Obstacles and Challenges of Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Libya

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ABSTRACT

Many studies investigated the issues associated with higher education quality in Libya. On other side, most of modern researches indicated that higher education needs to be developed meeting the objectives of such systems and attaining point of sustainability realization. This paper investigates the obstacles face the quality assurance representatives within higher education system in Libya. Furthermore, examine challenges of improving higher education outcomes quality. Inductive approach methodology was adopted to obtain results. Research found several challenges facing processes of quality assurance and accreditation starting from obstacles in public universities, quality offices difficulties, leading difficulties, organizational difficulties, learning and teaching difficulties, scientific research difficulties, community service difficulties, and obstacles in private universities. Study recommendations concentrate on the important of developing trend to reduce profound gap that make education process away from sophisticated universities, and it is time to cooperate among different destinations, starting from students through staff and parent down to labor institutions.

Keywords: Quality Assurance, Accreditation, Higher Education

INTRODUCTION

Higher education is considered as critical and vital issue within any country. For any country or region to be competitive, the education system should be able to provide high quality of services, to ensure that higher education outputs are placed at the level of challenges (Wilkens, 2011). Without doubt, there are absent areas and distortions in the education system within Arab world and in Libya particularly, where a lot of burdens were generated by the rapid growth of education institutions. However, a lot of universities have established in Libya, and such matter has played a crucial role in pressuring the quality of higher education process, where a huge numbers of students who intend to catch up higher education in the last years have constituted massive load on the potentials of education system, so the attention turn out to quantity rather the quality, to the extent of that the National Centre for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Educational and Training Institute has been established in 2006. As a bottom line, to address quality of higher education in Libya, a lot of intervention strategies and solution plans have taken a place lately, but those who have the responsibility on education system should provide more measures that could be harmonize for the situation in Libya at various levels to meet the contemporary challenges (Tamtam et al., 2011).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF EDUCATION-BASED UNIVERSITIES IN LIBYA

The first higher education institution in Libya was established in 1955 in Benghazi under the name of the Libyan University. Where, the first national university has started with Faculty of Arts and Education with 31 students and six members of the teaching stuff. In the Tripoli, in 1957, the College of Science was opened. In the same year, the Faculty of Economics and Commerce in Benghazi was established and was followed by the Faculty of Law in 1962 and then the Faculty of Agriculture in 1966. In 1967, the Libyan University started the expansion of its colleges and educational programs, and then, in 1973, separated into two independent universities: Garyounis University in Benghazi (now it is Bengazi University) and Al-Fateh University in Tripoli (now it is Tripoli University (Al-ashahr, 2008). Because of the increase in the number of students who have high school diplomas along with the expansion of the society's need the development of university education was continued steadily after 1970. Number of university faculties, in both Tripoli and Benghazi, were increased and new colleges were opened, in various disciplines, in cities Al-Baydaa and Sabha with development plans to become independent universities (Atlobah& Al-Haddad, 2010, P: 9-10). Since the beginning of the Eighties the number of universities has steadily expanded until it exceed thirteen universities in 2004 in Tripoli, Benghazi, Al-Baydaa, Sabha, Al-Zawya, Misurata, Elhoms, Sert and Al-Jabal Al-Gharbi, each of which includes variety of

disciplines and provides higher education for free, the statistics showed that there was a significant increase in the numbers of universities in Libya in 2010 where they become forty private university and twenty seven public universities (Higher Education in Libya, 2012).
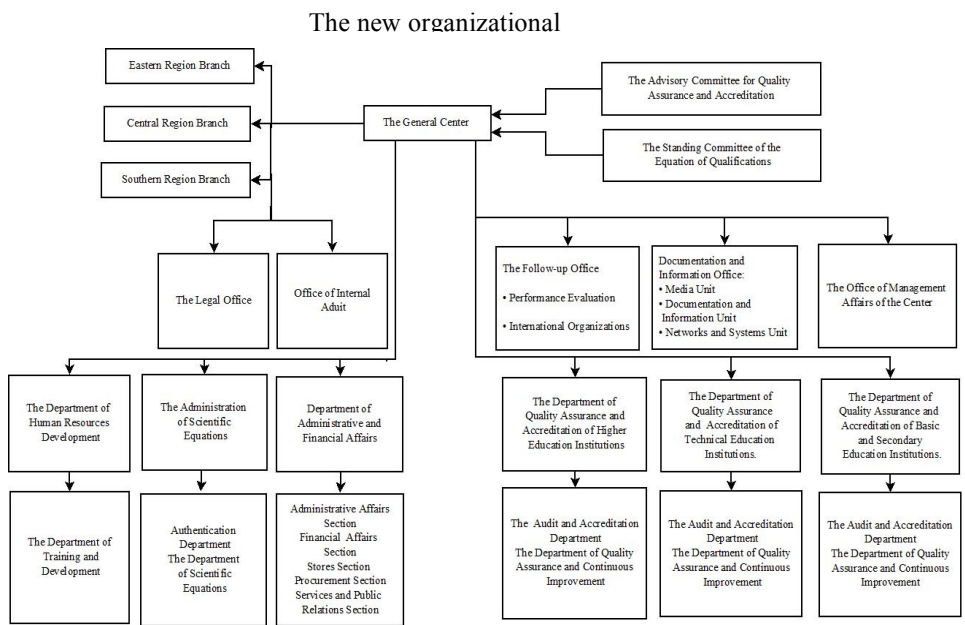
QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN LIBYA

The quantitative and horizontal expansion in some universities are resulted in a decline in quality level, and perhaps this is due to the significant shortage of permanent and specialist faculty members, poor infrastructure, as well as lack of funding, along with the absence of philosophy and the absence of clear criteria for evaluation and development (Al-Gadid, 2010). Based on the foregoing, the system of quality assurance in higher education has been initiated along with the application of quality standards and the issuance of laws for the development of higher education, where the national higher education has started in the year 2006. One of its most important development stations is that it granted the initial accreditation of the General People's Committee Act for Higher Education No. (38) Of the year 2006 for the following universities: Africa University in Benghazi, the University of United Africa in Zawia, Al-Refak University, after that in 2010 the General People's Committee Act No. (149) was issued of the reorganization of the universities, and thus became (10) ten universities, including three universities of a private nature (Al-Saghir, 2011, P: 423).

Libya has realized the important and the vital role of the system of education in the overall development. It also understood the local and global challenges they may face, and the importance of improving the quality of the system through the introduction of methodologies and applying quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms, so the center of quality assurance and accreditation of higher education institutions was established, according to the Act no. (164) of 2006 issued by the General People's Committee (formerly).The Education Act No. (18) for the year 2010 came to make the name of the Center (The National Center for the Quality Assurance and the Accreditation of the Educational and Training institutions) and the Centre has the legal personality along with the independent financial disclosure, which is the entity authorized by law to develop and follow up on quality assurance and accreditation in education institutions in Libya (The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Center of the Educational and Training Institutions, Strategic Plan for the center, 2012:6).

The General People's Committee (formerly) issued Act No. 430 of 2008, subjecting higher education institutions to the accreditation of the Quality Assurance Center, where Article (1) states the following: The public, civil, common and foreign higher education institutions in Libya (universities, academies, senior professional positions, and other institutions of higher education) are subject to the standards and procedures that ensure audit quality and accreditation contained in the directory of quality assurance and accreditation issued in the directory of quality assurance and accreditation of the Center of Quality Assurance in Higher Education Institutions (Al-Gadid, 2010 :16).

The center is a member of the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE) and is a member of the International Accreditation Organization (IAO), and in the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). The organizational structure of the center consists of several departments which can be summarized in fig. (1) (The Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Educational and Training Institutions Center, 2012, The Strategic Plan:pp8-11).

The new organizational

The Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Educational and Training Institutions Center, 2012, The Strategic Plan: p23.

Evaluation Processes of Accreditation are carried out according to the Following Steps:

1- Self-study: A set of procedural steps undertaken by the faculty members, staff, students and community members, and whoever the institution see beneficial, in order to assess their organization by themselves based on the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Manual issued by the center, through the collection of data and statistics on the performance of the institution in the current situation, and comparing it to the quality and accreditation standards, is considered the first step towards preparing for the process of internal audit, as is the process of internal audit in preparation for the development of hypotheses that may need a team of external audit in the field visit.

The results of the self-study include showing the strengths and weaknesses with respect to the activities of the institution or the educational program. Writing report must be based on the minutes of the meetings, files, records, and questionnaires of students, faculty members and staff. The report includes the organization's mission, strategic plan, the program of studies of the first undergraduate stage, the graduate program, scientific research and other activities (Radwan, 2008).

2- Starting the audit process: The audit process usually begins after the educational institution fulfills the required accreditation requirements and then contacting the center, and expressing their desire in writing to conduct the audit process. The specialized department in the center commissioned a director for the audit process who must be one of the employees of the center or one of its experts, and who has experience in the audit and accreditation operations. He must also be eligible to manage the audit process. Then, the center forms an audit team of local and international professionals to conduct external audit. Then, official contracts are signed with this team, along with clear job descriptions signed between the center and the team members. And hence, the institution or program, concerning with the time frame of the external audit to be implemented, is notified. The external audit team holds a preliminary meeting before visiting the institution to review and determine the appropriate mechanisms of action. The institution prepares a room that fits the audit team with the provision of computers and imaging services. Then, the external audit team interviews the members of the Technical Committee for Internal Audit during its field visit of the facilities of the institution. The number of auditors has to be no less than three, in addition to the team leader (Baird, 2006).

3-The team members raise their final reports to the center in a maximum period of (six weeks) from the date of the start of the work of the external audit team and each member of the team gives estimates of the degree deserved for each of the special items in all axes to be independently audited.

4- After the completion of the field visit, each member of the team has to give estimates of the degree deserved for each of the items in all axes to be independently audited

5- These estimates are delivered according to the form, assigned to that, by each member confidentially to the head of the team, accompanied by the evidences and the proofs on which every auditor has depended in his estimates for each item.

6- The head of the audit team convenes a meeting of all the team members to discuss the estimates given by each member to each item; to reach a majority agreement based on the debate and dialogue between the team members (Quality Assurance Manual, 2011).

7-After reaching the due estimates on each of the axes of quality assurance, the team extracts the due degree in accordance with the provisions and procedures for the distribution of the points allocated to the axes and gives the points which forms each of the axes contained in the Quality Assurance Manual.

8-The audit team writes the report, which must take into account the structure and the general instructions contained in this Quality Assurance Manual.

9- The report is treated confidentially until submitting it to the Quality Assurance Center, which will issue the appropriate decisions, where they attached a copy of the report to the institution requesting accreditation to inform them of the points obtained and of the strengths and weaknesses (Baird, 2006).

OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES FACING PROCESSES OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION

In light of the above, the processes of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education institutions in Libya are carried out under the supervision of the Center for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions. The process of accreditation of higher education institution in Libya does not differ in terms of procedures and standards from the procedures followed in many developed countries. The research questions are: "Are really those criteria and procedures have been applied in Libyan Universities before?" Is there a genuine interest by the

Libyan universities for institutional and program accreditation? Is the current status of the Libyan universities suitable for the application of quality standards and for getting accreditation? Are the procedures applied to private universities in the event of absence of accreditation are the same applied to public universities? Do the employees, members of the faculty and students have the sufficient background to allow the institution to carry out self-assessment? Is everyone ready to change and adopt the culture of quality? Finally and the main important question is, what are the obstacles and challenges facing processes of quality assurance and accreditation? In this paper we would like to present obstacles facing the Libyan universities in the field of quality assurance and accreditation.

Generally In Libya, there is a lack of satisfaction with the performance of higher education. Radwan (2008), for example, has referred to the decrease of internal efficiency in education in Libya, to the predominance of cognitive underachievement, and to the poor analytical and innovative capabilities of its outputs. The results of the study of Atlobh (2010) noted that the internal adequacy rate in Misurata University is low.

One of the results of research provided by Nick (2004) is that the educational policies in Libya have failed in almost the bulk of the scientific and the academic objectives. The report of the Center of Quality Assurance and Educational Institutions Accreditation (2010) indicated the low of quality of the Libyan universities in general (Ababneh, 2011, p6). It is clear that most of the Libyan universities continue to suffer from poor performance and from low-level curricula and teaching aids as a result of not absorbing the culture of globalization and the ITC revolution to develop their mechanisms and to ensure the quality of their outputs, which reflected negatively on the competencies of the graduates to cope with the requirements of the labor market in its real sites (Pisan, 2012, pp 258-259).

According to The Report of Exploratory Visit to the Center for Quality Assurance (2010, p12-18) the most important obstacles in public universities in Libya are:

– The lack of financial resources for the development of higher quality programs and its activities

– The incompetence and lack of qualifications of the management related to quality assurance in higher education in some universities and colleges and their branches.

– The lack of enabled binding legislation considering quality as a strategic choice binding on all.

– The lack of clarity in the terms of reference and functions of quality offices in the university regulations.

– Not delegating full powers to the quality offices in the universities to work for improvement.

– Keeping away from strategic planning, and restricting only to short-term planning.

– No clear criteria for selecting academic leaders.

– Unfamiliarity with the concept of quality and its assurance.

– The non-application of the principle of accountability in the event of wrongdoing and the overcome of the personal interests to the public interest.

– The continuation of the majority of the universities in using the traditional methods of learning, such as focusing on the memorization and indoctrination, the lack of using technology, the modern learning strategies and employing them in teaching, along with neglecting the use of self learning and mental skills such as analytical thinking, problem solving, innovation, and research.

the most important good practices taken by the quality assurance offices in the targeted universities, where the offices which are responsible for making sure that standards of quality are being matched, and provides the platform for validating or determining whether the University's services meets the customers' expectations. Some quality offices in some universities hold meetings with colleges to ensure the application of quality and the improvement of the programs provided by the university. Some offices hold monthly meetings with the coordinators of quality in colleges. Some of them implement programs and workshops related to the characterization of the educational program and the strategic planning as well as the implementation of workshops for the staff, the completion of the manual of the academic and administrative tasks, and the completion of the manual for the faculty staff affairs and graduate studies.

Some offices participate in the programs of international quality assurance, the completion of self-study in some colleges, making questionnaires for students to evaluate the curricula in the scientific sections, along with the development of the Best Academic Program Award. Some offices develop the website of the university in accordance with the international standards. However, there is a set of difficulties that faced such bodies, those difficulties are various and expanded to many areas, they have been listed below.

The Difficulties Faced by Quality Offices:

1-The weakness of rehabilitation and preparation:

A lack of experiences and knowledge for the human elements those are responsible to manage and apply the quality programs in most universities and colleges.

2- Leading Difficulties:

A lack of keenness of the senior management of the universities to apply the concept of quality in all the undergraduate programs, the lack of clear criteria for the selection of academic leadership, lack of acceptance of these leaders of the culture of quality.

3- Organizational Difficulties:

The organizational difficulties are represented in the absence of vision and mission of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the lack of a strategic plan for the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the absence of organizational structures, job descriptions and regulations, the lack of databases that can be invoked in the debriefing and making decisions properly, poor communications management within the university, the inadequacy of the university budget and unequal terms of disbursement, the times of disbursement are appropriate, in addition to the weakness of relying on the university work.

4- Learning and Teaching Difficulties:

sit-ins of students and their repeated protests because of the low level of the dormitory, curricula and grants, which led to stopping studying in some colleges for extended periods, the lack of programs to develop the capacity of faculty members, not linking the libraries to the internet and the non-participation in periodicals and international scientific journals.

5- The Difficulties of Scientific Research:

Which summarized in the lack of financial support for scientific research, in addition to aspens of classifying the research relevant to quality and its assurance among the promotion research, and the lack of specialized consideration affairs such as books, scientific journals?

6- Difficulties of Community Service:

This related to Lack of interest of universities in the development of programs and linking the requirements of the labor market.

MAIN OBSTACLES IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

Although, there are some private universities, has achieved a high level of quality, but most of them are not at the required level, The most important difficulties that came in the report on the exploratory visit to the year 2010 as follows:

1- Dependence on the collaborator faculty members in the educational process.

2- Most obstacles of quality offices are focused on the absence of a dedicated and a specific budget to activate quality in the universities and the lack of independence of quality offices.

Through the foregoing, the researcher sees that all the previous problems did not emerge today or yesterday, rather they are the result of a long experience characterized by improvisational in taking decisions, Moreover, the state spending on higher education and scientific research was very little, not in line with the income of an oil-producing country. Just getting a Master's Degree or a PHD Degree was sufficient to enable its holder to teach at the Libyan universities, without paying attention to the criteria of appointment for this profession. Also, the low salaries of the faculty members led to the cooperation of the faculty members with other institutions, rather than their own institutions, in order to raise their financial level which had a negative impact on their teaching performance (Harathi, 2012).

The salaries level of the faculty members have been raised only in the recent years and, despite of that, the Libyan universities have faculty members having high degrees of knowledge and having many published scientific research which directly related to the problems of the Libyan society in all areas. They are, as well, eminent graduates of the best international universities. But, general situation faced by the Libyan universities are viewed, and the lack of training programs for faculty members is due to the lack of interest of the senior management and the faculty members themselves of the importance of training in promoting their professional and teaching competence since some of them believe that they do not need such programs as the curricula are still old and duplicate and the concept of quality has not spread in the academic sites and in the educational institutions because of the novelty of the

experience. Also, the issue of tribes and social kinship plays a very big role in the Libyan society in terms of employment, candidacy for post-graduate studies, getting scholarships to study abroad, and others, (Braun and Jones, 2013).

This had a negative impact on the level of the outputs of the Libyan universities and on the lack of any programs to link between the outputs and the requirements of the labor market. Despite of the large numbers of those who carry high degrees, community is suffering from unemployment because the graduate does not meet the level of requirements of the labor market. Whoever follows that matter can realize that the problem is not only in higher education as the student is enrolled in the university while having a low level of skills, whether research skills, diction skills or the skills of working in groups. In addition, the vast majority suffer from not writing correctly in Arabic which is their native language along with the inability to deal with modern technology. The matter starts first from the stages of basic education, because you cannot, in any way, create poor inputs and get quality outputs, except if you have huge potential. Also, the infrastructure of the universities, are not in line with the scientific programs to be applied as they lack many equipment, (Shaw, 1981) and (Harathi, 2012).

Although the country has started the maintenance operations for all universities in the recent years, the projects have stalled due to the political circumstances which took place in Libya. The problems of the faculty members as referred to by Dr. Mregin, the Manager of the Department of Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in Libya, represented in the weak professional formation of some faculty members, not accepting the views of the students in the lecture halls, not reducing the importance of these opinions, depending on the method of memorizing and indoctrination, lack of timeliness of lectures, not developing the curricula and courses, lack of commitment to the criteria of students assessment, along with the low standard of ethics of some professors who insult and degrade students through the educational process.

It was stated by the Director of the Department of Quality Assurance that the most important problems of students are the lack of books and references, the lack of freedom of opinion within the lecture, not attending the seminars and conferences related to the specialization, the use of threat in exams, the dependence of the curriculum on photocopying some notes only, the derision and mocking of the students by lecturers, along with the inability of some teachers to explain information well. (Mregin, 2012, P: 274-277).

As for the private universities, there are some universities which are characterized by good reputation because it provided all the necessary equipment for the implementation of the scientific programs. Most of the private universities seek developing their infrastructures and obtaining accreditation because this is linked to success and to bringing the largest proportion of students to them, especially after the activation of quality and accreditation decisions on these universities which were opening their doors without any restriction or condition, which caused a crisis for the graduates of these universities because they are not accredited from the Center of Quality Assurance and Accreditation. The solution was to hold a thorough exam for the students of these universities.

These institutions depend on collaborator faculty members, because most of the collaborator faculty members are main faculty members at the public universities. This matter negatively affects the public and private sectors. Despite of the existence of a law not to give permission to faculty members working in the public universities to cooperate with private universities after raising the salaries of the faculty members at public universities, the law is inactive and there is no body to question or punish the violators of the law. In addition, the educational environment does not permit all the equipments necessary for the students of Applied Sciences in particular. Most universities take normal buildings designated for housing as premises of private universities though they were not designed originally as universities, (The National Report of the Great Libyan Jamahiriya, 2008).

Also, the websites of most universities are sites with a very weak level, i.e. Most of the links are inactive or under construction. What asserts this saying is the research done by Alchuirv on assessing the websites of the Libyan universities (that there is no fixed and specific criteria on which the Libyan universities depend when preparing their websites on the information network in a way to achieve the goals of the universities and meet the needs of beneficiaries, especially students) (Alchuirv, 2012, p236)

Despite of that there are some private universities, such as the Libyan International League for Medical Sciences, having a website characterized by modernity and providing all the information benefiting the students and beneficiaries.

Here, the most important of these obstacles are reviewed to try to find solutions necessary to raise the level of our universities to the level of prestigious universities, to underestimate the deep gap that gets us away from the developed universities, to get the outputs of education to be outputs able to go towards progress in all areas as failure is not the end of the road, but the knowledge of the causes of failure and trying to treat them is the first steps in the road to success. Diagnosing the disease correctly makes us get to find the right medicine to treat the illness, and trying to figure out where is Libya from quality first to begin in quality assurance processes. How can study ensure something

which does not mainly exist? Quality standards, and the ways to apply it, are the lamp that illuminates our way to access quality in higher education, and to achieve the desired development and progress.

Perhaps the efforts carried out by the Centre for Quality Assurance have a great impact on the dissemination and improvement of the educational process, on making the term of quality much easier and more understandable within the university environment and focusing on following up the officials responsible for quality within the offices of quality and the top leaders in the Libyan universities and whether they are qualified for this work or not. To ensure the achievement of the goals that are aspired to achieve, it must be realized that what is seen today achieving quality standards will become tomorrow not achieving it due to the great acceleration of the scientific and technological advances and the information revolution which has gone into accelerated development every day. Will the day when our universities realize that it is time to work together (students - faculty members - staff - parents - labor institutions) to create an integrated system to improve higher education, (Othman, 2012).

BENCHMARKING ON OTHER COUNTRIES EXPERIMENTS IN FACING QUALITY CHALLENGES

Decision maker in higher education in Libya realized that they should compare their experiment and challenges facing with other countries and benefit from their way of dealing with such challenges in order to arrive to ideal solutions, moreover case studies have been taken in terms of higher education challenges and education quality problems, it will be easy to benefit from their own experiences, plans, and measures to upgrade such gaps within the higher education in Libya. For example, it was obvious that there is correlation between investment in university education and economic growth as well as social development, at the same time, there is various problems faced Africa – Nigeria in particular – related to poor of scientific research, facilitates, preparation of entering students and inappropriate policy environment, so several procedures have been taken to address to control the situation such as rehabilitation of administrators to be more leadership, monitoring and evaluation through constant processes, engaging a third party as regulator – for instance the National University Commission (NUC) to enhance policy strategies and support quality offices, (Oladipo et al., 2009). Furthermore, Europe recently is taking into account the issue of quality assurance in terms of higher education, where there is a lot of limitations areas associated with poor infrastructure and strong population growth, and therefore a set of professional bodies such as the European parliament involve in drawing roadmap solutions related to improve and enhance the role of external quality assurance, this enhancement will be directed to process of guaranteeing predefined standards and evaluating units, departments, and programs, also revisiting the European criterion and strategy guidelines, finally encourage recognition of their decisions in other countries through conventions of mutual identification, 2(COM, 2009).

CONCLUSION

Higher education is one of the most significant segments that sustain a lot of aspects. In order to achieve high quality criteria in terms of education institute systems in Libya, problems existing in public and private universities should be addressed and analyzed clearly. Furthermore, challenges such as difficulties of quality offices or community service should be overcome, whereas most indicators showed that there is lack in financial supporting, rehabilitation human resources, enabled binding legislation, etc. Moreover, it is recommended to look for alternatives of the traditional solutions, mainly it's important to seek for long-term strategic planning, reconsider academic leaders, pay attention to scientific research, and involving all the educational elements within quality practice and utilize from overall feedback, in addition to using measures related to performance assessment, such as the balanced scorecard, moreover holding seminars, conferences and workshops. All of those procedures will lies in the framework of quality and its assurance in integrated and comprehensive manner.

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