The Study of Quality Assessment in Higher Education: A Case of Public and Private Universities in Mongolia

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Abstract
Our theoretical study examined two complementary frameworks central to quality and curriculum development in higher education. The first part, Theoretical Framework for Quality Assessment, conceptualizes quality in higher education as a multidimensional construct involving academic standards, institutional performance, student outcomes, and stakeholder satisfaction. It distinguishes between Internal Quality Assurance (IQA)—self-regulated mechanisms such as self-evaluation, peer review, and feedback—and External Quality Assurance (EQA)—independent evaluations through accreditation, audits, and rankings. Together, IQA and EQA ensure accountability, credibility, and continuous improvement within private universities. A strong quality culture, grounded in participation, leadership, and evidence-based decision-making, underpins sustainable educational excellence and public trust.

The second part, Comparative Theoretical Framework for Education, explores the main curriculum and pedagogical theories guiding modern higher education. Drawing on Tyler (1949) and Taba (1962), curriculum theory was seen as both philosophical and practical linking teaching goals, methods, and assessment to learner needs and social demands. Contemporary perspectives by Ornstein and Hunkins (2018) integrate competency-based and learner-centered principles that emphasize flexibility, inclusivity, and lifelong learning. Supporting frameworks include Constructivist Pedagogy (Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978), which views learning as an active and collaborative process; Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), which promotes learning through experience and reflection; and Lifelong Learning Theory (Candy, 1991; Jarvis, 2004), which positions learning as a continuous, self-directed process throughout life.

Finally, theoretical perspectives provide a coherent foundation for assessing and improving quality in higher education, ensuring that curriculum design, teaching practice, and institutional evaluation align with both student development and societal progress.

1. Introduction
Higher education refers to learning and research beyond secondary education, typically provided by universities, colleges, and professional institutions. It aims to produce advanced knowledge, develop professional skills, and foster intellectual and moral growth. Functions of Higher Education as below:

- Teaching and Learning: Transmitting advanced knowledge and critical thinking skills.
- Research and Innovation: Generating new knowledge, technologies, and solutions to societal challenges.
- Community Service: Contributing to social, cultural, and economic development through outreach and extension

programs.

- Cultural Preservation and Development: Safeguarding and enriching national identity, culture, and values.

UNESCO's Four Pillars of Education (Delors Report, 1996) rovide a holistic framework that guides the goals and values of higher education. They emphasize not only acquiring knowledge and skills but also fostering ethical awareness, social responsibility, and intercultural understanding. Together, these pillars promote lifelong learning that integrates intellectual, professional, social, and personal development for sustainable human progress.

UNESCO defines higher education as encompassing "all types of education (academic, professional, technical, artistic, pedagogical, long-distance … provided by universities, technological institutes, teacher-training colleges etc., normally intended for students having completed a secondary education, and whose educational objective is the acquisition of a title, grade, certificate or diploma of higher education."

Encyclopaedia Britannica defines higher education as "any of various types of education given in post-secondary institutions of learning and usually affording, at the end of a course of study, a named degree, diploma, or certificate of higher studies."

We agree for defined that higher education as "education, training and research guidance that takes place after the post-secondary level, at education institutions such as universities that are authorized as institutions of higher education by state authorities."

2. Theoretical Framework for Quality Assessment

Quality assessment in higher education is a multidimensional concept involving academic standards, institutional performance, student outcomes, and stakeholder satisfaction. In private universities, where competition and accountability are heightened, systematic quality assessment provides a foundation for ensuring educational excellence, sustainability, and social trust [1]. This theoretical study explores the main models and theories that underpin higher education quality assurance and their application in non-state (private) universities.

Quality in higher education is widely seen as multidimensional, involving academic standards (input/output), institutional performance (process, governance), student outcomes (learning, employability), and stakeholder satisfaction/accountability (students, employers, society). Quality Assurance includes all systematic processes and mechanisms designed to maintain and improve educational standards. According to Harvey & Green (1993), QA ensures that "the education provided meets or exceeds defined standards of excellence." In practice, QA operates at two interrelated levels—Internal Quality Assurance as IQA and External Quality Assurance as EQA [2].

IQA conducted by the institution itself (e.g., self-evaluation, peer review, feedback). IQA refers to the self-managed mechanisms established by the higher education institution to evaluate, monitor, and improve its own performance. IQA in higher education relies on continuous self-improvement through self-evaluation, peer review, feedback systems, curriculum innovation, and fostering a quality culture. Departments regularly assess teaching, resources, and outcomes to maintain standards, while peer reviews promote objectivity and knowledge sharing. Feedback from stakeholders supports evidence-based improvement, and curriculum updates ensure relevance to academic and industry needs. Ultimately, a strong quality culture—built on participation, leadership, and staff commitment—sustains long-term institutional excellence [3].

EQA conducted by external agencies (e.g., accreditation, audits, rankings). EQA refers to evaluation processes conducted by independent bodies—such as accreditation agencies, national quality councils, or international ranking systems to verify that institutions meet agreed national or international standards. EQA ensures public accountability and enhances credibility. It provides external validation of institutional quality, which is particularly vital for private universities seeking legitimacy, competitiveness, and trust from students, employers, and regulators [4].

EQA ensures accountability and credibility through accreditation, audits, rankings, and external reviews. Accreditation provides formal recognition that an institution meets established standards, while audits examine quality systems and policies for transparency. Rankings and benchmarking compare institutional performance with peers or international norms, and external reviews assess research, governance, and resource management—together strengthening institutional trust and public confidence [5].

3. Comparison Theoretical Framework for Education

Curriculum theory explains how knowledge, values, and skills are chosen and taught in education. Curriculum theory provides the conceptual foundation for understanding how education systems design, organize, and deliver learning experiences. It examines the principles, values, and decision-making processes that shape what knowledge is taught, how it is taught, and why it is taught—addressing the fundamental questions of content, method, and purpose. It answers three main questions: what to teach, how to teach, and why to teach such as below:

What to Teach (Content Selection): Curriculum theorists analyze how societies determine which knowledge, skills, and values are important for learners. This includes decisions about subjects, learning outcomes, competencies, and cultural relevance. The process reflects philosophical, political, and social priorities—what is considered "worth knowing." For example, Tyler (1949) emphasized defining clear educational objectives that guide curriculum content.

How to Teach (Pedagogical Methods): Curriculum theory explores instructional design and teaching strategies that best promote learning. It studies how content should be delivered—through lectures, discussions, projects, or experiential learning—linking teaching methods to cognitive development and student engagement. Taba (1962) proposed a systematic approach where teachers help plan

and test learning experiences based on student needs.

Why to Teach (Educational Purpose): The theory also considers the broader aims of education—such as intellectual growth, moral development, employability, and social transformation. It questions the purpose of schooling: Is education for personal fulfillment, economic productivity, or civic responsibility? Thinkers like Candy P.C (1991) argued that curriculum should connect learning with real-life experiences and democratic participation [6].

According to Ornstein and Hunkins (2018), curriculum theory serves as both a philosophical framework and a practical guide, helping educators align learning goals, teaching methods, and assessment with student and societal needs. Modern approaches integrate competency-based and learner-centered principles, emphasizing flexibility, inclusivity, and lifelong learning.

Philosophically, it reflects beliefs about knowledge, learning, and human development — for example, whether education should prioritize intellectual growth, moral values, social equity, or employability. Curriculum theory thus connects educational practice with social ideals and cultural values [7].

Practically, it provides educators with systematic guidance on how to align learning objectives, instructional strategies, and assessment methods. By integrating these components coherently, teachers ensure that classroom activities truly support the intended learning outcomes [8].

Modern curriculum approaches, influenced by educational reforms and global trends, have evolved beyond rigid, content-centered models.

Competency-based education focuses on what learners can do rather than merely what they know. It emphasizes measurable outcomes, applied skills, and real-world performance.

Learner-centered approaches place students' interests, backgrounds, and learning styles at the heart of instruction, promoting autonomy, active engagement, and collaboration.

These approaches also value *flexibility and inclusivity*, allowing curricula to adapt to diverse learners and contexts, and they support lifelong learning — preparing individuals to continue acquiring skills throughout their lives in response to social and technological change [9].

In essence, Ornstein and Hunkins (2018) **view curriculum theory** as a bridge between educational philosophy and classroom practice, ensuring that schooling remains relevant to both individual learners' development and societal progress. Modern theorists like Tyler (1949) and Taba (1962) suggest that teaching goals, methods, and evaluation should match student needs and social demands. In other words, Modern theorists such as Ralph W. Tyler (1949) and Hilda Taba (1962) emphasized that effective curriculum design requires a systematic alignment between educational goals,

teaching methods, and evaluation procedures—all grounded in the needs of learners and the expectations of society [10].

Ralph Tyler (1949) – The Tyler Rationale, in his influential book Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction, Tyler proposed that curriculum development should follow a logical, step-by-step process guided by four fundamental questions:

- What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
- What educational experiences can be provided to attain these purposes?
- How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
- How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?

Ralph Tyler argued that learning objectives must reflect both students' needs and societal values, ensuring that education remains purposeful and socially relevant. Teaching methods and learning experiences should then be selected to achieve those objectives, and assessment (evaluation) should measure how well students reach the intended outcomes. Researcher's model is often called the "objectives model" because it emphasizes clearly defined goals as the foundation for all curriculum decisions. Tyler's rationale remains a cornerstone of curriculum design worldwide, influencing outcome-based education and competency-based frameworks [11].

Hilda Taba (1962) – Grassroots Approach to Curriculum Development, emphasized that curriculum should not only be imposed from above (by policymakers) but developed collaboratively by teachers, who understand students' real learning contexts. In her book Curriculum Development explained that Theory and Practice, Taba proposed a seven-step process for curriculum design:

Diagnose learners' needs as find out what students already know, what skills they lack, and what they need to learn for personal and professional growth. Formulate objectives as set clear and measurable learning goals that describe what students should know or be able to do after completing the course. Select content as choose the topics, concepts, and materials that best help students achieve the learning objectives. Organize content as arrange the chosen content in a logical order — from simple to complex, or from basic to advanced — so that learning builds progressively. Select learning experiences as decide on suitable teaching methods and activities (e.g., discussions, experiments, projects) that help students engage with and understand the content. Organize learning activities as sequence and coordinate the learning experiences across lessons or units to ensure smooth progression and integration of knowledge and skills. Determine what and how to evaluate as Decide which aspects of learning to assess (knowledge, skills, attitudes) and how to assess them (tests, portfolios, presentations) to check if objectives are met [12].

Taba's model stresses diagnosing student needs as the starting point—making the curriculum responsive and adaptive to the classroom reality. This ensures that instruction is learner-centered while still aligned with broader societal demands such as work-

force preparation, civic engagement, and cultural continuity [13].

We concluded that Tyler and Taba's frameworks highlight that curriculum is not static but a living system that must evolve with social change. Their shared vision is that education should serve human development and societal progress simultaneously preparing learners not only to perform well academically but also to contribute responsibly to the community and the wider world.

Competency-Based Education as CBE focuses on what students can do after learning, not just what they are taught. It highlights clear learning outcomes, real skill use, and performance-based assessment. In universities, CBE helps students gain the professional and behavioral skills needed for work and society. CBE is an approach that organizes teaching and learning around the specific abilities or competencies that students are expected to demonstrate after completing a course or program. Unlike traditional education, which often measures progress through time spent in class or exam scores, CBE focuses on what students can actually do with the knowledge they have gained [14].

In this model, learning outcomes are clearly defined, and each outcome describes a skill, behavior, or understanding that students must master. Teaching methods are then designed to help students achieve these outcomes at their own pace. Assessment in CBE is performance-based, meaning that students must show evidence of their competence—through projects, demonstrations, portfolios, or real-life tasks—rather than relying only on written tests [15].

In higher education, CBE ensures that graduates are not only knowledgeable but also ready for professional practice. It helps students develop practical, cognitive, and behavioral skills such as problem-solving, communication, teamwork, and ethical decision-making. By connecting academic learning with real-world application, competency-based education prepares students to meet the demands of the workplace and society in a changing global environment.

Constructivist Pedagogy is a teaching approach based on the idea that learning is an active process, not a passive one. According to Jean Piaget (1972), students build their own understanding by interacting with experiences and making sense of them. He believed that knowledge is constructed step by step as learners explore, question, and connect new information to what they already know. Lev Vygotsky (1978) added that learning also happens through social interaction. He introduced the idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which means students learn best when they receive guidance and support just beyond their current ability level. This support, often called scaffolding, helps students move toward independent learning [16].

The approach, students are at the center of the learning process. They are encouraged to ask questions, solve problems, and work together to find answers. Learning activities often include discussions, projects, and real-life tasks that connect theory with practice. The teacher's role changes from being a lecturer to being a facilitator or guide. Teachers design learning environments that promote exploration and help students reflect on their thinking. Instead of only delivering information, teachers support students in constructing their own understanding [17].

We concluded that constructivist pedagogy promotes critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration, helping learners become active participants in their education and better prepared for lifelong learning.

Experiential Learning Theory as ELT (Kolb, 1984), learning happens through four steps: experience, reflection, thinking, and trying again. In higher education, this includes internships, projects, and case studies. David A. Kolb (1984) explains that learning happens through experience [18]. It emphasizes that students learn best when they actively engage in real or simulated activities, reflect on those experiences, and apply what they have learned to new situations. Kolb's theory describes learning as a cyclical process with four stages:
- Concrete Experience - learners take part in an actual experience or activity (e.g., doing an experiment, group work, field visit).
- Reflective Observation - they think about what happened, observe results, and reflect on their experiences.
- Abstract Conceptualization - they form ideas, theories, or conclusions based on reflection and prior knowledge.
- Active Experimentation - they test those ideas by applying them to new situations or problems [19].

Lifelong Learning Theory, based on the idea that learning continues throughout a person's life, not only during formal schooling. It views education as a continuous process that helps individuals adapt to changes in society, technology, and work. According to Candy (1991) and Jarvis (2004), lifelong learning includes both formal education (such as university courses) and informal learning (such as self-study, work experience, or online learning). The main goal is to help people develop the ability to learn independently and apply knowledge in real-life situations [20].

Lifelong learning encourages self-directed learning, meaning that individuals take responsibility for setting their goals, choosing resources, and evaluating their progress. This approach promotes critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability, which are essential in today's fast-changing world. In higher education, universities support lifelong learning by offering flexible programs, online courses, and adult education opportunities. These programs allow learners to continue their personal and professional development at any age [21].

Lifelong Learning Theory is also closely connected to the concept of education for sustainable development as ESD, emphasizing that continuous learning helps create responsible global citizens who can contribute to social, economic, and environmental progress [22].

We concluded that lifelong learning is about developing the habit and skills of learning beyond the classroom, enabling individuals

to grow personally, professionally, and socially throughout their lives.

4. Conclusion

The theoretical review highlights that quality assessment and curriculum theory are two interrelated pillars that determine the effectiveness and credibility of higher education, especially within private universities. Quality in higher education is a multidimensional concept, encompassing academic standards, institutional governance, student learning outcomes, and stakeholder trust. Effective quality assurance requires a balance between Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) driven by self-evaluation, peer review, and quality culture and External Quality Assurance (EQA) ensured through accreditation, audits, and external benchmarking. Together, these mechanisms strengthen accountability, promote transparency, and foster sustainable institutional improvement.

Equally, the study shows that education quality cannot be achieved without a strong theoretical foundation in curriculum and pedagogy. Curriculum theory, as developed by Tyler (1949) and Taba (1962) and expanded by Ornstein and Hunkins (2018), serves as both a philosophical and practical framework linking learning goals, teaching methods, and evaluation to student and societal needs. Modern educational approaches - including Competency-Based Education (CBE), Constructivist Pedagogy, Experiential Learning Theory, and Lifelong Learning Theory - emphasize flexibility, inclusivity, and learner-centered development. These models collectively promote active learning, critical thinking, and real-world application, preparing students to contribute meaningfully to the workforce and society.

In conclusion, a comprehensive quality framework in higher education must integrate both systematic assessment mechanisms and innovative educational theories. Internal and external quality assurance ensure institutional accountability and credibility, while curriculum theories and modern pedagogies provide intellectual and practical tools to sustain educational relevance and excellence. When combined, these frameworks create a dynamic system that supports continuous improvement, fosters academic integrity, and aligns higher education with the evolving needs of individuals and society.

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