Challenges and Best Practices in Implementing AUN-QA Standards in Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT: *The implementation of quality assurance mechanisms in higher education institutions is crucial for providing high-quality education and meeting societal needs. The ASEAN University Network-Quality Assurance (AUN-QA) framework is instrumental in promoting quality enhancement and international recognition for higher education programs in ASEAN member countries. This study analyzes information from 20 scholarly articles published in Scopus and Google Scholar indexed journals, focusing on AUN-QA-related content. The findings partially elucidate the reasons for higher education institutions' adoption of AUN-QA and shed light on the challenges they face during its implementation. Additionally, the research provides insights into the key preparations universities need to undertake to effectively implement AUN-QA standards. The results suggest that while universities adopt AUN-QA to improve their academic programs and enhance international collaboration, they encounter significant administrative and cultural challenges. Despite these obstacles, the AUN-QA framework fosters a culture of continuous improvement and student-centered learning, contributing to higher educational quality and international competitiveness. This study provides valuable insights for universities preparing to implement AUN-QA standards, emphasizing the critical role of strategic planning and stakeholder engagement in addressing implementation challenges and optimizing.*

KEYWORDS: AUN-QA; Challenges of AUN-QA implementation; Quality assurance; Quality management; Universities.

1. Introduction

The landscape of higher education is currently undergoing rapid and extensive transformations, with a global emphasis on the preservation and enhancement of educational quality. The ASEAN University Network-Quality Assurance (AUN-QA) framework assumes a pivotal role in ensuring quality assurance within higher education institutions. Serving as a regional quality assurance network, AUN-QA is dedicated to enhancing educational quality and promoting internationalization among its member universities. Quality assurance (QA) refers to systematic processes designed to assess and improve educational standards, while internationalization involves integrating an international dimension into the teaching, research, and service functions of institutions. AUN-QA provides a well-structured framework and a comprehensive set of criteria for the evaluation and accreditation of programs and institutions, thus aiding universities in

the refinement of their teaching and learning processes (Dharmasaroja, 2020). This network actively fosters collaboration and knowledge exchange among its member universities, facilitating the assimilation of best practices and experiences from each other's domains (Quoc Lam et al., 2020).

In carrying out quality assurance assessments and evaluations for programs and institutions, AUN-QA plays a crucial role. These assessments are meticulously structured around specific criteria that encompass various facets of program quality, spanning curriculum design, teaching methodologies, student evaluation techniques, faculty qualifications, and support services (Mukhaiyar et al., 2019) Through the rigorous AUN-QA assessment process, universities gain the ability to discern areas necessitating improvement and subsequently implement requisite changes to elevate program quality (Refnaldi & Arianto, 2017). Against the backdrop of this evolving educational landscape,

AUN-QA standards have emerged as universally recognized benchmarks, steering advancements in quality and garnering global acclaim for university programs within ASEAN nations.

Quality assurance mechanisms are intrinsic to the higher education landscape, serving as guarantors of the delivery of high-quality education aligned with societal expectations. The AUN-QA standards, in particular, occupy an esteemed status as prominent quality benchmarks, actively fostering quality augmentation and the continual enhancement of university programs across ASEAN member countries. The process of implementing AUN-QA standards on a global scale is intricate and influenced by a multifaceted array of factors. These encompass students' perceptions of the university's reputation, the impetus behind internationalization endeavors, the institution's interactions and competitiveness on both domestic and global fronts, alongside the pivotal role played by leadership in ensuring the efficacy of quality assurance initiatives.

To address this challenge, the ASEAN University Network has collaborated with Thai universities to encourage the adoption of quality assurance standards. Since 1997, one university in Thailand has been an active member of AUN, consistently implementing these standards in its educational programs. The AUN-QA standards have been thoughtfully designed to foster excellence in higher education institutions across the ASEAN region. These standards emphasize the importance of continual improvement and prioritize placing students at the center of the learning process, aligning seamlessly with outcome-based education principles and educational theory. This focus enables universities to concentrate on achieving specific learning outcomes tailored to individual student needs.

What sets AUN-QA apart from other global QA frameworks is its regional focus and emphasis on cultural and contextual relevance within ASEAN. Unlike some international QA frameworks that may impose a one-size-fits-all approach, AUN-QA considers the unique educational, cultural, and socio-economic contexts of ASEAN countries. This approach ensures that the standards are not only rigorous but also attainable and meaningful for institutions within the region. AUN-QA also places significant emphasis on continuous

improvement, student-centered learning, and active stakeholder participation, which are critical for fostering a culture of quality within higher education institutions.

The AUN-QA Implementation Guide for Universities Seeking to Adopt Standards serves as a comprehensive document outlining guidelines for universities aiming to embrace AUN-QA standards. This guide proves invaluable to academic institutions by providing a systematic approach to the effective implementation of these standards. It underscores the significance of adhering to AUN-QA standards, which have been meticulously crafted based on international best practices in quality assurance.

Realizing the full benefits of quality assurance measures necessitates the active participation of all Thai universities in the AUN-QA program and the implementation of recommended standards. By doing so, universities can cultivate a culture of continuous improvement, guaranteeing the provision of high-quality education to their students.

The AUN-QA assessment significantly influences the enhancement of program quality, instigating changes in curriculum design, teaching methodologies, student assessment techniques, facilities, and research infrastructure. These changes ultimately elevate the standing and reputation of universities. However, many higher education institutions encounter numerous challenges and difficulties in adhering to these standards. This study, based on statistical analyses of research outcomes from international publications indexed in Scopus and Google Scholar, seeks to address several key questions: 1) Why do universities adopt AUN-QA standards? 2) What challenges arise during the implementation of AUN-QA? and 3) What preparations must universities undertake to participate effectively in AUN-QA?

2. Literature Review

The AUN-QA standards are instrumental in ensuring the quality and competitiveness of higher education institutions (HEIs) within the ASEAN region. Established to foster regional collaboration and harmonize educational standards, the AUN-QA framework encompasses various aspects of

educational quality, including curriculum design, teaching and learning, research, community engagement, and administrative serv. Quality assurance (QA) is crucial for delivering high-quality education. Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) systems should be tailored to the specific features and interests of institutions rather than replicating externally defined models (Cardoso et al., 2017). Understanding the nuances of QA implementation in diverse educational settings is essential, as highlighted in studies on QA systems in Asian open universities (Zuhairi et al., 2020).

Defining quality, quality assurance, and quality enhancement in higher education provides a conceptual foundation for QA processes (Elassy, 2015). Adequate funding and support for QA initiatives are necessary, as evidenced by the challenges faced by Afghan higher education (Welch & Wahidyar, 2019). Evaluation rounds and self-evaluation play a significant role in fostering a culture of quality assurance and institutional development (Santos & Dias, 2017). AUN-QA standards drive educational programs towards competency-based education, aligning them with international standards and current higher education developments (Hieu et al., 2020). The positive impact of quality assessments on curriculum design and teaching practices has been observed following AUN-QA assessments (Huynh, 2024). Aligning curriculum components with stakeholder needs and integrating innovative pedagogical techniques enhance educational quality (Refnaldi et al., 2019).

Implementing AUN-QA standards in HEIs is fraught with challenges. A significant issue is the scarcity of skilled personnel capable of working under international standards (Muñoz, 2022). Additionally, balancing accountability and continuous improvement while fostering a receptive organizational culture is crucial. Aligning national and international standards early in the design stage is another critical requirement (Benz-Camino et al., 2023). Administrative burdens, such as increased paperwork and high implementation costs, further complicate the process (Kuepper & Batt, 2012). Financial constraints, particularly for universities with limited resources, and the lack of time and knowledgeable staff, are also notable challenges. Effective l eadership is essential;

improper implementation due to leadership issues can impede the successful adoption of AUN-QA standards (Ahmad & Ahmed, 2023).

Despite these challenges, best practices have been identified to facilitate the successful implementation of AUN-QA standards. Integrating internal, external, and international quality assurance criteria and standards is crucial (Grace Ahenkan Arthur & Alfred Kuranchie, 2022). Implementing AUN-QA standards in higher education institutions presents both challenges and opportunities. By addressing challenges such as administrative burdens, financial constraints, and the need for skilled personnel, and by adopting best practices such as strong institutional commitment, stakeholder engagement, and leveraging technology, HEIs can effectively meet AUN-QA standards. The role of quality assurance in higher education is pivotal in ensuring high-quality education delivery, and AUN-QA standards significantly contribute to shaping these practices.

3. Methodology
3.1. Summary of Research Process

To provide an objective overview of the existing research literature on the application of AUN-QA in universities, we conducted a systematic literature review using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework (Liberati et al., 2009). The objective was to analyze the content of 20 selected articles to address our research questions. These articles met the following criteria: Published in peer-reviewed academic journals, discussing issues related to the utilization of the AUN-QA toolkit in managing educational institution activities, published from 2016 to the present, and written in English.

To accurately identify articles that met these criteria, we established the following exclusion criteria for documents: conference proceedings, books, magazines, short surveys, brief communications, letters, newsletters, discussions, product reviews, editorials, and publisher notes. The selected articles were then read and analyzed (Fig 1.).

We conducted searches on the Scopus and Google Scholar databases. The search yielded a
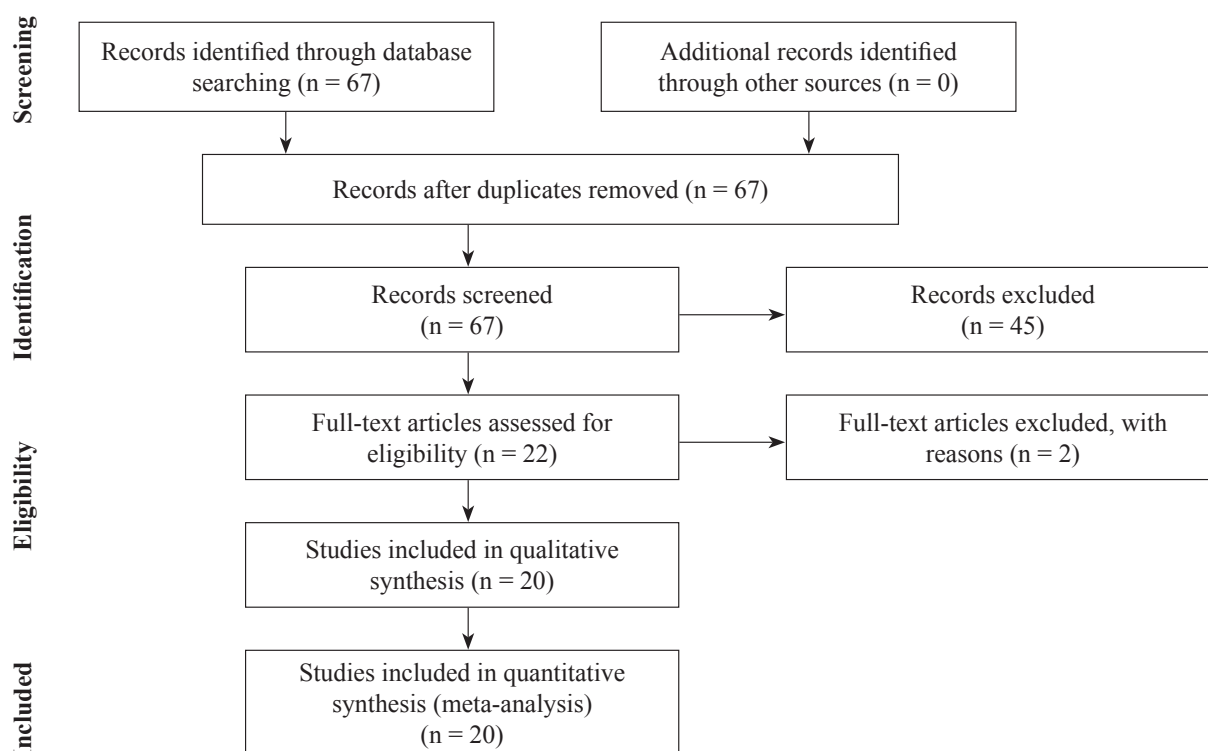
Fig 1. PRISMA flow diagram

total of 67 articles related to the keywords "AUN-QA" and "Quality assurance" or "AUN-QA" and "Quality management". Subsequently, we manually screened and assessed the relevance of these articles to our research topic. Among the 67 articles initially found, only 22 met the specified criteria for relevance. Finally, we carefully examined the content of these selected articles to analyze and extract relevant data in support of our research questions. During this stage, 2 articles were excluded due to their limited relevance to AUN-QA.

3.2. Data Extraction

From the 20 articles, we synthesized the key information from the articles and analyzed their contributions. Provides a summary of the article titles, publishers, and publication years (Table 1).

4. Research Findings

4.1. Why Do Universities Choose AUN-QA?

Universities implement the AUN-QA for various purposes. Essentially, there are several benefits associated with participation, including:

Enhancing international standing and recognition: Implementing AUN-QA can elevate the international status of universities and their programs. AUN-QA provides a quality management framework with international standards, making it easier for universities to demonstrate their commitment to global education quality (Kaunnil et al., 2021). This recognition can attract international students, faculty, and partners, fostering diversity and global collaboration within the university community.

Improving program quality: Adherence to AUN-QA standards encourages universities to continually enhance the quality of their educational programs (Dolly & Mukhaiyar, 2020). The assessment process helps identify areas for improvement and offers guidance on enhancing program design, teaching methods, student assessment, and research. By aligning programs with AUN-QA standards, universities can ensure their graduates possess the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to meet global employment market demands.

Building trust in society: Implementing AUN-QA reflects a university's commitment to quality education and responsibility to society,

Table 1. The list of analyzed articles

No	Title	Publisher	Citation
1	Curriculum Evaluation based on AUN-QA Criterion for the Case Study of the Electrical Engineering Vocational and Educational (EEVE) Study Program	IOP Publishing	(Mukhaiyar et al., 2019)
2	Occupational therapists' experiences and perspectives towards occupation-based practice in Thailand: A mixed-methods study	SAGE Publications	(Kaunnil et al., 2021)
3	The Voices of Alumni in Curriculum Development: A Step to Meet the Standards of the ASEAN University Network Quality Assurance (AUN-QA)	Universitas Negeri Padang (UNP)	(Refnaldi & Arianto, 2017)
4	Strategy to Improve Quality of Higher Education Institution Based on AUN-QA Standard	International Journal for Innovation Education and Research	(Pramono et al., 2018)
5	The Impact of ASEAN University Network-Quality Assurance (AUN-QA) Assessment on the Quality of Educational Programmes	Springer Singapore	(Johnson, 2017)
6	Kinerja akademik pasca sertifikasi AUN-QA Pada program studi di institut Pertanian Bogor	Graduate Program of Management and Business, IPB University	(Adelyna et al., 2016)
7	The effect of implementation of lecture performance measurement system and the role clarity of lecturer performance: a study of testing mediation effect	Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang	(Sofyani & Nazaruddin, 2019)
8	Concept of curriculum evaluation in education program of electrical engineering using AUN-QA as benchmarking	Universitas Negeri Padang	(Dolly & Mukhaiyar, 2020)
9	From Need Analysis to ELT Study Program Learning Outcome Development: Meeting the Standards of the ASEAN University Network Quality Assurance (AUN-QA)	Atlantis Press	(REFNALDI et al., 2018)
10	ASEAN University Network in Enhancing Student Mobility	STAR Scholars Network	(Soejatminah, 2018)
11	Service quality in higher education: Applying HEdPERF scale in Vietnamese universities	Ho Chi Minh City Open University	(Tri et al., 2021)
12	Supply Chain Management Model in Digital Quality Assurance for ASEAN University Network Quality Assurance (AUN-QA)	Canadian Center of Science and Education	(Kaewngam et al., 2019)
13	Moving toward a competency-based curriculum: Analyzing patients' information and students' evaluation in geriatric dentistry	Wiley	(Limpuangthip et al., 2021)
14	Exchange of Higher Education Teaching and Learning Practices Between UK and Thailand: A Case Study of RailExchange Courses	Springer International Publishing	(Fraszczyk et al., 2019)
15	Perceived Changes to Quality Assurance After AUN-QA Programme Assessment: Voices of Quality Assurance Practitioners, Academic Staff, and Students	International Journal of Learning Teaching and Educational Research	(Huynh, 2024)
16	Internal Quality Assurance of Academic Programs: A Case Study in Vietnamese Higher Education	SAGE Publications	(Pham et al., 2022)

No	Title	Publisher	Citation
17	Impact Study of Programme Assessment at Three Universities in Vietnam: Students' Perspectives	Academic Publishing House Researcher	(Huong Pham & Phuong Vu Nguyen, 2021)
18	The Development of Islamic Religion Education Curriculum at University Seen From the Perspective of Maqashid	Science Publishing Corporation	(Arifi & ., 2018)
19	Academic Inculcating Behavior Scale and Validation using CSE and PsyCap in Diverse Faculty Members	Science Publishing Corporation	(Bhanthumnavin, 2018)
20	Improving the Teaching and Learning Quality Towards ASEAN University Network (AUN) Standards	Atlantis Press	(Sinaga et al., 2021)

including students, parents, employers, and governing bodies. Transparent and rigorous assessment processes instill trust in the quality of education provided by the university. This can lead to increased student enrollment, positive recognition from employers, and an improved reputation in the field of higher education.

Internationalization opportunities: Implementing AUN-QA aligns with broader internationalization goals in higher education (Dharmasaroja, 2020). The establishment of branch campuses, cross-border partnerships, and programs for international students are examples of internationalization initiatives that are essential to the implementation of AUN-QA. These programs give colleges the chance to broaden their international networks, enhance intercultural understanding, and foster academic mobility (Fraszczyk et al., 2019). By incorporating perspectives and experiences from around the world, internationalization also improves the quality and relevance of programs in higher education.

Competitive advantage: The adoption of AUN-QA standards can confer a distinctive competitive advantage upon universities within the global higher education milieu (Wesarat et al., 2022). In an epoch characterized by heightened competition on both domestic and international fronts, universities are fervently endeavoring to bolster their standing by furnishing high-caliber educational programs that align with international quality benchmarks. This strategic endeavor not only has the potential to allure exceptionally talented students and distinguished faculty members but also stimulates the formation of research collaborations, thereby culminating in a holistic elevation of educational eminence.

Culture of continuous improvement: The adoption of AUN-QA fosters a culture of ongoing enhancement within universities. The assessment procedure prompts universities to meticulously assess and ameliorate their quality assurance systems, teaching methodologies, and support services. This culture of continuous improvement serves as a catalyst for innovation, integration, and adaptability in response to evolving student and societal requisites. Furthermore, it guarantees that universities uphold a prominent stance in the realm of educational progressions and the adoption of optimal practices (Soejatminah, 2018).

The implementation of AUN-QA offers numerous benefits for universities. It enhances international recognition, improves program quality, builds trust in society, provides internationalization opportunities, offers competitive advantages, and promotes a culture of continuous improvement. These advantages contribute to the overall excellence and reputation of universities, attracting students, faculty, and partners on a global scale.

4.2. Challenges Universities Face in AUN-QA Implementation

During AUN-QA implementation, universities may encounter various difficulties and challenges. These challenges can be categorized into different areas, including organizational, financial, cultural, and administrative aspects.

Complexity and diversity of global higher education: One of the challenges universities

faces is the complexity and diversity of global higher education (Pramono et al., 2018). The constantly changing world demands that universities reassess and adapt their approaches to effectively implement AUN-QA standards. Internationalization, driven by diverse purposes and motivations such as commercial advantages, knowledge acquisition, and enhanced international curriculum, contributes to this complexity.

Financial requirements: Financial demands can pose challenges for universities when implementing AUN-QA. Establishing quality assurance mechanisms requires financial resources to set up quality assurance units, conduct assessments, and support improvement efforts. Limited budgets may hinder universities' ability to allocate sufficient resources for quality assurance implementation.

Cultural factors: AUN-QA implementation may also be hampered by cultural considerations. Each institution has its own distinctive culture, values, and procedures that might need to be in line with AUN-QA guidelines (Benz-Camino et al., 2023). For colleges, overcoming opposition to change and creating an organizational culture ready to embrace quality assurance can be extremely difficult. A lack of awareness or comprehension of quality assurance concepts, opposition to new evaluation techniques, and reluctance to share data and information are a few examples of cultural hurdles.

Administrative challenges: The AUN-QA implementation procedure may run into administrative problems. Universities may need to create or restructure the groups or units in charge of monitoring the quality assurance procedure. In order to accomplish this, stakeholders such as faculty, staff, and students must coordinate and work together. Complex administrative activities may include ensuring effective communication, stakeholder participation, and program alignment with AUN-QA criteria.

4.3. What should Universities Prepare to Participate in the AUN-QA Program?

Understanding AUN-QA standards: Universities need to have a thorough understanding of the AUN-QA standards and criteria that will be applied to the evaluation of their programs. The requirements for program design, teaching and learning techniques, student assessment, faculty, support personnel, student support services, teaching and learning facilities, and research must all be clearly understood. Understanding these factors will help colleges make the necessary adjustments to their programs and procedures (Sinaga et al., 2021).

Quality assurance system: Universities must set up effective quality assurance systems that are in line with the AUN-QA framework. This system ought to include guidelines, practices, and checkpoints for assessing program quality. Participants in the quality assurance process such as faculty, staff, students, and outside partners should be included. The quality assurance system ought to be planned to guarantee ongoing improvement and satisfy the criteria for the AUN-QA evaluation.

Curriculum alignment: Universities should make sure that their curricula adhere to AUN-QA criteria. To make sure they adhere to the requirements established by AUN-QA, this include examining and making adjustments to program design, teaching strategies, practices, student assessment, and research activities. The university's courses are in accordance with quality standards and best practices thanks to curriculum alignment.

Documentation and evidence: In order to prove their involvement in the AUN-QA program, universities must provide extensive paperwork and supporting proof. This entails giving thorough details on the goals of the program, the material covered in the curriculum, the techniques used for assessment, the qualifications of the teachers, and the facilities. This documentation should demonstrate the program's quality and adhere to AUN-QA criteria.

Involvement of relevant stakeholders: Universities should involve pertinent parties in the AUN-QA process, including academics, staff, students, and outside partners. To acquire viewpoints and perspectives on program quality, this may entail obtaining feedback, carrying out surveys, and setting up seminars or task groups.

Involving relevant stakeholders ensures that the implementation of AUN-QA reflects the needs and expectations of the university community.

Culture of continuous improvement: Within their academic programs, universities should promote a culture of constant development. This involves promoting a way of thinking that seeks out input, examines data, and makes adjustments to improve program quality. In order to continuously enhance teaching and learning strategies, universities should encourage professors and staff to participate in professional development, research, and innovation.

Universities may successfully take part in the AUN-QA program and show their dedication to high-quality education and ongoing progress by addressing these issues.

5. Conclusion

AUN-QA assumes a pivotal role in advancing international recognition and facilitating student and graduate mobility. The accreditation and acknowledgment furnished by AUN-QA establish a quality benchmark for member universities, enhancing the international employability and credibility of their degrees. This recognition, in turn, paves the way for student and faculty exchange initiatives, research collaborations, and joint degree programs among member universities (Lam et al., 2020). AUN-QA is a catalyst in nurturing a culture of quality within higher education institutions. It proactively promotes quality assurance practices and standards, compelling universities to adopt a systematic and continuous approach to quality enhancement (O'Sullivan, 2017). This entails the establishment of internal quality assurance mechanisms, the regular conduct of self-assessments, and active stakeholder involvement in the quality enhancement process. AUN-QA places significant emphasis on the integral role of

students in quality assurance, recognizing them as vital stakeholders in the educational process.

The AUN-QA assumes a pivotal role in ensuring quality assurance within higher education institutions. It not only offers a structured framework and criteria for evaluating and accrediting programs and institutions but also fosters international recognition and student and graduate mobility, encourages collaboration and knowledge sharing among member universities, and contributes substantially to cultivating a culture of quality within higher education. Through its dedicated efforts, AUN-QA strives to elevate the standard of education and foster internationalization throughout the ASEAN region.

Maintaining educational quality in accordance with AUN-QA standards entails multifaceted considerations. These include factors such as students' perceptions of the university's image, the motivations driving international integration, competition both on a national and global scale, and the indispensable role of leadership in the effective implementation of quality assurance. The AUN-QA assessments wield substantial influence over the enhancement of program quality, catalyzing changes in curriculum design, teaching methodologies, student evaluation methods, infrastructure and facilities, and research initiatives. These are the formidable challenges that universities confront when aspiring to engage with AUN-QA. Universities with aspirations to implement quality assurance in line with AUN-QA standards must prepare diligently, comprehending the criteria and fulfilling the essential prerequisites. Through the scrutiny and synthesis of 20 peer-reviewed scientific papers, this research endeavor has partially elucidated the objectives, advantages, and challenges faced by universities in their engagement with AUN-QA.

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