QUALITY ASSURANCE IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION: THE CASE OF GHANA

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**Abstract**

This study explores private higher education and implementation of quality assurance procedures in Ghana, a country in West Africa. While focusing on the three main isomorphic classifications (coercive, mimetic and normative) of DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) institutional theory, this study examines how regulatory measures are not only designed to enhance the quality of private higher education institutions, but also how they impact the efforts employed by private providers towards meeting quality assurance standards in the environment in which they are located. Using a qualitative methodology, participants from five private university colleges and two private chartered institutions are selected as constituting the sample for this study. In addition, quality assurance documents from the website of the Ghana's National Accreditation Board (NAB) as well as documents from the websites of seven private higher education institutions are coded using NVivo 10 to determine the kind of efforts made by institutions to convey the message of legitimacy across to students and other clientele. Other participants are officials from the NAB, higher education specialists and retired faculty of public higher education institutions in Ghana. In general, the outcome of open-ended interviews with selected participants as well as documents analyzed found evidence of efforts private institutions are making towards meeting their quality assurance requirements through mimetic, coercive and normative isomorphism. These are indicated through institutional affiliations, conformity to mentoring (supervising) institution's programs, quality assurance requirements and measures established in conformity to the NAB requirements. Higher education specialists advocate that a specific policy aimed at addressing shortage of faculty members in Sub-Saharan Africa should be formulated to take on a more regional dimension. The Ghanaian private higher education landscape has a number of issues including shortage of academic and non-academic staff, dependence on adjunct faculty, and non-

compliance to time frame given for program and institutional accreditation. These issues will require a holistic approach involving the NAB and the PHEIs in order to find long lasting solutions. As a result of the continual growth of private higher education providers in Ghana, it is imperative that the NAB make the quality assurance process very welcoming to genuine actors.

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# Chapter 1

# Introduction

**Introduction**

Quality assurance in higher education institutions in Ghana began in the early 1990s mostly in response to an increase in the numbers of private institutions providing post-secondary education. To ensure quality and standardization of procedures in the provision of higher education, it became mandatory for institutions of higher education and their programs to be accredited. This study explores private higher education and implementation of quality assurance procedures in Ghana in West Africa. With a focus on the three main classifications (coercive, mimetic and normative) of DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) institutional theory, this study examines how regulatory measures are not only designed to enhance the quality of private higher education institutions, but also how they impact the efforts employed by private providers towards meeting quality assurance standards in order to be successful in the environment in which they are located. The study also explores how their efforts reflect mimetic, normative or coercive isomorphism. This chapter addresses quality assurance in private higher education, background to growth in private providers of higher education, the framework of the institutional theory, statement of the research question and concludes with a summary of issues addressed.

**Context**

Ghana, as a country, established quality assurance guidelines about two decades ago. The National Accreditation Board (NAB) of Ghana was established in 1993 under policy guidelines advanced by the country to address quality issues in higher education institutions. This was as a

result of growth in varied private providers of higher education (Fielden and Senadzra 2008). The NAB regulates both public and private higher education institutions and their programs.

Public higher education institutions in post-independence Anglophone Africa have been regarded as elite institutions following the British model with internal quality assurance measures and an external examiner system. During the pre-independence era, these institutions were controlled by universities in Britain and were thus tasked to similar standards. Sawyerr (2004) indicates that initially,

> ".... the universities were modeled after metropolitan examples and typically started off as colleges or affiliates of metropolitan institutions. For the former British colonies, the first postwar universities were set up as colleges "in special relationship" with the University of London. Staff appointments, syllabi, and examinations were controlled from London … and teaching and examination procedures were subjected to oversight by faculty from metropolitan institutions." 27.

The above pattern generally continued even after independence was granted to Anglophone countries in SSA. As self-regulatory entities public higher education institutions had, by definition, no need for regulation from an external body (Adjayi, Lameck, Goma and Ampah 1996). Levy (forthcoming) argues that regulation was not an intended theory of the Continental model, but rather instituted as a result of governmental tolerance for private higher education (PHE) institutions.

SSA governments' motivation to establish quality assurance agencies were several. First, the economic downturn in most SSA countries impacted governments' ability to provide public access and choice to post-secondary education during the 1980s. As a result, Anglophone Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries did not have the capacity to support public higher education. According to Assie-Lumumba (2006) higher education is so much more capital intensive than primary education that it demands ten times more what will be spent on secondary education. Public expenses on education in forty-nine Sub-Saharan African countries decreased from $10

billion in 1980 to $8.9 billion in 1983, even though school enrollments had increased by more than 50 percent due to population growth (Atteh 1996). Subsequently, access to higher education became a growing concern as enough public educational structures have not been established to accommodate the growing population. Sawyerr (2004) notes that enrollment at universities in SSA quadrupled from 1975 to 1985 and tripled from 1985 to 1995. These enrollment increases placed pressure on the resources at the public higher education institutions in their ability to provide quality environments for learning, and at the same time enabled government tolerance of private providers of higher education.

Reforms were instituted in the higher education sector by Sub-Saharan African countries, including Ghana to permit government broaden the scope of providers of higher education. Access and choice was provided to the increasing numbers of qualified secondary school graduands who were handicapped in their opportunities for pursuing higher education. Educational access could also be regarded as a mechanism for the attainment of social justice by equalizing opportunity for the disadvantaged (Karabel and Halsey 1977). Generally, in the Ghanaian setting, access to education is impacted by a number of issues such as socio-economic level, ethnicity and gender. Equal opportunity impacted educational choices based on elements that include school quality, cost to family, and rate of return. As indicated in Ballantine and Hammack (2009) regional variations affected educational opportunities for children from both the elite family and the working class family. The southern part of Ghana had more education accessibility than the northern part of the country as a result of colonial education institutions' dominance in the south during the pre-independence period. Moreover the south was more promising and open to development than the north.

Scholars have also noted that higher education access has not always been equitable to every individual. McDonough (1994) indicates that students whose families have cultural, social and economic capital have easy access to post-secondary information. It is documented that financial and economic factors and the expected benefits, impacts a secondary school graduate's decision to attend a higher education institution. Further, the human capital theory states that "investments can be made in human beings as well as in physical capital which yield a future stream of returns or dividends to the initial investment" (Langelett 2002), 1. By providing increased access to higher education, opportunities are created by individuals to invest for a future output benefit to the economy and to them. According to Becker (1975), a high school graduate could decide to attend a higher education institution if the present costs were lesser than the discounted benefits to be gained in the long-term. Thus obtaining higher education increases the value of human capital which also presents with both direct and indirect benefits. From the economist point of view investing in the human resource of a country would lead to economic growth.

However, various SSA governments could not shoulder the financial burden of providing higher education to all qualified applicants as a result of population growth (Atteh 1996). Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region that has had a continuous decrease of about 30 percent in public funding per tertiary student for over two decades (The World Bank 2010). To address the shortfall of decreasing number of students gaining access to higher education institutions, reforms in the education sector were undertaken by Sub-Saharan African countries. And PHE grew substantially usually quite apart from government plan. Some of the reforms that SSA countries had to undergo were engineered by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), for example, emphasized the privatization of

public services (higher education included). It was a prescription given most developing countries that had multiple issues precipitated by the economic downturn of the 1980s (Mabizela 2007; Sawyerr 2004; Konadu-Agyemang 2000). This prescription had its disadvantages as well since the implementing country's context had not been taken into consideration. According to Assie-Lumumba (2004) the SAP was regarded as the only path to SSA's development. In addition, Konadu-Agyemang (2000) is of the view that the benefits of SAP were outweighed by its disadvantages especially in relation to its impact on the provision of social services that were originally free to the Ghanaian public.

Though PHE institutions had been springing up prior to their authorization, there was an increase in the diversity of private providers of higher education afterwards. The increase in providers alleviated the burden on nation states as sole providers of higher education (Mkude, 2011). Included among these providers were religious private higher education institutions, demand-absorbing institutions, commercial and elite institutions (Altbach 1999; Levy 2007; Materu 2007). It is important to note that some of these private higher education institutions (PHEIs) are categorized as non-university level.

The Association of African Universities affirmed that private providers of higher education became involved in many Sub-Saharan African countries when national governments were not able to absorb the increasing "demands in each nation for higher education placements" in addition to the requirements for further educational resources (AAU 2007). Quality assurance became necessary for private higher education based on the assumption that, unlike the public higher education institutions, the private sector did not already have the internal quality assurance mechanisms in place. This was in addition to financial constraints and a weak human and physical resource base that places these PHEIs in a precarious situation and does not provide

the necessary foundation for the establishment of internal quality assurance committees. Thus quality assurance bodies were established to evaluate providers of higher education in the African sub-region and to determine whether institutions have the requisite resources and were following the required rules and norms.

Another salient factor that influenced the establishment of quality assurance agencies in SSA is the recognition that higher education has a significant role to play in the development of a nation's human capital thus fostering economic development (Materu 2007). Sub-Saharan Africa has the objective of indicating that its higher education system has quality, and capacity to compete favorably on the global scene. According to Levy (2002), private higher education institutions play varied roles. The roles include providing access, choice, and making profit. Private providers of higher education also complement a nation's efforts through human capital development, providing status to individuals and emulating other PHEIs in their bid to gain legitimacy. Importantly, Mabizela (2007) notes that "regulation of private institutions has largely been a reaction to the surge of private institutions due to the increasing demand for access to higher education", 5.[1]

The next section presents an overview of the quality assurance development in Anglophone SSA as it relates to private higher education institutions. In addition, it also discusses the framework of institutional theory and examines Ghana as a case study. The chapter concludes with the research questions and a summary.

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[1] Higher education has been variously defined. According to UNESCO's (1998) definition, higher education "consists of all types of studies, at the post-secondary level, provided by universities or other educational establishments that are approved as institutions of higher education by the relevant state authorities." It is also defined by Materu (2007) as institutions that have the legal authority to award degrees.

**Quality Assurance in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Quality assurance in SSA began in the 1990s when it became mandatory for institutions of higher education (especially private providers) in Sub-Saharan African countries to go through the accreditation process mainly to acquire legal recognition, and also evaluate and maintain quality in their program offerings. The significance of quality assurance is indicated by the rapid establishments of PHEIs in SSA. This study examines the efforts that PHEIs put into the quality assurance process through the variables of isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Materu (2007) notes that countries in SSA that lack quality assurance agencies include Botswana, Cape Verde, The Gambia, Malawi, Sierra Leone and Somalia. However, current statistics indicate that twenty-one countries in SSA have set up quality assurance agencies, and about twelve more countries are almost at the concluding stages of their establishment (Shabani 2013). In terms of strides made towards the establishment of quality assurance agencies, the Anglophone region (consisting of 24 countries), is ahead of the Francophone region in SSA (Shabani 2013).

Other factors that led to the establishment of quality assurance agencies in Africa included the deterioration in the quality of higher education offered in most of SSA, the rapid emergence of private providers of higher education that required regulation, as well as an upsurge in student and staff mobility across borders that necessitated the recognition of academic qualifications. Additionally, the market demand for education's relevance and quality in higher education led to new accreditation policies (Shabani 2013; AAU 2007).

Quality assurance in higher education is considered as licensing and accreditation prerequisites that an educational institution has to undergo (Levy 2007). Materu (2007) defines quality assurance as it relates to the Sub-Saharan African context as "a planned and systematic

review process of an institution or program to determine whether or not acceptable standards of education, scholarship, and infrastructure are being met, maintained and enhanced," p3.

Quality is also regarded as a relative concept and has been conceptualized by Harvey and Green (1993) as fitness for purpose, perfection or consistency and degree of excellence. Kinser (2011) agrees with Harvey (2011) that it is comprehensive and incorporates procedures, activities and policies that legitimize and enhance the performance of an institution of higher education. From these definitions some of the common terminologies that come up include quality, integrity, performance and self-study. Quality often focuses on idealized educational goals more than a representation of empirical observations about practice.

However, a valid and comprehensive quality assurance regime in a developing country sets the stage for the production of quality human capital that will substantially aid a nation's development. Developing countries must address private higher education quality if they are to compete in the current knowledge society.

Lim (2001) indicates that for quality assurance to work in a higher education system in developing countries, certain condition must be prevalent. These conditions include faculty having a PhD, a stable academic job, adequate resources, promotion of staff based on merit, and existence of academic freedom.  Thus quality assurance is effective in a higher education institution when the mission, support services, direct community services and objectives of the institution are clearly set out and assessed by an external quality assurance body. Lim (2001) admonishes that quality assurance measures in developed countries should be carefully analyzed by developing countries and then adapted to suit their environment. However, his assertions are problematic for poor developing countries where for example, sufficient human resources (such as PhD holders) may be quite scarce (Hayward and Ncayiyana 2015).

Comparatively, quality assurance procedures in Anglophone SSA are quite different from that of some developed countries. Quality assurance bodies in SSA are centralized whereas some developed countries like the United States, has a fairly decentralized system. In SSA, they are funded by the government, which raises questions about their sense of independence (AAU 2007). In addition, quality assurance policies are made by the government, thus PHEIs are regulated by national agencies. On the other hand, accreditation is voluntary in the United States and is undertaken by non-governmental organizations. To be eligible for federal government funding, a higher education institution in the United States has to be accredited (Lubinescu et al. 2001).

In Ghana the quality assurance agency is involved in both institutional and program accreditation, it is mandatory for institutions of private higher education to undergo accreditation (Fielden and LaRocque 2008) to acquire recognition. Higher education institutions, it must be noted, must have certain minimal requirements to qualify them for institutional or program accreditation (AAU 2007). These requirements are verified through a self-study document prepared by the institution followed by panel visits from the quality assurance organization. The contents of the self-study document include the institution's governance and administration, procedures, vision and mission statements, institutional integrity, educational programs, teaching and support staff, financial and physical resources (Alderman and Brown 2005; Manyaga 2008; Okebukola 2002). Recommendations made are benchmarked against the standards set out by the accrediting organization. And a determination is made as to whether or not an organization should be accredited.

*Challenges*

There are several challenges in assuring quality of higher education in developing countries especially in Ghana. For the institution seeking accreditation, challenges include inadequate funding to support the preparatory phase of the accreditation process, compliance with the basic standards, as well as inadequate human resource and minimal participation of administrative staff (Manyaga 2008; Okebukola 2002).

On the part of the accrediting body, challenges of developing countries include inadequate staff to provide long-term guidance to higher education institutions to assist them qualify for accreditation, and also bestow adequate monitoring of institutions already accredited. The inability of the quality assurance agency to effectively monitor unapproved higher education institutions that may not have undergone the accreditation process, but continue to offer academic programs to the public also presents a challenge (Manyaga 2008; Okebukola 2002). According to Shabani (2013), even though over sixty percent of the quality assurance agencies in SSA were established in the last decade, most of them "still lack the capacity needed to implement their mandates effectively", 2. Quality assurance stakeholders recognize the importance of human capacity development in SSA.

Notably, in both developing and developed countries, it is not always clear as to whom the accrediting body is accountable to (Alderman and Brown, 2005). However, there have been instances where accreditation issues/grievances have been taken to the courts to be resolved. There is also the challenge of the accreditation process being subject to manipulation and abuse when there is no watchdog authority overseeing the accrediting agency (Alderman and Brown 2005; Blackmur 2007).

This study focuses on the efforts private higher education institutions particularly in Ghana attempt to make through the quality assurance processes among others, instituted by Ghana's National Accreditation Board in spite of the challenges that it had to deal with. The next section will examine legitimacy in the context of quality assurance and how it is demonstrated in higher education. Legitimacy is considered an outcome of the efforts that PHEIs make when undergoing the quality assurance process. It must be noted that there is a dearth of literature on efforts private higher education institutions put towards meeting quality assurance standards as it relates to developing countries such as Ghana. Therefore comprehensive literature that was quite related to the research questions was drawn upon in the next section of this chapter.

**Legitimacy in the Context of Quality Assurance**

Legitimacy is denoted as being dependent on the external evaluation of the organization's activities. Thus to Suchman (1995), legitimacy is

> "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions." 574.

In this definition, Suchman emphasizes that a characteristic of legitimacy is to enable an organization to achieve its goals. Thus one of the outcomes of the efforts of PHEIs is legitimacy.

According to Scott (1987), organizations are influenced by their locational environment through conformity or manipulation. The environment plays a significant role in the formulation of objectives of an institution. Conformity is exhibited for example, when a higher education institution abides by the regulations established by the quality assurance agency such as having the requisite qualified staff, physical and human resources and the establishment of an internal

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system of evaluation. It is believed that including these factors set the tone for providing quality higher education in a society.

This study applies DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) institutional theory. This theory's isomorphic classifications will be applied to private higher education institutions in Ghana. Higher education institutions must have certain identifiable 'characteristics' that can be accorded the requisite recognition (Meyer and Rowan 1977) in order to attain legitimacy. Institutions seeking accreditation from quality assurance agencies through isomorphic concepts may have the semblance of those that have already been accredited.

Rusch and Wibur (2007) make an interesting observation about higher education accreditation as follows:

> "In higher education, accreditation processes for institutions, disciplines, or professions are examples of highly scripted procedures for attaining and retaining legitimacy.... accreditation represents an inspiration to attain status and legitimacy in order to belong to and mimic an entirely different set of norms, rules, beliefs, and values." 98.

It is worthy of note that the emergence of private higher education institutions in most countries, SSA included, was a 'surprise' and was started in an atmosphere of 'delayed state regulation' (Levy 2006). Subsequently, countries have enacted regulations, after the moment of 'surprise' to regulate and legitimize the quality of private higher education institutions through various modalities such as accreditation or quality assurance agencies (Slancheva and Levy 2007).

Meyer and Rowan (1977) further indicate that institutional environments have impacted organizations in several ways through isomorphism. Elements that are legitimated are embodied at the expense of efficiency. By implication, quality assurance in higher education has had impacts on their environments through isomorphic processes. Second, reliance on established organizations through isomorphism affirms stability and decreases instability. Thus, institutional

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isomorphism enhances the survival of an organization. They also note that, both new and existing organizations incorporate procedures and practices defined by concepts institutionalized in organizations and the society. Though organizations increase their legitimacy independent of the effectiveness of practices and procedures acquired, institutionalized services, products, policies, and programs among others, act as compelling myths that many adopt. Conformity to rules that are institutionalized is often incompatible with the efficiency criteria. Organizations that successfully embody 'structural elements' also become isomorphic with the external environment (Meyer and Rowan 1977).

In order to obtain legitimacy, a private higher education institution will conform to "institutional scripts"  that impact its activities. Subsequently, attaining legitimacy requires conforming to "broad institutional scripts" that in turn, influence organizational actions (Ogawa and Bossert 1995).  Quality assurance procedures could be interpreted as scripted processes that the PHEI has to undergo to obtain recognition. Quality assurance review is a periodic event that either reaffirms the status of a higher education institution or enables it to attain legitimacy in order to imitate a set of beliefs, rules and values. DiMaggio and Powell (1991) suggest that institutions must conform to 'scripts' in order to obtain legitimacy. This conformity results in institutional isomorphism that they differentiate as coercive, mimetic and normative. Coercive isomorphism arises when the legitimacy of an organization is threatened. Thus steps are taken by the organization to forestall that threat by becoming legitimate. Coercive isomorphism is propagated through regulations, laws and accreditation processes and mostly emanates from the state. Mimetic isomorphism results in an organization emulating norms of recognized legitimate organizations. Normative isomorphism is linked to professional values. Mimetic and coercive

forces play a role in the formation of normative behaviors "through the re-fashioning of cultural norms" that control professional practice.

The challenges to legitimacy include "lack of tradition, social standing, established support, and secure sustenance. Their norms may be not only new but even seen as contradictory to socially ingrained ones" (Slantcheva and Levy 2007, 6). However, through accreditation, private higher education institutions are able to attain legitimacy, once they pass the state requirements. And one of the ways that legitimacy is attained is through emulation. However, a valid observation is made by Slancheva and Levy (2007) which will be explored later in this study as follows:

> Different mixes of emulation and innovation, common broad approaches and niche searching, placid policy and strategy are found in different private institutions struggling to overcome legitimacy deficits and challenges. Legitimacy is pursued in varying ways with varying degrees of success. At the extremes, substantial legitimacy has been earned by a few academically strong and/or large universities, while the majority of institutions survive in a more precarious state, fulfilling an access and perhaps labor market function, sometimes without formal licensing or recognition. 9.

Thus different versions of emulation may be prevalent in PHEIs as a result of mimetic forces working in a developing country like Ghana.

This study determines the applicability of institutional theory by examining the three isomorphic classifications and their relevance to PHEIs in a developing country like Ghana in their interpretation of their efforts through quality assurance.


**Ghana as a Case Study**

*Background to Private Higher Education in Ghana*

Before attainment of independence from colonial authorities, Western education was made available to natives in Africa to equip them to become mediators and interpreters. It later

became a significant source of social change in the colonized African territories. The colonial British government granted authority to the missionaries in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) to establish educational institutions. And by the 1920s, the Princess of Wales School and College in Achimota was established. It was primarily set up as a vocational/technical educational institution, but soon became the basis of higher education in the then Gold Coast which was renamed Ghana after the attainment of independence (Atteh 1996).

Colonial Ghana was granted independence by the British in 1957. After becoming independent, public higher education provision was solely financed by the Ghana government. The funding package included full scholarship, boarding, lodging, and monthly stipends to students. Initially, a group of Ghanaians were trained to take over leadership in the public service from the colonial masters. Eventually, higher education was seen as a significant aspect of the ruling government's social policies. Between 1960s and 1970s Ghana spent as much as about 30 percent of her Gross National Product (GNP) on higher education (Assie-Lumumba 2006; Atteh 1986). However, with rapid population growth, coupled with the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Program policies, the government could not sustain its full sponsorship (Adjayi et al 1996; Assie-Lumumba 2006).

Conditions in Ghana's higher education sector in the 1980s deteriorated as a result of factors including continuous military interventions in the governance of the country, economic downturn of the 1980s resulting in the privatization of public services (including higher education), and population growth.   To address the demands of population growth and the increasing numbers of secondary school graduates, the Ghana government, in the 1980s, expanded its scope of higher education by increasing student intake, without a corresponding increase in the number of teaching and instructional facilities (Thaver 2004). The resultant effect

of this was a tremendous strain on physical, financial and human resources of the nation. Teachers and university professors in Ghana left in their numbers to other Sub-Saharan African countries like Botswana, Lesotho and South Africa that had higher salary levels and better instructional facilities. This affected the quality of higher education provision in Ghana (Court 1989), and ultimately propelled the government to take a more serious look at the challenge of providing access.

Funding for higher education in Ghana, however, decreased in absolute terms in the 1980s. It was mainly a consequence of the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) that privatized public services under the guidance of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. As part of the SAP conditions, there was currency devaluation and a focus on primary and secondary education, at the expense of higher education (Assie-Lumumba 2004; Teferra and Altbach 2004). It was believed that the rates of return for primary and secondary education were greater than returns to higher education (Psacharopoulos 1985). This impacted the ability of the government to provide infrastructural facilities for its educational institutions even though school enrollments had increased by more than 50 percent (Atteh 1996). There was an excess demand over supply in the provision of postsecondary education, be it at the level of the university, professional or training institutes. The focus on primary and secondary education resulted in Ghana's education system swelling up at those levels without adequate space to absorb the students at the public higher education level. Thus admissions at the public higher education institutions were very limited. This created a perfect chance for private sector involvement.

The implementation of SAP worsened an already bad situation. It led to a major reduction in the public education budget (Saint 1992; UNESCO 1998). Coupled with this was

the declining foreign assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa as a result of a change in World Bank policies towards higher education in the 1990s. It was based on the adverse belief that it generates minimal public good. The focus of the World Bank was more on primary and secondary education at this time. This was also emphasized at the Dakar summit on "Education for All" in 2000 (Bloom, Canning and Chan 2005).

Higher education's share of the entire education budget dwindled during the economic crisis (of the 1980s) reducing from 15 percent of the entire education budget to 11 percent. The FTE (Full Time Equivalent) funding of the student population was too low to provide a meaningful tertiary education decreasing from $2,500 a year in 1990 to about $900 in 1997. Meanwhile the growth in student enrollment numbers created additional problems such as the need for expanded library facilities and academic resources to accommodate the increasing student numbers (Girdwood 1999; Sawyerr 2004). Comparatively, data of 1998 indicates that similar FTE average expenditure on a tertiary student in an OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) country was $9,063 (Cohn and Cooper 2004). This indicates the differential level of higher education investment in a developing country in Sub-Saharan Africa and a developed OECD country. Even accounting for purchasing power parity the difference is large.

Further, some faculty members at higher education institutions in SSA countries like Ghana have had minimal graduate level training. This limited the level of knowledge imparted to students, and at the same time restricted students' ability to access existing knowledge and generate new ideas. Instructional technologies were often lacking and teaching methodologies were obsolete. Textbooks were either not available for purchase or were too expensive for the student's pocket. Students would rather write notes in class and memorize them for examination

purposes. These uncreative approaches to teaching and learning had little value in a world where creativity and flexibility were at a premium (Bloom, Canning, and Chan 2005). The World Bank Report (2000) indicated that a more enlightened view of learning was urgently needed in developing countries, which would emphasize active engagement and discovery of information instead of plaint assimilation of facts.

Moreover, as a result of the global crises of the 1980s, Ghana government's funding of tertiary education decreased substantially while the burden was shifted to families and private institutions among others. This shift placed an additional financial pressure especially on families in the low-income bracket. Thus the higher education landscape in Ghana was very gloomy during the 1980s and the early 1990s.

*Policy Reformulation in Ghana/Ghana's University Rationalization Committee (URC)*

Ghana's implementation of the SAP in the 1980s reduced state funding for post-secondary education. Consequently, the expenditure on the student population was too low to provide a meaningful education. Other contributory factors were rapid enrollment growth. Thus, the rapidly deteriorating conditions in Ghana's tertiary sector led to a major policy reformulation from 1986 to 1988 by Ghana's University Rationalization Committee (URC) (a body established by the Ghana government for higher education policy purposes). The URC proposed policies aimed at cost-sharing strategies, income-generating activities and cost-reduction measures at the post-secondary level of education (Girdwood, 1999).

To provide access to the growing secondary school population, the URC recommended that private higher education institutions be allowed to operate and also regulated. A further recommendation by the URC was the establishment of the Ghana National Accreditation Board

in 1993, to accredit public and private higher education institutions. A major objective of the accreditation board is to ensure quality (Girdwood 1999; Effah 2003; Okebukola 2002; Levy 2006). The opportunity granted private providers of higher education of varied categories aligns with the third wave as propounded by Levy (2006, 2008), which is, providing access because the demand for post-secondary education "exceeded the supply of public free higher education (2006, 222).

Since the 1990s Ghana had noted substantial growth in the private providers of higher education (Fielden and Norman 2008). This is in addition to other post-secondary institutions providing technical or professional training. The growth in private providers signals a decrease in the authority of the state (Kinser 2007). With the adoption of measures by the Ghana government to increase access to higher education, Ghana's Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER)[2] in 2005 was 4.0 for females and 7.0 for males (data.un.org), an improvement over the composite figures of 1990 and 2000 figures which were 1.4 and 3.0 respectively (Varghese 2004).

By mid-1990s another task force established by the World Bank indicated that higher education was very significant to the growth of the economy, cultural and knowledge sectors of developing countries (Task Force 2000).

*Ghana National Accreditation Board*

In 1993, the government of Ghana enacted PNDC Law 317 which established the Ghana National Accreditation Board (NAB) as the nation's quality assurance body for public and private higher education institutions. This legislation has been substituted by National Accreditation Board Act of 2007, (Act 744) and the Tertiary Institutions (Establishment and

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[2]The GER is calculated by dividing the number of students enrolled in tertiary institutions by the population (enrolled plus not enrolled).

Accreditation) Regulations, 2010 (L.I. 1984). Notably, there were religious private higher education institutions operating in the Ghanaian economy even before the establishment of the National Accreditation Board. The enactment of this new regulation constituted part of the delayed regulation since the establishment of private higher education institution was an element of surprise (Levy 2006; Slancheva and Levy 2007). The major goal of this law was to regulate and ensure quality in program offerings as well as provide accountability to stakeholders. Objective criteria for accreditation used by the NAB included academic content, staffing, physical facilities and funding of programs (Effah 2003; Okebukola 2002). The NAB is semi-autonomous and solely funded by the government. Established standards in Ghana require that higher education institutions seeking accreditation have sufficient human, physical and financial resources, minimum admission qualifications for students, and internal quality assurance mechanisms at the institutional level.

Higher education quality assurance in Ghana includes verification of resources, internal assessment measures as well as external peer review, policies guiding student admissions and staff promotions. The NAB accredits all post-secondary education in the country. Thus this study explores the efforts that private higher education institutions make to gain and maintain legitimacy through participation in the quality assurance process by applying the three isomorphic classifications of institutional theory. The facilitating role of government is also explored. In addition faculty members/administrators, higher education specialists and NAB officials with expertise on the quality assurance situation in Anglophone SSA especially Ghana, are interviewed as part of the larger data compilation. The following section explains the types of higher education categories found in Ghana.

*Ghana's Higher Education Categories*

The NAB of Ghana classifies post-secondary education into eight categories (www.nab.gov.gh):

1. University – "an educational institution designed for advanced instruction and research in several branches of learning, conferring degrees in various faculties, and often embodying colleges, schools and similar institutions";

2. University College – "an institution of higher learning that is affiliated to a public university and that offers instruction based on programs approved by the university to which it is affiliated and whose degrees/diplomas/certificate are awarded by the parent university";

3. Polytechnic – "an institution of higher or further education in which courses in a larger range of subjects, especially, of a technical or vocational kind are available;

4. College – "an establishment for further or higher education in the liberal arts (Pure Science/Humanities) or professional studies; sometimes part of a university e.g. Business College, College of Music, Naval College;

5. School – "an educational institution devoted to a special branch of higher education e.g. School of Education, School of Medicine";

6. Institute – "an establishment offering advanced courses in the professions, or in the arts, or science and technology";

7. Academy – "a place of study or training in a special field, e.g. Military Academy, Maritime Academy"; and

8. Tutorial College – "an institution which prepares students to take the examinations of a university or a recognized professional body."

According to the Universities Rules of 1989, the accreditation procedures are the same for the private and public universities. One of the major roles of the establishment of private higher education institutions is to address an unmet demand. This study focuses on private university colleges affiliated to mentoring chartered higher education institutions, and private chartered universities. The justification as to why these categories are selected is made in Chapter 3.

In Ghana, private universities begin as university colleges affiliated to chartered higher education institutions (universities) that serve as mentors for at least 10 years. These chartered mentoring institutions are not really mentors as the meaning of the word may indicate. They rather act in a supervisory capacity, thus in this study, the mentor institutions will be referred to as supervisors. To start a new private university college, an application has to be submitted to the NAB. The application will have the proposed name of the university college, academic resources available, timetable, indicating within the next three years how the objectives of the institution are to be achieved. The premises of the new private university college are inspected and verified and subsequently issued with a letter of interim authority. The NAB of Ghana has institutional standards that indicate minimum admission requirements for certificate, diploma and degree levels; minimum number of students that must be enrolled in a program; and minimum qualifications of faculty among others. One other requirement of higher education institutions is that they are required to prepare annual reports of every year's activities. In addition, there are institutional rights and obligations such as ensuring that course standards are at all times maintained. Educational programs on offer also have to be aligned to national education policies to qualify for accreditation. Institutions must also have adequate and stable financial resources as well as internal quality assurance committees.

**Table 1:** Number of Accredited Higher Education Institution in Ghana

| Type | Higher Education Institutions | Number | Of Which, Private |
|---|---|---|---|
| University | Public Universities / Chartered Private Higher Education Institutions | 12 | 3 |
| Academy | Regionally-Owned (West Africa) Tertiary Institution | 1 | 0 |
| College | College of Agriculture / Professional Institutions / Private and Public Colleges of Education / Private and Public Nurses' Training Colleges | 65 | 11 |
| Institute | Distance Learning Institutions | 5 | 5 |
| Polytechnics | Polytechnics | 10 | 0 |
| Tutorial Colleges | Tutorial Colleges | 12 | 12 |
| University College | Private Tertiary Institutions Offering Degree Programs/ Registered Foreign Tertiary Institutions | 53 | 53 |
| School | The Schools (for example School of Education) are part of the University system | - | |
| | Total | 158 | 84 |

Source: Ghana National Accreditation Website (February, 2014)

Table 1 indicates the breakdown in the number and types of higher education institutions currently accredited in Ghana. Current accredited private institutions are: three chartered universities, 53 university colleges, five distance learning institutions, 12 tutorial colleges, and 11 training colleges. During the 2008/2009 academic year, these institutions enrolled approximately 25,000 of the system's 177,000 total enrolment, a 14 percent share (National Council for Tertiary Education 2009).

**Table 2:** Regional Distribution of Ghana's Private University Colleges and Private Chartered Universities offering Degrees*

| Region | Number of Private Universities and Colleges | Private Universities and Colleges Percentage | Regional Population (Based on 2010 population Census) | Regional Population Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ashanti | 6 | 13.0 | 4,780,380 | 19.4 |
| Brong-Ahafo | 1 | 2.2 | 2,310,983 | 9.4 |
| Central | 2 | 4.3 | 2,201,863 | 8.9 |
| Eastern | 4 | 8.7 | 2,633,154 | 10.7 |
| Greater Accra | 32 | 69.6 | 4,010,054 | 16.3 |
| Northern | 0 | 0 | 2,479,461 | 10.1 |
| Upper East | 0 | 0 | 1,046,545 | 4.2 |
| Upper West | 0 | 0 | 702,110 | 2.8 |
| Volta | 1 | 2.2 | 2,118,252 | 8.6 |
| Western | 0 | 0 | 2,376,021 | 9.6 |
| Total | 46 | 100 | 24,658,823 | 100 |

*Data compiled from the websites of Ghana National Accreditation Board and Ghana Statistical Service, June 2014.

Table 2 portrays the number of university colleges and private chartered universities that are degree granting by region in the country of Ghana. The regional capital Accra, located in the Greater Accra region has almost 70 percent of the established accredited private higher education

institutions, while four regions (Northern, Upper East, Upper West and Western) do not have a single accredited private higher education institution. The Ashanti region has the highest population in the country (4,780,380), but it has only six accredited PHEIs which constitute 13 percent of the total. The location of the private higher education institutions also affirms the dominance of education institutions in the Southern part of Ghana during the colonial period (Ballantine and Hammack 2009). As indicated by Mabizela (2007) the location of PHEIs in the urban centers "is motivated by the possibility of large numbers of potential students, which would translate into more revenue", 27. The urban centers also provide graduates with job options.

In Ghana, private higher education has varied ownerships. Some of them are established in partnership with a foreign higher education institution, or by religious organizations. Others are also established by individual Ghanaians (Altbach 1999; Varghese 2004). Ghana does not have for-profit private higher education institutions even though they are expected to generate income. However, these institutions are tax exempt. Recently, there has been a proposal to withdraw the tax exempt status of private higher education institutions, and that has generated a lot of ire (University World News 2013). Many of these private tertiary institutions offer courses that demand very low infrastructural and equipment investment. And they run specific curriculums that are tailored to the labor market (Levy 2004; Kinser 2007).

Levy (1986) identifies three types of private higher education institutions namely: elite higher education institutions having high academic standards, higher education institutions that promote cultural differences, and higher education institutions that absorb unmet excess demand from the public sector. This third category is very prevalent in a Sub-Saharan African country like Ghana as in most developing countries.

Programs on offer at many of the private higher education institutions in Ghana do not generally include the liberal arts or humanities. Most of the programs offered either have a commercial or religious focus. This is because many of these institutions are self-financing and thus will offer programs that will attract full fee paying students as well as be beneficial to the labor market. Business studies, information technology, and religious studies are some of the popular courses offered by private higher education institutions in Ghana. The public higher education institutions are obliged to provide traditional courses such as the humanities and the liberal arts, since they are mainly state-funded. However, they have to generate additional income by admitting full fee paying students that includes international students from the sub-region and beyond (Varghese 2004; Levy 2006; Fried, Glass, and Baumgart 2007; Effah and Senadza, 2008).

Private higher education staffing in Ghana presents a challenge. The majority of faculty are employed as adjuncts. These adjuncts are mostly full-time faculty at the public higher education institutions. There is very little focus on research. Much emphasis is placed on teaching and service as opposed to research. As a result, academic output from PHEIs in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is very minimal (Varghese 2004).

The Ghana National Accreditation Board (NAB) is also presented with the challenge of guaranteeing that the growing numbers of private higher education institutions are accredited to ensure quality of programs offered.

**Research Questions**

The main research questions guiding this study are;

1. What efforts do PHEI in Ghana put toward meeting quality assurance standards?

2. Do those efforts reflect mimetic, coercive or normative isomorphism?

This empirical study examines Ghana as a case study, where there is a dearth of research on efforts of private higher education and quality assurance. This study explores the efforts private higher education institutions put towards meeting their quality assurance standards. This is done through the application of DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) three isomorphic classifications. These aspects are shown in my interview questions administered to selected respondents. Quality assurance is a growing phenomenon in SSA and minimal research has focused on private higher education institutions.

**Summary**

Ghana's private higher education system has been impacted by policies as well as other precipitating factors that have shaped it to the level that it is currently. This study explores how private higher education institutions are impacted by regulatory measures that facilitate their efforts at success. In addition, how these efforts reflect mimetic, coercive or normative isomorphism are addressed in this study. The background to the growth of PHEIs in Ghana has been explored in this chapter and it has shown that factors are multifaceted. The isomorphic concepts that these institutions employ in order to be recognized are also studied. DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) institutional theory provide the framework through which the study is undertaken. Ghana, a country in Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa has received minimal attention on issues about quality assurance in higher education. This is a country that had been impacted by growth in PHEIs as well as the economic downturns of the 1980s. This study's importance lies in the fact that it provides knowledge about quality assurance issues and efforts of private higher education institutions in Ghana facilitated at the institutional level. This research could

also form the basis of further exploratory study on quality assurance in SSA.  It enables an

extensive understanding of quality assurance in higher education in a developing country.

# Chapter 2 - Literature Review

This qualitative study examines quality assurance in private higher education in Ghana. This literature review chapter draws on the organizational theory of DiMaggio and Powell (1983) to inform the conceptual model of the study, as well as literature on quality assurance in private higher education. It is significant to note that none of the literature reviewed focused on Ghana in particular. However, a number of studies have shown relationships between isomorphism and quality assurance in higher education institutions in different settings and environments that could be applicable to this study. These studies are explored in this literature review chapter. DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) institutional theory indicates that the organizational environment emanates from cultural norms, symbols, beliefs, and rituals. Essential to this is the isomorphic nature of organizations, which are delineated as mimetic, coercive, normative and explored in this chapter. The research questions guiding this chapter are as follows;

1. What efforts do PHEI in Ghana put toward meeting quality assurance standards?

2. Do those efforts reflect mimetic, coercive or normative isomorphism?

This literature review section is further informed by themes developed from literature on research done about quality assurance in higher education and isomorphism. The chapter concludes with discussion on the relevance of the conceptual model to determine its applicability to quality assurance in private higher education in Ghana.

**Quality Assurance in Private Higher Education**

Quality assurance (QA) has been defined as;

> "…the policies, attitudes, actions and procedures necessary to ensure that the quality and scholarship (including research) is being maintained and enhanced…. It requires actions internal to the situation, but may also involve actions of an external body or bodies. It includes course design, staff development, and the collection and use of feedback from students and employees" (Gaither 1998, 3).

The above definition indicates that quality assurance is both internal and external. Thus for a private higher education institution to be evaluated, the following criteria including institutional mission, governance and administrative structure, financial resources, physical facilities, support services for students, learning and teaching resources and accountability processes are employed.

Quality assurance in PHE became popular for several reasons. Lemaitre (2009) indicates that quality assurance

> "…mechanisms were intended to recover the social legitimacy of PHE, threatened because of the perceived low quality of new institutions calling themselves universities but not really responding to the 'traditional' view of institutions dedicated to teaching, research and community service." (92).

Thus there was the need for regulation to provide legitimacy to PHEIs. Fielden and Varghese (2009) advances reasons why there is the need for regulation in private higher education. Reasons include protection of the consumer, especially the first generation student, who may not have any social network to draw upon to determine which higher education is legitimate; obtaining correct information about what is going on in PHEIs for decision-making purposes; and also "monitor the financial results of for-profits, since excessive profits could lead to removal of any incentive or tax exemptions they might have been granted." (72). Quality

assurance is also required as a result of accountability to government, students, employers, professions and colleagues.

According to Frazer (1992), the 1990s is known as the "decade of quality." In higher education, the term 'quality' has varied meanings and is elusive as its meaning cannot be fully ascertained. Several meanings advanced for the concept of 'quality' include "conforming to specifications," and "providing excellence" (Sanyal and Martin 2007). Gola (2003) advances the definition of quality by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) that is "specifying worthwhile learning goals and enabling students achieve them," as applicable to higher education. Therefore for objectives to be set, one must take into consideration the expectations of students, government and professional requirements. In addition for students to attain these objectives, an enabling environment for learning as well as teachers that are competent and well-designed courses are required.

Quality assurance agencies in higher education have varied designations that include accreditation agency, audit units or validating agencies. Their main goal is to imbue higher education institutions with the ability to self-evaluate. In higher education, quality assurance is noted to be comprehensive and include inputs, processes and outputs. Inputs consist of student qualifications, professional experience of the teaching staff and physical facilities at the institution. Processes include evaluating areas of learning and teaching, 'successes' and 'difficulties' of students, feedback from students about the teaching processes. Outputs include views of alumni of the higher education institution after employment for a while, graduates employed, and applicable external examiner's report (Barnett 1987; Church 1988; Frazer 1992). In Ghana for example, the Ghana National Accreditation Board has on its website a 'Roadmap to Accreditation' which indicates actions that a prospective higher education institution has to take

(Fielden and Varghese 2009). It should be noted that though institutional quality assurance has been in existence for a while (in Ghana's case during the colonial period), quality assurance as accomplished through national agencies is a fairly recent phenomenon Okebukola and Shabani (2007). In Ghana, the National Accreditation Board was established in 1993.

*Quality Assurance Mechanisms*

Quality assurance is divided into two types, namely internal and external quality assurance. An internal QA makes certain that a program or an institution has policies that guide its standards and objectives. On the other hand an external QA is conducted by an outside organization (Sanyal and Martin 2007). External quality assurance mechanisms include accreditation, quality audit and quality assessment. A quality audit evaluates the procedures in an institution to determine if control measures are working. Quality assessment and reviews measures a private higher education institution's practices and programs, and grades it using external evaluation procedures (Gaither 1998; Sanyal and Martin 2007). Accreditation, which is the main focus of this study, is defined as

> "….the outcome of a process by which a governmental, parastatal or private body (accreditation agency) evaluates the quality of a higher education institution as a whole or a specific higher education programme/course, in order to formally recognize it as having met certain predetermined criteria or standards and award a quality label." (Sanyal and Martin 2007, 6).

Accreditation validates the quality of a higher education institution programs based on the goals, mission, quality of learning opportunities, research, community involvement, administration and stakeholders' expectation. Through the accreditation process, a PHEI is either accorded or denied recognition.

In Ghana, accreditation of private higher education institutions through the quality assurance process began in 1993 when the Ghana National Accreditation Board was established. According to Okebukola and Shabani (2007), during the colonial period in Ghana, higher education was not the main focus of the colonial authority. Therefore higher education institutions were scarce. The University College in Ghana (established in 1948) was affiliated to the University of London, which awarded its degrees. It was not until after independence that the country saw an expansion in the establishment of higher education institutions.

It is worthy to note that the African region does not have a coordinating regional body on quality assurance. However, there are initiatives to establish a regional body based on the European Bologna model resulting from the UNESCO Africa Regional Conference on Quality Assurance in Higher Education held in Kenya in 2006. A regional body has not yet been established as a result of this conference.

Africa has a number of sub-regional networks including the Association of African Universities (AAU) Quality Assurance Initiative, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) quality assurance framework. These sub-regional networks have the objective of ensuring the quality of higher education institutions in their jurisdictions (Okebukola and Shabani 2007). However, those countries that are not under any of these jurisdictions, however, are left at the mercy of providers that are not accredited.

**Institutional Theory**

Institutional theory explains how organizations are able to change their culture and structure, or adapt themselves to socially accepted values and norms. Thus organizations become isomorphic when they embody the processes, structures and rhetoric prevalent in their

organizational field. Quality assurance frameworks are noted as reflections of myths that higher education institutions have to abide by under pressure. Quality assurance regulations work as strong forces to mold these organizations (Bell and Taylor 2005). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) explored two pressures for isomorphic change in organizations and noted them as competitive and institutional pressures. When organizations are competitive, they exhibit emulative tendencies in their search for efficiency. Institutional pressures are subdivided into coercive, mimetic and normative categories. Coercive isomorphism happens when there is pressure from the external environment on an organization or a private higher education institution, to conform to society's cultural expectation especially from the state. Mimetic isomorphic pressures indicate that organizations tend to model similar organizations in their fields that they believe are successful and legitimate. Normative isomorphic pressures are linked to professionalization when cultural support is obtained from local and global professional associations (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Scott 1982). Importantly, isomorphism also establishes the influential capabilities of the organization as well as institutional legitimacy (Deephouse and Suchman 2008).

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) further indicate that mimetic, normative and coercive concepts bring about similarities within certain organizational fields thus enhancing legitimacy. On a more significant note, Scott (2008) asserts that organizations (or PHEIs) have to conform to the rules and belief systems dominant in the environment in their efforts at interpreting quality assurance. The institutional life of a higher education institution consists of competitors, students, employers and regulatory agencies and they constitute an impact on legitimacy. Figure 1 depicts DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) institutional theory.

**Figure 1:** Depiction of DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) Institutional Theory
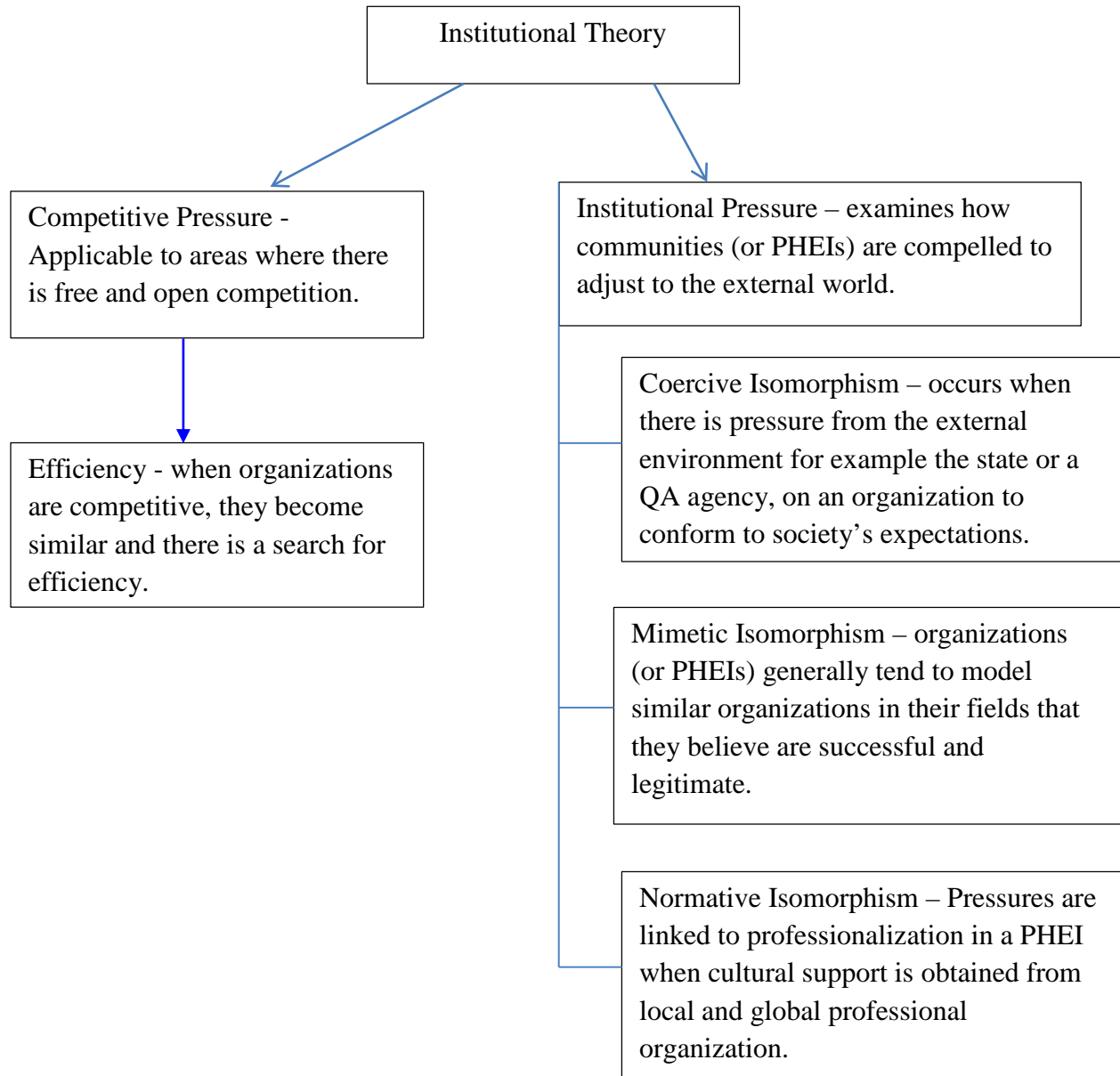
The isomorphic variables of DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) institutional theory are applicable to this study. In Figure 1, isomorphism is delineated as both competitive and institutional. It is defined as a constraining process that has the ability to control a unit in a population to be similar to other units that are confronted with similar sets of environmental conditions and thus gain acceptance. Competitive isomorphism, addresses fitness measures, and market competition among others, while assuming system rationality. It is applicable to those areas where there is free and open competition (Meyer 1979; Fennell 1980).

Institutional isomorphism examines how organizations are compelled to adjust to the external world. As noted by Aldrich (1979) "the major factors that organizations must take into account are other organizations", 265. Organizations contend not only for customers and resources in the external environment, but for economic and social fitness, political power and institutional legitimacy. Institutional isomorphism concept is relevant in the understanding of organizational life and PHEIs through its three classifications (coercive, mimetic and normative). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) defines coercive isomorphism as resulting

> "from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society within which organizations function. Such pressures may be felt as force, as persuasion or as invitations to join in collusion. In some circumstances, organizational change is a direct response to government mandate." 150.

Mimetic isomorphism evolves when there is uncertainty in the system that enhances the process of imitation. In addition, when there are vague goals, and technologies are not well understood, organizations may imitate other organizations (March and Olsen, 1976). Mimetic isomorphism has a number of advantages. This includes the ability of the organization confronted with vague issues, to address it through modeling at very minimal cost (Cyert and March 1963). Therefore,

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this process is undertaken to enhance the legitimacy of an organization that will model after like organizations that they deem successful or legitimate.

Researchers describe 'mimetic isomorphism' as enabling organizations to emulate or copy the norms and forms of recognized institutions, such as higher education institutions in their efforts at gaining legitimacy. Therefore, the accredited organization also imitates the values, rules, norms and beliefs of other accredited institutions. Through mimetic isomorphism, organizations are informed of institutional 'scripts' that have to be obtained to be legitimate (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). Scott (1987) argues that though an organization's objectives are shaped by institutional elements in the environment, organizations are still isomorphic because of mimetic, coercive and normative forces (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Morphew and Huisman (2002) examined how academic drift manifest in systems of higher education by drawing on institutional theory as the framework for the study. The study indicated that less reputable universities will emulate reputable higher education institutions over time. And this will result in similarity among them as a result of the pressures of isomorphism.

Normative isomorphism emanates from professionalism. Professionalism is interpreted as

"the collective struggle of members of an occupation to define the conditions and methods of their work, to control ….. and to establish a cognitive base and legitimation for their occupational autonomy" (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 152).

It is noted that professionals need to cooperate with nonprofessional bosses, clients, or regulators in order to be successful (Larson 1977). Two important aspects of professionalization are;

"the resting of formal education and of legitimation in a cognitive base produced by university specialists; the second is the growth and elaboration of professional networks that span organizations and across which new models diffuse rapidly". (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 152).

This suggests that higher education institutions and institutions for professional training are venues for the growth of norms among professionals. Wilkins and Huisman's (2012) study indicate that apart from rankings (normative framework) business schools in the UK employ the regulative framework (accreditation) in order to be regarded as legitimate. Thus as stakeholders classify accreditation as a norm, it is included as part of the 'normative pillar.'

According to Ogawa and Bossert (1995), an organization will need to conform to 'institutional scripts' in order to attain recognition. Barley and Tolbert (1997) regarded scripts as activities that continually reoccur and are characteristic of a particular environment. Quality assurance procedures that higher education institutions undergo to be accredited are examples of scripted procedures.

Through the application of DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) institutional theory, this study determines the isomorphic concepts that private higher education institutions apply in their efforts to meet quality assurance standards in the Ghanaian higher education environment. The establishment of a private higher education institution comes with challenges from within the society or the environment. Thus a newly established higher education institution has to address the challenge of being accepted in an environment where others have already gained ground. "This challenge is a two-pronged outreach task of (a) creating new, allegiant constituencies and (b) convincing preexisting legitimate entities to lend support" (Suchman 1995, 586). Similarly, Ashforth and Gibbs (1990) note,

> "both constituents and supporters are likely to prove most grudging when organizational technologies are uncertain or risky, when organizational objectives are contested or unconventional, and when the anticipated relationship with the organization is lengthy and difficult to exit." 182.

Thus among others private higher education institutions have to be recognized by conforming to societal norms through their efforts. Suspitsin and Suspitsyna (2007) studied the strategies employed by Russian private higher education organizations to maintain legitimacy with state actors. This qualitative study was based on interviews and document analysis. The outcome of the study indicated that higher education institutions in Russia employed the themes of conformity and manipulation among others to maintain their legitimacy. On the other hand, accredited institutions easily attracted and retained students than non-accredited institutions, suggesting the benefit of obtaining accreditation. Kinser (2007) rightly notes that "private higher education often relies on accreditation or recognition from a public entity in order to grant degrees", 272.

Giesecke (2006) explored the benefits of accreditation by a quality assurance agency of new private higher education institutions in Central and Eastern Europe (Poland and Hungary). In Poland the number of students enrolled in a higher education institution indicates legitimacy. Thus high student enrollment indicates that it is a recognized place for students to pursue an academic education. On the other hand in Hungary, a private higher education institution is accepted and recognized in the environment if it is accredited by a government quality assurance agency. This study asserted only the concept of legitimacy as conferred by a quality assurance agency and did not explore other constructs.

By application, this suggests that private higher education institutions of any kind have to comply with quality assurance regulations of the National Accreditation Board of Ghana to be considered legitimate by the state and the society.

**Conceptual Model**

Private higher education institutions globally rely on the quality assurance system more generally in order to operate in their regulatory environment to be successful (Kinser 2007). The conceptual model as illustrated in Figure 2 demonstrates DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) institutional theory. It indicates the framework from which this study is analyzed, that is efforts made by PHEIs to gain and maintain their success in the institutional environment through accreditation in Ghana. This study focuses on the three major classifications of isomorphism namely coercive, mimetic and normative. Coercive isomorphism is externally imposed, while mimetic and normative isomorphism are applied by the organization willingly as a result of an external stimulus or otherwise. The three categories are the concepts through which the success of private higher education is assessed in relation to Ghana's quality assurance process.

Studies on DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) institutional theory indicate that higher education institutions are impacted by coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphism. Higher education institutions mimic for example the norms of accredited and highly reputable institutions. Similarly, higher education institutions are coerced by external forces to respond to pressures in the environment in order to maintain a recognized status (Wilkins and Huisman 2012; Morphew 2009; Grimmet, Flemming and Trotter 2009; Gonzalez, Montana and Hassall 2009; Morphew and Huisman 2002). Accreditation granted to PHEIs indicates acceptability as well as the institution's compliance to beliefs, values and rules in the environment that it is located. A PHEI seeking external recognition must conduct its activities to resemble institutions that are already recognized. A combination of these three concepts in its application to a PHEI enhances legitimacy.

Quality assurance in PHE is recognized as a coercive force that enables conformity of a PHEI (Bell and Taylor, 2005). Research demonstrates a relationship between mimetic isomorphism and successful efforts of a private higher education institution (Morphew and Huisman 2002; Morphew 2009; Gonzalez, Montano and Hassall 2009; Grimmett, Flemming and Trotter 2009; Bell and Taylor 2005). As a result of their studies on mimetic isomorphism these authors determined that newly established higher education institutions will emulate prestigious institutions in order to gain legitimacy.

Bell and Taylor (2005) indicates that "…the mimetic process of imitation provides a means whereby organizations are able to deal with uncertainty by imitating the ways of others, whom they regard as superior or successful", 244. However, a significant outcome in the study by Grimmet et al (2009) indicated conflict in an institution where the teachers had wanted to emulate the values of a research-intensive institution. This clearly shows that emulation could create dissonance in a higher education institution in some circumstances.

Coercive isomorphism is noted as externally imposed (Santana, et al 2010; Suspitsin and Suspitsyna 2007) and often imposed by the state. The external environment is recognized as having a relationship to the success of a higher education institution. On the other hand normative isomorphism involves the emulation of professional norms of institutions. Wilkins and Jereon (2012) note rankings and accreditation are recognized as playing a significant normative role in a higher education institution.

The relationship between coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphism provides the conceptual model for this study and it attempts to make sense of the efforts private higher education institutions put towards meeting quality assurance standards and how these efforts reflect mimetic, coercive or normative isomorphism.

**Figure 2:** Conceptual model about institutional theory demonstrating its application to private higher education institutions in Ghana.

Through the quality assurance process, private higher education institutions in Ghana will conform to DiMaggio and Powell's institutional isomorphic concepts in their efforts towards meeting quality assurance standards and be successful in the institutional environment.

Private higher education institutions will conform to norms, beliefs, values, and rules of the institutional environment.

DiMaggio and Powell's Institutional Theory (1983)

*Coercive Isomorphism
*Mimetic Isomorphism
*Normative isomorphism

**Themes in isomorphism**

Studies on isomorphism indicate certain emerging themes which are discussed subsequently. Institutional theory notes that organizations become isomorphic when they emulate the processes and structures prevalent in other organizations to gain legitimacy. Organizations will lose their legitimacy if the 'rules of the game' are not adhered to (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). The internal dynamics of an organization indicates how values and norms are institutionalized. Bell and Taylor (2005) further note that quality assurance 'frameworks' indicate the institutionalization of myths that higher education institutions have to abide by. Regulatory frameworks of quality assurance agencies shape organizations according to their externally defined criteria. This is done through isomorphic processes that are normative, coercive and mimetic. It is important to note that none of the literature reviewed was found to focus on Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa or Ghana in particular.

This section reviews themes emanating from literature in the application of the institutional theory.  Themes that came up in literature are as follows: 1) Regulatory and normative issues 2) Isomorphic trends. These themes are taken from literature and examined together with the study's conceptual model constituting the basis.


*Regulatory and normative issues*

Literature on institutional theory indicates the normative and regulatory paths as the two foundations of institutional environments. The regulatory pillar consists of regulations that enhance order and stability (Bell and Taylor 2005). The appearance of a quality assurance agency signals to institutions of higher education about the need for regulatory legitimacy if they are to be accepted in the environment. Legitimacy as linked with the regulatory framework is indicative of the norms that have to be followed by institutions of higher education to gain

acceptance. An institution gains recognition when it goes through a process to identify with internal and external stakeholders in the environment.

Bell and Taylor (2005) assert that "accreditation is driven by the motive of self-enhancement to gain strategic advantage over competitors through association with more prestigious organizations", 244. Thus through quality assurance, less prestigious organizations emulate other prestigious organizations. Kostova and Zaheer (1999) note that multi-national enterprises have to abide by institutional regulations to be considered legitimate. In the context of higher education, institutional theory is based on the degree of institutionalization of norms and values which are dependent on the organization's internal dynamics. Quality assurance frameworks are regarded as the institutionalization of myths, norms and values that higher education institutions must abide by in order to be recognized.

Santana, Moreira, Roberts and Azumbuja (2010) examined the quality assessment systems in Brazilian higher education by focusing specifically on public universities modeled after North American universities. In order for Brazilian private higher education institutions to be classified as legitimate by their environment they had to respond to the demands of the external environment and be subject to coercive isomorphism. This suggests that a private higher education institution in Ghana may have to respond to the external environment to be qualified as legitimate. Similarly, Suspitsin and Suspitsyna (2007) studied the strategies employed by Russian private higher education institutions to maintain their legality with state actors. These higher education institutions in Russia employed the themes of conformity and manipulation among others to maintain their legitimacy. In addition, the accredited institutions easily attracted and retained students than the non-accredited ones, suggesting the value of accreditation.

Wilkins and Jeroen (2012) explored how ranking trends and conditions explained the historical development of higher education. The study indicated that apart from rankings, considered as normative framework, higher education institutions employed the regulative framework (accreditation). Further, there were linkages between the rankings and accreditation as students were most likely to attend the ones that are externally accredited. On the other hand, Giesecke (2006) explored the benefits of accreditation by a quality assurance agency of new private higher education institutions in Central and Eastern Europe (Poland and Hungary). In Poland the number of students enrolled in a higher education institution indicates legitimacy, whereas in Hungary, a private higher education institution is recognized if it is accredited by a government quality assurance agency. This study asserted only the concept of legitimacy as conferred by a quality assurance agency and did not explore other constructs. This is indicative of the value of accreditation as a regulatory framework, and also suggests that accreditation may be important in some instances and in others it may not be that important.

*Isomorphic trends*

Quality assurance in higher education is linked to recognition of institutions. According to institutional theorists, higher education institutions have goals that are difficult to measure, such as unclear technology and professionalized organizational actors that are easily influenced by isomorphic changes (Birnbaum 1988; Meyer and Rowan 1977; and DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Institutional theorists further indicate that the survival of an organization is directly linked to how the organization's legitimacy is perceived (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). The theory further suggests the need for organizations to conform to values, norms and rules of their

institutional environment in order to gain legitimacy and resources for survival, as well as respond to the pressures of isomorphism.

Mimetic isomorphic trends in higher education quality assurance are associated with less reputable higher education institutions emulating reputable institutions. During the isomorphic process, higher education institutions emulate the prestigious institutions that have gained legitimacy through mimetic isomorphism. According to Bell and Taylor (2005),

> "…the mimetic process of imitation provides a means whereby organizations are able to deal with uncertainty by imitating the ways of others, whom they regard as superior or successful. These models may be either consciously adopted or unintentionally diffused. In addition to any practical aspect derived from this, imitation serves a ritual purpose as organizations adopt what are perceived to be successful practices in order to enhance their legitimacy." 244.

Thus the imitation process is denoted as a ritual purpose that institutions of higher education have to undergo in the quality assurance process. Morphew (2009) examined United States higher education institutional diversity by drawing on institutional theory as the basis of evaluation. It was noted that though there was no significant change in institutional diversity, there was tremendous growth in the number of new institutional types that resembled already existing higher education institutions thus indicating mimetic isomorphism. This perspective appears to be linked to quality assurance processes of higher education institutions (Morphew 2009).

Similarly, Gonzalez, Montano and Hassall (2009) examined resistance to the introduction of policies aimed at combining the skills in accounting and business administration studies in Spain. The study revealed that accounting and business education in Spain addressed both competitive and institutional (mimetic, coercive and normative) pressures in the skills development of students.  Higher education institutions mimicking prestigious ones as a result of pressures of isomorphism are illustrated in Morphew and Huisman (2002). They examined how

academic drift manifest in systems of higher education. The study noted that less reputable universities will emulate reputable higher education institutions leading to similarity among institutions as a result of isomorphic pressures. In contrast, Grimmett, Fleming and Trotter (2009) explored how teacher educators gained recognition in a high research intensive higher education institution. The study noted that conflict is created as teacher educators emulate the values of a research-intensive institution through mimetic isomorphism.

On the other hand, Gayton's (2009) qualitative study among others sought to determine the impact of a college's institutional contexts on their approach to online education. Data for this study was obtained from eight higher education institutions in the United States. One academic administrator was interviewed at each institution and at the same time, institutional training and research documents were also analyzed. The outcome of the study indicated that a majority of academic administrators favored online education. On the other hand professional administrators rather liked face-to-face courses. Document analyses revealed that as demand for online courses increased at the colleges, challenges that had to be dealt with included establishing faculty and student online support services, convincing doubtful faculty about the need to be part of online education and obtaining technological and financial resources. The study noted that colleges offering online education were doing it in response to pressures from the external environment. Thus this study indicates how higher education institutions respond to their external environments through coercive isomorphism.

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) suggest in their theory that, there are processes that the higher education institution has to undergo with stakeholders and with the environment in order to be considered legal. The preceding literature indicates that through DiMaggio and Powell's

isomorphic pressures higher education institutions in diverse environments gain recognition and acceptance.

**Application of Institutional Theory**

The institutional theory revolves around the principle of isomorphism. To be considered successful in institutional efforts, institutions among others will emphasize on myths and beliefs as well as values. The study by Vartianen (2005) is indicative of this fact as myths and beliefs as well as values were considered as organizational building blocks. Abiding by regulatory requirements to be recognized in order to become legitimate is another requirement. Suspitsin (2007) and Giesecke (2006) present such evidence. In addition, Wilkins and Huisman (2012) indicate that apart from rankings, regulative framework (accreditation) was salient for an institution to obtain legitimacy.

The institutional theory also presents several applications. Three channels through which isomorphism occur have been noted as coercive, mimetic and normative. Coercive isomorphism is in evidence when higher education institutions in Ghana, are pressurized by the quality assurance body through invitations, regulations and persuasion to abide by the regulations of the accrediting body. Failure to abide by regulations will result in sanctions and thereby loss of legitimacy.

Mimetic isomorphism enables higher education institutions that are new to the environment to mimic the norms of the established higher education institutions in order to gain and maintain legitimacy. Higher education institutions mimic the course offerings at similar institutions than institutions that are dissimilar. This is indicated in Morphew and Huisman's (2002) study on academic drifting that indicated that universities duplicate programs offered at

similar higher education institutions than at dissimilar institutions. Similarly, newer PHEIs were more likely to mimic what their 'fellow' universities do. The historical analysis by Wilkins and Jereon (2012) that details rankings and condition of different types of educational institutions also indicated mimetic isomorphism. On the other hand normative isomorphism emanates from professionalism. This suggests that higher education institutions in Ghana could emulate course offerings or hire faculty having professional qualification as the established higher education institutions offered by similar organizations in order to be recognized as legitimate.

**Summary**

This chapter examined the institutional theory of DiMaggio and Powell (1983) which guided the framework for the study. The theory has been discussed and illustrated with applicable studies. Application of the theory was noted in the various studies analyzed. Research on legitimacy affirmed the theory's variants of isomorphism and their relationship to higher education institutions. One finds less prestigious higher education institutions emulating the prestigious institutions in their bid to be recognized. A shortcoming on this chapter was that none of the studies focused significantly on a developing country in particular in the institutional theory's relationship to quality assurance. This limitation is addressed by this study on Ghana. The outcome of this study could also generate knowledge for government, policy makers and PHEIs. The next chapter is the methodology chapter and it draws on concepts elaborated on in the literature review chapter as well as the introductory chapter.

# Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter explores the research questions guiding the study and the sequence of processes that is used to answer them. The main research questions for the study are;

1. What efforts do PHEI in Ghana put toward meeting quality assurance standards?

2. Do those efforts reflect mimetic, coercive or normative isomorphism?

**Overview**

This research is undertaken to examine the efforts private higher education institutions put towards meeting quality assurance standards and how they interpret those efforts within the framework of the three isomorphic classifications of DiMaggio and Powell (1983). 'Efforts' had been noted by Levy (2005) as having a distinct focus on attaining a specified objective. By application, the objective of 'effort' utilization in this study on quality assurance on the part of PHEIs, is its interpretation through the quality assurance process. Quality assurance in higher education institutions began about two decades ago and studies done especially in the context of SSA developing countries is almost non-existent. The growth of private higher education institutions in Ghana has given rise to the establishment of a quality assurance system that has the objective of enhancing effectiveness in both institution and program offerings.

DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) three isomorphic classifications constitute the theoretical concepts of this study and they form the basis of the interview questions designed. In addition, quality assurance documents from the website of Ghana's National Accreditation Board as well as documents from the websites of the various PHEIs indicating efforts they are making to stipulate legitimacy to students and prospective clientele among others are coded and analyzed. Ghanaian private higher education institutions selected as constituting the sample are private

university colleges and private chartered universities. The selection criterion is premised on the accreditation stance of these institutions. My justification for selecting these two categories of PHEIs in Ghana is that they constitute part of the educational group of institutions that have undergone the initial accreditation (of their institution and programs) as well as reaccreditation and are complaint to the NAB requirements. Specifically on the part of chartered private universities, their selection is based on the premise that they have gained full recognition in their environment and are capable of awarding degrees. My research questions are best answered by these two categories of PHEIs that have been recognized and reaffirmed by the Ghanaian society. Governments in developing countries regard legality of PHEIs as generating from quality assurance agencies (Lim 2001). On the other hand, PHEIs seek recognition for its own design and purposes. Various methodologies are applied by the PHEIs in their interpretation of their efforts from the quality assurance perspective.

**Study's Design**

This study applied varied methodologies in data collection to ensure triangulation (Jonsen and Jehn 2009). These included interviews of various categories of people and document analysis. Quality assurance documents from the website of the NAB were analyzed using NVivo 10 software (QSR International 2014). These documents include laws and regulations on PHEIs, quality assurance and accreditation. In addition, documents from the website of the PHEIs were coded and analyzed using NVivo 10, to determine the kind of efforts made by institutions to convey the message of legitimacy across to students and other clientele. These purposefully gathered documents included news items, publications and PDF documents.

The benefits of interviews in case studies according to Rubin and Rubin (2005), is to

"find out what happened, why, and what it means more broadly." It also helps in understanding a phenomenon. Yin (2009) indicates that the case study enhances knowledge acquisition. It also enables the researcher to observe events directly and interview people having roles to play in the study (Yin, 2009). A case study is defined as "…an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2003: 13). Similarly, Stake (1995) also indicates that a case study examines in-depth an event, program or activity within a certain time period. My main research questions seek in-depth description of how regulatory measures are not only designed to enhance the quality of private higher education institutions, but also how it impacts the efforts employed by private providers towards meeting quality assurance standards in order to be successful in the environment in which they are located.

The study also explored how their efforts reflect mimetic, coercive or normative isomorphism. Thus this case study method is recognized as valid for the exploratory study. Ghana is selected as a case, because it has experienced rapid growth of private higher education institutions resulting in legitimacy challenges, a typical phenomenon of Anglophone African states (Ishengoma 2007; Mabizela 2007; Otieno 2007; and Sawyerr 2004). Thus the analysis of the Ghanaian case will assist in addressing the phenomenon in the larger framework.

The methods of data analysis that I used in this study include content analysis of interview data and analysis of documents using NVivo 10 as earlier indicated. The interview data constitutes the primary data source. This study applies both the inductive and deductive approach in the analysis of the qualitative data. According to Lauri and Kyngas (2005) the inductive approach is used when 'there are no previous studies' or when previous research is minimal. On

the other hand the deductive method is applied when a theory is to be tested and the analysis is based on previous knowledge (Kyngas and Vanhanen, 1999; Boyartis 1998).

**Research Sample / Selection of Interview Subjects**

Rubin and Rubin (2005) indicate that the researcher must choose interviewees who are knowledgeable and experienced about the research problem. An interviewee having the required information about the research problem gives credibility to the research. This study selected interviewees who were knowledgeable and have the required experience about the problem that is studied. The questions that were posed to the interviewees include those that elicited perceptions and views from the respondents without being led to a particular viewpoint. Analyzing interview data and documents assisted in triangulating data obtained (Jonsen and Jehn 2009).

Ghana's higher education system is divided into eight categories, namely University, University Colleges, Polytechnics, College, School, Institute, Academy, and Tutorial College. In this study, nine private institutions (six university colleges and three private chartered universities) representing two institutional categories of private tertiary institutions offering programs in Ghana were purposefully selected for this case study. However, one private university college and one private chartered university declined participation later on leaving seven available for data collection. These two categories are also representative of the dominant aspect of the private higher education landscape in Ghana as well as its diversity. At these selected educational institutions, individual faculty and administrators or their equivalents were interviewed. This was in addition to nine other interviewees consisting of NAB officials, retired faculty members/rector of public higher education institutions and higher education

specialists/scholars totaling 16 respondents.

> Maxwell (2005) indicates four objectives for purposive selection of samples as
>
> …achieving representativeness or typicality of the settings, individuals, or activities selected….to adequately capture the heterogeneity in the population….to examine cases that are critical for the theories that you began the study with….to establish particular comparisons to illuminate the reasons for differences between settings and individuals. 89-90.

However, Maxwell (2005) indicates that one must have adequate knowledge about a study's setting before selecting a sample purposefully. According to Patton (1990) purposive sampling indicates attributes of particular sub-groups and encourages comparisons.


**Selection of PHEIs**

The selection of a sample of PHEIs in Ghana is based on the criteria that first, the private higher education must have been accredited within the last decade and have been reaccredited subsequently. This is because there have been instances where PHEIs have lost their accreditation in Ghana when they were due for reaccreditation, thus losing their gained legitimacy or recognition. Data from the website of the NAB indicates that there are a total of 46 accredited private higher education institutions (see Table 2) in Ghana. Out of this number, three are chartered private universities. The chartered PHEIs award their degrees and are not affiliated to any chartered higher education institutions in a mentoring (supervisory) position. The award of a charter by the NAB indicates that these three PHEIs have gained and maintained recognition for a certain period of time. As earlier noted, one of the private chartered institutions declined to participate.

It is noteworthy that about 70% (32 accredited PHEIs) are located in the capital region of Ghana. Six PHEIs of university college status were purposively selected from the 32 accredited

institutions in the capital region of Ghana, Accra. The homogenous sampling technique was applied to provide a representative sample of private higher education institutions (Patton 2002). Thus private higher education institutions that had similar characteristics such as human resources, and support services qualifying them to be in that category were selected. These institutions are used to explain the phenomenon of interest. Table 3 details the list of institutions selected. An administrator/faculty member of each PHEI was interviewed about the efforts PHEIs in Ghana put toward meeting quality assurance standards. The respondents were initially contacted by emails, followed by face to face interviews. The researcher travelled to Ghana to conduct the interviews.

The brief descriptions of the selected PHEIs are as follows:

**Category I**: *Chartered Private Universities* – Chartered private universities are degree awarding universities, involved in research and not affiliated to another higher education institution in a mentoring (supervisory) position. The justification for selecting these two institutions is to determine the efforts they make in their attempts to be successful in their environments using the quality assurance framework, which has resulted in the award of a charter. The two institutions in the category of chartered private higher education institutions in Ghana are as follows: 1. Valley View University (affiliated also to the Seventh-day Adventists Church) is located at Oyibi in the Greater Accra Region, and 2. Trinity Theological Seminary (affiliated to the Presbyterian Church and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church) is at Legon in the Greater Accra Region. All the two institutions have some form of religious affiliation.

Trinity Theological Seminary offers Certificates, Diplomas, Bachelor's, and Master's degrees in theology. Valley View University offers Bachelor's and Master's programs in Business Administration; Certificates and Bachelor's in Nursing; Bachelor's in Education, and

Bachelor's and Post-Graduate Diploma in Religious Studies (www.ttsghana.org) among others.

**Category 2**: *Private University Colleges* – Private university colleges are affiliated to a chartered university in a mentoring (supervisory) position. Their degrees and diplomas are awarded by supervising institution that they are affiliated to. These institutions were selected because they have had their initial institutional and program accreditation and have been reaccredited. Two out of the five PHEIs selected are established by religious organizations. The five selected institutions are as follows: 1. Ashesi University College is a non-profit institution and was accredited in September 2001. It was reaccredited in September 2005 and is affiliated to the University of Cape Coast. It offers four-year Bachelor degree programs in Business Administration, Computer Science and Management Information Systems (http://www.ashesi.org/).

2. Methodist University College was initially accredited in August 2000 and has successfully been reaccredited in 2012.  It offers Bachelor's in Business Administration, Social Studies, Humanities and General Agriculture. Master's programs are also offered in Business Administration, Theology and Guidance and Counseling. It is affiliated to the University of Ghana (http://www.mucg.edu.gh/).

3. Regent University College of Science and Technology was first accredited in September 2004 and was reaccredited in September 2011. This institution offers Bachelor degree programs in Business, Accounting and Information Systems, as well as MBA and Master's in Divinity and Theology among others (http://regentghana.net). It is affiliated to Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (and other local affiliates).

4. Pentecost University College had its initial accreditation in November 2004. It was successfully reaccredited by the National Accreditation Board of Ghana in December 2007. This

institution offers Bachelor of Business Administration programs, Bachelor's in Communication Studies, Theology and Master's programs in Business Administration. It is affiliated to the University of Ghana, which awards its degrees (http://www.pentvars.edu.gh).

5. Ghana Technology University College (formerly Ghana Telecom University College) had its initial accreditation in March 2005 and was reaccredited in July 2010. It is currently due for another reaccreditation. It offers Bachelor's programs in Telecommunications, Computer Engineering and a Bachelor in Business Administration as well as graduate degree programs. Their graduate programs include MSc Entrepreneurship and Technology and MBA in Engineering (www.gtuc.edu.gh). It is affiliated to the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology and other foreign affiliates.

**Table 3**: Purposive sampling of Private Higher Education Institutions

| Selected Private Higher Education/Chartered Institutions | Interviewee – Administrator |
|---|---|
| Ashesi University College | 1 |
| Central University College | 1(declined) |
| Ghana Technology University College | 1 |
| Methodist University | 1 |
| Pentecost University | 1 |
| Regent University College of Science and Technology | 1 |
| Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture (Chartered) | 1(declined) |
| Trinity Theological Seminary (Chartered) | 1 |
| Valley View University (Chartered) | 1 |
| **Total** | **7** |

**Selection of Documents**

As earlier indicated quality assurance documents from the website of the National

Accreditation Board were selected. The documents selected for analysis included Roadmap to

Accreditation; Tertiary Institutions (Establishment and Accreditation Regulations, 2011 (L. I.

1984); Information for New Program Accreditation (NAB/INFO). A.2; Questionnaire for

Institutional Authorization in Ghana (NAB/INFO.A. 1); Questionnaire for Institutional

Registration in Ghana; and Questionnaire for Institutional Re-Accreditation.  In addition,

documents from the website of the PHEIs were selected to determine the kind of efforts made by

institutions to convey the message of legitimacy across to students and other clientele. These

purposefully gathered documents included news items, publications and PDF documents, as they

relate to students, governance, faculty, institutional mission and vision among others.

A total of 131 documents were accessed from the websites of the eight institutions (seven

PHEIs and the NAB). These documents were selected based on their relevance to the research

questions. NVivo 10 was used to analyze the documents. The length of the documents ranged

from one page to 188 pages, and the cut-off date for document inclusion was purposefully set at

December 2011. Thus, the documents obtained from the websites of the private universities were

of two-year duration, specifically from January 2012 to November 2014. On the website of the

NAB, however, documents selected were those that had bearing on private university colleges

and private universities in general.

All the documents accessed were converted into Microsoft Word. The PDF documents

were converted to Microsoft Word using Adobe Acrobat XI Professional, before they were

imported into NVivo 10 (QSR International 2014). The research questions for the study guided

the analysis of the documents. In addition, *a priori* themes generated from literature guided the

selection process. Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that *a priori* themes enable the researcher to focus on the study's conceptual purposes.

**Selection of PHE Quality Assurance Specialists/Scholars**

The quality assurance specialists and scholars included officials from the two committees of Ghana's National Accreditation Board namely, the quality assurance committee and the accreditation committee; two retired faculty of a public higher education institution; a deputy Executive Secretary of the NAB; and a retired rector of a public higher education institution. Others are a Senior Education Specialist for the African Region; a Higher Education Specialist and former member on UNESCO Commission on Diploma Mills; a Consultant and Senior Higher Education Specialist for the World Bank. These specialists and scholars were initially contacted through emails, followed by Skype, telephone and face to face interviews as the situation demanded. My justification for selecting these specialists/scholars is based on the belief that they provided significant insight into the quality assurance process in a developing country like Ghana. The retirees were also selected because it is anticipated that they are neutral in their assessment of the quality assurance process in Ghana. Table 4 below indicates the purposeful sample of specialists/scholars and NAB officials.

**Table 4:** Purposive Selection of Quality Assurance Specialists and Scholars

| Specialists and Scholars | Number of Interviewees |
|---|---|
| Official from Quality Assurance Committee of the NAB | 1 |
| Official from the Accreditation Committee of the NAB | 1 |
| Retired faculty of a public higher education institution | 2 |
| Retired rector/ deputy executive secretary of NAB | 2 |
| Quality Assurance specialists outside  Ghana | 3 |
| **Total** | **9** |

**Data Collection**

An unstructured open-ended interview protocol served as a guide for the data collection. The researcher conducted all interviews in person and permission was sought from the interviewees to audio record. Recording of the interviewees offered an accurate data capture (Morgan and Guevara). The themes in literature as conceptualized from DiMaggio and Powell (1983) as mimetic, coercive and normative informed the interview protocol. All the interviewees agreed to allow their names and that of their institution to be published. However, for confidentiality purposes actual institutional and interviewee names were not included in the study. The duration of each interview ranged from 40 minutes to one hour, fifteen minutes and the average time for each interview was about 50 minutes. The interviewees were categorized into three groups, namely, administrators and faculty members, officials of the National Accreditation Board, and higher education specialists/retirees of public higher education institutions.

Copies of the interview protocol were given to the interviewees who requested for them prior to the interview. The questions were either emailed or hand delivered by the interviewer. These interview protocols were informed by the research questions guiding the study as well as the conceptual model.  As a result, the open-ended interview protocol for administrators and faculty members was divided into two sections. The first section focused primarily on quality assurance efforts and coercive isomorphism. The second section emphasized on questions that related to mimetic and normative isomorphism such as program identification, program quality and job market influences.  The open-ended interview protocol for the NAB officials focused on capacity building for PHEIs, affiliation and accreditation timeframe among others. The higher education specialists were interviewed on Ghana's quality assurance process and accreditation structure, quality of programs and quality of graduates. At the end of each interview protocol, interviewees were given the opportunity to express their thoughts on any related relevant issues that was not addressed during the interview. The interviewer recognized most of the additional information from interviewees as very relevant to the topic of study.

A few of the interviewees requested to have copies of their transcribed interviews, which was emailed to them. However, majority of the interviewees requested copies of the completed dissertation.

**Data Analysis**

*Interview Analysis*

The first phase of interviews analyses included transcription of interviews, preparing transcripts, memos, coding data, substantive and theoretical categories and summaries (Rubin and Rubin 2005; Maxwell 2005). Rubin and Rubin (2005) further suggest that ideas on coding,

concepts and themes can be obtained from published literature. They indicate that:

> Using published literature to suggest concepts and themes by which to code is perfectly legitimate. In fact, doing so will help you later on if you are trying to relate your findings to what others have already written. However, coding on concepts and themes from published literature requires care.  209.

I examined themes that emerged from the interviews both deductively and inductively. Second I looked for linkages and patterns between the themes.

After the transcription of the interviews, a thematic *a priori* coding generated from the literature review and the conceptual model enabled the coding process. According to Creswell (2003) *a priori* codes are codes that are generated from an existing literature before the data is examined. The coding was done manually by reading through the interview transcripts several times to look for repeating ideas that were relevant to my research questions. Each interview transcript was read at least three times to acquaint the researcher with the themes that would emerge from the coding process. This also enabled the researcher to accurately determine which thematic coding category to apply to words selected from the transcripts. The codes were applied to sentences/statements in the interview transcripts and themes were generated from repeating ideas (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003). Some statements did not have any of the thematic codes applicable to them, and others had more than one applicable code. It was noted during the coding process that multiple words represented each theme. Qualitative data analysis, is noted by Miles and Huberman (1994) as being made up of "data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification", 10, happening at the same time. Creswell (2009) also indicates that data analysis "involves making sense out of text...." 183.

Thus codes were used to generate categories and themes by aggregating similar codes together.  A second coder also reviewed data and identified major categories and themes based

on the research questions posed for this study.  This helped to determine the accuracy of the

identified categories and themes.  A peer reviewer read through all the data and coded segments

into categories and themes. Member checking helped in the triangulation of the coding and

analysis of the data.  Comparisons were made from the data to make sure it was consistent with

the text from the interviews and findings were supported by the literature review.

*Document Analysis*

Document analysis consisted of a thematic *a priori* coding, generated from the literature

and the conceptual model. According to Creswell (2003) *a priori* codes are codes that are

generated from an existing literature before the data is examined. In addition, thematic codes that

emerged during the coding process were also examined. Tables 5 and 6 indicate *a priori* codes

generated from literature on quality assurance.

A folder was created for the information sourced from the websites of the five selected

private university colleges and two private chartered universities. Relevant documents

downloaded from the website of the National Accreditation Board of Ghana were also put in a

folder for easy access. Each document was read completely, sentence by sentence for at least two

times to acquaint this researcher of the themes prevalent in each document. Some sentences had

no themes in them, and other sentences had more than one theme when they were coded.

A total of 23 coding themes were applied to the documents accessed (see Tables 5 and 6).

Two additional inductive emergent themes came up during the coding of the documents

(Boyartis 1998). These two inductive themes: 'charter' and 'corporate social responsibility' were

noted in the documents, and found to have bearing on the research questions. They were added to

the 23 a priori themes to total 25.

Nodes[3] were created from the 23 *a priori* themes generated from literature plus the two

emergent themes that came up from the reading of documents (see Appendix A). The NVivo 10

'drag and drop' coding tool was used to code the information downloaded from the websites of

five private university colleges, two private chartered universities and the NAB. This 'drag and

drop' tool function enabled the researcher to easily code large amounts of data from the websites.

However, the NAB documents were coded separately from the private institutions since it was

the authorizing entity. The 25 thematic nodes were used to analyze documents downloaded from

the website. Charts were generated from NVivo 10 using the 'Visualize' menu brought up by

right clicking the mouse and selecting the navigation button 'Chart Document Coding'. This

chart generation method was applied to data obtained from all seven private higher education

institutions and the NAB.

## Limitations

Analysis of documents on the websites of private higher education institutions had some

limitations. One of the limitations was data accuracy. Four of the institutions did not have a

search bar, and this limited the amount of information retrieved from the websites. The website

for Trinity Theological Seminary, one of the chartered private universities, was a work-in-

progress so not much information could be obtained. It also did not have a search bar. Similarly,

the websites of three of the university colleges (Ghana Technology University College,

Methodist University College and Regent University College of Science and Technology) did

not have search bars, thus document searches on these websites were rendered difficult. It also

limited the researcher's ability to obtain accurate information.

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[3] "Nodes are terms and concepts that are created during the process to designate properties, phenomena or keywords that characterize sources or individual parts of the sources. Nodes are of different types: parent nodes, child nodes, relationships and matrices" (Edhlund 2011, 11).

**Table 5**: *A Priori* Codes from Conceptual Model

| Themes | Definition |
|---|---|
| Coercive isomorphism | It occurs when there is pressure from the external environment on an organization to conform to society's expectations. |
| Mimetic Isomorphism | This is when organizations tend to model similar organizations in their fields that they believe are successful and legitimate |
| Normative Isomorphism | Pressures that are linked to professionalization when cultural support is obtained from local and global professional organization. |
| Competitive Pressure | Where there is free and open competition. |
| Institutional Pressure | Examines how organizations are compelled to adjust to the external world. |
| Efficiency | Organizations are competitive when they become similar and there is a search for efficiency. |

**Table 6**: *A Priori* Codes and Definitions Generated from Literature

| Generated Themes | Definitions |
| --- | --- |
| Institutional vision and mission | Defines the outcomes of education. |
| Governance and Organization | Indicates structure of the higher education institution. Its relationship with other stakeholders. Responsibilities of academic leaders are clearly stated. Faculty, staff, students and other stakeholders are involved in the decision making process (Bezuidenhout, 2007). |
| Faculty | Capable educators and institutional guidelines for promotion, appointment and dismissal (Bezuidenhout, 2007). |
| Educational Programs | Programs being offered at the institution and recognized by the accrediting institution. |
| Financial Resources | Stable and predictable finances of the institution (Eaton, 2011). |
| Curriculum design | Curriculum as aligned to the standards set by the accrediting body. |
| Academic content and organization | Content of programs on offer and areas of emphasis. |
| Teaching, Learning and Assessment | Outcomes of teaching, learning and assessment as aligned with the goals/outcome of program of study. |
| Student Progression and Achievement | Ability of students to demonstrate achievement of the indicated outcomes and set standards. |
| Student Support and Guidance | Support services available to students who have special needs as it relates to health, finances, welfare, spiritual and social. |
| Learning Resources | Facilities at the higher education institution that create conducive environment for learning, training and teaching. |
| Self-assessment/self study/ self evaluation | Written summary of institution or program performance, based on accrediting organization's standards (Eaton, 2011). |
| Quality assurance committee | A body that ensures that internal and external quality assurance processes are adhered to. |
| Administrative Support Staff | Qualified administrative/support staff capable of providing support for a successful academic environment. |
| Physical Resources | Institutions' physical facilities and presence that could be clearly identified (Stella, 2007) |
| Library Facilities | Institutions' well-stocked library with appropriate books that are clearly aligned with curriculum, as well as the qualified human resource to staff it. |
| Accountability | Responsibility for actions to stakeholders (Zumeta, 2011). |

## Informed Consent, Confidentiality and Anonymity

Approval was sought from the Institutional Review Board of the University at Albany before data collection started. Informed consent in writing was obtained from each participant (See Appendix C), and they were given the opportunity to ask relevant questions before the interview started. Before the interview begins, each participant is given the opportunity to sign the informed consent form. About eighty percent of the interviewees gave permission for their names and that of their institutions to be used. However, to maintain participant confidentiality and anonymity, names of participants and their institution's names were not used to analyze data in this study. In addition, participant confidentiality and anonymity were also ensured if they did not want their names quoted in the study.

## Triangulation, Validity and Reliability in Data Analysis

Triangulation is defined as "using a variety of sources and methods" (Fielding and Fieldling 1986). Triangulation provides the researcher with an opportunity to gain a broader perspective and understanding of the issues being explored (Jonsen and Jehn 2009). In this study information was obtained from administrators/faculty members of PHEIs, retired faculty/rector of public HEIs and specialists to guarantee triangulation. Other sources of information to aid data triangulation were document analysis, obtained from the website of the NAB and seven PHEIs as earlier indicated.

Maxwell (2005) defines validity as a "straightforward, commonsense way to refer to the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, and other sort of account", 106. Two threats to validity are noted as the bias of the researcher, and the impact on interviewees, called "reactivity." Sometimes the researcher affects what the interviewee says and that could impact validity (Maxwell 2005). As a researcher I was cautious about "reactivity"

in data obtained from interviewees. Reliability indicates the consistency in results of data collected by an instrument (Behling and Law 2000). In order to address the validity and reliability in data collected among others, the researcher analyzed emerging codes from data as well took cognizance of the *a priori* coding methodology.

**Summary**

This methodology chapter examined the study's design, how the research sample, consisting of interviewees and documents were selected and the categories from which the selections were made. The basis for the selection of categories of PHEIs was explored. Data collection methodologies, their analysis and limitations were detailed out. The analysis of interviews included preparing transcripts, memos and data coding. NVivo 10 was used to analyze documents downloaded from the websites of all the eight institutions. To ensure triangulation, a variety of sources were analyzed. These included interviews held with administrators/faculty members, NAB officials, higher education specialists and document analysis. Participant confidentiality and anonymity was maintained during data collection and analysis. Interviewees were also given the opportunity to make salient statements that were not covered in the interview protocol. Some limitations of the document analysis were data accuracy and the lack of search bars for a number of the private higher education institutions which hindered document retrieval. The next section analyzes data obtained which constitutes the main thrust of this study.

# Chapter 4: Part I – Findings and Analysis

**Introduction**

The focus of this study explores how the efforts of private higher education institutions reflect mimetic, coercive and normative isomorphism as indicated by DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) institutional theory. This chapter presents the findings and analyzes the outcome of open-ended interviews held with higher education specialists, retired faculty members/retired rector of public higher education institutions and NAB officials. The study found evidence of efforts institutions are making towards meeting their quality assurance requirements through mimetic, coercive and normative isomorphism. The main research questions guiding the study are:

1. What efforts do PHEI in Ghana put toward meeting quality assurance standards?

2. Do those efforts reflect mimetic, coercive or normative isomorphism?

Quality assurance guidelines were established over two decades ago to address quality issues in higher education institutions in Ghana. Interviewees were asked open-ended questions that revolved around efforts private higher education institutions were making in their attempts at being recognized in their environment, their views about the quality assurance process and the impact it has made in Ghana, quality of programs offered as well as quality of graduates, and how the quality assurance process can be improved. The outcome of the interviews is delineated according themes generated (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003; Creswell 2003; Miles and Huberman 1994). A total of nine respondents were interviewed for this section and they were designated with letter codes for confidentiality purposes.

**Higher Education Specialists and Retired Faculty/Rector**

Seven major themes were generated from the interview analysis of six respondents (specialists and retired faculty) regarding quality assurance in private higher education in Ghana. They are as follows:

1. Satisfaction with Ghana's quality assurance system,

2. Program quality and nature,

3. Influence on programs,

4. Quality of graduates,

5. Strengthening the quality assurance process, and

7. Challenges.

**Satisfaction with Ghana's Quality Assurance System**

The National Accreditation Board (NAB) of Ghana was established in 1993 under policy guidelines advanced by the country to address quality issues in higher education institutions. This was as a result of growth in varied private providers of higher education (Fielden and Senadzra 2008). The NAB regulates both public and private higher education institutions and their programs. It also supervises higher education institutions in Ghana and provides the legal framework that they must operate within.

Objective criteria for accreditation used by the NAB included academic content, staffing, physical facilities and funding of the program (Effah 2003; Okebukola 2002). The NAB is semi-autonomous and funded by the government. Established standards in Ghana require that higher education institutions seeking accreditation have sufficient human, physical and financial

resources, minimum admission qualifications for students, and internal quality assurance mechanisms at the institutional level.

All the respondents endorsed the establishment of the NAB structures, in spite of the fact that they had suggestions for areas that needed improvement to enhance the quality assurance process. They indicate that without the NAB providing the *coercive* force, Ghana's higher education landscape would have been uncontrollable. The following is an excerpt from a higher education specialist, who was a former member on UNESCO Commission on Diploma Mills, indicating two of the ground rules guiding Ghana's National Accreditation Board that has prevented diploma mills from taking root in the country.

> We would be plagued by sham operations and diploma mills if not for NAB. NAB's two guiding principles are sacrosanct: 1. The definition of tertiary education, and (2) Institutions are forbidden by law to advertise or recruit staff or students until they are accredited. This is what makes the difference. (KN, Specialist).

Another higher education specialist, a Senior Education Specialist in the African Region, also indicates that NAB is one of the better organized ones compared to some countries in Francophone Africa. Its regulations serve as deterrent to people with ulterior motives. He had this collaborative comment to make:

> My thinking is that you have a system in place. A system created by the people and a kind of system which is indicative of telling which institution is good and which one is not.… In a way this serves as a deterrent to people who just want to come in and run some programs and make money. They get to know that they can't just do that. It is a silent message going to people who want to invest in education that they cannot just do what they like. (MP, Specialist).

Thus the NAB plays a regulatory role and provides guidance to private higher education institutions. Institutions know that they have to abide by the regulations of the NAB or they would lack the recognition that they require.

Materu (2007) notes that the establishment of quality assurance agencies for higher education institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa, is indicative of the role that human capital plays in a nation's development. The quality assurance process in Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa in general and Ghana in particular, signifies the recognition of the relationship between an educated citizenry and a country's development. Views expressed indicate satisfaction with the quality assurance system in place that protects consumers and assist stakeholders with sincere motives. One specialist noted that the establishment of the NAB is a means to protect well-meaning investors and consumers.

Respondents recognized the regulatory pillar of the process that enhances order and stability. The NAB's norms and rules have to be followed by private higher education institutions in order not to lose their legitimacy. Further validating examples from respondents indicating satisfaction are as follows: "NAB is founded on solid principles…the legislative instrument and the accreditation procedures are excellent." (KN, Specialist). A World Bank specialist stated:

> The other thing that really struck me especially in Ghana was just the process of having an accreditation process clearly spelt out rules and requirements and conditions and goals which were really important for the private institutions (HF, Specialist).

However, respondents (retired faculty) in Ghana expressed some reservations about the quality assurance process. They acknowledged the stringent process of the quality assurance process, but noted that it did not allow too much room for innovation on the part of the accredited institution. This was partly because private higher education institutions were expected to behave like the public institutions in Ghana to a large extent, since most of them were mentored (supervised) by public higher education institutions. The following excerpt

critiqued the NAB for not being facilitative and not allowing the private institutions to be

innovative:

> I think the National Accreditation Board tries to be quite rigorous in terms of institutional accreditation, facilities, libraries, teachers and other things so I think that they do quite a lot. However, I think that in the twenty-first century they tend to place emphasis on the wrong things. Like, first of all, they insist on physical library and number of books. I wish that they will say that you must have an electronic library, and every student of yours should have a laptop….By facilitating for example, by now we should have had a dedicated ICT backbone for all higher education, then you are facilitating…the National Accreditation Board (NAB) is really doing its best but it is just an attitude of a national public psyche. (AS, Retired Faculty).

Likewise, a retired rector of a public institution believes that even though the NAB assures the

minimum standard of infrastructure, it should be more facilitative. He notes that:

> I tend to criticize them but they have made a lot of impact. Because they assure a certain minimum standard of infrastructure, of teachers and the rest. What I am thinking is that they can be more facilitative. They are doing an excellent job. In fact that is the reason why they don't see that they need to change their ways because they are doing a good job. (BP, Retired Rector)

The foregoing indicates the approval that the NAB has garnered.


## Program Quality and Nature

In this section, quality has to be understood in quality assurance terms. What is included

is quality in that sense, and also program quality in the context of programs offered at the PHEIs.

These are not the full range of programs, and so program quality can be understood to be with

respect to the narrow set of programs offered.

A major objective of the accreditation process is to ensure quality (Girdwood 1999; Effah

2003; Okebukola 2002). Most of the private higher education institutions in Ghana offer courses

that demand very low infrastructural and equipment investment. And they run specific

curriculums that are tailored to the labor market (Levy 2004; Kinser 2007). Thus there is an

element of emulation in the program offerings of the private higher education institutions. A

higher education specialist affirmed that his study of private higher education institutions in developing African countries generally show that they offer courses that did not require much investment and they complement the efforts of the public higher education institutions. The following excerpt provides noteworthy comment:

> At the time that I was looking at them in Africa generally, very few of the private institutions were offering the expensive courses. They say 'we are not offering sciences because building a science lab costs a lot of money.' So they were doing business …that did not require much of an investment. But they were attracting students.
> (HF, Specialist).

Generally, most private higher education institutions start with "areas of easy entry" as a retired rector of a public higher education institution in Ghana noted in an interview for this study.

Interview data also indicates that the respondents had perceptions that the quality of programs offered by the private institutions was of mixed quality. The following specialist's (former member on UNESCO Commission on Diploma Mills) comments represent the views expressed. "Private higher education institutions run the gamut from excellent to terrible." (KN, Specialist). A World Bank specialist was of the opinion that program quality "were somehow mixed" (Altbach 2005; Fried, Glass, and Baumgart 2007).

While there was concern about the quality of programs offered by private higher education institution, there was also a general view that some private higher education institutions offer high quality programs whereas some public institutions offer low quality programs, and therefore, public institutions should be held to the same standards as the private higher education institutions during accreditation. The following specialist comment represents this view:

> Some private institutions offer top-notch programs and some public institutions offer useless I mean weak programs. So whoever is doing it must … apply the same standards for the public as well as the private institutions. And this is the area where accreditation started. (MP, Specialist).

The quality of a program has been linked to the supervisor's (most likely a public institution) program quality. It is suggested that a mentor's (supervisor's) program's quality is transferred to the mentee institution. This is because most of the adjuncts teaching in the private sector are from the public sector. The following excerpt illustrates this point:

> In the main I will say they are of reasonably high quality. Given that in any case most of the teachers who teach there are from the public universities anyway…[Also] I think the programs offered are too limited. You can almost predict. Management, Theology, and IT. (BJ, Retired Faculty)

Quality higher education programs have been noted to impact the economic development of a nation (Materu 2007). The science and engineering programs have made the most impact in a nation's development. Some of the respondents were of the perception that most private higher education institutions were less likely to go into the applied sciences, engineering or the physical sciences as a result of the high startup cost. They further indicated that government should intervene as a matter of policy to facilitate a nation's economic development by concentrating on the sciences. A higher education specialist had this to say:

> The government should focus on the important sectors where the private sector is not able or ineligible, or sectors that are important to the economy or for the future of the country where there is no private investment. The other strategy which government can use in some places is that the government provides scholarships in areas where the private sector is not invested. So the private institutions see the scholarships from the government and they say 'Oh I will set up programs in this area so that we can also be part of it.' This is a way government can help shape the way for private institutions in their program offerings. (MP, Specialist)

Equally, a retired rector of a public higher education institution in Ghana added that at the policy level, the government should use its limited resources and concentrate on such infrastructural intensive programs such as Architecture, Engineering, Medicine and Pharmacy instead of

competing with the private university colleges by offering similar programs like business

management. He commented as follows:

> What must be done should be at the policy level whereby the government says 'oh now
> Economics and Business and other programs can be done at the private universities so I
> will use my limited national resources to concentrate on these other areas to complement.
> But rather, the public universities are actually becoming Arts universities. All our
> Polytechnics have become Social Science institutions. So it is a policy failure. If I am in
> government the answer is, 'since the private universities are concentrating in Arts and
> Social Sciences, I (Government) will rather concentrate on the hard sciences'. (BP,
> Retired Rector).

Thus program quality at private higher education institutions generated mixed perceptions.

**Influence on Programs**

A repeated theme among the specialists and retired faculty was about influences on

programs offered by private higher education institutions. Fifty percent of the respondents

argued that private higher education institutions in Ghana are mainly focused on emulative

programs that students would be interested in, have the job market in mind and have low

infrastructural layout (Varghese 2004). Globally, private higher education indicates similar

tendencies by offering emulative programs, low start-up cost, and frequently employing part-

time faculty among others (Altbach 2005; Fried, Glass, and Baumgart 2007).  According to Levy

(2003) programs of study given prominence by profit-oriented private higher education

institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa were somehow connected to the job market. A specialist

commented:

> The job market is the primary consideration, but it's all wrapped up together: the private
> higher education institution won't get students and therefore won't get income unless
> they offer what the public wants – and the public wants jobs after graduation.
> (KN, Specialist)

However, a senior education specialist in the African region questioned this type of program

offering, noting whether this type of program offering was what a nation needed to develop. He

stated:

> …their response to demand in the sense that they are addressing the segment of the
> market where that they know they will get more students to come right? Many are
> offering business programs because they know students will come. Now are these
> programs that are most needed in Ghana? (Specialist, MP)

Data obtained from the respondents note that though the accredited private institutions in

Ghana are offering similar programs, a few of them were now venturing into the engineering and

the health sciences to enable competition with the public universities as well. The following

retired rector's response indicates the progression of private higher education institutions into the

sciences in Ghana:

> When you are starting a university, unless you have big stack of money or you are
> dependent upon the state, you go for the areas of easy entry. You don't go for the areas
> where you will require heavy engineering … or Medicine where you must have a
> hospital.  But soon they (private universities) moved there. Already, Valley View
> University is moving into the Sciences,…Central University College is adding
> Engineering, Pharmacy and Architecture. It is a normal progression. (BP, Retired Rector)

According to an administrator from one of the private university colleges in Ghana, funding for

such science/engineering programs are obtained from a number of sources including internally

generated funds (IGFs), funding from individuals, local and foreign banks.


**Quality of Graduates**

The respondents had mixed perceptions about the quality of graduates from private

higher education institutions. A retired faculty from Ghana suggested that since most of the

private university colleges in Ghana were being mentored (supervised) by the public universities,

the quality of the graduates would be of similar quality as that from the public tertiary

institutions. However, respondents from Ghana further acknowledged that graduates of Ashesi University College were the best in Ghana in terms of how the mind was trained and employability (Adjei 2012, unpublished MA thesis). This was illustrated from the following excerpt from one faculty retiree:

> The quality of the graduates [from the private universities] are no worse than the quality of the graduates from the University of Ghana (supervisor) …. I haven't done a scientific study but let anybody show me the scientific study. At this moment for undergraduate social sciences, the best university in Ghana is Ashesi University College. It is about the proportion of employability and preference. (AS, Retired Faculty).

Further, a World Bank senior higher education specialist is of the view that generally, university students in developing countries need to improve their oral and writing skills in their first and second languages. This was as a result of most students not being involved in much writing courses and concentrating more on vocational courses. He emphasized this point as follows:

> But I will say the complaints that I have heard in Ghana and elsewhere … is that the students don't do enough writing in the universities and that their language is not very good whether it is in English or Akan. I worked in Madagascar for several years… and businesses were unanimous in saying these students cannot write in French but they can also not write in the local language. I think there hasn't been enough emphasis on that. (Specialist, FH).

He stipulated that the lack of good writing skills could not be blamed solely on the undergraduate student. It was seen as a lack of proportionality between the rapid growth in student population in Sub-Saharan Africa in general and Ghana in particular, and the shortage of faculty members to address this rapid growth in student population. Sawyerr (2004) affirms that enrollment in higher education institutions in SSA quadrupled from 1975 to 1985and tripled from 1985 to 1995. In the 1980s, the government of Ghana expanded its scope of public higher education by increasing student intake without a corresponding increase in the number of teaching and instructional facilities, thus increasing the strain on financials, physical and strain on human resources (Thaver 2004).

A specialist stated:

> Undergraduate education grew so rapidly in almost every underdeveloped country whether they talk about Africa or Asia. The burdens on the faculty grew. I mean when I first went to Africa in the early 50s and 60s, most classes has 15 or 20 students in them and so as a faculty member you could give the students a lot more time. So I think as the classes got to an average of 40s and 50s it's harder to grade them. I know when I was teaching in Fourah Bay College (in Sierra Leone), there were two of us and we had a 100 senior thesis to read. Not to mention all the other papers and examinations. So yes, you read them but you couldn't give them all the same attention. So it is not just the faculty members' fault…. I mean if you've got a hundred students in the class, you're not going to have them write too many papers because there is so much you can do to give them a fair response. (HF, Specialist).

Generally, perception about quality of graduates was mixed as the preceding interview excerpts have indicated.

**Strengthening the Quality Assurance Process**

Data gathered from respondents indicates that there are a number of ways that the quality assurance process can be improved. The suggestions are: regular training for peer reviewers, institutions individually developing their internal quality assurance process, incorporation of graduate education in the quality assurance process, and public higher education institutions being held to the same standards as the private higher education institutions before charter.

First, all three higher education specialists were consistent in their views that to strengthen the quality assurance process that there should be regular continuous training for peer reviewers contracted by the NAB. However, according to NAB officials interviewed for this study, training is provided on 'as and when needed' basis which is not adequate. Materu (2007) affirms this point that in Ghana particularly, peer reviewers complained about inadequate training.

A higher education specialist commented:

> The one weakness we saw in the process in Ghana was that there wasn't enough training for the peer reviewers. You can't just send somebody who is highly qualified without giving them training. They need to know that they go in as a neutral observer, they are not there as an inspector, they have to be polite as peer reviewers and observe and make comments. But there need to be some training. … Some of the peer reviewers were wonderful, thoughtful and experienced but they too felt that some of their colleagues did not have as much training as would have been desirable. (HF, Specialist).

Second, higher education institutions must develop their internal quality assurance

process through benchmarking systems as noted by a higher education specialist as follows:

> The point I am making is that it is not enough to have the National Accreditation Board. The institutions themselves need to strengthen their own quality assurance systems by bringing in external visitation. By bringing in benchmarking systems so that they can know whether they are making progress or not. (MP, Specialist).

Third, there was also a general consensus that the quality assurance process should pay particular

attention to doctoral education and research to ensure quality. This is because to ensure quality in

academic programs in private higher education, faculty members with a certain type of academic

qualification and knowledge acquisition will be required. A World Bank higher education

specialist recommends that graduate education should take on a more regional role in West

Africa as is the case in South Africa, since "graduate education in Africa as a whole is in

trouble". (HF, Specialist). In South Africa, higher education institutions provide discounted

tuition fees to graduate students from countries outside the South African region pursuing either

Master's or doctoral programs. Students who are classified as qualified but needy are also

eligible for food and housing subsidies. Students from countries in the South African sub-region

pay the same fees as the natives of South Africa. Thus South Africa is assisting to address faculty

shortage in other African countries by providing a regional sanctuary in graduate education

(Hayward and Ncayiyana, 2015).  It is recommended by Hayward and Nicayiyana (2015) that,

this South African example should be emulated in other regional centers in Africa.

Fourth, respondents in Ghana saw a contradiction in the requirements demanded of private higher education institutions before accreditation and eventually charter, and that of newly established public higher education institutions by the state. They did not approve the way new public universities were established by the government without the same stringent requirements asked of private higher education institutions. A retired faculty commented:

> My concern is how some (new) public universities come to be. For a private institution, you have to get institutional accreditation, program accreditation and operate for a while before your performance is evaluated (for charter). For government institutions, the government just comes out with a law for the university. Like Ho, Sunyani and UDS (University for Development Studies) were all created that way. Before UDS, and others, all the other public universities operated as colleges of existing universities. University of Ghana was under University of London, and Winneba (University of Education, Winneba) was under University of Cape Coast before they became autonomous. So I think that if they are so stringent with the private institutions, the same measures should be applicable to the public institutions. You must meet certain criteria before you are chartered. You should not be chartered right from the beginning. (BJ, Retired Faculty).

The interviewer prompted the interviewee that the NAB has stipulated that it accredits both public and private institutions. However, the respondent noted that the NAB goes through the motions with the newly established public higher education institutions. This was affirmed by the NAB official that was interviewed which will be discussed later.

**Challenges**

Two issues became apparent as challenges to ensuring adequate quality assurance standards at private higher education institutions. These were: clarification of vague charter requirements for the private higher education institutions and dependence on adjunct faculty Altbach 2005; Fried, Glass and Baumgartl 2007.

First, an issue that emerged from this study was lack of clear cut requirements for private institutions to apply for a charter and be autonomous.  Charter is the process by which an

individual institution is granted the autonomy from its mentor (supervisor) institution to operate independently and award its own degrees. According to the NAB Roadmap, the charter process includes operating under a mentor (supervisor) for at least 10 years, having a governance structure, evaluation of teaching quality of academic staff, research and publication of applicant institution, available resources of the institution, and other factors that the NAB would determine as appropriate. Two private higher education institutions (Ashesi University College and Central University College) that applied for charter as noted by a respondent, on the assumption that they had fulfilled all the stipulated requirements were denied. According to the higher education specialist, issues of inadequate scholarly research and publications were used by the NAB to deny the charter request of these two private higher education institutions, even though they were not formally informed about the reasons. This was confirmed by the participant interviewed at Ashesi University College in Ghana. Generally, inadequate publication by faculty is associated with them not having adequate time to research and publish as a result of high teaching loads. In addition, adjunct faculty members are mainly focused on teaching and service provision and not research.

Second, private higher education institutions depend on adjunct faculty members. Many of the PHEIs in Ghana do not have enough core faculty members of and rely on faculty members in the public higher education institutions or retired faculty members to supplement their core faculty. The increase in private institutions has further emphasized the need for qualified academic staff. Ghana is noted to have a need for 1000 new faculty members for its public higher education sector; however, the public universities are able to hire only 20-30 a year to replace the retiring professors (Hayward and Ncayiyana, 2014). At Ashesi University College for example, the full time faculty strength in January 2015, totals 17, adjunct faculty totals 18, faulty intern

strength is 15, plus two visiting scholars. The institution has administrative staff strength of 44

and a current student population of 631(www.ashesi.edu.gh). Generally, adjunct faculty in Ghana

do not focus much on research, as emphasis is placed more on teaching and service as opposed to

research. As a result, academic output from PHEIs in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has been very

minimal (Varghese 2004; Mugenda 2009). A higher education specialist and former member on

UNESCO Commission on Diploma Mills stated:

> You have faculty who are spread very thin at the private institutions because you've got
> fewer full-time people, and fewer with PhD coaching a lot of 'moonlighters' from the
> public institutions and that is a time bomb in the making there. (KN, Specialist)

Private higher education institutions have to work towards having a core faculty of their own to

reduce dependence on adjunct faculty, as this will increase research output from them.

Further, a retired faculty and a retired rector were of the view that private higher

education institutions in Ghana should not be forced to be like the public higher education

institutions by the NAB. They should be granted the liberty to be innovative in their program

offerings for example.   A retired faculty commented:

> My only criticism is that it doesn't allow too much room for the institutions (private) to
> be innovative and introduce new things. They expect you to do certain things like other
> institutions (public) in Ghana to a large extent. (BJ, Retired Faculty)

**Summary**

This section examined data obtained from interviewing higher education specialists,

retired faculty and a retired rector. Data obtained from respondents explicated on six themes

generated in the analysis of participants' responses. The themes generated were: satisfaction with

Ghana's quality assurance system, program quality, influence on programs, quality of graduates,

and strengthening the quality assurance process and challenges.  The next section analyzes data

obtained from NAB officials.

**NAB Officials**

The NAB of Ghana represents the regulatory frame of the quality assurance process that higher education institutions have to abide by. It also signifies the authority of the state in enforcing the regulations guiding the quality assurance process and ensuring that higher education institutions in Ghana do not deviate from what the NAB required of them. Quality assurance in private higher education enables conformity of a private higher education institution (Bell and Taylor 2005). This section analyzes responses from three officials of Ghana's National Accreditation Board: deputy executive secretary, a member of the accreditation committee and a member of the quality assurance committee. The data generated a total of seven themes as follows:

1. Accreditation timeframe,

2. Affiliation,

3. Establishment of internal quality assurance departments,

4. Penalties,

5. Measures,

6. Review of chartered private institutions, and

7. Challenges.

**Accreditation Timeframe**

The NAB was established under policy guidelines in 1993 to accredit private and public higher education institutions and also address quality issues in higher education. A critical examination of the list of accredited PHEIs at the NAB website indicates that institutional accreditation ranges from one to five years. It is important to note that the NAB document, L.I. 1984 that informs prospective institutions about accreditation procedures does not provide a

definite time frame for each accreditation period. It only states in schedule 11(3) that "The period

of accreditation shall be as specified on the certificate of accreditation." Therefore, when NAB

officials were asked the reason for the differences in years of accreditation, they indicated that

private higher education institutions were accredited for shorter periods of time when they had

issues that needed to be addressed, but did not warrant the closure of the institution. A member

of the quality assurance committee explained:

> Originally when we started operation we had something that we called initial
> accreditation. We found out … institutions might not have the internal quality assurance
> unit or other things in place, but that was not enough to deny them accreditation. So what
> we decided to do was change the term initial accreditation to say that we will give you a
> shorter term of accreditation – three years. And after the three years, if we do a review
> and we realize that now you are established and performing well, then the reaccreditation
> is for five years. (QF, NAB Quality Assurance Committee).

Similarly, a member of NAB's Accreditation Committee noted that the shorter periods of

accreditation provided a flexible way of addressing quality requirements of the private

institutions without being seen as compromising. This shorter time frame according to them,

allowed NAB to track how well the institution was performing and what challenges they might

be faced with. When one NAB official was asked what kind of challenges these newly

established institutions could be addressing, he listed them as governance structure not fully in

place, staffing and administrative challenges and an internal quality assurance unit not fully

established. Even with these challenges private higher education institutions were allowed to

operate and regularly admit students. He noted:

> By regulation, accreditation ranges between one and five years. For new institutions and
> new programs, it is a maximum of three years. This is to enable institutions start slowly.
> And it allows for quick monitoring because once we grant accreditation, we will visit
> once or twice before the end of the period. So as a new institution and new program, we
> have to look at things quickly or review them before things get bad. Five years is the
> maximum for reaccreditation. And instances where an existing institution or program has
> not shown the drive or the initiative to overcome the initial challenges and is still

grappling or tottering, we still give another three years to study it further. (RA,
Accreditation Committee)

The foregoing did not validate Lim's (2001) assertion that for quality assurance to work in a

higher education system in a developing country, conditions that must be met include faculty

having PhDs, a stable academic job, adequate resources and the existence of academic freedom.

The interview responses about accreditation timeframe indicate that in a developing country like

Ghana, quality assurance procedures are adapted to the prevailing conditions.


**Affiliation**

According to the NAB L.I. 1984, the quality of PHEIs is ensured through a number of

measures, that includes affiliation to a mentoring (supervising) institution. The benefit of the

affiliation process is to guide the mentee institution to become independent eventually. Its

importance is affirmed as follows:

The whole concept of affiliation also depicts part of our power that is the NAB's function
to the mentoring (supervising) institution – to assist the younger institution to grow,
which is also a quality assurance measure. (QF, Quality Assurance Committee)

The NAB officials are of the view that affiliation will ultimately assist the mentee institutions to

obtain their charter. An instrument created to evaluate the affiliation relationship between the

mentor (supervisor) and the mentee institutions has to be completed annually by both

institutions. The contents of the instrument for the mentee and mentor (supervisor) institution

differ slightly. The instrument completed by the mentee institution measures components

including the duration of the affiliation process between the mentor (supervisor) and the mentee,

the content of programs being supervised, student admission requirements, conduct of

examinations, evaluation of academic staff's qualification, and providing service on boards and committees of mentee institution (www.nab.gov.gh).

The instrument that the mentoring (supervising) institution evaluates the mentee institution on examines segments including conduct of examinations and results, endorsement of external examiners, content of programs, communication with key officers of the mentee institution, assessment of qualification of academic staff, providing service on committees and boards of mentee institution, establishment of an internal quality assurance unit and assisting the institution to become autonomous (www.nab.gov.gh). These affiliation measuring instruments have to be completed by each party at least once a year.

The key differences between the instruments that the mentee and mentor (supervisor) institution completes are as follows: the mentor (supervisor) institution enabling the mentee institution to become chartered, and the mentee's endorsement of external examiners. An additional excerpt on the evaluative role of the instrument is provided:

> If the mentoring (supervising) institution is not doing its work to ensure quality in the mentored institution, that instrument should be able to show it. If the mentored (supervised) institution is also not doing well the instrument should show that there is something wrong with the relationship. (RA, Accreditation Committee)

Overall, affiliation is taken seriously by all concerned parties namely mentor (supervisor), mentee and the NAB.

## Establishment of Internal Quality Assurance Departments

One of the policies of NAB is that all private higher education institutions (PHEIs) must establish internal quality assurance departments. This is done with the assistance of mentor (supervisor) institutions. However, the NAB also has a role to play in assisting private higher education institutions to establish quality assurance units. This is done through capacity building

workshops organized by the NAB for designated quality assurance officers at the private

institutions. Data obtained reiterate that regular workshops are organized for PHEIs aimed at

training and equipping staff mandated to establish the quality assurance units. Both domestic and

foreign resources are used in the capacity building process. An example is the German Academic

Exchange Service (DAAD) which focuses its training programs in the West African sub-region

(Kokutse 2014). A deputy executive secretary on the NAB had this to say:

> As a policy it is required that all higher education institutions in Ghana should have
> quality assurance units or departments…We have started holding workshops on capacity
> building for internal quality assurance officers for the various institutions. Indeed towards
> the close of last year (2013), we brought in an expert from the UK to take them through
> an aspect of quality assurance. And it is a continuous thing we want to be doing
> periodically. From next year (2015) there is going to be a project sponsored by DAAD
> (German Academic Exchange Service). It is a project to train internal quality assurance
> officers across English speaking West Africa. (Dep. Exec. Sec)

The NAB indicates that efforts to make the its role applicable to PHEIs is shown in surveys sent

out to institutions to gauge  and evaluate the internal quality assurance departments already

established as well as the institutions. Thus the NAB is continuously reevaluating itself in order

to improve. As noted by Shabani (2013), quality assurance stakeholders recognize the

importance of continuous human capacity development. An excerpt from a quality assurance

committee member stated:

> The next step we are taking now is we are conducting a survey ourselves. We have sent
> questionnaires to all the institutions to give us information on their internal quality
> assurance unit. How they are structured and how they function...The survey is being done
> this year (2014) and we are still getting responses. And what we seek to do with the
> survey is not just to know about the existence or otherwise of the internal quality
> assurance units. But they are supposed to attach to that questionnaire, copies of their
> institutional policies or guidelines that is informing their operations within that
> institution. What we intend doing is to review all such documents and to extract for
> ourselves what the strengths and weaknesses are in the document…and improve upon our
> guidelines for institutions. (QF, Quality Assurance Committee)

**Penalties**

A penalty is defined by the Webster's New World Dictionary (2003) as punishment given

for breaking a regulation or law. The NAB determines penalties based on a given situation

generally. However, the ultimate penalty given by the NAB is revoking an institution's

accreditation and closing it down. This indicates its regulatory authority at enforcing laws. The

NAB officials have indicated from data analyzed that they have not been very strict with

imposing penalties especially in situations where the NAB had contributed to the institution's

problem. In such situations the NAB is not quick to impose penalties. One area where they are

quick in imposing penalties is when students who do not have the required qualifications are

enrolled in a program by a private higher education institution. A quality assurance member

indicates that when a delay in a reaccreditation process is caused by the NAB, then no penalty is

given to the institution seeking reaccreditation. However, on the other hand when the private

institution has admitted students whose qualifications do not warrant admission, the NAB is

quick to stop the institution from admitting any more students until those who have been

inappropriately admitted are withdrawn. The following interview excerpt indicates a situation

where the NAB is quick to penalize:

> One penalty that we are really quick in applying is to stop the institution from admitting
> fresh students. That, we apply quickly when we realize that the institution has admitted
> unqualified students. Or when we realize that the institution is operating with unqualified
> lecturers [faculty]. (QF, Quality Assurance Committee)

In addition, according to the officials, the NAB has not been flexible when imposing

penalties on an institution that has not complied with regulations governing either a program or

institutional accreditation. The deputy executive secretary stated:

> What they (institutions) may think we are not flexible about is maybe adhering to
> guidelines and policies. Sometimes when we say for a new program we need at least

three lecturers, one of whom should be of Senior Lecturer status to head the department… they (institutions) bring you a list of about three people and none of them is of Senior Lecturer status. And in fact apart from the fact that we have stated three lecturers, some institutions will present two. So there is the back and forth issues which delay the program take-off. (Dep. Exec. Sec)

Thus, to the NAB, it has been strict in enforcing the relevant regulations.

**Measures**

The NAB indicates that it has in place a number of measures aimed at enforcing regulations that private higher education institutions have to abide by. These measures are also aimed at ensuring that higher educational institutions are provided guidance in their efforts at ensuring quality in their activities. In addition to the "Roadmap to Accreditation," that guides individuals on what the requirements are for institutional and program accreditation, the NAB organizes biennial stakeholders' workshop for institutional leaders of private and public institutions. One of such workshop was held in March 2014 according to one NAB official.

One measure that the organization intends to establish eventually is the accreditation management information systems. The Deputy Executive Secretary explained:

We are trying to establish or develop what we call the accreditation management information systems, where institutions will not have to come to the office with physical documents but they will apply online and the system will be such that it will prescreen and screen the application before it accepts it into the system. By that we would have weeded out a lot of non-desirables before we start the process. For now one of the challenges that we have is that we have lecturers moonlighting at various institutions. And it prevents the lecturers from carrying out effective work at any of the institutions. They don't do any effective research to add to the body of knowledge. We want the system to be able to capture any lecturer who is at more than one location. (Deputy Executive Sec.)

The Deputy Executive Secretary anticipates that when the accreditation management information system becomes effective faculty will be restricted as to the number of institutions that they could teach at. This may reduce the number of adjunct faculty 'moonlighting' at various

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colleges. When the official was further asked what will happen if a lecturer is noted to be at more than one institution, he stated that NAB "will refuse the institution applying later using the person's name." He further noted that one of the goals of the NAB is to direct private higher education institutions to quality faculty who will contribute to the generation of knowledge. This has further brought into focus the shortage of faculty especially those having PhDs in developing countries.

The NAB will also implement a ranking system in the long term, and the quality assurance official believes that it will assist higher education institutions embrace quality as a culture. A perspective of quality assurance is given:

> What we are looking forward to is to get all institutions to come that level of understanding where they embrace quality assurance as a culture rather than an institution. And that takes a while for an institution to come to that realization. In fact the planning strategy we think we can use to facilitate this thinking is to rank institutions and their programs. That is yet to take off. We have not done all the groundwork yet. We are in the process. (QF, Quality Assurance Committee)

The NAB recognizes that simple compliance with rules is not enough. There is the need for institutions to willingly buy into quality measures instituted by it.

Respondents perceived that policy formulation by the government in regard to the physical sciences and engineering programs can provide incentives which will encourage higher education institutions, especially the private institutions, to offer those capital intensive programs. They note that such policies will address the shortfall in the number of institutions offering such specific and specialized programs. Ultimately, this is aimed at the development of the nation and will also complement the efforts of the public universities. This point was reiterated in the data analyzed from higher education specialists.

Public universities in Ghana offer varied programs leaving very few options for different programs for the private institutions. The PHEIs tend to focus especially in the social sciences.

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However, the NAB officials believe that public universities need to be more focused and concentrate on an area of specialty. In addition one higher education specialist was of the view that the government should institute scholarships in subject areas that require a lot of financial outlay or costly to run. It is hoped that private HEIs in Ghana will take advantage of such scholarships and run programs that are most needed for the nation's development.

The NAB Deputy Executive Secretary was also of the view that the government should refrain from opening up new public universities that offer programs that the existing public universities are already offering. This will enable appropriate use of public resources. Likewise, a member of the accreditation committee raised concerns about why the government of Ghana should establish a new public university offering for example Agriculture, when there were already three established public universities offering the same program. This was at a time when the country did not have adequate faculty for newly established public universities. The official was of the opinion that most of these decisions by government were political decisions and indicated that government has to be more focused on training faculty to take over from the aging ones at the tertiary institutions (Hayward and Ncayiyana 2015).

**Review of Chartered Private Institutions**

Review of chartered private institutions is an aspect of the regulatory autonomy of the NAB. The NAB also expects all PHEIs to have some form of autonomy as this would encourage academic freedom for the creation and sharing of knowledge. Chartered private higher education institutions have some level of autonomy in their activities such as issuing their own degrees. They do not subject their programs to a mentor (supervisor) for review. However, any program that they introduce has to be accredited by the NAB.  Also, they can become mentors

(supervisors) of new private higher education institutions depending on the focus of specialty of the mentored institution. Chartered institutions and their programs are subject to a five-year cyclical review that is when their governance and administrative systems are reviewed.

A member of the accreditation committee stated:

> Even for those who have received their charter, we call it five years cyclical review. And even for public institutions too, we do an institutional review. As for the programs every five years you have to reapply...That is a comprehensive review. We look at your governance systems, we look at your administration, management, physical facilities, what you have added on, what is there, and how you are maintaining them.

It is significant to note that though chartered institutions are subject to a five-year cyclical review, the NAB officials admitted that they have not been able to do the five year audit at the required scheduled times. During the five-year cyclical review, the private chartered institution is advised by peers as to how the institution could improve among others. More importantly, the subsequent example reveals the shortage of relevant workforce at NAB which slows down their work output during the quality assurance process. A member of the quality assurance committee noted:

> It is an excellent exercise except that we are so overstretched by our work load that we are not able to do these exercises exactly the five years that we set for ourselves but we do them. (QF, Quality Assurance Committee)

**Challenges**

The NAB has to deal with a number of challenges when ensuring quality of higher education institutions. The challenges include: shortage of qualified academic staff in PHEIs, multiple admissions by PHEIs, non-compliance of private institutions to the time-frame given to them for program and institutional accreditation, truthfulness or honesty on the part the institution seeking accreditation, and interference from proprietors/owners of the PHEIs.

First, shortage of qualified academic staff at private higher education institutions in Ghana is noted by NAB officials.  A member of the accreditation team stated:

> There is the bigger issue of dearth of faculty. There are no people in the system. The institutions are expanding and we are not expanding the pool of lecturers [faculty] or PhD holders. It is a national problem. (RA, Accreditation Committee)

This quote affirms shortage of qualified faculty in Ghana in particular. However, this is a big issue in Africa as a whole (Hayward and Ncayiyana, 2015). This shortage has also been confirmed by data obtained.  Higher education specialists interviewed affirmed shortage of faculty in a developing country like Ghana. It is noted that some of the compelling challenges to the quality assurance process in Sub-Saharan Africa include having inadequate human resource and minimal participation of the administrative staff (Manyaga 2008; Okebukola 2002).

Second, there is a challenge of multiple admissions by the PHEIs. These private institutions admit students for the full-time regular, evening, sandwich and weekend sessions. It is important to note that at most times, it is the same faculty that teach at all these sessions, which takes away time for academic research and publication thus affecting the quality assurance process. Evaluation of students by faculty is also affected as they can be overwhelmed and may not have enough time to assess students adequately in all these varied sessions. Faculty also has very little time for research and service activities.

Third is non-compliance of institutions to the time-frame given to them for program and institutional accreditation. One NAB official (a member of the accreditation committee) explained:

> Some (institutions) may want to start a program in September, but will delay and bring the application in June of the same year. And when we are not flexible about it then they begin to complain. So the Board implemented a policy that in applying for a new program/new institution, apply at least 12 months to the envisaged start date. But if it is a program or institutional reaccreditation, apply six months to the expiry date. Even this,

they [private higher education institutions] have not been adhering to. (RA, Accreditation Committee)

Fourth is truthfulness or honesty on the part the institution seeking accreditation. A member of the quality assurance committee stated:

> One of the biggest challenges is being truthful to the system…Sometimes when an institution wants accreditation, they go to all lengths to get the CVs [resumes] of various qualified professors to convince us to give them accreditation. Once you give them accreditation, you go to the ground and you don't see the professors. (QF, Quality Assurance Committee)

This statement has shown that some PHEIs could be very manipulative just to gain accreditation from the NAB. All kinds of methods are employed by some PHEIs aimed at obtaining accreditation. The NAB does not have the mechanism to track PHEIs involved in this anomaly successfully. As noted earlier, the establishment of accreditation management information systems will enable the NAB verify information of faculty and reduce this anomaly.

Fifth, there is interference from proprietors/owners of some PHEIs. These owners, some of whom are non-academics try to interfere in the daily activities of the institution. These proprietors may not be academics but business people who have the money to establish a PHEI. They regard the institution as a business venture. The Deputy Executive Secretary stated:

> We have situations where the proprietors/owners of the institution in spite of all the mechanisms we put in to get the institution enjoy its autonomy right from the scratch also tries to influence the day-to-day administration of the institution. They might not be academics themselves. They are business people who have the money to set up a school. And they are not allowing the academicians to do the proper thing. If you dare not to tow their direction, they will sack (fire) you. (Dep. Exec. Sec)

When NAB officials were asked how they have been able to address this particular challenge, they noted that they dialogue a lot with these business people about their responsibilities.

**Summary**

This section examined interview responses obtained from three NAB officials. Seven themes obtained from the responses are: accreditation timeframe, affiliation, establishment of internal quality assurance departments, penalties, measures, review of chartered private institutions and challenges. Challenges that NAB officials associated with the quality assurance process were shortage of qualified academic staff, multiple admissions by PHEIs, non-compliance of institutions to time-frames give for program and institutional accreditation, truthfulness on the part the institution seeking accreditation, and interference from proprietors/owners of the PHEIs. The next section analyzes data from faculty and administrators of five private university colleges and two private chartered institutions.

# Chapter 5: Part II – Findings and Analysis – Continuation

**Analysis and Findings from Two Private Chartered Universities and Five Private University Colleges / Document Analysis**

Institutional theory explains how organizations are able to change their culture and structure, or adapt themselves to socially accepted values and norms. Organizations therefore become isomorphic when they embody the processes, structures and rhetoric prevalent in their organizational field. According to Bell and Taylor (2005) 'quality frameworks' work as strong forces to mold organizations, which in this scenario will be private higher education institutions. Analysis of interview data obtained from faculty members and administrators of five private higher education institutions and two private chartered universities, displayed evidence of coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphic institutional pressures as indicated by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). In addition, analysis of documents provided evidence of the efforts of private higher education institutions. However, the patterns in the documents displayed on the websites of the institutions did reflect minimal evidence of mimetic, coercive and normative isomorphism. The documents were analyzed with NVivo 10. The analysis below begins with interview responses obtained that aligned with coercive isomorphism and then subsequently, mimetic and normative isomorphism.

**Coercive Isomorphism**

Private higher education institutions rely on the quality assurance system in order to operate successfully in their regulatory environment (Kinser 2007). Data analyzed from interviews with administrators and faculty of five private university colleges and two private chartered institutions identified five themes associated with coercive isomorphism. Coercive

isomorphism indicates pressure from the external environment on an organization or a private higher education institution to enable conformity to society's cultural expectation especially from the state (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Coercive isomorphism is spread through regulations, laws and accreditation processes and mostly emanates from the state. Thus the NAB in Ghana derives its authority from the state, which enables it to formulate laws on quality assurance and ensures that institutions abide by those laws. According to Rusch and Wibur (2007) quality assurance procedures are examples of scripted procedures for gaining legitimacy. The identified themes are:

1. Establishment of measures in conformity to NAB requirements,

2. Influence of quality assurance requirements,

3. Institutional affiliations,

4. Conformity to Mentoring (Supervising) Institution's Programs, and

5. Challenges to Coercive Isomorphism.

Each theme that is associated with coercive isomorphism is illustrated with excerpts from interviews analyzed.


**Establishment of Measures**

Establishment of measures in agreement to NAB requirements was one of the major themes that came up when administrators and faculty were asked about the efforts being made to enhance the image of their institution. Interviewees were of the view that the regulations have enabled them to put in place measures that will ensure their conformity. All the interview participants agreed that the regulations of the NAB guide their activities and practices that relate to quality assurance. Thus their efforts have been impacted by the setting up of quality assurance

offices and putting in place measures that will enhance their recognition. It is acknowledged that in order to obtain legitimacy, a private higher education institution will have to conform to "institutional scripts" that impact its activities (Ogawa and Bossert 1995). Quality assurance procedures could be interpreted as scripted processes that the PHEI has to undergo to obtain recognition. An administrator of one private university college noted:

> We have institutionalized some measures which are all geared towards having a quality assurance system to not only impact on our educational system in Ghana, but to also conform to best practices. So whatever measures that we have put in place, they are supposed to conform to the expected measures. What we have here…is called the Institutional Research Planning and Quality Management (IRPQM)…. it talks about institutional advancement, it talks about research, teaching and learning, it talks about planning before coming to quality management. So these are the systems that we have in place to ensure that we conform to best practices. (RA, Administrator).

A faculty of a second private university college explained that:

> We as much as possible try to operate within the laws of the country because anything that is done against the laws will affect our image… as much as possible we try to go by the standards and the laws of the country. (PF, Faculty)

Quality assurance review is a periodic event that either reaffirmed the status of a higher education institution or enabled it to attain legitimacy in order to imitate a set of beliefs, rules and values. Similarly, another administrator also acknowledged the establishment of measures in conformity to NAB's requirements and further noted the involvement of the non-academic units in their efforts at enhancing their image as well as maintaining accreditation. He commented:

> One of them is to establish a Quality Assurance (QA) Office. That is one of the key efforts…and most of the activities that we run here go through the QA office. We have several activities in that office that aids us with quality. And apart from the typical academic activities, we also have quality checks in the non-academic environment. (GA, Administrator)

When the administrator was asked to give an example of non-academic quality checks, he referred to workshops that are organized by the institution to apprise the non-academic unit of quality assurance procedures and how accreditation requirements can be achieved. He explained:

> For instance we organize a lot of workshops especially in terms of documentation. Accreditation documentation involves almost every unit on campus, so we always have to make sure the documentation is up to date.... The quality assurance unit meets with these groups, organizes workshops for them and guides them on how to put their documentation together. But the key focus in that area is to meet accreditation requirements. (GA, Administrator)

Interviewees in all the institutions sampled acknowledged taking some sort of ownership in the quality assurance process through their activities. Some of which include setting up committees whose activities are linked to that of the quality assurance committee and ensures that the institution's set goals are achieved in line with NAB regulations. A Vice-Provost at one private university college illustrated this point:

> We have a committee that we have set up because of the NAB…We have two committees in addition to the quality assurance committee. The… academic affairs committee which is curriculum [oriented] and our academic council. So the curriculum committee has been changing the curriculum and we have had various intense discussions on that. And in the Academic Council, we raise questions there if we feel we need policies… and we pass legislation. So we have a number of committees that work on quality and not just one. (PV, Vice-Provost)

At one private chartered institution an administrator noted that his institution has an internal quality assurance committee that coordinates the activities of sub-committees at the departments. Likewise a faculty at a second private chartered institution explained the role that the quality assurance committee plays and reiterated that:

> Internally, you have the Academic Dean or Vice-President (Academic) as the head of the quality assurance committee. And it is the office's responsibility to make sure that things are done right - time tabling for teaching for examinations, number of hours per lecturer, how many courses one must take in a semester, how many hours one must teach in a semester – all those things must be done and done well…We have one big committee that sees to all the others. (TT, Faculty)

For the most part, the requirements of the NAB play a major guiding role for private higher education institutions in Ghana.

**Influence of Quality Assurance Requirements**

Respondents in all seven private higher education institutions were unanimous in admitting that the requirements of the NAB and the quality assurance processes influenced all their efforts. Though the NAB has established minimum QA requirements that institutions have to follow, the respondents indicated that they go the extra mile by involving in other activities to enhance recognition in their environment. These included seeking affiliation and international linkages with foreign universities. However, it is important to note that the NAB does not require institutions to have foreign affiliations, but the private institutions regard it as enhancing their image and credibility when they have such linkages. The data obtained indicate that a majority of the institutions have affiliations with foreign institutions. However, though these affiliations have their quality assurance requirements that the local institutions have to comply with, the requirements of the NAB takes precedence over the foreign affiliation requirements. An administrator at a private chartered institution indicated that:

> Quality assurance is linked to almost everything that we do here…. Not only that, we have the National Accreditation Board (NAB) whose standard we have to adhere to…we have another accrediting body, the Adventist Accrediting Association. You know as a Seven Day Adventist institution, we are part of a consortium of Seven Day Adventist institutions worldwide…. Every year somebody comes from there to monitor what we do here. And every five years they renew our accreditation. (VA, Administrator)

A faculty member commented about going beyond the minimum requirements of the NAB because they are in competition with other rival private university colleges and notes:

> We cannot also stay just at the minimum requirement because we are in competition…. we also want to be a bit dynamic just to make sure that we appeal to almost the diverse nature of the public who will have an interest in our institution. So we will have some things that after having met the minimum requirements, we will want to add and those will be our trade secrets. (PF, Faculty)

A Vice-Provost of another private university college was of the view that within the framework of the NAB requirements, private colleges should be recognized as partners since the public

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universities could not absorb all the qualified secondary school graduates. Thus they are

providing an access function. As already noted, private university colleges in Ghana are fulfilling

an access function while conforming to the quality assurance requirements in order to remain

legitimate (Slancheva and Levy 2007). An administrator at a private chartered institution further

acknowledged that the quality assurance requirements are helping them structure their practices.

He stated:

> We find them helpful when it comes to comparing best practices. I told you this
> institution was established with the Adventist Accrediting Association standards. Here
> we find ourselves operating under the NAB so we try as much as possible to work
> together with them to maintain standards. (VA, Administrator)

Thus, though this private chartered university became operational under the Adventist

Accrediting Association standards, which was before the NAB was established in Ghana in

1993, they had to abide by the latter's requirements which took precedence over the former.

**Institutional Affiliations**

The affiliation process in Ghana consists of a mentoring (supervising) institution and a

mentee institution. Each party to the affiliation agreement has a specific role to play. However,

the mentee pays the mentor (supervisor) for this relationship, and this has become an income

generating venture for the chartered institution. The fee paid by the mentee is determined by the

mentor (supervisor). One of the higher education specialists previously interviewed noted that a

"pro forma" relationship exist between the mentor (supervisor) and the mentee. She commented

that a new private university college wanted to be affiliated with University of Ghana but the

annual fee of fifty thousand dollars ($50,000) a year at that time was too much for that

institution. Therefore, that private university college affiliated with another public university

(University of Cape Coast) that was "charging considerably less." Similarly, the Deputy

Executive Secretary of the NAB confirmed in an interview that a private university college

(mentee) pays a fee of "about 12,000 dollars on average a year" to the mentoring (supervising) institution.

Both faculty and administrators of five private university colleges interviewed, indicated that they were affiliated to a chartered higher education institution, a requirement of the NAB. The two private chartered institutions acknowledged that they were also affiliated to institutions before their subsequent charter. According to the NAB L.I. 1984, in order for institutions to be accredited, one of the requirements is that there must be "proof of affiliation to a recognized mentoring (supervising) institution within or outside the country" (7).

One of the outcomes of interviews held with respondents on affiliation was that as a result of NAB requirements, institutions have multiple affiliations with various chartered universities since one university may not be able to mentor (supervise) them in all their programs. Data obtained indicated that many of the private higher education institutions were affiliated to multiple institutions. An administrator noted that his institution is affiliated to at least three public universities because of the varied programs that they offer. Each institutional affiliation indicates the type of programs offered by the mentoring (supervising) institution. He explained:

> ….we are affiliated to KNUST [Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology], University of Education in Winneba, and also Trinity Theological Seminary. In other words, we have three different universities, and depending on the specialty we need to align ourselves to a particular university. So when you talk about KNUST affiliation, it is basically with the Engineering and Computer Science programs. When you talk about University of Education in Winneba, it is about the Psychology … And when you talk about Trinity Theological Seminary, it is about the theological and divinity programs. So one university cannot really mentor [supervise] you in all the specialties. So you have to align with those universities that are specialized in particular areas. (RA, Administrator).

It is significant to note that all the universities listed in the quote are public institutions in Ghana. This type of multiple affiliations generates the question about the cost element that the mentee institution has to address.

With the exception of one private university and one private chartered university, the remaining five sample institutions confirmed their affiliation to multiple foreign higher education institutions apart from their local affiliations to public universities. An administrator at one of the chartered universities noted that it was operating under its foreign affiliate before the NAB was established. However, it had to conform to the NAB requirements once it was established in 1993, indicating that the NAB regulations superseded that of their foreign affiliate (Levy, forthcoming).

Mentor (supervisor) and mentee institutions are sometimes in conflict over what the mentor (supervisor) institution expected the mentee to do and what the mentee thought was the appropriate process. A Vice-Provost at a private university indicated that sometimes the form of assessment that they would like to use for the students differed from what their mentor (supervisor) would want them to do. She noted:

> Our mentoring [supervising] institution is UCC [University of Cape Coast], and UCC has a lot of private universities that they are mentoring [supervising]. And they have a process whereby in their pre-moderation where we send in our syllabi, our mid-term exams and final exams and they come for post-moderation after those exams have been graded and they go through. First, they tell us whether they like the exams or not, and we do some further work as a final form of evaluation. Sometimes it is not an exam, it could be a project, it could be a thesis, it could be a group project – they tend not to like that. They tend to like exams because it is easier for them to deal with. … It is harder for them to evaluate these projects or theses. Here, I can see that it would be good for me when we do get the charter. (PV, Vice-Provost)

In such conflicting situations, the mentor (supervisor) institution has the final word and it indicates the authority of the mentoring (supervising) institution.

Responses obtained indicated that other private higher education institutions are also offering programs in association with foreign affiliates if the program is specific to that mentoring (supervising) institution. This is because NAB requirements on affiliation allow institutions to be affiliated to recognized mentors (supervisors), either within or outside the country. These foreign affiliations are, among others, regarded by the private institutions as further enhancing their status and credibility.

Most interviewees were of the view that affiliation with a foreign institution increased prestige and strengthened their quality assurance process. An administrator at a private university college who has a similar view commented:

> I think one of the advantages we've had is we have affiliation with foreign institutions. Coventry University in the UK is one of them. We have Abbott University in Denmark, Staffordshire University in the UK etc. So we have several affiliations and …every affiliation comes with its own quality admittances…. But at least the UK quality assurance is a very stringent one… it puts us on our toes. For instance, I do not know of any school in the country [Ghana] where [graduate] students submit their work through 'Turnitin'. **'Turnitin'** is a plagiarism software...And so it is a big thing with Coventry University. (GA, Administrator)

**Conformity to Mentoring (Supervising) Institution's Programs**

Interview data shows that there was similarity in the programs offered by a mentee institution and its mentor (supervisor) institution since the affiliation process is based on the type of programs offered by the mentoring (supervising) institution. A mentee institution's programs had to conform to that of its mentor (supervisor). Even if there had to be slight modification in the programs that had to be done with the approval of the mentoring (supervising) institution and the NAB. Mentee institutions would not want to deviate from the mentoring (supervising) institution's requirements, in order to be regarded as conforming to the mentor's (supervisor's) requirements.

An administrator at a private university college, when asked about program quality,

stated how their programs conformed to that of their mentoring (supervising) institution as

follows:

> We are affiliated to KNUST, Now because the certificates that the students have from here are KNUST certificates, the Vice-Chancellor expects that whatever we do here conforms to whatever they do there…And so basically the programs here are the same ones run over there. We cannot afford to do things which are different from our mentor (supervisor) institution, never, we cannot do that… There is a check on us to make sure we do the right thing. (RA, Administrator)

**Challenges to Coercive Isomorphism**

Accredited private institutions in Ghana have had challenges associated with the quality

assurance process especially in relation to negotiating the processes with the NAB and the

mentor (supervisor) institution among others.  The challenges are: conflicting requirements from

the NAB and mentoring (supervising) institutions, dealing with duplication of activities between

local mentoring (supervising) institutions and the NAB, lack of regular and formal

communication about an institution's request for charter, unequal treatment of private university

colleges in comparison with the public universities, and the controlling nature of the NAB from

the perspective of the private chartered universities.

First, respondents revealed that during program or institutional accreditation,

recommendations given by the NAB and the mentoring (supervising) institution sometimes

conflict. Therefore the private institution seeking accreditation is confused as to whose

recommendation should supersede the other. A faculty member at a private university college

stated:

> The challenge we had, has to do with the fact that in the accreditation process, you know we are affiliated to Legon [University of Ghana] too, the NAB will come and assess, give their comments, University of Ghana will come and assess, give their comments and sometimes you will find that their comments are conflicting. So you are at a loss as to

which way to go…. University of Ghana is to give certificates to your products so if you are not going by their standards they are not issuing our certificates. And if you don't go by the NAB recommendations, they are going to withdraw your accreditation. So you are at a loss as to which one should take precedence. And that has been a major challenge we are facing. (PF, Faculty)

When this faculty member was probed further to indicate how such conflicting situations were dealt with, he noted that he had to liaise with both parties until a consensus was reached.

Second, respondents indicate that there is a lot of duplication of activities between the mentoring (supervising) institution and the NAB. An administrator of a private university college advocated that the redundancy must be eliminated and noted:

Generally, I think there is a lot of duplication going on at the NAB. At times what NAB is looking for is the same thing that KNUST, our affiliated institution is looking for and you have to do both. And also I think the whole process takes forever for accreditation to go through. In Ghana it takes about two years to get a program accredited. I mean there are little issues such as documentary issues, missing files here and there at the NAB, but I think generally, their mandate is to make sure they police the academic system and make sure it works. But I am not comfortable with the duplication of activities between the affiliated institution and the National Accreditation Board. (GA, Administrator)

Third, regular and formal communication between private university colleges and the NAB was lacking about charter applications according to data collected. Charter is defined by the NAB as an "assent by the President for a tertiary institution to award its own degrees, diplomas and certificates." (18) The NAB requires that an institution that wants to be granted charter, has to operate for at least 10 years, must have a governance structure, assessed on the quality academic staff, teaching and research, and have the required resources among others. One of the interviewees (a Vice-Provost) indicated that her institution had formally applied for charter believing that they had fulfilled all the requirements after being in existence for 12 years. She lamented the lack of formal communication between the NAB and her institution about charter application request and commented:

They are not dealing with us in a quality way. You would expect that they would at least write to us and acknowledge receipt. You would expect that after they (NAB) had their meeting, and I was told by the Vice–Secretary that they had their meeting in December [2013], that they would have written to us. (PV, Vice-Provost)

There is institutional dissatisfaction with NAB being in a position of authority by the mentee institution about lack of information. Ashforth and Gibbs (1990) observe that "both constituents and supporters are likely to prove most grudging when organizational technologies are uncertain or risky…" 182.

Fourth, some respondents complain that the NAB favored the public higher education institutions over the private institutions in their role as the oversight accrediting body. They observed that the NAB is softer on the public universities in terms of accreditation and quality assurance requirements. An administrator of a private university college explained:

Well, I am going to be very honest with you. Sometimes I just feel that they are not painting all the universities in Ghana with the same brush. They are a little soft towards what I will term the main stream public universities. But when it comes to the private universities, they are very tough. In a way, you can understand them because these are universities that were set up just to augment the intakes and increase the whole level of education in Ghana… And they [NAB] need to make sure that they exercise that authoritative role on them to make sure they conform… When it comes to the public universities like KNUST, the University of Ghana etc… these are traditional universities that have been in existence for so many years and they assume that whatever they do is in line with their expectations. (RA, Administrator)

Fifth, interviewees of the chartered private universities complain that the NAB was controlling, as chartered institutions did not have the freedom or autonomy to do whatever they thought was best for their institutions or take certain decisions that they considered were in their best interests.  An administrator at the one of the chartered institutions explained:

Sometimes we are not too sure what our status is as a chartered institution. They (NAB) don't seem to define it for us. Because there are certain things we should be doing as a chartered institution, but it appears they (NAB) are still controlling. (VA, Administrator)

Another faculty at a second chartered private university that specializes in theology emphasized that such specialized institutions and should not be treated like the public universities by NAB. He commented about the entrance requirements that the NAB insists on for prospective students who wants to enroll in a private chartered institution specializing in theology as follows:

> There are times that NAB is too strict on some areas, wanting you to go the way of the secular universities. But here is a case where you have people who want to enter into Ministry not necessarily into the academia. Why can't we lower it (qualifications) a bit for them? That is the issue. Not to say that by that we are lowering quality. (TT, Faculty).

The next section will examine mimetic and normative isomorphism and how it is reflected in the data obtained.

**Mimetic and Normative Isomorphism**

Mimetic isomorphism results in an organization emulating norms of recognized legitimate organizations, and normative isomorphism is linked to professional values. Mimetic isomorphic pressures indicate that organizations tend to model similar organizations in their fields that they believe are successful and legitimate. In addition, imitating successful organizations enables an institution to deal with 'uncertainty'. Normative isomorphic pressures are linked to professionalization when cultural support is obtained from local and global professional associations (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Scott 1982).

The analysis of data for the second part of the interview protocol for the five university colleges and two private chartered universities generated the following themes:

1. Similarity of programs on offer,

2. Reduction in examination malpractices

3. Job market influence,

4. Identification of new programs.


**Similarity of Programs on Offer**

An analysis of the curriculum of five private university colleges and one private chartered

university showed a lot of similarity in the programs that are offered. However, the second

private chartered university (Trinity Theological Seminary) specializes in only theological

programs. Therefore its programs are unique to it. Though many of the programs offered by the

six private institutions are similar with the exception of a few unique programs specific to each

institution, majority of the interviewees felt that their programs are of a superior quality than

their competitors. When interviewees were asked to comment about the quality of academic

programs offered by their competitors and how they differ, an administrator of a private

university college noted that his institution's programs were of a superior value because of their

regular quality checks and association with a prestigious foreign university. He stated:

> I will say because of the quality checks that we get from Coventry University, I think we
> do a much better job.  And also the fact that we use Turnitin, the plagiarism software.
> (GA, Administrator)

Similarly, a private chartered university that was established before most of the other private

university colleges, and offered similar programs also believed that they are the 'trailblazers'. An

administrator of the institution explained:

> The church established the school to train gospel ministers. Business and other programs
> were added on later. In terms of quality we are very careful about the students we churn
> out. So we try to maintain that image of being the trailblazer because we started it. We set
> very high standards for ourselves… and I told you the AAA (Adventist Accrediting
> Association) is there. So as for quality we have the road map. (VA, Administrator)

 Overall, the data analysis indicated that majority of the private institutions were

emulating each other in terms of program offerings. Though most institutions regard their

programs as superior, the majority of private institutions start with programs that do not require much infrastructure (Varghese 2004).

**Reduction of Examination Malpractices**

Private higher education institutions want to be tagged as institutions that take examinations and assessment of students very seriously. In addition to hiring credible faculty, preventing examination malpractice during finals was a recurrent theme from the data. Interviewees were of the opinion that the way examinations are conducted impact the credibility of an institution. Credibility in examinations was one of their ultimate concerns. Therefore, institutions ensure that examination procedures are credible since any lapse will impact negatively on their image. In Ghana, one of the measurements of a higher educational institution's credibility is contingent on how examinations are held and proctored. Private higher education institutions in Ghana have instituted certain values and norms to maintain their credibility when it comes to examinations thus linking it to *normative isomorphism*. An administrator of one institution noted that he instituted a policy of involving faculty members in supervisory capacities during examinations. He commented:

> Well I don't know what metrics you want to use to measure credibility. I think in Ghana here, the biggest issue is examination and examination leakages [malpractices]…We spend a lot of money on examination, especially invigilation [supervision] so there is something called invigilation [supervision] allowance…I remember when I came here the faculty were not involved in invigilating [supervising] examinations. So I changed the policy and said faculty should be there from the start to the end…We do that to ensure that our credibility, when it comes to examination, malpractice is minimized. (GA, Administrator)

Similarly, another interviewee indicated that the quality assurance unit is involved in the conduct of examinations. This is done to prevent any malpractice and maintain institutional credibility.

He stated:

> The issues of credibility emanates from 1) the institution is accredited; 2) the internal systems – how the examinations are conducted. These things go a long way to affect the certification of our products…We have strict and very strong internal policies through the quality assurance unit….There is an example of last semester when the quality assurance unit ensured that the questions that were administered were moderated at the departmental level and then submitted to the unit… All these are things that are being done to ensure the credibility of whatever goes on within the institution. (PF, Faculty)

Institutions will like to indicate to the Ghanaian public that it is insulated from examination malpractices and will therefore maintain legitimacy in its environment.

**Job Market Influence**

An analysis of responses from interviewees portrays a general consensus that the job market influences mimicry in programs that are offered among private institutions. These programs include Business, Management and Technology programs.  Recently established private higher education institutions emulate programs of established or superior institutions that students patronize because of market demand while aiding in the employability of graduates. An administrator illustrated this as follows:

> I think the market demand is one of them. I think our original plan was to do telecommunications which was the main focus. But we realized the demand for technology-based education is pretty high. And as Ghanaians we also see the need to find ways to get Ghana to develop.  (GA, Administrator)

Similarly, an Administrator of another private university college stated:

> Most of our directions are being shaped by the job market. We are having biomedical engineering on board, we are having Architecture on board, we are having Nursing on board, we are having Medical Laboratory Technology on board. These are all informed by the job market. …They are very expensive but if you don't do it that way you don't stand out. (RA, Administrator)

I further probed to find out from the administrator how his institution was going to fund these programs since they would require extensive infrastructure. He noted that the institution was sourcing external funds as well as relying on internally generated funds.

However, a few private institutions believe that it is not only the job market that is the driving force. A compelling reason is noted that apart from making the graduates employable, programs are offered to equip students with other values such as being critical thinkers and equipping students with job search skills. This can be linked to *normative isomorphism* because students learn the norms of critical thinking as well as job search skills while standards are developed.

An administrator at one private institution explained:

> Well they (job market) are, and they (job market) aren't. In the academic programs we want them to be critical thinkers. And also in the leadership program we really want the students to have a sense of social concern. But they do learn marketing. They do learn accounting; they do learn economics; they do learn to be programmers too... We have Career Services. And we do a lot with our students. We teach them how to do interviews, writing good CVs…And then we have internships. We also have tracer studies.  (PV, Vice-Provost)

Similarly, though there was mimicry in the programs offered, some of the institutions branded their programs as a form of marketing or advertising tool. Another administrator at one of the private university colleges noted that their programs are unique because each program has an added IT component which differentiates it from other private institutions. He stated:

> When you talk about the Humanities, what we do here is basically done by all the other private universities. So we sat down and said how can we brand what we do? So if you look at our structure and curriculum, almost all the Arts courses have an IT component. So instead of other people doing just Management, we have Management with Computing… And so that was the brand and that stood us out… and the value that was added which set us apart from the rest.  (RA, Administrator).

According to Bell and Taylor (2005), the mimetic process of imitation provides a means whereby organizations are able to deal with uncertainty diffused.

**Identification of New Programs**

Data obtained from respondents indicated similarity in the way programs are identified at the institutional level among private higher education institutions. Quality assurance efforts of institutions also presented as ways of enabling identification of new programs. However, there are differences between identification of programs by chartered institutions and identification of programs at private university colleges. Interviewees at private chartered universities noted the influence of the department/school and the governance procedures that a new program had to go through before an application for accreditation is finally made. Thus, the chartered institution identify new programs through a governance process that considers feasibility and requirements to mount the program, while the affiliates do not give much of attention to that part of the process but rather focus on the need of the country. A faculty at one of the chartered universities explained the identification of new programs and stated:

> The challenge goes to the various schools and departments. They are to conduct needs assessment, and as a result of the needs assessment they are able to come up with programs…. Once we have identified a particular program, we also look at the feasibility of it. The department or the school will defend it at the Academic Board. If the Academic Board is satisfied with it, it is sent to the University Council. The Council will also have to approve of it before the quality assurance unit starts working on it to make sure it conforms to the NAB standards. Then we can apply for accreditation. (TT, Faculty).

However, generally at the private university colleges, programs were identified on as needed basis according to interviewees. An administrator at one of the affiliated institutions explained that identification of a program is recognized as one that will assist in the development of the country. The benefit of the program to the country is the overriding reason. He stated:

> At the moment under the quality unit, we are looking at Mechatronics engineering. Mechatronics is a marriage between electronics and mechanical engineering… that is needed in developing countries. (GA, Administrator)

**Summary**

This section examined efforts that PHEIs put towards meeting quality assurance standards, and how they interpret their efforts within the framework of the three isomorphic classifications of DiMaggio and Powell (1983). It also explored how regulatory measures established by Ghana's National Accreditation Board impacts the isomorphic nature of the private higher education institutions in Ghana. This section examined interview data from administrators and faculty of five private university colleges and two private chartered institutions within the framework of coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphism. From the perspective of coercive isomorphism five themes generated were: establishment of measures in conformity to NAB requirements, influence of quality assurance standards, institutional affiliations, conformity to mentoring (supervising) institution's programs and challenges. Data analyzed from the perspective of mimetic and normative isomorphism generated five themes: similarity of programs on offer, reduction in examination malpractice, job market influence, and identification of new programs. The next section will examine documents culled from the websites of the NAB and private higher education institutions.  NVivo 10 is used to generate the analysis.

## Document Analysis

This section examined documents from the websites of five private university colleges,

two private chartered universities and the National Accreditation Board of Ghana (NAB).

Information culled from the institutions' websites included news items, reports, PDFs and

scanned documents that have bearing on my research questions. These documents were analyzed

to determine the kind of efforts being made by private higher education institutions in fulfillment

of quality assurance requirements.

The websites of the selected private University Colleges in Ghana were googled and

searched to determine what kind of information was posted that related to efforts that private

universities were making in relation to quality assurance. The *a priori* themes generated from the

literature review and the conceptual model formed the basis of the document search at the

selected universities websites. However, some of the private universities did not have a search

bar on their webpage, and this made document searches limiting. A total of 23 coding themes

were applied to the documents accessed (see Tables 5 and 6 in chapter 3). Each document was

read completely, sentence by sentence for at least two times to acquaint this researcher of the

themes prevalent in each document. Some sentences had no themes in them, and other sentences

had more than one theme when they were coded. Two additional inductive emergent themes

emerged during the coding of the documents (Boyartis 1998). These two inductive themes -

'charter' and 'corporate social responsibility' - were noted in the documents, and found to have

bearing on the research questions. They were added to the 23 *a priori* themes to total 25.

Nodes[4] were created from the 23 *a priori* themes generated from literature plus the two

emergent themes that came up from reading and coding of documents (see Appendix A). The

NVivo 10 'drag and drop' coding tool was used to code the information downloaded from the

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[4] Ibid

websites of five private university colleges, two private chartered universities and the NAB. This 'drag and drop' tool function enabled the researcher to easily code large amounts of data from the websites. However, the NAB documents were coded separately from the private institutions since it was the authorizing entity.

An analysis of the websites of five private university colleges (Ashesi University College, Ghana Technology University College, Regent University College of Science and Technology, Pentecost University College, and Methodist University College) and two private chartered universities (Valley View University, and Trinity Theological Seminary) using NVivo 10 revealed that each institution had a specific area of focus in the documentation displayed on their individual websites. The documentation showed efforts that private higher education institutions were making to continually ensure that they maintain the acceptance of their stakeholders through the documents uploaded on their websites. The next section will analyze each institution's website documents that indicate efforts that institutions are making using the *a priori* codes.


**Ashesi University College**

Ashesi University College is a liberal arts private university college established in 2002 in Ghana. It offers courses in the Social Sciences and Humanities, Computer Science, Business Administration and Management Information Systems.  It has been reaccredited by the NAB since it was established. The institutional website has a search bar which aided in locating relevant materials. The 25 thematic nodes were used to analyze documents downloaded from the website. Figure 3 was generated from NVivo 10 using the 'Visualize' menu brought up by right clicking the mouse and selecting the navigation button 'Chart Document Coding'. This chart

generation method was applied to data obtained from the remaining (six) private higher

education institutions as well as the documents downloaded from the NAB website. Figure 3

demonstrates the focus of documents on Ashesi's website.

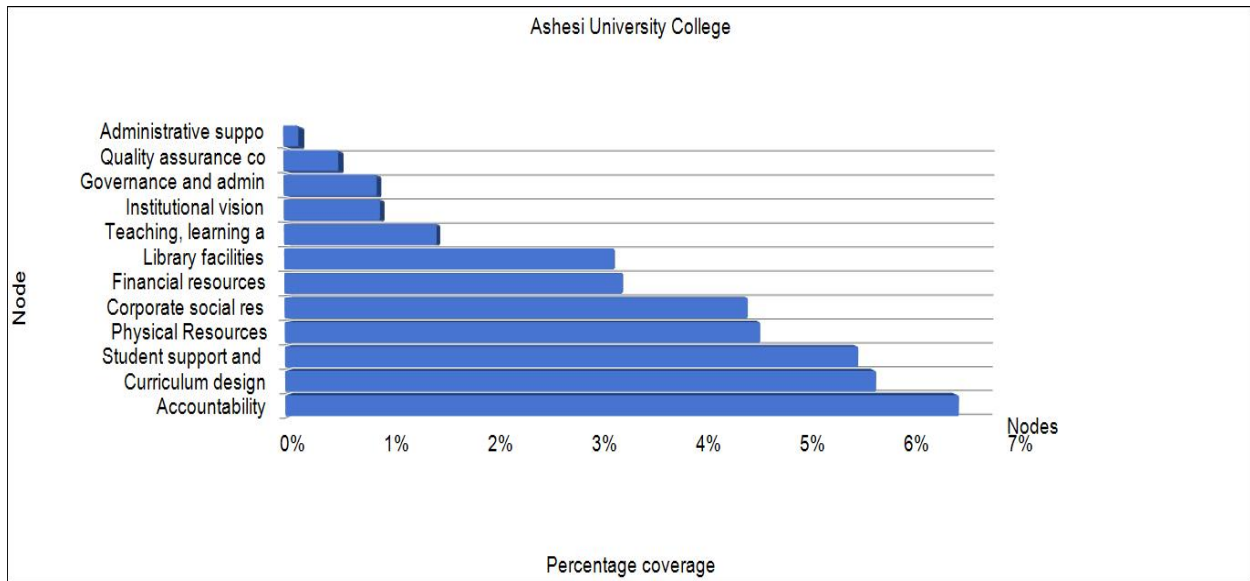**Figure 3: Ashesi University College - Indicating Dominant Themes in Documents**



Figure 3 indicates the thematic node 'Accountability' as dominant on the website of

Ashesi University College. It covers a percentage of 6.59 percent, which indicates the percentage

of the source content that has been coded at this node (accountability). The next two dominant

thematic nodes are 'Curriculum Design' and 'Student Support and Guidance' which had

percentages of 5.78 and 5.60 respectively. The thematic node, 'Accountability,' in the Ashesi

documents could be explained by the 'honor code' documents on the institution's website, that

students have to adopt and be accountable to in relation to examinations conducted by the

university college. This code also has a long term value of putting students in control of their

ethical behavior even after they have graduated from Ashesi. Documents about the 'honor code'

were prevalent on the website of Ashesi University College. In 2008, a white paper was issued

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on it called the "Ashesi University College – Honour System White Paper (www.ashesi.edu.gh).

Thus since 2008, every year group of students has voted to adopt it. The honor code contains

'codes of conduct' and expectations that each student have to abide by. The dominant theme of

accountability on the website of Ashesi University College may also indicate values and norms

that the institution sees applicable to its students in order to maintain its credibility and image

when it comes to examinations or ethical behavior of students, thus linking it to *normative

isomorphism*.


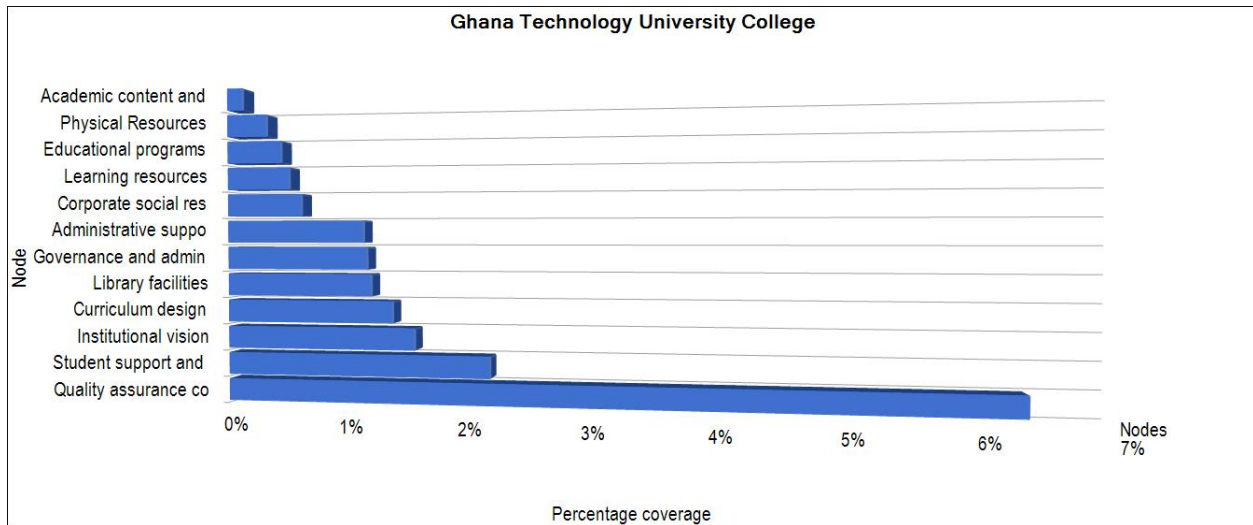**Ghana Technology University College**

Ghana Technology University College (GTUC) is a private university college in Ghana

offering programs in Telecommunications, Informatics, Business and IT up to the graduate level.

This institution has been reaccredited by the NAB. Ghana Technology University College is also

affiliated to a number of foreign universities that partners with them to offer programs

(www.gtuc.edu.gh). Thus it also has to abide by the affiliated foreign institution's quality

assurance requirements (personal communication with institution's Vice President) though the

NAB requirements takes prerogative over the foreign affiliates. The website of this institution

does not have a search bar which made document searches limiting in scope.

However, documents accessed from the website indicate the theme of 'quality assurance'

as having the most coded percentage coverage of its source content (see Figure 4). This

institution may want to indicate that it is driven by the theme of quality assurance through its

website documentation.  Since the theme of quality assurance is shown as very dominant, this

could be associated with *coercive isomorphism*. Further, information on the institution's website

indicated that it had received a number of awards for quality assurance, as well as organizing

regular quality assurance workshops for both academic and non-academic staff (www.gtuc.edu.gh). Figure 4 shows that the 'quality assurance' theme occupies a percentage of 6.42 indicating the amount of source content coded. The theme of 'quality assurance' is followed by the theme 'student support and guidance' which had 2.26 percent coverage.

**Figure 4: GTUC - Indicating Dominant Themes in Documents**



**Regent University College of Science and Technology**

Regent University College of Science and Technology offers program concentrations in Informatics, Computer Science, Business, Humanities and Theology. It has been reaccredited by the NAB. The website of this institution does not have a search bar which limited access to relevant documents. Information was culled from its news and publications section as well as any relevant information that was found on its website. Figure 5 indicates the dominant themes that were noted from analyzing documents found on the website.

**Figure 5: Regent University College - Indicating Dominant Themes in Documents**
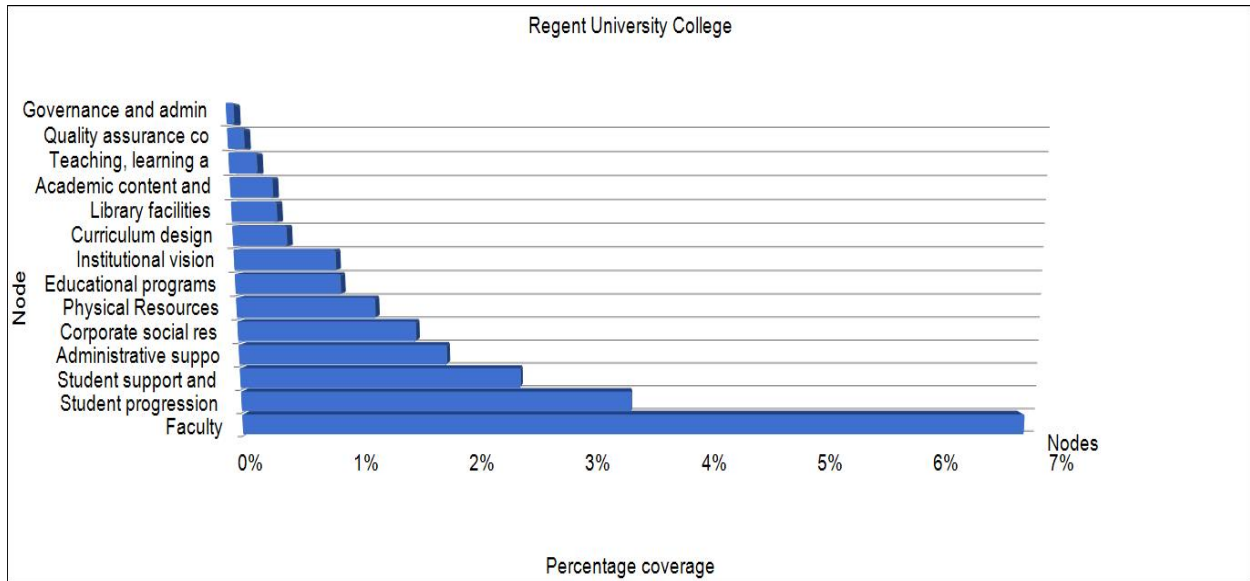


The outcome of the document analysis in Figure 5 revealed the theme of 'faculty' (6.84 percent) as dominant. This was followed by the theme of 'student progression and achievement' (3.41percent). The focus on the initial dominant theme of faculty on the institution's website may be linked to what the institution believed as pivotal in their efforts at addressing their quality assurance standards. A number of the publications on the websites referred to appointment of new faculty, to "raise the profile" of the institution's departments and schools. The news and publications section also indicate training programs that are offered to non-academic staff and faculty. These themes may be linked to the requirements of NAB that institutions need to fulfill such as hiring faculty and non-academic staff having the relevant qualifications for the institution's departments. Also, this could be considered as an aspect of *coercive isomorphism*

because the institution is conforming to the requirements of the NAB through its recruitment and training programs.

**Pentecost University College**

Pentecost University College has three academic units that are focused on offering undergraduate programs in Theology and Mission, Business Administration and Computing. It also offers graduate programs in Business Administration. This institution has been reaccredited by the NAB, and the search bar on its website aided document search. Document search on the institution's website indicate a focus on a number of themes. The coding revealed the dominant theme as 'faculty', representing 4.28 percent, followed by the theme of 'student support and guidance' which is 2.71 percent. Some of the documents analyzed indicate faculty from foreign universities arriving on working visits, and faculty attending workshops among others. Pentecost University College may consider faculty as their main selling point in the various efforts that they are making to enhance institutional quality. Similar to Regent University College, this emphasis on faculty could be associated with the requirements of the NAB and thus linked to *coercive isomorphism*. Figure 6 provides the details.

**Figure 6**: **Pentecost University College - Indicating Dominant Themes**



Pentecost University College
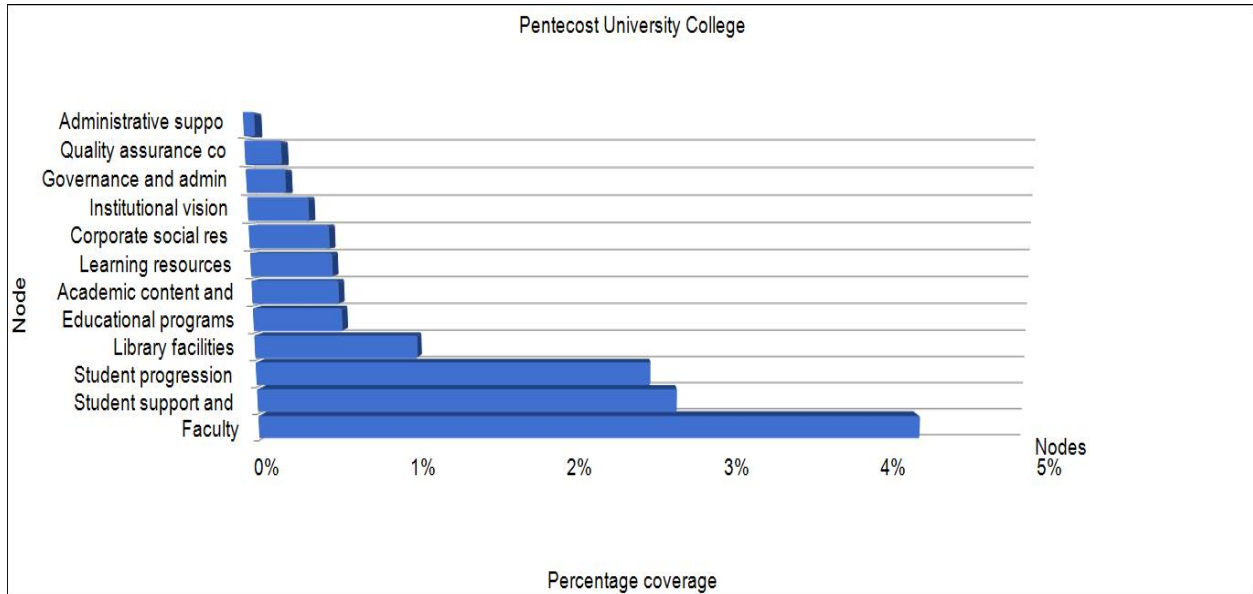
**Methodist University College**

Methodist University College (MUC) was first accredited in August 2000. Since then it has been reaccredited. It offers Bachelor's programs in Business Administration, Social Studies, Humanities and Applied Science as well as graduate programs (MBA, Master's and MPhil programs in Guidance and Counselling, and Statistics). Methodist University College website does not have a search bar which made accessing information quite limiting. Information was sourced from its 'news and events' menu as well relevant navigation links from the website. The chart (Figure 7) indicates that Methodist University College's main theme was 'student progression and achievement' followed by 'curriculum design'. However, the percentages representing the content in the documents coded were smaller (2.18 and 1.45 respectively) when they were compared to Regent University College's percentage of 3.41 for the same theme (student progression and achievement) which was at the second position. The dominant theme of student progression and achievement may be associated with NAB requirements and thus

linked to *coercive isomorphism*. Methodist University College's focus might be ensuring that students are catered for and properly evaluated according to the requirements of the NAB.

**Figure 7: Methodist University College - Indicating Dominant Themes**
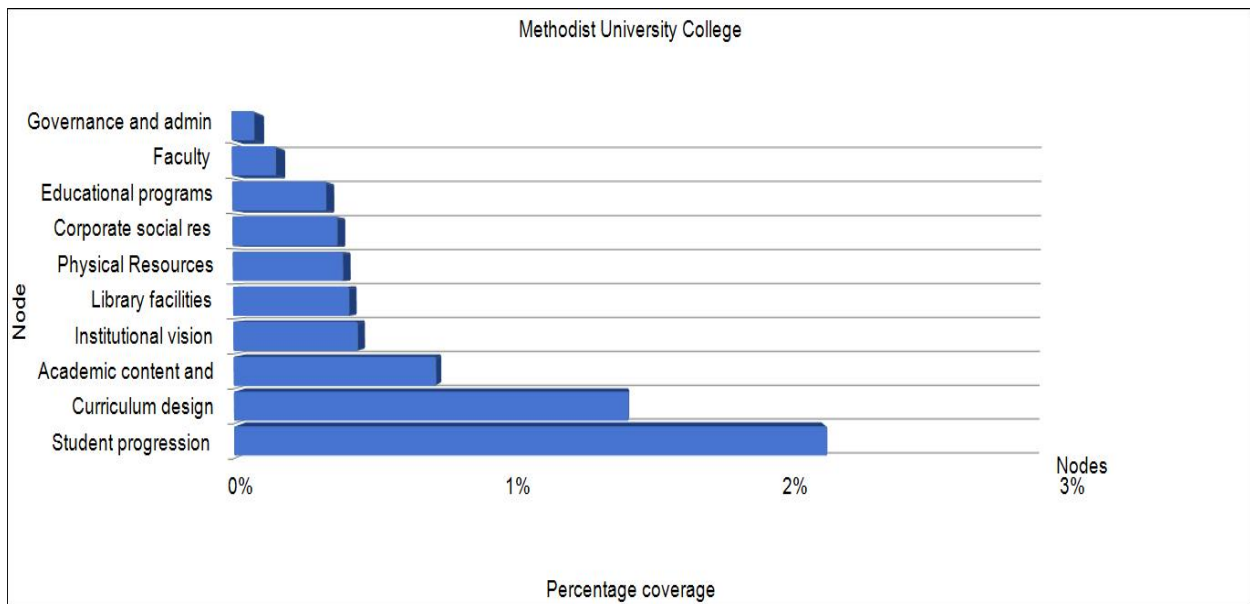


**Valley View University (Private Chartered University)**

Valley View University received its presidential charter in Ghana in 2006. It offers programs ranging from theology, business administration, computer science, and nursing. As a private chartered university, it is not mentored (supervised) by another institution and awards its own certificates. However, it mentors (supervises) other private institutions such as Heacon College, a private nursing institution in Ghana (www.vvu.edu.gh). The website has a search bar that aided information retrieval relating to the *a priori* and emergent themes. Documents that were prevalent on the website of this institution were mainly related to 'academic content and organization' (8.83 percent) followed by 'quality assurance' that had a coded source percentage of 7.77 (Figure 8).

This chartered university has various branch campuses in Ghana including one at Techiman in the Brong Ahafo region, and another at Kumasi in the Ashanti region of Ghana. This institution is further accredited by the Accrediting Association of Adventist Schools, Colleges and Universities (AAA). However, the regulations of the NAB supersede that of the AAA. Valley View University may regard 'academic content and organization' (8.83 percent) plus 'quality assurance' (7.77 percent) as very important. Thus the percentage of 7.77 for the theme 'quality assurance' is the highest generated from coding among the selected private higher education institutions. These percentages could indicate the value placed on NAB's regulations by Valley View University, thus linking it to NAB requirement about having the essential components of an academic program as well as the requisites for student graduation, performance and achievement, as well as quality assurance. Thus the preceding could be associated with *coercive isomorphism*. Figure 8 provides details of the percentages for the relevant nodes.

**Figure 8: Valley View University - Indicating Dominant Themes**
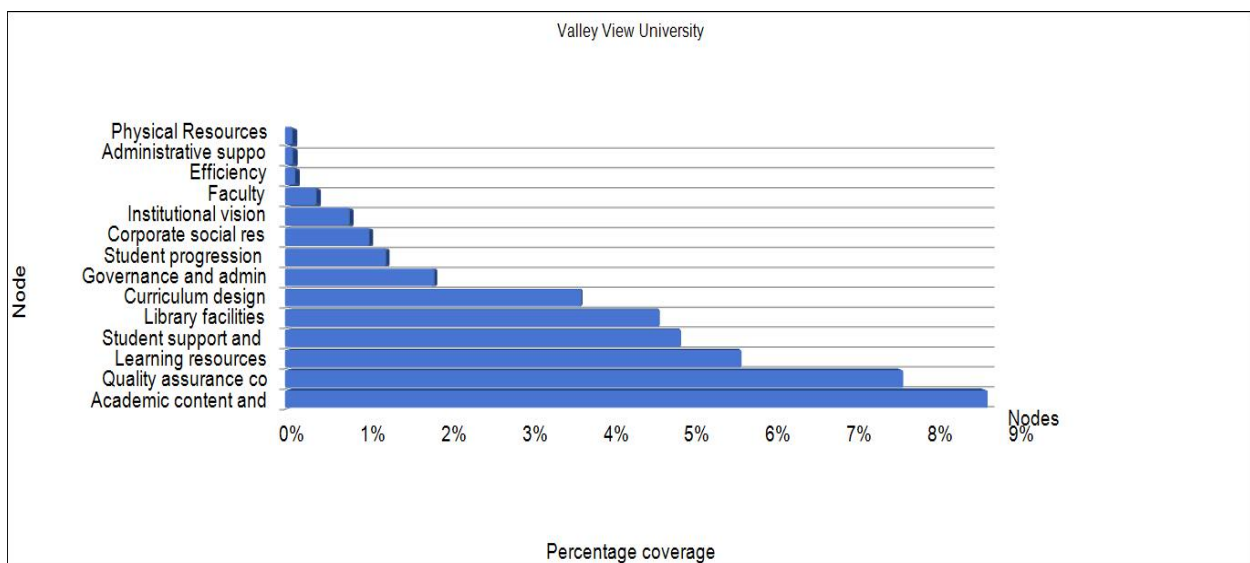
**Trinity Theological Seminary**

     Trinity Theological Seminary is the second private chartered university in Ghana focused on in this study. It specializes in theological education and had its charter from the Ghana government in 2005 (personal communication with Academic Vice-President in May 2014). Trinity Theological Seminary mentors (supervises) a number of institutions that offer theology in Ghana. Some of the mentee institutions include Regent University College of Science and Technology (personal communication with Academic Vice-President in May 2014).

     Document searches on the website of Trinity Theological Seminary was limiting since the new website was still under construction. Also it did not have a search bar, and some of the information provided was incomplete. Thematic search on the website was very limiting. The dominant theme that was obtained from the website was 'educational programs' (5.02 percent) and 'institutional vision and mission' (4.77 percent). Figure 9 portrays the thematic percentages.

**Figure 9: Trinity Theological Seminary - Indicating Dominant Themes**
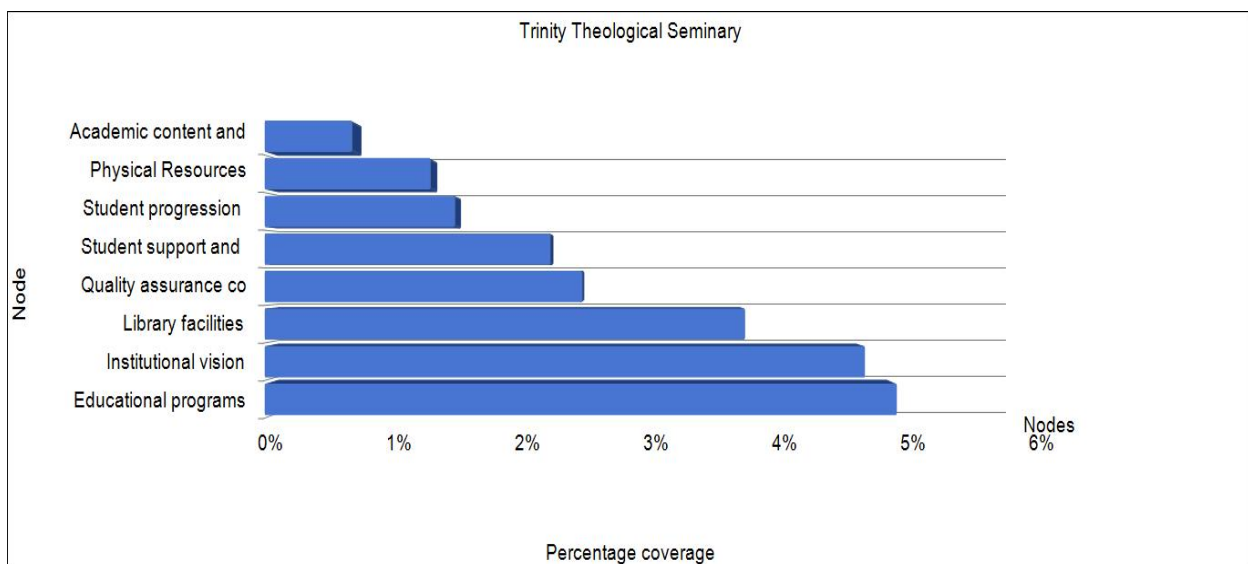
**Analysis of National Accreditation Board Documents**

A total of 18 documents relating to private higher education institution in Ghana were purposely selected and downloaded into NVivo 10 from the website of the National Accreditation Board of Ghana. Nine out of the 18 documents had information that could be coded (see Table 7). Two documents out of the nine, had information that was coded with four nodes[5] each. These two documents were 'Charter Application Form' (which is the same as 'Self-Evaluation Reporting Format for Presidential Charter Application'), and 'NAB Roadmap' (which is the same as Roadmap to Accreditation). The remaining seven documents had information that was coded with one, two or three nodes each. Thus the two documents that were coded with four nodes each were purposefully selected for further analysis. The four nodes in the 'Charter Application Form' are faculty, governance and organization, educational programs and self-assessment/self-study/self-evaluation. The nodes in the NAB's Roadmap to Accreditation are coercive isomorphism, charter, educational programs, and institutional pressure.

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[5] Ibid.

**Table 7: List of NAB Documents Created With NVivo 10**

| Name | Nodes | References | Created On | Created By |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Affiliation Barometer | 0 | 0 | 12/ 26/ 2014 8:57 PM | L |
| Charter Application Form | 4 | 4 | 12/ 26/ 2014 8:59 PM | L |
| Form 1-NAB INST. RE-ACC.Ques. | 0 | 0 | 12/ 26/ 2014 8:59 PM | L |
| Form 2-Self Evaluation Reporting Format For Institutional | 3 | 3 | 12/ 26/ 2014 8:59 PM | L |
| Gazette NAB Requirements (1) | 0 | 0 | 12/ 26/ 2014 8:59 PM | L |
| Gazetter NAB Requirements (2) | 0 | 0 | 12/ 26/ 2014 8:59 PM | L |
| Gazette NAB Requirements (3) | 0 | 0 | 12/ 26/ 2014 8:59 PM | L |
| Gazette NAB Requirements (4) | 3 | 3 | 12/ 26/ 2014 8:59 PM | L |
| Minimum Entry Requirements | 1 | 1 | 12/ 26/ 2014 8:59 PM | L |
| NAB Admission Requirement | 1 | 1 | 12/ 26/ 2014 8:59 PM | L |
| NAB Board Decisions | 2 | 2 | 12/ 26/ 2014 8:59 PM | L |
| NAB Distance Learning Prog. Accr. Questionaire | 0 | 0 | 12/ 26/ 2014 8:59 PM | L |
| NAB Prog. Re-Acc. Quest. Existing-21QAC | 0 | 0 | 12/ 26/ 2014 8:59 PM | L |
| NAB Quest. Inst Registration-21QAC | 0 | 0 | 12/ 26/ 2014 8:59 PM | L |
| NAB Standards For Physical Facilities | 1 | 1 | 12/ 26/ 2014 8:59 PM | L |
| NAB_LI_1984 | 0 | 0 | 12/ 26/ 2014 8:59 PM | L |
| NAB+Affiliation+Guidelines | 1 | 1 | 12/ 26/ 2014 8:57 PM | L |
| NAB Roadmap | 4 | 6 | 12/ 26/ 2014 8:59 PM | L |

*Charter Application*

The charter application document had four nodes that have been referenced, and a visualized chart created showed the nodes as self-assessment, educational programs, governance and administration and faculty as earlier noted. Figure 10 displays the percentages of these nodes.

**Figure 10: Charter Application**



Figure 10: Charter Application
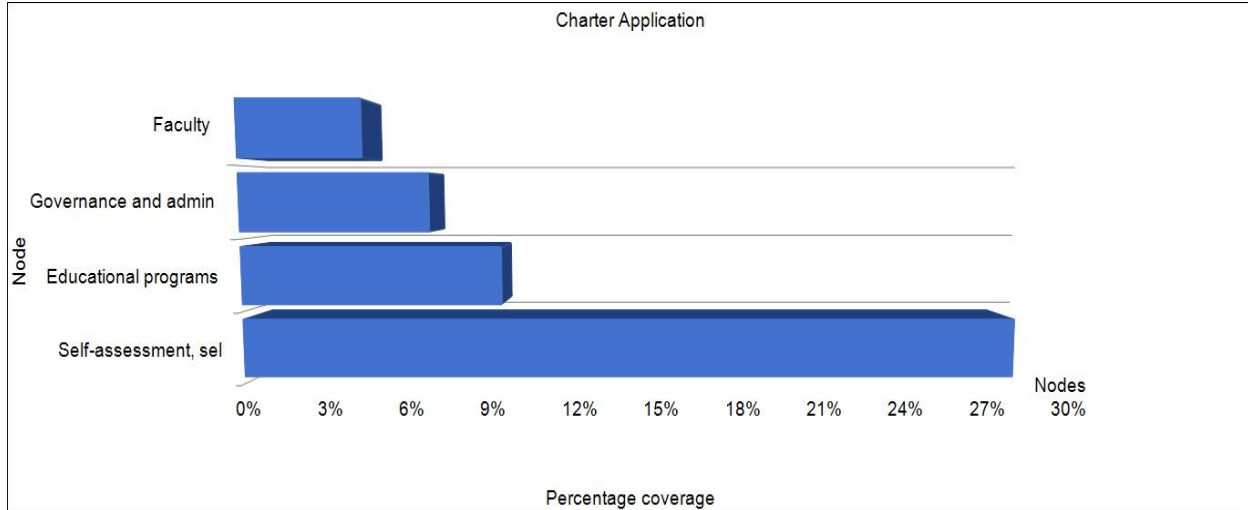
In Figure 10, 'self-assessment' had total percentage coverage of 28.97 percent. 'Educational programs' had a percentage of 9.74, 'governance and administration' was 7.08 percent and 'faculty' was 4.64 percent. Figure 10 revealed 'self-assessment' as a very important aspect of the charter application process as well as the quality assurance process. This order of importance is followed by information required on types of educational programs that the institution has expanded on in its ten years of existence leading to its charter application, plus history of programs that have been accredited and reaccredited. The 'Faculty' node indicates among others publications churned out and staff/student ratio.

*NAB's Roadmap to Accreditation*

The nodes coded in NAB's Roadmap to Accreditation had the following percentages as noted in Figure 11: institutional pressure (34.15 percent), educational programs (30.15 percent), charter (16.96 percent) and coercive isomorphism (16.36 percent). The total percentage coverage for 'institutional pressure' and 'educational programs' shows that more than 60 percent

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of the source document was coded for these two nodes. This could indicate the importance of those two nodes in NAB's document "Roadmap to Accreditation."

**Figure 11: NAB's Roadmap to Accreditation**
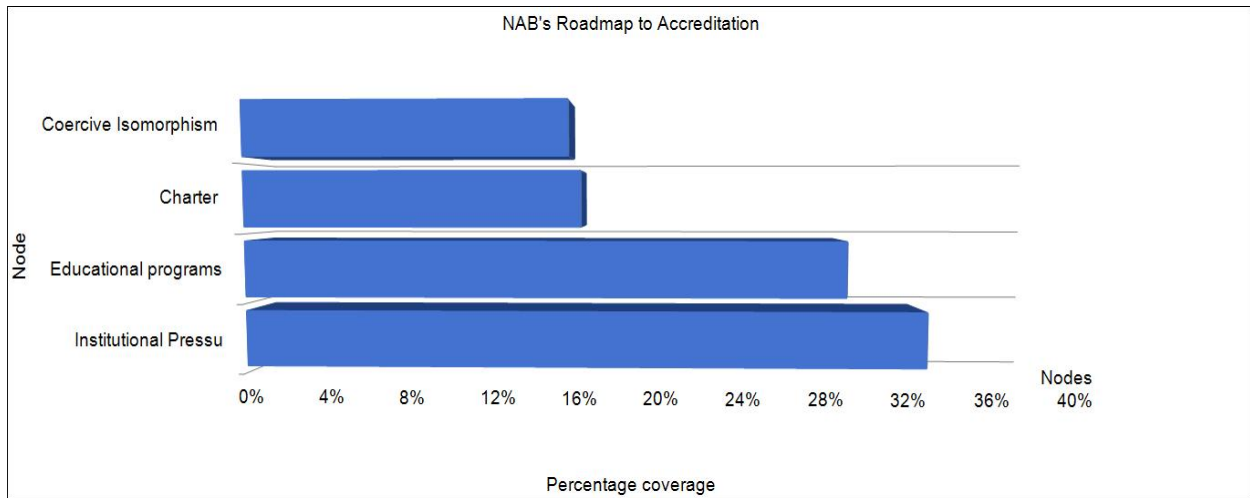


Institutional pressure is defined as compelling organizations to adjust to the external world (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). This is shown in how institutions are directed by the NAB on the requirements that they need to fulfill before institutional and program accreditation are granted by the NAB. The requirements include proof of affiliation to a mentoring (supervising) institution and submission of institutional registration form. 'Educational programs' in the accreditation document examined the procedure by which programs are accredited and reaccredited. The 'charter' node noted requirements that an institution that wants to be autonomous has to satisfy. Coercive isomorphism is defined as pressure from the external environment on the organization (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Thus, NAB's roadmap to accreditation notes that an individual or organization wishing to establish a private higher education institution must fulfill established prerequisites. These requirements include first

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seeking affiliation with a recognized mentoring (supervising) institution that would award the certificates of the mentee institution.

**Institutional Analysis**

Analysis of websites of private university colleges and private chartered universities indicates varied efforts that these institutions make in their attempts at meeting quality assurance standards. The document analysis revealed that institutions emphasized on varied issues on their websites. Ashesi University College focused on 'accountability' on the part of students. Regent University College and Pentecost University College emphasized on the quality of 'faculty' on their websites. 'Quality assurance' was the major emphasis of Ghana Technology University College and Valley View University. Methodist University College focused on student progression and achievement. Valley View University also emphasized on academic content while Trinity Theological Seminary focused on 'educational programs.'

The analysis indicates that there were some linkages to coercive and normative isomorphism. Institutional emphasis on faculty, student progression, and academic content are associated with *coercive isomorphism*, as part of institutional requirements at ensuring that the regulations and standards set by the NAB are followed. Ashesi University College for example, focused on accountability on the part of students especially during examinations. This is also noted as aiding in the future ethical development of the student even after graduating from Ashesi University College. Thus norms of accountability are developed for the student to follow, which could be linked to *normative isomorphism* (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

**Summary**

This section examined *a priori* themes generated from literature (see Tables 5 and 6 in Chapter 3) that were coded into nodes using NVivo 10 as well as the two emergent themes (charter and corporate social responsibility). The analysis of documents on the websites of seven private higher education institutions and the NAB revealed that various institutions put emphasis on different themes through publications on their websites. These themes also indicate the efforts that these institutions are making towards quality assurance in private higher education to convey the message of conformity.

## Chapter 6: Interpretation of Findings, Future Considerations and Conclusion

**Introduction**

   This study explored how the efforts of private higher education institutions reflect mimetic, coercive and normative isomorphism as indicated by DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) institutional theory. A focal point for this exploration has been quality assurance. Quality assurance in higher education institutions in Ghana began in the early 1990s in response to an increase in the numbers of private providers of post-secondary education. This study used a qualitative design that included open-ended interviews held with administrators/faculty of PHEIs, higher education specialists, public higher education retirees and NAB officials. Documents from the websites of eight institutions were also analyzed. The following research questions were answered in this study.

1. What efforts do PHEI in Ghana put toward meeting quality assurance standards?

2. Do those efforts reflect mimetic, coercive or normative isomorphism?

   This study presented an overview of what led to the establishment of a quality assurance agency in Ghana, and how policy guidelines advanced by the National Accreditation Board (NAB) addressed quality issues in higher education institutions. The conceptual model guiding this study drew on DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) institutional theory by emphasizing its coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphic variables. Overall, the analysis of open-ended interviews with sixteen participants as well as documents culled from the websites of the NAB and seven selected private higher education institutions found evidence of efforts institutions were making towards meeting their quality assurance requirements through mimetic, coercive and normative isomorphism. Though analysis of documents provided evidence of efforts, the patterns in the documents displayed on the websites of the institutions did reflect minimal

evidence of mimetic, coercive and normative isomorphism. These were not as strong as the evidence that came through with the interviews.

It is imperative to note that though research (Bell and Taylor 2005) has shown relationships between isomorphism and quality assurance in higher education institutions in different settings and environments, literature dealing particularly with the Ghanaian environment was almost non-existent. This study is significant as it addresses the dearth of literature about quality assurance and private higher education in Ghana.

The significance of this study, main findings, their interpretation, discussion as it relates to the conceptual model and future research considerations for the quality assurance landscape and private higher education in Ghana provides the overall conclusion.

**Significance of Study**

This study's importance lies in the fact that it provides knowledge about quality assurance issues and efforts of private higher education institutions in Ghana facilitated at the institutional level. This research can also form the basis of further exploratory study on quality assurance in Anglophone countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, given that the Great Britain was the colonial authority and the colonial history of these countries were intertwined (Sawyerr 2004). It will enable an extensive understanding of quality assurance in higher education in a developing country and will also generate knowledge for government, policy makers and PHEIs.

This study addressed a gap in research about quality assurance in private higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa in general and Ghana in particular. On a more significant note, there are almost no empirical studies focusing on DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) institutional theory and quality assurance in Sub-Saharan Africa as it relates to coercive, mimetic and

normative isomorphism. Available research studies in this area have all focused on aspects of the institutional theory and were not in any way related to Sub-Saharan Africa. Morphew (2009) examined United States higher education institutional diversity by drawing on institutional theory as the basis of evaluation. It was noted that though there was no significant change in institutional diversity, there was tremendous growth in the number of new institutional types that resembled already existing higher education institutions thus indicating mimetic isomorphism. This perspective appears to be linked to quality assurance processes of higher education institutions. Suspitsin and Suspitsyna (2007) found that accredited institutions easily attracted and retained students than non-accredited institutions, suggesting the benefit of obtaining accreditation.

As a result, this study provides both an example, through the case of Ghana, and findings that confirm a particular way to understand how quality assurance impacts the activities of private higher education institutions in a Sub-Saharan country.  It found evidence that the coercive force of quality assurance requirements as indicated by the NAB, greatly influenced the activities of private higher education institutions. El Hassan (2013) examined the achievements, challenges and issues of quality assurance in 20 Middle East and North African economies. She noted the importance of quality assurance in strengthening the internal and external efficiency of higher education institutions.  Krzykowski and Kinser  (2014) also noted among others how regional accreditors in the United States now require institutions to assess the learning of students and at the same time share the data with related stakeholders. The foregoing indicates the role quality assurance plays in the activities of higher education institutions. Further, this current study's findings could illustrate to prospective researchers what could be expected about quality assurance in private higher education in developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

**Overview of Major Findings**

       As a result of the two research questions guiding this study, the following are the overview of the major findings when data was analyzed.

1. The NAB provided the *coercive* force for Ghana's private higher education landscape.

2. Quality assurance requirements and measures established in conformity to the NAB requirements influenced institutional activities.

3. Institutional affiliations and conformity to mentoring (supervising) institution's programs played cogent roles in the quality assurance process in Ghana.

4. There were mixed views about quality of programs and graduates.

5. Quality assurance requirements influenced programs offerings, similarity and identification of new programs by the PHEIs and reduction of examination malpractice.

6. The NAB and PHEIs had varied ways of strengthening the quality assurance process.

7. PHEIs depend greatly on adjunct faculty.

8. Shortage of academic and non-academic staff in the private higher education sector had a negating impact.

9. The accreditation time frame given a PHEI was linked to how often the institution is tracked by the NAB to determine whether quality assurance requirements are adhered to.

10. Multiple admissions of students, non-compliance to timeframe given for program and institutional accreditation, and dishonesty on the part of PHEIs constitute some of the issues that the NAB has to address.

       In addition, findings from analysis of documents on institutional websites indicate that each institution had specific areas of focus in the documentation uploaded on their websites.

**Interpretation of Major Findings**

*Introduction*

Institutional theory presents three channels through which isomorphism can occur and they are noted as coercive, mimetic and normative. DiMaggio and Powell's institutional theory as shown through isomorphism in organizations is explicated in higher education institutions in varied forms as evidenced by research. In Santana et al (2010) Brazilian higher education institutions had to respond to the demands of the external environment and be subject to coercive isomorphism. In addition, Suspitsin and Suspitsyna (2007) indicate that private higher education institutions in Russia maintained their legality with state actors through conformity, and accredited institutions easily attracted students than the non-accredited ones.

The ten major findings earlier enumerated are further consolidated under the following four headings to enable clarity and organization in the interpretation of findings:

- Major findings 1, 2 and 3 are consolidated under the heading *Quality Assurance and National Accreditation Board Requirements*.

- Major findings 4, 5 and 6 are consolidated under *Quality of Graduates/Programs and Quality Assurance*.

- Major findings 7 and 8 are consolidated under the heading *Quality Assurance and Staffing*.

- Major findings 9 and 10 are consolidated under the heading *NAB Accreditation Time Frame and Other Issues*.

**Quality Assurance and National Accreditation Board Requirements**

This study noted that the NAB represents the regulatory framework and provides the controlling edge over private higher education institutions in Ghana. Thus for institutions to be classified as legitimate, they have to respond to the demands of the external environment especially the state, and be subject to coercive isomorphism through conformity in their efforts towards addressing quality assurance standards. Coercive isomorphism for example, is in evidence when higher education institutions in Ghana, are pressurized by the quality assurance body through invitations, regulations and persuasion to abide by the regulations of the accrediting body. Failure to abide by regulations will result in sanctions and thereby loss of recognition.

Accreditation granted to PHEIs in response to conformity to quality assurance standards, indicates acceptability as well as the institution's compliance to beliefs, values and rules in the environment that it is located. This study found evidence that private higher education institutions had to comply with the requirements of the quality assurance process in order to be accredited. Therefore, coercive isomorphism which is noted as externally imposed usually by the state is linked to recognition of an institution's accreditation status. These findings confirmed the results of other studies earlier reviewed in this study. In Santana et al (2010) Brazilian higher education institutions had to respond to the demands of the external environment and be subject to coercive isomorphism. Suspitsin and Suspitsyna (2007) indicate that private higher education institutions in Russia maintained their legality with state actors through conformity, and accredited institutions easily attracted students than the non-accredited ones. Similarly, Giesecke (2006) confirmed that accreditation as a regulative framework, was one of the ways that higher education institutions maintained their legality. Wilkins and Huisman (2012) noted that apart

from rankings, regulative framework (accreditation) was salient for an institution to obtain legitimacy. Gonzalez, Montano and Hassall (2009) examined resistance to the introduction of policies aimed at combining the skills in accounting and business administration studies in Spain. The study revealed that accounting and business education in Spain addressed both competitive and institutional (mimetic, coercive and normative) pressures in the skills development of students.

The study indicated that PHEIs in Ghana were compliant to the quality assurance process and thus will always abide by state requirements and follow the path that leads to recognition. As stated in literature, there are indications that in order for institutions to be classified as legitimate, they have to respond to the demands of the external environment through conformity, for example, as well as employ the regulatory framework in order to be recognized.

As required by the NAB, private higher education institutions have established internal quality assurance offices and put in place measures that will enhance their recognition. Quality assurance procedures are noted as scripted procedures that institutions have to undergo to obtain recognition (Ogawa and Bossert 1995). The NAB's role in this regard is to assist in capacity development of PHEIs through regular capacity building workshops. Quality assurance stakeholders recognize the importance of continuous capacity development (Shabani 2013).

Another regulatory requirement of the NAB is institutional affiliation which consists of a mentor (supervisor) institution and a mentee institution. The study revealed that PHEIs in Ghana had multiple affiliations because of the number of programs they offer. Levy (forthcoming) argues that private higher education institutions that are affiliated to public universities are in the majority and may not have a specified timeframe. In a similar vein, the affiliation process in Ghana does not have a specified time frame as noted in the L.I.1984, and the private affiliates are

in the majority. An affiliate private institution in Ghana is weaned off its mentor (supervisor) when it eventually attains a charter status. The minimum number of years required for a PHEI to charter is ten years, however, when this researcher was in Ghana to collect data (in 2014), she observed that the NAB did not approve two PHEIs that had applied for charter and had been affiliated to two public higher education institutions for more than ten years. Further, the reasons for denial were not explicitly stated according to an interviewee of one of the institutions that was denied charter. When this researcher questioned an NAB official about it, he indicated that those two PHEIs were denied charter because their faculty members did not have enough publications to their credit. This brought into focus the need for faculty members to have enough research publications to their credit. Some faculty members at PHEIs in Ghana have minimal or no publication to their credit.

**Quality of Graduates/Programs and Quality Assurance**

Data obtained from PHEIs revealed that many offer programs that were mimetic in nature and did not require a high start-up cost. In addition, general respondents' perception about the program quality was also mixed. However, a few PHEIs in Ghana are on the verge of offering programs requiring high start-up cost (such as the physical sciences and engineering programs) as the established public higher education institutions. During the data collection in Ghana by this researcher, she observed that two of the selected institutions (Ashesi University College and Valley View University) were constructing structures that would enable them offer programs in the physical sciences and engineering.

The similarity in the programs offered by these PHEIs indicates mimetic isomorphism. Research demonstrates a relationship between mimetic isomorphism and successful efforts of a

private higher education institution. Higher education institutions mimicking prestigious ones and a result of the pressures of isomorphism is illustrated in the study by Morphew and Huisman (2002) as well as Bell and Taylor (2005). Studies have shown that newly established higher education institutions emulate prestigious institutions in order to gain legitimacy. A PHEI seeking external recognition must conduct its activities to resemble institutions that are already recognized. Therefore, mimetic isomorphism evolves when there is uncertainty in the system that enhances the process of imitation. In addition, when there are vague goals, and technologies are not well understood, organizations may imitate other organizations (March and Olsen 1976). Researchers describe 'mimetic isomorphism' as enabling organizations to emulate or copy the norms and forms of recognized institutions, such as higher education institutions in their efforts at gaining legitimacy.

The study found mimetic isomorphism prevalent in the programs offered by the PHEIs. With the exception of one chartered private university (Trinity Theological Seminary), there was emulation in the program offerings at the other six PHEIs. The popular programs were Business Administration and Information Technology, though two out of the five private university colleges (Ashesi University College and Regent University College of Science and Technology) had slightly modified some of their programs to make them unique. Emulation in program offerings was also a way of institutions dealing with uncertainty as newly established higher education institutions emulate prestigious institutions in order to gain legitimacy. Results from interviews of representatives of private higher education institutions did not emphatically indicate that institutions were emulating prestigious HEIs but it could be implied from the examination of the curriculum of individual private higher education institutions. Thus, the efforts of these PHEIs reflect mimetic as well as coercive and normative isomorphism.

Similarly, findings from the study revealed mixed perception and concern about the quality of graduates from PHEIs. Some interviewees believed that since private institutions were affiliated to mainly public institutions, the quality of graduates from PHEIs would be similar to that of its mentoring (supervising) institution. This may suggest that some graduates of PHEIs may not be employable as a result of their incapability (either writing or oral), that would invariably affect the workforce requirements of a developing African country like Ghana.

Program offerings on the Ghanaian higher education landscape are influenced by a number of factors including the job market (Kinser 2007) and the infrastructural layout required. For example, some of the private higher education institutions in Ghana offer programs that students are interested in, have a demand on the job market and have low infrastructural layout. Research indicates that these findings are validated. A study of PHEIs in select European countries by Fried, Glass and Baumgartl (2007) noted that private higher education providers in Europe offer programs identical to what was offered by similar providers as is the situation in Sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, programs offered also did not have high start-up costs. Teferra and Altbach (2004) indicate that programs taught in PHEIs in Africa are restricted and 'generally similar across the continent and narrow in their program coverage" (34) and relatively have low start-up cost. Similarly, Varghese (2004) indicates that PHEIs in African countries offer programs that "require less investment in terms of infrastructure and equipment." (17).The foregoing suggests that few PHEIs will venture into programs that require huge infrastructure like engineering. Another outcome from the study was that programs were offered to equip students with values of critical thinking and job search skills. This could be linked to *normative isomorphism* because students learn the norms of critical thinking as well as job search skills while standards are developed. This study revealed similarity in program offerings at majority of

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PHEIs in Ghana (Varghese 2004), and this was obvious when the curriculum of the institutions was examined.

To promote quality of academic standards among the general public, private higher education institutions in Ghana have implemented measures to assist in the examinations and assessments of students to maintain credibility. In Ghana, one of the measurements of a higher educational institution's credibility is contingent on how examinations are held and proctored. Private higher education institutions in Ghana have instituted values and norms to maintain their credibility when it comes to proctoring examinations, an outcome from the study's findings which is an evidence of *normative isomorphism*. Examinations are held in high esteem and are considered as a measure of institutional credibility in Ghanaian PHEIs. One would have expected other measures such as credible faculty members, taking prominence in enhancing an institution's image.

The study noted varied ways of strengthening the quality assurance process of PHEIs to include regular training of peer reviewers (Materu 2007), and incorporation of graduate education in the quality assurance process (Hayward and Ncayiyana 2015). Peer reviewers in Ghana for example are trained on-as-needed basis. However, respondents are of the view that there should be regular training scheduled for them as this will strengthen the quality assurance process. In addition, newly established public higher education institutions must be held to the same standards as the private higher education institutions before charter is granted by the government. Respondents explained that newly established public higher education institutions that may not have all the complements of a full research university are granted charter by the government almost as soon as they are established. Generally, respondents were of the view that such an almost automatic charter granting to public institutions does not enhance the quality

assurance process. The preceding notes that strengthening the quality assurance process at the institutional level is required if institutions are to be abreast and up-to-date with the accreditation process. Research indicates that regular training of peer reviewers enables harmonization of working methods in a structured environment (Hayward 2006, Shaw 2000). According to Hayward (2006), peer reviewers in Ghana acknowledge the need for regular training to adequately equip them to deliver what is expected of them.

**Quality Assurance and Staffing**

This study indicated a huge dependence on adjunct faculty members by the PHEIs. A preliminary search on one of the websites of the institutions by this researcher revealed that adjunct faculty members constituted more than fifty percent of the academic faculty resource at the institution. In view of the continual growth and expansion in PHEIs, there will be additional need for faculty members, both academic and non-academic. This brings to light the lack of full-time faculty members as well as shortage of those having PHDs or research degrees available to teach (Fried, Glass and Baumgartl 2007; Hayward and Ncayiyana 2015). Many of the PHEIs in Ghana do not have adequate full-time faculty members of their own and rely on the public higher education institutions or retired faculty to address their staffing needs. The increase in the number of private institutions has further deepened the need for qualified academic and non-academic staff. Ghana is noted to have a need for 1000 new faculty, however, the public universities are able to hire only 20-30 a year to replace the retiring faculty and therefore, Hayward and Ncayiyana (2014) advocate the need for the quality assurance process to pay particular attention to doctoral education and research. Further, the authors advocate that graduate education should take on a more regional role in West Africa as is the case in the

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country of South Africa.  In South Africa, higher education institutions provide discounted

tuition fees to graduate students from countries outside the South African region pursuing either

Master's or doctoral programs.  Students who are classified as qualified but needy are also

eligible for food and housing subsidies. However, students from countries in the South African

sub-region pay the same fees as the natives of South Africa. The preceding example indicates

that South Africa is assisting to address faculty shortage in other African countries by providing

a regional support in graduate education (Hayward and Ncayiyana, 2015).  The authors contend

that this South African example should be emulated in other regional centers in Africa (Hayward

and Ncayiyana 2015). This suggests that PHEIs in Sub-Saharan Africa have to more proactive

and innovative in addressing this problem of faculty shortage.

In addition, there is also the lack of qualified non-academic staff to support the quality

assurance process at the institutional level (Manyaga 2008; Okebukola 2002). Likewise, the

NAB officials acknowledged during interview that sometimes they are overwhelmed by work as

a result of inadequate staff which delays their work output especially in responding to the

demands of the PHEIs seeking accreditation.


**NAB Accreditation Time Frame and Other Issues**

Private higher education institutions that were granted accreditation by the NAB had

different time periods. The periods ranged from one to five years. However, this study found that

the accreditation time frame was linked to the frequency of institutional monitoring by the NAB

to determine whether quality assurance requirements were adhered to. This indicates the

authority of the NAB and its role at ensuring that institutions conform to the quality assurance

requirements and not deviate from it. Thus the longer accreditation time frame given a private

higher education institution indicates minimal visits by the NAB officials and peer reviewers, whereas a shorter time frame meant frequency of oversight visits by the NAB officials and peer reviewers. On a more significant note, the NAB document, L.I. 1984 that informed prospective institutions about accreditation procedures did not provide a definite time frame for each accreditation period. It only stated in schedule 11(3) that "The period of accreditation shall be as specified on the certificate of accreditation." Thus, this regulation is open to interpretation and at the discretion of the NAB officials.

It is recommended that the NAB should clearly establish a definite timeframe for institutional accreditation so that the system could be seen as objective. This current system where the time frame is determined based on the findings of the NAB officials and peer reviewers are likely to make the system look subjective. Therefore establishing such a definite system would enable higher education institutions to be predictive and know what to expect during a particular accreditation period.

Generally, this affects the institution's quality assurance process requirements in terms of research and publication inputs of faculty. Evaluation of students by faculty members is also affected as they can be overwhelmed and may not have enough time to assess students adequately in all these varied sessions. Faculty members therefore have very little time for research and service activities (Varghese 2004). Findings from study support the lack of adequate time on the part of faculty to undertake any meaningful research and publish at the same time.

The study noted that some PHEIs were non-complaint to the time frame given to them for program and institutional accreditation. As a result the NAB at most times modify the time-frame to give institutions adequate time for their program and institutional accreditation renewal.

However, institutions still delay and are non-complaint to the time frame. This could be linked to the lack of adequate administrative staff to assist these PHEIs. This finding does not validate the conceptual model for this study.

A shocking finding from the study was that some private higher education institutions seeking accreditation use the curriculum vitae of various qualified professors to convince the NAB to grant them accreditation. Once accreditation has been obtained, the faculty presented during the accreditation process becomes non-existent on the college's list of faculty. This indicates the manipulative and dishonest nature of some PHEIs. These affected institutions used manipulation to gain legitimacy and recognition in their environment. This finding can also be linked to faculty shortage in Ghana and brain drain in Africa in general. According to Tettey (2006), 50 percent of faculty members at a public higher education institution (University of Ghana) were over 50 years and close to retirement. In addition, there are not enough doctoral students graduating to replace faculty members that are retiring (Ng'ethe and Ngome 2007).

**Interpretation of Unexpected Findings**

This study set out to answer the following two major research questions:

1. What efforts do PHEI in Ghana put toward meeting quality assurance standards?

2. Do those efforts reflect mimetic, coercive or normative isomorphism?

However, the findings of this study exceeded the quality assurance standards that it set out to determine. These are enumerated as unexpected findings as follows; relationship conflict between mentor (supervisor) and mentee, concern about quality of graduates, differences in identification of new programs, challenge of multiple admissions by PHEIs, conflicting requirements and duplication of activities between mentoring (supervising) institutions and the

NAB, and lack of formal communication between PHEIs and the NAB about charter requirements.

One of the fallouts in the Ghanaian mentor (supervisor)–mentee relationship is conflict or disagreement over what the appropriate process should be in a given situation. In such circumstances the mentee institution has to conform to mentor's (supervisor's) expectations. This indicates that PHEIs in Ghana adhere strictly to quality assurance guidelines as stipulated by the NAB in the mentor (supervisor)-mentee relationship. The foregoing represents one of the unexpected outcomes of this study. The expected and assumed outcome was that this mentor/mentee relationship will be one that is devoid of conflict. In this situation, the mentee is expected to conform specifically to the demands of the relationship. An existing conflict indicates that the mentee has likely challenged the status quo and has not complied easily with the demands of the mentor (supervisor).

Second, the specialist interviewees expressed concern about the writing and oral capabilities of some graduates of PHEIs among others. This was another unexpected findings and this was linked to the non-availability of qualified faculty members that will accommodate the rapid growth in student populations (Sawyerr 2004). A policy aimed at addressing shortage of core faculty members in Sub-Saharan Africa could be formulated to take on a regional dimension.

Third, quality assurance efforts of institutions also presented as ways of enabling identification of new programs. This study noted differences in the identification of new programs between the private university colleges and the private chartered universities. The private university colleges identified new programs on as-when-needed basis, whereas at the private chartered universities, it was the prerogative of the various departments to ensure that the

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proper governance procedures were adhered to. This constitutes an unexpected finding from the study and indicates a difference in the governance processes at the two categories of institutions. One would have expected that program identification at the institutional level in PHEIs will have identical methods. This finding may suggest that program identification procedures could be streamlined by the NAB to ensure conformity by all PHEIs.

Fourth, there was a challenge of multiple admissions by the PHEIs. Some of the private higher education institutions offer admissions to students as regular full-time students, and at the same time admit for evening, sandwich or weekend sessions. This trend of admission or providing access may be linked to making financial gains. It is important to note that sometimes, it is the same faculty that teach at all these sessions, which takes away time for academic research and publication.

Fifth, respondents from PHEIs (faculty members and administrators) noted conflicting requirements and duplication of activities between the NAB and mentoring (supervising) institution. Participants from PHEIs revealed that during program or institutional accreditation, recommendations given by the NAB and the mentoring (supervising) institution sometimes conflict. Therefore the private institution seeking accreditation is confused as to whose recommendation should supersede the other. Similarly, respondents indicated that there was a lot of duplication of activities between the mentoring (supervising) institution and the NAB resulting in redundancy. NAB has to address the duplication of activities between it and the chartered supervising institutions. This will reduce the time frame for a program accreditation or its reaccreditation.

Further, regular and formal communication between private university colleges and the NAB was lacking about charter applications according to data collected. Charter is defined by

the NAB as an "assent by the President for a tertiary institution to award its own degrees, diplomas and certificates." (18) The NAB requires that for an institution to be granted charter, it has to operate for at least 10 years, must have a governance structure, assessed on the quality of academic staff, teaching and research, and have the required resources among others.  There is institutional dissatisfaction with the NAB about lack of comprehensive information about charter issues. Thus, communication about charter requirements needs to be made more explicit by the NAB to PHEIs that want to become autonomous within the required time frame.

**Discussion as it Relates to Conceptual Model**

DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) institutional theory formed the basis of the conceptual model for this study that explored efforts PHEIs put towards meeting quality assurance standards in Ghana and how they interpret those efforts by focusing on the three major classifications of isomorphism: coercive, mimetic and normative. These three categories are the concepts through which the efforts of private higher education are assessed in relation to Ghana's quality assurance process. Overall, the conceptual model indicates that private higher education institutions are continually making varied efforts in addressing their quality assurance goals through the concepts of coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphism. In general, PHEIs were influenced and at the same time conformed to the requirements of the NAB. There were also mimetic emulations in their program offerings, how new programs were identified, and the influence of the job market in program identification. In addition, there was institutionalization of values and norms to address the challenges of examination proctoring.

The study's findings validate this conceptual model in the activities of the NAB of Ghana, the regulatory frame that seeks to ensure conformity.  Quality assurance guides are

offered to PHEIs to fulfill certain requirements, including affiliation, before accreditation is given. As a regulatory body, one of the NAB goals is to ensure that the capacity of institutions is built and the policy requirements for the establishment of internal quality assurance departments are conformed to within a specified time frame. But these goals have not been cogently adhered to by the NAB and some private higher education institutions as revealed by this study. In addition, this study found that communications about charter requirements needed to be made more explicit by the NAB to PHEIs that want to become autonomous within a specified time frame. This could be interpreted as a weakness on the part of the NAB as a regulatory body, which slows the development of private higher education institutions. Further as the PHEIs continue to evolve, the NAB affirms a need for policy formulation by government in regard to the physical sciences and engineering programs. A number of the interviewees advocate that government could provide incentives to encourage private higher education institutions to offer those capital intensive programs ultimately aimed at the development of the country. This was because the public higher education institutions may not have the capacity to enroll every student in the capital intensive programs; therefore the private sector would be needed to provide complementary access.

As the NAB's ultimate goal is ensuring that institutions conform to the quality assurance requirements, it also has to assist in addressing the issue of faculty shortage. Higher education specialists advocate that a specific policy aimed at addressing faculty shortage in Sub-Saharan Africa should be formulated to take on a more regional dimension as formulated in the South African region. South Africa as a country, has identified this problem of shortage of qualified faculty members in the higher education sector in the South African sub-region, and has taken appropriate action to address it to enhance the quality of higher education.

**Future Research Considerations**

Based on the findings from this study, there are many future research considerations. First, the findings from this study showed the kind of efforts that private higher education institutions were making in fulfillment of their quality assurance requirements. A future consideration could be to extend this study to compare the quality assurance processes of PHEIs in two other Anglophone countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. This could determine the kind of efforts PHEIs in those countries put toward quality assurance at the sub-regional level. This could be a follow-up study that would provide a more detailed perspective using a comparative case-study analysis.

Second, this study examined the quality assurance efforts on private higher education institutions in Ghana. However, the public higher education institutions in Ghana could be used to replicate this study to determine how they were also applying the requirements of the NAB in relation to the quality assurance process. This future research recommendation would serve as a way of ensuring that the NAB has been established to ensure quality in both private and public institutions.

Third, as the findings of this study noted, PHEIs in Ghana are affiliated to multiple public institutions as a result of the various programs that individual institutions offer. A future study could evaluate the impact of the varied affiliation procedures on the quality assurance process at PHEIs.

Fourth, findings of this study indicate shortage of full-time faculty members which has impacted on research output. A quantitative study or a longitudinal study could be conducted to assess the South African model of providing subsidies to qualified students in the African Sub-Region to pursue Master's and PhD programs in South Africa. In addition, this study could

evaluate the success of the South African framework in place for addressing the shortage of faculty members at higher education institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Fifth, given that most newly established PHEIs are influenced by programs that are offered by other incumbent private providers, requiring low start-up cost, quality assurance requirements might be formulated to take into account differences between the public and private and encourage focus on particular fields in public institutions as opposed to private institutions. Thus these findings can suggest a particular policy development. A study analyzing the implementation of such a formulated policy will be of relevance to academia and the higher education institutions.

Sixth, another study could examine the perception of students about the quality assurance processes at the institutional level. This current study could not include students because of time and resource constraints. Thus a study with students as the sample could generate additional information on their views about the quality assurance process.

## Conclusion

Quality assurance is regarded as a form of accountability to government, students and employers among others. The quality assurance process is recognized as the coercive force that enables conformity of a PHEI (Bell and Taylor, 2005). Regulation in private higher education is needed to protect consumers and well-meaning private investors, as well as ensure that private higher education institutions conform to the statutes guiding the process.  Fielden and Varghese (2009) advanced reasons for regulating PHEIs to include consumer protection as well as monitoring of financial results.

In addition, research demonstrates a relationship between mimetic isomorphism and successful efforts of a private higher education institution (Morphew and Huisman 2002; Morphew 2009; Gonzalez, Montano and Hassall 2009; Bell and Taylor 2005). As a result of the continual growth of private higher education providers in Sub-Saharan Africa in general and Ghana in particular, it is imperative for the NAB to make the quality assurance process very welcoming to genuine actors so that higher education access continues to experience growth in a developing country like Ghana.

The Ghanaian private higher education landscape has a number of issues including conflicting requirements as well as duplication of activities between mentoring (supervising) institutions and the NAB. These will require a holistic approach involving the NAB and the PHEIs regarding how they are addressed and long lasting solutions found for them. Other issues are shortage of academic and non-academic staff, dependence on adjunct faculty, non-compliance to timeframe given for program and institutional accreditation, and the charter process that does not have very definite requirements.

At the regional level, Africa has a number of sub-regional networks including the Association of African Universities (AAU) Quality Assurance Initiative, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) quality assurance framework. These sub-regional networks have the stated objective of ensuring the quality of higher education institutions in their jurisdictions (Okebukola and Shabani 2007). However, those countries not under any of these jurisdictions are left at the mercy of unaccredited providers. There is the need for these sub-regional networks to come together and formulate policy guidelines that will impact at least the activities of countries that do not have local quality assessment agencies. This will provide guidance and ensure conformity of private higher education institutions in SSA.

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Implications of Higher Education's Public Accountability. *The Review of Higher
Education*, 35(1): 131-148.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: List of Nodes with their Sources and References

| Name | Sources | References | Created On | Created By |
|------|---------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Academic content and organization | 9 | 10 | 12/24/2014 4:47 PM | L |
| Accountability | 2 | 4 | 12/24/2014 5:14 PM | L |
| Administrative support staff | 6 | 12 | 12/24/2014 5:10 PM | L |
| Charter | 3 | 3 | 12/29/2014 1:50 AM | L |
| Coercive Isomorphism | 1 | 1 | 12/24/2014 9:12 PM | L |
| Competitive pressure | 0 | 0 | 12/24/2014 9:17 PM | L |
| Corporate social responsibility | 7 | 9 | 12/27/2014 9:13 PM | L |
| Curriculum design | 6 | 7 | 12/24/2014 4:47 PM | L |
| Educational programs | 8 | 12 | 12/24/2014 4:45 PM | L |
| Efficiency | 2 | 2 | 12/24/2014 9:20 PM | L |
| Faculty | 10 | 33 | 12/24/2014 8:55 AM | L |
| Financial resources | 1 | 2 | 12/24/2014 4:46 PM | L |
| Governance and administration | 9 | 10 | 12/24/2014 8:26 AM | L |
| Institutional Pressure | 1 | 2 | 12/24/2014 9:19 PM | L |
| Institutional vision and mission | 10 | 13 | 12/24/2014 8:24 AM | L |
| Learning resources | 5 | 6 | 12/24/2014 5:03 PM | L |
| Library facilities | 10 | 16 | 12/24/2014 5:14 PM | L |
| Mimetic Isomorphism | 0 | 0 | 12/24/2014 9:14 PM | L |
| Normative Isomorphism | 0 | 0 | 12/24/2014 9:16 PM | L |
| Physical Resources | 8 | 9 | 12/24/2014 5:11 PM | L |
| Quality assurance committee | 6 | 12 | 12/24/2014 5:09 PM | L |
| Self-assessment, self study, self evaluation | 2 | 2 | 12/24/2014 5:08 PM | L |
| Student progression and achievement | 9 | 22 | 12/24/2014 4:59 PM | L |
| Student support and guidance | 10 | 25 | 12/24/2014 5:01 PM | L |
| Teaching, learning and assessment | 4 | 5 | 12/24/2014 4:50 PM | L |

**APPENDIX B**

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL WITH OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

**Administrators/Faculty Members of Private Higher Education Institutions**

**Part A: Coercive Isomorphism**

1. What efforts if any, have been made to enhance the image of the institution?

2. What efforts if any, have been made to enhance your institution's credibility?

3. To what extent do quality assurance standards influence those efforts?
( In your efforts, do you ensure that you satisfy the minimum standard set by the NAB or do you go beyond the requirements?[ Follow-up question to question 3 if needed])

4. How would you describe the impact of the requirements of the National Accreditation Board on your educational institution?

5a. Could you describe how your institution's internal quality assurance system works/operates?
5b. Could you indicate whether the internal quality assurance mechanism follows the requirements set by the NAB?

6. What informed your institution's decision on which public university it must be affiliated to?

7. What have been some of the challenges associated with the NAB process and how were they addressed?

8. If given the opportunity, what criteria will you eliminate from the NAB quality assurance process?

9. What were some of your ultimate goals at the end of the quality assurance process beyond gaining approval from the NAB?

**Part B: Mimetic/Normative Isomorphism**

1. What are your views about the quality of academic programs offered by your competitors, and how do they differ from the programs you offer?

2. How would you describe market influences (job market, student demand, others?) on the quality of programs that you offer (if any)?

3. How would you describe the impact that your competitors have over programs quality at your institution?

4a. Could you indicate how you are able to identify new programs and to what extent your competitors influence this aspect?

4b. How soon are you able to implement these new programs once they are identified as a result of competitor influence?

5. In terms of involvement in the community/environment, does your institution partner with any business or corporate organization in order to impact the community/environment in which you are in?

6. In terms of job prospects for your academic programs are you able to track your graduating students on the job market among others?

7. Are faculty/staff linked to an association(s) in the institution or outside, that has norms and values impacting members? For example the University Teachers' Association of Ghana etc.

8. As this interview draws to a close, is there anything that you will like to share that relates to quality assurance that has not yet been mentioned?

**Quality Assurance/Accreditation Committee Members of the Ghana National Accreditation Board (NAB)**

1. What efforts have been made to build the capacity of private higher education institutions to enable them to adequately address quality assurance requirements?

2. Could you please explain the policy that allows one private higher education institution to be due for reaccreditation in five years and another institution due in three years?

3. What policies are in place to educate private higher education institution institutional leaders about getting accredited?

4. How would you evaluate the quality assurance process from the government's point of view?

5. How are penalties decided? And how flexible are you when imposing penalties?

6. In your view, what policies do you think will further enhance the quality assurance process and assist PHEIs?

7. Could you describe the differences between a chartered PHEI and one that is affiliated to a public higher education institution (aside from the obvious which is the award of their own certificates) in terms of quality assurance?

8. What are the challenges that you have to address as a Board when PHEIs apply for accreditation?

9. How do you monitor PHEIs and those that have received their charter in terms of quality assurance?

10. As this interview draws to a close, is there anything that you will like to share that relates to quality assurance and legitimacy?

## Specialists/Scholars/Retirees

1. How would you assess the efforts that private higher education institutions make in their attempt at being recognized by the environment in which they are located?

2. What are your thoughts about the quality assurance process that institutions have to undergo to gain accreditation?

3a. How would you describe the quality of the programs offered at PHEIs?
3b. Are there any programs that are particularly of high quality and any that are of low quality that stands out to you?

4. In your view, are programs primarily being offered by private higher education institutions in response to the market? Or are other considerations more important (such as income generation, distinctiveness etc. (The second part of the question will be a follow-up question if necessary).

5. Are the programs offered aligned to the institutional mission of PHEIs?

6. As an independent person, what do you think about the quality of graduates from private higher education institutions?

7. To what extent has the current Ghana's national accreditation structure impacted the quality of PHEIs in the country?

8.  What suggestions, if any, do you have for the improvement of the quality assurance processes of PHEIs at the institutional and state level in Ghana?

9. As this interview draws to a close, is there anything that you will like to share about QA that has not yet been mentioned?

**APPENDIX C**

## Informed Consent Statement

My name is Linda Tsevi, a current doctoral candidate in the Educational Administration and Policy Studies program at State University of New York at Albany. My doctoral study is being supervised by Dr. Kevin Kinser, Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Educational Administration and Policy Studies.

In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the doctoral program in the Department of Educational Administration and Policy Studies, I am undertaking my dissertation research titled *Quality Assurance in Private Higher Education: The Case of Ghana*. This qualitative study explores how regulatory measures are not only designed to enhance the quality of private higher education, but how they impact the efforts employed by private providers in order to be successful in the environment in which they are located.

I assure you that no risk is anticipated during your participation in this study, other than you may be uncomfortable providing your personal opinions about your institution or the regulatory environment in Ghana. Although you may not receive direct benefit from your participation, others may ultimately benefit from the knowledge obtained from this research. If you agree, the interview (which will last between 45 and 60 minutes) will be audio recorded to facilitate analysis, and records will be stored in electronic files secured with a password known only to me. All the interview audio files will be destroyed immediately after transcription and analysis are completed. Your institution name will not be identified unless you grant the permission, and your identity as a participant in the study will be kept confidential to the extent permissible by law. In addition, the Institutional Review Board, University at Albany or United States government officials responsible for monitoring this study may inspect the records collected for research. Please sign below if you are willing to have this interview audio recorded.

Your participation is voluntary. Research at the University at Albany involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise have been entitled. You may choose not to answer any questions and may refuse to complete any portions of the research you do not wish to for any reason. I will

retain and analyze the information you have provided up until the point you have left the study unless you request that your data be excluded from any analysis and/or destroyed.

The findings from this research will constitute parts of my doctoral dissertation to be submitted to SUNY-Albany and research papers to be submitted to academic journals and conferences. Private higher education institutions will benefit from this research through my dissertation report. Such information can be beneficial feedback particularly for an institution's further programming. An additional benefit could also emanate from knowing about other private higher education institutions.

If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is complete, please feel free to contact me by phone at 001.785.979.4941 or by email at ltsevi@albany.edu. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject or if you wish to report any concerns about the study, you may contact University at Albany Office of Regulatory & Research Compliance at 1-866-857-5459 or hsconcerns@albany.edu. Please sign the consent form below and keep one copy of this form for your record. Another copy of this consent form will be secured together with the research records of this study.

I hope you will choose to participate in this research.


Sincerely,


Linda Tsevi

---------------------------------------------------------------------

The following signature represents that I, _____
(print your name) have read, or been informed of, the information about this study titled *Quality Assurance in Private Higher Education: The Case of Ghana,* to be undertaken by Linda Tsevi.


[    ] I agree to digital-record the interview.   [     ] I do not agree to digital record the interview.


[    ] I grant permission for this research to publicly identify my name.
[    ] I grant permission for this research to publicly identify my institution's name.

By signing my name, I hereby consent to participate in this research project.

_____                    _____

Type/Print Participant's Name                                       Date


_____

Participant's Signature