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RESEARCH ARTICLE

NETWORKING THEORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION POLICY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN AND EGYPT.

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Abstract

Quality assurance and accreditation notions denote a new paradigm shift to reinforce higher education reform policies. This research aims to elaborate a detailed analysis of the networking policies between the quality assurance and accreditation authorities and the universities by conducting a comparison of the networking strategies implemented in the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Arab Republic of Egypt. Recent literatures explain that the approach of public policy network is considered today as a principal stream of thought within the field of public policy analysis. Therefore, resorting to this framework of analysis makes it possible to approach differently the subject studied while trying to understand the interactions between all actors concerned. The results of this research support that the nature of networking strategy between the National Authority for Qualifications and Quality Assurance of Education and Training (QQA) in the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Bahraini universities may be described as Pluralistic network. However the networking strategy between the National Authority of Quality Assurance and Accreditation (NAQAAE) in Egypt and the Egyptian universities tend to be Clientelist network.

Introduction:-

Nowadays, quality assurance and accreditation are key notions introduced into the heart of governments' programs intended for the reform of higher education policies. The new notions denote a paradigm shift regarding the higher education policy in most of the developing countries. This research aims to elaborate a detailed analysis of higher education reform policies in developing countries with regard to quality assurance and accreditation notions. The paper seeks to explore the networking strategy elaborated between the quality assurance and accreditation authorities and the universities by conducting a comparison of the networking strategies implemented in the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Arab Republic of Egypt.

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The importance of our research regarding this subject originates from the scarcity of studies and the very recent concern of researchers dedicated to explore this topic, especially in the Arab world. We may illustrate that this field of studies still embryonic, therefore it needs more attention to be devoted.

Recent literature explains that public policy network approach is considered today as a principal stream of thought within the field of public policy analysis. Hence, by means of this framework of analysis it is possible to build a thorough understanding of the process of formulation and implementation of higher education policies; while trying to understand the interactions between all actors concerned with the quality assurance and accreditation file.

The research is divided into different parts. The first part is devoted to present a comparison between the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Arab Republic of Egypt regarding the quality assurance and accreditation history, principles, roles and process. The second part will mainly focus on the approach of Public Policy Network by providing a literature review about the importance of this approach which will guide our research to elaborate a theoretical framework for the study. The third part of this research will include the methodology of research and the data collection tools. The fourth part will present the analysis and interpretation of data. As a final part, the conclusion and recommendations of the research will be affirmed.

Quality assurance and accreditation policies in higher education implemented in the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Arab Republic of Egypt

The Kingdom of Bahrain puts emphasis on the national education reform policies; subject that was introduced into the strategic agenda of the kingdom and was very well highlighted in Bahrain's Economic Vision 2030 (launched in October 2008) for the professional advancement of Bahrain's human capital (Bahrain Economic Development Board (EDB) - Economic Vision 2030 http://www.bahrainedb.com/en/about/Pages/economic%20vision%202030.aspx#.WMQN8WC7rIU).

To achieve the national goals of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education policies in the Kingdom, The Education & Training Quality Authority (BQA) was established in 2008. To expand the Authority activities, the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was declared by the Royal Decree No. (83) of 2012.

The principle goal of the high education reform policy was broad enough to improve the education services not only for the educational institutions but also to integrate the vocational training sector (Education & Training Quality Authority – About BQA- website: http://www.bqa.gov.bh/En/AboutQaaet/Pages/default.aspx).

In Egypt, the higher education reform policies were introduced to the strategic agenda of the government in 2003 by launching the Higher Education Enhancement Project (HEEP). Over a period of five years different projects were introduced to include the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Project (QAAP). In Jun 2006, the president signed the Laws and bylaws

As part of the Government's reform program for the Higher education in Egypt, projects to enhance higher education were launched in 2003. These were coordinated by the higher Education Enhancement Project (HEEP). Over a period of five years, a series of major projects in higher education have supported public universities to improve their quality and to provide staff training. These have included the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Project (QAAP) under guidance of the National Committee for Quality Assurance and Accreditation (the National Committee). The implementation of the new laws and bylaws for higher education, including the arrangements for the National Agency for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Education were signed by the President in June 2006 (The quality Assurance and Accreditation Handbook for Higher Education in Egypt (2nd ed.), December 2007, p.9).

Table (1):- Comparison of the quality assurance and accreditation policies in higher education implemented in the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Arab Republic of Egypt

Unit of Analysis	Kingdom of Bahrain	Arab Republic of Egypt
Authority Designation	The Education **&** Training Quality Authority (BQA)	The National Agency for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Education (NAQAAE)
Starting Year of Higher Education Policy Reform	The Education **&** Training Quality Authority (BQA) was established in 2008	As part of the Government's reform program for the Higher education in Egypt, projects to enhance higher education were launched in 2003
The National Project	National Education Reform Project National Qualifications Framework (NQF)	The higher Education Enhancement Project (HEEP) The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Project (QAAP)
Establishment of the Authority	The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was declared by the Royal Decree No. (83) of 2012	The arrangements for the National Agency for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Education were signed by the President in June 2006
Sectors' Focus	Broad focus to improve the education services not only for the educational institutions but also to integrate the vocational training sector	Distinctive focus dedicated to higher education institutions (HEIs). These include public and private universities, technical institutes, colleges and other organizations

Research Methodology:-

The research aims to elaborate a detailed analysis of higher education reform policies in developing countries with regard to quality assurance and accreditation concept. It seeks to explore the networking strategy implemented between the authorities of quality assurance and accreditation and the universities existing in two countries; the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Arab Republic of Egypt.

The research methodology strategy is a comparative case study of the networking strategies implemented between the national authorities for quality assurance and accreditation and the universities of both countries the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Arab Republic of Egypt.

The research tool is a questionnaire which contains seven structured questions that was directed to key persons holding the position of "Director of the Quality Assurance Unit" from different public and private universities (Appendix 1). All the interviewee persons are treated as anonymous and the selection of this sample is random.

After the process of data collection, the answers are coded and then analyzed by means of Atles.ti software program allowing in this respect to treat the qualitative data for analysis ends.

Public Policy Network Theory:-

At present, public policy network theory appears to be one of the most dynamic theories in the field of public policies analysis (Ouimet and Lemieux, 1999). Having developed in the 1970s, the theory of networks takes more importance in the analysis and evaluation of public policies.

For Rhodes (1997), six crucial reasons are highlighting the importance of public policy network theory. The author advocates that networks restrict participation to the processes of elaboration of policies. Moreover, networks define the roles of the actors. Also, networks decide which problem or which subject will be included or excluded from the political agenda. Furthermore, through specified rules of games, networks determine the behavior of the actors. For the author, networks favor certain interests, not only by allowing their access, but also by favoring certain impacts on policies. Finally, networks are important actors integrated in the formulation process of public policy distinct from the engagement of only governments' authorities (Personal translation for Rhodes, 1997: 9-10).

Muller and Surel (1998) reveal the importance of public policy networks, by proceeding that they provide a useful interpretation regarding the relationship of State-society, which focus on the informal characteristics of exchanges between the actors of network (Muller and Surel, 1998: 91).

Kenis and Raab (2003), stated that public policy networks represent the only form of governance being able to deal with the complexity of modern societies' problems.

Atkinson and Coleman (1992, 1998) support that public policy networks have a great importance to understand and study the process of public policy formulation.

Börzel (1998) revealed that public policy networks are able to produce collective change despite of divergences of interests existing between actors. Besides, networks would provide additional informal links inside and outside the organizations regarding the formulation of decisions (Börzel, 1998: 262).

Klijn (1996) advances that public policy networks permit a comprehensive understanding of the formulation process of public policy by providing an explanation of the context where the formulation process take place.

Greer (2002) advocates that public policy networks provide an explanation not only for the relationship between the State actors and all other interests, but also public policy networks represent a very valuable tool for the analysis of public policy elaboration process.

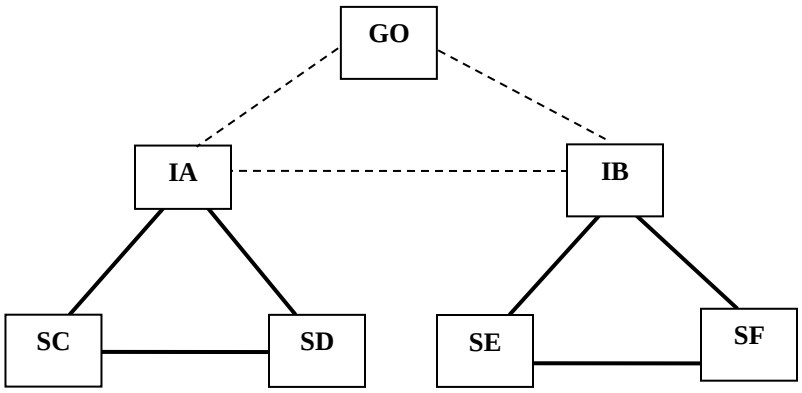
The study of Ouimet and Lemieux (1999) seems interesting to propose to reach our research objectives. The authors put in perspective the dynamic and progressive characteristics of public policy networks in terms of strong or weak "ties" between actors, as well as, the presence or the absence of "structural holes" (Schneider 1992; Lemieux 1999, 2000, 2002; Ouimet and Lemieux, 1999; Lemieux and Ouimet, 2004).

Ouimet and Lemieux (1999) attempted to investigate primarily the "circulation of information" and the "control exercised over the actors' resources" (Ouimet and Lemieux, on 1999: 22-23).

By drawing inspiration from Granovetter (1973) and Burt (1992), Ouimet and Lemieux (1999) proposed tree main forms of public policy networks: "corporatist", "clientelist" and" pluralist". The authors indicated that we may certainly discover other forms of these networks by the study of actual networks through empirical observations.

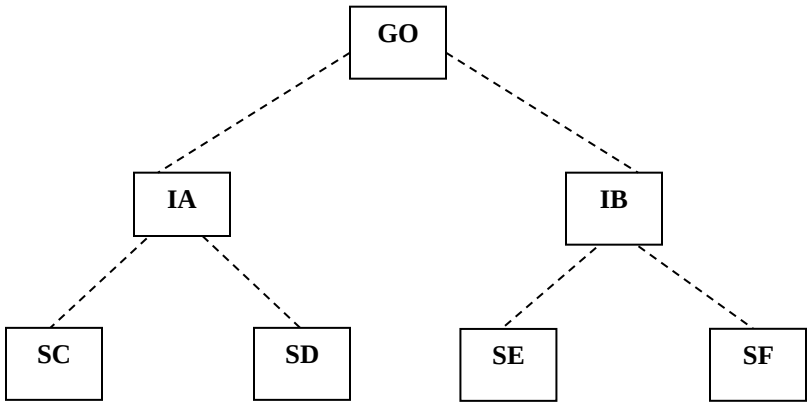
Ouimet and Lemieux (1999) suggested the following forms of public policy networks:
GO: Government,
IA, IB: Intermediaries,
SC, SD, SF: Subordinated,
_____: Strong link
..…….. : Weak link

Fig (1):- Corporatist Network



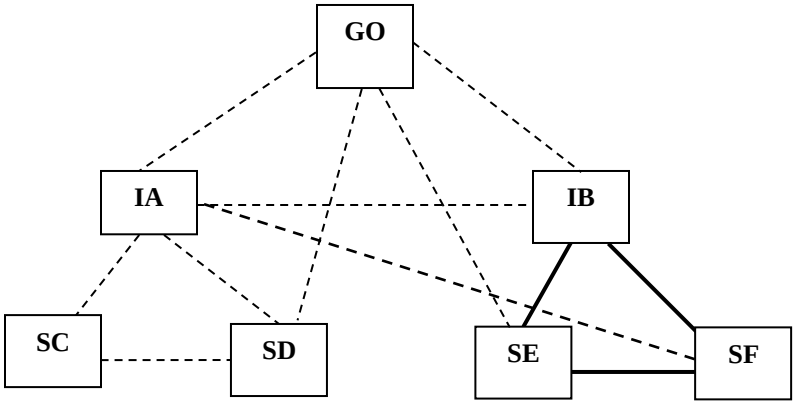
Source: Ouimet and Lemieux (1999)

Fig (2) :- Clientelist Network



Source: Ouimet and Lemieux (1999)

Fig (3) :- Pluralistic Network



Source: Ouimet and Lemieux (1999)

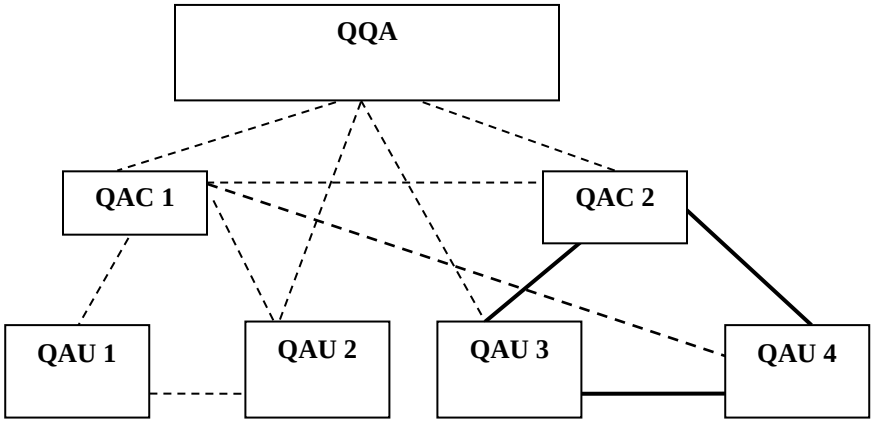
Analysis and Interpretation:-

Recent literatures explain that the approach of public policy networks is considered today as a principal stream of thought within the field of public policy analysis. Therefore, resorting to this framework of analysis makes it possible to approach differently the subject studied while trying to understand the interactions between all actors concerned. By drawing inspiration from the forms of public policy networks proposed by Ouimet and Lemieux (1999), our research supports the following:

_____: Strong link
…….. : Weak link
(QQA) : The National Authority for Qualifications and Quality Assurance of Education and Training
(QAC) : Universities Quality Assurance Center
(QAU) : Faculties Quality Assurance Units

After the analysis of data collected, the results of this research support that the nature of networking strategy between the National Authority for Qualifications and Quality Assurance of Education and Training (QQA) in the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Bahraini universities may be described as Pluralistic network.

Fig (4):- The nature of networking between the National Authority for Qualifications and Quality Assurance of Education and Training (QQA) in the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Bahraini Universities



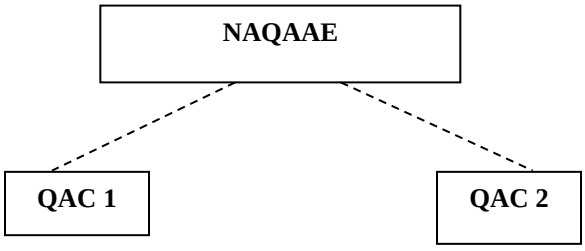
According to the current networking strategy which exists between the National Authority for Qualifications and Quality Assurance of Education and Training (QQA) in the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Bahraini universities, we may advocate the following:
All actors tend to have more number of contacts and more strong channels of communication in regard to the formulation and implementation of the quality assurance and accreditation in higher education policy.

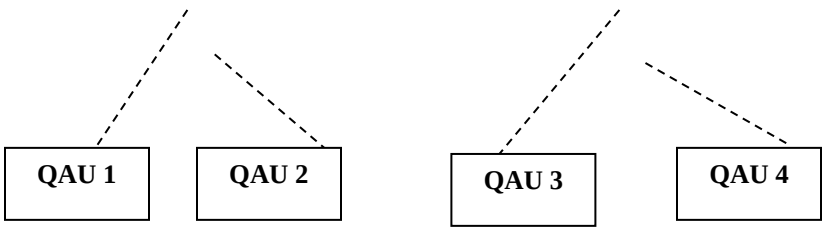
In this networking form, the actors tend to have more access to information and less structural holes, so we may support the following relationship between the different actors:

- Direct and strong relationship between the Universities Quality Assurance Centers (QAC) and the National Authority for Qualifications and Quality Assurance of Education and Training (QQA).
- Direct, but weak somehow, relationship between the different Universities Quality Assurance Centers (QAC).
- Direct and strong relationship between the Universities Quality Assurance Centers (QAC) and the Faculties Quality Assurance Units (QAU) in the same university.
- Direct, but weak somehow, relationship between the Universities Quality Assurance Centers (QAC) and the Faculties Quality Assurance Units (QAU) in different universities.
- Direct and strong relationship between the Faculties Quality Assurance Units (QAU) and the National Authority for Qualifications and Quality Assurance of Education and Training (QQA).
- Direct and strong relationship between the Faculties Quality Assurance Units (QAU) in the same university.
- Direct, but weak somehow, relationship between the Faculties Quality Assurance Units (QAU) in different universities.

After the analysis of data collected, the results of this research support that the nature of networking strategy between the National Authority of Quality Assurance and Accreditation (NAQAAE) in Egypt and the Egyptian universities tend to be Clientelist network.

Fig (5):- The nature of networking between The National Authority for Quality Assurance & Accreditation in Education (NAQAAE) and the Egyptian Universities





In this clientelist networking, the National Authority of Quality Assurance and Accreditation (NAQAAE) in Egypt has a clientelist link with the Universities Quality Assurance Centers (QAC) (public and private universities).

The Universities Quality Assurance Centers (QAC) have a clientlist link with their Faculties Quality Assurance Units (QAU). These links are weak because they are not much frequent.

Moreover, the Faculties Quality Assurance Units (QAU) "clients" are usually blocked in a structural hole by their mediators "the Universities Quality Assurance Centers (QAC)".

Thus, the links between the Faculties Quality Assurance Units (QAU) in the same university as well as in different universities are not much frequent and not much close.

In this network structure the National Authority of Quality Assurance and Accreditation (NAQAAE) in Egypt has a distinguished advantage related to the factor of control over the other actors; however the Universities Quality Assurance Centers (QAC) have a relative advantage concerning the factor of information because they have more contacts than the NAQAAE.

Conclusion and Recommendations:-

This research aims to elaborate a detailed analysis of the networking policies between the quality assurance and accreditation authorities and the universities by conducting a comparison of the networking strategies implemented in the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Arab Republic of Egypt. Recent literatures explain that the approach of public policy network is considered today as a principal stream of thought within the field of public policy analysis. The results of this research support that the nature of networking strategy between the National Authority for Qualifications and Quality Assurance of Education and Training (QQA) in the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Bahraini universities may be described as Pluralistic network. However the networking strategy between the National Authority of Quality Assurance and Accreditation (NAQAAE) in Egypt and the Egyptian universities tend to be Clientelist network.

Many efforts need to be invested to reshape this relationship in both countries as the following:

In the Kingdom of Bahrain, it is an advantage for the key actors to continue in the adoption of its pluralistic public policy network approach for the development of the quality assurance and accreditation in higher education policy.

Key actors in the Kingdom of Bahrain may need to take into fully considerations the principles of formal public policy networking strategy and not to relay on the informal networking strategy.

Key actors in the Kingdom of Bahrain may need to elaborate the higher educational policies for quality assurance and accreditation to be founded on evidence-based reporting and decision-making.

In Egypt, key actors need to adopt the pluralistic public policy network structure; therefore all actors will tend to have more number of contacts and more strong channels of communication in regard to the formulation and implementation of the quality assurance and accreditation in higher education policy.

Key actors in Egypt may need to take into fully considerations the principles of good governance, notably openness, transparency, participation, equity and accountability in the formulation process of higher education policy for quality assurance and accreditation.

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Annex (1)

Questionnaire (1)

Analysis of networking process existing between the National Authority of Quality Assurance and Accreditation (NAQAAE) in Egypt and the Egyptian universities

1. Is there a frequent interaction between the University Quality Assurance Centers (QAC) and faculties Quality Assurance Units (QAU)?
   Yes (which frequency) No

2. Is there a direct interaction between the University Quality Assurance Center (QAC) and the National Committee / NAQAAE?
   Yes (which frequency) No

3. Is there a frequent interaction between Universities Quality Assurance Centers (QAC)?
   Yes (which frequency) No
4. Is there a direct interaction between Universities Quality Assurance Centers (QAC) and the faculties Quality Assurance Units (QAU) of other Universities?
   Yes (which frequency) No
5. Is there a direct interaction between the faculties Quality Assurance Units (QAU) and the National Committee / NAQAAE ?
   Yes (which frequency) No
6. Is there a direct interaction between the faculties Quality Assurance Units (QAU) and Quality Assurance Centers (QAC) of other universities?
   Yes (which frequency) No
7. Is there a direct interaction between the faculties Quality Assurance Units (QAU) and the faculties Quality Assurance Units (QAU) of other universities?
   Yes (which frequency) No

Questionnaire (2)
Analysis of networking process existing between The National Authority for Qualifications and Quality Assurance of Education and Training (QQA) and the Higher Education Institutions

1. Is there a frequent interaction between the Universities Quality Assurance Center (QAC) and Faculties Quality Assurance Units (QAU)?
   Yes (which frequency) No
2. Is there a direct interaction between the University Quality Assurance Center (QAC) and the National Authority/QQA?
   Yes (which frequency) No
3. Is there a frequent interaction between all Universities Quality Assurance Centers (QAC) in Bahrain?
   Yes (which frequency) No
4. Is there a direct interaction between University Quality Assurance Center (QAC) and the faculties Quality Assurance Units (QAU) of other Universities in Bahrain?
   Yes (which frequency) No
5. Is there a direct interaction between the faculties Quality Assurance Units (QAU) and the National Authority/ QQA?
   Yes (which frequency) No
6. Is there a direct interaction between the faculties Quality Assurance Units (QAU) and Quality Assurance Centers (QAC) of other universities?
   Yes (which frequency) No
7. Is there a direct interaction between the faculties Quality Assurance Units (QAU) and the faculties Quality Assurance Units (QAU) of other universities?
   Yes (which frequency) No