The Functioning of Accreditation in Ethiopia

A study focusing on the views of private higher education institutions

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Abstract

Many higher education systems are undergoing transformations in the face of today's highly changing environment. One such change has to do with the establishment of external quality assurance systems. In Ethiopia, the number of private higher education institutions (HEIs) has increased significantly over the past decade. The government of Ethiopia has set up, as the main mechanism of overseeing the performance of private HEIs, an accreditation system. Higher education relevance and quality agency (HERQA) is the main agency appointed by the government to undertake the accreditation system.

This study analyzes the functioning of the accreditation system in Ethiopian higher education with an emphasis on the opinions of private HEIs about the current accreditation methods and procedures. To explore this topic, the study draws on relevant literature to identify the rationality behind the set up of the Ethiopian accreditation system. Both quantitative and qualitative study approaches are used. In addition, questionnaires, document analysis and personal communication through email are used as the main data collection tools.

The study shows that the Ethiopian accreditation system is more inclined to accountability rather than improvement. Moreover, the private HEIs identify delays, stringent standards, a focus on input and a general negative attitude held towards them as major weaknesses of the accreditation system. Nevertheless, the private HEIs concur that the accreditation system has to be implemented in Ethiopia to enhance the contribution of private higher education to the country's development goals.

Key words: Accreditation, private higher education, accountability and improvement.

Acknowledgments

Dedication

To my big brother **Wubishet Abebe Bekele**

My mentor throughout all the time I spent as an undergraduate and graduate student.

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Acronyms

HEIs   Higher Education Institutions

HERQA   Higher Education Relevance and Quality agency

MOE   Ministry of Education

INQAAHE   International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

EPHEIA   Ethiopian Private Higher Education Institutions Association

TVET   Technical and Vocational Education Training (normally at certificate and diploma levels)

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Education is identified as one important element for survival and growth in today's highly competitive global environment; as a result the focus given to higher education institution's (from here on HEIs) performance has been increased. Now HEIs have to be responsive to changes in demands that have been created by dynamic conditions in the globalized world. The governance structure, funding mechanisms, student selection procedures, teaching and learning processes and type of students are some of the areas which have been influenced by the dynamics in the higher education sector in many countries. The change in the governance structure is reflected in the changing role of the state in controlling and managing higher education. Today, in many countries autonomy is given to HEIs with regard to controlling their internal activities. However, this increased autonomy is granted in exchange for more responsibility (accountability) to be demanded from HEIs. For instance, they are expected to produce competent graduates who can perform well in the competitive labor market. These changes (described above) have led to a focus on 'quality' of the higher education sector.

The term 'quality assurance' is related to different stakeholders' concern about the quality of a given higher education system. Many countries are now making external quality assurance part of their higher education system. The set up and functioning of the quality assurance system differs depending upon factors related to a given higher education structure. For instance, it can differ based on: different mechanisms employed, the standards emphasized and the responsible organ undertaking the process. Quality assurance systems may include mechanisms like quality audit, accreditation, peer review and external examination (Van Damme, 2004, p.129). In some countries the organizations (agencies) that handle external quality assurance processes are autonomous and in others they are set by the government. In some cases they can make the final decision whereas in others their authority is limited to the point of giving recommendations to the responsible authority.

1.2 Motivation and Rationale

The Ethiopian higher education system has one of the lowest access rates only, 2% of the age cohort group (Tamirat, 2008, p.52). Even after the government's initiative to expand the size of the higher education sector, the gross enrolment rate remains to be the lowest in

comparison to the sub-Saharan average (Tamirat, 2008; Yizengaw, 2005). In 1991, when Ethiopia changed from a socialist system to a market based structure, the government undertook certain measures to reform the education sector at all levels (primary, secondary and higher education). Following the reforms, the Ethiopian higher education system has seen significant changes in the last decade (Tessema, 2008,p.34) For instance prior to 1999 only 0.2% of the age cohort group was in enrolled in higher education and in 2004 it has increased to 0.8% (Saint, 2004 as cited in Tessema, 2008,p.34). Now the gross enrolment rate has increased to 2% (Tamirat, 2008, p.52). Currently there are 21 public HEIs and 56 private HEIs (Belay & Adamu, 2008, p.9). Many of the current public HEIs were opened from scratch only two or three years ago (Tessema, 2009, p.34). The private higher education sector started in Ethiopia only a decade ago and its size is growing continuously, it accounts for 23% of the students' enrolment (Tessema, 2009). Most of the private HEIs are for-profit. In addition, the private higher education sector is associated with several problems. Since most of these institutions are for- profit, there is a fear among many stakeholders that this might pave the way for mal-practices. Furthermore, "the society by and large prefers the public HEIs as they are considered to have all the necessary credentials" (Tekelmariam, 2003, p.36).

How to uphold the quality of the sector within the current expansion scheme is one of the challenges facing the Ethiopian higher education system. In countries like Ethiopia, where there are many socio-economic problems a lot is expected from the higher education sector. In light of the burgeoning demand for access to higher education, the participation of private HEIs is considered vital to support the government. It is difficult to rely on the capacity of public HEIs alone (Tamirat, 2008). Moreover, the quality of private HEIs has to be improved in order for them to make contributions to the Ethiopian higher education system. At the same time the government has to protect the public from illegitimate providers of higher education. One way the government manages to control and/or improve the private sector is by implementing the accreditation system. The Ministry of Education (from here on MOE) is responsible for governing both types of HEIs with more power on the public side. The Ethiopian government has established the higher education quality and relevance agency (from here on HERQA) in 2003. HERQA is an independent agency and its main task is to make recommendations to MOE about accreditation applications from private HEIs (Teshome & Kassa, 2008, p.4). The MOE takes the final decision in the accreditation process. HERQA is taking the responsibility of handling activities such as, accreditation

(both institutional and programmatic) and quality audit with exclusive focus on bachelor degree (undergraduate) programs (Tamirat, 2008, p.155). The task of accrediting diploma and certificate programs is given to regional education bureaus (Teferra, 2005a). The focus of this study is on the accreditation system of HERQA, with respect to the views of private HEIs. Private HEIs raised complaints about the procedures followed in the accreditation system. It is significant to study this activity as the private sector is in its infancy stage and its importance will be enhanced in the future. As part of this, it is important to know the views of private HEIs as they are the main stakeholders in the accreditation system. If the views of private HEIs can be taken into consideration in the implementation of the accreditation system, the likelihood that the system contributes to the improvement of quality in the country's higher education sector can be enhanced.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Considering the nature of Ethiopian higher education and the accreditation system which is applicable to private HEIs, the research problem is formulated as: how does the current accreditation system function with respect to private HEIs? Accordingly the research questions below shall act as a guide to the study.

1.4 Research Questions

1. *What is the rationale behind the accreditation system in Ethiopia?*
2. *How do private HEIs perceive the strengths and weaknesses of the current accreditation system?*
3. *Is the accreditation system in line with the objectives and ambitions of the system?*

1.5 Scope of the Study

The focus of this study is on the accreditation process of the quality assurance system in Ethiopia which has been implemented from 2003 onwards. There are two types of accreditation systems undertaken in Ethiopia: institutional and programmatic (Teshome & Kassa, 2008, p.8). Thus far, the accreditation system has been focusing on private HEIs. More emphasis is not given to the accreditation process itself but rather on how the private HEIs evaluate the services included in the accreditation system. Nevertheless, the standards and procedures used in the accreditation processes are assessed to know how the accreditation system operates.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

In this study there were problems in gathering information from private HEIs. As a result the analysis of the data mainly focuses on the findings of a research conducted by HERQA's accreditation unit (by Belay & Adamu, 2008). To compensate for the limitations in HERQA's research, primary data were collected. However, direct contact with the private HEIs was not possible. Instead the researcher used the help of the associations of private HEIs. In the collection of the primary data, the way the respondents were selected could influence the chance of getting genuine information from the respondents. With the non-probability snowball sampling method adopted in this study, there is a possibility of missing out private HEIs who could have a different view about the current accreditation process. Furthermore, it was possible to identify that the respondents had problems understanding what some of the questions were asking in the questionnaire provided to them. The researcher could have had a better opportunity to rectify this problem if an interview was the method applied for this purpose, which however was not possible due to limitations in time and resources.

1.7 Description of Ethiopia

Ethiopia is a country in the horn of Africa bordered by Eritrea to the north, Somalia to the east, Djibouti to the north-east, Sudan to the west and Kenya to the south. It has a unique ancient history and has never been colonized. Ethiopia has a total area of 1.1million square kilometers. It is the second most populous country in Africa, the 2007 population census estimated it to be 74 million (Central statistical agency of Ethiopia (CSA), 2008). The gross national income (GNI) per capital of the country in 2008 was estimated to be 280 US dollars, which ranked 205th out of 210 countries (World Bank, 2009). About 85% of the population depends on rain-fed agriculture for their livelihoods and agriculture contributes more than 43% of the gross domestic product (GDP) (Tafesse, 2003). There are more than 80 local languages spoken in the country and Amharic is the working language of the federal government. The official name of the government of Ethiopia is the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE). FDRE is divided into nine regional states and two federal city administrations. The nine regions are Afar, Amhara, Bensihangul, Gambella, Harari, Oromia, Somali, Southern Nations and Nationalities and peoples region (SNNPR) and Tigray. The two city states that administer themselves are Addis Ababa (the capital city) and Dire Dawa (Tamirat, 2008). English is the medium of instruction in secondary and in higher

education. The country is yet to offer universal primary school to its school-age children (Tessema,2009,p.34).

1.8 Definition of Terms Used in the Study

Accreditation refers to the process by which the national Higher education quality and relevance agency (HERQA) gives a permit to private HEIs.

The term private Higher education institution is used in this study to refer to all institutions formed by private investors' and non-governmental organizations.

Accreditation process and system are used interchangeably in this study to refer to the accreditation mechanism of the quality assurance system.

The terms state and government are used interchangeably in this study to refer to any central unit managing the higher education system. Normally, this is the case in highly centralized higher education systems. Nevertheless, if it is related with the Ethiopian context the term government refers to the government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE).

1.9 Structure of the Thesis

This study is organized into six chapters. Chapter one (current chapter) includes: Introduction, motivation and rationale for the study including background about Ethiopian higher education system which is elaborated further in chapter two, research problem and questions, scope and limitation of the study, brief description of and, finally, definition of terms used in the study.

In chapter two, background information about Ethiopian higher education system is presented; with special emphasis given to the private higher education sector provided. As part of this the development of external quality assurance systems, more specifically the accreditation system, is described. In the third chapter a literature review discussing the general quality assurance and more specifically accreditation system is provided. Furthermore, the conceptual framework for analyzing the performance of Ethiopian accreditation system is discussed and reflected upon.

In the fourth chapter the research methodology used in this research is discussed. Chapter five includes presentation, analysis and interpretation of the data. Moreover, the challenges identified in the second chapter are analyzed in depth in the fifth chapter.

Finally, conclusions of the findings are provided in the last chapter with some recommendations and ideas for further research.

2. Ethiopian Higher Education System

In this section background information about Ethiopian higher education system is provided. The information given in this part is analyzed in more detail in chapter five. The discussion in this section focuses on the overall developments in Ethiopian higher education system and the challenges it faces to date. Much emphasis is given to the introduction of the private higher education sector and of external quality assurance system.

2.1 Background of Ethiopian Higher Education System

Ethiopian education system is currently structured as primary (Grade 1-8), lower secondary (9-10), upper secondary (11-12), Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) (10+1year, 10+2 years, 10+3years) and HEIs (please see the diagram in Appendix 1). The term HEIs refers to all higher education institutions which are offering bachelor (undergraduate) and programs above this level (Ministry of education (MOE), 2007).Before this the two subsystems of technical and vocational education and universities were organized under higher education, but now they are separated with each section having different divisions and state ministers, under the jurisdiction of MOE (Tamirat, 2008, p.50). The status of HEIs in Ethiopia include that of university, University College, college, junior college and institute (FDRE, 2003, article 4). To be able to get each status the institutions have to fulfill certain sets of criteria. The levels of programs that could be offered by HEIs include first (bachelor) degree, second degree (masters), medical specialty and a doctoral (PhD) degree. HEIs can offer their programs through regular, evening or distance mode. The language of instruction in both public and private HEIs, except language courses, is English (FDRE, 2003, article 10).

Public HEIs are established following regulations of the council of ministers (FDRE, 2003, article 8.1). Essentially, the public HEIs rely on public funding as the main source of income. Public HEIs do not have the power to select their students. Students who have the acceptable level of grade to enter HEIs will be allocated to different public HEIs by MOE. Student allocation is made by referring to the final grades students have on the national entrance examination. In most of the cases students with good grades in such type of examination attend public HEIs. Nevertheless, in the case of post-graduate programs, public

HEIs have the right to select students. This implies that the government has a strong power to influence the public higher education sector.

Private HEIs are owned by either private investors (individuals) or non–governmental organizations. The non-governmental organizations can be religious institutions, international donors and other related organizations. Private HEIs are established as the case may be in accordance with laws of associations, commercial law, cooperative or other relevant laws (FDRE, 2003, article 8.3). The for-profit type is dominant in the Ethiopian higher education system; it comprises 95% of the whole private higher education sector (Tamirat, 2008, p.91).

2.2 History of Ethiopian higher education system

According to Saint (2004) "Ethiopia possesses a 1700-year tradition of elite education linked to the Orthodox Church'' (p.84). However, modern higher education started with the establishment of the first university college, Addis Ababa University College in 1950. In the following years other specialized colleges were opened to become part of Haileseliasse I University (formed in 1961) including Addis Ababa University College. This name continued until the overthrow of the monarchical government in the 1974 revolution, after that and until today the name has remained Addis Ababa University.

In 1991 Ethiopia changed from a socialist structure to a market-based system, as a result the government formulated certain strategies to reform all public sectors including the education sector. Accordingly, in 1994 the first education and training policy was introduced to make changes in the higher education sector (Transitional government of Ethiopia (TGE) 1994 as cited in Saint, 2003, p.85). Of the provisions of the 1994 education and training policy that mainly influenced the higher education sector the following can be included:

- A provision which states that the government is ready to allow private providers to take part in the higher education sector;
- The governance structure of public HEIs was to be changed;
- New HEIs were to be opened and the upgrading of existing ones was to be started;
- Higher education was identified as one tool to contribute to the county's initiative to 'reduce poverty and steer economic development'.

As a result of the 1994 new education policy, the opening of private HEIs was made possible. The size of student enrolment has been increasing since 1994. The government

took further actions to expand and reform the higher education sector. In relation to this Saint (2004) claims that "the provisions laid down in the 1994 training and education policy were ratified in the introduction of the higher education proclamation 351/2003 in 2003". According to the new higher education proclamation FDRE (2003):

- All the public HEIs were to be given autonomy with regard to their management and their number was to be increased. They were given autonomy to manage their finances and allowed to become involved in income generating activities (article 7 and 48).

- New offices were to be created to assist the MOE in handling the growing higher education sector namely Higher education strategy centre (HESC); and Higher education relevance and quality agency (HERQA). Furthermore, the procedures on how these agencies should function were provided in the proclamation (article 78 and 86).

- The introduction of a cost-sharing scheme in the public HEIs, in the form of deferred graduate tax was provided in the proclamation (article 56).

These and other related changes were introduced in the higher education sector. Many of the provisions were implemented. The implementation of this policy was manifested mainly in the expansion of the higher education sector. According to Tessema (2009) some of the conditions which have been seen in recent years in Ethiopian higher education system are:

- The Ethiopian higher education system is growing at a faster rate with the main focus on quantitative outcomes.

- In the new system the focus given to adult learners is elevated which is shown in the growth in the number and kinds of programs offered through distance and evening modes in both public and private HEIs.

- A cost-sharing scheme has been introduced in the public HEIs in order that students could share parts of their costs.

- More 'market oriented' programs are being introduced in both public and private HEIs. (p.31).

From the conditions discussed above about Ethiopian higher education system, it can be said that the system is experiencing the same kind of changes and challenges like other higher education systems in many countries around the world.

2.3 Private Higher Education in Ethiopia

As shown above (section 2.2), following the introduction of the 1994 education and training policy private providers can participate in the higher education sector. At first the private providers were engaged in small sized language and computer training centers, which offered short term courses and programs. In 1998, the first private HEI was established which has evolved from a small language training centre to an institution offering full higher education courses (Tamirat, 2008,p.90). Up to 2008 the number of private HEIs has grown to 56 (Belay & Adamu, 2008, p.9).

2.3.1 The Structure of Private Higher Education Institutions

In line with the structure of private HEIs, Tamirat (2008) also commented:

> Most private HEIs are owned in the form of sole proprietorship, private limited companies and share holding companies. Making profit out of this venture is a common phenomenon and in many respects a driving force for opening such type of institutions. This must have contributed both to the immense mushrooming of the institutions and the suspicion that the public and government have developed towards the sector. (p. 91)

From the above statement it can be seen that the growth of the sector has raised concerns amongst the public. Private HEIs are primarily accountable to the appropriate organ that is provided in their memorandum of association (FDRE, 2003, article 60). Nevertheless, they have to report to the MOE about their annual plan and accomplished activities. Private HEIs differ depending on their age, kind of programs offered and location. Some of the private HEIs tend to focus only on one type of program whereas others, especially those that have a university college status, can offer a wide spectrum of programs. A number of them provide both the bachelor degree and TVET (certificate and diploma) programs and have campuses operating in different regions in the country. However, most of them are located in the capital city (Tamirat, 2008, p.102). The most common type of programs offered by private HEIs is Business, Information technology and Law (Teferra, 2005a). The level of participation of private HEIs in Science and Engineering fields is small (Tamirat, 2008, p.104). As in many countries they tend to focus on programs that are more 'market oriented' (Teferra, 2005a). Funding for the private HEIs mainly comes from tuition fees and other fees (Tamirat, 2008,p.). Unlike their public counterparts they do not receive direct financial support from the government. This shows that the institutes have to have good capacity and reputation to attract students in order to raise sufficient funds. Regarding student selection,

private HEIs can select their own students, in doing so they have to follow minimum entry requirements set by MOE (FDRE, 2003, article 31).

2.3.2 The Relationship between the Government and Private HEIs in Ethiopia

The Ethiopian government has set up certain mechanisms to support and sustain the private higher education system. As per the FDRE (2003) the following provisions specifically focus on private HEIs:

- The private HEIs are autonomous with regard to their management. However, they have to report about their objectives and annual plans to MOE (article 60:1);
- Land shall be allocated for the establishment and service of the higher education institutions in accordance with applicable laws and policies (article 33:3);
- HERQA and HESC are supposed to give services to private HEIs (article 78 and 86);
- Private HEIs are allowed to form mergers with the public HEIs (article 44:1: b).

In addition to the support structures discussed above, the government is planning to expand the enrolment rate in the coming years (Tamirat, 2008, p.200). Hence, it can be said that this provides good opportunities for the private providers in the country. Although government is attempting to develop and promote the private higher education sector, considering the very young age of the sector and complex hurdles facing the sector, more is expected from the government and other stakeholder's.

2.3.3 Problems Associated with Ethiopian Private Higher Education Sector

The society prefers by and large the public HEIs as the concept of private higher education is a recent phenomenon within the Ethiopian context (Tekelmariam, 2003). The traditional reputation of the latter hinders the growth of private providers in Ethiopia (Teshome & Kassa, 2008, p.19). Several problems were distinguished to be associated with the functioning of private HEIs. According to Tamirat (2008), some of the problems include

- The fact that most of them operate in rented buildings rather than owning their own campuses;
- Not having easy access to the best students as the MOE assigns the best students to the public HEIs;

- Majority of private HEIs do not have many tenured academic staff, as most of the academic staff work on part time basis;

- Lack of sufficient funding to support their activities as most of them depend on tuition and other fees;

- The increasing number of private HEIs with mainly a profit motive coming to the higher education market (taken from pp.182-189).

In addition to these, the harder competition that exists in the labor market for graduates from private HEIs when compared to their public counterparts affects their performance (Teshome & Kassa, 2008, p.19). According to Tessema (2009), in common with the public HEIs, the lack of research culture is also another problem that is identified in the current private higher education system.

2.4 Quality Assurance System in Ethiopian Higher Education

The introduction of an external quality assurance system in its present form is a new trend in Ethiopia. However, there existed an internal quality assurance system where each academic staff member is evaluated by his students, peers and the head of the department (Tamirat, 2008). Furthermore, public HEIs admit students based on their academic merits regardless of sex, age, religion, and ethnicity. There is also periodic curriculum reviews as a mechanism to ensure quality (Teshome & Kassa, 2008, p.4).

Before the establishment of HERQA in 2003, a special unit at the MOE was handling the accreditation process. It was done without following pre-established standards. During this period (before 2003) the market for private higher education was not restricted, and private providers could easily enter the higher education market (Tamirat, 2008, p.156). Nonetheless, as the number of private HEIs increased, a special agency was set up to undertake the responsibility of external quality assurance (Belay & Adamu, 2008, p.2). Accordingly, after 2003 every private HEI has to get a pre-accreditation permit before it begins operating and if this is not fulfilled any diploma awarded by the institution will become invalid (FDRE, 2003, article 61).

2.4.1 Higher Education Relevance and Quality Assurance Agency (HERQA)

HERQA was established as the main agency with the role of supervising the relevance and quality of education offered by any HEIs (FDRE, 2003, article 80). According to Teshome and Kassa (2008), the main objectives and duties of HERQA are:

- Assessing the relevance and quality of higher education offered by HEIs
- Ensuring that the relevance of higher education supports the country's development needs
- Providing an efficient and transparent accreditation system
- Disseminating information regarding standards and programs offered by both Ethiopian and foreign HEIs. (p.5).

With respect to accreditation, HERQA established standards, procedures and guidelines to oversee the overall accreditation process. Since 2003, the MOE bases its decisions regarding accreditation on the recommendations given by HERQA (Belay & Adamu, 2008).

The main bodies responsible in the accreditation process are MOE and HERQA (FDRE, 2003). HERQA uses the help of professionals from different public and private HEIs as external experts in the accreditation process. Then, HERQA provides its recommendations to MOE which makes the final decision. Thus, private HEIs are one of the key stakeholders in the accreditation system of Ethiopia.

The major activities of HERQA for its stakeholders include provision of: pre-accreditation, accreditation, re-accreditation and quality audit services. The main funding source is the annual budget allocated by the government (FDRE, 2003, article 85). However, private HEIs have to pay service fees when they apply for accreditation status. In addition, HERQA gets financial and other types of support from international donors such as the World Bank (Teshome & Kassa, 2008, p.19). Such type of collaboration with international bodies gives access for HERQA staff members to short and long term training abroad, exposure visits, and regional as well as international conferences (Teshome & Kassa, 2008,p.19).

In the first phase, once the private HEI gets the legal permit to be established as a private HEI from the investment authority (Tamirat,2008, p.75), it has to apply for a pre-accreditation permit from HERQA which is valid for one year. "Pre-accreditation is basically a permission to start a new program" (Teshome & Kassa, 2008, p.9). Issuance of pre-accreditation status shows that the private HEI is expected to meet accreditation stage

requirements within a one year time frame (MOE, 2003). After one year operating with the pre-accreditation permit, the institution can apply for an accreditation permit. The accreditation permit is valid for three years, after the third year the institution has to apply again to get the re- accreditation permit. The other major activity of HERQA is quality audit. It started three years ago with a pilot program implemented in public HEIs. Until this time, "HERQA has carried out institutional quality audit in eight public and four private HEIs" (Teshome & Kassa, 2008, p.6). In the future the quality audits are to be done in both public and private HEIs.

2.4.2 Accreditation System in Ethiopian Private Higher Education

HERQA developed the necessary procedures and guidelines for undertaking the accreditation process and gave training to its staff members both locally and abroad (Belay & Adamu, 2008, p.11). The accreditation system focuses at both institutional and program levels. In the case of program level HERQA is assigned to handle accreditation applications concerned with undergraduate (bachelor) degree and post-graduate level programs. As discussed earlier, accreditation of diploma and certificate programs is delegated to the regional education offices.

The whole process of accreditation is done in collaboration between MOE and HERQA. To sum up the process, in the first stage, the applicant private HEI will send the application to MOE, in which the ministry has to send this to HERQA (FDRE, 2003). HERQA will assess the application and forward its recommendations to the ministry. Then, MOE will issue the pre-accreditation permit within 15 days after the recommendation has been forwarded by HERQA (FDRE, 2003, article 63). In the accreditation stage the evaluation will focus on evidence for areas of improvement suggested during pre-accreditation stage (Teshome & Kassa, 2008, p.10). The proclamation states that HERQA should process the applications for accreditation within a 3 months period (FDRE, 2003, article 67.2).

The procedures developed by HERQA to undertake the accreditation process are somewhat similar to the general trend in external quality assurance systems worldwide. Furthermore, the procedures involved in both pre-accreditation and accreditation and re-accreditation are almost the same. In the next section description of the procedures followed in the accreditation process are outlined.

According to HERQA (2008 b) the procedures for handling pre-accreditation, accreditation and re-accreditation are as follows (taken from pp. 2-8):

First stage: Application

- A private HEI will send its application to the MOE whereby the ministry will forward it to HERQA. The application should include all the information about the capacity/ resources and other relevant information of the applicant HEIs. This should be done in accordance with the checklists/procedures provided by HERQA. In general the documents included in the application must show information which supports the claim that the institution is ready to meet the standards set by HERQA.
- The application document will be assessed by HERQA to check whether all the necessary documents are included. If complete information is not provided the applicant will be asked to provide additional information.
- The application will be evaluated by the external review team organized by HERQA.

Second stage: Arrangement of the site visit program

- HERQA will nominate and organize the needed external reviewers from public or private HEIs. The review team is composed of experts from HERQA and professionals from other organizations. Usually, the team is composed of three HERQA staff members and one external professional expertise (Teshome & Kassa, 2008, p.10).
- HERQA will arrange the date for the site visit and make the necessary arrangements needed for the visit.

Third stage: Institutional visit

- During the institutional visit the review team will take an overall view of all the inputs and processes of an institution (Belay & Adamu, 2008, p. 14). This will be done following the checklist/guidelines provided to guide the accreditation process. "The review team also offers advice regarding any perceived need for enhancement'' (Teshome & Kassa, 2008, p.10).

Fourth stage: Evaluation of the program or Institution

- The review team will evaluate the program or institution if it conforms to the established standards.
- The final accreditation decision (i.e. recommendation provided by HERQA) is based on the information gathered from: application documents presented by the applicant private HEI, institutional visit, discussion among external review team, and reports provided by external review team.
- The final recommendation will be forwarded to the ministry.
- MOE will evaluate the report provided by HERQA and make the final decision as to whether the applicant private HEI should be given accreditation or not. However, until this time the recommendations of HERQA have not been rejected by MOE (Tamirat, 2008).

Final stage: Preparation of Reports

- MOE will send a letter of accreditation permit to the applicant private HEI.
- In situations where the application for accreditation gets rejected the rejection letter will include the reasons for the refusal. In this case, the applicant has the right to make an appeal to the decision. In doing so, the private HEI will be given a chance to re-apply again by showing additional documentation. HERQA might need to undertake further arrangements for a full or partial site visit.
- After the pre–accreditation or accreditation permit has been given to the applicant HEI HERQA has the right to undertake a site visit to see if the institution continues to meet the standards set by HERQA (FDRE,2003,article 82)
- HERQA has the right to see the official statements provided by the private HEIs to the public in relation to their pre-accreditation or accreditation status. HERQA can take corrective actions in cases where illegitimate statements are provided.

2.4.3 Problems associated with the Ethiopian accreditation system

It has been five years since the accreditation process started to be undertaken in a systematized manner and in this time the number and size of private HEIs is increasing in the country at a fast rate. HERQA is responsible to give service both to the private HEIs and to MOE.

The agency has identified the following challenges in the current accreditation system Teshome and Kassa (2008),

- The fact that it is a young agency and that it cannot acquire the sufficient professionals to assess quality. As the number of private HEIs is growing all the time it finds itself continually working in order to respond to accreditation requests. This puts pressure on the agency.

- The accreditation system is focusing mainly on 'input' as the main criteria for accreditation.

- The recommendations made in the accreditation process are not based on an internal institutional quality assurance system.

- The presence of dishonest and fraudulent private HEIs that only focus on making a profit from the higher education market is another challenge facing the Ethiopian higher education system. Thus, the agency has to identify illegitimate providers while undertaking the accreditation process. (taken from pp. 18-19).

On the private HEIs side there is some dissatisfaction about the accreditation process of HERQA. According to Belay and Adamu (2008); Tamirat (2008); Taddesse (2003) and Teferra (2005b), some of the complaints from private HEIs are:

- Private HEIs claim that HERQA is using stringent standards that cannot be met by the public HEIs which are under direct jurisdiction of the MOE.

- The publication of the accreditation results before the applicant private HEI gets a chance to make an appeal to the final decision. This damages the reputation of the HEIs in the market.

- The time span provided in the FDRE (2003) is not followed in the accreditation process; as a result many application processes are delayed.

- One institution could be in a position to apply to two different government units i.e. HERQA in case of bachelor degree programs and regional educational bureaus in case of TVET (diploma/certificate) programs (see section 1.2 and 2.4.2).

- The accreditation process mainly focuses on input.

In this section a description of the Ethiopian external quality assurance system has been provided and it has demonstrated that it follows an accreditation mechanism. The quality

assessment system must be organized in a way that can enhance its contribution to the overall development of both the private and public higher education sector. In the Ethiopian case, with in the current structure, the government is mainly responsible to ensure the quality in the higher education system. However, the accreditation system is focusing only on private HEIs. In line with this, Tamirat (2008) alleges that: "since the accreditation has been done on private HEIs only, there is a fear of possibility for the public to see the wrong message that public HEIs are going in the direct direction in terms of quality, where as the private HEIs are on the wrong track" (p. 185).

Moreover, as can be seen from the procedures, the accreditation system does not incorporate any self-assessment document. With this regard, Teshome and Kassa (2008) state that ''the lessons learnt from the previous experiences are now enforcing HERQA to apply self-evaluation document at least in the re-accreditation stage'' (p.8).

With this background information about Ethiopian higher education system and on the external quality assurance system the next section will provide a discussion of the relevant literature about quality assurance in general and accreditation in particular.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

In this section, a literature review about external quality assurance process is presented with a special focus given to the accreditation mechanism. Furthermore, an attempt is made to link the major issues raised in the literature to the main aims of this research including reflections on the Ethiopian higher education system. In the last part, the main ideas discussed in the literature review are combined in order to make a conceptual framework for the study.

3.2 The Emergence of Higher Education Quality Assurance systems

Higher education is one of those sectors which are successful in passing through many challenges without much influence on its internal structure and activities (Van Vught, 1994). Today in an increasingly competitive and globalized economy, 'knowledge' is considered a vital tool to compete and the focus on higher education in many countries has been therefore enhanced. Consequently, the size of HEIs has expanded and the enrolment rate has increased. Enrolment is also reported to be still increasing at a higher rate. Furthermore, changes in relation to student selection practices, a high mobility of students, professionals and academics have all been experienced by many higher education systems worldwide (Brennan,1997). In line with this, Henkel (1998) describes the overall changes in higher education in many countries as follows:

> Higher education systems are required to demonstrate their value on widely diversified sets of criteria: basic research achievement, research contribution to industry, service to local communities reproduction of the academic profession, promotion of lifelong learning and preparation of increasingly large and diverse populations of students for labor markets characterized by change, uncertainty and high expectations of performance. (p. 291).

Thus, it can be seen that these changes have implications on the way higher education systems function. Broadly speaking higher education expansion in many countries has induced many governments to delegate power to HEIs. Nonetheless, the expansions and deregulations in higher education have been compounded with a reduction in the budget allocated to higher education. Consequently, more accountability is demanded from HEIs.

Students are also asked to pay for the services they get from HEIs. The introduction of a 'cost sharing' scheme in public HEIs and the fee-based private higher education system in Ethiopia can be taken as one example. As a result of these aforementioned factors, the concern of many HEIs is how to demonstrate to the public and to the government that they are operating with maximum capacity using the available resources effectively and efficiently. This can be interpreted as the need to show 'accountability' to external parties. It can be said that massification, deregulation, institutional autonomy, and accountability are some of the main changes that have occurred in many higher education systems. The experience of developing countries is not an exception to this. Higher education is no longer considered as a 'luxury good' and developing countries have also to engage in action to expand and reform their higher education sector. Even though it is difficult to claim that developing countries have reached the 'massification' level, their higher education system is faced with similar changes and challenges. Some of the challenges faced by HEIs in developing countries include: "lowest access (equity), quality deterioration, failure to respond to societal diverse interests, poor usage of information technology, and deficiency of intellectual resource and coordination problem" (Taddesse, 2003, p.48). Moreover, as Tefera (2005b) claims "new forms of institutions that are privately funded, managed and operated emerged throughout Africa, diversifying the higher education landscape of nations" (p.2). The situation in Ethiopia reveals similar conditions (see chapter two, section 2.3).

As part of the above mentioned local and international dynamics, many governments in the world have designed ways to change the governance structure of their higher education system and in a similar way, the Ethiopian government has designed ways to expand and reform the higher education system. With more power given to HEIs to manage and control their activities, the role of the governments towards HEIs has been changing. One of these changes is reflected through the introduction of quality assurance systems; the government employs quality assurance as one way of controlling HEIs from a distance. According to Van Damme (2004) "Quality assurance is referred to as the processes and schemes that have the objective of assessing, monitoring, guarantying and maintaining and/or improving programs with the purpose of both accountability and improvement" (p.129). With an exception of the UK, where the government introduced quality assurance system to centralize the higher education sector, quality assurance was widely developed to measure the level of accountability of institutions which have been given autonomy (Brennan,1997).

However it is difficult to generalize the accountability objective for all quality assurance systems. Moreover, the belief that it is possible to conduct authoritative evaluations and interpret them to quantitative outcomes to use them as criteria for resource allocation has contributed to the dominance of quality assurance in higher education (Henkel, 1998). In a way, the belief was that these processes in quality assurance systems could contribute to a better performance in higher education (Henkel, 1998). This makes both improvement and accountability the objective of the quality assurance system and contradicts with the above claim of mere accountability focus. One clear condition in the Ethiopian system is that the public concern about quality is exacerbated by the expansion policy the country's higher education system is undergoing (Teshome & Kassa, 2008, p.4). In relation to this, Van Damme (2004) claims that the growing concern about the level of academic standards in recent years has contributed to the prevalence of quality assurance in many higher education systems and the introduction of the external quality assurance system in Ethiopia might indicate this growing concern.

In summary, there could be implicit and explicit objectives behind the establishment of a given quality assurance system and identifying them helps to analyze the functioning of the system. Following Van Damme (2004) the term quality assurance system is used in this research to refer to any systematic review, evaluation or assessment of educational provision in HEIs (p.129). However, the focus of this study is on the external quality assurance system and more specifically on accreditation.

3.3. The Concept of Quality in Higher Education

As Van Vught (1994) argues ''quality is a political, highly sensitive, multi-dimensional and subjective concept'' (p.38). In higher education it is not easy to define the concept of 'quality' as it differs depending on the interpretations and needs of different stakeholders. As a result, there is no one commonly agreed definition of quality and quality assurance systems (Brennan, 1997; Westerheijden et al., 2007;Van Damme, 2004). The fact that society is constantly changing its expectations and demands of higher education only makes matters more complex. This is because different actors have special interests on quality for different purposes.

Consequently there are various definitions given for the concept of 'quality', and each definition has its own implications for standards and indicators emphasized in a given

quality assurance system (Van Damme, 2004, p.133). For instance, quality can be defined as 'exceptional' or 'excellence' (Harvey & Green, 1993 as cited in Westerheijden et al., 2007, p. 1). However, such an approach has been challenged by the coming of 'massification' in higher education. Another approach often discussed is that of 'fitness for purpose' which has been introduced in many quality assurance systems (Van Damme, 2004, p.132). In line with this, Harvey (2002) argues that if the quality assurance system adopts a 'fitness for purpose' approach then quality is assessed against minimum degrees of quality. In other terms, the standards employed in the quality assurance system reflect the level to which a product or service meets its stated purposes (Harvey, 2002). The 'fitness for purpose' approach has been accepted as a working definition in Ethiopia (Workshop proceeding 2005, HERQA as cited in Teshome & Kassa, 2008, p.3). It makes more sense to have this kind of approach as any talk of 'excellence' as a concept of quality is difficult with the current stage of development of the Ethiopian higher education system. However, there might be a dilemma as to who sets the objective of a given institution or indeed, the entire system.

The Ethiopian government has recognized the higher education sector as crucial for 'economic development and poverty reduction'. Thus, the government, employers, students, parents and HEIs themselves (both academic and administrative staff) and international donors have major concerns about the quality of HEIs in Ethiopia (Rayner & Teshome, 2005). As shown in (chapter two) the government has considerable power in Ethiopia in controlling the higher education sector. Moreover, the establishment of the national quality assurance agency is a governmental initiative. Thus, it can be said that the government has more power to influence the standards used in the accreditation system.

According to Van Damme (2004) one could refer to the following factors as possible indicators to determine whether or not a certain HEI exhibit quality in its performance.

- Whether the internal system has achieved certain 'minimum' standards or 'benchmarks'.
- The ability of HEIs to set objectives in a changing context in order to reach them with the available input and context variables.
- The capability to fulfill the demands and expectations of direct and indirect consumers and stakeholders.
- The way forward to excellence. (p.134).

One could argue for the impossibility of finding all of these elements in any assessment of quality in the Ethiopian higher education context and this would be due to the fact that

within the current structure there is no other better alternative for the public to know the legitimacy of private HEIs; except the information disseminated through the accreditation system. Moreover, the government can enforce such laws to equally treat graduates from public and private HEIs only if it is able to check the quality of private HEIs. Thus, on the one side, the government might be able to control the quality in the private higher education system but, on the other side it might also restrict the autonomy of private HEIs. Even though private HEIs in Ethiopia have more power than their public counterparts in setting objectives, they are restricted by the standards used in the accreditation system. Hence, it would be misleading to take all these points identified by Van Damme (2004) as normative ideas for claiming quality.

3.4. Quality Assurance System

The concept of quality assurance is inherent in the system of higher education since its establishment in the medieval period (Van Vught, 1994). However, in most cases academics associate quality assurance with an initiative to develop a more managerial or market based approach in higher education (Brennan, 1997). Similarly, Woodhouse (2004) argues that "as a worldwide phenomenon external quality assurance began in the 1980s" (p.78). Hence, it is associated with the emergence of 'massification' and its related consequences. As noted earlier, clearly organized external quality assurance is a recent trend in Ethiopian higher education system. According to Stensaker et.al. (2008) and Westerheijden et al. (2007) the introduction of an external quality assurance system is also an attempt to strengthen institutional autonomy and institutional capacity for self-government, not only an assessment of quality. In Ethiopia, the external quality assurance system is introduced in response to a growing private higher education sector (Belay & Adamu, 2008, p.9). Thus, this can be interpreted as one way to control mainly private HEIs. Nonetheless, Teshome and Kassa (2008) argue that "the ultimate goal of HERQA is to develop organizational culture in higher education that values quality and is committed to continuous improvement" (p.5). Whether the Ethiopian quality assurance system with its present structure is able to address the accountability and/or improvement approach will be commented upon in the following sections of this study (both in this chapter and chapter five).

The way a quality assurance system functions can be influenced by different factors that are related to its components. Such kind of factors can be related to: the way the external quality assurance agency is established, the focus of the quality assurance system, the methods and

procedures used by the organization that carries out the review and the direct result of the accreditation system etc. Often, conflict arises when choices are taken regarding the arrangement of specific parts of a quality assurance system. For instance the responsibility for handling a quality assurance system can be entrusted to HEIs or to an external organization. In the external quality assurance system a given governmental or non-governmental organization undertakes the external quality assurance process. However, Van Damme (2004) claims that in practice there will always be a need to get cooperation from private HEIs even in the purest forms of an external quality assurance system. This points towards the fact that getting the acceptance of HEIs is one important condition for the effectiveness of any external quality assurance system.

The external organization can be appointed by the government, i.e. in the form of an agency. The external agency can also be formed by professional (disciplinary) associations, association of HEIs and other accreditation bodies who conduct the accreditation on a voluntary basis. Generally, external quality assurance agencies have the responsibility to assess quality in one aspect and report about their performance to the other stakeholders. Furthermore, "in most cases quality assurance agencies tend to have some statutory basis especially where they have accreditation responsibilities" (Harvey, 2002, p.250).

The external quality assurance agency develops certain mechanisms to evaluate quality. The way these mechanisms function differ depending on the specific nature of a given quality assurance system. In Ethiopia, the government recognizes HERQA as being responsible for evaluating quality and the relevance of the activities in both public and private HEIs. In the case of private HEIs, ''quality is assured through accreditation where input parameters are examined against standards set by HERQA'' (Teshome & Kassa, 2008, p.5). The prevalence of for-profit private HEIs makes the overall functioning of the accreditation system more complex. Moreover, the fact that two different offices handle the accreditation system creates a problem (see chapter two section 2.4.3). Rather than an institution going through an accreditation processes by two accreditation agencies (that of HERQA and regional education offices) the system can become more effective if it creates some kind of 'mutual recognition method'. Such a method, as suggested by Woodhouse (2004), will work where ''the two accreditation agencies, one focusing at degree program levels and the other at diploma levels, are able to speak authoritatively about the quality of outcomes'' (p.85). According to this arrangement suggested by Woodhouse (2004), the two accreditation units

in Ethiopia ought to create mechanisms to share their information about the programs that they are accrediting. This will avoid the duplication of effort created by each private HEIs applying to different accreditation agencies. Nevertheless, creating such kind of mechanism might be difficult to accomplish with the conditions available in the current structure.

The nature of higher education creates a situation where the quality assurance system should have a subjective approach (Van Vught, 1994). The absence of widely accepted criteria and difficulty involved in identifying and controlling factors that can influence the quality of a certain HEI are some of the reasons for having such kind of approach (Van Vught, 1994). However, this does not mean that some kind of organized structure should not be there, rather there has to be a balance between the subjective and objective focus in the quality assurance system. As Tefera (2005b) asserts, "though private HEIs in Ethiopia are registered as for-profit businesses they need not be subjected to similar terms and conditions as in other businesses such as shoes, sugar or garments"(p.5). In other words the accreditation mechanism must be implemented taking into consideration the special nature of HEIs. The balance between objective and subjective elements is a challenge faced by many quality assurance systems worldwide. Nonetheless, "in practice quality assurance agencies are evaluating the performance of HEIs against fixed criteria" (Harvey, 2002, p.252). Nowadays as HEIs are expected to contribute to national competitiveness and innovativeness, the application of common standards across all types of HEIs will have significant consequences. To address this issue "HERQA is making an effort to shift the accreditation mechanism to quality audit with an aim to focus not only on input but also on output including competence of graduates" (Teshome & Kassa, 2008, p.5). However, it is difficult to claim that quality audit by itself addresses the three elements of input, output and processes. To measure the effectiveness one has to see the implementation of a given quality assurance system.

In the next section, a description of the various mechanisms employed by the quality assurance system is provided. A given quality assurance system can use quality audit, external quality assessment, accreditation and peer review as major mechanisms. According to Van Damme (2004) the following are characteristics of these mechanisms (p.129):

- **Peer Review**

Peer review was understood as the main mechanism in a quality assurance system for a long time. This was because of the belief that peer review mechanism could address the special

nature of HEIs activities thereby enhancing 'excellence' and 'diversity' (Langfeldt et al., 2008). Review panels, evaluation committees and expert teams are some of the alternative terms used nowadays to refer to the peer review method. In Ethiopia, a review team is composed of the different professionals from public and private HEIs and experts from HERQA (see chapter two, section 2.4.1). Though this does not necessarily reflect the common way peer review functions, it is evident that there is a tendency to use specialists in the process. In research conducted by Tefera and Tamirat (2003) it was disclosed that the majority of private HEIs opted for their counterparts to assess them, before the external review team conducts accreditation process.

- **Quality Assessment**

This is a system in which the actual reviewing or measuring and judging of quality aspects of programs or institutions are carried out. In most cases the process starts with a self-study followed by evaluation of the self-assessment document by the review team and then an institutional visit by the reviewers.

- **Quality Audit**

In this mechanism, the assessment focuses on institutions' or programs' (internal) quality assurance procedures. In general, quality audit has been viewed as enhancing institutional autonomy and building institutional capacity with the main focus being to develop the capacity of the top management level (Stensaker et al., 2008). Thus, the introduction of quality audit system in Ethiopia can be seen as one way of developing the autonomy given to public and private HEIs. As noted earlier, the impact of quality audit will be determined by different factors which can affect the implementation of the audit process.

- **Accreditation**

Basically, accreditation involves the use of standards i.e. minimum quality requirements and conditions that have to be met by an institution or program. When compared to other quality assurance mechanisms (described above), ''accreditation is expected to represent a more structured discourse where a certain threshold level is established'' (Prøitz et al., 2004 as cited in Stensaker & Harvey, 2006, p. 66). Moreover, the introduction of accreditation has been in general related with a focus on inspecting and controlling quality with the main focus at subject level (Fry, 1995; Harvey, 2004 as cited in Stensaker et al., 2008). The final outcome of an accreditation process leads to an official recognition of an institution. In one way accreditation can help the government of Ethiopia to protect the quality of higher

education, but if it is focusing solely on quality control and inspection, achieving the goal of long term improvement could become difficult.

In line with the objective of the study, the next section of the literature review will go in-depth into the accreditation mechanism.

3.4.1 Basic Characteristics of an Accreditation System

According to Ewell (2007) ''Institutional accreditation is a process dating back a hundred years in some regions in USA'' (p.143). Furthermore, many countries in Europe, in their endeavors to adjust to the Bologna[1] Process and a for-profit higher education system, are using accreditation as the major mechanism of quality assurance (Stensaker & Harvey, 2006). HEIs can seek accreditation either voluntary or in some cases it can also be compulsory. In Ethiopia accreditation is compulsory.

A given accreditation system usually is characterized by:

- Yes/No decision in relation to the final outcome for an accreditation request. In some cases the final outcome has a conditional nature (Yes the institution can be given accreditation status but with further improvements to the current system). Nonetheless, if only Yes/No outcome is associated with accreditation it will fail to provide detailed information to the public for making choices regarding which HEIs are best to attend to (Jones, 2002 as cited in Ewell ,2007, p.131);
- It is based on pre-determined standards and requirements;
- Official recognition is valid for a specified time frame. Usually, this lasts around 3-5 years depending on the nature of the accreditation system. And if the HEI wishes to continue it has to apply for a second round accreditation permit;
- In some countries (e.g. in Chile and also Ethiopia) there is a follow up procedure after the accreditation decision has been reached to ensure that everything is in place (Lematire, 2004).

As discussed in chapter two, the Ethiopian accreditation system identifies with some of the characteristics identified above. The difference in the Ethiopian case is that private HEIs have to secure a pre-accreditation status in order to apply for accreditation. As Ewell (2007)

affirms the consequence of the accreditation practice is greater in the case of private HEIs who are dependent on tuition and fees. In Ethiopia, the accreditation outcome is used as an indication mechanism to notify the public that the degree acquired from a certain institution is legitimate. Hence, having the accreditation status has a strong impact on the functioning of private HEIs in Ethiopia. According to Van Damme (2004) some of the consequences of accreditation on the HEIs side can be related to their: ability to function and provide educational services and the right to give legitimate degrees and the right to get funds from the government. In a similar way, accreditation can give students the right to get employment or work in a certain professional field and the prospect to be eligible for financial support.

In Ethiopia, students attending private HEIs pay upfront fees unlike their counterparts in the public HEIs. In this case, students will be considered as customers. In line with this, Rayner and Teshome (2005) assert that students' concern in Ethiopian higher education is to get assurance that their particular program meets certain minimum standards. In a way one could infer that this type of focus on quality can be interpreted as having a 'value for money' approach. According to Harvey (2002), the "value for money approach assesses quality in terms of return on investment or expenditure" (p.253). Thus, having accreditation status is important to attract students/customers in Ethiopia. It has to be recalled that private HEIs have to compete for the best students with the public HEIs (see section 2.3.3). This shows how important the outcome of the accreditation is for the private higher education market.

3.4.2 Accreditation Process

The common procedures in the accreditation process include: preparation of a self–assessment document or some other application document by HEI, followed by document analysis by an external review team and arrangement and conducting of institutional visit. However, the use of a self-assessment document is not employed by all accreditation systems. If accreditation were to use peer review and self study, it can be argued that it would focus on both internal and external quality indicators of HEIs thereby addressing the special nature of HEIs (Ewell, 2007). The justification for such a kind of arrangement is that it is better if quality assessment is done by those individuals who have special knowledge about the nature of activities of HEIs. Nevertheless, in relation with the changes in quality assurance, the mechanism of peer review is changing with the standards being developed on how to handle the process (Langfeldt et al., 2008). For instance, many national quality

assurance agencies use the help of international experts as part of their peer review team for comparing national standards with an international one (Brennan, 1997). Likewise, HERQA is a member of INQAAHE (international Network for quality assurance agencies in higher education) and it is most likely that it will adopt the core principles of INQAAHE (see Woodhouse, 2004). The introduction of standards in peer review process has generated concerns regarding the bureaucratization of overall quality assurance process (Langfeldt et.al., 2008). In the Ethiopian system this could lead to measuring new providers (private HEIs) to public HEIs performance without much reference given to the innovative capacity of these new types of HEIs. Thus, the application of international standards to the Ethiopian context has to be carried out with consideration given to the specific condition of the country. Nonetheless, in a study conducted to assess the views of the main stakeholders about the Ethiopian accreditation system by Tefera and Tamirat (2003) it was found that the majority of private HEIs seem critical toward the possibility of reaching the minimum requirements of validity of standards. Overall, this fear about the standardization of accreditation processes has been challenged by the following view which holds that: "although the new systems and procedures may be intimidating and sometimes boring to handle they also have the strange side effect that they somehow remove the mysteries and the often felt fears surrounding quality assurance making the whole process more predictable" (Stensaker, 2008, p.5). Thus, it is impossible to conclude that standardization by itself will lead to bureaucratization of the accreditation process. This implies that even though the Ethiopian accreditation system follows pre-established standards and procedures, it does not necessarily mean the system will as a result have a negative impact on the higher education system.

3.4.3 Objectives of Accreditation

Accreditation can be carried out at institutional or program levels (Harvey, 2004). The main objective of accreditation is to assess the institutions' capacity to follow expectations that come with having the status of university/college (Harvey, 2004). At program level the focus of accreditation is to assess the basic standards of inputs, staffing, resources, curriculum design and content. In some instances, the teaching process and the level of student support is also assessed and only in few instances accreditation assesses outcomes such as graduate abilities and employability (Van Damme, 2004). In many developing countries accreditation systems are established to control the private HEIs and to protect minimum quality standards. Likewise, the main purpose of the introduction of accreditation in many African

countries has been to control the growing number of private HEIs (Materu, 2007). In Ethiopia, the accreditation system was set up with the objective to: control quality of new providers, legitimize the degrees offered by private HEIs, safeguard the public from fraudulent higher education providers and inform students as well as other stakeholders about the status of each degree awarding body (Teshome & Kassa, 2008). Overall, the objective behind the accreditation process could influence the way the methods and procedures are to be implemented in the system, thereby affecting quality of the service rendered to the HEIs as major stakeholders in the system.

Basically, the mechanism employed by the external quality assurance agency can emphasize two objectives or approaches of quality assurance aims: to control (accountability) or to change (to improve) the HEIs that are being evaluated. Focusing on the improvement aspect is considered as a good approach. In line with this, Teshome and Kassa (2008) assert that, "HERQA has a responsibility to protect public interest to make sure that sound standards are being followed and to encourage continuous improvements in the management of quality in higher education" (p.5). Hence, this shows that HERQA intends to emphasize the improvement approach in the accreditation system. As part of this, Harvey and Newton (2005) argue that "accountability systems in short are unlikely to lead to a process of long term quality improvement" (p.7). If improvement is the main objective of the accreditation process and if it can inculcate this idea to private HEIs, the chance of getting genuine information regarding their internal activities could be enhanced.

This brings us to the concept of getting the support of HEIs in a given quality assurance process. The external agency has to show some kind of trust to the private HEIs. As discussed in chapter two, Ethiopia needs the participation of private HEIs in the higher education sector to satisfy the growing demand for access to higher education. Thus, the private HEIs should feel that they are contributing to the national goal (Tamirat, 2008). This implies that accreditation is expected to play a crucial role in enhancing the relevance of services provided by private HEIs.

With regard to accountability and/or improvement approaches "accreditation is criticized for focusing only on minimal standards while overlooking the challenge of quality improvement'' (Stensaker & Harvey, 2006, p.66). As noted earlier quality assurance should combine subjective and objective elements to reflect the special nature of HEIs. However, HERQA focuses on 'input' as criteria for accreditation (Teshome & Kassa, 2008, p.18). It

can be misleading to claim that a given HEI meets certain quality standards by only considering input factors. In a research conducted to assess the views of representatives of national quality assurance agencies by Harvey (2006), the group emphasized not to give too much weight to performance indicators (which are mainly quantitative) as this could lead to a mere compliance culture that the HEIs could end up adopting. The same group in the study reported by Harvey (2006) also emphasized the use of self-assessment documents to be central in the accreditation process. Therefore, focusing not only on inputs but also on output processes and on self assessment documents can enhance the level accreditation contribution towards quality improvement. However, to combine all the elements of input, processes and outputs of HEIs while undertaking the accreditation process is a challenging task. For instance, in evaluating the quality of output, 'employability' is one aspect that can be used as a possible indicator. However, the Ethiopian system has not developed ways where employability of graduates could be traced in the accreditation system. In addition, the development of ICT is at its earliest stage. Hence, it is difficult to collect the necessary information about the performance of private HEIs or their graduates.

In a similar vein, the use of a self-assessment document could face certain problems in the Ethiopian higher education context. As discussed in chapter two, the Ethiopian private higher education market attracts many new providers. Hence, the chance of getting truthful documents from each private HEI could be difficult. For instance, Teshome and Kassa (2008) state that "dishonest private HEIs attempt to argue and waste the time and resources of the agency without fulfilling the minimum criteria set in HERQA guidelines" (p.19). Similarly to this, the use of the self-assessment document brought negative consequences in Chilean higher education system because it became difficult for the external quality assurance agency to get truthful information from private HEIs (Lemaitre, 2004). Instead, the agency had to use additional data to support the information gathered from the self-assessment report. Since the Ethiopian system has some similar features with that of the Chilean system (both characterized by a previously government controlled system now moving towards a growing for-profit private higher education system); it can be well argued that the system has to have some kind of controlling mechanism. In connection to the use of self-assessment process Harvey (2002) alleges that if the quality assurance system can be viewed as less risky and more transparent, then there are chances for a more transparent self-assessment process to be undertaken by HEIs. As commented above, building such a kind of relationship with private HEIs needs to be developed in Ethiopia to improve the

accreditation process. Supporting this argument Harvey (2002) also claims that "if the process of self-evaluation is to have an impact on improvement in the long run it must be backed by established internal procedures and culture of continuous improvement" (p. 258).

Contrary to what has been argued above, there is another perspective holding that accreditation can result in improvement. Based on their study on a comparison of a random set of public and private accreditation systems in Europe, Stensaker and Harvey (2006) found accreditation systems which were able to adopt an improvement approach (p.75). Accordingly, they distinguished accreditation systems which: focus on innovative programs, saw compliance culture as one way to develop quality improvement, emphasize student competencies and build continuous communication with HEIs. Moreover, the accreditation process implemented in Chile managed to improve internal capability of HEIs (Lematire, 2004). Hence, it is difficult to conclude that accreditation by itself cannot result in improvement. This implies that there is a good opportunity for HERQA to adjust the accreditation so that it can emphasize more the improvement approach.

To enhance the improvement capacity of the accreditation system Harvey (2002) suggests independence of the agency as one important condition. For this agency has to be perceived as relatively independent from both HEIs and the government. Furthermore, in relation to the set up of the external quality assurance agency, Perellon (2007) argues that ''in effect, the independence of agencies generally is seen as a supplementary security for the validity of the entire processes'' (p.163). This has certain consequences for the overall functioning of the accreditation system. However, having an independent quality assurance agency becomes more difficult in Ethiopia, where the government had been playing a central role in controlling higher education sector. To support this idea, Stensaker and Harvey (2006) argue that: ''state owned or initiated accreditation schemes would expect to contribute to national educational objectives, to the spread of neutral and objective information about educational services and suit to particular national characteristics of education sector'' (p. 67). This implies that in Ethiopia the government should take an active role in the accreditation process at least for some time until the private higher education system can sustain itself.

Regarding the institutional visit procedure the participation of experts from notable private HEIs in the review team is one way by which HERQA allows private HEIs to be involved in the accreditation process. In line with this, Lemaitre (2004) states that in Chile, "the external

assessors who were trained to participate in the review process brought back many of the same procedures to their own institutions" (p.95). Thus, this kind of arrangement could benefit Ethiopia also. Moreover, the private HEIs would be motivated to protect the market from dishonest providers; in this way their participation in the accreditation process could help HERQA in identifying dishonest providers. In some countries, professional associations can carry out accreditation process on a voluntary basis (e.g. USA). And even in some cases graduates' qualifications have to be licensed by these associations. There also exist professional and disciplinary associations in Ethiopia. However, they have a limited power to influence the chance of graduates to be employed in a certain field.

In conclusion, accreditation should focus both on improvement and accountability. If only the accountability aspect is emphasized then the effort of the external agency to improve the quality of HEIs will become ineffectual. HERQA's aspiration to reinstate the rationality of the accreditation process to the improvement aspect is to be appreciated. In relation to this, Harvey (2002) argues that "as agencies mature they tend to place more emphasis on improvement approach rather than accountability" (p. 250). Thus, maturity of the agency is one factor for enhancing the improvement approach. Moreover, Harvey (2002) argues that agencies that take the responsibility of identifying legitimate from dishonest HEIs are in a lesser position to focus on improvement. This is because legitimization is the added responsibility of such kinds of quality assurance systems. As licensing is the main responsibility of the Ethiopian accreditation system it can be inferred that the system will face certain problems in addressing the improvement approach of quality assurance system. (See chapter two, section 2.4.3).

3.5 The Study's Operational Framework

This part of the study is devoted to show the operationlization of the main ideas discussed in the literature review. Most of the concepts discussed in the literature review are more related to the characteristics of a highly developed higher education system. Accordingly, critical arguments have been provided with each of the ideas by reflecting upon the Ethiopian experience. From the ideas reviewed in the literature it was possible to identify that the rationality behind the Ethiopian accreditation system is mainly based on controlling. In doing so, it has emphasized 'input' parameters as the main quality indicators. Nonetheless, HERQA recognizes that this mechanism would not result in improvement and it is willing to enhance the improvement capacity of the quality assurance process.

Private HEIs see the standards used in the accreditation system as difficult to achieve. Furthermore, it was possible to find the presence of participating private HEIs in the accreditation process (for instance by taking part in the external review team). However, the government assumes the central role in the accreditation system. In the following section the conceptual framework of the study is discussed and reflected upon.

- **Accountability versus Improvement Approaches' in the Accreditation system**

In the framework of this study and based on the literature review presented above, the following concepts are identified as core points to analyze the performance of the Ethiopian accreditation system in the eyes of private HEIs. Each of the sub-domains of the accreditation system is discussed to investigate which attributes it must incorporate to emphasize accountability or improvement approaches. The objective here is not to claim that this framework must be taken as the 'best accreditation system framework', rather the ideas in the framework will be used as an ideal criteria to analyze the conditions in the Ethiopian accreditation system. The conceptual framework consists of the model discussed by Van Vught (1994) together with core points discussed in the literature review. Van Vught (1994) recommended a model of 'multiple accreditation system' in order for the accreditation to contribute to a improvement of quality in higher education. In doing so, the author combined the main points from the 'general model of quality assessment' developed by Van Vught and Westerheijden (1993) as cited in Van Vught, 1994, p.45. The core points of the conceptual framework are summarized as follows:

1. The Agent: As per the 'multiple accreditation model' the agent at the national level must focus on standards and procedures rather than on quality of institutions. It must have a legal status and as much as possible be independent from the government. Furthermore, it must focus on overseeing the overall quality assurance process. The possible factors which can influence a given external quality assurance agency's performance are: whether the quality assurance agency is set up by the legislation to be independent or not, even if it is granted freedom by legislation its performance could be influenced by the inherent culture of the organization, political agendas, limitations put upon it by government and funding aspects (Harvey, 2002). As shown in chapter two, HERQA has a legal status and its role in the accreditation system is limited to the extent of providing recommendation to MOE. Considering the nature of the Ethiopian higher education structure, it can be argued that the independent accreditation agency could not be used as in a well developed higher education

systems such as USA. As discussed earlier, USA has independent accreditation agencies which have helped the federal government to control quality of HEIs (Harvey, 2002; Ewell, 2007). But the higher education market in USA is decentralized and it has managed to function without strict control from the federal government for a long period of time. Furthermore, the existence of not-for-profit private HEIs is predominant in USA. Thus, the market by itself can help in controlling quality. In comparison to this, the Ethiopian higher education system is characterized with a nascent deregulated market structure dominated with for-profit private HEIs. Likewise, in Chilean higher education system, which is characterized by the growing size of private HEIs, the market has failed to provide a measure of social legitimacy to private HEIs (Lemaitre, 2004). Hence, it is possible to claim that in Ethiopia the government must be actively involved in the accreditation system. Once the private higher education system develops, then it can refrain from its involvement in the accreditation system, however, this might take many more years. To support this idea Harvey (2002) affirms:

> There is a difficulty of the American accreditation system to move into countries such as Eastern Europe and South America that have experienced a rapid growth of private higher education sector and that a central government endorsed body has usually been set up to ensure private provision meets basic minimum requirements.(p.250).

2. Focus of the Accreditation System: In order to have an impact on improvement the accreditation system must focus on input, processes and output elements. If the system is focusing only on input the likelihood of addressing the improvement agenda will be less.

3. Methods and Procedures: The methods and procedures in the accreditation process can relate to the standards, the source of information in which the accreditation decision is based, the general procedure the accreditation process has to go through, how the institutional visit is conducted and the manner in which the accreditation results are announced. The core components of the methods and procedures are provided below:

- **The way standards are applied: :** "standards relate to the academic attainment of students and research attainment of staff, competence levels of students (on professional courses) service standards (such as teaching standards and the standard of learning resources) and organizational standards" (Harvey, 2002, p.252). There must also be a balance between objective and subjective elements of the criteria. From the private HEIs side, the overall concern can be related to who establishes the

standards and how they can achieve the threshold of the standards. From the quality assurance agency side, the questions that can be raised in this regard include: how is it possible to adjust the standards used in the accreditation mechanism to the new fields introduced in the existing private HEIs? The reviewed literature reveals that standards must be structured to encourage new types of programs to enhance the innovativeness capacity of HEIs. Moreover, the standards must be diversified so as to allow the review team to apply their expertise in the evaluation process.

- **Self-evaluation reports:** As per the 'multiple accreditation model', in order to increase the level of acceptance from the institutes and academics, the accreditation system must focus on self–assessment. However, as discussed earlier the application of the self-assessment document in the current Ethiopian accreditation system might be difficult (see section 3.4.3).

- **Procedures:** The procedures may include the review methods used, the reporting mechanism employed, the way in which appeal procedures are carried out and the average time the accreditation system takes. It is also related to areas such as how the review team is employing the standards in the accreditation process. Like the standards, the procedures must also be flexible enough to adjust to specific kinds of programs/institutions in order to have a positive impact toward improvement.

- **Institutional visit (Review team process):** Overall the system must be accepted by HEIs as being important. This needs a well developed trust between the external examiner and that of HEIs. As per 'the multiple accreditation model' institutional visits by peer reviewers must be part of the system since such groups could be accepted by institutions as specialists in the field. Because of the specific conditions identified above (in section 3.4) the application of the peer review mechanism in Ethiopia requires further developments to be made in the current higher education system. Pertinent to what has been argued against the mechanism of peer review during the institutional visit Harvey (2002) identifies the following major limitations:

    - They attempt to relate what they hear (and sometimes see) to the self-assessment document;
    - Most of the time they are provided with inadequate documentation and less time to process the application process;
    - Peer reviewers are encouraged to ask questions but they are not trained as investigators. (p. 257).

With these shortcomings of the peer review system the accreditation system in Ethiopia should give greater considerations on how the review team is to be organized. One can see the implications of the above listed limitations especially in a system dominated with for-profit higher education system. As noted earlier, the accreditation system should be able to encourage participation of private HEIs. Likewise, the institutional review team process should not be done just as one way to give licensing and identifying fraudulent providers but in a way to further improve the dialogue between the government and HEIs.

- **Reporting mechanism (Information service)**

As per the 'multiple accreditation model' in order to enhance improvement, the reporting mechanism must be built into the accreditation system; however, this must not be done with the intention of comparing or criticizing the institutions. Furthermore, summarized information must be provided to the public with the detailed part to be given to the applicant institute. In the case of Ethiopia, the reporting mechanism could encourage those institutions that have performed well (those which have secured the accreditation status) but with negative consequences on institutions with negative accreditation outcome. Nevertheless, HERQA should disseminate the information to the public to identify legitimate providers. In relation to this, private HEIs in Ethiopia complained about the condition where accreditation decisions were announced before institutions were given a chance to apply for an appeal (Taddesse, 2003).

4. The outcome of the accreditation process

The final element in the conceptual framework for accountability versus improvement approach is related to the outcome of the accreditation system. If the outcome is restricted to Yes/No output, it fails to achieve the goal of providing information to the public. The literature discussed thus far shows that the outcome of the accreditation process can have significant consequences on new providers that are based on tuition and fees. As part of this it also influences HEIs' chance to develop certain programs and their reputation in the higher education market. As per the 'multiple accreditation model', the outcome of the accreditation process must not be directly associated with funding in order to enhance improvement; as this would develop compliance culture to be adopted by HEIs.

As shown in chapter two, the accreditation system in Ethiopia is not associated with any funding allocation decision. However, the results of the accreditation practice have paramount effect on the likelihood of private HEIs to attract students. In addition to this, the higher education proclamation states that the degrees offered by private HEIs cannot be accepted in the job market unless the institution has accreditation (FDRE, 2003). Hence, the outcome of accreditation influences the employability opportunity of graduates from such type of institutions.

To sum up, Van Vught (1994) asserts that this model takes in to account the special nature of HEIs and the fact that HEIs are involved in both directions of the 'pure search for knowledge' and 'providing service to the society'. Hence, if the elements discussed in the framework are adopted by a given accreditation system, it can enhance the likelihood of emphasizing the improvement approach. The following table provides a summary of the core points discussed above. It shows the attributes of the parts of the accreditation mechanism that could lead to an emphasis either on accountability or improvement approaches. The table will be used as a point of departure for the analysis of the Ethiopian accreditation system in the data analysis section.

Table 3.1 Central characteristics of a control oriented and improvement oriented accreditation system

	Central Characteristics of an accountability and improvement oriented accreditation system		
	Approaches / **Domains**	**Accountability**	**Improvement**
	Agent	- Government Owned - Young	-Independent (formed by voluntary associations) -Work with HEIs -Matured
	Focus	- Input -Licensing(identifying legitimate providers)	- Input processes and output - Trust built in the system
The accreditation system	**The methods & procedures**		
	Standards	Uniform	-Diversified (to encourage new types of programs).
	Self- assessment process	- Not in use	-Central in the process
	Procedure	- Bureaucratic	-flexible
	Review team process	-Following strict guidelines	- As a chance for opening open dialogue with the HEIs. - Specialists in the field
	Reporting mechanism	-With purpose of Ranking HEIs	-Informing the public and HEIs -No direct relationship to funding ,ranking HEIs
	The outcome of the accreditation process	-Yes/No(specified)	- with detailed information to the institutes
	The overall system	- Externally imposed	-supported with internal culture.

Source: Modified and elaborated from Van Vught and Westerheijden 1993 as cited in Van Vught, 1994, p.45)

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a discussion about the research methodology used in this study. As described in chapter one, the purpose of this study was to analyze the views of private HEIs about the current accreditation system in Ethiopia. In light of this, an effort was made to relate the Ethiopian experience with accreditation systems available worldwide. Moreover, the basic procedural aspects of the accreditation system are analyzed to get a complete picture of the accreditation system. The study used both primary and secondary data sources. However, the secondary data constituted the major part of the data used in this study; it was obtained from a study conducted by HERQA's pre-accreditation, accreditation and re-accreditation team. The purpose of the research conducted by HERQA was to assess the 'views of private HEIs about the current pre-accreditation, accreditation and re-accreditation procedures' (Belay & Adamu, 2008). The findings of this study provided information about the views of private HEIs. A potential similarity in the objectives of HERQA's study with that of this study can be noticed (see chapter one). However, in this study an effort was made to apply a particular conceptual framework during the analysis of both primary and secondary data. Furthermore, accreditation standards and procedures of HERQA, other internal reports of the agency and the higher education proclamation of 2003 (FDRE, 2003) were used as secondary sources of data. Previous studies with themes related to Ethiopian accreditation system have also been referred as secondary sources of data. Hence, it is possible to say that this combination of sources of data enhanced the reliability of the data.

The Ethiopian government plays a central role in the country's higher education governance (see chapter two). As noted in the second chapter, HERQA is not entirely independent from the government. And while the country is in a transition period from a centrally controlled higher education system to a more deregulated system, the situation still affects the type of relationship private HEIs have with the government. In this case the private HEIs might feel a pressure to give positive answers to HERQA. Hence, it is doubtful if the participant private HEIs provided genuine responses during the study made by HERQA. For instance, it was possible to notice that some of the questions in the questionnaire used for the study were provided with restricted intervals and options. Hence, the concern about the validity of the findings in the study made by HERQA was the catalyst behind the desire for the collection

and usage of new data as a primary source. Accordingly, the small scale data collection procedure was held to better understand the private HEIs views about the current accreditation system. This way of combining data from different sources is believed to help in compensating for limitations of the individual sources (Marshal & Rosman, 1989, as cited in Pickard, 2007, p.17).

Following is a discussion about the methodology used in this study and the method employed for collection of the primary data and the usage of data from HERQA's study conducted by Belay and Adamu (2008) as secondary data. To summarize, with in the rest of this document primary data refers to the new data obtained for the purpose of this research whereas secondary data refers to the data collected and findings of the study conducted by HERQA. In addition, the agency's other internal documents and reports were included as secondary sources of data within this research.

4.2. Research Design

In general, the literature categorizes types of research design or research approaches into two: quantitative and qualitative. "Quantitative methodology assumes objective reality of social facts whereas qualitative assumes social constructions of reality" (Gorman & Clayton 2005, as cited in Pickard 2007, p.13). Qualitative methods can be used to obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought, processes and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.13). The choice among the research approaches can depend upon the purpose of the research: whether it is to roughly generalize about the topics, develop new theories or deeply understand the issues (Trochim, 2006). A combination of qualitative and quantitative research design is used in this study. Thus, a combined use of the two research approaches can potentially improve the information that can be gathered (Trochim, 2006).

4.2.1 HERQA's Study

HERQA's study used a case study method with cross-sectional perspectives. It used a combination of both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies (Belay & Adamu, 2008). Belay and Adamu (2008) described the research process employed in the following way:

> The implementation of HERQA's study has included basic research procedures like: developing a
> research proposal and instruments for data collection, selecting research settings and sampling the

research population, pre-testing instruments, administering instruments and completing data collection, analysis and interpretation of data, writing the draft report and finalizing and submitting to the respective body. (p.16).

4.2.2 The Primary Data

For the purpose of collecting the primary data, qualitative data collection methods were used. As described in the previous section, the objective of collecting the primary data is to know the views of private HEIs towards the existing accreditation system. The main reason for choosing the qualitative methods was the increased amount of opportunity the methods give to study perceptions, thoughts and attitudes of the private HEIs when compared to what the quantitative indicators alone can offer; as 'perception' is a subjective matter it is better if it is evaluated with a qualitative research design. In line with this, Trochim (2006) claims that qualitative research is in a better position than quantitative research to tell the story from the participants' viewpoint by providing rich descriptive detail. Furthermore, the objective of collecting the primary data was not to generalize based on the findings, but to collect additional information in order to verify the information gathered from the secondary source. However, quantitative study is in a good position to organize the data. Thus, the combined use of quantitative and qualitative design contributes to the validity of the findings of the research.

4.3 Instruments used for Data Collection

4.3.1 Instruments for Data collection for HERQA's Study

HERQA's study used both primary and secondary sources of data. Questionnaires, document analysis and informal discussion were used as main instruments to collect the data. In addition, HERQA's accreditation permit letters and internal reports were assessed as secondary sources of data.

- **The questionnaire**

According to Belay and Adamu(2008), the questionnaire (see appendix two) was prepared to understand the views of high ranking officials in private HEIs about the pre-accreditation, accreditation and re-accreditation service.The questionnaire had two parts: the first focused on collecting background information about the participants whereas the second part was devoted to collecting the views of private HEIs about the accreditation system. The questionnaire mainly contains 'Likert scale' type of

questions. It was possible to see that the questionnaire included more multiple-choice questions with the answers provided at intervals throughout the text. Though this is a common way questionnaires are administered in quantitative studies, it could have been better in terms of range of answers if more options were available for the respondents to choose from. This is mainly because of the fact that the more restricted the intervals are the fewer options the respondents will have which inhibits them from expressing their ideas more clearly. To avoid this problem Osuala(2001) suggests that the categories must be exhaustive and mutually exclusive which can be done by providing an extra category with open ended questions. This was not done in HERQA's research which can adversely affect the quality of the data collected (See Item 3 and 4 in appendix two).

- **The documents**

The accreditation permit letters from September 2003 up to December 2007 were reviewed in HERQA's study. This was done to get the actual information about the application dates; how the institutional visit was undertaken and dates when the letter of permits were send to private HEIs (Belay & Adamu, 2008,p.18). HERQA's study also compared the respondents' responses collected from the questionnaire to the information found in the internal documents.

- **Informal discussion**

In addition to the questionnaire and document analysis, the experts in the accreditation team conducted informal discussion with the external experts who usually took part in the review team. This was done to incorporate the experts' views on the accreditation system.

4.3.2 Instruments for Data Collection for the Primary Data

As mentioned earlier, the primary data was collected to compensate for possible limitations in the findings of HERQA's study. For the purpose of gathering the primary data, interviews with private HEIs could give a better opportunity to get a rich and in depth information about their perceptions. However, due to limitations of time, place and other resources, holding interviews was not possible and hence another alternative was considered. Thus, instead of the interview the primary data was collected using a questionnaire accompanied by personal communications via e-mail.

- **The questionnaire**

Questionnaires with more open ended questions were administered to the respondents that participated while collecting the primary data (See appendix three). The questionnaire addressed the views of the private HEIs in relation to quality, the set up of quality assurance systems, the accreditation procedures and strengths and weaknesses of the accreditation system.

- **Personal communication**

Direct contact with the experts in the accreditation team was made during the summer of 2008 during the initial stage of the study. In addition to this, the researcher has exchanged e-mails with the experts in the accreditation unit of HERQA. The main objective of these communications was to gather as much information as possible with regard to the themes of the research and to verify some of the information obtained from the secondary as well as the primary sources.

From the above description, it can be learned that an effort was made to use different data collection instruments to combine and cross-check information from the various sources included in the study. In summary, the study used questionnaires, informal discussion, information from reports and personal communications via e-mail as major instruments for the collection of the primary and secondary data. In general, this way of combining data collection methods is believed to enhance the internal validity of the final research findings (Pickard, 2007).

4.4 Sampling Techniques and Data collection Procedures

4.4.1 For HERQA's Study

The total population of the study was 56 private HEIs who are involved in offering bachelor and post-graduate degree programs. The researchers selected the participants through a non-probability purposive sampling method. The rationale given for the choice of this method was the fact that the purpose of the study did not have an aim to generalize the findings to the whole population of the study (Belay & Adamu, 2008, p.16). In line with this, Pickard (2007) noted that with purposive sampling one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purposes of research. Accordingly, "the selection of participants for the

study purposefully included high officials and centre coordinators in main cities (such as Harar, Diredawa, Shashemene, Awassa, Bahirdar, Gondar and Mekele" (Belay and Adamu, p.17). This was done with a belief that most of the regular and distance education centers are located in or around these cities. Moreover, these centers were believed to be the main source of information about the accreditation services of HERQA. Participants involved in the study were 42 in number and their position within the HEIs included :president, academic vice president, dean and vice dean, finance and administrative head, managing director, quality assurance head, public relations head, head of academic affairs and module distributors head (Belay & Adamu,2008, p.17). However, the authors' mentioned that the respondents included in the study were only those institutions that were willing to participate. As Trochim (2006) argues, the disadvantage with non-probability sampling is that it may or may not represent the population well. Nevertheless, having 42 out of 56 available private HEIs can still be considered as a good representation of the whole population.

4.4.2 The Primary Data

The primary data was collected using questionnaires administered to ten private HEIs in the capital city, Addis Ababa. As most of the private HEIs are located in the capital city, involving those residing in Addis Ababa was believed to provide sufficiently relevant information about the accreditation system. Moreover, the selected participant private HEIs have campuses operating in other regions of the country as well. Therefore, the selection of respondents is believed to represent the whole population of the existing private HEIs in the country to a certain level. Along with the process of gathering the data, the researcher used the help of the Ethiopian private HEIs association (EPHEIA) to contact the leaders in the individual private HEIs.

All of the selected private HEIs have institutional accreditation status (as per HERQA, 2008e). In addition, most of the programs they offer have one of the three statuses of accreditation, i.e. pre-accreditation, accreditation and re-accreditation. Thus, this shows that the selected institutions have been involved in the accreditation process already and hence it is believed that they are able to provide relevant information about the accreditation. The positions of the personnel that responded to the questionnaire within the HEIs includes: presidents, academic vice presidents, deans, department heads, academic development and quality assurance unit heads.

At first, an attempt made by the researcher to contact most of the private HEIs leaders in Ethiopia did not bring a satisfactory result. There was a high reluctance to respond to the cooperation sought for this research during the data collection process. Afterwards, due to the cooperation of the EPHEIA, it became possible to gain the private HEIs' attention. The questionnaire was sent to the president of the EPHEIA and a test was made to ensure its clarity. Then, the association selected ten private HEIs from its current members. This way of selecting participants is said to be a non probability snowball sampling. According to Trochim (2006), the snowball sampling method is one of the sub-categories of purposive sampling methods and it capitalizes on social networks to identify specific respondents who are hard to locate. The distribution of the questionnaires and the whole data gathering process took approximately two months. Out of ten questionnaires administered to the private HEIs seven questionnaires were returned. Though the respondents included in the sample might not represent the whole population, they provided substantive information that could enable to answer the basic research questions. As discussed earlier, the main need of collecting the primary data was to validate the information collected from the secondary data and it is possible to say that enough information was obtained for the purpose.

4.5 Ethical Issues

According to Pickard (2007), "ethical strategies should be included in all research proposals and procedures must be set in place to ensure that the research conducted is in appropriate and ethical manner" (p.72). The same author argues that every research participant in a research study, however small part they play, has the right to be asked if they are willing to take part. This is what is referred to as 'informed consent'. The following sections provide a discussion about the ethical aspects of the research methodologies used to collect both the primary and secondary data.

4.5.1 Regarding HERQA's Research

As noted earlier, there were some problems identified with ethical consideration in HERQA's research. However, Belay and Adamu (2008) argued that their research has kept in mind the ethical issues of core research methods. The support for their claim is that they have sought appropriate permission from the institutions and participants had been informed about the relevance and objective of the study. Nevertheless, researchers have to be careful in enhancing the cooperation from the respondents, because as Pickard (2007) alleges, if the

respondents feel an obligation to participate in the research then securing their collaboration might be limited. According to Punch (1998), the fact that HERQA has asked consent from the respondents can be considered as keeping up with the basic code of ethics established to guide social science research. In addition, Punch (1998) states that "the major safeguard to place against the invasion of privacy of respondents is the assurance of confidentiality" (p.175). The names of institutions that participated in HERQA's study were not revealed in the data analysis; instead they were given numbers. However, it was possible to identify that in the questionnaire the names of private HEIs were not kept anonymous. This might inhibit the chance of collecting legitimate information from the data (see section 4.1). Furthermore, Pickard (2007) claims that one code of the research practice is protecting the participants in the study. Pickard (2007) also indicated that harm could be caused by researchers' interpretation and presentation of research findings. In HERQA's study, it is less reliable to agree with the claim that the research has kept the ethical codes of research. A good example for this could be the fact that HERQA made use of the replies of the respondents to verify the information the institutions provided during their previous accreditation applications, which has completely deviated from the purpose of the questionnaire in the first place. One clear example is the question within the questionnaire that asked for the qualification of the respondent – who was for all intents and purposes the head of the institution, as that was the sole target source of the data collection – and which was then used to cross-check the qualification requirements during the previous accreditation process. In other words, it manifested the usage of the study as one way to control institutions' performance in terms of checking the qualifications of the leader at each unit in the private HEIs. This shows that the mentioned research purposes of the study were not the only intention and it did not stand up to the code of ethics in terms of protecting the participants.

4.5.2 Regarding the Primary Data

A letter of recommendation, that was provided from Department of Management Studies at University of Tampere, was shown to the experts in HERQA's accreditation team in June 2008 to get their cooperation towards this research(see appendix six). Furthermore, to assist in the collection of the primary data through the questionnaire, the leader of EPHEIA wrote a formal cover letter indicating the purpose of this research to encourage the participants in the data collection (see appendix five). In addition, to secure genuine responses from the respondents they were informed that the analysis of data will not reveal the institutions name. Following Punch (1998), the 'confidentiality' of the names of the institutions' is also kept in

the data analysis stage. Thus, it can be argued that the respondents freely expressed their ideas and feelings.

4.6 Techniques of the Data Analysis

4.6.1 HERQA's Research

Before the analysis the researchers organized and classified the responses into manageable categories (Belay & Adamu, 2008, p.19). Descriptive statistical methods were used to describe the basic features of the data in the study and then percentage and narrative accounts were used to analyze the data. In using this source as secondary data the researcher identified the specific findings that were relevant to answer the basic research questions.

4.6.2 The Primary Data

The procedures to analyze qualitative data include certain distinct stages. "These usually consist of conceptualizing and reducing data elaborating categories in terms of their properties and dimensions" (Miles & Huberman, 1994 as cited in Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.12). Accordingly, patterns in the responses of the participating private HEIs were identified. Then, the identified patterns in the responses were analyzed using the conceptual framework discussed in chapter three (see section, 3.5).

In interpreting data, Osuala (2001) states that qualitative analysis demands a deep and focused interaction with the raw data. The reason for this to be central in the analysis process is to make it possible to develop meaning while analyzing the data. Accordingly, different stages of data analysis and interpretation were also applied to the data obtained from both the secondary and primary sources. As Osborn and Smith (2008) argue the meaning of data is not transparently available, it must be obtained through a sustained engagement with the data and process of interpretation'' (p.66). Hence, "the researcher should engage in critically challenging the very patterns that seem so apparent" (Marshal & Grechen, 2006, p.161). In line with this, an attempt was made to critically investigate and read the responses included in the primary and secondary data using the conceptual framework. According to Osuala (2001) this is considered strength in qualitative research design. Furthermore, in the questionnaire an attempt was made to include questions which were relevant to the research questions. Overall with the interpretation of the data, it was possible to answer the basic research questions of the study.

4.7 Research Validity and Reliability

In relation to reliability and validity, Golafshani (2003) notes that both qualitative and quantitative researchers need to test and demonstrate that their studies are credible (p.600). Firstly, with regards to reliability, whether the result is replicable. Secondly, with regards to validity, whether the means of measurement are accurate and whether they are accurately measuring what they are intended to measure (p.600). The criteria for reliability in quantitative methodologies differ from those in qualitative methodologies (Cohen et.al., 2000, p. 120). "In qualitative methodology reliability includes fidelity to real life, context and situation, specificity, authenticity, comprehensiveness, detail, honesty, depth of response and meaningfulness to the respondents" (Cohen et.al., 2000, p.120)

To enhance reliability and validity, Golafshani (2003) notes that "if the issues of reliability, validity, trustworthiness, quality and rigor are meant differentiating a 'good' from 'bad' research then testing and increasing the reliability, validity, trustworthiness, quality and rigor will be important to the research in any paradigm" (p. 602). Therefore, to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings of the study combined data sources were used. However, in the use of combined sources of data, there is a need to define triangulation from a qualitative research's perspective in each paradigm (Barbour, 1998 as cited in Golafshani, 2003, p.603). Following this concept, 'triangulation' is used in this study to improve the quality of information collected from both secondary and primary sources. This is because the main objective of this study is to know the views of private HEIs and not to form or reject any hypothesis based on the findings. The study has combined two basic sources of information: HERQA's study and a small scale data collection with questionnaire conducted by the researcher. Moreover, in measuring reliability of data the main criterion should be 'dependability' or trustworthiness of the data (Guba and Lincon 1985 as cited in Cohen et.al., 2000, p.120). The authors suggest that researchers have also to be cautious in placing exclusive focus on respondents, because they are not in a privileged position to be sole commentators on their actions. For this reason, the analysis of the data in this study did not solely focus on the responses forwarded by the private HEIs; rather additional documents from HERQA were reviewed in order to cross check with some of the responses given by the respondents. Thus, this combination of data will enhance the dependability of the findings.

However, it is difficult to generalize the findings of this research to all accreditation systems. As Pickard (2007) argues, it is difficult to generalize findings of a qualitative based research.

Rather, 'transferability' of the findings is said to be possible. Other similar studies can benefit from this research by transferring some of the findings to other higher education contexts that have similar characteristics and structure as that of the Ethiopian higher education system. Although, this might not guarantee similar findings, the Ethiopian experience explored in this study can be used as basis to compare findings of other similar researches.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

5.1 Introduction

This chapter shows empirical evidence on how the accreditation process is undertaken with more focus given to the views of the private HEIs about the methods and procedures of the Ethiopian accreditation system. The concepts discussed in the conceptual framework (in chapter three) are used to analyze the data collected from the primary and secondary sources. This chapter includes data collected through the questionnaire prepared for the purpose of this study (primary data) and secondary data, a research conducted by HERQA's accreditation unit in the year 2008 for the purpose of studying 'the views of the private HEIs about the accreditation system' (Belay & Adamu, 2008). Moreover, internal reports, guidelines gathered from HERQA and personal communication via e-mails are used to support the data analysis as presented below. For the purpose of maintaining anonymity, names of the private HEIs that have participated in the questionnaires are not mentioned in this discussion. For convenience during the data analysis, the participating private HEIs are assigned numbers and similar numbering is used in this discussion whenever reference to them is necessary. The analysis begins with a discussion of the secondary data followed by the primary data.

5.2. Analysis of Secondary Data

5.2.1 Accountability versus improvement focus of the Ethiopian accreditation system

The private HEIs were asked to express their views as to whether the process of accreditation is accountability or improvement oriented. The core points identified in the conceptual framework in the second chapter (section 3.5) are used to analyze the data as provided below.
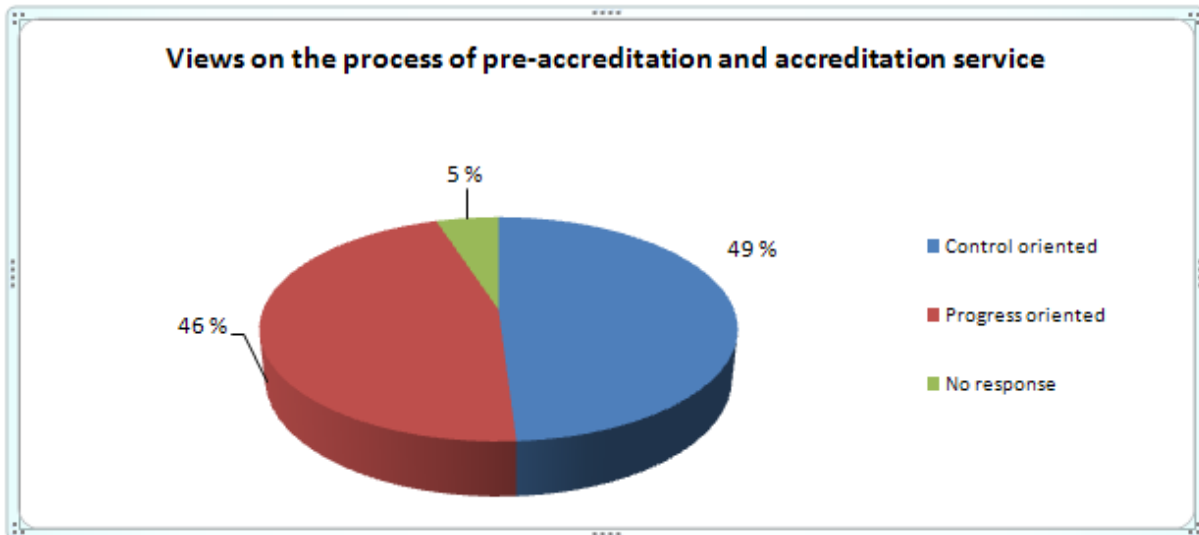
Figure 5.1 Respondents view on accreditation service (N=41)

Source: Belay and Adamu, 2008, (p. 30, fig.4.8.1)

Indicators = Control oriented 49 % (n=20)

        = Progress oriented 46 % (n=19)

        = No response 5 % (n=2)

The two possible approaches, namely accountability versus improvement, were one of the main concepts discussed in the part dealing with a review of the literature. From the above figure it can be seen that most of the private HEIs 49% (n=20) endorsed that the accreditation process is inclined to controlling (accountability) than progress (improvement). However, a comparable percentage of the respondents claimed that the accreditation system is focused on the improvement side as well 46% (n=19). Hence, it can be concluded that the private HEIs perceive the current accreditation system as focusing both on controlling as well as on the progress aspect, with a slightly higher tendency towards seeing it as control oriented. This shows that the private HEIs differ in their perception of the accreditation system. This can be interpreted as the current accreditation system having a balanced combination of accountability and improvement approaches. In this case, it can be considered as a strong point of the accreditation system. However, this same finding may also indicate that the agency is not able to provide the same kind of services to private HEIs. Therefore, the accreditation system must make an effort to control other factors that have the potential to influence the undertaking of the accreditation system. In addition, the agency has to make efforts to be considered as unbiased in the eyes of the private HEIs. As the reviewed

literature shows external quality assurance systems must have an improvement approach to have acceptance from the HEIs side.

5.2.2 Agent

As discussed before, the government actively participates in the Ethiopian accreditation system: basically, the establishment of the national quality assurance agency is the initiation of the government. The MOE used the help of external experts from other countries to develop the structure for the external quality assurance system[2]. The main source of funding for the agency is the government; however, private HEIs have to pay fees when they apply for accreditation. Financial and technical support from international organizations is also another source of support structure for HERQA (Teshome & Kassa, 2008). Thus it can be seen that the agency does not have full autonomy.

HERQA is the main agency undertaking the external quality assurance system in Ethiopia. Although, it is legally independent it lacks operational independence as it is working mainly with MOE. However, Tamirat (2008) stated that until this time the recommendations of HERQA have been accepted by MOE. Thus, it can be argued that the agency assumes central place in the accreditation system. The conceptual framework considers independence of the agency as one important factor to enhance the improvement approach of the accreditation. Within the current structure the effort shown to include experts from private HEIs in the external review team can be interpreted as one mechanism to dilute the concentration of power of the agency. In line with the reviewed literature, this may enhance the acceptance from private HEIs that are to be accredited in the following years, thereby contributing towards the improvement approach, as an externally imposed quality assurance system might not illicit the needed cooperation from the HEIs that are to be evaluated.

The following tables show the number of applications for accreditation HERQA has undertaken dating from July 2007 and continuing up to June 2008 (12 working months of HERQA). The report states that the agency was able to accredit more programs than the proposed number in the annual plan.

Table 5.1 Total Number of programs that were given pre- accreditation status in the period dating from July 2007 – June 2008

No	Programs	Number of programs	Total number of programs which were given pre-accreditation status		Total number of programs which were not given pre - accreditation status	
			No.	%	No	%
1	Natural science	-	-	-	-	-
2	Health sciences	10	4	40	6	60
3	Social sciences	59	26	44.0	33	56.0
4	Agriculture	6	–	-	6	100
5	Medicine	3	3	100	-	-
6	Teachers Education	12	-	-	12	100
7	Engineering	1	-	-	1	100
8	Computer Science	6	2	33.3	4	66.7
	Total	**97**	**35**	**36.1**	**62**	**63.9**

Source: HERQA Report, 2008d (p.6, Table 1) (original document in Amharic) [3]

Table 5.2 Total Number of programs that were given accreditation status in the period dating from July 2007 – June 2008

No	Programs	Number of programs	Total number of programs which were given accreditation status		Total number of programs which were not given accreditation status	
			No	%	No	%
1	Natural science	1	1	100	-	
2	Health sciences	7	4	80	3	20
3	Social sciences	57	48	84.2	9	15.8
4	Agriculture	-	-	-	-	-
5	Medicine	-	-	-	-	-
6	Teachers Education	38	29	76.3	9	23.7
7	Engineering	5	–	-	5	100
8	Computer Science	13	7	53.8	6	46.2
	Total	**121**	**89**	**73.6**	**32**	**26.4**

Source: HERQA Report, 2008d (p.6, Table 2) (original document in Amharic)

Table 5.3 Total Number of programs that were given re- accreditation status in the period dating from July 2007 – June 2008

No	Programs	Number of programs	Total number of programs which were given re-accreditation status		Total number of programs which were not given pre - accreditation status	
			No	%	No	%
1	Natural science	–	–	–	–	–
2	Health sciences	–	–	–	–	–
3	Social sciences	14	13	92.9	1	7.1
4	Agriculture	–	–	–	–	–
5	Medicine	–	–	–	–	–
6	Teachers Education	–	–	–	–	–
7	Engineering	–	–	–	–	–
8	Computer Science	3	3	100	–	–
	Total	**17**	**16**	**94.1**	**1**	**5.9**

Source: HERQA Report, 2008d (p.7, Table 3) (original document in Amharic)
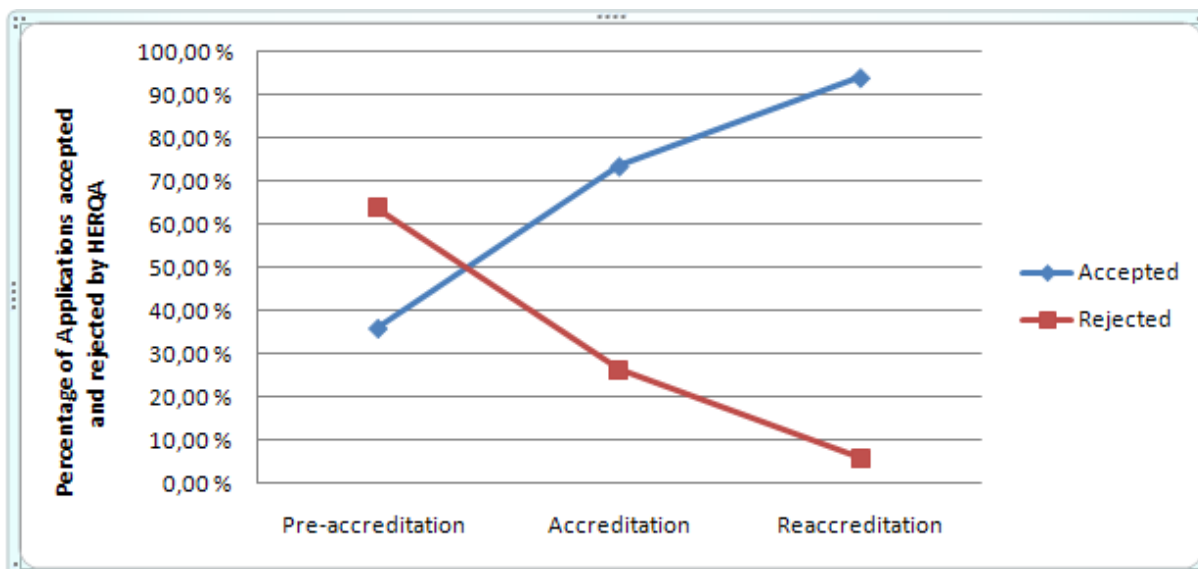
Source: HERQA Report, 2008d (p.7) (original document in Amharic)

Accreditation differs from other quality assurance mechanisms in that it is based on measuring quality against pre-established standards. As indicated before (in chapter two) the

pre-accreditation system in Ethiopia is employed as a license to start a new program. The above figure shows that a majority of applicants for the pre-accreditation had negative outcomes. As affirmed in the report, HERQA assumes this is a sign of the strength of the overall accreditation system in controlling private HEIs (HERQA, 2008d). When it comes to the accreditation and re-accreditation stages the majority of the applicants had a chance to get their applications accepted. Once an institute gets the pre-accreditation status it seems that the chances to get the accreditation or re-accreditation status are less difficult when compared to the initial stage of accreditation. It can be interpreted as the agency having more trust in the capacity of the applicant institutes at the later stages. As per the conceptual framework it can be seen that the trust element enhances the improvement capacity of the accreditation system.

5.2.3 Focus of the accreditation process

As discussed in the literature review part above accreditation systems are criticized for focusing only on minimal standards. Furthermore, it has been discussed that the Ethiopian accreditation system focuses on input as a criteria for accreditation. The declared reason for this approach is due to the capacity and stage of development of the agency (Teshome & Kassa, 2008). However, the same authors also allege that the agency is working to include process and output elements in the accreditation process (p.8). As per the conceptual framework the accreditation system must incorporate input, process and output focus areas to have a positive impact on improvement. Such an approach is good because it might be difficult to claim indicators of quality by considering only input factors.

In line with this, the analysis of the guidelines provided by HERQA indicates that the standards are more focused on finding weaknesses in the system rather than strengths. For instance, considering the students as one focus area in the accreditation process, the guideline provides the following areas to be given emphasis: "internal method of collecting student satisfaction, student selection criteria and course exemption criteria" (HERQA, 2008a, p.18). Looking at these areas it might be possible to claim that the accreditation system assesses quality of internal processes thereby focusing on the improvement aspect. However, the focus on student entry requirements can be associated with the controlling aspect of the accreditation system.

5.2.4. The methods and procedures involved in the accreditation System

5.2.4.1 Private HEIs' views about the standards employed in the accreditation system

As discussed earlier in chapter three (section 3.3), the 'fitness for purpose' approach is employed as a working definition for quality in Ethiopian accreditation system. Higher education quality is now becoming a major concern for all stakeholders including the government, HEIs, employers and students (Teshome & Kassa, 2008). From the provisions included in the higher education proclamation FDRE (2003) one could find that quality in Ethiopian private higher education system is assessed against minimum standards set by HERQA. Hence, meeting minimum standards is taken as one indicator of quality in the accreditation system. In line with the reviewed literature this might fail to address the improvement approach of the accreditation system.

HERQA has developed standards and procedures to guide the accreditation process. "These standards and guidelines were critically assessed and comments and suggestions of the stakeholders were also incorporated in workshops organized by the agency" (Teshome & Kassa, 2008, p.6). This shows that HERQA attempts to revise its guidelines and standards by taking the stakeholders' needs into consideration. In line with this, analysis of the guidelines provided by HERQA revealed that while assessing the available number of qualified staff, the agency attempts to find details for employment conditions like the academic rank, release from the last employer and related documentation to certify the qualifications. It is useful to have this kind of mechanism because there have been some incidences of providing false documentation in the Ethiopian higher education system (Teshome & Kassa, 2008). However, it can also be argued that HERQA has gone too far in this direction and is becoming quite intrusive in the activities of private HEIs and this negatively affects the agency's movement towards quality improvement. As indicated in the literature review the external quality assurance system must give room for HEIs to have autonomy. Nonetheless, in the future there are chances that the system could sustain itself and the mutual trust between the agency and private HEIs be enhanced. The plan to use a self-assessment document, at least in the re-accreditation stage, could be an indication of this progress.

As discussed in the literature review, a tension between historically developed standards and new types of programs is another challenge accreditation systems in many countries face. From this perspective the respondents were asked to evaluate the way standards are applied to programs offered through distance learning modes.

Table 5.4 Private HEIs' view about accreditation process in the case of distance learning programs

	Yes	No	No response
Does your institution provide distance education?(N=23)	9(39%)	13(57%)	1(4%)
Pre-accreditation/accreditation in distance education is too long.(N=32)	13(41%)	5(16%)	14(44%)

Source*:* Belay and Adamu, 2008 (p. 34, Table 4.12.1)

As can be seen in the table above, 39 % (n= 9) of the private HEIs offer programs through distance learning modes. From the 32 of the respondents who replied about the accreditation service of HERQA in distance learning programs, 41 %(n=13) believe that the accreditation process takes longer for such kind of programs. However, 44% (n=14) did not respond to this question. The above result could also be due to discrepancy in the data collected in the study, since the number of institutes who are reported to give distance courses and the number of respondents who replied about the accreditation system for distance education has a huge difference. It can be the case that many of the institutes who have never passed through an accreditation system and responded basing their ideas on speculations. Nevertheless, an institution in the secondary data in a reply to the open ended question (please refer to items 13 & 14 in appendix 2) stated that HERQA should design its own mechanism that could be applicable to programs offered through distance and conventional modes (Belay & Adamu, 2008, p.33). Moreover, the same respondent insisted for external professionals to differentiate the standard that is applicable in distance and regular programs.

From the points discussed in the conceptual framework, application of uniform procedures for all types of programs negatively affects the capacity of the accreditation towards an improvement approach. However, internal reports of HERQA indicate that the agency is making an effort to develop mechanisms to accredit distance learning programs (HERQA, 2008d). However, the respondents do not agree with this claim. Thus, it can be inferred that HERQA faces problems in accrediting distance learning programs.

5.2.4.2 Private HEIs view about Pre- Accreditation, Accreditation and Re-accreditation procedures

The standardized nature of accreditation systems is one of the weaknesses identified in the literature review. However, there are certain advantages identified in relation to the standard nature of accreditation procedures, such as making the whole process more predictable. Likewise, the Ethiopian accreditation system has developed procedures to guide the accreditation system (see chapter two, section 2.4.2). Thus, private HEIs will pay attention to the procedures as they are the main stakeholders in the accreditation process. As described earlier, the final decision is made after a consensus is reached within the review team. Then, the review team will provide the recommendation to the director of HERQA, the body that makes the final decision. Nevertheless, the final decision of HERQA has to be approved by MOE. The review team conducts the institutional visit to compare the information provided in the application document with that of the existing situation. In doing so, they have to follow the guidelines set by HERQA (HERQA, 2008a). Nonetheless, there is an 'open place' provided in the evaluation forms where the reviewers can write their comments. This can be taken as one way where reviewers express their ideas without restrictions. Hence, it can be said that the system employs both professional (subjective) and uniform (objective) focus areas for the purpose of evaluation. As per the conceptual framework this mechanism enhances the improvement approach of the accreditation system, because the accreditation system allows some flexibility to permit the review team members to apply their expertise.

Of the procedural aspects the time taken to handle the application for accreditation can be considered as one indicator. With this view in mind, the following figure shows the summary of private HEIs view about the average time it takes for HERQA to arrange the institutional visit from the initial date when the first application has been forwarded to HERQA.
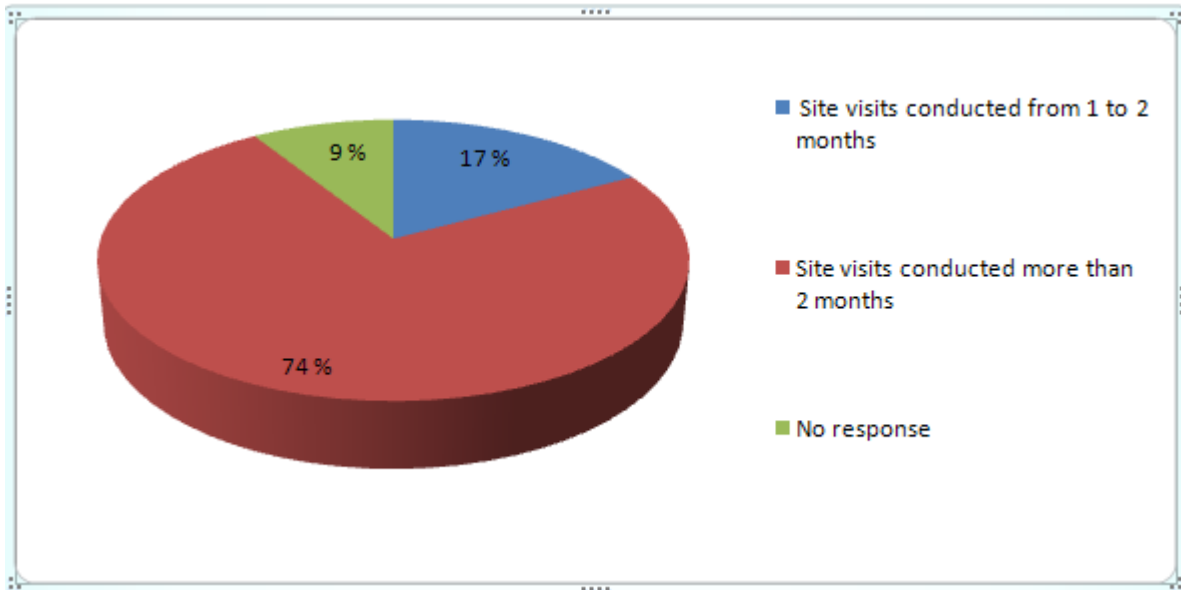
Figure 5. 3 Private HEIs view about the duration to get the first site visit (N=42)
 Source: Belay and Adamu, 2008 (p.24, Fig, 4.4.1a)

Indicators = less than a month (0%)

=1-2 months (17%, n=7)

=more than two months (74%, n=31)

=no response (9%, n=4)

From this diagram it can be seen that (74%=31) of the respondents state that HERQA arranges the time for institutional visit after two months, whereas (17%, n=7) of them stated that it takes one up to two months. From this, it can be seen that HERQA takes more than two months to conduct the institutional visit, which is the most crucial part of the accreditation system. This information alone cannot allow us to make generalizations of the average time HERQA takes to handle the accreditation process. This is because the question was provided with very limited intervals as alternatives for the respondents to choose (refer to Item 3 and 4 in appendix two). Nevertheless, it shows that there is a delay in the process with the majority of respondents choosing the 'more than two months' duration.

Furthermore, private HEIs were asked about the timing where the final letter in relation to the accreditation process is granted. This is the stage where the institution will be notified about the outcome of the accreditation process. Accordingly, private HEIs responses can be depicted in the following diagram.
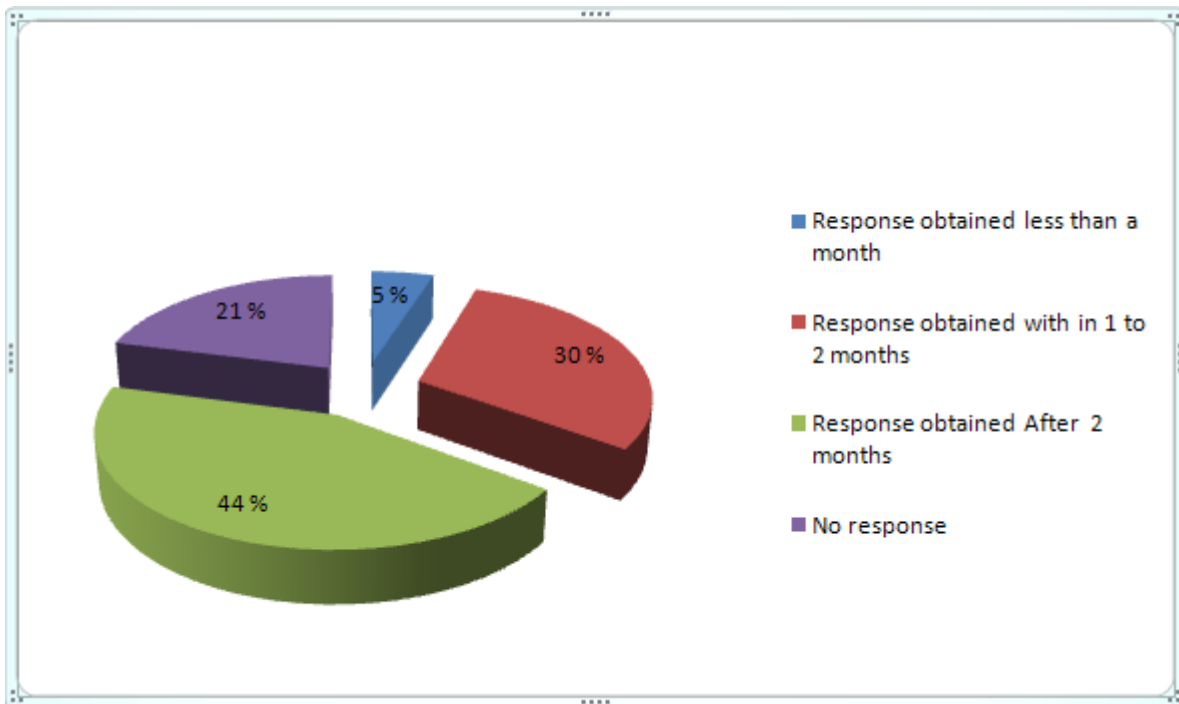
Figure 5.4. Private HEIs view regarding the duration to get the denial or granted letter from HERQA (N=42)
Source: Belay and Adamu, 2008 (p.25, Fig 4.4.1.b)

Indicators =Responses obtained = less than a month (5%, n=2)

= 1-2 months (30%, n=13)

= more than two months (44%, n=19)

= no response (21%, n=8)

From the above two figures it can be seen that the accreditation system is taking all together more than four months to respond to the applications. The higher education proclamation states that the average time the accreditation process should take is three months (FDRE, 2003, article 67.2). Hence, from the above table it can be concluded that the private HEIs in the secondary data believe that the application processes are not handled on time. In addition to this, the annual report of HERQA for the duration of July 2007 up to June 2008 has also shown that the average time the accreditation processes took for each program was 5.5 months (HERQA, 2008d). Thus, it can be seen that there is a delay in providing accreditation services to the private HEIs. If the accreditation system is delayed it creates a challenge on the day to day activities of private HEIs. This approach does not go in line with the agency's objective to enhance the improvement of quality in the private higher education system. As reflected in the conceptual framework this will have an adverse impact on the capacity of the accreditation towards an improvement approach.

The other aspect related to the procedures, is whether the services of HERQA are seen as bureaucratic or not in the eyes of private HEIs. Previous studies have shown that many private HEIs see the accreditation system as bureaucratic and therefore, suggest additional adjustments to be made (Tamirat, 2008). Likewise the application process is cumbersome for most of private HEIs (Taddesse, 2003; Tamirat, 2008; Teferra, 2005a). The following graph shows summary of respondents view about the accreditation system of HERQA.
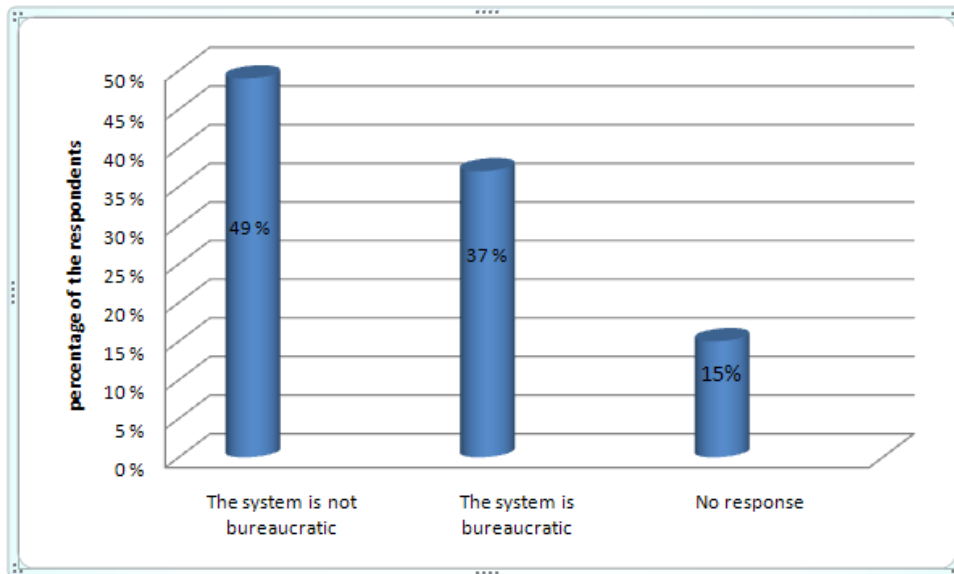
Figure 5.5 Private HEIs view on accreditation service of HERQA (N=41)

Source: Belay and Adamu , 2008(p.26, Fig.4.5.1)

Indicators = not bureaucratic (49%, n=20)

= Bureaucratic (37%, n=15)

= No response (15%, n=6)

As can be shown from the above figure the majority of the respondents (49%) seem to endorse that the system is not bureaucratic and it can be taken as a positive sign that the majority of them viewed the accreditation mechanism as non-bureaucratic. The conceptual framework affirms that the accreditation mechanism should be flexible to have a positive impact on improvement. The positive attitude of the private HEIs towards HERQA could be genuine and a very good foundation for future improvement of the system as a whole. However, a considerable number of the respondents feel that the system is bureaucratic (37%). With regard to the interpretation of the responses to such type of general and critical questions the primary data can potentially supplement this information.

5.2.4.3 The accreditation process in relation to the procedures followed by the external review team

Private HEIs were asked to evaluate the contribution of the external assessors' commentary in the accreditation process. The following table summarizes their responses:

Table 5.5 Private HEIs' comments on the helpfulness of external assessors' comment (N=42)

Participants view on the role of assessors' comment				
Contribution of external Assessors' comment given during pre-accreditation or accreditation was:	Very helpful	Moderately helpful	Not Helpful	No Response
	62%(n=23)	35%(n=13)	3%(n=1)	12%(n=5)

Source: Belay and Adamu, 2008 (p. 31, Table 4.9.1)

According to HERQA (2008c), "peer reviewers can give their comments about the private HEIs quality" (p.9). In line with the conceptual framework, it is better if the external reviewers are accepted by the private HEIs to enhance the contribution of the accreditation towards an improvement approach. Hence, if a majority of the respondents agree with the positive contribution of the external assessors' comment it can be interpreted as a good attribute to enhance the improvement approach. However, HERQA will take the information collected from the institutional review team and only summarized forms of the comments are included in the final letters (Belay & Adamu, 2008, p.29). HERQA has identified this phenomenon as one limitation in the accreditation process (Belay & Adamu, 2008). According to the conceptual framework, if the accreditation system was able to provide detailed information to the institutions it would have been in a better position to enhance improvement. As discussed in the literature review, if the final information provided through the accreditation system is limited to the extent of Yes/ No i.e. whether the institutions have been given accreditation or not, then it fails to inform HEIs about their strengths and weaknesses. This will negatively influence the effort towards an improvement system.

The respondents were also asked whether their institution had been revisited after the accreditation status had been granted by HERQA. This was considered as one element to

identify whether the agency is working as a 'supportive body' rather than as a 'regulatory body' (Belay & Adamu, 2008, p.31). Continuous institutional visits are also considered as ways to provide constructive comments and furthermore this approach can open up a dialogue between the private HEIs and the accrediting agency. The reviewed literature showed that external quality assurance systems need to get the cooperation of HEIs for an effective result to be garnered from the system. To achieve this objective, "HERQA has organized workshops and conferences at various times on issues relevant to quality" (Teshome & Kassa, 2008, p.7). This shows that HERQA attempts to include the views of private HEIs in the accreditation process and raise overall awareness in the area of quality assurance. As discussed in the conceptual framework, incorporating the views of private HEIs is considered as a positive element towards an improvement approach.

The following figure shows a summary of the responses:
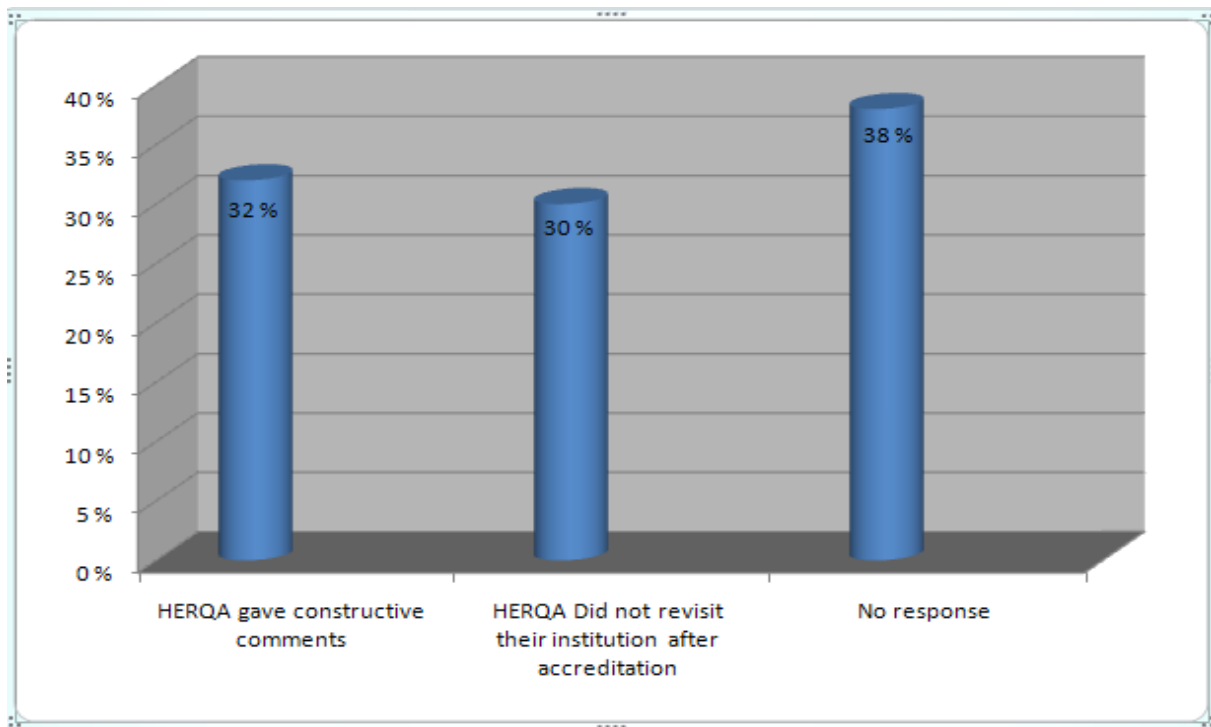
Figure 5.6 Private HEIs view as to whether HERQA revisted their instituion after the accreditaion process (N=37)
 Source: Belay and Adamu, 2008 (p. 32, Fig.4.10.1)

Indicators = HERQA gave constructive comments 32 %(n=12)
= HERQA did not revisit their institution after accreditation or pre-
accreditation 30 % (n=11)

= no response 38 % (n=14)

Of those who replied to this question most of them believed that HERQA gave them constructive comments (32%). However, the majority of the respondents did not give an answer to this question (38%). This can be interpreted as private HEIs being indifferent to the supportive role of HERQA. It can also be interpreted as private HEIs having a negative view about the role of the agency as a supportive body. As discussed in the conceptual framework, this will negatively affect the capacity of the accreditation towards an improvement approach. Furthermore, a significant number of the respondents (30%) answered that their institution had not been re-visited by the agency. This indicates that the accreditation system lacks ongoing communication with the private HEIs and this also has a negative influence on the improvement approach of the accreditation.

5.2.4.4 Private HEIs view about the information provision service in the accreditation process (Reporting mechanisms)

HERQA gives access to information about the accreditation procedures and standards to its main stakeholders. Moreover, information related with the pre-accreditation and accreditation status of HEIs and their programs is provided to the public. The reviewed literature showed that the agency should provide detailed information to the HEIs and summarized information to the public. As part of this, "HERQA has developed a communication strategy at the beginning of 2008, and a quarterly news letter was launched in July 2008" (Teshome & Kassa, 2008, p.6). One way HERQA disseminates such types of information is through the website of the agency. Accordingly, private HEIs were asked to express their opinions about the information provided through the website. The following table shows the summary of their responses.

Table 5.6 Summary of private HEIs view about HERQA's website

		Number of Respondents	Proportion Of Respondents
The website of the Agency:	Satisfy both the public and institutions	15	36%
	Does not satisfy stakeholders	8	19%
	No response	3	7%
	I do not know the existence of the website	16	38%

Source: Belay and Adamu, 2008, (p.27, Table 4.6.1)

As can be seen from the table, of those private HEIs that have information about the availability of such kind of website, 36 % (n=15) mentioned that they were satisfied with the information provision service of HERQA. Nonetheless, a majority of the respondents (38%, n=16) were not aware of the availability of the website. This indicates that HERQA is not able to satisfy the information requirements of private HEIs. As per the conceptual framework the accreditation system has to be transparent in order to have a positive impact towards improvement. To alleviate this problem the respondents recommended the agency to use other forms of media to disseminate information. This is a crucial aspect in relation to the poor status of the current information technology usage in the country. However, the website would still be helpful to stakeholders that have access to internet facilities.

5.2.5 Private HEIs View about the Outcome of Accreditation Process

As indicated in the conceptual framework, the outcome of accreditation is normally limited to a simple response whether the institutions have met the minimum requirements or not. In Ethiopia, the importance of the outcome of quality assurance is now being increasingly recognized mainly to enhance reputation and consequently attract stakeholders (Teshome & Kassa, 2008). These stakeholders are mainly prospective students who are the major source of funding for the private HEIs. The direct result of the accreditation process is either the grant of pre-accreditation, accreditation or re-accreditation status to the applicant institution. As Belay and Adamu (2008) stated "the consequences of the pre-accreditation permit are much less when compared to the accreditation permit, which entails a capacity to graduate

students" (p.29). Hence, the "accreditation stage requires the fulfillment of both staff and other resources for the duration of the study" (Belay & Adamu, 2008, p.29). However, private HEIs are not allowed to offer programs without having the accreditation status, if this is not the case the degree they provide will be invalid. Analysis of the annual report of HERQA for the duration of July 2007 up to June 2008 showed that some of the applications for accreditation or re-accreditation were rejected because these institutions were found to offer programs without having pre-accreditation status (HERQA, 2008d). Thus, it can be inferred that the outcome of the accreditation process has significant consequences in the Ethiopian private higher education market. Nevertheless, the outcome has no direct relationship with funding allocations from the government. In line with the conceptual framework, this is a good element to enhance the improvement approach. Moreover, the announcement of the results in a widely circulated media could be related to the ranking mechanism used in other countries. Though it is the agency's obligation to inform the public about the legitimacy of each program offered by private HEIs, in line with the conceptual framework it might have a negative impact on the improvement approach.

5.3 Analysis of the primary data for the study

To validate the above findings and discussions based on the secondary data, the next section will go into the analysis of the primary data collected through the questionnaire. In doing so, the same points discussed in the conceptual framework in chapter three are used. Furthermore, a reference is made to the description of the Ethiopian higher education system in chapter two. The respondents are given numbers to identify them. In total seven questionnaires were returned out of ten administered to the private HEIs in the capital city.

5.3.1. Improvement Vs Accountability orientations

What do you think is the rationale behind the establishment of the accreditation system in Ethiopia?

The reviewed literature showed that external quality assurance systems were introduced in relation to 'massification' in higher education. In relation to the above question, some of the objectives mentioned by the respondents include: to make HEIs responsible (accountable), to provide information to the public regarding the legitimacy of private HEIs, to follow the teaching and learning process, to maintain the quality of education and to control dishonest private providers. In line with the objectives of the accreditation system stated above the

private HEIs were asked to identify whether the accreditation system emphasizes accountability or improvement approaches. Most of the respondents replied that the accreditation system is focusing more on accountability than any improvement aspect. In relation to this one respondent stated: "even though HERQA states that the quality assurance system is focused on improvement I do not see any steps that have been taken towards helping HEIs for improvement so far" (Institution 2).

There were two private HEIs who believed that the accreditation system stimulates quality and improvement. Nevertheless, most of the institutions stated that the accreditation system had its limitations to address the improvement element. Accordingly, the respondents identified the following points as major obstacles in the accreditation system to emphasize the improvement approach:

- The current system is input based;
- Many private HEIs are concerned about deploying needed resources until they secure the accreditation permit;
- It is applied only to private HEIs;
- No financial support is given to private HEIs from the government.

These points show that majority of the respondents are dissatisfied with the way accreditation is applied in Ethiopia. In addition, the respondents were asked the following question:

Do you think the accreditation system is important for the development of private higher education institutions in Ethiopia?

A large number of the private HEIs included in the primary data believed that the accreditation system was important for the development of private higher education system in the country. Even those private HEIs which believed that the rationality behind the Ethiopian accreditation system is accountability supported the existence of the accreditation system. This indicates that the private HEIs support the implementation of the accreditation system. This can facilitate the collaboration to be gained from private HEIs. As per the conceptual framework getting the acceptance of the institutions in the accreditation process is one crucial element to enhance the positive impact of the accreditation towards an improvement approach. In line with this, Institution 1 claims that "such kind of development is possible if the accreditation is properly done and if the objectives are essentially about

improvement". This shows that the respondents have greater expectations from the accreditation system. Thus, unlike in the secondary data the primary data allowed to see that the accreditation system is considered to focus on accountability than improvement.

5.3.2 Agent

What is your opinion about the organization of the national quality assurance and relevance agency (*HERQA).Could you please provide reasons for your suggestion?*

The reviewed literature identified maturity and independence of the agency as important factors to enhance the improvement capacity of the accreditation system. With regard to the way HERQA has been established and how the system is running so far, respondents asserted that such an organization is needed and has to be strengthened in the future. It is believed that the agency is important as it oversees quality and provides information to the public about the legitimacy of private HEIs. However, all of the respondents commented that the agency should be supported with the participation of other independent non-governmental associations. If other associations take part in the accreditation process the chances are that it will balance the political agendas put on HERQA (Institution 6). Institution 1 also recommended that operational independence should be given to HERQA. In relation to this, one of the participating institutions refused to comment about the set up of HERQA since it is a governmental organization and this might indicate the characteristics of a politicized system. In accordance with the conceptual framework, the accrediting agency must be considered as independent from government or any political objectives to have a positive impact on the improvement approach.

5.3.3 Focus of the accreditation process

How do you interpret quality in a higher education? In other terms what criteria would you suggest for claiming certain performance of a higher education to have quality?

The reviewed literature showed that different stakeholders can interpret quality in higher education in different ways. Most of the respondents referred to quality as more of a subjective concept. One institution considered quality as the basis of higher education. In contrast with the other respondents, Institution 1 interpreted quality as 'fitness for purpose', where purpose is formulated by the institution itself. While they seem to have somewhat similar interpretations of quality in higher education, they all recommended for a quality assurance system that includes a focus on input, processes and output elements. For instance,

the respondents suggested for the performance of graduates to be included as one criterion in the accreditation process. As indicated in the conceptual framework having a balanced focus on input, process and output contributes towards a positive impact on the improvement approach.

As discussed earlier (in chapter two) the accreditation mechanism is applied in the private HEIs only (see section 2.3.1). The public HEIs are established under the direct jurisdiction of the MOE. In addition, the government does not provide financial support to the private HEIs. As a result, most of the private HEIs feel bitter about the fact that the accreditation system has been implemented in the private sector only. In relation to this, Institution 3 claims that some private HEIs performance is even better than public HEIs except for a few HEIs whose motive is mainly seeking profit. This might be interpreted as the private HEIs associating the accreditation mainly to the controlling aspect. Following the conceptual framework, such a view from the institutions side can harm the accreditation in its effort to have a positive impact on quality improvement.

5.3.4 The methods and procedures in the accreditation process

5.3.4.1. Private HEIs view about the Standards Employed in the Accreditation Process

How do you evaluate the standards employed in the accreditation activity? With regard to the minimum standards insisted?

As per the reviewed literature, the standards relate to the level of achievement of a certain program or institution. Out of the seven private HEIs, four of them replied that the standards were good. However, the remaining three expressed their dissatisfaction with the standards. The institutions claim that the standards are very strict especially the requirement regarding qualifications of academic staff. In line with this, Institution 6 mentioned that they were asked to have the necessary qualified staff for each program even before the program commenced its operation (i.e. in the pre-accreditation stage). Hence, it can be inferred that the majority of private HEIs feel that the standards in the accreditation system are very strict or difficult to attain. According to the conceptual framework, the standards must be diversified enough to contribute to an improvement approach. The standards should also be able to encourage new types of programs offered by institutions. However, this is not the

case in the Ethiopian situation and it might have a negative impact on the objective of having a quality improvement.

How do you evaluate the standards employed in the accreditation activity in relation to the way the standards are applied in the accreditation process?

Most of the respondents agreed that the standards are applied equally across different private HEIs. Nevertheless, there were some respondents who were dissatisfied with the application of standards. Lack of uniform evaluation criteria and a fault finding kind of approach adopted in the accreditation process were some of the challenges identified by the respondents. In line with this, Institution 2 claims that sometimes the reviewers are firm on one institution and lenient on others. Here again, the fact that the accreditation system has not been implemented in the public HEIs caused the resentment of most of the respondents. A majority of the respondents claim that the 'minimum standards' emphasized in the accreditation system are not fulfilled by the public HEIs, which are under the direct jurisdiction of the MOE. The accreditation system should be considered as consistent to have a positive impact on improvement. This view can also be seen in the responses analyzed from the secondary data (see section 5.3).

5.3.4.2 The Role of the Self-assessment Document in the Accreditation System

Do you think that a self-evaluation document should make part of the accreditation process? Please give some more explanation about your answer to this question?

This item was not covered in the secondary data. It has been discussed in the literature review that the general trend in many external quality assurance systems is that they are based on internal quality assurance systems. In the Ethiopian case, the respondents were for the self-evaluation document. Some of the justifications given for choosing this approach is: to avoid compliance culture that could be developed by HEIs as a result of an externally imposed accreditation system, to have a look into other components of the higher education besides input, to allow private HEIs to reflect on their own operations and to seek what they should do about quality enhancement. In line with this, Institution 2 argues that "the self-assessment document is broader and looks more into the 'processes' and 'output' elements of HEIs". More specifically, Institution 6 recommended using the self-evaluation document at the accreditation and re-accreditation stages, as there is not much information to be seen in

the pre-accreditation stage. Thus, all private HEIs seem to prefer the self-assessment document to be used in the accreditation process. However, the self-assessment process is not central in the current accreditation system. As indicated in the conceptual framework the accreditation process should focus on the self-assessment document to have a positive impact towards improvement.

5.3.4.3 Private HEIs view about the Procedures in the Accreditation Process

In your opinion, what problems and challenges in general are encountered during the undertaking of the accreditation process?

Concerning the overall procedures of the accreditation system, the private HEIs responses reveal the following viewpoints. Most of them responded that the accreditation system has its limitations. They identified delays, less power given to private HEIs and lack of a self-assessment document as major limitations in the accreditation process. Additional challenges that were identified include the fact that it is a new system implemented in a setting where there is predominance of the for-profit sector, the prejudices held towards private HEIs, its input focus, lack of skilled manpower on HERQA's side to assess quality (analysis of the reports from HERQA (2008d) also revealed this information) and very limited time available for institutional visits. Thus, it can be concluded that private HEIs are dissatisfied with the way accreditation procedures are implemented. As noted in the conceptual framework, these limitations will have a negative influence on the agency's objective to enhance the improvement of quality. Thus, the qualitative information in this part tends to provide a clearer view of the respondents' view about the procedures followed in the accreditation system than the secondary data (see section 5.2.4.2).

In a similar way, with the respondents in the secondary data, one of the most mentioned weaknesses of the accreditation process was that there are unnecessary delays within it. According to Institution 6 the reason for the delay is the fact that HERQA is working with MOE and MOE takes 15-20 days for approving the case. The higher education proclamation states that MOE must issue the accreditation permit within ten working days from the date of the receipt (FDRE, 2003, article 68). Hence, it can be seen that both the secondary and primary data are showing that there is a delay in replying to the accreditation applications.

5.3.4.4 The accreditation process in relation to the procedures followed by the external review team

What is your expectation from the institutional team review process?

The reviewed literature suggests for a peer review mechanism to be used in the accreditation system. In line with this the respondents suggest that the review team should objectively review the institution and report to HERQA, avoid biases and be flexible in following the standards (criteria) that are stated in the guidelines. For instance, Institution 2 argued that some of the standards of little importance should be tolerable when they are not fulfilled during the institutional visit. In line with the use of the review team process private HEIs were also asked the following question:

How is your relationship with the review team? Does the review team have a chance to give you some suggestions during the institutional visit?

The respondents expressed that their relationship with the external reviewers is purely professional. Moreover, the private HEIs insisted that the accreditation system should be able to encourage new and 'market oriented' programs with the available standards in the system. This is one important element identified in the conceptual framework to have a positive impact to an improvement approach. The secondary data showed that HERQA was facing problems in accrediting distance learning programs. It has to be recalled that the private HEIs offer more market oriented programs than their public counterparts (see chapter two, section 2.3.1). Thus, the accreditation system in its application of standards is expected to play a crucial role in this aspect.

5.3.4.5 Private HEIs view about the information provision service in the accreditation process

How do you evaluate the procedures followed in the accreditation process with regard to the reporting system (announcement of the final result of the accreditation process).

In contrast to the findings in the secondary data the respondents identified the posting of information about standards and guidelines on the website as a potential source of strength for the accreditation process. Overall, apart from the delay in announcing the result of the accreditation system, most of the respondents replied that the information provision of the accreditation system is generally good. This is a good quality to enhance the improvement approach of the accreditation system.

5.3.5 The outcome of the accreditation process

As discussed earlier, private HEIs without the accreditation permit are not allowed to offer programs. According to the views forwarded by an expert in the accreditation unit in HERQA it was disclosed that:

> Such types of private HEIs will be notified to stop if they are offering the program they are not accredited for. Mostly, the students are the ones who will appeal for such cases but sometimes rival colleges do so. Thus far, two private HEIs were closed down due to absence of accreditation status. In addition to this, a program closure will happen during the re-accreditation stage which is undertaken after the accreditation has expired after three years. During re- accreditation stage, private HEIs are supposed to show improvements in their internal structure, if the institution is below the expected standard, the permit for the already accredited program will be taken away until the institution applies for new pre- accreditation status of that program (personal communication via email, July 15,2009).

The respondents were also asked to state the direct outcome of the accreditation process. Most of the respondents replied that the outcome is the issuance of the accreditation permit, which has the information of Yes/No (stating whether the applicant institution is granted accreditation or not). With the exception of Institution 1 the respondents considered the information contained in the accreditation letter as good and comprehensive. As has been argued in the literature review part (section 3.4.1) if only a Yes/No outcome is associated with accreditation, then it fails to provide detailed information about the quality of a given higher education system. In the second question related to the outcome of the accreditation, they were asked if their institution was convinced of the final decision. One institution claimed that the outcome of the accreditation process took into account the institutional constraints, and that it was flexible (Institution 2). But, there were other respondents that stated that they were not satisfied or were partially satisfied with the final outcome of the accreditation process.

5.3.6 Strengths and weaknesses of the accreditation system as given by private HEIs

Strengths of the accreditation system as identified by the private HEIs

The final element in the questionnaire distributed to the private HEIs, asked about strengths and weaknesses of the accreditation system. Accordingly, the following areas were identified by the respondents as major strengths in the accreditation system.

- Its mere existence is strength, because it makes HEIs be accountable for the services they provide.

- It informs the public, thereby building their confidence about the credibility of the private HEIs.

- It is an effort shown by the government to uphold quality of education which was ignored for so long.

- It can contribute to the country's higher education growth and development.

- It has developed detailed standards and procedures and communicates them

- The combination of experts in the review team is good. The expert team combines experts from different stakeholders.

- The fact that it involves the scheme of pre-accreditation. This scheme prevents some private providers from opening institutions whose motive is solely 'seeking profit'.

Although private HEIs have dissatisfactions with the procedures they believe that the government is concerned to improve quality in the Ethiopian higher education sector. This is a good base from which HERQA can work on the following years. Most of these strengths identified above are in line with the points identified in the conceptual framework that have a positive influence towards an improvement approach.

Weaknesses of the accreditation system as identified by private HEIs

Private HEIs identified the following areas as the major weaknesses of the accreditation system:

- HERQA is not an independent organization

- The system is applied to private HEIs only

- The system focuses mainly on input

- The system is mainly focused in finding faults rather than encouraging private HEIs

- There are prejudices against private HEIs

- The external reviewers are biased.

- There is unnecessary delay in replying to the accreditation request, which includes inconsistent visiting schedules and delays in the issuance of the final accreditation letter.

- No monitoring mechanism is built into it once the system has been implemented

These weaknesses identified above will have a negative influence towards an improvement approach of the accreditation system. These responses could also be interpreted as the private HEIs expecting the accreditation system to be lenient on them. However, analysis of internal documents of HERQA has also shown some of the weaknesses identified above. Furthermore, analysis of the findings from HERQA's research by Belay and Adamu in 2008 also supports some of these weaknesses identified above. Thus the areas identified above have to be re-adjusted in order to have a positive impact on improvement.

Suggestions provided by private HEIs to improve the accreditation system

To address the strengths and weaknesses of the accreditation system identified above the private HEIs were asked to state their suggestions on how to improve the overall accreditation system. Accordingly, their suggestions are provided below:-

- HERQA must recruit professionals to handle the accreditation process to enhance its skilled manpower capacity
- The standards should be applied taking into consideration the major problems encountered in the private higher education sector. Independent associations should also be involved in the accreditation process at least as witnesses.
- The system should also be applicable to public HEIs
- The system should incorporate monitoring mechanism to check what HEIs are doing after the accreditation status has been granted
- The evaluation process should be rational and objective
- The system should be able to control factors which can influence the accreditation decision.
- The system must incorporate process and output focus, besides its present input focus
- There must be careful selection of the professionals involved in the accreditation process
- The government must give assistance to private HEIs
- Ethiopian education system needs policy reform at all levels

Overall the private HEIs identified independence of the agency, balanced focus on elements of HEIs and the development of positive attitude towards private HEIs as major areas to be improved in the accreditation system. Some of these suggestions follow a similar direction

with the main points identified in the conceptual framework. Thus the areas identified above should be reconsidered by HERQA in its effort to reformulate the accreditation system.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

With the view that higher education can contribute to economic development and poverty reduction, the government of Ethiopia has reformulated the governance structure of the higher education system, which is reflected through the establishment of the external quality assurance system. HERQA was established by the government to be the main agency responsible for undertaking the external quality assurance system which includes the accreditation system for private HEIs. Most of the private HEIs are for-profit and offer 'market oriented' programs. The accreditation system has three phases: pre-accreditation, accreditation and re-accreditation.

The main objective of this study was to see the functionality of the Ethiopian accreditation system. In line with this, the study focused on 'the opinions of private HEIs about the current accreditation system'. The following research questions guided the study:

- *What is the rationale behind the accreditation system in Ethiopia?*
- *How do the private HEIs perceive the strengths and weaknesses of the current accreditation system?*
- *Is the accreditation system in line with the objectives and ambitions of the system?*

The objective behind the implementation of the accreditation system can influence the methods and procedures employed. This can also influence the view private HEIs have on the accreditation process. Hence, the whole idea of the objectives of the accreditation system and the related research questions that imply the methods and procedures were the areas given attention throughout this study.

6.1 Key Ideas and findings

In this part the key findings of the study are presented using the main points of the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework discussed central characteristics of an accreditation system that can contribute to accountability or improvement approaches. The analysis of the respondents in the primary data, internal documents of HERQA and HERQA's research on 'the views of private HEIs about the current accreditation system' show the following pattern in the Ethiopian accreditation system:

- **The Agent**: HERQA is legally independent agency tasked with the responsibility to give recommendations to MOE regarding the accreditation applications. However, the analysis of the data showed that HERQA enjoyed high levels of power in making the accreditation decision. Thus, it is possible to claim that HERQA is the main organ responsible for the accreditation process. In relation to the set up of the accreditation system, the private HEIs opted for professional or other independent accreditation associations to oversee the accreditation system. There was also one institution that was reluctant to comment about HERQA as it was perceived as a governmental agency.

- **The focus**: The accreditation system employed both professional (subjective) and standard (objective) focus viewpoints. However, the process follows more of a structured assessment procedure. The analysis of the data reveals that there is a lack of trust built into the accreditation system. The reason given by HERQA for such a kind of approach is because the agency wants to protect the higher education market from dishonest private providers. In line with this, the private HEIs have a negative view about the implementation of the accreditation system on solely private HEIs. Moreover, the study shows that the criteria used in the accreditation system are focused more on the input element than the other elements of process and output.

- **The methods and procedures**: The analysis of the data showed that the majority of the private HEIs were dissatisfied with the methods and procedures used in the accreditation system. Accordingly, highly overrated standards, elongated application process and insufficient information provision were identified as the major weaknesses. The private HEIs expressed that the institutional visit procedure did not allow them to have an open relationship with external reviewers. Moreover, the fact that the accreditation system is not based on an internal quality assurance system is identified as a limitation. Though the agency states that it has accomplished more than it has planned for the year 2008, delayed application processes are the main areas identified as weaknesses by the respondents.

- **The outcome of the accreditation process**: the study shows that the consequences of the accreditation system are high because it can determine the chance of private HEIs to offer legitimate programs. The other important finding was that the outcome of the accreditation did not have a direct link with funding or ranking of institutions.

However, the outcome of the accreditation process is circulated in widely accessible media which can be comparable to ranking mechanisms' in other countries.

One interesting finding is that despite the many weaknesses identified above, private HEIs believe that the accreditation system must be implemented to have an impact on the overall development of the country's higher education system. In the next section analysis of identifiable patterns within the study is made with reference to the basic research questions.

6.2 Revisiting the Research Questions

What is the rational of Ethiopian accreditation system?

The government of Ethiopia has set up the accreditation system as a response to the growth in the number of private HEIs. The analysis of the data shows that the accountability objective appears to be given more focus in the accreditation; to begin with the accreditation agency is not independent from the government. Though, the agency assumes a central role in the accreditation process it is considered as a governmental organization affiliated with political goals. Next, legitimizing is the major role of the accreditation. Such a focus makes it likely that the accountability agenda will dominate. As Harvey (2002) argues, agencies that take the responsibility of identifying legitimate from dishonest HEIs are in a less likely position to focus on improvement. This is a challenge faced by HERQA.

With regard to the dichotomy of the accountability/improvement dilemma the belief that accreditation cannot result on improvement is challenged in this study (see section 3.4.3). It has to be recalled that the Chilean accreditation system has managed to have an impact on improvement. In the same way, the private HEIs included in this study believe that the pre-accreditation mechanism enhances the improvement capacity of the accreditation system. Moreover, analysis of the internal report of HERQA shows that getting the pre-accreditation status seems to be more difficult than the accreditation and re-accreditation permits. With more trust developed on the capacity of private HEIs in the accreditation stage, it looks like the Ethiopian accreditation system may have the opportunity in the following years to have an impact on improvement.

How do the private HEIs perceive the strengths and weaknesses of the current accreditation system?

The private HEIs identified some strengths and weaknesses of the accreditation system. When it comes to the strengths, the fact that implementation of the accreditation system gets the support of private HEIs is a good sign taking into consideration the current stage of the accreditation system. Moreover, the study shows that the accreditation process involves the private HEIs to a limited extent. This provides room for future improvement of the procedures involved in the accreditation process. It can also be considered as a good base to work on in the following years for enhancing the improvement approach of the accreditation.

One of the weaknesses identified by the private HEIs includes the application of highly overrated standards. According to the respondents the accreditation system, which is applied to private HEIs only, expects minimum standards that were not fulfilled by the public HEIs which are run by the government. In addition to this, the fact that the system is mainly focusing on input is another weakness. The study also shows that the Ethiopian accreditation system uses very intrusive methods while accrediting private HEIs. For this reason, the respondents suggested for the agency to focus on other elements of the higher education such as processes and outputs. Moreover, there is lack of open communication between the review team and the institutions because the institutional visit process follows a structured procedure.

Two of the weaknesses identified above stand out as the main areas in the accreditation process: i.e. the procedures and the communications between the agency and the institutes. Regarding the procedures, the fact that there is a delay makes the whole process less effective. In order to have an impact on improvement, the accreditation system has to be less bureaucratic. If the accreditation system is bureaucratic then it will obstruct the smooth flow of the institutions' internal processes. In this case, it might be difficult to elicit the needed cooperation from HEIs. As one component identified in the conceptual framework, getting the cooperation of institutions is important for enhancing the improvement capacity of the accreditation system. Thus, the accreditation system should be able to deliver fast services to stakeholders. With regards to the information service the study shows that private HEIs are able to get only summarized information of the reviewers' assessment reports. Thus, private HEIs are not in a good position to know where they are standing except for the final information which states whether they have been given accreditation status or not.

Is the accreditation system in line with the objectives and ambitions of the system?

In general, considering the objectives envisioned by HERQA and the stage of development of the accreditation system at present, it can be argued that it has played a crucial role in the Ethiopian private higher education system. The study shows that there is an increasing public concern about quality that is related to the fast growth in the number of private HEIs. Prior to 2003 there was no strong built-in system to control the quality of the private higher education sector. The results of the study showed that the accreditation system was able to license new institutions which participated in the higher education market. This is important because the government of Ethiopia needs the participation of private HEIs in order to expand the current low access rate. Furthermore, the fact that the agency identified some of the weaknesses in the current procedures is a good indicator that shows the agency's effort to align its services to the current conditions in the higher education sector. However, achieving the improvement objective of the accreditation system is difficult with the current procedures used in the system. In line with the literature reviewed, accreditation systems will have a chance to have a positive impact on improvement if they can focus on innovative programs, emphasize student competencies and build continuous communications with HEIs. This shows that there is a good opportunity for HERQA to adjust its mechanisms so that it can emphasize on the improvement approach in the future.

In conclusion, the Ethiopian accreditation system can be labeled as centralized. There have been attempts to include the help of professionals in the process. Furthermore, from the points discussed in the second chapter (in section 2.4.3) it can be inferred that the system is moving towards adjusting its mechanisms to the specific conditions in the country. Thus, it can be concluded that the research was able to get relevant findings that can answer the basic research questions. Due to the rapidly growing private higher education sector in Ethiopia the role of the accreditation system is important. The findings of this study can be used to improve the current accreditation system. It is important to note that the results of this study are limited to the Ethiopian higher education context only. Against this background the researcher advises future studies of this kind to cover wider data and to have a larger sample size to be able to make better generalizations of their findings. In terms of the scope of the study the researcher recommends to focus on the role of accreditation in enhancing the relevance of higher education services in developing countries. One recommendation in the future is to include the views of students and employers. The students can give information

regarding the relevance of accreditation in relation to the labor market. The employers could provide information as the quality of graduates of HEIs in the labor market is their concern.

6.3 Recommendations

Based on the study, the researcher recommends the following areas to be given consideration in the accreditation system:

- The perception of the private HEIs about HERQA as the main controlling governmental authority should be changed in the future. For this to happen, HERQA has to be viewed as independent from the government and that it is meant to provide support to the current higher education system in Ethiopia.

- The accreditation system should develop the already existing mechanisms to incorporate the private HEIs' concerns. For this the information sharing process between HERQA and private HEIs should be improved in the future. This can enhance the level of cooperation that can be gained from the private HEIs. Furthermore, HERQA should be able to work to enhance the level of trust built into the accreditation system.

- The current application of standards in the accreditation process should be reconsidered as it is expected to play a crucial role especially in relation to accrediting market oriented programs. Thus, it should be diversified enough to handle new kinds of programs.

- The information contained in the final accreditation grant /refusal letter should include detailed information to give the private HEIs a chance to re-organize themselves to improve the quality of education expected from them.

- In the future accreditation should be applied to public HEIs also to level the playing ground for both public and private HEIs. That will improve the cynical view private HEIs have towards the current accreditation system thereby enhancing the collaboration to be gained from the private HEIs.

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Endnotes

1. The Bologna Process is the process of creating the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and is based on cooperation between ministries, higher education institutions, students and staff from 46 countries, with the participation of international organizations.

2. http//www.cis.vu.nl/Projects/index.cfm/home_file.cfm/fileid/5447DBC6-0324-D291-B5062DDEC840E4FE/subsectionid/5430EB1C-BB34-42AE-92753FDDB8CECE41

3. All original documents that have been written in Amharic have been translated in to English by the researcher.

Appendices

Appendix one

Structure of the Ethiopian Education System

Pre-School
1 2 3
KG

Primary Education
1 2 3 4 | 5 6 7 8
1st Cycle Grade 1-4 | 2nd Cycle Grade 5-8

1 2 3
ABE

General Secondary Education
PSLCE 9 10 EGSECE
1st Cycle Grade 9-10

TVET
1 10 + 1
1 2 10 + 2
1 2 3 10 + 3(Diploma)

Preparatory Secondary
11 12 EHEECE
2nd Cycle Grade 11-12

Postgraduate Degree Program
4 3 2 1 — 2 1
PHD MA

Undergraduate Degree Program
3 2 1
4 3 2 1
6 5 4 3 2 1
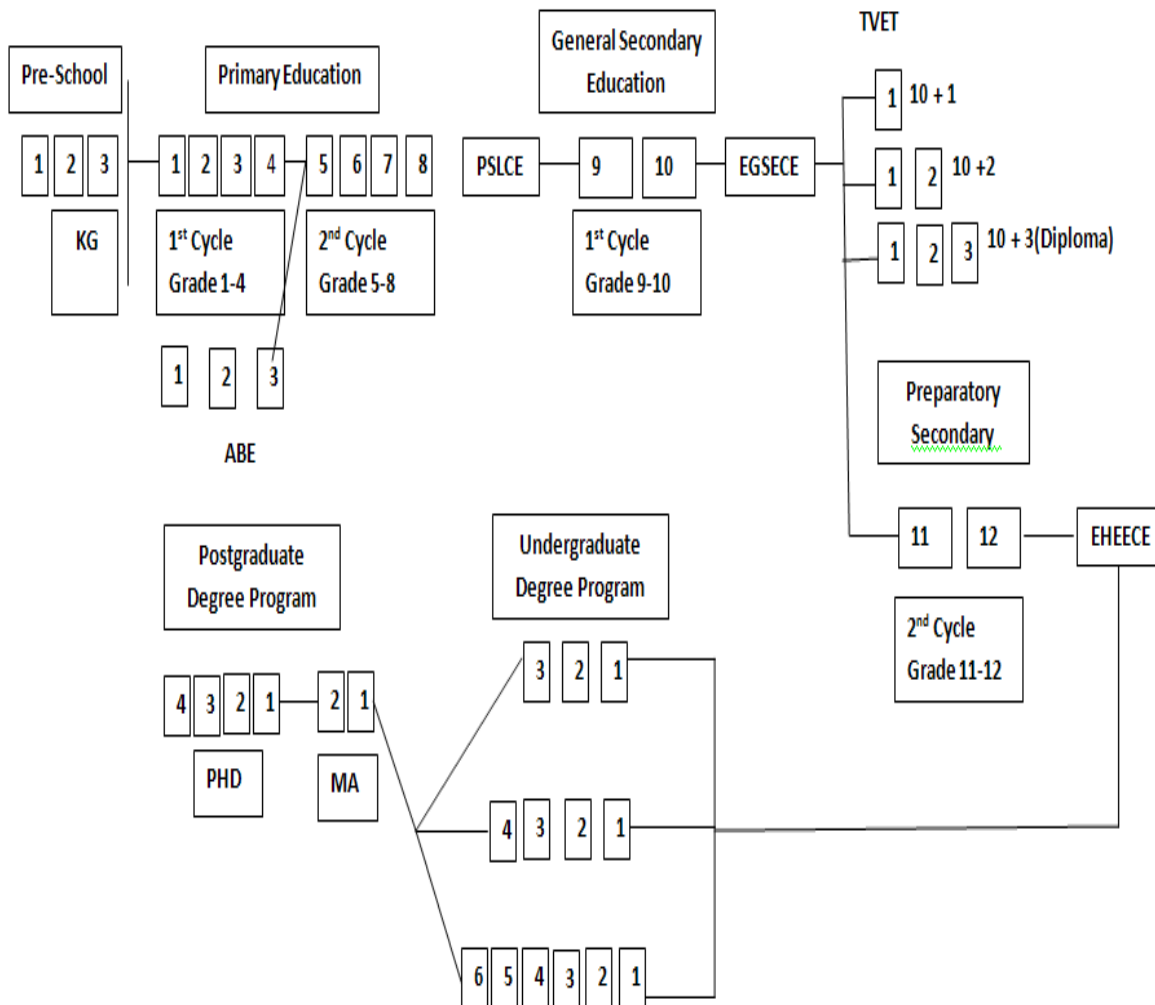
EGSECE- Ethiopian General Secondary Education **TVET 10 + 3**- Three year Technical Vocational Training, **Preparatory**-2nd Cycle secondary, Preparatory for tertiary education, **EHEECE**- Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Certification Examination, **PSLCE**- Primary School Leaving Examination, **MA**- Master Degree, **KG**- Kindergarten, **General Secondary Education**- 1st Cycle Secondary, **ABE**- Alternative Basic Education, **TVET**- Technical and Vocational Education and Training , **TVET 10 + 1**- One year Technical Vocational Training, **TVET 10 + 2**- Two year Technical Vocational Training, **PhD:** Philosophical Doctorate Degree

Appendix two

HIGHER EDUCATION RELEVANCE AND QUALITY AGENCY
ACCREDITATION AND PRE-ACCREDITATION SECTION

Questionnaire

Objectives

The objective of the questionnaire is to gather feedback on pre-accreditation and accreditation services provided by HERQA. The information you provide us will be used to examine the services that have been provided by the HERQA for private higher education institutions (PHEIs) in relation to its accreditation and pre-accreditation. It is anticipated that the feed back will improve the services provision, and the development of strategies that enable the agency to respond quickly for requests of pre-accreditation and accreditation services. Moreover, your response would be an input to develop an objective pre-accreditation and accreditation guideline for different fields of studies provided by higher education institutions.

Your frank, honest, and true responses are appreciated.

Part one: basic descriptive information

Please give the required information in the space provided.

Date_____

Institution's Name _____

Campus_____

Participants post in the institution_____

Participant's educational level_____

Part Two

For the following questions please place a check mark (√) in the box, and write your response in the space provided or at the back of the page as deemed necessary.

1. Does your institution obtain the indicative criteria set for accreditation and pre-accreditation in a given program before the institution presents its request for the agency (HERQA)?

        A. yes □   B. No □

2. Does HERQA provide feedback whether your application for accreditation or pre-accreditation fulfils the required components or not?

A. yes □   B. No□

3. After presenting accreditation or pre-accreditation request, how long does it take to get the first site visit services?

      A. Less than one month   □

      B. From one to two months □

      C. More than two months   □

4. After the first site visit services, how long does it take to get the response about the acceptance or rejection of the accreditation or pre-accreditation request?

      A. Less than one month □

      B. From one to two months □

      C. More than two months□

5. Is it bureaucratic to get the service from HERQA after a request for accreditation or pre-accreditation is presented?

      A. yes □   B. No □

6. Does the website of the HERQA where accredited and pre-accredited programs of institutions are up loaded satisfy both the public and the institutions easy access on the information sought?

      A. yes □   B. No □

      C. I don't know □

- If No, what alternatives will you suggest in this regard?
  a._____

  b. _____

  c. _____

7. Are there any condition(s) in which your institution's accreditation or pre-accreditation request(s) of a program(s) faced rejection by HERQA?

      A. yes □   B. No □

- If **yes**, were you convinced by the decision?
  A. yes □   B. No □

- If **No**, was there any enabling situation to present an appeal while the justification for denial of accreditation or pre-accreditation is not convincing for you?
  A. Yes□   B. No □

C. I don't know its presence □

8. The process of accreditation or pre-accreditation service was_____

        A. Control oriented □   B. Progress oriented □

9. To get accreditation on a given program what was the contribution of the external professionals' evaluation during the pre-accreditation visit?

        A. Very helpful □   B. moderately helpful □

        C. Not helpful

- If **C**, explain your reason?

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

10. Does HERQA provide constructive comments by revisiting the institution after it gives accreditation or pre-accreditation?

        A. yes □   B. No □

11. Did you get accreditation renewal service?

        A. yes □   B. No □

- If yes, did you get the criteria for renewal of accreditation before hand?
  A. yes □   B. No

How do you evaluate the period of renewal for accreditation?

        A. Very long □   B. long □

        C. short □   D. Very short □

12. Write your general comments about accreditation and pre-accreditation services provided by HERQA including your suggestion to improve the service.

_____

_____

_____

_____

13. Does your institution offer distance education program?

       A. yes □   B. No □

- If yes, does the period to get pre-accreditation or accreditation for distance education too long?
  A. Yes □   B. No □

14. Write your suggestion about accreditation and pre-accreditation services of distance education by including your comments to improve the service.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix Three

Dear Sir / Madam,

The objective of this questionnaire is to gather views held by private higher education institutions regarding pre-accreditation, accreditation and re-accreditation services of HERQA. Both program (Bachelor and above level) and institutional accreditation process are included in the study. Excuse the predominance of more open ended questions in this questionnaire. I guarantee that your replies will remain confidential and be used for this research purposes only. In addition the presentation of the data will not reveal the name of your institution. Thank you in advance for your willingness to cooperate in this research.

1. Basic information

1.1 For the following questions please choice the one that applies for your institution (You can place an(X) mark in the space provided).

1.1.1 Date_____

 1.1.2 Institution's Name _____

 1.1.3 Does your institution have:-

- Pre-Accreditation_____
- Accreditation_____
- Re-accreditation_____
   1.1.4   How many programmes you have been given:-
- Pre-accreditation _____
- Accreditation _____
- Re-accreditation_____

1.1.5Are there any condition(s) in which your institution's accreditation or pre-accreditation request(s) of a program(s) faced rejection by HERQA?

           A. yes _____   B. No _____

If **yes**, were you convinced by the decision?

           A. yes_____   B. No _____

If **No**, was there any enabling situation to present an appeal while the justification for denial of accreditation or pre-accreditation is not convincing for you?

           A. Yes_____   B. No _____

Should you have more comments about the above issues please use the space provided below.

_____
_____
_____
_____-
_____

2. (For the remaining questions write your response in the space provided or at the back of the page as deemed necessary)

- **Quality and Quality Assurance system**

2.1 How do you interpret quality in a higher education? In other terms what criteria would you suggest for claiming certain performance of a higher education to have quality?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2.2 What do you think is the rationale behind the establishment of the accreditation system in Ethiopia?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2.3 Which one of the two objectives of improvement (progress) Vs accountability (controlling) is emphasized in the accreditation system implemented in Ethiopia? Could you support your opinion with reasons?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3. Accreditation Process and Standards

How do you evaluate the standards employed in the accreditation activity?

3.1With regard to the minimum standards insisted

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3.2The way the standards are applied in the accreditation process?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3.3 Do you think that self-evaluation document should make part of the accreditation process? Please give some more explanation about your answer to this question?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3.4 How do you evaluate the procedures followed in the accreditation process with regard to

the reporting system(announcement of the   final result of the accreditation   process) .

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3.5 Is your institution provided with the needed information before undertaking the accreditation activity?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3.6 In your opinion, what problems and challenges in general are encountered during the undertaking of the accreditation process?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

4. External Quality Assurance system Arrangement

4.1what is your opinion about the organization of the national quality assurance and relevance agency (HERQA).Could you please provide reasons for your suggestion?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

4.2 In your opinion who should handle the accreditation practice? Could you please provide reasons for your suggestion?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

5. The Accreditation Process

5.1 How is your relationship with the review team? Does the review team have a chance   to give   you   some   suggestions   during   the   institutional   visit?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

5.2 What is your expectation from the institutional team review process?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

5.3To what degree do you consider the accreditation system helps you improve your institution's performance quality?

_____

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

5.4In your opinion, do the procedures in the accreditation system go in line with the main objectives of the accreditation process?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

5.5 How do you rate the way the overall way of a given application for accreditation is handled?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

5.6What is the direct outcome of the accreditation process? Are you convinced with the final decision taken out of the accreditation process?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

6. Strengths and Weaknesses of the accreditation activity

6.1 Can you identify strengths of the accreditation process (with regard to both institutional and programmatic accreditations)?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

6.2Can you mention some weaknesses you identified on the accreditation process?

_____
_____
_____

_____
_____
_____

6.3Could you give some recommendation regarding the accreditation process of HERQA?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

7. Do you think the accreditation system is important for the development of private higher education institutions in Ethiopia?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

8. If you have additional comments about the accreditation process of any aspect please provide in the space below?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Many thanks for completing the questionnaire. In case of any interest, I will be pleased to communicate the result of the research.

 With Regards

Essete Abebe Bekele

Appendix four

Requirements' for accreditation status
Section A: Institutional requirements

No			Information Provided	Information Not Provided	Remarks
A1	**Institution**	Name			
		Address			
		Mission and Vision			
		Name of program to be (pre) Accredited			
		Program aims			
		Mode of Program delivery			
		Anticipated annual intake of students to program			
		Total number of students currently registered for all programs			
A2	**Contact person**	Name			
		Address			
		Phone			
		Fax			
		Mobile			
		Email			

A3	Owner	Name			
		Address			
		Phone			
		Fax			
		Email			
A4	**Legality**	Registration document			
		Investment license/business license			
A5	**Organization**	Organizational structure			
		Job Descriptions			
A6	**Accountability**	Accountability of Head of Institution			
A7	**Academic Profile**	Outline of academic programs			
A8	**Administrative Structure**	Description of Administrative structure			
A9	**Financial Viability**	Auditors statement			
A10	**Tuition fees and payment regulations**				
A11	**Three year development plan**				

Section B: Program curriculum requirements

No	Curriculum		Information Provided	Information Not Provided	Remarks
B1		Description			
		Objectives			
		Instructional methods			
		Assessment methods			
		Graduate profile			
		Program structure			
		Curriculum workshop Proceedings (new Programs only)			
		Credit hours			
		List of prescribed student texts			
		List of reference texts for students			

Section C: Facilities for program

No			Information Provided	Information Not Provided	Remarks
C1	Classrooms	Number			
		Size			
		Number of Seats			
		Equipment			
C2	Library	Number			
		Size			
		Number of seats			
		Total number of textbooks			
		Number of reference books			
		Number of journal titles			
		Number of textbooks for program			

		Number of reference books for program			
C3	**Computer Center**	Number			
		Size			
		Number of Seats			
		Number of Computer stations			
		Number of Printers			
		Internet Access			
C4	**Language laboratory (if appropriate)**	Number			
		Size			
		Number of learning stations			
		Languages Supported			
		Main items of equipment			
C5	**Science Laboratories (if appropriate)**	Number			
		Size			
		Specialization			
		Number of work stations			
		Services (water, gas, electricity *etc*)			
		Main items of Equipment			
C6	**Workshops (if Appropriate)**	Number			
		Size			
		Specialization			
		Number of work stations			
		Services (water, gas, electricity *etc*)			
		Main item of equipment			
C7	**Program office**	Equipment			

Section D: Staffing for program

No			Information Provided	Information Not Provided	Remarks
D1	**Academic staff**	Names			
		Academic Rank			
		Qualifications			
		Evidence of Qualifications			
		Contracts			
		Number of full time contracts			
		Payroll Number			
		Release form last employer			
D2	**Administrative**	Names			
		Qualifications			
		Positions			

Section E: Institutional rules and regulations

No			Information Provided	Information Not Provided	Remarks
E1	**Academic staff**	Recruitment and selection			
		Rights			
		Responsibilities			
		Induction			
		Professional Development			
		Monitoring			
		Promotion			
		Dismissal			
E2	**Administrative staff**	Recruitment and selection			
		Rights			
		Responsibilities			
		Induction			
		Professional Development			
		Monitoring			
		Promotion			
		Dismissal			
E3	**Students**	Academic rules and			

		regulations			
		Code of conduct			
		Guidance and Counseling			
		Payment and repayment of tuition fees			

Section F: Report on improvements (only for accreditation applications)

No			Information Provided	Information Not Provided	Remarks
F1	**Report**	Report on improvements made as per the recommendations given during pre accreditation			

Notes:

- The application letter with all the above documents should be submitted to HERQA's director
- Please arrange your documents according to the order in the checklist
- All documents should be duly signed and have the seal of your institution
- Attach the bank receipt of pre-accreditation fee deposited in the name of the institution at the national bank of Ethiopia in the Account No. 0160101347800 with your application
- Any incomplete document will not be processed rather rejected at the spot and it will be communicated to the institutions.
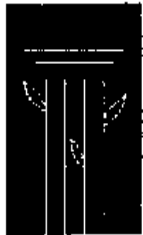
Appendix five

የኢትዮጵያ የግል የከፍተኛ ትምህርት ተቋማት ማህበር
Ethiopian Private Higher Education Institutions' Association

Ref. No. EPHEIA/062/2001

Date:- May 20, 2009 ዓ.ም

Johtamistieteiden laitos
Tampereen yliopisto

Department of Management Studies
University of Tampere

To whom it may concern

Date:23.5.2008
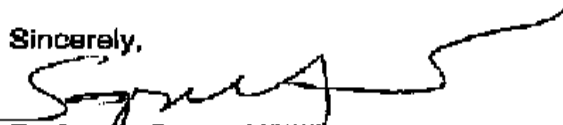
Letter of Introduction

LETTER OF INTRODUCION

This is to confirm that **Essete Abebe Bekele (30.08.1983, Ethiopia)** is enrolled in the European Master Programme in Higher Education (HEEM) offered jointly by the University of Tampere, Finland, the University of Oslo, Norway, and the University of Aveiro, Portugal.

During the two-year master programme **Essete Abebe Bekele** studies at the University of Oslo, Norway (autumn 2007) at the University of Tampere, Finland (spring 2008). In the third semester (1.9.2008 -) the student will continue studies at the University of Aveiro, Portugal. The student is scheduled to graduate in spring 2009.

In order to preprare for the thesis work done during the fourth semester, the student is collecting information and data during the summer. The preliminary topic of the master's thesis is *Analysis of Accrediation System in Ethiopia: A Study Focusing on Private Higher Education Institutions*. All discussions will remain confidential and used for research purposes only. Thank you for your kind help.

Should you require any more information about this student or the programme, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Professor Seppo Hölttä