered when planning and implementing programs and services, ensuring that the institution's offerings remain relevant and impactful. This concept is reinforced by Vettori et al. (2017) who explain the impact of IQA processes and mechanisms on employability, management effectiveness, teaching and learning, and on the overall quality culture of the institution.

On the other hand, the succeeding narrative will focus on the three IQA principles that obtained the lowest ratings from the respondents. Ranked the lowest at number 10 in implementation was the IQA principle "A structured and functional IQA system with clearly defined responsibilities is established." Although there was a strong coordination between the IQA unit and other departments within the institution, a prevailing belief persisted that any matter related to QA should be handled by the IQA unit. Despite the IQA unit's continuous efforts to emphasize that QA is a shared responsibility, management tended to assign all QA duties to the IQA unit. Additionally, the training and development programs on QA have been insufficient, with opportunities largely reserved for key administrators. Furthermore, the IQA manual has not been effectively communicated to the relevant stakeholders.

Ranked number 9 in the implementation is the IQA principle that says "Quality assurance is a participatory and cooperative process across all levels incorporating involvement of academic staff, students, and other

Table 2. Summary of University B's level of implementation of the ten IQA principles

	IQA Principle	Mean	SD	Rank	Verbal interpretation
1	The institution has a primary responsibility for quality.	4.38	0.6835	1	Advanced
2	Quality assurance promotes the balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability.	4.37	0.6004	2	Advanced
3	Quality assurance is a participatory and cooperative process across all levels incorporating involvement of academic staff, students, and other stakeholders.	4.24	0.6356	4	Advanced
4	A quality culture underpins all institutional activities including teaching, learning, research, services, and management.	4.16	0.6410	6	Advanced
5	A structured and functional IQA system with clearly defined responsibilities is established.	3.83	0.6863	9	Advanced
6	The quality system is promulgated and supported by the top management to ensure effective implementation and sustainability.	4.21	0.6730	5	Advanced
7	Sufficient resources for establishing and maintaining an effective quality system within the institution should be provided.	3.95	0.6729	8	Advanced
8	The institution should have formal mechanisms for approval, periodic review, and monitoring of programs and awards.	4.33	0.7080	3	Advanced
9	Quality is regularly monitored and reviewed for purposes of continuous improvement at all levels.	4.07	0.7264	7	Advanced
10	Relevant and current information about the institution, its programs, achievements, and quality processes is accessible to the public.	3.64	0.8598	10	Advanced
	Overall	4.12	0.6097		Advanced

stakeholders." Data showed that quality assurance was not integrated in the planning processes and there were concerns with the implementation of colleges and departments of action plans to address recommendations of accrediting agencies. The IQA unit coordinates closely with the vice chancellors and with the Brother President mostly through the Executive Council. Though it holds a general assembly at times and manages ad hoc committees, there is apparently a communication and implementation gap in the middle management level. Groen (2017) emphasized the importance of engaging internal stakeholders in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of QA processes to ensure collective participation. This involvement ultimately makes enhancement efforts meaningful, rather than merely driven by external accountability requirements.

Ranked number 8 is the IQA principle that says "Sufficient resources for establishing and maintaining an effective quality system within the institution should be provided." Resources in this regard refer to human, financial, and material resources for QA systems. The IQA unit is admittedly understaffed with only the director, two coordinators, and an office associate. It should be noted that the director and the coordinators are full-time faculty members who have been given teaching deloading and they still therefore have teaching responsibilities and committee work in their respective academic departments. The director teaches one class while the coordinators teach three to four classes every semester. Budget for training and development is also limited and so the strategy is for one or two people to attend external training sessions and then conduct echo seminars/workshops among colleagues. Also, IT infrastructure to support the current data management system is not adequate. Warehousing is a current concern because the IQA unit doesn't have its own server. Maintenance and updating of the information management system likewise call for the collaborative efforts of all account users.

Overall, University A showed an advanced level of implementation of the ten AQAF IQA principles.

Table 2 shows the summary of the level of implementation of the ten IQA principles by University B. This part of the narrative focuses on the principles that landed on top three and the other three that landed at the bottom, and explains the implementation details of such.

The IQA principle that yielded the highest level of implementation is "The institution has a primary responsibility for quality." The university's more than four decades of accreditation history shows its earnestness to adhere to quality standards and to get the confirmation of its external peers on the quality direction that it is taking. The institution has also implemented internal quality mechanisms like monitoring and evaluation tools and regular quality dialogues in order to support this goal. University B's quality initiatives are led by its academics head.

This has made teaching-learning excellence the focus of the quality efforts of the institution. The quality of teaching and learning was extensively explored by Elken and Stensaker (2018) and Mårtensson et al. (2014), who emphasized the significance of the day-to-day activities and practices of all actors in HEIs. They highlighted how even the details and impacts of teaching-learning processes collectively contribute to the overall quality of the institution. These authors stress the importance of the roles played by academics, focusing on how they understand and interpret quality policies and processes, the dynamic conflicts that arise, and the reflection and sense-making that occur as part of the ongoing quality improvement process.

Ranked number 2 is the IQA principle "Quality assurance promotes the balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability." University B is an autonomous institution and it also underwent Institutional Sustainability Assessment by CHED recently. This autonomy is balanced by its internal quality processes that ensure that the quality of its educational provision is carefully monitored and evaluated. Along this line, Dill (2000) has extensive work focusing on academic accountability called academic audit meant to ensure the quality of student learning through QA processes implemented by higher institutions themselves. The main goal of academic audits, centered around capacity building, is to drive institutional reform and organizational development, which are also influenced by public accountability. Dill's framework emphasizes building the capacities of program managers and university administrators to plan, implement, and monitor initiatives aimed at ensuring academic standards and fostering institutional academic reforms for continuous improvement.

The IQA principle "The institution should have formal mechanisms for approval, periodic review, and monitoring of programs and awards" ranks third. The academic division of University B has implemented robust measures to regularly review and monitor its academic programs. This process includes representatives from various stakeholders, including alumni and industry sectors, to drive continuous improvement efforts. These internal processes play a crucial role in regularly assessing the university's performance and have a significant impact on the quality of its academic programs (Martin & Emeran, 2017).

The three IQA principles whose implementations were rated the lowest are now presented. At rank 10 is the IQA principle "Relevant and current information about the institution, its programs, achievements, and quality processes is accessible to the public." This is attributed to the lack of sufficient information available on the university website pertaining to the university's achievements in accreditation and on its quality processes. In this age when everybody goes to online platforms to get information, the respondents understand the importance of the university website as a vehicle of information to enhance the institution's reputation of quality. There were other information media, however, like publications, reports and announcements that have featured the University B's successes in accreditation.

Ranked as number 9 is the IQA principle "A structured and functional IQA system with clearly defined responsibilities is established." Interviews and university documents showed lack of coordination and interaction between the academics division and the Quality Assurance Office. There was no evidence of information dissemination for updates and consultative processes regarding IQA. The deans and chairs were also looking for an encompassing quality manual—both on academic programs as well as processes that should guide them. The importance of integration of quality assurance processes cannot be overemphasized. Integrative approaches in the overall management framework that cut across different organizational levels and actors play a significant role in the success of HEIs (Manatos et al., 2018). The current efforts of the academics and research division may well be complemented by the supporting units outside of this division and also by the IQA unit, understanding that they all create a common product, that is their educational provision, for one common client.

At rank number 8 is the IQA principle "Sufficient resources for establishing and maintaining an effective quality system within the institution should be provided." Resources needed here refer to human, financial, and material resources. The IQA unit is relatively new and is understaffed though it is augmented by various executive committees composed mainly of program managers of the academic affairs team. Budget for QA comes from different sources and QA programs which have not been included in allocations are still given financial support despite financial challenges being encountered at the moment. Also, information management systems that can better facilitate data collection, analysis, and reports generation need to be considered in future planning.

Results of the SWOT analysis

Tables 3 and 4 present the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the IQA systems of the participating institutions.

Opportunities for University A and University B

The global network of Lasallian HEIs offers numerous opportunities for enhancing QA. This network fosters close collaboration with key stakeholders, particularly alumni and industry partners. Additionally, EQA activities, such as accreditation processes and AUN-QA assessments, provide valuable opportunities for continuous QA development. Moreover, their active involvement in QA associations, which regularly organize conferences and

Table 3. Summary of University A's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
• Well-established IQA unit • Established structures and processes in all levels of management • Open constant communication among stakeholders in different units • Use of IQA instruments in monitoring and evaluation • Top management support • Institution's autonomy	• Lack of integration of QA systems • Implementation problems due to lack of proper criteria in selecting administrators • Lack of systematic planning processes in the institutional level • Gap in data analysis and utilization • Lack of integrated information management systems • Limited resources for the IQA system	• Network of Lasallian higher education institutions in the world as a resource • Collaboration with stakeholders • Accreditation activities as driver of continuing improvement • QA associations in the region and in the world as partners • Changing landscape of the HEI environment that compels change and innovation	• Externally-driven QA initiatives and the constantly changing requirements of regulatory and accrediting agencies • Availability of human and material resources does not necessarily align with the expanding roles and responsibilities • Managerialism • Data Privacy Law • Changing landscape of the HEI environment that requires new ways of looking at QA and university performance

Table 4. Summary of University B's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
• Strong feedback mechanism • Use of IQA monitoring and evaluation instruments • Established structures and processes in all management levels • Top management support • Strong academic leadership • Institution's autonomy	• Weak institutionalization of the IQA system • Lack of adequate human and material resources in the IQA unit • Lack of integrated information management systems • QA direction is largely accreditation-driven • Lack of integration of IQA systems • Information on the university's QA programs and milestones are not accessible to the public	• Network of Lasallian higher education institutions in the world as a resource • Collaboration with stakeholders • Accreditation activities that drive continuous quality improvement • QA associations in the region and in the world as partners and resource • Changing landscape of the HEI environment that compels change and innovation	• Externally-driven QA initiatives and the constantly changing requirements of regulatory and accrediting agencies • Availability of human and material resources does not necessarily align with the expanding roles and responsibilities • Managerialism • Data Privacy Law • Changing landscape of the HEI environment that requires new ways of looking at QA and university performance

training sessions, further contributes to the enhancement of QA practices. The growing emphasis on quality assurance in HEIs, coupled with the challenges posed by an evolving academic landscape, presents further opportunities. These dynamic circumstances often lead to disruptions that compel HEI leaders to rethink their leadership approaches, embrace emerging technologies, engage in meaningful dialogue, and innovate in their programs and services.

Threats to University A and University B

The externally-driven QA initiatives and the ever-changing requirements and standards of regulatory and accrediting agencies pose a threat. Without a systematic data management that is assisted by an integrated management system where data warehousing enables generating data from different sources, this is a tiring and repetitive task that will wear out people and hamper their more important activities like teaching, learning, and research. The institutions' practices also show that with the expansion of QA initiatives over the years,

the availability of human and material resources does not necessarily align with the expanding roles and responsibilities. This is clearly a threat to continuity and sustainability and deserves careful attention. Managerialism also looms as a threat. Managerialism is a set of management processes and instruments implemented in a university that aims to ensure efficiency by means of control. This management approach makes quality assurance activities an imposition, and in the end just develops compliance and not a quality culture (Deetz, 1992 as cited by Davis, 2017). Yet another area of concern is the recent imposition of the Data Privacy Law that has strict provisions on collecting, handling, and storing personal information, especially sensitive personal information. Finally, the changing landscape of the HEI environment that requires new ways of looking at quality assurance and university performance is both an opportunity and a threat. With the autonomy of the participating institutions also comes the responsibility for efficient self-management and sustainability.

Key results that informed the IQA model development

1. QA frameworks at the international (e.g., ABET, AACSB) and regional (e.g., ASEAN) levels, along with national regulations (e.g., CHED) and accreditation standards (e.g., PAASCU) were key drivers shaping the environment of the participating institutions.
2. The study revealed that the identity and character of Lasallian institutions served as the foundation for all initiatives. The Lasallian identity and values remained central, guiding and grounding all processes and systems.
3. Shared values and goals serve as key drivers of IQA, shaping the understanding and commitment to QA programs. These values are fundamental, as they guide and influence organizational practices. Elken and Stensaker (2018) emphasize the importance of shared values, noting that their successful implementation requires strong leadership and collaboration among members of the organization.
4. Distributed leadership (Bolden et al., 2009) is important in QA systems implementation. It was clearly shown in the study that the support of top management was crucial in IQA systems implementation. This was further complemented by the significant efforts of the middle managers, and the cooperation and involvement of all personnel of the institution.
5. Quality literacy or competencies (Ehlers, 2007) are necessary in IQA implementation. Leaders who were knowledgeable in QA management and processes, had experiences in QA program implementation, and possessed the ability to find new ways of doing things were instrumental in the QA achievements of the participating institutions. Berry (1998) has further emphasized the importance of leadership factors and training requirements to support the development of quality management systems.
6. QA structures, processes, and resources were material to make IQA systems work. Units and persons in charge, their roles and responsibilities, and the resources available for them should be clearly defined.
7. Organizational culture plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of QA systems. While structural and managerial components are essential, they alone are not sufficient (Ehlers, 2009, 2010; Elken & Stensaker, 2018; Mårtensson et al., 2014). The daily quality activities of various actors across different organizational levels are integral to shaping the quality culture within institutions.
8. Feedback is indispensable as shown in the study's results. Gathering feedback, analyzing them, and utilizing them to inform quality improvement practices figured significantly in the whole IQA system design.
9. Continuous quality improvement is key. "The idea of quality improvement is the cornerstone of what the university is about when it talks of advancing knowledge" (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2004, p. 276). The study showed that the needs of stakeholders change, organizations and structures evolve, and the education landscape continuously changes.

Development process of the IQA model

The proposed IQA model was formulated after analyzing the results of the survey including the qualitative comments, interviews, and document analysis. The transcribed texts of the interviews and the qualitative content of the survey were carefully studied and were assigned themes to draw up good IQA practices of the participating institutions. Initial analysis yielded the components of the model and their relationships and connections. Consequently, the emerging themes and components were revised and enriched after further discussions through email exchanges and face-to-face discussions with some administrator respondents. Further revisions took place as a result of the presentation of the model to the representatives of the participating institutions and an extensive critique by QA practitioners. To determine if the model components devised were supported by sound QA concepts and principles, the researcher had to delve into more QA literature and studies that eventually resulted in the finetuning of the model. Considered as important inputs as well were the conceptual studies and old documents pertaining to the history of Lasallian education in the country and in the world.

As a result of the foregoing process, the proposed IQA model was hugely informed by several QA principles and proponents such as Ehlers' participative model for quality development (Ehlers, 2009) and his quality literacy concept (Ehlers, 2007). Quality literacy, according to Ehlers, includes quality knowledge, quality experience,

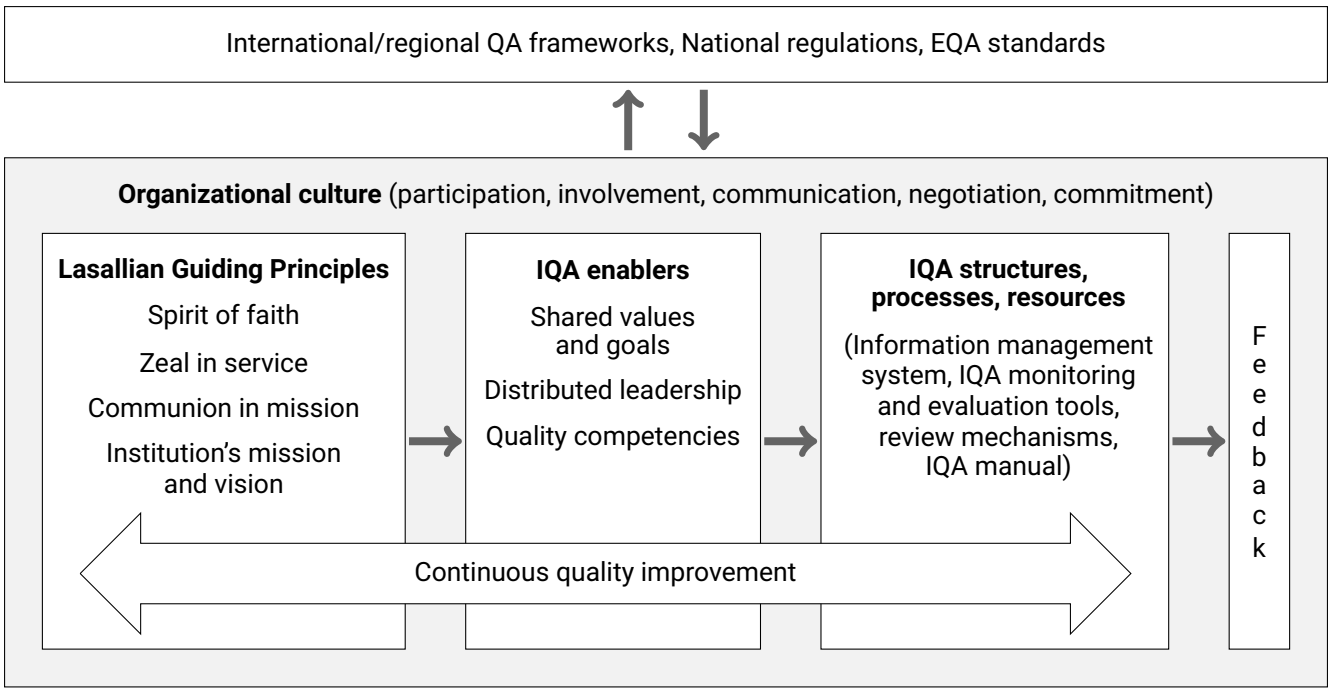

Figure 1. Proposed IQA model for HEIs

quality innovation, and quality analysis (analytic and reflexive). His participative model involves negotiation, participation, and co-production among actors. Also influential are the concepts of 'quality work' of Elken and Stensaker (2018) and 'quality practice' of Mårtensson et al. (2014) which highlight the day-to-day activities and practices of all actors in HEIs, even the details and impacts of teaching-learning processes, that altogether comprise significantly the overall quality of the institution. Finally, the proposed model was also influenced by the integrated quality management systems of Berry (1998), Kettunen and Kantola (2009), and Manatos et al. (2018) which extensively explained the management systems, processes, and structures, and the power of technology platforms and information management systems in order to complement the QA framework of institutions.

The IQA model and its implementation in HEIs

The proposed IQA model, shown in Figure 1, presents the link between IQA and EQA, the factors that enable an IQA system to be efficiently implemented, the processes and resources that are necessary in the implementation phase, the element of feedback, and the role of organizational culture. It also emphasizes the need for continuous quality improvement.

The proposed model shows that QA frameworks, national regulations, and EQA standards are external to the organization but they shape the quality standards by which programs and HEIs are measured especially with the harmonization of QA processes in higher education in the ASEAN region. They are essential parts of the landscape and the Lasallian HEIs interact with and respond to them.

These external standards are adapted in consideration of the unique context of the institution. In so doing, the mission-vision of the institution is always central to this context. In addition, the Lasallian identity and character serve as the foundation of the whole IQA system development. All other components are determined based on these non-negotiable guiding principles—spirit of faith, zeal in service, and communion in mission. The *Guiding Principles of the Philippine Lasallian Family* (2009) explain that these three values "are fundamental to the Lasallian identity . . . and provide a paradigm for living the Lasallian story today" (p. 5).

The IQA enablers comprised of shared values and goals, distributed leadership, and quality competencies provide the inspiration, empowerment, and direction of the whole IQA system. Shared values should be established at the beginning with the participation of the stakeholders so that they own and believe in the shared values and goals of the IQA program. These will then be the basis of their decision-making and prioritization. It should be noted that communication and negotiation processes figure prominently in this phase. In the end, members of the organization should identify themselves with these values and goals and embrace them as their own. Distributed leadership is characterized by the combined top-down management efforts and the bottom-up involvement of the people on the ground. This leadership inspires commitment, initiates dialogues and con-

sultations, and spearheads decision-making processes. Quality competencies are empowering because they encompass the skills, knowledge, and attitudes essential for effectively and efficiently managing an IQA system. These competencies include the ability of HEI planners and implementers to develop quality strategies and tools tailored to their specific educational contexts, based on established QA concepts and principles. They also involve the capacity to analyze various quality development objectives and the differing perspectives of stakeholders, make necessary adjustments to IQA systems, and even innovate beyond existing information to create their own development programs. These competencies do not emerge naturally or overnight. They require intentional development through capacity-building programs, and resources must be allocated to support the achievement of this goal.

On the other hand, IQA structures, resources, and processes serve to translate goals and aspirations into tangible mechanisms that enable the implementation of IQA programs in the everyday operations of the academic community. These mechanisms may include establishing QA units or committees within colleges, utilizing IQA monitoring and evaluation tools such as student satisfaction surveys, or conducting focus group discussions to assess courses, among others. Martin and Emeran (2017) emphasized how all these IQA initiatives of an institution impact the quality of its programs and services. These initiatives are the result of shared values and are driven by distributed leadership and competencies within the organization. Ultimately, the feedback gathered from stakeholders should be systematically analyzed and used to inform the next cycle of quality improvement activities.

However, having the structural elements, processes, and expertise to implement and manage an IQA system does not guarantee the desired outcomes or impact. The system is not straightforward, as the organization in which it operates is dynamic and alive, with various actors and implementers who have different motivations for both individual and collective commitment. These actors also communicate and negotiate in diverse ways, and the overall sensemaking process is inherently fluid. Cultural factors inevitably play a significant role. As Ehlers (2009, 2010), Harvey and Stensaker (2008), and Vettori (2012) noted, QA and culture are deeply intertwined. Lasallian HEI quality managers must understand all these elements and strike a balance to ensure that the institution remains true to the Lasallian mission of teaching and learning excellence, research excellence, and responsive community engagement. This balance ensures that the institution meets the needs of its stakeholders through educational offerings that bear the hallmark of Lasallian quality. Moreover, the entire IQA system is a continuous process, as stakeholder needs evolve, the education landscape changes, and standards are regularly evaluated and revised. As a learning organization, continuous quality improvement is integral to the institution's daily operations.

Conclusion

Based on the study's findings, it is clear that an HEI can adopt various approaches to implementing the general AQAF principles for IQA, depending on its mission, vision, goals, and unique context. In this regard, the proposed IQA model presented in this paper is applicable to both Lasallian HEIs and other HEIs. It can serve as a framework for formulating and designing their IQA systems. The elements of the model are not prescriptive; instead, they can be tailored with specific details agreed upon by stakeholders, ensuring alignment with the institution's unique context.

The implementation of IQA systems in the Lasallian HEIs studied revealed that their design, dynamics, and execution are deeply rooted in the institution's character, identity, and mission/vision. These elements serve as the central context for the system. Organizational culture also plays a critical role. The dynamics of communication, negotiation, and sensemaking within the organization are influenced by factors such as trust, confidence in leadership, power struggles, cooperation, and interrelationships across various levels of the institution (Coghlan & Rashford, 2006; Ehlers, 2009; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008). The study also highlighted that key factors in the successful implementation of IQA systems include top management support and leadership, adequate resource allocation, institutional autonomy, stakeholder participation and involvement, functional IQA structures and processes (such as quality dialogues and feedback mechanisms), and the use of IQA instruments like monitoring and evaluation tools.

The results also indicated a complementarity between EQA, such as accreditation, and IQA, referred to as the EQA-IQA link. Accreditation-driven quality systems are eventually supported by IQA systems that help implement QA programs and ensure the sustainability of QA efforts. External standards influence the internal adaptation of the HEI. Additionally, IQA systems are characterized by Deming's quality cycle of Plan-Do-Check-Act. Since it is a cycle, it is continuous and does not end with a single component. Continuous quality improvement, therefore, becomes a natural process that HEIs should embrace, considering the opportunities available to them and the threats that may impact sustainability and effectiveness. Along with this, the continuous empowerment of individuals through training and development programs is crucial (Dill, 2000). As roles and responsibilities expand, it is important to align human and material resources accordingly.

Recommendations

This paper, while acknowledging its merits and limitations, offers the following recommendations:

1. *Informed decision-making for participating institutions*. The findings of this study can be used to inform the participating institutions about the status of their IQA systems. Additionally, this research may serve as a guide for other HEIs in evaluating their own IQA systems against the AQAF principles.
2. *Integration of quality assurance and strategic management*. Quality assurance and strategic management in HEIs should be integrated within institutional planning processes to prevent fragmented implementation. Stakeholder involvement is crucial to ensure a cohesive and effective approach.
3. *Capacity building for institutional research*. Participating institutions may consider developing capacity for institutional research to assess QA policies and practices. This will facilitate continuous quality improvement and provide an empirical basis for enhancing quality or improving practices (Newton, 2012).
4. *Adequate resource allocation for IQA systems*. Resource allocation is essential for establishing a robust and functional IQA system and should be prioritized by HEIs. The evolving nature of the EQA-IQA tandem requires continuity and sustainability. QA units should be sufficiently staffed, capacity-building programs should be implemented, and information management systems should be established with the necessary IT infrastructure and support. Over time, these investments will reduce manual work, save personnel hours, and improve the efficiency of data retrieval and report preparation.
5. *Developing quality competencies among IQA implementers*. Building quality competencies, particularly among planners and implementers of the IQA system, is key to success or failure for HEIs. Investment in development programs and resource allocation for these programs will yield long-term benefits. Additionally, institutions may explore partnerships and networks to support this effort.
6. *Investigating the impact of EQA*. Further research should be conducted on the impact of EQA, specifically accreditation, as the IQA programs of the participating institutions are primarily driven by EQA. The effects of accreditation on teaching and learning processes are worth examining, given the considerable time and resources invested in these initiatives over the years.
7. *Studying the microcultures of teaching-learning groups*. A deeper investigation into the microcultures of teaching and learning groups within universities could provide valuable insights into how QA efforts directly impact teaching and learning processes. Understanding how academics perceive and engage with QA initiatives will help refine these efforts.
8. *Exploring the role of leadership in quality development*. An interesting offshoot of this research could be the exploration of the role of leadership in driving quality development within HEIs. Understanding how leadership influences QA implementation can provide a clearer framework for enhancing quality management in higher education.

Acknowledgments

The author acknowledges the Private Education Assistance Committee (PEAC), through its Research for School Improvement Towards Excellence (RSITE) Program, and CHED, through its Dissertation Grant Program, for the financial grants and generous support for the completion of this research. The author is also indebted to her institution De La Salle University-Dasmariñas and to the participating institutions that went to extra lengths to support this study.

This paper is based on a dissertation of Calairo (2021) who was granted assistance by PEAC in 2020–2021 under its RSITE Program.

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