

Quality Assurance **In** Higher Education Across the **World**

Editors

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Judith Eaton

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Foreword

The scope and scale of this Festschrift is a fitting tribute to the breadth and depth of Dr. Judith Eaton's work on quality assurance in higher education over many years. The book reflects her extraordinary career and its steadily increasing international focus. After serving as chancellor of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities and president of community colleges in Pennsylvania and Nevada, she became vice-president of the American Council of Education in Washington, D.C. These diverse roles were an ideal preparation for her appointment as founding president of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) in 1996.

Under her focused leadership, CHEA became the largest association of degree-granting colleges and universities in the United States and a respected national advocate and institutional voice for nurturing academic quality through accreditation. At CHEA's annual conferences she herself wove together discussions from the diverse sessions into a coherent whole, creating events that people tasked with quality assurance in higher education could not afford to miss. Over the years CHEA's conferences attracted increasing numbers of participants from outside the USA, leading her to establish the CHEA International Quality Group (CIQG) in 2012. The two editors of this Festschrift were both key figures in CIQG's growth and development.

Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić became CHEA's advisor on international affairs, bringing from her long career at UNESCO extensive experience of degree recognition and quality assurance that dated back to the development of the Lisbon Convention. Peter Okebukola joined the CIQG International Advisory Council, which met annually alongside the CHEA Conference, and was its chair from 2016-19. He brought to the table decades of experience of university governance, with a particular focus on quality assurance and combating corruption in Nigeria and Africa generally.

Dr. Eaton herself became more active internationally as overseas participation in CHEA's conferences grew. She already had a long association with accreditation in Hong Kong and was a respected figure in the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). I remember well her address to the 2010 INQAAHE Conference in Windhoek, Namibia, on the past, present and future of quality assurance. After noting how the focus of quality assurance had shifted from inputs to processes and then from processes to outcomes, she coined the phrase “the spread of the familiar” to describe the convergence of methods around the world. But while she encouraged quality assurance bodies to learn from good practice elsewhere, she reminded us that countries were at different stages and that one size did not fit all. This attitude ensured that CHEA's international activities were free of the imperialist undercurrents that can hamper US associations spreading their wings abroad.

She fully understood that higher education accreditation in the USA, which is largely a voluntary process run by the higher education institutions themselves under the guidance of CHEA, was an outlier in world terms. In other countries governments usually play a greater role in quality assurance processes. Given the highly partisan politics of the USA, she inspired CHEA to fight against government encroachment on the institutionally based processes of her own country, while accepting that government involvement in accreditation and quality assurance elsewhere was not necessarily malign. She brought the different traditions together by encouraging the debate on quality to focus on the essentials, of which the development of CHEA's Quality Platform in 2013 was an example. It was an outcomes-based external review of performance and quality, targeted for national or international use by the alternative providers that were emerging at that time.

The variety of the contributions to this Festschrift, which emanates from 16 countries, reflects the impressive international networks and reputations of its editors. The book's seven parts furnish us with a comprehensive picture of the increasingly complex challenges facing quality assurance and accreditation in the contemporary world. One of the final chapters quotes Dr. Eaton's use of the term "the new normal" to describe a situation in which no one is happy: "institutions feel burdened, policymakers are frustrated, consumers are unprotected, employer needs are unmet, and accreditors are under fire."

Earlier contributions describe how quality assurance journeyed to this crossroads and suggest future directions of travel. A first section recalls the history, noting the increasingly intrusive role of governments with their growing demands for accountability. This leads onto a series of case studies, with a particular focus on Africa, and a section detailing the impact of successful initiatives to introduce internal and external mechanisms for quality assurance. In Part four, an important contribution addresses the vexed question of the relationship between quality assurance and rankings because "the current debate asks not just what universities are good at but what they are good for." The following section sets higher education in the context of wider global developments, zeroing in on the fight against corruption.

Dr. Eaton took advantage of the combined convening powers of CHEA and UNESCO to constitute international groups that could advise on combating bad practices in higher education. I took part myself in the articulation of a 2009 CHEA/UNESCO statement on effective practices for discouraging degree mills and of a 2016 statement on combating corruption. Both documents have helped quality assurance agencies around the world to fight these harmful developments.

Fittingly, the final section of the book looks to the future with contributions that grapple with the renewal of quality assurance and accreditation systems as they attempt to serve many masters. Existing difficulties have been compounded by the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education and the wider world economy. Students planning to study internationally are not the only ones reassessing their options. Domestic students have pressing questions too. What programs should they study to give them good chances of employment as economies recover? Does full-time study on campus become less attractive if more of it has to be done online? Judith Eaton's exemplary career and this book written in her honor can be an inspiration to those charged with the quality assurance of higher education in these challenging times.

Sir John Daniel

Former Assistant Director-General of UNESCO and
Pioneer Chairman, CIQG Advisory Council

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Introduction

Over the last 20 years, the quality assurance environment in higher education has undergone impressive changes. The drivers of the changes are internal and external to the jurisdiction where higher education institutions operate. Demand for greater accountability, operationalization of academic freedom, and the demands of national higher education reforms and policies are some of the internal forces. The externals include mobility of staff and students especially across national boundaries; demands of implementing regional and global conventions in higher education; the desire to be well-placed on ranking league tables; impact of COVID-19 on the delivery system; matters of credentialing; and the dynamics of curriculum reforms. The changes that we have seen point increasingly to institutional strive for improvement in the quality of teaching, research, community engagement, social responsibility, and trust. In this five-part book, perspectives of the forces driving change and the products of such efforts are richly documented across all the regions of the world by the thirty-three contributors.

Part A sets the conceptual tone with its focus on definitions, theory, philosophy and the history of quality assurance in higher education. In the first chapter of this section, Dessalegn Ejigu Berhane provides the reader with definitional and philosophical underpinnings of quality assurance. Other chapters bring rich perspectives from national and global lenses as exemplified by contributions of Jamil Salmi and John Bassett. Part B on country/regional experiences and case studies of successful practices in quality assurance in higher education gives further flavor of the global reach of the contributions to this book. All the regions of the world are represented in the narratives of the twelve contributors to this section. Peter A. Okebukola opens the section with perspectives from Nigeria. Other contributors are Arlene Lawrence from Jamaica, Syun Tutiya from Japan and Concepcion Pijano from the Philippines.

Part C on successful practices in setting up, monitoring, and evaluating internal (institutional) and external quality assurance units/agencies in higher education is helpful for the quality assurance practitioner as it provides useful guide from the six contributors. The book branches out beyond national boundaries in Part D to global trends, new directions, partnerships, and challenges. The opening chapter of this section by Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić takes on the important subject of quality assurance adapting to change and within this context, she describes the role of CHEA's International Quality Group (CIQG). Other contributors to this section include Ellen Hazelkorn, Gareth Phillips, and Nadeem Khan. As probably expected, the concluding part is on future directions of quality assurance in higher education. Here we telescope into the future with contributions seeing this future from national and international lenses.

This book was delightfully put together to honor Judith Eaton who is founding President of CHEA and who, over the last 20 years at least, established a global web of quality assurance practitioners who were unhesitant to contribute to this book. We continue to wish Judith well and trust that this book will stimulate improved quality in higher education across the world in the decades ahead.

Peter A. Okebukola and Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić
Editors

Part A

DEFINITIONS, THEORY, PHILOSOPHY, HISTORY OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Chapter 1

Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Dessalegn Ejigu Berhane

Introduction

The term “higher education institutions” (HEIs) comprises training and research institutions that are recognized and authorized by the government. Education, in general, is a human right, and higher education, in particular, represents the rich cultural and scientific assets of society (Wells, 2018). HEIs have various roles to play in development, including cultivating new knowledge and interpreting old knowledge and beliefs in the light of recent discoveries. They provide the right kind of leadership, identify talent in individuals, and help them to build up their potential, develop the right interests, attitudes, and moral and intellectual values. HEIs offer quality training that leads to competent individuals in various disciplines that cultivate them with a sense of social responsibilities.

Quality education in HEIs strives for fairness and reduces social and cultural differences (Kim-Soon, 2015). According to Diana (1994), quality is a relative concept and different stakeholders in higher education have different priorities concerning it and their focus of attention may be different about it as well. It is not possible, therefore, to talk about quality as a single concept. As a result, the best that can be achieved is to define quality based on the criteria that each stakeholder uses when describing quality according to their thoughts. Harvey & Green (1993) described five ways of thinking about quality. These include:

Quality as being exceptional or excellent: This view refers to quality as achieving the exceptional or the highest academic excellence and standards, and these kinds of thinking about quality are not usually achievable.

Quality as perfection or consistency: This approach looks at quality as a process to eliminate defects, thus aspiring for a perfect outcome. To attain this kind of thinking about quality, there is a need to avoid errors by increasing improvements in products or services.

Quality as value for money: This kind of thinking about quality focuses on the input per output ratio, with the main purpose of gaining more efficiency. For instance, quality is attained when a better outcome can be achieved at the same cost, or if the cost can be minimized while the outcome remains the same.

Quality as transformation: This thought about quality looks at learning that is centered on the learner and views quality as value added. It focuses on the empowerment of students through the learning process and believes that quality is achieved when the learning proves transformative for the students.

Quality as fitness for purpose: In this view, quality is measured by the level of fulfillment of a stated purpose, mission, or goals of the institution or an academic program. As a result, the exact meaning of quality will vary depending on the actual purpose stated by the

institution. It is all about meeting the needs and expectations of stakeholders concerning functionality, reliability, durability, and cost of the products or services (Williams & Ansfield, 2007).

In the context of Ethiopian HEIs, quality refers to fitness for purpose, where the word purpose is to address the mission, goals, and objectives of the institution. It implies that HEI has procedures in place that are appropriate for the specified purposes and that there is evidence to show that these procedures are achieving the specified purposes (Quality Care Manual, 2008). Fitness for purpose implies the institution and its components of activities have quality if they conform to the purpose for which they were designed (Makerere University, 2017).

What is Quality Assurance?

Quality assurance (QA) is defined as an activity performed to ensure that an institution is providing the best possible services or products to its customers (Ryan, 2015). It is the process whereby measures are established which ensure that outcomes of academic programs and activities are of agreed standards. Quality assurance is a system of procedures and corrective actions to ensure that all teaching, research, community engagements, and other related activities are of the highest achievable quality (Quality Care Manual, 2008). It covers all the processes in HEIs to serve stakeholders to the expected quality standards. Quality assurance is the process of executing systematic activities that will provide confidence that a product or service will fulfill specified levels of quality (Okebukola, 2005). It focuses on improving the processes to deliver quality services or products as per the set quality standards. Moreover, quality assurance is a proactive process, which focuses on the process, and is used to make the product with its stated standards.

Quality is assured by the internal quality assurance system organized within each HEI, and external quality assurance mechanism conducted by agencies that work with systems of HEIs. To assure quality, the external quality assurance process usually relies on internal quality assurance systems. For instance, in Ethiopia, the external quality assurance systems are usually supportive to improve quality in the HEI. As the demand for quality education increases, there is also a growing demand for quality assurance in HEIs where there is increasing internationalization in the mobility of students, academic staff, and programs (Varonism, 2014).

Mechanisms of Quality Assurance

Internal Assessment

Self-evaluation of HEIs is carried out at the end of each academic year to ensure the quality of the teaching and learning, research, and community engagement activities. During this evaluation, student surveys concerning the study programs, teaching, and learning processes, and the work of academic staff are carried out at different levels. An institution submits a self-assessment report to the concerned agency office. In Ethiopia, for example, Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) office is responsible for evaluating the self-assessment report prepared by the Ethiopian HEIs. Thus, the method and criteria of self-evaluation concerning study programs, teaching, and learning facilities, qualifications of academic staff, teaching methods, enrollment of students, exam pass rate, and percentage of graduate students are evaluated by HERQA.

HERQA is mandated to assure quality education provision both in public and private HEIs. In internal evaluation, student participation is mandatory. The survey is anonymous, and students are interviewed at all levels about the study programs, teaching and learning process, and commitment of academic staff. In Ethiopia, the method and criteria of internal assessment concerning the different activities of the HEIs are described in more detail by HERQA, and it is prepared in the form of a manual, which is available in each institution. The

internal assessment report of an institution is passed by the higher officials of the institution, and then the institution submits the assessment report to HERQA.

The institution's internal assessment is carried out continuously and is conducted by the HEI following its settings. In the process of self-evaluation, students are interviewed at all levels once per academic year. Besides the teaching and learning activities, internal assessment of the research on the applicability of acquired knowledge and competences in the labor market is also conducted, and the findings are considered during the preparation of the self-assessment report.

The participatory nature of the internal quality assurance assessment structure is critical and shall be reflected in the HEIs committees and task forces. The available expertise and leadership in each department shall be exploited when identifying the leaders of teams, as a result, professors, and senior lecturers would have participated in the task forces. Moreover, current students and alumni could have participated in the internal quality assurance assessment team. The direction and support provided by the HEIs leadership bodies at different levels are critical. To summarize, the internal quality assurance assessment mechanisms shall focus on the quality of programs and courses; teaching and learning experiences; staff and student performance; support services; resources and facilities; and research conducted in the institution (Makerere University, 2017).

External Assessment

In Ethiopia, as a case study, external assessment of HEIs could be performed using standards and guidelines for quality assurance, and standards and guidelines for the accreditation of study programs (HERQA, 2006). Hence, quality assurance through external assessment is carried out following the law on higher education using different procedures. Areas of external review include contents of courses or programs and delivery mechanisms, student assessment, teaching and learning resources, academic staff qualifications, and professional development activities. The evaluators use different methods to get adequate data about the institution's activities. Thus, they focus on a review of documents including staff and student records, observations on lecture rooms, teaching and learning processes, and laboratory set-ups. They also prepare interviews with students and staff, onsite visits to the academic and administrative staff offices and activities, and examine the quality, reliability, and validity of the internal assessment report.

The external assessment team may also require documents including student assessment mechanisms like examination papers; projects; answer sheets; academic staff course materials such as course outlines, handouts, laboratory manuals, study guides, course modules, references books; program and course structure and content; physical facilities including laboratories and equipment, library facilities, ICT facilities; financial support including research grants, conference funds; curriculum vitae of academic staff; publications by academic staff; student tracking information such as progression and employment data.

Accreditation of Study Programs

The accreditation process is the responsibility of the agency. The institution is obliged to submit the internal evaluation report to the agency, at least six months before applying and sending a request for accreditation of the study program. The process of accreditation of the study program evaluates the quality of the study program and its compliance with professional needs and standards adopted and comparability with the same or similar programs abroad, as well as the representation and credit evaluation of practical training (HERQA, 2006; Quality Care Manual, 2008; Makerere University, 2017). The accreditation of the study program is issued for a period of not more than five years. Exceptionally, accreditation for study programs lasting more than five years is granted for the duration of that study program. The agency shall

set up a committee of independent experts for the accreditation of study programs. The cost of accreditation of study programs is funded by the institution itself.

Reaccreditation of Higher Education Institutions

During the reaccreditation process, the HEI shall apply for accreditation of the institution with a report on self-assessment and other supporting documents. The agency shall delegate a procedure coordinator from among the staff of the agency. The coordinator checks the formal fulfilment and timeliness of the reaccreditation request and supporting documents. Then an expert committee with a minimum of five members including a representative from students who will evaluate the reaccreditation request is constituted by the agency.

Reaccreditation of the institution is administered by the agency every five years. The agency evaluates the HEI on the basis of evaluation standards for institutions. Within the reaccreditation process, an institution prepares a self-evaluation report covering the period not longer than five years. Supported by the self-evaluation report, the agency prepares a reaccreditation report for the institution. The reaccreditation report is submitted to the agency, the institution, and the Ministry of Education. Based on the positive reaccreditation report, the agency issues a certificate on reaccreditation of the institution. If an institution fails to get a reaccreditation certificate, the license is valid for a maximum of one year, without the likelihood of enrolling students during that year. If an establishment fails to get a reaccreditation certificate after this time, the ministry shall be employing a choice to cancel the license granted to the institution.

During the validity period of accreditation or reaccreditation, a licensed institution can make alterations to a program at undergraduate level up to a maximum of 30 ECTS credits without undergoing accreditation and licensing procedure. An institution carries out market research a minimum of once in five years by conducting a survey among graduate students, associations of employers, commercial entities, and entrepreneurs concerning the applicability of the obtained knowledge, skills, and competencies required within the labor market. The results of the research are considered on the occasion of preparing self-evaluation and reaccreditation reports. Institution reaccreditation may be a process supported by the institution's external assessment report and its study programs following the prescribed standards for institution's reaccreditation.

Rationale for Quality Assurance

The rapidly growing student population and the increasingly competitive nature of higher education demand quality assurance in HEIs. Moreover, student exchange and international cooperation, internationalization of professions and globalization, regional and global education trends, and pressure to satisfy societal needs all demand quality services.

As education systems grow and diversify, society is increasingly concerned about the standard of the programs. Much attention is given to public assessments and international rankings of HEIs. However, these comparisons tend to overemphasize research, using research performance as an index of institutional value. If these processes fail to deal with the standard of teaching, it is partially because measuring teaching quality is challenging. Quality assurance is often a driver for institutions to realize excellence in education. However, ensuring the quality of educational programs meets local and international standards has become a great challenge in many countries including Ethiopia. Hence, a need emerges for the cooperation of quality assurance agencies and acceptance of quality assurance review decisions.

Determinants of Quality Education in Higher Institutions

Background

In HEIs academic matters, curriculum, and teaching methods are the foremost essential determining factors of students' satisfaction. According to Sedov & Valiev (2017), quality education in HEI is decided by various factors including institution's quality assurance policies, which encompass projects designed to develop a top-quality culture; program monitoring; and teaching and learning supports. Teaching and learning support determine quality education in HEI including instructors, students, and the learning environment. A systematic and consistent quality assurance system helps to determine the institution's reputation. It includes clear standards of accomplishment, documented procedures, and clear accountability for outcomes. The result is greater public confidence, more satisfied students, efficient processes, and staff members who are confident in their professions. Students are more likely to experience better-quality instructions, learning materials, and interactions with the institution and its staff, resulting in enhanced learning outcomes. Quality in HEI is multidimensional and embraces all functions and activities of upper education including teaching, academic programs, research and scholarship, profile of educational staff, students, infrastructure, and services to the community.

Academic Staff

The instructor is probably the foremost important factor in determining the standard of education. How qualified is the instructor? The number of staff members with a PhD degree, and where they have received their highest degrees, are some of the contributing factors required to increase the probabilities of better-quality education. The quality of university graduates might be measured by how well they are prepared to render their services to society. Quality can also be considered on the basis of how good and efficient the instructors are; how adequate and accessible the facilities and materials needed by instructors for effective teaching and learning are; and the way the graduates are prepared for meeting the challenges of life and for solving the societal problems. Moreover, instructors' expertise and interest towards the subject matter are the most influential factor and have a significant and positive impact on quality education and students' satisfaction.

Teaching as a profession is often considered as a human resource of an institute. The competencies of instructors add value to the academic institute. Competency refers to an individual's demonstrated knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Instructors can reveal their competencies not only by their teaching and learning activities but also by delivering ideas and initiatives to their institutes. Therefore, instructors are also human capital which will create value and sustainable competitive advantages, and they are considered as the backbone of the institution. Both instructor's quality and institute's facilities are often considered as the key determinants of education quality (Pootrakul, 2014). The quality of instructors influences the quality of the education system, as well as the quality of students. Therefore, the instructors are one of the key factors in producing qualified students and are required to hold out their roles efficiently. Students want to be taught by an instructor who is enthusiastic and knowledgeable, sympathetic, friendly, supportive, and patient, and that will encourage them to develop their full potential.

Curriculum

Although the curriculum has different definitions, it includes the courses offered by an academic institution, the set of standards, and concepts required to be taught and learned during a given course or academic year. It is a socially constructed body of knowledge that articulates the needs, values, and aspirations of society through the teaching and learning process for the accomplishment of desired outcomes. The curriculum is what is taught both inside and outside of the institution, and it can be taken to be a set of subjects. It includes the

aims, objectives, teaching content, teaching strategies, assessment methods, and other components of teaching and learning activities.

The curriculum may be a program of studies that has everything that goes on within the institution, including extra-class activities, guidance and counseling, and interpersonal relationships. Generally, the curriculum of an institution deals with all the scheduled activities undertaken within the institution, and if any of the aspects is lacking, it becomes inadequate and thus there is a need for its revision. How often is the curriculum revised? What is the curriculum flexibility level including the percentage of the elective courses? Do they provide choices in those electives? What do graduates do? Do all of them go for jobs, or do they choose higher education? All such details should be considered during the revision of the curriculum, and usually, the curriculum should be revised every five years.

According to Akareem & Hossain (2016), the course structure in a curriculum is found to possess a significant contribution to international students' satisfaction level. This shows that the better the course structure was planned within the curriculum, the greater the extent of international students' satisfaction would be. Therefore, courses offered by HEIs have a significant relationship on students' satisfaction, which signals HEIs should identify courses that are popular and highly demanded by international students. The curriculum being developed at the center and being implemented by instructors that do not themselves understand them leads to an unbridged gap between the formal and the actual curriculum, which creates implementation problem (Akareem & Hossain 2016; Saleem et al. 2012).

Saleem et al. (2012) explained that the curriculum is usually being criticized for being too academic. Instructors' involvement in curriculum development is not usually encouraged as they are supposed to lack confidence, competence, experience, and capabilities for undertaking any activities aside from those which involve familiar and safe teaching routines. Instructors who are professionals within the educational field should be included in curriculum design to develop a comprehensive model of institute effectiveness. Moreover, in developing the curriculum, various factors including the learning environment, professionalism, management, and quality should be collectively considered to realize its objectives.

Learning Environment

The learning environment refers to an educational approach, cultural context, or physical setting during which teaching, and learning have been taking place. Since students may learn in different settings, the term is usually used as a more accurate alternative to the classroom, which has more limited and traditional setups. The learning environment also encompasses the culture of the institute including how individuals interact with and treat each other, as well as how instructors may organize an educational setting to facilitate teaching and learning.

The learning environment is additionally found to have great influence on international students' satisfaction. Consistent with the view of Akareem & Hossain (2016), an appropriate learning environment with adequate facilities is found to have a significant relationship with students' satisfaction in education. Moreover, there is a direct correlation between learning facilities and services with the general satisfaction of students in HEIs. Agrey & Lampadan (2014) also suggested that students prefer those institutions which are given for an updated learning environment and modern facilities. It might be important to make sure that efforts are being made to determine a positive reputation within and beyond the immediate context during which the HEI is found.

The learning environment is the best variable in influencing students' satisfaction level. Higher educational institutions should create conducive learning environment within the university setting that meets international students' expectations. Hence, HEIs should continuously determine and understand what matters most to students regarding the entire

system and continuously improve the general quality of higher education. Thus, continuous improvement of service quality that emphasizes managing students' satisfaction is significant for HEIs to create their reputation. According to Sedov & Valiev (2017), it is necessary to single out local and general determinants of quality education. Local determinants within the quality of higher education should be attributed to the modernization of education, while the general ones include globalization, informatization, and the integration of education. The standard of upper education may be a cumulative indicator, the standards of which should be described because of the process and its output.

Infrastructure

Quality education is additionally determined by infrastructure. How good are the laboratories within the discipline of students' choice? Do they need modern and adequate equipment? How good is the common infrastructure? What percentage of books is there per student within the library? What e-journals do they subscribe to? What proportion bandwidth do they have? Are lecture halls equipped with computers, projectors, screens, and audio facilities? What sport facilities exist on the campus? Ciriaci & Muscio (2011) argue that prestigious HEIs may act as a magnet for talents. Kusumwati et al. (2010) also suggest that the reputation of the institution and course of study flexibility are the foremost significant factors about a student's decision for further study in a given HEI. Consistent with the view of Agrey & Lampadan (2014), if the HEI claims that it provides an international education; this is often an important characteristic in attracting students. It is deemed important to prospective students to possess a broad range of nationalities represented within the teaching faculty when considering a world education.

Institutions should provide attractive and clean accommodation for students, and that they would have adequate health care available to them. Saleem et al. (2012) emphasize institution leadership as being key to the institution's effectiveness, involving the community in institution governance, including locally determined infrastructural improvements. Daud et al. (2019) argue that international students' satisfaction level is crucial in measuring HEIs' performance within the globalized higher education. In any HEI, the quality of teaching and learning, research, and community engagements offered is highly dependent on the supply of the required infrastructure and learning resources. Every HEI should take significant steps in fulfilling the required infrastructure and learning resources. Physical facilities including classrooms, offices, cafeteria, dormitories, clinics, sports fields, and learning resources should sufficiently be available to draw in talented students at national and international levels.

Service Quality and Students' Satisfaction

Service quality has a strong contribution to students' satisfaction, and it is an important requirement to survive within the competitive market environment. Students' satisfaction is greatly influenced by the service quality, and service quality is passing through perceived value in HEI settings. Thus, if service aspects are properly executed, students' satisfaction would be ensured. Generally, quality services in student advice and counseling, admission, and registration have a big contribution to students' satisfaction. The students' overall satisfaction will increase if their learning outcome and their study experience exceed their perception (Daud et al., 2019).

Quality Management System

Quality management systems (QMS) refers to all the processes that are in place to facilitate the achievement of quality in an institution. It is a management technique used to communicate to human resources what is required to supply the specified quality of products and services and to influence employee actions to finish tasks consistent with the stated quality standards. A QMS should establish a vision for the employees, set standards for employees,

build motivation within the institutes, set goals for the employees, and help fight the resistance to change within institutions.

Purpose of Quality Management System

The purpose of the QMS is to make sure, whenever a process is performed, the same information, methods, skills, and controls are used and applied reliably. QMSs are a reflection of what is done, how it is done and the way it is managed. Thus, to ensure quality education, research, and community engagement in HEI, dynamic and functional quality management systems should be established, and the leadership should be supportive of such confirmed skills.

According to Kim-Soon (2015), quality management is evolving, and its journey never ends. Whether it is a big organization or a small one producing products or services, it is quality that matters to the customers. Global market competitiveness and market dynamics are continuously changing the situations of management quality (Joseph & Ford, 1997). Hence, effective quality management systems are dynamic and adaptable to change in meeting customers' expectations. It can guide for establishing an organization's processes for maintaining records, improving processes, and systems.

The quality management system includes a scientific approach, documentation, guidance, and audit which will be a part of every management process (Neyestani, 2016). An institution will benefit from establishing an efficient QMS. The basis of quality in an institution is the concept of the customer and supplier working together for their mutual benefit. For this to become effective, the customer-supplier interfaces must extend into, and outside of the institution. QMS enables an institution to achieve its goals and objectives. It provides consistency and satisfaction with all activities of the institution. Effective QMS uses different approaches including engagement of individuals, process approach, customer focus, continuous improvement, evidence-based decision-making, and relationship management.

Assessment Mechanisms

Institution-level assessment

An institutional quality assessment is an in-depth analysis of the quality and relevance of programs and therefore the teaching and learning environment in HEIs. In Ethiopia, for instance, the institutional quality audit by HERQA assesses the appropriateness and effectiveness of HEI's systems of accountability and quality assurance and its internal review mechanisms. According to HERQA (2006), an institutional quality audit provides an outline and evaluation of the quality of HEI's educational provision and of its mechanisms for assuring quality and relevance. In issuing institutional quality audit reports, HERQA aims to support HEI by recognizing its good practices and by indicating areas where changes in practice can enhance the quality and relevance of its activities. HERQA hopes that through its institutional quality audit reports and the dissemination of excellent practice, it will help to enhance the provision of higher education in Ethiopia, and therefore the confidence of all stakeholders within the quality of that provision.

Areas of focus for HERQA institutional quality audit include: i) vision, mission, and educational goals; ii) governance and management system; iii) infrastructure and learning resources; iv) academic and support staff; v) student admission and support services; vi) program relevance and curriculum; vii) teaching-learning and assessment; viii) student progression and graduate outcomes; ix) research and outreach activities; and x) internal quality assurance. Using these ten focus areas, a given HEI is assessed and its teaching and learning, research, community engagement, and governance systems are evaluated by HERQA.

In Ethiopia, HERQA is authorized as a responsible agency for the reassurance of quality in HEIs. As a result, all HEIs are expected to conduct periodic quality audits through their internal quality assurance systems and to be externally audited by the agency usually every five years. Based on HERQA's audit report, each HEI has identified its strengths and weaknesses, and hence designed strategies to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, research, and community engagement within the institution.

Program-level assessment

Programs in HEI have to be assessed due to rapid changes in science and technology, national demand, socio-economic development, learning environment, discipline, and methods of teaching and learning. Moreover, every program is to be updated regularly to implement state-of-the-art technologies. To carry out these activities effectively, various instruments including the alumni questionnaire and the program evaluation questionnaire can effectively be utilized. The alumni questionnaire is ready to gather information about the program from batches of graduates. The responses from these recently graduated alumni who are employed would be valuable for reviewing and designing the prevailing programs. Besides, a questionnaire for current graduating class students is additionally used to assess the effectiveness of the programs within the institute. The responses from both recent alumni and graduating class are imperative to review and design the program to enhance the standards of the teaching and learning process.

Course-level assessment

In the course-level assessment, students are the main stakeholders involved in the instructional process. As a means of improving the quality of teaching and learning in HEI, it is necessary to assess the learning experiences during the process. One commonly employed way of doing this is often by providing questionnaires to students to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching by their instructors. Students' evaluation of the teaching and learning process provides valuable information to enhance the quality of instruction. The information obtained from the students would be used for various purposes. Their feedback about the instructor on the effectiveness of his/her teaching is often used to maintain the strengths and improve the weaknesses. Moreover, based on the evaluation results, the department will communicate the results to the concerned instructor and offices. This information shall be used to design appropriate training to enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

Students have a multidimensional understanding of quality in higher education. As a result, they should participate in quality assurance initiatives in a transparent way i.e., all participants see the outcomes and subsequent changes. Students' participation in quality assurance activities influences the quality of higher education (Palomares, 2014). Students play important roles in ensuring quality assurance in HEIs, and being at the center of higher education, involving them could improve quality assurance processes (Ryan, 2015).

During course evaluation, a student questionnaire consisting of instructors' instructional skills, professional ethics and attitude towards students, course relevance and organization, and assessment methods and feedback should be included. The results of course evaluation will be used by students to exercise their right and participate within the quality improvement process of the HEI. Moreover, it might even be used to communicate to the students that their comments are taken into consideration with regards to improving the quality of teaching and learning processes. The information obtained from the course evaluation would even be deployed by HEI management to evaluate the performance of instructors. For instance, in Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia, course evaluations are administered every semester, and therefore the students' satisfaction survey is used to elicit vital information about proper course delivery within the institute.

Quality Assurance in Research

The higher education system grows and diversifies, and more attention is given to international rankings of HEIs. Competition for ranking of higher education emphasizes research, and research performance is employed as an index of institutional values. Research is a scientific investigation aimed towards discovering and applying new facts, techniques, and natural laws. It is the driving force for human development as globally determined, and such research should be evidenced by publications in reputable journals. Research is conducted by organizations including HEIs, government agencies, and industries. Quality assurance of research is organized to offer assurance about the care and control with which research has been conducted. It is typically concerned with the responsibilities of those involved within the research to urge reliable research findings.

Quality of Research

Quality research most commonly represents the scientific process including all aspects of study design. It relates to the judgment regarding the relationship between the methods and questions, selection of subjects, measurement of outcomes, and protection against systematic bias, nonsystematic bias, and inferential errors.

HEIs should do research that will contribute to solving societal problems. The research and education functions are two sides of a coin; research makes a better level of education possible and education, in turn, develops the human resources to try research. The idea of a research university in HEIs is recognized to train professionals and researchers to generate new knowledge and support the national innovation system (Bahir Dar University, 2019). Recently, contributions to society have increasingly been demanded of HEIs. This suggests the HEIs have to have activities to make sure that accumulated knowledge is diffused directly back to society to enhance its standard of life. Thus, education can make a crucial contribution to putting together a stronger society. It can serve the community by contributing knowledge and advanced skills as well as basic competencies and research. Knowledge plays a growing role within the global economy, driving economic growth, and productivity.

Standards for Quality Research

Quality assurance professionals ensure that the facilities, equipment, personnel, methods, practices, records, and reports meet the quality standard. Globally, HEIs are subject to rankings by different organizations as a measure of their performance in research, attracting talents and external research funds, and research universities are usually on the top of such rankings due to advanced publications in reputable scientific journals (Bahir Dar University, 2019).

One of the international standards associated with quality research is the presence of research integrity. Strict adherence to moral principles and professional standards is important for the responsible practice of research. Ethical principles refer to honesty, trustworthiness, and high regard for the scientific record. For instance, in Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia, the establishment of institutional research ethical clearance board, research conduct, resolution of the conflict of interest, publication and intellectual right, and enhancing research capacity-building are considered as standard components of the research policy.

Enhancing Education Quality and Graduates' Employability

Mechanisms for Enhancing Quality in Education

The inability of the HEI to satisfy the requirements of students' self-reliance and self-sufficiency has resulted in the unemployment of graduates. For any nation to be economically strong, politically stable, and culturally appreciable, the HEI has the responsibility of producing skilled graduates for the country (Onyeike & Onyeagbako, 2014). According to

Endut (2014), HEIs should be more responsive and routinely take proactive roles in quality assurance in time with the internationalization of education and therefore the massification of enrollment in academic programs offered. This will be done through continuous quality improvement by enhancing, complementing, and developing HEI internal quality assurance mechanisms. The quality of an academic program is explored from the perspectives of stakeholders. A comprehensive quality assurance system should examine the multi-dimensional concepts of quality from three interrelated dimensions- inputs, processes, and outputs. Usually, HEI has been observed to promote a top-quality assurance system using the top-down management-oriented approach in handling quality.

The higher education system is challenged by many quality problems within many of its institutions. Shortage of experienced instructors, poor-quality teaching, outdated and rigid curricula and training, lack of accountability, and quality assurance; are some of the challenges of quality assurance in HEIs. Moreover, lack of research capacity and innovation, and low level of university-industry linkage are common challenges of HEIs especially in developing countries (Mishra & Kushwaha, 2016).

Combating Academic Corruption

Corruption in higher education is not a new phenomenon, but the growing challenge of mitigating and preventing it in many academic systems as well as its international aspect are rather new (Denisova-Schmidt, 2016). Academic corruption in HEI can be described as the opportunities for academic dishonesty and therefore the costs related to corruption. It is an evil problem in HEI, and therefore the efficiency of quality assurance in minimizing academic corruption is often enhanced by skewing it to the accountability imperative. Academic corruption includes all sorts of corrupt practices happening in academia and which have an immediate negative effect on the quality of education.

A study showed that the very worst causes of educational corruption were poor study habits of students and poor entry qualifications of students (Hallak & Poisson, 2007). Academic integrity, hard work, and self-discipline are mandatory to alleviate academic corruption. Furthermore, the government and every stakeholder must join hands in ensuring quality assurance (Dimkpa, 2011). In HEI, corruption might often be considered an efficient tool to deal with the challenges of massification, internationalization, and shrinking financing.

The publication is prone to academic corruption. People may publish in predatory journals that lack a rigorous peer-review process and publish on condition that the author pays a fee instead of in lieu of the standard of their research work. Some samples of academic corruption in HEI include promoting a staff not supported by academic merits, sexual harassment of staff and students, corruption related to student admission, student assessment, and corruption in research theses and publications (Okebukola & Awaah, 2019). Corruption in higher education can implicate the students themselves, thus exerting influence over a subsequent generation.

Graduates' Employability

Employment of graduates is one of the precise indicators of outputs to quality assurance in HEIs. Employability is about being capable of getting and keeping a fulfilling work. Employment and employability are not the same. Being employed means having a job whereas being employable means having the attributes needed to get employment and make progress within the workplace. For an individual, employability depends upon assets in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes; the way these assets are implemented; presentation of assets to potential employers; and, therefore, the context within which the individual works. Generally, employability is the capability to maneuver self-sufficiently within the market to understand potential through sustainable employment.

According to Yorke (2004), employability may be a set of accomplishment skills, understanding, and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to get employed and achieve success in their chosen occupations. Employability implies something about the capacity of the graduates to function during a job and be ready to move between jobs, thus remaining employable throughout their life. Employability from the view of HEIs is therefore about producing graduates who are capable and able, and these impact upon all areas of university life, in terms of the delivery of educational programs and extracurricular activities.

Robinson (2000) describes employability skills as those basic skills necessary for getting, keeping, and doing well on a job. These are the skills, attitudes, and actions that enable graduates to form sound and important decisions. For one to become a valuable employee, he/she can evaluate situations to form decisions, and to solve problems. For a few employers, the degree or subject studied is not as important as the graduate's ability to handle complex information and communicate it effectively. Most employers need some other skills, personal and intellectual attributes, instead of specialist subject knowledge. Oral communication, teamwork, self-management, problem-solving, and leadership attributes are valuable skills for graduates to be employable.

Employability skills are all important, and employers increasingly want graduates who are confident, optimistic, with a belief that they will make a difference. Employers want graduates who can adapt to the workplace culture, who can use their abilities and skills to evolve the institution and who can participate in innovative teamwork. Employers also value critical thinking as this is often required for innovation and participating in leading change. Although HEIs provide individuals with a far better chance of being employed, they have to focus more on employability skills required by individuals once they graduate.

According to McGuinness et al. (2016), HEIs may have a crucial role to play in combating market mismatch among graduates. By strengthening links with employers and investing more heavily in career-support functions, HEIs can play a crucial role in matching graduates with jobs, thereby reducing the incidence of graduate mismatch. HEIs also can play a crucial role in terms of teaching students in job search methods. It appeared that some fields of study command a better demand within the market than others. Several reasons were adduced by students for the time gap between their graduation and their first employment such as: jobs not up to expectation, no response from employers, field saturated, graduates not having the proper contacts with people in higher places, and therefore the delay between application and interviews. According to Tuyet (2016), enhancing graduate employability has become one among the central focuses in many HEIs. Collaboration between HEIs and industries in several ways has been reported as being valuable to bring the market into the classroom.

Mbabazi (2013) explains that higher learning institutions in Africa are challenged in regulating their program structures, curricula teaching and learning methods to adapt to a replacement range of demands like technological developments, adaptability, teamwork, communication skills and therefore the motivation for continual learning. The difficulty of employability has been linked with the power of graduates to tackle graduate jobs and therefore the expectations and requirements of people to be and remain competitive within the market. Questions are raised about the role of higher education in preparing students for future work. Thus, employability is a crucial issue when discussing the aim of higher education and quality learning in HEI.

According to Knight and Yorke (2004), individuals' ability to realize how institutions work and what is expected during a particular position to understand the know-how of success during a particular practice is consideration for maximum skillful practice. According to Harvey (2000), during a rapidly changing world, graduates have to be lifelong learners. Therefore, the first role of HEI is increasingly to transform students by enhancing their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities. Many employers are trying to find various sorts of experiences hence, a degree is not a guarantee for employment, and therefore the undeniable

fact remains that the acquisition of a degree notwithstanding, a graduate still requires certain key competencies to become employable.

Conclusion

Higher education comprises training and research institutions that are recognized and authorized by the government. The principal role of HEI is to seek and cultivate new knowledge and interpret old ones in the light of new demands and discoveries. Higher education provides society with competent individuals trained in various disciplines, and to cultivate them with a sense of social responsibility. Quality education is one of the most important issues for the development of HEIs. It strives for social justice and reduces social and cultural differences (Kim-Soon, 2015). The HEI has adopted quality as fitness for purpose, a concept that emphasizes the need to meet generally accepted standards in fulfilling the stated purpose, mission, and goals of an institution (Harvey & Green, 1993). It focuses on meeting the needs and expectations of stakeholders. Quality assurance is explained as an activity to ensure that an institution is providing the best possible services or products to its customers (Ryan, 2015). It is a system of procedures and corrective actions to ensure that all teaching, research, community engagements, and other related activities are of the highest achievable quality. Quality assurance is the process of planning and implementing systematic activities that will provide confidence that a product or service will fulfill and maintain specified levels of quality.

Quality in higher educational institutions is assured by internal assessment and external assessment mechanisms. During the internal assessment, different stakeholders are participating in providing information about the overall activities of the institution. Communicating with students concerning the study programs, teaching and learning processes, and commitment of academic staff towards their profession are carried out at all levels. Quality assurance through external assessment is also achieved by reviewing the contents of courses and programs as well as by assessing their delivery mechanisms. It focuses on students' assessment, observations on available resources, academic staff qualifications, and professional development activities. The rapid increase in student populations and the competitive nature of HEIs demand the need for quality assurance in HEIs. Furthermore, internationalization of professions and globalization, and pressure to meet societal needs demand the provision of quality services. Thus, quality assurance can be a driver for institutions to achieve excellence in higher education.

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Chapter 2

Leading ways: Looking Towards 20 Years of Enhancement in Scotland QAA's Journey as a Responsive and Innovative Quality Assurance Agency

Rowena Pelik

Introduction

This chapter explores the nature and value of quality enhancement through the development of the responsive, enhancement-led approach to quality in Scotland. It draws on my experience working within higher education in the UK and for the UK's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The chapter reflects a number of the themes in this book. It contributes towards the history of quality assurance in higher education through one of the key informing philosophies, that of quality enhancement. As it is about Scotland, within the context of the UK more broadly, it provides insights into the regional experience of quality assurance in Europe. Quality enhancement in Scotland has shown itself to be effective and, thus, the chapter is also an example of successful practices over time. Within Europe the broad trend in approaches to quality has been towards quality enhancement, thus it also connects to wider global trends.

The factors that created the opportunity for what was a radical change will be outlined followed by the five elements of Scotland's Quality Enhancement Framework. The main discussion focuses on three of those elements: external quality assurance, Scotland's national Enhancement Themes and student engagement. A short concluding section is in two parts: the first sets quality enhancement in Scotland within the wider work of QAA and quality assurance in the UK, with the second exploring the defining characteristics and conditions that enable this enhancement-led approach.

Quality Enhancement in Scotland: Background and Context

Scotland embarked on its quality enhancement journey in higher education in 2003. The approach to quality enhancement has evolved continuously since, developing into a strong and effective national quality culture. Scotland is home to 15 universities, the oldest of which, St. Andrews, was founded in 1413; these, together with the UK-wide Open University and three specialist university-level institutions, make up the university sector in Scotland; it is not homogeneous. There is wide diversity in mission, character, and history, in size and in student profile.

Late last century, QAA undertook external quality review of UK higher education at both the level of the institution and subject, although arrangements were slightly different in the different parts of the UK. By early this century, this was seen as over burdensome, with the cost and benefit out of balance. Across the UK, and across disciplines, the outcome at subject level demonstrated that quality was high and there were few problems to be exposed. In March 2001,¹ the then UK Secretary of State for Education and Employment announced a 40% reduction in external quality review. Responsibility for education is a devolved matter in the UK (i.e., responsibility for higher education in Scotland rests with the Scottish Government not that in Westminster, London), nevertheless this announcement had an impact in Scotland. "In Scotland, the opportunity was taken to stand back and reflect on what had been learned

¹ David Blunkett (now Baron Blunkett), then Secretary of State for Education and Employment; noted in Brown, 2003

from past experience” (Brown, 2003). From this point forward, quality arrangements in Scotland became more distinctively different from those elsewhere in the UK.

The process of ”standing back” that Brown identifies brought together the four key stakeholder agencies: the funding council (which held the statutory duty to assure the quality of the higher education it funded),² the representative body for universities in Scotland, the quality assurance agency (QAA) and the National Union of Students Scotland, as the students’ representative body. This is crucial. It established that the approach to quality assurance was a joint endeavor. An endeavor that most beneficially should be conceived to meet the needs and interests of each of these core stakeholders (and thorough them the wider public interest). It also very clearly established that students and the student experience would be fundamental to any approach to quality in Scotland.

The Creation of the Quality Enhancement Framework

The result was the jointly developed Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF), operational since 2003. The QEF has five elements: External Quality Assurance, known in Scotland as “Enhancement-Led Institutional Review” (ELIR); Internal Quality Assurance, termed “Institution-led review”; Student Engagement in quality; the Enhancement Themes; and Public Information. This integrated framework and its five pillars have stood the test of time – it remains essentially the same, although it has evolved. The QEF embraces:

- the responsibility of autonomous institutions for setting and maintaining academic standards and for managing quality
- external assurance (including peer review)
- the involvement of students, recognizing learning as a partnership with students; and
- collaborative aspects, especially through the Enhancement Themes and combines these with accountability and public reporting. Consensus around the QEF was achieved because the agencies worked together to create a climate of trust and worked in partnership with a common aim, around common values.

Today, quality enhancement in Scotland represents a well-established and mature enhancement-led approach. It is now nearing the end of its fourth cycle of external reviews. It has retained strong support, partly because the approach demonstrably works (Dempster et al. 2014; Maher, 2013; Saunders, 2014; Scottish Funding Council, 2010) and also, I would argue, because it lives by its own values. Values core to the approach and culture include critical self-evaluation; evidence- and peer-based evaluation and review; collaborative practices; partnership; transparency, openness, and trust; and enhancement itself – the determination continuously to seek to improve.

I illustrated “living by its own values” with self-evaluation as an example in an earlier essay: self-evaluation exemplifies how the whole system reflects its basic tenets. Self-evaluation is expected, in the review of internal academic units and services by institutions and of institutions by QAA Scotland as part of ELIR. The QEF has been subject to independent evaluation. Before each new cycle, QAA Scotland and the partners to the QEF reflect critically on ELIR as it is revised and enhanced before the next cycle. (Pelik, 2016)

External Quality Assurance in Scotland: Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR)

² This duty “to secure that provision is made for assessing and enhancing the quality of fundable higher education provided by fundable bodies” derives from Section 13 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005 and, prior to that, the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992.

The approach to external quality assurance (EQA) in Scotland is enhancement-led. It is important to stress that this enhancement-based approach embraces assurance; quality enhancement and quality assurance are not opposed and neither precludes the other.

Alignment with the European Higher Education Area³

ELIR operates in line with wider framework for EQA in Europe and complies with the *Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ENQA, 2015) and incorporates the basic characteristics of external quality assurance in Europe: published review method, self-evaluation, peer review that includes students and published reports.

Continuing Evolution

ELIR has evolved with each cycle, so that the process and experience remain of value and deliver benefit for funders, universities, and students. Both steady evolution and the focus on enhancement has meant that ELIR has avoided the pitfall of the diminishing returns resulting from repeated external review against the same baseline or criteria. To date it has retained the active support of government, funders, higher education providers and students.

Defining Enhancement, Driving Change

Enhancement in the Scottish university sector, and in ELIR, is defined as “taking deliberate steps to bring about improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experiences of students” (QAA, 2017a). This focus on the quality of the student experience of learning places the emphasis on the outcome and impact of internal quality assurance processes and policies, rather than on quality assurance processes themselves. Having documented processes that are effective and are followed is, of course, important. However, that is only truly valuable if those processes are useful, not only in confirming standards and expectations, but also in leading to beneficial change. The question is not only ‘have you completed your annual monitoring?’ but ‘what have you learned from annual monitoring that is enabling you to deliver your course more effectively for the students who take it?’

The QEF was designed, and ELIR developed, to move beyond confirming that threshold standards and expectations are being met, and to ask institutions *how* they are working strategically to enhance the quality of their students’ learning experiences, *how* they are engaging and working with their students to improve learning.

Quality enhancement is never mechanistic or ‘tick box’ in its approach. It is about engaging critically with the purpose of quality. Enhancement, as conceived in Scotland, is a way of working and a system living by its own values. The basic premise is *that wherever you are you can always improve*. Excellence is never a thing achieved or ‘job done’ but a continuous, purposeful striving.

With quality enhancement the emphasis is on effectiveness – in practice, in delivery, in responding to student needs, in managing quality, in overseeing collaborative partnerships, in setting and maintaining academic standards and so forth. Assurance is not neglected. All institutions map their internal quality process against the UK Quality Code and need to demonstrate that they meet UK and Scotland-specific requirements. The mapping is scrutinized in advance of the external review visit and the review process, designed to cover most quality assurance early, freeing the main visit primarily to be a constructive enhancement-oriented dialogue.

³ The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was formally established in 2010 and, in May 2020, comprised 48 nations; it is part of the Bologna Process launched in 1999, that has enabled progressive harmonization in higher education across Europe.

More than Periodic Review

An important strength of ELIR is that it is more than a periodic external review process, it is also an annual process (QAA, 2017b). Senior staff and students have an annual discussion with a QAA Scotland officer each year. That discussion considers the outcome of internal quality assurance processes, as well as progress in implementing actions from the last ELIR report. Institutions submit an annual report on institution-led review to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). There is also collective learning – QAA Scotland analyses those annual reports alongside matters identified in ELIR reports. It produces digests of emerging themes – areas of shared strength, common challenges, frequently emerging areas for development – which are shared with the sector (QAA, various dates; SFC, 2017b).⁴ This helps create an evidence base for setting priorities and enables each institution to set its own strengths, weaknesses, and challenges in context.

Looking Ahead

Since the last review of the ELIR method in 2016, the wider pace of change in EQA and the context for EQA has altered. In the UK there has been extensive change to approaches to quality. England has seen a new Higher Education Act (UK Government, 2017), the introduction of the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework and, in 2018, the establishment of the Office for Students as a new regulator for English higher education. More widely, approaches to EQA are needing to adapt to the increasing availability of ‘big data’ that can be used to interrogate and analyze performance, as well as to how what is measured and reported (for example through global league tables) is driving institutional behavior and impacting upon quality.

The important point here is “ELIR 5” is likely to have to make bigger changes, than the relatively small evolutions to date, if it is to continue to retain support and confidence – and to demonstrate the continuing place of quality enhancement in the lexicon of effective approaches to external quality assurance. The pace of change may no longer allow a fixed method to operate effectively over a four-six-year cycle – not if it is to be as pertinent in year six as it was when planned prior to year one.

Future approaches, be it in Scotland, elsewhere in the UK, in Europe or in other countries and regions, are likely to need to be far more responsive and flexible. The culture that enabled the radical thinking in 2002 that led to the QEF needs to be recaptured with similar fundamental questioning and willingness to reconceive approaches and structures. This is the right time to be asking how quality enhancement can re-invent itself to be an excellent solution to EQA in the second decade of the 21st century.

Scotland’s Enhancement Themes

The Early Days of the Enhancement Themes

The Enhancement Themes were a significant innovation back in 2003. They were established to drive improvement. Initially they were a little more “done to” rather than “done with” and not wholly welcomed. First, the Enhancement Themes were selected by the funding council rather than the sector. There was some nervousness about the role of QAA Scotland, as a quality assurance body, managing and overseeing the work, a concern that the association with EQA could make it harder to get sector engagement and for institutions to acknowledge areas of challenge. Thus, in the early days the role of QAA Scotland in managing and facilitating the Themes was not especially visible; the Enhancement Themes continue to have

⁴ These overview reports are discussed at the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee. The reports for 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 have not been published by SFC, thus only that for 2016-2017 is referenced here.

their own website,⁵ visual identity and branding. The Themes rapidly came to very much belong to the HE sector in Scotland and to be led by it. They are also an integral part of the work of QAA Scotland which has developed, and continues to extend, the skills needed to manage and support Theme activity that takes place across the sector as well as within each HEI.

Initially, two Themes ran concurrently. In the first year, 2003-2004, these were “Responding to Student Needs and Assessment,” followed by “Flexible Delivery and Employability” in 2004-2006. Fairly quickly it was recognized that Themes needed to be longer to achieve engagement and change and thus Themes began to run over two and then, increasingly, three years. Similarly, the importance of sector ownership and leadership was recognized early on, and the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) was formed, chaired by a senior member of staff from the Scottish sector and comprising representatives from institutions across Scotland.

Collective Consideration

Change can be achieved quickly, and two or three years could be seen as quite a gentle pace. However, any such suspicions would be to mistake the nature of the Enhancement Themes as they have come to operate. A Theme is selected by the sector, it needs to be a strategic topic that requires engagement and exploration over time, one that will benefit from engagement at multiple levels and one that will have meaning for all of Scotland’s higher education institutions (HEIs) and their students. Themes are complex and multi-faceted, the issues that are involved are what would often be termed ‘wicked problems.’ These are not easily fixed, there is not one solution, the Theme enables collective consideration and progress, but the challenges will remain, and work continue. Themes represent common and recurring areas of focus in higher education – be it the linkages between research and teaching,⁶ the nature of graduates in the 21st century⁷ or supporting students with the many transitions⁸ involved in navigating HE.

Fundamental to the philosophy and approach in Scotland is the belief that more can be achieved by working collaboratively and collectively than any one institution could achieve alone. Given that institutions also, necessarily, compete in many respects collaborative activity may seem counter intuitive. Each institution is different and distinctive, its history, location, size, subject mix, mission, priorities, and student profile make it individual. The experience of one institution can rarely be simply applied to another –translating practice to a different context changes it. For instance, it is easy to see that the way in which The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, as a small specialist performing arts institution, would approach research-teaching linkages would be different from the nearby research-intensive University of Glasgow. Cross-sector involvement and collaborative activity enables learning from what is shared and what is different, from how different priorities and differing learner needs impact on approaches and what makes effective practice. It deepens understanding and improves decision-making.

Managing the Themes

Today, the governance structures that support the Themes, nationally and within institutions, are well-established, while remaining responsive and adapting to changing circumstances. Working practices and particular approaches change with each Theme to suit the nature of the topic and they change responsively over the life of each Theme. The reflective nature of an enhancement culture means that collectively and individually we are always questioning and

⁵ <https://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/>

⁶ “Research-teaching linkages” ran as an Enhancement Theme 2006-2008.

⁷ “Graduates for the 21st century” was the 2008-2011 Enhancement Theme.

⁸ “Student Transitions” was the Enhancement Theme that ran 2014-2017.

evaluating, challenging ourselves and others. ‘Collaborative clusters’ were introduced as part of Evidence for Enhancement (2017-2020) and have proved a valuable and effective mechanism. The clusters provide a bridge between sector-level activity and institutional work. They enabled groups of institutions to work together on topics of particular interest or relevance. Specific examples included: “Beyond the metrics: The Intangibles” (Robertson, 2019); “Student mental well-being”; and “Learning Analytics – policy and practice.” Each cluster included events or activity open to the whole sector as well as project outputs published on the Enhancement Themes website.

To celebrate 10 years of the Enhancement Themes in 2013, the first 3-day International Conference was held; after that, the Themes worked to a model of a national one-day conference one year and the multi-day International Conference the next; now the intention is to align the international conference with the end of each Theme, so every three years. Very recent circumstances, with COVID-19, have changed the conference planned for June 2020 from venue-based to online with an adapted focus, “Learning from disruption: Exploring what counts in higher education.” However, the plan is still to welcome delegates from around the world in 2023 when Scottish higher education will note only close the 2020-2023 Theme but also celebrate 20 years of the Enhancement Themes.

Sharing and Learning

It will be clear that two further characteristics of a quality enhancement culture are the willingness to learn and the determination to share freely. Thus, all Themes draw in and explore international practice. This may take the form of a literature review, a survey of practices in a number of other nations, case studies or the involvement of academics/practitioners from other countries in the work. Themes Conferences will tend to have a number of international speakers or contributions.

The Enhancement Themes website is open to all.⁹ The analytics confirm that the website receives a good proportion of international visitors and, from feedback and contacts, QAA Scotland know that resources have been used across the world. Many Theme outputs are designed to be readily adapted to a users’ own context. Toolkits are designed to be downloadable; there are re-writable pdfs, Word and PowerPoint documents; QAA Scotland also re-curates and re-freshens or updates some resources to help ensure continuing currency (and also retires some past content). Commissioned research and investigations are undertaken by academic teams or consultants; other pieces of work are student-led. Some work is commissioned in a practical form, such as a toolkit, some will be adapted by QAA officers into practical resources, working with students or other user-groups to help maximize relevance and practical applicability.

Some Examples of Theme Resources

The practical nature of Theme resources can be readily illustrated. Understanding available evidence and how to use evidence effectively has informed work across the “Evidence for Enhancement” Theme (2017-2020). “Students Using Evidence” resulted in a substantial 75-page report (Austin, 2019), but each section can be downloaded individually alongside a glossary and an Evidence and Data Planner; the sections include exercises and problems. These resources seek to involve and support, to enable rather than instruct.

A second example is from the earlier 2014-17 “Student Transitions” Theme. A foundation piece of work for the Theme was the commissioning of research reports on transition models and skills (QAA, 2015); these were adapted into downloadable activities sheets and guides covering topics such as: “Establishing and Achieving my Goals,” a “Mindset” card-sort activity, a

⁹ The references section includes details of all the Enhancement Theme resources referred to in a subsection on the Themes with specific weblinks

worksheet on “Structured Journal Entries” or a leaflet on “Managing my time to become an Independent Learner.” Student-focused, constructive, and helpful resources designed with students and for students. Themes are not about the passive production of ‘stuff’ but about activity that helps to drive change and deliver enhancement.

Working in Partnership

As part of each Theme university staff, students and QAA officers produce suites of resources designed to support progress and change, to inform the development of policy and practice; they come together at workshops, events, and conferences to discuss, debate and share. The Themes epitomize partnership working and collaborative activity between the staff and students of HEIs and the QAA, as the external quality agency. There have been a few stutters along the way, approaches tried that were not as effective or successful as hoped, but overall, the Themes have evolved – through flexibility and close partnership working – into a rich source of highly valued activity. The active and vital involvement of students is fundamental, and it reflects a determination to continue to strengthen, and deepen, partnership with students and to work to empower learners.

Student Engagement

The third element of the QEF explored is student engagement. This section covers two main topics: it outlines how student engagement was conceived and has been sustained, illustrating how it has evolved and deepened. Second, it highlights some of the outstanding student-led work undertaken over recent years.

Supporting Student Engagement

The creation of the QEF involved students through their representative organization, the National Union of Students Scotland. From the beginning, in building the value of learner involvement and learner engagement in quality into the QEF, it was recognized that more was needed than to state that “Student Engagement in quality” would be one of its pillars. Action and investment were required, not only good intentions and a positive vision. Thus, Student Participation in Quality Scotland was created in 2003. Known as sparqs,¹⁰ it has been fundamental to supporting and championing student participation, student representation and student agency in Scotland,¹¹ Since its foundation, sparqs has been supported by funding from what is now the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), as well as having won funding from other sources for particular projects and activity.

As indicated on its website, sparqs is “funded by the Scottish Funding Council to advance education by promoting an environment where students are able to make a positive and rewarding difference to their own and others’ educational experience... [it supports] students to shape the nature of their learning and contribute to the overall success of learning provision” (sparqs, 2016). Its Mission is to “Foster a culture of partnership between students and staff which enables the Scottish education sector to respond to challenges and realize its ambitions to provide the best possible experience for each and every student” (sparqs, 2019).

Evolution and Development of sparqs

Sparqs proved an effective innovation. Its success can be illustrated in part simply through the fact that it is still funded and operational. It has developed into an independent charitable organization and has weathered potential existential storms of economic and political change. sparqs operates with the continued support of the education sectors, students and student

¹⁰ More information about sparqs is available on its website <https://www.sparqs.ac.uk/index.php>

¹¹ The sparqs model and experience has been drawn on extensively elsewhere in the world and sparqs itself is regularly asked to offer advice and guidance internationally

associations from across Scotland, it works effectively with other organizations (not least with QAA Scotland on the Enhancement Themes). Over time, it has extended its work (and has been funded to do so). Early on, as numbers of student representatives grew, it moved from training student representatives directly to ‘training the trainers.’ This shift also stressed the commitment to empowerment and shared agency. sparqs has since come to focus more strongly on the support and training of elected student officers as well as providing supplementary training and materials for students involved in internal and external quality review. It also undertakes work on the representation needs of particular groups of learners.

Sparqs has evolved over its life. Its role and influence have been extended from the university sector to embrace the college sector. With the growth in apprenticeships at a range of educational levels sparqs responded to the needs of these learners, it explored the Apprentice Voice¹² at work and at college and, from 2016-2017 offered specific training to support representatives for this group of learners. Throughout its life sparqs has worked to support less easy to hear student voices and to ensure that institutions were active in trying to ensure they heard, learned, and benefited from partnership with all their learners.

The Value of a Body Supporting Student Engagement

Having an organization such as sparqs is good for Scottish HE. It has challenged the sector at times, it has continued to help push progress, develop, and deepen the ways institutions work with their students. At its simplest, as an independent organization and charity dedicated to supporting the student voice and student engagement, it is able to undertake the research and work needed to develop good, representative collaborative resources and to help find effective solutions. It helps keep student engagement and partnership central to thinking and approaches.

For instance, sparqs led the development of “A Student Engagement Framework for Scotland” in 2011 (sparqs, 2011). The work was funded primarily by the Scottish Funding Council, and supported by QAA Scotland, the Higher Education Academy (now part of AdvanceHE), Education Scotland, Scotland’s Colleges (now Colleges Scotland/College Development Network), NUS Scotland and Universities Scotland. That list of organizations further illustrates the collaborative approach underlying the quality enhancement culture in Scotland.

In line with many resources linked to the QEF, the Student Engagement Framework identifies agreed characteristics that emerged from research and joint activity, identifying five key elements of student engagement and six features of effective student engagement. It does not present a fixed model or solution but makes a series of suggestions, it is a tool to help a conversation, to enable development.

Ambitions and Expectations Around Developed Student Engagement

To illustrate the kinds of things student engagement can mean in practice in Scotland, it is worth quoting/paraphrasing a couple of examples from the Student Engagement Framework (sparqs, 2011). These examples highlight multi-factorial nature of developed student engagement, doing student engagement well is not simple. Under “Adequate resources and support” (one of the features of effective student engagement), the framework emphasizes that “Progress in student engagement does not happen by accident.” It stresses the importance of financial support, of issues of continuity and sustainability, support for institutions, for students and for staff, and that “developing engagement opportunities and support requires particular sets of skills and expertise” (sparqs, 2011).

As part of the key element “Students working with their institution in shaping the direction of learning,” it is explained that: this element of engagement relates to the ways in which students

¹² See: <https://www.sparqs.ac.uk/institute.php?page=511>

can comment on their learning experiences either individually or as a group. It builds on the idea of students working in partnership with academics and other staff at the subject level to bring about enhancements in their learning experience. At its most engaging, this element includes the processes and activities which give students appropriate opportunities to influence the way in which curricula are designed and implemented. Importantly, it is about students not just identifying problems, but working with staff to develop solutions, implement actions and explore/identify future developments (sparqs, 2011).

Two examples of activities and developments suggested are: “Involving students in the *design*, collection and *analysis* of student surveys etc. [my italics]” and “Student-staff project teams working on specific projects (e.g., changing the primary foci of assessment, curriculum review, improving feedback etc.)” (sparqs, 2011). Both examples illustrate the nature of expectations and culture of student engagement in Scotland – it is active, it is empowering, it enables agency, and it involves students in creating solutions.

Student Partnership Agreements

In a pre-legislative paper, *Putting Learners at the Centre: Delivering our Ambitions for Post-16 Education* (Scottish Government, 2011), the Scottish Government had included ideas around how institutions and their students could extend how they worked together. sparqs published its *Guidance for the development and implementation of a Student Partnership Agreement in universities* (sparqs, 2013). This guidance helped to translate an ambition articulated by the government into practice. Like many initiatives, there was not initially wholehearted take up and support for student partnership agreements, but increasingly institutions took up the model, or developed equivalents. Although the specific guidance was not uncritically adopted, there was broad consensus across the university sector in Scotland that the principle of a partnership model, for any articulation of the relationship and working practices between an institution and its students, was correct for Scotland. There was general consensus¹³ that alternatives – such as more consumer-based or transactional Student Charters – did not fit the culture in Scotland.

Student Engagement Initiatives

Formally established student engagement organizations are not a panacea, nor essential to successful engagement within institutions. Initiatives similar to sparqs have not always succeeded. It is not the existence of an organization such as sparqs per se, that has resulted in success in Scotland, it is that student engagement exists within a national commitment to quality enhancement and to student involvement, within a simple and (so far) enduring framework. It is a multi-agency, multi-organizational commitment. The equivalent organizations in Wales and England did not prove to be sustainable.

The Wales Initiative for Student Engagement (WISE) was established in 2009, becoming Wise Wales in 2013 with a mission statement: “to achieve meaningful partnership between educators, students’ unions, and students across Wales” (Wise Wales website). In England, The Student Engagement Partnership (TSEP) was established formally in 2013, supported with initial funding for three years. It, too, has a continuing web presence which speaks of student engagement being “about empowering students to shape their own educational experience and creating excellent teaching and learning within a connected and cohesive

¹³ For example, “Universities Scotland welcomes the proposed development of Student Partnership Agreements. Distinct from England, where Student Charters characterise students as consumers, we believe consumer-oriented documents should be avoided.” Universities Scotland. *Putting learners at the centre Universities Scotland’s summary response to the Scottish Government’s consultation on post-16 education reform to Putting Learners at the Centre*. January 2012 <https://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Putting-Learners-at-the-Centre.pdf>, accessed 18.05.2020

higher education community” (TSEP website) Both Wise Wales and TSEP ceased to be operational around 2017 – but may yet re-emerge.

In contrast, in 2015 sparqs made a subtle change to its name with ‘participation’ in its title becoming “partnership.” This reflected the extent of cultural change that had been achieved. sparqs has had an impact beyond Scotland, including elsewhere in the UK, with many students’ organizations and national systems drawing on its experience and expertise. It has been asked to deliver workshops and presentations across Europe and elsewhere.

Student Involvement in External Quality Assurance

In Scotland, sparqs has been instrumental in making student engagement a reality. However, this is only one aspect of the commitment to involving, valuing and working with students at a national level. Student engagement and partnership is fundamental to external quality assurance in ELIR and an embedded aspect of the Enhancement Themes. Scotland led the rest of the UK in

including students as full and equal members of all external peer review teams from 2003 as part of the Quality Enhancement Framework, indeed it was a pioneer internationally. Student reviewers were not an expectation in the initial (2005) *Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area* but were by its 2015 revision: “External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of experts that include (a) student member(s)” (ENQA, 2015).¹⁴

Outwit Scotland, it is interesting, thinking back, to some of the counterarguments and resistance to students as reviewers, much of it a distraction (such as arguing whether or not students are technically peers rather than considering how their involvement could help improve quality). When student reviewers were first introduced in England it was not a requirement (as a mid-cycle change) and initially a few universities opted out and did not accept student reviewers on QAA’s external review teams. I remember it being said that it was not reasonable to have a student chair review meetings involving staff (yes, really). During that time of change in England I was a member of external review teams that included students and those that did not; student reviewers improve the processes – and, as such, the involvement of students in EQA is an active contribution to the assurance and to the improvement of educational quality.

Inter-agency working is an important part of student engagement and quality enhancement in Scotland. The funding body, universities, student organizations and QAA Scotland all continue to work together drawing on their complementary areas of expertise and interest. Thus, for example, while QAA Scotland produces a range of operational guidance on ELIR, it also houses the guidance developed by sparqs to support students as part of ELIR 4 on its own web pages. The *ELIR cycle 4 practice guide* is designed “to support meaningful student engagement throughout the process... for students’ association reps and staff... It provides context and background to the process and makes suggestions of ‘what you need to do’ at each stage of the process” (sparqs, 2018).

Student Involvement with the Enhancement Themes in Scotland

The final aspect of student engagement practice in Scotland that I want to explore is some of the contributions made by students to the Enhancement Themes. I will outline some of the governance issues before illustrating engagement in practice with an example of student-led activity.

¹⁴ The 2005 version had: “an external assessment by a group of experts, including, *as appropriate*, (a) student member(s)” [my italics]

Getting Governance Right

It is instructive to look back at how student involvement in Theme leadership has deepened and at interesting lessons along the way. Most recently, each Scottish university-sector institution has been represented on the Theme Leaders' Group by one staff and one student member. This works so much better than previous iterations of membership. The staff and the student voice are more equal.

Despite the emphasis on partnership and the value placed on student involvement it took a long while before it was effectively achieved in the Enhancement Themes. Earlier on, there had been two or three students on the leadership group, as representatives of the student interest. That worked well enough but there was a desire to increase student involvement with Themes activity, both at national level and within institutions. This reflected a sense of disappointment that there was no more extensive interest and engagement in work dedicated to developing and improving the student experience i.e., that we had not yet got it right for the primary constituency.

For a few years QAA Scotland ran a student network linked to the Themes. It aimed to involve a greater number of students and better equipped student representatives on the main group with an empowered voice. It was logical as an approach and had all the right intentions, but never worked that well. It was supported, including with financial resources, for student-led activities, but with limited success. The student network approach was not inevitably flawed but it did place student-shaped activity on the periphery rather than at the core. Students were in the room, but the balance of power and influence were not optimum. The present approach – one staff/one student representative – does work and, with the wisdom of hindsight, should have happened earlier. But it would be a mistake to think that it is a panacea, could be imported, applied, and would necessarily work effectively elsewhere. Partnership and engagement take time to mature, and arrangements have to be right for the context and the time. Arrangements will change again.

Student-led Projects within the Enhancement Themes

A strength of recent Theme activity has been student-led work; this epitomizes partnership working and illustrates one of the ways students can shape the agenda. It should be emphasized that students, like staff, are involved across a Theme, with institution-level work, in other sector-wide activity and in collaborative projects, not only in specific student-led work. However, the main student-led project is overseen by a steering group chaired by a student; it will involve sparqs and QAA Scotland staff. "Students Using Evidence" from 2018-19 was discussed earlier and is a strong example of work to support empowerment and effective student agency. The principal student-led project the previous year was "Responding to the Student Voice." It explored existing policy and practice, commissioned a scan of international practice (Trowler, 2018) and then used this research and workshop activity to identify a set of core principles. Evidence and insights were then translated into a series of resources that could support the development of improved practice.

The principles were summarized in a poster and a series of practice cards produced to enable discussion within institutions. In common with most Theme outputs, the resources are downloadable (and the cards both in fixed and adaptable formats). When first produced in hard copy, the card sets had to be re-printed a number of times to deal with demand.

Responding to Student Voice: Principles of Practice

Responding to student voice involves paying attention to how student feedback is processed and how the impact of this activity is communicated back to students. These principles of practice were designed by staff and students working in partnership to help you improve the policies, processes, and practices that shape how you respond to student feedback.



WORK IN PARTNERSHIP

Empower staff and students to participate fully and meaningfully in student feedback cycles.



UTILISE REPRESENTATIVE SYSTEMS

Continue to engage with and evolve student representative structures as a framework for meaningful discussions on student feedback.



ENCOURAGE DIALOGUE

Encourage respectful and open-ended dialogue between staff and students to ensure feedback cycles are dynamic and inclusive.



BE TIMELY

Process feedback efficiently and share outcomes emerging from this activity at a time which will benefit students.



ENSURE TRANSPARENCY

Provide accessible and clear explanations of feedback processes and information about who is responsible for these processes.



EMBED ETHICS

Adhere to all relevant ethics standards and procedures when processing student feedback and communicating outcomes realised through this activity.



SUPPORT ENHANCEMENT-LED APPROACHES

Approaches to responding to student feedback should be regularly evaluated and reviewed with a view to supporting continuous improvement.



CELEBRATE ACHIEVEMENT

Ensure achievements emerging from actions taken as a result of student feedback are shared and celebrated.

Student Engagement in Scotland: Concluding Reflections

In the approach to quality enhancement in Scotland it is the combination of actions (such as the inclusion of student reviewers as full and equal members of review teams from the inception of the QEF in 2003 or the creation and work of sparqs) that has helped produce a step change in student participation and engagement in internal and external approaches to quality assurance – and to make manifest that a primary focus of quality activity is students and their learning.

The structural as well as practical engagement of students in national-level activity, as well as within institutions, helps keep student engagement and partnership central to thinking and approaches, helping to make sure it does not slip down the agenda or get squeezed out by other priorities. At the time of

writing, in spring 2020, the global coronavirus pandemic could be one such example. Immediate health priorities, the financial sustainability of universities, the practical challenges involving in moving rapidly to online delivery and assessment could easily see partnership with students replaced by command and control and managerial huddles. As was stated on sparqs’s COVID-19 web pages: “The student voice in quality has never been more important given the current transformation of the learning experience as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.”¹⁵ If optimum decisions are to be made about how learning can be most effectively supported, and students enabled to demonstrate their achievement of learning outcomes in ways that are fair and robust, then – I would argue – student must be at the table, helping to consider the options, set the priorities and to shape solutions.

Actively engaged learners are likely to benefit more from all that can be gained from higher-level learning. Thus, student engagement can be presented as having an economic and social rationale. As quality assurance is about the quality of the student learning experience it should involve students, as partners, in quality assurance processes. Quality assurance needs to lead on to quality enhancement – the planning, implementation, and evaluation of improvements. Engagement and partnership mean far more than seeking student views. In future-focused, high-quality contemporary higher education students should be involved in setting the agenda. Student engagement is about far more than finding ways to involve students in an agenda already set. It is *their* learning and the nature of what is learned, in the fullest sense, that will shape our future.

Enabling Quality Enhancement

It is important to acknowledge two of the many other enabling and contextual factors: the active support by the Scottish Government for a student-centered approach to quality enhancement and the fact that quality in Scotland is part of the wider UK quality assurance system. This latter is especially important internationally as it is UK higher education that is the recognized “brand,” not the individual home nations.

The role of the Scottish Government

¹⁵ sparqs COVID-19 Information hub, accessed 19.05.2020 <https://www.sparqs.ac.uk/page.php?page=886>

Successive Scottish Governments have had a central role in creating conditions for, and supporting, quality enhancement and active student engagement; it is important that this is not forgotten. For example, *Putting Learners at the Centre* (Scottish Government, 2011) put student partnership agreements firmly on the table. The Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Act 2016 built into law requirements for university governing bodies and their academic board to include students (two nominees of student associations on governing bodies and at least 10% of members to be elected by the students of the institution from among the students of the institution on the academic board) (UK Government, 2016). The Scottish Government has been explicit in confirming its continuing support for the quality enhancement approach in Scotland in the context of regulatory change elsewhere in the UK: “the existing Quality Enhancement Framework approach to quality assurance in Scotland remains the key determinant of assessing the provision of quality learning in Scottish universities. The SFC should therefore work with us [the Scottish Government] and sector partners to mitigate the impact on quality assurance in Scotland of changes implemented in other parts of the United Kingdom.” (SFC, 2019)

QAA’s UK-wide Role and Work

The work of QAA Scotland tends to be foregrounded in any consideration of quality enhancement and achievements of the QEF. QAA Scotland is very much part of QAA and Scottish higher education part of UK higher education. The UK-wide frameworks, the agreed expectations, codes and guidance, which define academic standards, higher education qualifications, subject-level expectations, etc. provide the secure context within which different approaches in each of the UK’s home nations are enabled to flourish. QAA maintains and develops those UK-wide reference points. Behind QAA Scotland, QAA has been a strong enabling contributor, in supporting difference, and in its UK work. QAA has ensured the essential comparability and consistency that must underlie the external review judgments on academic quality and standards across the UK.

In its pivotal role in the development of quality enhancement in Scotland, and its wider work across the UK, QAA has consistently demonstrated that it has been able to provide responsive quality assurance, delivering different methods and approaches for its different constituencies. It has shown its willingness to embrace innovation and to adapt to changing and to differing needs – yet always, of course, providing robust, internationally recognized external quality assurance judgments.

Concluding Reflections

I will close by summarizing what has characterized successful quality enhancement in Scotland. These characteristics have remained consistent, if not unchanged, across what is heading towards a 20-year journey. I finish by stressing why, for me, an enhancement-led approach to quality is vital in providing the responsive and dynamic quality assurance higher education, its students and wider society require in the 2020s and beyond.

Scotland has not only voiced notions of putting students at the heart of the system, but it has also worked to create the conditions to make this a reality. Without the commitment and the partnership and that lay behind the QEF it is far less easy to create a successful, effective, and sustained national quality culture. Through sustained work overtime, Scotland has a nation-level quality enhancement culture in higher education. The “top-down” element of this is undoubtedly important (the inter-connections with government policy, the work of the agencies and organizations involved, the ways in which funding and reporting support quality, the national committees and structures that involve stakeholders in the continuing debate and so forth). However, continuing support from across the higher education sector, and from within it, is equally vital. National activity is matched by the commitment and work of Scotland’s higher education institutions, by staff at all levels, by student associations, elected student officers and students themselves. Change in quality enhancement may be driven from

above or from ground level, but it is mainly driven by working in partnership with joint endeavor and a shared goal – to deliver a high-quality student learning experience.

Quality enhancement is, quite simply, important. It is about continually striving to improve. It is about the desire and determination to deliver excellence. It is about accepting that change is continual (and ever-increasing) and thus quality or excellence may be achieved in the moment but that there is always more work to be done, a new student group, new approaches to learning, new information and insights. Higher education is dynamic, the nature of disciplines, the boundaries and connections between them, the creation of knowledge and information, technological advance, changing economic and social needs, the complexity of challenges facing society, the nature of learners and learning etc. etc. all mean that provision has to keep progressing and adapting. It has to keep questioning. It cannot be satisfied. Wherever you are you can always improve. It is a hard mantra to live by. Committing to quality enhancement is not easy; it is worthwhile.

Given that ambiguity and change will remain features of the Higher Education landscape as we look ahead, quality assurance and quality assurance agencies need to be an effective force to support, enable and drive change. Quality assurance needs to be responsive and flexible. Approaches to quality assurance cannot afford to be brakes on development. Quality assurance must be future facing, always keeping students and their learning firmly in sight, if it is to support higher education to create graduates with the flexibilities and creativity to find solutions for emerging – and yet to be defined – social, economic and sustainability challenges of the century ahead.

Reflections On the Impacts And Lessons From the Coronavirus Pandemic

The pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus has had far ranging impacts on higher education, education more generally and on the ways, we have had to adapt to how we live, engage and work. I chose not to be drawn into a discussion of the impacts when I initially finalized this essay for three main reasons: the crisis was clearly going to continue and quality to evolve as a result; there was a vast array of brilliant work being done by QAA and the HE sector in the UK, as well as across the world, to react and respond with many commentators writing about impacts and responses; and, third because I felt that important messages were already there in the essay. I will unpack what I mean.

Enhancement is a leading approach to quality because it embraces the characteristics that will be central to the longer-term adaptations to the implications of this pandemic. My essay stressed the role of change and importance of quality being an enabler of change, able to adapt and support the ever-growing nature and pace of change in the world. I suggested the need to move beyond fixed and cyclical approaches to EQA. I stated that “Future approaches [to quality] ... are likely to need to be far more responsive and flexible” and the need for “fundamental questioning and willingness to reconceive approaches and structures.” The pandemic has encouraged rethinking, for example, a number of quality regimes have had to grasp the need to change to accept online delivery and assessment. It will be important that flexibility becomes inbuilt and the instinct to return to the familiar is resisted.

For me, the pandemic has served further to underline the vital importance of student engagement, a main theme in my essay. Good solutions to the panoply of challenges COVID-19 threw up for higher education were, and will continue to be, best solved by working in partnership with students. Many will have seen the negative consequences of failures to do so and the benefits of effective engagement in the responses by individual HEIs.

I would reiterate my earlier conclusion:

Given that ambiguity and change will remain features of the higher education landscape as we look ahead, quality assurance and quality assurance agencies need to be an effective force to

support, enable and drive change... Quality assurance must be future facing, always keeping students and their learning firmly in sight, if it is to support higher education to create graduates with the flexibilities and creativity to find solutions for emerging – and yet to be defined – social, economic and sustainability challenges of the century ahead.

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Chapter 3

Is Big Brother Watching You?

Jamil Salmi

Introduction

The French philosopher Paul Valery observed with nostalgia that “the trouble with our times is that the future is not what it used to be.” This is particularly true in the realm of tertiary education, which is in great flux. A recent report published in the United Kingdom proposed the image of “an avalanche” to describe the radical changes affecting tertiary education in many parts of the world (Barber, Donnelly and Rizvi, 2013). Indeed, powerful transformative forces of three kinds – rupture factors, crisis factors, and stimulus factors – are challenging tertiary education systems all over the planet.

First, a growing number of rupture factors are at play in transforming the ecosystem in which tertiary education institutions are operating, drastically influencing how they perform their teaching and research functions. Among these rupture factors are technological innovations such as flipped classrooms for interactive learning, massive open online courses (MOOCs) reaching hundreds of thousands of students all over the world, new forms of competition from for-profit and corporate universities that provide professional qualifications closely linked to labor market needs, and new accountability modalities like the global rankings, which allow us to measure and compare the performance of universities across all continents (Salmi, 2013).

Second, as a result of the 2007 financial downturn, the tertiary education sector in most regions of the world has been affected by serious crisis factors. In the USA, for example, the level of public support for tertiary education has been reduced substantially in nearly every state – 48 out of 50 over the 2008-2013 period – under the combined impact of the economic recession, federal mandates to fund other sectors such as healthcare, and the reluctance to increase state taxes (Miller, 2013). In Europe, 13 out of the 20 university systems that the European Universities Association has been monitoring since the beginning of the financial crisis experienced overall budget decreases in real terms between 2008 and 2012, 9 of them of more than 10% (EUA, 2013). The cuts have been even more severe throughout the developing world, with the aggravation of falling household incomes and soaring graduate unemployment rates.

The third type of factors worth mentioning are the stimulus factors that refer, in contrast to the previously mentioned crisis dimensions, to the availability of significant additional funding for tertiary education in a small number of countries where governments consider that the role of universities in support of innovation and growth is so important that they deserve extra resources. In most cases, the package of additional funding has come in the form of an “Excellence Initiative” designed to strengthen the leading universities of the countries concerned, China, Denmark, France, Germany, Russia, South Korea, and Taiwan to mention a few recent examples.

Today’s unprecedented COVID-19 crisis is likely to have momentous effects on tertiary education systems across the world along the dimensions of change outlined in the above paragraphs. As universities close their campuses and switch to online learning, they are relying on new forms of assessment and considering new admission criteria for next academic year. In many countries, quality assurance agencies are making their requirements more flexible to accommodate the rapidly evolving situation and the many uncertainties arising from it.

Against this background of complex forces at play, tertiary education enrollment has continued to increase rapidly in most parts of the world. The proliferation of tertiary education institutions has generated concerns about the quality and relevance of the programs offered, especially in the case of private providers, and put additional pressure on quality assurance agencies. Ironically, even in situations of significantly reduced public funding for tertiary education, governments have not lightened their demands on quality assurance agencies and tertiary education institutions. If anything, it seems that the role of government has become more intrusive in recent years and the accountability requirements have grown significantly.

In this context, the main objective of this chapter is to analyze how the interplay among governments, quality assurance agencies and tertiary education institutions has evolved in the past decades, and the extent to which governments have become more heavy-handed in their relationship with quality assurance agencies and tertiary education institutions. After a brief history of quality assurance world-wide, the second part of the chapter documents the evolution of the role of the State vis-à-vis quality assurance agencies in recent years, identifying significant developments, key issues and new challenges. The third part explores the growing importance of new forms of accountability such as rankings and measures of learning outcomes. After a small section on the likely impact of COVID-19 on tertiary education and quality assurance, the chapter concludes by proposing a few principles to help reach an appropriate balance between autonomy and accountability as they apply to the relationship between governments and quality assurance agencies.

The Quiet Quality Assurance Revolution in the early 21st Century

Until the 1980s, tertiary education institutions in the United States, the United Kingdom and Commonwealth countries were the only ones in the world with a strong tradition of external quality assurance. In the absence of a federal Ministry of Higher Education in the United States, the quality assurance function was carried out essentially through private accreditation agencies. This continues to be the prevailing modality today, unlike what happens elsewhere in the world.

By contrast, most tertiary education systems elsewhere evolved without any formal quality assurance mechanism at the national level. Tertiary education institutions operated under a widely accepted notion of academic autonomy that applied not only to the relationship between universities and the State but went all the way down to the lecture hall and the classroom. In sharp contrast to standard practices at the primary and secondary education levels, where ministries of education in most countries have commonly exercised a strong supervisory role through their corps of inspectors, university professors have traditionally enjoyed a very high level of autonomy, if not total independence, in organizing and delivering their courses and exams.

This all started to change in the 1980s and the 1990s, as most OECD countries moved to establish some form of government-sanctioned quality assurance. Van Damme (2002) explains the rapid expansion of quality assurance in this period as the combination of at least five factors at play in many countries. First, the transition from elite to mass higher education led to concerns about a possible decline in academic standards. Second, employers lost confidence in the ability of tertiary education institutions to maintain the relevance of their programs in an increasingly competitive and global economy. Third, as governments reduced funding for tertiary education because of fiscal restrictions, they called for greater accountability in the use of public resources. Fourth, the growing competitiveness within and across tertiary education systems made it more important to have tangible measures of quality. Finally, stakeholders began to demand more transparency in tertiary education as far as quality was concerned. For example, the first college ranking published in 1983 by *US News and World Report* responded to this societal preoccupation for more information about the performance of tertiary education institutions.

Europe witnessed a considerable drive as a direct result of the Bologna Process officially launched in 1999. One of the most important dimensions of the Bologna Process activities has indeed been the development and/or strengthening of quality assurance in all participating countries, based on the principles issued through the Berlin Communiqué in 2003, and the standards and guidelines prepared by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and adopted by the Ministers of Education/Higher Education in 2005 at the Bergen meeting. By 2008, most countries had a functioning evaluation or accreditation agency. The European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) has been a strong factor in influencing QA agencies wishing to integrate the community of national systems recognized as being in compliance with the Standards and guidelines. The successful convergence of QA regulations has been one of Bologna's most noticeable outcomes.

The former socialist countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union have also been keen to participate in this process. Today, most of them have a quality assurance system in place, even though the capacity is still unequal, as reflected by the fact that many of the agencies from these countries have not been accepted as full members of ENQA. For example, the agencies from Albania, Armenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Russia and the Slovak Republic are only affiliate members.

Whereas only a minority of developing countries had a formal quality assurance system by the turn of the century, the QA movement has gained tremendous momentum in the past 15 years. In Latin America, the first quality assurance body was established in Mexico in 1991, followed two years later by a national accreditation agency in Colombia. In the following two decades, most countries in the region set up a national quality assurance body, with the exception of the Central American nations, which started with a regional accreditation agency. Today Uruguay is the only country in the region without any formal quality assurance and accreditation body, although the Ministry of Education is responsible for licensing new private universities. In the majority of cases the quality assurance agencies have been operating as independent bodies, but in three countries, Ecuador, El Salvador and Nicaragua, the government has maintained direct control of the quality assurance body.

Asia and the Middle East have experienced a similar evolution. In South-East Asia, Indonesia took the lead in establishing a national quality assurance agency in 1994, followed over the next two decades by almost all the countries in the region. Today, Myanmar is the only tertiary education system in the region without a formal external quality assurance department or agency. In the Arab world, the first decade of the new century saw the creation of quality assurance systems in most countries, eleven out of the seventeen main countries in the region by 2009. Yemen was the twelfth nation, and today only four countries are without a formally established QA system after Tunisia set up its own evaluation agency.

Africa is perhaps the region where the quality assurance movement has been slowest. By 2006, only six countries had a fully established quality assurance agency, Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa being the pioneers in that domain. In the past ten years, however, progress has been impressive and today 23 countries count on a national QA agency. The concluding declaration of a recent pan-African conference on quality assurance urges all countries that do not have with a proper QA system to put one in place as a matter of priority, especially in view of the growing importance of private tertiary education and e-learning (Jongsma, 2014).

As a result of this worldwide expansion, countries can be characterized today as belonging to one of the following four categories:

- Advanced systems whose tertiary education institutions have well-developed internal quality assurance processes with a strong focus on quality enhancement, in line with national standards defined by the external quality assurance and/or accreditation

agencies, often linked to the national qualifications framework; leading OECD economies would be in this category.

- Well-established systems relying still predominantly on external quality assurance, where a significant proportion of tertiary education institutions do not fully meet the national quality assurance standards; many industrial and developing countries would be in this category.
- Countries that are in the process of setting up and consolidating their quality assurance system; many developing countries and countries in transition in Eastern Europe and Central Asia would be in that category.
- Countries that have not established a formal quality assurance system; these would encompass a few countries in Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean and the Middle East, and about two dozen countries in Africa.

It is worth mentioning in this brief account of the modern history of quality assurance that, in parallel with the spread of national quality assurance agencies, the quality assurance movement has also taken on an important international dimension under the impulsion of the donor community (Wells, 2014). First, the German academic exchange agency, Deutsche Akademische Austausch Dienst (DAAD), undertook in the late 1990s to help the Spanish-speaking Central American countries build up their capacity to carry out accreditation, resulting to the establishment of a regional accreditation body (Consejo Centroamericano de Acreditación de la Educación Superior) in 2004. The premise of this project was that a regional agency could serve their quality assurance needs in a more effective manner than if each country would set up its own accreditation organism from the viewpoint of achieving a critical mass of peer reviewers and reducing the risk of conflict of interest that small countries invariably face. DAAD is currently following a similar approach to support the development of quality assurance in West Africa.

Second, alarmed by the impact of the rapid growth of cross-border education on quality, UNESCO and the OECD teamed up between 2003 and 2005 to elaborate guidelines in support of all stakeholders involved in the provision of cross-border education programs (governments, providers, faculty members, students, quality assurance agencies, professional associations). The joint document resulting from this effort offers a synthesis of good practices and proposes tools to monitor and improve the quality and relevance of cross-border education in order to protect students from below-standard practices (UNESCO and OECD, 2005).

In 2008, UNESCO also joined forces with the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the principal US professional association in charge of recognizing accreditation bodies besides the Federal Department of Education, to address the growing issue of *diploma mills* and *accreditation mills*, which offer and sanction worthless degrees affecting thousands of students not aware that they are exposed to fraudulent practices. Their 2009 Declaration sought to provide guidance to countries and quality assurance agencies keen on combating dishonest practices in tertiary education (CHEA and UNESCO, 2009). The official Communiqué of the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education further alerted Member States to the alarming phenomenon of degree mills (UNESCO, 2009).

Third, the World Bank tertiary education strategy published in 2002 (*Constructing Knowledge Societies*) identified quality assurance as a global public good.

“Globalization and the growth of borderless education raise important issues that affect tertiary education in all countries but that are often beyond the control of any one government. Among the challenges of particular concern to countries seeking to build up their advanced human capital capacity are new forms of brain drain that result in a loss of local capacity in fields critical to

development; the absence of a proper international accreditation and qualifications framework; the dearth of accepted legislation regarding foreign tertiary education providers ...”

The rapid development of virtual providers of tertiary education programs on a global scale, the increasing mobility of professionals across national borders, and the absence of quality assurance infrastructure and capacity in many developing countries make it important to establish an international framework that sets out minimum common standards worldwide (World Bank, 2002, pp. 98 and 101).

Following up on this recognition, the World Bank set aside grant resources to support the strengthening of INQAAHE (*International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education*), the international umbrella association for quality assurance, and the development of quality assurance regional networks. A series of *Development Grants* helped establish the Asian and Pacific network (APQN) first, followed by the Latin American network (RIACES), and then networks in the Arab (ANQAHE), African (AfriQAN) and Caribbean (CANQATE) regions. These grants culminated with a collaborative project, the Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity (GIQAC), financed by the World Bank and managed by UNESCO, to consolidate the regional networks. More recently, the German cooperation program and the European Union have supported the development of AQAN, the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network.

Finally, it is important to note that this significant transformation of the tertiary education landscape has, interestingly, happened without too much controversy. By contrast to reforms in the areas of governance and financing, which have more often than not generated heated debates and encountered strong resistance in the academic community, the development of quality assurance has been widely accepted in most countries across all regions of the world. This can be explained by a combination of two major forces. First, the evolving balance in the steering of tertiary education systems has generally meant greater institutional autonomy and growing reliance on market mechanisms in exchange for increased accountability, including through formal quality assurance mechanisms (World Bank, 2002). Second, as described in the previous paragraphs, external factors at the global and regional levels have heavily influenced national and institutional behaviors. In the same way as the Bologna Process has been a powerful vector of convergence in Europe, in developing countries the emergence of regional QA networks has acted as a strong catalyst facilitating the establishment of QA agencies at the national level. In addition, the expansion of cross-border education has reinforced the perceived need for regulatory and quality assurance measures in many corners of the planet.

Recent Trends in Quality Assurance: The Changing Role of the State

Against the historical background presented above, this section documents recent trends in quality assurance requirements from the viewpoint of the evolving relationship between governments, quality assurance agencies and tertiary education institutions. As signaled earlier, the purpose is not to provide an exhaustive account of developments in all countries of the world in the past decade, but to give a sense of major trends through a few illustrative cases.

Increased Scrutiny

The first important development could be described as *tightening of quality assurance requirements*, in the form of stricter regulations or even the closing of universities in countries where the quality assurance standards and process have proven insufficient to weed out below-standard institutions. This has often come as a result of the rapid proliferation of tertiary education institutions, growing suspicion towards the quality of private sector providers – especially the for-profits – and evidence of fraudulent practices.

Latin America, the region that started earliest to put quality assurance in place, offers several examples of such shortcomings. As most countries opted initially to focus on program accreditation rather than institutional accreditation, they have found it difficult to keep up with the fast growth of programs, especially in the private sector. In Colombia, for instance, after more than 20 years of accreditation effort, accredited universities offer less than 1% of all graduate programs. The proportion of accredited institutions was 7% in 2013, and the share of accredited programs was 13%. Interestingly, more private universities (13) had obtained the high-level accreditation than public ones (only 9) (OECD, 2012). In Costa Rica there were only 63 accredited programs by 2011, and only 74 in Bolivia.

In 2012, the Government of Ecuador shut down 14 private universities out of the 26 that had been put by the accreditation agency on its list of worst performers. The same year, the Chilean government also closed down a private university, Universidad del Mar, because of poor quality. In 2014, the Colombian Ministry of Education closed down several medical programs offered by a well-known private university, San Martin Foundation, because of serious concerns about the quality of teaching and lack of compliance with legal and tax requirements. The Chilean case is perhaps the most striking. Recent scandals have completely undermined the credibility of the accreditation process. Considered for many years as one of the most advanced quality assurance systems in the region, the Chilean Accreditation Commission has lately been under fire with accusations of conflict of interest, lack of independence and insufficient professional rigor. One rector and a former acting chair of the Accreditation Commission were jailed under accusations of fraud and conflict of interest. The entire quality assurance system has undergone a significant overhaul in the context of a new Accreditation Law passed by Congress in 2018.

In Russia, acknowledging that the quality assurance efforts of the Ministry of Education have not been sufficient, the government has begun to involve the Attorney General's office to monitor the operation of public universities. More than 700 Russian universities have undergone audits in recent years. In Hungary, the growingly authoritarian Government of Prime Minister Orbán has not only curtailed institutional autonomy – successfully driving the Central European University out of the country – , but also seriously restricted the scope of responsibility of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in recent years. Established in 1993, the Hungarian QA body lost its full member status with ENQA in 2013 because, as a result of the new Higher Education Act passed in 2011, it now plays only a consultative role with regard to accrediting new institutions or programs. It also lacks financial independence.¹⁶

In the Netherlands, a government report published in 2011 deemed existing quality assurance methods insufficient. This report also indicated that the Minister of Education should have authority to issue orders to a university's board, if serious failings were found. As a consequence, the government decided to increase the role of the Ministry of Education's Inspectorate, thereby undermining in part the authority of the official Accreditation Organization (NVAO) (Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2011).

In Poland, the government introduced amendments to the tertiary education legislation in 2011 to shift the focus of the Polish Accreditation Committee (PKA) from inputs to learning outcomes, and from quantitative aspects previously regulated by national legislation to qualitative aspects.¹⁷

With regard to similar efforts to tighten quality assurance in East Asia, the South Korean experience is worth mentioning. In 2011, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

¹⁶ http://www.mab.hu/web/doc/mabmin/External_Review_Report_300713.pdf, particularly pp. 8-10, 34-35, 41.

¹⁷ http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/PKA-review_Final-report-of-the-review-panel.pdf, p. 9.

clamped down on low quality private providers by “naming and shaming” 43 tertiary education institutions deemed of sub-standard quality, after a thorough evaluation of the country’s 346 private institutions (Kim, 2011). As a result, they lost access to the 143 million dollars of annual state subsidies that they had been receiving, and their students would not be eligible for student loans anymore. A few months later, in early 2012, the ministry prohibited 36 universities and two-year colleges from receiving foreign students, again because of low quality.

Along similar lines, the Government of Yemen decided in 2014 to stop financing scholarships for studies in private institutions in Malaysia, complaining about “poor educational quality and high costs” (Tan, 2014). More than 4,000 Yemeni students are currently studying in private Malaysian universities.

In Turkey, the new Higher Education Law proposed by the government in 2014 would give YÖK, the national regulatory agency for higher education, additional powers regarding quality assurance for doctoral degrees.

The USA is the last country example worth mentioning in this regard. In late 2013, the Senate questioned the effectiveness of the accreditors, wondering whether the various accreditation agencies were strict enough (Field, 2013). They called for the application of more rigorous standards and warned of potential conflicts of interest between peer reviewers and the institutions being assessed. In recent years, the U.S. Department of Education under Education Secretary Betsy DeVos proposed changes to the regulations for higher education institutions and accrediting agencies that could result in weaker quality standards (Saidi-Kuehnert, 2019).

Consolidation and Transformation of QA Structures and Procedures

A second, related trend is the transformation of QA structures and procedures to improve how the quality assurance functions are carried out. This has taken at least five forms: moving from program accreditation to institutional accreditation, making accreditation compulsory, decentralizing accreditation, merging existing QA agencies/departments into a single structure, and consolidating the independence of QA agencies.

Some countries where the QA agency has been unable to keep up with the rapid growth of programs, especially in the private sector, have started to offer the option of institutional accreditation as a complementary way of ensuring quality. Colombia, for example, has moved in that direction, although the number of universities that has received institutional accreditation is still very small. In Mexico, the Federation of Private Universities (FIMPES) relies on institutional accreditation to ensure the quality of education offered by its members. In the Middle East, the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education decided in 2013 to make accreditation compulsory rather than voluntary, as it had been in the past. Chile is considering the adoption of a similar measure as part of the general overhaul of the QA system mentioned earlier.

Following the US example of decentralized accreditation, Mexico has moved from a direct accreditation system to a distributed approach, whereby the government approves accreditation agencies responsible, in turn, for the external quality assurance functions of higher education institutions. Since 2002, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (COPAES) has recognized accreditation agencies and associations according to the general criteria that it defined at the beginning of its mission (*Lineamientos y Marco general para los procesos de acreditación de programas de educación superior*). This explains why Mexico is

perhaps the Latin American country that has most advanced in the area of quality assurance in its region, although progress has been mixed among the various types of institutions.¹⁸

Efforts to rationalize and consolidate the oversight structure in some countries that had several QA agencies operating are another dimension of transformation worth mentioning. In 2012, Ireland decided to integrate four agencies into the new Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), replacing the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and incorporating the functions of the Irish Universities Quality Board.¹⁹ Similarly, in Austria, the new QA agency that was constituted in 2014 amalgamates the formerly separate quality assurance bodies responsible for universities and *Fachhochschulen* (polytechnics). In Malaysia, where the accreditation department within the Ministry of Higher Education (National Accreditation Board (Lembaga Akreditasi Negara, LAN) was initially set up with jurisdiction over the private institutions exclusively, a second QA department (Quality Assurance Division, Ministry of Higher Education – QAD) was later created to look after the public institutions. In 2007, the ministry brought both departments together under a single QA department called the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA).²⁰

A variation of the merger option is found in countries that have traditionally kept the quality assurance functions under the direct responsibility of the main funding agency. In Pakistan, for instance, the Higher Education Commission, which plays the role of a higher education federal ministry, is also in charge of all quality assurance functions. Similarly, in Nepal, the University Grants Council is also responsible for quality assurance.

Finally, some countries have made efforts to strengthen the independence of their QA agency. In Croatia, for example, the government realized in 2009 that the Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE), the national agency responsible for quality assurance that had been set up in 2005, did not operate with sufficient autonomy because of the constraining legal framework. The new Act on Quality Assurance in Research and Higher Education redefined its responsibilities, making ASHE the only institution in Croatia competent to perform external quality assurance and establishing its Accreditation Council as a fully independent body composed of academics, students and other relevant stakeholders in the Croatian higher education sector.²¹

Some of the Nordic countries, notably Denmark and Sweden, have experienced a pendulum movement in that respect. Both countries started with a relatively hands-off system focusing on quality enhancement at the institutional level, but then moved to program accreditation with more State control. Denmark, which has today two QA agencies, one for institutional accreditation and one for crosscutting systemic aspects, has gone back to an approach built on mutual trust, thereby guaranteeing more autonomy to higher education institutions. In Sweden, the government forced a new QA system on the higher education sector in 2011 without consultation with the institutions themselves. As a result, the new Swedish QA agency (HSV) got into trouble in the European area in 2012 for its perceived lack of independence from government. In addition, ENQA singled out HSV for not abiding by European standards and guidelines with respect to the impartiality of its assessment of internal quality assurance

¹⁸ The largest public universities (including UNAM) are autonomous and, as such, are not required to be accredited. The proportion of students enrolled in accredited programs ranges from 90% among the public, non-autonomous universities to 50-60% among the technological universities and institutes, to only 23% among private universities. (Source: R. Tuirán, “La Educación Superior en México, 2006-2012: un balance inicial”, 2013)

¹⁹ <http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/About-Us.aspx>.

²⁰ <http://www.mqa.gov.my/>.

²¹ [http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/ASHE - Agency for Science and Higher Education#Agency.27s position within the national higher education system](http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/ASHE_-_Agency_for_Science_and_Higher_Education#Agency.27s_position_within_the_national_higher_education_system)

mechanisms (Myklebust, 2012). The government is now planning to allow HSV to operate more independently and rely again on institutional accreditation.

In France, a new High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES) replaced in 2013 the Agency for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (AERES), which was created in 2006. This change aimed to increase the autonomy of French universities in alignment with the 2007 governance reform, as HCERES's mandate is to only perform evaluations and accreditations on request from the universities (Pain, 2013).

Use of Funding Mechanisms for QA Purposes

It is also worth noting that some governments have encroached indirectly on the responsibilities of QA agencies through changes in the funding mechanisms used to allocate public resources among tertiary education institutions. In the Netherlands, for example, the funding formula rewards universities whose graduates finish their studies on time. Similarly, in the Canadian province of Quebec, successive governments have pressured the universities to become more efficient through quantitative indicators of completion rates (Salmi and Hauptman, 2006).

In the United States, the number of states relying on some kind of performance-based funding approach has increased from 7 to 33 since 2010 (College Productivity, 2012). The overarching objective of these initiatives is to reward those tertiary education institutions that make deliberate attempts to raise the proportion of students completing high-quality programs. Similarly, performance contracts in Austria, Chile France and Spain allow universities to receive additional funding in return for a commitment to fulfill a number of national objectives, including quality improvement, as measured by specific targets agreed between the relevant Ministry of Education and the institution.

Deregulation

In contrast with those countries whose government has tightened up quality assurance structures, regulations and procedures, in some cases the national authorities have rather opted for relaxing the supervisory role of the quality assurance agency (Australia) or even relieving the public quality assurance agency from its exclusive responsibility to carry out evaluation and/or accreditation functions (England). In Australia, the definition of the role and responsibilities of TEQSA, the quality assurance agency, has been in flux. Established in 2008 upon recommendation of the Bradley review of higher education that called for a strong national regulator with the power to register and close down established universities, TEQSA took over the duties of the previous agency (AUQA) with an extended mandate, combining the functions of the state-level quality assurance bodies and the national QA agency. But in 2013, the government decided to backtrack, stripping TEQSA of its full responsibilities and halving its budget for regulation and quality assurance (Hare, 2014). With this change, the government's purpose was to lessen the regulatory burden on higher education institutions, emphasizing "risk, necessity and proportionality" as working principles.²²

In England, a surprise announcement by the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) in October 2014 revealed the government's intention of opening the door to private companies, charities and government agencies to take over the current responsibilities of the Quality Assurance Agency (Grove, 2014). The main reason behind the proposed shift is the perception that, faced with a rapidly changing higher education world, the Quality Assurance Agency has been unable to cope with the need for frequent reviews, that it has been too lenient, and that the review process has become more formal than effectual. How the new system would be organized and would operate remains to be defined.

It should also be noted in this context that the 2006 Services Directive of the European Union, which guarantees the freedom of public and private tertiary education institutions from any

²² <https://www.education.gov.au/teqsa-advisory-council-terms-reference>

European country to establish a branch campus or franchise institution in any other country of the Union, infringes on the independence of national QA agencies. According to the Services Directive, the primary responsibility for quality assurance does not rest with the QA agency of the receiving country, but with the country from which the cross-border institution originates.

Taiwan has recently experienced a milder version of deregulation. The Ministry of Education decided in 2012 to grant the most reliable universities the status of “self-accrediting” universities. This move was meant to respond to the wish for more institutional autonomy and the intention of the ministry to help strengthen internal quality assurance systems. Self-accrediting universities are expected to have the capacity to assess their own strengths and areas for improvement and developing their own review standards. At the same time, they would be given the authority to organize an external evaluation without prior review by HEEACT, the Taiwanese Quality Assurance Agency.

Quality Assurance and Innovation

One of the challenges faced by quality assurance and accreditation systems has been to find the right balance between enforcing standards in a reliable and consistent manner and allowing sufficient space for innovations in curriculum design and pedagogical approaches. Three recent developments, in India, Peru and Saudi Arabia respectively, illustrate the tension between quality assurance and innovation that strict government regulations can create.

In India, a number of institutions have introduced four-year undergraduate degrees in the past few years, moving away from the traditional British-like three-year programs (Narayan and Sharman, 2014). Among those who made the change are the University of Delhi, several Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), the Indian Institute of Science, and a few private universities. The rationale behind the change was to align their degrees closer to US degrees, open the option of offering dual degrees with US universities, and give their students the opportunity to acquire research skills during their undergraduate studies.

However, India’s main regulatory body, the University Grants Council (UGC), has not recognized this change as a desirable move. Instead, in 2014 it instructed all the institutions that implemented the four-year degree to reverse course and stick to the standard three-year degree. The institutions concerned have tried to fight back through the courts or by asking the Minister of Human Resources to intervene in their favor, arguing that the four-year degrees were in line with international trends.

“These moves could push the brightest students of India away from choosing a career in science. It could threaten innovation in higher education that is in bad need of an overhaul. Experiments to improve education must be encouraged, especially if the premier institutes of the country are taking the lead. We can only know what works best if we attempt a variety of approaches” – *Vishwesh Guttal, assistant professor at IISc*

The IITs, which get their budget directly from the central government, not from the University Grants Council, have also argued that the UGC did not have jurisdiction over their academic affairs. But it looks doubtful that the UGC would reverse its stand.

For several decades, the Peruvian tertiary education system was one of the least regulated ones in Latin America. The National Council that was responsible for authorizing new universities, CONAFU, consisted of university rectors and former rectors for whom it could be difficult to remain fully objective and independent when it came to license and accredit new private sector competitors. To reduce the risk of conflicts of interest inherent to this setup, the government introduced a new Higher Education Law in 2014 that establishes a more independent and professional regulatory agency (Superintendencia Nacional de Educación Superior

Universitaria – SINEDU) in charge of authorizing new institutions to operate for a fixed number of years.

At the same time, however, the law includes a number of restrictive clauses that seem to be out of sync with recent developments in the field of virtual and distance education. For example, the members of the Board of the Superintendencia must hold a PhD but it cannot be an online degree. Similarly, no one who obtained her/his PhD online is eligible to become rector of a university – public or private, dean of a faculty, or even a full professor. The law goes on to prohibit undergraduate degrees that are not taught at least 50% in a presential mode as well as continuing education programs that are shorter than five years, the equivalent of a regular full-time undergraduate degree.

Several private universities, which have successfully pioneered the development of innovative virtual and continuing education programs in Peru, have claimed that political and commercial interests influenced the drafting of the law. Whether this is true or not, the fact remains that these clauses against online education do not appear to be grounded in sound technical knowledge and run contrary to the current evolution of tertiary education delivery modalities, as reflected by the development of the MOOCs and the rapid expansion of online programs all over the world.

A last example worth mentioning is that of Saudi Arabia. At the same time as the government made accreditation compulsory rather than voluntary--as mentioned earlier--, it decided that it would not recognize the international accreditation received by some programs, such as ABET accreditation for engineering programs. By forcing these programs to undergo the national accreditation process as well, the ministry is sending a negative message to the more innovative universities that took the initiative to submit themselves to the scrutiny of international accreditors.

More generally, universities in many countries complain that the evaluation/accreditation procedures have become so bureaucratic and cumbersome that they risk becoming a ritualistic process that adds little value to the actual quality of programs and pedagogical practices because of the focus on formal compliance rather on quality enhancement aspects. Anecdotal evidence from countries as diverse as Argentina, Australia, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom points to a lengthy and costly review process that does not always translate into meaningful guidance on areas that could be improved. A recent report prepared by the Australian Evaluation Agency, TEQSA, acknowledges the urgency of “reducing the excessively bureaucratic procedures, which strangles universities,” considering the numerous reports required every year by parliament and government at both the State and Federal levels (Maslen, 2013). As early as 2008, Peter Williams had observed from his vantage as president of ENQA that too many QA agencies had become fixated on processes rather than focusing on their original quality promotion purpose. He expressed concern about what he called “the ossification” of quality assurance (Williams, 2008).

New Forms of Accountability in Tertiary Education

New instruments of accountability have appeared or been discussed in recent years, which could potentially affect the work of national QA agencies or complement the pool of information available to measure the performance and operation of tertiary education institutions. Of particular relevance in this context are the following modalities:

- Student engagement surveys
- Assessment of student learning outcomes
- Labor market observatories
- Rankings
- Benchmarking

Student Engagement Surveys

Following the example of the United States, where the first large-scale survey of student engagement (NSSE) took place in 2000, a number of countries have developed and implemented their own version of a survey to ascertain how students feel about the quality of teaching and learning in their institutions. Today, student engagement surveys are carried out regularly in Australia, Canada, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Pilot surveys have also been undertaken in recent years in countries as diverse as China and South Africa.

Continuing a movement that started in the 1960s with student evaluations of their teachers, student engagement surveys include not only subjective indicators such as the level of satisfaction of students but attempt also to measure more objective aspects related to the degree of active engagement of students in interactive and collaborative learning activities (Ramsden and Callender, 2014). In countries where surveys of student engagement are conducted regularly, high school graduates tend to be better equipped to choose which college or university they would like to attend. Institutions that participate voluntarily in student engagement surveys can use the results for quality improvement purposes.

Student engagement surveys face two challenges (Klemencic and Chirikov, 2014). First, some observers have questioned their validity and reliability with respect to the ability of students to make informed judgments when asked to report learning gains, and in relation to the selection of the key factors that are supposed to determine student learning, assuming standards of institutional practice and student behavior (Porter et al., 2011). Second, not all stakeholders are ready for the kind of transparency that these surveys imply. For instance, many US universities, including top-tier universities, continue to refuse to release their NSSE results (Salmi, 2007).

Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

Unlike what happens at lower levels of education – primary and high school – the world of tertiary education does not have a long tradition of measuring learning outcomes. However, promising initiatives have emerged in recent years. In the United States, a growing number of institutions have been relying on one of three assessment instruments to try and measure added value at the undergraduate level: the ACT Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP), the ETS Proficiency Profile (EPP) and the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA). Others are using self-designed performance-based assessments instruments with student responses assessed through specially elaborated rating scales or rubrics. Similar instruments have been in use in other industrial countries such as Australia (Graduate Skills Assessment) and the Netherlands in medical education (Coates, 2015).

A few Latin American countries – Brazil and Colombia, for example – have also been pioneers in attempting to measure the acquisition of knowledge and competencies of undergraduate students. In Brazil, for example, when the late Paulo Renato, then Federal Minister of Education, introduced the *Prova* in 1996 as a voluntary test designed to compare the performance of similar programs across all universities, it was the first such national assessment system in the world. The *Prova* consisted of a final course examination for undergraduate students that did not count towards the graduation of the students themselves but served to evaluate the results of their program and institution. The *Prova* was replaced in 2004 by a new test (ENADE), applied every three years to a sample of students, which examines the test scores of both first year and last-year undergraduate students as an attempt to measure the added value of undergraduate programs (Salmi and Saroyan, 2007). Similarly, the Colombian Assessment Institute (Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación), has implemented two tests (SABER-11 and SABER-PRO) since 2009 that measure students' abilities at the start and end of their undergraduate education.

In some cases, policymakers have considered the opportunity of using students learning outcomes for quality assurance purposes. But these proposals have been met with caution by the tertiary education community, as illustrated by the controversy sparked by the 2006 report

of the Spellings Commission on the Future of Higher Education in the United States. The report recommended measuring learning outcomes to complement the existing accreditation system.

“... by law, student learning is a core part of accreditation. Unfortunately, students are often the least informed, and the last to be considered. Accreditation remains one of the least publicized, least transparent parts of higher education – even compared to the Byzantine and bewildering financial aid system” (NACIQI 2007).

Initiatives to measure students learning outcomes in an international perspective have also been received with little enthusiasm. In 2012, the OECD conducted a pilot experience to measure the achievement of generic competencies and the acquisition of professional skills in the areas of economics and engineering in the context of the AHELO project (Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes). Even though seventeen countries participated in the feasibility study and the pilot, the future of the project, presented as an alternative to the global rankings, remains uncertain (OECD, 2013).

The recent emergence of private companies specializing in testing the work readiness of young graduates has introduced a new twist with respect to the assessment of student learning outcomes. In India, for example, several large multinational firms make it compulsory for anyone interested in applying for a job to take one of these professional tests.

“More than 1.5 million people in India have taken a test called the AMCAT (Aspiring Minds' Computer Adaptive Test). The assessment measures aptitude in English, quantitative ability and logic. ... It also includes a variety of situational and judgment tests, which scrutinize personality types and soft skills to see how they might apply in specific fields” (Fain, 2014).

Labor Market Observatories

Another noteworthy development has been the establishment of labor market observatories (LMOs) in a growing number of developing and transition countries, following the example of the many OECD countries that have employment observatories either at the supra-national level (European Union employment observatory), the national level (e.g., Bureau of Labor Statistics in the USA, university-based AlmaLaurea observatory in Italy), and the sub-national level (e.g., Learning and Skills observatory in Wales, OREF in France, Education-Employment Information system in Florida). The examples of Bulgaria, Chile and Colombia are worth mentioning in this context.

Since 2012, the Bulgarian government has published detailed data on the labor market results of university graduates. Using data from the Registry of Tertiary Students and statistics from the National Social Security administration, the Ministry of Education is able to provide a wealth of information on the types of jobs and levels of remuneration of graduates who left university in the previous five years. The database indicates, for instance, if the graduate found a job, if the position corresponds to the field and level of study, what type of employer she/he is working with, if the graduate has a permanent or temporary job, and the level of salary based on social security contributions.

Supported by the Chilean Ministry of Education and jointly run by the School of Government of the private University Adolfo Abánuez and the University of Chile's Department of Industrial Engineering, *Futuro Laboral* aims to equip youths and students with academic orientation tools. *Futuro Laboral* provides information on the occupational situation of graduates of hundreds of professional and technical careers that represent 75% of technical and professional graduates. The information available to the public includes detailed data on salaries and employment opportunities. The portal displays, for each program of every tertiary education institution, detailed information on dropout rates, average time to degree, average earnings of the graduates after 4 years of graduation, current tuition fees for the program, and

accreditation status of the program. Employment and earnings data are not self-reported but gathered from the database of the national tax revenue authority. Earnings are matched to the databases of graduates provided by the tertiary education institutions. The privacy of the information is maintained, as the tax service issues only the average values for each program in each institution, provided there are at least 25 individuals in each program/institution's cohort for whom earnings data are available.

Graduados Colombia (Observatorio Laboral para la Educación) was launched in 2005 and is managed by the Ministry of Education. It collects and presents information on the demand and supply of graduates. Students, families, tertiary education institutions, researchers and the productive sector have access to statistics on the academic level of the graduates of technical institutes and universities, the salaries they receive, the average time for finding the first job, as well as the cities where they work. The website serves as a tool for students trying to choose a career, and it is also useful for tertiary education institutions intent on renewing and adapting the programs they offer according to labor market needs. Graduados Colombia's site provides links to job offers in Colombia and in other countries as well as advice and tips on how to write and present a good resume. Visitors are able to look for the results of the graduate and employer surveys, as well as studies in specific disciplines and economic sectors.

These three initiatives show relevant examples of labor market observatories that aim to provide a better understanding of and match among individuals' professional aspirations, tertiary education, and occupational trends. As such, they help to address one of the main challenges of tertiary education: its relevance to individuals and societies.

Rankings

The power of public opinion is nowhere more visible than in the growing influence of rankings. Initially limited to the United States, university rankings and league tables have multiplied in recent years, existing today in more than 35 industrial and developing countries (Salmi and Saroyan, 2007). While fully acknowledging their methodological limitations, it is undeniable that the rankings have often played a useful educational role by making relevant information available to the public, especially in countries lacking a formal system of quality assurance. In Poland, for example, when the transition to the market economy started in the early 1990s, there was a thirst for information about the quality of the rapidly proliferating private education institutions. This demand for information pushed the owner of *Perspektywy* magazine to initiate the country's first university ranking. Similarly, for many years the annual ranking published in Japan by the *Asahi Shimbun* fulfilled an essential quality assurance function in the absence of any evaluation or accreditation agency. In France, after the publication of the 2008 edition of the Shanghai ranking, while the Secretary-General of the national teacher union (SNESUP) complained that it was unfair to compare the performance of universities to a race at the Olympic Games, the French Minister of Higher Education declared a few days after the publication of the 2008 rankings, "[T]hese lists of winners may not be ideal, but they do exist... They show the urgency of reform for the [French] university" (Floc'h, 2008).

Some of the rankings include information from student engagement surveys and/or labor market observatories as key indicators. In Chile, for example, the country's main weekly magazine (*Que Pasa?*) uses the results of *Futuro Laboral* to rank universities and programs every year on the basis of the labor market outcomes of their graduates. Similarly, in Bulgaria, the Ministry of Education has developed a ranking that incorporates the labor market results of university graduates.²³ The proliferation of rankings has provoked intense reactions, ranging from disagreements about the very principle of rankings, criticism about the methodology used to produce them, boycotts, political pressure, and even court actions to stop their publication.

²³ <http://rsvu.mon.bg/rsvu3/?locale=en>

“The expansion of league tables and ranking exercises has not gone unnoticed by the various stakeholders and the reaction they elicit is rarely benign. Such rankings are often dismissed by their many critics as irrelevant exercises fraught with data and methodological flaws, they are boycotted by some universities angry at the results, and they are used by political opponents as a convenient way to criticize governments” (Salmi and Saroyan, 2007, p. 80).

Despite several attempts to boycott the *US News and World Report* and MacLean rankings in the USA and Canada, respectively, they remain very popular among students and parents trying to figure out how to choose among universities, colleges and study programs.

Benchmarking

Benchmarking has been proposed as a more meaningful alternative than rankings (Salmi, 2013). Benchmarking can mean establishing comparative performance among similar institutions in a given country or across countries, or it can refer to the determination and application of best practices in any given industry. In the case of universities, the approach followed is usually the first one, by comparing the performance of universities to other institutions in the same country or in other nations. Rather than assigning a rank order, benchmarking enables users to compare several programs/institutions against a series of performance indicators without relying on rank-order numbers to designate the “best” among peer institutions. Unlike rankings, which tend to lead to a “race to the top,” benchmarking can provide a more tempered assessment of performance.

The German Centre for Higher Education (CHE) offers one of the most comprehensive examples of benchmarking, even though people often refer, mistakenly, to the information available on the CHE website as the German ranking. CHE makes a large number of indicators of inputs, process and outcomes available – including the results of student and employer satisfaction surveys – distributed into three broad bands of universities: the top 25%, the middle 50% and the bottom 25%. Users can select which universities and indicators they would like to combine to conduct a more refined search.

Elements of benchmarking have also reached the US tertiary education scene in recent years. In September 2007, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) announced that they would start publishing key performance indicators through a Voluntary System of Accountability Program. The program was a reaction to the recommendations – and perceived threat – of the Spellings Commission report mentioned earlier. According to the plan released by the two associations, each participating university would use a common template – called a College Portrait – to post key data on costs, transfer and graduation rates, and student satisfaction. The program would also include an assessment of student learning from one of the existing tests. Among the sponsors of this proposal were the same university presidents who had decided to boycott the *U.S. News and World Report* rankings (Fischer, 2007).

Impact of COVID-19

As country after country decreed partial or total lockdowns from the COVID-19 pandemic in the first months of 2020, the number of universities and colleges closing and switching to e-learning has soared world-wide (Brown and Salmi, 2020). However, few of these institutions were well-prepared for the sudden and disruptive move. A lot of scrambling and improvisation has occurred as administrators, instructors, and students have struggled to implement broad-based online learning. Many institutions are grappling with difficult decisions about how to assess student learning, whether to postpone or cancel final exams, and how to recruit students for the next academic year – especially in countries where national end-of-high school exams have been scratched.

These developments have revealed the need for greater flexibility in the application of quality assurance criteria. This has involved suspending deadlines for accreditation and program

registration processes, postponing accreditation – or switching to “virtual visits” – because of university closures and travel restrictions and lifting many regulatory requirements concerning online education. In the United States, for example, the Federal Department of Education announced accreditation waivers early March 2020, and extended them late May until December 31, 2020, owing to the continuing health crisis. Oversight bodies in many countries have relaxed their quality assurance criteria to support the rapid transition to virtual education. While some have issued detailed recommendations to guide colleges and universities regarding online teaching and assessment, the general trend has been to issue blanket approvals of the new approaches and delegate responsibility for establishing quality online programs and assessment modalities to the higher education institutions themselves.

Conclusion

This review of recent trends concerning the development of quality assurance from an international perspective has revealed several important aspects. While the establishment of national QA structures has become a universal movement, with fewer countries left without a proper quality assurance system every year, it is difficult to discern any single general trend in terms of the evolving relationship between the State and QA agencies. The country examples analyzed throughout the paper show a mixed picture, with some countries tightening up the supervisory role of the State at the risk of compromising the independence of their national QA agency, others moving away from the “Big Brother” approach to grant more autonomy to their QA agency and/or the tertiary education institutions, and others carrying out significant structural changes with the aim of improving the effectiveness of their QA system.

At the same time, new accountability mechanisms have emerged in recent years, complementing the traditional evaluation/accreditation role of QA agencies. Student engagement surveys, learning outcomes assessments, labor market observatories, rankings, and performance indicators used in benchmarking exercises can all provide useful additional information for quality assurance purposes. The multiplicity of accountability mechanisms provides students, employers, government and society at large with more abundant and transparent data about the operation and results of tertiary education institutions. This also gives the opportunity to QA agencies to embrace a more comprehensive approach in fulfilling their quality enhancement mission.

The imperative to enlarge the scope of quality assurance is a never-ending process. The rapid spread of microcredentials, growing concerns about equity in access and success, and the need to strengthen measures to prevent and sanction sexual harassment are three examples of important dimensions that quality assurance must take into consideration. Furthermore, the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis will undoubtedly force renewed focus on adequate evaluation and accreditation procedures for online education and blended delivery modalities.

Finally, in light of the analysis undertaken in this article, three principles of good accountability can be proposed. First, the relationship between the State and QA agencies must reflect a healthy balance between accountability and independence, with clear rules of engagement defined and agreed on both parts. While the State – and society at large – have a legitimate interest in ensuring the quality of tertiary education, especially in countries where private providers and/or cross-border providers have multiplied, QA agencies must enjoy sufficient autonomy to carry out their responsibilities in an effective manner. Excesses should be avoided on both sides. Governments must not allow politics and lack of trust to color their relationship with QA agencies and the latter should not be too lenient towards below-standards providers or too rigid towards innovative institutions.

Second, in order to make a meaningful difference, quality assurance should not focus mainly on the way tertiary education institutions operate, but on the educational results that they actually achieve. To use the distinction proposed by Stein (2005), procedural accountability, which is primarily concerned with rules and procedures, is less meaningful than substantive accountability, which focuses on the essence of the research, teaching, and learning in tertiary education institutions. It may be easier to monitor the first type of accountability, but it is without doubt more relevant to concentrate on the second, notwithstanding its complexity and

the difficulties involve in measuring the acquisition of competencies, student learning outcomes, and added value.

Last, the most effective accountability mechanisms are those that are mutually agreed between QA agencies and tertiary education institutions. Genuine consultation leads to agreements that can ensure a greater sense of shared responsibility for the evaluation and feedback process, and fuller ownership of the quality assurance goals and instruments.

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Chapter 4

Accreditation as Quality Management Theory and Assessing Student Learning Outcomes in Higher Education

Steven Parscale

Introduction

Accreditation is a leadership tool that facilitates improving academic quality. This study was about the relationship between quality management theory, using accreditation as a framework, and student learning outcomes assessment results at institutions of higher education. The government was becoming more involved in accreditation, which has historically been a private sector process (Eaton, 2010). The consequences for administrators and faculty members are far-reaching and are as serious as diminishing academic freedom through the loss of authority to make judgments on curriculum and academic standards (Eaton, 2010).

Researchers concluded that quality management was beneficial to institutions of higher education (Emiliani, 2005; Imran & Mahmood, 2011). Empirical evidence indicated there were statistically significant differences in efficiency and effectiveness between quality management firms and non-quality management firms (Ahire et al., 1996). Spearman's Rank-Order correlation coefficient was statistically significant ($r = .72$), suggesting there is an association between the application of quality management and enhanced student learning assessment results. Even though correlation did not mean causation, the high correlation coefficient indicated a clear association of quality management to enhanced student learning results and was significant at the .01 level.

All business schools, programs, and departments should implement quality management through the employment of accreditation processes. There were 15,731 institutions of higher education that had business programs worldwide in 2014 according to AACSB's business school data guide, 2014 (Business school data guide, 2014). Between AACSB and ACBSP there were 1,064 institutions of higher education that had implemented quality management through accreditation as of February 2014. That was less than 7% worldwide. Therefore, 93% of the institutions of higher education with business programs worldwide could benefit from business program accreditation. The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic was a major disruptive force to the world and markedly to higher education. For decades, higher education strived to continually improve academic quality. Striving to academically improve was evolutionary change or evolutionary improvement. 2020 has been a time of revolutionary change in life and revolutionary change in higher education.

Prologue

Higher education adapted to revolutionary changes to survive. Revolutionary changes touched everything from teaching and learning, to assessing student learning, accreditation, and recognition, to classes and graduation ceremonies, or lack of classes or graduation ceremonies. Academic quality in this new paradigm is on a steep learning curve. Our mission is to align the revolution in higher education, with the revolution in academic quality. As the marines would say, we in higher education and quality are improvising, adapting, and overcoming!

People in organizations worldwide shifted from in-person meetings to virtual "everything" to overcome the pandemic. People learned how to present and how to attend virtual conferences, virtual peer review site visits, virtual board meetings, and virtual team meetings. People all over the world had to learn totally new communications tools to continue to improvise, adapt,

and overcome. There is no immediate end in sight for this revolutionary learning curve in higher education and the future will never look the same.

There were regulatory requirements from multiple stakeholders to report student learning outcome assessments in higher education. Government officials demand evidence of student learning to justify federal funding expenditures in higher education (Culver, 2010). Duque and Weeks (2010) noted the importance of student learning outcomes assessment in response to the requirements from external stakeholders, such as the government. However, there was a lack of guidance on how to assess student learning outcomes to meet the requirements of the regulators. The U.S. Department of Education formed a committee to report to the Secretary of Education on measures of student success (U.S. Department of Education, Committee on Measures of Student Success, 2011). The committee noted that data and measures of student learning are being collected for numerous stakeholders, but there are few standardized measures that stakeholders agree on (U.S. Department of Education, Committee on Measures of Student Success, 2011).

Ohia (2011) noted that administrators, faculty, and staff members are still struggling to identify useful models that allow them to assess and report effective student learning outcomes. Administrators, including deans and department chairs, which were responsible for student learning outcome assessment had no uniform or standardized guidance in directing their efforts in meeting the needs and expectations of multiple external stakeholders (Middaugh, 2012). Quality management tools such as accreditation facilitate improving academic quality. This study was about the relationship between quality management theory (accreditation framework) and student learning outcome assessment results (improving student learning) at institutions of higher education.

Management theory building must include factors responsible for observed patterns and in specific management contexts (Dierksmeier, 2011; Klefsjö, 2010; Prabhu, 2011). The research studied student learning outcome assessment results as factors responsible for observed patterns. The other requirement of management theory building was the specific management context (Prabhu, 2011). The specific management context studied was quality management systems (accreditation) at accredited business schools in higher education. Quality management principles and concepts could be beneficial to institutions of higher education (Emiliani, 2005; Imran & Mahmood, 2011; Keller, 1992; Man & Kato, 2010). Hence, there has been more support for quality management in higher education, and statistical analysis of sample data indicated a positive association between quality management and organizational effectiveness (Man & Kato, 2010).

Accreditation was the primary tool used by the government to determine whether or not institutions of higher education are qualified to receive federal funding. However, government officials were demanding evidence of student learning, through accreditation for their investments (Culver, 2010). Also, Duque and Weeks (2010) noted the importance of student learning outcomes assessment in response to requirements from external stakeholders such as the government.

Literature Review

The search for management in 28 databases revealed 147,633 papers. The search was focused on "management theory" and provided 1,782 papers. During the initial review of the first few papers from this group, it was discovered that "quality management theory" was a sub-theory of "management theory" and as such the search for "quality management theory" provided 4,664 papers. It was surprising that the search for "quality management theory" resulted in more articles than "management theory."

A search of SAGE journals for "management theory" provided 641 articles. A search of SAGE journals for "student learning outcome assessment" resulted in one article. The SAGE journals

search was expanded to "student learning outcomes" and resulted in 197 articles. After reviewing these sources, the search focused on using the advanced search mode to "quality management" and "student learning outcomes." This search provided zero articles; therefore, the focus of the search was changed to "quality management" and "student learning assessment." This search resulted in one article. The search was then broadened to "quality management" and higher education." This advanced search resulted in 93 articles. Another search for "quality management" and "student learning" revealed zero articles.

Researchers indicated that administrators in higher education struggle to identify useful models or standardized measures to assess student learning outcomes (Middaugh, 2012; Ohia, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, Committee on Measures of Students' Success, 2011). Administrators who develop student learning outcome assessment data and information only to satisfy stakeholder requirements may not have data and information as valid or reliable as it could be if they used a systematic approach such as the practice of quality management (Ahire, Waller & Golhar, 1996).

The Study of Management

Pioneers in the field of management established a foundation for the field to evolve from the industrial age to the quality management age (Ahire et al., 1996; Dobyns & Crawford-Mason, 1991; Lewis, 2011; Waller & Golhar, 1996; Wyld, 1996). The Hawthorne studies investigated what made employees more productive (Scott, 2005). The Hawthorne studies evaluated time and motions studies that would improve business operations. Management theory evolved through new knowledge and building on existing knowledge into quality management theories (Carrigan, 2010; Pryor, Humphreys, Taneja & Toombs, 2011; Shiraz, Rashid & Riaz, 2011; Smothers, 2011).

Quality Management

Three well-known quality management gurus were Edward Deming, Joseph Juran and Philip Crosby (Fred, 2012). Edward Deming traveled to Japan and taught the Japanese statistical process control after Sarashn and Protzman laid the foundation for the Japanese into quality management (Dobyns & Crawford-Mason, 1991; Fathi, 1995). Deming went on to develop his 14 points of management and, most importantly, a continuous improvement process known as Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA). Walter Shewhart, a bell laboratories scientist, was Deming's friend and mentor. He originally developed the PDCA wheel and also developed statistical process control (SPC) in the late 1920s. For this reason, the PDCA cycle is sometimes referred to as the "Shewhart Cycle" (Michael et al., 2013).

Many notable quality management experts, such as Juran, Crosby, and Deming have written handbooks that have been used as the main reference by quality managers around the world for many years (Porter, 2011; Klefsjö, 2011; Sedlock, 2010; Smith, 2011). Juran has been called the father of quality, and many refer to him as the greatest quality giant of the 20th century (Smith, 2011).

Quality Management in Higher Education

Quality management principles and concepts can be beneficial to institutions of higher education (Emiliani, 2005; Imran & Mahmood, 2011; Keller, 1992; Man & Kato, 2010). There are three immediate apparent examples (a) quality management principles can help institutions of higher education be more competitive against the for-profit, continuing education, and the traditional public and private institutions of higher education (Man & Kato, 2010); (b) there has been more support for quality management in higher education, and statistical analysis of sample data has indicated a positive association between quality management and organizational effectiveness (Man & Kato, 2010); and (c) quality

management in higher education improved morale, reduced costs, and improved performance (Elmuti, Kathawala & Manippallil, 1996).

Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

Peter Ewell, a leading expert on student learning outcome assessment, noted the start of the assessment movement in 1985 at the first National Conference on Assessment in Higher Education in Columbia, South Carolina (Baepler, 2010; Culver, 2010; Curtis & Wu, 2012; Kallison & Cohen, 2010). Given its concern, the government is becoming more involved in accreditation, which has historically been a private sector process (Eaton, 2010). The consequence for administrators and faculty members is far-reaching and is as serious as diminishing academic freedom through the loss of authority to make judgments on curriculum and academic standards (Eaton, 2010). Quality experts such as Deming and Juran were faculty members and they provided research regarding quality management in higher education. Their histories as faculty members at universities made it easier for some administrators to buy into the work of other people (Spanghehl, 2012). Deming, Juran, and Crosby may be given the credit for developing the vocabulary on quality management and higher education, other institutions can learn a great deal from these ideas (Sanjaya, 2006).

The U.S. Department of Education formed a committee to report to the Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, on measures of student success (U.S. Department of Education, Committee on Measures of Students' Success, 2011). The committee noted that data and measures of student learning are being collected for numerous stakeholders, but there are few standardized measures that stakeholders agree on that can be used internally or externally in institutions of higher education (U.S. Department of Education, Committee on Measures of Students' Success, 2011). This problem is important because student learning outcomes are now some of the most important criteria for accreditation and government funding (Ohia, 2011).

The Baldrige Performance Excellence Program (BPEP)

BPEP provides a management model with a systems perspective for managing higher education institutions and their key processes to achieve results (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2013). The criteria also serve as the basis for the Malcolm Baldrige national quality award. First published in 1999, the education criteria have been used by postsecondary institutions across the United States for more than a decade. Most states and numerous countries in the world have established similar criteria and award programs based on the Baldrige criteria. The BPEP was the foundation for the quality management studied in this research and was used to answer the research question. The BPEP included seven categories that were linked and integrated as quality management principles. The seven categories were (a) leadership, (b) strategic planning, (c) customer focus, (d) measurement, analysis, and knowledge management, (e) workforce focus, (f) operation's focus, and (g) results (NIST, 2012).

A set of interrelated core values and concepts, including visionary leadership, learning-centered education and systems perspective make up the education criteria. Within the Baldrige framework, a systems perspective is defined as the senior leadership focus on strategic directions and students. It means the senior leadership team monitors, responds to, and manages performance based on results, both short-term and strategic. A systems perspective also includes using information and organizational knowledge to develop core strategies while linking these strategies with key processes and resources to improve both student and institutional performance.

One of the core values of the Baldrige educational criteria was learning-centered education (Walters, 2011). Students and stakeholders were the ones who determine the quality and performance of educational processes (Brown-Bullock, 2011). The high-performance educational process contributed value to students and stakeholders that could lead to positive

benefits including institutional stability (BPEP, 2012). Learning-centered education was a decisive model that had been strategic in its application in order to be constantly aware of changing needs with the consumer as well as in the marketplace. The Baldrige educational criteria list the key characteristics of learning-centered education. The criteria integrated these key characteristics into quality management principles (Walters, 2011).

The education criteria consider several important education concepts and the specific needs of education organizations. These include the following:

1. The education criteria place a primary focus on teaching and learning because these are the principal goals of education organizations.
2. While the education criteria focus is on student learning for all education organizations, individual organizational missions, roles, and programs will vary for different types of organizations (e.g., primary and secondary schools, trade schools, engineering schools, or teaching and research organizations).
3. Students are the key customers of education organizations, but there may be multiple stakeholders (e.g., parents, employers, other schools and communities).
4. The concept of excellence includes three components: (1) a well-conceived and well-executed assessment strategy; (2) year-to-year improvement in key measures and indicators of performance, especially student learning; and (3) demonstrated leadership in performance and performance improvement relative to comparable organizations and to appropriate benchmarks (BPEP, 2012).
5. Manufacturing, banking and finance, education, management, and consultancy organization extensively benefited from the EFQM excellence model. Companies have applied the EFQM excellence model in the pursuit of business excellence through total quality management which is a decisive factor in allowing them to compete in the global market (EFQM, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

Management theories are concepts surrounding recommended management strategies, which may include tools such as frameworks and guidelines that can be implemented in modern organizations. Managers should be interested in learning management theories because it helps maximize productivity. The concept of quality management tools in theory should help improve the results of student learning outcome assessments. (Corporate Finance Institute, 2020).

Management theory building must include factors responsible for observed patterns and in specific management contexts (Dierksmeier, 2011; Klefsjö, 2010; Prabhu, 2011). The research studied student learning outcome assessment results as factors responsible for observed patterns. The other requirement of management theory building was the specific management context (Prabhu, 2011). The specific management context studied was quality management systems (accreditation) at accredited business schools in higher education.

Pioneers in the field of management contributed new knowledge and built on existing knowledge (Ahire et al., 1996; Dobyns & Crawford-Mason, 1991; Lewis, 2011; Waller & Golhar, 1996; Wyld, 1996). In addition, a few pioneers in the field stand out in management books. Fredric Taylor was considered the father of scientific management. Henri Fayol and Max Weber studied management as a bureaucratic and administrative approach (Lewis, 2011); Frank and Lillian Gilbreth conducted time and motion studies (Chattopadhyay, Ghosh, Maji, Ray & Lahiri, 2012). Mary Parker Follet, Hugo Munsterberg, and Chester Barnard studied management from the humanistic approach (Scott, 2005).

This study is built on this evolutionary foundation of knowledge in the field of quality management. The quality management system at accredited business schools was accreditation. Accreditation provided the specific management context needed to help expand the knowledge in the field of management theory (Dierksmeier, 2011; Klefsjö, 2010; Prabhu, 2011). Therefore, this study was conducted from the context of quality management systems, accreditation applied in business schools. The results could help consolidate knowledge and increase consensus in the field of quality management.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative method study was to determine whether the application of quality management at institutions of higher education resulted in enhanced student learning outcomes assessment results.

Research Question

Q1. Does the application of quality management principles at institutions of higher education enhance student learning assessment results?

Hypotheses

H1. The application of quality management principles at institutions of higher education does not enhance student learning outcomes assessment results. $\mu_1 \neq \mu_2$

H1_a. The application of quality management principles at institutions of higher education enhanced student learning outcomes assessment results. $\mu_1 = \mu_2$

Research Methods and Design

This quantitative methods study was used to evaluate the relationship between quality management and student learning outcome assessment results at institutions of higher education. The research design included primary data from a population of 370 institutions of higher education. The population represented baccalaureate, graduate, associate degree institutions in and outside of the United States. A random sample was selected using a GPower 3.1 computer application. The application tested the difference between two means (matched pairs) to determine the random sample size. A two-tailed test with an effect size of 0.5 and a sigma error probability of .05, a 1-beta error probability of .95, and a critical t of 1.6802300 resulted in a random sample size of 45. The actual power, 0.9512400, produced a total sample size of 45 (Bodnar, 2011). The power analysis from GPower 3.1 required a random sample of 45 to conduct the research.

The random sample generator identified a random sample of 45 institutions. The random sample institutions of higher education provided primary data through self-study reports that were submitted to verify they meet quality management standards. There were two constructs scored for each random sample: Quality management using the process guideline scoring rubric (Appendix A) and student learning outcome assessment results using the results guideline scoring rubric (Appendix B). The two scoring guideline rubrics met the criteria of construct validity and content validity.

The mean of the quality management constructs and the mean of the student learning outcome assessment result constructs for each random sample institution provided scores that were statistically analyzed. The means for quality management were tabulated in one column, using SPSS statistical analysis software and the means for student learning outcome assessment results were tabulated in an adjacent column in the SPSS statistical analysis program. The scoring of the data resulted in ordinal scaled numbers for each construct. The mean of the constructs produced an ordinal number for the variables. Spearman's Rank-Order

correlation was a non-parametric measure of association that used ordinal numbers and was used for this study. Non-parametric measures of bivariate relationships statistically analyzed the results from the data collected. Spearman's Rank-Order correlation was performed on the results from the data collected from the random sample of 45 schools (Zikmund, 1994). The random sample represented the population.

Materials/Instruments

The quantitative effectiveness of the quality management system implemented was scored with a scoring guideline rubric developed by the Baldrige Performance Excellence Programme (BPEP, 2012). BPEP was managed by the American Society for Quality (ASQ) through the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). The process scoring guideline rubric is in Appendix A. Scores from the process scoring guideline rubric reflected the business unit's overall progress and maturity in quality management. The results scoring guideline rubric is in Appendix B. Scores from the results scoring guideline rubric reflected the business unit's overall progress and maturity in student learning outcomes assessment results.

The scoring guideline rubrics meet the criteria of construct validity and content validity. The scoring guideline rubrics established content validity through an agreement among professionals in the field of quality management. The scale accurately reflected what it was supposed to measure, and the content of the scales was adequate (Zikmund, 1994). The theory of quality management as studied through the BPEP provided evidence of construct validity with both scoring rubrics. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient is a useful measure when evaluating monotonic relationships (Piggot-Irvine & Youngs, 2011). The literature review validated the application of Spearman's Rank-Order correlation with similar studies when researching Spearman's rank-ordered correlation with quality management and Spearman's rank-ordered correlation with student learning outcomes (Ruhley & Greenwell, 2012; Wahab & Rahman, 2012).

Data Collection, Processing and Analysis

The population of 370 institutions of higher education with accredited business units was used to gather a random sample of 45 business units using an Excel random sample generator. An Excel spreadsheet documented the 370 institutions with accredited business units. The name of the second column was random number. In the first cell under the heading, the function =RND() was entered. The first cell was copied and pasted into the cells next to the population of 370. Then, the records were sorted by the "random number" column. This produced a random sample.

There were two statistical assumptions for this study. The first assumption was that the data from this study employed an ordinal scale which allowed statistical analysis using Spearman's Rank-Order correlation coefficient (Zikmund, 1994). The data resulted in categories on an ordinal scale that had ordered relationships to each other, but the data did not provide any specific, measurable number of differences (Wang & Dey, 2011). The second statistical assumption was, there was a monotonic relationship between variables. A monotonic relationship exists when the value of one variable increases, the value of the other variable increases or, when the value of one variable decrease while the value of the other variable decreases (Reiss, 2009). Thus, a monotonic relationship was required to use Spearman's Rank-Order correlation.

Results

SPSS statistical software computed the means of the two variables for each of the random sample 45 institutions. The correlation coefficient was subjected to a test of significance at 0.01 level. Therefore, the statistical analysis determined whether the correlations were sufficiently different from chance expectations and not due to random sampling error

(Zikmund, 1994). Non-parametric measures of bivariate relationships statistically analyzed the results from the data collected. SPSS statistical software was used to perform Spearman's Rank-Order correlation on the results from the quantitative data collected from the random sample of 45 schools. Spearman's rank-ordered correlation test resulted in a correlation coefficient of .722. The correlation was significant at the 99% confidence interval or the 0.01 significance level.

The correlation coefficient of .722 showed that it was unlikely that the null hypothesis was true. Table 1, "Spearman's rank-ordered correlation results," provided data that the correlation coefficient was .722. In addition, the statistical analysis provided evidence that the information was significant at the 0.01 level, or 99% confidence interval.

Table 1: Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation Results

Correlations			Student Learning Outcome Results	Quality Management Standards Mean
Spearman's rho	Student Learning Outcome Results	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.722**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	45	45
	Quality Management Standards Mean	Correlation Coefficient	.722**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	45	45

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Evaluation of Findings

The findings produced a correlation coefficient of .722. This positive correlation added data and information to the existing knowledge in management theory by providing evidence that implementing quality management (accreditation) correlates positively to enhanced student learning outcomes assessment results. The correlation coefficient from Spearman's Rank-Order correlation was significant at the 0.01 level. The results of this study show that it is unlikely that the null hypothesis is true. There does appear to be an association between quality management (accreditation) and student learning outcome assessment results. Therefore, the research question was answered. The statistical analysis resulted in high a correlation between the variables associated with the research question. Variables that are not causally related can be statistically related, even though correlation does not indicate causation (Zikmund, 1994).

Implications

There were two other organizations in the United States that were recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) to accredit business degree programs using quality management processes in addition to the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP). The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, International (AACSB) had 694 institutions of higher education that were accredited as of January 2014 according to their website. AACSB was no longer CHEA recognized in 2020. The International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education (IACBE) had 169 institutions of higher education that were accredited as of January 2014 according to their website.

Faculty and staff members must develop, deploy, evaluate, and report robust processes to follow assessment standards and to maintain accreditation (Stivers & Phillips, 2009). Institutions of higher education continued to struggle to identify effective models that allowed them to assess and report effective student learning outcomes (Ohia, 2011). The problem was that there was no standardization, no systematic process, and there was no consistent guidance on how to develop, implement, evaluate, and report student learning outcomes (Gehart, 2011; Kelley, Tong & Beom-Joon Choi 2010; Muñoz, Jaime, McGriff & Molina, 2012; Petropoulou, Vassilikopoulou, & Retalis, 2011; Sidney & Chad, 2010). The theory of why and how quality management (accreditation) worked is related to the principle of synergism. Significant synergism occurred through the linkage and integration of the application of quality management (Deming, 1982). The synergism of quality management (accreditation) enhanced student learning outcome assessment processes.

Recommendations

All business schools, programs, and departments should implement quality management through the employment of accreditation processes. There were 15,731 institutions of higher education that had business programs worldwide in 2014 according to AACSB's business school data guidebook 2014 (Business school data guide, 2014). Between AACSB and ACBSP there were 1064 institutions of higher education that had implemented quality management through accreditation as of February 2014. That was less than 7% worldwide. Therefore, 93% of the institutions of higher education with business programs worldwide could benefit from the results of this study.

There were approximately 1,624 institutions of higher education with business programs in the United States (Business school data guide, 2014). Between AACSB and ACBSP 788 institutions of higher education implemented quality management through accreditation as of February 2014. That was 48.5%. That means that 51% of the institutions of higher education in the United States that had business programs may be able to benefit through the application of quality management. Quality management helped faculty, staff, and administrators at institutions of higher education improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their educational processes. The association with this process of implementing quality management met the needs, and demands, of internal and external stakeholders to provide evidence that students were learning through the process of assessing student learning outcomes.

This study resulted in strong positive correlation coefficients between quality management and student learning outcome assessment processes. Spearman's rank-ordered correlation was .722 and significant at the 0.01 level. The recommendations for future research were to expand the study to higher samples sizes per population segment. The population of 370 institutions of higher education that ACBSP accredited business programs included diverse missions and segments of higher education. Some of the institutions of higher education were private, public, for-profit, associate degree, baccalaureate degree, and located in 52 different countries. An opportunity exists to study these different segments of higher education to determine performance associated with quality management and student learning outcome assessment.

The results for associate degree institutions and institutions outside the United States did not provide evidence of the correlation between quality management and student learning outcome assessment. This may have been a result of the small sample size. The random sample size for this study was 45 as determined by power analysis conducted using GPower 3.1 computer application software. An opportunity exists to conduct a study that will methodologically provide empirical evidence answering the research question and hypothesis, or similar research questions or hypotheses to the ones studied in this research since the study of correlation and association cannot be used to determine causation.

Conclusions

This study resulted in strong positive correlation coefficients between quality management and student learning outcome assessment processes. Spearman's Rank-Order correlation was .722 and significant at the 0.01 level. As a result, it was recommended that all business schools, programs, and departments implement quality management through the employment of accreditation processes. This research study provided statistical evidence that the application of quality management principles at institutions of higher education with accredited business programs did result in the association with enhanced student learning outcomes assessment processes. The research question was answered from the data collected and statistically analyzed utilizing bivariate analyses, measures of association, statistical techniques. Spearman's Rank-Order correlation coefficient was significant at the 0.01 level providing confirmation that it is unlikely that the null hypothesis was true.

This study fulfilled the need for more information about the influence that quality management systems had on performance outcomes such as student learning, student retention, and graduation rates in higher education (Elmuti et al., 1996). Researchers concluded that quality management principles and concepts were beneficial to institutions of higher education (Emiliani, 2005; Imran & Mahmood, 2011).

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Appendixes

Appendix A – Process Scoring Guidelines (For use with Categories 1–6)

SCORE	DESCRIPTION
0% or 5%	<p>No systematic approach to item requirements is evident; information is anecdotal. (A)</p> <p>Little or no deployment of any systematic approach is evident. (D)</p> <p>An improvement orientation is not evident; improvement is achieved by reacting to problems. (L)</p> <p>No organizational alignment is evident; individual areas or work units operate independently. (I)</p>
10%, 15%, 20%, 25% or	<p>The beginning of a systematic approach to the basic requirements of the item is evident. (A)</p> <p>The approach is in the early stages of deployment in most areas or work units, inhibiting progress in achieving the basic requirements of the item. (D)</p> <p>Early stages of a transition from reacting to problems to a general improvement orientation are evident. (L)</p> <p>The approach is aligned with other areas or work units largely through joint problem-solving. (I)</p>
30%, 35%, 40%, 45% or	<p>An effective, systematic approach, responsive to the basic requirements of the item, is evident. (A)</p> <p>The approach is deployed, although some areas or work units are in early stages of deployment. (D)</p> <p>The beginning of a systematic approach to evaluation and improvement of key processes is evident. (L)</p> <p>The approach is in the early stages of alignment with the basic organizational needs identified in response to the Organizational Profile and other process items. (I)</p>

50%, 55%, 60%, or 65%	<p>An effective, systematic approach, responsive to the overall requirements of the item, is evident. (A)</p> <p>The approach is well deployed, although deployment may vary in some areas or work units. (D)</p> <p>A fact-based, systematic evaluation and improvement process and some organizational learning, including innovation, are in place for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of key processes. (L)</p> <p>The approach is aligned with your overall organizational needs as identified in response to the Organizational Profile and other process items. (I)</p>
70%, 75%, 80%, or 85%	<p>An effective, systematic approach, responsive to the multiple requirements of the item, is evident. (A)</p> <p>The approach is well deployed, with no significant gaps. (D)</p> <p>Fact-based, systematic evaluation and improvement and organizational learning, including innovation, are key management tools; there is clear evidence of refinement as a result of organizational-level analysis and sharing. (L)</p> <p>The approach is integrated with your current and future organizational needs as identified in response to the Organizational Profile and other process items. (I)</p>
90%, 95%, or 100%	<p>An effective, systematic approach, fully responsive to the multiple requirements of the item, is evident. (A)</p> <p>The approach is fully deployed without significant weaknesses or gaps in any areas or work units. (D)</p> <p>Fact-based, systematic evaluation and improvement and organizational learning through innovation are key organization-wide tools; refinement and innovation, backed by analysis and sharing, are evident throughout the organization. (L)</p> <p>The approach is well integrated with your current and future organizational needs as identified in response to the Organizational Profile and other process items. (I)</p>

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Appendix B – Results Scoring Guidelines (For use with Category 7)

SCORE	DESCRIPTION
0% or 5%	<p>There are no organizational performance results, or the results reported are poor. (Le)</p> <p>Trend data either are not reported or show mainly adverse trends. (T)</p> <p>Comparative information is not reported. (C)</p> <p>Results are not reported for any areas of importance to the accomplishment of your organization’s mission. (I)</p>

10%, 15%, 20%, or 25%	<p>A few organizational performance results are reported, responsive to the basic requirements of the item, and early good performance levels are evident. (Le)</p> <p>Some trend data are reported, with some adverse trends evident. (T)</p> <p>Little or no comparative information is reported. (C)</p> <p>Results are reported for a few areas of importance to the accomplishment of your organization's mission. (I)</p>
30%, 35%, 40%, or 45%	<p>Good organizational performance levels are reported, responsive to the basic requirements of the item. (Le)</p> <p>Some trend data are reported, and most of the trends presented are beneficial. (T)</p> <p>Early stages of obtaining comparative information are evident. (C)</p> <p>Results are reported for many areas of importance to the accomplishment of your organization's mission. (I)</p>
50%, 55%, 60%, or 65%	<p>Good organizational performance levels are reported, responsive to the overall requirements of the item. (Le)</p> <p>Beneficial trends are evident in areas of importance to the accomplishment of your organization's mission. (T)</p> <p>Some current performance levels have been evaluated against relevant comparisons and/or benchmarks and show areas of good relative performance. (C)</p> <p>Organizational performance results are reported for most key customer, market, and process requirements. (I)</p>
70%, 75%, 80%, or 85%	<p>Good-to-excellent organizational performance levels are reported, responsive to the multiple requirements of the item. (Le)</p> <p>Beneficial trends have been sustained over time in most areas of importance to the accomplishment of your organization's mission. (T)</p> <p>Many to most trends and current performance levels have been evaluated against relevant comparisons and/or benchmarks and show areas of leadership and very good relative performance. (C)</p> <p>Organizational performance results are reported for most key customer, market, process, and action plan requirements. (I)</p>
90%, 95%, or 100%	<p>Excellent organizational performance levels are reported that are fully responsive to the multiple requirements of the item. (Le)</p> <p>Beneficial trends have been sustained over time in all areas of importance to the accomplishment of your organization's mission. (T)</p> <p>Industry and benchmark leadership is demonstrated in many areas. (C)</p> <p>Organizational performance results and projections are reported for most key customer, market, process, and action plan requirements. (I)</p>

Chapter 5

Creation and Early Years of CHEA

Peter Ewell

Introduction

This chapter recounts the short history of the National Policy Board on Institutional Accreditation (NPB), the organization from which the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) evolved. The NPB was created in response to the failure of previous attempts to coordinate accreditation and a set of draconian proposals affecting accreditation set out in the 1992 Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA). The policy and higher education environment surrounding the creation and history of the NPB, as well as some significant ideas about how to change accreditation that the NPB advocated, and that were occasionally adopted over the subsequent twenty-five years, had a considerable influence on the kind of organization that CHEA became. It should be acknowledged that many of these ideas are related more fully in other writings (such as Ewell, 2015).

The immediate background to the creation of the NPB was the Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA), whose provisions came close to abolishing institutional accreditation's role as part of the so-called "Triad" of oversight over institutional eligibility for federal funds established in the original Higher Education Act of 1965. The Triad consisted of the federal government, the states, and institutional accreditation. Convinced that academic accreditation and the independence of the nation's colleges and universities were threatened, the heads of the (then) nine regional accreditation commissions and seven national higher education associations established the NPB in June 1993 to consider accreditation alternatives for the future (Ewell, 1994). Over the course of five face-to-face meetings and a national conference sponsored by the Education Commission of the States (ECS) and the Johnson Foundation at Wingspread, members of the NPB decided to propose a new organization, The Higher Education Accreditation Board (Education Commission of the States, 1994). This national body would protect institutional independence and advance the public interest by:

- Defining common institutional eligibility requirements describing the essential characteristics of institutions seeking membership in accreditation entities.
- Establishing a recognition function for all institutional accreditation entities based on a common set of standards.
- Encouraging member institutions and accrediting agencies to provide substantive public reports on the results of their reviews of institutions.
- Establishing a board with a majority of public members and heavy representation by institutional chief executive officers to govern the HEAB.
- Working through 1994, the NPB came up with several innovative ideas on the future shape of institutional accreditation. As described in subsequent sections of this chapter, a number of these proposals survived beyond the creation of CHEA and are still being talked about today.

Prior Attempts to Re-organize Accreditation

The development of accreditation in America was essentially unplanned and produced many instances of duplication and unanticipated difficulty. As a result, efforts to coordinate accreditation on a national basis arose almost from the beginning. The first was the National

Conference Committee on Standards established in 1906 to provide a liaison for all entities setting “educational standards” (Zook & Haggerty, 1936). This function was taken over by the American Council for Education (ACE), which held a “standardizing” conference in 1922 that included accrediting organizations like the North Central and Southern Associations of Colleges and Schools, but also such players as American Association of Universities and the University of California. Part of the motive here was to establish aligned definitions of the meaning of accreditation and to publish unified lists of accrediting organizations, the institutions they recognized and their standards. These lists are still published today.

The next effort at national coordination emerged in 1949 when the six major presidential associations representing different types of institutions in Washington, DC formed the National Commission on Accrediting. This organization represented institutions and associations of higher education and was intended to lessen the institutional burden of accreditation by eliminating duplication among accreditors and streamlining the accreditation process. The effort was aimed primarily at programmatic accreditors, and its ultimate goal was to subsume their activities under the regional associations. But drawing on the resources of their powerful professional associations, programmatic accreditors were able to hold their own against the National Commission and nothing much changed as a result (Bloland, 2001).

Meanwhile, the regional accreditation organizations came together to create the National Committee of Regional Accrediting Agencies to coordinate their activities and to try to limit the proliferation of accrediting organizations. In 1964, this organization became the Federation of Regional Accrediting Commissions of Higher Education (FRACHE). While its members espoused early hopes about standardizing procedures, the Federation was also not very successful in stimulating change. This was primarily because the individual regionals enjoyed their autonomy and wanted to preserve it. After the passage of the HEA of 1965, efforts to strengthen and coordinate accreditation were renewed. The Puffer Report (Puffer, 1970), commissioned by FRACHE, called for creation of a strong national association on accreditation to try to achieve what the National Commission on Accrediting had been unable to do – to centralize all accrediting functions under the regional associations. It was not until 1975, however, that an attempt to do this occurred when the National Commission and FRACHE merged to create the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA). By this time, FRACHE had incorporated private career accreditors into its membership.

COPA’s aims were ambitious and comprehensive (Bloland, 2001). It was supposed to serve as a voice for accreditation nationally, conduct research on accreditation and quality assurance and engage in professional development activities for accrediting staff. At the same time, it was supposed to solve the original political difficulties raised 25 years before: differences between programmatic and institutional accreditors, and the burden of accreditation on institutions. A core function was to independently recognize accrediting organizations against an established set of standards, a process that would hopefully encourage accreditation practices that were more helpful to institutions.

With unclear purposes and with conflicts between different types of accreditors among its members, COPA struggled with its coordination role, although it provided valuable professional development services for accreditors (Bloland, 2001). Institutions remained free to seek whatever programmatic accreditations they liked and, despite presidential desires to limit its influence, they continued to allow their programs to seek it. Presidential associations and programmatic accreditors – both stakeholders and constituents of COPA – regularly clashed. The regional accrediting organizations with jurisdiction over not-for-profit higher education institutions were upset with COPA for including the accreditors of for-profit institutions. Moreover, none of these stakeholders felt that COPA was fulfilling its role as a national representative of accreditation in Washington. Passage by Congress of the draconian accountability amendments to the HEA in the Reauthorization of 1992 provided strong evidence that they were right. Acting finally on a frequently expressed desire to pull out, the

regionals announced their intention to leave COPA in early 1993, and its Board of Directors dissolved the organization at the end of that year.

The demise of COPA stopped the immediate conflict but did nothing to solve the underlying coordination problem. Because many leaders in higher education felt it was important to continue a national recognition function distinct from that of the federal government, an interim organization to discharge this responsibility was created by the COPA Board as one of its last acts. This was the Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation (CORPA). The Washington-based presidential associations and the leaders of the regional accrediting organizations also realized that some kind of national coordination among accrediting organizations was still needed, so they agreed to establish a new organization, the National Policy Board on Higher Education Institutional Accreditation (NPB). This was the organization that subsequently evolved into CHEA.

The NPB's Policy Proposals

In its relatively brief existence, the NPB developed and promulgated several policy proposals to reform institutional accreditation that remain of interest today. Indeed, some of these have actually been enacted in one form or another. They included the following:

Multiple Levels of Accreditation

Traditionally, institutional accreditation has only had one level of recognition: an institution is either accredited or it is not. In contrast, one of the most prominent of the NPB's proposals was to establish three tiers of accredited status – baseline, institutional improvement and demonstration of excellence (Education Commission of the States, 1994). Institutions would be required to achieve baseline (Level 1) recognition to continue to be eligible for receipt of federal funds and would demonstrate fulfillment of baseline requirements through a set of published criteria and quantitative performance indicators. Institutional improvement (Level 2) requirements would require institutions to demonstrate that they engaged in a range of good practices consistent with high-quality undergraduate instruction including the establishment of common student learning outcomes like oral/written communications, critical thinking and quantitative reasoning and assessing their graduates against these outcomes. In defining the characteristics of a Level 2 institution, NPB emphasized that it would be a “learning organization” capable of setting a limited number of clearly stated community purposes and values, established and effective mechanisms for assessing needs and monitoring key processes, and possessing clear organizational incentives for initiating informed action based on the information generated by these mechanisms (Ewell, 1994). Finally, demonstration of excellence (Level 3) requirements would be granted rarely, only for institutions that could unambiguously demonstrate that they and their graduates performed far above their peers in all these dimensions.

Because loss of accreditation is an outcome that few institutions can survive because it means that they cannot access federal funds, accreditors are understandably reluctant to deny it entirely, as they must under an all-or-nothing system. Accredited status, moreover, conveys very little information to anyone interested in institutional condition or performance. If a review finds that an institution is better at some things than at others, there is no way to convey that information. Finally, many institutions are far above minimum levels of compliance and are reluctant to invest much in the accreditation process because it does not benefit them greatly.

One way to address these issues is to establish a multi-level accreditation system under which institutions could earn higher levels through exemplary performance or could be simultaneously rated on several dimensions, as originally proposed by the NPB. Multi-level institutional rating schemes are not uncommon in quality assurance systems elsewhere in the world. For example, the institutional audit process in the U.K. at one time rated colleges and

universities on the “level of confidence” the review indicates in their internal quality processes (QAA, 2002). This practice resembles bond ratings like those provided by Moody’s Investors Service in the financial world – a popular analogy that is cited frequently in the literature on higher education quality assurance (e.g., Ewell, Wellman, and Paulson, 1997).

Assigning multiple levels of accreditation would clearly provide more information about quality to the public and would likely stimulate the engagement of institutions and programs that are well above minimum standards. Indeed, it is hard to conceive of a well-known institution or program with an established reputation for “quality” simply “taking a pass” under such a scheme. Another approach might be for accrediting organizations to develop additional elective review processes, offered on a fee basis on various topics, which institutions could undertake in addition to their basic review. Successful performance would result in an additional certification that might well be of value to the institution – much as the Malcolm C. Baldrige National Quality Award or ISO9001 Certification are of value to corporations. For example, additional in-depth certifications of good practice might be developed in several broad areas of institutional functioning such as finance, quality of general education programming, or student support. This would provide a kind of parallel to programmatic accreditation in the disciplines.

To a certain extent, it can be claimed that a multi-tiered system already exists behaviorally, embodied in the actions that accreditors take in the wake of a review. Some, for example, extend accreditation for varying periods of time or require focused visits or special reports, under particular circumstances. But such existing “distinctions” among levels of accredited status are invisible to the public. Formally recognizing and rationalizing such distinctions might be a palatable first step towards a multi-tiered approach to accreditation.

Increased Public Disclosure

When the NPB was created, the only piece of information that an accreditor typically disclosed about the accreditation process was whether or not the institution was accredited. In contrast, another NPB proposal was to create a mechanism for making public some accreditation results beyond the simple declaration of an institution’s accredited status. This would entail creating standard narrative reports around a common set of performance criteria written in such a way that they could be easily understood by policymakers and the public. These reports would be widely disseminated under the imprimatur of the HEAB as a regular part of the accreditation cycle.

As noted, until recently, accreditors did not provide much information on the results of institutional reviews other than whether or not the institution under review maintained its accredited status. But much of this has changed in recent years because many institutional accreditors are making the results of reviews more publicly accessible. Yet transparency remains a challenge for a variety of reasons. One is the general public perception that accreditation is a somewhat shadowy and secretive activity in which only academic insiders can participate. A second more legitimate concern is that confidentiality is important to the accreditation process because it encourages institutions to honestly report their shortcomings. If all of the results of a review – including negative findings – were disclosed to the public, institutions might be inclined to conceal their weaknesses.

A number of mechanisms can be used to further extend public reporting. The first is for the accreditor itself to develop a short public report that provides information about the results of each review in terms of its findings. This might be organized in terms of specific findings associated with each accreditation standard or, more preferably, in the form of a list of institutional strengths and areas of concern. Several regional accreditors have already done this. The second approach is to require institutions themselves to post-accreditation results on their websites. In addition, most regional accreditors are requiring institutions to disclose other information relevant to the accreditation process such as financial information, cost of

attendance, retention/graduation statistics, graduate or job placement information, and learning outcomes statements, together with associated performance on student learning assessments. These developments reinforce the conclusion that this original NPB policy proposal is well on the way to being adopted today.

Consistency of Language

An associated issue is consistency of language. Although the seven regional accrediting commissions have evolved roughly similar review processes, the language in which they communicate these central components is distinctive to each organization (Gaston, 2014; Ewell, 2008). For example, statements of the fundamental expectations that accreditors have established for an institution to be accredited are usually termed “accreditation standards” but are also called “criteria,” “requirements,” or “commitments.” This reflects the fact that these organizations have a long history of independent evolution and have had no compelling imperative to develop a standard terminology. This lack of linguistic consistency across accreditors has both perceptual and practical implications. With regard to the former, higher education’s stakeholders find this lack of comparability confusing because it is not clear whether or not different accreditors using different labels are referring to the same institutional characteristics or areas of performance, or something different. At the practical level, meanwhile, lack of a common language means that it is not clear that institutions are being held to equivalent standards of performance across accreditors. They may be, but without definitional clarity, it is hard to tell.

This challenge is particularly apparent in the critical arena of student learning outcomes. All institutional accreditors have established broad lists of proficiencies that the graduates of accredited institutions are supposed to possess. But the language and contents of these statements differ across accreditors, and they are not very precise or well specified in any case. This makes it hard for higher education’s stakeholders to know what a given award actually means with respect to what its recipients actually know or can do. It also provides accreditors themselves with little guidance in what they should be looking for when they examine the quality of student learning.

Possible approaches to addressing this challenge can be pursued at multiple levels. The most basic is for accreditors to establish a common vocabulary for describing some of the most basic aspects of the institutional accreditation process. This should embrace what to call the statements of expectations against which institutions will be reviewed (e.g., “standards”), the document(s) or presentations submitted as evidence that these expectations are met (e.g., “self-study”), statements of what degree recipients should know and be able to do (e.g., “student learning outcomes”), and the actions taken as a result of a review (e.g., “warning”). It is gratifying that progress has been made on the last of these with the recent adoption of common terminology on accreditation actions on the part of C-RAC (C-RAC, 2014). Similar progress to encourage accreditors to agree on terminology on the rest of the list above could be encouraged by NACIQI and CHEA through their ongoing agency recognition processes and, over the long term, in changes to the language of Part H, Section 496, (a) of the HEOA.

Common Core Goals

At a deeper level, accreditors can be encouraged to voluntarily align the substance of what they examine during a review, especially in the realm of student learning outcomes. Indeed, one of the pioneering efforts of the NPB was to propose a common list of graduate proficiencies that all accreditors should demand. These included:

- high-level communications, computational, technological literacy, and informational abilities
- the ability to arrive at informed judgments

- the ability to function in a global community
- a range of attitudes and dispositions including flexibility and adaptability, comfort with diversity, initiative, motivation and persistence, creativity and resourcefulness, and ability to work with others.

Consistent with this, accreditors should be encouraged to map or otherwise justify their own core expectations for institutions with respect to learning outcomes to some kind of external reference point like the DQP or AAC&U's LEAP outcomes. The former has undergone a good deal of experimentation by institutions including the involvement of four of the seven regional accreditors and the latter are frequently voluntarily referenced and used by institutions in the course of their accreditation reviews. In both, institutions are encouraged to add or modify proficiency statements consistent with their mission and student clientele. Adoption of an aligned frame of reference of this kind with respect to student learning is very close to what the regional accreditors already have in substance, if not terminology (Nichols, 2004), and would strengthen the public transparency and credibility of institutional accreditation.

Standard Statistical Performance Measures

A final potential change related to public reporting recommended by the NPB was increased use of standard statistical performance measures. Institutional accreditors currently ask for many kinds of evidence in the course of a review including documents, visiting team observations, and quantitative measures of institutional condition and performance. The first two of these cannot, and should not, be prescribed because accreditors need the flexibility to develop lines of evidence based on differing institutional missions and differing issues facing each institution under review. The case for distinctiveness is less clear for quantitative measures of institutional condition and performance such as undergraduate retention/graduation rates and ratios of financial condition that many accreditors require institutions to produce as part of the annual reporting process. While all accreditors now require such statistics, they are not defined consistently across accreditors, except for those statistics – like cohort graduation rates for first-time, full-time students – that are already defined by the federal government. The statistics that are included in these annual reports, moreover, are mostly descriptive and few are focused on institutional outcomes.

Lack of consistency across accreditors with respect to quantitative measures has long been a source of complaint by institutions – especially when they are compelled to recalculate commonly used measures to fit the specific definitions required by different actors (e.g., accreditors and states). This discontent has resulted in at least two attempts to create a set of standard definitions for the measures used in accreditation. The first was produced in 1985 for the now defunct Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA) and proposed commonly defined measures in four areas – program or institutional descriptors, resources, utilization of resources, and outcomes (Christal and Jones, 1985). The second was published in 2000 and proposed commonly defined measures in the areas of institutional and program descriptors, faculty/staff resources, facilities, equipment and information resources, fiscal resources and activities, admissions, students and enrollments, and outputs (NCHEMS, 2000).

So, if action were to be taken to align the quantitative measures used in accreditation, there are certainly resources on which to draw. In many ways more important, some institutional accreditors are beginning to require the use of a small set of institutional performance indicators in the institutional review process. For example, the WASC Senior Commission and the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) both require consideration of institutional retention and graduation rates in their newly adopted institutional review processes. This makes it all the more important that such measures be consistently defined. The specific proposal here is that a standard array (“dashboard”) of 10 to 12 performance indicators be developed for common use in the accreditation process. At minimum, these should address retention/completion and graduate placement (in further study and in employment) appropriately disaggregated by gender, race/ethnicity and other relevant student

characteristics; financial condition and performance; student/faculty ratios or other productivity statistics such as credit hour generation; and investments in equipment and the maintenance of physical plant. Most state higher education agencies collect such statistics for public institutions and accreditors should be encouraged to research these and/or collaborate with states in their regions in developing such measures.

The resulting “performance dashboards” might then be reviewed and commented on by panels of expert third-party reviewers as a number of regional accreditors have already begun to do in the realm of financial measures. Extending this practice might free up expensive on-site peer reviewer time to devote to the main focus of undergraduate teaching and learning. Going further and consistent with earlier points about assessing and setting standards on a limited set of student learning outcomes, accreditors should set appropriate benchmarks or thresholds on such measures as graduation rates. As some of accreditation’s most prominent critics have pointed out, it is hard to defend the accreditation status of institutions with six-year cohort graduation rates of 5% or less (Carey, 2013).

Professional Review Teams

The NPB also envisioned an accreditation system that was much more prescribed than the established array of voluntary organizations using peer review. Instead, it proposed the use of professional external reviewers specifically trained for the job, who were not necessarily drawn from institutions. It also suggested that reviews themselves be more tightly scripted and driven by established methods and protocols. Both these were in some contrast to established accreditation methods. Peer review is central to accreditation as it is currently practiced in the U.S. and there are many reasons why this should remain the case.

The strongest case for review by peers is that they can bring to bear considerable expertise, drawn from experience, about what a “high-quality” institution of higher education ought to look like. When the array of institutions under review was fairly homogeneous – as it was until the 1980s – this was a powerful argument. A related argument is that peer review provides a visible embodiment of the assumption of collective responsibility for self-governance owed by any profession that serves society. An approach based on peer review is also fairly cheap, at least with respect to direct cost. The bulk of the time invested by peer reviewers is contributed service as the regionals pay reviewers only nominal sums to undertake substantial commitments examining materials and visiting campuses. Alternative quality assurance systems based on professional reviewers, as are typical in other countries, must invest heavily in personnel costs and the costs associated with the development of review infrastructures.

Though arguably well suited to an age when U.S. higher education was smaller and more homogeneous, at least two changes in the environment within which it must operate pose escalating challenges to accreditation’s heavy dependence on peer review. The first is technical: judging the quality of colleges and universities appropriately today requires levels of knowledge about important topics that typical peer reviewers do not possess. The second is political: in the age of heightened accountability, a process based on peer review looks like an inherent conflict of interest because those who judge performance are drawn from the community that is being judged. Together, these challenges have combined to yield a number of specific drawbacks of peer review that are becoming ever more apparent.

Accrediting organizations do take pains to match the characteristics of peer reviewers with those of the institutions that they will be asked to examine. But colleges and universities have become sufficiently complex organizations that it is difficult to find random members of the academic community who really understand how they function. Lack of technical background and expertise possessed by peer reviewers is even more acute in specific areas of institutional functioning like interpreting and acting on disaggregated graduation and retention data or evidence about the achievement of student learning outcomes. As these topics become ever more prominent in accreditation, accreditors are struggling to find peer reviewers in their

regions with the requisite background to examine them. Part of the reason for this condition is that peer reviewers in U.S. accreditation receive relatively little dedicated training on how to conduct a review compared to the reviewers and auditors who staff quality assurance processes in other countries. Although this is beginning to change, most visiting team members only attend a day-long (or even half a day) orientation session before being deployed for review. This contrasts with the multi-day (and occasionally as long as a week) training regimens experienced by quality auditors in Europe or Australasia.

Some observers have claimed that peer review's significant deficiencies render it unsuitable as a quality assurance tool. But dropping it would go too far because, done well, peer review has much to contribute to both the practice of accreditation and the public perceptions of professional self-regulation on which widespread trust in the academy depends. Instead, calling on institutions and accrediting organizations to take specific steps to improve the peer review process – to “discipline” it, if you will – might help alleviate its most prominent deficiencies (Ewell, 2012). A first step here, as argued earlier, might be to carefully examine what peer reviewers are good at and what they are not, with an eye towards off-loading the latter topics to expert panels. An additional step might be directed at increasing staff presence in on-site reviews to ensure that team deliberations are focused on the right issues and to provide on-site technical assistance.

In sum, peer review as a central feature of institutional accreditation in the U.S. has vociferous supporters and critics. Taking a balanced position is more advisable. Peer reviewers are good at some things and not very good at others. Accreditors should leave such processes undisturbed in the former and look for promising “professional” alternatives in the latter.

Protocol Driven Review Processes

Turning to the actual conduct of review, the current way in which accreditation reviews are undertaken has been in place for more than sixty years, having been established during what has been termed the “golden age” of accreditation (Ewell, 2008). One pillar of this approach, as described above, is peer review of the institution's self-study followed by a multi-day site visit by a team of peer reviewers. How this team spends its time during the site visit, moreover, is remarkably standard and circumscribed. Most of it is allocated to approximately hour-long group interviews involving two or more team members asking questions of a set of campus representatives who usually represent a common function (for example, a group of department chairs, student affairs professionals, or finance and budget staff). Any balance of the remaining time is supposed to be devoted to examining documents assembled by the institution in a team room that include such exhibits as financial records, course syllabi, strategic plans and associated implementation documents, and minutes of various councils and committees. Team discussions leading to an accreditation decision (if this is the team's function in any case) usually occur hurriedly over meals or late into the night. Some of these tools for gathering additional evidence include:

- ***Mini surveys:*** Consisting of only a few closed-ended questions, postcard-sized surveys can be effectively used in large group meetings to quickly gather opinions about the issues facing an institution. If the results can be tabulated quickly, the group's distribution of opinion on these issues can be used by team-member facilitators to shape a meaningful group discussion. This contrasts with the usual way such group meetings are conducted, which is simply to let those with a grievance air it.

Focus groups: Most accrediting teams, as noted, conduct group interviews with representatives of institutions and programs in various roles. But these are frequently unstructured and are not deliberately designed to answer questions thought out in advance. Consumer and market researchers, in contrast, have developed focus group techniques that are capable of determining the answers to much more sophisticated questions with far greater

consistency and reliability than those generally asked by accreditation teams. Written protocols for conducting such interviews can also be helpful in achieving these ends.

Audit Methods: Quality assessment of higher education in most of the English-speaking world adopted the so-called “audit” method in the 1990s (Dill, 2000). Modeled on the familiar method of a financial audit and designed principally to determine whether established quality assurance processes are being followed as they were designed, the method consists of choosing at random a few examples of the process – perhaps in a particular program or term – and following “audit trails” through a review of actual documents and files. Audit methods were also the central feature of one of the most prominent analyses of how institutional accreditation might be improved (Graham, Lyman, & Trow, 1995).

Field Observation: The disciplines of anthropology and organizational behavior have evolved a range of field observation methods for extracting useful information about how a society or organization is working, based on unobtrusive observation. Techniques applicable to accreditation site visits may include counting the numbers of people doing things in particular settings (e.g., traffic at the registrar’s office, including service speed and lines, how students appear to be using the library, etc.), listening to group interactions at meetings or reading bulletin boards. Most accrediting teams spend most of their time listening to people rather than looking at things. It may pay, in contrast, to have one member of a team that is devoted to intentional “walking around” instead.

The lack of appropriate tools available to review teams is perhaps more serious when it comes to achieving team consensus about its conclusions. General opinion is sometimes dominated by the views of the chair or a few strong individuals, so decision aids that can help overcome this tendency in order to mobilize and discuss *all* of the evidence that the team has uncovered can be helpful. Group aids to decision-making frequently used in corporate strategic planning, such as nominal group technique or multiple voting, can be helpful here. So can detailed templates about how teams should structure their time together. In short, lack of appropriate tools, together with training in how to use them, is perhaps the single biggest drawback to the effective conduct of accreditation reviews under the current U.S. approach. And this condition could be remedied without significant shakeups in the current role and scope of regional or professional accreditors.

Reorganization by Sector Instead of Geographic Region

Historically, accreditation for not-for-profit institutions (both public and independent) has been organized by geographic region, the original basis on which their parent associations were founded. Indeed, the six regions and seven commissions developed incrementally and independently, with the first created in the 1880s and the last in the early 20th century. In contrast, the NPB considered reforming the organizational structure of not-for-profit institutional accreditation by institutional sectors. In an age increasingly influenced by distance delivery of instruction, members felt that geographic representation was no longer relevant. Instead, they proposed, institutions should be organized for recognition purposes by type – for example, major research universities, regional universities, four-year undergraduate institutions, and community colleges.

On the face of it, the idea has some merits. Many now argue that in a postsecondary instructional space that increasingly transcends “brick and mortar” institutions, geographic location has become irrelevant. And there are some types of institutions – major national research universities, community colleges, and certain special-purpose institutions – for which a persuasive argument can be made for such an approach. But as soon as accreditation by institutional type is seriously examined in the light of today’s rapidly changing postsecondary environment, significant difficulties become apparent. Increasing numbers of two-year institutions now grant bachelor’s degrees – a fact that makes the distinction between two-year and senior commissions increasingly awkward. At the other end of the scale, recent

changes in membership in the Association of American Universities (AAU) demonstrate how difficult it is to maintain boundaries based on a fixed set of institutional characteristics (Lederman and Nelson, 2011). The vast majority of institutions in the U.S., moreover, lie somewhere in the middle, where boundaries between institutional types are far more difficult to establish and maintain.

Admittedly, however, the current accreditation regions are not rationally constituted and contain radically different numbers of institutions. The North Central region, for example, includes nineteen states, two of which border Mexico and the Western Association embraces just two states as well as a number of Pacific territories. The largest regional accreditor has review responsibility for more than 1300 institutions and the smallest for fewer than 200. One only addresses two-year institutions and the rest accredit all kinds of institutions. (An eighth, recently defunct, also only addressed two-year institutions.) These differences in scope evolved by happenstance over many years; as the report of an ACE task force convened about a dozen years ago put it, “the current regional basis of accreditation is probably not the way America would structure [quality assurance] if starting from scratch (ACE, 2012, p.18).”

This current approach to defining geographic scope has two drawbacks, one perceptual and one practical. The perceptual problem is that this peculiar assignment of review responsibilities geographically and with respect to type of institution is one of many things that currently impede public and stakeholder understanding of what accreditors do. The fact that New Mexico and Arizona are in the “north central” region seems strange to the casual observer, and the distinction between two-year and four-year institutions in the Western region means that otherwise integrated institutions like the University of Hawaii System must deal with two different accreditors. The less apparent practical drawback is that the widely divergent numbers of institutions that each regional accreditor is responsible for reviewing cannot help but affect the level of attention that a given accreditor is able to devote to a given institution. For example, some regionals send members of staff on every site visit, while others only occasionally do so. And some commissions act as a committee of the whole in making accreditation decisions, while others rely on a decentralized decision-making approach because they must examine and pass judgment on so many institutions.

On reflection, the decision of the ACE task force to recommend leaving the geographic basis of regional accreditation intact appears wise. But this does not mean that nothing can change. In fact, the geographic scopes of regional accreditors *have* changed in the past for a variety of historical reasons. For example, the North Central region originally encompassed ten states in contrast to its current nineteen, and Arkansas began as a state in the Southern accreditation region but passed to the North Central region in the 1920s (Ewell, 2008). So, there is nothing to prevent regional accreditors from revising their geographic scopes if persuasive public benefits for doing so are made clear. New rulings from the Department of Education now also permit institutional accreditors to accredit colleges and universities that are located outside their former regions. A second potential avenue is to harness a developing “marketplace” for accreditation for institutions that have a choice of accreditors. For example, a large for-profit distance education provider recently changed its accreditor from the Higher Learning Commission of the NCA to the WASC Senior Commission.

Of course, there is also a down-side to creating a competitive marketplace for institutional accreditation: institutions may naturally seek accreditors with the least rigorous requirements, initiating an unproductive “race to the bottom” with respect to standards. But this can be avoided by encouraging accreditors to develop distinctive niches for some of their processes based on qualities that institutions will genuinely want to pursue. Because of their long and established histories, the respective geographic scopes of institutional accreditors will be hard to change, which is why adopting a long-term, incremental, and voluntary perspective is important. But current accreditors and policy bodies can play a key role in promoting incremental change by re-examining the current scopes of recognized accreditors

to promote more rational regional boundaries and to increase positive and beneficial competition among accreditors for institutional members.

The Fate of the NPB and Creation of CHEA

In spite of these creative reform proposals and the achievement of considerable consensus, much of the urgency that spurred the creation of the NPB seemed to be gone by 1995. A new Congress, under the leadership of Newt Gingrich of Georgia and the banner of “A Contract with America” was elected in 1994 and immediately rolled back most of the most draconian elements of the 1992 reauthorization. And absent the need for bold action to reform self-regulation, institutional leaders became less engaged. Partly as a result, opposition to the NPB’s proposal for a strong new national organization on accreditation developed and was particularly apparent among the leadership of independent institutions. As Robert Atwell, President of the American Council on Education (ACE) and one of the founders of the NPB aptly put it, “People saw this thing as national, Washington, bad.” A decision was made to change course by turning over responsibility for the design of a national coordinating organization to a working group of presidents. Over the next two years, this group established the main features of what became the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), and the new organization was launched in 1996. CHEA today has three main purposes that in part reflect the circumstances surrounding its creation.

The first, advocacy, is discharged by serving as a primary national voice for representing accreditation. This purpose is clearly consistent with the activities of the NPB which created a national platform for advocacy in the Higher Education Accrediting Board (HEAB). The second purpose, service, is visible in the organization’s work in compiling databases and directories of accrediting organizations and accredited institutions and programs, supporting conferences and meetings, and conducting research on accreditation and quality assurance. The NPB accomplished some of this, building on the work of prior organizations like COPA and FRACHE, but was less successful in doing so than in its two other functions. The third purpose, recognition, is fulfilled by serving as the only nongovernmental organization that examines and recognizes accrediting organizations. This purpose was also originally envisaged by NPB in the form of a recognition function performed by HEAB against a common set of standards and eligibility requirements.

At the same time, there are purposes and activities that CHEA has undertaken in its quarter-century history that were not explicitly called for by the NPB. As already noted, one of these is providing resources and technical assistance to accrediting organizations. CHEA now offers dozens of resources and publications via its website, conferences, and workshops. This is well beyond the initial set of resources provided through NPB. More fundamentally, CHEA’s reach has gone beyond the United States to embrace partnerships with quality assurance organizations worldwide via the International Quality Group. This was not part of the original remit for the NPB, largely because when the NPB was created, quality assurance was a novel and distinctive activity among other nations. Now quality agencies exist in most countries and a meeting of the International Quality Group is held annually in conjunction with the CHEA annual meeting.

In short, although a very different organization that that proposed by the NPB, CHEA has remained a useful and productive part of the quality assurance landscape in the U.S. in part because it has remained flexible and responsive to the conditions of its creation some twenty-five years ago. This is a significant achievement, much of which can be ascribed to the leadership of Judith Eaton and the contributions of numerous talented board members and staff. This achievement will make it ever more likely that CHEA and its members will effectively address the challenges noted throughout this chapter. May it ever be so.

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Chapter 6

Assuring and Enhancing Quality in an Age of Change and Challenge

John Bassett

Introduction

In 2019 CHEA initiated what was called a national quality conversation on higher education. Over the last few decades, the justification ran, higher education, the processes of quality assurance and accreditation, and the context for education had all changed so much that there was no longer an agreed-upon meaning of “quality.” Important questions about diversity, debt load, and campus climate, moreover, had also moved to the center of the oversight process; and the industry seemed unsure of just what it should be measuring in order to assure quality and how to measure it. The problem may be, of course, that while we can still distinguish teaching or facilities or student life as being of good or bad quality, the questions we are asking about the overall quality of universities have changed.

This paper addresses how several major changes in the world of higher education have affected the way quality is perceived and measured. It considers how issues such as diversity and inclusion, cost and debt loads, safety and free speech all have taken legitimate roles in the oversight process but with an uncertain connection to issues of educational quality. It compares five conversations about quality that CHEA in 2019 observed taking place in America and considers how issues vary among them. Finally, it explores options for returning a clearer role for quality assurance to the center of institutional and educational oversight.

The Changes

Changes in the world of American higher education have included the enormous impact of new technologies, the development of new kinds of course providers and new kinds of degree providers, expanded roles for the proprietary sector and community colleges, new student demographics, and changed faculty roles. Changes in the context have included more global interaction, increased involvement of the federal government, and increased influence of ratings. More attention in evaluating and accrediting universities, moreover, is now paid to cost and debt load, campus safety and limitations on free speech, and inclusiveness.

New Technologies

Among all the changes that have had an impact on higher education, new technologies have perhaps been the most important because they represent many changes –affecting course content and delivery, research, administration, admissions, information systems, and more –and are part of some of the other changes. As the digital impact on education continues to evolve and provide more opportunities, moreover, quality assurance reviewers and government continue to struggle to understand its impact on questions of quality and to adjust their oversight. The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the potential of electronic learning for higher education, especially at those schools that had built a strong infrastructure, but it also raises the question of how important the quality of a college’s electronic environment should be in assessment of institutional quality. It is possible to imagine a college in the future defining its mission and its operations as entirely in-person on campus and not computer-dependent; but it gets harder to do so.

The pandemic has provided an opportunity to even the more traditional colleges to expand their pedagogical flexibility, learning resources, and sense of core mission. Granted the needs at each college will differ, as library needs at universities have varied for hundreds of years. But qualitative assessment of an institution's electronic resources in relation to its mission seems essential. That assessment also must address the quality of instructor preparation to work online and in an electronic environment (synchronous or asynchronous or both) and the quality of relevant support services for students, all raising significant questions of cost as well. Schools with limited resources will get boxed into unpleasant tradeoffs. The more powerful electronics available, moreover, do not assure the most effective support systems; so assuring quality in a college's on-line educational programming will always be complex.¹

Technology, of course, has an impact on other operations – from Admissions to Advancement to financial operations to basic research, at times with the potential for cost savings but at times with cost inflation. Some of these developments may not seem directly related to educational quality but they certainly can be. At the very least they are part of a higher ed matrix that will not return to a previous status quo after the current crisis, and information technology will be a large part of the basis for determining where the industry finds itself then.

New providers of courses and new pathways to a degree

Some of the most impactful recent changes in education have derived from new providers of higher education courses, some quite good, although the providers may not have a system of accreditation. Companies such as StraighterLine and Pearson have been developing and providing courses for years. The content and requirements of some of these courses can be validated by the American Council on Education for colleges that are considering accepting the credits towards a student's graduation requirements, as ACE has done for years with credits from the military and industry. Such courses, like the many MOOCs available, may make up a significant part of a student's program, particularly her distribution requirements. But because there is no regular oversight of the companies developing the courses, there is not much of a record of the quality level at which the courses continue to be overseen, graded and updated. That is a vacuum waiting to be filled.

Then there are accredited universities that may offer few courses but can package credits from many places for a student into a meaningful degree. Some of these, such as Charter Oak State College in Connecticut and Excelsior College in New York (founded by New York State Regents and later spun off as an independent college), have strong track records. They provide opportunities for students not only to stack credits but also to demonstrate competencies by exam and show portfolios justifying credit for real-life experiences. Some states, moreover, have advanced the opportunities for students to package stackable credits towards a degree; and institutions such as Western Governors University and Southern New Hampshire University have been out in front with creative opportunities for students, particularly older students, to achieve meaningful degrees and credentials. There are also less honorable practitioners out there offering to package a person's varied credits, but higher education accreditors are experienced in evaluating these "packaged" degrees. The point here is that this all represents a big change from what was general practice 40 years ago and can challenge reviewers who are assessing how to relate quality analysis of a part of a student's academic experience to the quality of her overall experience.

Growth of the Proprietary Sector

There has been a remarkable growth of the for-profit sector, with some recent retraction, but a growth that has been highly and not helpfully politicized by both parties in Washington. Many Americans remember when Republicans would not attend Senator Tom Harkin's committee meetings to discuss the topic, nor would Democrats have any patience

with what they called irresponsible Republican support for unethical operations in the for-profit sector. Truth is there have been quite reputable and solid performers in that sector, generally open to and being granted regional accreditation, but others who were out simply to exploit the potential for profit from federal scholarship dollars available to students. It is still clear that higher education, the federal government, and reviewers of quality are not on the same page in addressing the for-profit sector. To some extent the questions should remain the same as for the non-profit sector, albeit with the possibility that interference in the autonomy of the institution by its corporate ownership body could affect decisions involving educational quality.

The for-profit conundrum is related to the larger issue of institutional autonomy. While financial stability is essential to a college's capacity for educational quality, that is a different issue from the one posed by making educational decisions based on corporate profitability. In most countries, autonomy is an issue related to a national government's intrusion into a university's educational operations. In the United States autonomy issues revolve more around corporate oversight, a professional association's oversight of a degree program it established, church control, or local and state government intrusion. In any case the absence of autonomy affects the capacity to hold an institution responsible for quality assurance; and as more colleges facing financial vulnerability today have considered and are considering new kinds of partnerships in order to survive, reviewers have to be especially wary of agreements that may risk a college's autonomy and its decisions affecting educational quality.

Expansion of Community Colleges

Over the last few decades, community or two-year colleges have also experienced large growth, with many now approved to offer four-year degrees. In certain geographical areas there is a need for workers with bachelor-level qualifications of various kinds that are not being provided by nearby four-year colleges.² Approval of the new bachelor-level degrees is often supported at the state level, because of influential local interests, without full assessment of the quality implications – related to faculty credentials, level of facilities, and services – of a two-year institution transforming into a four-year college, or even the state budgetary implications for that matter. In some states this can become a political issue as four-year state colleges are threatened by new public competition in their own region.

Changes in the Student Body and the Role of Faculty

In addition to changes in providers, there have been changes in personnel. Student demographics have changed in terms of age, ethnicity, gender, and economic status. The number of traditional college-age people in America, particularly white middle-class college-age people, is declining, even as many older students are filling classrooms. Sometimes they ask different questions about quality and value. The number of women in college is now greater than the number of men. There are more Asian-Americans in American colleges, and while the number of Latino and Black students grows too slowly, it has over time increased. Students in all groups can be varied in their goals and views of quality, but the more diverse student bodies make more challenging an institution's evaluation of how it assures and enhances quality in the classroom and in support services.

Meanwhile the long-standing faculty role in quality oversight has been compromised as the percentage of classes taught by regular full-time faculty at many universities has significantly declined. With a large increase in courses taught by part-time and temporary faculty, moreover, the industry has not begun to take seriously the impact on instructional and learning quality that this change has had, to say nothing of the labor issue raised by so much college teaching being done by poorly paid part-time instructors. To be sure, many "freeway fliers" teaching for low pay may be quite good and dedicated, and some full-time faculty are

not strong teachers; but overall, the shift to so much part-time and contingent and graduate-student instruction raises significant questions about the current level of quality assurance for programs taken by large numbers of students in higher education.³

Increased Focus on Cost and Debt Load

While universities like to say that inflation in the cost of tuition and living expenses is no greater than in other areas of life, students and parents know that a person no longer pays for college through summer jobs and work study. Private colleges can be expensive. Even though they often have funding for need-based financial aid, they may become a home only to those wealthy enough to pay plus those with a low enough income to receive the needed aid. Middle-class students therefore most often attend public colleges or universities, perhaps equally good, unless they receive a “merit” scholarship. Usually, those scholarships are described as simply reducing aid available to the financially needy, but ironically, they may increase economic diversity on a campus. Meanwhile reductions in state funding of higher education over the last thirty years have made the percentage increases in tuition and fees at public universities in many states greater than those at private institutions. As universities struggle to budget for replacing retiring professors with at least equally good new professors and to budget for better laboratory equipment, information technology, and student services, quality is challenged with every decision.

Increased debt burden of graduating students, moreover, has become a big family and political issue, even if unhelpfully sensationalized by media that tend to ignore the fact that half the total burden is for graduate education and the fact that the median debt burden for a graduating senior is manageable.⁴ But there are real horror stories, and there is no question that increased costs have determined who can go where to college. On the other hand, criticism of a college for allowing students to accumulate unreasonable debt burdens seems separate from evaluation of its instructional quality; and often it is hard for an individual university to control the debt load of a student attending multiple institutions. Questions of quality and “value,” however, do get merged today in the minds of many students and parents. Just what they are seeking from higher education may govern their own questions about its quality in relation to value for them.

Increased Emphasis on Diversity and Inclusiveness

Evaluation of institutions today often attends to issues of diversity and inclusiveness, which can have an impact on the richness of an educational environment. In surveying a number of university presidents last year, I found every one believing a diverse learning environment improves educational quality for students graduating to go out into a diverse world. At the same time, none knew for sure how to connect evaluation of a campus’s inclusiveness with questions about overall educational quality; and all realized that at some colleges the potential for diversity may be limited by geographical or religious considerations.

More Emphasis on Campus Climate

Similarly issues of campus safety and Title IX and free speech are significant to student learning and need monitoring on campus, but it is at times unclear how to connect them to evaluation of educational quality. Safety issues are always a legitimate part of an overall review of a college as they relate to students and staff. Unjustified curbs on free speech are a red flag for the academic program. Equitable treatment of students is also fundamental. A college can be and should be graded on all of these criteria. At times they impact the quality of the learning experience, but how to measure the impact is less clear.

Globalization of Education

The context for higher education evaluation now includes a more globalized environment, with American universities having campuses abroad and with the dialogue about quality being much more international. At many universities building in an international experience for students has become a goal not only because it is important to a liberal education but also because their graduates will go out into careers that have global connections. Of course, quite a few universities and colleges have in recent years come to depend on full tuitions received from international students; and not all have a safety net for preserving quality when those students are no longer coming to America.

Increased Involvement of Government

Meanwhile there is a much-increased role being played in the United States by the federal government in the interests of taxpayers who are funding far more financial aid for students than they were when Pell Grants were inaugurated. Those in higher education often complain that the result has been an accreditation system far more concerned about compliance with regulations than quality of learning. It is certainly reasonable for citizens and their government to ask for accountability for so much expenditure. One result, however, may be reduced emphasis on evaluation of learning to allow for more emphasis on earning potential, debt load, and other issues. Another may be for government and reviewers to gravitate towards measuring learning outcomes by efficiently used quantitative yardsticks instead of more valid qualitative assessment.

Growing Influence of Ratings

We also live in a more aggressive world of ratings, not simply *U. S. News* but many others. Concerns about ratings in the market can affect the educational decisions a college must make. Counselors at private high schools and elite public schools, moreover, have often told me that they only get credit for placing students in those institutions ranked in the top tier of universities and colleges, even when many of their advisees would get a better education at a different kind of college, where they would be a better fit. A great deal of ranking criteria, moreover, are tied to what the student brings in, test scores and grades and activities, or to resources of the institution, not to what happens to students while at the institution.

Five Conversations

All in all, higher education has experienced major changes in how and by whom education is provided, in the learning environment, in the contexts for education, and in the personnel involved. It has seen more challenges raised as to whether a college education is “worth the cost.” It has seen a challenge to the notion that there is a real public value to having an educated citizenry; more and more the college degree is seen as a personal asset for the recipient and not a value to his or her society. For years having an educated citizenry to build a stronger democratic republic was at least an implicit value in America; that seems less and less to be the case. It was in reviewing challenges to ideas of quality in this changed landscape of higher education that CHEA began its project of asking what kinds of conversations and dialogues are now taking place in America about educational quality. Synthesizing what they learned, CHEA concluded that five different kinds of conversation have been taking place: one among those in education and its accreditors, one among foundations and research policy institutes, one among some of the newer providers, one in government, and one among the employers who hire the graduates.⁵

A conversation within higher education

One broad conversation is taking place within higher education itself and its accreditors. It is more tied to traditional academic values than earning potential, even when fully open to new practices and technologies. It is concerned about educating good citizens and challenging students to think. It tends to include consideration of the breadth of a student's

liberal education, and it emphasizes new developments in learning that revolve around such things as high-impact practices, critical thinking and problem-solving, communication and global awareness. That is, it generally takes seriously the news that more students today are looking at the job-relatedness of their college education than before, and it tries to connect values of a “liberal education” with preparing graduates to navigate the “real world.”

At the center of much of the discussion is an emphasis on “assessment,” to the extent that a college preparing for an accreditation review will have both jokes and fear over whether it has attended enough to assessment. Ideally the rubric means “are you evaluating what you are doing and then are you making improvements based on what you learn?” This is good, although in practice, with what is often an emphasis on certain performance data not systems of oversight, the “improvement” may come from recruiting fewer students from disadvantaged backgrounds who may negatively impact performance statistics than from improving oversight of the quality of a university’s practices. Nonetheless there is a real concern among most participants in this conversation about improving the quality of education.

A conversation within foundations and policy centers

A second conversation about quality in higher education is taking place in research and policy institutes and foundations. It emphasizes outcomes measurements, workforce development, and issues of debt and equity. It often tries to balance the more traditional concerns of the academic world with more quantitative evidence of learning, because the participants may need to make annual decisions about what proposals and initiatives they should fund or support to improve education. On the other hand, when a foundation has significant funding to disburse and has committed itself to some “silver bullet” developed by its research, it may stubbornly adhere to its own tunnel vision. The sector, moreover, is often open to greater government regulation of accreditation.

A conversation among new providers

A third conversation involves the alternative providers, who do focus on priorities of employers but are also sensitive to their own need to develop greater credibility. On the one hand they seek to be ahead of the curve on what kinds of courses and pedagogy will be in demand; on the other they are in competition among themselves to demonstrate their effectiveness in learning. So, while they seem tangential to the core of higher education, they are constantly attempting to prove that the quality of what they offer matches up with industry norms, that students taking their courses can do at least as well in future courses as students on campus. Just last spring, for example, StraighterLine advertised that it is ahead of the curve in developing innovative ways to teach laboratory science courses online.

A conversation within government

Another American conversation is taking place in federal government, although differently in Congress and the Department of Education. In Congress there is some continuity in the personnel of both parties who care about reauthorization periodically of the Higher Education Act. Recently Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), developing the new HEA with Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN) before his retirement, insisted that her non-negotiables for inclusion are accessibility, affordability, accountability, and campus safety. All are important but not necessarily tied directly to instructional quality. In the Department of Education there can be huge swings in the emphasized issues as Republicans and Democrats take turns in power, but one way or another each party has a strategy for greater government involvement in higher education policy and practice. Many in higher education used to say America had the best system of higher education because it did not have a system of higher education. Today at times it seems the United States is well on the way to having a minister of Higher Education.

In any case this conversation emphasizes quantitative measurements and taxpayer accountability and often leads to proposals that involve greater federal oversight. All of the participants would argue that the quality of the student experience is as important to them as accountability, but it is clear that the quality issues are different from those in the first conversation above.

A conversation heard among employers

Finally, there is a conversation by employers. Although it is generally focused on skills and workforce needs, at another often less visible level it can be quite thoughtful about the broader sets of hard and soft skills needed by those who can be future leaders of American companies. The view from human resources can be very different from the view executives have about the education of their successors. This dialogue actually captures one of the basic challenges of evaluating the quality of an education. While certain hands-on capabilities can be evaluated when a student graduates and heads off to her first job, the overall quality of an education may only be clear years later when an individual succeeds or fails at a higher-level challenge; and at that point it becomes almost impossible to separate out what skills and talents are due to which part of that education.

Meeting the Challenge of Change

So, colleges, universities, and their accreditors are not only adjusting to the changes in higher education but also to changed expectations among these many stakeholders. The institutions confront new kinds of competition, reduced revenues per student, the need to invest in and utilize new technologies, in many cases the need to reassess market potential in light of demographic shifts, new federal regulations and reporting requirements, and new questions about the value of the education they are providing. The accreditors deal with the same changes, in relation to the schools they accredit, but also pressure to adopt clear and efficient measures of “quality” to justify their own recognition as accreditors. While some of the five conversations do address questions of learning and instructional quality, others have quite different concerns about the student experience and what should be measured to assure and enhance the quality of an institution and the quality and value of an individual student’s educational experience, which these days after all may take place not in two or four years but over many years and with interruptions.

Quality in Professional and Specialized Programs

It is important to recognize that oversight of professional and specialized programs is different from oversight of institutions. Professional programs, especially at the graduate level, where “general education” is no longer a factor, have a clear goal of preparing students to enter and perform effectively in a given profession, whether nursing or business or occupational therapy or law or something else. All professions have changed over the last forty years, and programs, and their accreditors, must be held accountable to adapt to those changes. Several professions have multiple accreditors. In the eyes of some people, they differ in prestige and standards; but in the eyes of others, they simply differ in type of program and level of research by faculty. Still, it is fairly clear in each case what quality-related criteria are relevant for continuing approval. Some programs have higher graduation rates than others because of the students they can recruit or choose to recruit; but all programs can be held accountable for how their credentialed graduates perform afterward, passing licensure exams and performing effectively in the profession. There may be several reasons for a program to be of low quality, but from one perspective a low-quality program is one whose credentialed graduates do not or cannot perform well after graduating.

Quality in an Institution

Evaluations of institutional quality are more complex. With a large university, assessment of the overall financial and physical resources, the governance structure and organizational and planning protocols have to be somewhat superficial given the timeframe of reviews. Assessing the instructional and learning quality of education at the institution may be even more of a challenge, less so of course at a Grinnell or Williams than at a regional public or a research university. Students in the undergraduate program, usually the main academic focus of an institutional review, may be amassing credits from multiple places. Distinguishing the quality of the student's educational experience at this university from what has been her overall learning from several places is not easy. Those not in an undergraduate professional program, moreover, have majors that do not lead to one profession but may prepare them for many career paths and graduate programs. The challenge is to know what metrics should be used to understand the quality of instruction and learning at the institution under review.

Graduation Rates

Graduation rates (four-year, six-year, ten-year), often one of the more popular measuring sticks, are a poor indication of a college's educational quality. Some colleges have a special usefulness as a place to go for a year before a student can afford to go off to where she really wants to be. No matter how well she is taught that year, she will always count as a failure for the college. The university where she graduates, no matter how well it teaches her, will find her data is irrelevant to their scores. At many large public institutions, fewer than half the graduating seniors were also freshmen there. Colleges could, of course, lower standards and help their graduation rates; or, more likely, they could admit only those almost certain to graduate, a strategy being incentivized by some proposals these days.

Outcome's Assessment

One of the most popular proposals today is for greater assessment of student learning outcomes. On the one hand, it is hard to quibble with this proposal, for the well-prepared student marching off to a meaningful life and career is what everyone wants. It may be hard, however, to distinguish the quality of the graduate from the quality of the "value added" provided by the institution. So much attention is paid in the ratings to entrance qualifications and selectivity that some universities may end up bragging about the success of students who would have been successful anywhere. It is as important to address student growth as raw outcomes data. Imagine two students graduating with the same 3.4 GPA and 1400 on the GRE. In high school, one had a 4.0 GPA and 1500 on the SAT; the other was a 2.5 student with 1050 on the SAT. Does the university get the same credit for graduating both students with the same outcomes scores? If we had a way to understand how and why the two turned out that way, we might find ourselves getting at something really important.

Assuring Learning Quality

It is right to expect a college to offer students the support needed to graduate in a timely way and to evaluate the college on that support. It is right and useful to ask a college to explain its graduation rates. It is right to hold a college somewhat accountable for the quality, as attested to by later success, of those graduates it actually credentials and to whom it grants a diploma. Part of its responsibility is rigorous assessment of the transfer credits it accepts. But the reasons for students not to complete a degree where they started, not to complete in six years, or not to complete at all – many enter community college without intending to go all the way to graduation--are too varied and complex to make traditional graduation rates a standard for institutional instructional quality.

All colleges and universities need to develop more reliable ways of demonstrating how they assure and enhance the quality of instruction and instructors as well as the quality of learning – a different question since it involves student motivation, student advantages and handicaps,

the student support system, and the overall academic atmosphere. In fact, despite the creativity now being invested at many colleges in learning quality, American universities are probably falling short more in the area of assuring overall instructional and learning quality than in assuring anything else. Partly, this is due to the massive increase in the use of part-time and temporary faculty as a result of budget squeezes and competing priorities. As good as some of these teachers may be, most large universities are not prepared to commit the needed resources to assure levels of overall instructional quality.

Is the Financial Model Broken?

For 70 years, we have continued to believe that the post-war American model of consolidating high-quality research and high-quality teaching together in universities (along with a few national research centers), with the best minds also being teachers, is still viable. For many reasons, however, the model has broken down, just as the financial model supporting most non-research institutions has for other reasons broken down. This has actually been one of the biggest changes in higher education, a change that has not been well addressed. While we can still point to situations where the outstanding teacher-researcher flourishes, the overall national model does not work. With increases in the cost of running universities, with increased pressures on securing research funding, with the formula of replacing grant holders with part-timers, with increased private-college tuitions that limit their enrollment to those who can afford to pay and those poor enough to get need-based financial aid, America now has millions of students registered for schedules taught largely by contingent faculty and graduate students.

The two most tempting budget savings for a president are deferring maintenance and replacing regular faculty with part-timers. In both cases, there are negative consequences for educational quality. We continue to wrestle with just how to assess those consequences. In an institutional self-study, progress may be demonstrated at some universities only by showing that in the past three years they have reduced courses taught by part-timers from 50 % to 47 % and by showing they now require grad students to take a course on teaching and by stating that they have added another round of student evaluations, confidence in which may still be minimal.

A perspective from abroad

In the past few years, I was able to gain a new perspective on these issues from my experience as a reviewer in Ireland with QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland), which uses a system similar to that used in other countries. The emphasis is on how an institution provides quality assurance by putting in place policies and practices that assure and potentially enhance quality in each of the major areas. The university is also asked to provide hard evidence that those policies and practices are actually implemented as intended. Reviewers have access to performance data but focus more on evidence of how quality is being assured and enhanced. Each year, the institution's quality assurance (and enhancement) documents are updated, and when the self-study for the institution's periodic review is prepared, it aligns well with the processes outlined in the other document. While all aspects of a university's operation can be assessed, as with American accreditation procedures, one finds a far more probing assessment of the assurance of quality in program development, selection and oversight of faculty, instruction and learning, as well as student support.

Adapting the Model in America

The model lends itself to adaptation by American universities and colleges and their reviewers. Its advantage lies in replacing a general overview of such categories as academic programs, faculty, teaching and learning, and student affairs with targeted requests for evidence that plans are in place in each area for assessing, assuring and enhancing quality,

and for hard evidence that those plans are being implemented regularly, that the university performs what it professes. The focus shifts. Given all the changes that have taken place in higher education, moreover, it allows for emphasis on the adjustments that colleges are making to adapt to them. It allows for special emphasis on how a college is assuring and enhancing the quality of instruction, instructors, and learning, which can also accommodate American interest in learning outcomes.

One can imagine an institutional review protocol that divides into three or four sections, with all parts based on quality assurance and enhancement. One would be institutional foundations (governance, planning, finances, facilities and technology, public discourse and integrity). One might be learning environment (access and affordability, campus safety, free speech, equity, debt burdens). A third, of course, would be teaching and learning (program approval process, appointment of teaching faculty, quality of instruction, handling of transfers and transfer credits, student support systems, student learning and outcomes). A fourth could be research.

Is the Peer-review Model Broken?

None of this is meant to suggest that either measuring quality in education or achieving universal agreement on what “quality” is will be easy. American regional accreditation of colleges and universities for years has been built on the principle of “continuous improvement” for all and on de-certifying those that cannot operate at an acceptable standard of performance. Allowing for choices to be made by students in an open market, it has not operated as an exclusionary process to eliminate colleges in need of improvement. There has been no sense that the consulting arm of accreditation cannot co-exist with the credentialing arm. It is the visiting team, and the staff, who serve as non-decision-making consultants and analysts but the commissions that exercise decision-making authority.

In fact, outside of the colleges that fail on grounds of integrity, unethical behavior, or abuse of students, it is hard to argue that America would be better off if a large number of her colleges were put out of business. Every time one fails, scores of students and local communities are hurt. So, the idea of continuous improvement, along with certain red lines of performance, is reasonable. It is still important, however, to keep an institution’s focus on how its decisions and practices affect the quality of the education their students receive and the quality of what the students can do, as professionals and citizens, after graduation.

The Value of Performative Evaluation

At times I am reminded that the best part of the quality conversation in the employer community is especially telling, for it points to a fundamental dilemma in our attempts to evaluate the quality of a university. Almost all of the university’s evaluation of student learning (outside of studio courses and some professional courses) is based on “summative” testing. A student is tested on a body of content, proves what she knows at that point and whether she is a good exam-taker. She may forget most of the content soon thereafter. The more valid and meaningful testing, however, is often “performative” that shows what a student can do with what she has learned. One is less likely to forget what one has had to learn in order to perform, to actually do something, to show someone else how to do something she has learned to do so well. After graduation, she may be regularly tested on whether she can perform, that is, diagnose problems, develop creative solutions, and perform in other ways not directly learned in college. She will also be expected to communicate what she has learned not in term papers but in varied rhetorical ways.⁶

A college’s challenge can be making the mind-expanding courses in a rigorous arts and sciences education help prepare graduates for successful performance in a rapidly changing world. The quality of instruction and education at a university may come down to this, but the challenge also points to a dilemma for evaluators: the real quality of the university’s

preparation of its graduates may not be clear until years after graduation, and accreditation cannot wait that long. As it may improve the deep value of a college education to complement summative testing of students with forms of performative testing, however, so it may improve the evaluation of an institution if we can find ways to supplement the summative information provided to reviewers with evidence that the university is performing at a certain level in assuring and enhancing the quality of what it is providing students. That is what might be gained by shifting the focus of accreditations toward examination of just how the institution is assuring and enhancing the quality of what it does.

A disclaimer

Before concluding, one disclaimer! I am certainly not arguing that people in higher education are not concerned about educational quality. On the contrary, we have seen over the last few decades an enormous amount of creative pedagogy and curricular innovation. Change has been disruptive for higher education, and developments have been both evolutionary and revolutionary. Although improvements have certainly not benefited all constituencies, the efforts to use new technologies, as well as to address the importance of high-impact practices, critical thinking and problem-solving, communication and teamwork have led to many positive curricular innovations including programs such as LEEP (Liberal Education/Effective Practice) fostered by AAC&U and many more. Nonetheless, in a larger sense the industry may be less confident on how to measure instructional and educational quality at the institutional level as it affects the education of the majority of students.

Conclusion

To circle back to where we started, we might conclude that the fundamental meaning of “quality” in higher education has not changed. That is, after accounting for developments in pedagogy and in learning science, we can still make a reasonable effort to tell good, inspiring, engaging teaching and advising from bad. The evaluation of professional programs, outside of changes in the professions and greater sophistication in evaluation, has maintained a consistent sense of quality (which does not mean all accreditors are consistent). The term “quality” in assessment of universities, colleges, and the education students receive from them and other providers, however, has become more problematic. Higher education grapples with how to connect the quality of the education a student receives with assessment of the several providers from which she took classes. It wrestles with how to incorporate a whole set of important non-instructional questions into the assessment of the institution’s teaching and learning environment.

Most universities, moreover, are not asked to invest seriously in rigorous assessment of instructors and instruction on campus. To be sure, the quality of a certain university for George may be different from its quality for Sam because both the quality and the value of that education can only be measured interactively. The key question is whether that education was good for George or Sam or Sarah at that point in their life. Higher education, of course, has to continue to evaluate the providers but one would hope with full recognition that the method for doing so should be based on the quality of the student’s life and performance afterward.

Notes

¹The pandemic has led to so many articles on how the new normal for higher education will be very different from the old normal that it is hard to determine who really is a good visionary, but all agree that many things will be different. A new survey of presidents by PLEXUSS, a recent correspondence informs me, says that 53 % worry about the financial viability of their own institution. A recent essay by Judith Eaton, “Accreditation and the Future of Quality,” connects the paired needs during and after the pandemic for accreditors to be flexible but also to maintain quality in higher education. It appeared in a May 2020 issue of the occasional publication *Inside Accreditation*.

²An early and eloquent case for the two-year colleges to do this was provided by President Jill Wakefield in the *Seattle Times* on March 14, 2007.

³There have been many articles over the last decade on the shift of teaching to part-time and contingent faculty, all supported by my own experience at five universities. One in *Forbes*, May 28, 2015, said that in 1975 30 % of faculty were part-time, but in 2011 51 % were (with 19 % more full-time temporary). In 2009 (December 30), the *New York Times* claimed that in 1960, 75 % of instructors were full-time tenure track, but in 2009 that figure was 27 %.

⁴I do not mean to minimize the importance of the debt issue. Median debt for those who graduate owing something has crept up to almost \$30,000 and often that is augmented by debts their parents have taken on. Many graduates are able to budget their repayments. Others are not, and sometimes the debt affects their career choices. In the worst shape, of course, are those who incur debts but never graduate.

⁵This was published in October 2019 as *Conversations about Quality in Higher Education: What Are They and Where Do We Take Them?* An Exploratory Paper from the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. It is part of the CHEA/CIQG Publication Series.

⁶There is in the field of Education an extensive literature on the differences between “summative” testing on content and “formative” testing on the process of the learning taking place. I am simply distinguishing here between the content testing in quizzes and exams on the one hand and the evaluation of a student performing in a way so as to demonstrate in practice what she has learned on the other. Most of our real-world learning, of course, is evidenced by performative assessment as we show we can, for example, hit a fastball, bake a cake, fly fish, reassemble a computer, or persuade a customer or voter.

Chapter 7

Evolution or Revolution? The UK Quality Code for Higher Education

Andy Smith

Introduction: The Current State of Play

The way UK higher education has been funded and regulated has undergone significant change in the past 25 years, moving from primarily government funded teaching and research grants to a mixed system of loans to directly fund student tuition, with some government funding still provided via funding bodies and research councils. Alongside these changes to funding, an increase in both student numbers and providers has seen an exponential growth in the sector, changing from an ‘elite’ system to that of mass participation, with the Labour Party’s general election manifesto in 1997 setting a target of 50% of school leavers entering higher education. In 1997, the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education put forward a number of recommendations to reform higher education. There were 93 recommendations in total, and 5 that related to academic quality and standards. I will explore those recommendations in more detail later, but it included recommendations on the setting up of a national framework for qualifications, amending the remit of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) to include standards verification and the maintenance of the qualifications framework, and the creation of a code of practice that “every institution should be required formally to adopt, by 2001/02, as a condition of public funding” (NCIHE, 1997, p. 373). The committee also recommended a ‘compact that would allow universities to retain their autonomy and provide financial security while providing accountability for the public funds they receive’ (Jackson and Bohrer 2010, 79), leading to the introduction of £1000 tuition fees for full-time students, a first for UK higher education: ‘We recommend to the government that it shifts the balance of funding, in a planned way, away from block grant towards a system in which funding follows the student, assessing the impact of each successive shift on institutional behavior and the control of public expenditure, with a target of distributing at least 60% of total public funding to institutions according to student choice by 2003’ (NCIHE, 1997, 379).

The current higher education structure in the UK is devolved, following the creation of the Scottish and Welsh parliaments in the late 1990s and the development of a power sharing executive in Northern Ireland following the Belfast agreement in 1998.²⁴ The UK Government in Westminster has responsibility for the funding and regulation of English higher education, through the Department for Education. The other devolved nations each have responsibility for education in their jurisdictions. Future increases in tuition fees followed the NCHIE report, led by reviews commissioned by the Westminster government such as *Sustaining a Future for Higher Education*, published in October 2010. This independent review, chaired by Lord Browne, made recommendations to the UK Government on how student tuition in England should be funded in the future, extended the logic of the NCIHE proposal by increasing tuition fees and introducing the Student Finance Plan, which had the principle that students would pay back their tuition costs ‘in proportion to the benefit they have received’ (2010, 40) with repayment thresholds and interest rates relating to levels of future income. Crucial to the report’s findings was the proposal that competition for student places was to be founded on “price” and “teaching quality,” within a “framework that guarantees minimum standards” (2010, p. 8). “Quality” in this context becomes a measure of satisfaction for the purposes of creating a market in higher education, rather than a process for assuring standards. As the report states:

²⁴ Before devolution, responsibility had laid with the Secretary of State for each nation.

“What we recommend is a radical departure from the existing way in which HEIs are financed. Rather than the government providing a block grant for teaching to HEIs, their finance now follows the student who has chosen and been admitted to study. Choice is in the hands of the student. HEIs can charge different and higher fees provided that they can show improvements in the student experience and demonstrate progress in providing fair access and, of course, students are prepared to entertain such charges.” (2010, p. 3)

This principle of “the money will follow the student” changed English higher education’s financial operating model, putting an emphasis on the student experience as a transactional outcome of educational delivery. As McGhee notes in relation to the rise in student numbers and private providers in the Israeli educational system, ‘extending educational opportunities to meet student demand connected to fluctuations in the employment market reinforces the instrumentality of degrees such that variations in academic quality become much more marginal concern for student customers, who value their degree purely in terms of its impact on promotion or salary’ (2003, p. 3). Assessing the merits or otherwise of the market-driven approach to higher education is not primarily the aim of this paper, but how this approach has subsequently changed how quality assurance and enhancement is determined and accounted for across the separate nations of the UK is. As Jackson and Bohrer write, “Quality in higher education is a political issue” (2010, p. 83) and this reflects the period in UK higher education that became known as ‘the quality wars,’ as the tension between institutional autonomy and the need for governments, funders and regulators to justify public accountability in the funding models led to an increasing focus on “value for money” and “successful outcomes” for students. Alex Griffiths succinctly outlines the changes to Higher Education brought on by the reforms of 1992 which saw a significant expansion of the sector with former colleges and polytechnics being awarded university title:

“While the goal of an expanded, more cost-effective higher education sector had clear benefits, there were also clear risks to quality from increased student numbers, enhanced competition, a reduced ‘unit of resource’ cost, and structural changes. Moreover, as the sums of public money invested in the sector grew, so too did the demand for accountability.” (Griffiths, 2016, 25)

The devolved nature of UK higher education sees some contradictions and tensions but also opportunities in accommodating varying approaches to assuring quality and funding education; on the one hand you have the English sector’s focus on higher education as a marketplace that students can pick and choose from, the entrance of new providers into that market and the primacy of “high-quality student outcome.” In direct contrast to this position is the more collaborative and enhancement focused system as set out in Scotland, which has had an enhancement-led approach since 2003. Wales has also recently moved to a more enhancement focused approach with its Wales Quality Assessment Framework. There is also a difference in size between the sectors across the UK, with England having over 200 registered higher education providers, against the 30 plus providers in the rest of the nations. Alongside this difference in the size of the sector are the variances in how student tuition is funded and regulated, including maintenance loans. So, how did we get here, what lessons can we take from that journey and what does the future hold for quality assurance and enhancement in the UK?

A revolution in quality: NCIHE 1997

The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE), chaired by Sir Ron Dearing, was published in July 1997 and put forward some fundamental proposals for higher education in the UK. At the same time, a committee chaired by Sir Ron Garrick examined similar changes in the Scottish higher education system. The NCIHE report offered a vision for education that would encompass the development of a ‘learning society’ that would see a

massive expansion of student numbers into the HE system and focus on the ‘pursuit of quality and a commitment to standards’ (NCIHE 1997, 7). The report highlighted the lack of clarity in safeguarding academic standards and called for ‘greater explicitness and clarity about standards and the levels of achievement required for different awards’ (NCIHE 1997, 142). Key to this was the proposal to safeguard the rigor of awards within the context of an autonomous system. The report identified the delicate balancing act required between institutional diversity and autonomy in the sector while also establishing a ‘collective responsibility’ and ‘achievement of reasonable standards of awards’ (NCIHE 1997, 142).

To achieve this balance the report recommended the creation of a national framework of qualifications (although separated out between England, Wales and Northern Ireland on the one hand and Scotland on the other) with the ‘development of recognized exit points within a framework of qualifications’ (NCIHE 1997, 145). The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and the Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS)²⁵ were first published by QAA in January 2001. As McGhee writes, ‘the FHEQ is an outcomes-based qualifications framework, which defines qualifications in terms of the end product rather than inputs, processes or increments in learning’ (2003, 12).

The other major recommendation of the NICHE report was for the QAA to develop a ‘code of practice which every institution should be required formally to adopt, by 2001/02, as a condition of public funding’ (2007, 373), although a previous body with responsibility for Quality existed in the form of the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC). The Joint Planning Group for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, chaired by Sir William Kerr Fraser, whose report in 1996 ‘recommended the establishment of a single quality assurance agency with a UK-wide remit as soon as possible. The relationship between it, the institutions, and the funding councils should be one of partnership and co-operation. It should replace the HEQC, all of whose functions should be transferred to the new agency, as should the main quality assessment functions of those funding councils choosing to contract with the agency for the discharge of these functions.’ (1996).²⁶ As Jackson and Bohrer write, ‘The establishment of the QAA in 1997 and its work after the 1997 NCIHE report led to the development of quality and standards frameworks which in part have provided a way of reconciling growth with resource tensions in trying to offset worries about standards and quality by focusing attention on institutional management of academic programs and the students’ learning experience’ (2010, 79). This “code of practice” developed from the recommendations of the NICHE into what later became known as the ‘Academic Infrastructure’ – an overarching system that set out the key frameworks for maintaining academic standards and how autonomous institutions were to embed nationally agreed benchmarks and reference points into their internal mechanisms for assuring quality and enhancing the student experience.

Academic Infrastructure 1997-2010

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is responsible for maintaining a set of reference points which help UK higher education providers to set, maintain and assure the academic standards of the higher education awards they make and the quality of the learning opportunities they offer. These reference points help higher education providers describe their awards in a way that can be useful for both a local and international audience. This set of reference points is known as the “Academic Infrastructure” (QAA 2010, p. 2)

²⁵ The FQHEIS was built on an existing credit framework which became the Scottish Qualification and Credit Framework (SCQF).

²⁶ Further details on the establishment of the QAA and the work of the JPGHE can be found in Paul Greatrix’s ‘Two quality assurance systems to one: remembering the Joint Planning Group’, WONKHE, 10 May 2016. <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/two-qa-systems-to-one-part2/>

The development of the Academic Infrastructure and its role in supporting a shared understanding of academic standards and quality was to form the foundation of the new arrangements for quality assurance and institutional audit in UK higher education post-1997. For the duration of the 1990s the quality audit and quality assessment methods in England, Scotland and Wales²⁷ were conducted differently on separate cycles as they were managed by national funding councils, as Alex Griffiths notes:

“...the work of the ‘quality assessment units’ within each funding council whose assessments of what is actually provided would result in the award of an institutional quality ranking of ‘excellent,’ ‘satisfactory’ or ‘unsatisfactory’ and inform the Council’s funding decisions. Quality was to be assessed via ‘subject review’ (what was to become known as the Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA)) in two ways. First, quantitative performance indicators and value-added calculations would provide an overview of institutions and their courses. Second, direct observation of teaching and learning, management and organization, accommodation, and equipment by professional staff, predominantly recruited from HMI, would provide a more comprehensive view of quality.” (Griffiths, 2016, p. 26)

The statutory basis for universal subject review was the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, which required the funding councils to assess the quality of education provided by institutions who received funding (QAA, 2003, p. 7). Subject review, starting in 1993 and finishing in 2001, was “one of the largest programs of evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning support in higher education ever undertaken” (QAA, 2013, p. 2). Initially the reviews were conducted first on the basis of self-evaluation by individual institutions (SAD), followed by site visits from review teams comprising subject experts (1993-1995). Further changes to this system were introduced in England and Northern Ireland in 1995 with a more coherent structure for review activity with six interrelated sections and “a numerical scoring system on a scale of 1 to 4 for each of the six topics considered by the review team... as a process it raised awareness about quality and standards and provided a stimulus for enhancement activity” (Jackson and Bohrer, 2010, p. 81).

As Griffiths writes, “the QAA was established with the aim of reducing the burden on providers by combining the quality audit and assessment bodies. While continuing the ‘subject review’ and institutional audit work of its predecessor bodies, the QAA sought to find a method that effectively combined its assessment and audit roles. (Griffiths, 2016, p. 34). This new methodology was named ‘Academic Review,’ and the proposal was to introduce in England program reviews that were to be conducted by academics that would result in a threshold judgment concerning program outcome standards. Furthermore, the “Programme Reviews” would judge aspects of a provider’s learning opportunities to be either “commendable,” “approved” or “failing.” In addition to Programme Reviews,” “Institutional Reviews” would examine the management of institutional standards and result in the identification of areas where it was essential, advisable or desirable for the institution to take action along with an overall judgment of confidence (Griffiths, 2016, p. 35)

This new method for judging academic quality was not without its controversies. Introduced in Scotland in October 2000, the announcement of the end of universal subject review by the then Secretary of State for Education David Blunkett in 2001 and the subsequent shelving of Academic Review in England led directly to the shift towards an enhancement-led approach in Scotland and forced the resignation of the then chief executive of the QAA John Randall (Griffiths, 2016, p. 36). Instead, starting with the first review in 2003, QAA embarked upon developing a cyclical five-year institutional audit review method that would be supported by the “code of practice” that the NCIHE report had called for five years previously, with Scotland undertaking a different approach that included an “internal subject review process and a

²⁷ Northern Ireland was audited on the same cycle as England for the duration of subject review.

separate quality enhancement process” (Griffiths, 2016, p. 38). Wales followed a similar model to England and Northern Ireland with a cyclical institutional audit.

However, the new institutional audit method was reliant on what later became known as the “Academic Infrastructure” to adequately measure and judge the reliability of standards. Composed of ten sections, plus the qualifications’ frameworks and Subject Benchmark Statements, the Academic Infrastructure was developed and published over a period of ten years. QAA’s 2010 evaluation of the Academic Infrastructure examined its use, impact and effectiveness, whether it met its original expectations and benefits, its relevance and its future role (QAA, 2010). As the report notes, the benefit the Academic Infrastructure brought to higher education was that for the first time there was a ‘consistent approach’ and ‘a common vocabulary about academic standards and quality’ (QAA 2010, p. 5). Its importance was emphasized by the ability of providers to use it in the context of their own mission and values, thus not infringing upon institutional autonomy, although some providers were initially resistant to the idea of Subject Benchmark Statements as a threat to that autonomy.

Crucially, the code of practice performed the administrative function of linking the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements (SBSs) and institutional audit arrangements. The structure of the code of practice lent itself to institutions to use it in their own context; made up of precepts and points of guidance, it asked providers to consider key factors in the delivery of their provision and how they could assure standards and academic quality. As McGhee notes, “Generally speaking the precepts are written broadly whereas the points of guidance are more focused” (2003, p. 69). This points to a wider issue that McGhee identifies, namely the way providers were to approach using the precepts as part of institutional audit, and the role of the precepts that were “more than just advisory but less than regulatory” (2003, p. 70).

McGhee here recognizes the issues inherent in the development of a code of practice in a system of self-regulation and autonomy, one which was to have an influence on the future shape of the Quality Code. The code of practice did not set specifications for *how* providers are to meet the precepts; rather it set out how providers could assure themselves that they are making consistent decisions in the student interest and how they could improve that experience for students. The guidance notes following the precepts outline what processes the provider could take in implementing the precepts without being overly prescriptive: “an institution *should*” precedes the guidance notes, rather than “an institution *must*.” Given the context of the time, “should” was still a strong word for a quality agency to use, and there was still some institutional discomfort about which parts of the Code of Practice were to be used and which were for guidance only.

The code of practice was not short; composed of ten sections, from Section 1, *Postgraduate Research programmes*, to Section 10, *Recruitment and Admissions*, the code of practice ran to 175 precepts and 258 pages. In its review of the Academic Infrastructure, QAA noted that “the Academic Infrastructure was valued as a technical tool or reference point for those that provide higher education but had not fully achieved its original intention of providing valid, reliable and useful information about higher education qualifications to a wider audience because it is not well-known or understood beyond those directly involved in the sector” (2010, p. 6). The review does note how ‘education providers have embedded the Academic Infrastructure within their own institutional policies and procedures’ and that it provides ‘an adequate basis for the comparison of threshold standards and a useful baseline for the management of the quality of learning opportunities’ (QAA 2010, p. 8).

The review noted the impact and effectiveness of the Subject Benchmark Statements (SBSs), that they are “valued by the subject communities which has developed them” and that through them the Academic Infrastructure has become “more accessible to more people working in the higher education sector” (QAA 2010, p. 6). It is certainly the case that SBSs perform a valuable role in defining the threshold standards for specific subjects and are often the entry point for academics in engaging with quality frameworks. Given the differences in approach to teaching

and assessment across departments delivering the same subject, the SBSs offer a level of consistency and level outcomes that a graduate in the discipline could be expected to achieve. As we shall explore in the next section, SBSs were to become an Expectation that providers needed to meet when aligning with the 2013 Quality Code, emphasizing their importance to subject communities and complementing the qualifications frameworks threshold standards.

Codes of Practice or Codes of Quality?

QAA's review of the Academic Infrastructure put forward a number of proposals that would result in the development of the Quality Code between 2011 and 2013, notably that QAA should "clearly set out which components of the Academic Infrastructure are essential requirements for higher education providers when they are setting and maintaining the academic standards for which they are responsible" (QAA 2010, 11). The review also noted that "there could be greater clarity about the relationship between the components of the Academic Infrastructure and QAA's audit and review processes, and that there could be more transparent articulation with other reference points." The review also identified how QAA could work with other sector bodies such as the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education and the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman with regards to student appeals and complaints. However, providers were most interested in meeting what they perceived as essential requirements in managing the quality of the student learning experience, as well as greater clarity on how the Academic Infrastructure linked to European frameworks and how external audit and review related more directly to the precepts.

The Academic Infrastructure did much to assure academic threshold standards and the quality of academic provision. Local interpretations of the Academic Infrastructure allowed for a plurality and diversity of approaches while safeguarding institutional autonomy. However, issues remained with the implementation of the Academic Infrastructure. QAA noted that there were inconsistencies in the way individual providers had applied the Academic Infrastructure. The problems of communicating a detailed and technical set of precepts and guidelines to an outside audience, as well as the use of the term "academic infrastructure," were flagged in the evaluation report, with suggestions for a new title that could "better explain the relationship between the components by using different, more transparent, terminology" (QAA 2010, p. 13).

Alongside the changes to institutional audit in England and Northern Ireland happening at the same time, the review of the Academic Infrastructure was to focus on 'the stages of the student life cycle' (QAA 2010, p. 6), supported by a series of principles that replaced the precepts from the Academic Infrastructure. This new framework, called the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, was developed over several years, and the review process coincided with the election of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010, which led to the tripling of student tuition fees in England per annum from £3000 to £9000 (currently capped at £9,250 in England) in 2012. Partly driven by the austerity cuts brought on by the financial crash of 2008, the tripling of fees and the reduction in the teaching budget signified a seismic transformation in funding models that led more directly to the opening up of a market in higher education, at least in England (Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales all responded to the changes in different ways, but only Scotland retained the principle that tuition was funded by the state for home students). The Browne review articulates this change in its conclusion:

"Our proposals are designed to create genuine competition for students between institutions, of a kind which cannot take place under the current system. There will be more investment available for the institutions that are able to convince students that it is worthwhile. This is in our view a surer way to drive up quality than any attempt at central planning. To safeguard this approach, we recommend that the HE Council enforces minimum standards of quality; and that students receive high-quality

information to help them choose the institution and program which best matches their aspirations.” (Browne, 2010, p. 56)

This decision to increase the amount students would be required to pay back under the student finance loan system was met in 2010 with protests and demonstrations, led by students and the University and College Union (UCU), and is still to the present day seen as a highly controversial policy shift. The decision to allow providers to set differential fees depending on the course never materialized; virtually all providers set their course fees at the upper level of the fee cap, thus creating a market where student choice was determined not by differential pricing but by comparing similar courses for subject content and graduate outcomes.

It was during this period of change and flux that the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) was introduced in sections, starting in 2012 and finishing in 2015. As already noted, the Quality Code differed from the Academic Infrastructure in its design, namely the mapping of “chapters” to the student life cycle, the introduction of a set of “Expectations” to replace “precepts” and the changing of “points of guidance” to “indicators of sound practice.” The Quality Code was divided into three parts: *Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards*, included the Qualification Frameworks, the Higher Education Credit Framework for England and Characteristics Statements, which describe the distinctive features of a qualification and their purpose and generic outcomes for students.

Part B: Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality consisted of eleven separate chapters mapping the student life cycle, starting with “Programme Design” and ending with “Research Degrees.” *Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision* sets out the kind of information that providers needed to make public, including information for prospective and current students. Subject Benchmark Statements, although not a constituent part of A, B or C, were still included through the Expectation that providers were to align their courses to the threshold standards in SBSs. The three different sections of the Quality Code were completed and published at different stages. The *Part A* Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications document, which contains the FHEQ and the FQHEIS, was published in October 2014, and became a reference point for the purpose of reviews carried out by QAA in August 2015. The original Characteristic Statements were published between 2010 and 2011, and in many ways detail more explicitly the distinctive features of a qualification and their purpose than the threshold standards in the Frameworks were unable to do. The chapters in *Part B* were published between June 2012 and October 2013, with the principle that any chapter needed to be published for a year before they were formally reviewed against. *Part C* was published in March 2012. In total, there were 19 Expectations across the three constituent parts of the Quality Code. QAA’s *Guide to the Quality Code* (2011) also articulated a series of ‘overarching values,’ as well as setting out the main themes that each chapter addresses.

However, the application of the Quality Code had subtle variations according to the different review methods in place across the UK. Detailing the history of the review methods in use across the UK would require a separate paper in itself and is partly covered in Jackson and Bohrer’s *Quality Assurance in Higher Education: recent developments in the United Kingdom* and Alex Griffiths’s Doctoral thesis, *Forecasting Failure: Assessing Risks to Quality Assurance in Higher Education Using Machine Learning* (King’s College London, 2016). This difference in approach became even more pronounced when the Quality Code underwent extensive revision in 2017-18, partly as a result of a significant shift in how the English higher education sector was regulated and opened up a wider debate as to the role of enhancement in the quality landscape. As with the debates over the Academic Review in 2001, this process of rewriting the Quality Code was fraught with political tensions, highlighted by the different approaches to quality assessment and enhancement across the four nations of the UK.

A Culture of Quality? The UK Quality Code 2018

The revised UK Quality Code was formally published in April 2018 and consisted of a set of four Expectations (two for 'Standards' and two for 'Quality'), and a set of 17 'core' and 'common' practices, again divided into 'Standards' and 'Quality'. Effectively, what was an overarching quality framework consisting of 3 parts, 11 chapters, 19 Expectations and 431 pages, had been significantly reduced down through a process of consultation and refinement to one side of A4.

This revised code now formed the basis of institutional review and audit for UK providers, and its context is set within the change to English higher education brought about by the 2017 Higher Education and Research Act (HERA). This bill, passed by the House of Commons, brought about wide-ranging changes to the regulation of higher education in England through the creation of the Office for Students (OfS), a new regulator that replaced the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). This act also required the new regulator to establish a register of English higher education providers, and access to the register for providers was based on meeting a set of initial conditions laid out in the OfS regulatory framework which would be subject to external/independent assessment by a designated quality body (DQB). Following a tendering process, QAA was appointed as the DQB for England responsible for carrying out the quality and standards assessment functions for entry to the OfS register. However, as the regulatory framework outlines, the conditions of registration relate to a baseline of quality indicators that are based on student outcomes through data sets, and not *how* students achieve those outcomes. Conditions B 1, 2, 4 and 5 in the OfS regulatory framework that relate to quality and standards replicate the four Expectations for the 2018 Quality Code, and this relationship between the Conditions and the Expectations reflects the very different approaches to how higher education is currently regulated, funded and reviewed across the four nations of the UK.

In Scotland, the emphasis is on an enhancement-led approach to quality through its Quality Assessment Framework, of which Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) is one of five elements. ELIR includes a threshold judgment on the security of academic standards and on the enhancement of the student learning experience, plus commendations and recommendations. The focus on enhancement also relates to the student experience through the Scottish HEI's strategic approach to enhancement. Reviews are carried out by QAA Scotland who work collaboratively with several sector bodies including the Scottish Funding Council, the National Union of Students (NUS) and Universities Scotland. In Wales, QAA carries out Quality Enhancement Reviews (QER) on behalf of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), which is the Welsh Government-sponsored body responsible for regulating the Welsh higher education sector.

In Northern Ireland oversight of higher education is the statutory responsibility of the Department for the Economy. Reviews for higher education providers in Northern Ireland used the Annual Provider Review (APR), using data sets provided from a dashboard, although currently there is no active external review method in NI. What the Scottish and Welsh review methods have in common, and act as a point of difference from England, is they rely on a cyclical review of what providers are doing to enhance *above* the baseline laid out in the Quality Code. What Derrick Ferney writes about ELIR in 2007 could just as well apply to the current landscape: 'In respect of transformational change the raising of quality enhancement to a level of strategic importance seems to have taken the Scottish approach some way beyond the territory traditionally occupied by quality assurance' (2007, p. 17). Although this did not happen through ELIR alone – the Enhancement Themes (another constituent part of the Scottish QEF) play a vital part here, including in engaging staff and students in focusing on enhancement activity. The outcomes of the Themes form new reference points which the Scottish HEIs engage with during review, both in their self-evaluation and in peer review. The Enhancement Themes draw in international practice as well as developmental practice within the Scottish sector itself.

With such widely differing approaches to assuring quality, the revision of the Quality Code in 2017-18 caused significant problems for those tasked with the approval of the rewriting. The body responsible for having ‘sector-led oversight of higher education quality assessment arrangements’ is the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment, set up in 2017 and made up of funders, regulators, mission groups and student representatives from across the sector. The committee oversees the baseline regulatory requirements that apply to UK higher education and acts as a “mechanism for determining the ongoing development of the Quality Code” (Terms of Reference, UKSCQA, 2017). The committee acted as a mediator and arbiter for the development of the revised Quality Code; in concert with QAA it also published the consultation on the review of the Quality Code in October 2017. The consultation needed to reflect the changes that were taking place in England, with the consultation on the OfS regulatory framework taking place at the same time in 2017. One of the main focuses of the consultation was to ensure that the Quality Code was still fit for purpose for all four nations of the UK. As David Kernohan notes, “this convergence is important: the UK sector’s global reputation rests to a significant degree on being legible from beyond its borders as a single system” (2017), although in reality it has not been a single system for a considerable period of time.

The structure of the revised code – a set of high-level Expectations shared across the UK, with more detailed ‘practices’ underneath – reflected this need to ensure a UK-wide code while still allowing for national points of departure in how quality is assured and audited. Together with the streamlined approach focusing on student outcomes, the revised Quality Code is designed to allow providers more flexibility in how they achieve those outcomes through their pedagogical approaches without worrying about whether those processes meet a set of external benchmarks. But how to account for the differences of approach across the UK to enhancement-led approaches to quality? The answer lay in separating out the practices between ‘core’ and ‘common’ – the ‘core’ practices are those that apply to all nations of the UK, and the ‘common’ practices apply to those nations that use enhancement to drive quality processes, namely Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. For example, the “core” practices for quality include the following:

The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience. (UK Quality Code, 2018)

The “common” practice however has an important addition:

The provider engages students individually and collectively in the *development, assurance and enhancement* of the quality of their educational experience. (UK Quality Code, 2018, my italics)

The original proposal for the revised Quality Code was to call the common practices ‘supplementary’ and have them sit underneath the ‘core’ practices in a hierarchal taxonomy table. This was rejected in the consultation responses as it was felt that it demoted the importance of enhancement. Instead, the ‘common’ practices were included in the table alongside the ‘core’ practices, an inelegant solution to a tricky problem, but crucially one that all nations of the UK could sign up to via the Standing Committee, regardless of their regulatory systems. This enabled the revised Quality Code to be truly UK-wide, reflective of the sector’s needs and supportive of students and their educational experience.

Conclusion

Debbie McVitty and Jordan Lewis write:

“The Quality Code functioned as a cultural repository for how the higher education community was thinking about quality – for all students, not only those for whom outcomes data exists. Rather than constraining innovation, it arguably established a

community of practice within which creativity could flourish. And it should be noted that the Scottish sector has acted to protect this culture through retaining its enhancement-driven approach to quality” . (2019)

In order to support this wider “cultural repository,” QAA, in partnership with the higher education sector, developed 12 “Advice and Guidance” themes designed to support the mandatory Expectations and practices of the revised Quality Code. These themes, again reflecting the student life cycle of the previous “chapters” of the 2013 Quality Code, were published in November 2018. Components of the previous Quality Code, such as Characteristic Statements and Subject Benchmark Statements, were no longer part of the streamlined, revised Quality Code. Instead, they are now used to support providers in enhancing their teaching and learning environments, clarifying the context of threshold standards for types of qualifications and subjects, and offering guidance on technical queries relating to the frameworks.

The Quality Code has evolved according to the needs of the sector and changes to how higher education in the UK is funded, organized and engaged with – reaffirming Jackson and Bohrer’s view that ‘Quality in higher education is a political issue’ (2010, p. 83). In some respects, the current challenges brought on by COVID-19 have highlighted some of the problems associated with a market-driven, outcomes-focused approach to higher education, with students unsure of what the future holds, and providers facing major financial challenges if student intakes fall in September 2020 because of the pandemic. However, the challenges of COVID-19 are also being met through innovative, responsive and paradigm shifting solutions to traditional pedagogical models of delivery.

The Quality Code is a set of principles that we can rely on to remind ourselves of what matters in moments of crisis – it acts as a common point of reference for all higher education providers, no matter their size, their history or reputation. It creates that common bond for talking about quality, protecting standards, and championing the student as the focus of a truly transformative educational system.

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Part B

COUNTRY/REGIONAL EXPERIENCES AND CASE STUDIES OF SUCCESSFUL PRACTICES IN QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Chapter 8

Seven Decades of Quality Assurance of University Education in Nigeria

Peter A. Okebukola

Introduction

The developmental history of quality assurance in higher education in Nigeria began in 1939 when the colonial administration instituted a panel to review the programs offered in Yaba Higher College, the first institution of higher learning in Nigeria. In Taiwo's (1982) account, the then Governor-General was responding to public comments about the quality of technical personnel that the college was producing. Fears were being expressed that the colonial government was implementing a deliberate policy to ensure that locally produced middle-level human resource from the college was of poor quality when compared with those trained in equivalent institutions in the UK. The report of the panel led to a review of the curriculum of the Yaba Higher College in 1942 (Okebukola, Shabani, Sambo and Ramon-Yusuf, 2007).

By 1948, the colonial administration opened up the first university-level institution in the country as a college of the University of London. University College, Ibadan was operated with the academic framework of the University of London including its quality assurance practices. To assure equivalence with London degrees, the delivery and evaluation methods at Ibadan were patterned largely after and regulated by the University of London. After independence in 1960, Ibadan, which was later weaned as University of Ibadan maintained the internal quality assurance culture that it imbibed from its former parent university.

At independence in 1960, a handful of institutions including University of Ibadan and University of Nigeria, Nsukka with a total enrollment of less than 2,000 made up the higher education system in Nigeria. By 2010, the number of universities had risen to 104 with a pooled student enrollment of about 1.5 million. The total graduate output from the system during the 50-year period is estimated to be about 8.5 million. When combined with research output in the form of published books and articles, patents and inventions as well as community engagement, the system, assuredly, delivered with an eye on quality. While the pursuit of quality was the goal, the extent to which this goal was attained failed to fully meet expectations. The major thrust of this paper is to describe the trend in quality assurance in the Nigerian higher education system over the last 50 years and forecast the future of the process.

The quest for improved quality has developed momentum over the last 50 years. Rising public demand for better performance of higher education institutions, enrollment pressure, efficiency and accountability demands, the need for better-quality graduates to drive the economy, dwindling public resources for higher education and the increasing cross-border provisions are some of the major drivers of this momentum.

Quality assurance, the central theme of this paper, is a label for the process of ensuring fitness for purpose. It emerged strongly in the education lexicon in the mid-1930s. Consensus has built around defining it as fitness for purpose. In the last ten years, an upwelling of interest has grown around it at national and global levels, leading to the establishment of over 2300 agencies and networks which have quality assurance as core mandate.

In Nigeria, three national regulatory agencies are statutorily empowered to quality assure the higher education system. These are the National Universities Commission (NUC), established in 1964; the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), established in 1977; and the National Commission for Colleges of Education, established in 1989. The laws setting up higher education institutions superintended by these agencies accord the institutions concurrent powers to ensure quality of process, products and services.

Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Quality assurance is an umbrella concept for a host of activities that are designed to improve the quality of input, process and output of the higher education system. Figure 1 summarizes the component elements of quality assurance. As the figure shows, quality assurance is not accreditation as some erroneously conceive. Accreditation is one of the activities in quality assurance.

Quality assurance has components internal and external to the institution. Internal quality assurance includes the internal examiner system and internal academic and management audit. An institution engages in these activities to assure itself that it is on course to fulfilling its vision and mission in terms of quality of input, process and output. External validation of institutional quality assurance is often necessary in the desire to norm that institution with others with the same vision and mission. Agents external to the university are players in the external quality assurance system. The key activities are accreditation, periodic monitoring and evaluation by NUC, visitation and external institutional audit. The quality assurance process examines the effectiveness and efficiency of the input, process and output elements of the teaching, learning, research and service activities of a higher education institution. For instance, the quality of products can be measured by how well the graduates are being prepared to serve society and for meeting the challenges of the world of work. It can be judged through ascertaining how efficient the teachers are, and the adequacy of the facilities and materials needed for effective teaching and learning. The utility value of quality assurance can be seen through the provision of information to the public and other interested parties about the worth of the higher education delivery system. It equally ensures accountability in respect of the investment of public funds (Okebukola, et al., 2007).

A systems approach to quality assurance demands that dimensions of input, process and output should be the focus. The input segment includes students, teachers, curriculum and facilities. On the process side, emphasis is on teaching/learning interactions, internal efficiency, research, evaluation procedure and management practices. The output includes the quality of graduates as well as the system's external efficiency.

Equity, Efficiency, Effectiveness, and Relevance

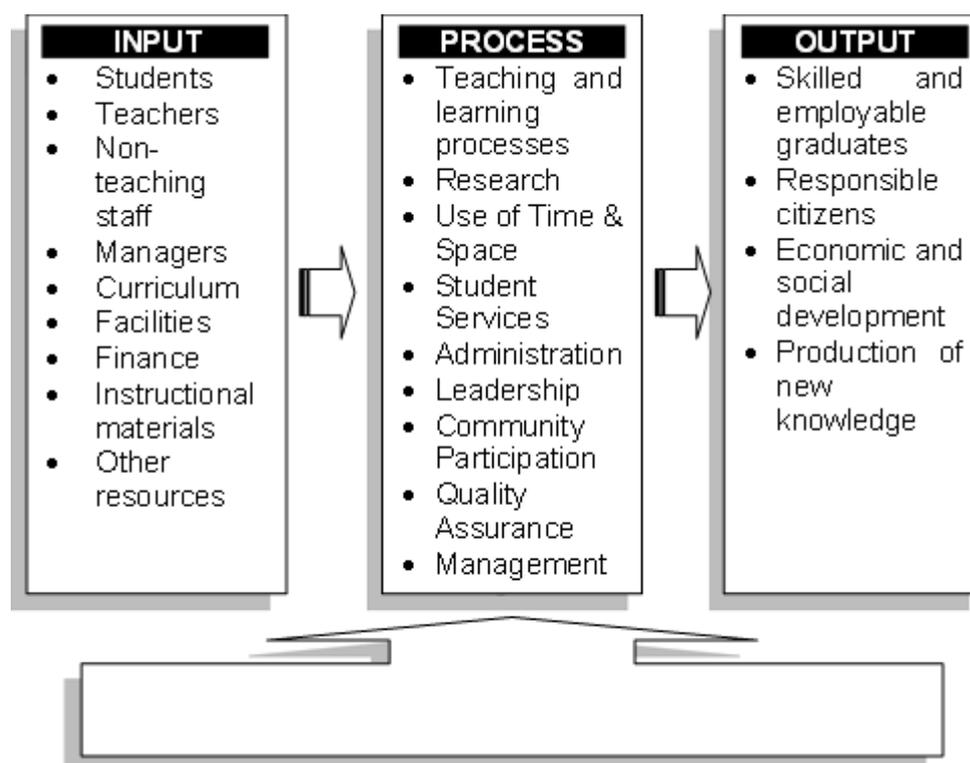


Figure 1: Dimensions of quality assurance

We should now describe in some detail examples of some of the dimensions.

Input dimension – students: The quality of candidates aspiring to have university education is a core element in consideration of the quality of graduates. Six credits (including English and Mathematics) in the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) is the minimum qualification for entry into degree programs. Candidates sit for the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), formerly Universities Matriculation Examination (UME). UTME scores form the basis of admission into universities. A UTME score is set as the national cut-off point. Only SSCE candidates attaining this score or higher are eligible for admission into undergraduate programs. Beyond the minimum national cut-off, universities are at liberty to set cut-off marks for specific programs and conduct post-UTME. The quality of candidates finally admitted is based on the thoroughness of the conduct of the UTME and post-UTME.

Input dimension – teachers: In all higher education institutions in the region, teacher quality is addressed first at the point of recruitment and subsequently through evaluation for promotion and in-service training. The minimum academic standards for staffing provide for minimum qualifications for appointment and for promotion. To progress from one lecturer grade to another through promotion, minimum scores for teaching and research have been set with local variations applied at the level of the university. A PhD is required for appointments and promotion to lectureship positions.

Input dimensions – facilities: Minimum standards have been set for all major facilities in the universities notably classrooms, library, laboratories workshops and offices. Apart from space, standards for equipment and furniture are also set for these facilities. It is against these standards that the quality of facilities is assessed.

Input dimension – curriculum: As part of the minimum academic standards (MAS), minimum content load is specified for the curriculum. Core courses that must be passed regardless of university the student attends are specified as part of this minimum curriculum content. The expectation is that universities will add to this minimum to further enrich their curriculum. In practice, most universities adopt the minimum with the claim that what is regarded as minimum is loaded enough to be maximum. NUC has taken steps to continually update MAS in response to national and global developments.

Process dimension: The transactions in classrooms, laboratories and workshops are hardly subjected to direct quality check. Teaching/learning is assessed indirectly through student assessment of their lecturers and performance of students at the end of the course. During accreditation visits, accreditors are expected to sit in live classrooms or observe laboratory work in progress. This cross-sectional view is the best that can be achieved in the circumstance.

The Accreditation Process

Accreditation can be broadly defined as a process leading to the granting of approval or authority to a program or institution after meeting a set of minimum standards or criteria. The process of accreditation begins with the establishment of a set of minimum standards against which programs are evaluated. Second, a panel of experts evaluates the performance of the program against the standards. Third, a decision is taken based on the accreditation status whether to permit continued operation of the program, make minor adjustments to it or cause the program to be suspended. The process of program accreditation by NUC over the last 20 years will now be sketched under three headings: pre-accreditation, accreditation and post-accreditation phases.

Pre-accreditation activities: As stated earlier, a major pre-accreditation activity is the setting of minimum academic standards against which to measure the performance of a program. The first system-wide and comprehensive development of the minimum academic standards was undertaken in 1990. Through an inclusive stakeholder participatory process, minimum standards were set for students' input, staff input, facilities input, course content, course delivery and evaluation system. The MAS is at the heart of the evaluation instrument used by accreditation panels (see Ramon-Yusuf, 2003).

For a program to merit entry into the accreditation process, it should have been approved by the National Universities Commission. The approval is preceded by a feasibility study and assent by University Senate as well as successful resource verification by the National Universities Commission. The program is run for two years to mature for accreditation. The mature programs and those with expired accreditation certificate as well as programs with denied accreditation whose deficiencies are remedied are presented to NUC for accreditation or re-accreditation.

On the receipt of the list of programs for accreditation from the universities, NUC forwards self-study forms for completion. This affords the universities the opportunity to assess their programs or the entire institution against the minimum academic standards and take last-minute corrective actions. Completed self-study forms are returned to NUC as working documents for the accreditation panels.

Two groups of institutions/agencies are empowered by law to conduct program accreditation in Nigerian universities. The first is the National Universities Commission. Professional bodies and registration councils make up the second group. The group, through specialized accreditation processes, ensures that products from most of the professional programs meet specified output behaviors for practice. For instance, the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria accredits NUC-approved medical programs for the purpose of ensuring that medical graduates are equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes for practice of

medicine in Nigeria and elsewhere in the world. The same is true for the Council for the Registration of Engineers (COREN) with responsibility for accrediting engineering programs and the Council for Legal Education for law programs. There are sixteen of such professional bodies and registration councils that conduct specialized accreditation for NUC-approved programs. Each of these bodies is empowered by its enabling law to conduct accreditation. If the professional body fails to grant accreditation to a program, graduates from such program though accredited by NUC, will not be registrable for practice.

Whereas NUC takes responsibility for accreditation of all programs offered in Nigerian universities, only about a quarter of the programs are subjected to specialized accreditation by professional bodies. In response to the complaint of accreditation visit overload by vice-chancellors, NUC and many of the professional bodies have adopted joint accreditation exercises when panels from NUC and the professional bodies concurrently conduct accreditation during a single rather than dual visit.

The major steps in the accreditation process are:

1. Communication to NUC by the university with the intention to mount a program after feasibility study.
2. NUC checks alignment of program with national need and global relevance. On satisfactory fit, a resource assessment team is sent to the university.
3. Upon satisfactory resource assessment, NUC grants formal approval for the running of the program.
4. Two years into the life of the program, it is deemed mature for accreditation. An accreditation panel is commissioned to evaluate the program.
5. Based on the quality of the program and its delivery in relation to the minimum academic standards, accreditation is assessed as FULL, INTERIM or DENIED.

Running alongside the processing of self-study forms is the composition of accreditation panels. Membership of the panels is limited to full professors in the discipline with track record of objectivity, integrity and non-compromising of standards. Vice-Chancellors make nominations to complement selection from the NUC database of experts. Professional bodies and registration councils also nominate their members to serve on NUC accreditation panels. The leader of each panel is elected from among members. He/she is usually the most senior professor with experience in the business of accreditation (Okebukola, et al., 2005).

With the panel in place, a coordinating meeting is held to induct new members into and refresh the old about the mechanisms of the accreditation process. Usually a full-day event which begins with presentations on the philosophical and procedural framework for accreditation, the exercise proceeds into sessions where the assessment instruments are discussed. In a step-by-step manner, accreditors are worked through every item on the assessment instruments. The meaning of each item relative to the minimum standard to be measured and the procedure for scoring are explained in detail. After panel members have attained a high degree of fluency in the use of the instruments, simulation exercises are then carried out. During such exercises, scenarios of hypothetical cases of what can be found on ground during accreditation visits are presented for scoring. Scores of panel members are debated and harmonized. The simulation exercise continues until the differential between the scores of all panel members on each item in the assessment instrument is reduced to the barest minimum. The thrust of the entire exercise is to enhance inter-rated reliability. At the close of the coordination meeting, the panels depart for their accreditation sites. It is ensured that, as much as possible, no member offers service within 300 km of his/her university catchment.

At the accreditation site, the panel meets with the vice-chancellor and then the dean of faculty, head of department and staff of the program to be evaluated. After the introductory meeting, the panel settles down to work for two days assessing the program content, facilities, delivery and evaluation modes. Interviews are held with students and sample lectures and practicals

are observed. Each member of the panel scores the performance of the program during the course of the two days. At the end of the visit, the panel writes its report which is discussed with the program staff and the vice-chancellor. It is mandatory to secure the comments and signature of the vice-chancellor or representative on the report. The report along with the quantitative assessment of the program and recommendations as to accreditation status earned are sent to NUC.

The panel reports are processed in NUC through its management committee and the board. The accreditation decisions on each program are informally discussed with the vice-chancellors following which results are officially released to the universities and the public upon approval by the board. The strengths and weaknesses of each program are communicated to the universities. The universities in turn use the information to remedy identified deficiencies. In cases where vice-Chancellors contest the decision of the panels, an appellate system is in place to look at such queries. However, the original decision is in force until overturned by the appeal.

NUC also takes steps to compute the cost of remedying deficiencies of program with denied accreditation. The information is conveyed to the proprietor and management of the university for further necessary action. Universities that have several denied programs are encouraged to consult NUC regarding the action to be taken on such programs. The report from the panels which include lessons learned and recommendations for improving the accreditation process is also a major post-accreditation activity.

As Okojie (2008) noted:

- The NUC accreditation system stands out in the African continent as a very robust system.
- The first accreditation exercise organized by the NUC in 1990 was unprecedented in the African continent.
- To add more credibility to the exercise, a team of experts in various academic fields from different African countries participated in the November 2008 Accreditation exercise as international monitors.
- Instruments were developed for ODL undergraduate (Ibadan, Lagos, Abuja, NOUN) programs which were used for the eventual accreditation of this mode of learning.

There has been a progressive improvement in the performances of universities in accreditation exercises as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Trends in accreditation status of programs in Nigerian universities

Year of Accreditation	Number of programs accredited	FULL	INTERIM	DENIED
1990/91	837	185 (22.1%)	572 (68.4%)	79 (9.5%)
1999/2000	1,119	128 (11.4%)	801 (71.6%)	190 (17%)
2005/2006	1,670	748 (44.8%)	810 (48.5%)	112 (6.7%)
2007	1,110	749 (67.5%)	332 (29.9%)	29 (2.6%)

Source: Okojie (2008). Briefing document for the Honourable Minister of Education

NUC successfully carried out academic programs audit of the Nigerian University System. The exercise made it possible for the Commission to know the number of programs and their status, as follows:

Number of programs in NUS:- 2936
Number of approved programs: 2605
Number of unapproved programs: 331
Approved Affiliation: 6, with 5 universities, as follows:

- College of Education, Ondo affiliated with O.A.U Ile-Ife
- Rivers State College of Education, Omoku affiliated with University of Ibadan
- Alvan Ikoku College of Education Owerri affiliated with University of Nigeria, Nsukka
- Federal College of Education, Zaria affiliated with A.B.U. Zaria
- Federal College of Education, Kano affiliated with A.B.U. Zaria
- Kaduna Polytechnic affiliated with FUT, Minna
- There are 91 unapproved affiliations in 13 universities

The trend in quality assurance within the Nigerian higher education system with focus on universities will now be addressed.

Trends in Quality Assurance in the Nigerian University System

At independence in 1960, University College, Ibadan basked under the shadow of the internal quality assurance system of its superintending university- University of London. University of London has over 170-year history of quality assuring its input, process and products. Its affiliate college at Ibadan benefited from the oversight since the goal was to run a university college and produce graduates that are not below the standards of the University of London. Students were admitted into University of Ibadan based strictly on impressive performance in the Higher School Certificate and General Certificate of Education Advanced level. Available spaces were far short of the number of qualified applicants hence only the top-scoring candidates were creamed from the pack. In 1960, over 3000 candidates applied to the university. Admission was offered to less than 240.

Between 1960 and 1962, University of Lagos, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and University of Nigeria, Nsukka were added to the list followed by University of Benin in 1970 to make up what is now known as the first-generation universities. In these universities, internal quality assurance through stringent admission conditions, appointment and promotion criteria, monitoring of the curriculum delivery and evaluation process was patterned along the lines of well-rated universities in Europe and North America.

With regard to appointment and promotion, in the first two decades after independence, the first- and second-generation universities applied criteria which ensured that good quality teachers, administrators and technical personnel from anywhere in the world were appointment. Better funding of the universities which translated to good quality working environment and attractive welfare scheme fostered the staying power of such international staff. Promotion was also based on well-established international standards. Thus, the quality of staff was assured through a regime of transparent and objectively applied criteria for appointment and promotion that was in line with good practices in reputable universities in Europe and North America.

Another amplification worth making is that of the external examiner system. This system ensures that the quality of the examination process was high and anticipated to be a good proxy for the curriculum delivery process. External examiners were top-rate scholars drawn from highly reputable universities within and outside Nigeria. The quality of the external

examination system was high. This kept university teachers on their toes with regard to keeping faith with curriculum delivery.

In order to gain deeper insight into the trends in quality assurance since 1960, eleven former vice-chancellors, nine emeritus professors and eighteen serving professors who had offered service for upward of 20 years were asked to rate the quality assurance process of the Nigerian university system over ten-year intervals from 1948 to 2010. The clusters of interest were (a) student admission process; (b) staff appointments and promotions; (c) external examiner system; (d) visitation process; and (e) accreditation process. The findings of the study which are reported in full in Okebukola (2010a) are summarized below.

Trends in student quality assurance: The process of admitting students was adjudged, on average, to be above 80% in quality between 1948 and 1960 (see Figure 3). A steady depreciation crept in from 1970 to 2000 where a 54% mean score was recorded. A rise to 66% was noted for 2010.

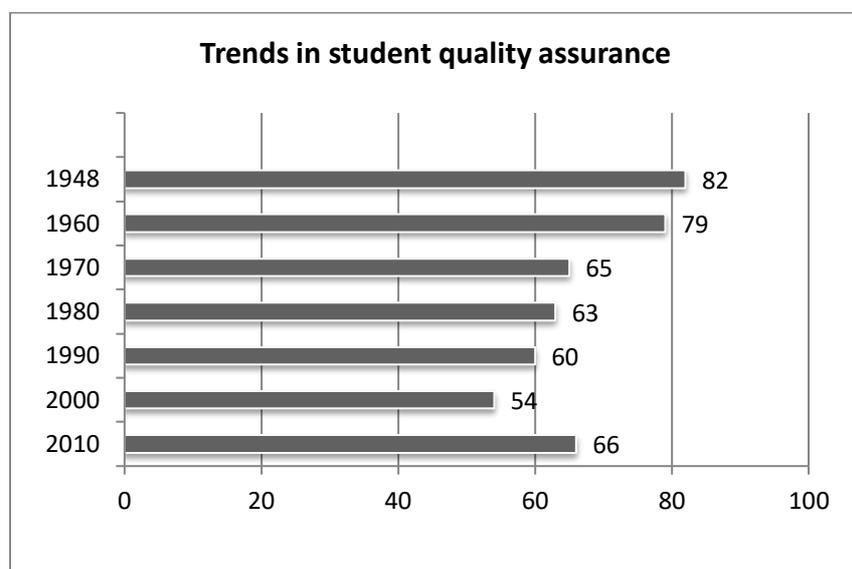


Figure 3: Trends in student quality assurance

Participants in the study explained the drop from 1960 to 2000 to, among other factors, the increase in the number of universities leading to a motley assortment of admission processes especially by state universities with their unapproved satellite campuses. Another reason offered is the malpractices engaged in by UME candidates, thus compromising the quality of candidates admitted into the universities. The spurt of improvement in the process recorded for 2010 was adduced to the post-UME (now post-UTME) screening which was instituted in 2004.

Trends in staff quality assurance: The study showed that from 1960 to 1980, staff appointment and promotion processes were assured to range impressively between 75% and 84%. However, by 1990, a drop to 63% had occurred, further dropping to an all-time low of 43% in 2010 (Figure 4).

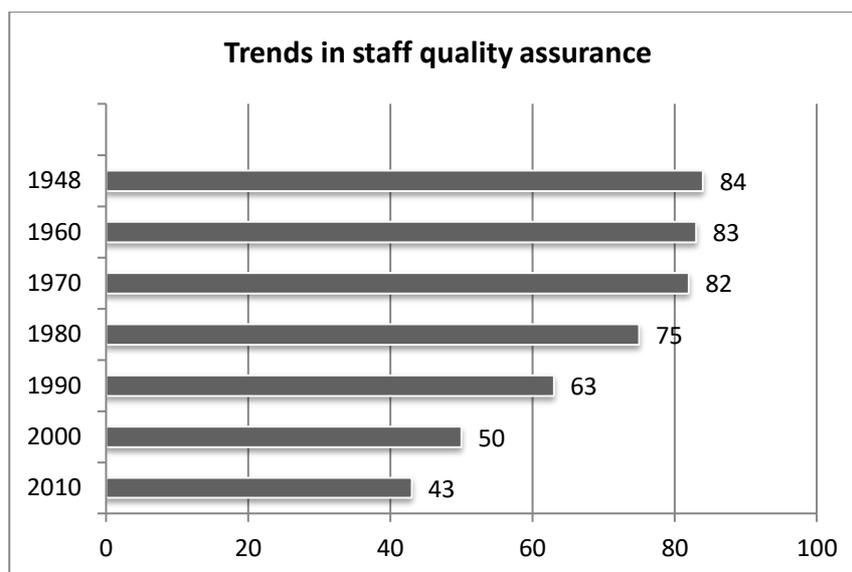


Figure 4: Trends in staff quality assurance

The study sample reasoned that the expansion of the system, especially with state and private universities, is accountable for the depreciation in the quality of staff appointment and promotion. Field observations confirmed that new universities depressed their appointment and promotion standards to be able to meet NUC-prescribed minimum standards for staff mix. More worrisome is the appointment into professorial positions of persons with academic credentials much lower than what obtained “in the good old days.” A crop of professors had started to emerge within the last ten years that would hardly merit a lecturer grade 1 position in any of the first-generation universities in the 1960s and 1970s. The claim to research and publications by these charlatan “professors” is found in “roadside” journals and self-published, poorly edited, largely plagiarized books.

Clannishness and parochialism have also added dead weights to lowering the quality of process of appointment and promotion. In some universities including federal-owned institutions, being a “son of the soil” ranks higher than merit in appointment to management and academic leadership positions such as vice-chancellor, registrar, dean of faculty or head of department. State universities are most guilty on this score. Non-indigeneship of a state is inhibitory to appointment into the university, more so into academic leadership positions. A few universities such as Osun State University, Osogbo (UNIOSUN) and University of Science and Technology, Ifaki-Ekiti (USTI), provide examples of cosmopolitan and merit-driven climate for appointment and promotion. These examples are worthy of emulation.

Trends in quality of external examiner system: The results of the study (Figure 5) showed that the external examiner system was strong and respectable from 1960 to 1990. From 1990 to date, a significant drop in quality rating was recorded to a low of 40% in 2010.

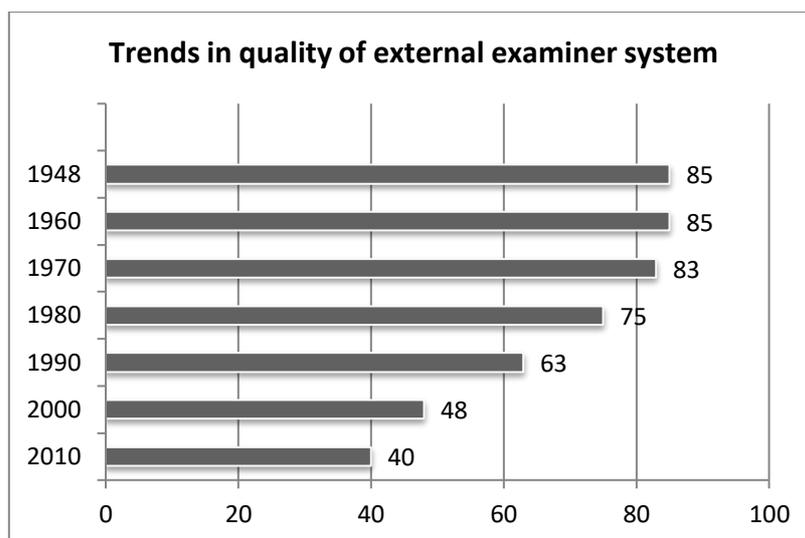


Figure 5: Trends in quality of external examiner system

In the early days of the Nigerian university system (1960-70), the external examiner was typically a top-rate scholar from a highly reputable university outside Nigeria. Many were from European and North American universities who were the household names in their disciplines. They vetted examination questions, moderated marked scripts and sat in judgment over the defense of projects, dissertations and theses. They applied the strict and stringent conditions for curriculum delivery and evaluation that prevailed in their institutions. This translated into adoption of the same culture of quality by the Nigerian university of the top-rate university where the external examiner came from. In contrast, the external examiner in contemporary times, is not cut in the same mold. Many are friends of the head of department who are invited not to rock the boat but paper over quality cracks in the curriculum delivery and evaluation processes. The good external examiner who stands the chance of being invited again (and making a little money on the side), is one who makes positive recommendations on a poor-quality process. The “wicked” examiner who will hardly be invited a second time is one who applies the quality rule book and penalizes as appropriate. With the ever-growing number of professors appointed or promoted on doubtful research and publication output, the ranks of the mediocre external examiner, if not checked, may swell in the coming years and lead to severe compromise of quality.

Trends in the visitation process: The survey sample adjudged the visitation process in the Nigerian university system from when data was available (1980) to be of good quality (mean of 75%)- see Figure 6. A visitation is often impaneled every five years by the Visitor of a federal university. In other universities, the regularity is indeterminate, oftentimes determined when a university-wide problem demands investigation and resolution by the visitor or proprietor.

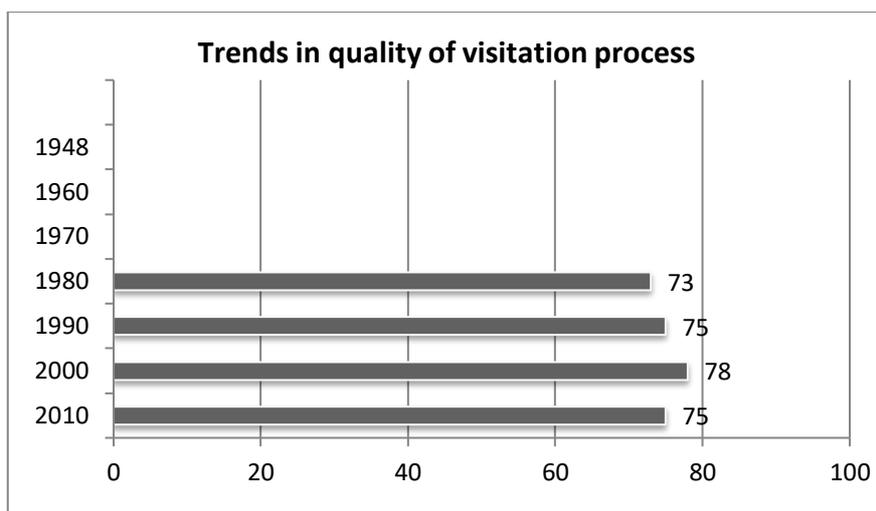


Figure 6: Trends in the quality of the visitation process

According to most university laws:

The visitor shall, as often as the circumstances may require, not being less than once in every five years, undertake a visitation to the university or direct that such a visitation be conducted by a selected team of academics, University administrators and/or professionals set up by the visitor for the purpose of ascertaining that the objectives of the university are being met, and to this end:

1. conduct an evaluation of the vision and mission of the university
2. ensure that the academic standards envisaged are sustained; and
3. inquire whether the administrative and financial affairs of the university are being conducted in accordance with the provisions of these laws, statutes, ordinances and regulations and in consonance with acceptable ethical and professional standards.

The findings of the study confirm the good quality of the visitation process over the years. However, it is worthy of a remark that except in a few instances, the white paper that will activate remedial action is hardly published until after several years. This mocks the effectiveness of the process.

Trends in quality of the accreditation process: Accreditation as a process is a relatively recent phenomenon in Nigeria. This is perhaps a consequence of its recency in the global higher education transaction. Thirty years after independence was when the plan to implement program accreditation came into being. Within about 20 years of its implementation, the study sample adjudged the process to be of respectable quality (73% by 2010)- Figure 7.

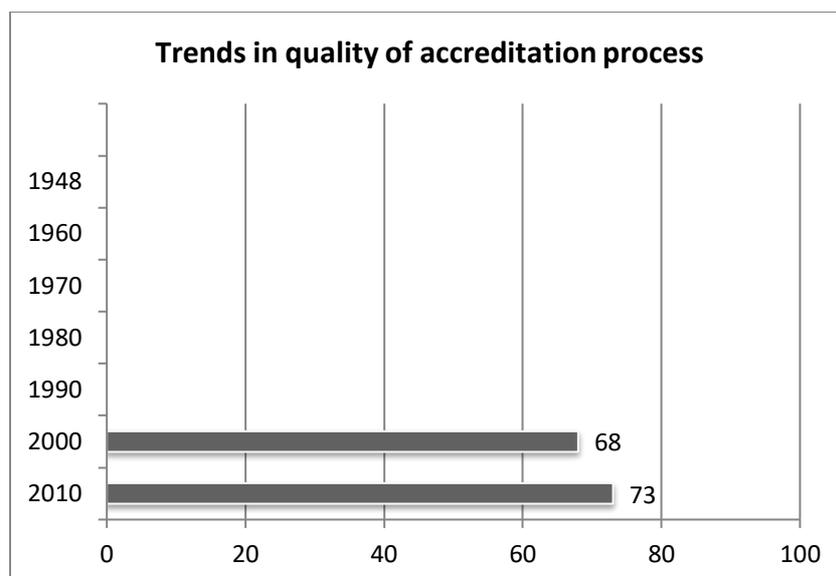


Fig 7: Trends in quality of accreditation process

Since its take-off in 1990, the accreditation process has continued to undergo refinement in the quest to improve based on lessons learned from one year to the next. The program accreditation focus is expected to be enriched with institutional accreditation beginning from 2010/2011.

Current Thrust of NUC Towards Institutional Accreditation (Pilot Phase)

The National Universities Commission under the leadership of Professor Julius Okojie is expanding its quality assurance horizon to include institutional accreditation. Institutional accreditation is a process where an institution is reviewed by a competent body or organization for the purpose of establishing whether or not the institution meets a particular set of standards. Institutional accreditation considers the characteristics of the institution as a whole. It evaluates the organizational capacity to deliver quality programs. It does not seek to deal with any particular program in detail although programs are reviewed as a part of the consideration of the entire institution (Figure 8). It examines such institutional characteristics as governance, administrative strength, academic policies and procedures, quality of faculty, physical facilities and financial stability. It is an evidence-based process carried out through peer review.

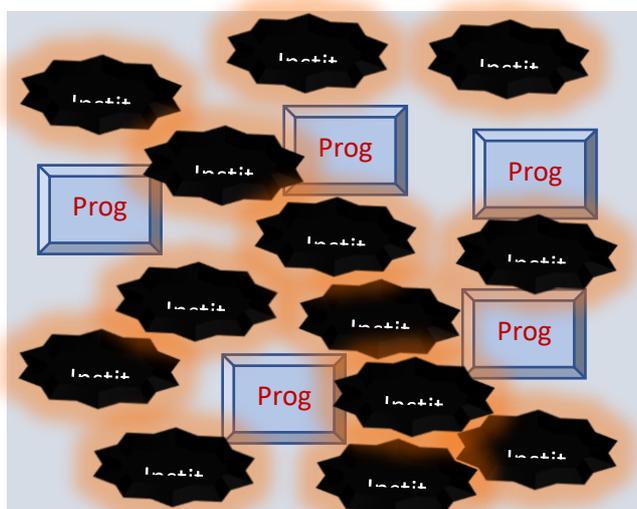


Figure 8: Program accreditation relative to institutional accreditation

Minimum standards have been developed around the following:

1. Institutional vision, mission and strategic goals
2. Institutional governance and administration
3. Institutional resources including Learning resources and student support
4. Quality of teaching and research
5. Management of human and material resources and institutional efficiency and effectiveness
6. Extension, relationships with internal and external constituencies and consultancy
7. Financial management and stability
8. General ethos

What to assess in the standards and some data sources are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Standards and data sources

	Standards	Data sources
1	Institutional vision, mission and strategic goals	
	Assess the fitness of purpose of the vision, mission and strategic goals of the university in relation to institutional responsiveness to local, national and international development agenda. Assess how overall university curriculum meets labor market, knowledge or other socio-cultural needs.	Completed and validated Self-Study Report University's Strategic Plan; Annual reports; Visitation Panel reports; Faculty and Departmental Handbook
2	Institutional Governance and Administration	
	In relation to vision, mission and strategic goals of the university, assess quality of governance and administration by Council, Senate, Principal Officers (Vice-Chancellor, Registrar, Bursar, University Librarian), Faculty boards, Departments, and other statutory bodies. Assess effectiveness of the Committee System.	Completed and validated Self-Study Report University's Strategic Plan; Annual reports; Visitation Panel reports; Questionnaire administration and interview of staff, students, parents and other stakeholders
3	Institutional Resources including Learning resources and student support	
	Assess academic infrastructure and facilities (classrooms, laboratories, workshops, library, and staff offices); facilities for sports, games and recreation; healthcare facilities; regularity of water and electricity supply; network of roads; communication (intercom) facilities; toilet facilities; cleanliness of environment (not bushy, walls not defaced with posters); IT infrastructure; student hostels; guidance and counseling services and student support services	Completed and validated Self-Study Report; on-site assessment in relation to minimum standards
4	Quality of Teaching and Research	
	Assess general teaching and learning interactions (curriculum delivery) in the university in relation to producing national	Completed and validated Self-Study Report; on-site assessment of

	relevant and globally competitive graduates; quality and relevance of research undertaken by staff and students; level of deployment of e-learning and use of new technologies for teaching, learning and research; research ethics, code of conduct, regulations on plagiarism and intellectual property rights;	teaching and learning; University's Annual Reports; staff CVs; University Policy on research and its implementation; questionnaire and interview data.
5	Management of Human and Material Resources and Institutional Efficiency and Effectiveness	
	Assess students' admission and selection process-compliance with NUC and JAMB guidelines on carrying capacity and quality of intake; ease of registration for courses, staff recruitment process and staff mix in line with NUC guidelines; staff welfare; effectiveness and efficiency of the committee system; internal and external efficiency of the system (progression, dropout and graduation rates); visibility and richness of web presence.	Completed and validated Self-Study Report; admission records; on-site assessment; interview of students.
6	Extension, Relationships with internal and external constituencies and Consultancy	
	Assess quality and quantity of external activities of staff of the university; consultancies and virility of linkages with national and international organizations and universities.	Completed and validated Self-Study Report; staff CVs; University's Annual reports; records of consultancies and academic and cultural linkages.
7	Financial Management and Stability	
	Assess transparency and accountability in funds management; external auditor's reports; funds generation capability	External Auditor's reports; Questionnaire and interview data on Bursary administration.
8	General Ethos	
	Assess staff and student discipline tone; level of non-manifestation of social vices (cultism; examination malpractice; sale of handouts).	On-site assessment; questionnaire and interview data.

The assessment criteria for the minimum standards which are currently being pilot tested in six volunteer universities are given in Table 3.

Table 3: Assessment criteria for minimum standards for institutional accreditation

	Standards
1	Institutional vision, mission and strategic goals
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear and realistic vision and mission statements and strategic goals. • Strategic goals have timeframes and are measurable. • Institutional vision, mission and strategic goals are being pursued in alignment with development agenda at the local (e.g., State

	<p>Development Plans), national (e.g., Vision 20-2020) and international (e.g., Millennium Development Goals) levels.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University curriculum across Colleges/Faculties are designed to meet the demands of the labor market and entrepreneurship.
2	Institutional Governance and Administration
	<p>Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lays down sound policies for effective running of the university • Appoints good quality staff at all levels, following due process • Prudent and transparent in the management of university funds • Innovative in attracting funds for the university • Performs oversight functions of the activities of Management • Manages staff appellate issues not resolved by the Vice-Chancellor • Promotes and makes provisions for research in the University • Provides for the welfare of all persons employed by the University • Proactive in dealing with academic and managerial matters in the university <p>Vice-Chancellor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership in promoting academic program development of the university as Chairman of Senate • Leadership in promoting physical development of the university • Financial prudence • Fairness in attending to staff disputes • Implementation of the Committee System • Maintenance of security of lives and property on Campus • Ability to listen and tolerate divergent views • Trustworthiness as head of the university • Proactive in dealing with academic and managerial matters in the university • Passionate about taking the University to great heights <p>Registrar</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality leadership of the secretariat of Senate • Responsiveness to staff needs relating to the Registry • Accurate record-keeping in the registry, including staff and student records • Creative in solving problems in the Registry • Provides sound advice to the Vice-Chancellor on administrative matters • Applies modern methods in Registry operations • Provides good examples to be followed by subordinates in the Registry <p>Bursar</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides sound financial advice to the Vice-Chancellor • Applies modern methods in bursary operations • Institutes effective financial control • Effective in record-keeping in the Bursary • Provides good examples to be followed by subordinates in the Bursary

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative in solving problems in the Bursary • Responsive to staff needs relating to the Bursary • Keeps accurate records in the Bursary, including staff and student records <p>University Librarian</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applies modern methods in library operations • Provides good examples to be followed by subordinates in the library • Creative in solving problems in the library • Ensures stocking of the library with current and relevant holdings of books and journals • Liaison with departments to ensure that their specific needs for books and journals are addressed • Provides sound advice to the Vice-Chancellor on the running of the library • Leadership in establishing and operating a library policy for the university • Gives academic leadership through research and publications • Effective in record-keeping in the library <p>Committee System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least (a) 3 committees of Council; (b) 5 committees of Senate; (c) 2 Faculty committees; and (d) 1 Departmental committee are in place. • Committees hold statutory meetings when due. • At least half of the recommendations of committees of statutory bodies and ad-hoc committees are expeditiously processed.
3	Institutional Resources including Teaching-Learning resources and student support
	<p>Global</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each College/Faculty has a commodious, visibly impressive building. • All Departments have ample space for staff offices, classrooms, laboratories, workshops and library in line with the minimum standards for program(s) offered. • There is a health center with in-patient and out-patient facilities. Staffing includes full-time medical officer(s), pharmacists, technologists and nurses. The Pharmacy department is well stocked for the population of staff and students. Service in the health center is professional and prompt. • Academic buildings, on-campus hostels and staff quarters are supplied with at least 12 hours of electricity daily and a 24-hour supply of water. • Network of roads feeding main university buildings are tarred and well drained; communication (intercom) facilities are functional • All academic buildings and hostels have functioning and clean toilet facilities in appropriate ratios to users. • Clean campus environment (not bushy, walls not defaced with posters); aesthetically appealing landscaping. • IT infrastructure in place and functioning. 24-hour Internet access for staff and students. • Clean and well-maintained on-campus student hostels with adequate bed space per student. • Availability of efficient guidance and counseling services and student support services including transportation.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreational facilities such as games and sports are well-developed, in use and maintained • At least 70% of the buildings have firefighting and safety facilities. • At least 70% of buildings have facilities to accommodate students with special needs. <p>Specific</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum standards for academic infrastructure are met for all programs offered in the university.
4	Quality of Teaching and Research
	<p>Assess general teaching and learning interactions (curriculum delivery) in the university in relation to producing national relevant and globally competitive graduates; quality and relevance of research undertaken by staff and students; level of deployment of e-learning and use of new technologies for teaching, learning and research; research ethics, code of conduct, regulations on plagiarism and intellectual property rights.</p> <p>Quality of Teaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class is participatory, non-threatening and eagerness to learn pervades the faces of students. • Lectures are based on the latest developments in the discipline as obtained from the most recent literature. • Course materials are of good quality regarding academic content and are made available to every student. • Lecturers and students are prompt to class. • Class size and organization are conducive to effective teaching and learning. • Voice of teacher projects well or is aided by a functioning public address system. • Laboratory/workshop practicals are hands-on and investigatory. • There is evidence of ample prelab/workshop preparations. • Safety rules are obeyed throughout the duration of the practical work. • Good use of instructional aids, especially new technologies. <p>Quality of Research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A minimum of 70% of staff in the university have published at least two articles in reputable local journals in the last 12 calendar months. • A minimum of 20% of staff in the university have published at least two articles in reputable international journals and registered patents and inventions that are indexed in global databases within the last 12 calendar months. • A minimum of 10% of staff in the university have won at least N1 million research grant each within the last 12 calendar months. • A minimum of 5% of staff in the university have won international academic prizes. • At least 10% of the research output from the university is from collaborative/transdisciplinary research.

5	Management of Human and Material Resources and Institutional Efficiency and Effectiveness
	<p>Assess students' admission and selection process- compliance with guidelines on carrying capacity and quality of intake; ease of registration for courses, staff recruitment process and staff mix in line with NUC guidelines; staff welfare; effectiveness and efficiency of the committee system; internal and external efficiency of the system (progression, dropout and graduation rates); visibility and richness of web presence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admission process is conducted within acceptable timeframes and in season • Quantity and quality of student intake match minimum standards for the courses to which admission is made • Registration process is devoid of stress to students and executed in a timely manner • All staff are recruited through due process and in the correct category mix • Welfare of staff and students not below generally acceptable standards • At least 95% of students' progress to the next level of degree program annually • Not more than 1% of students drop out (internally or externally) from degree programs • At least 95% of a cohort of students graduate within the duration of their course of study • Pervasive culture of recycle and reuse of material resources e.g., paper • Pervasive culture of conservation of water and electricity • Timeliness (sessional) in the release of results to students and sponsors
6	Extension, Relationships with internal and external constituencies and Consultancy
	<p>Assess quality and quantity of external activities of staff of the university, consultancies and virility of linkages with national and international organizations and universities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum of 20% of staff engage annually in approved extension services to the community e.g., public lectures and consultancies • Minimum of 1% of staff are engaged in approved membership of national and international boards • Minimum of 1% of staff have patents, inventions and commercialized products
7	Financial Management and Stability
	<p>Assess transparency and accountability in funds management; external auditor's reports; funds generation capability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of the university community of funds intake and disbursements by Management • Cash advances are retired within timeframe specified in the University's Accounting Manual • Minimum of 20% of total income is from internally generated revenue

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publication of the annual reports of the university on the university's web site and in print • Auditors' reports published and widely circulated (web site and in print) • University is financially solvent and stable; university is able to meet all financial obligations; accounts not in the red • Annual reports published at year's end
8	General Ethos
	<p>Assess staff and student discipline tone, level of manifestation of social vices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discipline culture pervades staff and student life in the university (promptness to work/class; prompt attendance to request for goods and services; maintenance of serene atmosphere; courtesy in dealing with people; respect for queues; and religious/cultural tolerance and harmony) • Non-manifestation of social vices e.g., examination malpractice and sale of handouts.

Decision

The following decisions can be reached from the scores obtained.

Score	Letter Grade	Judgment	Remarks
80% and above	A+	FULL accreditation (10-year life span)	Excellent
70-79%	A	FULL accreditation (10-year life span)	
65-69%	B+	FULL accreditation (8-year life span)	Good
60-64%	B	FULL accreditation (8-year life span)	
55-59%	C+	INTERIM Accreditation (5-year life span)	Fair
50-54%	C	INTERIM Accreditation (3-year life span)	
45-49%	D	Probation (for two years)	Poor
40-44%	E	Probation (for one year)	
Less than 40%	F	DENIED	Fail

Proposed Process

The following **14-step** process has been proposed:

Step	Activity	Remarks
1.	Application	University applies in writing to NUC and on approval, proceeds to make online application.
2.	Self-study	University completes NUC Institutional Accreditation Self-Study Form <u>online</u> and in hard copy.
3.	Pre-Accreditation Meeting	Each institution holds pre-accreditation meeting with NUC to get acquainted with the process and for review of Self-Study Form.
4.	Composition of Accreditation Panel	NUC composes Accreditation Panel and reviews same with target institution.
5.	Training of Accreditors	NUC trains Accreditation Panels to familiarize them with the process and streamline (harmonize) assessment.
6.	Pre-Site Visit	Accreditation Panel and NUC officials hold meeting with University Management and other stakeholders on logistical and other issues related to the successful conduct of the exercise.
7.	Site Visit	On-site assessment using approved criteria (above, modified and finalized with stakeholders) and cross-checking with Self-Study Forms.
8.	Post-site visit meeting with university	Accreditation Panel reviews findings with University Management and other officials.
9.	Submission of first draft of report by Accreditation Panel to NUC	Accreditation Panel submits draft report signed by the University to NUC.
10.	NUC reviews report with university	Meeting held on the report by NUC with VC of the University and other Principal Officers. University to submit its improvement plan.

11.	Processing of report through NUC Management, Board and HME	Due process and consultations on report and securing of approval.
12.	Disclosure of findings	Release of approved results.
13.	Remediation by the University and continuous improvement	University takes steps to improve on its areas of deficiency.
14.	Post-disclosure visit by NUC and monitoring of progress	NUC visits the university periodically to monitor improvement.

Impact of Quality Assurance on Quality of the Nigerian University System

The stress put on the universities in terms of demand and the limited expansion in physical facilities and academic staff to cater for this demand has taken a great toll on the quality of programs in the institutions. Employers of labor and the general public have expressed concern over the quality of graduates of Nigerian universities. The situation is glaringly evident when they are requested to take qualifying examinations. Hitherto, Nigerian certificates were offered automatic recognition abroad. Similarly, an increasing number of employers are forced to practically retrain newly recruited graduates to give them the skills that should have been acquired in the University.

This problem is further worsened by the exodus of academic staff from the universities, popularly referred to as “brain drain.” This has largely been as a result of the economic crisis of the mid-eighties to early nineties in the country made worse by the devaluation of the Naira as a result of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). Another dimension to the problem in the 1990s and which is now threatening the very existence of the system is the perennial staff strikes with resultant frequent closures of the universities.

The state of university education in Nigeria can therefore be described as one of massive explosion in student enrollment; increasing number of prospective new entrants in the face of inadequate and obsolete infrastructure and equipment; poor library facilities, inadequate academic staff in number and quality; lack of relevance of academic programs, low level of funding, cultism, examination malpractice and generally therefore low-quality graduates as shown by many studies supported by the World Bank and the Needs Assessment Survey of the NUC in 2004. The world economy is however changing as knowledge supplants physical capital as the source of wealth. This is driven by technology, especially information technology and biotechnology. As knowledge becomes more important, so does higher education. The quality of this and its availability to the wider economy is becoming increasingly critical to national competitiveness. These challenges and problems call for a re-think of the sub-sector in terms of what it should be and how it is expected to play its mandatory role in society.

The quality of graduates from the Nigerian university system was assessed by NUC in 2004 through labor market surveys. Highlights of the results are given below.

Management and social science graduates

- Lack of analytical and ICT skills required in the workplace.
- Lack of entrepreneurial and problem-solving/decision-making skills.
- Inadequate technical skills as exhibited by their inability to appropriately apply acquired knowledge to the workplace.
- Inadequate practical skills due to lack of linkage with industry.

- Lack of professionalism and professional ethics.
- Poor-quality teaching staff due to poor training and lack of professionalism.
- Poor creativity and critical thinking.
- Low communication and literary skills.

Suggestions to improve competencies of graduates: Arising from the identified deficiencies, the following were suggested measures for improving the competencies of graduates:

- Improvement in the teaching of English Language to improve literary and communication skills of graduates.
- University education should be geared towards addressing our unique problems and needs while responding to global trends.
- Reading culture in the universities should be revived by emphasizing production of books and journals as against handouts.
- Student Industrial Work Scheme (SIWES) and entrepreneurial education be integrated into the curriculum.
- University curricula should be restructured to imbue students with practical and analytical skills.
- University curricula should incorporate professional ethics and technical components to closely link theory with the world of work.
- Attention should be paid to training of teachers on the content-material development and proper mode of delivery.

Sciences

- Very weak laboratory practicals and field exposure.
- Limited knowledge of statistics, particularly biometrics and field experimentation, hence weak analysis of data and the faulty drawing of inferences to make logical conclusions.
- Lecturers were not committed to their jobs, many of them carrying out external jobs and assignments to the detriment of their primary job.
- Curriculum not modern enough, lacking in the treatment of new concepts and practicals, hence the lecturers themselves were not up to date.
- Skills in literary and oral communication, information technology, entrepreneurship, analytical competency, problem-solving/decision-making capabilities, subject-specific knowledge, technical capability, critical thinking, self-directed learning and numeracy, were, overall, considered only *average*, but the magnitude of weaknesses varied with the specific attributes.
- The only attribute in which the graduates were rated *good* was in Interpersonal Skills.
- The seriousness of deficiency in the various skills is evident in the *poor* rating by a consistent 20% of the respondents.
- Of the organizations studied, on average, only 20% recruited graduates in the last five years, ranging from a low of 9% in 2002 and 40% in 2003.

Agriculture and veterinary medicine

- The basic weaknesses being experienced in the declining quality of graduates, with particular reference to agriculture and veterinary medicine graduates, are mainly traceable to the inherited (“carry-over”) weaknesses of pre-university level; that is, the primary and secondary levels of education, about which the respondents overwhelmingly pronounced “falling standards”.
- A thoroughly compounding factor is the pervasive deterioration of Nigerian social values of truth, honesty and dedication, thus leading to the moral decadence that has affected the processes of examinations conducted by the West African Examinations

Council (WAEC) and more recently the Nigerian Examinations Council (NECO); and the Joint Admissions Matriculation Board (JAMB) examinations/admissions processes.

- There is a disturbing massive shift towards university education by “all comers” regardless of background preparation, to the detriment of polytechnics and colleges of education, which have their definitively complementary roles in human resource production for national development.
- The issue of curriculum is twofold:
 - subject matter inclusivity on the one hand; and
 - the task of faithful delivery of the full contents as programmed and scheduled within sessions and in successive sessions; it is believed that, often-times, the latter is the problem.
- Apparent under-funding of the universities has, over time, led to the deterioration of existing structures and the lack of additional structures to match the phenomenal rise in student populations. More than that, it has caused a decline in the quantity and quality of the wide array of teaching facilities that would normally enhance the practical aspects of training. The point was also made that managers of the universities can be more resourceful in the acquisition, control, use and maintenance of facilities.

Arts

- Poor communication skills – particularly writing skills.
- Cannot write a note-verbal, or letter very well. Need to learn style, format, language, voice/ tone of both formal and informal letters. They are also deficient in situational writing and speaking.
- They lack the style that goes with each occasion.
- Need training in personal appearance, comportment and civility.
- A high proportion lack confidence, discipline and reasonableness.
- A poor attitude to work (lateness, truancy), and a tendency towards fraudulence and the get-rich quick syndrome were highlighted.

Architecture

- Practical skills: it was noted that Architects working with the firm did not have sufficient practical knowledge of architecture.
- Limited knowledge in some critical allied fields, especially structures. The Company explained that the knowledge of structures acquired in the university had no bearing with the realities in the field.
- There appeared to be a disconnect between theoretical knowledge and the practice of the profession. Industrial training (IT) was said to have not been properly supervised and that students have not been serious about the program; and
- Lack of some basic IT skills, \1,\2 knowledge of the use of computers.

It is noteworthy that there are on-going efforts to salvage the university system. For instance, the level of funding for recurrent and capital expenditure has increased significantly especially in the last five years; a national digital library facility is being packaged to ensure availability of current books and journals for university students and staff; installation of e-learning protocols in pilot universities for ICT-enabled delivery; since 2004, a monthly special grant is made to every department in the federal university system for the purchase of consumable items for the conduct of practical, field work and the administrative running of the department; a massive overhaul of the curricula was undertaken in 2004 which sets new benchmarks and minimum academic standards, modernized the curriculum and made it more socially relevant with a slant on entrepreneurial education; the system of accreditation, monitoring and quality assurance has been invigorated; enforcement of carrying capacity quota; access is enhanced through the licensing of more private universities and a blueprint

on cultism is being implemented. Together, these efforts are reported to be impacting positively on the system. However, the rate of improvement of the system, which had suffered decades of neglect, is perceived by many to be slow. There is an obvious need to catalyze the recovery process.

Clamping Down on Degree Mills

Degree mills (sometimes referred to as diploma mills, bogus institutions or rogue providers) are broadly defined as entities which offer, for a fee, degrees, diplomas or certificates and which requires individuals to complete little or no education or coursework to obtain credentials. Some of these fake universities, of course, will invent fake courses, fake grades, fake transcripts, fake certificates, and in some instances, fake campuses and addresses. Degree mills harm the society since the fraudulent credentials issued to individuals who have no knowledge and skills to back up such credentials, threaten public safety, especially when fake degrees are offered in such vital areas as education, health, and engineering. They also undermine the value of legitimate higher education institutions. Within a broader definition, legitimate higher education institutions which indulge in producing very poor-quality graduates with a focus on large number rather than quality of products are degree mills (Okebukola, 2008).

There are key features of degree mills that are obvious wherever mills set up services. Description of these features provides a foundation for challenging mills now and in the future and can, over time, lead to a single international definition of these operations.

We know that we are dealing with a degree mill when the operation is accurately described by some or all of the following. Any one of these descriptors should be cause for concern.

- Lack the legal authority to operate or offer degrees.
 - Require little if any coursework or completion of assignments and far less work than legitimate colleges and universities.
 - Require a much shorter period of time to obtain a credential than the generally accepted time to degree of legitimate institutions.
 - Requires little if any attendance, either on-site or online.
 - Allow the outright purchase of degrees or credentials or set fees that are very high as compared with the average fees charged by the various types of legitimate institutions.
 - Publish false claims of external quality review (accreditation or quality assurance) or, if the claim is accurate, the external quality review body is a mill or dubious provider as well.
 - Issue degrees that are not accepted for licensing or entry into graduate or professional programs in the mill's home country.
 - Are unable to provide verifiable lists of faculties and their qualifications.
 - List "faculty" whose advanced degrees were issued by degree mills.
 - Plagiarize material from legitimate institutions for inclusion on mill Websites.
 - Feature websites with internet domain registration that is obscured by a privacy service rather than being publicly accessible.

The Nigerian higher education system is the most expansive in Africa. It looks back to a highly respected system, now sadly paled, among other quality-depressing factors, by activities of degree mills. Persons who want certificates at any cost and lack the basic entry requirements for admission into available spaces in approved institutions make up one of the pools from where degree mills draw their students. The other source is the left-over candidates after an admission season. In 2008, it is expected that about 80% of the over million candidates who sat for the Universities Matriculation Examination will fall into this category. Holders of degrees from these bogus institutions are decried by employers of labor in the private and public sector for their poor knowledge and skills in the enterprise they claim to have tertiary-level education. Attainment of the Nigerian vision of being of one the top twenty economies

by 2020 will be compromised by the injection of such poor-quality graduates into the economy. Herein lie the distaste for and the *raison d'être* for government's clampdown on degree mills.

Four major institutional arrangements qualify as degree mills in the Nigerian context. These are unapproved satellite campuses of local and foreign universities; unapproved sub-degree institutions serving as affiliates of approved universities; unapproved courses run in universities; and online courses offered by rogue foreign providers. From 1995-2001 these "pollutants" produced annually, about 15% of total university "graduates" in Nigeria. Between 2001 and 2004, there was a sharp drop in output, followed by a slight rise between 2005 and 2006. By 2007, the activities of the National Universities Commission (NUC), induced a significant drop in the number of and enrollment in these institutions. Sustainance of the momentum of the NUC clampdown is expected to reduce the activities of degree mills to non-significance. There has been a flurry of activities in the past eleven years directed at clipping the wings of the degree mills. Seven of these are noteworthy. By 1999, a national policy was enacted by the National Council on Education. This highest policy-making body directed the closure of all local and foreign satellite campuses. Policy enactment turned out to be a good beginning point in ridding the higher education terrain of degree mills.

Second is enforcement and application of sanctions. It was not until 2001 that NUC gave effect to enforcement of the policy on closure. In a dramatic national raid, NUC, backed up by the force of the anti-riot wing of the Nigeria Police under orders of the Inspector-General, took steps to physically close the illegal campuses. Success rate was about 90% since some that initially terminated operations emerged to clandestinely run their courses. Between 2002 and 2005, there was a perceptible reduction in the number and vigor of the degree mills.

The third in the series of actions against degree mills is the establishment and enforcement of carrying capacity of approved programs. Carrying capacity is the maximum number of students that available resources can support in the production of quality graduates. This ensured that universities do not over-enroll through illegal degree mill operations and resulted in the mapping and documentation of approved programs. Sanctions for over-shooting carrying capacity are de-certification of the program by NUC and non-mobilization of graduates from erring programs for the compulsory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme. The NYSC certificate is a pre-requisite for employment and for post-graduate studies.

Fourthly is the partnership of NUC with the Department of State Services and the Nigeria Police Force in locating, arresting, and prosecuting operators of unapproved universities and satellite campuses. The fifth strategy is public disclosure in national electronic and print media of the names of illegal tertiary institutions as recently exemplified by advertisements and news bulletin placed by the Executive Secretary of NUC, Professor Julius Okojie. Potential students, parents and employers of labor have started to shun these institutions. With dwindling clientele, such institutions are expected to fade into oblivion.

Beginning from 2007 and as a major stride against degree mills, NUC directed all approved universities to make full disclosure of their programs. The Commission followed up with resource verification leading to granting of formal approval where minimum academic standards for setting up programs are met. These programs will be published in the *Directory of Approved Programs in the Nigerian University System*. Since online and cross-border programs are yet to be backed up for recognition purposes by any national policy or law, the publication of the Directory as a seventh strategy will screen out degree mills from institutions that potential students would desire enrollment (Okebukola, 2008).

On May 5, 2008, NUC announced the closure of ten illegal universities. Later in the year, more fake universities were identified and listed for closure. This effort thinned the ranks of the degree mills and signaled others in the ignoble league that NUC was close at their heels. In addition, the May 2008 mop-up accreditation of programs and the November 2008

nationwide accreditation exercise was another edge to the NUC sword for clipping the wings of degree mills. In September 2010, NUC published an updated list of degree mills and is following up with actions to penalize proprietors.

In the last six years, the National Youth Service Corps Scheme into which university graduates are fed, has stepped up its regime of screening out products from bogus institutions and unapproved programs. Together, these efforts have translated into an estimated 70% success rate in the war against degree mills. Degree mills thrive on fertile grounds provided by a mixture of desperate students and easy profit seeking providers. We must make the terrain as inclement as possible for the duo. The increasing number of candidates who fail to secure university admission and who want university degrees at all costs makes such an assurance unrealistic. Hope is however rested on the conviction that NUC will sustain its clampdown on degree mills, indeed, with increasing vigor.

Impediments to quality assurance in the Nigerian higher education system

Depressed funding; capacity deficit in governance and management; political interference, low carrying capacity of the university system and corruption are some of the major impediments to quality assurance in the Nigerian higher education system. The contribution of poor funding to lowered quality is huge. The scenario that emerged especially between 1990 and 2000 is gross inadequacy of proprietor funding which pushed university managers to over-enroll poor-quality students into satellite campuses and remedial programs, primarily to earn income from tuition. Poor funding also explains infrastructural deficiencies and the engagement of university management in unwholesome income-generating activities. The occurrence of social vices such as examination malpractice and sorting as well as incessant strikes and closures may not be unconnected, directly or indirectly, with poor funding.

Capacity deficit in university governance and management impedes the quality assurance process through inability of management staff to respond in a timely manner to the demands of quality. Vice-Chancellors, deans of faculties and heads of departments who project weak disposition towards applying strict rules to governance in the pursuit of quality are increasing in number especially in the state and private university communities. They bow to political pressure to admit weak candidates and be soft on disciplining students of influential members of the society or their staff relations. They succumb to compromising quality as payback to godfathers who were instrumental in their appointment. Such university managers were usually appointed on a “man-know-man” basis and hence lack the capacity to run a quality system. Some, such as dean of faculty or head of department got to position on the basis of ethnic affiliation or religious disposition rather than through merit. Hence you find a “son of the soil” lecturer grade II with low management capacity but with high local connection superintending over a department with senior colleagues including professors who are not indigenes.

Political interference stands as an obstacle to the quality assurance process in the appointment of weak but politically well-connected vice-chancellors and council. Pressure is brought to bear on the vice-chancellor to obstruct the course of discipline and warp student admission and staff recruitment processes. The council of some universities is laden with political office holders who lack understanding of the university system. Oftentimes, the mission of the university managers on quality diverges from that of such council members whose desire is to corner contracts and derive financial gains.

The low carrying capacity of the Nigerian university system poses a huge challenge to quality assurance. The deluge of secondary school leavers angling for the severely limited places in the universities brings with it a host of quality challenges. The capacity of 200,000 new entrants into the 104 universities is a drop in the ocean for over one million aspiring candidates. Examination malpractice and admission racketeering show up as collateral damages. Those who manage to secure places will desire to keep such admissions. The weak

students resort to “sorting” to progress their way through to graduation. Also, low carrying capacity is one of the causative factors for degree mills which pollute the quality environment of the Nigerian university system as detailed in the preceding section of this paper.

Corruption displayed by staff, students, parents and others that patronize the Nigerian university system affects quality. The quality process is compromised through corrupt practices in different shades and forms. Admission, discipline, and examination processes are most affected. After highlighting the challenges to quality assurance since independence, we turn next to the future of quality assurance in the Nigerian higher education (university) system.

The future of quality assurance in Nigerian higher education system

The ingredients for success for improved assurance are building up (Okebukola, 2002; 2008; 2010). The regulatory agencies- NUC, NBTE and NCCE are strengthening their capacity to deliver more effectively on their mandates. The Federal Ministry of Education, through its Education Roadmap to 2020 is re-positioning quality assurance and academic standards in a way that better-quality graduates will be produced in the coming years. A generous political will pervades the air.

Whether or not on-going efforts will be sustained in the years ahead is a matter for debate. We however look to the future with hope trusting on the legendary Nigerian survival spirit. This trust should be backed up with the appointment of Education Ministers and heads of NUC, NBTE and NCCE and their boards who share the vision of improved quality for the system and are vigorous in the pursuit of such vision.

In the coming years, the challenges to quality will continue to be on the horizon. The pressure for admission will increase with its attendant quality challenges. The number of higher education institutions will increase to address the carrying capacity deficit. Staff for such new institutions, especially the universities, will be in short supply and quality of curriculum delivery will tend to decline.

The following suggestions are made to ensure that quality assurance of the Nigerian higher education system is set at a respectably high level in the next fifty years:

Establish a National Quality Assurance and Monitoring System: There current exist, pockets of quality assurance agencies with no operational link between any two for the purpose of harmonizing minimum standards appropriate for each level of the 6-3-3-4 system. Such linkages are important since the quality of basic education products is important for the senior secondary level. In turn, the quality of senior secondary products has implication for entrants into the universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. The acerbic comments and complaints about quality of products from secondary schools by higher education practitioners will be diminished if there is a National Quality Assurance and Monitoring System that can synchronize minimum standards across the system. The elements making up the system will be the Inspectorate Service at the State and Federal levels, NUC, NBTE, and NCCE. The statutory quality assurance functions of the different agencies will not be thinned down by this arrangement. The strength of the arrangement will be in the component elements learning from one another and collaborating in monitoring, system-wide, rather than in individual cocoons of their sub-sector. When the Director of Inspectorate in Kaduna State is an observer in the NUC accreditation exercise of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria or NCCE accreditation of programs at the Federal College of Education, Zaria, he/she will better appreciate the quality demand for higher education from the secondary school system. Reciprocally, NUC, NBTE and NCCE officials, by this arrangement, should participate in secondary school inspection on a random selection basis. From this team, the Ministry of Education will receive facts-based advice from the higher education sub-sector on how best to prepare students for post-secondary experience (Okebukola, 2008b).

Subscription to international quality standards: In a globalized world, dependence on national quality assurance is best complemented with international certification of quality. Our higher education institutions should strive to subject themselves to national and international quality stamps. For example, our universities should earn NUC accreditation as well as accreditation by international agencies accrediting professions and institutions. This way, quality will be seen beyond local standards and graduates of such Nigerian institution with international accreditation will have enhanced mobility in the international labor market.

Improved resourcing of NUC, NBTE and NCCE: Human and financial resource strengthening of the regulatory agencies will foster greater readiness to face future challenges to quality assurance. Capacity-building through local and overseas training of all professional staff of the three agencies should be accorded priority attention. Models such as the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) of the USA and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) of the UK could be basis for such capacity-building to approximate. Funds for effective implementation of the quality assurance programs of NUC, NBTE and NCCE should be well provided for by the government.

Establishment of State Quality Assurance Agencies: State governments should model the example of Ondo State in setting up agencies that will take responsibility for quality assuring the educational system in the State. The national quality chain is as strong as its weakest link. If federal level efforts at maintaining quality are strong and the States do not rise to the challenge, the overall quality is compromised. The future of quality assurance will be brighter if efforts at the federal and state level converge in promoting good quality of the education system.

Effective use of ICT in quality assurance: The efficiency and impact of the quality assurance process will be significantly enhanced with increased use of technology. Quality assurance practitioners will need to be continually updated about emerging technologies so that these can be deployed for data capture, processing and management of the quality assurance process.

Setting up of a quality observatory: The regulatory agencies need to work in harmony to set up an observatory to monitor trends in quality in the higher education system with a view to responding in a timely manner to quality breaches.

International partnerships and alliances to bolster quality assurance: We endorse the recommendations of Materu (2007) on the issue of international partnerships and alliances as follows:

- *Partnership with foreign institutions and QA agencies* with sound QA experience can help to supplement local capacity in the short-term and also bring in relevant experience from other regions. However, this must be weighed against the costs involved.
- *The need for technical assistance to develop quality standards is urgent, particularly as regards regulation of e-learning and cross-border delivery of tertiary education.* Because expertise in this area is very limited in Africa, external assistance may be required.
- *Regional collaboration in quality assurance is particularly relevant to Africa,* given the large number of small countries with fragile economies and weak higher education systems. Desirable forms of regional collaboration include peer reviewing for accreditation purposes, regional accreditation agency instead of national ones (especially for small countries), common standards and guidelines for cross-border education, mechanisms for credit transfer and recognition of qualifications, and sharing of experiences. But for regional collaboration to work well, increased

commitment by governments and continued assistance from international development partners are critically necessary.

Conclusion

In this paper, we reviewed the trends in quality assurance in higher education in the Nigerian higher education system with special focus on the universities. In 50 years, the quality assurance process improved steadily. Improvement in quality of graduates from the system was found to mismatch the quality assurance efforts. This calls for invigoration of the quality assurance activities at the federal and state levels. In this connection, recommendations were made for establishment of a National Quality Assurance and Monitoring System; subscription to international quality standards; improved resourcing of NUC, NBTE and NCCE; establishment of State Quality Assurance Agencies; effective use of ICT in quality assurance; and the setting up of a quality observatory for the higher education system.

As we celebrate the 50-year anniversary of the nation's independence, it is important to reflect on the importance of high-level human resources that the higher education system provides and the need to foster quality in the system. We must march resolutely forward on this road since this is one of the pathways to achieving our goal of being one of the 20 leading economies by 2020 (FME, 2009).

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Chapter 9

Recent Developments in Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Africa

Juma Shabani

Introduction

Since the 1990s, several countries and regions of the world have made sustained efforts to improve quality of higher education, particularly with a view to promoting mutual recognition of academic and professional qualifications and facilitating mobility of students and staff. These efforts led to the organization by UNESCO in 1998 in Paris of the first World Conference on Higher Education. Several initiatives have been launched in Africa as a follow-up to this conference and to the Bologna Process for the construction of the European Higher Education Area which initiated the Bachelor-Master-Doctorate (BMD) reform. The implementation of this reform is mainly based on harmonization of higher education systems, programs and quality assurance mechanisms. Africa has introduced several other programs for the harmonization, quality assurance and accreditation of higher education at the continental and regional levels mainly with the aim of supporting the processes of building an African higher education and research area and the operationalization of free trade areas (Shabani, Okebukola and Oyewole, 2014).

In this chapter, we identify the major quality assurance initiatives recently implemented in Africa at continental and regional levels and analyze their achievements, challenges and prospects. Section 1 provides an overview of major initiatives currently undertaken in harmonization, quality assurance and accreditation of higher education in Africa. In the second section, we discuss the implementation of the BMD reform in CAMES member countries, in particular, its mandate as a regional body for accreditation and quality assurance of higher education institutions and programs in all its member countries. We also analyze the conditions of implementation of the CAMES regional mandate in a new environment characterized by the existence of national quality assurance agencies. Finally, we analyze the contribution of the UNESCO-Shenzhen Funds-in-Trust Project in the establishment of new quality assurance agencies in Africa, capacity-building of the newly created agencies and quality assurance networks and the implementation of the African Regional Convention for the Mutual Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education.

The third section is dedicated to the discussion of the African Union Higher Education Harmonization Strategy and the three initiatives used to achieve the outcomes of this strategy. These initiatives are the Tuning Africa Project, Harmonization of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education in Africa and the African Continental Qualifications Framework. In Section 5 we introduce and discuss the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework and its six components and in Section 6, we analyze two recent quality assurance initiatives implemented at regional level: the Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework and Harmonization of Higher Education Systems in the East African Community

An Overview of Quality Assurance in Africa

Since the mid-1990s, all regions of the world have made sustained efforts to promote quality in higher education, in particular to support mutual recognition of qualifications with a view to facilitating the academic and professional mobility of students and staff. These efforts culminated in the organization by UNESCO in Paris in 1998 of the first world conference on

higher education on the theme: *"Higher Education in the 21st Century: Vision and Action"*. The Communiqué adopted at the end of this conference suggested several follow-up actions to various partners, including African countries. At the same period, two major events organized in Europe have had a positive impact on the development of quality assurance in higher education in Africa. These are the ratification of the Lisbon Regional Convention on Mutual Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education Europe in 1997 and the launch, in 1999, of the Bologna Process for the construction of the European Higher Education Area (Council of Europe, 1997, UNESCO, 1998; Bologna 1999).

Several recent developments in quality assurance in Africa are related to the implementation of the BMD reform that emerged from the Bologna Process. Other developments are related to a series of continental and regional initiatives launched since 2007 in the field of harmonization, quality assurance and accreditation of higher education. They include: the African Union Strategy for Harmonization of Higher Education, the ratification and implementation of the African Regional Convention on Mutual Recognition of Qualifications, the African Quality Rating Mechanism, the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework, the African Continental Qualifications Framework and the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency.

In this chapter we identify and analyze recent developments related to the above continental initiatives and the following regional initiatives: The Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework and the Harmonization of Higher Education Systems in the East African community.

The Bachelor-Master-Doctorate Reform

The Bologna Process in Europe has facilitated harmonization of higher education systems, programs, and quality assurance mechanisms. The process has led to the implementation of the "Bachelor-Master-Doctorate" (BMD) reform in Europe, which has now been adopted by several countries and regions of the world. In Africa, the adoption of this reform began in the mid-2000s, in particular by the African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (Conseil Africain et malgache pour l'enseignement supérieur, CAMES). CAMES was established in 1968 to harmonize and coordinate higher education policies and programs in its 19 member countries. These countries are, in alphabetical order, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Rwanda, Chad, Senegal, and Togo.

In 2006, the CAMES council of ministers adopted a resolution committing all its member countries to implement the BMD reform (CAMES, 2006). At the national level, the implementation of this commitment started mainly in the early 2010s with the enactment of laws and other legal and regulatory texts necessary to ensure a smooth transition from the former higher education systems to the BMD system. The beginning of the implementation of this reform has faced several challenges caused mainly by insufficient ownership of the system by higher education stakeholders. This has led to tensions between students, academic staff and the higher education institutions' management, student strikes and disruptions in the academic years. Today, these tensions seem to have disappeared. However, challenges in implementing this reform persist, in particular due to the use of inadequate quality assurance mechanisms and the lack of capacity to develop training programs that meet the needs of the world of work or self-employment.

Quality Assurance Mechanisms in the CAMES Member States

African countries consider establishment of operational national quality assurance agencies as one of viable strategies for improving quality of higher education on the Continent. This

strategy explains the rapid increase in the number of national quality assurance agencies, which rose from 6 in 2006 to 25 in 2020 (Materu, 2007; Oyewole 2020). Quality assurance in the CAMES Member States is related to the Program for the Recognition and Equivalence of Degrees (PRED). In April 1972, CAMES Member States signed in Lomé, Togo, a regional convention for mutual recognition of higher education qualifications. The ratification of this convention led to the establishment of the PRED.

In 2006, a resolution of the CAMES Council of Ministers has assigned to this program the responsibility for conducting accreditation and quality assurance of higher education institutions and programs in all the CAMES Member States. A new PRED agreement was signed in 2009 by the 26th session of the CAMES council of ministers held in Dakar, Senegal for the purpose of enhancing quality assurance. Currently, applications to CAMES for accreditation of an institution or a program may be submitted by public or private higher education institutions from within or outside the CAMES Member States which have obtained a national accreditation and can provide evidence of graduating at least one class (CAMES, 2020).

This situation is in line with legal provisions adopted by CAMES Member States to set up national quality assurance agencies to support implementation of the BMD reform at national levels. This is the case, for example, in Senegal where the government decided to enact a decree for the establishment of a national quality assurance agency despite the regional mandate given to CAMES in the field of accreditation and quality assurance (Senegal, 2012). Currently, there are several national quality assurance agencies in the CAMES member countries. These include Burundi, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, Senegal, Guinea, Mali and Niger. Other CAMES member countries such as Togo and Côte d'Ivoire are at an advanced stage in the process of setting up national agencies with the support of the UNESCO funds-in-trust project supported by the municipal government of Shenzhen in China, which we present below.

The UNESCO-Shenzhen Funds-in-Trust Project

This project was designed by UNESCO and the Shenzhen municipal government in China to contribute to the capacity-building required for the implementation of Quality Assurance Mechanisms and the African Regional Convention on the Mutual Recognition of Qualifications. The project is being implemented under the coordination of UNESCO's multi-sectoral regional offices in Africa. The project has three major components, namely: (a) support for the establishment of new quality assurance agencies in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Togo and Zambia; (b) institutional capacity-building of newly established quality assurance agencies in Egypt, Gambia, Malawi, Namibia and Senegal; and (c) support for two existing quality assurance networks: the African Quality Assurance Network and the East African Quality Assurance Network.

It is worth noting that Mali and Niger have established their national quality assurance agencies in 2018 and 2019 respectively, while the other countries targeted in this project are making progress towards the establishment of national agencies. The remaining project activities have been implemented mainly through capacity-building workshops, in areas such as development of instruments for mutual recognition of qualifications, improvement of effectiveness of quality assurance networks and capacity development for quality assurance agencies. This project has also supported the implementation of the African Regional Convention for Mutual Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications (UNESCO, 2020).

The African Union Strategy for Harmonization of Higher Education

This Strategy was adopted by the African Union 2007 to achieve several results including the following quality assurance-related results: (a) development of minimum standards in targeted qualifications, and (b) development of a higher education continental qualifications

framework. The harmonization strategy will help to promote recognition of qualifications and thus facilitate student mobility (AU, 2007). This Strategy is implemented through three major initiatives: (a) the Tuning Africa; (b) Harmonization of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education in Africa (HAQAA) project which are implemented in collaboration with the European Union as of the Joint Africa-European Union Strategy and the Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs partnerships and (c) the African Continental Qualifications Framework which is supported technically and financially by the German Agency GIZ and the European Training Foundation (ETF).

The Tuning Africa Project

The Tuning Africa Project contributes to the implementation of the higher education harmonization strategy through development of curricula based on generic and specific competences required in relation to learning outcomes, credit transfer and accumulation systems, pedagogical techniques, evaluation and quality improvement. This process of curriculum development is highly participatory and involves all the major higher education stakeholders. This project is being implemented jointly by the African Union and the European Union. The project has been implemented in three phases starting in 2011.

This project has already achieved major results, including (a) capacity-building in curriculum development, (b) improving graduate employability and entrepreneurial skills of young people. A detailed analysis of the early phases of the Tuning Africa experience and thematic analyses have been published by Hahn and Teferra (2013) and Onana, Oyewole, Teferra, Beneitone, González and Wagenaar (2014) respectively. The ongoing third phase of the project is expected to (a) strengthen capacities of academic staff and students and policymakers in the development of generic competences; (b) establish a network of Tuning African experts and (c) develop an African credit transfer system (Tuning Africa, 2021).

Harmonization of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education in Africa (HAQAA)

This initiative was launched in 2016 as a joint initiative of the African Union and the European Union (HAQAA, 2021) to promote the harmonization of quality assurance and accreditation at all levels. The first phase of this project was implemented between 2016 and 2018 by a consortium of institutions under the leadership of the University of Barcelona. Other members of the consortium included: the Association of African Universities (AAU), the European University Association (EUA), the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). Major outcomes of this phase of the project include: (a) the development of the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA), and (b) the contribution made to the development and promotion of the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF). The relevance of the ASG-QA was tested in 2018 through an evaluation of four national quality assurance agencies in Senegal, Egypt, Mozambique and Zimbabwe and four consultancy visits to newly established agencies or ministries preparing to establish an agency.

The second phase of this initiative, which began in December 2019, will be completed in 2022. Its general objective is to improve the quality and harmonization of African higher education and support students' employability and mobility across the continent. HAQAA 2 is expected to achieve the following results: (a) strengthen the culture of quality through implementation of a series of virtual campaigns on the African Quality Rating Mechanism, (b) promote the implementation of the ASG-QA, (c) build capacity for the implementation of the PAQAF, (d) contribute to the feasibility study for the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency, (e) establish and run a data collection for African higher education policy analysis at the Association of African Universities and (f) coordinate the publication of a book series on higher education as a contribution to the implementation of Continental Education Strategy

for Africa (CESA). The consortium implementing this second phase of the initiative includes the same partners who now work under the leadership of the OBREAL global observatory.

The African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF)

The decision to establish ACQF dates back to the adoption in 2018 by the AU assembly of the "Protocol to the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community on the Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment." Through this protocol, the State parties committed themselves to establishing a continental qualifications framework in order to encourage and promote the free movement of persons. The process of establishing the ACQF began in September 2019 with the inaugural workshop in Addis Ababa and the first meeting of the ACQF advisory group.

The first activity of this initiative is a mapping study that will help to determine Africa's updated situation in the area of qualifications frameworks. The ACQF, which will be fully operational by 2023, is expected to contribute to achieving the following results: (a) improvement on the comparability, quality and transparency of higher education qualifications; (b) establishment of a higher education space and (c) operationalization of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AU, 2019).

The Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF)

Some of the initiatives outlined above have been integrated into the PAQAF, which provides an overriding framework for a number of commitments related to quality assurance and harmonization activities in Africa. This framework was adopted by the African Union in 2016 in order to promote quality assurance culture in Africa. PAQAF is made up of the following initiatives (Okebukola, Fonteyne 2016):

i. African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA)

The ASG-QA adopted in 2018 are one of the major outcomes of the HAQAA Initiative. Several countries are currently revising their accreditation and quality assurance standards to align them with these guidelines. It is now agreed that the ASG-QA will play a major role in the implementation of the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency's programs. The HAQAA 2 project will build the capacity of the various partners in higher education in Africa to enable them to make effective use of the ASG-QA.

ii. The African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF)

ACQF will play an important role in the construction of an African higher education and research space and the operationalization of the African Continental Free Trade Area. Its protocol on trade in services requires mutual recognition of professional qualifications to enable foreign professionals to access national markets.

iii. The African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM)

AQRM was adopted by the African Union in 2007 to establish a system that can help to measure the performance of African higher education institutions on the basis of a set of common criteria and to help them to carry out self-assessments that will be used to develop a culture of quality (AU, 2013). In 2010, 32 higher education institutions from 11 countries participated in AQRM as a pilot project. In 2017, 15 universities participated in this evaluation as part of the HAQAA 1 project (AQRM, 2018; HAQAA, 2019). AQRM will benefit from the HAQAA 2 initiative mainly through an online campaign to be led by the Association of African Universities to encourage higher education institutions to participate in AQRM's activities.

iv. The Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States

This convention was developed by the African Union in collaboration with UNESCO. It was adopted by all African countries and signed by 14 countries in December 2014 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (UNESCO, 2014). It entered into force on 15 December 2019. Countries that have ratified this convention are expected to take the necessary steps, including thorough revision of legal and regulatory texts governing higher education, in order to honor all their commitments, including assessment of refugees and displaced persons and recognition of prior learning and qualifications to promote employability of learners. The African Regional Convention will be implemented in synergy with the global convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education (UNESCO, 2019) allowing national implementation structures to fully benefit from good practices used in other regions of the world.

v. African Credit Accumulation and Transfer System.

This system is part of the results expected from the tuning 3 project approved by the African Union and the European Union, which will be implemented between 2019 and 2022.

vi. Continental Register for Quality Assurance Agencies and Quality-assured Higher Education Institutions

No steps have yet been taken to develop this register.

Quality Assurance in Africa at Regional Levels

Several major developments have recently taken place at regional level in the field of quality assurance. In this section we briefly highlight two initiatives: The Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework and Harmonisation of Higher Education Systems in the East African Community.

The Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF)

The SADCQF which covers higher, technical and vocational education and training, as well as schooling was approved by the Ministry of Education in 2011 in order to promote mutual recognition of qualifications and to facilitate mobility of students and workers within the 16 SADC member countries, namely Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Implementation of the SADCQF has been entrusted to the Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation which is made up of 16 experts representing each of the SADC member countries.

In May and October 2019, South Africa and Seychelles had completed alignment of their national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) with the SADCQF respectively while in 2020, Mauritius produced a first draft of the alignment report (Jaftha, 2020). Five other countries are engaged in a pilot project to align their NQFs with the SADCQF. These countries are Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Swaziland and Zambia

Harmonization of Higher Education Systems in the East African Community (EAC)

For more than a decade, the six EAC member countries, namely Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, South Sudan and Uganda, have been involved in a process of harmonizing their

higher education systems. This process has been carried out under the coordination of the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) through several actions, including establishment of a regional quality assurance system, harmonization of training programs, development of a regional qualifications framework for higher education and a credit accumulation and transfer system. (IUCEA, 2014; 2020). These achievements have motivated the Heads of State to declare in May 2017 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, the transformation of the East African Community into a common higher education area (EAC, 2017). Several activities are currently being implemented to operationalize this area.

Quality Assurance in the Context of COVID-19

With the emergence of COVID-19, several higher education institutions around the world have been forced to make a sudden shift from face-to-face to fully online education. In Africa, this has led to foreseeable challenges related to inadequate internet infrastructure, the high cost of the internet, and a lack of preparation of the academic staff to teach online. In addition to these challenges, in several countries, accreditation mechanisms do not provide for situations where site visits could be conducted entirely online. Quality assurance agencies are therefore called upon to revisit their current accreditation and quality assurance procedures in order to extend them to virtual evaluations and site visits.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have identified and analyzed the major initiatives currently implemented in Africa in the field of harmonization, quality assurance and accreditation of higher education. All these initiatives will contribute, with the support of the various PAQAF instruments, to the efforts undertaken by African countries and their partners to develop an African Higher Education and Research Space, to implement protocols on the free movement of persons and to operationalize the African Continental Free Trade Area

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Chapter 10

Once Upon a University

Stephen Afolami

Introduction

A New Beginning from an Existing Institution

Once upon a time (January 1988), a specialized federal university was created with a tripodal mandate for teaching, research and extension. What it had going on at that beginning were an academic brief, a vice-chancellor, and the name – the University of Agriculture, Abeokuta. The UNAAB acronym was coined by the pioneer vice-chancellor, a man of vision, courage, and impeccable character much given to the pursuit of academic and administrative excellence. He had been part of the experts that put together the academic brief, motto and the tripodal mandate of the university which was created from an existing campus of a College of Science and Technology, Abeokuta (COSTAB). To promote the research and extension parts of the mandate, a Research and Development Centre (RESDEC) and Agricultural Media Resources and Extension Centre (AMREC) were created in the academic brief of the university.

A Beginning with Quality in Mind

The vice-chancellor set out to chair every interview session that recruited academic and nonacademic staff members for the university with a large interview panel with each expert looking out for specific attributes for the various levels and grades of the personnel to pioneer the beginnings of the new university. The old staff members of the university who were absorbed from the existing college had to meet the criteria set up by the recruiting panels. Those who did not or whose specializations were considered not to be immediately relevant to the new mandate of the university were laid off. Fortunately, in those days in Nigeria, jobs for such highly qualified staff were not scarce and mobility of labor was not limited by safety and security considerations as it currently is in the country. Before too long, the staff displaced found new places to continue with their careers, although not without some discomfort and dislocation.

More Quality Recruitment Still

The visionary vice-chancellor, Professor Nurudeen Olorunnimbe Adedipe, set about carrying out recruitment continually and head-hunted for those he knew were given to excellence and diligence in academic pursuit and other aspects of life. Where husbands and wives had these desired attributes, he did not hesitate to take them both, especially in cases where one of the two belonged to the so-called hardship areas. Professor Carolyn Afolake Afolami who was recruited to teach econometrics was a case in point. In some cases, academic excellence like first class degrees and academic laurels recommended the candidates; in other cases, administrative experience and proven diligence were the highly desirable characteristics. Religion and state of origin were not important criteria in the recruitment drive. Although students were few in the first year, they doubled every year for the first five years just as the staff strength was increasing to the appropriate proportions approved by the regulating authorities.

Governance Through a Committee System

A stickler for principles and procedure, the vice-chancellor set up the appropriate organs of university governance and carefully selected individuals with obvious leadership qualities as

the heads. Where the choice turned out not to be as good as it was expected to be, a new one was made to rejuvenate the slacking committee or unit. The vision and mandate were kept in focus all the time. All new members of staff were assisted to imbibe the spirit of the system through the provision of the academic brief of the university that contained the decree that set the university up as well as the details of the reason for creating it.

Masterplan with a Difference

Meanwhile, the masterplan for the university's permanent site was carefully perfected with appropriate experts from within and outside the university, including the famous Mrs. Ajoke Murtala Mohammed, a leading figure in landscaping and management of the environment at the time. A permanent site development committee was set up to work with the director of physical planning, Architect Akiode. Committee meetings frequently went far into the night because they usually started late in the evening after lectures would have ended so that students would not have to miss their lectures, except in cases where re-scheduling was impossible.

Receiving funds from two ministries, the university was able to move from its temporary to its exquisite permanent site within eight years in part, and fully in 1997, nine years after take-off. The first phase of the campus development focused on the iconic Senate house, the College of Plant Science and Crop Production, the university library which was at the center and knoll of the campus around which a circular road ran as a major artery into which minor roads empty like tributaries to link college buildings, service buildings and living areas. The concept of the Senate house was a germinating cowpea seed with the plumule just emerging; and the Nimbe Adedipe Library is still an architectural masterpiece fit for the tropics.

Pervasive Sense of Mission

The sense of mission was pervasive, the head of the institution himself showed exemplary commitment to fairness, diligence, exemplary punctuality, discipline, financial prudence, strict control and transparency. Eight years into the pursuit of academic and administrative excellence produced a system that was heading for the stars. The system was also designed to remain manageable in student population with an upper limit of five thousand students at full capacity, including postgraduate students.

Participatory Governance

One quality issue that emerged in the administration of the university in its foundational years was the participation of end-users in conceptualizing the design of college buildings. This writer happened to be in charge of a department at the time in question. It was a delight to participate in generating ideas for the architect in charge to use as brief for designing the building. For example, my college, the College of Plant Science and Crop Production (COLPLANT), led by professor T.O. Tayo, opted for a building with offices large enough for a professor to use as standard rooms. The idea was to have professors and readers as single occupants and the other cadres in twos such that those sharing offices would graduate into single occupants with time as they too progressed academically.

As it turned out, the college provided office accommodation for three colleges at the time the university had to move to its permanent campus and as those tenants had their own college buildings erected, the beauty of the concept became more obvious as the college did not have to be searching for large offices for its professors, readers and senior lecturers to meet the specifications of the regulating body, NUC. All that was required was appropriate furnishing commensurate with the designation of the staff occupying the office. The collective wisdom of generating ideas from end-users and stakeholders as quality assurance became obvious as the years went by. In spite of expansion, COLPLANT building was still good enough for accreditation of programs 25 years later when the second phase of the building needed to be

constructed to meet growing needs. That was foresight and good utilization of available funds at its best. In all its foundational 15 years, those were the hallmark of the administration of the university.

On its permanent site, the lush, expansive lawns were a scene to behold. They were maintained with deliberate consciousness for beauty and environmental serenity. Joyfully, they still are, to this day, as a visit to the university will confirm. The trees have grown to provide shade and improve the ambience, but they are scattered enough not to snuff life out of the grasses below. In those days before NUC stepped in to begin to compel universities to become environmentally conscious if they are not to be scored out of relevance, the University of Agriculture, Abeokuta had given that aspect of university administration a life of its own which stood it out, in spite of its young age as an institution with class and academic culture in mind. Its serene environment was a major contributory factor to its high ranking by NUC from 2002.

Quality Assured, Even in Dress Code

Because of its sound management, staff members were very nicely dressed for class and students were mentored to be decent and elegant even in the days when staff salaries were not able to take them home as it was commonly said then to aptly describe the phenomenon of poverty imposed on Nigerians by the obnoxious Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). The SAP decimated all that Nigeria used to be in its heydays and set in motion the difficulties still being experienced till this day. The crap was the evil machination of a neocolonialism bent on setting back the hand of the clock for a country destined for great heights and blessed with the human and material resources to get there. But that was a digression. This story is not about dirges!

The point being made is that an institution set out, with the exemplary and compelling leadership of a focused, determined and effective head to reach for the stars by a dint of hard work, discipline, deliberate selection, induction and mobilization of the workforce, to achieve greatness, high productivity and academic excellence succeeded in doing so in spite of all the economic constraints of the epoch within which it came into existence because merit was its watchword. Staff-student ratio was such that no student was anonymous. A badly clad student would soon meet with recriminatory glances along the route to classrooms and most likely not be allowed into the classroom by a dis-approving lecturer calling the student by name. The high standard became sustainable for decades because of succession of like minds.

Sustainability of High Standards through Continuity

At about the 7th year of the existence of (F)UNAAB, the Ministry of Education and the NUC decided to cede the power of succession to the respective university community for selection of vice-chancellors and replaced the renewable 4-year tenure of a vice-chancellor to a single non-renewable term of five years. The aim was to ensure that the campuses were rid of acrimonies and divisions that usually crippled universities as a result of unpopular choices made largely by government who owned the public universities like (F)UNAAB. Once again, this university excelled in the manner it conducted its affairs in this regard. Being one of the first to elect a vice-chancellor through popular ballot as required by the procedure, the story is worth summarizing for the benefit of the university system, especially since many other institutions failed so woefully in this regard as to warrant the removal of voting as a requirement in the selection process for a vice-chancellor.

As usual with UNAAB, the incumbent vice-chancellor, Professor Nurudeen Olorunnimbe Adedipe set up an election committee (UCRECO) which this writer had the privilege of chairing. The committee sought memoranda from all members of the community and crystallized the ideas generated into the election procedure. It was decided that only members of congregation would have the voting right rather than the entire gamut of senior and junior staff. The incumbent VC was to convoke a special meeting of congregation meeting for this

purpose to give legitimacy to UCRECO for the conduct of election within the meeting of congregation as an item of the agenda. Although there were rumors that the VC had a favorite among the candidates, he was administratively discrete enough not to show it. Neither did he at any point in the process reach out to the electoral body on this issue. You could then say that the VC expressed no preference for any candidate. In fact, in handing over congregation to UCRECO chairman for the conduct of the election of a new VC, he informed the meeting that he was ready to work with and hand over the administration of the university to whoever of the five contestants to emerge as the VC-elect. he reminded congregation that election was only a part of the process, albeit a very important 25% of the process.

The result was an overwhelming choice of Professor Julius Amioba Okojie with 98 votes out of 128 leaving the other 4 candidates to share the balance of 30 votes. The losers there and then accepted defeat, congratulated the winner and pledged their readiness to work with him. He eventually took over from Professor Adedipe as the second VC of UNAAB and declared himself a rookie VC that was merely "*primus inter pares*". His was a very successful five-year tenure. One evidence of that was his appointment as successor to the cerebral Professor Peter Okebukola as Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission (NUC).

Superior Argument as Principle of High-Quality Decision-Making

One impressive unwritten quality assurance policy of Professor N.O. Adedipe's was the principle of superior argument. This principle, which propelled the establishment of very high standards in decision-making in UNAAB, enunciated that you hold on to a particular opinion on an issue until a logically superior argument provides reason for accepting a new and superior point of view. Although it was at times inconvenient for the person in charge, most meetings, including senate meetings, were conducted with this principle at the back of the mind of the attendees.

This meant that within the framework of the tripod mandate of the university, the Act establishing the university, ethical standards, merit, the goals and objectives of the university, the academic brief, students and staff handbooks; any staff (or sometimes students) who offered an opinion that was contrary to what was extant as a contribution to any matter on the agenda was likely to be listened to. In very many cases, at senate meetings especially, boardroom politics of meetings before meetings such that decisions that were based on favoritism, pre-conceived illogical decisions contrary to any known rules were very largely avoided. This allowed merit and ability to flower and bear fruit. The university was to benefit from it for many years later. It encouraged the younger and junior academics to speak their minds and it exposed those who were gifted in specific areas to the management such that sound administrators among the staff were soon identified for leadership roles as head of academic units, chair of university committees, representation of the university in external duties, etc.

So, it was that this writer, as lecturer 1, was saddled with pioneer chairmanship of the *farm practical year program* of the university, with two senior lecturers as members of the committee which had representatives from all departments contributing to it. Being a University of Agriculture, the committee was like a junior senate! There were as many members as there were departments in four of the existing colleges of the university at the time (1991/1992 session when the university was in its fourth year, the penultimate year before graduating the first set of 64 students). Senate and the deans of participating colleges later officially commended the chair of the committee for exemplary leadership and the committee for excellence in establishing a *farm practical year program* that became a source of quality seed supply to farmers in the catchment areas of the university and the envy of other two universities of agriculture at the time. The industrial training fund also later commended the university in 2008 as the best university in industrial training scheme (FUNAAB Calendar 2015-2018, page 5).

Quality Control and its Inconveniences at Times

I also remember a second case in point where quality control was allowed to take its course even when a little fewer than half of a class of students had failed a particular (unpopular?) course. A head of department who was a stickler for discipline, efficiency and strict adherence to the rules had to split a large class of 124 students into two practical groups so they could be properly trained in a laboratory with a capacity for a maximum of 65 bench spaces. Every other week, one of the two groups had to endure the inconvenience of having to forgo their 2-5 p.m. free hours in order to attend the laboratory practical sessions for the course. Because those hours were free for all on the timetable, a particular group of students chose to rebel against the decision by stubbornly failing to attend the practical sessions most of the weeks.

Meanwhile, the head of the department hosting the inter-collegiate course had written for and obtained a written permission of the pioneer vice-chancellor through the dean of his college to utilize that period to mount the practical because of the space constraints and in line with the policy of quality education for the students. Week after week the students were officially notified that the practical notebooks were being graded and would constitute the continuous assessment for the course, with the heads of participating departments and chairman of senate and deans of the participating colleges copied on each occasion.

The disobedient group of students persisted in its obduracy, with the palpable support of one dean with an ulterior motive. Naturally, most of the obdurate students failed the course, but those who participated passed very well. In presenting the semester's results of his college to senate, the traitor dean drew attention of senate to the failure rate in the course in question and wanted to live up to the promise he had made to the delinquent students that he would ensure that the result of the course was canceled or modified by Senate for reason of mass failure and, as he wrongly thought, for mounting practical sessions outside the time stipulated by the timetable. Unfortunately for the dean, 90% of the students who took the course in his college passed with marks ranging from 50-80% and the Senate was unable to relate his allegation of mass failure to the results he was presenting, and the vice-chancellor ruled him out of order.

He re-opened the case when a particular college that harbored the weak and delinquent students presented results. That was the point at which the chairman of Senate asked for details of all that happened. The head of department presented all the documentary evidence of due process and the motive for splitting the class at a cost to the lecturers who received no extra pay for their sacrifice in order to give the best to the students instead of crowding 120 into the laboratory space for 65. Senate, guided by the chairman who confirmed approval of all that was done by the department, approved the results as presented. Senate later got to know that the Students Union had actually hired a band to celebrate the downfall of the head of that department because the traitor dean had assured the delinquent students that Senate would cancel the result of the course. That was a classic case of quality control and discipline overriding sentiments and disobedience. It sent a very powerful message to the student body and encouragement to hard-working and principled academic staff.

This is a first-hand story related by the one in the eye of that storm. That Senate decision set the stage for firm control of students in lecture halls far into the future of the university.

Another Example, 16 Years Later

Sixteen years later in the life of the (Federal) University of Agriculture, Abeokuta under the leadership of the fourth vice-chancellor of the university, an opportunity to live up to its policy and reputation for excellence showed up during an Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) strike. The academic staff members had been forbidden to attend any meetings whatsoever in whatever guise and for whatever reason! The World Bank was offering

opportunities for universities to compete for World Bank-financed centers of excellence in western and central regions of Africa.

The incumbent vice-chancellor, Professor O.O. Balogun, in the tradition of the university and in flow with his own penchant for identifying excellence and utilizing it, assembled a group of academic staff with track record of good performance and courage, to work on the competition. The union ignorantly did its best to prevent meetings of the group from holding on campus and even at off-campus locations. The group motivated by altruistic love of the university worked with the incumbent VC to complete the process and submitted the papers within the deadline. Today, both the union and the entire university community still bask in the glory of winning CEADESE for the university in 2014 as a Centre of Excellence for Agricultural Development and Sustainable Environment under the African Higher Education Centre of Excellence (ACEI) scheme with World Bank funding as loan to government (FUNAAB Calendar 2015-2018, p. 5).

Early Computerization of the University for Quality Assurance

When personal desktop computers of the Pentium variant surfaced in the early 90s in Nigeria, the succeeding vice-chancellor of that university, Professor J.A. Okojie, made it his own priority to raise the bar of excellence by being the first Nigerian university to purchase computers for all the administrative and academic departments and units of the university without locking them up as it was customarily being done by other universities who joined the fray in those days. Staff members were trained to use them, and others trained themselves because of their frequent contact with the outside world. Those who traveled for conferences or study leave in Europe or the Americas purchased personal computers and trained themselves to use them with the complements of input and output devices.

Within a short time, departments had started producing results for Senate with their personal or official department-owned computers. Quality kept improving and the ambience of the university exuded excellence. It was the era of emerging global connectivity. The UNAAB academic community keyed into that by opening e-mail accounts for communication with the outside world. Yahoo was the popular (perhaps the only) domain available then and many of UNAAB staff still maintain the original domain they used then, including this author. With TEEAL in place and internet connectivity at such a crucial stage of the university's development, staff publication soared both in quality literature review and the journal outlets in which they were published. Visibility also soared. These were the factors contributing to the accolades later won by the university in the new millennium when ranking began to foster competition.

Boosting Staff Morale Towards Quality Assurance

The second vice-chancellor, Professor J.A. Okojie, raised the morale of staff by paying particular attention to their welfare with loans, promotions when due and exploring all legitimate avenues to improve their earning capacity because the purchasing power of their official salaries had been very badly eroded by the misguided Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) which ended up decimating the lives of individuals through rapid devaluation of the currency without concomitant increase in salaries. Workers' salaries stagnated for a whole decade before anything was done about them after series of protest by staff unions, particularly, the Academic Staff Union of Universities. The 13th month salary was an initiative targeted at boosting staff morale and compensating them for dedicated service with quality performance from most units of the university. It was a remarkable initiative for sustainability of quality service delivery in the face of grinding all-pervasive poverty in the economy. Those were the days when first class graduates would rather head for the private sector of the economy rather than accept postgraduate scholarship awards!

First Electronic Library in West Africa

The university library was the first in west Africa to subscribe to TEEAL (The Essential Electronic Agricultural Library), a database for research developed by Cornell University Library which brought academics from very faraway universities for current literature search to improve the quality of their publications, research proposals and postgraduate teaching and projects.

TEEAL is a full-text and searchable database of articles from more than 450 high-quality research journals in agriculture and the related sciences. For many years, TEEAL has been improving access at institutions with limited Internet time and/or financial resources. It is a searchable, offline, digital library which contains mainly agriculturally focused reference journals updated annually and delivered by the TEEAL project office at Cornell University's Mann Library (Google).

Albert R Mann library of Cornell university released the searchable database in 1993, UNAAB acquired it in 1997 as the only West African institution that subscribed to it. Currently, there are about 198 institutions in West Africa subscribing to the database which does not need the internet to function. Nigeria alone has 130 of those higher institutions. That is what foresighted, effective and forthright leadership can do in the life of an institution. It consistently had trouble-free leadership succession for the first 19 years of its existence, during which time it had appointed and nurtured a large crop of academic and non-academic staff with excellence and quality delivery as their focus. When some disquiet in succession arose in its 19th year, the university weathered the storm and survived but not without bruises that sowed the seeds of division among staff to the point that an interregnum had to be imposed before a substantive vice-chancellor was appointed from another university for the first time in the history of the university after 20 years of internal succession in all leadership positions.

Quality Assurance and Ranking Performance in the New Century

When ranking was introduced by the National Universities Commission in the early parts of the 21st century, (F)UNAAB was at the forefront in campus beauty, serenity, library facilities, quality staff, program accreditation and university governance. The university was ranked the best and the most computerized university in Nigeria at about its 15th year of existence. In addition, among its many academic laurels, one of its products won the first prize in a national competition for computer science students in Nigeria. In that university, things worked. It was and I dare say, it still is an island of excellence at a time that things were sliding down the slope in almost all facets of national life. It sounds incredible but it is true.

Evidence of Quality and Excellence

Professor Israel Folorunsho Adu was the successor to Professor Julius A. Okojie. Under him, all the efforts of the past and his own contributions lifted the university high as it began to win laurels (FUNAAB Calendar 2015-2018, pp. 5 and 17). Prominent among these awards and laurels are the following:

- i. The maiden edition of best vice-chancellor award for Nigerian universities in 2002 and also for specialized universities in 2005
- ii. The Kwame Nkrumah Africa leadership outstanding merit award for agriculture in 2004
- iii. The National Universities Commission's first place prize as the best research university (2004 and 2005)
- iv. The best university in Nigeria in 2005 by the ranking of the National Universities Commission
- v. The World Bank Step-B Project 2007 till 2015
- vi. Second-best university out of 120 universities in Nigeria and 29th among 814 higher institutions in Africa in 2013 of Webometric Ranking of world

universities. With this ranking, FUNAAB was ranked the best University of Agriculture in Africa and 8th best in the world

- vii. UNAAB became a center of excellence for CAEDESE in 2014.

Further Evidence of Excellence

A consequence of consistent excellence and quality delivery in the 32-year-old University as I write this story is the appointment of very many members of staff of the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta as vice-chancellors and registrars of other universities in the last fifteen years. At the last count, seven universities have been headed by staff of (F)UNAAB, including Augustine University, Ilara-Epe, Lagos, while six administrative staff have served as registrars to six universities in Nigeria as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Staff of the (Federal) University of Agriculture Abeokuta serving/that have served as Vice-Chancellor or Registrar of other Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

S/No	Name of Staff	Institution Served	Position	Duration	Remarks
1.	Mr. Elvis Lawale	Bowen University, Iwo, Nigeria	Pioneer Registrar	10 years	
2.	Mr. Elvis Lawale	Chrisland University, Abeokuta	Registrar	2 years	Died in service
3.	Dr. (Mrs.) Linda Onwuka	Petroleum University, Efurun, Nigeria	Registrar	5 years	
4.	Mr. Leke Adeboye	Samuel Adegboyega University, Ogwa, Benin	Pioneer Registrar	3 Years	Died in service
5.	Mr. Peter Akinlabi	Ondo State (Rufus Giwa) Polytechnic, Owo	Registrar	5 years	Back to base
6.	Mrs. Oluwayemisi Gbadebo	Bells University of Technology, Ota, Nigeria	Registrar	10 years	
7.	Professor Okojie J.A.	Bells University of Technology	Vice-Chancellor		Became Executive Secretary of NUC
		National Universities Commission	Executive Secretary	8 years	Retired as first Emeritus Professor of UNAAB
8.	Professor T.O. Tayo	Caleb University, Imota, Lagos State	Pioneer Vice-Chancellor		
9.	Professor S.O. Afolami	Augustine University, Ilara-Epe, Lagos Nigeria	Pioneer Vice-Chancellor	2015 to date	
10.	Professor K.A. Okeleye	Crescent University, Abeokuta	Vice-Chancellor	4.5 Years	
11.	Professor T. M. A. Olayanju	Landmark University, Omuaran	Vice-Chancellor		Still serving
12.	Professor G.O. Olatunde	Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria	Vice-Chancellor	2017 to date	
13.	Professor A.B. Idowu	Samuel Adegboyega University, Ogwa, Benin	Vice-Chancellor	2019 to date	

Storms the University Has Had to Weather

The succession of Professor Okojie by the third VC caused some level of rancor that took some time to heal. Some division took place and healing of wounds lingered on for some while. Unfortunately, a botched transition at the end of the third vice-chancellor's tenure sowed the seed of a lingering rancor that started with the hurried departure of the vice-chancellor from the campus. It will not be wrong to say that in spite of the years that have gone by since 2006, the wounds resulting from the rancor have not completely healed.

With the system polarized somewhat, an interregnum was inevitable to heal wounds and set the stage for a tenured successor. The lot fell on Professor Ishola Adamson to hold the fort until a substantive vice-chancellor was appointed from outside the university. Professor Olufemi Olaiya Balogun took over the reins of governance of the university and set out from the beginning an agenda of phenomenal increase in everything: buildings, programs, revenue, staffing and discipline. The physical and financial achievements of the university during the period are still very obvious on campus: expansion of the senate building, new college buildings, unity houses, PG school building, further campus beautification with tiled walkways, etc.

It also marked a departure from the specialized university concept to a semi-conventional university as a prelude to a full-blown conventional university. The succession, from Professor Balogun to Professor Bamidele Oyewole as 5th substantive vice-chancellor was peaceful and was expected to be a highly desired continuity. Things did not exactly happen as they had been predicted and some lingering rancor once again began to fester to the point that the federal government had to intervene. Professor Ololade Enikuomehin was appointed acting vice-chancellor to sort out things. He galvanized the community as best he could, using all his expertise and experience as a former ASUU chairman to good effect with the support of the deputy VC academic (Professor Catherine Eromosele) with whom he had been serving as DVC (Development) before the interregnum. It took some while for peace to reign beyond the surface.

The appointment of the incumbent 6th substantive vice-chancellor of FUNAAB, Professor Felix Kolawole Salako, from all appearances especially for those of us watching from a distance on leave of absence has brought some healing balm into the system. Hopefully, the march to further excellence is being rekindled. (F)UNAAB was built on excellence from the beginning. The continuous pursuit of it with so much quality control was the bedrock of its fame and success. The core of excellent staff recruited to serve the institution was its pillar of strength. In spite of the series of rancor, clever VCs still endeavored to utilize the services of the core staff to serve, especially to mentor the new intakes and younger workers. It appears that this process broke down after the departure of the 4th substantive VC, thus affecting the strong link between the past and the present. Furthermore, the phenomenal growth under the 4th VC in students' population from about six to fourteen thousand in five years and concomitant staff population led to anonymity on campus. Besides, the change in concept from a science-based university to a semi-conventional university created fresh problems of free hours in the hands of the non-science students with all the implication for weak links between students and staff, especially academic.

Obstacles to Academic Excellence and Productivity

The university system worldwide is governed through committees to ensure that all hands are on deck to fast-track growth and development taking maximum advantage of the wisdom of each and every member of the university community. Each committee is chaired by a head who is expected to operate as *primus inter pares*, first among equals. If recruitment has been appropriately done, everyone in the system is supposed to be the best you can find in each of the various segments of the system. Therefore, whoever is in charge is expected to bear that in mind in the decision-making process by listening to others who are expected to freely voice their opinions on all issues. This applies even to the head of the institution who also is first among equals. Obviously, arrogance which leads anyone in charge to consider that he has a monopoly of wisdom and refuses to allow the committee system to function, is inimical to the tenets of the university system. A recruitment system that uses criteria in which merit does not play a key role will impose on the system deadweights that will be throwing a spanner in the works and create obstacles to the pursuit of excellence in the discharge of duties and the efficient running of the system.

Favoritism and lack of uniform standard in assessment of scholars for promotion and leadership positions lead to dislocations in the system and cause inefficiency. Round pegs must fit into round holes for the benefit of the system. By its very nature and nomenclature, the university system must, of necessity, be open to the global community in its academic pursuit. Interactions through conferences worldwide, publication of research results in reputable academic journals, grant-aided research and scholarly activities enhance the visibility of the system to the international community. Funding to ensure that the university system meets these expectations to contribute to societal growth and development is sine qua non for efficiency. This is the point at which many institutions in the system meet their greatest challenges. In all of this, training and periodic review of strategy become imperative to ensure that skills are constantly being sharpened and new techniques are being learned to keep the goal of excellence in focus.

Conclusion

The university system is supposed to run under the best practices. It requires excellence, sanity, and peace. We are all aware that, in many cases, the campuses are full of rancor, envy, mismanagement of human and material resources and all the other ills that plague the general society above which it is expected to rise. Whether it does or not ultimately depends on the quality of leadership at every level. In all cases, it is helpful if those in charge have respect for truth, justice, fairness, and love of wisdom and virtue. A virtuous life is an antidote to pride, selfishness, covetousness, lack of consideration for others, lust, enmity, and other human defects that stand in the way of peaceful co-existence. When a system has a leadership that takes these human virtues seriously in all aspects of university life, excellence is likely to flourish and productivity is likely to be high and sustainable as it has been, save for occasional hiccups, for much of the existence of the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta.

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Chapter 11

Quality Assurance Monitoring and Evaluation: A Case Study of Federal University Gusau (FUGUS), Gusau, Zamfara State Nigeria

Umar Danbatta

Introduction

The Federal University Gusau (FUGUS) is a publicly funded research university located in Gusau, Zamfara State, Nigeria. It is one of the 12 new Federal Universities established on 18th February 2013, which is committed to compliance with statutory, regulatory and other internal quality assurance (QA) regulations, in keeping with changing national and international requirements. It has adopted a faculty system, semester system and course credit system for the development of its core academic structure, which is composed of multi-disciplinary courses. What is important in knowledge is not quantity, but quality. As such, the university kicked off with a School of Pre-Science Studies and three faculties: i) Faculty of Humanities and Education; ii) Faculty of Management and Social Sciences, and iii) Faculty of Science; with 17 Departments that offer 27 undergraduate academic programs. Since its establishment in the last 6 years, FUGUS does not compromise with quality and has expanded to five faculties and 21 Departments, in addition to developing extensive links with other Nigerian universities, both public and private.

The term "quality" is defined as "the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bears on its ability to satisfy given needs" (American National Standards Institute [ANSI] & American Society for Quality [ASQ], ANSI/ISO/ASQ A3534-2, 2000). It refers to the degree to which a set of expedient operations fulfills the requirements of high-quality results that manifests itself in the high commitment of staff and students to their work and studies (International Organization for Standardization [ISO] 9001, 2008; Quality Matters [QM], 2014; Schindler et al., 2015).

According to ANSI/ISO/ASQ A3534-2, 2000, quality assurance is "all the planned and systematic activities implemented within a quality system that can be demonstrated to provide confidence that a product or service will fulfil requirements for quality". It involves a deliberate and systematic measurement, comparison with standards, monitoring and evaluation of teaching, learning, governance and all other factors that undermine sustainable development in the institution (Materu, 2007). Standards refer to official benchmarks by which quality is measured, while benchmarks are the guidelines the university has to comply with to achieve quality.

Quality assurance in higher education has become a universal issue that involves the systematic review and assessment of academic programs run by institutions, to guarantee improvement of their standards, quality, equity and efficiency (Hodson & Thomas, 2010; Green, Marmolejo & Egron-Polak, 2012). The quality assurance approaches encompass a range of tools, processes and actors used to monitor overall system performance, policy implementation, university and staff effectiveness, and individual student outcomes (Harvey, 2014). It includes the internal mechanism which refers to those policies, measures and practices universities designed to monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of their educational provisions; as well as the external mechanism which refers to policies and practices designed by the state to assure the quality and academic standards of programs (Wong, 2012). For instance, in Nigeria, the National Universities Commission (NUC) is charged with the responsibility of implementing an external quality assurance system that

reviews the quality and standards of universities and their higher education programs to ensure they measure up to a minimum standard and are maintained and developed through continuous improvement.

Both internal and external quality assurance play important roles as providers of standard key performance indicators (KPIs) that provide universities with relevant information about their performance. A key performance indicator (KPI) is a type of periodic and quantifiable performance measurement that is used to evaluate the success and progress of an organization, employee, or of a particular activity in which it engages (KPIs, 2016; 2019). It is used to identify what “has” happened in the past and map out potential improvements, towards a variety of goals and linked targets for the promotion of quality and productivity. The performance focuses on measuring a particular element of activity and has four elements: input, output, control, and mechanism (Carol, 1990).

Success is often defined in terms of measuring performance progress towards achieving strategic goals (KPIs, 2019). Results of the external evaluation provide KPIs values that are important for policy-level decisions and resource allocation; while internal evaluations provide more detailed and timelier KPIs data that can be used by organizations at multiple levels as the basis for making recommendations and decisions to support teaching and learning and improve various aspects of its performance and practices. Quality assurance initiatives and mechanisms are aimed at enhancing quality and trust in all areas at the university, to ensure effective use of resources to provide a fulfilling academic culture that will sustain future generations towards imparting knowledge that produces quality products and services (Cedefop, 2013; Cerna, 2014). This paper reviews the quality assurance standards and procedures that are in operation at FUGUS to attain customer satisfaction through an integrated system of tools, techniques, and training. It highlights the university’s increased efforts and success in safeguarding its policies and practices through continuous improvement of organizational processes that will result in high-quality educational programs, graduates and services.

University’s Academic Brief

Preamble

The systematic introduction of quality assurance in higher education around the world has forced universities to articulate and define their vision, mission and philosophy, in an increased effort to provide quality education for their students. Similarly, FUGUS has defined vision, mission and philosophy in a strategic plan and academic brief produced after evaluating its strength, weakness, opportunity and threat (SWOT analysis), which is further divided into the internal environment (institutional strengths & weaknesses) and the external environment (systemic opportunities & threats). These are the foundation for all its quality activities, as what is important is doing the right things right the first time and every time.

Vision and Mission Statements

The vision of Federal University Gusau is “to be a renowned, outstanding university, dedicated to excellence in teaching, research, service and the protection of truth and the liberty of man,” while its mission is “to generate and expand human knowledge and capacity to transform society and to create the positive changes we all constantly seek and cherish in partnership with various stakeholders.”

In achieving its vision and mission statements, the university will deliver all its quality assurance functions for effective and efficient education delivery, through a system of sustainable institutional arrangements to promote core values of quality, excellence, partnering, integrity, and accountability. Integrity forms the foundation for moral virtue and courage upon which good character, ethical attitudes and behavior are built; while

accountability entails achieving academic excellence in a systematic, timely and cost-effective manner, which is the trademark of transparency and discipline through information dissemination, public participation, reporting, monitoring and evaluation (O'Day, 2002).

The balance of accountability and improvement is relevant to internal quality assurance, as both are important for ensuring the quality of processes as well as of outcomes by those accountable for their actions and those demanding accountability. This will be achieved through a dynamic quality assurance system that guarantees effective and efficient curriculum delivery and good educational management for improved learner outcomes; which ensure the specific levels of knowledge, skills, and abilities attained by its graduates in a particular education program, meet the needs and demands of society; especially with respect to the diversity of opinion and culture, and the proper understanding and consideration for the healthy and aesthetic environment, in a globally competitive environment. As part of the quality assurance system, the university will establish academic linkages, affiliations and collaborations with other universities within and outside Nigeria to benefit from as well as make an impact on its immediate society and across countries.

Philosophy of the University

The philosophy of FUGUS is to be a conventional university that propagates a new quest for knowledge for the development of Zamfara State, Nigeria and the world. It will train graduates with sufficient, adequate and qualitative academic and practical background for the creation, transfer and application of their acquired knowledge and skills for the advancement of mankind in a friendly, interactive and multicultural environment. To achieve this feat, the university shall, among others, develop well-structured academic curricula that cut across all disciplines and ensure strict adherence to their implementation using the quality assurance system designed to improve the quality of learning conditions.

Quality Initiatives and Mechanisms

The university has its own robust quality assurance initiatives and mechanisms put in place to support and guide the academic community and its members in developing a quality culture containing strategies that strive to operate a quality management framework. It is the basis for achieving its mission and vision, as well as the aims and objectives of the various academic programs in the university. The quality strategies are aimed at effective use of resources to set up a standard core academic structure that will produce quality graduates who are resourceful, creative, and leaders with corporate quality culture, who are able and capable of satisfactorily solving local Nigerian problems, in addition to global challenges that they might be confronted with.

Aspect I: Quality Statement and Policy Goals

FUGUS is committed to developing and improving an effective quality assurance system that offers quality teaching, learning, research and community service to enhance learners' achievements that satisfy local and global challenges. It is the policy of the university to sustainably conserve these core values, through a policy of deep commitment to the development and continual improvement of the quality of its programs, operations and procedures. This commitment is supported by the Academic Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (APM&E) Unit of the university, which is an integral part of the Vice-Chancellor's Office and is headed by a director, who reports directly to the vice-chancellor. The APM&E unit acts as the focal point for coordinating and implementing quality assurance-related activities, through strategies that will promote and help sustain the culture of quality as a way of life in the university.

The policy goals of the university are to ensure excellence through a high level of quality in all areas of the university activities, including all aspects of academic, personal, cultural, and

professional development of its students and staff. They focus on enhancing the effectiveness of the university's vision and mission through effective management and delivery of the institution's programs in an appropriate manner, to relate its activities to the social, cultural and economic needs of the people of Nigeria. As part of these processes, the university has established a quality assurance section (quality assurances) in the year 2019 within the APM&E unit, which is headed by a deputy director. It has also developed a quality assurance system that provides formative meta-evaluation mechanisms to periodically evaluate its appropriateness through self-assessment. The quality assurance system provides regulatory mechanisms and strategies focusing on all the policies, inputs, planning processes and actions that will safeguard and encourage the sound management and maintenance of high-quality education. It is designed to systematically enhance and protect the quality of best practices achieved in teaching and research, as specified in its strategic plan and academic brief.

The 15 formulated internal and external quality assurance mechanisms include:

- i) Participate in curriculum review and improvement for various academic programs and administrative activities of the institution, to address national developmental needs and regulations, as well as other established norms from relevant Professional bodies.
- ii) Coordinate evaluation of proposals for new responsive academic programs to tackle and respond to emerging feedback from students, faculty, industry, national and global challenges, in line with NUC minimum academic standards (BMAS).
- iii) Regularly monitor and ensure compliance to the academic brief and provisions made to regularly monitor the KPIs of staff-student ratio, staff quality and mix, etc.
- iv) Act as a link with outside bodies and foster a climate of mutual trust and confidence in stakeholders that will reinforce the desired quality assurance and quality culture.
- v) Ensure delivery of quality training programs through effective teaching and research, including entrepreneurial and e-learning; as well as regular evaluation to ensure timely Graduation/Certification of skillful graduates.
- vi) Establish structures and mechanisms to design, monitor and evaluate KPIs of academic standards for internal mock accreditation exercises, prior to external NUC accreditations, to ensure the development, maintenance and continuous improvement in the quality of instructional activities of educational programs.
- vii) Ensure and oversee the development of a mature working relationship between academic and non-academic departments, like the institution's management information system (MIS) to enhance their self-assessment process.
- viii) Prepare, review and update Assessment Instruments and KPIs for institutional quality evaluation, prior to NUC institutional accreditation exercise.
- ix) Demonstrate visible commitments by actively encouraging teaching staff to conduct self-assessment that will lead to quality improvement using selected KPIs.
- x) Engage departments to conduct self-assessment of programs that have completed their accreditation cycle, through generating KPIs values on the inputs, processes and outputs of the various programs for remediation, preparatory to the next exercise.
- xi) Ensure the existence of remedial and diploma academic programs to improve the quality of students to be admitted for the various degree programs.
- xii) Facilitate deeper and quality engagement and feedback mechanisms with stakeholders e.g., community, staff, parents, students, industry to effectively improve and create awareness of the provisions for quality assurance and their general interest on quality issues.
- xiii) Participate in the systematic gathering, review and periodic dissemination of information on quality assurance evaluation results and efforts made on various best quality assurance practices and recommendations made for continuous improvement.

- xiv) Highlight the problems and difficulties encountered by both staff and students of the institution, as well as the range of institutional efforts designed to provide practical solutions to them.
- xv) Organize train-the-trainer workshops, seminars and conferences for the development of the capacity of both teaching and non-teaching staff and teachers that focus on continuous professional learning aimed at meeting international benchmarks of excellence in the field, while integrating the acquired skills for effective and efficient delivery of quality-related themes. These would ensure quality learning and teaching, which will contribute significantly towards the training of highly skilled graduates.

Aspect II: Quality Assurance and Assessment of Staff and Students

Quality assurance in FUGUS is a collective responsibility involving all staff and students of the university under the guidance of the University Management, Senate and Council, who join forces for a better university. It is dependent on: i) creating effective student relations, student-lecturer relationships and relationships between individual staff members, to enable them to work in harmony; ii) advising and coaching students on the effective understanding of organizational quality aspirations with particular emphasis on excellence, competence, knowledge and communication skills; and iii) promoting effective workplace climate through generating a culture of trust and mitigating challenges in the workplace; and iv) provision of incentives for teaching, non-teaching and management staff to be agents of quality change; and v) creating opportunities for the professional advancement of staff.

The quality of staff in a university has a great influence on the quality of its graduates since teachers can only impart what they know to their students (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2013). In pursuance of the above, the university has put in place stringent admission, recruitment and selection procedures that ensure that only appropriately qualified students and highly qualified and motivated teaching and non-teaching staff are employed, in line with national and international requirements. It shall therefore attract and retain good quality staff and students without distinction of race, creed, sex or political conviction. To reach global standards in terms of quality, costs and time management during our day-to-day interactions, we will only employ staff that are adequate in terms of: i) good qualifications; ii) relevance; iii) distributions; iv) skills; and v) experience. The hired staff shall participate in decision-making, through a committee system, decentralization and delegation of power. The university shall also create an awareness of responsibility for teaching staff and take collective responsibility for: i) student learning, community, and public service; ii) creating active linkages through affiliations and collaborations; and iii) creating impulses about the need to develop consensus goals and criteria for their self-evaluation.

In most cases, the teaching and learning mode shall be face-to-face lectures and practical classes, while tutorials shall be organized to help further knowledge importation. In addition, the students shall be encouraged to be innovative in the use of modern teaching facilities and information and communication technology (ICT). However, at the classroom level, teachers may need training on how to gather and analyze timely and detailed KPIs data needed to adjust teaching pedagogy to students' needs. This is to ensure students and faculty are up-to-date on their studies and are in touch with global expectations and trends in their fields.

We will develop a well-qualified and highly motivated faculty through enhanced and timely salary, allowances, promotion, training/ development etc. However, the promotion will be tied down to transparent guidelines on procedure, qualifications, residency, timeliness, teaching, research and other relevant criteria, such as community service. No organization, even if it does not compromise on quality, can achieve its goal without its people. As such, a positive research environment that shall create a deep aptitude for research will enhance the capacity of our institution, staff and students to integrate research strategies in teaching and learning

processes. This will enable us to deliver and promote: i) staff specialty; ii) positive attitude to work; iii) inclusive client/member participation; iv) commitment; and v) high staff retention rate.

Every member of the university community is responsible for the quality and improvement of their own work and results either as a student, teaching or non-teaching staff. The roles of all staff in quality assurance include promoting and sustaining the culture of quality in all aspects of the institution's operations, through exposing students to a variety of relevant teaching methodologies, in collaboration with deans of faculties and heads of departments in a non-authoritarian atmosphere that is devoid of rancor. It is important that, as a member of the university, you play an important role in managing the quality of the university community's operations by attending to your own duties to the best of your ability. This will lead us to achieve our prime goal of guaranteeing the quality of our programs through the active participation and co-operation of all staff, students and our stakeholders.

The admission policy in the University is in line with: i) NUC regulations on carrying capacity of programs; ii) student admissions quota, including quota by professional bodies; iii) admission requirements; and iv) the available human, physical and material resources that shall adequately cater for the admitted students. All students, irrespective of race, gender, religion, ethnicity, or political leaning, who are eligible for admission and have satisfied the UTME and post-UTME requirements for admission into a program of study, shall be admitted into the university. Also, prospective candidates shall undergo further screening exercises to ascertain their potentials for high-quality education, especially in the fields of research, science and technology.

To motivate and cultivate core values in enrolled students of the university, they are provided with incentives in the form of support services in academic and psychological counseling, career guidance and placement, and welfare; e.g., access to the utility, hostel accommodation and toilet; and other services such as student unionism. All students are treated with courtesy and respect and have opportunities to fully participate in academic activities, as well as contact their teaching staff for individual consultation and effective learning. They are assigned teaching staff for their mentoring, guidance and counseling, who from time to time interact and guide the assigned student in a fair, impartial and objective way, both quantitatively and qualitatively, to mitigate their spiritual, social and/or academic problems (if any).

The reliability of quality assurance systems depends on the independence of the evaluation and the roles both staff and students play in the evaluation. Every member of the academic community collaborates and shares good practices, to contribute to the common goal of achieving the university's values and objectives in accordance with standard quality policies. Including students in quality assurance activities influence the quality as they provide an important lens for transparency, meaning all participants see the outcomes and subsequent changes (Palomares, 2014).

Every staff and student shall be responsible for their performance and outcomes. To this effect, attendance of lectures by both staff and students are independently assessed to enhance the reputation of the institution both locally and globally. Before the beginning of each semester examination, students would be issued with an evaluation form to assess their course lecturers with numerical grades from 1-5 points, covering competence, service delivery, honesty/sense of justice, discipline and attendance. They will also be forbidden from visiting the offices of lecturers without an official schedule. The students will be encouraged to write and submit a report about sharp practices by alleged lecturers to the appropriate body in charge but will be warned that false petitions or report against innocent lecturers will lead to dismissal from the university.

Students can also contribute to the quality assurance efforts through several channels where they can have the chance to provide feedback about their academic experience and the learning

and study environment by participating in: i) focus group interviews during NUC accreditation exercises; ii) course feedback survey using questionnaires or forms; iii) various university committees and decision-making organs as student representatives; iv) peer learning and peer counseling study groups, and v) University student unions and associations, as well as other professional organizations.

The above tasks of evaluating the quality of education and training will be achieved through the use of the following instruments to be developed and updated by the APM&E unit of the university: i) students and teachers lecture attendance forms; ii) students and staff feedback survey forms; iii) peer-in-class assessment forms; iv) course experience survey questionnaire; v) external examiners reports; vi) NUC new program resource verification reports; vii) NUC program accreditation reports; viii) institutional accreditations and reviews; ix) mock accreditation self-assessment form; and x) employers and alumni feedback survey forms.

Aspect III: External and Internal Quality Assurance Strategies

The quality assurance system in the university is to ensure continuous quality program content development, through designing programs with specific features related to professional and ethical responsibilities, to guarantee systematic and transparent enhancement of quality, thorough evaluation of some selected KPIs. Quality evaluations of KPIs in FUGUS are done periodically both internally and externally to ensure the quality of its programs meets the specifications of a set of NUC minimum academic standards (BMASS) Benchmark and those of other professional bodies legitimately empowered to make specifications.

Self-assessment is an indispensable internal quality assurance management tool that assures quality through KPIs evaluation-driven process, rather than an accreditation driven-process (kpilibrary.com). It evaluates the methodology, techniques and effectiveness of quality assurance arrangements for both teaching and research. Consequently, 5 KPIs were identified and selected to help us evaluate and understand the position of our university in the educational community and these are: i) graduate satisfaction; ii) student satisfaction; iii) employer satisfaction; iv) students' turnover in terms of graduation rate; and v) demographic analysis of individuals applying to become students and the levels of approval and rejections.

Evaluation of the five selected KPIs has ensured the following: i) value for money, measured as efficient achievement of more with less; ii) noticeable transformation, with value-added quality activities; iii) improved perfection, perceived by the attainment of almost perfect service and system; and iv) observable excellence, with the attainment of exceptionally high standard service and quality system. These KPIs generate quantitative data on the overall performance of systems as well as the quality of the university and the teaching staff, as measured against learning outcomes and standards defined in the Academic Brief and Strategic Plan Frameworks, for enhancing quality in all areas at the University through evaluation and implementation strategy, and the mechanism for their review and evaluation.

External quality assurance mechanisms aim at providing objective, valid and reliable data on school performance. For example, NUC accreditation panel, which is not a part of the university community, brings objective viewpoints about the quality of development strategies, and teacher performance. Internal quality assurance mechanisms are most effective when they support teacher collective work and are focused on improving instruction. No single internal or external quality assurance mechanism can provide all the information needed for school accountability and development.

However, when taken together, the different mechanisms can provide important and complementary insights on school, teacher and student performance and support evidence-based decision-making. Ultimately, the university can use the synergy between the external and internal mechanisms to ensure a healthy, dynamic quality assurance process. For instance, the internal and external KPIs quality assurance data are used to track policy

implementation and impact to identify and support areas for improvement in the university. Where possible, professional communities can also use these types of feedback mechanisms that are designed collaboratively for school and staff development.

Students are assessed using fair, consistent and tractable criteria, senate approved regulations and procedures which are applied in a manner consistent with international standards and research requirements. Internal and external examiners are appointed to review and assess both examination questions and marking schemes for an academic discipline. Such periodic review of the examination activities of academic programs in the university plays an important role in enhancing their quality and effectiveness. Internal examiners are the lecturer(s) responsible for delivering courses who draft and submit examination question papers to the chief examiner (head of department/dean), while the external examiners are appointed to review both examination questions and marking schemes for an academic discipline, to provide independent external quality assurance for the assessment process and to ensure that standards are maintained.

The university ensures effective management of the institution's examination activities through a variety of procedures and strategies that ensure hitch free exercise. These include issues related to: i) the use of different types of assessments; ii) the use of continuous assessment in theory and practical classes; iii) invigilator/students ratio; iv) capacity of examination hall; v) exams malpractice; vi) accurate examination time table; vii) quality of examination questions; and viii) timely release of assessments and examination results.

The director of academic planning, deans and heads of departments normally set up a board of examiners and examination grievance committees at all levels. After examination papers are marked and final grades calculated, there is a meeting of the departmental board of examiners followed by that of the faculty, at which each course under examination during the semester is reviewed, with a discussion of all the results particularly "A" grades, fails and borderline cases. Examination results are made available to students following the consideration and approval of departmental and faculty boards of examiners but subject to final approval by the University Senate.

Examination malpractice in the university is sanctioned either by: i) expulsion; ii) rustication for one academic year; and/ or iii) written warning; depending on the nature of the offense. Its severity is investigated and ascertained by the Examination Regulations and Irregularities (ERIC) Committee, using acceptable criteria for obtaining correct evidence through witnesses and exhibits. However, the university allows the student to write to the Vice-Chancellor and appeal if he/she is not satisfied by the outcome of the sanction imposed. In this way the University seeks to ensure quality of its products and services for its principal stakeholders that include its staff (both academic, administrative, and technical), its students and the community.

Aspect IV: Handbooks, Timetables and Academic Calendar

It is the policy of FUGUS to prepare, publish and provide developed Students' handbooks, course lecture and examinations timetables, as well as a consistent yearly calendar of academic events. The university, faculties, departments and independent units draft their own Students' handbooks based on the university academic brief, the strategic plan document and other vital instruments. The students' handbooks guide and offer up-to-date, useful, better and detailed information about the university, as well as all the programs available in the different departments and faculties.

The Students' handbooks use appropriate process flow to describe the different stages of the university operating processes and the staff responsible in relation to the following activities: i) content development of courses and programs; ii) outlines of courses and course credit system regulations; iii) registration procedure; iv) examination administration system; v)

examination regulations and assessment procedures; vi) disciplinary procedures and penalties for examination malpractice; vii) outlines of all other relevant policies and procedures; ix) expectations and penalties to mitigate other circumstances that determine students' progression; etc.

The printed, hard copies of the students' handbooks are distributed to the students at the beginning of a course, and all the soft copies are integrated with other contents on the university intranet, to improve access to information needed by students, faculty, and staff. A student will also receive an appropriate course timetable with regards to his program, which will guide him or her through, to enhance learners' achievement and training in an organized way. The timetables contain up-to-date and useful information in relation to the names of the courses, time, venue and the teacher responsible for delivery. These timetables are also made public, for example on school websites, along with other relevant quality instruments. An academic calendar which clarifies management good practices, harmonizes operations between university units, and helps safeguard assigned academic timelines, will also be prepared and disseminated to both staff and students. It will contain timelines related to beginning and end of semesters, mid-semester break, exams, and various management meetings, etc.

Aspect V: Quality Assurance Approval, Monitoring and Evaluation

The strong university management board of FUGUS bears ultimate responsibility for the overall quality of operations and results of the quality assurance principles and policies. It has established formal mechanisms for approval of quality delivery, effective regular monitoring and evaluation processes to allow for assessment of its academic programs. Deans of faculties, directors of units and heads of departments are responsible for the operational and qualitative results of their own units. They are accountable for monitoring, evaluating, enforcing standards and relaying appropriately to the university leadership for policymaking. These would require thorough record-keeping to track and measure progress and ensure adherence to standards.

To achieve this, the Academic Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (APM&E) unit of the university has set up a quality assurance committee (quality assurance) of the university, with the deputy director in charge of quality management, as the chairman. Quality assurance provides and perfectly ties together strategies for implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting processes. Each operating unit (faculty, department, independent institute, Central Administration sector and other relevant units) has at least one quality coordinator, whose duty it is to communicate about quality management procedures, promote quality management in his or her own unit and support the University leadership in quality management issues.

The quality assurance is composed of representatives from all faculties as well as representatives from the registry, students' affairs, bursary, library, works, health services, and SERVICOM. The faculty representatives are usually senior academics (readers and professors) and shall chair their respective faculty quality assurance unit, which is composed of representatives from all the departments under a given faculty, as well as faculty quality assurance desk officers who are appointed from staff of the APM&C. Quality Assurance conducts a host of activities that are designed to improve the quality of inputs, processes and outputs of the university system. It acts to guarantee that the quality assurance system is "fit for purpose" and compliment the efforts of the APM&E unit in achieving its set goals of monitoring and evaluation.

The roles of the quality assurance in the university are to:

- i) Formulate, implement, monitor and periodically review a FUGUS quality assurance strategy based on the priorities identified, in line with existing university governance instruments.
- ii) Coordinate and monitor the implementation and conduct of annual evaluation of the university's strategic plan which is a blueprint for the systemic development of the university.
- iii) Regularly assist the APM&E Unit in data collection and evaluation relating to university's quality assurance performance activities, such as the reaction of stakeholders, peer group and students' evaluation of staff and programs through a two-way dialogue that will reinforce the desired quality culture and the needs of alternative pedagogical approaches in relation to teaching.
- iv) Monitor, assess and analyze past accreditation reports of the university, as well as the quality, adequacy and currency of infrastructural facilities and resources in departments and faculties; to highlight areas that need amelioration and development.
- v) Contribute and support the achievement of the quality assurance policy goals defined in all aspects of the university educational activities by strengthening: a) self-assessment activities from faculties and departments; b) learning from other universities and institutions that have regularly engaged in internal monitoring; c) appointing a member to join students during lectures to evaluate the relevance of course content, readiness and potentialities; and d) receive feedbacks for developing and updating appropriate check lists of criteria and format for KPIs evaluation of teaching quality and effectiveness.

Other bodies involved in the quality monitoring process are selected class representatives for all courses at all levels of study, who periodically report issues on lecture attendance by academic staff and other grievances issues related to quality assurance. Last, the APM&C Unit has also created and encouraged Whistle-blowing feedback from both staff, class representatives and other students; for monitoring, assessment and evaluation, as these relate to school trust. Whistleblowing is the act of drawing public attention or the attention of an authority figure, to perceived wrong-doing, misconduct, unethical activity within an organization. Statutes have been established to: i) provide confidence for both staff and students to blow the whistle; ii) aid anonymous reporting (email, press, telephone numbers, WhatsApp, etc.); and iii) ensure confidentiality and security of the whistleblower. For instance, a dedicated WhatsApp group has been created to act as an instrument for receiving Whistle-blowing feedback on quality-related issues.

The quality assurance system put in place at FUGUS is implemented through monitoring, evaluation of standard KPIs, reporting and continuous improvement of the day-to-day running of the institution; to ensure that the administrative processes and core academic activities are fit for the purpose for which they are desired. The monitoring system involves continuous assessment of program implementation by examining the differences between the planned (program) and the actual (achievement), to provide KPIs data for analysis and action. The assessment of the university and its activities in relation to set goals and objectives over a period of time, is an evaluation that measures the progress in the implementation of a plan, to ensure an effective implementation strategy.

Decision makers refer to KPIs assurance data to: i) ensure universities are meeting National standards set out by NUC and identify areas of success and progress, as well as areas that need effective improvement; ii) distribute resources effectively and equitably across departments and units; iii) identify educational programs that are 'at risk' and in need of additional support; iv) identify areas where students have further needs; and v) highlight and share 'good practices' more widely, to stimulate and support improvement.

Aspect XI: Quality of Facilities and Learning Resources

The university has procedures in place to create and maintain effective teaching and learner-centered conducive environments through the provision of adequate resources and infrastructural facilities that support uninterrupted quality research and learning experience in universities (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2009).

The University shall adequately provide the following quality facilities and resources: i) for teaching, research, learning and examination, with each department having adequate number of functional staff offices, classrooms, lecture theaters, library (with the right and adequate information resources in both print and electronic media), teaching aids, teaching and research laboratories, workshops, theaters, and studios, etc.; ii) to support a technology driven culture to aid e-learning and research, and other services to be delivered university-wide through the creation and management of a comprehensive ICT infrastructure and environment with facilities like; central server, LAN, internet, intranet, networking and connectivity services; iii) adequate utilities (water, electricity, roads, telecommunications, drainage, transport, etc.); iv) for health and sanitation including medical facilities, drainages and sewers, toilet facilities, waste handling equipment/dumping sites, terrain landscaping, etc.; v) social infrastructure such as social centers, corner shops, sporting facilities, mosques, churches, etc.; and vi) to support security e.g., communication equipment, detection gadgets, security equipment, vehicles, offices, etc.

The university ensures that these physical resources and equipment are fairly adequate and appropriate for each program offered. These resources and facilities shall be routinely maintained, regularly refurbished, rehabilitated and upgraded as the case may be. The university shall accrue its funds from government subventions, allocations, grants, endowments, and student charges to meet its other obligations of: i) prompt payment of salaries and allowances; ii) purchase of goods and services; and iii) further development of physical facilities. It shall also partner with the private sector and international public institutions in the funding of its program to enable it to guarantee quality service delivery through best practices, like avoiding problems related to overcrowded classrooms and lack of laboratory equipment.

Aspect VII: Challenges to Quality Assurance Occasioned by the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) and Mitigation Measures

With the formation and implementation of the quality assurance system, several challenges and issues have arisen that remain to be addressed, and these include:

- i) Our university has expanded significantly in terms of numbers and student enrollments and is faced with uncertainty and challenges occasioned by COVID-19.
- ii) The quality assurance system is new, complicated and rigorous and has created new cost, bureaucratic overload, as well as evaluation fatigue, as it is rigidly regulated and controlled.
- iii) There is a clear division in imposing quality assurance activities between non-academic departments and units that do not have properly defined goals and objectives, as compared with that of academic departments with clear criteria.
- iv) There is no real developed institutional 'quality culture' due to the very little understanding and participation by both staff and students in quality assurance activities.
- v) There is no framework that properly defines responsibilities and staffing for consistent assessment of learning design, content, and pedagogy within the quality assurance system that will support learning for all categories of students; and
- vi) Challenges on issues related to lack of total cooperation from our staff during accreditation on how to integrate external and internal mechanisms and balance their accountability and improvement functions (Darwin and Lewis, 2005).

The following management strategies shall be adopted as mitigation measures to handle these challenges:

- i) The quality assurance system will be effectively implemented and kept under regular review, to ensure the university operations and services are of the highest quality possible.
- ii) The university strategic plan, academic brief and other instruments will be regularly updated, to be current and relevant to national and international developmental needs and aspirations that will set standard learning design, content, and pedagogy.
- iii) The university will establish linkages and affiliations with world-class universities that will ensure the quality of its educational programs meets local and international standards simultaneously.
- iv) Periodic one-day workshop on quality assurance discourse shall be organized for deans and heads of departments to improve all aspects of quality culture.
- v) Research activities and consultancy shall be explored as propeller for discovery, economic, technological and internal generated revenue development.
- vi) Review of complex quality assurance systems to achieve suitable coherence, adaptability and sustainability by avoiding narrowly defined criteria and standards, as well as a tight coherence or alignment of mechanisms using experiences and innovations of others shall be carried out.
- vii) The university shall utilize appropriate IT systems and tools to easily and quickly collect, report and issue graduation performance data, such as academic transcripts for graduates; and
- viii) It will also ensure excellence through a high level of quality in all areas of operation, including enhancement, maintenance and implementation of internal and external quality assurance procedures and practices consistent with the university's policies, systems and processes, as enshrined in its vision and mission statements; as well as well as being consistent with internationally recognized standards.

The strategies that were put in place to protect students and employees (e.g., faculty, staff, and administrators) and slow the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic are: i). classroom layouts were modified with seats/desks at least 1.83m (6 feet) apart when feasible; ii) learning on shifting basis involving staggered/rotated scheduling to accommodate smaller class sizes and hosting of smaller classes in larger rooms; iii) offering hybrid virtual e-learning in addition to in-person classes; iv) provision of adequate distance between individuals engaged in experiential learning opportunities (e.g., labs, vocational skill building activities); v) to cope with the Social Distance requirement of the COVID-19 protocol, students residence halls were opened at lower capacity but shared spaces (e.g., kitchens, common areas), were closed; and vi) regulatory checks to sustain physical distancing were carried out.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the present study has outlined the quality assurance standards and guidelines at FUGUS and the extent to which they improved academic quality and promoted institutional advancement, through continuous improvement and effectiveness of the planning, strategy, reporting and implementation processes. Quality means doing it right when no one is looking and it is our first priority, and the essence is to produce graduates that attain excellent skills and knowledge through quality academic programs that are valued by stakeholders and consistent with internationally recognized standards. It has effects on the following KPIs of academic work; teaching practices, curriculum development, power relations between faculty and students, and faculty workload that are used to identify needs, adjust university strategies, and motivate improvements.

In the final analysis, as the standing of any academic institution, both nationally and internationally is ultimately judged by the quality and performance of its graduates, it is

recommended that: i) the grading/evaluation standards need improvement and there is also the need for a shift of focus to encourage students to develop the necessary skills being taught as opposed to cramming notes for an exam; ii) due to availability of programs that are offered across international boundaries, there is a strong need for an international quality assurance framework with emphasis on greater awareness of the attributes and requirements of quality assurance organizations worldwide; iii) the university explores strategies to support other universities to develop their quality assurance mechanisms, as well as the present NUC initiative that addresses improvements and strengthening of the internal evaluation processes of Nigerian universities through annual quality workshops.

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Chapter 12

How To Inform the Public on Quality In Higher Education: The Croatian Experience

Jasmina Havranek

Introduction

This chapter explores the topic of sound and transparent informing of the public about the quality of higher education institutions from the standpoint of the Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE). There are two key topics on which ASHE, as a state-funded institution, is obligated to inform the public in an appropriate manner: (1) quality in higher education as an abstract notion and (2) accreditation procedures and their outcomes as complex processes involving the use of expert terminology. Given that the information needs to be clear and comprehensible to be useful to both experts and the general public, ASHE is faced with communication challenges concerning the abstract nature of the notion of *quality* and the use of expert terminology that is largely unknown to the general public, as well as the environment within which ASHE operates.

ASHE's Communication Strategy (2019) references ASHE's mission,²⁸ which puts the promotion of the importance of quality assurance in higher education and science at the core of ASHE's activities. Therefore, it is necessary to inform the public about the agency's scope of work. By providing timely, clear, accurate, objective, valid and easily accessible information, ASHE maintains credibility of its work, strengthens stakeholder confidence in the national and international context, and promotes importance of quality assurance in higher education and science, while exercising the principle of transparency (ASHE, 2019, p. 3). The paper examines the context within which the Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education operates, the characteristics of communication, the target audience, and finally, the communication channels through which messages are transmitted. Given the importance of the media in the transmission of messages to the general public, media relations are discussed in a separate section.

Context within which ASHE operates

Environment

The Agency for Science and Higher Education is the national agency in the Republic of Croatia, established in 2005. It is responsible for quality assurance in higher education and science while carrying out the following external evaluation procedures: initial accreditation of study programs and higher education institutions, re-accreditation of higher education institutions and scientific organizations, audit and thematic evaluation.²⁹ ASHE carries out the mentioned procedures in compliance with the national legislation (Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education, Scientific Activity and Higher Education Act, national evaluation standards and other regulations) and Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the

²⁸ ASHE's mission is defined in ASHE's Strategy for 2016-2020:

ASHE promotes the importance of quality assurance in higher education and science with the aim of continuous quality enhancement of higher education institutions, scientific organizations and the overall Croatian system of science and higher education and their recognition within the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area, while encouraging society's sustainable development, (Agency for Science and Higher Education, 2019, p. 14).

²⁹ External evaluation procedures within the competence of ASHE are defined by the Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education (Official Gazette 45/2009).

European Higher Education Area (ESG). Compliance of ASHE's work and the evaluation procedures it carries out with the ESG is confirmed by ASHE's full membership of European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and listing in European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

ASHE is an independent legal entity with public authority, entered in the court register, and established by the Republic of Croatia (Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education, Official Gazette 45/09). It is not part of the executive, that is, the ministry responsible for education, or of any other institution or body, but it is an independent *agency* financed by the state budget. According to the Guidelines for the Regulation of the System of Agencies, Institutes, Funds, Centers and Other Legal Entities with Public Authority of the Ministry of Administration of the Republic of Croatia (2015),³⁰ the term *agency* is not defined in the legal system of the Republic of Croatia, nor does it constitute a legal form but rather, this term" represents a name for a rather heterogeneous group of legal entities ranging from an institution to various forms of companies" (p. 9).

For public administration theorists – Koprić, Musa, Đulabić & Lalić Novak, as stated by the Ministry of Public Administration (2015, p. 9), agencies represent a type of administrative organization that arises within the process of administrative (real, functional) decentralization by assigning administrative tasks of the central government to structurally separated organizations with a degree of autonomy (independence) in their activities and accountability for the result and the achievement of a specific predefined purpose. (...) Agencies are considered to be organizations that are formally separated from ministries to perform public duties at the national level on a permanent basis, which are usually employing public servants and funded mainly from the state budget and subject to public law regulations.

In accordance with the abovementioned characteristics, the Ministry of Public Administration (2015) recognizes 57 institutions in Croatia that can be considered agencies. It is worth mentioning that the number of agencies, institutes, centers and other legal entities with public authority, which were established by separating organizational units from the state administration bodies, or which were established to perform new public affairs, has grown since the mid-1990s, and has gained momentum in the process of accession of the Republic of Croatia to the European Union, when dozens of such organizations were established (Ministry of Public Administration, 2015). When the issue of rationalization of public administration came to the focus of the governing bodies in the Republic of Croatia,³¹ a decrease of the number of agencies was announced. In 2015, the Government of the Republic of Croatia adopted the "Decision on reducing the number of agencies, institutes, funds and other legal entities with public authority and establishing a commission for the implementation of the rationalization of the system of agencies, institutes, funds and other legal entities with public authority." The purpose of the decision was to decrease the number of agencies with the aim of reducing costs in the public sector". This decision has not been implemented, but the question of effectiveness and justification of agencies has come to the center of public attention, particularly the aspect of effectiveness and usefulness of such organizations. Such an environment is a constant communication challenge for ASHE.

Higher education system in the Republic of Croatia and external quality assurance

³⁰ <https://vlada.gov.hr/UserDocsImages//2016/Sjednice/2015/225%20sjednica%20vlade//225%20-%204.pdf>, retrieved on 1 April 2020.

³¹ Rationalization of public administration was in part encouraged by external influences. The document of the World Bank "Croatia – Public finance review: restructuring spending for stability and growth" from October 2014 mentions the following: "A noticeable trend in Croatia's public administration has been the increase in the number of agencies. In 2013, there were still around 70 plus various agencies/institutes at the central level. "(Ministry of Public Administration, 2015, p. 5). It also mentions the need for a more rational management of agency organization in the Republic of Croatia.

In Croatia, higher education is delivered in the form of professional and university study programs at the undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate level. According to the funding source, higher education institutions in the Republic of Croatia are either public or private, and according to the type there are universities (with their constituent units: faculties, art academies and university departments), polytechnics or colleges. According to ASHE's Directory of Study Programs,³² there are 10 universities, 18 polytechnics and 18 colleges in Croatia, which deliver 1,555 study programs in total (1,282 university and 273 professional study programs). According to the Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education, Official Gazette 45/09) all public and private higher education institutions, public scientific institutions and other scientific organizations founded by the Republic of Croatia, as well as private scientific organizations and other legal entities financed from the national budget, shall undergo a periodic re-accreditation every five years.

Re-accreditation, as well as other external evaluation procedures – initial accreditation, audit, thematic evaluation – is carried out by ASHE. The first re-accreditation cycle in Croatia was carried out from 2010 to 2016. This was the first time all higher education institutions had undergone re-accreditation according to the same methodology and criteria in which foreign and Croatian experts took part. Using the feedback and experience resulting from the first re-accreditation cycle, an enhanced re-accreditation model was built which the Agency started to apply in the fall of 2017. External evaluation procedures protect the system of science and higher education from poor-quality institutions. At the same time, they are aimed at enhancing institutions and the entire system of science and higher education, guaranteeing to students that the study program they have selected meets the necessary quality criteria, and to the institutions financing the scientific activity that the scientific organizations meet the conditions for conducting scientific activity.

Due to the circumstances caused by the coronavirus outbreak in 2020, and in order to ensure the continuity of Agency's work, ASHE adapted its operations in a way that an assessment is made for each external evaluation procedure on whether the conditions for its implementation in a regular format (in-person) are fulfilled; the decision thereof is adopted by the Accreditation Council. If the conditions are not fulfilled, a mixed (hybrid) model is applied, i.e., one part of the procedure is carried out via video conferencing, and the rest of the procedure is carried out in a traditional manner. If the epidemiological situation so requires, the entire procedure can be carried out online, or even postponed, which is also a decision made by the Accreditation Council. In order to facilitate the participation in a hybrid model of evaluation to all the stakeholders, detailed guidelines were drafted for expert panel members, higher education institutions and ASHE coordinators. Feedback from the participants in hybrid evaluation procedures confirm the usefulness of these guidelines, as well as the excellent technical support provided by the Agency throughout the entire process.

Characteristics of Communication, Target Audience and Communication Channels

As mentioned above, the Agency is part of the public sector and is financed from the national budget. Therefore, the Agency is obliged to report to the competent state authorities, as well as to citizens and the general public about their activities, the manner in which they are conducted and the effects they produce. Considering the expert terminology in the field of quality assurance that is very often incomprehensible to the layperson, as well as the legal terminology often found in documents important to the public such as accreditation recommendations,³³ the challenge faced by the Agency, along with the aforementioned

³² <https://mozvag.srce.hr/preglednik/pregled/en/tipvu/odabir.html>, retrieved on 2 April 2020

³³ An accreditation recommendation is an official document issued upon completion of re-accreditation by the Agency for Science and Higher Education based on the opinion of the Accreditation Council (ASHE's expert council) and forwarded to the ministry responsible for higher education and science. In the Accreditation

(negative) public perception of agencies and other similar organizations, is how to convey information to the general public in a clear and comprehensible form.

There are two key principles behind ASHE's communication practice: transparency and openness. Transparency implies that the information is publicly available and can be disclosed upon request of the citizen or another entity. Citizens are presented with the results of the government activity and are more or less capable and engaged recipients in the communication process, while the information flow is from the government to the citizens, either on its own initiative or upon request. Information is the result of the work of public authorities, it is an *output* (Musa, 2013, p. 11). Openness, on the other hand, implies that the institution is open to the information and feedback provided by the public (citizens, civil society and private sector) on its work, or about intended decisions (e.g., when formulating public policies or regulations). The relationship is two-way, and the main information flow is from the citizens, who are now active, to the government, which takes into account the opinions and suggestions of the public when making decisions or improving their work. (OECD, 2001; Bannister and Connolly, 2010, cited in Musa, 2013, P. 11).

Transparent and open communication is an important anti-corruption tool. ASHE is shaping its communication practice in line with the described principles of transparency and openness described above, which is described in ASHE's Communication Strategy (2019). The goal of the strategy is to clearly present the general and specific communication goals and develop a communication plan which is linked to ASHE's activity plan. The general communication goal of ASHE is promoting a culture of quality in science and higher education as widely accepted values, raising public awareness of its multifaceted importance for the development of higher education institutions and scientific institutions, their recognition, visibility, comparability and relevance at national and international levels, but also its importance for society as a whole – primarily for students and pupils, as direct users educated to join the labor market and, finally, for the economy as a whole. (ASHE, 2019, p. 3).

Communication goals are designed for target groups so that messages and approaches are tailored to specific groups to maximize the impact of the message. "Communication with target groups is conducted within the framework of general principles of communication, which are the following: effectiveness, transparency, accuracy, timeliness, clarity, mutual respect and readiness to engage in dialogue" (ASHE, 2019, p. 5). ASHE's target groups are universities and university constituents, polytechnics and colleges, scientific organizations, members of the academic and scientific community, policymakers, international organizations of which ASHE is member, foreign higher education institutions, members of expert committees, high school students, students and their parents, the media, and other interested individuals or entities.

Various communication channels are used in a coordinated manner to meet the communication goals during the activity implementation process in order to produce positive effects. Below are examples of the Agency's communication with stakeholders and the general public, presented by the following types of communication channels: (1) website, (2) social networks, (3) printed publications, brochures and leaflets, (4) promotional videos, (5) presenting ASHE's activities at conferences and symposia, (6) organization of various conferences and training events for representatives of higher education institutions, etc. Communications with the media are presented in a separate section (7).

Recommendation, ASHE recommends to the ministry responsible for higher education and science the outcome of the re-accreditation which can be: (1) Issuance of a confirmation on compliance with the requirements for performing the activities, or parts of the activities, (2) withholding a license to carry out the activities or part of the activities, or (3) issuing a letter of expectation for a period of 1 to 3 years that may include a ban on student enrollment in the period defined by the letter of expectation.

1. ASHE's website

The main communication channel used by ASHE is the official website (www.azvo.hr) in Croatian and English, which is regularly updated with news from ASHE and the higher education system, including information on activities carried out by international networks such as ENQA, EQAR, etc. of whom ASHE is a member, as well as news from Croatian higher education institutions. The website features, in Croatian and English, detailed descriptions of all external evaluation procedures, the annual higher education institutions re-accreditation plan and the doctoral studies re-accreditation plan, as well as the audit plan adopted by the Accreditation Council, ASHE's expert council. Important documents and regulations used in external quality assurance procedures are also available to all interested parties, including procedure workflows for initial accreditation and higher education institutions and PhD studies re-accreditation, standards for the evaluation of quality of universities and their constituents in the procedure of re-accreditation, standards for the evaluation of quality of polytechnics and colleges in the procedure of re-accreditation, criteria for the evaluation of online study programs, audit criteria and manual, useful guidelines and forms.

Accreditation reports on conducted evaluations, accreditation recommendations, higher education institutions' observations and other relevant documents concerning the procedure itself are published in the evaluation outcomes database which is linked to the European database and the Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR), which includes reports and decisions from higher education institution evaluation conducted by EQAR-listed agencies. ASHE prepared summary accreditation reports from the first cycle of higher education institution re-accreditation (2010–2016) and linked them to the central website featuring relevant information and applications to study programs of higher education institutions in Croatia. With only one click, all candidates for the application to study programs of higher education institutions in Croatia will receive, along with other information, feedback on the higher education institution's quality through a shortened version of the accreditation report. ASHE also manages the Central Applications Office responsible for tasks pertaining to the application to study programs of Croatian higher education institutions.

The website features analyses and syntheses prepared by ASHE, which are useful for higher education institutions and policymakers in the field of science and higher education, various thematic editions published by ASHE, as well as other valuable national and international publications in the field of science and higher education.

Experts interested in joining the work of expert committees in external evaluation procedures (teachers at higher education institutions, industry representatives and students) can register via a link on ASHE's website to the database of potential reviewers. When the need for experts fitting a specific profile occurs ASHE's Accreditation Council appoints them. ASHE QA forum, i.e., Forum on quality assurance,³⁴ is also an important tool that can be found on ASHE's website. During the preparation of the self-evaluation report for re-accreditation purposes, higher education institutions, and other interested parties, can post questions on the forum. ASHE's staff responds to the questions and the whole procedure is publicly available.

The website also features the Directory of higher education institutions in Croatia and accredited study programs which are delivered in Croatian.³⁵ The Directory is bilingual (in Croatian and English) and regularly updated. Information can be searched according to various criteria such as the type of higher education institution or study program, education provider, etc. The Directory itself is a relevant source of information for the general public. In 2019, ASHE published the Directory of study programs delivered in Croatia in a foreign

³⁴ ASHE's QA forum is available on the link <https://forum.azvo.hr/>, retrieved on 2 April 2020

³⁵ Directory of accredited study programs and higher education institutions in Croatia is on the link <https://mozvag.srce.hr/preglednik/pregled/hr/pocetna/index.html>, retrieved on 2 April 2020

language.³⁶ It is an informative list of accredited study programs fully delivered in English or another foreign language by higher education institutions in Croatia, and it is intended for foreign students who wish to study in Croatia, but also for Croatian students wishing to study in a foreign language. The Directory features links to the aforementioned study programs, promotional leaflets and contact details of personnel responsible for international cooperation and student exchange at the higher education institutions delivering these programs. In the first half of each year, an annual report covering the previous year is published on the website, together with the financial report and an action plan for the current year in Croatian and English. The annual report in both languages is also issued in the printed version.

ASHE's website is also a platform for the inclusion of the general public in the process of drawing up important documents used in external evaluation procedures. During the preparation of documents for the second cycle of re-accreditation of higher education institutions (2017) and the second audit cycle (2017), ASHE published drafts of the following documents: Standards for the evaluation of quality of universities and university constituents in the procedure of re-accreditation of higher education institutions; Standards for the evaluation of quality of polytechnics and colleges in the procedure of re-accreditation of higher education institutions; Procedure for the re-accreditation of higher education institutions; System for the evaluation and assessment of quality of higher education institutions in the procedure of re-accreditation of higher education institutions; MOZVAG Tables in the Self-evaluation Report; Ordinance on Audit of Quality Assurance Systems at Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Croatia; and Audit Criteria. All interested parties, within a specific deadline, had the opportunity to send in their comments which, upon consideration, were accepted or rejected. In the process of preparing the aforementioned documents, ASHE held consultations with relevant representatives of the academic community, such as the Rectors' Conference of the Republic of Croatia, the Accreditation Council and the like.

2. Social media

Social media – Facebook, Twitter and You Tube – are channels of communication with the general public featuring regular publications of news, related audio-visual content and links to the ASHE's website. Social media is an inevitable part of everyday reality, both private and professional. We often bear witness to journalists stating Facebook and Twitter pages of politicians, private parties and institutions as a relevant source of information. According to data³⁷ published by the digital advertising agency Arbona (17 January 2019), in 2019 there were 1,900,000 Facebook users in the Republic of Croatia, meaning that 4 out of 9 Croatian citizens use this social media platform. Following the trend of public institutions' presence on social media, and in order to establish communication with the general public, in 2012 ASHE joined the Facebook and Twitter communities. News published on ASHE's website under the section "News from ASHE", news from the higher education and science community as well as those from higher education institutions are also published on social media platforms once their content is adapted to the language used on social media. This presupposes an informative, but casual tone, straightforward language without careful phrasing and platitudes, and the use of social media jargon, such as Facebook emoticons. Each publication also features a link to ASHE's website in order to achieve synchronization and increase the website's visiting rate.

According to the abovementioned data, the majority of Facebook users in Croatia are those aged 25-34 (540,000) and 35-44 (420,000), which is also the target group addressed by ASHE through social media, especially Facebook. The other group of ASHE's Facebook audience

³⁶ Directory of study programs delivered in Croatia in a foreign language is on the link <https://www.azvo.hr/hr/studies-in-foreign-languages>, retrieved on 2 April 2020

³⁷ <https://www.arbona.hr/blog/drustveni-marketing/infografika-facebook-vs-instagram-na-pocetku-2019-godine-tko-smo-i-sto-nas-najvise-interesira/2803>, retrieved on 14 April 2020

consists of high school pupils and students as 435,000 Facebook users are aged 13-24 (Arbona, 17 January 2019).

ASHE updates its Twitter page in the same way as it does on Facebook: news is published at least once a week in a language and style appropriate for this network, along with a photograph and a link to ASHE's website.

3. Printed publications

Printed publications, brochures and leaflets are published periodically, and they include annual work reports, newsletters, re-accreditation syntheses, brochures and leaflets on external quality assurance procedures, publications presenting results of surveys conducted by ASHE, and other informative and useful publications.

The annual activity report, including the financial report, is published in printed and electronic form by May of each year, including an activity plan for the current year. It is delivered to all higher education institutions, scientific organizations, the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the ministries, the Croatian Parliament, the Office of the President, the media and other relevant stakeholders. Below are examples of the publications printed in the last five years:

- “Analysis of the five-year cycle of re-accreditation of HEIs 2010-2015,” which contains extensive data on Croatian higher education institutions and their activities and is the result of the first comprehensive evaluation of all public and private higher education institutions (universities and their constituents – faculties and academies, as well as polytechnics and colleges) in Croatia, which began in 2010 and ended in 2015. The analysis is in large measure based on the processing of data from written self-evaluation reports of higher education institutions, reports of review committee members and the Accreditation Council decisions. The publication also contains a number of useful recommendations for policymakers in the field of higher education and science, higher education institutions and relevant bodies.
- “*Higher Education in the Republic of Croatia: A Guide for Members of Expert Committees in Evaluation Procedures of Higher Education Institutions and Scientific Organizations*” contains useful information on the system of science and higher education in Croatia. It resulted from the need to provide foreign and domestic expert committees participating in the evaluation procedures conducted by ASHE with an insight into the Croatian higher education and science system and its specific characteristic. In addition to the information on the higher education system in Croatia, the guide also provides information on quality assurance and the role of ASHE.
- “*Quality assurance of doctoral studies in Croatia: recommendations and examples of good practice*” is a publication the purpose of which is to provide guidance for higher education institutions undergoing PhD re-accreditation and to encourage them to self-evaluate, i.e., to raise awareness of their advantages and disadvantages, with the aim of continuous quality enhancement of doctoral education in Croatia. It was developed in cooperation with representatives of higher education institutions, doctoral candidates and young scientists, and it contains experiences and recommendations from previous evaluations conducted in Croatia, as well as examples from other countries. It presents similarities and differences in the delivery of doctoral education, quality criteria and outcomes of the re-accreditation of doctoral studies, and recommendations of expert committees for improving the national framework across countries.

Publications printed by ASHE are distributed to all higher education institutions in Croatia and to other relevant stakeholders. They are also available to participants in the events organized by the Agency, as well as to guests of the Agency, and are available in an electronic form on the Agency website and can be downloaded without restrictions.

4. Video content

The promotional videos that ASHE makes in cooperation with student television aim to inform future students and the general public about the higher education system in Croatia, the types of study programs, the importance of accreditation and informing the public on the quality of study programs when deciding on enrollment. ASHE began making and publishing short videos in 2018 through the campaign “FAKSiranje.” Surveys conducted by ASHE gave an impetus to this campaign, especially the survey carried out within the framework of SKAZVO project (Improvement of Quality Assurance and Enhancement Systems at Higher Education Institutions),³⁸ under the title “Analysis of the needs and state in secondary upbringing and education related to informing the public about the choice of study and procedures for enrolment in study programs.”³⁹ Research has shown that young people are not well informed about the transition from high school to higher education system.

High school students mostly obtain important information from informal sources, such as from parents, friends, or the media. Likewise, they are poorly informed about quality assurance, the system of higher education in general, especially about the levels of education according to the Bologna reform, the difference between professional and university study programs, etc. Encouraged by these findings, ASHE made a promotional video to inform prospective students and their parents and the general public about the start of higher education, types of higher education institutions and study programs, and the importance of accreditation and the choice of a high-quality study program. The mentioned video was posted on the Agency’s YouTube channel, ASHE website and social networks Facebook and Twitter. All relevant media were informed about the video in a press release, particularly those covering the topic of enrollment as well as mass media such as national television. The video was also sent to all high schools in Croatia, to higher education institutions and relevant bodies in the system such as the National Center for External Evaluation of Education which is responsible for State Matura exams in Croatia.

Due to the positive feedback, ASHE made another promotional video in 2019 with the goal of informing the applicants about the system of higher education and enrollment in the study programs entitled #tibiraš (#youchoose) and Croatian and English version of the video “Zašto studirati u Hrvatskoj?” (“Why study in Croatia?”), providing a short overview of the higher education system in Croatia, i.e., presenting Croatia as a higher education destination. Like the previous video, the mentioned videos were also posted on ASHE’s YouTube channel and on the website, social networks, sent to the media and other relevant stakeholders in the system of higher education and science in Croatia, while the media covering the Croatian community abroad and foreign portals were informed about the English version of the video.

In 2020, ASHE made and published a shortened 2019 annual report video. It is an innovative format aimed at summarizing the most important achievements of the past year. The video was disseminated through regular channels such as ASHE’s website and social networks, the media and stakeholders in the system of science and higher education in Croatia. All the videos were made in cooperation with the student television of the Faculty of Political Sciences of the University of Zagreb (TV Student) which further strengthened ASHE’s cooperation with higher education institutions and the work of student associations as one of the aspects of quality.

³⁸ SKAZVO (Improvement of Quality Assurance and Enhancement Systems at Higher Education Institutions) is a project carried out by ASHE from 2016 to 2020 for the purpose of development of a new model of external quality assurance in higher education in Croatia, which is financed by the European Union under the European Social Fund.

³⁹ The results of the survey were published in the publication “Što nakon srednje? Želje, planovi I stavovi hrvatskih srednjoškolaca” (translation: “What to do after high school? Wishes, plans and attitudes of Croatian secondary school pupils”)

5. Participation in conferences and symposia

Given the fact that ASHE's strategic objective⁴⁰ is "strengthening ASHE's national and international role and enhancing the recognition of the quality of its professional work and the results achieved" (ASHE, 2016, p. 30), the director and ASHE personnel present the Agency's activities, with a particular emphasis on the re-accreditation processes, at conferences and symposia organized in Croatia and abroad. They take part in the events organized by the international networks of which ASHE is member, especially ENQA, EQAR, Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA), European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), CHEA International Quality Group, etc. as well as in training events organized by the mentioned organizations.

On a yearly basis, ASHE representatives give more than 20 presentations at various conferences and symposia around the world, for example, in the United States, China, EU Member States and Croatia. These activities are related to ASHE's efforts to actively participate in national and international discussions on quality assurance in higher education, to present examples of good practice and challenges that it faces and to actively promote the Croatian higher education and science system.

6. Organizing conferences and training events

As part of the re-accreditation process, a self-evaluation workshop is held each year for higher education institutions undergoing re-accreditation. Representatives of ASHE explain in detail the re-accreditation process, drawing up of the self-evaluation document and respond to inquiries from representatives of higher education institutions. Likewise, as an essential part of the re-accreditation process, before the visit to the institution (site visit), all members of the review committees are obliged to undergo training organized by ASHE where they learn about the details of the procedure, the documents used in the procedure, and specific characteristics of the higher education system in Croatia and of a higher education institution undergoing re-accreditation.

Encouraged by the findings of the carried-out re-accreditation procedures, ASHE also organizes various conferences and training events aimed at strengthening the capacity of higher education institutions such as those aimed at enhancing teaching competences, professional guidance and strengthening the role of career guidance services in the system of higher education, etc. In 2018, another important topic related to the communication activities of higher education institutions was opened. In cooperation with the University of Zagreb and the network European Universities Public Relations and Information Officers (EUPRIO) ASHE organized a workshop on the topic of planning of communication activities in higher education institutions, which is a new topic in Croatia. As attendees expressed the wish for more workshops of this type, another workshop was held in 2019 on the topic of branding of higher education institutions.

In December 2019, a seminar for students was held on the topic of the role of students in quality assurance processes in higher education institutions. The goal of the seminar was to introduce students to the culture of quality assurance in higher education institutions, informing them about their rights, obligations and options, and to encourage them to actively engage in segments such as improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment experience, and other aspects of student life.

Although training activities are not ASHE's primary activity, because of the high number of attendees and positive feedback, ASHE attaches great importance to these activities. Owing to the European Union funds under the European Social Fund, 72 workshops were organized

⁴⁰ Strategic objectives are defined in the Strategy of the Agency for Science and Higher Education for 2016-2020.

within SKAZVO project from mid-2016 to March 2020, which brought together 1,434 attendees, thereof 1,270 representatives of higher education institutions and 164 students. During 2020, due to the epidemiological circumstances and the ban on public assemblies, educational activities were carried out online, which, along with adjustments made to the content, ensured the continuity of this part of the Agency's activities. The advantage of this organizational method is that a larger number of participants can attend – some ASHE webinars therefore had more than 300 participants.

7. Media relations

An important segment of public relations is communication with the media and nurturing mutual trust with media representatives covering topics in the field of higher education and science. The most common media communication tool is a press release that is published in the news and the media sections and sent directly to journalists covering the topics in the fields of education and science. The list of the media, journalists and their contact information are updated once a year, and more frequently if necessary. The press releases are also shared on social networks with a link to ASHE's website. Press releases follow the activities of ASHE and, where possible, are accompanied by photographs.

Media relations also include invitations to journalists to events such as press conferences, various events organized by ASHE such as workshops, seminars, conferences and the like. Journalist inquiries are answered as soon as possible, if possible, on the same day, and if some time is required for e.g., data collection, a journalist is informed about the timeframe within which he/she can expect a response, i.e., the requested information. Written and audiovisual content, such as various press summaries, photographs of events or persons, etc., is also produced for the media.

7.1. Survey of journalists' satisfaction with ASHE's communications

The quality of information provided to journalists as communicators and creators of the media content is an important element of public communications. Therefore, ASHE conducted a survey aimed at gathering feedback from journalists covering the topics from the field of higher education and science, with whom ASHE frequently communicates, in order to: (a) assess journalists' satisfaction with the quality of information (relevance, comprehensibility, availability, frequency of publication), communications activities and communication with ASHE representatives and (b) enhance the quality of information, communication activities and the communication of ASHE representatives with journalists.

The survey was conducted from 31 March to 6 April 2020, and it included journalists covering topics from ASHE's scope of work.⁴¹ The survey has shown that journalists were satisfied with the frequency of media announcements and the clarity of ASHE's answers to their queries. Of the topics within the scope of ASHE's work, journalists are most interested in the topics of re-accreditation of higher education institutions, admission quotas and conditions for enrollment in higher education institutions and the interest of candidates in higher education institutions' study programs. With regard to suggestions for improving communication, some of the participants in the survey mentioned "setting up push notifications for Google Chrome subscribers" in addition to existing press releases sent by email. From the data collected, it can be seen that journalists prefer informing through the ASHE website rather than social networks, so ASHE will consider populating the website with additional useful content.

Conclusion

Effective communication with the public is one of the priorities of the Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education. On the one hand, this implies transparency of relevant

⁴¹ Survey of journalists' satisfaction with ASHE's communication activities was carried in 2016, 2018 and 2020.

information pertaining to the activities of the Agency, their accessibility and comprehensibility, and openness to the public, while on the other hand, it implies an effort to raise awareness of the importance of this information with the target audiences and motivate them to use said information. Accreditation procedures in Croatia are financed by public funds, as is the overall activity of the Agency, so it is important to communicate relevant data in a timely and accurate manner in order to build and maintain citizens' trust. Likewise, information on the quality of higher education institutions and scientific organizations is important for informed choice of studies, insight into the state of the system and evidence-based policymaking in the field of higher education and science.

Therefore, the Agency attaches great importance to communication activities and is constantly working to improve them. It uses a communication structure that brings together traditional and digital channels, with the inevitable human contact. Messages are designed to be understandable to the end recipient, and ASHE employs proactive and up-to-date approach in the communication with the media, while conducting periodic surveys of journalists' satisfaction with the quality of information provided and the desired modes of cooperation. Based on the data collected from a survey sent to journalists, further improvements are introduced to the communication practice.

ASHE follows trends in public communications and considers and introduces new forms of information presentation, such as the annual video report. The need for further development of communication activities stems from the development of media technology and its stronger application, as well as the development of an effective system for evaluating communication practices, and in the coming period the emphasis will be placed on these segments.

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Chapter 13

Internal Quality Assurance Practices in Selected Nigerian Universities

Aliyu Nabegu

Introduction

Universities all over the world play crucial roles in national development by producing skilled personnel in all fields of human endeavor through generation of new knowledge and innovation geared to solving developmental problems (Faganel & Dolinšek, 2012). In the last 20 years the realization of the value of university education has manifested in enormous increases in student numbers, cross-border mobility of students and graduates, and cross-border mobility of education. These changes have made the quality of education offered by universities a major issue of discourse (Hou, 2012; Varonism, 2014). Countries have responded to these changes by both the traditional institutional or government external quality assurance and by the universities themselves through the establishment of internal quality assurance units. Institutional or external quality assurance refers to the role of an external body, often under governmental control, which assesses the university operations and/or its programmes to determine if it is meeting a set standard. Internal quality assurance, on the other hand, refers to a university's practices and mechanisms for ensuring quality.

Nigeria like other countries recognize that the quality and outcome of university education has a significant impact on its economy, industry, science and technology, health, public administration and governance and is also vital to its standing in regional integration within the Economic community of West African states (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU), and indeed the international arena. Consequently, in order to ensure quality, Nigerian universities have to submit to the mandatory program and institutional accreditation by the government regulator, the National Universities Commission (NUC) and professional associations. However, external quality assurance by government regulators have been shown to provide little change within institutions and does not produce good internal quality assurance within universities or even sustainable quality improvements in education (World Bank, 2013).

In fact, many studies have shown that the quality of university education is predicated on the internal quality assurance system rather than external quality assurance (Cheng & Tam, 1997). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that internal quality assurance in universities is fundamental to safeguarding public interest since it encourages continuous improvement and control in the management of quality of education offered in the university (Pozo, Bretones, Martos, Alonso & García, 2013; Giertz 2000; Bunoti, 2012). Further, the World Bank (2013) in highlighting the need for quality assurance, points out that as a result of globalization, internationalization of university education, free market system and development of international qualification framework, no university will survive the present competition with other universities in the world without paying attention to its internal quality assurance.

However, despite its recognition as invaluable to quality education, the internal quality assurance processes of universities have many variations, with individual universities developing systems and practices mainly to serve their unique local contexts. Some universities judge the effectiveness of their internal quality assurance practices by the salient features of the quality assurance framework as good practices; some pay attention to the success towards intended change; some look at the immediate impact and others see the long-term benefits (Green, Marmolejo & Egron-Polak, 2012). The level of detail and analysis within institutions also varies with the majority requiring only basic information regarding each of the standards with marginal expectations on the final overall assessment. Others require a

more evaluative or analytic report. In this scenario of diversities, there is no harmony and thus comparison and interpretation of the result is difficult. Yet it is crucial for proper evaluation to be able to compare results of internal assurance assessment of universities within a country.

Consequently, it is important to undertake a study of individual practices in order to identify commonalities of practices in internal quality assurance practice in Nigerian universities. Communalities can be helpful in aspects such as harmonization of standards, ensuring the integrity of the process, and eliminating any conflict of interest. It is also important to understand and bring to light good practices in terms of quality enhancement activities of the internal quality assurance systems, the manner in which the units are governed and the good principles of cooperation and collaboration with other players. An analysis of these practices will be helpful in establishing a set of characteristics that include a central place for the objective of internal quality enhancement and the reporting format in order to provide harmonious and comparable public information. Furthermore, as internal quality assurance is a resource intensive exercise for universities, its sustainability is predicated on clearly identifying its strengths and weakness as a system.

The Context of the Problem

The last 20 years have witnessed an unprecedented increase in the demand for university education. As the demand for education increases, there is also a corresponding growth in demand for quality due to increased mobility of students, occasioned by globalization (Özer, Gür, & Küçükcan, 2010). Today, therefore, enormous responsibilities are placed on universities in terms of quality assurance that requires systematic monitoring and evaluation of their activities in order to determine whether it meets expected quality standards (Özer et al., 2010). In recognition of the importance of quality education, the Nigerian government established the National University Commission (NUC) as the agency responsible for external quality assurance in university education. However, it has been shown that the existence of a formal government control and procedural focus on quality assurance has led, at least in some countries, only to an increased level of bureaucracy and additional paperwork rather than to quality improvement (Van Damme, 2011).

It has also been argued that improvement in quality of education can be challenging to achieve through external quality assurance approaches, regardless of the official balance between the accountability and improvement functions and roles of the system (Westerheijden, 2007). In relation to this, Harvey & Green (1996) pointed out that an external quality assurance approach in higher education has a low probability of leading to a culture of compliance as academic staff may comply with external quality assurance mechanisms to minimize disruptions rather than to improving quality. External quality assurance is further criticized for its inadequacy to address issues related to actual student learning experience (ibid.).

In an effort to compliment external quality assurance and address its observed shortcomings, universities have developed internal quality assurance systems in order to ensure a robust quality assurance of their program as internal quality assurance system is organized in a way that it involves the administration, all facilities and stakeholders of the organization and also provides an inner control mechanism in relation to the quality of education and all other activities of the university. A key argument in favor of placing internal quality assurance at the center of quality assurance stresses that: “internal quality assurance is more formative in nature and likely to lead to continual quality improvement efforts and the development of quality culture in institutions” (Kahsay, 2012).

However, despite the general consensus on the importance for internal quality assurance systems and its widespread application in Nigerian universities, there is a dearth of empirical data about its practices, systems, policy, implementation strategies or interpretation, or the associated challenges. It has also been noted that the steps taken towards internal quality assurance are not uniform as the issue of quality assurance is closely related to local culture,

perceptions and governance (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). Further, Özer et al., (2010) has shown that quality assurance should first be accepted, embraced and turned into an organizational culture within the body of the institutions, its internal structure and working system. There is therefore the need to understanding internal assurance practices, frameworks, perceptions and governance in Nigerian universities, since as argued by Puzzi, ferro & Shelton (2008) in order to have a common and consistent assessment of learning design, content, and pedagogy, a communality of practice is necessary. The aim of this paper is therefore to assess the current practice of internal quality assurance mechanism in Nigerian universities in order to identify communalities that can form the basis of a harmonious national standard.

Methodology

The focus of this study was to assess activities and structures relating to the internal quality assurance mechanism in ten selected universities in Nigeria. Information on the activities was obtained from management, staff and students of the case-study universities. Purposive sampling was used to select ten (10) Universities namely: Kaduna state university(KADSU), Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil (KUST); Yusuf Maitama Sule University, Kano (YUMSUK); Bayero University, Kano (BUK); Umaru Musa Yaradua University, Katsina (UMYU); Federal University, Dutse (FUD); Federal University Dustinma (FUDIMA); Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (ABU); Sule Lamido University, Kafinhausu (KAFINHAUSA); and Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi (ATBU). The instrument used for this study was the Internal Quality Assurance Interview Guideline, via a semi structured open-ended interview instrument and Internal Quality Assurance Observation Guideline.

The Internal Quality Assurance Interview Guideline contained an introductory section; a section on degree of awareness of the quality assurance practices; conceptualization and contextualization; role of students; governance; stakeholder role and perception; degree of success in attaining and maintaining internal Quality; strategies for implementing the quality assurance models and suggestions for improvement. The Quality Assurance Observation Guideline includes document content analysis to understand the basis of the policies and practices as well as challenges followed the same format. A total of 50 staff and 200 students were interviewed in each of the 10 universities including the heads of the internal quality assurance system. The interview was carried out in the staff offices, while the students were interviewed at the students' center. Each participant was interviewed separately. Data collected was analyzed using simple descriptive statistics of frequency count and percentage.

Results and Discussion

The Concept, Context and Perception of Quality Assurance

In general, there is no one single definition of quality. Yet, in the process of designing a university internal quality assurance system, it is important to define clearly how quality is understood and articulate a definition that is explicitly linked to the functions of the university that are considered important. Development of a definition or common understanding of quality for a specific university context is therefore crucial since it will not only influence the overall design but also guide the selection of the appropriate quality assurance concept. In general, quality assurance is predicated on a number of concepts and theories that are often divergent such as the assessment and outcomes movement, the total quality management (TMQ), quality assurance control (QAC), quality improvement, enhancement and accountability and performance indicator among others. Choice and interpretation of the workings of these concepts are most times perceptual.

The concept of quality assurance in university education has also been addressed in specific ways, including: a creature of political fashion, multi-faceted and elusive (Frazer, 1992) contentious and slippery (Espinoza, 2013). In general, conceptualization and

contextualization of quality assurance is also based on among others societal needs, stakeholder perception, the university's' mission, vision and goal. Clearly, therefore, quality is perceptual, conditional and somewhat subjective and may be understood differently by different stakeholders (World Bank, 2013).

Result of this study indicated that there are differences in the context of internal quality assurance systems among the ten universities reflected in the variation in policies, implementation strategies, procedures and design adopted by each of the universities. This is not surprising as it has been noted that the systems and models of quality assurance used in most developing countries like Nigeria are either copied from United States or European universities (World Bank, 2013). Yet, quality assurance is a supplement of quality management which is necessary to improve the quality of university education and should be properly contextualized in order to allow for comparison of management strategies among universities (Kumar et al., 2013). However, as a result of vague contextualization, quality assurance systems employed in Nigerian universities vary, and its procedures and practices are not well understood by most of its stakeholders. This is similar to what obtains in most other African countries (Materu, 2007).

Result also indicated varying conceptualization and perception of quality assurance in Nigerian universities. In fact, no two universities in the study have similar conceptualization of quality as each has its own understanding of the concept. Yet, it is imperative for Nigerian universities to conceptualize quality assurance to align with societal demand through measures, or a set of measures to satisfy it and demonstrate to society that it has capacity to deliver quality education and other services of the desired standard. As Mahfoodh (2013) argues since quality assurance recognizes the autonomy of universities and seeks to enhance their capacity to operate in a responsive way, it places the responsibility for quality with the university itself, expressed through its relationship with their customer which is the society at large. Consequently, individual universities have a responsibility of assuring the quality of their graduates reflects public concern and not as a private venture to win market.

It must be noted that historically, the notion of quality assurance in university education is largely dominated by the formal tradition of accreditation in Europe and United States: a system that is largely based on close government oversight of universities by adherence to carefully crafted processes of self-study and peer evaluation (Jones & Jones, 2011; Kumar et al., 2013) which Newton (2002) showed was imported from industrial and commercial settings of the 1980s into the domain of university education. However, the concept of quality assurance in universities is much more complicated than the concept of quality in other fields such as industry and commercial settings since universities have broad autonomy to decide their visions and mission and core values even though they tend to perform similar functions (teaching, research and community outreach).

Quality is also a multidimensional concept that touches not only upon quality assurance procedures, but also accessibility, employability, academic freedom, and responsibility. It serves multiple purposes, such as enhancing learning and teaching, building trust among stakeholders throughout the university education systems. Thus, conceptually, quality (as opposed to quality of university education) means how the product (graduate, research outputs) or service (teaching and learning, publications) does what is intended to do which is also subject to the interpretation of different stakeholders such as governments, employers, students, administrators, lecturers etc. who have different interests and expectations regarding quality education (Tammaro, 2005; Materu, 2007).

The result further showed that all ten universities have always regarded quality as a crucial factor in building reputation and winning admiration and support from the public which is consistent with the observation by Mourkani & Shohoodi (2013) that the process of establishing stakeholders or societal' confidence that fulfills expectations is what constitutes the basis of conceptualizing quality assurance systems, procedures and practices. Although a

common conceptualization of a quality assurance model is desired for Nigerian universities as it would provide consistent assessment of learning design, content, and pedagogy (Puzzi, ferro, & Shelton, 2008) it must be recognized that it would be difficult to achieve. The main obstacle in developing a common concept of quality assurance system in universities in Nigeria is how different universities address the matter, since “quality assurance are no longer purely national undertakings” (Green, Marmolejo, & Egron-Polak, 2012) and different jurisdictions take different approaches to quality assurance.

For instance, in recent years the growing influence of international ranking systems are placing pressure on universities to move beyond their traditional roles in quality assurance to respond to growing demand outside the stakeholders (Lenga, 2009). The challenge is to find a balance between the different purposes and functions of quality assurance that satisfies both the university needs and the broader national aspirations reflected in a comprehensive and coherent framework with a buy-in and engagement from all stakeholders. However, the development of a university quality assurance framework should not be done by importing models from elsewhere as such. A university system should be designed considering local circumstances, corresponding to clear objectives. It should aim to attain objectives defined and understood by all stakeholders.

Result of this study also indicated that the dominant perception of quality relates to academic achievement measured in terms of grade of degrees obtained by the students especially the number of first-class degrees which often form the hall mark of vice-chancellors addresses during convocations. In all the universities there is no emphasis of skills and competencies relevant to societal or industry needs. In fact, in all the universities and indeed the curriculum no consideration is given to industry needs or societal skills requirement. Yet the African Virtual University (2012) argues that the underlying rationale of quality assurance in universities is: “...to ensure that universities effectively and efficiently deliver education, training, research and community services which are of high quality, and which produce socially useful and enriching knowledge as well as a relevant range of graduate skills and competencies necessary for social and economic progress...”

From the observations, there is a need to define quality assurance in university education according to its importance in terms of economic and social advancement. Clearly, universities should strive tirelessly to provide what is needed in the market, rather than just producing big number of graduates without skills and enough knowledge to be competitive in global economy. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that quality assurance is rooted in minimum thresholds of educational quality as it is seen as a necessary measure to inculcate public confidence in the quality of university education provision that provide the foundations for the development and support of excellence at all levels of university education and training (African Virtual University, 2012).

A key issue in quality assurance practices in universities is the motivation or the overall objective of the practice. Various understanding has evolved to account for the motivation of universities embarking on establishing internal quality assurance system ranging from quality as a measure for excellence to quality as perfection, quality as value for money to quality as customer satisfaction, quality as fitness for purpose to quality as transformation (Harvey & Green, 1993). Result from this study showed clear variation in motivation for quality assurance among the ten universities. The differences in motivation often lead to differences in quality assurance policies and guidelines. Due to divergent systems observed in the ten universities, it is difficult to assess on systematic basis information about quality in the ten universities especially those that promote action to improve performance. Yet quality is about putting in place a system of accountability and universities should be able to document quality aspects and inform their stakeholders about this.

Although the quality of university education is still viewed through the eyes of its producers as well as consumers such as parents, students, teachers and the universities as entities, Nkunya

(2008) and Dill (2010) argued that physical products of a production chain have to meet the exact specifications of the desired product, in its perfect form, without any defects. In university education, this is difficult since no knowledge is perfect, and outputs are multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary. Consequently, it is difficult to define a graduate as a perfect or zero error or defect no matter how knowledge is superior; this is only for mass production in manufacturing or processing industry (Lenga, 2009). Defining quality in African context Materu (2007) and Bunoti (2012) asserted that any statement about quality implies a certain relative measure against a common standard. Thus, in university education quality makes the difference between success and failure. When high failure is experienced among students, poor service delivery among graduates, poor quality of publications that do not conform to international standard, it means that something went wrong with regard to quality. When the stakeholders and community accuse universities of producing low-quality products, it means that something is not operating well.

Clearly, Nigerian universities should strive to identify clearly the motive for quality assurance as it influences the major factors to monitor as well as information to be garnered and disseminated. An important factor to be considered in establishing motive for internal quality is stakeholders. In promoting quality, it is imperative to clearly identify key stakeholders namely: the teacher, the student, the society, industry and the government as well as the mission and vision of the university. These can be aligned with other factors including learners' achievements, teaching and learning approaches, both academic, professional development, instructional innovation. A further issue to consider is the nature (physical, cultural, political and social) of the universities. Furthermore, although quality and efficiency in university education are not identical, yet they are related. It is important, for example, to have mechanisms in place to ensure that resources are not wasted and ensure that only few students enrolled in a university complete their studies and graduate. It is also a matter of quality and quality assurance whether students are prepared in such a way that they can find jobs after graduation and can have successful careers and active lives as citizens.

Thus, although there is little doubt that internal quality assurance systems are complex, and there are diverse approaches to it, however, situating internal quality assurance system in alignment with the university vision and mission is an important determinant of the outputs of university education, reflected in characteristics of the university graduates, such as their skills and professional capacity to act in the real world. It is also reflected in the attributes of the knowledge produced by universities through research disseminated at the disposal of the society for use. If, for example, university education graduates are not capable of performing effectively in their professions due to "lack of quality" – be it as engineers, doctors, public servants, secondary school teachers, etc. – the universities would have failed their mission (Materu, 2007). But quality is also about certain characteristics of university education as a process, not only about the outcomes that includes aspects of fairness and equity, but also about who can become a student (access), who can graduate from university (completion), and what kind of careers are available. Ethical aspects also have quality implications as well, for example, how students or academics are treated in universities and how they interact with each other.

Governance Arrangements of Internal and External Quality Assurance Systems

Governance refers to the means by which internal quality assurance systems are formally organized and managed. It is the way they operate; the internal structure; organization and management. Governance arrangements and quality guidelines play similar roles in helping universities become more effective. Governance arrangements clarify institutional structures and procedures. Quality guidelines focus on planning processes and the nurturing of a quality culture. To some extent, governance arrangements signify a cautious approach to help universities progress without hampering the diversity of university education. Governance has

become a major leverage tool for improving quality in all aspects of higher education (Hénard & Mitterle, 2010).

A comprehensive framework for quality assurance of university education at the system level typically comprises of the internal quality assurance processes based and managed by the universities themselves, and the external quality assurance mechanisms and procedures, coordinated and carried out by a responsible entity outside the university like the National University Commission (NUC) in Nigeria. The general consensus is that an external quality assurance system is more likely to be effective and stimulate quality improvement when the internal quality assurance mechanisms are developed and systematically carried out by the universities not only for the external quality assurance purpose but mainly for their internal process.

The self-assessment process, which is conducted at the level of universities represents a starting point for the external process, is considered key to achieving an effective quality assurance system (Martin, 2016). The rationale behind setting up a national external quality assurance system in a specific way and also its purpose differs from country to country, but the three most common approaches that are all present both in Europe and the USA are: accreditation, assessment or evaluation and audit or review. They are not mutually exclusive and can often be part of one quality assurance framework (SEAMEO RIHED, 2012).

Internal Quality Assurance refers to all kinds of policies, activities and mechanisms related to evaluation and improvement of quality developed and carried out by and within a university. The internal quality assurance systems encompass a wide range of institutional policies, values, structures, and mechanisms. They can be independently developed by the university in systems where there is high level of institutional autonomy, or they can follow certain pre-determined criteria or guidelines established at the system level (UNESCO, 2013). Dill (2010) described internal quality assurance as those policies and practices whereby universities themselves monitor and improve the quality of their education provision, while UNESCO (2013) describes internal quality assurance as each university's or program's policies and mechanisms for ensuring that it is fulfilling its own purposes, as well as the standards that apply to university education in general, or to a profession or discipline. The aim is to achieve accountability and enhance performance. Internal quality assurance systems are associated with procedures, criteria and mechanism practiced in individual universities.

The quality assurance systems identify the key elements universities should strive to promote when promoting quality in university education. Internal quality assurance system involves among other self-analysis, quality plan, monitoring and evaluation. Internal quality assurance systems are considered as more improvement-oriented, and they tend to focus more on the quality of teaching and learning aspects and of organizational culture. A key argument in favor of placing internal quality assurance at the center of a national quality assurance stresses that: "internal quality assurance is more formative in nature and likely to lead to continual quality improvement efforts and the development of quality culture in universities" (Kahsay, 2012).

The result of this study indicated that all the ten universities in this study have established internal quality assurance structures. Few operate as directorates, while the majority operate as a unit under the Academic Planning and Control Department. All are headed by senior academic staff with the responsibility of managing and coordinating the quality assurance activities. In all the ten universities, there are faculty/school quality and department quality committees that see to the maintenance of quality standards. Across the 10 universities, the quality assurance directorates/units are directly accountable to the vice-chancellor. Result of the study also indicated that the universities have an average of five personnel in the quality assurance units and none of the staff had formal qualifications related to quality assurance

Result of the study also indicated that all the universities undergo the mandatory external quality assurance through the NUC accreditation. This involves self-study assessment of each

program in the universities. However, information obtained in this study showed that all the universities report that they hire professors on sabbatical and visiting status during the external accreditation in order to meet the staff-student ratio and staff mix by rank. Furthermore, Heads of departments indicated senior staff of the NUC are employed as consultants to fill in the self-study forms. In the light of this, the universities undertake self-assessment in compliance with NUC's procedures but not to ensure the continuous improvement of their operations. In fact, majority of academic staff in the ten universities indicated that they have never seen the self-study form. Consequently, the universities do not use the completion of the questionnaire to critically assess their capacity to ensure quality in their operations. As noted by Stensaker (1999) when he studied such processes in Sweden, institutions considered the self-evaluations only as preparatory processes. They were not regarded as a process of importance separated from the external audit.

Result of this study also indicated that there is no evidence of university-wide quality assurance policies in form of documented laws or statutes in all the ten universities. However, all the universities formulate and implement internal quality assurance guidelines related to various academic activities. For example, all the ten universities have published examination guidelines to regulate examinations. They have also adopted the external examinations system where examination questions, marking schemes and marked scripts are externally moderated. The universities have also developed varying internal moderation processes. However, neither the internal nor the external examinations moderation involves the quality assurance directorates/units. There is also strict supervision of examinations. All case universities have put in place examinations malpractice committees which investigate issues relating to examinations malpractices and make appropriate recommendations to the management.

For quality enhancement, examination results go through many processes which include departmental and faculty boards and the Senate Business Committee before they are finally approved by Senate. All the universities have explicit appointments and promotion procedures that ensure that only applicants that satisfy recruitment and promotion requirements are employed or promoted. However, the heads of the quality assurance directorates/units are not represented on the appointment and promotion committees. The universities have staff development policies. Staff members are given scholarships in various forms to develop themselves.

In terms of specific practices, the result of the study revealed that the ten universities do not have maximum teaching loads for staff. There are also no clear policies that guide lecturer-student ratio and no guidelines on student class size. Consequently, student class sizes differ from one university to another and even between departments in the same university. The result of this study also showed that all the ten universities have explicit and documented guidelines for programs' approval. The processes usually include Departmental recommendations to the faculty/school board and the Academic Development Committee and then to the Senate for consideration and approval. Furthermore, in all the ten universities, the internal quality assurance directorate/unit has developed quality benchmarks in various activities, organize workshops and seminars, and prepare reports to management. Although in general all the quality assurance units perform similar functions, there is marked variation in scope. The study showed that the ten universities are at different stages in developing their internal quality management systems.

The result of the study further revealed that although some universities have quality assurance manuals to guide their operations, quality manuals are not common. What exist are circulars which are not binding on the staff because they have not been approved by the relevant committees. Moreover, there are strong indications that most academic staff members have not seen copies of the circulars/guidelines or manuals and therefore do not know their contents. It was revealed that to a large extent the quality assurance policies were copied from local and foreign universities without much regard to national and local contextual factors.

The universities do not also have strategic plans for quality assurance as a result; quality assurance issues are approached on ad-hoc basis.

Internal Quality Assurance Culture and Standards

Quality assurance process makes use of standards, for example in the case of external program accreditation by the National University Commission (NUC), a program is granted accreditation for meeting minimum standards of quality. In order to achieve the process, National Universities Commission (NUC), has developed standards and procedures to guide universities self-assess their commitment to continuous adherence and improvement of the programs. Result of this study indicated that all the ten universities have developed varying templates to measure the quality of education they give that include students' grades, attendance figures, staying-on rates, exclusion rates, teacher qualifications, and students-teacher ratios. Also, all the ten universities as part of their quality assurance have strategies in place to improve and enhance students' welfare, monitor staff teaching and students learning as well as promoting quality research and publication.

The study further revealed that the universities are making efforts to provide infrastructure/equipment to support the core activities of teaching and learning and research. It is, however, noteworthy that in all the universities, there is no organized student appraisal/assessment of course content and teaching effectiveness at the end of every semester. Generally establishing a clear and unambiguous standard for measuring the quality of university education is a major concern. Most of studies in developing countries reveal that, the quality of university education is measured by the extent to which the training received from a university enables the recipients to think clearly, independently and analytically to solve relevant societal problems in any given environment (Saint, 2004, Tefferra, 2007, Materu, 2007).

Quality assurance in university education also implies the ability of the university to meet the expectations of the users of manpower in relation to the quality of skills acquired by their outputs (Dill, 2010) as quality assurance in university education is the ability of the university to meet appropriate criteria relating to academic and administration matters: staff-student ratios, staff mix by rank, staff development (professionalism), physical facilities, supporting staff, funding systems, and adequate library facilities. Adequacy of various inputs in university education system, in terms of quantity and quality assurance practices, exercises tremendous influence on quality assurance in the university education system itself. Quality assurance is a supplement and a domesticated version of quality management to improve quality of education offered in universities (Kumar et al., 2013).

Result of the study also indicated clear absence of quality assurance culture in all the ten universities. Yet, quality culture is the stable or enduring quality assurance practices in an organization that has virtually become a way of life for the staff and proprietors of such organizations. Quality culture encompasses all cultural/psychological elements of shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitment towards quality and a structural/managerial element with defined processes that enhance quality through coordinated group efforts. Thus, the organizational culture enhances quality permanently. Result further showed majority of staff in the ten universities are not aware of the real function of the internal quality assurance and often consider it as an ad-hoc committee with no bearing to the overall mission and vision of the university. The result further suggested a lack of ownership of quality assurance arrangements by the academic staff of the ten universities. This is partly because quality assurance in the universities is centrally managed. Apart from deans, most of the academic staff is not involved in the development of quality assurance policies.

Moreover, it was observed that quality assurance policies and arrangements are borrowed from universities and international practices without due regard to contextual factors. To be successful quality assurance system should be organized in a way that it will involve all – the

administration, all facilities and stakeholders. It should provide an inner control mechanism in relation to the quality and all other activities of education in the universities, since internal quality assurance systems in university education is seen as the monitoring, assessment and review of activities of the stakeholders who benefit from university education in terms of meeting their views and expectations at minimum requirements (Skolnik, 2010).

Consequently, it is imperative for the universities to create a condition where all stakeholders can share a vision as to what quality is and choose a management model to improve overall quality and maintain continuous improvement, a suitable design for a quality assurance framework that combines accountability, does not omit the enhancement purpose of quality assurance and tries to integrate different stakeholders' perspectives and needs, combining the national higher education system needs with the local and aspirations into one coherent and effective quality assurance system, avoiding resistance and potential conflict among stakeholders, risk of over-bureaucratization of the quality assurance processes, risk of insufficient academic buy-in in the development of quality assurance or academic ownership of the quality assurance process (Tefferra, 2007).

As a result of increasing awareness and divergent views on quality of university education, it has become a compulsory global practice for every university administration to improve the education process constantly, establish a participatory administration understanding and become an expert in the field of management. Thus, universities must question their mission again and constantly, consider their duties and responsibilities towards various interests and the society. Universities that want to establish a systematic and sustainable quality improvement define their purpose, what they want to do; their targets, function, internal and external stakeholders including society as a whole (World Bank, 2013). In addition to these, universities should also put forward methods which will help them to reach their target and achieve their goals. Consequently, universities through the internal quality assurance Directorate/unit must identify the most appropriate quality assurance system. Furthermore, it is important for universities to understand the quality assurance trends in international university education as quality assurance is more competitive and rigorous than ever before. Moreover, quality assurance is becoming recognized regionally leading to the need for an international quality assurance framework in recognition of program offerings across international boundaries that require students to enroll in multiple jurisdictions as part of their degree programs. These increasing changes and demand on university education require greater awareness of the attributes and requirements of internal quality assurance systems (Wong 2012).

Stakeholders in Internal Quality Assurance

Based on the different quality assurance approaches, several key groups of stakeholders at different levels of engagement in quality assurance can be identified by the university as internal stakeholders such as university leadership, teachers, researchers, administrators, and students. There are also external such as external quality assurance agencies like the NUC and professional bodies such as Council for registered engineers (COREN) and pharmaceutical Council of Nigeria (PCN) etc., employers, industry, funding agency, alumni, local governments, prospective students, parents, general public, media and visiting academics. In general, it is recognized that anyone who directly takes part in or has the ability to affect the achievements or performance of university education should be considered a stakeholder.

The result of the study revealed that in all ten universities, stakeholders have not been fully identified and where they have been, they are not systematically involved in the quality assurance process. The study observed that appropriate mechanisms have not been put in place to obtain useful feedback from graduates and employers. Thus, the universities do not conduct quality checks on graduate performance and employment. Yet, each stakeholder tends to have a different perspective and definition of quality. For example, students may

associate quality with the academic program in which they study, with their learning or with the overall student experience and student support structures provided by the university.

Conversely, employers tend to be more concerned with quality in terms of the final product, which may refer to the qualifications the graduates possess (Harvey & Knight, 1996). Academics, on the other hand, may be more concerned about the academic standards of excellence in their respective disciplines. Therefore, in order to define quality and establish an enduring culture of quality in university education, all stakeholders should be involved to ensure that different perspectives and needs are incorporated (Kis, 2005). Consequently, the diversity in perceptions of quality among different stakeholders is an important aspect to consider when designing a quality assurance system in university education as the differences in perceptions of quality by different stakeholders are at the root of misunderstandings and conflicts between the different actors of quality assurance systems” (Harvey & Green, 1993).

The result of this study indicated that in all the ten universities, students are not involved in any form of quality assessment and their views are never formally thought in any activity. This is consistent with the study by Jonathan et al., (2015) of a private university in Nigeria which revealed that majority of the students interviewed were not aware of any quality assurance practice or reported that the observed quality assurance practices were barely effective. Yet, students’ evaluation of the academic programs is a significant assessment instrument used for quality enhancement in a university (Stukalina, 2014). Carmichael, Palermo, Reeve & Vallenge, (2001) suggest that the perspective of the individual learner should be placed at the core of quality in all areas of education, and considered an essential component of quality assurance programs and processes. Nkunya (2008) also emphasized that in university education quality is determined by views of students and parents expected achievement, institutional commitment to satisfy political and stakeholder expectations, achievement of institutional missions, adherence to internal policy, accountability to stakeholders.

Introducing students as part of the internal quality assurance processes and allowing them to participate in evaluation provides good experiences for students. The student has the ability to see the situation from the learner’s perspective, which others may not be able to take into account. Furthermore, the students are stakeholders with time and money investments in the system and as such they have a special interest in the quality of the academic program (Skolnik, 2010). The benefits for involving students in quality assurance can be grouped into two categories: benefit to the student and benefit to the quality assurance process. Benefits for the student include development of communication, analytical reasoning and leadership skills (Elassy, 2013). The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in the United Kingdom reports that student participation is “an opportunity for students to develop their ability to analyze the quality of their programs, creating a sense of ownership of these programs” (QAA, 2009). Another benefit of involving students in quality assurance initiatives is transparency, meaning all participants see the outcomes and subsequent changes (Palomares, 2014).

The COVID-19 Pandemic

The sudden outbreak of corona virus disease (COVID-19) in the early part of 2020 came as a major surprise. Covid 19 became not only a public health issue for Nigeria but also a major challenge to its education system. In order to arrest the issue, the Nigerian government through the Federal Ministry of Education ordered the closure of all schools including the universities. The sudden closure led to interruption of the education system particularly to the calendar of the universities. There is no doubt the school calendar is going to be extended and while this is on, there is the realization that because of the infectious nature of the disease, teaching based on physical contact may not be possible in the Nigerian universities due to congestion. A common strategy being put in place as alternative method to physical teaching learning process is virtual learning, which is being proposed in varying format since, the Federal Ministry of Education’s school-closure directive did not produce policy measures on how to ease the disruptions and how to address the digital mean of learning. Consequently,

Nigerian Universities are individually experiment different strategies of addressing this emerging new normal; with no definitive pattern of practice is discernible. Clearly, the Covid 19 pandemic has ushered in the new normal in the public university system in Nigeria

Challenges to Internal Quality Assurance

The result of this study highlighted myriad of challenges to internal quality assurance in the ten universities among which are:

1. *Lack of internal quality assurance culture:* Absence of a quality culture in which all stakeholders share common vision as to what quality is and choose a management model
2. *Centralization of the internal quality assurance structure:* There is the challenge of centralization and over-bureaucratization of the quality assurance processes, insufficient finance and training and lack leading of buy-in especially by academic staff
3. *Including students in the internal quality assurance process:* A major challenge in all the universities is non-inclusion of students' views and how best to include students in the quality assurance systems.
4. *Lack of a coherent internal quality assurance management system:* The universities lack the internal quality management systems for effective self-regulation of their operations as staff have no formal training in quality assurance.
5. *Lack of experienced staff:* Most faculty members and Heads of Departments are below the rank of a senior lecturer and thus inexperienced at managing.
6. *Weak management system in the universities:* All the ten universities do not have a comprehensive staff development plans applicable to the wider university and where they exist, they are not systematically followed.
7. *Monitoring teaching and learning quality:* With respect to teaching and learning there is a challenge with related to the problem of large class sizes and high lecturer-student ratios. All ten universities are unable to satisfy their own timelines for the release of results as there are long delays in the submission of examination questions and marked scripts, and release of examination results. Peer review of examination questions is also not a regular activity in universities. Examination malpractice is still common in the universities despite efforts by the universities to reduce it to the barest minimum.
8. *Monitoring curriculum:* None of the ten universities have clear cut policies on curriculum review and the curriculum of most programs has not been reviewed for years.
9. *Absence of feedback:* In all the ten universities, the tracer systems have not been used to obtain useful feedback from graduates and employers. Thus, the universities do not conduct quality checks on graduate performance and employment.
10. *Lack of ownership of the IQA system by staff:* There is a lack of ownership of quality assurance arrangements by the academic staff in all ten universities as staff consider the quality assurance unit with suspicion. This is partly because quality assurance in the universities is centrally managed. Apart from deans, most of the academic staff are not involved in the development of quality assurance policies. Moreover, the quality

assurance policies and arrangements of the universities are borrowed from universities and international practices without due regard to local contextual factors.

Conclusions

This study assessed the internal quality assurance practices in ten Nigerian Universities. Although there are varied conception and conceptualization of the internal quality assurance systems, there are significant communalities especially as all the ten universities in this study have established internal quality assurance departments/units and all have developed varying templates to measure the quality of education they give that include students' grades, attendance figures, staying-on rates, exclusion rates, teacher qualifications, and students-teachers ratios. Also, all the ten universities as part of their quality assurance have strategies in place to improve and enhance students' welfare, monitor staff teaching and students learning as well as promoting quality research and publication.

The study further revealed that the universities are making efforts to provide infrastructure/equipment to support the core activities of teaching and learning and research. These communalities provide a basis for establishing a uniform national framework for internal quality assurance system in Nigeria. Nonetheless, the study observed that despite the significant resources and efforts by the universities in establishing systems to improve and enhance the quality of education they offer, they are bedeviled with many challenges, common among which include, lack of ownership and support of quality assurance arrangements by staff, non-inclusion of students' views and absence of a quality culture.

Recommendations

To improve their existing quality assurance practices in the ten universities in this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The universities should consider setting up quality assurance structures at all levels to address quality issues and report to the heads of the quality assurance directorates/units in order to decentralize the system.
2. The internal quality assurance directorates/units in the universities should be given adequate financial and material resources to operate with.
3. The competences of internal quality assurance staff should be improved through regular training and workshops to reflect current issues in quality assurance.
4. The universities should have documented quality assurance manuals which will guide their operations. The manuals should be reviewed periodically.
5. The universities should develop strategic plans for quality assurance, support the plans through to their implementation and assess all major activities against quality standards.
6. The universities should show strong commitment to internal quality assurance, as this will gradually transform the organizational culture of each university into quality culture.

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Chapter 14

ASEAN Regional Harmonization

Concepcion Pijano

Introduction

West Meets East: How It All Began

The ties that bind Western Europe and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) run deep and cover a span of 47 years. The cooperation agreement signed between ASEAN and the then-European Economic Community, a precursor to the European Union, dates back to 1973, six years after the establishment of ASEAN. This was the first inter-regional cooperation agreement ever entered into by Western Europe with another foreign regional body (Camroux, 2008). ASEAN is a regional grouping founded in 1967 by the leaders of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines to accelerate economic growth, social progress, cultural development and promote regional peace and stability.

Brunei joined in 1984, followed by Vietnam in 1995. Lao PDR and Myanmar were admitted as full members in July 1997. Cambodia became ASEAN's tenth member in 1999. This study will focus on the inter-regional cooperation between ASEAN and Europe as seen in the various initiatives undertaken in the last nine years since the launching of the ASEAN-QA project in 2011 and the European Union Support to higher education in the ASEAN region (EU-SHARE) in 2015. It will examine the journey undertaken by Europe and ASEAN through the lenses of these two initiatives that have made a significant impact on the region.

Understanding ASEAN

Southeast Asia is one of the most vibrant and fastest-growing regions in the world. With a population of 665 million, the region accounts for a significant share of global trade and investment. Together, ASEAN's ten Member States form an economic powerhouse with a large potential market. If ASEAN were a single country, it would be the seventh-largest economy in the world. From the time ASEAN was established in 1967, the region has experienced waves of rapid change when countries moved towards greater liberalization in their socio-economic sectors and closer interdependence, regionally and globally. It is within this context that domestic and global forces have significantly transformed the region's higher education sector. Southeast Asia is home to more than 7,000 higher education institutions with around 17 million students. Next to the People's Republic of China and India, ASEAN has the world's third largest labor force that is relatively young. As connectivity increases and the ASEAN Community expands, national higher education systems are rapidly changing.

Towards a “Common Space in Higher Education”

In 2008, the Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) approved the “Structured Framework for Regional Integration in Higher Education: The Road Towards a Common Space.” The creation of a Common Space in Higher Education “facilitates greater mobility and enhances better quality of regional higher education among HEIs and countries in Southeast Asia” and provides “the instrument to facilitate academic activities between institutions as well as trainings and employment with business and industrial sectors” (SEAMEO RIHED, 2008). This document raised the awareness of policymakers and academicians towards harmonization in higher education in Southeast Asia. The policy infrastructure focused on the principles and practices of quality assurance, qualifications framework and lifelong learning, education and research, credit transfer and student mobility.

On that same year (2008), the SEAMEO Regional Center for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO RIHED) initiated the creation of the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN). The purposes of AQAN are: to promote and share good practices of quality assurance in higher education in the Southeast Asia region, to collaborate on capacity-building of quality assurance in higher education, to share information on higher education and facilitate mutual recognition of qualifications throughout the region, and to develop a regional quality assurance framework for Southeast Asia (AQAN, 2017).

Since its inception in 2008, AQAN declared that it will promote harmonization in higher education and support the call for a “common ASEAN Higher Education Space” while remaining mindful of the diversity and different stages of development of QA agencies across the region. Quality assurance was identified as one of the key mechanisms to promote cooperation, harmonization and integration in higher education.

The establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015 is a major milestone in the region. At the ASEAN summit held on November 22, 2015, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, the ASEAN leaders adopted the AEC Blueprint 2025 which provides a roadmap for ASEAN from 2016 to 2025. The 2015 Kuala Lumpur declaration acknowledged higher education as one of the catalysts in accelerating ASEAN’s economic, political, and sociocultural development agenda and upheld the need for quality higher education across all Member States. This strengthened the role of the AQAN in the region. The declaration gave a significant push to AQAN’s efforts towards harmonization. It enabled each ASEAN Member State to retain its unique identity and work together in enhancing regional competitiveness through education. This can be achieved through comparability of higher education systems using a regional quality assurance framework. Since August 2016, AQAN has been recognized as an entity associated with the ASEAN Secretariat that works jointly towards the harmonization of quality assurance in higher education for ASEAN. It now has 17 full members.

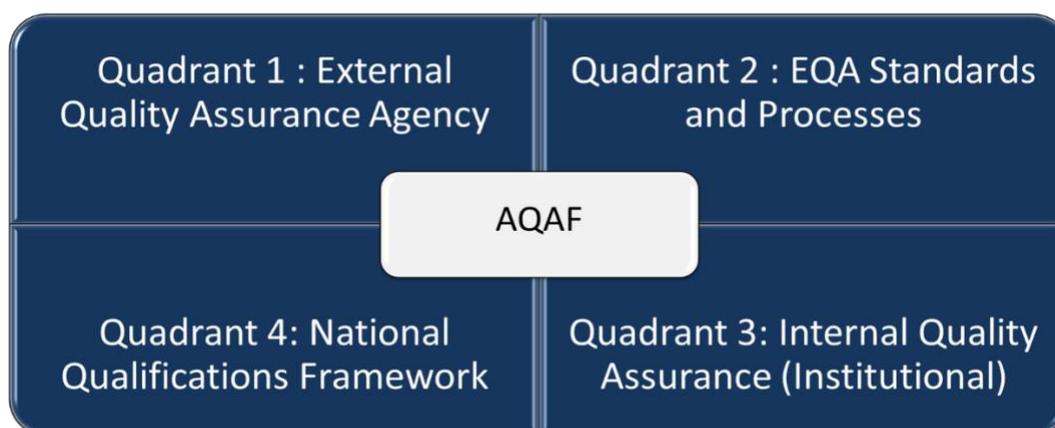
The ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework

The crafting of the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework (AQAF) began in 2011. It was a long and challenging journey which took four years to complete. AQAN created an inter-agency task force to work on the framework with the end in view of promoting regional harmonization in higher education. The AQAF is an inspirational document which recognizes the diversity in the cultures, beliefs and values in ASEAN that shape its higher education systems. As an indigenous regional framework, it provides a common set of QA core principles that mirror good international practices and socio-cultural values to serve as benchmarks and reference points for external quality assurance agencies and systems. The intention is to foster good practices and strengthen the quality assurance agencies in their endeavor to serve their countries by ensuring quality higher education and training for economic and social prosperity. It bolsters the move towards a strong ASEAN Economic Community, linking both external and internal quality assurance as well as the qualifications framework. AQAF is intended to benefit all quality assurance agencies and institutions across ASEAN member countries which are on varying stages of development. The overall approach is developmental and seeks to address the diverse needs of the quality assurance agencies in Southeast Asia (Fahmi, 2015).

The AQAF, as reference framework, guides the creation of new accrediting agencies and provide benchmarks for existing quality assurance agencies, be they organizational reviews for continuous quality improvement or external reviews for public accountability. The principles and statements of the framework are generic and can be applied to various political, legal and cultural settings without compromising a country’s basic values and traditions. It is non-prescriptive, voluntary, and context sensitive. It serves as a common reference point to align quality assurance (QA) systems, higher education institutions and qualifications, and allows national QA systems to benchmark against it. AQAF is a neutral device that does not

require the national QA systems to change but demonstrates how their system aligns with AQAF. It seeks to improve consistency of QA practices and builds a zone of trust to facilitate recognition of qualifications, support the mobility of students, workers, and professionals, both within and outside the region. The Framework is envisioned to promote harmonization as ASEAN strives to move towards a “Common Space in Higher Education.”

The Framework is divided into four quadrants: External Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA), External Quality Assurance Standards and Processes, Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) and National Qualifications Framework (NQF), with each quadrant consisting of inter-related principles that focus on 10 core statements of good practice (Figure1).



Quadrant 1 examines the establishment and systems of EQAA and its operational capacity. It is a key player in maintaining and sustaining the quality of education and puts at center stage the interests of students and various stakeholders. The core statements in this principle focus on the establishment of a shared set of values and good practices to ensure their accountability and integrity. Quadrant 2 demonstrates the systematic approach undertaken by quality assurance agencies towards the development of agency standards and processes. This principle includes the participation of stakeholders, professionalism and ethical conduct of the assessors, training of reviewers and continuing quality improvement.

Quadrant 3 flows from Quadrant 2 and focuses on the need of institutions to put in place an internal quality assurance system which is also part of the quality assurance standards set by the EQAA. This principle includes a number of elements such as institutional responsibility for quality, the promotion of quality culture, formal mechanisms for approval, periodic review and monitoring of programs. Quadrant 4 sets the requirements for national qualifications frameworks (NQF) which most countries have developed, while others are in the process of being implemented. NQFs are vital to the reform of education, training, and qualifications systems in ASEAN. It addresses learning outcomes, credit systems, and lifelong learning within a quality assurance system to ensure its effective implementation.

The AQAF Guidelines were developed jointly with EU Experts and benchmarked against international QA frameworks such as the European Standards and guidelines, the International Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education Guidelines of Good Practice, Chiba Principles of the Asia Pacific Quality Network, and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation International Quality Group Principles. In October 2016, AQAF was finally launched in Jakarta with the support of EU-SHARE and the participation of the ASEAN Secretariat, national policymakers, and stakeholders. In the ASEAN context, harmonization is defined as a process that recognizes the diversity of higher education systems, cultures and traditions, while simultaneously seeking to create a common education space to “foster a higher level of understanding, a sense of shared purpose and common destiny in a highly globalized world” (Wallace, 2000; Enders, 2004).

For ASEAN to forge ahead, this shared consciousness of the critical role of quality assurance in higher education must be developed to strengthen accountability, comparability, and trust. With the launching of AQAF and the continuing journey towards regional harmonization, some new actors emerged bringing quality assurance to a higher level in the local, national, and global spectrum of policymaking and practice. Against this backdrop, AQAN, the ASEAN University Network (AUN) and SEAMEO RIHED were the ideal partners for their European counterparts in launching a joint QA capacity development project in ASEAN.

The ASEAN-QA Project (2011-2019)

As AQAN embarked on formulating the AQAF, the ASEAN-QA project, a joint European-Southeast Asian initiative, was launched by six associations involved in international cooperation in higher education and regional quality assurance networking, namely, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), German Rectors' Conference, AUN, SEAMEO RIHED, AQAN and its European counterpart, the European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The project focused on strengthening the capacity for internal and external quality assurance through dialogue and training events for ASEAN-QA professionals based on regional standards. The Memorandum of Understanding was signed in Bonn in July 2011. ASEAN-QA was funded by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and carried out within the framework of the Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies Programme, which was coordinated by the DAAD and the German Rectors' Conference. The ASEAN-QA project was based on experiences gained in similar initiatives carried out with partners in Central America (2004-2010) and East Africa (2006-ongoing). Overall project coordination was done by the University of Potsdam, Germany which is recognized for its advanced quality management system. The ASEAN-QA project was not part of the official EU-ASEAN dialogue partnership, but an example of bi-regional civil society exchange funded by a European member country which is Germany.

A key component of the ASEAN-QA project was inter-regional dialogue and the exchange of experiences between Europe and Southeast Asia. The project was intended to create links between the internal and external sphere of quality assurance paving the way towards a regional quality assurance framework for Southeast Asia. The ASEAN-QA project and its objectives were very well aligned with the political direction of the overall Southeast Asian integration process. Around this time (2011), the ten members of ASEAN had agreed on the formation of the ASEAN Economic Community by 2015. Despite the cultural, historical, social, political, and economic differences in ASEAN, as well as the diverse higher education systems existing in the region, a common ground was easily found for starting the ASEAN-QA project.

A variety of instruments were already in place within the region to support the creation of an ASEAN Higher Education Space. Nine out of ten ASEAN Member States had established External Quality Assurance (EQA) systems. Some had also developed national qualifications frameworks. Hence, the ASEAN-QA project did not start from scratch, but rather, it was built upon the efforts of ongoing regional initiatives, good practices existing on a national level and the experience and expertise of both the senior QA experts from the ASEAN region and the participants in the training activities themselves (Fahmi and Wilde, 2012). The expected outcomes of the ASEAN-QA project were to strengthen and enhance the institutional quality culture and to enrich EQA practices at the program and institutional levels. The first phase of the project (2011-2013) offered a didactic and hands-on training program in two tracks: the IQA Track was directed at internal QA procedures performed by university staff in charge of QA while the EQA track focused on external QA mechanisms such as accreditation being performed by accrediting agencies or governmental bodies and peers. The activities of both tracks were implemented in parallel and ended in a peer review process conducted in 22 universities across the region.

The chart below outlines the topics covered by the two tracks:

IQA Track	EQA Track
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to internal QA in higher education in a regional and international perspective • Introduction to instruments for higher education quality development • Performing IQA: self-assessment at study programs, i.e., how to write a Self-Assessment Report (SAR) • Project management: writing a SAR, preparing the institution for peer reviews/ assessments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to external QA in higher education in a regional and international perspective • Running an accreditation agency effectively • Preparing EQAAs at program level, i.e., how to analyze and check a SAR • Conducting peer trainings and preparing academics for their role as assessors • Implementing site visits at universities

The IQA track was represented by 24 QA officers of ASEAN universities, while the EQA track had 17 participants from QA agencies which were part of AQAN. The second and third wave of the ASEAN-QA project called TrainIQA were held in 2014-2016 and 2016-2018. It was built on the success of the first initiative and provided support to a select group of Southeast Asian universities to build up systematic internal quality assurance structures within their own organizations. TrainIQA was based on five modules with a strong practical focus on the tools and procedures of quality assurance, curriculum design and revision, change management, and linkages between quality management and higher education management. The course included an online module on data-based information management, data sharing and reporting.

Since 2011, the ASEAN-QA project had focused on capacity training of QA practitioners in both internal and external quality assurance. A pioneering initiative, the ASEAN-QA project made history in the region. It was the first capacity building project conducted in Southeast Asia with six regional and international partners, and the first project where peer assessors from Europe joined their ASEAN counterparts to conduct site visits to 22 universities across the region, covering 8 countries in 6 months. Prior to the site visits, the first regional training of assessors was conducted in Manila, yielding a harvest of 30 assessors from 6 countries in the region. The project fostered inter-regional dialogue through the exchange of experiences and good practices between ASEAN and Europe, promoting an international dimension in QA through closer collaboration between ASEAN and their European counterparts.

The ASEAN-QA project also served as an important first step towards developing human capital in the region and building the second generation of QA champions who were expected to set up and strengthen the internal QA systems in their institutions. The project provided the QA officers with instruments and suitable mechanisms to run their accreditation agencies more effectively. It paved the way towards greater convergence among the national QA systems and supported the harmonization processes underway in the region.

European Union Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region (SHARE 2015-2019)

The SHARE was a four-year initiative launched in 2015 to support harmonization and boost the quality of higher education systems in Southeast Asia. Its objectives were to strengthen regional cooperation and enhance the quality, regional competitiveness and internationalization of ASEAN Higher Education institutions and students. It was designed to promote regional harmonization of higher education and introduce an ASEAN scholarship inspired by the European Erasmus scholarship, thereby facilitating the creation of an ASEAN

Higher Education Space in support of a people-centered ASEAN Community (EU-SHARE, 2016). A consortium composed of the British Council as lead, Campus France, DAAD, the Netherlands Universities Foundation for International Cooperation, the ENQA and the European University Association worked with their ASEAN counterparts to implement SHARE from 2015 to 2019.

SHARE had three main components (called Result Areas): 1) Policy Dialogue 2) Quality Assurance and Qualifications Framework and 3) Credit Transfer and Mobility. The British Council took the lead in carrying out the first result area on policy dialogue. Within the period under review, nine policy dialogues were organized in seven countries across ASEAN with 10 partner organizations and 1,229 participants. These policy dialogue events brought together stakeholders who discussed the technical aspects of Qualifications Framework, Quality Assurance, Credit Transfer System and the Mobility scheme. SHARE also produced a series of policy briefs targeting a wide audience composed of policymakers, universities, students, and other stakeholders. The second component focused on the further development of two frameworks: The ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework (AQAF) and the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF). A Working Group on Quality Assurance composed of ASEAN and European experts collaborated in developing two sets of guidelines – one for agency reviews and another for institutional assessments.

The guidelines for agency reviews offered advice and guidance to the accrediting agencies which volunteered to review their operations in accordance with quadrants 1 and 2 of the AQAF Principles. The agencies that participated in the pilot project were the National Accrediting Agency for Higher Education of Indonesia better known as BAN-PT, the Malaysia Qualifications Authority, the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment of Thailand and the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities. The agency reviews were conducted by joint teams of ASEAN and European experts. In a survey conducted after the agency reviews, it was noted that “the combination of European and ASEAN members in the panel, working closely for a few days on a very focused assignment, provided a very conducive environment for the understanding of cultural issues in terms of similarities and compromises” (Wilde, 2018).

The second set of guidelines prepared by the Working Group on Quality Assurance focused on Institutional Assessments based on Quadrant 3 of the AQAF. Eleven universities across the region participated in the SHARE pilot assessment project which was meant to help selected universities boost their capacity for internal quality assurance. The main focus was to check whether the universities have suitable structures and processes in place for effective internal quality assurance. Capacity building projects and consultancies were also held for QA agencies in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam. Parallel to the work being done on the AQAF, another working group focused on AQRF, a project that was initially funded by the Australia-New Zealand free trade agreement, led by the ASEAN Secretariat, and endorsed by the ASEAN Ministers in 2015. The project brought together the National Qualification Frameworks of the various ASEAN countries under an overarching meta-framework as a neutral translation device and provided reference points to the national systems. The essential elements included an agreed eight-level framework, a commitment to learning outcomes and validation of achievements outside formal education and training systems, an agreed process for referencing, and an agreed position on quality assurance (Manzala, 2020). Learning outcomes and a robust benchmarked-national QA system are among the key criteria in the referencing exercise. To date, three countries, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand have submitted their reports for the referencing process.

SHARE’s activities in Result Areas 2 and 3 also covered background research and policy advice, regional and national stakeholder dialogues and capacity development. To widen the body of knowledge available in the region, SHARE published a series of studies focusing on qualifications frameworks, quality assurance, mobility and credit transfer systems and degree structures. The results of these studies were fed into a series of national dissemination

workshops aimed at raising awareness and informing various stakeholders of the developments in regional frameworks, the credit transfer system and the student mobility scheme. Dissemination workshops in various countries were successfully conducted in close collaboration with the relevant national authorities. These workshops attended by experts, policymakers, university leaders, students, as well as representatives from the labor market, reached about 2,000 stakeholders and more than 500 institutions across the region.

A notable achievement of the SHARE program is the student mobility scheme. Inspired by the Erasmus Scholarship Scheme in Europe, ASEAN teamed up with the EU to build the mechanics of an intra-ASEAN student mobility scheme through SHARE. Result Area 3 led by Campus France focused on designing an ASEAN-EU Credit Transfer System (AECTS) valid for ASEAN and EU mobility. The AECTS was meant to ensure the comparability and compatibility of study programs and to facilitate student mobility so that credits gained abroad will be recognized at the student's home institution. The SHARE Mobility Tools and the SHARE Platform were put in place earlier, followed by the publication of the SHARE Credit Transfer Handbook in 2018. By the end of the SHARE program, 489 intra-ASEAN scholarships were awarded to undergraduate students from a network of 32 public and private universities across ASEAN. The EU also funded 102 scholarships for undergraduate students who spent a semester in 10 universities across Europe.

SHARE's activities in the areas of quality assurance and qualifications frameworks, credit transfer systems, and student mobility served as catalysts in ASEAN's journey towards regional integration and harmonization in higher education. Through the SHARE program, the European counterparts shared their experiences and expertise on the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area which were relevant to higher education in ASEAN. The development of the frameworks and corresponding guidelines jointly produced by the ASEAN-European Expert Working Groups served as guideposts in steering the journey towards harmonization. Like the Bologna Process, harmonization of higher education in ASEAN does not aim to change the national education systems but rather provide tools to connect them towards creating a Common Space for higher education and strengthening the ties that bind them together as members of the ASEAN Community.

Challenges and the Way Forward

The drive towards the harmonization of ASEAN Higher Education is on track and progressing "amid an intricate web of motives, interests, positions of national governments, higher education institutions, and higher education networks" (Kuroda et al., 2018). The bottom-up initiatives already happening in the region are a good beginning. A study on the state of play and development needs in the ASEAN region observed that the current initiatives provide crucial fertile soil, but political will and decisions are needed to ensure further implementation among the ten Member States (Niedermeier and Pohlenz, 2016). Harmonization must be made a central policy priority of ASEAN, with a more systematic approach and concrete collective actions built around common regional goals. Ways must be found to influence policy directions at the highest level among Member States. "Without clear political statements and goals for integration in HE, such as the European Bologna Declaration, and without mandating or endorsing the mechanisms and instruments such as the AQAF, a common HE spaces in ASEAN will be difficult to put in place" (Niedermeier and Pohlenz, 2016). An enhanced leadership role for ASEAN as a regional body is an essential precondition for the construction of a Common Space in Higher Education (Soongsawang, 2018).

There is need for governance and leadership in driving a Common Space in Higher Education as laid out in the 2016 Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Higher Education and its corresponding action plan. It has been observed that in recent years, ASEAN Member States have been slow to act on the action plan, and the momentum has stalled somewhat. It is also noted that, "Progress in higher education harmonization has been incremental. In particular, the political will of ASEAN leaders, the commitment and priorities of HE policymakers and practitioners,

and societal values regarding region-building have not sufficiently progressed” (Soongsawang, 2018). It is hoped that the development and implementation of the ASEAN Work Plan on Education 2021-2025 will accelerate ASEAN’s journey towards harmonization.

Quality assurance agencies, higher education institutions and regional networks in ASEAN are key players and drivers of change in this continuing journey. Wider participation from various other stakeholders must be sought to increase acceptance, legitimacy, and commitment. “The experience in Europe shows that it takes time to reform higher education systems and institutions in order to align them with regional aspirations. The importance of investing in awareness-raising and capacity-building activities should not be underestimated” (Loukkola, 2019). A clear communication strategy is needed to inform the accrediting agencies, universities, industry, and regional organizations about the value and benefits of AQAF and AQRF and how to embed these into their policies and practices. It has been reported that many stakeholders, “particularly those working at QA agencies and universities, are not aware of regional initiatives and their implications at the institutional level” (Niedermeier & Pohlenz, 2016).

The role and visibility of AQAN as a regional network, should be strengthened to ensure that the gains made from these two initiatives are sustained and carried forward. While important milestones have been reached, many challenges remain, especially with the outbreak of COVID-19 which has altered the global higher education landscape. Due to COVID-19, higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies had to rethink their IQA and EQA procedures and are now struggling to navigate through this crisis. Its impact on university programs, particularly to maintain academic standards and quality assurance procedures, has become more challenging and complex. The scale of the impact of this pandemic has forced many HEIs and QA agencies to adapt and take innovative actions to mitigate the consequences of the crisis. Capacity-building activities focusing on AQAF and AQRF must be pursued and sustained through innovative means such as putting in place digital processes, setting up regional exchange platforms, developing online course materials, resources, training, and webinars.

The journey is far from over. “The regionalization train has already left the station. But questions like where it is headed, which tracks it will use, what passengers or cargo will be on board, how many stops will it make, and what is the final destination, are yet to be answered” (Knight, 2012). Moving forward, harmonization is a continuing journey of cooperation and collaboration, of finding common ground and working towards agreement and consensus, of intra-regional exchanges and inter-regional dialogues, of alignment and convergence of ideas and interdependence in a fast-changing world reeling from the negative impacts of COVID-19.

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ACRONYMS:

AECTS	ASEAN-EU Credit Transfer System
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEAN-QA	Association of Southeast Asian Nations Quality Assurance
AQAF	ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework
AQAN	ASEAN Quality Assurance Network
AQRF	ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework
AUN	ASEAN University Network
BAN-PT	National Accrediting Agency for Higher Education of Indonesia
DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service
ENQA	European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQA	External Quality Assurance
EQAA	External Quality Assurance Agency
EU	European Union
EU-SHARE	European Union Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN region
HE	Higher Education
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance

NQF	National Qualifications Framework
QA	Quality Assurance
SEAMEO	South-East Asia Ministers of Education Organization
SEAMEO RIHED	South-East Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development

Chapter 15

Accreditation of Medical Schools in the Caribbean: A Case Study of the University of Guyana

Marta van Zanten

Introduction

The rapid increases in the number of medical schools worldwide (Duvivier et al., 2014) combined with students and graduates who migrate for education and employment have necessitated the development of systems that ensure medical educational institutions function appropriately (Boulet & van Zanten, 2014). To address this global need for educational quality in undergraduate (basic) medical education, accreditation systems have been implemented around the world. Accreditation is defined as a process by which a designated authority, either a governmental entity or an independent body accountable at a governmental level, evaluates an educational program or institution on a cyclical basis (van Zanten et al., 2008).

Various international organizations support health professions education quality assurance efforts worldwide. The World Health Assembly which, in its Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health: Workforce 2030, set a goal for all countries to have accreditation mechanisms for health training programs by 2020 (Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health: Workforce 2030, 2016). The World Medical Association encourages the creation of accreditation systems that meet the principles for validity and trustworthiness (WMA, 2017). Accreditation systems are being developed and managed to assure various stakeholders, including students, educators in postgraduate educational programs, employers and patients, that graduates are ready to further their training or begin practice (van Zanten et al., 2008).

Accreditation Evidence and Impact

While there is a general global consensus that accreditation of educational programs enhances program quality, and the numbers of accrediting organizations are increasing around the world (FAIMER | DORA, 2020), there is limited published research in this field. A recent scoping study with no date or language restrictions identified only 38 published studies that met the inclusion criteria for scholarship and focus on accreditation issues in undergraduate medical education (Tackett et al., 2019). Included studies were all cross-sectional or retrospective, and only 13 articles reported empiric data collection to address a research question. Few studies (Blouin et al., 2018; Chandran et al., 2013) described the direct, or indirect, impact of accreditation activities on a medical education program, and none analyzed a program's changes longitudinally throughout multiple accreditation cycles.

To further support the development and implementation of accreditation systems worldwide, additional evidence is needed describing if, and how, an accreditation process directly leads to sustained educational improvements. The purpose of this study is to describe accreditation practices in the Caribbean region and document, via a case study, the system employed by the Caribbean Accreditation Authority for Education in Medicine and Other Health Professions (CAAM-HP). The University of Guyana School of Medicine's (UG's) 13-year experience undergoing multiple CAAM-HP accreditation reviews and periodic monitoring is highlighted, including the program's loss and subsequent reacquisition of a positive accreditation status. We describe the accreditation system's direct and indirect impact on changes made to the UG's medical education program throughout CAAM-HP's ongoing oversight.

Medical Education Accreditation in the Caribbean Region

The growth in the numbers of medical schools and subsequent accreditation activities in the Caribbean region has been of particular interest (Eckhert & van Zanten, 2015; van Zanten et al., 2009). In addition to the established medical schools that educate domestic citizens to practice locally, such as the three campuses of the University of the West Indies (UWI) and most schools located in Cuba and the Dominican Republic, approximately 50 additional schools in the region currently educate students who wish to enter post-graduate training and practice elsewhere, mainly in the United States (Lynn Eckhert & van Zanten, 2014).

Those seeking residency positions in the United States must first be certified by the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG). Certification is based on several criteria, including eligibility of the medical school attended, documentation of the completion of the medical degree, and successful performance on the first two steps of the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE) (ECFMG, 2020.). Beginning in 2023 (recently postponed to 2024), to be eligible for ECFMG certification, ECFMG will also require that applicants graduate from a medical school that has been accredited by a recognized agency (Shiffer et al., 2019).

Because accreditation is voluntary in many Caribbean countries, some schools in the region have never undergone a formal accreditation process, while a small number of schools have been reviewed by more than one accrediting body. Table 1 lists operating medical schools as of May 1, 2020, located in Caribbean Community (CARICOM) member countries or other predominantly English-speaking countries located in the Caribbean (World Directory of Medical Schools, 2020.). CARICOM is a political and economic affiliation of 15 Member States, and it includes most of the English-speaking islands in the Caribbean, Belize in Central America, and Guyana and Surinam in South America.

Member countries are Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago. Associate members of CARICOM include Anguilla, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, and the Turks and Caicos Islands. For each medical school in Table 1, information is provided on the year established, relevant accreditation agency(ies) name(s), and accreditation status(es), and if students/graduates of the school are eligible apply for ECFMG certification and pursue graduate medical education in the USA.

Prior to 2004, accreditation from the General Medical Council (GMC) of the United Kingdom allowed domestic graduates of UWI medical education programs to register and practice in the United Kingdom and most other Commonwealth nations without undertaking further examinations. Beginning in 2006, CAAM-HP has accredited UWI and additional schools throughout the Caribbean region. Some schools are accredited by entities located outside of the region, such as the independent organization, the Accreditation Commission on Colleges of Medicine (ACCM), located in Ireland. The ACCM has accredited medical schools in various countries including the Cayman Islands, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Sint Martin. Governmental agencies that oversee medical education quality as part of a mandatory review of higher-education institutions operate in Cuba and the Dominican Republic, while the Netherlands-Flemish Accrediting Organization (NVAO) accredits the school located on Saba, a special municipality of the Netherlands (Duvivier & van Zanten, 2015).

The Caribbean Accreditation Authority for Education in Medicine and Other Health Professions

The establishment of CAAM-HP in 2003 by CARICOM was an important component of the regional emphasis to ensure quality education in the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME). The CSME allows for the cross-border movement of skilled persons, including physicians, who are CARICOM nationals (van Zanten et al., 2009). CAAM-HP is empowered to accredit programs of medical, dental, veterinary and other health professions education,

and functions with a clear, authoritative mandate, independent of governments and educational institutions (CAAM-HP, 2020). The CAAM-HP standards and procedures for evaluating an existing medical school program are available on the organization's web site (www.caam-hp.org). Separate guidelines outlining minimal requirements are also available for new and developing schools. Established medical education programs are evaluated in the following areas: (1) the institutional setting; (2) the students; (3) educational programs; (4) the faculty; and (5) educational resources.

The CAAM-HP accreditation system conforms to globally accepted protocols (WFME, 2020.) After confirming eligibility for accreditation, medical school officials negotiate a timeline for the review with the CAAM-HP Secretariat. The school leadership completes a self-evaluation, which includes the provision of data for the CAAM-HP medical education database and the compilation of supporting documents. The CAAM-HP Secretariat appoints a survey team from its pool of experienced professionals (typically three to five people) to visit the school. The team includes basic science and clinical educators, medical practitioners, educational researchers, administrators, and one member of CAAM-HP or the Secretariat. All members are required to participate in training sessions focused on interpretation of the standards and assessment of compliance. The site visit lasts three to five days, depending on the location and cycle of clinical site reviews. Based on the institutional self-study and data obtained on-site, including meetings with students, the CAAM-HP team is charged with assessing the medical education program's fulfillment of the CAAM-HP accreditation standards.

After the visit, the site visit team secretary prepares a draft report, which is reviewed by the agency Secretariat, the other team members, and the dean of the school that was reviewed. The final report is disseminated to the members of CAAM-HP for consideration at the next scheduled meeting. Membership of CAAM-HP comprises representatives from the training institutions in the region, medical students, civil society, professional associations, and specialists from outside the region, including the United States, Canada, and Europe, who have expertise in and knowledge of medical education and accreditation. Finally, CAAM-HP members meet to determine the accreditation status of the program or, if necessary, to defer action pending receipt of further information.

The accreditation status and period of accreditation are awarded based on the level of compliance with the standards. Accreditation without conditions is awarded or renewed when a program is deemed to have met CAAM-HP's standards and is expected by the structures in place, to maintain these standards. In these cases, accreditation is granted for a period corresponding to the length of the program plus one or two years, at the discretion of the CAAM-HP. When accreditation is granted for shorter periods, it is expected that deficiencies will be corrected within a specified period, usually two years.

In the event of probation, denial, or withdrawal of accreditation, the medical school must notify all enrolled students, newly accepted students, and those seeking enrollment of this accreditation decision within three months of CAAM-HP's determination. The CAAM-HP procedures document includes policies on conflict of interest, confidentiality, appeals, and complaints. The agency's website includes CAAM-HP's standards, procedures, levels of accreditation, names of site visitors and names of CAAM-HP members, dates and locations of upcoming site visits, accreditation decisions, policies, fees, etc. Accreditation decisions, and a short explanation of the committee's findings, are also provided on the website (www.caam-hp.org).

A school is required to submit annual progress reports documenting steps taken or are being taken to correct specific areas of non-compliance with accreditation standards identified in the site visit report, describing the outcomes of areas that were in transition at the time of the site visit, or responding to other CAAM-HP questions or concerns. Progress reports will normally be discussed at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the agency. CAAM-HP action

on a progress report includes consideration and determination of the accreditation status of the program and any required follow-up.

In addition to meeting regional requirements, CAAM-HP ensures that the education programs for medicine and other health professions comply with nationally and internationally accepted standards of educational quality. In 2012, CAAM-HP was evaluated and recognized by the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME). The WFME Recognition Programme provides an independent, transparent and rigorous method of ensuring that accreditation of medical schools worldwide is at an internationally accepted and high standard (WFME, 2020). In addition to global endorsement, recognition of an accrediting agency by WFME is important for the future training of individuals who seek to enter graduate medical education and pursue licensure in the USA. As noted previously, ECFMG has announced that beginning in 2024, only graduates from medical schools accredited by an agency recognized by WFME will be eligible for ECFMG certification (Shiffer et al., 2019).

Starting in 2013, the National Committee on Foreign Medical Education and Accreditation of the U.S. Department of Education (NCFMEA) determined, based on CAAM-HP applications, that the accreditation standards for the countries Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Grenada, Jamaica, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines are comparable to those in the USA (NCFMEA, 2020.) In addition to the positive review of CAAM-HP, NCFMEA has also determined that the standards used by ACCM and the NVAO are also comparable to US accreditation standards. The NCFMEA evaluation of an accreditation agency is one step in the process of determining the eligibility of international medical schools to participate in US federal student loan programs. To date, CAAM-HP has reviewed 25 medical schools, including preparative visits to several proposed or newly developing schools and multiple visits to established schools. Details of CAAM-HP's past and future site visits and accreditation decision can be found on the agency's website (www.caam-hp.org).

University of Guyana School of Medicine

Guyana is a former British colony located on the northern mainland of South America, bordered by Venezuela to the west, and Suriname to the east and Brazil to the south. It is the only country in South America with English as the official language. Despite its location on the South American continent, Guyana is part of CARICOM and is considered part of the Caribbean region because of its strong cultural, historical, and political ties with other Anglo-Caribbean countries.

Medical education is relatively new in Guyana. As recently as 30 years ago, all physicians practicing in the country had been educated elsewhere, mainly Cuba (Medical Council of Guyana, 2019). The University of Guyana (UG) was founded in 1963 and opened the country's first school of medicine in 1985. Currently, UG offers a five-year Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) program. The mission of UG is to "maintain an internationally accredited educational program that produces future physician leaders who are compassionate, able to practice patient-centered medicine of the highest standard, dedicated to the ethical and social principles of health care, and committed to a lifetime of continued professional development and scholarship" (School of Medicine | Faculty of Health Sciences | University of Guyana, 2019). As of 2017, more than 500 doctors have graduated from UG and are working in Guyana, Europe, North America, Asia, Africa, Australia and the CARICOM region.

From 1985 to 1999 UG was the only medical school in Guyana. Since 2000, six new medical schools have been established in the country and are currently operational. These schools offer four or five-year programs leading to an M.D. degree and are focused mainly on attracting international students. Based on the 2019 American Medical Association (AMA) Physician Masterfile (AMA Physician Masterfile, 2019), there are 49 physicians practicing (including residents) in the USA who attended medical school in Guyana of whom 27 graduated from

UG. Of the 49 physicians educated in Guyana, 24 were citizens of Guyana at entry to medical school, 15 were US citizens at entry to medical school, and 10 were citizens of other countries.

Accreditation of University of Guyana School of Medicine

CAAM-HP first performed an accreditation site visit to UG in October 2006. The agency delayed their decision until January 2008, at which time the medical program was granted provisional accreditation (2008 –2009). CAAM-HP at its meeting held in January 2007 noted substantial inadequacies in the Databases and Institutional Self-Study and after due consideration advised the school that these could not be accepted and requested revised documentation within 12 months whereupon a decision would be made about any further site visit before re-considering the matter of accreditation.

CAAM-HP at its meeting held in January 2008 accepted a new report of two members of the original 2006 site visit team noting that while several areas of deficiencies had been adequately addressed there still existed aspects of the documentation which led members to doubt the credibility of the information submitted by the school. As a result, CAAM-HP decided to accord provisional accreditation to the program for the period January 2008 to December 2009 during which time it was recommended that graduates of the program should sit the Caribbean Association of Medical Councils (CAMC) examinations before registration to practice. The school was also required to provide a report to CAAM-HP by October 2008 on the progress towards resolution of the problems identified in the report, followed by a limited survey visit shortly thereafter. A further determination on the accreditation status would be made after the report of the visit.

In October 2008, UG provided a report to CAAM-HP describing the progress made on remediating the issues identified in the previous accreditation report. In May 2009, CAAM-HP accepted the UG progress report and acknowledged efforts being made by the school, but also expressed some areas of concern that had not been adequately addressed. CAAM-HP was not satisfied that the roles and responsibilities of the dean and medical director had been clarified and certain concerns relating to student services had not been addressed. Based on these findings, CAAM-HP rescinded UG's provisional accreditation and accredited the program with conditions (2009 –2012). UG submitted an annual progress report in April 2010 but failed to submit one for 2011. At the CAAM-HP meeting that year the agency noted UG's lack of fulfillment of mandatory protocols and, through official communication, reminded the school that annual reports are required for the maintenance of accreditation. UG submitted a progress report in 2012.

CAAM-HP carried out a second accreditation site visit of UG in March 2013. At the 2013 meeting, where the report from the March visit was addressed, CAAM-HP was concerned that some of the issues of non-compliance identified in the current report had also been highlighted in 2006, and in subsequent progress reports UG provided assurance that the issues were being addressed. Because of these ongoing issues, CAAM-HP awarded UG with provisional accreditation (2013 – 2015) with the condition that flagged issues must be addressed by the school, and that CAAM-HP will undertake a limited survey visit in the near future. In July 2014, CAAM-HP considered the progress report submitted by UG and noted that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between UG, the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation and the Ministry of Health had been drafted; however, the CAAM-HP committee was not satisfied with the school progress in addressing the majority of the issues previously identified, including signing of the MOU, promised infrastructural improvements, and a review of curriculum. After filing the 2014 progress report, UG did not submit any additional progress reports in 2014 and 2015. In July 2015, CAAM-HP withdrew the school's provision accreditation status, effectively rendering the school non-accredited.

CAAM-HP's decision to withdraw UG's accreditation was a powerful statement that spurred change. Guyana's improving economy also made it possible for the medical school to have

additional resources, and in August 2016 news reports indicate that the Guyana parliament committed GUY\$109.6 million (over 500,000 USD) to support the re-accreditation endeavor. The 2016 site visit report noted numerous planned improvements, including a deliberate effort to institute a program of staff development and a new curriculum to be implemented in the 2017/2018 academic year. The leadership of the new vice-chancellor, dean and medical director also helped to bring about positive changes.

Overall, CAAM-HP believed that the expected improvements in the school's human, infrastructural and financial resources were likely to enhance the school's scholarship and research endeavors. In November 2016, CAAM-HP performed the third accreditation site visit to the school. At the July 2017 CAAM-HP meeting, the agency commended the school for the progress in addressing their weaknesses and the previously flagged issues, such as limited faculty development, lack of a functioning appraisal system, no review of the curriculum since 1995, inadequate funding and lack of student services. Based on demonstrated improvements in these areas, CAAM-HP reinstated the school's accreditation status and accorded UG accreditation with conditions (2017-2021).

CAAM-HP's reinstatement of UG's accreditation in 2017 reflects the school's remediation efforts and commitment to improving education quality. The positive enhancements implemented at UG should lead to improved outcomes, such as student performance on various standardized assessments, graduation rates, and success in obtaining post-graduate opportunities. For example, Table 2 depicts the USMLE performance of UG students/graduates in the two-year period 2017 – 2018 compared to all graduates of international medical schools (IMGs) who took the examinations in the same period. Compared to their IMG peers, UG student/graduate pass rate was lower for Step 1 (basic science). Here, however, the first attempt pass rate for UG students/graduates increased from 46.7% (2015-2016) to 72% (2017-2018) over the 4-year period. Compared to all IMGs in 2017-2018, UG students had higher Step 2 CK (Clinical Knowledge) and Step 2 CS (Clinical Skills) pass rates. Based on 2017-2018 performance, none of the UG students (n=15) failed the clinical skills examination (Step 2 CS). Only 1 of 13 students/graduates (7.7%) failed the clinical knowledge exam (Step 1 CK) on their first attempt.

While the relationship between accreditation status and licensure examination outcomes could be confounded by a number factors (e.g., changes in student selection, curriculum modifications, student motivation, examination timing), and the summary data is based on a small sample of students who took these exams, one would still expect that higher quality programs (i.e., those achieving accreditation status) would produce higher ability students. UG students tended to perform better once the program was provisionally accredited in 2017. Despite the progress made in the previous several years, in 2019 CAAM-HP expressed concern that the rate of improvements had slowed. In their most recent report, CAAM-HP also noted the school's recent decrease in financial resources and increase in staff turnover. Annual progress reports documenting continued efforts to address the issues flagged by CAAM-HP are expected to be received in subsequent years. It is hoped that UG can maintain the progress achieved in recent years and increase their momentum towards ensuring quality education.

Conclusions

In the Caribbean region, CAAM-HP's evaluation and monitoring processes ensure that undergraduate medical education programs in the Caribbean continue to function at a globally acceptable level. CAAM-HP continues to seek international recognition and global dissemination of its mission and policies, as is demonstrated by the agency's recognition by WFME and NCFMEA comparability decisions. Stakeholders, including students and graduates of UG, directly benefit from improvement of their medical education through CAAM-HP's accreditation system. This, in turn, can directly impact the patient populations they serve. In addition, because many of the graduates of schools located in CARICOM countries are US citizens who return to the United States to practice medicine, residency

directors and medical licensing boards will also benefit greatly from improved education and oversight in the region.

This chapter described the multi-year accreditation experience of one medical school. Additional program evaluation data from a variety of educational programs and regions in the world is needed to make generalizable conclusions about the quality of oversight process and the general value of accreditation. Managing an accreditation system effectively is challenging and demands commitment and resources, both by the school being reviewed and the agency that awards accreditation status. With rigorous oversight, such as provided by CAAM-HP, problems at educational institutions requiring remediation will be identified. Schools must address these issues in order receive and maintain full accreditation, although it is also important to recognize that even with leadership commitment and sufficient resources, sustaining positive change can be difficult. Accreditation systems are needed to fulfill the important function of evaluating and monitoring education programs over time.

Table 1: Characteristics of medical schools located in CARICOM countries and other predominantly English-speaking Caribbean countries, listed in the World Directory of Medical Schools, and operational as of May 1, 2020

Country	School name	Year started	ECFMG eligible	Accreditation status (WFME recognized agencies)
Anguilla	Saint James School of Medicine, Anguilla	2010	Yes	CAAM-HP Full accreditation review pending ACCM Conditional Accreditation
Antigua and Barbuda	American University of Antigua College of Medicine	2004	Yes	CAAM-HP Accredited for 4 years, 2018-2022
	Atlantic University School of Medicine ^a	2017	No	
	Metropolitan University College of Medicine	2017	No	
	University of Health Sciences Antigua School of Medicine	1983	Yes	
Aruba	Aureus University School of Medicine	2004	Yes	
	Xavier University School of Medicine	2004	Yes	CAAM-HP Accreditation with Conditions for 3 years, 2018-2021 ACCM Accredited for six years to May 31, 2025
Barbados	American University of Barbados School of Medicine	2011	Yes	CAAM-HP Initial Provisional Accreditation for 2 years, 2018-2020
	American University of Integrative Sciences	1999	Yes	
	Bridgetown International University School of Medicine	2017	No	
	International University of Barbados School of Medicine	2017	No	
	Ross University School of Medicine (previously located in Dominica)	1978	Yes	CAAM-HP Accreditation with Conditions extended until December 2019
	University of the West Indies, Barbados Faculty of Medical Sciences	1967	Yes	CAAM-HP Accreditation with Conditions extended for three years, 2018-2021
	Victoria University of Barbados School of Medicine	2017	No	
	Washington University of Barbados School of Medicine	2016	No	
Belize	Central America Health Sciences University Belize Medical College	1996	Yes	
	Columbus Central University School of Medicine	2006	Yes	
	Washington University of Health and Science	2012	Yes	

Country	School name	Year started	ECFMG eligible	Accreditation status (WFME recognized agencies)
Bonaire (Special Municipality of the Netherlands)	International University School of Medicine ^a	2010	No	
Cayman Islands	Saint Matthew's University	1997	Yes	ACCM Accredited for six years to June 30, 2025
Curaçao	Avalon University School of Medicine	2003	Yes	CAAM-HP Provisional Accreditation for three years, 2019-2022 ACCM Conditional accreditation to May 31, 2022
	Caribbean Medical University School of Medicine	2007	Yes	CAAM-HP Accreditation denied
	John F. Kennedy University School of Medicine	2014	Yes	
	New York Medical University School of Medicine	2017	No	
	St. Martinus University Faculty of Medicine	2003	Yes	
Dominica	All Saints University School of Medicine	2006	Yes	CAAM-HP Not accredited ACCM Conditional accreditation to May 31, 2022
Grenada	St. George's University School of Medicine	1977	Yes	CAAM-HP Accredited with conditions, 2015-2019
Guyana	American International School of Medicine	2000	Yes	
	Georgetown American University School of Medicine	2014	Yes	
	GreenHeart Medical University School of Medicine	2005	Yes	
	Lincoln American University School of Medicine	2017	Yes	
	Rajiv Gandhi University of Science and Technology School of Medicine	2012	No	
	Texila American University College of Medicine	2011	Yes	CAAM-HP Accreditation denied
	University of Guyana School of Medicine	1985	Yes	CAAM-HP Accreditation with conditions, 2017-2021
Jamaica	All American Institute of Medical Sciences	2010	Yes	CAAM-HP Initial provisional accreditation withdrawn
	Caribbean School of Medical Sciences	2015	No	
	University of the West Indies Faculty of Medical Sciences	1948	Yes	CAAM-HP Accreditation with conditions for three years, 2018-2021
Montserrat	University of Science, Arts and Technology	2003	No	CAAM-HP Not accredited
	Vanguard University School of Medicine	2014	No	CAAM-HP Not accredited
Saba (Special Municipality of the Netherlands)	Saba University School of Medicine	1993	Yes	NVAO Accredited October 2018 to October 2024
Saint Kitts and Nevis	International University of Health Sciences	1998	Yes	
	Medical University of the Americas	1998	Yes	ACCM Accredited for six years to May 31, 2022
	University of Medicine and Health Sciences	2008	Yes	ACCM Accredited for six years to May 31, 2021
	Windsor University School of Medicine	2000	Yes	CAAM-HP Not accredited

Country	School name	Year started	ECFMG eligible	Accreditation status (WFME recognized agencies)
Saint Lucia	American International Medical University	2007	Yes	CAAM-HP Accreditation denied
	Atlantic University School of Medicine	2010	No	
	College of Medicine and Health Sciences	2001	No	
	International American University	2004	Yes	CAAM-HP Programme placed on Probation for 2019-2020
	Spartan Health Sciences University	1980	Yes	CAAM-HP Programme placed on Probation for three years, 2019-2022
	Washington Medical Sciences Institute ^a	2011	No	
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	All Saints University College of Medicine	2011	Yes	CAAM-HP Not accredited
	American University of Saint Vincent School of Medicine	2012	Yes	
	Saint James School of Medicine	2013	Yes	CAAM-HP Full Accreditation Review Pending
	Saint Teresa University School of Medicine	2019	No	
	Trinity School of Medicine	2008	Yes	CAAM-HP Accreditation for 3 years, 2019-2022
Sint Maarten	American University of the Caribbean	1978	Yes	ACCM Accredited for six years to December 31, 2021
Suriname	Anton de Kom Universiteit van Suriname Faculteit der Medische Wetenschappen	1953	Yes	
Trinidad and Tobago	University of the West Indies Faculty of Medicine St. Augustine	1967	Yes	CAAM-HP Accreditation with conditions for three years, 2018-2021

Table 2: First attempt pass rates on USMLE Step 1, Step 2 CK and Step 2 CS for UG and all IMG students/graduates in the two-year period 2017-2018

	UG	All IMGs
Step 1 (Basic Science)	72.0% (n=18) (n total=25)	79.2% (n=23,137) (n total=29,218)
Step 2 (Clinical Knowledge)	92.3% (n=12) (n total=13)	83.6% (n=19,105) (n total=22,850)
Step 2 (Clinical Skills)	100% (n=15) (n total=15)	77.6% (n=17,559) n total=22,615)

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Chapter 16

Creating an Effective Accreditation Pathway in a Culture of Care: A Case Study

Tona Leiker, Linda Hollinger-Smith and Trish Hughes

Introduction

Chamberlain University (“Chamberlain” or “University”) is a private degree-granting institution of higher learning dedicated to quality healthcare education that prepares graduates to transform healthcare worldwide. It offers healthcare professions programs to undergraduate and graduate students throughout the United States, Virgin Islands and Seychelles. Chamberlain’s roots dated back to 1889 when an evangelical pastor in St. Louis, Missouri, proposed establishing healthcare services based on the Deaconess model to address the needs of the local community. Those services evolved into the School for Deaconesses and, later, the Deaconess College of Nursing that offered a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree. In 2005, Adtalem Global Education, Inc. (Adtalem), a global provider of educational services, acquired Deaconess. As a stipulation of the purchase agreement, Adtalem changed the name to Chamberlain College of Nursing.

Subsequently, Chamberlain revised its mission to expand educational programs outside of the nursing profession and changed its name in 2017 to Chamberlain University with a College of Nursing and a College of Health Professions. The university has been regionally accredited for 35 years and as previously noted, was a very small Midwest college 15 years ago. During the 2018-2019 academic year, Chamberlain offered nursing degrees at the baccalaureate, masters and doctoral levels; post-baccalaureate and post-master’s nursing certificates; the Master of Public Health degree and post-baccalaureate certificates; and the Master of Social Work degree. There were 51,800 unduplicated students enrolled this academic year, with a total of 13,915 graduates from its 22 campuses and multiple online programs offered in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, U.S. Virgin Islands, and Seychelles. As of April 2020, Chamberlain had 77,884 graduates.

In 2019, Chamberlain faced its mid-cycle comprehensive institutional accreditation evaluation. Given the huge volume of stakeholders, dispersed nationally and globally, and with nearly 30 percent of colleagues (faculty, staff, and administrators) not assigned to a physical location, it could have been a daunting challenge to engage the Chamberlain community in participating in and contributing to the preparation of the assurance argument (AA) and site visit. The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) is “one of six regional accreditors in the United States, HLC accredits degree-granting institutions in a 19-state region.” HLC defines the assurance argument as “a narrative in which the institution explains how it meets HLC’s criteria for accreditation which is supported by linked documents in the Evidence File” (HLC, 2019, 2020a, and 2020c). In addition, all institutions accredited by the HLC are required to maintain the obligations of affiliation (HLC, 2020b), which are defined as the “responsibilities that institutions affiliated with HLC are required to fulfill to maintain their affiliation.”

Chamberlain has a team of colleagues dedicated to guiding its institutional and programmatic accreditation efforts. Members of that team heard about or experienced issues during the 2015 reaffirmation evaluation. These included a disjointed evaluation and preparation strategy; lack of efforts to engage a broad and diverse pool of stakeholders; unclear expectations of contributors to the self-study; frustration among colleagues when requests for information or examples were marked “urgent”; and a last-minute submission of the AA. In planning for the 2019 visit, this team wanted a process that was coordinated and organized, leveraged our data-

driven culture; positively and proactively engaged stakeholders; incorporated diverse and rich exemplars; and allowed time for thoughtful analysis and insights.

By leveraging its mission-driven focus in a culture of care and its organizational values, the university successfully completed its comprehensive regional accreditation mid-cycle evaluation. This article describes the university's foundational principles and key strategies used to engage the university community towards exemplary execution of this comprehensive evaluation through the use of teamwork, energy, accountability, community, and heart within the Chamberlain care culture. While this chapter focuses on the university's recent institutional level evaluation, the preparation and processes described are being implemented, on a smaller scale, when seeking or maintaining specialty accreditations for its healthcare programs. Chamberlain hopes that the strategies engaged in, and lessons learned from preparing for and implementing the accreditation review process will be of value to institutional leaders and accreditation leaders – especially those in large institutions with geographically dispersed and diverse faculty, staff, and students – in preparing for their next accreditation evaluation.

Foundational Principles

The university's overarching philosophy of care and the parent organization's (Adtalem) values were foundational to the success of this comprehensive evaluation. In 2010, to address gaps in service to students and a desire for improved outcomes, efforts resulted in a college-wide quality improvement initiative. Chamberlain care evolved as a cultural transformation that is now deeply embedded across the university. Chamberlain care is defined as “the excellent service we provide to each other and to students to help them achieve their goals and reach their dreams” (Groenwald, 2018, p. 8). It has become the “lens through which all operations, processes, practices, behaviors, and interactions are viewed and assessed” (Chamberlain University, 2020, p. 16). The core ideals in the Chamberlain care model are:

- i. Care for self so we have the capacity to care for others and be our best selves at work
- ii. Care for colleagues so we create a respectful and supportive environment as we work collectively towards our shared mission and goals; and
- iii. Care for students so we provide resources and support to help students succeed and become extraordinary graduates (Groenwald, 2018).

The way we operationalize Chamberlain care in our day-to-day work is supported by implementing that Adtalem TEACH values. Figure 1 illustrates the definition of each value (<https://www.adtalem.com/about-us>) and how the values were evident in the planning and execution of this comprehensive evaluation. The synergistic interplay of culture and values infused the project, each team, and every colleague who contributed to the work. This journey afforded Chamberlain colleagues opportunities to join the team, drive towards continued quality and excellence, and celebrate successes and each other.

Sound data structures provide for rich assessment and evaluation information

This section of the chapter describes Chamberlain's collaborative work of the office of institutional effectiveness, accreditation, and research (IEAR) across the university; it describes the foundational processes that supported writing a strong AA. The university's commitment to the TEACH values created the culture to do this work with energy and excellence.

Developing Evaluation Methodologies

Program evaluation is the foundation for any accreditation process. The development of an effective evaluation methodology provided a framework to determine data needs, analyses, and reporting structures for this comprehensive evaluation. It assured comprehensiveness,

consistency, and continuity from data collection through analysis and application of results supporting quality improvement efforts. Chamberlain's IEAR office took the process a step further to move from a culture of compliance to a culture of inquiry, best practices, and program improvement.

Approach to Program Evaluation

The university's focus on continuous quality improvement efforts reinforced the depth and breadth of program evaluation required by accrediting agencies. Supporting the university's care culture and TEACH values, program evaluation is supported at the university level by promoting a "culture of assessment and evaluation" across all levels. National leaders and the IEAR team collaborate with faculty and leaders to establish and implement roles and responsibilities for ongoing assessment and evaluation, including key metrics, benchmarks, data collection instruments, data collection and reporting processes, and plans for dissemination and follow-up recommendations for improvement of students' academic experiences.

The Systematic Evaluation Plan (SEP)

The systematic evaluation plan serves as the program evaluation framework addressing standards for accreditation, expected competencies, program outcomes, and student learning outcomes to determine program effectiveness and document improvement. The SEP guides the collection, analyses, dissemination, and utilization of the evaluation outcomes. Program assessment and evaluation processes are articulated throughout the plan to document evidence supporting reported outcomes. The university's approach is to individualize program evaluation requirements. Each SEP includes the following components:

- Accreditation standards/criteria
- Expected outcomes or level of achievement
- Assessment methods
- Accountable party for conducting assessment, analysis, and/or quality improvement actions
- Frequency/timetable for assessment
- Source of evidence of assessment, analysis, and/or quality improvement actions
- Determination if the outcome is met or in compliance with standard
- Description of evidence, analysis of data, and actions for quality improvement.

Due to the complexities inherent in managing multiple SEP programs in conjunction with several accrediting agencies, Chamberlain sought an online solution for tracking and review of quality improvement initiatives, evaluating learning assessment plans (LAP) and documenting outcomes. Strategic Planning Online (SPOL) (www.spol.com) offered such a solution with a secure, cloud-based platform to track self-study efforts to support continuous quality improvement efforts. The assessment module of SPOL is now the "home" for all SEPs program, serving as the dynamic data and information repository for program faculty and leaders to directly engage in program review activities. "SPOL champions" (faculty and leaders) are prepared across all programs. They partner to build strategies and support to enhance local engagement in program review processes.

Evaluating Student Success

Measuring and evaluating student success is an ongoing process for the university. There are the traditional measures collected relative to student persistence and program completion rates as well as student characteristics that are required by accreditors. For professional degrees offered at Chamberlain, student success is also measured against their ability to pass

licensing or certifying examinations. University faculties establish benchmarks for each of their respective programs based on examination of past program trends, in addition to standards identified by some accreditors as specific to those programs. For example, standards of the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) require a program completion rate of 70 percent or higher, demonstrating program effectiveness (CCNE, 2018). CCNE standards provide several options as to how the completion rate may be calculated, defining the starting point of the cohort and completion time, and identifying inclusion and exclusion criteria for the rate calculation.

With a focus on continuous quality improvement, the university tracks improvements based upon trending data as measured by specific time periods such as year-over-year (typically for periods of three to five years) or semester-over-semester. Examining a time-based analysis of trends allows continual evaluation of student success performance within a program or within an individual starting cohort. The university's robust evaluation processes facilitated the HLC accreditation process through the compilation of both qualitative and quantitative data from multiple sources including reviews of survey results, course performance metrics, and committee meeting minutes, licensing/credentialing criteria, and faculty qualifications. The program evaluation methodology addressed four broad areas of assessment including:

- i. Students' perceptions of the programs
- ii. Achievement of student learning outcomes
- iii. Students' performance and application of knowledge, skills, and values they gained as applied to their post-graduate work settings; and
- iv. The impact of programs on potential employers and other key stakeholders (i.e., job placements, perceptions of employers regarding program graduates.).

Program Assessment and Evaluation Tools

In collaboration with program faculty and leaders, Chamberlain's IEAR team developed and implemented several tools used in assessment planning, data collection, reporting, and application of results. IEAR's role during this accreditation process was to also provide programs ongoing support and guidance including identifying pertinent evidence or key insights from data analysis. This section describes further some of these key tools implemented across the University's programs to support program assessment and evaluation components.

Learning Assessment Plans

Student outcomes assessment is a key source of data to evaluate student learning demonstrated by students and objectively assessed. Assessment of student learning is a continual process, encompassing both formative and summative strategies and informing student performance evaluation, course development/refinement, and teaching strategies. The Learning Assessment Plan (LAP) is a portfolio tailored to each program providing a collection of evidence that reflects the alignment of curricular content, assessment methods, and student performance based on student learning outcomes. The student learning outcomes describe learning expectations focused on the development of students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes within each level of an academic program. The benefits of the LAP include:

1. Consistency in assessment plan format and processes to evaluate student achievement, providing a high-level determination of program excellence
2. Documentation of assessment level data from multiple sources supporting revisions to courses and curricula
3. Repository for assessment tools; and
4. Ability to track and document quality management initiatives in a single location.

Figure 2 shows an excerpt from Chamberlain University's Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program LAP as an example.

Program Overview

This section of the LAP is an introduction to the academic program and describes the academic unit, the total number of courses in the program of study, course sequencing, a curriculum map, and alignment tables.

Assessment and Evaluation Methodology: The assessment and evaluation methodology is driven by the university's strategic plan, guiding statements, and accreditation requirements. This helps to ensure assessment including both direct and indirect measures from a variety of sources and those evaluation methods include formative, summative, and process assessments.

Student Learning Outcomes: Student learning outcomes establish measurable expectations. This section describes how each outcome is measured and may also include program and course outcomes, clinical competencies, and other outcomes that may guide learning processes.

Key Academic Markers (KAMs) and Benchmarks: KAMs are specific assessments measuring students' abilities to synthesize and apply essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes from past learning or several courses. Each program has multiple KAMs spanning the program of study with each marker having an established benchmark or goal.

Assessment Tools and Methods: Assessment tools are specific instruments, such as a grading rubric, clinical evaluation tool, or exam items, used to measure and verify that students met identified learning outcomes. Assessment tools need to be evaluated to determine appropriate usage. Tool evaluation methods include determination of the reliability and validity of the instrument, its measurement rigor, and test-item construction.

Data and Reports: Quality improvement efforts are supported by data-driven decision-making. How assessment data are defined, collected, and analyzed should be clearly outlined. Reports may include scorecards and dashboards, gap analyses, executive summaries, and other reports.

Course Annual Reports: Another key evaluation tool and source of both quantitative and qualitative data is the course annual report. This report provides a retrospective course overview and documents conclusions and perspectives from the course team related to course data and information. Additionally, the report summarizes quality improvement actions implemented by the team for the academic year. Importantly, the course report becomes a vehicle to communicate the results of course team functioning. It constitutes evidence of course and curricular review and evaluation of actions taken to improve course quality, both of which are required by accreditors and licensing bodies and fulfills a professional expectation of educators. Most course teams meet periodically during the academic year, documenting discussions, concerns addressed, reflections, and summaries of course data and student comments. Some of the key evaluation components of course annual reports include the following:

1. Review of accreditor standards required in the course syllabus
2. Description of assessments used to evaluate student performance and achievement based on each course outcome
3. Review of the quality of assessment practices and rubrics used to evaluate student performance and achievement
4. Student outcome metrics and year-over-year trends including course pass rates, course satisfaction scores, and course engagement index scores

5. General themes and patterns in student course comments
6. Impact of any changes made in the course to improve students' academic performance; and
7. Evaluation of prior year's action plans to improve course quality.

Program Surveys

Program surveys are important sources of assessment data incorporated into the university's program evaluation processes. Surveys typically include information about respondents' perceptions, attitudes, and opinions. In combination with direct measures of student learning and performance, surveys may provide a deeper and more holistic interpretation of student learning outcomes and faculty performance.

Examples of Student' Surveys

Student surveys focus on students' perceptions of their courses, instructors, services provided by the University, student engagement, and other key metrics that may impact their academic experience and performance. Some of these surveys include end-of-course surveys which capture students' feedback on course design, content delivery, course materials, instructor performance, and overall course experience. Instructors may access an anonymous online report to view aggregate student feedback for the courses they taught during each session. Program leaders may access online reports to view anonymous student feedback for each course and instructor they manage.

The annual student satisfaction survey collects overall and component satisfaction results on numerous programs and university services. A full version of the survey is distributed to all university students, and a brief "pulse" survey is distributed in the fall. Included in the survey is the Net Promoter Score (NPS) which is an index measure used to discern student loyalty or willingness to recommend their school to other potential students. As applied to higher education, NPS results are reported to have the greatest impact on students' commitment and continued relationships with their alma mater organization. Alumni Surveys assess alumni satisfaction with their educational preparation for employment in addition to collecting data on employment, enrollment in post-graduation education, and other key information.

Examples of Other Surveys to Key Stakeholders

Surveys of other key stakeholder groups provide essential data for program review purposes. These surveys include employer surveys which ask employers to rate their satisfaction with graduates' job performance in light of alumni's academic and professional preparation. Clinical partner and preceptor/mentor surveys are distributed to healthcare agencies and preceptor/mentors associated with university courses that include an external clinical practicum component. These surveys focus on stakeholders' perceptions of student professionalism, preparation, and degree of satisfaction with their relationship to Chamberlain's academic programs.

The colleague engagement survey includes data from all faculty, leaders, and staff about their perceptions of the quality of the work environment; relations with supervisors and administrators; and satisfaction with resources, support, and benefits. The survey is conducted annually in the spring with a shorter "pulse" version distributed in the fall. The academic achievement survey is conducted annually to collect data on faculty and academic administrators' professional activities and scholarly contributions to their professions. Faculty's perceptions of a caring work environment are also assessed in this survey.

Review of Program Measures and Outcomes

As previously described, the SEP delineates specific outcomes measures designed to assess program-level achievement of performance benchmarks, quality indicators, and adherence to compliance and other process requirements. Program outcome measures in the SEP align directly with criteria and standards from accreditors and other regulatory agencies. Figure 3 provides examples of metrics evaluated under each program outcome domain. Chamberlain categorizes program outcomes and measures in four categories (brief descriptions in parentheses):

1. Compliance and process outcomes (primarily qualitative data found in accreditation reports, committee meetings, and annual program reviews with outcomes assessed in a dichotomous manner).
2. Performance outcomes (primarily quantitative data including progress on performance measures against pre-determined benchmarks: outcomes address strategic tactics, program goals, and accreditation criteria).
3. Program effectiveness outcomes (primarily quantitative data with outcomes reflecting overall program effectiveness and congruence with guiding statements).
4. Student learning outcomes (primarily quantitative data with aggregate outcomes demonstrating student learning achievement).
- 5.

Specific to accreditation evaluations, IEAR prepares tables and scorecards based on the criteria for programs under review. Since Chamberlain approaches program review as a continuous process, this facilitates compiling multi-year trends against benchmarks and standards to address accreditation criteria requirements.

Moving Towards a Culture of Inquiry

Focusing on continuous quality improvement provides opportunities for academic settings to set their sights on testing new approaches and best practices to better serve a growing diverse student population, thereby driving towards a culture of inquiry. Ideally, the academic institution's strategic plan should broadly support a culture of inquiry to move forward. The university's strategic plan provides such a framework for IEAR to incorporate predictive analytics to measure student success efforts. The Educause Center for Analytics and Research (2019) recently published study results of colleges' adoption of various types of innovations. They reported that only 7% of college leaders deployed predictive analytic models in order to better understand factors impacting their students' success, while only 3% have adopted predictive learning analytics at the course level in their institutions.

Academic research conducted by Chamberlain's IEAR team as well as other published studies published to support the contention that both academic and nonacademic factors are associated with students' potential for academic success and persistence (Cowling, Hollinger-Smith, and Eldridge, 2018). To measure some of these key nonacademic factors (i.e., students' level of confidence, commitment to the program, sense of belonging, resilience, goal-setting skills, and ability to balance work/school responsibilities), the Chamberlain Early Assessment Program (CEAP) survey was developed and is currently being administered to all pre-licensure baccalaureate nursing (BSN) students at the start and completion of their program. Students and faculty review the results and identify "focused activities" to strengthen skills identified in students' individual reports.

IEAR's study of factors predicting the academic success of pre-licensure BSN students supported the need to revise some transfer credit policies for prerequisite science courses and nursing courses taken at other colleges. An advanced form of multiple regressions, propensity modeling, is used across the pre-licensure BSN program to initially identify students at academic risk and then track the impact of interventions promoting student success through to graduation. Similar advanced modeling is being tested for implementation across other programs. During the accreditation site visits, IEAR leadership had opportunities to share results and impact on student outcomes from the predictive modeling work with the visiting

teams. Site visitors recognized the support Chamberlain provides and students success outcomes measured throughout students' entire program of study. Campus and program groups were able to articulate data and findings relative to student success indicators in their respective areas, followed by a description of action steps to improve student success, and demonstrating to site visitors that evaluation and efforts to improve the success of Chamberlain's students and graduates were front and center for the university.

Processes that Supported the Successful Mid-Cycle Accreditation Comprehensive Evaluation

The university's robust evaluation processes facilitated this accreditation work through the use of both qualitative and quantitative data. Starting with prior accreditation documents, written reports from regulatory agencies, and requests for additional information or data, these important documents had previously guided institutional-level development of robust data sources and information. In addition, three key HLC documents were carefully reviewed: (a) criteria for accreditation (HLC, 2020a), (b) providing evidence for the criteria for accreditation (HLC, 2019), and (c) annual resource guide (HLC, 2020c) was reviewed to identify any possible gaps in data, and therefore, evidence. A table of requested data was prepared using a pre-determined three-year period of inclusion criteria. Chamberlain's IEAR team gathered the results of its strategically focused surveys and reports for use in the writing process. The IEAR team prepared three-year data charts for internal review and vetting to ensure accuracy during the writing period. Gaps or areas below internally established benchmarks were addressed at the departmental or local level with content area specialists.

Regulatory Relationship Development

It has been and continues to be the expectation of the university that full regulatory compliance and site-visit readiness is a routine part of the work of providing excellence in higher education today. Chamberlain College of Nursing's intentional and planned growth led to its request to become a university with a two-college structure: College of Nursing and College of Health Professions. This set the stage for the additional degree offerings, yet, added to the complexity of maintaining compliance with the criteria for accreditation. A strong relationship between the University and regional accreditor liaisons was nurtured and supported over time. Meetings with the staff liaison officer are held periodically to apprise HLC of university development plans and receive continued regulatory guidance. Maintenance of both internal and external relationships and institutional commitment to the achievement of full regulatory compliance set the stage for the University's mid-cycle accreditation review.

This ongoing communication facilitated the university's ability to establish new programs in compliance with accreditation requirements. In 15 years, 5 additional degrees were added while several degrees included multiple tracks or related certificate programs. Each change was communicated to HLC following the policies and procedures of this accreditation agency. In addition, the university intended to apply for and obtain specialty programmatic accreditation appropriate to the degrees offered. The university's commitment to academic excellence was a driving force that led to many quality improvements, often based upon the richness of data and information provided by the IEAR team to departmental colleagues. This commitment was evidenced in improvements in students' outcomes over time and the multiple external achievements or recognitions, such as quality matters and NLN center of excellence designations.

Internally, the accreditation work of the university is an ongoing process in which preparations for each accreditation cycle begin with receipt of the final report of the last accreditation review cycle. The nature of the degrees offered in multiple states resulted in multiple and frequent regulatory self-studies and annual reports. The ongoing nature of this work supports the university's culture of internal readiness for unannounced site visits. This

ongoing work served as fitness tests in preparation for the mid-cycle comprehensive evaluation and will serve as continued fitness tests for its upcoming reaccreditation comprehensive evaluation in approximately five years. These ongoing regulatory compliance reports and site visits provide the opportunity for the university to fine-tune its policies and processes. Opportunities for improvement are logged to inform future regulatory work.

Findings or reviewer comments that may lead to additional review during future site visits, including resolution of potential regulatory risk, are routinely logged and monitored. This ensured the university immediately solve for findings or reviewers' comments related to improvement opportunities. Any notations perceived to potentially raise concern in future work, reports, or site visits are critically assessed and evaluated to develop quality improvement initiatives and provide evidence that regulatory guidance is valued by the institution. The IEAR team maintains a systematic repository of interactions with diverse regulatory entities. Specifically, for this university's comprehensive evaluation all previous correspondence from HLC was reviewed and logged to ensure all recommendations received were solved to the university's satisfaction before the writing period and site visits. Thus, the initial orientation and kick-off to officially begin active preparation for this mid-cycle evaluation started with a firm foundation of quality improvement initiatives and historical documentation.

Creating the Plan: Timeline Development

Approximately, two years before the anticipated evaluation a small team of six committed colleagues began discussing strategies that would support the development of a well-articulated document with successful site visits. Following the HLC's 2018 annual conference in April 2018, this team began meeting monthly to discuss key takeaways and potential opportunities for improvement. This team of colleagues continued to meet throughout the next two years providing leadership guidance to the university's academic liaison officer. Simultaneously, three colleagues prepared and executed a detailed plan for meeting all required deliverables, including locking the AA before the submission deadline.

The initial timeline development initially included all known mid-cycle evaluation requirements and deadlines. These included: selection of mid-cycle evaluation site visit dates, students' opinion survey, public notification of mid-cycle evaluation, selection of branch campus site visit dates, and electronic submission of AA. Deadlines and date of submission with the use of red, yellow, and green provided a quick visual for team members to know the next steps and deadlines (see Table 1).

Table 1: Major Deadlines

Major Deliverable	Due Date
Summary of quality improvement initiatives to HLC ALO	December 1, 2018
Identification of required additional reports	April 1, 2019
Students' opinion survey	October 7-16, 2019
Public comment period notification	October 9, 2019
Receipt of students' opinion survey	October 28, 2019
Submission of assurance argument	November 11, 2019
Selection of branch campus site visit dates	November 2019
Receipt of public opinion comments	November 11, 2019
Branch campus site visits	November 25, 2019 December 2 and 4, 2019
Comprehensive evaluation site visit	December 9-10, 2019

Major Deliverable	Due Date
Receipt and response to written report of peer reviewers with institutional response	December 2019 through January 2020

Three colleagues developed a detailed timeline for the successful writing of the AA, including identification of recommended sources of evidence that included multiple layers of review and revision before final document editing. The criterion-specific timeline detailed the requirements of the five criteria of accreditation with core components and sub-components, primary and secondary writing leaders, potential sources of evidence. Primary documents used to facilitate the discussion and writing process included the university’s 2015 AA and HLC’s sources of evidence document (HLC, 2019), along with previously identified changes, one required embedded monitoring report, and other guidance recommendations from specialty programmatic accreditors.

Strategic Steering Team

Approximately 21 months before the December 2019 comprehensive evaluation, seven colleagues prepared to attend the 2018 annual HLC conference. Decisions were made to send this team to the Saturday pre-conference workshop for colleges and universities preparing for an accreditation visit within the next 12 months. The team selected sessions in areas of work responsibilities and professional interests. A grid of proposed sessions that the team was attending was created. This grid was designed to support collaboration and to ensure all key topics supporting the 2019 mid-cycle accreditation evaluation were covered. During the annual HLC conference, the team informally met in smaller workgroups throughout the conference, collaborated with presenters, and networked with other conference attendees, and met as a larger group one evening. The purpose of the meetings was to begin to develop key takeaways or lessons learned. The primary focus was on opportunities for continuous improvement over the next 21 months.

In May 2018, the team prepared a report document that identified key takeaways and lessons learned. These ideas were presented at the June 2018 IEAR departmental retreat, which served as the internal kickoff for this HLC mid-cycle comprehensive evaluation. Following the retreat monthly meetings were held with the strategic steering team (SST). The team included the provost, and six members of the IEAR department: associate provost, two directors of regulation and accreditation, one director of evaluation, one senior manager accreditation, and one accreditation specialist. One of the directors of regulation and accreditation is the institution’s academic liaison officer to the HLC. To ensure that opportunities for improvement were addressed on time, the SST prioritized the conference takeaways and lessons learned. Knowing data-informed decisions were deeply embedded within the culture of the University the SST determined the fiscal and calendar years that would primarily inform the writing of the AA. In addition, the team considered the complexity of stakeholders and the potential length of time to solve perceived gaps or improvement initiatives before the mid-cycle evaluation.

For the next six months, June 2018 through January 2019 monthly meetings of the SST occurred. In addition to routine meeting agenda items such as timeline data writing key stakeholders were invited to discuss and share current quality improvement initiatives. Examples of quality improvement topics discussed in these meetings were detailed website reviews, co-curricular program development, continued compliance with HLC’s faculty credentialing policy, and internal management of the university’s policies and procedures. By January 2019, all previously identified key data points for FY 16 – 18 and CY 16 – 18 were placed into a master Excel file and reviewed with the 2015 AA, key new initiatives, quality improvement initiatives, SEP, and HLC suggested sources of evidence. This data was verified internally for accuracy before the intensive writing period.

In March 2019, approximately 85 subject matter experts were identified to provide AA narrative support and rich sources of evidence to complete the multi-month writing process. Three kickoff meetings were held to orient these subject matter experts to (a) HLC as the institution's accreditor, (b) the standard pathway process, (c) the mid-cycle comprehensive evaluation, and (d) specific types of writing requests. By this time the SST was meeting biweekly, in addition to supporting both academic and functional departmental initiatives related to the institution's accreditation. By July 2019, the SST began meeting weekly more frequently adding key stakeholders as guests, in addition to bringing in the project editor and event coordinator to complete their assigned work on this project.

In the early fall of 2019, the HLC peer review team was assigned to the University's mid-cycle comprehensive evaluation. At this time the event coordinator joined the SST. Key deliverables managed by the event coordinator included the development of clear guidelines regarding travel cost and methods of reimbursement; logistics for travel, hotel, and meals for both the peer review team as well as University colleagues; and development of four site visit agendas, one for each site visit. During this busy time of writing, gathering of sources of evidence, and logistics planning, it was the SST who ensured that key deliverables were executed on time. These included the student opinion survey the public comment, public notice for third-party comments, and the final editing of the written AA.

When the student opinion survey and public comments were provided to the University, key themes were identified and shared with the senior leadership team and specific academic or functional areas. This information was useful to celebrate successes and consider opportunities for improvement. Noted opportunities for improvement in both the student opinion survey and public comments were known by program administrators and had been a part of previous quality improvement initiatives.

The Writing Process

The writing process was initiated using a structured overarching framework the SST developed. Each criterion of accreditation was addressed to include the core components and all subcomponents. The primary writing included at least three years of historical information, with a focus on the current state. Changes or improvements from the 2015 comprehensive evaluation were referenced throughout the 2019 AA. Anticipated sources of evidence were identified at the beginning of the writing period as well as throughout the writing process. The primary and secondary criterion writers served as leads for each of the five criteria and requested information for narrative from the previously identified list of subject matter experts.

The primary and secondary leads for each criterion supported narrative writing requests by providing suggested material and sharing content submitted during the 2015 comprehensive evaluation. The intent was to give colleagues ample time to develop specific and well-written content. Throughout this process the ALO was responsible for editing the content into one voice, considering and reconciling recommended edits while working closely with a senior accreditation project manager and accreditation specialist. Draft versions of criterion writing were logged and archived for reference until the conclusion of the evaluation process.

Each criterion was prepared with the common overarching structure to the narrative. The content was presented at the university level first followed by college-level information. The College of Nursing specific information was presented first in the structure of undergraduate education and then graduate education at the master's and doctoral levels. Certificate programs were embedded with the appropriate degree levels. The College of Health Professions information was provided by the degree being granted. All information within the narrative was written to include data-informed quality improvements, new initiatives, and outcomes. After the ALO reviewed the criterion creating one voice, three members of the SST reviewed and edited each criterion in sequential order. Last, the university provost and

president reviewed the final work that also included an internal compliance review and audit to ensure the accuracy of information presented. As each criterion was completed it was uploaded into the electronic assurance system. When all five criteria were completed and uploaded a final review was conducted including a final spelling, grammar, and punctuation check.

Two hundred and twenty-eight sources of evidence were labeled, uploaded, and hyperlinked to the criteria within the assurance system. Each source of evidence was prepared as a PDF file with the cover page that included the source of evidence title and number. Each document opened within the assurance system to the related criterion narrative and included highlighting for ease of identification and review by the peer reviewers. Table 2 provides a brief example of the numbering and labeling system used to organize the university’s sources of evidence. During the four site visits, the peer review team requested an additional 18 documents for a total of 246 sources of evidence. These were provided using the same level of preparation detail, including the numbering and labeling of each source of evidence. Over 10,000 pages of documentation were provided during this mid-cycle comprehensive evaluation. All content was then placed into an internal electronic portal using the university’s SharePoint site. This site was used to create an internal site visit repository for ease of colleague review, preparation, and access before and during the site visits.

Table 2: Examples of Labeling and Titling Sources of Evidence

2019 Sources of Evidence
1A_02 Evolution of Mission, Purpose, Vision and Goals Chart 2011-2018
1A_03 Mission Statements – Chamberlain University Catalog 10.07.2019
1A_04 Mission and Vision Statement – Chamberlain University Online Website
1A_05 Governance Guidelines with Decision Threshold Guide 02.20.2019
1A_06 Chamberlain University Systematic Evaluation Plan – HLC 08.26.2019
1A_07 MSN CCNE Approval Certificate of Accreditation 02.08.2010
1A_08 DNP CCNE Approval and Certificate of Accreditation 11.06.2014
1A_09 CNEA DNP Grant Initial Accreditation Certificate 02.27.2018
1A_10 DNP and FNP CCNE Accreditation Certificate 10.30.2019
1A_11 Chamberlain University Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes 04.03.2014 – MPH Program Approval
1A_12 Chamberlain University Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes 07.13.2017 – MSW Program Approval
1A_13 Chamberlain Care Philosophy – Faculty Handbook July 2019
1A_14 Chamberlain Care Student Success Model (CCSSM) -Chamberlain University Academic Catalog 10.07.2019
1A_15 AACN Fact Sheet: Enhancing Diversity in the Nursing Workforce

Managing Multiple Site Visits

Preparation for the four site visits began in August 2019. The four site visits included a three-branch campus one-day visit and the 1.5-day comprehensive peer review site visit. To prepare for these site visits early assessments were conducted virtually with the 22 branch campuses, graduate program, and functional area leaders. Next, early assessment visits were made to each of the three selected branch campuses. These served as both an educational opportunity to update colleagues about HLC and the anticipated site visit process for this mid-cycle comprehensive evaluation. Mock visits were conducted approximately two weeks before the anticipated campus site visits to support local level preparation. The AA was widely shared throughout the institution during mock visits in preparation for the site visits.

Preparation for the 1.5-day comprehensive evaluation site visit included 12 virtual mock visits with colleagues across the United States. Members of the SST were also available to answer questions and provide departmental-level support when requested. Key themes of the mock visit preparations included who is HLC; what is a mid-cycle evaluation; and how our day-to-day work supported preparation for the AA writing to demonstrate ongoing compliance with the five criteria for accreditation. The university has implemented common standards and best practices that are used in preparation for all site visits. Common regulatory questions without answers are provided for staff and faculty to consider and reflect upon how they do their day-to-day work. Students are informed by their program leaders of upcoming visits and perhaps the need for student interactions with peer reviewers. However, it is the standard of the university to not conduct mock visits, provide guidance, or influence potential student interactions with peer reviewers.

As previously noted, the event coordinator was responsible for developing the agendas for these four site visits. Development of these agendas was through the use of virtual conferencing with cameras on. Each agenda was reviewed by the primary/lead peer reviewer before each site visit. The IT department provided on-site support at each site visit to ensure the peer reviewers and colleagues had access to any requested technology. Local administrative coordinators collaborated with the national event coordinator to ensure consistency with logistics and for different locations. During the 1.5-day site visit conducted by a team of six peer reviewers, there was one conference room solely for their use. A large conference room with enhanced technology services was used when meetings were conducted between the entire peer review team and university personnel or when virtual conferencing was required. Four additional classrooms were configured in different footprint formats to enhance and support communication with different group types. Table tents with the names and titles of attendees were provided.

In addition, peer reviewers are provided with meeting attendee lists to support conversation and documentation during group meetings. For colleagues, there was a common meal area, while the peer reviewers were served near their team workroom. Two additional meeting rooms were available for colleague use: one served as a remote workspace area and the second served as the logistics headquarters to provide a single place for problem-solving as questions or requests arose during the site visit. The focus of this two-year preparation cycle was to support colleagues' ability to showcase the university's story by focusing on their own work and data-informed quality improvement initiatives with the desire to be fully compliant with regulatory expectations at the local, state, and federal levels.

Lessons Learned

The preparation for a major accreditation evaluation – whether for initial accreditation, mid-cycle reviews, or reaccreditation – looms as a series of tasks to be survived. We hope that Chamberlain's experiences with planning and implementing its mid-cycle review demonstrates how the organization's culture guided its approach in ways that made it a community experience among colleagues who respected and supported each other as they collectively and collaboratively shared the workload, their ideas, and their stories of successes and challenges. Did everything go perfectly? Of course not, but Chamberlain had key learnings that will help build towards our processes for the next accreditation visit. We found the following to be important factors for our successful outcome:

1. The culture of accountability and excellence is supported by robust data collection, with regular analysis and interpretation, intervention when needed, and reevaluation. Since the systematic evaluation plan incorporates the HLC criteria, Chamberlain had data to demonstrate its commitment to achieving full compliance.

2. The value of teamwork meant that diverse points of view, experiences, examples, and ideas resulted in a richer story than otherwise would have been the case if the AA and site visits reflected only the voices of a few.
3. The commitment to serve with a heart meant that the steering team invited colleagues to participate in the process, not assigned them to do so, and supported them with intentional, solid, and regular coaching and training.
4. Additionally, advanced planning and preparation are crucial. Although the data and information needed for the self-study were and continue to be collected regularly, it still takes significant time to collect it all in a single repository for the distillation of themes and trends to highlight for comprehensive evaluations and site visits. Our advanced preparation resulted in confident, prepared colleagues celebrating and sharing their stories of day-to-day work demonstrating excellence in higher education. The outcome was a successful comprehensive evaluation.

Table 1. Adtalem TEACH Values Defined and Examples of How They Were Evident During the Project

TEACH Value	Definition	Examples
Teamwork	We put the team first, appreciate diverse points of view, assume positive intent, and communicate and collaborate openly.	The entire project was executed with a team mentality, and there was no “I” or “You” in the work; it was a collective and collaborative mindset that drove the work from the initial workgroup through robust site visits
Energy	We move quickly, learn from mistakes, build a positive spirit and always look for a better way.	The project team reviewed the lessons learned from its accreditation activities in 2015 and planned new approaches that maximized efficiency, quality, and stakeholder engagement.
Accountability	We take ownership and initiative, demonstrate courage as we speak up, and act with integrity in all that we do.	The university’s culture of accountability to internal work processes and timelines, and a strong ethic of compliance fostered on-time completion of each individual and team’s tasks or request to not delay the work of other colleagues.
Community	We operate with a shared sense of responsibility and purpose and enrich colleagues, students, and the broader community we serve.	Every department of the University was committed not only to excellence but also understood that the work of teaching students in higher education is a community effort. To have a healthy community, each individual must take accountability for their scope of work and be willing to stretch or help others.
Heart	We serve students and each other with passion, respect, and care.	Across the University, colleague engagement in the accreditation was supported and encouraged through orientations, pieces of training, ongoing question-and-answer sessions, and a continuous feedback loop.

Table 2. Excerpts from Chamberlain University’s Doctor of Nursing Practice Learning Assessment Plan

DNP Program Overview	The Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree program is a post-master's professional degree program designed to prepare graduates to deliver, either directly or indirectly, the highest level of nursing practice. The Chamberlain DNP degree program is practice-focused and prepares graduates to analyze, synthesize and apply scientific reasoning at the highest level to plan, design, implement and evaluate care for individuals, families, and populations to improve healthcare outcomes. The DNP curriculum provides core nursing courses addressing each of the DNP Essentials. The courses guide students to develop and advance their practice to new levels, advancing their expertise in a variety of topics. The four Project and Practicum courses provide the opportunity for the learner to design, implement and evaluate a project aimed at changing practice in a healthcare delivery setting chosen by the student. Chamberlain DNP graduates will be prepared to work in leadership roles in a variety of healthcare delivery settings, leading healthcare services that result in quality improvement and increased patient safety.		
DNP Program Alignment			
DNP Program Outcomes	Chamberlain's Conceptual Framework for Nursing: Curricular Constructs	Chamberlain Philosophy: Chamberlain Care Constructors	NLN Competency Alignment
DNP Program Outcome #3: "Synthesize scientific methods and underpinnings to develop best practices with a spirit of inquiry to shape advanced nursing judgment and systems of care for person/family and populations to improve care-focused outcomes"	Focus on Care	Care for Self Care for Colleagues/Peers Care for Students/Others	Human Flourishing Professional Identity Spirit of Inquiry
DNP Program Outcome #4: "Build advanced nursing practice on relationship-based care and care-focused delivery models that embrace political, ethical, professional, economic, socially-just, and culturally-appropriate services across healthcare systems"	Person-Centeredness Focus on Care Cultural Humility	Care for Self Care for Colleagues/Peers Care for Students/Others	Nursing Judgment Professional Identity Spirit of Inquiry
Alignment of DNP Course Outcomes, Learning Activities, and HLC Curricular Requirements			
Course	Learning Activity	Course Outcome (CO)	HLC Curricular Requirement
NR703 Applied Organizational & Leadership Concepts	Week 5 Discussion: QI and Patient Safety Outcomes in Advanced Nursing Practice	CO8: Analyze mandatory reporting threats to the future of healthcare and patient safety improvements CO9: Examine selected quality improvement and intra/interprofessional	Human and cultural diversity Ethical use of information resources Effective use of research and information resources Engagement of students in collecting, analyzing, and communicating information

	Week 5 Assignment: Systems Changes for Quality Improvement of Patient Safety	practice models that serve to support patient safety and advanced nursing practice	
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Table 3. Excerpts from Chamberlain University’s Doctor of Nursing Practice – Performance Outcome Domains and Example Metrics

Domain	Example Metrics
DNP Curriculum Alignment (Compliance and Process Outcomes)	DNP curriculum aligns with guiding statements. DNP curriculum builds on a master’s education foundation.
DNP Faculty (Compliance and Process Outcomes)	DNP faculty scholarly achievements are documented and disseminated.
Faculty Qualifications (Performance Outcomes)	100% of faculty will have a minimum of a doctoral degree and either a master’s or doctoral degree in nursing.
Student Learner Needs (Performance Outcomes)	Student performance will be assessed using varied and pedagogically sound methods in at least 90% of all courses.
Chamberlain Care (Program Effectiveness Outcomes)	DNP students’ perception that Chamberlain cares about their success (benchmark > or equal to 85% providing rating of 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale) Faculty’s degree of agreement that Chamberlain supports a culture of care (benchmark > or equal to 90% who “agree” or “strongly agree”)
Student Satisfaction with Instructors (Program Effectiveness Outcomes)	Students rate satisfaction with instructors > or equal to 3.50 on a 4-point scale on end-of-course surveys
Faculty (Program Effectiveness Outcomes)	Master Instruction peer observation score (benchmark > or equal to 85% index score out of 100%)
Program Evaluation and Institutional Effectiveness (Program Effectiveness Outcomes)	DNP graduates’ degree of agreement that the program’s practicum/ applied experiences positioned them for success (benchmark > or equal to 90% who “agree” or “strongly agree”)
Retention, Program Completion, Employment (Program Effectiveness Outcomes)	DNP enrollment rate to 2nd session (benchmark > or equal to 75% retention to 2nd session) DNP session-to-session persistence (benchmark > or equal to 87% session-to-session persistence) DNP graduation rate (benchmark > or equal to 70% when rates average over the past three years) DNP employment rate (benchmark > or equal to 70% report employment within 6-12 months of degree conferral) Employer satisfaction with DNP graduates (benchmark > or equal to 90% who “agree” or “strongly agree”)
Key DNP Course Pass Rates (Student Learning Outcomes)	Mean fiscal year NR700 course pass rate (benchmark > or equal to 80%; stretch goal > 85%) Mean fiscal year practicum course pass rate (benchmark > or equal to 95%)

Key Academic Markers (KAMs)	NR700 (Analyzing Forms of Nursing Inquiry) course rubric (benchmark > or equal to 90% of DNP students achieve an 86% or higher score on the rubric) NR704 (Health Interventions and Outcomes Presentation) course rubric (benchmark > or equal to 90% of DNP students achieve an 86% or higher score on the rubric) NR711 (Organizational Assessment for Project Planning) course rubric (benchmark > or equal to 90% of DNP students achieve an 86% or higher score on the rubric)
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Chapter 17

Developing Internal Quality Assurance Systems: A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of Leaders in Select Jamaican Higher Education Institutions

Arlene Lawrence

Introduction

Program and institutional accreditation is important in Jamaica; as is common in many parts of the world. A requirement of the national external quality assurance agency (EQAA) for accreditation is that higher education institutions (HEIs) have an internal quality assurance (IQA) system. Martin (2014) reveals that this was one of several reforms promulgated by EQAAs globally in the 1990s. The IQA system is developed to ensure that quality pervades the institutional structures, processes and programs and that there is continuous improvement. The development of the system is an ongoing process. Martin (2014) observes that concurrent with the stipulation from the EQAAs, institutions are keen to ensure the delivery of quality and relevant education to their students, given intense competition in the sector.

According to Brennan and Shah (2000) and Loukkola and Zhang (2010), quality has always been the responsibility of higher education institutions with the aim to provide education that enables graduates to function effectively as professionals and citizens within their societies. Effective higher education institutions are therefore seen as building blocks to a country's development and sustainability, thereby making quality an imperative for governments and citizens (De Waal & Kerklam, 2015; Lomas, 2004; Martin 2014). Evaluation and monitoring of higher education institutions by external agencies, through quality assurance and accreditation processes, have consequently come to occupy center stage on the policy agenda of many countries (Calegari, Sibley & Turner, 2015; Eaton, 2012; Haris, 2013; Martin & Stella, 2007). With rising unemployment of college and university graduates, reported inability of graduates to perform expected job requirements, and student loan indebtedness, the challenges faced by leaders in higher education institutions become even more important (Altabach, 2011; Jones, 2014; Longanecker, 2014).

Numerous studies have investigated external quality assurance and accreditation and, in more recent years, various aspects of the internal operations of institutions in relation to quality assurance processes have been studied. However, research on the essence of the experiences of the persons who play an integral part in building and maintaining the system is sparse. A phenomenological study was therefore conducted to explore the lived experiences of select academic and administrative leaders in five Jamaican higher education institutions, as they developed their internal quality assurance systems in preparing for accreditation. The study attempted to provide an avenue for the voices of these leaders to be heard. This chapter is a summary of my dissertation study (Lawrence, 2019) and presents a glimpse of participant leaders' experiences in building their internal quality assurance systems.

Context and Definitions

The literature on quality assurance is extensive internationally and, to an extent, in Jamaica and the Caribbean. Harvey and Williams (2010) note in a review of the first 15 years of the international journal, *Quality in Higher Education*, that most contributions focused on external quality assurance and accreditation. The literature mainly details the role and historical development of external quality assurance agencies, globally and in particular countries; governmental policies and priorities; accreditation requirements or standards; and

quality assurance models adopted in various countries and regions. To a lesser extent, the literature also outlines the benefits of quality assurance processes and practices as well as some criticisms. Within Jamaica and the Caribbean, studies and articles have increasingly focused on quality assurance issues related to teacher education, assessment and the external examiner; ethics; financing; technical and vocational education; regulations; and regional mechanisms (Alleyne, 2015; Dunn-Pierre, 2015; Hordatt Gentles, 2011; London, 2005; Nkrumah-Young, 2015; Perkins, 2015). More recently though, international and local studies have explored quality assurance from an internal perspective, but the focus has not been on the people.

In 2014, UNESCO through an International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) project, conducted case studies in eight countries: Austria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Chile, China, Germany, Kenya, and South Africa. One university from each country participated, with a particular focus on their internal quality assurance systems, in relation to innovative and cost-effective solutions (Martin, 2014). The studies were published in 2017. While these case studies do not share the same objective as this research, the participants' responses included stories of their journey in the development and maintenance of the IQA systems and provided a reference point for what the participants in the dissertation research experienced in building the IQA systems and how they experienced the process. The UNESCO project participants included academic and administrative leaders/managers and staff, and student leaders (Martin, 2014).

From a document review of the studies emanated themes that were useful to the furtherance of this study. Overall, five main themes that emerged from the case studies were (i) IQA instruments and processes utilization; (ii) conditions supporting an IQA system; (iii) the impact of IQA on workload; (iv) the benefits of IQA; and (v) varying perspectives on IQA based on the roles study participants play in their institutions. The themes are interrelated rather than discreet. In the presentation of the findings of the dissertation research, references are made to these themes.

The working definitions of key concepts used in this chapter are given below with the main sources indicated.

- Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) Mechanisms: Essential components (policies and procedures, structures, instruments) designed to *achieve quality* in an institution and program (Daguang, Zuoxu, Fan, & Yanjie, 2017; Ganseuer & Pistor, 2017).
- Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) System derived from systems theory: when the mechanisms of quality are working in an integrated manner to promote institutional quality, the institution has an internal quality assurance system (Martin, 2014).
- Institutional Effectiveness, according to Carter-Smith (2015) is:
an information-based decision-making model wherein the data gathered through organizational learning activities is used for quality improvement. Specifically, it refers to the ongoing process through which an organization measures its performance against its stated mission and goals for the purposes of evaluation and improvement (para 1).
- Lived experiences relate to the common experience individuals have of a particular phenomenon that takes cognizance of the objective reality as well as the subjective perceptions and insight the individuals bring to bear on the experience.

While many jurisdictions use the term internal quality assurance, it is not as popularly used in the United States. Rather, institutional effectiveness is a standard for accreditation. In this chapter, an internal quality assurance system serves the same purpose as institutional effectiveness.

Research Methodology

Phenomenology was the research methodology for this study as it focuses on the common meaning that several individuals put to their lived experiences of a phenomenon or the *essence* of the experiences (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell (2013), the principal data collection procedure engages participants in interviews, while observations, poems and other documents may also be used. As such, data for this study were collected from in-depth individual interviews and focus group discussions. In this study, the phenomenon is the ongoing development and management of an internal quality assurance system. Moustakas (1994) and van Manen (1990) observe that lived experience is the core of phenomenology.

Moustakas (1994) shares that a phenomenon is the building block of human science and that there is a relationship between what exists in the world and what appears in the mind. Van Manen (1990) expresses that the subjective and objective are not mutually exclusive, but that the objective is what is before a person, while the subjective concerns the perception and insight that the person brings to the object in enlightenment, richness and depth. Given that a phenomenological study seeks to understand a phenomenon from varied angles and perspectives to provide a total picture (Moustakas, 1994), open-ended questions were used to elicit from the participants their experiences of the journey of having responsibility for developing and maintaining components of a quality assurance system. The perspectives of several participants were also sought.

Van Manen (1990) posits that the issue behind a phenomenon is determining what the experience is like and Creswell (2013) states that how persons experience phenomena is based on contexts, conditions and situations. Moustakas (1994) explains the comprehensive experience of a phenomenon in terms of “what” the individuals experience (the nature of the experience) and “how” they experience it (conditions, such as feelings, thoughts, time, space, and relations to self and others). The interview questions therefore focused on matters such as what being involved in the development of the system was like and any benefits of the system as well as their perceptions of the process, occasions of joys and challenges, concerns they had and any impact on their working relationships. Moustakas (1994) describes what the individuals experience as textural descriptions and how they experience the phenomenon as structural descriptions. Moustakas (1994) also indicates that the “texture and structure are in continual relationship” (p. 79) and together provide the fullness of the essence of a phenomenon or experience. In this study therefore, the textural and structural descriptions were not separated. Instead, the previously untold stories of the participants were simply reported using the themes and sub-themes that emanated from interviews indicating what they experienced and how they experienced the phenomenon on a continuum.

Population and Sample

The population constituted the over 45 higher education institutions in Jamaica that had received accreditation by the local accrediting agency for programs that had been submitted for evaluation up to 2018. Criterion sampling was used to select the sample, which included those institutions with programs that had undergone at least two cycles of accreditation and had indicated an intention to the accrediting agency that they would be pursuing institutional accreditation. The rationale for this selection was that these institutions, including universities and colleges, were of the view that they had an internal quality assurance system that could be subject to an external review, with an expectation of a positive outcome. Nearing the time for extending the invitations to participate in the study, information came that several staff changes had taken place in three of the eight institutions resulting in individuals in critical positions not meeting the inclusion criteria.

The institution with the least changes was asked to participate in the pilot study and agreed, while the other two institutions were not asked. The other five institutions were invited and agreed to participate in the study. Five participants from each institution were nominated by

their heads/presidents and met the criteria, including (i) being an academic or administrative leader; (ii) been employed at the institution in excess of three years; and (iii) been deeply involved in more than one accreditation evaluation exercise. The participants included deputy presidents/principals, deans, registrars, librarians and quality assurance officers. Thirteen of the 25 participants had been employed at the institutions between 15 and 30 years. Only two were employed for less than 10 years. The selected leaders in the sample therefore had the relevant and critical experience required for participation in a phenomenological study (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Four of the 25 participant leaders were male.

Data Collection Procedures

As studies on the lived experiences of stakeholders in the higher education institutions regarding their IQA systems were sparse, and there were no published instruments available, open-ended semi-structured questions were developed. Content validity was established in two ways. First, a group of two local and one overseas quality assurance experts critically reviewed the questions and their recommendations were incorporated. Second, a pilot study was conducted among representatives of a higher education institution who occupied similar positions to those in the sample.

The same questions were asked of all study participants. In essence, they were asked to describe the nature of their experience relating to the ongoing development of an internal quality assurance system as they prepared for accreditation; that is, they were asked to relate their journey in designing and refining their institution's internal quality assurance system in relation to (i) what they found most fulfilling and most challenging; (ii) factors that most supported the development of the system; (iii) how developing the system impacted relationships, if at all; (iv) the extent to which they felt developing the system was an imposition; (v) any concerns they had arising from their work in the process; and (vi) anything they would do differently if they had to repeat the journey.

Individual interviews and focus groups discussions were conducted within each institution. The individual interviews were done with five deputy presidents/principals with responsibilities for academic affairs. The focus groups consisted of two academic (deans) and two administrative personnel (registrars, librarians and quality assurance officers) from each institution, totaling 20 leaders. The interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were member checked and analyzed in collaboration with a second coder. The *Nvivo 10* qualitative analytical software was used in the coding and analysis of data.

The institutions were assigned identifiers: P, Q, R, S and T. The participants for the individual interviews were assigned the identifier R, so they became P-R; Q-R, R-R, S-R, and T-R. The participants in the focus groups were identified as R1, R2, R3, R4 and the institutional identifier preceded theirs. In all situations, R1 and R2 were administrative leaders and R3 and R4, the academic leaders.

Findings and Discussions

The five main themes that emerged from the data were (1) the IQA system is essential to the institution and its stakeholders; (ii) the system brings validation to the institution and stakeholders through accreditation; (3) developing the system adds an onerous workload to the core responsibilities of staff; (4) participants experience pleasant and challenging working relations during the development process; and (5) critical strategic direction and responsiveness is necessary for the effectiveness and continuity of the system. This study extends the quality assurance literature mainly in identifying, from a phenomenological perspective, the subjective participants' actuality on the objective reality of designing and implementing the IQA systems. Accordingly, in the ensuing discussion of the findings,

attention is also drawn to findings that are consistent with the literature as well as where new insights are gained.

An Internal Quality Assurance System Is Essential

Several study participants posited that having an operational IQA system is essential to the development of the institution. They said developing the system improved the institutions' operations and heightened institutional value. They also stated that the system and accreditation enhanced competitiveness, enabling their institution to contend with others in the global arena as they introduced good practices to their processes and systems. Most revealed that the IQA system is inextricably linked with accreditation, from which it derives greater value. Martin (2014) and Welsh and Metcalf (2003) indicate that an IQA system and accreditation have come to be seen as prerequisites in the current international higher education sector, although Brennan and Shah (2000) and Roberts (2007) note that quality has always existed in the institutions. Many participants further stated that in building the system, they became invested and their personal and institutional commitment deepened; they owned the quality system. One participant said, "It [IQA] is a must" (Q-R1).

Most of the participants stated that they did not see developing the IQA system as an imposition by the local accrediting agency. According to S-R3:

"I don't know if I would really say it is an imposition. Because I think as a professional, once you are in the environment and something needs to be done to take the [institution] from one stage to the next, then you just have to get it done. So, I guess imposition as being part of international position to get the job done is you have to do what you have to do [laughter]."

However, some participants admitted that initially they felt that the system requirements were an imposition but admitted that they had reached a point where they said it was vital to the institutions' survival (Q-R4; S-R2). Q-R4's view was that institutions should be guided more by the industry to which the graduates would go to work rather than an accrediting agency. According to R-R4:

"I would say it is a necessary evil. It has to be done and it is for the advancement of the institution. So, all of us, we have owned the institution, its processes, and what must be done... it is the way of forging ahead in order to keep the institution in a particular light. So, it is a necessary evil. You don't always want to do all of this, but it has to be done."

Seyfried and Ansmann (2018) observe that change can be internally or externally motivated and when it is mandated or 'forced' there can be ambivalence in views especially where resistance is high. It is interesting to note that some participants reported that they and some colleague staff had shared this perspective of an imposition. As the participants recounted their journey with the IQA system, information emerged regarding what the system looked like and what they were experiencing. The participants described key features of the system as the (i) development and streamlining of policies, standards, structures and processes; (ii) the regularity of monitoring and evaluating practices, operations and programs for further improvements; and (iii) documentation. Wheatley (2015) notes that "data production, documentation and analysis are recognized as key elements in the quality assurance process" (p. 244).

Many participants revealed that they were members of multiple committees that were formed or strengthened to conduct reviews and approve policies, standards, and structures after considering international benchmarks. With respect to monitoring and evaluation, Q-R4 stated that quality "meant monitoring to ensure that the standards, our reputation, were maintained." In highlighting the value of evaluation, T-R expressed that "great organizations

tend to hire individuals who are constructively critical of processes that are implemented and that there be (*sic*) evaluation of results.” T-R further indicated that constant evaluation “keeps the institution in the game.” In expressing similar sentiment, P-R pointed out that institutions must use data to demonstrate the delivery of quality education.

Inherent in developing standards and policies, collecting data and conducting reviews is the necessity of documentation. In many instances, participants said that developing the IQA system provided an opportunity to document procedures that were already in place. In other instances, policies and procedures were developed and/or streamlined and documented for the first time. Without exception, the participants bemoaned the volume of required documentation and the difficulties encountered. Q-R1 observed that individuals saw documentation as additional to their core responsibilities, noting “People don’t like to document things or maybe they don’t see the importance of documenting... and so it becomes a litany of woes.”

In spite of this, many participants cited benefits for documentation. They proffered that it provides an enhanced clarity and appreciation of roles, responsibilities, stability, and accountability. This is consistent with the literature on the description of the system (AlHamad & Aladwan, 2017; Lange & Kriel, 2017) and accountability in relation to quality assurance and accreditation (Brittingham, 2010; Vlăsceanu, Grünberg, & Pârlea, 2007). While admitting to having some knowledge of the quality system, participants across the five institutions revealed that their understanding of quality assurance deepened subsequent to becoming involved in the accreditation process, the requirements and documentation. In relation to stability and continuity of responsibilities, P-R3 elaborated that “if I leave office and someone else comes, then the same process is followed.”

The UNESCO literature indicates that there were improved management systems and data-driven decision-making (Ganseuer & Pistor, 2017; Vettori, Ledermüller, Schwarzl, Höcher, & Zeeh, 2017) and this was expressed also in the research data. The need for evidence to guide decisions or actions taken and documentation emerged as an important issue as the institutions grappled with improving their IQA systems. The study extends the quality assurance literature in revealing that the participants developed deepened personal and institutional commitment as they owned the system and self-evaluated in order to ensure improvement. They reported making discoveries and gaining both personal and professional insights as they worked with the system. In addition, one participant spoke of how deeply she experienced the process of developing and implementing the system when she described the soul searching, she went through to determine the model that best fit her institution (P-R).

The IQA System Leads to Validation

Institutional validation was the most frequent response that the participants gave in relation to the most fulfilling aspect of their involvement in building IQA systems. Several participants reported elatedly that validation was a reward for efforts to obtain endorsement from the local accrediting body and it increased stakeholder confidence. Validation, however, was also identified as a facilitator for the development of the system due to a strident demand for accreditation by the public and fierce competition for students from other institutions. These issues are elaborated next.

Validation from the National Accreditation Agency.

While many participants across the institutions used the term validation, they admitted that it meant accreditation by the national agency. They saw validation as a third-party endorsement that standards were met, and it was beneficial to students and graduates. According to Q-R, “the most rewarding thing is external validation. When the results come and it is positive, it is very encouraging.” He further stated that although an individual may be confident in the institution’s work, validation by a third party makes a difference. Other

participants said the system and accreditation were an affirmation by an external body of what they already believed about their work, their programs and institutions; that they had been doing the right thing; and that they had met international standards in their programs and operations. R-R3 saw accreditation not only as a reward for the work done but as a presented opportunity for further development. She remarked that:

“I guess it is a reward for the work you have been doing. And it allows you to improve as well, because it comes with a document [accreditation report] with suggestion of what one should do to improve in the program... because you don't want it to stay static, especially my area, IT.”

S-R4, along with others, highlighted that validation brought benefits to the students and graduates.

“So that has been the most rewarding thing for us – to know that programs are accredited, and it means that we have met the standards and we are confident that our graduates can stand up to scrutiny when they go into the wider world or society.”

Similarly, describing himself as student centric, Q-R4 expressed specifically that he found it fulfilling when the standards are in place and the programs are accredited because the graduates benefit by way of remuneration. These statements were consistent with the UNESCO case studies that found graduate employability with increased remunerations and job promotion, teaching and learning outcomes, and management systems and data-driven decision-making were positively impacted by the IQA system (Daguang et al., 2017; Ganseuer & Pistor, 2017; Kuria & Marwa, 2017; Lamagna, Villanueva, & Hassan, 2017; Villalobos, Rojas, Honorato, & Donoso, 2017).

Increased Stakeholder Confidence

Inextricably linked with the validation of the institution that comes from accreditation is the confidence gained by internal and external stakeholders, of which many participants spoke. For example, Q-R stated that the validation gives an assurance that the “outputs of the institution are guaranteed to be of good quality” and further remarked that the internal stakeholders could be confident that their work had value as “they are a part of a highly respected brand.” P-R3 reported that the academic and administrative members of staff became more confident and had more institutional pride.

“For me, a beneficial factor is that I now find myself selling the institution with more delight, because I know that what we say, we provide. There is a system that backs that up. And I find myself articulating the same about the institution with great pride.”

Other participants observed that the confidence gained also manifested in staff members' behavior, seen in activities such as mentoring others and planning for new recruits. It has not been surprising to find that enhanced stakeholder confidence was not captured in the literature. For the UNESCO case studies, the questions were directly focused on the objective impact of the system on particular areas, whereas the focus of this study has been on the leaders' *lived experiences* in developing the system.

Strident demand for accreditation and fierce competition for students.

As indicated earlier, the participants observed that while validation/accreditation was a reward, it was an important factor that contributed to the development of the internal quality assurance systems. The UNESCO case studies found as well that accreditation was a main driver for the development of the IQA system. The participants in this study noted their

awareness of alternatives for students to their institutions and programs, and as such they needed to maximize program quality, efficiency and effectiveness in order to remain in the market. However, as AlHamad and Aladwan (2017) and Daguang, Zuoxu, Fan, and Yanjie, (2017) indicate, many institutions worldwide are moving from being externally driven with regard to the systems development to becoming internally motivated. Consequently, many higher education institutions have been giving more attention to an institution-wide system for their own development and enhancement or effectiveness.

According to Kotter (2007), the main goal of organizational change is to position an organization to manage its response to new and more competitive market environments. The Jamaican higher education sector has had its own share of competition involving traditional as well as local for-profit and offshore distance education providers with flexible delivery modalities. S-R4 made the point that as institutional leaders they have to be mindful of their student customers because people have choice. Q-R3 noted that “facing the competitive environment with that internal quality is very important” and Q-R similarly opined that the main drivers for the development of the IQA system were accreditation and competition.

... the external demand for accreditation by employers and the need for a competitive place in the marketplace since other institutions provide alternative to us, and we need to assure stakeholders and potential students ... that we are a viable choice.

Some of the participants observed that there was a time in the educational landscape in Jamaica when accreditation was not a concern. However, as noted by S-R, with the changing landscape, over time her institution’s “brand was challenged, and we had to go through accreditation.” This is another reference to the previously cited linkage of the IQA system with accreditation. A number of the participants spoke of the students as customers or clients, indicating the impact of the marketplace on their quest for students. R-R2 indicated that customer satisfaction was one of the motivating factors for the development of the IQA system for her “because, for me, as [position] for student affairs we want to satisfy customers; meet the customers’ needs.”

The Tedium of Additional Work

Without exception, the additional workload that was created for the entire staff in the ongoing building of the institutions’ IQA systems was an overarching theme. Most participants referred to this as the most challenging and frustrating aspect of developing the system given that all facets of the key features of the system entailed work, additional to their core obligations. As leaders in the institutions, the participants were totally involved: long days and nights; numerous meetings; deadlines; policy and procedural development and review; monitoring; evaluation and development/selection of evaluation instruments; documentation.

While the participant leaders derived tremendous fulfillment in developing the quality assurance mechanisms they admitted to experiencing challenges and frustration. The participants said the sheer magnitude of the work was overwhelming. According to S-R, initially the work felt like “walking in a pair of uncomfortable leather shoes,” or taking a bumpy ride on a road filled with potholes, and many team members became “tired of it.” Q-R4 declared that “I understand systems are necessary, but they must not feel like a big stick over you all the time. So that is my only frustration, but I love standards. But standards shouldn’t feel like a chain around your neck” [laughter]. This theme was recurring, and P-R said it this way:

“Right now, when you have people carrying out required responsibilities and all that entails, such as writing all kinds of reports, to add IQA tasks to their normal responsibilities – that becomes burdensome.”

P-R also noted that in several instances, the additional work was taken on by a small set of the same people.

“And so, when you ask faculty to form a committee – it’s hard; because they still have their teaching role, they still have their other college responsibilities it becomes burdensome. The nature of the institution with all the various activities that the same people are doing – to establish something that, for me to say I would be very proud of, was a challenge; because you are really asking people to take on more”.

According to her colleagues, P-R2 and P-R4, developing the system required perseverance and time was of the essence.

“For me it would just be the time constraint... your everyday operation was not put on hold for you to complete what you are given. It required that you had the will to go the extra mile to get it done because you recognized the importance of what was at stake (P-R2).”

P-R4 observed that “there were not enough hours in a day. Inevitably, in as much as one may not have the direct oversight to see that some things are happening; you still have to see that certain things are happening.” Those sentiments were shared by T-R1 and T-R2. T-R1 further opined that the lack of resources added to the frustration.

“... when you think about the volume and the sheer magnitude of what you want to do ... you are not sure if you have enough time, or the capacity, or all the resources to do it, and that can be a source of frustration. When you see the job to be done and you are not sure, you sort of have some doubt as to whether or not you can meet the requirement. “

T-R2 introduced the element of the work demands impacting relations. She observed that:

“And the fact that if you have a deadline, for example, you have to be hounding and hounding and when the time comes for you to get the information, you still don’t get it. And because sometimes you have output, externally, it puts you under pressure because you are not getting what you are to get on time. So that is one of my most frustrating aspects of this.”

This finding on increased workload is similar to that of the UNESCO case study researchers, who revealed that in five of the eight universities that reported on the workload of staff, the workload was higher due to the implementation of the IQA system (AlHamad & Aladwan, 2017; Kuria & Marwa, 2017; Lamagna et al., 2017; Lange & Kriel, 2017; Vettori et al., 2017). Gillen et al. (2010) also identified burdensome work for administrative staff and faculty as a criticism of the process of accreditation.

Staff Relations: A Roller Coaster Ride

The participants that shared relationships within the universities and colleges were impacted in the development and maintenance of the IQA system. As with a roller coaster ride, there were highs, lows and even mixed reactions. P-R2 indicated that success in the development of the system hinged on a number of factors, one of which is teamwork. P-R2 stated that “one is the cooperation and willingness of staff, and I don’t take that for granted. It’s recognizing that you can’t do it all by yourself and you have to coopt others in the process.”

Highs

On the positive and fulfilling side – the highs, most participants were effusive in describing the collaboration and willingness to help that was generated among many academic and administrative team members. R-R2 even described the team of leaders and staff as family,

“... what I see came out of the process too, is the coming together of the staff... when it comes to things like these, and the accreditation is one of them, that everybody will pull together as a family and you get the things done, because it is for one common goal and for the benefit of everybody.”

The participants in the institutions explained that as they built the IQA system and committees were formed, opportunities were created for team members across faculties or schools and departments to get to know and better understand each other. Thereafter, participants in one college said that when they met anywhere on the campuses, they stopped and held brief conversations. One participant shared that they learned about each other’s families and offered assistance in institutional projects, such as program accreditation reviews in different departments. Some participants also spoke of collaboration and networking with other institutions that reaped significant benefits in building their systems. According to T-R3, collaboration facilitated multiple perspectives that enriched deliberations. P-R4 concurred, saying “building the IQA system enriches your processes.”

The participants in all the institutions reported that shared vision, goals and knowledge were established in the development process. It was also stated that over the period of working on accreditation exercises and further developing their IQA systems, they had experienced fulfillment in seeing the buy-in, multi-level participation and commitment of board members, faculty and staff. Participants, like Q-R1, remarked that they saw substantial professional and personal growth in some faculty and administrative staff members as they bought into, and committed to, the development of the IQA system. It was notable, however, that one of the things the participants found most frustrating was the lack of, or delay in, buy-in and commitment for the system.

Lows

Without exception, participant leaders reported that resistance to change and lack of buy-in from team members was another of the most frustrating matters for them. Q-R2 observed that “I don’t think I have ever gone through anything that has stretched me as much; because what I found out [was] that during the process, some people did not engage as much as I thought they would have.”

Three reasons advanced by the participants for the lack of or slow buy-in for the development of the IQA system were (i) persons were just resistant to change, (ii) persons did not understand that quality is work and think that quality is a bother, (iii) there is an absence of commitment to the institution. The participant leaders revealed that sometimes these factors led to robust and contentious discussions and strained relations. Participants in two institutions admitted to feeling bruised after some exchanges, noting that the strongest resistance sometimes came from those who had been with the institutions for a very long time. However, as leaders, they posited that they had to manage the change process and resistance, in order to move ahead with the process of building institutional quality. Some suggestions were that “constant communication was a must” (P-R2) and that sharing the vision and expressing appreciation for individual’s contribution were important (P-R4). According to P-R4, contributions to the development of the quality system required huge personal sacrifice from individual team members that needed to be acknowledged. She states that

“In following through those very same approaches and steps, what it takes is not even just communicating ... I have to build a relationship with you ... to get you to understand... in terms of what I am asking them to do. So it is a shared investment and it’s really trying to get a good buy-in. It also becomes

incumbent on us to recognize this contribution from them... we really have to find creative ways ... to build morale and to foster that relationship that is going to give you that maintenance of the parts. It is a heavy investment.”

R-R noted that sometimes, despite tremendous efforts to gain buy-in, leaders do not get the desired result. Her pragmatic approach was to persevere, indicating that after she had tried her best, she was prepared to move on and hope that late starters would follow suit. Some participants spoke candidly of emotions they experienced during the process of building their institution’s quality system. They were not representative of the group; but in this phenomenological study, it is important that their voices are heard. As such, their personal realities are related in the ensuing paragraphs.

Personal Reflections

As indicated, many of the participants were working in their institutions for over 15 years and have vested interests in the institutional community. Even as they discussed the fulfillment and challenges experienced, some also shared stories of the impact of the journey on them on a personal as well as professional level. On a positive note, T-R1 expressed that she felt “*valued*” and fulfilled as a result of her involvement in the development process, sitting on various committees and making contributions. Q-R2 treasured her involvement with her staff and tried to assist in various ways. She states that:

“I find that I like to lead by my presence. So, although it might be hectic on me, for example, I visit ... almost every morning ... to see what is happening if they need my help ... So, I bring some lunch... offer to assist... But I find that even if you can’t do the work but your presence is there, it helps to give that feel... But that sort of a thing I find encourages my staff and *I find it very dear to me* [emphasis added].”

As discussed earlier, some participants were appreciative of the benefits for their graduates arising from the external validation of their IQA system. Q-R4 recalled promising graduates that he would call on receipt of news of the outcome of the accreditation evaluation of a particular program because he knew of the financial gains for them, he cares about them. He remarked that “I had people on speed dial you know. I tell them as soon as I hear I am going to call you... I am very comforted when students see the benefits of our systems...” Similarly, P-R4 was thrilled at the development of the students, which she alluded, was the reason d’être of being a faculty member. She said:

“For me it has been pretty much ... *to see how they mature and literally evolve before your eyes, in terms of becoming. One of the things that I find gratifying is the return* [emphasis added]. There comes a point after the culmination in that final year ... in remembering the students that came in. In a sense you can remember them from the very first interview, the awkwardness, the uncertainty or the extreme bravado. And then comes the change, the shift. *And the recognition that the student is what all we do is really about* [emphasis added].”

T-R’s take-away was that she carried the requirement for evaluation into her personal life. She commented that “my attitude is positive, in that *even within the context of my own personal life, I must evaluate and assess what I am doing* [emphasis added] and set new goals if I am to succeed in this competitive environment.” Some participants said that the journey conjured mixed emotions for them. Q-R2 said that she felt that she was part of a relay contributing to further progress of the institution. She was making her contribution, knowing that someone else would come after and take the quality system and process further along. She confessed to crying on an occasion when she felt overwhelmed as others had not lived up to their

responsibilities. Q-R1 said she had been hurt by comments others made but she focused on those persons who were responsive and helpful.

On the negative side, some participants acknowledged feeling tired, lonely or hurt. Several others highlighted having to complete work assigned to others, as deadlines were missed or what was required was not satisfactorily done. A few participants admitted to being told to “do it yourself” when they asked for quality assurance activities to be done. In those instances, their own workload became more burdensome. The participants spoke without bitterness – it was their reality. A few others shared that some experiences caused them to become reflective. S-R indicated that she had not realized how much she pushed her staff, acting like a slave driver, and actually invaded their personal time. In response to what she would do differently if she had to repeat the journey she said

“I might have not been such a slave driver. I might have approached it differently in that I could have used different strategies. But I am somebody who is driven and sometimes my passion spills over into ... [laughter]. Well one of my senior team emailed me over, was it Christmas, and said – “[name of participant], back off. It is family time.” *And I felt guilty because I am saying I didn't realize* [emphasis added]. “And plus stop sending people email on Sunday and Saturday.” And I said to myself – Lord. It just never crossed my mind that I should be respecting people space, so those things. And I think of all those emails that I send like two in the morning... Yes. *Sometimes you just feel that it is a lonely road* [emphasis added]. Sometimes you feel you are the only one carrying it and that might not be so.”

To the same question, R-R noted that she could delegate more but she wrestled with the decision based on her leadership style and anxiety to meet deadlines. She said:

“You see I kind of have a different leadership style. I try to be very hands-on but with hands-on sometimes there is a lot that comes on your plate. So, I guess one thing would probably be, in some instances, to delegate more of the process. But you delegate some and there are some things that you just have to be a part of. *And then with the delegation, sometimes if you delegate too much you run the risk of delays in getting things done. So, I guess sometimes delegation too, in some experiences, there could be more of that* [emphasis added]. And in some, it is just being able to get people to act with a little bit more urgency where certain things are concerned.”

There was no doubt that the participants learned fulfilling and also hurtful lessons as they worked together on the IQA system. Learning brings growth and development and according to Martin (2011), a litmus test of personal development is how we interact with changes. The candor of the participants revealed an important aspect of the untold story of individuals who design, implement and manage quality assurance systems. The staff relations theme is a major finding of the study that is not reflected in the quality assurance literature reviewed for the study. Although the issues are raised in the organizational and managing change literature (Cummings & Worley, 2015; Harrison & Shirom, 1999), the phenomenological nature of this study has unearthed this gap and therefore extends the literature.

Persistent Strategic Direction for the IQA System

In discussing the factors that contributed to the development of the IQA system, any concerns they had and what they would do differently, the participants identified factors that hinge on the need for strategic direction of the system. The participant leaders noted two inter-related critical factors for the maintenance of the quality system and its effectiveness (i) leadership of the development process and (ii) responsiveness to sustainability issues. The development of an IQA system is a deliberate action for change. Planned organizational change is aimed at

better positioning organizations or institutions for quality enhancement and competition (Kotter, 2007). Change has to be managed for effectiveness and sustainability of organizations and institutions. Cummings and Worley (2015) indicate that organizations need to address critical issues from governance decisions to resource provisions and social processes, including leadership and group dynamics.

Leadership

In all five institutions in the study, the individual interviewees had principal responsibility for leading the process of building the internal quality assurance system by providing direction and support to those they lead. However, the participant leaders remarked that the impetus for developing the system was strengthened in their institutions when direction and support of the board and top management was evident. This finding was consistent with that of the UNESCO researchers. Some institutions in the UNESCO studies further highlighted centralized and decentralized decision-making and top-down and bottom-up processes as a part of the quality culture (Daguang et al., 2017; Ganseuer & Pistor, 2017; Kuria & Marwa, 2017). Northouse (2010) observes that organizations need both management and leadership for effectiveness. Other important leadership related factors noted by the study participants included leaders being able to share the vision, obtain buy-in, set the tone for change, and being trusted. Participants, such as Q-R1 and T-R3, explained that individuals in the departments and faculties usually took their cues from their leaders. Accordingly, where leaders were actively involved, academic and administrative staff tended to participate more in the quality assurance activities. They reported that the converse was also generally true from their experiences. The participants shared that issuing instructions was not effective in achieving good results. T-R1 opined that

One of the factors... the things that influenced the development ... the individuals who were put in charge of the whole quality assurance thing; they understood the dream. They lived the dream, and they were able to articulate the dream ... to get me to understand and why we needed to do that, so you could get the vision. They understood what it was that was beneficial, how it would benefit the [institution] and the community and the whole tertiary landscape as a whole.

Q-R1 commented that the leader needed to “show that you are a part and you have embraced this whole quality thing.”

Some participants identified other ways in which leadership contributed to the system and institutional progress. Q-R argued that a leader should believe there is no one way of doing things, thereby permitting others to innovate so that the institution may benefit from the richness of multiple perspectives. R-R posited that top management should recognize gaps and provide resources, such as retaining qualified and experienced personnel in quality assurance to lead the development process. In two focus groups, participants said that leaders should recognize their and others' strengths and build on the foundations laid by others. In those discussions, R-R2 and T-R3 traced the history of their various heads of institutions, their leadership styles and the contributions made as each leader built on what the previous head had accomplished. The participants expressed concern that the sustainability of the system was linked to effective leadership.

Strategic Responsiveness/Imperative

A major concern that the participants had regarding the IQA system was the strategic responsiveness of the leaders to its ongoing development and maintenance. The participants posited that the longevity of the system would depend on (i) the continued inclusion of the system development/maintenance in the strategic objectives of the institutions, (ii) internalizing or institutionalization of the system, and (iii) effective communication.

Many participants said that it was incumbent on the executive management to ensure that the IQA system remained a part of the institutions' strategic planning and budgetary provisions. There was a strong recommendation from T-R that the institution articulate a quality mandate with a policy that "enunciates the principles, the features, the requirements, as well as the obligations of all workers ... for you to get the desired results." The participants in all the institutions were cognizant of significant resource constraints and insisted that if the IQA system continued to be among institutions' strategic priorities, then funding would need to be allocated given the challenges they faced with inadequate resources and facilities. Some participants also mentioned that the accreditation fees were high, as were the measures to implement the various recommendations that were made from the evaluations.

Given all the work that had been done in moving from individual IQA mechanisms to a coordinated system, several participants were concerned about its continuity. Many participant leaders admitted that the quality culture and system were not yet entrenched throughout their institutions. Some participants stated that there were varying levels of development in the systems, particularly in the administrative areas, as mechanisms were more developed in the academic area. T-R4 stated that he wanted to see the system entrenched in order to maintain operational continuity and relevance in the marketplace.

"The major concern that I see is the hope that the process through which we have been, it's entrenched across the [institution], wherein we realize that it has to operate at a higher level continuously and the fact that we can't go back to where we were if we are going to be relevant with our deliverables, and even to continue to compete in the market that we exist in. So, one of the concerns also is we have to guard against lethargy ...because this can creep up on us, if we aren't, what you'd say, vigilant in securing and maintaining what we have got."

S-R expressed similar views and emphasized the need for continuity of processes, structures, and vision as well as preparation for succession changes.

"Concerns – well, continuity, sustainability. We want to ensure that whatever we have started, the policies, the different advisory boards, the mechanisms we have put in to ensure checks and balances, transparency, and so ... that we will really continue to use them, live them, apply them..."

While the participants had their concerns regarding the systems' continuity and sustainability, they were strongly convinced of the survival of the IQA system. Many pronounced that the system would not grind to a halt. However, participants such as S-R2, acknowledged that the staff was tired, and the pace and activities could not be sustained. Several participants repeatedly spoke about the need for the IQA system to be reflected in the strategic objectives of the institutions and budgets to include additional staff. All, except one institution, had either a dedicated unit (department) or posts that coordinated the quality assurance activities. These institutions felt that the units were understaffed. While many participants supported the need for a dedicated unit, they recognized that the quality assurance activities could not be left solely to the specialized team; emphasizing the need for the quality process and culture to be internalized.

Many participants in all the institutions observed that sharing the vision, stimulating buy-in and commitment, and maintaining momentum regarding the IQA system required sustained communication, sensitization and training. The participants contended that these activities in relation to the IQA system were not one-off events but there was need for building ongoing awareness at levels, repetition, and variety. As staff changed it was imperative that orientation, training and re-training, and communication and sensitization were conducted. Participants noted that it was essential to receive feedback from stakeholders and acknowledged that communication was oftentimes challenging. According to Q-R4

“We have to understand how communication works in our culture. I don’t think we quite get it yet. We shouldn’t assume that because we publish it or because we have one meeting that people understand it... it has to be ongoing, and it really can be frustrating ... It seems to me that it’s most effective when you doing it face to face with somebody; and you say it to them last semester and you say it to them again this semester... Communication in our culture, I think ... It’s a big climb. It’s a mountain.”

These findings of the research were similar to those in the UNESCO studies (Ganseuer & Pistor, 2017; Kuria & Marwa, 2017; Lange & Kriel, 2017; Vettori et al., 2017; Villalobos et al., 2017). According to Cummings and Worley (2015), there are key activities to effective change management including motivating change, creating a vision, developing political support, managing the transition, and sustaining the momentum. It appears that some of these might not have been given the required attention, hence the challenges mentioned by the participants. For example, attention seems to be particularly needed in the area of motivating change and developing a wider base of political support to address issues of resistance and also sustaining the momentum to ensure resourcing and continuity of the IQA system.

Essence of the Lived Experiences: Developing an Internal Quality Assurance System

The essence of the experiences of the participants in developing the internal quality assurance systems in their institutions, in Jamaica, is that it is similar to many of life’s experiences. There have been anticipated and unanticipated results, including successful outcomes and onerous work; mixed on the one hand with pleasant collaborative success-oriented relationships and often on the other hand, strained relations that were challenging and frustrating. These leaders have faced serious constraints with human and physical resources. The leaders in this study recognized that the IQA system is essential; without it the institutions would not survive. The leaders developed standards, structures and evaluation instruments to streamline and monitor their programs, policies and processes. They have begun a journey and as S-R stated, “there is no turning back... We cannot do it.”

Implications of the Findings

Higher education is essential to the competitiveness and economic development of any country (Altabach et al., 2009). What happens in higher education institutions is therefore of importance to governments and the public in general. During the data collection, participants in two of the five institutions remarked that the reflection prompted by the questions stimulated further dialogue among them. Evidently the knowledge and experience gained by the participants in the process of developing the quality system can be said to be rebounding to the ongoing success of the institutions and their stakeholders. However, the findings suggest an absence of adequate preparation of the institutional community for the changes the IQA system brings.

The participants experienced severe challenges with the overwhelming workload, the management of the resistance to change, lack of sustained communication and human and physical resource constraints. It is important that when organizational changes are planned that assessment or diagnosis, to use the term Harrison and Shirom (1999) advance, is conducted to find the best ways to solve problems or enhance institutional effectiveness. Admittedly, the institutions received a mandate from the accrediting agency and the international community to which they have responded. Since the participating institutions have been in the process for some time, it is now incumbent on them to conduct their own analysis in order to address the challenges identified and better prepare for, and manage, the changes for the institutions’ continued implementation of the IQA system and its sustainability as they fulfill their particular mission.

The data have indicated how the participants in the institutions experience the requirement of the local accrediting agency. The findings would be instructive for the agency in its training and developmental relations of the institutions. There is for ongoing sensitization of the institutions regarding the essence of the experience of developing an IQA system to better assist in their preparation for its implementation and continuity. Financial constraints are common among both public and private institutions. However, the information from the study could be useful in guiding policymakers into prioritizing resources, based on good practice and successful outcomes.

Future Research

This study is a good foundation highlighting what some members of institutions experience as they develop internal quality assurance systems under the mandate of the local accrediting agency. Other studies could explore (i) the experiences of the presidents/principals and (ii) faculty and administrative staff members to provide a comprehensive picture of the institutional community. The voices of these important stakeholders in higher education quality assurance ought to be heard and given attention. Other studies could consider a wider sample of the higher education population or compare the experiences of persons in categories of institutions, such as specialized or faith-based institutions. Others could also explore the experiences of participants in non-traditional for-profit or totally online higher education institutions which were not included in this research. Areas of the IQA system that are most effective or less effective could also be investigated as well. As a major concern of the participants of the study was the continuity of the IQA system, a study focused on the sustainability of the system could be considered.

Conclusions

This study has shown what developing the internal quality assurance system is like for academic and administrative leaders in five Jamaican institutions. The leaders in the research have had expected and unexpected results and as with life in general, they have enjoyed the successes and continue to learn from and address the challenges. For the sustainability of the system, they opined that the development of the system must remain integral to the strategic direction of the institutions with adequate budgetary provisions and sustained communication, sensitization and training to ensure preparedness and buy-in of each faculty and staff member. The participants further posit that institutionalization of the system and internalization of the process by individuals of the entire institutional community is critical to its continuity.

We have heard the voices of the participants stating that they have journeyed far in developing their internal quality assurance systems and they cannot and will not go backward. Their voices also indicate serious concerns regarding onerous workloads and human and material under-resourcing. Will we listen?

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Chapter 18

Quality Assurance of Higher Education in post-War Japan and its New Challenges in the 21st Century

Syun Tutiya

Introduction

Japan's statutory quality assurance of higher education started in 2004, building on the experiences and lessons from UK, European and US practices, and has progressed into its third cycle of seven years each, which focuses on internal quality assurance and information disclosure. Though the former could be viewed as consistent with the general trend, the latter has several particularities which are pertinent to the conditions of the higher education in the 21st century Japan. Among them are the major driving forces of the growth of higher education in the post-war Japan, the influences from the ideas on university reforms since the 1980s, the national agenda emerging in the 21st century that include the decreasing population.

Given those backgrounds, the general landscape of Japan's higher education, in which private institutions are largely responsible for undergraduate education while public ones are more focusing on postgraduate education and research, provides interesting insights into the future challenges and new roles for quality assurance practices in Japan, including the further demand for transparency of institutional finance and teaching conditions as well as possibly different approaches to a variety of objectives of higher education institutions in response to society's demand for human resources.

The higher education reform in the postwar Japan and the start of Japan's quality assurance system

The postwar higher education system started in 1949, four years after the end of World War II under the Allied occupation, as part of the "democratization" of the country's education system. The education reform generally converted the prewar system to the US-like system consisting of six years of primary school education, three years of junior high school and three years of high school education, and four years of higher education. Part of the higher education system inherited the prewar system but those higher education institutions which were not allowed to call themselves "universities," including both public and public postsecondary, professional schools, were made a full-fledged part of the system. Quality assurance of those institutions were thought, officially by the occupation forces, to be provided by the US-type autonomous and collegiate accreditation, leading to the creation of The Japanese University Accreditation Association (JUAA) in 1947, while the Ministry of Education, whose structure remained intact after the war in face of the occupation policies, insisted on the government's authority over higher education system.

After Japan became independent by signing the Treaty of Peace in 1952, the ministry finally succeeded, through the School Education Act, in launching the Approval of Establishment Procedure in 1956, by which it intended to rigidly control the quality of new higher education institutions at the point of planning their creation. The concept of quality assurance by way of the regulation at entry point had been taken for granted through the rest of the 20th century.

The perceived demands for reform of higher education system in the 1980s

Through 1960s and 70s, Japan was no exception with respect to the increased demand for access to higher education as a result of the increased population of the baby boomer cohort. The increased college students were accommodated mainly by the private sector in Japan. In

fact, the percentage of the number of universities which private sector accounted for increased from 53.5% in 1955 to 72.6% in 1975, during which time the rate of progression from secondary to higher education increased 7.9% to 27.2%.

The 1980s saw society's perception of a certain degree of malfunctioning of four years college education, such as the lost cause of general education and the futile scholarly teaching in professional training courses. The perception eventually led to the creation of the Ad hoc Council on Education outside of the Ministry of Education, and in its agenda was a possible restructuring of higher education system. Before disbanding, the Council put forward a variety of reform proposals ranging from the promotion of lifelong learning and social outreach, the increased focusing on postgraduate education, information disclosure and "university evaluation" in the sense of external quality assurance etc., all of which have developed, though in somewhat modified forms, into the transformations in the first two decades of the 21st century.

International Influences in the Formative Stage of Japan's Current QA system

Japan's current quality assurance system was prepared in the 1990s, beginning with the recommendation, and later the obligation, of internal and autonomous review of teaching and research for institution as well as the loosening of the Approval of Establishment Procedure, by which institutions had come to be allowed to start new programs without asking the ministry for approval as long as the programs satisfied the formal conditions *prima facie*.

In 2004, the School Education Act was revised and enacted to the effect that Japan's system of external quality assurance had been defined for the first time as Certified Evaluation and Accreditation, though the language of the law only obligated higher learning institutions to apply for third-party evaluation but did not specifically stipulate the accrediting power of the accreditation agencies.

In the course of preparing for the system, the government researched the situation overseas quite extensively. The USA's long history of accreditation practices gave the policymakers an influential insight into the plurality of accreditation agencies and the methodology based on the principle collegial peer review. UK and European practices, backed up by the launch of the Bologna Process, were an encouragement in stipulating the prospective standards.

Notable Characteristic of Japan's QA System

The current system, which has entered the third cycle of seven years, are additionally characterized by the following features.

- An institutional review of the general conditions of teaching, research and their infrastructures without assumptions about the quality of program-level teaching
- Universities free to choose any QA agency out of those certified by the Minister of Education
- Reviewers mainly consisting of university professors and staff members
- The results, which not only include decisions but also their reasons and grounds, written quite extensively and made publicly available online

Challenges and Prospects in the 21st Century

After gradual changes have been made to the system, Japan's system of quality assurance of higher education faces the following challenges.

- The society, which is apparently not very aware of the system, expects it to play a regulatory role in improving higher education system beyond the ingroup peer review.
- The standards stipulated by AQ agencies generally tend not to take into account recent

innovations in teaching and its management, such as online education and cooperative programs, about which the Ministry of Education have already deregulated without showing its quality principles.

The institutions are under the pressure of showing their accountability through a variety of external, third-party evaluation and accreditation agencies while there are no accepted principles, legal or conceptual, for an integration of their results and decisions.

Chapter 19

Quality Assurance in Higher Institutions: A Case Study of Chrisland University, Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria.

Chinedum Babalola

Introduction

Quality remains the most essential attribute that creates value about the product/service for the receiver. A quality assurance system sets out expectations that an organization should meet. It is intended to raise the standard of work and ensure everything is done consistently. It is a formal management system used to strengthen an organization. Quality assurance is the means by which service providers differentiate themselves from their competitors. Quality assurance (QA) in higher education is now an essential skill that should be fully incorporated in the university system. This cuts across the academic and non-academic sectors, (with other business functions such as finance, strategy, internal control, procurement, continuity planning and compliance). It is a condition that leads to the achievement of transparency. It will ensure the quality of the academic (teaching, curriculum), non-academic (staffing, administration) and structural (buildings, facilities), and will allow an objective review of their quality.

This ensures that the standard and value of the higher institution is maintained and improved upon. This standard also includes the output produced (graduates from the institution) and the impact they make on their environment/economy. Quality assurance is equally multifaceted. It is an important characteristic of the outputs of higher education, reflected in characteristics of the university graduates, such as their skills and professional capacity to act in the real world. It is also revealed in the attributes (level, relevance) of the knowledge produced by universities through research, disseminated and put at the disposal of the society for use.

In this regard, it is quite obvious why quality and quality assurance are essential. If, for example, higher education graduates are not capable of performing effectively in their professions due to “lack of quality” – be it as engineers, doctors, public servants, schoolteachers and others – the universities would have failed their mission. But quality is also about certain characteristics of higher education as a process, not only about the outcomes. Quality of higher education includes aspects of fairness and equity, such as who can become a student (access to higher education), who can graduate from university (completion), and what kind of career is available. Ethical aspects have quality implications as well, for example, how students or academics are treated in universities and how they interact with each other. Stakeholders should be an integral part of the institutional evaluation process.

What is Quality Assurance?

Quality is often defined as the totality of features and characteristics of a service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs. Quality Assurance is the maintenance of a desired level of quality in a service or product, especially by means of attention to every stage of the process of delivery or production. As defined by ISO 9000, it is "part of quality management focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled." Quality assurance has been variously portrayed by different authorities. Okebukola (2008) defines quality assurance as “the policies, systems, strategies and resources used by the institution to satisfy itself that its quality requirements and standards are being met.” In the same vein, Oladosu (2012) views it as “the process of monitoring quality and ensuring that standards are not only continuously sustained but also improved upon.” This, he maintains, implies constant

evaluation, assessment, maintenance, and improvement of quality by an institution, a program or a higher education system.

Quality in higher education, according to Article 11 of the World Declaration on Higher Education published by the United Nations, is a multi-dimensional concept, which should embrace all its functions and activities: teaching and academic programs, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, faculties, equipment, services in the community and the academic environment. It should take the form of internal self-evaluation and external review, conducted openly by independent specialists, if possible, with international expertise, which is vital for enhancing quality.

According to Vroeijsstijn (1995), Quality assurance is a systematic, structured and continuous attention to quality in terms of quality maintenance and improvement. It could also be referred to as an ongoing development and implementation of ethos, policies, and processes that aim to maintain and enhance quality as defined by articulated values and stakeholders' needs. (Boyle and Bowden). Considering quality assurance in the higher institution, it is a collective process by which a university ensures that the quality of educational process is maintained to the standards it has set for itself. (Wilger, 1997). Quality assurance in higher education includes all policies, measures, planned processes and actions through which the quality of higher education is maintained and developed. By this definition, quality of higher education can be described as the degree to which the education meets the clients' needs and demands; where the clients are in this case are students and the society.

According to Barnett (1992), Quality assurance in the higher institution implies a determination to develop a culture of quality in an institution of higher education, so that everyone is aware of his own part in sustaining and improving the quality of the institution. Stakeholders should be an integral part of the institutional evaluation process. Quality also requires that higher education should be characterized by its international dimension: exchange of knowledge, interactive networking, mobility of lecturers and students, and international research projects, while taking into account the national cultural values and circumstances. Quality assurance (QA) system typically comprises of a number of connected facets and serve numerous purposes such as accountability, control, evaluation, measurement and quality improvement.

National quality assurance systems in higher education are operational in all Nigerian universities through the National Universities Commission (NUC), the regulatory organ for higher education in Nigeria for external quality assurance. It was established for the monitoring and evaluation for compliance by universities with laid-down rules and standards. However, the internal QA is very important as it ensures that the policies, mechanisms, processes as well as attitudinal changes are effected internally by the institution leading to compliance with standards, accountability and fitness of purpose (Oladosu, 2012). Standards should meet the specific needs of the country.

Quality Assurance Systems and Standards

Generic QA system – identifies critical tasks, processes, or systems. It consists of the following: i) documentation of standards – policies, procedures, guidelines and reference information; ii) institutionalizing their implementation; iii) monitoring and evaluating achievement of objectives; and iv) providing feedback to all stakeholders and adjusting to improve the system.

Standards are developed through a collaborative and transparent process involving all key stakeholders; endorsed by experts; are evidence-based; validated through reliable measures and outcomes; publicly disclosed; and reviewed and updated periodically to ensure contemporary applicability (Taylor, 2011). By 2025, the projected global demand for higher education could reach 263 million. Quality assurance is not complete and adequate without a proper quality control measure. Quality control refers to the verification procedures (both

formal and informal) used by institutions in order to monitor quality and standards to a satisfactory standard and as intended. Quality control is aimed at identifying and fixing the defects. It is concerned with making things right rather than discovering and rejecting those made wrong.

Chrisland University, Abeokuta, Ogun State, established in 2015, has gone through both external and internal QA systems from inception till date including academic, non-academic, and structural. Some of the QA processes are mandatory due to NUC specifications and expectations as well as the pedigree of the founders of the university who are bent on building quality into all tiers of educational system, which they have had the privilege of running for over four decades. These processes are presented as a case study in this write-up.

Quality assurance has some expectations. For example, in the academic sector, the qualifications of all the lecturers should be thoroughly verified, teaching aid materials made available and training on how they can be used provided. Also, how exam questions are set and vetted is scrutinized, appropriate dress code, standard rules and regulations and staff/student appraisal should all be put in place. For the non-academic sector, there should be adequate training for staff, periodic peer review, appropriate dress code, standard rules and regulations, staff appraisal, then appropriate health and safety environment. As well for the structural, conducive environment for learning should be in place and offices (i.e., well ventilated lecture rooms and offices) provided; good laboratories for practical sessions, well-furnished and equipped library, well-constructed sports center with good sport facilities among others should also be made available. Although not all of these have been effected in our institution, Chrisland University has a general quality assurance director that monitors and controls quality in the various units of the institution, (both academic and non-academic).

Chrisland University as a Case Study

Establishment of the Institution

Chrisland university was established in March 2015, following the provisional approval of the federal government of Nigeria, having satisfied the requirements, as contained in the Education (national minimum standards and establishment of institutions) Act Cap. E3 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (2004), for the establishment of a private university. The initiatives that culminated in the establishment of the university, however, go considerably back in time, and can be dated to over four decades of involvement of the founders in the provision of quality education to generations of Nigerians and citizens of other nations from nursery level to tertiary level. Chrisland university's parent organization is Chrisland Schools Limited. The university went through another resource verification by NUC in 2018 before it was given full license by the federal government of Nigeria.

Vision and Mission of the University

As part of the internal QA system, the university defined its vision and mission from the onset. The vision of Chrisland University is to become a world-class University, renowned for intellectual freedom, ethical standards, research, community service and outstanding training of a new generation of leaders, while its mission is to create a learning environment that nurtures a sound, moral and intellectual culture and attracts an excellent blend of faculty from across the world and deploy resources to educate the total person. The students and staff are regularly reminded of the vision and mission at almost all functions and events with emphasis on key words such as world-class, new generation of leaders, creating enabling environment and total person. The vision and mission plaques are placed in almost every office and formal places as a reminder to all of our goals.

Academic Programs

Chrisland University commenced academic activities on January 4, 2016, with two colleges. The College of Arts, Management and Social Sciences (CAMASS) and College of Natural and Applied Sciences (CNAS) with eight departments and 14 undergraduate programs. The NUC in recent time has verified and approved another college – College of Basic Medical sciences and 14 new programs making a total of 28 bachelor programs. The university also has two academic units: the General Studies Unit (GSU) and the Entrepreneurship and Skill Acquisition Centre. The university offers a one-year advanced level/foundation program (Joint Universities Preliminary Examinations Board – JUPEB), whose certification qualifies candidate for direct-entry admission. The full academic structure of Chrisland University is designed to be attained in 20 years with a school of postgraduate studies, 6 colleges, 45 departments and 169 academic programs at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. All these are to be implemented in phases.

Curriculum Development

This has been ongoing regularly in order to meet NUC BMAS specifications and global standard. The verification and accreditation exercises have assisted in improving the curricular being run. However, we have found out the need for overhauling the curricular in 2019. A committee was set up and sent on a 3-day retreat which has produced a better revised curricular ready for full adoption by senate.

Student Enrollment

The university has specified eligibility for admission for each program in accordance with NUC standards including O Levels (WAEC or its equivalent), A Levels, JUPEB, HND, ND with a minimum of merit passes in relevant courses. In addition, candidates must have at least 5 credit passes at WASSCE or equivalent in relevant courses including English language. There is an admission committee that screens applicants and their parents/guardians through oral interviews for now in order to determine academic qualification, character and willingness to abide by the rules and regulations of the university. This has strengthened the quality of candidates admitted and supported by parents and guardians. The university has successfully completed one four-session academic cycle and graduated its first set of students in November 2019.

Student Assessment

The university maintains standard quality assessment processes. Attendance at lectures is documented and 80% attendance is the requirement for participation in examination. Course assessment carries 30% and examination carries 70%. This is maintained as strictly as possible. Results are approved at the department, college and finally at senate. The university, as a result of being young adopted a method of engaging external examiners among well-qualified academics from well-established universities to vet all questions at all levels rather than at final year as is the norm. This is one way of strengthening the standard and the NUC commended the university for this initiative. Another value added is result processing. The pro ICT vice-chancellor has been able to capture individualized and customized results on each student's portal such that details of results are available to each student and their parents including attendance, CA and all other relevant information. This helps parents and students to know areas of strengths and weaknesses.

Organizational Structure

The university has a Board of Trustees (BOT), the apex governing body that also supplies finances for running the university, headed by a chairman who is currently the chancellor and founder – Dr. (Mrs.) Winifred Awosika (OON). The university is run by a governing council made up of members carefully selected as a result of their known dedication to matters of integrity and commitment to excellence in qualitative and functional education. These

members were drawn from different parts of the country, and they are distinguished men and women with vast experience and expertise from the world of academia, government and public service, law, banking and finance, commerce, and private enterprise.

The vice-chancellor is the principal officer responsible for the day-to-day operations of the university and she reports directly to the governing council. The vice-chancellor is expected to work in pursuit of the realization of the university's vision and mission. The management team includes the registrar, bursar, librarian, and the deans. The current vice-chancellor Professor Chinedum Babalola had to defend strategic plans and goals in accordance with the vision and mission of the university which is being used to run the university. The administration is working on seven set goals, as follows:

1. Staff development and welfare – to guarantee staff development in the area of teaching and learning delivery, research, administration, leadership and innovation
2. Curriculum review in line with global standards
3. Transformational teaching, learning activities
4. Increase in student population
5. Drive for resource mobilization and internally generated revenue (IGR)
6. Research, innovation and service – to promote discovery, creation, and transfer of new knowledge through research and services. Introduction of “Innovate Chrisland” to ensure that every undergraduate engages in a creative and independent project; and
7. Students' conduct and welfare – to support the overall academic, social and moral success of students.

Student Affairs Unit

The university established the students' affairs unit in 2018 and it is currently headed by a dean of students who is supported by a students' affairs officer. This unit monitors almost all students' activities from welfare to conduct to character building. Being a full boarding institution, the SAU monitors the application and approval of exeats. The university established the Student Representative Council (SRC) in 2019 as a way of building leadership and negotiation skills. Once the first set was elected, the elected officers were treated to a leadership retreat in a hotel outside the university where a leadership coach trained them on the rubrics of transformational leadership. This has helped the university to groom well focused leaders who dialogue in a responsible manner with management.

Orientation

Orientation exercises are conducted twice before matriculation and, many times, all the students are made to attend so as to refresh their memories. It involves familiarization of the university's environment by a tour, seminars by internal and external personnel – health, academic excellence, morals, dangers of substance abuse.

Student Conduct

To guide student conduct, there is student handbook given to every student to read along with their parents/guardians. Both parties are made to sign an undertaking that they will abide by the regulations. There is an established student disciplinary committee which meets regularly to determine cases of misconduct. Punishment ranges from warning to community service, suspension, expulsion depending on the degree of offense. There is room for students to appeal to the council for a reversal of punishment. The university conducts a mandatory weekly assembly every Wednesday for one to two hours on life-building skills such as morals, leadership, debates, speeches, seminars among others as a way of building the total person. External and internal speakers are invited.

Counseling- CCAPS

The university has set up Chrisland Counselling and Psychological Services (CCAPS) to counsel students and also staff in order to foster a healthy mental state in everyone. It is headed by a certified clinical psychologist. Programs of CCAPS have provided succor to many students. Some disciplinary cases have been effectively managed by CCAPS.

Staffing: Enrollment

The university has academic and non-academic staff in cadres and various units. The due process for enrollment includes media advertisement, collation and screening of application and interviews. Interview panels are of high quality and consist of external consultants versatile in university administration, professional experience and internal members. The university invests a lot on recruitment. Interviewees face oral and written exercises and at the end, the qualified candidates are offered employment with job description. The university has adopted some standards for academic staff that includes possession of a minimum of master's degree, with PhD grade and evidence of PhD registration to ensure that the candidate is progressing in his/her academic career.

Staff Development

The university pays attention to staff development as a way of strengthening quality. Almost all academic staff are sponsored for local conferences in part or in full (at least once a year). Those that attract foreign sponsorship are given the opportunity to attend. Some of the staff have won fellowships and postdoc fellowships internationally. The staff undertaking their PhD are given one day off per week to attend to their PhD programs. Through this, a number of them have completed their programs. They are monitored and given a timeframe to complete their programs. Progress reports from supervisors are also required annually, all to enhance commitment. In-house seminars and workshops are conducted to strengthen staff. One of such was the workshop on pedagogical skills in teaching and learning held in 2019. The university has hosted international conferences as well.

Staff Welfare and Appraisal

The council has a committee on staff welfare who conducts staff audit. The university is currently undergoing a staff appraisal exercise to determine the status of those that qualify for confirmation and promotion, and this will soon be completed. The guidelines for this have been established. The staff handbook which has been produced is still undergoing changes to meet expected standards.

Other Special Features

- i.** Mandatory 12-week internship in the industry for all students.
- ii.** Annual Scholarship Awards for best academic performance at CGPA not below 4.50.
- iii.** Foreign faculty and professional staff for diversity and global linkage.
- iv.** Classrooms and laboratories with state-of-the-art teaching facilities.
- v.** Classrooms and laboratories with multimedia facilities.
- vi.** Robust ICT platform with Wi-Fi facility for 24/7 internet connectivity.
- vii.** Small-sized classrooms (maximum of 25 students per cohort).
- viii.** Professional certification (ICAN, ACCA) before completion of degree program, which just began in May 2020.
- ix.** Hostel accommodation with *ensuite* facilities (with two occupants per room).
- x.** Stable academic calendar.

Office of Directorate of Academic Programme (DAP) and Quality Assurance Directorate (QAD)

The DAP was formally established in 2018 with a director. This has assisted the university in gaining many miles including accreditation and verification exercises. DAP also monitors many academic processes. DAP and QAD were joined and run by the DAO from 2018 to 2020. However, in March 2020, an officer was appointed by the director of QAD and this has improved the quality assurance activities.

Staff Assessment by Students

In 2018, the university set up guidelines for assessing lecturers and this has continued till date. Forms are sent out electronically and sometimes in hard copies for students to assess their lecturers per course at the end of each semester. This has also improved the performance of some of the lecturers. The university is looking towards fine-tuning this process and making it better automated, better analyzed and better applied to staff assessment and staff training.

Accreditation and Verification of Programs

The university went through its first NUC accreditation in November 2018 and presented 9 programs in the process. At the end of it all the university obtained full accreditations for all the programs with scores ranging from 72% to 97%. Each team that visited was impressed by our outing, academic facilities, library, content, staffing and the students' conduct, environment among others. This gave the university a lot of encouragement and confidence to apply for new programs, including a College of Basic Medical Sciences. The verification of 11 new programs took place in October 2019 and again the university obtained full verification for them including Nursing, Physiotherapy, Medical Laboratory science, Anatomy, Physiology biotechnology and others. The BOT invested a lot on building and resources for all these exercises.

Quality Assurance Organogram and Core Activities

There is always periodic verification as to the level of achievement of the vision and the mission of the school. This has helped in maintaining the standard and also improving it. Chrisland University is barely four years old and in its fifth session and so has faced and is still facing teething problems. However, the university has not rested on its oars with respect to quality assurance. She has taken and is still taking steps to build in quality so as to fulfill its mission of being a world-class university.

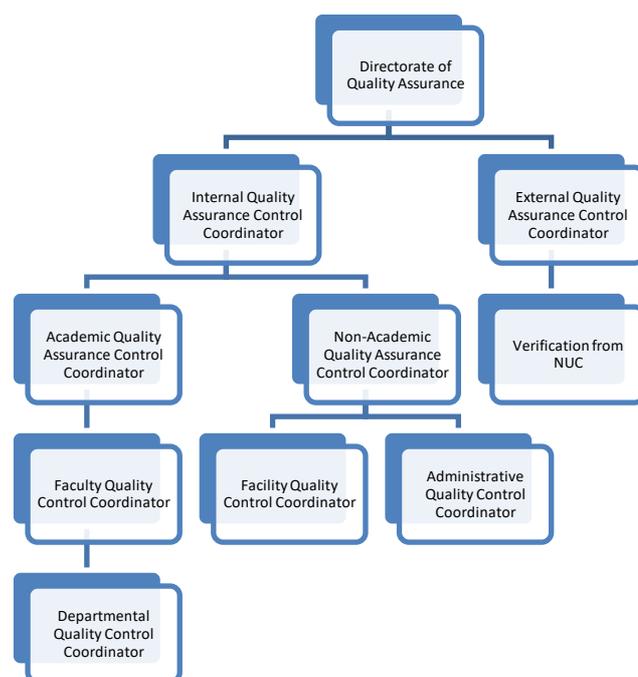


Figure 1: Quality Assurance Organogram for Chrisland University.

The university undergoes both external and internal quality assurance (QA) measures. The external measures include regulation by National University Commission (NUC) which ensures that universities meet certain standards such as establishment of Directorate of Academic Planning (DAP), Quality Assurance Directorate (QAD) among others. CLU established DAP office in 2018, has a quality assurance unit under the DAP's office with a coordinator. CLU went through NUC accreditation exercise in 2018 and obtained full accreditation in all the nine courses accredited. It also went through resource verification in 2018 and obtained full license for operation from the Federal Government of Nigeria. It also went through NUC verification of courses in November 2019 and has obtained approval for 8 new programs including that of a College of Basic Medical Sciences and Nursing.

Internally, the university has guidelines such as student handbook, staff handbook, and job description which govern staff and students' conduct. The university has set up various units, divisions, committees that serve to build and ensure quality in the system. Of note are the offices of DAP and QA which have been carrying out student-staff assessment since 2017/2018 session both manually and electronically till date. Unlike other universities, the university introduced the practice of engaging reputable external examiners from older and established universities to assess all examination questions right from year one till final year, a practice that is usually carried out for final year students. The NUC commended the university for this.

The university set up a curriculum committee to overhaul the curriculum to meet NUC and global standards. Staff appraisal forms have been developed and they are in use. Staff audit has been carried out three times in the past two years by various units and committees. The university has staff and student disciplinary committees which meet regularly to treat disciplinary cases in accordance with the rules and regulations. Staff development is a priority and so the university has either supported in part or in full staff conferences and workshops locally. A staff retreat on teaching and learning has been conducted and will always be reviewed.

Recruitment exercises are thorough because the university engages external experts and/or consultants (from older universities and other reputable professional bodies) as well as internal staff interviews. The university has computerized registration and results such that parents and students can view their results, class attendance, course assessment from anywhere online. The university has also put in place mechanisms to ensure that resources are

not wasted. One of the internal committees set up is to monitor the efficiency of the use of the university's resources. This includes the maintenance of the buildings, the cars and other university resources. It is not acceptable that of all the students enrolled in a university only very few complete their studies and graduate. The university ensures there is qualitative education and good learning environment that keep the students motivated to complete their university education.

It is also a matter of quality and quality assurance whether students are prepared in such a way that they can find jobs or be self-employed after graduation rather than becoming unemployed and can have successful careers and active lives as citizens. CLU products are of standard to compete anywhere in the world, standing out as the best and also being equipped to be self-employed with creative minds. This is enhanced by enriched certified training on entrepreneurship, enhanced by the newly established entrepreneurship center. All students undertake mandatory entrepreneurship courses from year of entry until graduation, making each student graduate with a certificate in entrepreneurship.

Partnership and Memoranda of Understanding (MOU)

The quality assurance sector in Chrisland University is anticipated to be occupied with efficient and effective professionals. This will simply take place by employing capable hands that can effectively handle the posts and deliver appropriately because professional hands are needed to effectively achieve its goal. This will help also the adequacy and efficiency of the sector, thereby leading to proper monitoring and control. While processing the establishment of a new College of Basic Medical sciences, MOUs were signed with some institutions including Federal Medical center (FMC) Abeokuta, Psychiatric Hospital Aro, Abeokuta, Holy Trinity Hospital Ikeja, Lagos, University College Hospital (UCH) Ibadan and Eye Hospital Eleta, Ibadan. Others are HP-Mirai-Claserra based in UAE and USA for an e-learning management system (LMS) called Claserra, Horizon Systems for computer training certification plus an ongoing establishment of engineering programs with US institutions.

Disruption in Learning Due to COVID-19

COVID-19 has come to break the learning barriers. Prior to this time, learning only took place in the four walls of the classroom, thus restricting who can teach and who can learn. If you could not travel physically, then you could not be a part of teaching and learning. Chrisland University was also part of this restricted system. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic, learning in the university has been thrown beyond the barriers of the physical walls. Now, both our lecturers and students do not have to be physically present in a location (on-campus) before learning can take place. With a properly equipped capacity building, the right tools and a learning management system (LMS), our lecturers can teach online.

It all began just before the lockdown in March 2020 and at the commencement of the second semester when the nation was confronted with the pandemic, which brought about closure of economic and social activities including teaching. Chrisland University, primed in innovative thinking refused to be defined by challenges and immediately swung into action and became the first institution in the country that embraced a holistic e-learning system thereby putting us ahead of the pack. The university engaged the services of a consultant in educational technology, carried out some training for staff and adopted products available such as Zoom, Google classroom, Microsoft teams, WhatsApp, e- laboratory tools among others.

This attempt in online teaching and learning was later buoyed by collaborative efforts between our university and some leading ICT organizations such as HP (Inc), Classera (R) and Mirai partners based in the USA and UAE respectively. We have participated in HP organized "Be-Online Education Program", while Classera provides an e-learning management system (LMS) for the university. Classera is an example of a learning management system (LMS)

adopted by Chrisland University for the purpose of teaching and learning. The following features are available to teach online using the Classera LMS:

1. Ability to upload materials – (pdf, word, power point, Excel, images, audio content, video content, etc.)
2. Ability to take live lectures, using Zoom or MS Teams
3. Ability to hold online discussions

However, when it was time to write exams, it became apparent that the usual technologies could not deliver full-proof examinations devoid of some form of malpractice or the other, hence, the need for a robust LMS. This was the biggest need that warranted the adoption of Classera – to conduct successful examinations online. Classera among several other features, can be used to conduct examinations. The following are its other features:

1. Use of seven different question types
2. Different examination types with the ability to upload content
3. Randomization of exam questions and answers
4. Time duration of each paper
5. Auto grading of students' answers with option to release scores immediately or at a later date
6. Ability to monitor students live while examination is ongoing using webcam
7. Exam platform locks once webcam detects an additional or unfamiliar face during the exam.

With this, the services of an educational technology consultant, some experts in ICT among the lecturers and the Classera team, several training courses were conducted online for lecturers and students to be able to conduct the examinations effectively online. Classera was used for second-semester and summer-system teaching and examinations leading to an MOU with the HP-Mirai-Classera group and adoption of blended learning, especially with the need to adhere to physical distancing and avoid over-crowding of classes. Worthy of note is that laboratory experiments (simulated and videos) were conducted from very rich open course wares available online. However, final year students were admitted in house to complete their projects. Classera has provided a robust system for online learning already adopted and was used to conduct the second-semester examinations and summer system lectures and examinations. Our lecturers are the heroes and have been fantastic in adopting and implementing the learning systems and have participated in several online training programs.

The online teaching and learning have been very rewarding in many ways

- i. It has helped to track students' attendance, submission of assignment, plagiarism, among others.
- ii. It provided the opportunity to use the best laboratories in the world for online practical sessions.
- iii. Students can listen and listen again to lectures and interactions even after classes.
- iv. Interaction between staff and student has been more effective than what obtains in face-to-face learning situation.
- v. It has exposed students and lecturers to richer resources online including information from Ivy League Institutions.
- vi. It has encouraged group/team-based activities by students.
- vii. It has enhanced discipline of staff and students.
- viii. It provided easy to carry out M&E for staff and students.
- ix. It enabled the university to adopt blended learning.
- x. It ensured that each student owns a laptop that enables the use of Classera with minimal teaching.

- xi. It necessitated the readjustment of mark allocation between course assessment/hands-on, assignments (more marks) and exams (less). From 30/70 to 40/60 for CA/exams.
- xii. It promoted case-based question setting.
- xiii. It necessitated the setting up of a committee on LMS for Monitoring and Evaluation.
- xiv. It brought about the use of a consultant on educational technology for regular training.

Some of the Challenges Faced with Online Learning

- i. Quality assurance
- ii. Technical know-how on setting questions – MCQ, essay, copying internet, plagiarism
- iii. Inadequacy in trained human resources
- iv. Poor Internet accessibility and connectivity
- v. Inadequate software packages for learning
- vi. Shortage or inadequate power supply
- vii. Poor technological know-how of teachers
- viii. Prohibitive cost on the part of students and staff.

New Directions

In order to ensure that the quality of the educational process is maintained to the standards it has set for itself, every institution must have a Quality Assurance Directorate (QAD) with an efficient director. All the units (faculties, departments, administrative) of the university must have an effective quality assurance sector, being controlled by a central quality assurance director. Much effort is being put in place to attain this in Chrisland University because the QAD is yet to be established as a stand-alone unit but the plans to do so are ongoing.

Challenges

It is essential to map out the challenges related to quality assurance in higher education. The major challenges are in the implementation of the quality assurance system and also the efficient control of the system. The implementation of the quality assurance system in the university has not been satisfactorily effective due to financial constraint. Finance is needed in order to employ professionals for its efficiency. Another major challenge is the quality control system. The proper verification of the process in order to achieve, maintain and improve on the standard aimed at is another major challenge. This is due to lack of adequate labor force.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) system in the university is still having teething problems. Adequate staff and facilities are needed for a robust ICT unit. This delays and complicates the process of registration and releasing results as well as other activities. More staff is needed in the registry to cope with the volume of work and relieve the overburdened workforce. Some units are not established.

Conclusion

Having a good quality assurance system in all sectors of the university (academic and non-academic), ensuring a good partnership with professionals in quality assurance, executing proper implementation and control system will help maintain and improve the standard and value of higher institution, thereby making it easy for it to achieve its aims and goals. Though this is what the current state is, many things are being put in place to move up to the global standard.

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Part C

SUCCESSFUL PRACTICES IN SETTING UP, MONITORING AND EVALUATING INTERNAL (INSTITUTIONAL) AND EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE UNITS/AGENCIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Chapter 20

Transforming Higher Education through Quality Assurance: Myth or Reality?

Phetolo Malau-Modiega

Introduction

If there is any common topic between learners, parents, employers, educational managers, legislators, and educationists, it is about the quality of education delivered by an education and training provider. Stakeholders prioritize quality as a determinant factor in their decision to choose which higher education and training institution they can do business with. Multiple constituents, such as students, corporations, government, and the public, and all other stakeholders need institutions to account to them at different levels (Eaton, 2011), political, legal, bureaucratic, professional, market, parental, student, fiscal, and public (Becker, Renehan, Wiestling & Glouner, 2008). “A quality higher education system with high rates of participation is a necessary requirement for improvements in living standards and the broad distribution of those improvements” (Williams, Rassenfosse, Jensen & Marginson 2013 p. 599), however, prudence should be exercised to ensure that the quantity and quality of the graduates are balanced. Along with quality (OECD, 2019), equity is a fundamental attribute of effective higher education systems and cuts across indicators at all stages of higher education system performance, from input to output.

Quality is a tormenting challenge that no education provider can afford to ignore or take lightly, otherwise one risks withdrawal of license to operate, at a learning-program level or institutional level. Institutions of higher education face social and economic pressures to run as engines of national and global development, therefore, accountability to different stakeholders can no longer be regarded as interference in the academic space. Accountability, improvement, and transparency of operations of a program are related to the quality of the academics who deliver the program, and the quality of the learner: the inputs (Modiega, 2015). An effective quality management system is likely to improve the institutional capacity directly, leading to an upgrade of educational efficiency (Gorea, & Saharov, 2015), because, according to Daromes & Ng, (2015), setting of standards, procedures, planning, and evaluation of activities have the same characteristics of a management control system.

Interest in the quality of higher education institutions in Botswana was stimulated by increasing public cost, rapid growth in the number of registered public and private tertiary education institutions, the role of higher education as a catalyst for transforming Botswana into a knowledge-based economy, and the commodification of higher education (Nhundu, 2008). The role of higher education can be summarized as “instruction, scientific research and public service” (Sari, Firat, and Karaduman, 2016 p.327) hence its importance as a contributor to national development.

Survival in a competitive knowledge society dictates that the quality of higher education provided should be closely monitored to ensure that graduates fit in the contemporary society. Gunay (2011), indicated that the purpose of higher education is to train graduates for sustainable employment and prepare them to live as active citizens in a democratic society. Williams et al., (2013) agree with Gunay (2011) that “a good higher education system should provide the nation with a well-trained and educated workforce that meets the country’s needs, provides a range of educational opportunities for people with different interests, and skills and contributes to national and world knowledge” (p. 599). Thus, if properly executed by both the regulators and the institutions, the quality assurance system would contribute towards building a prosperous nation.

Quality assurance, being the process of monitoring educational quality, is used as a statutory tool in higher education alongside other regulatory tools such as policies, rules and regulations, and other guiding instruments (Westerheijden, Stensaker, and Rora, 2007). Since one of the economic responsibilities of higher education is to meet the increasingly market-driven, knowledge-based economy and to address the pressures of economic growth, change, and development that is evident in the country (Republic of Botswana, 2008), the government established a regulatory body, the Tertiary Education Council (2003-2013) through the Tertiary Education Act (Republic of Botswana, 1999). The vision of the Tertiary Education Council (TEC) was “to be a leader in transforming Botswana to a globally competitive knowledge society through tertiary education” (Tertiary Education Council, 2010, p. 12). Further investigations are necessary to determine whether this vision was achieved or not.

The TEC was established based on the recommendations of the revised National Policy on Education that pointed out the need for coordination and orderly development of tertiary education (Republic of Botswana, 1994). By the Tertiary Education Act, the Council was established, too, among others, to regulate the tertiary education sector (the Republic of Botswana, 1999). The Tertiary Education Policy of 2008 (Republic of Botswana) defines tertiary education as “all formal education program beyond the level of senior secondary embracing technical and occupation-specific programs and those with a strong theoretical foundation through to advanced research qualifications” (p.16). The World Bank (2013) corroborates this definition that tertiary education refers to all post-secondary education offered in public and private tertiary institutions such as colleges, technical training institutes, community colleges, nursing schools, research laboratories, centers of excellence and distance learning centers. The TEC was modeled along with other comparable bodies around the globe, therefore higher education is implied whenever there is a mention of tertiary education in this chapter.

The quality assurance process in higher education institutions in Botswana was first done by the Ministry of Education, later transferred to the university of Botswana for affiliated institutions which were mainly public institutions. Private institutions were, before the government extended students’ sponsorship to them, responsible for their own internal and external quality assurance, quite a risky undertaking. Shin (2018) also noted that in Korea, the first quality assurance systems were not fully developed as a modern form of quality assurance because the quality assessment was un-standardized and conducted by the Ministry of Education, not by an independent agency. In Finland, the Ministry of Education handed over the quality assurance responsibility to the Finnish Education Evaluation Center in 1995 (Ala-Vähälä, & Saarinen, 2013), an independent government agency that evaluates education in Finland and the work of Finnish education providers from early childhood education to higher education.

To execute the mandate, the TEC facilitated the development of internal quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms within institutions, simultaneously developing external quality assurance instruments. The standards, procedures, planning, and evaluation of activities were meant to encourage, enable, or sometimes coerce stakeholders to do their best to achieve the

institution's vision, mission, and interest (Daromes & Ng, 2015). The TEC was first preoccupied with the registration of institutions because of a deluge of applications from prospective providers. In exercising this mandate, TEC opted for a developmental approach that allowed registered institutions to demonstrate potential for a sustainable provision and a commitment to gradual infrastructural development and the establishment of systems, processes, and procedures. The developmental approach proved to be risky because some recommendations made during the registration process were not acted upon timeously.

Throughout the registration process and the period thereafter, TEC closely monitored registered institutions by making numerous site visits to measure institutional progress in fulfilling commitments made at registration. As time went on, the focus was shifted to issues of quality assurance and quality enhancement, administered through program accreditation and institutional audits. Program accreditation is "a process of external quality review created by higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities, and programs for quality assurance and quality improvement" (Eaton, 2006, p.2) and it can be considered as one of the most prominent reform issues in higher education to provide quality monitoring, accountability, consumer protection and mediation (Eaton, 2011; Teelken & Lomas, 2009). The Tertiary Education Act (Republic of Botswana, 1999) directed that program accreditation should be carried out in private institutions only and the learning program should undergo the accreditation process after being offered for a minimum of one year. This law prevented the TEC from carrying out program accreditation in public institutions, which was disadvantageous considering the benefits. Kemenade and Hardjono (2010) affirm that accreditation is used around the world, mainly for accountability purposes.

Higher education involves various stakeholders with varying degrees of understanding of core academic issues that need specialists. "The vibrancy and value of accreditation must be protected" (Eaton, Fryshman, Hope, et al., 2005, p. 44). Accreditation agencies should be careful about how disclosed information is used, for improvement or punishment. Kuh (2007), Castiglia and Turi (2011), and Yüksel (2013) cautioned that standardized accountability requirements might disregard the uniqueness and complexity of the education provided in different institutions and impact negatively on the process of higher education by providing uniform reporting templates which might be more problematic than beneficial because they could be used to rank institutions. Further on, studies have revealed that education systems cannot use a uniform program accreditation system (Burden-Leahy, 2005; Lomas & Nicholls, 2005), but rather, a general model of external quality assurance provides a starting point from which countries can make deviations (Billing, 2004). Thus, ideas may be adapted from international models, but contextual differences and potential impacts must be carefully considered (Nguyen, Oliver & Priddy, 2009) to ensure that the system is relevant to the user country.

Botswana government rationalized functions within the education sector and in the process, discovered overlaps in the mandates of some envisaged organizations. The mandates of TEC and Botswana Training Authority, which was later transformed to Botswana Qualifications Authority (BQA), were hence harmonized. This process caused the mandate of quality assurance in higher education, managed by the TEC, to be transferred to the BQA through the Botswana Qualifications Authority Act of 2013 (Republic of Botswana, 2013). The transition was made in 2014. The BQA was authorized to provide for and maintain a National Credit and Qualifications Framework, coordinate the education, training, and skills development quality assurance system for general education, technical and vocational education and training, and higher education to ensure lifelong learning (Republic of Botswana, 2013). Thus, the mandate was broadened to cover the entire education and training system to avoid fragmentation, promote a common quality assurance platform, and facilitate prudent resource utilization.

The transition of the quality assurance system in higher education to BQA was well managed in that institutions continued to operate under the TEC regulations although under the BQA regime (Republic of Botswana, 2013), in addition, some key officers who were manning the

higher education offices in the TEC were transferred with the mandate of the BQA for continuity purposes. Under this transition, as Westerheijden et al. (2007) observed from different reforms, the government reduced direct or authority-based tools, and increasingly used more advanced policy tools with more emphasis on capacity building, accountability-oriented, and quality enhancement.

The criteria covered under registration and accreditation for one to qualify as an education and training provider are legal status and name; ownership; vision, mission, and strategic planning; governance; management; scope of accreditation; quality management; records management system; financial viability and management; human resources; physical resources; safety, health, and the environment; admissions, access, and equity; protection of enrolled learners; learning program development and delivery; learning program review and evaluation; work-placement /internship; assessment and moderation; learner support services; research; internationalization and corporate social responsibility (Botswana Qualifications Authority, 2016). For learning program accreditation, the criteria cover global trends in so far as the accreditation of learning program is concerned, among the criteria are aligned to the National Credit and Qualifications Framework; content and delivery; modes of delivery; assessment, and moderation strategies; resources; benchmarking, comparability, articulation and referencing (Botswana Qualifications Authority, 2016). The criteria cover a broad range of academic and non-activities within the institution and are used for quality assurance purposes.

The criteria used to assure quality in higher education institutions in Botswana are comparable to those in other countries. This is so because extensive benchmarking was done during the development of the instruments. It is also important to acknowledge Botswana's participation in most of the quality assurance continental initiatives, to ensure that she is not left behind as the harmonization process progresses. The CHEA International Quality Group (Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2015) developed quality principles that are consistent with existing international standards and guidelines to promote a shared understanding of educational quality, partly addressing globalization within higher education. The principles focus on providers, students, society, government, accountability, the role of quality assurance and accreditation bodies, and quality and change. A closer look at the standards used in Botswana addresses these principles, by design, to ensure global competitiveness.

Virtually all development players now concur that for any meaningful and sustainable economic growth to be realized and sustained, higher education must be centrally placed in the development agenda of nations. Countries are trying to create the strongest economies of the world based on knowledge, therefore, according to Sari, Firat, and Karaduman, (2016, p. 327) they “impose important duties towards higher education institutions which is the source of knowledge.” Building a higher education system is no longer a luxury but imperative for national development and global competitiveness. The use of global network systems should be more prevalent for the effects of quality assurance studies in the world (Sari, Firat, and Karaduman, 2016). Coalition bodies like European Networks of Information Centers (ENIC), National Academic Recognition Information Centers (NARIC); are responsible for providing information about foreign qualifications. European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) was established to encourage collaboration in the areas of quality education and assurance among practitioners are necessary.

The African Union, an organization resolute to unite and see Africa as an affluent continent, is driving Africa's Agenda 2063. Agenda 2063 sets a collective vision and roadmap for transforming Africa through immediate action to “catalyze education and skills revolution and actively promote science, technology, research, and innovation, to build knowledge, human capital, capabilities, and skills to drive innovations for the African century” (African Union Commission, 2015, p. 14) and is “a call to action to all Africans and people of African descent, to take personal responsibility for the destiny of the continent and as the primary agents of

change and transformation” (p. 13). The Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25) is the framework for transforming education and training systems in Africa, as called for in Agenda 2063 (African Union, 2017), and addresses Sustainable Development Goal 4, quality education.

Various remarkable efforts to assure quality in higher education within the continent are underway: the African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN), the East African Higher Education Quality Assurance Network (EAQAN), the East African Community Partner States (EAC), and the Southern African Quality Assurance Network (SAQAN) has been set up to avail collaboration opportunities among quality assurance practitioners. The Harmonization of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation Initiative (HAQAA), funded by the European Union in partnership with the African Union, was established to support the development of a harmonized quality assurance and accreditation system at the institutional level, national, regional and pan-African continental level (HAQAA Initiative, 2017).

The Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF), endorsed by the African Union Commission is an overriding framework for some commitments related to quality assurance and consists of several tools and action lines such as African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA) and the African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM), (HAQAA Initiative, 2017). These tools and frameworks will eventually be safeguarded and implemented by a Continental Accreditation Agency (HAQAA Initiative, 2017) whose general mandate will be to coordinate, promote, and facilitate harmonization of quality assurance and accreditation systems in Africa.

Expectations in Forming the Quality Assurance System

Different countries have specific agendas relative to their economies when forming a quality assurance agency, however, “there is a general agreement that their job should entail promoting and upholding public and stakeholder confidence in the quality of higher education institutions, program, and academic standards...” (Nhundu, 2008, p.13). The CHEA succinctly puts it that they are “a national advocate and voice for promoting academic quality through accreditation” (Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2019). Botswana established the TEC; a quality assurance agency to be responsible for policy coordination, planning and development, funding, and quality assurance of education (Republic of Botswana, 1999), the same mandate was transferred to BQA.

The Tertiary Education Act of 1999 noted that quality could mainly be assured through a deliberate effort to ensure that quality assurance procedures are in place in all tertiary education institutions (CAP.57:04 Part II, sub-Section 3-5). To facilitate the process of quality assurance with respect to the core functions of the institutions, the TEC developed the External Quality Assurance and Internal Quality Assurance frameworks. The quality assurance frameworks embodied agreed standards and criteria to be used as touchstones, to evaluate the effectiveness of institutional policies, processes, programs, and practices as they pertain to the overarching drive to ensure their contributions to the quality of tertiary education in Botswana.

The intent of forming a quality assurance system was partly to monitor the quality of education provided to the nation, to achieve a coherent focused education system that addresses educational excellence, operational excellence, institutional excellence, and partnership excellence. Providers of higher education are required to develop formal policies and procedures to assure and monitor the quality and standards of their courses, programs, and awards. The goal of institutional quality assurance is to develop an internal quality culture, where quality is a primary focus of the institution and where quality permeates all institutional undertakings. In their study on quality assurance in Romanian technical higher education in line with the Bologna Process, Liliana-Luminița, Anca, and Iuliana (2014), observed that most

of the universities that they targeted focused on aligning their management with the legal requirements set by the Bologna Process.

The quality assurance principles work at the optimum level when institutions take ownership and become accountable to stakeholders by building a positive quality culture, but not through enforcement of legislation. The foundation of the institution builds an unwritten culture that ends up being a mandatory regulation; therefore, institutions should take responsibility for their productivity through evaluation and continuous improvement. The unwritten culture is usually conservative in nature and will oppose any innovation or major changes of management, although major societal changes force even institutions such as Harvard University to go through a continuous adaptation process which is done through a managerial system and an adequate quality policy (Todorut, 2013). "Quality is a prerequisite for the credibility of the tertiary education system. To continue to be alive to quality issues in the pursuit of their mandate, institutions on their part should be committed to ongoing review..." (Ramatsui, Kupe & Molutsi, 2008, p.44). Institutions should build quality assurance principles into their daily operations to uphold a quality culture.

The values of a quality culture are derived from the general universal principles of "quality management: customer focus, leadership commitment, engagement of people, process approach, improvement, evidence-based decision-making, and relationship management" (Botswana Bureau of standards, 2015, p. 8). These values apply to both academic and non-academic institutional activities, to both internal and external clients and the general stakeholders, with students as major customers. Institutions should ensure that they focus on satisfying the key customer, the student, in all operations with the understanding that, no students, no institution of learning. Todorut (2013) states that the re-establishment of a normal balance between the management of quality and institutional culture is done through the implementation of new ways of thinking, the implementation of strategic management, and the implementation of quality management. Hanson, (2003) expounds that implementation of quality management and assurance will force the institutions to move from a culture based on mediocrity and bureaucracy to a culture that aims at operational excellence.

The introduction of the quality assurance system saw an increase in the number of private providers and more opportunities for higher education in Botswana. However, there is a paradigm shift across the world to move from concentration on increasing enrollment to improving the quality of teaching and learning at the higher level (Bray & Martin, 2003). Opening access has caused an uncomfortably high enrollment that inevitably compromises quality; unfortunately, an increase in access cannot be ignored because it also caters to population growth and internationalization. It is therefore judicious to reflect and analyze where improvements are necessary to realize the fruits of quality in higher education.

As stated in the Botswana National Human Resource Development Strategy, the country aspires to make a transition from reliance on natural resources to human resources (the Republic of Botswana, 2009). Countries such as Australia, Finland, Mauritius, and New Zealand have prospered partly because they invested in the development of their people, besides a focus on research and innovation, information and communications technology, economic incentives, and institutional regime (the Republic of Botswana, 2009). The intent of forming a quality assurance system was partly to expedite the transformation of the country from being resource-based to a knowledge-based economy. The Tertiary Education Policy, "Towards a Knowledge Society" (the Republic of Botswana, 2008), identified higher education as one of the vehicles that Botswana can use to successfully transit from being a resource-driven economy to a diversified economy that is characterized by a highly skilled knowledge-intensive service sector.

The Reality on the Ground/Impact

The quality assurance system in higher education in Botswana is comparable to international practice. The process covers registration and accreditation as a provider, registration as an awarding body, registration of qualifications, accreditation of learning programs, evaluation of lecturer qualifications, registration, and accreditation of assessors and moderators, and auditing to ensure compliance to registration and accreditation requirements (Botswana Qualifications Authority, 2016). Most of the regulations to guide these processes were published in 2016; however, opinion on the impact is grounded on experience from TEC, BQA, the university environment, and international involvement.

Heads of African States, Botswana included, have committed to the CESA 16-25 strategic objective number nine, “revitalize and expand tertiary education, research, and innovation to address continental challenges and promote global competitiveness” (African Union Commission, 2017, p. 19). The objective expounds on the resolve by Africa to strengthen debates, activities and innovative interventions for strengthening education and training towards “Africa We Want”: accordingly, countries must comply with the demands of the continental initiatives. The policymakers must be accompanied by the implementers in such high-level meetings for ownership of the initiatives and immediate uptake.

Botswana Government expends more than 50% of its budget on education, with the bulk going to higher education, the expectation being that transformation of the education system will expedite the trajectory from a resource-based economy to a knowledge-based economy. The quality assurance sector was thus formed partly to ensure that education provided to the nation met the requirements of the changing environment. It remains to be established if the country has realized expected returns from the expenditure made so far, however, the rate of graduate unemployment negates the level of independence and entrepreneurship capability instilled upon the graduates.

Formal policies and regulations for effecting quality assurance in most systems are established by governments. Liliانا-Luminița, Anca, and Iuliana (2014) posit that concerns about the development and quality assurance of higher education result in various policies and quality assurance presupposes the existence of specific institutional bodies, standards, models and external assessment procedures. It is unequivocal that the quality assurance culture blossoms when the processes and mechanisms are developed and used regularly to assess, monitor, guarantee, sustain and/or enhance the quality of both academic and non-academic delivery within an institution. Moreover, the higher education provider must prove conformity to the external quality assurance system and standards.

The Botswana higher education quality assurance system was, right from the TEC (2003-2013) to the BQA (2014–present) mainly designed for a face-to-face mode of delivery and learning. The same system was however used to register and accredit Botswana Open University (BOU), a comprehensive national distance education institution, without much noticeable alignment of the quality assurance system to its nature of delivery. BOU was established to increase opportunities for higher education especially for the out-of-school youth and adults using open and distance learning methodology with no or minimal face-to-face. Thus, BOU is an essential institution in the country because it provides flexible learning environments, enabling people to realize their potential through life-long learning opportunities, at their pace and interest. This is likely to be a high-risk area; it suggests possible inadequate evaluation of the curriculum development and delivery process as well as the suitability of resources. The quality assurance system must be designed to cater to different modes of delivery to enable relevant auditing, monitoring, and evaluation for compliance with the registration requirements.

Program accreditation is a primary mechanism for assuring policymakers and the public that graduates will be globally competitive. It ascertains the relevancy and currency of the program, promotes improvement, accountability, and transparency of delivery and management of a program. Globally, the program accreditation process begins with the production of a self-

evaluation (self-study) report by the institution, followed by a site visit by experts selected by the regulatory body to validate the claims made within the report, culminating in a decision to accredit or not to accredit a program (Council on Higher Education, 2004; Eaton, 2006; Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2013), together with recommendations for improvement, unless in a worst-case scenario where the program is rejected. This process is applied to programs that are already running.

For programs that have not been introduced in the system, the education and training provider applies for accreditation following the set guidelines. One of the key considerations is that the program should lead to a qualification or part qualification that is registered on the National Credit and Qualifications Framework. Shaw (2019) submits that higher education institutions are mandated to follow the National Qualifications Framework and to meet standards of evaluation, while their autonomy to design programs of study is increased. Individual institutions are free to develop programs as long as they satisfy the regulatory requirements.

The quality assurance process should contribute to the transformation of the economy. It is a reality that well-implemented systems will have a positive impact on the economy. However, several challenges defeat the necessary impact of quality assurance within institutions, breeding risks that are likely to defeat the purpose, therefore, turning the quality assurance process into a myth. Most of the risks could be avoided or minimized. Registered institutions should, as part of compliance to regulatory requirements, have a quality assurance wing staffed with trained personnel otherwise quality maintenance and enhancement will just be talked without action due to lack of internal mechanisms and institutional structures for quality assurance, or the structures are there but not well incorporated into the strategic management of the institution, therefore, uptake and ownership very low.

The process of quality assurance should be operationalized within well-set structures that allow communication and transparency for continuous improvement of the education system to prevail. Lack of professional administration of the quality assurance process can render the process inconsequential, tantamount to waste of resources. Possible factors and risks are presented in the Table 1.

Table 1: Possible factors that can promote or impede the quality assurance process

Quality assurance point of reference	Expected impact/output	Risks	Possible mitigating factors
Registration and accreditation of the institution: The baseline of the quality assurance framework.	The applicant should prove that they have enough relevant resources and expertise to provide quality education in accordance with the National Credit and Qualifications Framework and the requirements of the National Human Resource Development Strategy. Evidence of global competitiveness and comparability to institutions of the same caliber should be presented.	The applicant proves on paper that they can provide education and training for a defined scope of education and training by indicating the inputs and the outputs. Applicants are never sure that they will be granted a license to operate; therefore, it is risky on their part to gather the necessary resources. On the other hand, it will be risky for the regulator to register the applicant without certainty of viability.	The applicant must be given a timeframe within which to gather necessary resources before they can start operating. The applicant must not be allowed to operate while there are outstanding issues at the registration stage. The registration requirements should be given weightage and 'pass range' so that the applicant can gauge themselves before submission as to whether they qualify or not. This might reduce submissions.
Registration of qualifications on the National Credit and Qualifications Framework.	The qualifications should be globally competitive so that the graduates fit in the global economy. International and local mobility of students should be enhanced. Qualifications should address the needs of both the local and global economies.	The institutions go through the pain of developing qualifications that end up being national qualifications, thus once on the NCQF they belong to the regulator and any provider can use them. This compromises the institution's niche area or uniqueness that they wanted to advance and separate themselves from the rest.	No learning program can be offered if it does not satisfy a qualification registered on the NCQF. The regulatory body should be cognizant of the skills demand locally and globally, therefore they should engage qualification developers to develop the qualifications to rightfully own them.
Accreditation of the learning program	Promotes the principles of the provision and enhancement of the teaching and learning process, curricular content, assessment and feedback, research, and cooperation with industry. Should address human resource needs of the country and the global community. Cross-border providers of higher education whether accredited in-home country or not, go through the accreditation	Inadequate local human resources to assess curricular content, therefore external assistance should be engaged, which might be costly. In some instances, the travel cost is transferred to the applicant. The engagement of lecturers from competitor institutions causes a lot of uneasiness among institutions.	Accreditation of programs before being offered deters the institution from operating with insufficient resources. Qualified personnel who are knowledgeable in the fields to be assessed should be trained to undertake accreditation. To promote harmonization, a database of experts in Africa should be developed and agreements made as to how collaboration and

Quality assurance point of reference	Expected impact/output	Risks	Possible mitigating factors
	process before they can offer the program to ascertain conformity to local standards.	Non-consideration of emerging issues can render the program irrelevant. Can be subjective if not carefully monitored.	engagement with external bodies can be effected and monitored. Participation in international assessments such as AQRM will be beneficial to both the provider and the quality assurer.
Audit of the institution	A detailed report of the audit findings with commendations and recommendations for improvement should result. Delay in implementing the recommendations is likely to have a negative impact on the learners who are on strength because then their learning would be compromised by identified and unidentified challenges such as limited resources, human or physical.	The institution is expected to come up with an action plan on how it will address the shortcomings. If timely follow-ups are not done, shortcomings can go unresolved, and this will be disadvantageous to the students on strength.	Recommendations can be addressed within different time frames. Debarring the institution from enrolling in a program with inadequate resources might serve as a panacea to the timely execution of corrective actions. The audit cycle should be adhered to.
Terminology	A glossary of terms should be provided. As the continent harmonizes quality assurance,	Different interpretations of the quality assurance terms can breed misinterpretation of concepts.	The harmonization of quality assurance in Africa should develop a glossary of terms to promote common understanding.
Human resources	Procure and retain qualified instructors and other service providers. Recognize and award high performance. Up-skill trainable employees.	Inadequate supply and/or use of under-qualified staff, lecturers with content but no pedagogical training might compromise the teaching and learning process. High mobility in search of job satisfaction and a motivating work environment can affect continuity and productivity.	Continuous professional development for staff members is essential to address emerging issues. The institution must do regular stakeholder surveys to find out the needs of employees and engage them to come up with relevant solutions.
Teaching and learning performance	Student throughput and employability of graduates are used as yardsticks for the quality of provision. Outcome-based education can promote the relevancy of the qualification.	A large number of graduates may waste national resources if they do not meet the demands of the national and even global economy. The institution might be measured on output	When analyzing institutional performance, compare inputs against output and assess value addition. Pedagogical training should be entrenched within the academic area; this includes assessment

Quality assurance point of reference	Expected impact/output	Risks	Possible mitigating factors
	The graduates should satisfy the graduate profile of a qualification. The lecturers should employ relevant methods for different modules.	without considering the quality of the input. Lecturers without relevant training are likely to jeopardize the quality of teaching and learning.	methods and industry attachment where relevant. Relevant resources should be provided for effective delivery.
Rapid growth and large enrollments	Overstretched teaching and learning facilities such as laboratories and libraries compromise the quality of education.	Student: teacher ratio compromised. Student academic and welfare support services not coping with the enrollment.	The regulator should enforce the student-teacher ratio and get institutional returns and learner records for assessment.
Research output	Research performance is measured by publications and their impact. Action research to inform practice is also vital.	Lecturers become overwhelmed with conflicting demands if their teaching loads exceed the recommended one. Exploration of better ways of delivery is hindered due to insufficient time.	Employ adequate staff so that all areas of a higher institute of learning are addressed. Higher education institutions should provide solutions to problems, and this demands research.
Cooperate Social responsibility (CSR)	Deliberate effort to build relationships with stakeholders, communities, and industry should be part of the mission of the institution.	Weak or non-existent structures for engagement between the institutions and the communities in which they are based, therefore institution not impacting the community where it is based.	Reporting structures should emphasize evidence of CSR activities. Departments should be encouraged to develop CSR activities and consolidate within the institution for ease of management and cooperation.
The credibility of the accreditation or quality assurance agency	Accreditation agencies should be periodically assessed by external auditors. Staff members of the agency should be trained on quality assurance to enable them to execute the mandate professionally.	Employees of the regulatory body without relevant expertise cannot adequately manage the external experts and this might breed resistance from the institutions.	Cooperation between accrediting bodies, tertiary education institutions and society should be strengthened. The harmonization of quality assurance in Africa should be expedited.

Thus, awareness of the benefits of quality assurance to the achievement of the strategy should be owned by institutional leadership. The Association of African Universities and other relevant bodies host international conferences and workshops that address contemporary issues in higher education. Several workshops are held, such as the International Conference on Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Africa (ICQAHEA); Quality Assurance for Higher Education Leaders (QAHEL); Conference of Rectors, Vice-Chancellors, and Presidents of African Universities (COREViP); and Workshop, Legal Issues, Quality Assurance Regulatory Frameworks and Credentials Evaluation in Higher Education Conference & Workshop. The African Students Alumni Forum is also another initiative that could benefit institutional management. Active participation of leadership in these conferences will benefit the institutions and can assist in the improvement of internal quality management.

Institutional governance is a fundamental issue in quality assurance, it is a precursor to the creation of an appropriate learning environment that promotes and is committed to quality. It is vital that tertiary institutions have the autonomy to carry out their core business and this can be guaranteed by separation of powers between institutional ownership and academic authority. Institutional autonomy underpins academic freedom that leads to scholarship and academic excellence. The integrity of academic decision-making in higher education is protected and assured when the institution's autonomy is not compromised by corporate or commercial interests. This independence is a guarantor of the autonomy of the academic authority to exercise professional responsibility for academic development, quality assurance, enhancement, and scholarship. In most private institutions, the ownership or trusteeship of the institution exercises direct authority and influence over academic decision-making. Although "governing bodies are established with a clear mandate for academic development, quality assurance, and decision-making, the reality on the ground is institutional ownership, which may be primarily concerned with commercial rather than academic interests of the institution, giving direction."

Internal and external collaboration with other regulatory and professional bodies is essential to ensure that the graduates will be suitable for absorption into the market. Some professions such as medical, engineering and law require prior registration and seasonal renewal of the license to practice. The academic transcript to ascertain the credibility of the degree becomes very essential in this instance. The same professionals registered by expert bodies also require registration with the education accreditation agency and this scenario is also applicable to the suitability of learning programs. To reduce fatigue on lecturers and institutions, it would be ideal for all the relevant bodies to collaborate and have a comprehensive quality assurance process that covers the scope from training to the workplace.

To promote deeper learning, collaboration, and communication in the learning community, the role of learners, the lecturer, pedagogical design, assessment, content characteristics, and organization of the digital learning environment (Blau, Shamir-Inbal & Avdiel, 2020) are all very important. The world is going digital, the advent of a recent pandemic, COVID-19, where people were 'locked down' in their homes, should act as a wake-up call to institutions to consider blended modes of delivery so that teaching and learning continue both onsite and offsite.

The primary responsibility for quality in higher education lies with the institutions and not quality assurance bodies. The institution, staff, and students have the collective responsibility for the maintenance and enhancement of the quality of academic programs and awards, and improvement of the quality of the student learning experience. Providers of higher education must be willing and ready to assure students, employers, and the public of the quality of their programs, and services and demonstrate their commitment to the provision of quality education by instituting effective internal quality assurance mechanisms. Regional and international students can be attracted to an institution that can provide credible and quality programs and awards that can compete with the best in the world. Furthermore, in a globalized

world, a quality higher education system that is well-connected internationally facilitates the introduction of new ideas, and fosters trade and other links with foreign countries, through the movement of students and researchers across national frontiers. A quality education system is current, it addresses contemporary issues.

Conclusion

It is a reality that quality assurance plays an important role in transforming the higher education system, right from setting standards to regulation and monitoring. The key to the entire process is that the institutions should take ownership of building a quality culture, for both academic and non-academic delivery to promote institutional excellence. The quality assurance system has greatly impacted the provision of quality education in Botswana. It remains to be proven that the quality assurance system has impacted the transformation of the country in a significantly positive way between the years 2003 to 2019. The quality assurance model might be suitable for all forms of delivery, remote, blended, and face-to-face, the challenge then would be: do we have relevant expertise to assess the effectiveness of all modes of teaching and learning? This should be one of the concerns as the world is forced to consider remote learning.

It would be informative to gauge the impact of external quality assurance on internal quality assurance through a study on how many and how often higher education institutions in Botswana carry out formal self-evaluations that are followed up by action on corrective action plans. A credit-bearing training course in quality assurance would be ideal and should be a requirement for staff in every quality assurance unit in institutions. The regulators should also go through international assessment through collaboration. A register of regulatory bodies in Africa should be maintained indicating the number of trained personnel and the size of the education system. Higher education will hence contribute towards building the Africa we want, through the provision of quality education.

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Chapter 21

Strengthening Quality Assurance Practices in Nigerian Higher Education

Ruqayyatu Ahmed Rufa'i

Introduction

Every society, in recognition of the importance of education to its growth, seeks to develop an educational system aimed at transforming citizens into assets to support national development. The backbone of such a system is the existence of a quality assurance system that ensures the development and maintenance of minimum standards upon which the processes of education must adhere. For education to be relevant to social needs, the implementation must adhere to minimum quality assurance requirements of delivery at all levels – from the basic to tertiary levels. This paper provides a brief overview of the challenges of quality assurance in Nigerian education with reference to the university sector. It is based on observations and experiences of the Nigerian university environment over the years as well as some review of relevant literature. It looks at the shortcomings of the current approach and elaborates on the need to strengthen efforts at ensuring quality outcomes through an improved commitment to components of quality assurance.

When Nigeria attained political independence from the British colonial rule in 1960, it had two universities located at Ibadan and Nsukka, two polytechnics at Yaba and Kaduna and a college of education at Kontagora. The governments at both the federal and regional levels recognized the importance of higher education towards attaining developmental objectives in such a way that it will enhance the development of the economy. The Elliot and Ashby Commissions of 1943 and 1959 respectively, highlighted the importance of higher education (Dada, Wunti and Martin, 2017) and in the light of this, after independence, attention was, therefore, given to the establishment of higher educational institutions to complement efforts at lower levels of education and support the development of high-skilled manpower. By 1962, there were three additional universities in Ile-Ife, Zaria, and Lagos. These played roles in helping to mentor and develop other universities between 1970 and 1975 at Benin-City (1970), Kano (1975), Calabar (1975), Ilorin (1975), Jos (1975), Maiduguri (1975), Sokoto (1975) and Port Harcourt (1970) (NUC, 2020). As of 1992, there were a total of 36 universities, (25 owned by the Federal Government of Nigeria and 11 by state governments).

In line with the commitment to supporting national competitive advantage, the first generation of Nigerian universities was at the top of their game in relation to seeking to provide world-class facilities which led to commensurate production of world-class graduates. Apart from recruiting quality academic staff from different parts of the world, there was also a commitment to the development of human resources involving the training of young academics at the best universities across the globe. The commitment to excellence also saw the development of infrastructure, provision of teaching and learning resources as well as the provision of a conducive environment for learning. The outcomes of the commitment of the universities at that time are reflected in the products of the universities now being major players in different fields of the human endeavor around the world (Akinterinwa, 2020).

To meet the increasing demand for higher education, the federal and State governments continued to establish universities and other higher institutions of learning. As a result of further liberalization of the sector by the federal government, non-state actors are also becoming actively involved in the establishment and administration of universities as well as

other higher educational institutions. In universities, for example, as of July 2020, the number of universities in Nigeria was as follows:

1. Federal	44
2. State	48
3. Private	79
4. TOTAL	171

Source: National Universities Commission, 2020

Approaches to Quality Assurance in Nigerian Higher Education over the Years

Okebukola (2012) points out quality assurance as an umbrella for activities designed to improve the quality of input, process, and output of the education system. Involved in this are monitoring, assessment and evaluation. As part of the commitment to quality education, the federal government established regulatory agencies dedicated to setting and maintaining standards in the sector. The National Universities Commission (NUC) was established in 1962 and has the following functions:

- a. Granting approval for all academic programs run in Nigerian universities;
- b. Granting approval for the establishment of all higher educational institutions offering degree programs in Nigerian universities;
- c. Ensuring quality assurance of all academic programs offered in Nigerian universities; and
- d. Acting as a channel for all external support to the Nigerian universities.

In line with these functions, the commission developed minimum academic standards (MAS) in 1990 that serve as a guide for the establishment of academic programs in Nigerian universities (Akomolafe and Adesua, 2019). The commission conducts accreditation of academic programs, the objectives of which include:

- a. Ensure that the provisions of the MAS are attained, maintained, and enhanced
- b. Assure employers and other members of the community that Nigerian graduates of all academic programs have attained an acceptable level of competency in their areas of specialization
- c. Certify to the international community that the programs offered in Nigerian universities are of high standards and their graduates are adequate for employment and further studies.

In assessing various programs, the commission considers components that are mostly used to assess the quality potentials of programs. These include:

- a. Curriculum
- b. Infrastructure
- c. Human Resources and
- d. Teaching and Learning Resources.

It is pertinent to note that assessments or accreditation teams from the NUC, as in other parts of the world are normally made up of peers from similar institutions as well as professional organizations. They evaluate programs to ensure they meet the minimum standard.

Concerns about the Quality of Programs in Nigerian Universities

Despite the efforts of the National Universities Commission (Akpan, 2014; Olaleye and Oyewole, 2016) at the standard setting for universities and accreditation of programs, there

have been consistent concerns, especially from the turn of the century about the quality of the products of Nigerian universities. This coincided with a period of greater demands for access which led to the establishment of more universities by the federal and state governments as well as the private sector. Among the key effects of the concern about the quality of outcome from the Nigerian universities was that foreign educational institutions, unlike before, started demanding for Nigerian graduates to take preliminary courses before admission into postgraduate programs. Local industries also had concerns about what was regarded as a mismatch between the curricula run by Nigerian universities and the requirements of the local and global economy. According to Dada, et al., (2017), among the key challenges of accreditation of programs in Nigerian universities are funding, the multiplicity of functions performed by the NUC, and the unhealthy relationship between the NUC and the Tertiary Labor Unions.

The concern about the quality outcome in Nigerian universities has led to a considerable number of Nigerians, especially among the elites, seeking university education outside the country. This has resulted in the loss of revenue even to nearby countries that have established institutions to target Nigerian students. Some of these are sub-standard to what is found in Nigeria. However, the challenge of low access in Nigeria is fueling the demand.

A confirmation of the challenges facing the Nigerian university system in relation to quality was glaring in a comprehensive survey of the needs of public universities in Nigeria (FME, 2012). It showed a system that mostly lacked the basic facilities needed for the provision of quality university education. The question was how the programs of these universities consistently passed the accreditation and assessment reviews of the National Universities Commission. What seems to be the practice is that at the time of accreditation or assessment, they spruce up things, paint, patch up, and borrow equipment and personnel, with the view of meeting the minimum standards. After the process, things go back to normal. These challenges were noted by Ekpo and Edet (2017).

Furthermore, it will be a source of worry to how institutions that were noted for the quality and had produced professionals that are making an impact globally came to be in those sorry states. A few factors that led to these include:

- a. Nigerian economic challenges that led to reduced investments in education
- b. Poor governance of the university system
- c. Increased demand for higher education without increases in facilities
- d. The conflict between the government and the tertiary institution unions
- e. Brain drain – looking for greener pastures
- f. Lack of effective sanctions by the regulatory agency.

From the mentioned factors, one can claim that the challenges facing the Nigerian university system over the years mean clearly that approaches to quality assurance have not been effective. Whatever efforts were made, have been clouded by other factors relating to management, politics, and other intrigues that cannot be in the interest of quality. Thus, the need to develop a system that can address Nigeria's skills and knowledge needs for the 21st century.

Strengthening Quality Assurance Mechanisms in Nigerian Higher Education

The need to ensure that Nigerian higher education and especially the university sector aligns with national development objectives has led to greater attention towards strengthening quality assurance practices. Agencies such as the National Universities Commission are supporting universities to strengthen their capacities and commitment to incorporating diverse components that support quality outcomes. However, the recurring concerns about the quality of products of Nigerian universities clearly show that there are challenges in the system.

It means that despite the efforts of the regulatory agency, more effort must be made to ensure commitment to quality in the universities.

The key point to note before looking further at areas that need attention is that the onus is primarily on the universities to assure quality. As noted by Adetunji (2016; 2016a) and Adetunji, et al. (2017), a university is as good as the quality of its programs. While the National Universities Commission exists to develop and support the maintenance of standards in the system, it is the responsibility of the universities to ensure that they not only maintain the standard that has been set but also exceed these in line with the expectations of society. The fact that most of these institutions work to be deceptive during the accreditation process means that they may not fully understand their roles in putting in place educational programs that are meant to meet society's quest for high-level skills and knowledge.

In the drive to strengthen quality assurance practices in the Nigerian university system, it is necessary to take a comprehensive look at the components that make up a quality system. This will ensure that universities rise to the status that enables them to gain and retain the confidence of the society through their academic programs, teaching, learning, research, and community service. Let us examine some key issues that need specific attention as follows:

Institutional Strengthening and Governance

No institution can succeed without a governance system that promotes efficiency and transparency. It is the governance system that will work to promote an environment that supports excellence in teaching, learning and research. The challenge in building and strengthening the governance process in Nigerian universities over the years has led to conflicts between the various governments, which own a good number of the universities and the academic staff union. The union believes greater autonomy of the institutions will lead to stronger institutional governance. While some elements of independence exist in the universities, this has not addressed some of the challenges that hinder the enthronement of good governance in the institutions. Some of these include:

- i. At the public universities, the governments (federal and states) still appoint the Governing Councils of the universities. The challenge with this is that most of the time, those appointed to superintend these institutions do not have a background in the administration of education or higher institutions. Also, being political appointees, their interests may not really be on the growth of the institutions but on personal benefits.
- ii. Appointment of vice-chancellors/chief executives of universities: In many instances, the appointments of the heads of universities have nothing to do with the quality of leadership but rather a process that is full of intrigues – political, ethnic, and religious. This distracts from the determination to develop and implement programs for greater social dynamism.
- iii. Political interference: With political office holders still having influence in the provision of basic resources to the universities, they are bound to make unnecessary demands on the universities which may ultimately not be in the interest of the growth of the institutions.
- iv. In private universities, there are also challenges of proprietors interfering with the administration of the institutions, thus affecting the smooth operations of the system.

These are some of the factors that continue to hamper the growth of the university system in Nigeria. Ensuring standards must start with reversing the trend in the approaches to leadership and institutional development. Some key actions that should be considered include:

- i. Members of the governing council of the universities must have backgrounds in the system with representation from the private sector and the wider society
- ii. The appointment of vice-chancellors should be based on merit. To further seek out the best, consideration should be given to the use of external bodies to widely conduct a competitive search and recommend candidates based on their capacities for management at the level of higher institutions of learning.
- iii. Greater independence from political interference would come from the professionalization of the governing structure as well as ensuring that the appointment of chief executives has less manipulation of the political class.

The management of universities should also pay attention to strategic planning as a way of ensuring that they have a coordinated approach to meeting the objectives of the institutions. The management teams in the universities, therefore, need to be on alert to the challenges of developing world-class programs (Akerele, n. d.).

Self-Assessment

As earlier noted, universities have the primary responsibility for developing and implementing programs to meet society's needs. The teaching, learning, research, and community service approaches of the institutions need to be tied to this. For this reason and greater success, universities must pay attention to regular self-assessment and the monitoring and evaluation of their programs. Through self-assessment, the universities would clearly understand their capacities in relation to their programs and relevance to their objectives. Self-study is part of the continuous process for quality and a key accreditation process (Obadore and Alaka, 2013). It enables them to understand the relevance of their infrastructure and resources to meeting their educational needs. Self-assessment should be a primary function of the universities in their determination to assure the quality of their programs. Commitment to self-assessment will enable universities to generate data to support their programs. It will also ensure that they have relevant information to use in seeking funding from the government or their proprietors and other organizations.

Curriculum and Its Relevance

One of the key concerns of stakeholders has been the mismatch of the curriculum in the universities to their needs. Through the Basic Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS), the National Universities Commission has provided basic guides in curriculum development and implementation. From the concerns of the stakeholders, it seems as though the institutions rarely move beyond the basic provisions. In the light of these, the universities should note that as educational institutions, their role is to develop the citizens into assets for society. This is done through the implementation of the curriculum. In the light of this, in the development and implementation of the curriculum, of primary importance is considering the key sectors of the community and their human capacity requirements.

It is noteworthy that the National Universities Commission is currently taking the lead in this by ensuring the involvement of the private sector and professional associations in the review of the curriculum across the board. The universities on their own part should work towards further engagement with the wider stakeholder community to support the greater quality outcome. This should include engaging practitioners in assessing the implementation of the curriculum across subject areas. The key to an effective curriculum comes from the sustained opportunities for stakeholders to make input in the design and implementation. Professional organizations must be actively involved in the development and monitoring of curricula in their areas of specialization.

Infrastructure

The availability of relevant infrastructure is vital to the quality delivery of education programs. These infrastructures are used for diverse purposes which include classrooms, lecture theaters, laboratories, and staff offices. The Nigerian public university system has benefited largely from the interventions of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund). This is the funding agency dedicated to the development of infrastructure, research, and human capacity. The challenge relating to infrastructure in Nigerian universities is how functional they are for the purposes they are meant for. At most times, buildings are provided but without the necessary facilities that make them functional. These include the provision of alternative power supply through solar panels; lack of functional toilet facilities; access for those with physical disabilities; emergency lightning; fire and security protection and a few others.

Every university, therefore, needs to ensure that its physical development and related infrastructure must align with global best practices. Every building must be properly functional for teaching, learning, and related social activities. They must also have the necessary facilities to ensure the health and safety of those that utilize the facilities.

Human Resources

Quality and world-class human resources are essential for the efficient implementation of the curriculum in higher education. The crisis in the Nigerian university system has over the years led to the sector suffering brain drain. The loss of some of the best academic personnel in the system has affected programs across the board. Another challenge over the years has been the quality of those recruited into the system. Some of these were recruited, not based on their quality, and need, but rather through the influence of external (political) factors. In working to address the human resource challenges, these need to be considered.

The efforts of the TETFund, through its academic staff training and development, are supporting the development of human resources for higher education institutions. While this should be strengthened, the universities on their own should also work on mentoring and further developing their staff that may have been recruited without the necessary assessment on their suitability as academic staff. Potential candidates for recruitment as academic staff in the universities must go through rigorous processes to determine their understanding of their roles in the university in relation to teaching, learning, and commitment to research and generation of new knowledge.

The universities should also work on incentive systems to enable them to attract and retain quality personnel. They should also work to develop a database of academic personnel from other institutions that they could rely on for collaboration to develop the quality of their programs.

Application of Technology

An area in which most Nigerian universities are lacking is the integration of information and communications technology into teaching and learning. While the advantages technology offers (higher) education is not in doubt, there have been un-coordinated efforts towards implementation. In many instances, structures are constructed and filled with computers which are left to rot away. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the lack of attention to information technology by Nigerian Universities. The pandemic revealed that alternative approaches needed to be adopted for the delivery of education. Technology offered this alternative through online teaching and learning. While the Nigerian Minister of education ordered the implementation of online facilities, this was not completely possible because universities in the past had ignored putting in place the necessary facilities that can make this possible. This means that many of the universities had no fallback option to address the needs of their students even when a body they belonged to, the Association of African Universities directed that they should serve students virtually (Dell and Sawahel, 2020).

The experience of Nigerian universities and their lack of preparedness to deploy virtual learning show that they need to re-assess their focus in the areas of technology and Information. They must give attention to the provision of necessary facilities for the utilization of technology in teaching, learning, and research. Annual allocations to technology from the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) should be comprehensively dedicated to these. TETFund should also provide further support in ensuring that universities develop the most basic infrastructure. The reality in the provision of technology facilities in universities in the 21st century should be basic because of associated benefits.

Teaching, Learning, and Research Resources

At the center of quality in the university system is the availability of teaching and learning resources. These include library and information resources, laboratories, workshops, and related facilities for teaching, learning, and research. While there are some of these in Nigerian universities, the challenge is to do with their quality. While there are university libraries, the diversity of resources such as the availability of books and non-book materials is also an issue of concern. There is also the challenge of the currency of materials. Further, many universities have the challenge of the utilization of technology. In this vein, many do not have access to components of online databases that bring to the fingertips of the university community millions of information materials from diverse sources. Similarly, there are challenges of poor laboratory facilities. Without teaching and learning resources of world standard, whatever takes place within such facilities is basically useless and has no relationship with what the outside world is up to.

Therefore, Nigerian universities need to pay attention to the development and maintenance of teaching, learning, and research resources that are up to global standards in all fields. This is the only way they can ensure that the products of the universities will be globally mobile and competent. Instead of having students that are not properly supported with teaching and learning resources, it will be better for such programs to be suspended until facilities are adequately provided.

Gender Balance

Gender inequality is a major challenge in Nigerian higher education. This reflects the wider society that rarely gives the necessary recognition to the role and importance of women in development. All universities in Nigeria should work towards promoting gender balance in not only enrollment but also academic staff as well as leadership of units. The seeming suppression of women in Nigerian universities does not augur well for the system. There should be the promotion of greater recruitment of female academic staff, training programs targeted at the development of female lecturers, and mentoring women for leadership in the universities and other environments. Among the universities, there are hardly women vice-chancellors. Of the 44 federal universities in Nigeria, there are only three female vice-chancellors (Atueyi, 2019).

Academic Corruption

Every effort towards promoting quality can easily be undone through one form of academic corruption or the other. The challenge of academic corruption has had its head up in Nigeria for some time. These include grade inflation, selling of sub-standard materials to students, and sexual harassment. The challenge of grade inflation which gives the false impression of the capacities of students is a major issue. Related to this is the victimization of students in one form or other which again does not show the true status of a student and could sometimes have long-standing effects. Plagiarism is another area that is of critical concern on the need to maintain the integrity of the Nigerian university system (Lawal, 2019).

There should, therefore, be continued efforts at addressing every aspect of academic corruption in Nigeria as appears to have been started recently. This will promote quality in the system and garner respect from the wider society which seems to have lost confidence in activities in the university system.

Research

One of the key determinants of the quality of a university and its activities is research. This is of course in recognition of the fact that among the reasons for the existence of modern universities is to lead the way in developing human skills and capacity of the highest order and the generation of new knowledge through research. As was stated in the quality of output of graduates, there have also been concerns about the research output of the universities and the general society with limited major breakthroughs in terms of research related to the needs of the university. Rather, the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TET-Fund) accused beneficiaries of its research grants under the National Research Fund of diverting the funds to the acquisition of luxuries such as cars, houses, and others (Alabi, 2020).

The consequence of this is the temporary suspension of sponsorship for conferences attendance. This has a negative impact on research and development aspects. A closer look at the publications of most university academic staff would also show that most of the time these are joint publications where at most times, works of one person have names of others inserted. There is also the challenge of localized journals, edited locally without external assessment of articles. These are unfortunately most times treated and given the international respect that they do not deserve. Basically, most academic staff seek to publish for the purpose of gaining promotion and not really for knowledge generation. Unfortunately, they get away with these because, in the assessment of research output, there is hardly a rigorous approach sometimes due to external factors as earlier noted.

Every university must, therefore, comprehensively revise its approach to research and the evaluation of research output. While organizations such as TETFund are keen on giving attention to research and development in the universities, there should be closer management of not only the grants but also their utilization. The research activities should have some external input to ensure that they can stand the test of critique from any part of the world. Institutions should take interest in what comes out of their universities because this could cause long-standing embarrassment especially when it involves plagiarism or low-quality studies. Emphasis should be on the formation of strong research groups. It should also be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic, just as it exposed Nigerian universities' weakness in the application of technology, the pandemic has also shown the inadequacies in research but provides the opportunity to make progress. With the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) committing billions of naira to research, it is an opportunity for Nigerian universities to raise their standards in research and development. The universities must show their understanding of research as a core function and central to quality as it provides opportunities for the generation of new knowledge and promotes the ideals of the institutions. Institutes and departments of virology should be tasked with the responsibility of taking proactive steps towards finding a cure for the COVID-19 pandemic while others could be charged with finding effective ways for containing the virus taking into cognizance, the Nigerian peculiarities. This will show the true essence of the Nigerian university system and its competence in the world of research and development.

Funding, Resource Mobilization and Management

Funding and its management in Nigerian universities have been a central issue over the years. This is especially so in public universities where the government is the main provider of funds. In the recent past, there have been concerns about shortfalls in the provision of financial resources to the universities. This has also brought about conflicts between the governments

and the university unions, especially the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). The other challenge within the system is concerned about the poor commitment to fiscal responsibility and value for money by the university management. Due to external factors and influences, university administrators most of the time face challenges of dealing with the demands of pressures from outside the system. This means that at most times there are unseen expense lines that undermine the interest of the financial health of the universities.

There will hardly be a commitment to quality without access to the necessary financial resources to sustain this. The universities, therefore, need to carefully look at working within their resources as well as exploring alternative resources. Part of the self-assessment is the revision and removing of expense lines that are unnecessary so that some of these are moved to infrastructure, research, human resource, and research development. Commitment to quality will gain the respect of the stakeholders and the wider community and lead to greater (financial) support. This includes better-qualified students, research output, and community service. Such will help stakeholders to see the importance of the institutions and provide greater support.

Scholarships and Financial Aid

The government should look critically at introducing cost-sharing in higher education. However, to ensure that this does not obstruct the opportunities of those in the lower economic ladder, scholarships and financial aid programs should be instituted. This will benefit those who may not afford to contribute to their education. In this situation, those who can afford will contribute to the cost of their education, providing the universities with additional resources to enhance the provision of quality education.

Internationalization

Nigerian universities, as part of their commitment to quality enhancement, must embrace internationalization. This will provide opportunities for collaborations that will benefit staff and students. It will also be a source for mentoring in the areas of research and similar avenues for sharing ideas. The need for giving attention to internationalization is because it will support a great leap forward for Nigerian universities. As noted by Oyewole (2009), it will support the drive for knowledge that can be used to narrow the income gap between the developing and developed world economies. It is therefore necessary that all universities strengthen their commitment to internalization. This should include ensuring that there are personnel with the capacity responsible for the administration of issues relating to internationalization. At all times, there must be attention to take advantage of collaboration with universities, organizations, and institutions from across the globe. Ensuring the availability of a strong technology infrastructure will also help to strengthen this.

Services

The provision of services to the university community enhances quality in different ways. In most Nigerian universities, students' accommodation and the provision of basic municipal services continue to be a major challenge. Every university must work towards the provision of functional services, be it housing for staff and students, quality health facilities, and municipal services. Adequate hostel facilities for students, especially in the early years, would support their capacity to settle down to their studies and a greater chance of success in their academic pursuits. Attention also needs to be given to the overcrowding of the hostels. TET-Fund should not only be concerned with building more theaters, offices, and roads on the campuses, but also more hostels should be built to ease problems for the students. Further, the provision of water and a stable power supply is another issue that needs to be tackled because of their importance to the quality of life on the campus. The absence of efficient provision of this affects all members of the university community and drives down quality. Alternate avenues for the

provision of power must be fully explored. Efficient implementation of the independent power generation project across the universities is, therefore, necessary.

Community Engagement

Universities must be actively engaged with their diverse communities. These include the communities of their locations, students, and staff as well as the alumni associations. These are parts of the stakeholder community that enhance the capacity to grow. The universities should also take interest in the lower wing of the education sector and encourage the production of quality students from secondary schools. This will ensure that they receive students who are well-prepared for higher education.

The National Universities Commission

The National Universities Commission as the regulatory agency of the universities must continue with the drive to reposition itself for greater effectiveness. This is in line with the key role it needs to play for Nigeria's higher education to be relevant to globalization objectives (Ohaka, 2018). It should continually review its approach of ensuring that universities maintain the standard required of them. Apart from normal accreditation visits, there need to be other monitoring and evaluation visits to ensure that they are in line with national development requirements. Programs that do not meet requirements must be supported to meet these. Attention should also be given to the development of resource personnel responsible for accreditation and assessments of programs. This will further help in enhancing the quality of the process (Akomolafe and Adesua 2019).

Conclusion

Nigeria's capacity to compete globally is dependent on an education system that is in sync with national development objectives. Higher education is particularly key to the development of high-level skills as well as the generation of new knowledge. After starting on what could be said to be sound footing by producing graduates that are among the best-qualified professionals in the world, Nigerian universities now have the challenge of being regarded as lacking quality in their output. It is necessary for this trend to be reversed.

This paper has sought to make input on the strategies for enhancing quality in the Nigerian university system. It suggests those areas that are critical in ensuring that the universities reflect a commitment to quality. These include among others, governance, curriculum, infrastructure, and funding. Of concern, in line with current events is the need to pay attention to the integration of ICT in teaching, learning, and research. There is also the need to review approaches to research and development in line with the current global challenges and roles that universities could play in the development of new knowledge for society. Further, attention needs to be given to the role of internationalization in the design and delivery of quality education as it provides the opportunity for collaboration and partnerships. Ultimately, a university system committed to quality assurance will support the production of skilled manpower to meet Nigerian development objectives in a changing global environment.

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Chapter 22

Reflections on and Lessons learned from Setting up and Implementation of IQA Processes in Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Nigeria

Ngozika Mbajiorgu

Introduction

Assuring quality in higher education institutions (HEIs) has become a global imperative as educators strive to maintain a balance between access to education and the quality of education received. The increase in the demand and diversification of educational provisions has led many nations to establish structures for the regulation and evaluation of the programs provided by educational institutions (Kinser & Lane, 2017). These regulatory bodies are often domiciled outside the educational institutions and the trend has greatly increased since the 1960s (INQAAHE, 2017; Kamusoko & Jingura, 2019). Despite the lack of agreement among quality assurance experts on the meaning of quality (INQAAHE, 2017, Qadri & Malik, 2017, Seniwoliba & Yakubu, 2015) every conception of quality involves three components. These include the input, the process, and the output/outcome variables (UNESCO, 2004 and UNICEF, 2000).

Over the years, the practice of assuring quality has shifted from regulation of the processes through policies, laws, guidelines and rules to the evaluation of the input and outcomes using predetermined proxies (INQAAHE, 2017). In either case, the processes of regulation fail to assess the internal procedures and processes through which these prescriptions are applied, monitored and managed to yield the outcome. These internal workings are left entirely to the institutions to grapple with. Many higher education institutions (HEIs) respond to this lack by developing an internal monitoring and management structure globally referred to as Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) (Okoche, 2017).

In Nigeria, the universities are regulated and evaluated by a national body, the National Universities Commission (NUC). The need arose in 1959 as Nigeria prepared for her independence from Britain. First set up as the Asbhy Commission in 1959, the major goal of the Commission was to advise the federal government on its higher education needs. It was legally established in 1962 and became a statutory body in 1974. The legal instruments acquiescing its regulatory functions were the Education (National Minimum Standard and Establishment of Institutions) Act No. E3 L.F.N. 2004 and the National Universities Commission Act No. N81 Laws of Federation, Nigeria (L.F.N.) 2011 (Rasheed, 2019).

Whereas this body regulates the university system in Nigeria, individual universities are left to monitor, manage and chart the paths leading to their own quality enhancement. The NUC adopts the standards-based model of quality assurance where benchmarks are seen as thresholds of quality. Universities are to comply with norms, rules and regulations clearly set out in its evaluation documents (National Universities Commission, 2007 & 2018). This is in line with what Okoche (2017) claims to be the major role of most national quality assurance agencies in Africa. NUC evaluates four key areas: curriculum, staffing, facilities and library. Other areas also evaluated are feedback from the labor market and funding. Teams comprising university professors and the staff of NUC visit institutions and through peer review processes, programs are accredited. A program can earn full accreditation, to be re-accredited after five years. Another can earn interim accreditation, to be re-accredited after two years while yet another can be denied accreditation. Universities whose programs are so denied can invite the

NUC for a re-accreditation at any later date. The growth and operations of this national body is beyond the scope of this paper.

Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT)

Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), a state-owned university in the South-East of Nigeria, was founded on July 30, 1980, with three faculties, the Faculty of Engineering, the Faculty of Science and Faculty of Technology. By the end of 2019, the number of faculties had increased to eleven with 63 programs and a student population of 18,480. The National Universities Commission's (NUC) first accreditation visit to ESUT was in the year 2000 after 20 years of its existence. The result of this first visit revealed that ESUT earned 12.73% full accreditation, 83.64% interim accreditation and 3.64% denied accreditation. The quality of its provisions steadily increased and in December 2019, ESUT had obtained 88.34% full accreditation, 11.67% interim accreditation and none of its programs deserved a denied accreditation status. This steady improvement in the accreditation status of its programs can be traced to the actions taken in order to improve quality.

In 2019, ESUT became a member of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) International Quality Group (CIQG). In 2020 ESUT signed the Memorandum of Affiliation with CIQG representing the desire of ESUT "to promote cooperation and partnerships in the pursuit and strengthening of academic quality in higher education world-wide" (CIQG, 2016, p. 3) and in ESUT in particular. This membership exposed ESUT to contacts and conferences which have in no small way helped ESUT to embrace best practices in assuring quality of its provisions.

ESUT's Conception of IQA

An analysis of the NUC accreditation visits, the different officers at the administrative heads as well as the different operatives at different times revealed that external quality assurance is not sufficient to enhance quality in a consistent and sustainable manner. From the year 2010, the idea that quality should be instituted as a culture in the university was strong among the management and staff. At that time, the external quality assurance program appeared to be an ad-hoc, far-flung exercise, where programs were equipped to meet standard requirements only when an NUC accreditation visit was imminent. Consequently, the process was sometimes compromised.

The considerations of these shortcomings led to the conception of quality assurance within the university, as a process which evaluates the programs and services of the university with a goal to improve quality in an evolutionary manner. This evaluation, it was accepted, should be carried out through regular assessments, feedback and follow-up actions. As Peiris & Wickramasinghe (2013) emphasize, quality assurance needs to be a continuous, on-going process built into the day-to-day activity of staff of HEIs. As part of their requirement for accreditation, many EQA agencies have in recent times demanded the existence of an effective IQA unit in institutions (NUC, 2019). Consequently, between 2010 and 2019, ESUT took a number of steps to enhance the quality of her programs and services, culminating in the establishment of the Directorate of Quality Assurance.

Setting the stage for QA actions and processes in ESUT

Two important governance instruments were produced at this stage, these are the five-year Strategic Plan and the 50-year Academic Brief. The Central Strategic Planning Committee (CSPC) was set up to develop the first Strategic Plan 2014-2019 (ESUT, 2014) of the university. The committee comprised representatives of all stakeholders of the university: staff, student union, alumni, industry and the host community. The Strategic Plan covered the following:

- Detailed SWOT analysis
- Logical Framework Matrix, including outline of the goals and the responsible units. The goals as outlined in the document include:
 - Goal 1: Strengthening university governance
 - Goal 2: Raising the academic profile of the university
 - Goal 3: Raising the profile of the post-graduate programme of the university
 - Goal 4: Upgrading of infrastructure and facilities
 - Goal 5: Funding of the university
 - Goal 6: Capacity building
 - Goal 7: Internationalization of the university
 - Goal 8: Raising the moral profile of the university
 - Goal 9: Developing community sensitive programs
- Short-term, medium-term and long-term plans
- Cost implications.

The milestones, as specified in the Strategic Plan, were clearly spelled out. The Academic Planning Unit identified key performance indicators (KPIs) on a yearly basis against which performance and achievements were matched throughout the period. A second committee, headed by the director of academic planning, embarked on the production of the first academic brief (ESUT, 2015). This document captured the history of the development of the university as well as its future direction. The document was prepared with the past years in retrospect and has a life span of 50 years. It clearly captured the vision, mission and core values of the university and also interpreted the university's logo and colors.

It would seem that the university adopted the three-tier Planning Pyramid (INQAAHE, 2017). This is illustrated in Figure 1. The academic brief represents the long-term vision of the university, and the strategic plan fills the second tier and also provides details of the operational plan. One huge deficiency of this process was the termination of the work of the CSPC when the Strategic Plan was produced. This left the offices of the directors, academic planning and physical planning to manage the implementation and operational plans. Consequently, the third tier can be labeled the weak point in the process. Despite this flaw, by the end of 2019, the Strategic Plan 2014-2019 was 80% implemented.



Figure 1 ESUT Planning Pyramid

The second weakness of the process was that apart from the 10 members of the CSPC who underwent a three-day training workshop on the development of a five-year strategic plan, other members and most of the members of the implementation units were largely untrained

for the exercise. All other officers and stakeholders in the committee and implementation units depended heavily on personal experience and sometimes on limited and ad-hoc training received as part of staff development programs.

Implementation of QA Elements

Incentives, rewards, sanctions and assessment of teaching and research

ESUT had a change of administration at the turn of the decade (2010), and with it came the birth of a new goal. This goal was to develop a culture of quality among the staff and students at the university. Achieving this goal was given top priority by the new administration. A number of committees were inaugurated to handle different faces of quality in the university. Initially the process was guided by the need to re-orient the staff and students at the university without reference to any knowledge or theory of quality assurance. Thus, based on their presumed level of integrity, members of staff were appointed to belong to or to head the new committees.

In pursuance of the new administration's goal, a number of steps were taken. First, a committee was set up in 2011 to identify gaps and weak links in the administrative machinery. This led to the expulsion of some students and the sacking of some staff. The findings of this committee validated the need to strengthen the statutory Senate disciplinary committees. The committees include the senior staff disciplinary committee, the junior staff disciplinary committee and the committee on examination irregularities. These committees have been very active, and their recommendations have guided management decisions on disciplinary matters since then.

Second, the Best Lecturer Award Committee was set up to assess teachers' processes of teaching. Using the questionnaire as the instrument for data collection, the committee asked students to evaluate their lecturers and provide feedback. Partner financial institutions provided car prizes and other financial incentives for the award. Third, the Best Researcher Award Committee was set up to assess the research works of lecturers and postgraduate students. Again, a partner financial institution provided car prizes. Though these events spurred the staff to improve their teaching, research and relationship with students, the process generated rancor among the staff. Finally, students with CGPA of 4.5 and above on a 5-point scale, were placed on tuition-free scholarships by the university for as long as such students were able to maintain that level of performance.

After a couple of years, a review of the processes and feedback from stakeholders revealed the need to improve the processes. The major deficiency was found in the data collection instruments and the categorization of the staff. Besides, it was discovered that some soft skills that should be part of a lecturer's character, and which cannot be evaluated through students' feedback, for example, professionalism and teamwork, were largely not evaluated. For the best researcher award, factors like registering a patent were also not included as proxy. To improve the processes, a team was commissioned to develop an IQA framework for the university.

Development of a data warehouse and monitoring of different variables

Developing a data warehouse: Four variables were monitored to produce a data warehouse for supporting decision-making in the university. This is in line with best practices in current university management (Santoso & Yulia, 2017). The variables include student admission, student enrollment, student load and students' finances. These variables are interfaced in the database. Student admission and enrollment had been identified to be a troubled area in the Nigerian university system between 1995 and 2005 (Oladipo, Adeosun & Oni, 2009). They noted the criticisms leveled on admission processes in the country leading to poor quality of the graduate output at this time. This national trend was felt acutely in ESUT

as a university. The data warehouse was primarily developed to handle some of the problems encountered in the admission and enrollment processes.

As a result of this, admission of students now goes through a very rigorous procedure to ensure that qualified students are admitted. The university has an admission committee, headed by a professor at the university. This committee makes all decisions regarding admissions and is composed of representatives from all faculties, the Academic Planning/Quality Assurance Unit and the registry. The committee admits students guided by the recommendations from the departments and faculties, and in line with guidelines from the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB). JAMB is the national board that sees to all admissions into Nigerian HEIs. The admission committee, therefore, constitutes the link between the different stakeholders in the admission process.

Students scale through three levels of control before they are registered as bona fide students of the university. These are the departmental level, faculty level and university level. At the departmental and faculty levels, control officers are in place to screen the candidates and to ensure they meet the requirements set for the program. These requirements, which are well publicized in the admission brochures and on the university's website usually conform to the standards of the NUC. At the university level, the data warehouse is interfaced with the JAMB platforms. Consequently, the scrutiny of candidates is based on their identities on the JAMB platform, rather than their paper submissions during registration. The control staff access directly the West African Examination Council and National Examination Council result platforms for the authentication of candidates' O Level results. In the past decade, this process not only made sure that the results presented by the candidates were authentic but ensured that qualified students were admitted into the university.

This data warehouse has been very useful to the university as it provides accurate and up-to-date information about students. For instance, during counseling an academic adviser has access to data on each student which makes it easier to monitor students' progress. One problematic area in this process was the capture of courses in the data warehouse. Course data from different sources seemed to be inconsistent, varying with the source it was accessed. For example, course data from the departments (usually the extant form) differed sometimes from that obtained from the faculty and so on. The credit units and course codes could also differ for the same set of students in line with its source. To solve this problem, in 2016, a curriculum review and harmonization exercise was set up. The review was done in stages.

- During the first stage, the university curriculum committee, all Deans of Faculty, and their curriculum committees, all Heads of Department and their curriculum committees attended a three-day curriculum workshop. This was followed by an analysis of the NUC curriculum benchmarks.
- Then, each Departmental curriculum committee went back to review the curriculum of their program with emphasis on including local content. Departments were to include some courses not contained in the NUC Benchmarks in order to meet the outcomes identified for each program. This stage also involved meetings with relevant stakeholders, e.g., industry.
- Next, the reviewed curricula were passed through the Director of Academic Planning and the University curriculum committee for final vetting.
- Finally, the curricula were presented to the University Senate for approval.

These processes brought a drastic improvement in the data warehousing process and consequently, students' progress is currently better monitored. It was recommended that the university-wide review should take place every five years.

Statistics and information management: Prior to 2015, the Academic Planning Unit collected and managed data for the university. But as the need to use data in making management decisions increased, it became necessary to track and trend issues in order to make informed decisions. This led to the use of data to build statistics. Areas covered by the statistics include student enrollment, full-time equivalent, graduate output, staff/student ratio, staff mix by rank, staff qualification, staff attrition and mobility. The trends are built with five-year datasets for each variable to inform decisions and enable remedial actions where necessary.

It is often easy to track and trend academic staff positions while neglecting to do the same for non-academic staff. There is no gainsaying the fact that support staff are equally important in the delivery of goals in an academic institution. At the initial stages, the university only collected data on support staff without tracking and trending the data. However, this was changed as data from this category of staff are now tracked and trended.

The outcome of these actions, as well as the yearly production of an audited account lent transparency to ESUT operations. Transparency and trust are two key variables vital in attaining quality (Praraksa, Sroinam, Inthusamith & Pawarinyanon, 2015; Seniwoliba & Yakubu, 2015). A university must be accountable to the stakeholders, including the students, who pay for their services. Availability of accessible statistics and data is, therefore, crucial to any efforts at quality assurance. A university earns the trust of her stakeholders when she consistently takes actions that make her operations transparent. It is hoped that over time, ESUT will enjoy the full trust of all her stakeholders.

Assessment through benchmarking: ESUT and some Sub-Sahara African universities were involved in a benchmarking exercise in 2018. The project covered the 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 academic sessions and was organized by the World Bank and Shanghai Ranking Institute (World Bank, 2019). The two broad areas studied were performance and health indicators. The key indicators are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Key Indicators for PASET 2018 Benchmarking of SSA Universities

S/No.	Performance Indicator	Health Indicator
1	Inclusion and Equity	Inclusion and Equity
2	Learning Achievement	Quality of Teaching and Learning
3	Labor Market Outcomes	Relevance
4	Research Results	Internationalization
5.	Technology Transfer Results	Research
6.		Community Service and Technology Transfer
7.		Governance and Management
8.		Financing

The result of the benchmarking is being analyzed for feedback and remedial actions where necessary. One vital lesson learned from this exercise is the critical need for an effective MIS that will feed a robust data warehouse. Most of the data used for the benchmarking exercise came from basic records in the university. For IQA to be effective, universities must develop strong MIS and robust data warehouses.

Monitoring of attendance to work and duties: The university has a well-established Ethics Committee headed by a senior member of the academic staff. Before 2017, attendance to duties has been monitored. However, to achieve effective monitoring of staff's attendance to work and discharge of duties, the Ethics Committee organized series of workshops in 2017 and 2018 for the staff of the university. During the workshops, the university community was

informed of the drive of the administration and the need to adopt better work ethics. Thereafter, the work schedule of every member of staff of the university was clearly spelled out. Subsequently, the monitoring of each member of staff's discharge of duties would be based on the work schedule.

Monitoring of examinations: Examinations were also monitored with the aid of a template. During the 2015/2016 academic session the faculties were ranked for the first time based on examination conduct. The impact of the ranking was dramatic. By the next session, a huge improvement was recorded in examination conduct. The greatest challenge faced in monitoring examination conduct is in the lack of experience by the Monitors. The instrument employed is technical and to get accurate results, the Monitors need training and re-training.

Development of an IQA Framework

In view of all that the university had put in place to achieve effective quality assurance, it became imperative to engage an expert to strengthen the quality process. This was made possible by the appointment of a new Director of Academic Planning (DAP) in 2015 and a study was commissioned to develop an IQA framework for the university (Mbajiorgu, Onoh & Anigbo, 2016). A three-person committee headed by the DAP and including an expert in measurement and evaluation was constituted. At this point, there was a shift in the goal of the quality process. The shift was from the development of a quality culture only, to the achievement of the vision and mission of the university enshrined in the motto, "technology for service." This transition led to a shift from the use of rewards and sanctions as the major drivers of the quality process to the use of meeting targets and healthy competitions as drivers of quality.



Figure 2 Transition in ESUT IQA Process

To achieve this transition, the giving of rewards and sanctions was not removed. Rather than being a one-off event, the academic environment was designed to promote the publicity of awards and laurels won by staff or students. To champion this cause, The ESUT Bulletin, the official news platform, reduced its publications of sanctions meted out to erring students and staff and rather published, any laurels, awards and exceptional performances of both students and staff. The university's emphasis on academic staff's electronic visibility and the increase in the budgetary allocation to core academic activities enhanced this transition. The funding of staff and students to national and international programs and competitions increased. Faculties and programs collaborated with the private sector to organize conferences and workshops and many benefited. This transition changed the atmosphere in the university, and many engaged in professional activities and innovations that contributed to the enhancement of the quality of the provisions.

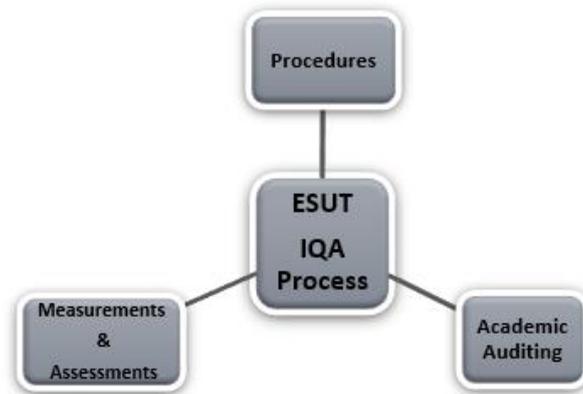


Figure 3 Three emphasis in ESUT IQA processes

The framework developed for the university has three broad emphases (Figure 3), measurements/assessments, procedures and academic auditing. A few instruments were developed and procedures for achieving quality were described for different proxies of quality. The framework covered eight key areas of quality: governance, the teaching process, research and innovation, staffing, facilities, student matters, community service and the curriculum (Figure 4).

Development of the IQA Instruments

One deficiency of earlier quality processes, for example, the teacher assessments done before the development of the framework, was in the instruments used. The committee, therefore, embarked on the rigorous development of instruments for the assessment of the different quality proxies. First, the committee identified areas for evaluation and monitoring in the university. The following areas were listed:

- students' progress, and completion rates, feedback (labor market and alumni)
- research and innovation
- undergraduate program (courses, curricula and services, the teaching process)
- quality of staff, student evaluation
- quality of facilities
- governance and community services

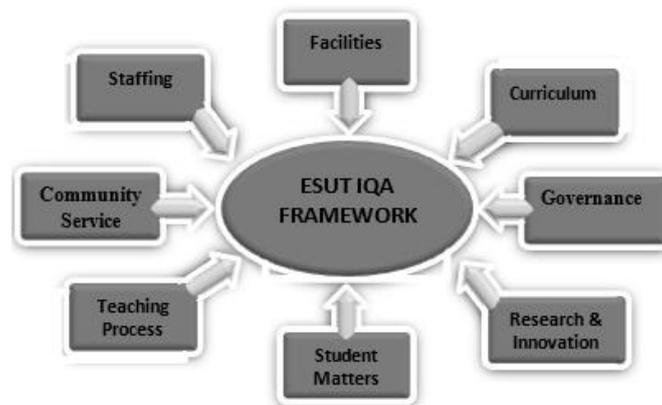


Figure 4: Components of ESUT IQA Framework

Instruments are yet to be developed for governance and community services. The university was judged to have an adequately developed governance structure with the organigram and governance instruments. For the other identified variables, instruments were empirically developed, and the development process included:

- Generation of items and development of subscales
- Face validation of the instruments to check for language, clarity and adequacy of items
- Trial testing and construct validity was carried out in this way:
 - An exploratory factor analysis was run with varimax rotation. The eigen value was placed at 1 and all absolute values less than 0.4 were suppressed. A review was made, and
 - ✓ any items that did not conceptually belong to the subscale was deleted
 - ✓ one of any set of items that indicated collinearity was retained
 - ✓ some items were rephrased, and
 - ✓ factors were extracted in accordance with the items that loaded onto them.
- Finally, the instruments were pilot tested after corrections and a second Cronbach alpha was performed. Any sub-scale with α value less than 0.7 was thrown out.

The summary of the result of the analysis of the sub-scales for the instrument used in monitoring undergraduate programs is presented in Table 2 below. To arrive at the pilot testing version of the questionnaire, we eliminated all the items from the different sub-scales that were implicated for elimination and rephrased others as indicated in Table 2 below. Some sub-scales were collapsed to give one sub-scale. The Cronbach alpha coefficients for the sub-scales from the pilot testing data are given as 'Final alpha value' in the table.

Table 2: Summary of Factor Analysis for the Different Sub-scales of the Instrument for Monitoring

S/No.	Sub-Scale	Determinant	Items Eliminated	KMO	Bartlett's Test	Factors Extracted	Total Variance Explained	Initial α Value	Final α Value
1	Teaching Process	3.35E-009	Items 6 & 14 deleted	0.545	361.026 (p = .000)	4	75.211	0.930	0.933
2	Student Support and Services	2.92E-005	Item 9 re-phrased	0.529	224.479 (p = .000)	4	72.857	0.783	.783
3	Teaching Resources	0.087	None	0.726	60.767 (p = .000)	3	76.092	0.792	.792
4	Objectives of the curriculum	0.007	None	0.717	115.005	3	81.424	0.858	.858
5	Factors Influencing Curriculum Provision	6.37E-008	Item 4 deleted	0.413	350.697 (p = .000)	4	73.166	0.894	.878
6	Comprehensiveness of the Curriculum	0.001	Item 6 Deleted	0.619	176.116 (p = .000)	2	71.744	0.880	.846
7	Planning and Preparation for lectures	3.31E-005	Item 5 re-phrased	0.682	242.435 (p = .000)	3	79.201	0.880/0.928	.897
8	Instructional Delivery	0.178	None	0.754	44.544 (p = .000)	1	66.996	0.833	
9	Professionalism	0.205	None	0.351	40.904 (p = .000)	2	82.3	0.655	.732

*Subscales 7 & 8 were collapsed

Table 3 illustrates the outcome of the development process for the sub-scale on lecturer's planning and preparation for lectures. This sub-scale has eleven items measuring planning skills, content knowledge and management of classroom environment. These three variables were extracted from the construct validation.

Table 3 Planning and Preparation for lectures

S/No.	Items	Always	Very Often	Often	Rarely	Never
1.	The teacher is adequately prepared for the lectures in terms of goal setting?					
2.	The teacher exhibits mastery of the subject matter					
3.	The teacher shows signs of awareness of how much time that is available to accomplish the goals					
4.	The teacher paces the lectures adequately					
5.	The teacher administers the in-course assessments at regular intervals.					
6.	The teacher has a fair knowledge of the resources available for accomplishing the goals					
7.	Appropriate assessment techniques are used in the assessment of students' learning					
8.	The teacher designs appropriate and coherent instruction for delivering the lecture					
9.	The instructor maintains a purposeful and equitable learning environment where each student feels safe, valued respected and free					
10.	Behavioural expectations are clearly specified and communicated to students					
11.	The instructor encourages student-teacher and student-student interactions					

Factors extracted: planning skills, content knowledge & management of classroom environment

Procedures for assuring the quality of proxies: As mentioned earlier, the university had already embedded in its practices many of the principles and procedures for quality assurance. These practices, structures, mechanisms and instruments, such as the ESUT Law, the Academic Brief, the Strategic Plan, the University Calendar, Staff Conditions of Service, the General and Academic Regulations, and Terms of Reference for different standing committees and governance structures, were already in existence. Some of these procedures had deficiencies that needed to be improved, hence the development of the framework. The framework, therefore, attempted to harmonize, put these information and practices into their correct perspectives as well as justify their usage. It developed procedures for the assurance of quality of staff, student evaluation/assessment, facilities and teaching process.

Procedure for assurance of staff quality: A university should be committed to providing an environment where qualified staff are recruited and are able to develop career opportunities. The framework considered staff recruitment, remuneration, appraisals and promotions, professional development, teacher evaluation and rewards and sanctions of staff. The criteria for all these practices except professional development are already well-established and contained in a document, the Staff Conditions of Service which is reviewed at appropriate intervals.

Procedure for the assurance of student evaluation and assessment: Quality implies rigorous methods of evaluation and assessment in order that standards at each level and for all activities are maintained. To determine the extent to which a university achieves its educational objectives different ways of gathering information about the students must be put in place. Poor standards in education result from a lack of rigorous and systematic evaluation processes. Therefore, the framework considered the procedure for assuring that assessments capture the true nature of evaluation, the aims of the program and the vision and mission of the university. The following procedures were equally validated, improved or clearly specified: the procedure for specifying measurable criteria and outcomes; the procedure for examination conduct; management of scripts; marking and grading; the duties of the Examination Boards, the duties of the Academic Audit Unit and external examiners; and sanctions for examination irregularities.

Procedure for the assurance of quality of the teaching process: The teaching process is a complex task, which demands a properly planned and systematically tailored program of study. It provides learners the opportunities to acquire necessary and variety of knowledge and skills that equip them for the future. The areas considered were preparation of teaching/lecture guide, procedure for course content delivery, management of classroom environment including teacher/student interactions and student/student interactions and course scheduling.

Procedure for the assurance of the quality of research and innovation: A university is built on the three pillars of research and innovation, service and teaching. Therefore, a strong research culture is a pre-requisite for any university to fulfill its mandate. Against this background, the procedure for evaluating research and innovation was spelled out. This was very important as earlier assessments did not capture areas such as registration of patents, publication in indexed journals and creation of spin-offs.

Procedure for the assurance of quality of facility: This includes the processes for the assurance of the quality of lecture rooms, auditoria, laboratories, staff offices, staff quarters, libraries, sanitation measures, all lecture equipment, furniture, sports facilities, laboratory equipment, fixtures, books, multimedia equipment and power generation. No structures were in place for this process before this time. The framework therefore included: policy definitions, and specification of quality indices. The step-by-step process include developing the policy instrument, specifying the quality indices, taking inventory of facilities, making projections for future needs and identifying facility for maintenance, budgetary allocations, procedure for procurement and allocation of facility and evaluation of facility.

The Academic Audit

Academic Audit aims at encouraging departments or programs to evaluate their “education quality processes,” the key faculty activities required to produce, assure, and regularly improve the quality of teaching and learning. It makes a demand on the faculty by asking how the faculty approaches educational decision-making and the organization of her work using the resources available to it and working collegially to provide quality education in the best interest of the discipline and students’ learning. It is also a peer review process that includes self-study and a site visit by peers. It involves self-reflection and self-improvement rather than compliance with predetermined standards. The Academic Audit Unit (AAU) consists of its elements and principles. The framework therefore considered the AAU Elements which include: the Self-Study and the Peer Review. The AAU Principles considered in the framework are clear statement of learning outcomes, focus on processes, collaborative work, evidence-based decision-making, coherence of the program (content and objectives throughout the program of study), learning from best practices and prioritizing continuous improvement. The framework then specified the composition of the Academic Audit to include:

- A chairman (should be appointed by the Vice-Chancellor from the DAP’s nominees)
- A dean of faculty or an associate dean
- A member of the Quality Assurance Unit
- A member of support staff (non-academic not below the rank of a deputy registrar)
- A member of the DAP, not below the rank of deputy director
- The deputy registrar in charge of exams and records in the university
- One external assessor (to be nominated by the faculty for audit exercise)

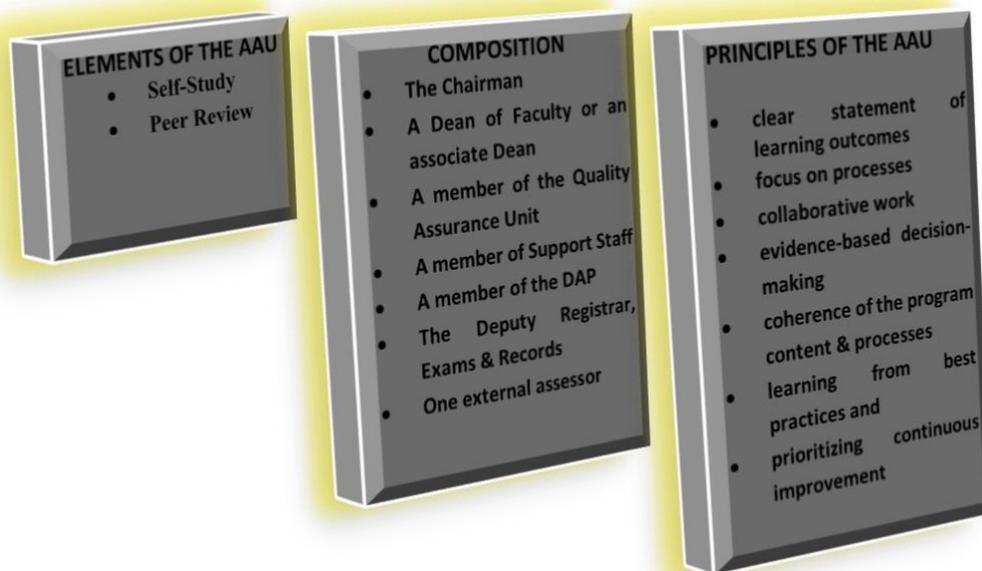


Figure 5: ESUT Academic Audit: elements, principles & composition

Establishment of the Directorate of Quality Assurance

In 2019, the Senate approved the establishment of the Directorate of Quality Assurance. This was followed by the approval of Senate’s decision by the Council of the university. The terms of reference include:

1. Monitoring of compliance of academic staff to lecture timetable
2. Monitoring the attendance to and discharge of duties by non-academic staff
3. Assessment of staff by the students
4. Monitoring the conduct of examinations
5. Take part in academic auditing
6. Evaluation of the facilities of the university
7. Monitoring of the processes of admission and registration of students
8. Monitoring the processes of staff recruitment and appraisal
9. Monitoring of any other governance structure or process as may arise from time to time.

A professor at the university was appointed to head the unit with the full compliments of space and staff.

Lessons Learned

The process of internally assuring the quality of the provisions of any university is a rigorous process and this is fairly new in Nigeria. Although most universities have mechanisms for the enhancement of quality, many do not have formalized frameworks for assurance of quality. A number of lessons can be learned from this case study. The formalization of IQA in ESUT did not occur in one day. The concept of quality evolved from compliance to rules and regulations through rewards and sanctions to its conception as a process, whose objective was the continuous and gradual improvement of the quality of the provisions of the university. The major goal of the process is to build trust and accountability by striving to achieve the goals of not only an academic program but the vision and mission of the university. The vital lessons learned from the process include the following:

1. IQA must be guided by a framework. A framework provides the structure and gives direction to the quality enhancement activities of the university, making it possible to assess progress. Apart from specifying the processes, the framework must include measures for sustainability. This includes detailed and measurable work/operational plan, the bodies that would carry out the functions and detailed terms of reference. Operational plans must be strong for effectiveness because the success of the process depends on it. Other critical measures for sustainability include developing the key performance indicators (KPIs) at appropriate intervals. It is against these indicators that progress can be evaluated.
2. Universities must engage and invest in the training of staff, especially in the areas of monitoring and feedback. Adequate monitoring and feedback are the bedrock of IQA. The entire staff of the university must be trained to understand the need for IQA and the roles they must play in order to enhance the process. Many IQA processes are not effective because of resistance by the university community. Many staff wrongly perceive some quality assurance activities as witch-hunting exercises, rather than processes that enhance the quality and development of accountability and trust, which lead to the growth of the university. Because quality assurance is a fairly new concept, there is a dearth of experts in the area. Universities must, therefore, respond to the urgent need for training.
3. Universities must also invest in the development of robust data warehouses. The assessment of different variables cannot be effective if data can only or largely be accessed through basic records. Such data are inaccurate and the processes of gathering the data and retrieval very cumbersome. The rigor required in internal quality assurance processes demands that data be accessed seamlessly and promptly. Prompt, evidence-based decisions are vital to the success and efficiency of IQA.
4. While external QA may and often adopts the standards-based model, in order to be effective, IQA must adopt the goodness-of-fit model. Achieving the vision and mission of an institution or program must be the primary goal of the quality process. Outcome variables must, therefore, be placed on the front burner for any quality assurance process. The stakeholders and students must have value for their investments. Many candidates apply to particular institutions because of what they perceive them to be offering. Delivering on the mandate of a university is one of the strongest indexes of quality.
5. Results of monitoring and associated actions should be publicized but care should be taken not to craft the results and publications in a disparaging and pejorative manner. Take for instance, using categories such as “Best and Worst Lecturers” can be very unproductive. This is one of the strongest lessons learned early in the development of ESUT’s quality process. Couching outcomes in judgmental terms could easily derail the process of assurance of quality.
6. Rewards & sanctions should be part of the quality process. However, they should be conceived in a relativist manner. A culture of quality must be developed where each staff commits to ownership of the process. In such situations, rewards and sanctions become intrinsic. When members of a university community actively participate in an

activity and own the process, a culture of pride in doing the right thing is developed. This is better than dividing the university community into 'authority' and 'us' groups. The latter approach breeds resistance and artful dissimulation, rather than the right actions. In an atmosphere of mutual trust, individuals voluntarily subject themselves to control, leading to an inner sense of dignity, rather than humiliation (Perry, 1970).

7. In this context, quality becomes a common goal for all.

Challenges

The process is not without challenges. The challenges include:

1. Excess workload and willingness of staff to be involved
2. Lack of experts, trained staff and ignorance on the part of many staff
3. Political atmosphere in the university and lack of commitment to the institution
4. Strategic responsiveness of the top management.

One of the major challenges is the excess workload that comes with the process. The key drivers of the process had added workload and sometimes felt overburdened by the process. Monitoring is a tedious activity requiring selflessness and motivation in the form of incentives and where this is not adequate, morale flag. This was one of the major challenges of the process. Staff involved in different duties sometimes had to be engaged after official hours, weekends and sometimes during public holidays. This made willingness to be part of the process a very rare commodity. The principal actor, therefore, was engaged in motivational activities and in advocacy with management to give adequate incentives to the key drivers of the process. This quite often falls below expectation in the face of meager resources. Incentives could be as basic as lunches and snacks during high activity periods and official cars for commuting between one point and another. A leader of IQA must, therefore, have good human relations skills and show example through actions.

A second major challenge was the lack of experts and trained staff. There was also ignorance by the generality of the university staff. Only very few staff of the university understood the importance and concept of quality assurance. Many conceive the different aspects in different ways. Others see each aspect as stand-alone activity, rather than the interaction of the different aspects in the process of enhancing quality. This diminishes the impact of the process and the willingness of staff to participate. Take for instance, teacher evaluation may be presented as witch-hunting exercise, and used by erring staff as political propaganda against management. Consistency and refusal to be detracted was enough to ameliorate this challenge. Again, the linking of these activities to the accreditation process increased the importance in the conception of many. Without exception, all staff were eager to have the university provisions validated by the NUC and presenting the IQA process as part of the requirements for this validation proved very helpful.

Some of the staff involved in monitoring found it difficult using some of the instruments and training and re-training had to be done with varying successes. This led to the change of monitors from time to time, and this slowed down the process. To handle this problem, more core staff were recruited to the Directorate of Academic Planning. These were trained, and continued involvement in the process enhanced their experiences and expertise. ESUT is a state-owned university and was sometimes used as a platform for partisan politicking. This eroded the commitment of some politically active staff to the university. These staff would pledge allegiance to their political godfathers who may not be favorably disposed to the management staff of the university at any given time. The result is negative propaganda. The dynamics of the political atmosphere affected some members of staff of the university and corroded the public trust. Negative public perception, albeit untrue, flows back to the university

in the form of resistance leading to estrangement of management and alienation by a good number of staff.

By far, this problem proved to be the most challenging and made quality assurance an uphill task. This is because handling it was not very easy. However, the best way it was tackled was by broadcast of the success stories through the official internal news bulletin and efforts were made to get the University Council, made up of respectable members of society, to understand this and throw their weight on presenting the correct situation to the public in order to counteract negative propaganda.

Strategic responsiveness of top management has only just begun. Quality assurance in HEIs is yet to be given its due position as is done in the industry. In ESUT, statutory recognition of elements of quality assurance in budgetary allocations is yet to be achieved. In the last Strategic Plan (2014-2019) nothing was allocated to many of these elements. This proved to be challenging as resources were not always available when needed. Funds were made available on request constrained by availability of resources at the time of request. It is hoped that with the establishment of the Directorate of Quality Assurance and the importance given to IQA by the last two administrations, subsequent management teams would strategically include IQA elements in its short-, medium- and long-term strategic plans and budgetary allocations.

Conclusion

Although the practice of quality assurance is a common practice in the world of the industry, assuring quality in HEIs has only recently become an accepted global practice. A common criticism of this practice in the educational sector is that it pays little attention to educational processes and encourages mechanistic, compliance-driven behaviors (Darojat, 2018). This, according to the critics, leads to incidental improvements. This shortcoming arises because accreditation in many nations is carried out by established national agencies and the assessments are periodic. Even in some countries like the USA, accreditation of HEIs and their programs is carried out by independent bodies recognized by CHEA and the U.S. Federal government through the U.S. Department of Education. These periodic assessments are not able to provide the daily and regular checks by which programs are guided to achieve prescribed outcomes.

To overcome this shortcoming in the evaluation of university programs the educational community is advocating the use of internal processes referred to as internal quality assurance (IQA) to handle daily processes and to develop quality consciousness and culture among staff of HEIs. This paper has traced the trajectory of the formalization of ESUT's IQA processes and the challenges that were faced along the way. A number of lessons have been drawn from this process. We hope these lessons will benefit other institutions trying to establish robust and efficient IQA structures. As CHEA continues in its efforts to identify and articulate emerging issues such as flexibility, distance learning and the place of non-degree credentials in the accreditation process, it is hoped that ESUT and other HEIs will integrate these emerging issues into their IQA processes in order to build provisions that will advance achievements and develop innovation abilities among the students in our global digital economy.

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Chapter 23

Strengthening Internal Quality Assurance: Hub of Global Development in Quality Assurance

Rafiu OlaOluwa Okuneye

Introduction

Quality assurance has the natural inclination. All human activities at any level are backed up with guidelines. For the purpose of uniformity and to set a benchmark, standards were set hinging on guidelines. Akpan (2014) explains Quality assurance (QA) to be accepted criteria of minimum standards of quality should be achieved in the production of goods and services. Saliu (2019) considers QA as the process of planning and implementing systematic activities that will provide confidence that a product or service will fulfill and maintain specified levels of quality.

Quality assurance for higher education is a global phenomenon and the major aim is to see that all phases of the academic standard are assured. Higher education is the hub of the production of manpower and professionals for the operation of all segments of society. It requires therefore that acceptable values are placed on qualifications awarded to graduates of various specialization and professionals which can only be achieved by ensuring that academic standards of courses meet the relevant requirement of the national qualification framework (UK Quality Code, 2018).

There is now a global insistence on quality in higher education and this poses anxiety on providers of higher education be it private, state, or national. In the past, it was based on complying with set guidelines and standards under the supervision of the ruling body, after which a national coordinating body by each country was established. The exchange of programs, manpower, and professionals triggered off the focus on global quality assurance. The anxiety of providers of higher education arising from the global focus on quality assurance stemmed from challenges that may confront them meeting up with the requirements. Achieving quality assurance in higher education appears tasking particularly among nations with less preference for education when components of quality assurance vis-à-vis coverage, implementation demands, and sustenance are considered.

Challenges on quality assurance do not end with the higher education providers, other stakeholders have some shares. The regulatory bodies are in partnership with the providers and the system, that is, the administration, staff, and students. The regulatory bodies churn out evaluation demands' guidelines that may be based on global criteria and in the end, would have to manage or condone some lapses on the part of the institutions. The consciousness of the institutions towards meeting up with evaluation demands usually leads to another level of anxiety. The reality of the capacity of the institutions to meet up with evaluation demands may sometimes lead to sharp practices on the part of the institutions and cover-up in some aspects of the demands. There is usually a high level of desperation on the part of the institutions even in the face of apparent inadequacy to be given a clean bill of quality assurance.

Global focus on quality assurance will be more realistic only if much premium is placed on internal quality assurance with regards to the availability of what is required, personnel, and proper execution of programs. The ability and willingness to comply with the demands of quality assurance internally in different institutions vary and this would affect global target/objective on quality assurance hence the need to strengthen activities on internal quality assurance.

The Coverage of Quality Assurance

The focuses of higher education are teaching/learning process, research, and community service and upon them, quality assurance hangs. The teaching/learning process is the centerpiece in higher education, and it is constantly under monitoring. It covers governance, recruitment, library, facility, equipment, laboratory, curriculum, admission, counseling, evaluation, capacity development, lecture, workshop and conference. Governance controls all operations of higher education. It is the authority that formulates policy, implements policy, and ensures the smooth running of the institutions. The success recorded in the direction of position attained on either national or international ranking depends on the governance. Therefore, the integrity, experience, commitment, and dynamism of people involved in governance matter a lot. As there are emerging challenges facing the governance of institutions in the areas of increase in entrants, infrastructure, funding, and manpower, there should be an avenue for capacity-building for personnel involved in governance.

In Nigeria for example, the National Universities Commission has created avenues for interventions on governance that should be embraced, some of these are (i) retreat for councils, vice-chancellors, and other principal officers, (ii) international training for principal officers (iii) U.S. Department of State international leadership program for vice-chancellors (Mafiana and Mba, 2019). In most cases, internal quality assurance has little or no impact on the governance of higher education institutions. There may be a quality assurance policy statement on governance but there is high control of information on governance to the quality assurance office. Whatever may be the constraints, internal quality assurance should strive to have an impact on the governance of higher education institutions.

Recruitment of staff (academic, non-teaching, and technical), as well as admission of students, is based on specified rules and regulations. The exercise is actually a process. It is within the purview of the internal quality assurance to ensure that due process is followed. A qualified staff is one who can guarantee quality service while students admitted with deficient admission requirements will attract minus for the program. Internal quality assurance should be firm in this aspect to uphold the integrity of the institution. Workshop and conference attendance as part of capacity development for staff is to be monitored by internal quality assurance even though the authority determines the level of compliance, records must be kept.

Facility, equipment, and laboratory have a standard specification in terms of space, size, and number and they are essential components of the teaching/learning process. In most cases, specifications are met but a sudden increase in students' population sometimes compromises the standard. Internal quality assurance should prompt the institution in good time where there is a need for expansion and addition of facility, equipment, or laboratory. The curriculum covers all that is to be impacted on the learner before certification. After a review of various definitions of curriculum, Saliu and Okebukola (2019) viewed the curriculum to be the set of activities that are planned and implemented for the achievement of an institution's educational goals. The product of a program is expected to have experienced certain input spelled out in form of contents. To have an output or a product that would be acceptable with minimal competency, the input must be based on an uncompromising standard hence the establishment of an academic minimum standard by the national coordinating body of higher education of different countries.

For example, in Nigeria, National Universities Commission (NUC) established Benchmark Minimum Academic Standard (BMAS). To drive home, the importance of curriculum, Saliu, and Okebukola (2019), further indicate that National Universities Commission takes a position that the curriculum is either adequate for the degree program or not adequate for the degree, there is no mid-course. If it is adequate, full mark, if not adequate, zero scores. Internal quality

assurance sees this aspect as one of its primary functions in order to showcase that the institution has the ability to meet the expectations of users of its product.

The library is central to the academic programs in higher education. It is both physical and electronic and contains books, journals, and other resource materials. The currency of library holdings and subscriptions is important for quality assurance. Quality assurance also covers evaluation, which is a core component of higher education operations. Evaluation is a feedback mechanism that unravels the level of service delivery by academic staff, non-teaching staff, and student academic performance to determine necessary improvement and enhancement measures. It also beams searchlight on the learning environment, social amenities, lecture venues, publications, lecture standards, academic events (Inaugural lecture, convocation, distinguished lecture), and uniformity of standards across the institution.

The Implementation Framework

The enormity of areas of coverage by quality assurance demands a standard framework for its implementation within institutions, at national, regional, and global levels. There is a United Kingdom body, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) which formulates strategies that safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education. In the United State of America (USA), there is an umbrella organization for all quality assurance agencies – Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA); International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), in Africa, African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN). Okebukola and Fonteyne (2015) graphically showed that there are 21 countries in Africa including Nigeria with legally established quality assurance mechanisms. All these corroborate the high level of premium placed on quality assurance in higher education globally.

Implementation of guidelines on the areas of coverage in quality assurance is structural and that is how it can percolate to the least unit of operation. Guidelines are set by various agencies and execution takes place at each of the institutions through internal quality assurance. The fact is that the goal of agencies on QA of assuring quality at national, regional, and global levels depends heavily on the effort of internal quality assurance which determines the kind of judgment that would be made on the product of the institution or the institution as a whole. Internal quality assurance arrangement has a solid structure. The framework for quality assurance as contained in the university of Ibadan quality assurance policy and strategy (University of Ibadan, 2013) presents an acceptable model.

The first step is the establishment of a directorate – Directorate of Quality Assurance – under the office of the head of the institution, which serves as an apex outfit that manages all quality assurance activities of the institution. The leadership of the directorate must be an experienced, disciplined, and committed senior academic who commands respect and belief in the vision and mission of the institution. Under the directorates, committees are set up to complete the structure and these are: for example, polytechnic/ university quality assurance committee, college quality assurance committee, faculty/ school/ center/ institute quality assurance committee, departmental quality assurance committee, library quality assurance committee, registry quality assurance committee, bursary quality assurance committee, postgraduate quality assurance committee, health center quality assurance committee, students affairs quality assurance committee, works and services/ Physical planning quality assurance committee and any other units deem fit can be added.

The University of Ibadan quality assurance policy and strategy (University of Ibadan, 2013) highlighted further, functions of the directorate and committees of quality assurance which are as listed below.

Functions of the Directorate of Quality Assurance

1. Mainstreaming quality management into the institutions' functions, activities and processes
2. Providing counseling, training, and support to the institution's unit in developing and implementing quality assurance mechanisms
3. Preparing and circulating quality evaluation manuals for use within the institutions
4. Organizing and coordinating the institution's self-evaluation exercises
5. Validating the self-evaluation exercises of the institution's units
6. Monitoring global trends in quality management and incorporating good practices into the implementation of quality assurance measures for the institution
7. Reporting periodically to the head of the institution on the state of quality assurance in the institution.

Other functions of the Directorate of Quality Assurance include:

1. Formulating procedures that facilitate consistency in implementation and transparency at all levels of the quality framework
2. Ensuring commitment to evidence-informed reflection throughout the quality framework and uniformity across the institution
3. Recommending reward system for adherence to quality assurance procedure by individuals and constituent units of the institution
4. Ensuring inclusion of feedback and input from both students (online assessment of academic process) and external peers at all levels of the institution
5. Providing regulatory service on keeping in line with best practices on the existence of good library, laboratory, and conducive learning environment; the conduct of convocation, inaugural lecture, and distinguished lecture are included here.

The functions of the quality assurance committee at other levels in the institution are:

1. Mainstreaming quality management into the unit's function, activities and processes
2. Publicizing the unit's quality assurance activities to both staff and students
3. Organizing and coordinating the unit's self-evaluation exercise
4. Also monitoring global trends in quality management and incorporating approved good practices in the unit's implementation of quality assurance measures
5. Submitting periodic reports to the Directorate of Quality Assurance on the state of quality assurance in the unit.

Careful formation of implementation framework is critical to the success likely to be recorded particularly selection of individuals that would form the membership of the committees. It is imperative for the directorate and every committee to be determined to be impactful.

The Internal Quality Assurance Mechanism

Internal quality assurance is the nucleus of global quality assurance in higher education. It is institutionally based. Internal quality assurance involves a deliberate program of activities within an institution that will provide confidence that a product or service will satisfy and maintain an expected level of quality in line with the objectives, mission, and vision of the institution. It is through internal quality assurance that judgment is made about the quality of an institution. Activities involved in internal quality assurance could be grouped into three areas –processing, monitoring, and evaluation.

Processing

- (I) Highlighting existing guidelines – This starts with the philosophy, vision, and mission statements of the program. The highlight of minimum standards for teaching, comprising minimum standards for course outline, lecture materials, lecture delivery (theory, practical, and field trip), contact hours, and student attendance. There should also be a highlight of minimum standards for quality/relevance of research, publications, and engagement in community service. It also covers the minimum standard for the conduct of meetings of council, congregation, senate/board, faculty/school, department/unit, inaugural lecture, and convocation, institution public lecture, student dressing, character, and values.
- (II) Establishment of new guidelines – This takes place when there is a modification to the existing guidelines or there is new information on general operations or there are certain peculiarities that may require scaling up actions to meet up with an expected level of quality.
- (III) Facilitating provision/installation of facilities/equipment and materials – Inadequacy or shortage of facilities, equipment and materials do exist in institutions at different magnitude in different programs, particularly consumables. The inadequacy could remain perpetual if there is no promptness on the situation to the institution management.
- (IV) Facilitating the adequacy of qualified resource personnel is essential particularly when a new program is being mounted. Mobility of staff and retirement may affect staff strength across various programs in the institution.

The components of processing activities involved in internal quality assurance appear simple and could easily be skipped. Internal quality assurance should not neglect any of the components if success is to be recorded. There is a need to be mindful of common excuses from staff. For example, some staff may find it convenient to proclaim the absence of guidelines, as well as lack of materials and work overload.

Monitoring

Internal quality assurance is more feasible in this aspect. It is like a watchdog ascertaining a doing-it-right attitude to a standard level. There is the monitoring of timely release and compliance with the institution's academic calendar, lecture and examination timetables, monitoring of lecture delivery which covers the presentation of a course outline, regularity, promptness, and coverage of contents and conduct of examinations. There is also monitoring of compliance with contents in the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standard and laboratory operations. Service delivery of various servicing departments of the institution like health center, works and physical planning, bursary, registry, library, information and technology center, security, student affairs, and others are monitored. Service offered to the community by the institution and other interactions through linkages are also monitored.

Monitoring is a task in an institution where the culture of quality is not entrenched. Reluctance would greet every move to put things right, but what is required is insistence. Monitoring may also be challenging in affiliated institutions due to the distance and compromising the attitude of operators of the program.

Internal Quality assurance carries out evaluation activities for two reasons:

- i. As a feedback mechanism for the institution or self-appraisal.
- ii. Preparation for external quality assurance or external appraisal.

With regards to the first reason, internal quality assurance facilitates student assessment of teaching or course delivery by academic staff, periodic assessment of existing facilities,

equipment, utilities, and materials, the establishment of checklists or templates on the existence of essential items, tracking of graduates through employers rating, visitors or outsiders appraisal of responses received from the institution and ratings of the responses received by students and staff from servicing departments of the institution. In preparation for external quality assurance appraisal, the internal quality assurance conducts (mock) accreditation exercise and also finalizes logistics for external accreditation exercise.

In their presentation on self-rating at the institutional level, Okebukola, Jegede and Mba (2019) identified six key areas internal quality assurance has to focus on. These are governance and management, infrastructure, finances, teaching and learning, research, publication and innovation, and societal engagement. The components of each of these areas require that all stakeholders play the expected roles. The owner/government/employer establishes the vision, mission, and goals of the institution, puts in place a credible management team which in turn coordinates the activities of all the stakeholders. The management establishes standard and enduring structures that guarantee recruitment of appropriately qualified staff, see to staff growth and development, mentorship, apprenticeship, the attraction of high-flight scholar or Nobel laureate on the staff list, ensure all students of the institution are free from admission irregularities, students are exposed to support and counseling services as well as academic support. Policies formulated should also guarantee adequate and standard infrastructure in terms of lecture hall/room, laboratory, library, workshop, computer resources, e-learning resources, recreation/sports facilities, office accommodation, and furniture. The institution's policy should also cover research activities, linkages, community/societal engagement, and sufficient funding.

Ensuring that all these parameters are quality assured is the task of internal quality assurance; therefore, internal quality assurance must be established on a solid foundation. All the committees from the unit level to the level of the directorate should be composed of staff members with high integrity and well disciplined. Any institution that expects a high degree of success from its internal quality assurance is expected to strengthen it by providing (i) all logistics required to operate effectively (ii) adequately funding its activities like workshop, seminar, instrument development, and administration, (iii) implementation of recommended sanctions (iv) enforcement of guidelines (v) publication of information (vi) general cooperation in respect of discipline, firmness, and fairness by all stakeholders.

The fact is that the internal quality assurance relies absolutely on the management of the institution. The extent of backup and strength that are given to internal quality assurance would determine the extent of its operations and coverage which would also expose the level of commitment the management has for the entire institutional operations towards excellence. Invariability, the regulatory body through external quality assurance should start the appraisal of the institution from the records of internal quality assurance. Records of activities presented by internal quality assurance are expected to be dependable to such a level that all appraisals conducted would be only to verify and confirm records. As much as possible this approach would stem the preparation for external assessment as an emergency matter.

A well-structured and strengthened internal quality assurance is most ideal to the extent that every institution is bold to submit itself for grading and ranking by external bodies. This process is the hub by which various bodies and agencies in charge of quality assurance would be able to regulate contents, review, and probably develop in new areas.

Sustenance of Internal Quality Assurance

Sustenance is a means by which enduring standard is assured. Quality assurance is not for a moment, rather it is a continuous phenomenon as long as it is desired that the product is continued to be valued and recognized. Right from the onset, plans on the sustainability of its activities should be part of scheduled programs of internal quality assurance. This involves

ensuring regular supply of materials, reagents, and equipment for replenishment or replacement when necessary; upgrading or expanding facilities that may be necessitated due to increase in population, updating of records and data with clear analyses, or adapting relevant research findings and new discovery.

Internal quality assurance should develop a manual which should be well circulated. Seminars/workshops/pieces of training on quality assurance codes and protocols should be conducted at regular intervals in order to keep staff constantly abreast of the demands of quality assurance. Internal quality assurance should work hard and be confident to apply for rating and ranking among institutions regionally and globally. It should strive towards expertise that can deliver cost-effective service within the system and beyond (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2017). In all of these activities towards the sustenance of internal quality assurance, the institution would be better for it. Things would fall in place; quality assurance would be seamless, and the institution would remain highly rated.

The Implication of Strengthened Internal Quality Assurance on Global Development of Quality Assurance

Internal quality assurance is vested with the authority to implement all established guidelines that would assure standards in all affairs of an institution. In the course of implementation, there would be the dissemination of contents in the guideline as well as monitoring of compliance level. Still part of the implementation, there would be evaluation both internally and externally. There is a remarkable difference between strengthened and non-strengthened internal quality assurance with respect to product/output. Non-strengthened internal quality assurance may have problems with personnel concerning adequacy, competency, and commitment and there may be a problem with funding and in such a situation, implementation becomes overbearing. On the other hand, an internal quality assurance that is strengthened would have the capacity to fully implement all the programs and in addition, develop some innovations.

In the course of implementing all programs and guidelines from the management level to every unit of the institution, strengthened internal quality assurance would be able to identify guidelines that require modification or un-implementable or where the new guideline is required properly documented with narrations. Higher education is dynamic as new knowledge and new approaches keep emerging and so shall be the need for a review of guidelines periodically. When it is time to review or to develop a set of new guidelines, may be at the national, continental, or global level, the agencies in charge should harvest efforts of well-ranked/strengthened internal quality assurance. The records harvested would serve as the primary source of the reviewed contents. The records would assist in formulating the next upgrade of global policy on quality assurance. This is in tandem with a bottom-up approach that would lead to an adjustable and implementable global policy on quality assurance.

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Chapter 24

Lecturers Awareness and Implementation of Quality Assurance Practices for Classroom Management in Federal Universities in South-South, Nigeria

Paul Elijah

Introduction

The need for ensuring quality in the education system is an issue that cannot be ignored in today's educational cycle where different sectors of the economy as well as educational stakeholders depend on the university system to solve some of the personal and societal problems bedeviling the nation. It is therefore important for quality to be ensured in the process of managing activities in the classroom as this translates to the readiness of students to solve some of the problems affecting society. In the process of managing the classroom, students are equipped with the right skill, knowledge and attitude which will be required for meeting personal and societal goals and objectives. Classroom management must therefore be carried out with the intention of sustaining the quality of education and even improving upon the existing standard (Elijah, 2019).

Ofojebe and Ezugoh (2010) opined that quality assurance refers to the determination of standards, appropriate methods and quality requirements by an expert body, accompanied by a process of inspection or evaluation that examines the extent to which practice meets these standards. This explains why lecturers who act as in-loco-parentis to students must be professional in the process of classroom management as this has a great implication on the overall growth and development of the nation. In fact, Nascimbeni and Burgos (2016) agreed with other educational scholars that the slow progress and low quality observed in the education sector is as a result of the lack of awareness on the part of educators on what they are expected to do such as enforcing quality assurance principles and processes.

It is important for lecturers who oversee the academic needs of students under their care to be aware of the required quality assurance practices that they need to enforce in their classes. Lecturers need to first be aware of these practices before they can devise strategies for their implementation. The government as well as university administrators therefore have the responsibility of ensuring that lecturers who handle student related activities inside and outside the classroom are aware of quality assurance practices that will contribute to the sustenance of quality education. Abbas and Olasunkanmi (2016:51) stated that:

“Empirical research studies undertaken in Turkey, United State of America and United Kingdom and in Kenya overtly demonstrated the effectiveness of quality management in arresting the trend of educational fortunes and it has the kicking potentials of continuously improving educational outcome.”

It is important on this basis for lecturers to be adequately prepared for this responsibility. Lecturers need to be equipped intellectually, materially and otherwise to gain understanding on how they can contribute to the achievement of quality in educational services rendered in their place of work. Additionally, Olsson (2017, p. 55) asserted that “knowledge, information, technological communication and open educational resources used in a way that enhances the quality of education is becoming an expectation of teachers in higher education.” This further highlights the fact that teachers' awareness of quality assurance is essential for quality educational outcomes at any level of education.

In the process of enforcing quality assurance practices for classroom management, lecturers need to be aware of the need for proper planning of classroom activities. This involves planning of lessons, assessment, as well as instructional materials. In the same manner, lecturers need to be aware of the practice of proper documentation as this will go a long way to ensure continuity in classroom activities. These practices will help to ensure quality in the classroom. It will also make it easy for quality assurance practices to be implemented in other areas that will contribute to effective classroom management.

Similarly, Ofojebe and Ezugoh (2010) asserted that the issue of motivation is also a vital quality assurance practice that has great impact on the management of classroom activities. When students are properly motivated, it makes it easy for classroom activities to be successfully implemented. Educational scholars have established that the issue of motivation and quality assurance is fundamental to achieving quality educational outcomes, service delivery and high standards across all levels of education. Lecturers in the University therefore need to develop the right strategy to motivate their students so as to simplify the process of classroom management. These lecturers can motivate their students through mentorship, creating an all-inclusive teaching and learning session among others. Educational scholars, as captured in Mitreva, Filiposki, Taskov, Krivokapić and Jovanovic (2017, p. 1172), pointed out that “there are different sources of motivation, level of motivation, motivation between individuals and their nature vary in different periods of time.” Lecturers need to develop this understanding in order to manage the attitude of students and sustain quality in their service delivery.

Furthermore, Ofojebe and Ezugoh (2010) stated that students can also be motivated by their lecturers by enforcing motivational practices such as motivation which includes good learning conditions, good grades, training and development programs, participatory decision-making, secured learning environment, recognition of performances and the teaching profession, financial rewards, scholarships and awards and provision of other facilities are strong tools for improving the status of these students. Such practices as this will create a smooth classroom interaction between lecturers and their students. The attitude of the lecturers both professionally and personally can also serve as motivation to students (Taurina, 2015). Lecturers must therefore be ready to engage their students by motivating them by any means possible. Ssekakubo, Lwanga, Mc and Ndiwalana (2014) equally pointed out that quality assurance is often used to promote reputation and as such teachers also stand to benefit by enforcing the right quality assurance practices. This in the long run will benefit all the stakeholders in the school.

The implementation of quality assurance practices in the management of the school curriculum is also essential classroom management. Toit (2014) highlighted that one of the quality assurance practices that need to be enforced in curriculum management is that all stakeholders are expected to be involved in the bottom-up approach of curriculum development. In fact, George, Muigai and Nyakwara (2013, p. 106) stated that “quality assurance standard in schools is the process of bringing improvement in instruction and school management in general through visits by quality assurance and standards officers to the individual schools.” It is therefore difficult to separate quality assurance from the implementation of the right educational curriculum. This establishes the need for all stakeholders to be engaged in the development, implementation and evaluation of the curriculum. Additionally, Kayyal and Gibbs (2012) pointed out that there is need for an environmental evaluation for the successful implementation of any university curriculum which will contribute to adequate classroom management. All of these practices go a long way to ensure that the curriculum designed for a university is able to contribute to the effective management of classroom activities.

Furthermore, Osuji and Etuketu (2019) stated that quality assurance in any school curriculum implementation seeks to address issues of standard, value and how the products of education would be able to achieve the goals of education. Lecturers must be able to enforce these values

and standards in order to sustain quality in the classroom and school in general. The success or failure of the goals and objectives of university education lies in the kind of educational relationship that exists between students and their lecturers. Therefore, these lecturers must consciously enforce quality assurance practices in their entire classroom related activities. When this is done, it will impact positively on the educational outcome of students as well as contribute to the achievement of national goals and objectives.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study was to investigate lecturers' awareness and implementation of quality assurance practices for classroom management in federal Universities in South-South, Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

1. determine the extent of lecturer's awareness of quality assurance practices for classroom management in federal universities in South-South, Nigeria
2. ascertain the extent of quality assurance practices in students' motivation for classroom management in federal universities in South-South, Nigeria
3. examine the extent of quality assurance practices in curriculum implementation for classroom management in federal universities in South-South, Nigeria

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the extent of lecturers' awareness of quality assurance practices for classroom management in federal universities in South-South, Nigeria?
2. What is the extent of quality assurance practices in students' motivation for classroom management in federal universities in South-South, Nigeria?
3. What is the extent of quality assurance practices in curriculum implementation for classroom management in federal universities in South-South, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female teaching staff on the extent of lecturers' awareness of quality assurance practices for classroom management in federal universities in South-South, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female teaching staff on the extent of quality assurance practices in students' motivation for classroom management in federal universities in South-South, Nigeria.
3. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female teaching staff on the extent of quality assurance practices in curriculum implementation for classroom management in federal universities in South-South, Nigeria.

Methodology

The design adopted for the study was descriptive survey design. The population of the study consisted of all the 4,938 teaching staff members (3,442 male and 1,496 female) in federal universities in South-South, Nigeria. The teaching staff strength of the selected universities were Nigerian Maritime University 257, University of Port Harcourt 1492, University of Benin 1884 and University of Uyo 1305. These universities were selected from the seven federal

universities in the six South-South States of Nigeria. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select 370 teaching staff as sample for the study based on the staff strength of each university, faculties and departments in the institutions selected for the study. Taro Yamane sample size determination formula was used to determine the sample size from the population of the study. Instrument used for data collection was a 15-item well-structured questionnaire tagged Lecturers Awareness and Implementation of Quality Assurance Practices for Classroom Management in Questionnaire (LAIQAPCMQ). The instrument was validated by three experts – two in measurement and evaluation, and one in educational management – at University of Port Harcourt. The reliability of the instrument was 0.84 using Cronbach alpha statistic. The instrument was administered by the researchers and two trained research assistants. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while z-test statistic was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question One: What is the extent of lecturers' awareness of quality assurance practices for classroom management in federal universities in South-South, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Scores on the Extent of Lecturers' Awareness of Quality Assurance Practices for Classroom Management in Federal Universities in South-South, Nigeria

S/No	Items	Male Teaching Staff n=197 Mean \bar{X}_1	SD	Female Teaching Staff n=173 Mean \bar{X}_2	SD	Mean Set X \bar{X}	Decision
1	Lecturers are aware they should ensure proper documentation of all relevant classroom records	2.85	0.89	2.77	0.74	2.81	HE
2	Lecturers are aware they should adhere strictly to the academic plan and programs of the University	2.84	0.88	2.94	0.81	2.89	HE
3	Lecturers are aware they should carry out regular evaluation of all classroom-related activities	2.81	0.91	3.11	0.51	2.96	HE
4	Lecturers are aware they should keep all classroom related information as confidential as possible	2.77	1.03	2.93	0.83	2.85	HE
5	Lecturers are aware they should make use of all resources provided by the University for the discharge of my duties	2.84	0.88	2.92	0.84	2.88	HE
Grand Mean and Standard Deviation		2.82	0.92	2.93	0.75	2.88	HE
$3.50 \leq x \leq 4.00$ Very High Extent (VHE)				$2.50 \leq x < 3.50$ High Extent (HE)			
$2.00 \leq x < 2.50$ Low Extent (LE)				$1.00 \leq x < 2.00$ Very Low Extent (VLE)			

Table 1 revealed that the responses of the male teaching staff to items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 produced mean scores of 2.85, 2.84, 2.81, 2.77 and 2.84. These items were above the criterion mean score of 2.50 used for decision-making and as such implied high extent to the items raised. On the part of the female teaching staff, the same set of items produced mean scores of 2.77, 2.94, 3.11, 2.93 and 2.92 indicating high extent to the items raised. In summary, the average mean scores of 2.82 from the male teaching staff and 2.93 from the female teaching staff showed that they are both aware of quality assurance practices for classroom management in federal universities in South-South, Nigeria. The mean set value of 2.88 showed that they both had a high extent of awareness of quality assurance practices for classroom management in federal Universities in South-South, Nigeria.

Research Question Two: What is the extent of quality assurance practices in students' motivation for classroom management in federal universities in South-South, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation Scores on the Extent of Quality Assurance Practices in Students' Motivation for Classroom Management in Federal Universities in South-South, Nigeria

S/No	Items	Male Teaching Staff n=197 Mean \bar{X}_1	SD	Female Teaching Staff n=173 Mean \bar{X}_2	SD	Mean Set X \bar{X}	Decision
6	I mentor students to become experts in our academic discipline	2.41	1.06	2.42	0.72	2.42	LE
7	I give regular team assignment to students to encourage partnership	2.56	0.95	2.24	0.94	2.40	LE
8	I give academic assistance to students after regular classroom activities	2.23	1.01	2.47	1.01	2.35	LE
9	I have reward plan for all my outstanding students	2.14	1.04	2.45	0.91	2.30	LE
10	I give attention to academically weak students	2.76	0.99	2.48	0.87	2.62	HE
Grand Mean and Standard Deviation		2.42	1.01	2.41	0.89	2.41	LE
3.50 ≤ x ≤ 4.00 Very High Extent (VHE)				2.50 ≤ x < 3.50 High Extent (HE)			
2.00 ≤ x < 2.50 Low Extent (LE)				1.00 ≤ x < 2.00 Very Low Extent (VLE)			

In Table 2, the responses of the male teaching staff to items 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 showed mean scores of 2.41, 2.56, 2.23, 2.14 and 2.76. Items 6, 8 and 9 with mean scores of 2.41, 2.23 and 2.14 were below the criterion mean score of 2.50 used for decision-making and as such showed a low extent while items 7 and 10 with mean scores of 2.56 and 2.76 implied high extent since their mean values were above the criterion mean score of 2.50 used for decision-making. On the part of the female teaching staff, the same set of items (6, 7, 8, 9, 10) produced mean values of 2.42, 2.24, 2.47, 2.45 and 2.48. All of these items were below the criterion mean score of 2.50 and as such implied a low extent to the items raised. The grand mean score of 2.42 and 2.41 showed that the male and female teaching staff displayed a low extent of implementation of quality assurance practices in the area of students' motivation for classroom management in federal universities in South-South, Nigeria. This is further supported by the average mean set of 2.41 which was below the criterion mean score of 2.50 used for decision-making.

Research Question Three: What is the extent of quality assurance practices in curriculum implementation for classroom management in federal universities in South-South, Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation Scores on the Extent of Quality Assurance Practices in Curriculum Implementation for Classroom Management in Federal Universities in South-South, Nigeria

S/No	Items	Male Teaching Staff n=197 Mean \bar{X}_1	SD	Female Teaching Staff n=173 Mean \bar{X}_2	SD	Mean Set X \bar{X}	Decision
11	I ensure students' active participation during classroom encounter with lecturers	2.59	0.85	2.90	0.71	2.75	HE
12	Relevant educational resources that fit each	2.49	1.06	2.90	0.71	2.70	HE

13	curriculum content are provided in each lesson Regular evaluation exercise is carried out on the extent of curriculum implementation	2.48	1.04	2.14	0.97	2.31	LE
14	Relevant technological devices are used to simplify the process of curriculum implementation	1.49	1.12	2.03	1.03	1.76	VLE
15	I give regular report on the extent of curriculum implementation	2.98	0.74	2.44	0.92	2.71	HE
Grand Mean and Standard Deviation		2.41	0.96	2.48	0.87	2.44	LE
3.50 ≤ x ≤ 4.00 Very High Extent (VHE)				2.50 ≤ x < 3.50 High Extent (HE)			
2.00 ≤ x < 2.50 Low Extent (LE)				1.00 ≤ x < 2.00 Very Low Extent (VLE)			

Table 3 indicated the responses of the male and female teaching staff to items 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15. The responses of the male teaching staff to the items showed mean values of 2.59, 2.49, 2.48, 1.49 and 2.98. On the part of the female teaching staff, the same set of items had mean scores of 2.90, 2.90, 2.14, 2.03 and 2.44. Items below the criterion mean score of 2.50 on both sides showed a low extent while the remaining items showed a high extent to the questions raised. Summarily, the average mean scores of 2.41 and 2.48 showed a low extent of implementation of quality assurance practices in the area of curriculum implementation for classroom management in federal universities in South-South, Nigeria. This is also supported by the average mean value of 2.44 which also revealed a low extent.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female teaching staff on the extent of lecturers' awareness of quality assurance practices for classroom management in federal universities in South-South, Nigeria.

Table 4: z-test Analysis of the Difference in the Mean Scores of Male and Female Teaching staff on the Extent of Lecturers' Awareness of Quality Assurance Practices for Classroom Management in Federal Universities in South-South, Nigeria

Variable	n	Mean	SD	df	z-cal.	z-crit.	Level of Significance	Decision
Male Teaching Staff	197	2.82	0.92	368	1.28	1.96	0.05	Failed to reject
Female Teaching Staff	173	2.93	0.75					

In Table 4, the value of z-crit. of 1.96 at 368 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance is above the value of z-cal. of 1.28. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected implying that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female teaching staff on the extent of lecturer's awareness of quality assurance practices for classroom management in federal universities in South-South, Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female teaching staff on the extent of quality assurance practices in student's motivation for classroom management in federal universities in South-South, Nigeria

Table 5: z-test Analysis of the Difference in the Mean Scores of Male and Female Teaching staff on the Extent of Quality Assurance Practices in Student's Motivation for Classroom Management in Federal Universities in South-South, Nigeria

Variable		n	Mean	SD	df	z-cal.	z-crit.	Level of Significance	Decision
Male Staff	Teaching	197	2.42	1.01	368	0.10	1.96	0.05	Failed to reject
Female Staff	Teaching	173	2.41	0.89					

Table 5 showed that at 368 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance, the value of z-crit. of 1.96 was above the value of z-cal. of 0.10. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected, and this indicated that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female teaching staff on the extent of quality assurance practices in students' motivation for classroom management in federal Universities in South-South, Nigeria.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female teaching staff on the extent of quality assurance practices in curriculum implementation for classroom management in federal Universities in South-South, Nigeria.

Table 6: z-test Analysis of the Difference in the Mean Scores of Male and Female Teaching staff on the Extent of Quality Assurance Practices in Curriculum Implementation for Classroom Management in Federal Universities in South-South, Nigeria

Variable		n	Mean	SD	df	z-cal.	z-crit.	Level of Significance	Decision
Male Staff	Teaching	197	2.41	0.96	368	0.74	1.96	0.05	Failed to reject
Female Staff	Teaching	173	2.48	0.87					

It was revealed in Table 6 that the value of z-crit. of 1.96 at 368 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance was above the value of z-cal. of 0.74. On this note, the null hypothesis was not rejected suggesting that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female teaching staff on the extent of quality assurance practices in curriculum implementation for classroom management in federal universities in South-South, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

Extent of Lecturers' Awareness of Quality Assurance Practices for Classroom Management in Federal Universities in South-South, Nigeria

The success of any quality assurance process depends on the extent to which stakeholders in an organization are aware of quality assurance practices that are instituted or needs to be introduced in the organization. In this case, university lecturers need to be aware of these practices in order to succeed in their service delivery. The quality assurance and quality control unit/department of universities therefore have a huge responsibility in ensuring that lecturers are aware and implement these practices where necessary. It was revealed in the findings of the study that there is a high extent to which lecturers are aware of these quality assurance practices. Quality assurance practices such as adherence to planning schedules as well as regular evaluation of educational activities were well understood by these lecturers. This contradicts the outcome of the findings by Abbas and Olasunkanmi (2016) which showed that 21% of the respondents were aware of quality assurance as part of total quality management. This highlights the need for the university, through its quality assurance department, to continue to sensitize their lecturers on quality assurance practices.

Similarly, the study showed that lecturers are aware that they should make use of available educational resources assigned to them for the purpose of sustaining the quality of education needed at this level. This achievement can be sustained through a regular interface between

the quality assurance unit/department and lecturers. This will help to avoid a situation where lecturers will be enforcing practices that are against the aspirations of their individual universities. Olsson (2017) revealed in the finding of his study that the lecturers were not part of any transparent quality assurance system in their workplace. Effort must therefore be made to correct this development by involving lecturers in the formulation of the quality assurance policies for the purpose of creating a school climate where the actual quality assurance practices of each university are understood and implemented by lecturers in and outside the classroom.

Extent of Quality Assurance Practices in Students' Motivation for Classroom Management in Federal Universities in South-South, Nigeria

One of the areas where lecturers need to enforce quality assurance practices for proper management of students' activities is students' motivation. The implementation of quality assurance practices in the area of students' motivation is expected to arouse students' interest in classroom activities which will contribute to the attainment of educational goals and objectives. However, data from the study indicated that these lecturers implement these quality assurance practices in the area of students' motivation to a low extent. The male and female teaching staff responded that they often do not mentor students and also do not attend to students after regular instructional time. This no doubt will create a disconnection between these lecturers and their students which will have a negative effect in the management of classroom activities. Mitreva, Filiposki, Taskov, Krivokapić and Jovanovic (2017) pointed out in their study that financial incentives, further training, bonuses among others often help to promote motivation in an educational institution. However, these practices are not adequately implemented by these lecturers, and this is bound to have negative consequences on the management of the classroom.

Further findings from the study also showed that they do not have any specific reward plan for students with outstanding performance. However, the male teaching staff revealed that they try to make their teaching environment as appealing as possible to encourage students to learn while the female teaching staff practiced otherwise. This may explain why some of these lecturers find it difficult to manage their classroom effectively. This is because, Ssekakubo, Lwanga, Mc and Ndiwalana (2014) pointed out in their findings that there existed a positive relationship between motivation and quality assurance. They also pointed out that motivation and quality assurance practices can predict 72.5% of organizational performance. This suggests that when lecturers enforce required motivational strategies as quality assurance practices, it will assist in the management of classroom activities.

Extent of Quality Assurance Practices in Curriculum Implementation for Classroom Management in Federal Universities in South-South, Nigeria

The implementation of quality assurance practices in the management of school curriculum is also an important practice for classroom management for the attainment of educational goals and objectives. Unfortunately, some of these practices were implemented to a low extent by the teaching staff. The study revealed that the teaching staff showed that there is a low extent to which they use the required technology for curriculum implementation. This no doubt deprives these lecturers of some of the benefits of using modern technological devices for classroom management. Similarly, the findings of the study also showed that there was a low extent to which they evaluate the classroom activities carried out by them. This is not surprising as George, Muigai and Nyakwara (2013) revealed in the findings of their study that there are various challenges faced by quality assurance and standards officers just like other organizational employees in the management of curriculum in schools. These challenges included the non-supervision of curriculum implementation, lack of communication, shortage of manpower, absence of funds among others. All of these factors jointly affect the ability of

these lecturers to implement quality assurance practices in the area of curriculum management for classroom management in these schools.

The finding indicates that lecturers engage their students in their curriculum implementation activities, and this is a healthy practice for building a meaningful classroom interaction. Osuji and Etuketu (2019) agreed in the findings of their study that this kind of quality assurance practice, if properly implemented and sustained, will enhance the quality of education at any level where it is being implemented. Lecturers therefore need to be diligent in the process of implementing quality assurance practices in the management of the school curriculum as this has a direct implication on how well they will be able to manage their classroom for the attainment of the goals and objectives of education in their various universities.

Conclusion

The study concluded as follows:

1. Lecturers in federal universities in South-South, Nigeria are aware of the quality assurance practices that are needed for classroom management in their universities.
2. There is a low extent of implementation of these quality assurance practices by these lecturers in the area of curriculum implementation and students' motivation for classroom management in these universities.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

1. University administrators should continue to organize orientation programs such as seminars for lecturers in these universities in order to acquaint them with contemporary quality assurance practices and also for them to make input in the quality assurance policy that will assist them in the management of the classroom for the attainment of the goals and objectives of education in the University.
2. University lecturers should be appraised from time to time as regards the extent to which quality assurance practices have been implemented in the area of curriculum management so that corrective measures can be taken where they are deficient.
3. The government and school administrators should ensure that adequate educational resources are provided, that will encourage lecturers to enforce quality assurance practices in the area of students' motivation for effective classroom management.
4. Students' motivation, classroom management and quality assurance in schools and classrooms are part of the curriculum for professional education courses so perhaps the acquisition of a professional education certificate/degree should be a requirement for all lecturers in universities as already being advocated.

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Chapter 25

Institutional Quality Assurance Units in Colleges of Education in Delta State, Nigeria: Successful Practices, Challenges and Future Directions

Theodorah Ezugoh

Introduction

Education is a formidable tool for instituting sustainable national development in every society. It has been recognized, as well as considered, as an instrument for any nation's socio-economic, cultural, political and environmental progress and development. Education generally is an 'instrument par excellence' in Nigeria which has led to the establishment of different levels of education including higher education, as disclosed by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013) in the National Policy on Education (NPE). The Nigerian higher education popularly known for manpower training and development for the nation's economy is a composition of different cadres of tertiary education institutions such as universities, polytechnics, colleges of education (COEs) and others. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013: 39), Nigerian higher education is tertiary education given in institutions such as universities and inter-university centers such as the Nigerian French Language Village, Arabic Language Village, national institutes of Nigerian languages, institutions such as innovation enterprise institutions (IEIs), and colleges of education, monotronics, polytechnics and other specialized institutions such as colleges of agriculture, schools of health and technology and the National Teachers' Institute (NTI).

The overall goals of the above-mentioned Nigerian higher education institutions as further pointed out by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013: 39), therefore, are to contribute to national development through high-level manpower training and development, provide accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in formal and informal education in response to the needs and interest of all Nigerians, provide high-quality career counseling and lifelong learning programs which prepare students with the knowledge and skills for self-reliance and the world of work, reduce skill shortages through the production of skilled manpower relevant to the needs of the labor market, promote and encourage scholarship, entrepreneurship and community service, forge and cement national unity, and promote national and international understanding and interaction.

Achievement of all these goals in the higher education institutions, especially in colleges of education, which is the main focus of the paper, cannot be possible without the provision of an equitable quality control system or best practices that will foster quality assurance in the education system. These quality assurance control systems or best practices are highly necessitated in the management of higher education institutions, in specific areas of the inputs, processes and output, which involves the general administration, admission processes and students' intake, coordination of teaching and learning activities, consultancy services, research and development, facilities/ resources provision, students' services, evaluation and assessment procedures, curriculum implementation and staff development, among others (FRN, 2013). Besides, the issues surrounding harnessing and enhancing an effective quality control system and quality assurance in the management and administration of the Nigerian higher education system has been a serious challenge and a matter of discourse for many education stakeholders.

In this present time, the poor quality and falling standards of most higher education institutions especially those of the colleges of education in Nigeria and Delta State inclusive has

become so worrisome, raising doubts about the future of the graduates or products from these institutions. Notwithstanding, the Nigerian colleges of education (COEs) in Delta State are teacher education institutions established with the mandate of training would-be teachers for the basic, primary and junior secondary schools in the country. They are saddled with the responsibilities of producing quality teachers for the Nigerian education system. The COEs have their goals and mandate for the award on the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). They also occupy the three cadres on the ladder of Nigerian higher education.

Given the need and demand for enhancement of quality assurance in the administration and management of higher education institutions coupled with compliance to the federal government policy directives and statements for the establishment of quality assurance agencies or departments in higher education institutions, quality assurance units or departments have been established for the improvement of best practices in the COEs. Several successes leading to best practices as well as several challenges have been recorded since the inception of these quality assurance units or departments in the COEs. More so, all the issues relating to institutional quality assurance units which were discussed in the paper has led to future directions in the practices and operations of institutional quality assurance units in the Nigerian COEs in Delta State. The thrust of this paper, therefore, is to discuss matters arising from institutional quality assurance units, successful practices, challenges and future directions of institutional quality assurance units in colleges of education in Delta State, Nigeria. Discussions have been done in the paper in different sections to disclose matters as they relate to the thrust of this paper.

Conceptual Definition of Terms: In this section, several terms were defined and conceptualized by different scholars including the author as they include quality assurance (QA), quality assurance practices (QAP), Nigerian colleges of education and institutional quality assurance units (IQUA).

Quality Assurance (QA)

Scholars have defined quality assurance from different perspectives. However, the concept of quality was first defined in the paper. Quality can be perceived as the fitness to purpose in relation to the user and customer needs. It measures the degree to which a product conforms to standards, specifications or requirements (Babalola, Adedeji & Erwat, 2007). Quality according to Eldin (2011) has several meanings which have been described from different perspectives. For Eldin, quality means those features of products that meet customer needs and thereby provide customer satisfaction. In this sense, the meaning of quality is oriented to income. The purpose of such higher quality is to provide greater customer satisfaction and, one hopes, to increase income. However, providing more and/or better-quality features usually requires an investment and hence usually involves increases in costs. Higher quality in this sense usually costs more.

Quality according to Eldin (2011) also means freedom from deficiencies, that is, freedom from errors that require doing work over again (rework) or that result in field failures, customer dissatisfaction, customer claims, and so on. In this sense, the meaning of quality is oriented to costs, and higher quality usually 'costs less.' Quality, therefore, evolves from several definitions which include: customer or clients' satisfaction and loyalty; doing right things right; providing a product which is "fit for the purpose"; providing an acceptable product at an acceptable cost; a standard which can be accepted by both the supplier and the customer; the totality of features or characteristics of a product that bear on its ability to satisfy a given need; and something fitness for use (Eldin, 2011).

Radziwill (2013) opined that quality involved the totality of characteristics of an entity that bear upon its ability to satisfy stated and implied needs. However, a product according to Radziwill (2013) is only likely to satisfy needs if it is deployed in the environment for which it

was intended (and usually, this is covered by implied needs). A high-powered laptop with 32GB of memory and all the latest bells and whistles is not going to satisfy someone's data processing needs if he or she is sitting out in the middle of the desert with no battery and no electrical outlet.

Quality also is the totality of characteristics of the entities; including people, processes, products, environments, standards, and learning – are all addressed by this framework. It suggests that when individuals improve themselves, they improve their ability to create quality in the world around them and innovate to ensure quality in the future world. Deming (2000) as the founder of total quality management, described quality in different ways; quality is the degree to which performance meets expectations. Quality for Deming (2000) denotes excellence in goods and services, especially to the degree they conform to requirements and satisfy customers. The essence of quality is to produce quality products. Quality can be termed as reliability. Reliability implies dependability – reliability introduces the concept of failure and time to failure: Quality and reliability go hand in hand. The customer expects a product of good quality that performs reliably. Reliability is the probability that a system or component can perform its intended function for a specified interval under stated conditions (Deming, 2000).

Harvey and Green (1993) identify five categories or ways of thinking about quality. Key aspects of each of these categories can be summarized as follows: i) Exception: distinctive, embodies excellence, passing a minimum set of standards. ii) Perfection: zero defects, getting things right the first time (focus on process as opposed to inputs and outputs). iii) Fitness for purpose: relates quality to a purpose, defined by the provider. iv) Value for money: a focus on efficiency and effectiveness, measuring outputs against inputs. v) Transformation: a qualitative change; education is about doing something to the student as opposed to something for the consumer. It includes concepts of enhancing and empowering: the democratization of the process, not just outcomes. Watty (2003) suggests that the dimension of quality as perfection can be removed since higher education does not aim to produce defect-free graduates. Lomas (2001) suggests that fitness for purpose and transformation seem to be the two most appropriate definitions of quality, according to small-scale research with a sample of senior managers in higher education institutions.

Quality of the Nigerian COEs in Delta State as conceptualized within the context of this paper refers to the process of attainment of a high degree of standard or effectiveness which measures the worth or worthiness of the colleges of education as regards to the overall operations, practices, services and entire management of the colleges of education. Quality here embraces promoting quality planning, quality control and quality improvement in the management of COEs. These three terms, if effectively fostered, will lead to the quality assurance of an institution. Given these definitions of quality, quality assurance, according to Joseph and Agih (2007), deals with setting standards for the various processes, practices and activities that lead to the production of graduates by the training institutions. It connotes zero defects in the production of goods and services, that is, quality is attainable or maintained at the work process at all times.

Quality assurance (QA) is a broad concept that focuses on the entire quality system including suppliers and ultimate consumers of the product or service. It includes all activities designed to produce products and services of appropriate quality. Quality assurance (QA) is equally a management technique that adopts a holistic approach in the work processes of an educational organization (Joseph & Agih, 2007). The International Organization for Standardization (ISO, 2000) stated that quality assurance describes all the planned and systematic actions necessary to assure that a product or service will satisfy the specified requirements. Storey, Briggs, Jones and Russell (2000) attested that quality assurance (QA) is a management method that is defined as all those planned and systematic actions needed to provide adequate confidence that a product, service or result will satisfy given requirements for quality and be fit for use. A

quality assurance program is the total of the activities aimed at achieving that required standard (Storey, Briggs, Jones & Russell, 2000).

According to the American Society for Quality (ASQ, 2020), quality assurance is part of quality management focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled. The confidence provided by quality assurance is twofold – internally to management and externally to customers, government agencies, regulators, certifiers, and third parties. An alternate definition is all the planned and systematic activities implemented within the quality system that can be demonstrated to provide confidence that a product or service will fulfill requirements for quality. Typically, quality assurance (QA) activities and responsibilities cover virtually all of the quality systems in one fashion or another, which includes quality control which is a subset of the QA activities (ASQ, 2020).

Quality control as further described by the American Society for Quality (ASQ, 2020), can be defined as part of quality management focused on fulfilling quality requirements. While quality assurance relates to how a process is performed or how a product is made, quality control is more the inspection aspect of quality management. An alternate definition is the operational techniques and activities used to fulfill requirements for quality. Quality management (QM) on the other hand is defined as a formalized system that documents processes, procedures, and responsibilities for achieving quality policies and objectives.

Quality management is focused not only on product and service quality but also on the means to achieve it. Quality management, therefore, uses quality assurance and control of processes as well as products to achieve more consistent quality. What a customer wants and is willing to pay for it determines quality. It is a written or unwritten commitment to a known or unknown consumer in the market. A quality management system (QMS), therefore, helps coordinate and direct an organization's activities to meet customer and regulatory requirements and improve its effectiveness and efficiency continuously (ASQ, 2020). Given the above definitions of the entire quality processes of quality control and quality management infused in quality assurance, the whole gains and benefits of QA are as follows: defining, improving, and controlling processes; reducing waste; preventing organizational mistakes; lowering costs; facilitating and identifying training opportunities for employees; engaging staff; setting organization-wide direction; and communicating a readiness to produce consistent results (ASQ, 2020).

Quality assurance in education as described by the European Commission (2018) involves the systematic review of educational programs and processes to maintain and improve their quality, equity and efficiency. Quality assurance relies on approaches that also include certain mechanisms that are both external and internal to schools. Besides, approaches to quality assurance may need to be adapted over time to better meet needs for feedback and decision-making across systems. External quality mechanisms may include national or regional school evaluations and/or large-scale student assessments. Internal quality mechanisms may include the school self-evaluation, staff appraisal and classroom-based student assessments, which could be controlled by setting up a quality assurance unit or department.

However, the design of quality assurance mechanisms (tools, processes & actors) varies across national contexts; their common objective is to improve teaching and learning – with the ultimate goal to support the best outcomes for learners. From these explanations, quality assurance is important for accountability as well as to support the ongoing development of schools, teaching and learning. Well-functioning systems have mechanisms to support and balance vertical and horizontal, internal and external accountability. Quality assurance is focused on development support for schools to adapt to the changing needs of learners. The focus is not only on improvement but also innovation – that is, the development or experimental testing of approaches in different contexts –to support quality, equity and efficiency (European Commission, 2018). The whole idea of QA as deduced from all the

foregoing explanations is that it requires quality processes of maintaining a standardized system, quality control system, quality management system, quality improvements, quality planning, quality assessment and quality auditing, among others.

Quality Assurance Practices (QAP)

To ensure that quality assurance is enhanced or fostered in the COEs, certain practices are maintained. Practice could be termed as a technique or methodology that through experience and research has proven reliably to lead to the desired result. These practices need to be shared and adopted to benefit more people. In the context of education, a practical definition of practice is knowledge about what works in specific situations and contexts, without using inordinate resources to achieve the desired results, and which can be used to develop and implement solutions adapted to similar educational problems in other situations and contexts (World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa, 2017).

Best practices if adopted in the COEs should meet at least the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, sustainability, ethical soundness, the possibility of duplication, the involvement of partners and the community and political commitment criteria, in addition to one or more of the other criteria. A best practice need not meet all the above criteria, because it can be anything that works to produce results without using inordinate resources, in full or in part and that can be useful in providing lessons learned (World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa, 2017).

According to Schmidt (2014), practice is not reduced to mere activity, more or less regular sequences of operation, but is taken to also encompass how workers competently handle contingencies and variations, ensure orderly alignment of their distributed activities, as well as sundry intellectual activities such as envisioning the outcome, devising methods and plans, identifying tasks, preparing and allocating tasks, etc. The modern concept of practice as further described by Schmidt (2014) can be seen as rules guiding an operation.

Quality assurance practices (QAP), therefore, as envisaged within the context of this paper has to do with all internal and external mechanisms, activities or measures including frameworks established or laid down to ensure that quality is assured in an educational institution. They include good or best practices that will enable an organization or institution like the COEs to attain its goals and objectives. These can also encompass a wide range of internal and external mechanisms (tools, processes and actors) to monitor overall system performance, policy implementation, school and staff effectiveness, and individual student outcomes. The school systems include various layers, operate in diverse contexts, and employ staff with a range of experience and competencies.

External mechanisms provide data important for policy-level decisions and resource allocation, while internal evaluations provide more detailed and timely data important for the school-level development and to support teaching and learning. Schools and external institutions and actors may work together to define strategies and alternatives for school improvement (European Commission, 2018). Joseph and Agih (2007) observed that QAP are credible frameworks built on preventive management theory which works on its own towards the realization of productivity and excellence in the system. As regards, quality must be assured in various practices in the COEs involving the general administration of the institution, student-personnel management and assessment, teaching and learning activities, among others. In the same light, the European Commission (2018) viewed quality assurance practices are part of reforms, mechanisms, processes, policies or approaches undertaken or established to attain quality assurance in the education system.

The European Commission (2018) further noted that many countries are engaged in continuing or recent reforms, ranging from a general introduction of quality assurance

mechanisms, the introduction of specific measures, and the adoption of national frameworks to maintain a quality education system. Many countries have incorporated evaluations that are external and internal to schools, which can complement and reinforce each other. It is, therefore, believed that school education systems that support the synergy of external and internal quality assurance mechanisms will have more resilience for the complex process of change.

Most countries are also increasingly allowing schools greater autonomy so they may better respond to local contexts and individual learner needs. Internal quality assurance mechanisms support evidence-based decision-making for internal accountability (that is, peer professional accountability) and school development. Most European countries have created frameworks that integrate some combination of internal and external quality assurance mechanisms, which may include use of inspectorates, national student assessments, school self-evaluation and teacher appraisal, just to ensure that quality assurance is enhanced in the education system. In general, these mechanisms generate data on the overall performance of systems as well as the quality of schools and the teacher workforce, as measured against learning outcomes and standards defined in national qualification frameworks (European Commission, 2018).

Machumu and Kisanga (2014) observed that to assure what HEIs like the COEs are maintaining standards; quality should dominate many forums in higher education. A window is open for every HEI to practice QA strategies for its survival. HEIs are encouraged to conduct window-shopping before buy-in. The truth is that QA is walking with us; living with us; we practice it whether knowingly or unknowingly. If QA strategies cannot be appropriately practiced HEIs cannot survive any competition around everywhere. Therefore, QA practices in higher education institutions are responsible for safeguarding the public interest in sound academic standards of higher education qualifications (taught and research).

It also informs and encourages continuous improvement and control in the management of the quality of education offered in higher education institutions. But a great deal is known about QA in HEIs but unfortunately not much is known about its practices (systems, policy, implementation strategies or interpretation and procedures) employed to assure quality especially in the Nigerian higher education system which includes the COEs. To support the above statement, Machumu and Kisanga (2014) further attested that it is well-known that there are internal and external QA practices. HEIs conduct internal QA practices by means of students' assessments, peer reviews of publications, and reflective practices. Also, HEIs try to improve and enhance students' welfare and support system; monitor staff teaching and students learning; as well as promote quality research and publication.

External QA practices are enhanced, maintained and monitored by QA agencies of respective countries or regions, for example, the NCCE for COEs. Given all these practices, it is a public concern that QA practices employed in most of HEIs, especially COEs do not work properly and that its procedures and practices are not well-known and conceptualized to the majority of education stakeholders. This has been evident openly due to lack of competencies and employability skills to most graduates; difficult to compete in the competitive labor market and difficult to invent new business ventures for self-employed (Machumu & Kisanga, 2014). Hence, experience has shown that low quality of graduates has been reported in several countries both developed and developing.

However, in most African countries, there is an open and wide link between the low quality of graduates and QA practices since without well-coordinated, controlling, and maintaining appropriate QA practices; no HEIs can prove to produce high-quality graduates (World Bank, 2003). Nevertheless, it is important to note that quality assurance practices which include processes of setting up or establishment of institutional quality assurance units (IQUA) infused in the higher education system like those of the COEs in Delta State will certainly ensure that quality is assured on the long run in the management of this system.

Nigerian Colleges of Education (COEs)

The Nigerian colleges of education are NCE-awarding higher education or tertiary institutions. They are teacher education institutions responsible for the training of NCE teachers especially for the Nigerian basic education program whose scope covers early childhood care and development education (ECCDE), pre-primary education, primary education and junior secondary school. The origin of colleges of education in Nigeria according to Oga and Okpaga (n.d.) is traceable to the Ashby Report (1960:16) called, "Investment in Education."

Besides, from inception as noted in the works of Jibril (2007) it was accounted that with the intervention of Christian Missionaries whose activities metamorphosed into western education calling for the need of teachers, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) established the first teacher training institution in Abeokuta, western Nigeria, in 1859. The Baptist Mission also founded the Baptist Training College Ogbomoso in 1897, with the Wesleyan Mission establishing the Wesley College in Ibadan in 1918.

In the Eastern part of Nigeria, the Hope Waddell Institute was founded in Calabar in 1892. Later in 1909, the then colonial government established the Nasarawa Schools in Northern Nigeria. Katsina and Toro Colleges were later established in 1927 and 1929 respectively. The grade III teachers' certificate was the qualification most of these institutions award. Later on, teachers colleges awarding the grade II sprang up. The grade I teachers training was later introduced and aspired by ambitious teachers willing to enhance their status to qualify for teaching in secondary schools. The earliest curriculum for the early teacher training consisted of subjects like, English language, arithmetic, writing, geography, hygiene, general studies, geometry, agriculture, nature study, local languages.

The Ashby Commission report however observed a lot of anomalies in the then colonial education in Nigeria, including teacher training that was seen to be highly inadequate. Many teachers were un-certificated and improperly trained (Ashby, 1960). This resulted in the recommendation for the massive expansion of intermediate education for teachers aimed at upgrading the existing teaching force. This brought about the existence and emergence of advanced teachers' colleges, which later metamorphosed into colleges of education (Jibril, 2007). The Ashby Commission recommended the establishment of teachers' grade one colleges, which would offer a two-year teacher program based on a school certificate. As a result of the modification of the Report, five advanced teachers' training colleges were established in 1962 by the federal and regional governments with the aid of UNESCO. The program is a three-year course open to candidates who had completed a grade II teachers' course or secondary education with required credit passes.

The five advanced teachers' training colleges were established at Lagos, Ibadan and Zaria in 1962. That of Ibadan was later transferred to Ondo in 1964. The College is now known as Adeyemi College of Education. Other advanced teachers training colleges were established at Owerri in 1963, Kano in 1964 and Abraka in 1968 (Oga & Okpaga, n.d.). All the advanced teachers' training colleges as further added by Oga and Okpaga (n.d.) were co-educational with sponsorship from either the federal or regional governments. Some of the advanced teachers' training colleges were elevated to the status of colleges of education because of their high standards and the reputation of their products.

In 1973, the number of advanced teachers' training colleges and colleges of education in Nigeria rose to 13. Until the establishment of the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) in Nigeria in 1989, all the advanced teachers' training colleges and colleges of education in Nigeria numbering about 43 were affiliates of institutes/faculties of education in Nigerian universities. Today, there are 152 colleges of education (both public/federal or state

government owned and private COEs) in Nigerian with uniform minimum standards as provided by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE).

The setting up of the uniform minimum standards by the commission was necessitated, among other things, by the discriminatory admission policies of the universities in favor of the candidates from ATTCS/colleges of education that were affiliated to them. Since the establishment of the National Commission for Colleges of Education in Nigeria, the academic programs of all the colleges of education in Nigeria have been accredited from time to time as stipulated in Section 5 (c) and (d) of Decree 3 of 1989 that set up the Commission. The decree states that; the commission shall: (c) lay down minimum standards for all programs of teacher education and accredit their certificates and other academic awards, (d) approve guidelines setting out criteria for the accreditation of all colleges of education in Nigeria. The purpose of the accreditation and re-accreditation exercise is to ensure the maintenance of minimum standards and quality assurance in all the colleges of education in Nigeria. This has recently called for the establishment of institutional quality assurance units in the COEs to complement the activities of external accreditation.

Additionally, COEs including those in Delta have their roles, tasks, responsibilities and mandates. Oga and Okpaga (n.d.) opined that among other tasks and responsibilities, the COEs have produced a large number of non-graduate professional (NCE) teachers that teach in our primary and junior secondary schools, thus alleviating the manpower problems of the nation at those levels. They have waded into the task area of producing professionally trained teachers for our vocational and technical secondary schools to meet the nation's requirements for technological take-off as provided in the National Policy on Education.

Another contribution of colleges of education is in the structural integration of Nigeria. Through public lectures, seminars, workshops, conferences, intercollegiate sports competitions and the implementation of their curriculum, especially in general studies courses like citizenship education, they have raised the level of national unity, and national consciousness, sense of oneness, common citizenship and common purpose among Nigerians, thus enhancing the development of the nation. In addition, they provide in-service courses, extra-mural classes and sandwich programs to raise the literacy level of the members of the communities around them.

Another vital area of the COEs task and contributions is in the area of research. Their research results enable educational planners to formulate appropriate education policies for the nation's development. The performance of these onerous tasks by colleges of education depends upon the quantity, quality, and caliber of the staff the colleges' systems can employ, train, develop and maintain. Without an adequate, skilled and well-motivated workforce operating within a sound human resource management program, development is not possible. Any organization that underrates the critical role of people in goal achievement can neither be effective nor efficient (Onah, 2008). Hence, of all the organizational resources which are made up of men, materials, money, machines and methods (the 5-m of organizational management), the human resources (men) stand out as most crucial for quality control and quality management. The COEs have certain mandates in which they should certainly fulfill, and they have been outlined below.

Mandates of the Nigerian Colleges of Education (COEs)

The mandate of the Nigerian colleges of education in Delta State as teacher education institution has been drawn from its goals which were accordingly stated by FRN (2013: 43) in the National Policy on Education as follows:

- i. producing highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of the educational system

- ii. encouraging further, the spirit of inquiry and creativity in teachers
- iii. helping teachers to fit into the social life of the community and the society at large and enhance their commitment to national goals
- iv. providing teachers with intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and to make them adaptable to changing situations; and
- v. enhancing teachers' commitment to the teaching profession.

For the COEs to achieve their mandate, they need to ensure that quality is assured in the system through the establishment of internal or institutional quality assurance units (IQAU). Just as observed by Storey, Briggs, Jones and Russell (2000), to maintain a QA system especially in the management of the COEs in Delta State, it is necessary to check periodically through the establishment of an institutional quality assurance unit (IQAU) each area of the system for compliance, that is general management effectiveness, students' assessments, teaching and learning, academic programs, accreditation, auditing, academic and nonacademic staff efficiency, among others. This involves auditing the parts to assess whether they continue to meet the original criteria. This procedure should be formerly documented. Reports on all audits should be made available to management and the people responsible for the work concerned. Deviations from required standards must be corrected as soon as possible. The audit must be independent and should be thorough and unannounced.

Institutional Quality Assurance Units (IQAU)

Quality assurance practices which led to the establishment of institutional quality assurance units and department in the higher education institutions as previously indicated in this paper by Machumu and Kisanga (2014) is responsible for safeguarding the public interest in sound academic standards of higher education qualifications (taught/teaching and research). It also informs and encourages continuous improvement and control in the management of the quality of education offered in higher education institutions. HEIs are encouraged to take a nuts-and-bolts approach in developing, finding and implementing appropriate QA practices (policies, systems, strategies, and procedures) to improve the quality of education in HEIs for community services, education management system, good governance and clients' satisfaction is a key role to boost higher education provision and economic profitability in developing countries.

One way in achieving these missions is through the establishment of institutional quality assurance units (IQAU) as proposed and highlighted by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013) in the National Policy on Education (NPE). The evolution of quality and its journey in education as indicated by Machumu and Kisanga (2014) goes beyond the time of medieval ages whereby the notion of universities came into being. So, neither quality nor QA is new. In Africa for instance, most HEIs have their roots in university colleges created during the colonial period. After independence, most of them transformed into full-fledged universities and obtained support from their respective governments. The fundamental structure, governance and organization are the same, and the historic commitment to maintaining standards of institutional quality and accountability, particularly with regards to program review, evaluation and assessment, is unbroken. At that time, professors and individuals of high rank were responsible for safeguarding institutional quality. Princes and Popes were used to controlling the institutional standards of medieval universities by granting charters (Machumu & Kisanga, 2014).

As time went on around the 18th century, the German contribution of the conception of a university as a research institution, which redefined their quality, and accountability of universities was witnessed. By then German universities such as the University of Berlin innovated new things such as laboratory and seminar mode of teaching and learning whereby the majority of students worldwide were attracted to learn the tone of German excellence, which made Germany the intellectual capital of the world, the place to which scholars and

scientist looked first for light and leading (Charles, 2007). During the 1950s the US accreditation system was leading among other systems of higher education. The system is undergoing modification and changing from time to time and now is as quality assurance. It goes beyond the 1950s whereby a system that increased close government oversight of colleges and universities by adherence to carefully crafted process of self-study and peer-reviewed (evaluation) (Machumu & Kisanga, 2014).

Sequel to the developments of QA in other parts of the world, quality assurance has become an internationalized concept in Nigeria. According to Omebe (2015), the NUC reported that the first attempt at universalization of quality assurance in higher education across the globe was in 2004. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013) in a bid to ensure that minimum standards and quality assurance of instructional activities in schools also gave directives concerning this course that is the establishment of IQAUs. The history of institutional quality assurance units (IQAU) for COEs as stated by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE, 2012) could be traced down to the year 2012 whereby the high rate of poor performance in the products of the Nigerian COEs was worrisome and this led to a pilot survey looking inward at the system operations.

Discovering that certain problems were affecting the system, led to sending some officials abroad to train on quality assurance in the United Kingdom, sponsored by three agencies, the Commonwealth of Learning, ESSPIN and NCCE. The training was based on five focal areas of the system which includes the different aspects of the administration that is leadership management and organization of institutions, curriculum implementation, infrastructure, assessment and evaluation procedures, and students support and progression. These officials were supposed to return and train the trainees. Coupled with the issues surrounding accreditation of institutions, this equally led to the establishment of QA units and departments in the COEs. Besides, as part of effective administration of higher education, the federal government (FRN, 2013) also indicated in the NPE the establishment of QA agencies at the federal, state/FCT and local government levels for monitoring and maintaining set standards at all levels of education.

Quality Assurance Agencies and Units for Higher Education Institutions: Nigerian Federal Government Policy Directives and Statements

Generally, the federal government of Nigeria gave directives on the establishment of QA agencies in which every level of the education system must pursue and follow suit. According to the FRN (2013:67), QA agencies in state ministries of education/FCT education secretariat and local government education authorities in collaboration with the federal QA agency would be responsible for the organization of supervision and inspection of all educational institutions under their jurisdiction. Given this directive, the goals of QA agencies are to:

- a. set, maintain and improve standards in all aspects of the school system
- b. ensure minimum standards and quality assurance of instructional activities in schools through regular inspection and continuous supervision
- c. disseminate regularly, information on problems and difficulties of teachers and institutions and offer practical solutions to them; and
- d. encourage dissemination of information on innovative and progressive educational principles and practices in the school system through publications, workshops, meetings, seminars, conferences, among others.

Furthermore, to ensure that educational institutions maintain equitable quality minimum standards and overall quality of education in higher education institutions that will guarantee quality assurance in the system, a QA unit or department shall be established in educational institutions to supersede internal affairs and educational activities. The institutional quality assurance unit in various higher education institutions including the COEs in Delta State have

their own *modus operandi*, that is, certain roles, functions and responsibilities which they perform. This has been discussed in the next section.

Institutional Quality Assurance Units (IQAU) in the Nigerian Colleges of Education (COEs) in Delta State: Modus Operandi

The roles, responsibilities and functions of IQAUs in the Nigerian COEs including those in Delta State as pointed out by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE, 2012: 41) are as follows:

- i. Provide guidance and support to other units in QA activities in the institution
- ii. Support and promote the attainment of NCCE minimum standards
- iii. Periodically organize internal mock accreditation
- iv. Ensure quality of internal institutional data collection, analysis, dissemination, for management purposes
- v. Ensure institution conducts regular self-assessment of programs (to monitor strengths and weaknesses)
- vi. Ensuring that the college regularly update self-assessment document
- vii. Act as liaison with NCCE on quality assurance issues in the institution
- viii. Serve as the coordinating organ of the institution in matters of logistics during external assessments
- ix. Monitoring teaching
- x. Report to management monthly or as the need arises
- xi. Provide information to the public and other interested partners about quality and standards
- xii. Review external examiners reports and advise relevant action/implementation by management, deans and HODs
- xiii. Coordinate tracer studies on the graduates of the institution
- xiv. Organize meetings with and workshops for teachers, when necessary, with the view to improving their professional competence
- xv. Obtain information in respect of challenges experienced by teachers in schools and institutions as well as provide advisory solutions through appropriate authorities
- xvi. Perform any other function as may be required.

Given the above roles, functions and responsibilities of the IQAU, QA officials especially the head of the QA unit must fulfill certain criteria which includes that he or she must have undergone QA training organized or recognized by NCCE; have a track record of quality enhancement in the college; possess a higher degree in any area of study of the institution; generally, acknowledge as a successful/accomplished lecturer in the institution; have a good working knowledge of the college of education system; conversant with the NCCE minimum standards and accreditation procedures and instruments; and be prepared to serve a single term of four years. However, certain practices or activities take place in the COEs which require that IQAU oversee. Omebe (2015) asserted that IQAUs in the COEs just as they exist in the universities to establish and maintain high-quality standards in the COEs have a shared responsibility with NCCE in addressing the following key areas of minimum academic standard, accreditation, carrying capacity and admission quota, visitation, impact assessment, research and development, publications and research assessment, structures, infrastructures and utilities, students assessments and examinations.

Describing these areas further, Omebe (2015) expressed that the minimum academic standards form the baseline for entrenching quality higher education system since it prescribes a profile of curriculum, human resources, structures, infrastructures, equipment and associated facilities required for establishing, governing and managing the COEs. Accreditation on the other hand is the process by which programs are evaluated against set minimum academic standards. Institutions comprehensive academic research and development

activities are evaluated against prescribed criteria (including self-vised and self-produced strategic plans). In this case, it is the responsibility of the IQAUs in the COEs to prepare for external accreditation. They should conduct an internal assessment beforehand before external accreditation comes up.

The carrying capacity of any higher education institution is the maximum number of students that the institution can sustain for qualitative education based on available human and material resources, and it is the duty of IQAUs in the COEs to see that this is maintained by the management and college leadership. Visitation to COEs is a statutory requirement that empowers the proprietor to ascertain the well-being of the COEs. Impact assessment is a specialized form of evaluation aimed at finding out if the core expectations of the establishment of a particular COE are being met. This is the responsibility of IQAUs in the COEs to organize such. Research however is the driving force for human development as globally determined; such research should be evidenced by publications. Therefore, IQAUs in the COEs should ensure that quality research is provided in the institutions. Structures, infrastructures and utilities are the essential driving force for qualitative productivity in any organization, particularly in the college of the education system.

Facilities are important in promoting a quality teaching and learning environment in the COEs, therefore, IQAU should encourage the college management to make adequate provisions of facilities in the institution. They should also ensure that the existing facilities are highly sustainable through the adoption of effective maintenance procedures. Omebe (2015) highlighted the following as quality assurance checklist which enables the IQAUs to foster quality control, practices and processes are enshrined in the COEs, as they include: institution/faculty mission and objectives, teaching programs, students selection, course structure and documentation, teaching arrangement, postgraduate supervision, students support, assessment/evaluation, grievance procedures, monitoring of outcomes, research and development, community service, staffing issues, infrastructure /resources and governance. Other target areas as further identified by Omebe (2015) to be considered to ensure quality assurance by the IQAUs in the COEs are as follows: mode of admission, teaching practice, motivation, staff recruitment, and raising the status of teachers.

Under the mode of admission in the COEs, it has been observed that education courses are the least preferred by candidates seeking admission into tertiary institutions, especially in the COEs. The majority of the students who studied courses in education did so not because they desired such but because they were not able to get the cut-off marks on their preferred choice courses. The provision of quality teachers demands that the mode of admission of candidates into the teaching profession be changed. Superior brains should be attracted to the teaching profession through the use of incentive packages like scholarships, bursaries, wavers and allowances to be given to educating students to induce and attract good brains into the profession.

Teaching practice or field experience is one of the core courses in a teacher education program that helps to prepare and equip teachers for the task they are captured to perform. It aims to build up student teachers real classroom experiences and competencies as they practice what they have learned theoretically. Supervisors must ensure that real supervision is done. The practice of not completing the supervision time of student teachers should be seriously frowned at. Omebe (2013) suggest that teaching practice should be done in two contacts for efficiency and effectiveness. In addition, there should be a one-year internship system similar to that of Medical Doctors and Pharmacists. This will make NCE a four-year course and B. Ed a five-year course and at the end of the training, NCE holders will be employed on grade level 08 and degree holders on 09. The one-year internship should be regarded as national service and students should be paid stipulated allowances.

The motivation which by Omede (2015) is defined as the totality of financial and union financial rewards given to an employee in return for his services to an organization, promotes staff efficiency and effectiveness. People are motivated when they expect that a course of action is likely to be rewarded. By implication, the level of rewards provided for staff largely influence their commitment and performance. Teachers in COEs need adequate motivation because they are mandated to translate educational programs into practical experiences. Without motivation, teachers' willingness to perform will be low hence poor achievement of educational goals and objectives. Teachers are motivated through payment of salaries, promotions, leave allowances, staff development, etcetera. Motivation helps to increase effectiveness and efficiency which makes for quality. Improved conditions of service should be used to motivate teachers already in the profession and to attract qualified ones into the teaching profession.

The issues surrounding staff recruitment according to Omebe (2015) is the responsibility of IQAUs. It is a process of enlistment of new members into a group and through which they become part and parcel of the administration of an organization. The main purpose of recruitment exercises is to attract a qualified and sufficient number of potential teachers to apply for job vacancies in educational institutions. With the belief that no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers, IQAUs in the COEs must ensure that the following method of teacher recruitment must be seriously considered. Advertisement of the job and application forms, employment interviews, selection tests, Investigation of applicant's background medical examination and selection decisions. Whereby these strategies are strictly and transparently followed, qualified and dedicated teachers will be recruited into the teaching profession for quality assurance in education. Again, with IQAUs in the COEs, this will enhance raising the status of teachers.

Teaching is one of the professions in Nigeria that is looked down on. People look at a Nigerian teacher as someone less ambitious that cannot fit into society's highly valued professions like medicine, law, engineering, pharmacy and accountancy, among others. The poor uncomplimentary perception of teachers has made them lose self-confidence and interest in professional responsibilities. The poor self-image of the teacher has serious consequences for the teaching profession in Nigeria. When a teacher's self-image is raised, self-confidence, courage, dedication, and commitment will come into the teachers, and this will help in improving efficiency and effectiveness. Raising the status of teachers should have prime consideration by IQAUs (Omebe, 2015). Given all the modus operandi of IQAUs in COEs, especially those in Delta State, there have been some successful quality assurance practices reported in the COEs as a result of establishing IQAUs and departments.

Successful Quality Assurance Practices Instituted in the Nigerian Colleges of Education (COEs) in Delta State through the Establishment of Institutional Quality Assurance Units

The inception or institution of institutional quality assurance units (IQAU) in colleges of education (COEs) in Delta State, Nigeria, have brought in a lot of practices in which there have been recorded successful practices. Speaking and judging from experience, institutional quality assurance units (IQAU) in the COEs in Delta State have enabled colleges to identify their strengths and weaknesses before accreditation through their self-assessment exercise. It has led to both lecturers and students' punctuality to lectures, where lecturers become aware that they are monitored, and then this will boost their attendance to lectures. Institutional quality assurance units (IQAU) have assisted to strengthen administration in schools. They help to checkmate the activities of the college management and leadership as watchdogs which will assist to curtail or curb corruption and corrupt practices in the COEs. Institutional quality assurance units (IQAU) have helped to curb corruption and exploitation by lecturers in the colleges. Institutional quality assurance units (IQAUs) have assisted in promoting improvement in students' assessment and curriculum improvement.

In addition, the units have assisted to change most lecturers' attitudes towards their students' by building good and healthy lecturer-student relationships, especially when lecturers know that they will be judged and assessed by their students, among others. With the introduction of institutional quality assurance units (IQAUs) in the COEs, students are now involved in lecturers' assessment procedures which significantly encouraged constant use of student-centered teaching and learning, lecturers' preparation of lesson plans and lesson notes, commitment to lectures, among others. Adegbesan (2011) opined that successful practices have been recorded in many tertiary institutions as a result of the establishment of IQAU and include the following; they serve as an indispensable component of quality control strategy in education; they ensure and maintain a high standard of education at all levels; assist in monitoring and supervision of educational activities; helps to determine the quality of the teacher input; determine the number of classrooms needed based on the average class size to ensure quality control of education, and determine the level of adequacy of the facilities available for a quality control system in the COEs, and they ensure how the financial resources available could be prudently and judiciously utilized.

Similarly, Ajayi and Adegbesan (2007) previously argued that institutional quality assurance units are related to accountability both of which are concerned with maximizing the effectiveness and efficiency of educational systems and services concerning their contexts, their missions and their stated objectives. Ehindero (2004) says quality assurance units focused on the: (i) Learners entry behaviors, characteristics and attributes including some demographic factors that can inhibit or facilitate their learning, (ii) The teacher entry qualification, values pedagogic stalls, professional preparedness, subject background, philosophical orientation, among others, (iii) The teaching/learning processes including the structure of the curriculum and learning environment, (iv) The outcomes, which are defined for different levels in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes including appropriate and relevant instruments to assess these objectives.

Fadokun (2005) sums the definition of quality assurance in education as a programmed, an institution or a whole education system. In such case, units of quality assurance in the COEs describes all the attitudes, objectives, actions and procedures that through their existence and use, and together with quality control activities, to ensure that appropriate academic standards are being maintained and enhanced in and by each academic programme. IQAU in the COEs however has successfully created means of measurement and standardization of academic attainments through evaluation of the quality of work during supervision and institutional self-assessment. Even with the successful practices discussed in this section, some challenges are inhibiting the effectiveness or quality performance of IQAUs in most COEs. This has been discussed in the next section.

Challenges of Institutional Quality Assurance Units in the Nigerian Colleges of Education (COEs) in Delta State

Notwithstanding, the successful practices recorded, there are some challenges that constraint the operations of many of the institutional quality assurance units, as they include: inadequate funding, lack of support and cooperation from college management, other staff and students, the problem of unionism which prevents lecturers from subjecting to the activities of QA, an example is the use of lesson plan and note objected by lecturers through their union. Other challenges include inadequate facilities or resources to work with; most institutions are not interested in QA matters until accreditation, the problem of implementation of QA objectives, lack of both leadership and staff training on QA matters, corruption, among others. These challenges have been further discussed below.

Inadequate Funding

The issue of inadequate funding has been one of the important matters of discourse in the Nigerian education system. Due to poor funding of COEs, this has made it impossible to foster quality in the management of the system, therefore, affecting quality assurance in these institutions. Inadequate funding has created difficulties for the provision of facilities and resources for quality assurance officials in the COEs to work with. Ebisine (2013) opined that a well-structured funding arrangement is imperative for meeting the cost of providing adequate educational service in colleges of education. However, inadequate funding affects the provision of facilities and the recruitment of the desired manpower to implement the programs that have been developed. This in turn affects the academic delivery in the colleges of education resulting in what Ebisine (2013) called “a dull intellectual atmosphere.”

Anavberokhai (2007) averred the poor funding affects proper planning and implementation of policies and programs, as well as lower productivity. The reduced spending has impacted negatively on the system as necessities for teaching and research are lacking in both federal and state colleges of education. Ebisine (2013) remarked that funding is crucial in facilities acquisition, staff development (to cater for the enrollment increase) and policy implementation. In the face of an acute shortage of funds, other inputs suffer a setback, which in turn influences the level of quality obtainable. To this end, poor funding has the following implication for academic quality assurance: the inability of the IQAU to organize quality self-assessment; set, maintain and improve standards in all aspects of the academic programs; constantly monitor academic programs and periodically organize internal mock accreditation; maintain appropriate documentation; among others. In effect, poor facilities, and other learning materials, due to poor funding impede not only academic quality assurance but also hinder IQAUs to carry out their responsibilities and task effectively.

Lack of Support and Cooperation from College Management, Other Staff and Students

For successful quality assurance practices in the COEs, there is a need for support and cooperation from various stakeholders such as the college management, staff and students to be actively involved in the issues concerning QA. But in most COEs this is difficult to achieve because of a lack of support and cooperation from stakeholders. With this, Matei and Iwinska (2016) opined that in Europe, various stakeholders in the school are important for the success of QA practices. School leadership, teachers and students, all are very important stakeholders in both the design and implementation of quality assurance systems. The best example is the crucial role of the European Students' Union in the development and later revisions of the standards and guidelines for quality assurance. The students' voices are important for both internal quality assurance and external quality assurance.

In many countries in Europe, it is required that external review panels/groups involve students as members. In the UK, the students' opinions are also highly valued at the national level. There is still room for improvement when it comes to the involvement of employers in quality assurance processes (Matei & Iwinska, 2016). Omebe (2015) noted that one challenge of quality assurance reviews is faculty members and other stakeholders' concerns about the QA process. Faculty beliefs and their plans to participate in the peer quality assurance reviews using the quality matters rubric is very discouraging. In a study conducted by Schwegler, Altman and Bunkowski (2014), the researchers use a qualitative approach to examine faculty members' perceptions of completing the QA peer review. Although faculty were skeptical before participating in the QA process, the results indicate that many of the concerns and criticisms of the peer review process did not validate earlier assumptions.

The Problem of Unionism

The problem of unionism has prevented lecturers from subjecting themselves to the activities of QA in the institutions. Most times the unions object to the practices instituted to promote QA in the COEs. For instance, some of the practices recommended to foster QA in the COEs like lecturers' preparation of lesson plans and students' assessment of their lecturers, among other practices, have been heavily objected by their union and most times they can embark on strike action just to prevent this course (Edukugho, 2003). Supporting the above statements, Ajayi and Ekundayo (n.d.) asserted that one of the banes of effective management of higher education in Nigeria in recent times is the unbridled labor unions' violent reaction to national issues and internal problems.

According to Akindutire (2004), the result of some unions' militancy or violent unionism has been the cause of disruption to successful management of academic programs and other managerial activities in some tertiary institutions, among others. Where there are no concrete rapport or cordial relationship between the unions and IQAUs, then, it becomes impossible for the quality assurance unit to perform their task effectively because there will always be some interference by the unions.

Inadequate Facilities or Resources

Most of the IQAUs have no or limited resources to work with creating difficulties for them to execute their functions effectively. Facilities and resources such as well-furnished offices with equipment like computers, stationeries, electricity, experienced manpower on QA matters, among others, are needed by quality assurance units to effectively work with; but in most situations and given the issue of inadequate funding, the requisite facilities and resources are mostly not available. With the situation of inadequate resources promoting QA practices become difficult to accomplish. Ebisine (2013) observed that inadequate facilities are manifested in an inadequate and poor state of classrooms, offices, laboratories, hostels and libraries in the tertiary institutions. The provision of the relevant educational facilities and equipment is vital in the provision of quality educational services in the colleges of education. However, the poor state of facilities and equipment has been a major challenge to academic quality assurance likewise the operations of IQAUs in the college of education.

Lack of Interest in QA Matters

Most institutions are not interested in QA matters until accreditation. Most leadership always pay attention to other problems neglecting matters related to QA but wait until external accreditation is around the corner before they put interest in QA matters. The challenge of lack of most of the institutional leadership interest in QA matters generally and directly affects the activities of all QA units and departments in the COEs including Delta State. Ekpiken and Ifere (2015) opined that the success and achievement of organizational activities such as QA and equally the goals of higher education depend on the leadership and governance by the management.

To perform effectively and achieve success, leaders must depend on the situation they find themselves in as well as the nature of the organization, as different situations require different leadership abilities and skills and styles. But most leadership pay less attention to QA units' activities in their institutions, focusing their attention on other issues which they consider most trivial. However, leadership is indispensable in any organization. It is all about the social influence which one person is accorded support by other group members to achieve laid-down objectives. Ekpiken and Ifere (2015) stressed that leadership being both the adhesive that binds the group together and the catalyst that triggers employee motivation can have a major influence on organizational performance for it is one of the crucial factors that lead to success. Therefore, administrative functions like planning, staffing, organizing, coordinating, directing, controlling, among others would be ineffective without good institutional leadership interest (Ekpiken & Ifere, 2015).

The Problem of Implementation of QA Objectives

The federal government's failure in the implementation of the objectives of QA is one of the problems hindering the operations of IQAUs. Arikawei and Torubeli (2015) identified the problem of poor implementation of QA objectives as one of the challenges inhibiting institutional QA as the gap in policies is however on the process of implementation. It is, therefore, important to note that most of the QA policy objectives are yet to be effectively implemented. Asiyai (2013) observed that poor policy implementation is a challenge to quality delivery in education. The poor-quality delivery is responsible for the abysmal low performance of graduates of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria in their world of work and the alarming incidence of examination malpractice. Asiyai (2013) argued that our policies are written by knowledgeable writers who have the foresight and believe strongly in what they write for the future, but the problem comes when it comes to translating theory into practice by implementers.

However, several factors could be adduced as inhibitors to smooth implementation of educational policies and thereby resulting in poor-quality delivery. Such factors as government underfunding of education and injudicious utilization of available funds by implementation agencies –when funds meant to deliver quality education are misappropriated or embezzled, the education which learners receive becomes worthless. Asiyai (2013) reported that the lack of staff development and training programs accounted for the decline in the quality of tertiary education in Nigeria.

Poor Staff Training and Retraining on QA Matters

The lack of leadership and staff training and retraining on QA matters is one of the challenges affecting the operations of IQAUs in the COEs. Most leadership and staff do not understand the modus operandi of QA units in the COEs. They feel that IQAUs is a watchdog of the government set up to witch hunt staff and leadership. With this wrong notion or conception, they tend to act as obstacles to any QA practices in the COEs. Due to poor continuous staff training and retraining through seminars, workshops and conferences on QA matters, it becomes difficult for them to understand the operations of IQAUs in the COEs, as such jeopardizing their activities.

Asiyai (2013) opined that most institutions of higher learning in Nigeria lack staff development programs for training and re-training of staff. A vibrant staff development program continuously will help academics and non-academics to clarify and modify their behavior, attitude, value, skills and competencies. In this way, they grow and develop in their knowledge and thus become more effective and efficient in the performance of tasks. Staff development is paramount because knowledge of today is only sufficient for today. In this era of knowledge explosion and emergent knowledge-based economy, staff training, retraining and development should be the priority in the management of COEs for effective QA practices.

Corruption

Corruption in the education system is also one problem affecting the smooth operations and practices of IQAUs in the COEs. Ebisine (2013) asserted that embezzlement, misappropriation and diversion of scarce funds meant for educational purposes further impoverish the sector. The implication is that there can hardly be any meaningful implementation of policy and acquisition of facilities that are vital to effective teaching and research in the COEs (Anavberokhai, 2007). Given the challenges affecting the operations of IQAU in the colleges of education in Delta State, certain future directions of QA practices have been discussed in the subsequent section.

Future Directions of Quality Assurance Practices in Colleges of Education (COEs) in Delta State, Nigeria

Since the establishment of institutional QA units in the COEs, there have been some remarkable successes that have been discussed previously in this chapter. However, notwithstanding various odds and challenges, there is a need for the future direction of QA practices for the QA units in the COEs in Delta State, as they include the following:

Awareness creation through continuous staff training and retraining programs

QA matters: Full QA enlightenment programs should be constantly organized for leadership, management officials, lecturers, non-teaching staff, unions and students in the colleges to promote QA activities, practices and processes by the unit in the COEs. By creating awareness for the college leadership, staff and students will aid in building cooperation for all the parties and trust for the quality assurance units, thereby leading to the realization of goals. Landerville (2015) attested that the quality assurance unit through staff training and retraining would be capable of involving all the stakeholders in the QA process and by this, they will be clear to know what needs to be achieved in the COEs and correct their negative reactions as far as attaining QA issues are concerned.

Training of trainees: Training of trainees should be universally reinstated in the COEs including Delta State likewise extended to the universities and polytechnics as a way of training members of the institutional QA unit staff who will train and educate all the staff on QA matters in the COEs.

Free autonomy to operate: Institutional quality assurance units should have full autonomy to operate in the COEs either as a directorate or agency on its own. By so doing this will reduce leadership interferences and obnoxious control over QA practices, processes and activities in the COEs.

High concentration on academic programs: Institutional QA units in the COEs especially in Delta State should look into certain areas like mounting of courses by staff, guidance for minimum standards for mounting of new programs, academic staff peer review, evaluation and implementation of moderators reports and assessment, among others. It has been indicated by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013), that tertiary institutions shall pursue their goals through quality teaching and learning, quality students' intake and admission processes, high standards in the quality of facilities, services and resources, and staff welfare and development programs. Quality assurance units should redirect their focus on monitoring these areas in the COEs including Delta State.

Adequate funding of IQAUs: There is a need for adequate funding of quality assurance units or departments in the COEs by the federal and state governments. This will assist to facilitate QA processes and activities in the COEs in Delta State.

Full policy implementation on QA processes: Full policy implementation of quality assurance processes by the QA unit should be highly encouraged. Omede (2015) opined that a strategic policy implementation framework is vital to the success of quality assurance efforts. The policy framework should begin with a quality policy statement for managing and encouraging students' participation in academics. This is effective in resolving problems such as low student morale, low student performance, truancy and student failure.

Constant self-assessment: There should be constant and consistency of institutional self-assessment which is highly encouraged in the COEs before external accreditation. This will enable QA units to advise the management on how to go about addressing the internal problems of their institutions before accreditation.

Auditing and assessment of lecturers and other facilities: Institutional quality assurance units should always supervise lecturers' classroom activities to address issues affecting teaching and learning in the institutions. They should also frequently conduct constant auditing of the physical facilities in the COEs; give their recommendations were necessary for effective management of the institution for QA.

Research boosting: Another important area is boosting research in the COEs which should be monitored and controlled by the quality assurance units. It has further been directed by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) that tertiary institutions shall pursue their goals through quality research and development, therefore, quality assurance units in the COEs should focus on research matters and activities in the COEs.

Creating a systematic or standard operation procedure (SOP) of work for QA process: Institutional quality assurance units should create a systematic or standard operation procedure (SOP) of work for QA processes in the COEs to achieve their aims, objectives, target and goals by adopting their techniques. In support of this statement, Landerville (2015) opined that quality assurance units must have procedures in place, also called SOPs (standard operation procedures), especially if the QA process is critical for the finished product in which the institutions need to have or must have an SOP or procedure. If the IQAUs need and require (How to) do a job or QA process, they need a procedure or SOP.

Landerville (2015) further highlighted several steps that can aid institutional quality assurance units create a standard operating procedure as follows: i). identification of organizational goals starting the QA process by defining how employees' jobs are tied to the organizations' goals; ii. identification of critical success factors that make an organization's quality assurance system successful through factors such as well-designed production process, great product, technical support, customer/clientele support, financial security, or employee satisfaction; iii. identification of the key groups of customers that make quality assurance systems work in the institution.

Knowing these customers and their needs can help you develop programs and services for these people; iv. providing constant feedback to customers including other stakeholders which enable organizations to detect and solve quality problems before they become serious issues. This could be attained through survey and by encouraging constant students' assessment, lecturers' assessment, monitoring students' satisfaction and dissatisfaction to review their complaints and academic programs and checkmating other matters; v. implementation of continuous improvements from the results or information gleaned from an organization's survey or other customer feedback tools used to make the necessary changes to the quality assurance process; and vi. select quality assurance software that not only helps institutions to implement a quality assurance process but also helps them to maintain and improve the process; vii. measure results and achievements.

Omede (2015) suggested that Total Quality Management (TQM) models could be applied by the units in higher education institutions in assuring quality. These models should be appropriately linked to the selection of contents/learning experiences, lesson presentation and evaluation of the students. Thus, they should ensure that what they give the students are up to standard. Again, The QA unit should ensure that students can progress in academic programs by examining lecturers scheduling, academic calendars, and academic programs to promote quality practices and processes in the COEs. Also, Omede (2015) opined that involving students in QA processes is important in the QA systems.

Student involvement in evaluating and enhancing the quality of their higher education institution brings about improvement in academic programs. The quality of educational services provided by a COE is a crucial aspect of strategic plans in the student-centered education context. Students' evaluation of the academic programs is a significant assessment

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Part D

GLOBAL TRENDS, NEW DIRECTIONS, PARTNERSHIPS AND CHALLENGES

Chapter 26

Quality Assurance Adapting to Change: The role of CHEA's International Quality Group

Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić

Introduction

In the 21st century higher education institutions have been called upon to innovate in their provision of learning to embrace ever larger numbers of students, and a greater diversity of learners, through different modes of delivery. The demand for higher education has continued to grow, especially in the global south, with estimates of global enrollments rising from 221 million in 2017 (UNESCO, 2018) to close to 600 million in 2040 (Calderon, 2018). Providing inclusive, equitable higher education for all in a lifelong perspective has also been one of the targets of the 2015 UN Sustainable Developments Goals, acknowledging higher education as an important element of development.

Will higher education continue to be a driver of change in a knowledge society? The SDG 4 target is to ensure “equal access for all women and men to affordable quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university” by 2030. Generally, a greater insistence on social equity and justice in higher education and a reminder of the importance of values in higher education is increasingly being highlighted by the global academic community within a crisis of trust in public institutions.

To what extent have these aspirations been attained? Although statistics demonstrate that the global higher education enrollment ratio (GER)⁴² has increased to 38 % globally (UNESCO, 2018), up from 19 % in 2000, regional and national disparities persist. While the GER has increased in low- and middle-income countries among the richest percentile of the population, less than 1% of the poorest quintile are enrolled in higher education (UNESCO, 2017/2018). Furthermore, a very low number of countries around the world have in place policies to promote equitable access to higher education (Salmi, 2018).

Diversification of provision is one of the means to respond to widening access to higher education supported by some governments. These trends include privatization of higher education (especially in Africa) that some consider the fastest-growing sector of higher education (Altbach et al., 2009). Other examples include internationalization of higher education, is another example, including cross-border provision (also called transnational education or franchises) when institutions and programs, not only students, researchers and staff cross borders⁴³ and competency-based education which takes into account prior learning

⁴² GER is the percentage of the age cohort 18-22 enrolled in higher education.

⁴³ Cross-border higher education includes higher education that takes place in situations where the teacher, student, programmed, institution/provider or course materials cross national jurisdictional borders“(UNESCO, 2006).

and is based on students' mastery of knowledge rather than relying on time-based learning structures which revolve around credit hours and grades.

Alternative ways of access to learning and flexible learning pathways are becoming the new norm and Open and distance learning (ODL) becomes a prominent part of the diversification of higher education but also an important vector of internationalization, inclusion and widening access. ODL in different forms has come to the forefront during the COVID-19 pandemic when HEIs were forced to go online. Demographic and economic factors further exacerbate this diversification, with rapidly aging populations and labor market requirements for new skills and competences. New shorter courses are becoming more common and digital certificates and badges are now being more widely accepted in the context of both new skills and competences needed by employers and the digitization of higher education. Both massification and diversification of learning require quality provision. Hence, quality assurance is under constant pressure to change and adapt, not least, in the abrupt changes higher education had to face in times of emergency, demonstrated by the latest COVID-19 pandemic.

The paper will focus on three main evolutive trends in quality assurance: the internationalization of quality assurance; a more student-centered approach to quality assurance, such as the assessment of student learning outcomes and quality assurance of open and distance learning which has been particularly revisited in recent times. Quality assurance of open and distance learning will include shorter courses and digital credentialing (microcredentials) and give prominence to quality assurance of remote learning in a time of disruption, such as the one during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. It will conclude by some emerging thematic approaches to quality assurance, in the context of the general focus on academic values, that of quality assurance and academic corruption which are again gaining renewed attention. As a tribute to Dr. Judith Eaton, the paper will look at these evolving quality assurance trends with a particular focus on contributions of CHEA's International Quality Group to innovative approaches to quality assurance and accreditation.

Internationalizing Quality Assurance: Emergence of a Global Model

Quality assurance and accreditation have existed in the United States for almost a hundred years, while they started developing in other parts of the world in the late eighties. In the nineties, however, quality assurance was strengthened, and an international model began to emerge.

The Bologna Process in Europe was an inspirational model for other world regions, with a noted trend towards the creation of regional higher education spaces. Developing quality assurance was an important component of these trends. Creating a higher education and research regional space were particularly pursued in Africa over a number of years and resulted in several mutually supportive projects contributing to harmonization of HE across the continent. In Asia-Pacific, they were triggered by the Brisbane Communiqué (2006), and in Latin America and the Caribbean through ENLACES (2008). A similar trend was noted in Arab States, and all were supported by the revision of regional conventions on the recognition of higher education qualifications⁴⁴ and reinforced by quality assurance networks.

These regional higher education spaces gave a prominent place to quality assurance, in Europe through the development of the European Standards and guidelines for Quality Assurance (2005; 2015) which would motivate the development of African Standards and Guidelines (2019). In Asia-Pacific, despite the fact that a formal regional higher education space, comparable to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) did not materialize, a regional

⁴⁴ The 2011 Tokyo Convention for Asia-Pacific, the 2014 Addis Ababa Convention for Africa, the 2019 Buenos Aires Convention for Latin America and the Caribbean.

approach to quality assurance was achieved by the strengthening of the Asia-Pacific QA network (APQN). In a recent survey, APQN leadership called for the revision of the 2008 Chiba Principles –guidelines defining quality assurance in Asia-Pacific. The revision of these principles is intended to take account the many changes in QA that have taken place in the past decade in the region.⁴⁵ In Latin America Quality assurance is an important part and the ENLACES portal, as a transparency tool which collects information on institutional initiatives: commitments to quality assurance and accreditation, academic mobility, curriculum development, and lifelong learning.

The development and internationalization of quality assurance was also supported by international organizations, such as the World Bank, OECD and UNESCO. UNESCO partnered with the OECD launched the 2005 Guidelines for Quality Provision in Crossborder Higher Education as an international instrument for quality assurance in a global context. In the European framework, these guidelines were perceived as a useful tool for the European regional process in a global setting.⁴⁶ They also inspired regional approaches to quality assurance, e.g., the Chiba Principles in Asia-Pacific.⁴⁷ A *World Bank-UNESCO partnership* (2007-2011) strengthened five regional QA networks and one international network,⁴⁸ through sharing of best QA practices and other forms of collaboration among the networks (Wells, 2014; Salmi, 2015; 2017). The Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity (GIQAC) supported network activities that were viewed as the most useful.

Although a certain diversity of approaches and implementation modalities chosen by countries around the world are noted, several analysts have concluded on the emergence of a global model. Wells (2014) notes the convergence in approaches to QA. He states that QA practitioners are responding to a similar model of ‘good practices’ while implementation of these practices varies, in the diversified higher education landscape. And Salmi (2015; 2017) calls this a “quiet quality assurance revolution.” Judith Eaton, to whom this book is dedicated, labeled the global QA model as the “spread of the familiar” (cf. Daniel, Foreword).

Lewis (2016, p. 47) identifies the five basic elements of this global model, as follows: a set of regulations and standards are produced by the QA agency; a self-evaluation report is prepared by the institution; a peer group is appointed for the review of the institution or program and reviews the self-evaluation report; a site visit by the peer group takes place; a report is published and in some cases the decision. As part of this move to international quality assurance, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) established an international branch, the CHEA International Quality Group, known as CIQG. Launched on 13 September 2012, as a successor of CHEA’s International Commission, its aim was to provide a venue for accrediting and quality assurance bodies, colleges and universities, businesses, foundations and others around the world to work together on international quality issues through annual meetings, policy briefs, publications, and a newsletter and other activities.

One of the early annual meetings of the CIQG featured a lively debate whether a single set of quality standards was needed in a rapidly changing higher education world? Would it benefit

⁴⁵ In 2008, APQN released “Higher Education Quality Assurance Principles for the Asia Pacific Region” (Chiba Principles). (...). Ten years has passed, and many changes have taken place during the decade: the prosperity of lifelong learning, the development of online learning (MOOCs), and the students’ learning methods and others have laid new demands on education quality. Therefore, the Chiba Principles should also keep pace with the changes in higher education and make new revisions.

⁴⁶ 2007 London Communique,
https://eha.info/Upload/document/ministerial_declarations/2007_London_Communique_English_588697.pdf

⁴⁷https://www.apqn.org/media/library/publications/higher_education_quality_assurance_principles_for_the_asia_pacific_region_chiba_principles.pdf

⁴⁸ African QA Network (AfriQAN), Arab Network for QA in HE (ANQAHE), Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN), The Latin American Quality Assurance Network (RIACES).

the internationalization of quality assurance in a constructive way? Benefits of a set of single standards were highlighted as an international benchmark for quality, facilitating international comparisons and portability of degrees and quality assurance of cross-border higher education. On the other hand, in order to develop such standards, a number of difficult challenges would need to be addressed: how to describe quality; how to achieve consensus in order for the standards to be trustworthy and in which way the effectiveness of the standards is to be judged. Finally, who could be entrusted to elaborate such standards? An acceptable approach would be to begin with designing a set of guiding principles for quality, rather than standards, with a focus on common expectations and a shared understanding of quality (McGregor, 2014; CHEA/CIQG, 2014).

Stemming from this debate, based on the assumption that certain fundamental principles underpin all forms of higher education, no matter what the curricula or delivery mode, *Seven International Quality Principles* were articulated in 2015 by CHEA/CIQG as presented.

The CHEA/CIQG Seven International Quality Principles

1. *Quality and higher education providers:* Assuring and achieving quality in higher education is the primary responsibility of higher education providers and their staff.
2. *Quality and students:* The education provided to students must always be of high quality whatever the learning outcomes pursued.
3. *Quality and society:* The quality of higher education provision is judged by how well it meets the needs of society, engenders public confidence and sustains public trust.
4. *Quality and government:* Governments have a role in encouraging and supporting quality higher education.
5. *Quality and accountability:* It is the responsibility of higher education providers and quality assurance and accreditation bodies to sustain a strong commitment to accountability and provide regular evidence of quality.
6. *Quality and the role of quality assurance and accreditation bodies:* Quality assurance and accreditation bodies, working with higher education providers and their leadership, staff and students, are responsible for the implementation of processes, tools, benchmarks and measures of learning outcomes that help to create a shared understanding of quality.
7. *Quality and change:* Quality higher education needs to be flexible, creative and innovative; developing and evolving to meet students' needs, to justify the needs of society and to maintain diversity.

Two principles particularly resonate. First, Principle 1 states that “assuring and achieving quality in higher education is the primary responsibility of higher education providers and their staff.” This applies both to face-to face and online provision of higher education. Second, quality assurance will have to adapt and become more flexible and creative – as stated in Principle 7 – to keep abreast with the dynamic diversification of higher education provision as it opens up in multiple ways and promotes equitable access to greater number of learners.

Student-centered Approaches: Assessment of Learning Outcomes

Despite the acceptance of the global model of quality assurance and the “quiet revolution” mentioned above, and the diversity of adapting the model to regional and national realities, needs and demands, there was growing criticism over time that quality assurance processes were time-consuming for both the HEIs and the QA agency as well as overly costly without a clear demonstration of benefits, especially for students. Quality assurance remained voluntary,

particularly in large higher education systems as it was difficult to cover all institutions and programs (Uvalić-Trumbić & Martin, 2021).

To respond to criticism and to adapt to the constant transformation of the higher education sector, a number of new and more innovative approaches started being developed. As the focus of quality assurance shifts to teaching and learning, QA adopts more student-centered approaches described below. A student-centered approach is based on the assumption that the student (learner) is at the heart of the teaching and learning process, which is particularly significant for a greater diversity of learners.

With a greater focus on teaching and learning, student-centered approaches are emphasized in more recent Bologna Process policy orientations, but this is noted as a general worldwide trend. Outcomes-based assessments in QA represent a predominant paradigm shift in quality assurance practices as an overarching approach that responds to needs of innovation, comparability, recognition of qualifications and employability. They are often discipline-based, setting student learning outcomes for certain professions, but can also be generic. This approach was given international visibility by the OECD through the Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) project. It was discontinued in 2013 due to a lack of funding and disagreement about methodology.

The assessment of learning outcomes and the closely related national qualifications frameworks as a means of quality assurance nonetheless gained a central place in Europe, as a core of the Bologna Process and are integrated into the 2015 European Standards and guidelines.⁴⁹

In the context of increased EU support to Asia and Africa, within the EU-SHARE⁵⁰ program for ASEAN countries, assessment of student learning outcomes is one of the objectives of the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (Niedermeier & Pohlenz, 2016). In Africa, the 2018 African Standards and Guidelines ensure that the formulated learning outcomes are benchmarked against level descriptors of national or regional qualifications frameworks, as applicable.

A number of countries around the world have introduced student learning outcomes in their QA approaches and they are relevant for a range of alternative and new providers and a greater diversity of learners. A few countries in Latin America have been pioneers in attempts to measure student learning outcomes at undergraduate level. An example is the introduction of Provão in Brazil, in 1996, as a national test which measures the acquisition of knowledge and competences of undergraduate students (Salmi, 2017). A similar test, the SABER-11 and SABER-PRO is in place since 2009 in Colombia (ICFES, 2019).

The Netherlands and Flanders Accreditation Organization (NVAO) offers a good example of explicitly including the assessment of learning outcomes in the EQA procedure for the assessments of study programs. It includes a three-fold focus on learning outcomes: whether

⁴⁹ The EHEA Bucharest Communiqué (2012) reinforced this approach by the Ministers' commitment:

"To consolidate the EHEA, meaningful implementation of learning outcomes is needed. The development, understanding and practical use of learning outcomes is crucial to the success of ECTS, the Diploma Supplement, recognition, qualifications frameworks and quality assurance – all of which are interdependent."

⁵⁰ SHARE, the European Union Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region, is a four-year initiative by the EU and ASEAN. They have entrusted the implementation of SHARE to a consortium of British Council (leader), Campus France, DAAD, EP-Nuffic, ENQA, and EUA. Launched in Jakarta in May 2015, SHARE aims to support ASEAN in harmonizing regional higher education by sharing European expertise. It does this through strengthening regional cooperation, enhancing the quality, competitiveness, and internationalization of ASEAN higher education for institutions and students, and thereby contributing to a closer ASEAN Community in 2015 and beyond.

the program's intended learning outcomes align with the relevant qualifications framework and correlate with international requirements of the discipline and/or professional field; whether teaching and learning ensure that students are able to achieve the intended learning outcomes and whether the program has an adequate system of student assessments which demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are realized. These standards are not only used in all types of procedures but are applied to all types of programs such as e-learning, work-based learning, cross-border provision and others. A learning outcome is what a learner is supposed to know and be able to do after a successful study or learning process (NVAO, 2016).

Qualifications frameworks based on the assessment of learning outcomes, is another practice of significance. National qualification frameworks (NQFs) have become a global phenomenon and have developed in the perspective of lifelong learning and are most often related to vocational and higher education levels. They are used to classify qualifications by level and what the holder of the qualification is expected to know (Cedefop, 2019). The classification is based on student learning outcomes and the assessment of their quality. NQFs in some countries are intricately linked to QA and the recognition of qualifications, as complementary tools.

The new QA approach is concerned with whether the program's intended learning outcomes align with the relevant NQFs and correlate with international requirements of the discipline and/or professional field. The Malaysian Qualifications Agency offers a good example of a body implementing the national qualifications framework and linking it to quality assurance. In other countries, the body responsible for NQFs devolves this responsibility to the QA competent body (e.g., the Council on Higher Education in South Africa). In the UK, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), requires academic standards of courses to meet the requirements of the relevant qualifications' framework (Quality Code, 2018). The Hong Kong QF is underpinned by a robust quality assurance mechanism to ensure all QF-recognized qualifications are of good quality and standard. The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) is specified as the Accreditation Authority and the Qualifications Register (QR) Authority.⁵¹

Quality Assurance and Alternative Providers

In order to meet demand for access to higher education, higher education providers were compelled to diversify. There has been a shift away from a traditional model of higher education provided and funded only by the state to one provided also by alternative, non-traditional or post-traditional providers. Private higher education, online and distance learning, cross-border education, shorter courses, competency-based education and a range of increasingly accepted flexible learning pathways are some examples of this diversification.

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation/International Quality Group (CHEA/CIQG) developed a new tool as a form of external review of the quality of alternative/innovative providers of higher education that are not part of the traditional higher education systems or quality assurance frameworks. The Quality Platform was designed in 2013 as a tool to measure learning outcomes from shorter online courses such as MOOCs and other alternative providers. The platform is designed as a response to an emerging new sector of higher education, offerings from private companies and other organizations, often online, now available alongside the provision of traditional colleges and universities. The primary intent of the Quality Platform is to assure and improve quality as this sector develops and serves more and more students. It is an outcomes-based review using standards established by the platform, a self-review by the provider, an external review and a site visit of a team of experts. The acceptance of the report by CHEA/CIQG is the basis for the award of the Quality Platform Provider Certificate.

⁵¹ Hong Kong Qualification Framework (<https://www.hkqf.gov.hk/en/qa/index.html>)

The **CHEA/CIQG Quality Platform** is based on four simple standards summarized as follows:

1. Learning outcomes are articulated and achieved.
The provider organizes its work, determines the content of offerings and sets expectations of rigor based on anticipated and actual results for students who enroll information about gain in skills, competencies or other attributes resulting from a learning experience.
2. Learning outcomes meet postsecondary expectations
The provider demonstrates that the articulated and achieved student learning outcomes are consistent with expectations of student learning at degree-granting colleges and universities.
3. Curricula provide opportunities for successful transfer of credit
For the provider's offerings intended to be used for credit or credentialing at a college or university, the provider: 1) Builds opportunity for student progression beyond its offerings as part of its curriculum development; 2) Organizes offerings into a coherent learning experience that can be sustained across multiple providers of higher education.
4. Transparency is maintained and comparability is established:
The provider develops and provides reliable, easily accessible and readily understandable information to the public, at least annually, about its performance: 1) An aggregate description of the student learning outcomes that are achieved; 2) The results of comparisons of performance among similar types of non-institutional providers; 3) An aggregate description of the uses of the offerings to students, for example, advancing toward an educational goal, employment.

The Quality Platform was pilot-tested in 2015 with the DeTao Masters Academy in Shanghai, China. DeTao is a private company set up in 2012 with the aim of developing innovative educational programs, which go beyond conventional educational approaches and are not part of the traditional higher education system in China. The Quality Platform was included in 2016 by the U.S. Department of Education Educational Quality through Innovative Partnerships (EQUIP) a pilot program to accelerate and evaluate innovation through partnerships between colleges and universities and non-traditional providers to assess the quality of the provision the Dallas County Community College District and StraighterLine, a U.S. company that offers online higher education courses at low cost.⁵²

Quality Assurance and Open and Distance Learning

Among alternative providers, Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is certainly the most prominent one and its evolution and diversity of modes constantly draws the attention of a wide range of stakeholders. Stimulated by the lifelong learning perspective, according to which learning can take place anywhere and anytime, ODL has been developing fast. It has existed

⁵² <https://www.chea.org/chea-quality-platform-serve-quality-assurance-entity-equip-program-and-other-accreditation-related>

for many years and enrolls an increasing number of students. In the USA alone, distance education enrollments have grown by 5.6 % from autumn 2015 to 2016 (Babson Report, 2018). And the growth of enrollments is even faster in the developing world. Despite the perceptions prevailing in certain countries that ODL is of lower quality than face-to-face learning, it plays a crucial role in providing access to education for millions of people globally, particularly in the developing world (WENR, 2018).

Although distance education and open universities have existed for years, three main triggers caused a renewed attention to distance education and hence how to assess the quality of its provision. The first one was the release by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) of some 100 of their courses free and online – the “Open Courseware” – in 2001. This sparked an open educational resources (OER) movement throughout the world. UNESCO coined the term in 2002 (UNESCO, 2002) and from a community of interest it grew into government led policy discussion culminating in an international commitment to OER by 193 governments in 2019 (UNESCO, 2019).

The second one was a decade later with new forms of e-learning, *Massive open online courses* (MOOCs). They started in North America (i.e., Canada and USA), provided by online platforms such as Coursera and Udacity (commercial and for-profit), and edX (public and non-profit), the latter originating from MIT and Harvard. An evolution rather than a revolution (Daniel, 2012), MOOCs growth and transformation could be witnessed over the years. Thus, in 2018, the MOOC movement reached a total of 101 million learners (Shah, 2018). In addition to the US platforms mentioned above, which were at the forefront of the MOOCs initiative, a European MOOC Consortium consisting of FutureLearn, France Université Numérique, OpenupEd, Miriadix and EduOpen (EMC) has also been created and recently launched a Common Microcredential Framework. Just five MOOC providers – Coursera, edX, XuetangX, Udacity and FutureLearn –enrolled more than 68 million people in 2018 (Shah, 2018).

The third one was the abrupt and forced move to online learning during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic when remote learning became the new, sometimes the only mode of learning for millions of students worldwide. Although this move was considered temporary, as the pandemic continued over a year, predictions are now that blended learning will become the preferred mode of learning even for conventional traditional higher education institutions, as some of its benefits were demonstrated

Many contest ODL as legitimate, considering it of lower quality than face-to face learning. Others recognize ODL as viable but insist that traditional QA practices should be applied to ODL. A great number of traditional HEIs have include blended learning as an integral part of their teaching and learning and the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that blended learning may become the preferred mode of learning for a much larger proportion of learners around the world. Despite its growth and evolution, quality assurance of open and distance learning (ODL), is a long-debated issue. A global study of quality models for ODL was carried out in 2015 by the International Council for Distance Education (ICDE). It recommended that e-learning quality “should be mainstreamed into traditional internal quality assurance” but also that quality assurance should address the emergence of non-traditional educational providers and digital learning (Ossiannilsson et al., 2015).

Some countries that already have different standards for e-learning, are now incorporating them into regular EQA processes. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a good example of this change of practice. Before, the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) in UAE had special standards for e-learning based on a number of requirements, including learning outcomes and requirements consistent with on-campus offerings. However, according to the latest development, the criteria of e-learning standards have been interweaved within the normal standards (CAA, 2007).

In Australia, the 2011 Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Act (TEQSA Act) includes providers where online delivery is part of the course of study leading to a higher education award (from a diploma up to a doctoral degree). According to their website, “the TEQSA Act supports multiple means through which higher education can be delivered. Providers are required to demonstrate that outcomes for students will be achieved, whatever the chosen method of delivery (...)”.

The European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU) has been particularly proactive in developing, in close cooperation with ENQA, tools for assessing the quality of ODL such as the e-Xcellence⁵³ label which provides benchmarks, indicators and guidelines for strategic management, curriculum design, course design, course delivery, staff support and student support. With the increase of shorter courses leading to macrocredentials, the European Commission is in the process of developing a Micro Credential Framework proposing the award of academic credit based on student learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks.⁵⁴

Within the shift of focus to student-centered learning, student learning outcomes and development of skills and competences, an increase in shorter courses is on the rise as they are better adapted to acquiring skills and competences needed by the labor market. While a convergence of qualifications and quality assurance in higher education has been achieved internationally, a clear divergence in recognizing and assessing skills and competences acquired through shorter courses is noted (Van Damme, 2019). Such courses, often provided through the internet as massive open online courses (MOOCs) have spread, sometimes lead to certificates, more widely labeled as ‘microcredentials.’

The term itself is confusing and often misleading as it refers to a very wide range of certificates as a result of different routes to learning. Thus, open badges, nano-degrees and MicroMasters, all fall under the generic umbrella of microcredentials, despite being outcomes of courses of different content, duration, and quality. Microcredentials and the terms used are often provided by the leading MOOC platforms. Thus, in the U.S. the Udacity platform uses “nano-degrees,” the Ed-X “MicroMasters”⁵⁵ while Coursera uses “specializations.”

In Europe, the European MOOCs Consortium⁵⁶ launched a Common Microcredentials Framework (CMF)⁵⁷ in 2019, accepting ‘microcredentials’ as a generic term within which microcredential courses are required to ensure the earning of academic credit. This way, the courses must be developed within the university’s National Qualifications Frameworks and in line with the European Qualification Framework (EQF), which facilitates qualifications be understandable across different countries and systems.

According to the CMF “these microcredential courses will aim to be recognizable between different higher education institutions and thereby create an ecosystem where learners can one day take microcredentials from within a network of universities that can be used towards a larger qualification, such as a postgraduate certificate or master’s degree.”

⁵³ Excellence Manual (2016).

⁵⁴<https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplus-project-details/#project/590161-EPP-1-2017-1-DE-EPPKA3-PI-FORWARD>

⁵⁵ e.g. the MIT provides a series of MicroMaster online courses for a semester that can lead to a graduate degree

⁵⁶ Consisting of European MOOC platforms: FutureLearn, France Université Numérique (FUN), OpenupED, Miriadax, EduOpen.

⁵⁷ Launch of CMF, accessible at <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/content/emc-launches-common-microcredential-framework>

As this is not likely to be a passing fad, more systematic approaches to microcredentialing are being developed, which in turn, raise the issue of relevant and more adequate quality assurance procedures. The term “microcredentials” is more widely used in Europe, while authors in the USA write about the proliferation of different non-degree credentials (NDCs), stemming from changing labor market needs, noting that in 2016, as many as 27 % adults in the United States were holders of an NDC⁵⁸ (Van Noy, 2020). Based on a typology and conceptual framework for NDCs, the following elements for a quality framework for NDCs are suggested: Credential design; Competencies; Market Processes; Outcomes. The accumulation of competencies represented by credentials are expected to generate outcomes of value, typically in terms of the educational, employment, and social advancement of individuals, employers, and society.

The lack of reliable quality assurance systems for digital credentialing is recognized on the global level as a serious threat to their credibility in addition to setting constraints on the flexibility of traditional degrees (Chakroun & Keevey, 2018). Some raise the question whether the traditional norms of quality assurance and accreditation can be effective for shorter-term learning experiences such as microcredentials (van der Hijden 2019).⁵⁹ Based on an expert group convened by CHEA, van der Hijden proposes nine quality review types that could be adapted for this particular purpose: self-assessment; peer review; benchmarking; external evaluation and audits; provider appreciation; employer appreciation; professional appreciation; crowd assessment and comparative assessment of learning outcomes. Most recent discussions in Europe, supported, by the European Commission, are striving to develop a more systematic approach to shorter courses and microcredentials and their quality assurance and accreditation.

A clear and simplified approach brings in some structure into the confusion and disparity of approaches created around microcredentialing⁶⁰ (Camilleri, 2020).⁶¹ It defines a micro-credential as a sub-unit of a credential. A microcredential is based on open access and made up of distinct units. A standardized unit of measure is being introduced based on the credit unit (10 ECTS-equivalent⁶²), expressed as learning outcomes. They are short, averaging between 5 and 30 ECTS, they focus on academic skills/programmes/competence. Exams are taken by the offering university. It must be accredited and part of the qualifications level. They are student-held and recognized by different institutions to give access and to stack across institutions. Their content needs to be quality assured. Micro-credentials are earned in any mode but awarded digitally, stacked digitally and recognized digitally.

It is clear that microcredentials issued as a validation of shorter-term learning experiences are part of the new higher education trends globally and are likely to be on the rise. In terms of external quality assurance and accreditation process, as part of student-centered learning, they are probably to be included in the assessment of student learning outcomes and linked to qualifications frameworks (and level descriptors).⁶³ Therefore, as quality assurance adapts to new developments, especially to more flexible learning pathways, it may find ways to use these particular tools for assessing quality of shorter learning experiences or develop a lighter different approach focused on the course itself.

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⁵⁸ https://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/rutgerseerc_ndcquality_framework_full_paper_final.pdf

⁵⁹ <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED597931.pdf>

⁶⁰ More about micro-credentials can be found here: <https://microcredentials.eu/microhe-at-microcredentials/>

⁶¹ <https://knowledgeinnovation.eu/events/open-education-recognition-and-credentials/>

⁶² ECTS-equivalent = approx. 10 hours of teaching, and 15 hours of self-motivated study

⁶³ See UNESCO 2015, *Levelling and recognizing learning outcomes, the use of level descriptors in the twenty-first century*, Paris.

When the COVID-19 pandemic was announced at the beginning of 2020, most HEIs were faced with difficult choices. The news that Cambridge University declared it would go online for the rest of the year caused shock and dismay but soon many HEIs around the world followed this example. Some opted for blended dual-mode learning, offering on-site teaching for laboratory work, difficult to conduct online (University of Belgrade). But most HEIs were forced to abruptly go online, without much preparation or training, or combined classroom teaching with remote learning. QA procedures had to adapt to this new reality. Reviews were either postponed or became virtual. During spring 2020, a flurry of webinars was organized to examine challenges, novel practices and new opportunities for quality assurance in a time of disruption during a major emergency.

A European Quality Assurance Forum session looked at the experiences with virtual Quality Assurance reviews. Surprisingly, the results presented were rather positive. Thus, Quality and Qualifications, Ireland (QQI) from Ireland reported positive feedback from virtual institutional review with 97% confidence in their efficacy. Based on the exercise, new lessons were learned how to improve the process. Similarly, The Quality Assurance Agency for the University System in Catalonia (AQU) remarked that although universities were skeptical before the review, perception changed after, and satisfaction was expressed. M.Martin (UNESCO/IIEP) drew attention that the pandemic showed that there was a need for alternative and flexible admission approaches and that NQF and QA could enable this flexibility.⁶⁴

Other organizations, such as INQAAHE developed principles for QA agencies members of this international network and organized training workshops on how to conduct virtual reviews and other national QA agencies (e.g., QAA, UK) developed specific guidelines to help institutions improve the quality of their online offerings. CHEA/CIQG conducted a series of webinars in spring 2020 looking at developments in the coming academic year and its impact on quality. In addition, an international virtual session at the 2021 CHEA Annual Conference addressed the issue further, looking at how to frame international higher education and quality assurance for the future, exploring virtual quality assurance, the role of universities in the pandemic, social unrest and equity and what impact will mainstreaming remote learning have in the future.

These discussions demonstrated that we were in a formative period, that online should not be an obstacle but could be a facilitator and that the changes occurring now should be an opportunity for reform and innovation of QA in the future. Examples were given how open universities (e.g., the OU in the UK or Universitas Terbuka in Indonesia) were helping traditional ones to cope with the changes. Certain standards were being developed but it became clear that long-term strategies were needed, not just damage-control adaptations before going back to business as usual. The digital divide was highlighted as a significant obstacle to inclusiveness and equitable access to learning and in countries like India, mobile phones provided better opportunities than the internet.

To ensure better quality in remote learning, in addition to adequate technology, a key element is effective pedagogy. In African higher education systems, there is an urgent need to build human and institutional capacity to deliver quality online education. In Africa, a lack of training was noted with both students and faculty not trained adequately in online learning and teaching, a deficiency shared by many HEIs around the world. External and internal quality assurance in the future must include institutional ICT and ODL capacity in all HEIs.⁶⁵ The challenges faced during the 2020-2021 disruption offer a new opportunity for QA to be more open to innovation and change. It may well develop lighter approaches which will be less process-oriented, more efficient and will increasingly use the potential of online tools.

⁶⁴ <https://eua.eu/events/72-2020-european-quality-assurance-forum.html>

⁶⁵ <https://www.chea.org/chea-podcasts-and-webinars>

Finally, UNESCO announced the convening of its Third World Conference on Higher Education on Higher Education in October 2021. The Conference, within the 2030 agenda as its main framework, will devote special attention to the global disruption created by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶⁶

Quality and Academic Integrity

We conclude this paper by revisiting the issue of academic integrity and academic corruption. Although, historically the risk of corrupt practices has not been a significant feature of either external or internal quality assurance, the increasing frequency of press reports on corrupt practices in higher education in the past decade has put the issue of academic corruption as a topic of discussion and concern in the academic and quality assurance communities.

Promoting academic integrity and fighting academic corruption has further been exacerbated by the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and online learning. As reported by the press, researchers in the United Kingdom are warning of an alarming rise in cheating in universities since the pandemic started, essay mills and contract cheating being the most prominent scourge manifested that may affect academic integrity beyond repair.⁶⁷

According to the UK QAA, as a consequence of COVID-19, higher education institutions have, in a very short timeframe, needed to adapt their assessment practices to fit online delivery. In doing so, providers have needed to ensure that the assessment arrangements are robust, guarding against academic misconduct while also ensuring the fair treatment of students who have had to submit their work in challenging circumstances.⁶⁸

At the European level, the Bologna Ministerial Conference 2018 Paris Communiqué reinforces the importance of social responsibility and academic integrity in higher education and the 2020 Rome Communiqué takes this further by declaring:

“Quality education will continue to be the hallmark of the EHEA. A robust culture of academic and scientific integrity that blocks all forms of academic fraud and distortion of scientific truth, will be supported by all higher education institutions and all public authorities.”

At the international level, building on the previous work CHEA and UNESCO did on Degree Mills (2009), the International Quality Group of the US Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA/CIQG) joined forces with UNESCO again to convene an international expert group to review this threat in March 2016. Its Advisory Statement noted that: “dishonest practices are undermining the quality and credibility of higher education around the world” (CHEA/UNESCO, 2016).

As an outcome of an international working group composed of experts from all world regions, convened in Washington, DC in March 2016, an *Advisory Statement for Effective International Practice, Combatting Corruption and Enhancing Integrity: A Contemporary Challenge for the Quality and Credibility of Higher Education* was issued in July 2016 (Daniel, 2016).

The Advisory Statement identifies the main stakeholders that can take preventive measures to combat academic corruption and offers a matrix with examples for each group.

⁶⁶ <https://events.unesco.org/event?id=1674672224&lang=1033>

⁶⁷ The Guardian, February 14, 2021

⁶⁸ https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/guidance/covid-19-overview-quality-standards-students-unions.pdf?sfvrsn=4b82cc81_4

The CHEA/CIQG UNESCO/IIEP

Advisory Statement identifies the following stakeholders:

- governments;
- quality assurance agencies;
- higher education institutions;
- faculty and staff, students; m
- press/civil society;
- employers and professional bodies.

The Statement offers a matrix giving examples of effective preventive actions that each of the stakeholders could use to diminish academic corruption. Three among these seven stakeholders are singled out: students, as possible perpetrators but also vital allies in fighting corruption; academics as key players in preventing corruption within the institution and the press and civil society and their role in exposing and discouraging corruption.

The examples cover: the regulation of higher education systems; the teaching role of higher education institutions; student admissions and recruitment; student assessment; credentials and qualifications; research theses and publications; and public awareness.

Source: Daniel, 2016

Quality assurance is central to the battle against corruption, both through Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) by developing a robust internal quality culture at institutional level and through External Quality Assurance (EQA) as a support to IQA. Unfortunately, academic corruption is rarely a focus of EQA at present. Enhancing the credibility of higher education requires concerted action by all stakeholders. Building on the Advisory Statement, CHEA/CIQG commissioned a global study about actions and responses and responses of accreditation and quality assurance bodies to address different forms of corruption in higher education (Glendinning et al., 2019). The study concluded that the activities of QA bodies are quite limited around the world, with some exceptions of good practice. It is clear that this is one of the areas that quality assurance in its new developments should take into account to move forward.

Conclusion

This chapter tried to address the way quality assurance and accreditations have evolved in an effort to adapt to change by addressing transformations in higher education globally. It focuses on:

- the internationalization of quality assurance and the creation of a global quality assurance model
- the paradigm shift of quality assurance from inputs to outputs with a focus on the assessment of student learning outcomes and their links to national qualifications frameworks
- the evolution of open and distance learning and the developing quality assurance approaches to its new forms, shorter courses and digital credentials or the need to innovate in order to meet disruption such as COVID-19, including the increase in academic corruption.

All three quality assurance trends are approached through the lens of the innovative approaches developed by CHEA/CIQG over a number of years, inspired and informed by its President Emeritus, Dr. Judith Eaton, who had the flair to always look ahead.

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List of Acronyms

AAU	Association of African Universities
AfriQAN	African Quality Assurance Network
ANQAHE	Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
APQN	Asia-Pacific Quality Network
AQAF	ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework
AQAN	ASEAN Quality Assurance Network
ARM	African Rating Mechanism
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASG-QA	African Standards and Guidelines for QA
CAA	Commission for Academic Accreditation of the United Arab Emirates
Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CHEA	Council for Higher Education Accreditation
CIQG	CHEA International Quality Group
EADTU	European Distance Teaching Universities
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENLACES	Latin American and Caribbean Meeting Space for Higher Education
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance
GER	Gross Enrollment Ratio
HAQAA	Harmonization of African Quality Assurance and Accreditation
HE	Higher Education
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HKCAAVQ	Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications
ICDE	International Council for Distance Education
ICFES	Colombian Institute for the Promotion of Higher Education
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning of UNESCO
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
MQA	Malaysian Qualifications Agency
MQF	Malaysian Qualifications Framework
MQR	Malaysian Qualifications Register
NQFs	National Qualification Frameworks
NVAO	Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders
ODL	Open and Distance Learning
PAQAF	Pan-African Quality Assurance Framework
QA	Quality assurance
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency, UK
RIACES	The Ibero-American Higher Education Quality Assurance Network
SABER	Systems Approach for Better Education Results
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Act
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

Chapter 27

Complex Relationship Between Quality Assurance, Accountability and Ranking: Where Next?

Ellen Hazelkorn

Introduction

Quality assurance (QA) focuses on assuring a threshold of performance and improving higher education performance. But massification, globalization and internationalization of higher education, research and development (HERD) are changing the way we think about quality. Today, quality is a concern for everyone. In addition to signaling minimum standards and expectations to potential students and parents as the link between higher education and career opportunities and lifestyle grows, it serves as an indicator to employers and businesses, at home and abroad, of graduate capability. For society, quality is a measure of value for money and return on investment – a reassurance that the money spent in terms of public expenditure and/or tuition fees paid by individuals or families is worth it. Governments around the world recognize the competitive importance of high-quality institutions, and regularly refer to achievements in terms of geo-political positioning as well as a sense of national pride.

Over the last decade or so, discussion around what constitutes quality and excellence has broadened beyond student learning and graduate achievement to include societal impact and community engagement. The current debate asks: not just what universities are good at, but what they are good for (Brink, 2018). As the questions around widening participation, employability/employment and graduate attributes intensifies in many countries, the public is asking whether its interests or expectations are being served (HEFCE, 2010); is there a “gap between what HE could, and should, be and what HE currently is”? (Fishman, Ekowo & Ezeugo, 2017).

Criticism often focuses on the appropriateness of the curriculum and whether graduates have the appropriate balance between practical skills, learning facts and critical thinking (Machin & McNally, 2007; OECD & International Labour Organization, 2018). These questions are heating upon the aftermath of pandemic particularly around higher education’s commitment and role with respect to the social and economic development and sustainability of their community and region (EUA, 2021; Hazelkorn, 2020a; Myklebust & Smidt, 2021). Universities are being asked to rethink their role and responsibilities to the public good.

Higher education has traditionally relied on peer review and self-reporting and has asked the public to trust this form of accountability. Quality assurance has correspondingly been based on embedding a quality culture with ownership and responsibility resting with autonomous higher education institutions (HEI). But tensions are rising as to the continued appropriateness of this model in the global era. What is or should be the balance between assuring a quality standard, enhancing or improving quality and/or regulating institutions? Are QA processes sufficiently effective, inquisitive or transparent about what institutions, both public and private, are doing about student learning outcomes? Is “quality found in the processes or in the outcomes?” (Kinser & Phillips, 2018, p. 255).

When rankings began to be widely used around the millennium, they claimed to fill the gap as a measure of quality and excellence, and a source of information for students, parents and the public. Their success has lain in their simplicity – the ability to show which institution is better than another in an easily understandable ordinal format. In so doing, they exposed a weakness in quality assurance systems – the ability to compare higher education performance.

Institutions and nations are measured against each other, highlighting comparative and competitive global advantages and disparities in capacity and capability, and reflecting a world order in flux (Cooley, 2015). Admittedly, comparison was never the intention of QA but in the era of globalization, the ability to compare and benchmark quality and performance HEIs as well as nations has taken on great significance in the global era because the HERD landscape is a “relational landscape.”

This helps explain the near hysteria generated by the multi-annual publication of results. While QA is a mechanism of institutional oversight and governance, rankings have become a tool of public governance. QA relies on expert judgment and academic peer review whereas rankings use quantitative indicators based on indicators of choice. Despite continual criticism, rankings have continued to gain popularity with universities and governments; indeed, many institutional strategies and government policies reference rankings. These issues have taken on an even greater significance in the context of COVID-19. Countries and individuals have experienced a sudden and severe personal and financial shock. Attention is turning to societal and economic recovery, and correspondingly the role and contribution of higher education.

This paper examines the influence of rankings and discusses the extent to which they have helped shape our understanding of quality. It argues that the integration of the global economy and labor market and internationalization of the educational enterprise has changed the way we think about accountability and QA. Can traditional forms of academic accountability, such as quality assurance and accreditation, continue to provide public assurance of the quality of institutional performance or are new/different forms required? How do we balance different perspectives with expanding societal demands? What kinds of accountability and transparency instruments/tools – for assessing, measuring and comparing quality and outcomes – are fit for purpose in the 21st century? There are four sections in this paper. Part 1 summarizes key trends affecting international higher education and global science. Part 2 identifies six dimensions (re)framing our understanding of quality setting the context for Part 3 which discusses the rise and legacy of higher education rankings. Part 4 considers the implications of these developments for quality assurance.

The Global Integration of Higher Education and Research

Over the past decades, globalization, massification and technological change have transformed the global economy and the higher education landscape. The escalation and intensification of the movement and integration of trade, capital and people across borders has created many new goods and services, cross-border supply chains, markets and opportunities, further integrating nations into an increasingly competitive yet interdependent world. Usually considered only in economic terms, globalization is also shaping the social, cultural and political, thereby affecting the way people think and identify themselves, and perceive and pursue their interests. Whereas activity might previously have been confined (if not restricted) within national borders, trade, capital, people and knowledge are now all mobile and borders are (relatively) permeable (Crafts, 2000).

Since the late 20th century, a dramatic transformation has occurred in the balance of power across the global economy. While the USA, and then Japan and the EU, were dominant players in the late 20th century, recent decades have seen the rapid expansion of East/Southeast and South Asia. The shift to higher-valued goods and services innovated by talent is shifting trade and consumption patterns. Being part of regional and global value chains is dependent upon a country’s capacity and capability to develop attractive innovation systems and create a sufficient pool of skilled labor. As the shift from mass production to knowledge economy advances, countries have strong incentives to build up the skills of their populations through higher education. The aftershocks of the COVID-19 pandemic may dent projections but are unlikely to alter the overall geo-political shifts which have been underway since the millennium (Allen et al., 2020).

Economic growth has coincided with, and been driven by, demographic changes heightening demand for higher education everywhere. The number of students enrolled in higher education is estimated to reach 660m by 2040 rising from 28.6m students in 1970 and approximately 220m today (Calderon, 2018, p. 187). The number of young people with a tertiary qualification will continue to increase across OECD and G20 countries but the greatest growth is occurring in non-OECD G20 countries. As knowledge and innovation processes become more dispersed and openly accessible, the cross-border movement of people and ideas is becoming indispensable.

Highly educated people are most likely to be mobile leading to problems associated with brain drain to other countries as well as regions within countries. This includes internationally mobile students who are estimated to reach around 8m by 2025, compared with 0.8m in 1975. These developments are propelling the rise of the middle class and changing the geography of the global talent pool. These trends are reflected in the number and type of higher education institutions (HEI), rising from around 12,000 in 1997 to 19,400 in 2020 according to the International Association of Universities.⁶⁹

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is only beginning but there is already strong evidence that it will have a significant impact on working life, employment and skill requirements. Labor market estimates suggest the bulk of new employment opportunities into the future will require higher-order cognitive, communication and interpersonal skills, complex problem-solving, creativity, fluency of ideas and active learning requiring people to have broad-based skills alongside specialist knowledge. The standard employment model in which people have stable jobs and work full-time is likely to become less and less dominant (ILO, 2015) with employment shifting from the career, to the job, to the task (Davis, 2015). At the same time, the new economy presents significant challenges to the existing model of compulsory education which traditionally has envisaged students progressing systematically from primary to secondary to tertiary and then into employment. These developments hide the fact that a growing demographic deficit in most developed countries presents a challenge to knowledge-intensive strategies.

These trends are likely to accelerate in the aftermath of COVID-19. Countries will have experienced very sharp declines across their economies affecting almost all employments with people with lower levels of educational attainment and skill levels being most vulnerable (ILO, 2020). Higher education will be called upon to respond quickly and flexibly, and to rethink the balance between their educational provision (supply) and societal and labor market requirements (demand). There will be new pressures as young people choose, or are steered towards (Anon, 2020), education rather than un/under-employment while older workers seek re-skilling opportunities (Douglass, 2020).

In many countries, the pandemic will highlight domestic shortage of appropriate skills and dependence on international students and graduates as international mobility is curtailed at least in the short-medium term (Business Roundtable, 2018). These factors will bring significant changes to the higher education landscape generating a survival-of-the-fittest environment, while placing greater emphasis on work-based/work-informed learning, career and learning pathways and new forms of credentials including micro-credentials as an alternative to traditional education models. Despite significant political will to support higher education systems as a route to recovery, social equity and investment in the future, funding is likely to come under severe pressure over the next years with implications for quality and for QA.

Tensions Around the Quality and Accountability Agenda

⁶⁹ <https://whed.net/home.php>

Higher education and research are necessarily a global enterprise wherein geo-political factors have become increasingly prominent. Yet, as the scale and scope of the HERD expands, nation-states remain the primary governance and funding arena. This tension has been immediately apparent in response to the pandemic as nations move to close borders and re-nationalize supply chains with implications for internationalization. Many of the issues impacting on HERD reflect the sheer logic of complex governance, funding and decision-making arrangements required for massified and globalized systems, and changes in personal and societal expectations. Against this backdrop, trust and (re)assurances around quality are the essential lubricant, a differentiator in the marketplace – and a feature likely to become even more important as HEIs and nations seek to reboot their systems. This has and will continue to change the relationship between higher education and the state (Hazelkorn, 2018).

There are probably six dimensions that underlie concerns about quality and quality assurance (Hazelkorn, Coates, & McCormick, 2018; Kinser & Phillips, 2018; Eaton, 2016). First, the concept of “quality” is itself problematic. There is “no agreed-upon definition...or how it should be measured, much less improved. Everyone has their own perspective, as evidenced by the different approaches, methodologies, and choice of indicators” (Hazelkorn, Coates, & McCormick, 2018). It is often interpreted as or used interchangeably with prestige, reputation and selectivity. This suggests “quality” is variable, and is shaped by who-ever decides, by the choice of methodology (qualitative or quantitative) and the indicators – rather than on the basis of standards. Academics may understand why there is no official or uniform set of criteria or benchmarks and why context matters, but to the public this seems to be just another form of obfuscation.

Second, massification and the surge in student demand and mobility has led to spectacular growth in the number and range of educational programs, and providers, inter alia for-profit and trans-national/cross-border higher education. There are concerns about standards, accountability, corruption and unethical practices and promises (Glendinning, Stella-Maris Orim, & King, 2019). Assessment is increasingly required to show that qualifications are of high quality and internationally comparable and transferable. This is especially important in a globalized world, in which students and graduates are mobile and employers recruit internationally. Developments around qualifications frameworks (Tuck, 2007) and frameworks for mutual recognition of qualifications, such as the UNESCO *Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education* (2019),⁷⁰ are acknowledgment of this growing necessity.

Third, questions are being asked about how well HEIs operate vis-à-vis their goals and those of society. Emphasis has primarily been on teaching and learning and research but increasingly there are concerns about the capacity and capability of higher education to meet a variety of societal needs and demands. The focus is shifting to actual outcomes and benefits rather than simply the process of quality management, and how well HEIs are meeting the expectations and needs of students, stakeholders and society. Attention is also shifting to the academic and professional staff. Productivity asks what academics produce through their teaching, and issues of academic outputs and outcomes such as progression and graduate employment. What people want to know is how effectively students are learning, what they are achieving, and how personnel, institutions and the systems overall help students to succeed.

Fourth, government or students (or other stakeholders) are increasingly aware about getting value for money. For government, there is the incentive of endeavoring to ensure it gets best value for the money it spends. In the era of massification, these concerns go beyond simply achieving what it regards as efficiencies. No government can afford all the higher education that students and society require, or desire given competing demands from/for other parts of

⁷⁰ <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-adopts-first-united-nations-international-treaty-higher-education>

society; so, how well does the institution perform with the resources it has? For students, questions concern balancing cost and personal benefit. Tuition, maintenance and opportunity costs are rising while higher qualifications are strongly associated with career, salary and lifestyle opportunities and personal and societal benefit.

Fifth, reviews are primarily undertaken by peers using expert judgment augmented with self-evaluation reports and institutional data of varying degrees of comprehensiveness. The practice of involving students, international peers and external stakeholders varies around the world. The final report is usually lengthy and focuses on issues of institutional management of quality more so than the outcomes of quality. Reports, or a synopsis thereof, may be published on the website of the agency and/or the institution albeit the primary audience is the institution. In some countries, reports are confidential or written in English rather than the native language.

QA is based on the promotion and embedding of a quality culture with ownership and responsibility resting with autonomous higher education institutions. Despite observable virtues, it is seen as too process-oriented and insufficiently focused on measurable outcomes. There are concerns about inefficient use of public resources and people's time; the number of people participating in internal or external quality assurance activities has created an "industry" of people moving around the globe. Emphasis on the process is seen to benefit an academic community which revels in talking about issues. And the final product, the report, is not scalable in any meaningful way. The inability to be *genuinely* accountable and provide comparable evidence in a usable and transparent format has become a major handicap. Indeed, students have limited knowledge of quality assurance mechanism and there is little evidence that the reports are read and/or used by students (Jungblut & Vukasovic, 2013, p. 10-11) or the wider public to inform decision-making in any meaningful way.

And finally, sixth, quality assurance is caught up in a wider set of issues framed by growing public disquiet about public trust. From a public interest and consumer perspective there are perceived and inherent limitations, disadvantages and ethical concerns arising from professional self-regulation (Hazelkorn & Gibson, 2017). Self-regulation is based on the principle that people with expertise in a particular scientific field can best assess, evaluate and judge the quality of academic scholarship and the resultant publication. This has been a cornerstone of academic culture and self-governance since the 17th century although "prior to the Second World War the process was often quite uncodified" (Rowland, 2002, 248).

Nowadays public scrutiny is affecting many professions, inter alia financial services, clergy, media, legal, health and social services as well as politicians themselves, with countries making varying moves towards (re)regulation. Debate about the balance between institutional/university autonomy and public accountability, and how that balance is and should be struck differs across countries (Estermann & Nokkala, 2009; Estermann, Nokkala, & Steinel, 2011; Pruvot & Estermann, 2017). This tension is evident in discussions about the appropriate balance in the roles and responsibilities of ENQA (the professional association of QA agencies) and EQAR (the regulator) (Stensaker et al., 2019, p. 52-58).

The accountability agenda is usually described as part of a neo-liberal, ideologically driven reform and restructuring of public services (Lynch, 2014; Silova and Brehm, 2015). Ferlie et al. (2008) argue that "steering patterns can be linked to underlying narratives of public management reform which apply to higher education subsystems as well to other public service subsystems." But accountability is more fundamental; it concerns the "the obligation to report to others, to explain, to justify, to answer questions about how resources have been used, and to what effect" (Trow, 1996). The desire for greater accountability is associated with "ever-increasing complexity of governance" (Bovens et al., 2014, 16). The 2008 global financial crisis, for example, raised fundamental questions about the role of banks and financial institutions "fueled by scandal and perceived misuse of authority in both the private and public sectors"

(Leveille, 2013, 6). It exposed the limits of the market as a self-governing mechanism and provoked concerns about insufficient oversight.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also exposed serious flaws in global supply chains, and weaknesses in our health systems and public services and in government responses. With respect to higher education, accountability speaks to issues of responsibility to the public for quality. It is about meeting the needs of students, society and government. It is about the effectiveness and performance of colleges and universities as well as their transparency of their efforts. Accountability is about higher education serving the public interest and about higher education as a public trust (Eaton, 2016, p. 325). Arguably and ironically, the attributes which have underpinned peer review's value to the academic community and to quality assurance are those which have contributed to a breakdown in trust between higher education and students, policymakers and civil society, and undermined the social contract. It is within this wider context that the influence and impact of global rankings should be seen (Hazelkorn & Gibson, 2018).

The Rise of Rankings

The origins of rankings go back to the early years of the 20th century (Hazelkorn, 2015; Myers & Robe, 2009) (see Table 1). The man who “invented” rankings was James McKeen Cattell; his 1910 version of *American Men of Science* “showed the “scientific strength” of leading universities using the research reputation of their faculty members” (Webster, 1986, pp. 14, 107–119). Early rankings used several “dimensions of quality,” inter alia, faculty expertise, graduate success in later life and academic resources, such as faculty/student ratio or volumes in the library. The historical turning point came in 1959 when rankings emphasizing reputational factors began to dominate. These formats relied on the *Science Citation Index*, 1961 and annually thereafter, and the *Social Sciences Citation Index*, 1966 and annually thereafter. Publication of *U.S. News and World Report Best College Rankings (USNWR)* in 1983 celebrated the massification and marketization of US higher education (Karabel, 2005, p. 514), providing a consumer-oriented college guide for students and their parents.

Global rankings coincided with the current phase of globalization, and the acceleration of trans-national trade, capital, business and student and professional mobility. They began to gain notoriety and influence with the publication of *Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU)* in June 2003. The involvement of international/supra-national authorities such as the European Union with *U-Multirank* and the OECD with *AHELO* marked a significant paradigm shift. There have also been attempts to measure the performance of higher education systems, by the Lisbon Council (Ederer, Schuller, & Willms, 2008), QS and Universitas 21 – although none has achieved any prominence beyond the “common fascination with league table hierarchies” (Marginson, 2016).

There is also a wide range of specialist and alternatives rankings: Washington Monthly College Guide focus on measuring universities as engines of social mobility (Carey, 2018) and the *Greenmetric World University Ranking*⁷¹ compares commitment to sustainability. Another category seeks to link higher education performance more directly to student performance and broader issues of affordability. These instruments are less concerned with rankings per se and more about transparency and accountability (Crandall, & Malika Tukibayeva, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2016a).

Over the next years, we have seen continuing expansion across the rankings industry. Inclusion of more institutions in rankings, different types of rankings (regional, subject, national) and new indicators (teaching and learning, engagement, student experience, etc.) are all evidence of adjustments in response to genuine commentary and criticism as well as to develop the

⁷¹ <http://greenmetric.ui.ac.id>

product range (Siwinski, 2016). Unfortunately, earnest efforts by public or non-profit organizations have been dwarfed by commercial ones with much deeper financial pockets and greater agility to respond to customer and policy demands in a rapidly changing market. Today there are around 20 global rankings, and, at a rough guesstimate, upward of several hundred other primarily nationally-based rankings (IREG Observatory, 2018).

Table 1: Evolution of Rankings Reflecting Social/Political Characteristics of their Time

Phase	Defining Characteristics
Phase 1 (1900-1950s)	Influenced by the eugenics movement, early rankings defined leading universities according to reputation and educational origins of “eminent men” and considered broader questions of institutional excellence. Early movers include: Alick Maclean and Havelock Ellis, <i>Where We Get Our Best Men</i> (1900), and James McKeen Cattell, <i>American Men of Science</i> (1904 and 1910).
Phase 2 (1959-2000)	Commercially driven rankings responded to massification, student mobility and marketization of higher education, in the USA initially. They focused on reputational factors, and relied on data from <i>the Science Citation Index</i> , 1961 and annually thereafter, and the <i>Social Sciences Citation Index</i> , 1966 and annually thereafter. Nationally oriented rankings are now popular in many countries, developed by commercial/media companies, and occasionally by governments/government agencies. Early and influential movers include Hayward Keniston, <i>Graduate Study and Research in the Arts and Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania</i> (1959), Allan Cartter <i>Assessment of Quality in Graduate Education</i> (1966), and <i>US News and World Report Best College Rankings</i> (1983, and thereafter).
Phase 3 (2003-)	The advent of global rankings reflects significance of globalization and HE research for national competitiveness; also signals importance of quality and internationally recognized credentials for mobile professional/faculty labor market. Early and prominent movers include Shanghai Jiao Tong <i>Academic Ranking of World Universities</i> (ARWU) (2003), <i>Webometrics</i> (2004) and <i>THE-QS World University Ranking (THE-QS)</i> (2004). <i>THE-QS</i> partnership split in 2009, forming: <i>QS World University Rankings (QS)</i> and <i>THE World University Rankings (THE)</i> (2010).
Phase 4 (2008-)	Supra-national rankings initiatives began in response to a need to monitor, assess, compare and regulate quality internationally, including for trans-national and private providers. Early and prominent movers include European Union <i>U-Multirank</i> (2014); OECD <i>Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO)</i> (2010-2012).

Source: Hazelkorn, 2018a

Rankings’ popularity is strongly related to their perceived ability to answer the “Which university is best” question. They compare HEIs using a range of different indicators, which are weighted differently according to “some criterion or set of criteria which the compiler(s) of the list believe...measure or reflect...academic quality” (Webster, 2001, p. 5). The choice of

indicators and weightings reflect the priorities or value judgments of the producers. There is no such thing as an objective ranking; “neither is there any intrinsic reason why indicators need to be either weighted or aggregated” (Usher & Savino, 2007). Although global rankings purport to measure higher education quality, they focus on a limited set of attributes. They are especially handicapped by the absence of meaningful internationally comparable data for teaching and learning, student outcomes, societal engagement, third mission, etc. This means that most global rankings focus unduly on research and reputation using a combination of reputational factors (such as surveys and measures of internationalization) and bibliometric indicators and citations drawn from Thomson Reuters’s *Web of Science* or Elsevier’s *Scopus* data bases. In this regard, national rankings have access to a greater range of data sources.

The rise, use and misuse of rankings has been the primary focus of our collective attention over recent decades. But rankings are especially significant because of the way they have accelerated three trends. First, it is notable that despite sustained criticisms, rankings have succeeded in filling an information deficit and placing consideration of higher education quality within a wider comparative and international framework. Their use of primarily externally verifiable data is a notable advantage over shortcomings of self-perceptions of excellence or peer review albeit THE-QS, U-Multirank and USNWR do rely on institutional data and surveys.

Ironically, it’s in these latter areas that rankings have themselves become the target of misconduct by universities seeking to re-engineer their data (Hazelkorn, 2015, p. 112-113). Despite these problems, rankings’ success derives from their “appearance of scientific objectivity” (Ehrenberg, 2002, p.147), and the absence of alternative transparency instruments and their ability to portray themselves as “experts” (Lim, 2017). By linking the talent- and knowledge-producing capability of universities to the ambitions of competitive regions and nation-states eager to participate in world science and the global economy, rankings have taken the debate about quality and performance beyond higher education and placed it firmly onto the public and policy agenda around the world.

Second, desire for comparability has led to a growing alignment between rankings and the publishing industry creating a global HERD intelligence business. LinkedIn (Bergen & Hesseldahl, 2016) has also entered this space using crowd-sourced data on graduate employment. There are also links to research management developers and systems, most notably Elsevier (Fyfe et al., 2017; Posada & Chen, 2018). Data is drawn from citation indices and harvested from information provided by HEIs and/or individuals eager to be ranked or promoted. The resulting huge repositories are usually held behind paywalls despite being provided free in the first instance.⁷² Growing interest in these different rankings and information systems highlights their value beyond the HERD community including governments, business, investment companies and rating agencies. But, benchmarking and policy comparison necessitates a methodology and governance which can engender confidence and trust. This will require international agreement around data collection, definition, storage and most importantly ownership (Fyfe et al., 2017; Larivière, Haustein, & Mongeon, 2015).

Third, comparison and benchmarking – using a preponderance of quantitative indicators in a variety of “governance indices” – has been a growing part of public policy across many sectors, including health and crime, to drive, monitor and evaluate behavior and outcomes (Erkkila & Piironen; Sauder & Espeland, 2009, 64). Rankings, ratings and benchmarking national performance across almost all aspects of public life are recognized as one of “missing institutions” of global governance which “extend beyond cross-border movements or transactions” (Nayyar, 2002, p. 10, 11). According to Cooley, ninety-five such indices have been produced since 1990 “explicitly in the international realm targeting a diverse global audience of national policymakers, international bureaucrats, transnational activists, and media outlets”

⁷² For example, the *THE Impact Rankings* require universities to “take a paid-up three-year subscription to the THE’s dashboard which enables institutions to benchmark against other”. (Calderon, 2020)

(Cooley, 2015, p. 9-10). This excludes the large number of university rankings, aforementioned, which also appeared over this timeframe.

The OECD began compiling statistical information shortly after it superseded the Organization for European Economic Co-operation (OECE) in 1961. UNESCO established the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) framework in 1976, a tool which has gone on to inform qualifications frameworks around the world. The Sorbonne Declaration of 1998, which triggered the Bologna Process, was predicated on the free movement of students, faculty and workers across national boundaries. Mobility requires trustworthy information with the assurance that student/graduate performance and credentials would be recognized in other parts of Europe. The United States has long experience of government data collection, and accreditation arrangements. The Bureau of Education began issuing reports on individual academic institutions in the 1870s, and the first accreditation agencies were established around 1900 (Hazelkorn & Gibson, 2018). QA has traditionally been the shared responsibility of the “triad,” comprising the federal government, regional accrediting agencies, and state governments, supported by the academy. In the UK, professional self-regulation, underpinned by a strong culture of external peer review has been a distinguishing characteristic of that system.

Rankings signal a fundamental shift in the relationship between HERD and government. They have become one of the instruments used by students, universities and colleges, governments and agencies to “assure” and compare quality. Despite objections to rankings, many governments have worked with them and use them and/or developed alternative policy instruments. Because quality is a key differentiator in the global market, this has inexorably brought about greater government involvement either directly in the quality process or in the use of outcomes for policy and decision-making. In its place, and given higher education’s overarching importance for talent maximization and knowledge production, constraints on funding and issue of public trust, greater steerage or “over-regulation of academic output as performance” has ensued (Marginson, 2010). The involvement of government into areas which has traditionally been the remit of the academy signals the extent to which higher education’s role as primary guardian of quality is under challenge (Dill & Beerkens, 2010, p. 51; Harman, 2011, p. 313–315). A Rubicon has been crossed.

Implications for Quality Assurance

Changes at the global level reveal a dynamic, complex and competitive world economy and higher education landscape, involving: more and more diverse providers, cross-border flows of students, researchers, academics and other professionals; myriad universities and educational models, trans-national and branch campus and e-learning providers; and trans-national knowledge networks and open source/open science platforms, research collaborations, large-scale infrastructure and multi-party spin-offs and other corporate ventures. Higher education institutions are increasingly networked, collaborating locally and increasingly cross-border, initially on the basis of bilateral agreements but increasingly as members of recognized networks and associations. Use of English as the lingua franca for scientific communication and for teaching, especially when combined with the Internet, makes communication easier and quicker.

Being part of global knowledge value chains has changed the way we think about quality and accountability. As the academic, research and professional worlds become more globally intertwined, new communities of practice, guidelines, regulations and codes of practice are required in order to work smoothly and efficiently. Irrespective of whether graduates live and work close to their home or are internationally mobile, they are part of the global talent pool in an inter-connected global economy. This necessitates credentials being quality assured, mutually recognized and internationally comparable. Ultimately, students, graduates and

employers, and society overall, require confidence in the quality of higher education and research provision around the world.

Quality assurance has performed an invaluable service for society, strengthening the capacity and capability of higher education and research through the lens of quality and quality management. It produces valuable information to enhance institutional effectiveness, student performance and graduate outcomes and opportunities. Perversely, these attributes contrast with the perceived advantages of rankings which include external verification, international comparability and simplicity. The latter's popularity has coincided with and reflected changes in attitude towards public accountability and transparency. Peer review is a key part of QA but it is not without shortcomings affected by the choice of reviewers, their experience, expertise or context. Accordingly, there are signs of growing dissatisfaction with the robustness of traditional collegial mechanisms, twinned with an increasing requirement for international comparative and benchmarking data. Indeed, where QA is seen to be emergent or weak, some countries have used (global) rankings as an alternative. Effectively there is a trade-off.

Higher education and research help foster excellence, drive innovation and ensure graduates have the knowledge and skills to prepare them for future careers and role as active citizens. Societal and labor market changes, associated with globalization, massification, technological change and the 4th industrial revolution are being accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The future education landscape emphasis will see greater emphasis on the digital learning environment, work-informed and work-based learning, new credit arrangements and credentialing, just-in-time learning and flexible pathways, collaborative organizational models embracing further/TVET and higher education along with new governance arrangements, community and regional engagement, etc.

Higher education has risen to the challenges presented by the current pandemic, but more is needed. Because quality is key to sustainability and a major differentiator in a competitive market, quality assurance and accreditation processes can help higher education institution meet learner and societal expectations and needs and demonstrate their value to society. The shift from professional self-regulation to institutional processes mediated through intermediary accrediting organizations to involvement of the (federal) government is not surprising. Student learning and graduate outcomes are central to institutional performance (Eaton, 2020) but quality also extends to evidence of authentic commitment to the public good in all its dimensions: civic, social, economic, cultural and intellectual (Hazelkorn, 2020b). This carries implications for the robustness and transparency of the process itself. Students are already an important part of the process in most countries but so should business, employers and civil society. New technologies and social media platforms will play a bigger role in the future facilitating genuine on-going citizen engagement.

The ability to benchmark and compare is increasingly important; good practice suggests this should include balanced usage of qualitative and quantitative measures of achievement but communicating this information in a meaningful way is still a challenge. This all points to having a dynamic QA system which goes beyond self-evaluation and quality management. As globalization accelerates, more diverse providers are established and the global talent pool expands, there is a necessity for better coordination at the global level to underpin the sustainability and security of the global knowledge economy. All this requires new and different communities of guidelines, regulations and codes of practice to work smoothly and efficiently.

International organizations and associations, e.g., OECD, UNESCO and the World Bank have established various arrangements and programs in response to this complex global environment, most recently the UNESCO Global Convention on Recognition of Higher Education (2019). The EU Bologna Process originated to bring coherence and greater opportunity across disparate European national higher education and research systems. Similar initiatives are evolving elsewhere, e.g., the ASEAN Qualifications Reference

Framework (AQR) Task Force in Asia, the African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN), and South America's MercoSur-Educativo. International networking and co-ordination are also fostered by IAU and EUA as well as such as CHEA and CIQG, ENQA, INQAHEE, etc.⁷³

Notably quality assurance, mutual recognition of qualifications, cross-border regulation, issues of corruption and fraud, etc are at the heart of these international networks and associations. Together they form the basis for a strengthened multilateral architecture which is necessary to underpin international higher education and global science (Hazelkorn, 2020c; van Damme & van der Wende, 2018). The issues discussed throughout this paper are intended to frame a wider discussion about how we think about quality and quality assurance in the global age. Many propositions will challenge traditional thinking. The post-pandemic recovery will however demand even more from higher education. Public trust in the quality of higher education and research – going beyond self-declaration to external verification – will be severely tested.

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⁷³ IAU = International Association of Universities; EUA = European University Association; ENQA = European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education; CHEA = Council of Higher Education Accreditation; INQAHEE = International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education; CIQG = CHEA International Quality Group.

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Chapter 28

Emerging Challenges in Quality Assurance: Requisite Leadership Knowledge and Expertise

Gareth Phillips

Introduction

Higher education is a dynamic system of organized learning within an education sector that develops and refines a country's human capital (Machumu & Kisanga, 2014). Thus, the provision of higher education globally is characterized by many differences yet there are certainly similarities or shared features found across several higher education systems. Within this global context, higher education has been through many cycles of rapid change. These global changes usually intensify the pressure on the local higher education system to implement practices that are responsive to diverse needs and demands of an ever-changing student population as well as society (Prakash, 2018). In the Jamaican context, with the proliferation of higher education provisions, the need for greater management and assurance of quality has been underscored. Many individuals, both at the institutional and system levels, are grappling with the concepts of quality and quality assurance in higher education (Martin & Stella, 2007). As a consequence, there are as many variations of internal quality assurance mechanisms in higher education as there are institutions. However, it is important to note that variations in internal quality assurance mechanisms do not necessarily suggest that there is a problem. In fact, these variations may well be indicative of a mature system that has the capacity to embrace diversity.

As global higher education expands, the institutions and systems within the sector are contending with a plethora of emerging challenges (Ryan, 2015). These challenges and how they are addressed, in some way, affect the provision of quality programs and experiences in higher education. The use of quality assurance mechanisms—internal and external—remains the means by which high quality is maintained and secured in this fast-changing sector (International Institute Educational Planning, 2006). However, developing countries, like Jamaica and other Caribbean countries, require leadership knowledge and expertise in quality assurance to navigate these rapidly changing and emerging demands for higher quality. This chapter will highlight challenges within the Jamaican external quality assurance context by focusing on quality assurance agencies. Of specific interest is the leadership of external quality assurance, and the extent of the knowledge and understanding of quality assurance. Further, it will include an evaluation of the agencies' readiness to address the emerging challenges and to present possible solutions.

Patterns of Change in Demand for Higher Education

In Jamaica, the number of individuals able to access higher education continues to increase. However, this increase has not been without periods of decline. For example, according to the World Bank's data 2019, Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) in tertiary education was approximately 9% in 1999 with a steady increase to approximately 21% in 2004. In 2005, it fell to 19% and again increased steadily to 29% by 2012. The last reported GER was 27% in 2015 which remains unchanged since 2013 (The World Bank Group, 2019). Thus, there is evidence that local higher education is expanding on the demand side. The other side of the same token is that there have been more providers of higher education locally than at any other time. Based on the University Council of Jamaica's 2000 report, there were 41 registered local tertiary institutions with an additional seven universities from overseas (offshore) offering higher education. Today, there

are 45 local institutions and 13 universities from overseas with two additional overseas universities offering fully online learning (UCJ, 2018a).

A major challenge in local higher education is the limited funding that is available to access the system (Nkrumah-Young, 2015). As a result of limited financial resources, most of the individuals who participate in higher education are from families that are better off. The poor are less likely to be able to afford higher education. In that sense, the system remains mostly elitist since a large majority of locals are unable to afford higher education. It is a fact that students who are high performers tend to study in foreign institutions (Evans & Burke, 2007). They are able to take advantage of the opportunity through the use of academic scholarships. Others have used sport scholarships to access overseas universities.

Types of Providers

In the higher education sector, there are a number of institutional types that are offering programs. There are universities, university colleges, colleges, training centers, schools, and institutes. A large majority of the local higher education providers are private institutions. This trend is consistent with countries such as Peru, Belgium, and Columbia (Knight, 2008). The private institutions are typically for-profit where all income is from tuition and other private sources of funding. There is one private local university and a number of other institutions that are church owned. Public institutions are supported by government through subventions (Evans & Burke, 2007; Nkrumah-Young, 2015). Transnational provision has also been on the rise. As indicated earlier, several US and UK-based institutions have been offering online and other forms of distance education. Additionally, several have partnered with local institutions (the same as Twinning, Knight, 2008) to deliver their programs in the traditional face-to-face modality.

Evolution of Quality Assurance in Jamaican Higher Education

Higher education locally – otherwise referred to as Tertiary Education – first began with the theological and teachers' colleges to train ministers for church ministry and teachers for schooling at the primary level (Evans & Burke, 2007). At that time, quality management was solely the prerogative of the institution (Roberts, 2003). Therefore, the litmus test of quality was the degree to which graduates were able to function effectively in their respective jobs following graduation. Later, there were several attempts at providing a liberal arts education which all failed until the University College of the West Indies in association with the University of London began offering degree programs. This institution later became the University of the West Indies with its own charter to grant degrees. Under the previous arrangement, quality assurance was the responsibility of the University of London.

The formal system of quality assurance in local higher education has existed for a number of years. In fact, the origin of the system dates back to 1987 when an act of parliament – the University Council of Jamaica Act, 1987 – was passed to establish an agency to assure quality in tertiary education institutions (Alleyne, 2015). This Act was only preceded by the establishment of the Joint Board of Teacher Education which occurred in 1965. However, the development of structures and procedures began immediately following the passage of the Act because the mandate came with much urgency. By 1991, the Agency accredited its first program and since that time has expanded its capacity to be able to review 64 programs within a year (UCJ, 2018a). The policies and processes observed by the Agency are generally reflective of and comparable to international standards and, in many ways, serve as a model or guide for new and upcoming agencies on how to establish such an entity.

While not typically characterized in this way, for the purposes of the analysis and discussion undertaken in this chapter, the local quality assurance network shall consist of the national External Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA) – the University Council of Jamaica (UCJ

established in 1987) – that caters to public and private universities and colleges or institutions largely through institutional and programmatic accreditation. Additionally, specialized or special mission bodies, that is: for Teacher Education – Joint Board of Teacher Education (JBTE established in 1965); for Technical and Vocational Education – the National Council on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NCTVET established in 1994); for community colleges – Council of Community Colleges of Jamaica (CCCJ established in 2001); and for Health Professions – Caribbean Accreditation Authority for Education in Medicine and other Health Professions (CAAM-HP established in 2003) are also part of this network.

All tertiary-level institutions, both public and private that develop and deliver study programs are included. The Jamaica Tertiary Education Commission (JTEC) which is still being established primarily to regulate and monitor the tertiary education institutions, and the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Information (MoEYI) which represents the policy and governance arm of the network are also important members of this network. The final and most central of the network are the students who participate and graduate from the programs. Over time, consultations have been held regarding the official interactions of all these entities with each other but to date, it remains largely undefined and unintegrated with duplications and overlaps in some areas. Besides the UCJ, several of these entities are positioned to have greater influence on external quality assurance activities in the system.

As part of this quality assurance network, the tertiary education institutions have their own or are expected to have their own internal quality assurance mechanisms (Tamrat, 2019; Perkins, 2015). Several institutions have begun to develop such systems but are experiencing challenges in ensuring that these systems function in a reliable way or in a way that produces timely consistent outputs. When institutions fail to produce a certain output, it is interpreted by an external quality assurance agency as gaps or deficiencies in the institution's internal quality assurance mechanism. Local external bodies believe that if left unchecked, institutions' quality standards would be at less than desirable levels. Since there is a high chance of this situation becoming true in a number of cases locally, it makes the function of external quality assurance extremely important (IIEP, 2006).

Traditionally, the UCJ has operated using its own qualifications framework – Tertiary Qualifications Framework (TQF) – now revised and is aligned to the national framework developed by JTEC (UCJ, 2018a). In spite of this development, the TQF continues to be a guide to institutions or interested entities on several issues relating to tertiary education offerings, primarily on the distinction of qualification types and levels. JTEC led the development of the National Qualifications Framework of Jamaica (NQFJ) which was presented to the MoEYI in 2015 (JTEC, n.d.). That framework will be the authority on all the various qualification types available in the Jamaican education system from primary to tertiary education covering academic and non-academic qualifications. Generally, acceptable qualifications in the Jamaican higher education system include certificates, diplomas, associate degrees, bachelors, masters, and doctorates.

Special Features of the External Quality Assurance Agency

The UCJ reports to the MoEYI but has its own governing council (UCJ, 2018a). The Minister of Education determines the general membership of the council. However, the first three local universities have had a designated seat on the Council. It is not yet clear how these designated seats will be affected as the number of local universities increases. Outside of those predetermined seats, the Minister of Education invites all the other members. The Council makes all major decisions regarding policies and practices by the agency, which includes employment decisions. An Executive Director heads the agency and manages the staff, chief of which are the Accreditation Officers. These officers are assigned specific institutions for which they are responsible for monitoring and reporting, as well organizing site visits, and assemble expert review panels for these site visits.

The UCJ performs several functions within the higher education system. These functions include accreditation, credential equivalency assessment, research and granting of degrees. Accreditation is the form of quality assurance practiced by the agency (Nkrumah-Young, 2015; Perkins, 2015a). Accreditation: through the Boards of Studies – comprising experts from academia and industry – the agency establishes discipline specific standards. These standards are used by institutions to guide their development of academic programs. The standards are often used in the process of program accreditation and now institutional accreditation. Credential equivalency: the agency provides reviews of academic credentials from other countries to determine their equivalence to those awarded in Jamaica. In the year 2017- 2018 alone, the agency processed over 300 applications for credential equivalency (UCJ, 2018a).

For research, the agency's staff, primarily accreditation officers, engage in researching areas of relevance to quality assurance and higher education. The results of which are typically shared through paper presentations at quality assurance conferences (UCJ, 2018a). The Act of 1987 authorizes the Council to grant degrees in cases where students have completed studies at institutions that do not yet have a charter to award degrees (Nkrumah-Young, 2015). Therefore, these degrees – known as the UCJ approved degrees – are awarded each year to students who have met the requirements for such degrees.

Program accreditation has been the primary focus of the UCJ because the reality is that a majority of the institutions are smaller in the Jamaican higher education system. Here, a “*small*” institution is determined based on the numbers of programs being offered and the numbers of students enrolled. However, in 2012, the UCJ granted its first institutional accreditation to the University of the West Indies (UWI) Mona (Office of Campus Registrar, 2012; Nkrumah-Young, 2015). On the one hand, this decision marked a transition in the practice of external quality assurance locally and pointed to a direction in which the agency would expand its experience and expertise. On the other hand, it created a disquiet among members of other institutions who felt the decision was largely based on privilege. This privilege would have come as a result of the social capital attributable to the institution being the largest campus in the regional university system.

Some from the institutions argued that prior to institutional accreditation, the UWI had not submitted any of its programs of study for review by the Council whereas their institutions had done so successfully on several occasions demonstrating their capacity to produce quality outcomes. Therefore, following a period of public discussions in the media and other quarters, two institutions finally applied. Having achieved a successful review, the institutions – Northern Caribbean University and the University of Technology, Jamaica – were granted Institutional Accreditation in 2018 (Sterling, 2019). By maintaining its membership with international quality assurance bodies, the UCJ has ensured that international partnership will continue to be a part of the agency's activities.

The agency has strong affiliation with the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) International Quality Group (CIQG) and International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) (UCJ, 2018a). For a number of years, UCJ has attended and participated in conferences and webinar sessions organized by these bodies. Specifically, the Executive Directors of UCJ, some Accreditation Officers, and other quality assurance leaders from Jamaica have interacted personally with Judith Eaton, President, CHEA (personal conversation with Judith Eaton at 2019 CHEA & CIQG Conference and Meeting). The consensus is that she is one of the most personable, kind, and committed quality assurance leaders and experts in this international movement. The quality assurance movement in Jamaica is forever influenced by her wisdom, insight, and leadership on quality assurance issues in global higher education. This kind of mutually beneficial connection is an important feature for UCJ as it serves as a good source of reviewers for programs and institutions.

Additionally, it facilitates the agency's currency on global practices and trends within quality assurance.

In 2018, the UCJ demonstrated its capacity to carry forward with excellence external quality assurance into the future by obtaining ISO 9001:2015 Certification (UCJ, 2018b). This certification came after an intense period of review by the ISO team. This certification is a stamp of validation for the UCJ's internal business processes and systems meeting international standards. While an important and useful milestone, UCJ should continue towards seeking quality review of its systems by an EQAA for external agencies. This would provide another critical perspective using global external quality assurance standards as the measure, and one that is more directly aligned to the core area of the agency (Perkins, 2015b).

In 2015, the UCJ completed its first review of programs using its Transnational Recognition Policy. An institution that had a number of Jamaican students who completed its Master of Education and Doctor of Education degrees was the first candidate. It provided opportunities for learning for the institution as well as UCJ as new challenges peculiar to this kind of review were encountered. This experience pointed to gaps in the policy and ways in which the policy needed to expand in order to respond to non-traditional contexts (personal conversations with the Director of Accreditation and Executive Director of UCJ in 2015). The lesson was critical for UCJ as it was determined to engage this emerging phenomenon in global higher education and be among the early initiators to transnational recognition of programs. As an outcome, the agency was positioned to address this issue in an international forum on establishing standards and conducting reviews relating the transnational arrangements.

Challenges Facing Quality Assurance in Jamaica

Despite the mature system of quality assurance that has been developed, there are several current critical issues that need to be addressed. These critical issues include: (a) the influence of government and interest groups on the core operations of the agencies; (b) preparation and training of staff and stakeholders to utilize automated system; (c) lack of mutual understanding between higher education institutions and the external quality assurance agency; (d) lack of clear and transparent mechanism for consistent decision-making at the agency level; (e) weak internal quality assurance system at the institutional level; (f) limited opportunity for capacity-building within quality assurance; and (g) financial constraints (h) impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Following will be a discussion of each issue to illuminate the concerns.

Independence of EQAA

External quality assurance agencies should be able to function with some measure of independence and autonomy from government or interest groups (IIEP, 2006). As an external quality assurance agency, it is desirable that there be the freedom to carry out its responsibilities without fear of consequences. When independence is not secured, it poses a threat to the agency's authority and by extension its ability to effectively fulfill its function. The goals of any agency could easily be derailed, and the integrity of the work compromised. It may be useful for the mechanism to be put in place to safeguard against the potential threat.

Shifting to Automation

In an attempt to reduce the level of manual processing that currently characterizes the workload by the accreditation officers, the agency has been pursuing automation (UCJ, 2018a). At this juncture, the process appears to be in its advanced stage and training for internal staff has been ongoing. A shift towards full scale automation would immediately reduce the time taken to complete accreditation while reducing the incidents of errors. Institutions could feel more in control and engaged as they will be able to interact more directly with the agency or at the very least, they could easily identify where they are in the process. This change would result

in improved communication between the agency and the institution and will also improve the quality of service and experience.

Lack of Mutual Understanding

Confusion typically results whenever there is a lack of adequate information or clear communication (IIEP, 2006). This confusion may be caused by the absence of a shared vocabulary of technical terms. There was a time not too long ago when several institutions began complaining about the accreditation process appearing as a moving target and being difficult to grasp. This lack of understanding has led to low trust and confidence in the agency's processes as fair. It seems the agency should consider providing more opportunities for clarification and presentation of information that institutions will understand. It is also important that those institutions have the perception that the agency is willing to engage them in further dialogue with the hope of achieving greater understanding. Therefore, a clear message needs to be communicated to the institutions that the agency is willing to accommodate them through meetings and to provide training for their representatives who are involved in quality assurance. The idea is not to violate the principles of external quality assurance, rather it is to develop and guide institutions so that there is greater understanding and improved levels of outputs (IIEP, 2006).

Transparent Decision-Making

The principle applied in making accreditation decisions is that programs are accredited at minimum standards (UCJ, 2018a). That means that institutions will receive accreditation if they meet those minimum standards. While that is often said, it is not very clear for everyone involved and certainly, there has not been the sharing of a profile of an institution that typically meets those standards. Thus, it is conceivable that where two institutions are presented for accreditation, both with weaknesses in their quality assurance mechanisms, one is granted accreditation while the other is delayed. However, if a matching of the two institutions were to be done, it is possible that they are qualitative at the same level. Therefore, to be more transparent, UCJ has reintroduced a quantitative auditing tool to be included in the assessment of institutions. This tool may offer more precision when determining whether an institution has met the minimum standards. However, the use of a more holistically designed matrix that goes beyond checkboxes might offer a better profile of an institution that has met the standards (Ryan, 2015; IIEP, 2006).

Weak Internal Quality Assurance System

This issue may well be an offshoot of the previous challenge. Since some institutions are still not yet clear on the relationship between the EQAA and the institution they continue to fall short of developing an internal quality assurance system that is robust and can achieve quality assurance goals that are desirable (Tamrat, 2019). Earlier, it was mentioned that the institutions failed to produce reliable outputs that indicate the process works well. On the one hand, this raises an issue about the impact on student outcome and the final quality of the graduates. On the other hand, the concern is for achieving a mature internal system that is sustainable. In any event, given the small (geographic) space Jamaica occupies, it is necessary for the institutions' internal quality assurance systems to interlock seamlessly into the external quality assurance system. In other words, there needs to be greater synergy between the external quality assurance agency and the tertiary-level institutions (Ryan, 2015).

Several institutions appear to have developed a dual system of quality control, that is, one quality management system for the institution and another for the external quality assurance agency. The two are brought into contrast when the institution has to prepare for accreditation. The volume of work that is always required by an institution for accreditation reveals the extent of the differences. Ideally, if the systems are aligned, it will take less than half the time it now

takes an institution to complete the self-study and assemble the evidence (Ryan 2015; Liu, 2013). Once the systems are aligned, the focus needs only to be on enhancement which will ultimately lead to the growth of the internal quality assurance system. It should help if the institutions were able to recruit or develop skilled and knowledgeable individuals to guide their development.

Limited Capacity-Building

Capacity-building represents a major challenge in global higher education quality assurance (Perkins, 2015a). Generally, the sustainability of any system depends on the resources available to develop and build capacity through ongoing training. Locally, as with other territories, there is a gap in the continuous development of quality assurance skills and expertise. Besides the staff at the external quality assurance agency who from time to time engages in training and workshop sessions, the pool of practitioners – largely made up of individuals from institutions – have had little or no exposure to formal training in quality assurance. Additional training is sometimes conducted by the external quality assurance agency for representatives from the institutions (UCJ, 2018a). However, there is no formal program available locally in quality assurance. This situation makes it difficult to establish professional practice among those who are in the field. It is crucial for this issue to be addressed as a priority.

Limited Funding

Funding is another major issue in the local quality assurance system (Evan & Burke, 2007; Nkrumah-Young, 2015). Even with the greatest ideas, without available funding these ideas might never become a reality. Both the institutions and the agency must find additional sources of income in order to meet the demands of quality assurance. Improving the infrastructure within institutions requires funding without which, program quality may be jeopardized. A decision by the agency to undertake a review for accreditation is based on the institution's ability to pay the associated fees. These fees are necessary since they are used by the agency to offset the cost for accommodation and travel for the visiting experts to the country. Institutions' inability to pay restricts the agency's ability to undertake new ventures or even to carry out its core functions.

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

As with other jurisdictions, the Jamaican higher education quality assurance context has been placed in a quandary as institutions and the EQAA grapple to find the best approach to maintaining high quality in the shift to mass online learning. The onset of the COVID-19 resulted in immediate and complete closure of all institutions of learning in spite of the Prime Minister's announcement for specific institutions to close (OPM Communication, 2020). Higher education institutions migrated to virtual learning using platforms such as Zoom and Google Classroom. Colleges and universities continue to face challenges to convert to full online learning. However, those that already had existing online or other distance learning structures have been faring better than those institutions that still need to identify available funding. Undoubtedly, this crisis has exacerbated the differences among institutions as well as the differences in outcomes for students. These differences now include uneven exposure to instructional materials and facilitators due to limited or even no access to internet connection, relocation or dislocation of students from campuses and other living accommodations, and limited options for the continuity of quality learning experiences (Marinoni, et al., 2020).

For accreditation agencies, site visits are being conducted virtually which are likely to encounter varying challenges across institutions. Thus, the capacity of the agencies is brought into focus as they navigate institutional limitations in the process. The lack of digitization becomes a contrasting reality that highlights many of the gaps in the higher education system and the immediacy of the need for a multi-layered intervention or multiple interventions.

These interventions are critical as the threat of uncertainty continues to loom across the globe. Whether COVID-19 or other pandemics of this magnitude in the near or distant future, agencies and institutions within the Jamaican higher education system must seriously consider what is required for preparation for the unknown. In spite of limited resources, these conversations which should be assisted by the discourse on “digital resilience” must be had now and be inclusive of the relevant entities across sectors in order to be impactful (Bhagat & Kim, 2020). Efficiency in this new normal requires a strong display of “agility, adaptability, and transformation” (p. 366), especially by the institutions and the national external quality assurance agency. The roles and responsibilities of some entities may need to expand or be refined in some instances in order to achieve the best outcomes for students now and in the future.

The Leadership Conundrum

An essential component for success is leadership (Kezar et al., 2006). The formulation of leadership power and influence is a function of the culture and context within which such leadership exists. Thus, knowing how the key players interact within the ecosystem of a given context provides leadership with a distinct advantage in producing desirable levels of outcome. To achieve optimal performance requires deep understanding of the factors at work and an ability to navigate the dynamism within the context. Therefore, the emergence of leadership relies on the needs of that ecosystem and the unique engagement of the elements to bring about optimal outputs. This leadership framework is useful to the examination of quality assurance leadership in Jamaica since it foregrounds leadership as embedded within an ecosystem. Quality Assurance in Jamaica has its own ecosystem which must be the backdrop for a study on external quality assurance leadership. Thus, in this section, the focus is on the nature of leadership for external quality assurance within this ecosystem.

According to Salis (2002), leadership is a pivotal factor for the advancement of quality and quality management. He advocates that “commitment to quality has to be a prime role for any leader” (p. 68). While Salis’ perspective is about leadership at the institutional level, the principle is applicable to all levels of leadership. Therefore, applied to quality assurance and more so external quality assurance, leadership is vital in ensuring that there is a strong commitment to quality among the constituents. Thus, through consistency in leadership action, there should be a clear demonstration of such a level of commitment. Where there is strong leadership commitment to quality, it is expected that evidence will be found in the kinds of structures, interactions, and activities implemented by leadership.

Within a given context, it is anticipated that those who are involved in external quality assurance in higher education will have a sense of what quality is and what it looks like (Ehlers, 2009). Here, the issue extends beyond merely a definition and more towards measuring and accounting for quality based on agreed and acceptable minimum standards. Given the varied applications of the concept – quality – one’s working knowledge should be located within a broad network of understandings that allows for flexibility and adaptability. In other words, one’s understanding of quality should not serve as restrictive lens but rather providing an enabling and empowering vision that facilitates meaningful interactions with a combination of usage even within the same context (Ehlers, 2009; IIEP, 2006). This facilitation is required for the current reality where quality is being redefined in traditional as well as emerging contexts and accommodating future framing yet known. The leadership mindset in these contexts must be flexible and agile in order to be responsive to these dynamics. Thus, within each context, the greater emphasis needs to be on achieving consensus around acceptable minimum standards to be used in assuring quality (Ryan, 2015).

“There is [sufficient] evidence that leadership is an indispensable element in the process of initiating and sustaining the development of a quality culture in organizations” (Berry, 1997, p. 52). Therefore, enabling the right kind of leadership is critical to the establishment of a national

external quality assurance agency. Supported by Salis (2002) and Berry (1997), Ehlers (2009) argues that leadership for the development of a strong quality culture in quality assurance must be empowering. Where there is already within external quality assurance a culture that is for compliance, control, and assessment, he recommends a type of leadership that is more transformational. This type of leadership facilitates the development of professionalism that is necessary in the context of constant change. At this juncture where an improved higher education system is being advanced in Jamaica, the question of how to embed such a value into a new or revised national system at the start becomes very important.

In May 2018, the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Information (MoEYI) in Jamaica staged a higher education summit with major stakeholders to produce a draft declaration on higher education. Participation was from a wide cross-section of stakeholders that included representatives from government, higher education institutions, private, and other public sector organizations. The targeted outcome for the ministry as stated in the Declaration was to establish an Integrated Higher Education System for Jamaica (IHES-J). This integrated system, as conceived by the ministry, would champion 10 key outcomes in order to upgrade the current tertiary landscape to the 21st Century. While the outcomes are interrelated, the three specifically combine to form a nexus that is relevant to this discussion on external quality assurance leadership. Specifically, they are (a) the promotion of quality culture; (b) the institutionalization of flexible and agile administrative systems, processes and control; and (c) promotion of internationalization.

The proposed framework for quality within the integrated system has four levers (a) policy; (b) regulatory body; (c) external quality assurance; and (d) credentialing. In the document, quality is defined as fitness for purpose guided by some generally accepted standards. According to the Declaration, this approach to quality assurance allows for a diverse set of institutional missions: academic, technical and vocational, professional education and training albeit that they will have to meet minimum standards. Critical to the sustainability of this approach is a solid quality culture. Although well stated in the Declaration on Higher Education, these ideas must be examined within the context of Jamaica's realities, and the implications fully understood as this will impact implementation. The first to be examined is *quality culture*. A quality culture sees all members within an organization or system taking personal responsibility and action to ensure that outcomes are right the first time or a "zero defect" stance on output (Ehlers, 2007).

Further, it is an understanding of the relationship or link between one's actions and all the other parts within a system. Such commitment results in the continuous attainment of high quality across the system and equally in every subsystem of an organization. On the individual and managerial levels, it is a deliberate attempt at minimizing, if not fully eliminating, errors or flaws in processes and outcomes. Thus, the promotion of a quality culture while a noble goal for any organization, cannot simply be mandated. On the one hand, there are the rules and regulations and on the other hand, there is buy-in among stakeholders. In other words, while there are stipulations about quality – typically expressed in terms of levels and targets – to be achieved by an organization, cultural reality is dependent on the alignment of individuals' attitudes and dispositions to the achievement of those quality outcomes (Ehlers, 2009).

Given this understanding – applied to the integrated higher education proposal – the promotion of a quality culture must have shared understanding of quality among all the players. Again, as expressed in earlier discussions, those understandings must remain flexible and agile to respond to nuances in practice. Therefore, in practical terms, those with governance responsibilities along with all other stakeholders, including quality assurance bodies, and higher education institutions will need to remain committed to ongoing shaping and reshaping of their current understanding of quality and quality practices. Suffice it to say, that stakeholders will need to adopt a mindset that allows them to remain engaged as new

practices continue to emerge. Assuming that all players develop an appropriate mindset, then there will be openness to revise in some cases, but in others, revamp what is acceptable minimum standards.

The major argument here is that a quality culture is tied to a particular definition of quality used in a specific context (Ryan, 2015). Since quality is a complex, multidimensional concept that is expressed as a function of its context, then a quality culture must be defined by that context. However, this specific contextual understanding does not disregard shared understanding. Thus, a quality culture by necessity must simultaneously satisfy two conditions (a) relate to a specific contextual understanding; and (b) relate to a broader, more general understanding of quality. In other words, there is no standardized quality culture that should be imposed upon an integrated system, rather, it is the outcome of the interaction between the specific and the general that should be promoted within the system. Here, it is implied that the integrated system must remain intelligent as it is expected to continuously refine its understanding and practices.

Second is institutionalization. Quality assurance is concerned with the internal and external mechanisms an institution employs to give confidence to stakeholders that its systems and programs are of high quality (Tamrat, 2019). Institutionalization focuses on the internal mechanisms and how they are aligned to the quality culture. However, building a vibrant internal quality system should enhance or lead to better outcomes for the external system. All higher education institutions should therefore strive for a synergistic relationship between their internal and external mechanisms. In the Jamaican context, there is a prevalence of a dual system where the internal mechanism seems to have relation to the external but lacks the requisite alignment. Thus, efforts and resources appear doubled in order to satisfy both mechanisms. There are even instances where the two systems appear to be independent of each other. These anomalies pose a threat to the goals of institutionalization and need to be addressed in order to achieve effectiveness.

For system-wide institutionalization to occur, first, all stakeholders must view themselves as important and necessary as the others within the system (IIEP, 2006). Second, there must be commitment to the goals of an integrated system such that individual stakeholders will make the required investment of time and resources. Third, is the valuing of systems learning, that is, the knowledge and experience that emerge within the system are embraced and applied systemwide. Finally, there is reciprocity among stakeholders, especially institutions, by their acceptance of the quality assurance practices established within the system. Therefore, external quality assurance should serve to strengthen and support the internal processes for all stakeholders: institutions, bodies, agencies, and learners. If coordinated well, institutionalization should facilitate greater internationalization of processes and practices within the system.

Among other principles or strategies, the Jamaican Declaration points to the provision of quality programs across several institutions. An element of providing quality programs refers to freedom of inquiry by institutions and individuals within those institutions. A true higher education system must engender freedom within the academy for the pursuit of all types of knowledge (Brubacher & Rudy, 2007). On the one hand, this freedom should be expressed through the nature of research and the teaching areas that are aligned to institutional goals and missions and should not be curtailed by a higher education regulatory body. On the other hand, a government for economic and social reasons, may choose to incentivize some research and teaching areas more than others. Such actions remain the purview of a government but should not be adopted or advanced by a higher education framework. If an institution is able to obtain funding to support any area of interest, there should be no restriction placed on that institution's freedom. Therefore, external quality assurance should advance Academic Freedom for institutions and individuals and not be used to restrict such (Brubacher & Rudy, 2007).

Third is internationalization. Internationalization requires that the output from the Jamaican higher education system be of a standard that is recognizable and acceptable in other jurisdictions. External quality assurance facilitates access to professional reviewers and in some cases, those individuals are from foreign countries and add other perspectives in the feedback to institutions. These external perspectives can serve to enhance and strengthen an internal system making it more attractive to an international audience. Whenever a higher education system reflects standards and outcomes that are comparable and appears familiar to systems in other parts of the world, it brings a measure of comfort and a sense of security especially in relation to issues of transferability. Transferability is an important concern for many who participate in study abroad programs. Adopting good practices from other jurisdictions does support the goals of internationalization (Ryan, 2015).

Currently, based on the relationship established with international bodies in quality assurance, for example, CHEA and INQAAHE, Jamaica's authorized external quality assurance body in higher education – UCJ – already enjoys a strong international presence and reputation. This high regard came as UCJ continued to demonstrate consistently high quality in their procedures and practices informed by good practices that may have been established in other parts of the world. Additionally, being bold in engaging trending issues in external quality assurance, for example, transnational and cross-border accreditation, brought to the UCJ a leading edge. More importantly it was through direct frequent participation in international engagements, largely through attendance to international symposia, conferences, and meetings, and by creating a voice through ongoing contributions to discussions, declarations, and policy issues. Thus, the internationalization of a country's external quality assurance system – certainly the case for Jamaica – flourishes as a result of a deliberate choice to be influenced and impacted by the shifts occurring beyond its local borders.

The current study involved 44 individuals in the Jamaican higher education system who work in agencies that offer some related external quality assurance services including special mission institutions. The purpose of this exploratory cross-sectional study was to determine the knowledge these individuals had of external quality assurance generally, and of the practices in Jamaica specifically. Further, the study sought to capture the individuals' perceptions of the quality of leadership necessary to facilitate the changes proposed by the Jamaica Declaration on Higher Education. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What do Jamaican practitioners understand about external quality assurance?
2. What are their beliefs about external quality assurance leadership in the Jamaican higher education system?
3. What is their attitude towards the current nature of leadership for external quality assurance transformation? and
4. What do they believe would strengthen external quality assurance leadership in the Jamaican higher education system?

A quantitative survey design was used in this study. According to Cresswell (2013), a survey type design is well suited because of its rapid turnaround on data collection as well as the economy of this design. Thus, a 19-item questionnaire was developed based on literature review on quality assurance, specifically, external quality assurance. The first 16 were continuous Likert Scale items covering definition, description, and the practice of quality assurance in Jamaica while the other three items related to participants' familiarity with the proposal for changes in external quality assurance, their confidence in current leadership ability, and the number of years in their current agency. The instrument was reviewed for content validity by a panel of experts who are heads of international regional accreditation agencies, and adjustments were made based on their feedback. Since the external quality assurance practitioners represent a very small, specialized group of professionals in the

Jamaican higher education system, there was no comparable group on which to conduct pilot testing, therefore none was done prior to distribution of questionnaire to research participants.

Six agency directors were approached for approval for participation and only four responded favorably. They represented quality officers and related staff from Community Colleges, Technical and Vocational Training, Teacher Education, and an education commission. No higher education institution was included since their mechanism is described as internal quality assurance. All participants were sent a letter of invitation and their consent granted prior to completing the questionnaire. A total of 50 questionnaires were distributed and 44 were returned which represented an 88% response rate. The data were entered and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 20. More than half of the participants (52%) worked for five years or less in their current agencies while approximately 23% worked between six and 10 years, and the others all exceeded 10 years.

Knowledge Expertise of External Quality Assurance Leadership

The large majority of the respondents were of the view that *quality* is an easily and precisely defined concept. They also believed that decisions regarding quality are best made by individuals who have a strong understanding of quality. Thus, they believed for effective quality assurance, only individuals with strong knowledge of quality should be involved. Further, they saw experience in quality assurance as a prerequisite for making good decisions about quality. The respondents also viewed quality assurance as the process of applying common and shared beliefs about quality as standard measurements. High academic quality, it was believed, is only possible if there is an external quality assurance system. Finally, they saw external quality assurance as essential only if internal quality assurance was effective.

Based on the responses, the knowledge expertise of external quality assurance leadership could be characterized as having clear and precise knowledge and understanding of quality as a concept. It requires experience in quality assurance such that there is knowledge of the shared or common beliefs about the standards to be used when assessing quality in higher education. Leadership must appreciate the link between internal and external quality assurance, and the importance of that connection in achieving high academic quality. Having experience in quality assurance is a prerequisite for making good decisions about quality. The Jamaican QA practitioners appeared to believe that quality is a very specific and simple concept to understand and apply. This limited view of the quality concept has the potential and to some extent, may have already been prohibiting QA practitioners from embracing the reality of a multidimensional phenomenon. This situation does represent a departure of the local context from the international community.

Attitude Towards External Quality Assurance Leadership

Generally, the QA practitioners (approximately 80%) called for stronger leadership in order to achieve effectiveness and efficiency in external quality assurance. It was clear that these practitioners (approximately 68%) believed leadership will need to engage radically new strategies in order to bring about improvements in external quality assurance. However, they (approximately 64%) indicated that they believed there is need for thought leadership if there is to be meaningful improvement. They (approximately 48%) did not believe the current level of leadership was adequate for improvement, however, approximately 23% were undecided.

A majority (approximately 75%) of QA practitioners agreed that the proposed restructuring will lead to improvement in external quality assurance. However, only about 50% were somewhat confident that the current leadership possesses the technical know-how and competence to make the change; 25% said that they had very little confidence in the leadership; approximately 11% said that they had total confidence; while another 11% said, not at all. Overall, it appears that the leadership of external quality assurance does not demonstrate the leadership capacity

to lead change and improvement. As a result, if the current leadership arrangement remains, there will be no expectation of improvement. There seems to be some desirable features of external quality assurance leadership. These features include effectiveness, efficiency, innovation, and strategic planning all of which should lead to improved expectations among QA practitioners. Based on the results, it seems that the leadership will have to devote time and effort to building confidence at least among practitioners in the field.

Improving External Quality Assurance Leadership

QA practitioners were of the view that modernization of the external quality assurance system will address low quality within the higher education system. Digitization, as a special form of modernization, was accepted as a means by which responses can be quickly and more efficiently handled especially when there are several issues to be addressed within a short time. (These results were found a year before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Jamaica. Now, with the physical distancing requirements due to the pandemic, it is conceivable that the support or call for digitization of several related QA processes would be stronger). The majority were also of the view that external quality assurance could benefit from greater infusion of international expertise. It also follows from the previous discussion on attitudes towards EQA leadership that there needs to be the development of scholar-practitioners in the field to advance the thinking around the critical areas for development and enhancement.

Upon deeper interrogation of the data using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), two independent scales emerged: a six-item scale measuring External Quality Assurance (EQA) Knowledge Competence ($N=42$, $M=1.84$, $SD=.10$, $\alpha=.74$) and a seven-item scale measuring External Quality Assurance (EQA) Leadership Competence ($N=42$, $M=2.61$, $SD=.12$, $\alpha=.76$). When EQA Knowledge Competence alone was placed into a regression model, it predicted Confidence Level at $F_{(1,41)}=4.83$, $p<.05$, $R^2=.11$. However, when Knowledge Competence and Leadership Competence were entered in the model, neither was found to be a predictor of Confidence Level in Leadership at $F_{(2,39)}=2.73$, $p>.05$, $R^2=.12$. EQA Knowledge Competence had a moderately positive relationship ($r=.34$, $p<.05$) with Confidence Level in Leadership. There was a positively moderate relationship between the Agency in which one works and Confidence Level in Leadership. An important conclusion from this study was that leadership should promote knowledge and understanding about external quality assurance as a necessary strategy for advancing the desired transformation. Therefore, leadership would do well becoming less preoccupied with perceptions about their ability to get the job.

Ehlers' (2009) "quality literacy" concept taken from his Quality Culture Model for higher education provides a useful lens for applying the findings from the Jamaican context. Quality literacy is directly linked to quality enhancement which is quality culture. According to Ehlers (2009), the specialized competences of quality literacy are: quality knowledge, quality experience, quality innovation and quality analysis. Knowledge requires knowing about current quality developments and strategies. Experience refers to being able to use those strategies to achieve specific outcomes. Innovation calls for creatively adapting strategies in order to meet new needs. Analysis refers to differentiating and reflecting on current knowledge and strategies in relation to new challenges. This kind of leadership enables the systems and empowers the individuals to always reinvent, giving rise to new and cutting-edge solutions or responses. With such a culture, the external quality assurance system will always be relevant and in sync with the latest development.

Implications of the Changes

The overall intent of all the changes considered is to bring about a more efficiently operated system with the highest level of returns on any public investment. Success will be measured by increased revenue, increased levels of output in terms of accredited programs, institutions, and increased satisfaction among stakeholders. At this point, a change in the current system of

quality assurance should lead to more measured outcomes. Many of the graduates will be able to confidently pursue future goals locally and anywhere in the world. With greater efficiency, the reputation of the local external quality assurance system will continue to be respected and available to enable citizens to better compete in the global market.

By the very nature of the proposal in the Declaration, that is, to modify an existing quality assurance system, it dictates that the application of change management principles would be well suited. According to Kotter (1996), to bring about a desired change will necessitate a change strategy beginning with a rationale that is clear and a process that is transparent. People are more inclined to support a clear and logical important move when they have adequate information and understanding of how they will be impacted. Each step or each point in the development must be fully explained and the necessary clarification be made for all staff. Question-and-answer sessions are very useful in achieving this goal and will help all stakeholders take ownership of the change that has to be made.

To overcome the challenges, Kotter (1996) points to the use of a project management approach. With this approach, organizations are better able to ensure that the implementation of the change gets completed. The approach further offers a more direct engagement of key personnel to ensure that the job gets done. Here is where the chair leaders and champions of the change must be skillfully engaged in order to engender buy-in. Among these implications, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic must be underscored. As the pandemic continues to wreak havoc in global higher education systems, the Jamaican system will require exceptional leadership to anticipate the emerging challenges.

These emerging challenges being unscripted require deep understanding of the purposes and roles of external quality assurance in order to creatively navigate while maintaining high quality within the system. Issues related to changing assessment approaches which include the reporting of grades on transcripts as pass/fail or letter scores for the semester, to lack of access to appropriate laboratory experiences for specific disciplines, to complete disruption of teaching and learning at institutions are just few examples of the challenges now in the environment (Bhagat & Kim, 2020). How should measures of academic quality respond in order to accommodate these new realities? Perhaps benchmarking must even more so be done within local context as opposed to across contexts in order to be more meaningful and applicable. Well, if so, how would we still ensure transferability and acceptability. Is quality assurance in higher education back to a starting point? In Jamaica specifically, UCJ continues to lead the way in external quality assurance. Yet a lingering question remains: will UCJ's current role be adequate for the future?

Conclusion

The local quality assurance system is quite well-developed with several institutions of varying missions that are either public or private, offering different types of qualifications, an external quality assurance agency and other related licensing and regulatory entities, and several governing operational policies. The challenges facing external quality assurance generally require a quick decisive move that would redefine and realign the goals to efficiency and optimal performance. The proposed changes involved improving the relationship between the agency and the institutions; automating all of the agency's processes; increasing the knowledge and practice of quality assurance especially among institutions; and facilitating opportunities for increased training in quality assurance. These changes will certainly achieve the goals outlined. For developing countries, similar to Jamaica, attention to and investment in capacity-building for QA practitioners would be a worthwhile investment. This investment should result in significant leadership achievement in quality assurance and EQA leadership development. Finally, access to more degree programs of high quality increases the potential of citizens to compete effectively in a global market.

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Chapter 29

Future Challenges and Quality Assurance: Lessons from the UAE

Nadeem Khan and Abdullatif AlShamsi

Introduction

Almost everything developed for the 20th-century workforce is being dismantled and reconstructed; higher education is no exception. Universities (and quality assurance agencies) must reevaluate their roles now... (World Economic Forum, 2020).

Some changes are planned while others are abrupt and force a paradigm shift to a new normal. For instance, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on higher education globally. According to a recent report by the World Bank, nearly 220 million post-secondary students are impacted by the pandemic across 175 countries. In some countries, universities have been closed or studies ended abruptly due to the disruption caused by the pandemic (World Bank, 2020). Conversely, a few countries found this disruption as an opportunity to experiment with new ways and extend their operations fully online, which was never possible before.

Universities and institutions of higher education are dynamically evolving to keep up with the pace of changes in the higher education landscape. The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA, 2010) suggests that the digital revolution has become the paramount factor in changing the way the higher education ecosystem operates. The traditional route to employment through a university degree is no longer the norm particularly in the field of Information Technology. Employer-led training, qualifications, and certifications by most tech giants such as Google, Apple, Microsoft, etc. offer an alternative yet attractive pathway for employment that can leave traditional routes of higher education at a competitive disadvantage. The impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution has been felt in all fields including higher education and led to the evolution of “Persona 4.0” that requires universities to inculcate digital, professional, and entrepreneurial competencies in students by the time they graduate (AlShamsi, 2020).

The paper is structured in two parts. The first part highlights many disruptive factors that have triggered changes in the higher education arena. The second part discusses the implications for the quality assurance agencies and presents the case of recent changes in the quality assurance standards of higher education in the United Arab Emirates. The latest discussions and debates at the World Economic Forum (World Economic Forum, 2020) stress that the changes in academia are happening so fast that it is impossible for quality assurance agencies to constantly review and evolve to address the challenges these changes pose. Some of the key challenges for quality assurance agencies and systems discussed are the emergence and embracing of new technologies, developing blended modes of education, integration of competency-based learning and dealing with the uncertainties while keeping the key stakeholder – the student – in mind. Additionally, this paper identifies the national quality assurance agency of the United Arab Emirates as a blueprint to tackle the addressed structural issues in the higher education landscape followed by some recommendations for further consideration.

Embracing New Technologies

Advances in technology have contributed to real disruption in higher education (Eaton, 2018). More educational technological tools are now being embedded in teaching and learning.

Universities are heavily investing in technology infrastructure and advancements. According to one of the longitudinal research projects encompassing twenty years (1997-2017) across 122 countries, the investment in education technology worldwide over twenty years was 37.8 billion of which 62% was just invested during 2015-2017 (Metaari, 2018). This shows a major shift in how higher education has changed significantly in a very short time. Institutions are investing heavily in AI-based learning, mixed reality learning (simulation, AR, and VR), next-generation game-based learning, cognitive learning (behavior modification), mobile learning, location-based learning, and educational robots (Metaari, 2018). Animations, holograms, 3D prototyping, CAD printing, and other artificial intelligence and machine learning tools have become integral to most programs and courses (World Economic Forum, 2020).

In addition to hardware and infrastructure, advancement in Educational Technology resources such as learning management systems (LMS) and assistive technologies such as analytics are no longer luxuries, rather have become essential in higher education institutions. Technology has a profound role in the way the higher education ecosystem operates. Quality assurance agencies are no exception when it comes to investment in as well as adaptation to the new technologies. The pace at which the changes are proposed, reviewed, and approved takes a long time and varies from one context to another. There is a considerable shift from paper-based submission of self-evaluation documentation to complete on-line repository. Some quality assurance agencies have moved to a paper-free environment. Therefore, accreditors have to keep pace with digitalization and innovation to assure that these changing environments are appraised and inculcated into the broader higher-education ecosystem.

Transitioning Towards a Blended Mode of Instruction

Learning environments for higher education have been subject to exponential change over the past three decades. There is a growing need to prepare students for the challenges and demands of the future. This requires the development of an environment that fosters creativity, problem-solving, and high-order thinking using a variety of media engagingly and interestingly. The traditional approach to classroom teaching and learning is no longer effective and is influenced greatly by the advancements in technology and innovations in pedagogies being offered using a variety of online tools and techniques. Students are no longer interested in one-way and longer lectures and keeping them interested has been of paramount concern for teachers. Blended learning offers students a variety of learning tools and flexible environments and students can advance in a course at their own pace (EDUCAUSE, 2020). Students appear to be well engaged if offered a variety of learning opportunities to suit individual needs. The flexibility in space and time offers students more chances to practice and master a skill or competence and also leads to better outcomes.

There is convincing evidence that by using blended learning techniques, student engagement has improved. Five-year research concluded that a combination of computer-assisted instruction with the use of multi-media and other tools in addition to face-to-face interaction by the faculty can yield better outcomes (Dringus & Seagull, 2015). The reliance on the use of the blended approach will continue to expand in the future. The growth in the use of the blended mode of delivery is a clear indication that higher education teaching and learning is evolving at a fast pace. However, it is only recently that the European Foundation for Quality in Blended Learning has been established. What is needed and expected is that the quality assurance agencies ensure timely and updated guidelines. The pace at which changes are introduced in the quality assurance systems is significantly slower as compared to the changes in the higher education ecosystem.

Non-traditional Learners and Non-traditional Learning

Non-traditional learners and non-traditional teaching and learning are mutually exclusive. Non-traditional learners in the context of the USA are those who are either older than the

regular intakes or who are returning students taking a gap of a few years. National Center of Education and Statistics USA used the criteria based on age and over 25-year-olds are classified as non-traditional students (National Centre for Education Statistics, n.d.). Research over several decades concluded that the primary motivating factor for non-traditional students has been career advancement. These mature students bring both challenges and opportunities for higher education institutions. A study in the USA has demonstrated that 36 % of US students, during their college years demonstrated no 'significant' improvement in their learning (Arum & Roska, 2011). Teaching and learning should no longer be confined to colleges and universities alone. There are alternative routes to acquiring mastery and skills. Distance/ remote learning, e-learning, and other forms of non-traditional learning are available to both current and returning adults.

The non-traditional route to teaching and learning means learning outside the traditional environment of teaching and learning as offered by most colleges and universities. It offers more flexibility in the pace and freedom to choose and is based around individual needs. It is often quoted that the most accomplished people in the world did not follow the traditional route of learning. The big names often quoted include successful entrepreneurs such as Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook; Richard Branson, founder and chairman of Virgin; Steve Jobs, co-founder of Apple; and several others. It does not imply that the traditional route to higher education is not worthwhile; rather, the key message is that there is no single track to the successful outcome and sometimes other factors play a more significant role in achieving personal and professional goals. It becomes more imperative for quality assurance agencies to assure the recognition of formal and informal learning.

Emphasis on Competency-based Education

With more employers seeking graduates with industry-specific competencies, there is a growing trend to develop these during studies and to modify a traditional approach to teaching and learning. The competency-based education (CBE) approach means that the students are allowed to advance at their own pace based on their ability to master a skill or competency, regardless of the environment (EDUCAUSE, n.d.). CBE environment is specifically designed to meet the learning needs of an individual and result in better outcomes in terms of mastery of a skill. The students must not only possess the requisite knowledge but also the necessary skills and competencies required by the complex jobs of the future. This implies more cohesion between the labor market and the higher education arena.

Therefore, the critical challenge that remains unaddressed is the way the two streams of learning are approached by higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies. Competency-based qualifications and awards are mostly regarded as 'vocational' in nature. In the vocational stream, the focus for students is that they should be able to demonstrate capabilities related to their trade or profession and also to develop and grow as skilled practitioners with a focus on constantly updating the skills and competencies. Conversely, students graduating from mainstream tertiary education institutions usually demonstrate high-order skills and knowledge to adapt and lead as self-managed employees (Cairns & Malloch, 2017). In the ever-changing job market, it is even more challenging to acquire the skills and competencies that will be validated by the time students graduate. Jobs such as office administration, installations, maintenance, etc. are on the decline and being replaced by complex IT solutions, analytics, operations, procurement and supply chains, etc.

The critical challenge future graduates will face is to ensure how they can secure a job that does not exist by the time they graduate. World Economic Forum (World Economic Forum, 2020) experts predict that people in the vocations and essential services that are being automated will become completely redundant in a short period unless organizations move fast to develop new competencies and skills in the existing workforce. Although there exists a clear framework for both academic and vocational tracks with clear level descriptors, the clear and simple

mechanisms in terms of establishing equivalencies and recognition of awards are still a work in progress. As a consequence, quality assurance agencies must define clear articulation between the vocational and academic streams. A smooth transition from the vocational stream into the academic stream and vice versa is still a challenge. Quality assurance systems have to appraise alternative routes and multiple pathways to ensure a smooth career transition as required for the future. 'Vocational' and 'Academic' quality assurance bodies have to work in cohesion and create a simpler and workable framework of transition between the two streams.

Micro-credentials, Digital Badges and Certifications

The emergence and popularity of micro-credential certifications and digital badges among students to achieve a specific skill or competence in a short time have made these awards more attractive and in demand by both students and employers. The traditional route to a university degree is no longer the norm, and alternative ways of teaching/ learning and certifications are now commonplace. According to the World Economic Forum (WEF 2020), the influx in the future workforce will be seen in the IT sector. Large IT companies such as IBM along with major employers such as Ernst and Young and PWC no longer require college awards and instead use their tailored-made assessments to short-list the best talent. Recent statistics reveal that 15% of the workforce at IBM USA does not hold a college degree (Mrig & Sanagham, 2018). Such a trend was never heard of a decade ago. In the USA alone, training providers are providing alternative boot camps that offer specific skills under intensive delivery mode lasting six months or less and resulting in comparable careers that a university graduate is offered. Employer-led training, qualifications, and certifications by most tech giants such as Google, Apple, Microsoft, etc. as well as training boot camps, micro-credentials, online certifications, digital badges, competency-based awards, etc., offer an alternative yet attractive pathway for employment. Just two large companies offering coding boot camps in the USA alone had produced over 23,000 coders that is equivalent to nearly 30% of the entire computer science graduates from HEIs (Mrig & Sanagham, 2018).

The fast pace of research and development in the IT field and new emerging technologies take too long to reach the curriculum textbooks. The easiest route is to offer these emerging technical updates through massive online micro-credentials. Each unique online micro-credential is awarded as a digital badge that can be published on job portals such as LinkedIn. These individual micro-awards are also packaged as a complete suite of mini courses bundled together and upon completion, result in a certification. The extent to which the quality is maintained in the institutions offering boot camps is a question. Most boot camp offering companies hold licenses as commercial entities and are regulated as a business but are not formally accredited. Some boot camp offering entities have sought affiliation with accredited universities to attract student loans and funding. The awards from the boot camps require the clear articulation of the academic credential system. Also, the recognition of micro-credentials as academic awards is still a work in progress.

Coping with Uncertainty

Higher education institutions have to be prepared for any impending crises in the least turbulent way. Global crises such as the recent pandemic of COVID-19 virus have impacted the higher education landscape all over the world. Universities all over the world had to adapt and prepare for alternative and innovative ways to cope with the crises, ensure the credibility of their credentials and at the same time not penalize the students who equally have to adapt to new forms of learning. Most countries have enforced lockdowns that resulted in a completely online mode of delivery of courses for students. Some universities have graduated students ahead of the end of the academic year, others shifted to the online mode of teaching and learning. In addition to the above-mentioned practices, equitable access to online education for students in underdeveloped and developing economies remains a major challenge. Universities that had heavily invested in the higher education technology infrastructure found

this pandemic as an opportunity to experiment and advance while for others it became one of the greatest challenges. The International Association of Universities has compiled the impact of the COVID-19 virus outbreak on higher education across the world.

National agencies such as the Quality Assurance Agency of the UK, Tertiary Education and Quality Standards Agency of Australia, regional and program accreditation bodies in the USA, etc. acted fast and issued guidelines and measures for higher education institutions (QAA, 2020) & (TEQSA, 2020). This is by far, the most comprehensive listing of measures countries has taken including details of initiatives taken by all leading quality agencies including the Council of Higher Education Accreditation CHEA-USA and several others (IAU, 2020). Not all countries in the world will successfully come out of the crises caused by the pandemic. In several underdeveloped countries, governments have postponed secondary examinations resulting in a disruption in the forthcoming fall admissions to the universities. Also, online and remote learning is not an option in some countries where internet access is out of reach of the masses. Funding for access and research in higher education will also be impacted owing to travel restrictions and low international student mobility, particularly for the privately funded institutions. The impact of the pandemic in the underdeveloped and developing world will last longer and recovery will be much slower (Brown & Salmi, 2020).

The key question this pandemic has posed to the world is whether the higher education provision will ever be the same as it was in the pre-COVID-19 era. It is believed that institutions that have successfully experimented with and implemented online instruction will leverage the opportunity to expand on distance learning in the near future. It appears that the new normal will be a blend of online and on-site learning and the distance mode of education will gain long-awaited recognition and acceptance by the higher education quality assurance agencies. Simultaneously, the fundamental challenge for higher education institutions is to ascertain the quality and credibility of credentials yet offer maximum flexibility to the students. This is not an easy task. Flexibility requires some way of relaxation from the stringent protocols as laid out by quality assurance agencies. Universities had to come up with alternative forms of assessment, remote proctoring, no impact grading and several other measures to minimize any adverse impact of students' experience in unfamiliar circumstances.

With students not being able to reach the universities, emphasis on the preparation of online learning materials, practicum demonstrations, and alternative and innovative assessments are the main issues to assure the quality of credentials. Complete online instruction has also added fatigue for instructors to completely transform their course and assessment materials to suit the online delivery environment. Not all instructors have the necessary skills and competencies to quickly switch from face-to-face to online mode of instruction. There is a risk that the quality of instruction can be compromised, and this may also result in students falling short of meeting the desired learning outcomes. All of the above-stated measures provide an opportunity for the quality assurance agencies to review and adapt to the challenges the uncertainty has posed.

Preparing for the Jobs of the Future

The 2020 report from the Association of Governing Board of Universities and Colleges and Gallup reveals that “only a minority of higher education trustees agree that U.S. college graduates have the skills they need to be competitive in the global economy” (Ferguson, 2020). The key drivers of change that impacts the future workforce demand are demographical, socio-economic, and technological (World Economic Forum, 2016). The future job scenario is blurred with more and more jobs being made redundant by automation, and more onuses on higher education institutions to prepare students for complex problem-solving skills and jobs of the future which do not exist at the moment. As already mentioned, according to estimates by World Economic Forum, around 7.1 million jobs worldwide will be lost in just 5 years owing to disruption caused by technology and automation, two-thirds of which belong to the office and administrative jobs category alone (World Economic Forum, 2016).

However, it is reported in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2019 report that “despite widespread anxiety about potential job destruction driven by technological change and globalization, a sharp decline in overall employment seems unlikely. While certain jobs and tasks are disappearing, other jobs are emerging, and overall employment has been growing” (OECD, 2019). Nevertheless, the report suggests that the challenge still prevails in terms of re-skilling and up-skilling of the workforce across various industries and regions where these jobs disappear or emerge. Strong growth is projected in the Computer and Engineering fields. Those losing jobs will not be able to get absorbed in the specialized job market unless there is significant up-skilling and re-skilling. As the world population grows, jobs will become more competitive and those who are well-prepared will contribute to alarming unemployment rates. Similar predictions have been made by other leading educational consultancies worldwide.

The joint report by (Microsoft Education and McKinsey & Company, 2020) reveals startling predictions for the 2030 job market scenario. According to the report, around 11 million jobs requiring low-level education and skills worldwide will be lost. The new emerging jobs will require advanced and sophisticated skills. There is no single recipe that contains all the ingredients for the uncertain future job market. However, there are some common themes and ideas that will be useful in predicting the future skill set required for the jobs (Ferguson, 2020). The first common theme that emerged from the available literature is the impact of automation and artificial intelligence across the board on both public and private sector future jobs. Though the extent of the impact of technology will vary from one location to another, it cannot be ignored altogether.

The top ten skills suggested for the future workforce include sense-making, social intelligence, novel and adaptive thinking, cross-cultural competency, computational thinking, new media literacy, trans-disciplinarity, mindset design, cognitive load management, and virtual collaboration (Ferguson, 2020). As it has been correctly summed up, “tomorrow belongs to the companies and individuals who are approaching education in parallel with work, with continuous loops of learning. Success in the future won’t be defined by a degree, but by potential and the ability to learn, apply, and adapt” (Harvard Business Review , 2019).

Expectations of Students

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) research suggests that “students’ expectations for their future influence what they choose to study and the activities they pursue, which, in turn, determine subsequent accomplishments” (OECD, 2017). Factors that influence such expectations include socio-cultural, ethnic, racial, and economic backgrounds. According to the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AACU, 2002), as much as these students bring a variety to college life, there are extra-ordinary expectations and demands on the college faculty and staff to meet their expectations. As demographics change, so do the demands. Students must be recognized as key stakeholders and want their voice to be heard in key decisions taken about their future by the universities and quality assurance agencies (ESU, 2017).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2019) in the USA, the enrollment of students over the age of 25 was 11% higher in 2016 as compared with 2006. Moreover, the number of students earning part-time degrees increased by 15% percent over the same period. It implies that the universities and colleges have to keep up with the changing expectations and demands of the student population. Besides, the increasing trend in lifelong learning is another driving factor that is changing the span of student life at a given university from 4 years to 20 years or even more. Students and employers expect higher education providers as their journey partners to constantly up-skill knowledge and competencies.

Students expect higher education as the route to future employment or a career starting point. Not only do they expect that higher education will offer a personalized learning experience, but it will also lead to preparation for employability skills. The future job market is highly turbulent and the linear career pathway in the same field is diminishing fast. Jobs of the future constantly evolve and may also require additional specialized competencies and skills, resulting in future work-relevant and employer-focused education and training. Students also expect that higher education institutions will provide future relevant, experiential, purpose-driven, and immersive learning to meet the changing demands of future employment (WES, 2020). With the increasing costs of higher education worldwide, the return on investment is the key concern for both parents and students (QS, n.d.). No matter how well students perform in high school, there is a higher level of expectation about the future, and it is up to the higher education institutions to identify ways to measure the extent the higher education institutions meet the expectations. This is by far the most challenging task.

Are Quality Assurance/Accreditation Agencies Ready?

The real question is to understand the extent to which quality assurance standards are addressing and appraising the challenges the above-stated changes pose. The delay in responding to the changes may result in institutions being not allowed to work at the desired pace owing to over-prescription of standards or undervaluing the benefits such changes could bring to the quality of its graduates. Quality assurance agencies are under pressure to respond quickly to changing circumstances. For instance, the Utah System of Higher Education – the governing body that regulates higher education in Utah stresses that the accreditation bodies will be under heavy pressure and scrutiny from the federal and state governments on the way they respond to the fast pace of changes in higher education delivery (USHE, 2016).

Higher education accreditation bodies are usually governed by active professionals in the fields who devote their voluntary time for the objective of providing an impartial peer review of a program or an institution to provide credible and trustworthy information to the public. These agencies meet a few times in the year to make recommendations for improvements. The review and approval processes sometimes take several rounds of revisions and even years to be implemented. Though the intent is always to provide the best outcomes through a long peer-review process, the agreements and revisions are sometimes delayed. A case study by the American Council on Education suggested that accreditation slows down innovation due to the overload of regulators at state, regional, and federal levels. The authors argued that there is a compelling need for new approaches and models and the regional accreditors should proactively look into the ways to support innovation. There are some recommendations in the report for accreditation bodies and regulators seeking their timely support to embrace and promote innovation (Soares & Choitz, 2019).

The pace of readiness of quality assurance agencies is not uniform throughout the world. There are examples, such as Australia and the UK, where the quality assurance agencies have reviewed and revised standards and guidelines to ensure that the outcomes of programs offered by institutions are aligned with the industry needs and demands. For other parts of the world, there is a considerable need to bring more clarity for the long-awaited issues at the regulator's level. The areas where accreditation agencies need to act fast include the acceptance of online awards, micro-credentials, competency-based education and digital badges. Quality assurance bodies must ensure a smooth transferability of student course credits and credentials between the academic/ online and vocational tracks with clear and simple guidelines.

Unlike the USA, Canada, UK, Australia, and Western Europe there is always a different dimension when it comes to accreditation in other parts of the world. Universities and colleges in Asia, MENA, Africa, and other parts of the world reach out to international accreditation agencies/ bodies to assure that they offer similar/ equivalent quality in terms of teaching, learning, assessment, facilities, and other areas. The institutions in these countries first seek

accreditation from their local/ national accreditors before reaching out to the international accreditation agencies. This adds a burden on the resources as most peer reviews are carried out by reviewers physically visiting the institutions from abroad. Quality assurance and accreditation agencies worldwide take steps to modify the standards and guidelines to address changing needs, to an extent. An overview of the changes that have taken place in the context of the United Arab Emirates in the recent past is summarized below.

Lessons from the UAE

The United Arab Emirates is a young country, established as a federation of seven emirates in 1971 and has shown tremendous development and growth in a short span of time. The country transformed into a vibrant, rich, and economic hub in the Gulf region with nearly 10 million inhabitants of which nearly 1.4 million are native-born Emiratis. UAE has made significant strides in the past two decades and invested heavily in human capital and infrastructure development. The government of UAE made significant investments in the higher education sector as part of the national priorities. With the first university starting in the UAE in 1976, higher education has seen profound growth. The number of licensed universities operating in the country stands at 77 according to the Commission of Academic Accreditation CAA. The Emirate of Dubai hosts 61 higher education institutions of which 28 hold the license to operate from CAA, in addition to 33 branch campuses of overseas universities that are accredited internationally.

As an emerging transnational hub of higher education, Dubai attracts students from neighboring Asian and Arab countries in addition to the UAE citizens. These branch campuses must be accredited in the home country before they are allowed to operate in the country (Kamal, 2018). Like the Emirate of Dubai, the Emirate of Abu Dhabi – the largest city and the capital also hosts 28 higher education institutions, which are licensed by CAA to operate, and several international higher education brands including New York University Abu Dhabi, INSEAD and the Sorbonne. The Emirate of Sharjah hosts 9 higher education institutions licensed by CAA, and the emirates of Ras Al Khaimah, Fujairah, Ajman, and Umm al Quwain host only a few higher education institutions licensed by the CAA.

UAE is among a few countries in the world where public higher education is free for its citizens. The three public higher education institutions – United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), Zayed University (ZU), and the Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT) cater to almost 95 percent of females and 80 percent of all UAE citizens completing high school in the country. Founded in 1988, the Higher Colleges of Technology is the largest public higher education institution with 16 branch campuses across the country. HCT offers work-ready diplomas, higher diplomas, and bachelor awards and is classified as a teaching-focused institution. As well as that, UAEU is the oldest university in the country and known for its research and scholarship packages and offers programs from bachelor to doctoral levels, whereas ZU offers bachelor's and master's Programs but no doctoral degrees.

Quality Assurance Landscape of UAE

Quality in Higher Education in the United Arab Emirates is assured by the Commission of Academic Accreditation (CAA) – the regulatory body of licensing higher education institutions and its programs by the Ministry of Education. In addition to the national regulator (CAA), some emirates have their specific regulatory authorities such as the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK), Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) in Dubai, etc. The KHDA provides academic regulations and assures the quality of overseas/ foreign higher education institutions located in the free zone areas.

ADEK is a government entity that regulates the education system in Abu Dhabi. All educational establishments operating on the mainland (not free zones) must undergo a rigorous review by

the CAA to obtain a license. The license does not automatically qualify to offer a program. Each program must be accredited individually before any student enrollment in the university. Both the institutional license and program accreditation have to be renewed periodically. Though the aim is to assure quality, the process itself is lengthy and time-consuming. There is also an expectation by the regulators that the institutions should also pursue international accreditation both institutionally and for each of the programs.

Multiple regulators and variability of standards and requirements also result in accreditation overload. However, in the UAE, both national and international accreditation is the norm. As UAE institutions seek program accreditation from the multiple accreditation agencies of the world, every layer of accreditation brings an opportunity to learn from best practices from a variety of quality assurance agencies. The Commission of Academic Accreditation (CAA) announced long-awaited modifications to the standards of licensure and program accreditation. In the following, a summary of the key changes as well as the implications of the changes from the perspective of the end-user is further elaborated.

Changes in Quality Assurance Standards in the UAE

In November 2019, CAA published the revised standards that were modified from the 2011 set of standards. Main revisions relate to the following key aspects (CAA, 2019). **Naming conventions:** The 2011 standards were named as ‘Standards for Licensure and Accreditation 2011’ and the revised standards are renamed as ‘Institutional Licensure and Program Accreditation Standards 2019’ thus providing clarity.

Concise nature: The total number of standards is the same in both 2019 and 2011 versions, however, the scope of standards has changed in the revised standards. Previously, all eleven standards applied to both institutional licensure and program accreditation. In 2019, the standards are distributed according to the scope. This change will significantly reduce the burden on higher education institutions and also reduce the volume of work that is required in the preparation of self-study reports. Instead of addressing all 11 standards, institutions are required to specifically address 7 standards for institutional licensure and 6 standards for program accreditation. Standards on ‘quality assurance’ and ‘research and scholarly activities’ are common in both institutional licensure and program accreditation and the scope of the standards will be limited to the respective category.

Table 1: Summary of CAA 2019 Standards

Summary of CAA 2019 Standards – Focus	
Standards for Institutional Licensure - Institutional Level Focus (7)	Standards for Program Accreditation Program-Level Focus (6)
Governance and Management	Quality Assurance (as applied to programs)
Quality Assurance (as applied to institution)	Educational Programs
Research and Scholarly Activities (as applied to institution)	Research and Scholarly Activities (as applied to programs)
Health, Safety, and Environment	Faculty and Professional Staff
Fiscal Resources, Financial Management and Budgeting	Students
Legal Compliance and Public Disclosure	Learning Resource Center, Facilities, and Infrastructure
Community Engagement	

Risk-based approach: Determination of the risk undertaken by the review team based on two equally weighted elements. Risk evaluation will be carried out against two-part criteria based on the standards.

Risk Evaluation Part A: Reviewers will give a score on the checklist against each criterion to determine whether the HEI met the requirements of the standard during the licensure visit.

Risk Evaluation Part B: Reviewers will evaluate the risk of strategic, operational, legal and financial, academic and international dimensions. The outcome of the risk-based assessment will be classified as low, medium, or high-risk institutions/programs.

Institutions demonstrating low risk will be advantaged whereas those with high risk will be reprimanded. Some of the advantages of low risk assessment include:

- i. Longer duration of licensure and program accreditation (seven years)
- ii. Priority for Program Reviews (quick turnaround)
- iii. Smaller review teams, resulting in cost savings
- iv. Cluster submissions (programs together)

On the other hand, high-risk institutions will be disadvantaged with a shorter duration of accreditation (3 years), more audits and visits, higher costs and larger peer review teams, to name a few.

Sanctions, Violations and Appeals: For the first time, CAA introduced well-defined rules for determining sanctions, violations and appeals.

Recognition of Prior Learning: The standards referred to the recognition of prior learning with some guidelines which were not the case in the previous version

Recognition of International Accreditation: Due regard will be given to institutions that hold reputed institutional and program accreditation from reputed international accrediting bodies. This will result in a reduction of accreditation overload as mentioned above.

Stipulations and Annexure: Though the standards are short, there are detailed stipulations and annexures (91 stipulations and 23 annexes, over 100 pages altogether). In some instances, these are over-prescriptive and provide less flexibility to different types of higher education institutions. For instance, the stipulations prescribe the workloads, percentage of adjunct faculty and percentage of the total budget towards research and scholarly activities, etc. that appear to be set on the assumption that one-size-fits-all.

The claim by the CAA in the preamble that the standards are brief and concise is slightly misleading because standards alone are not compulsory to be met for institutional licensure or program accreditation. In addition to the brief four paged standards, it is noted that:

“The stipulations carry the same weight as the standards themselves and, if applicable to the particular institution or its programs, the commission expects each criterion within the relevant Stipulation to be addressed in the HEI’s applications for licensure and accreditation (CAA, 2019 p.12).”

Though the new standards have been published, however, compliance and implementation by the higher education institutions are yet to be examined.

Implications for the Quality of UAE Higher Education

As mentioned earlier, the COVID-19 pandemic has an impact on almost every sector and higher education is no exception. The disruption in higher education caused by the pandemic is unprecedented in recent history. Since the start of the pandemic, the Ministry of Education of

the UAE advised all higher education institutions to offer remote/ online instruction to the students. All major state actors collaborated in making swift decisions to ensure the smooth delivery of online instruction. The national telecommunication providers ensured that necessary internet speed and video-streaming applications across the country are available for all schools/ colleges and universities. Higher education institutions launched a massive campaign for professional development for faculty and staff in readiness for the e-learning initiative during the two-week Spring break.

Ministry of Education of UAE issued guidelines to ensure students are not disadvantaged in the current pandemic. Also, the Ministry of Education together with the Commission of Academic Accreditation (CAA) has been tasked to carry out remote reviews to gauge the readiness for e-learning. In addition, CAA is carrying out both remote and blended reviews of institutional licensure and program accreditation. Most recently, CAA has launched an initiative to develop the national capacity of certified reviewers to reduce the reliance on reviewers from abroad. Institutions have also been asked to share necessary policies and procedures against the online teaching criteria in addition to access to LMS and teaching/ assessment tools. These measures are claimed to be intended to offer necessary support to institutions that are found to be lacking technological infrastructure in an e-learning environment.

There has always been debate about the extent to which online learning is possible and/or effective and what will be the future of higher education after the pandemic. Each country in the world is now experimenting with online delivery. It appears that there is an opportunity to capitalize on the long-awaited challenge of creating engaging and quality-focused complete online teaching and learning environments. The pandemic has provided opportunities for experimenting with something every institution had feared to do. Will higher education in the UAE ever completely return to the pre-COVID-19 environment? This is a difficult question to answer. The social distance guidelines and restrictions at campus might result in a new normal that is a blend of face-to-face and online modes of delivery. Blended/hybrid or online where students can choose and learn from the place of their choice and according to their pace will become a new norm.

Universities will still hold the place for laboratory-based practicum as well as a hub for social-emotional well-being but the traditional route to higher education appears to be diminishing. This brings a real challenge for the quality assurance bodies in the UAE. How well are they prepared to accommodate these changes? In what ways can they measure the quality of online instruction, assessment and attainment of learning outcomes (Eaton, 2020). How will the effectiveness of online advising, counseling and student support be judged? With travel restrictions to stay for some time, it will be difficult to invite reviewers from abroad. It appears that there will be a shift in the accreditation process and more online and remote reviews will be conducted in the near future than face-to-face reviews. In addition, CAA has recently launched an initiative to identify and train senior academics from the higher education institutions who upon completing training and assignments, will be classified as “certified reviewers.” This initiative will assist the CAA to develop the in-country capacity for accreditation review.

As stated above, the revised CAA 2019 standards are aimed to tackle the future challenges identified above. The extent to which these challenges are addressed by the standards is worth discussing. For instance, there is a clear commitment to appraise online and blended learning in higher education. It is stated that:

“The quality of education available to students within this knowledge-based economy will require “a stronger, broader, more flexible higher education system,” in which universities and colleges serve as “a core part of the nation's innovation system,” active in research and

scholarship and creative activity, delivering high-quality programs that are “relevant to employers in a changing global marketplace.” Higher education institutions (HEIs) will increasingly use new learning approaches, including online and blended learning. (CAA, 2019, p.7.)”

The recognition of micro-credentials and digital badges into the degrees will only be a challenge if these could not be justified as part of the program. The institutions, going forward, need to develop clear processes of mapping the micro-credentials within a specific course or a number of micro-credentials into a full course. As far as necessary protocols are developed and quality assured properly, in terms of delivery and assessment, accreditation bodies will likely accept these awards. The real challenge that will continue to prevail is the acceptance of the awards by the companies offering training boot camps. Nevertheless, the route to offering the training boot camps in affiliation with recognized universities might be acceptable.

Due to the lack of standards specific for applied and vocational programs, there poses a significant burden on institutions to justify their scope and to seek exemptions on prescriptive standards and stipulations that do not align with their mission and mandate. The requirement of faculty with terminal degrees in more applied fields is not only unjustified, rather it puts the program under the risk of not delivering the hands-on and training component of the curriculum. There are fields where more industrially trained faculties are more suited than the academics holding terminal qualifications. The revised standards relaxed the number of PhD qualified faculty in a program from 90% mentioned in the 2011 standards. In 2019 standards it is mentioned that “exceptions to the requirement for a terminal degree are limited to no more than 20% of all faculty teaching in any specific program; and are also limited to faculty members in applied fields” (CAA, 2019 p.44).

This and other prescriptions make the standards less flexible to a certain extent and put the undue threat of non-compliance for the institutions that have a different mission and scope. The transitional route between academic and vocational streams is still a challenge, though the CAA introduced the recognition of prior learning in 2019 standards, the seamless transition between academic and vocational streams stays as the challenge. Key future skills have been made compulsory for the programs in the 2019 standards. Innovation, entrepreneurship and sustainability have been introduced as a compulsory part of the general education curriculum in the form of a stand-alone course unless they are part of the other courses. There has been an ample amount of evidence that demonstrates that the new standards of licensure and accreditation by the CAA have to some extent addressed the future challenges. There are still many opportunities to be availed and the constant revisiting of these standards to align them with the dynamic landscape of higher education.

The Way Forward

The future always brings new challenges and opportunities. No matter how well-prepared we are, there are pitfalls, enchanted territories and untested grounds to explore. As discussed in the above sections, future challenges to higher education quality revolve around the impact of technological advances, changed expectations, the introduction of micro-credentials, alternative and non-formal learning and unpredictable future scenarios. Students’ expectations have changed considerably, and traditional academic degrees awarded by higher education institutions will no longer be relevant (AlShamsi, 2020). The recent COVID-19 pandemic is an example that the future is never fully predictable. At the beginning of the year 2020, universities started the spring semester, and it was “business as usual” without any signs of a major disruption in the higher education arena. The shake-up caused by the pandemic in a very short span of time resulted in both challenges and opportunities for the institutions of higher education and quality assurance agencies to act fast. The main focus of all quality assurance agencies was to minimize the impact of any threats to the quality of student

assessment and credentials within the limitations. For some institutions, there is no going back to normal, rather a new normal is in the making.

As rightly pointed out by Judith Eaton, President of Council for Higher Education Accreditation, we are only certain about ‘uncertainty,’ (Eaton, 2020). The extent to which the countries, the systems of higher education and the quality assurance agencies will be able to cope with the uncertainty is still being tested. By amalgamating resilience, collective will, collaboration and hard work, there will be ways and new opportunities and new solutions will emerge. Quality assurance agencies will have to evolve in more flexible ways to assure that future graduates are prepared for unprecedented circumstances and can offer innovative solutions to the complexity the future brings. Finally, the authors acknowledge Judith Eaton’s life-long commitment to quality in higher education globally. Her contributions to CHEA and the International Quality Group (CIQG) will be long remembered and cherished by all those involved in the higher quality assurance landscape worldwide.

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Part E

GLOBAL DEVELOPMENTS IN QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Chapter 30

Developments in Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Africa

Jonathan C. Mba

Introduction

Harmonized quality higher education systems are key for promoting international competitiveness and imperative for Africa to realize the potential of higher education and research in achieving its vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful continent. The African Union (AU) has, at the highest level, called for harmonization and strengthening of the quality of higher education in Africa to make it locally relevant and globally competitive. This is in line with the AU's vision articulated in Agenda 2063 "*The Africa We Want*," and quality assurance is indeed integral to the drive to revitalize higher education and research in Africa and has become part of the contemporary agenda of African governments, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the African Union.

It is common knowledge that education plays a fundamental role in the development of any country. While much of the focus on educational development over several decades has been on basic education, it is now realized and accepted that investment in higher education yields significant benefits for Africa. The 21st Century is witnessing enormous demographic shift towards high population growth rates in Africa. This has led to increased access to higher education. In our countries, universities and other higher education institutions are increasing exponentially. The challenge is to ensure quality education provision in a way that promotes international competitiveness and local relevance. Quality in higher education has become a matter of great concern globally, particularly at a time when tertiary education is being increasingly linked to economic growth and development. Countries have come to realize that the quality of educational provision by higher education institutions (HEIs) is critical in providing the highly skilled human resources that will drive economic growth and sustainable development.

The African Union's Harmonization of Higher Education Strategy is an overarching policy framework that was adopted by the Conference of African Ministers of Education in 2007 and envisions an African Higher Education and Research Space (AHERS) along the lines of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) – an outcome of the Bologna Process, which started in Europe in 1999. The African Higher Education Harmonization Strategy was a response to the vision of an integrated, peaceful and prosperous Africa, and endeavored to revitalize the Addis Convention (or the revised Arusha Convention, 1981), which envisaged mutual recognition of qualifications in African states, as a major tool for the integration process. The multiple higher education systems undermine mutual recognition of qualifications across the countries and further militate against African integration and the unfettered mobility of students, graduates and academics across the continent. Therefore, harmonization of African

higher education is anticipated to establish compatible structures and systems to facilitate academic mobility and foster the comparability of qualifications.

As the African heads of states and governments have expressed their commitment to setting up mechanisms for harmonization and quality assurance processes to ensure comparable higher education in Africa, the AUC has therefore developed the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF) to provide a continental platform for enhancing the provision of quality higher education and promoting compatible methodologies. This is because harmonized quality higher education systems are imperative for Africa to realize the potential of higher education and research in achieving its vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful continent.

The PAQAF, which was validated by national/regional QA agencies, endorsed by Ministers of Education and adopted by AU assembly at 2016 January summit, is expected to guide the implementation of continental QA and accreditation mechanisms. The development of PAQAF helps to establish harmonized QA practices on the continent. It facilitates the establishment of a Continental Accreditation Agency. The PAQAF instruments include the Tuning Africa; African Standards and Guidelines for QA; Continental Qualifications Framework; African Quality Rating Mechanism; Addis Convention for Recognition of Qualifications; African Credit Accumulation and Transfer System; Continental Register for QA agencies and quality-assured higher education institutions.

Tuning Africa

The Tuning Africa project is a European Union Commission-funded initiative that was launched in 2011 and is intended to promote the implementation of the Harmonization Strategy. This is in line with the concept of promoting the quality and relevance of higher education in Africa with a view to achieving the *Africa We Want* of the African Union, a number of new developments have emerged. The Tuning Africa is the African version of the Bologna Process in Europe that is implemented in the framework of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy. The Joint Africa-EU Strategy was adopted at the Lisbon Summit in 2007 and constitutes the overarching long-term framework for Africa-EU relations. It is implemented through jointly identified priorities, which are of common interest to both the EU and Africa and significantly impact on the daily lives of citizens on both continents.

Tuning of higher education is a collaborative process that involves major higher education stakeholders from specific subject areas in curriculum development to enhance student competences. The tuning approach concentrates on generic and subject-specific competences, student workload (credits), teaching and learning approaches, and assessment strategies. The Tuning Africa Project, whose second phase ended in 2018, focused on eight subject areas – agriculture, applied geology, civil engineering, economics, higher education management, mechanical engineering, medicine and teacher education – and involved 42 countries, 109 universities and 124 representatives, regional bodies in charge of higher education and students. A remarkable outcome of the Tuning Africa project has been the identification of 18 generic competencies for higher education in Africa. The Tuning Africa project has been credited with developing an improved understanding of graduates' competences that are relevant to a variety of scopes, prominently to the labor market and that can inform interventions to narrow the gap between higher education and the continent's needs (Hahn & Teferra, 2013).

The ASG-QA

The vision of the African Union to build an integrated Africa requires harmonized education, underpinned by intra-Africa mobility and skills portability. The Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) recognizes that 'harmonized education and training systems are

essential for the realization of intra-Africa mobility and academic integration through regional cooperation.’ Heads of states and government of the African Union have further institutionalized their appreciation of the role of higher education in achieving the AU vision, by taking a decision calling for mechanisms for harmonization and quality assurance to ensure comparable higher education in Africa, and for the establishment of a continental accreditation and quality agency. This is reflected in the first ten-year Implementation plan of Agenda 2063 as a means to develop and monitor educational quality standards across the continent.

One of the necessary instruments for the appropriate functioning of PAQAF is the development of the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA).⁷⁴ Proper implementation of the ASG-QA can contribute to the provision of quality higher education and ensure that the qualifications obtained by students and their experience of higher education remain consonant with program requirements, institutional vision and mission, and the objectives of higher education.

In order to optimally achieve this, a fundamental prerequisite is that HEIs inculcate a culture of evidence-based quality in all their activities. The AUC believes that the ASG-QA provides an overarching framework for quality assurance and that its implementation will be supported by the African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM) discussed in detail hereunder. The ASG-QA has been subjected to a series of consultations of major African higher education agencies and experts, as well as Member States quality assurance bodies, student organizations and other key stakeholders. The ASG-QA therefore reflects a valid African perspective, while not ignoring international good practices.

The ASG-QA Goal and Objectives

The overarching goal of the ASG-QA is to support HEIs and quality assurance agencies (QAAs) in Africa in implementing good quality assurance (QA) practices by guiding them in the application of standards and guidelines in higher education, helping them to develop adequate internal QA mechanisms that fit international best practices and assisting them in assessing their own quality through self-assessment.

The specific objectives of the ASG-QA are to support HEIs and QAAs in member states in Africa to:

- have a common framework and understanding of QA
- systems for teaching and learning among all stakeholders at continental, regional and national level
- develop mutual trust, thus facilitating recognition and mobility
- of students and human resources within and across national borders of the continent
- ensure quality improvement/enhancement in higher education on the continent through self-assessment, external peer review and continuous monitoring and evaluation
- promote transparency and accountability by providing appropriate information on QA to the public
- support HEIs to develop a sustainable quality culture
- promote international competitiveness of Africa’s higher education system; and
- support the production of relevant teaching and learning resources as well as student assessment instruments.

⁷⁴ The African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA) document has been developed by the HAQAA Initiative, implemented on behalf of the European and African Union Commissions by five Consortium Partners (University of Barcelona; AAU; DAAD; EUA; and ENQA). The document is currently awaiting ratification by African political leaders.

As the ASG-QA and the African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM) are complementary and mutually supportive; the ASG-QA will operate alongside the AQRM and will complement the AQRM in supporting African higher education institutions to develop a sustainable quality culture. The ASG-QA are a set of standards and guidelines for internal and external QA in higher education. These standards are not meant to be prescriptive, but they rather provide a mechanism for quality attainment in African HEIs and QAAs. They are developed to eventually add value to institutions and QAAs by providing a unified framework applicable to all QA processes, allowing an enhancement-led approach for the escalation of institutional and educational quality.

National QAAs are expected to function as the national contacts for the ASG-QA. The ASGQA can serve as the guiding framework in facilitating the establishment of QAAs in countries where they do not yet exist. The ASG-QA consists of three broad parts; namely part A: standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance; part B: standards and guidelines for external quality assurance; and part C: internal quality assurance for quality assurance agencies. Part A of the ASG-QA presents standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance (IQA) at the level of the institutions, but also incorporates standards and guidelines for open and distance learning (ODL) modes. This is in line with the principle that HEIs have the primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and assurance thereof. The standards and guidelines cover areas that are considered essential for the attainment of the provision of quality higher education, focusing mainly on: institutional governance, policies and processes that promote quality higher education; teaching and learning environment; research and innovation; collaboration and community engagement.

Part A of the ASG-QA comprises the following 13 standards. Standard 1. Vision, Mission and Strategic Objectives; Standard 2. Governance and Management; Standard 3. Human Resources; Standard 4. Financial Resource Management; Standard 5. Infrastructure and Facilities; Standard 6. Student Recruitment, Admission, Certification and Support Services; Standard 7. Design, Approval, Monitoring and Evaluation of Study Programmes; Standard 8. Teaching, Learning and Assessment; Standard 9. Research and Innovation; Standard 10. Community Engagement; Standard 11. Information Management System; Standard 12. Public Communication; and Standard 13. Collaboration, Staff and Student Mobility.

Part B of the ASG-QA describes the methodologies (or standards) used for external quality assurance (EQA) of HEIs since it is important that HEIs subject themselves to periodic external assessment for purposes of accountability and quality enhancement of their provisions. It further takes into account the standards and guidelines in part A (IQA) for HEIs, ensures that IQA examined is relevant to and efficient for the concerned higher education institution, and that there is consistency between internal quality assurance undertaken by institutions themselves and external quality assurance. Part B also covers objectives of EQA, designing mechanisms that are fit for purpose, independence, decisions and reporting, periodic review, and complaints and appeals.

Part B of the ASG-QA consists of the following seven standards: Standard 1. Objectives of External Quality Assurance and Consideration for Internal Quality Assurance; Standard 2. Designing External Quality Assurance; Mechanisms Fit for Purpose; Standard 3. Implementation Processes of External Quality Assurance; Standard 4. Independence of Evaluation; Standard 5. Decision and Reporting of External Quality Assurance Outcomes; Standard 6. Periodic Review of Institutions and Programmes; and Standard 7. Complaints and Appeals.

Part C of the ASG-QA is for the purpose of internal quality assurance of QAAs through self-assessment of its policies, practices, procedures and activities and/or for external assessment/evaluation by another body/peer organization. This section covers policies, processes and activities of the QAA, legal status, vision, and mission, financial and human

resources, independence, and standards and processes used by the QAA. Part C of the ASG-QA comprises the following 9 standards. Standard 1. Legal Status; Standard 2. Vision and Mission Statement; Standard 3. Governance and Management; Standard 4. Independence of QAA; Standard 5. Policies, Processes and Activities; Standard 6. Internal Quality Assurance; Standard 7. Financial and Human Resources Standard; 8. Benchmarking, Networking and Collaboration; and Standard 9. Periodic Review of QAAs.

The ASG-QA Dissemination

As the ASG-QA was developed within the framework of the HAQAA Initiative to support the development of a harmonized quality assurance and accreditation system at institutional, national, regional and pan-African continental levels, mainly through the dissemination channels of the AAU, the ASG-QA is currently being disseminated to all major stakeholders including HEIs, QAAs and ministries and governing bodies of higher education in Africa, for their information and use. The document is available in English, French, Arabic and Portuguese.

In order to raise awareness, the ASG-QA has been presented at several international conferences such as the International Conference on Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Africa (ICQAHEA) conferences in 2016 and 2017 and the AAU 50th Anniversary conference in June 2017. The ASG-QA will also benefit during HAQAA2 Initiative from further dissemination via various media platforms and outlets including webinars, workshops, seminars, conferences, and AAU TV.

The AQRM

The African Union's harmonization of higher education strategy comprises a number of key instruments: the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA), the African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM), the Pan African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency, the African Continental Qualifications Framework, and the African Credit Accumulation and Transfer System. These instruments constitute the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF), which was endorsed by the African Union Commission in 2016. The aim of the framework is to facilitate the creation of a harmonized quality assurance regime and procedures and is essential to the reinforcement of a harmonized system in Africa.

The development of a harmonized quality assurance and accreditation system at institutional, national, sub-regional and continental levels is being supported by the Harmonization of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA) Initiative – an initiative funded by the European Union Commission in partnership with the African Union Commission.

The first phase of the HAQAA Initiative (2015-2018), or HAQAA1, was implemented on behalf of the African Union Commission (AUC) and the European Commission (EC) by a consortium of five organizations: the University of Barcelona as the coordinator, the Association of African Universities (AAU), the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the European University Association (EUA) and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA) of higher education were developed and published in December 2018 under the first phase of the HAQAA Initiative. The second phase of the HAQAA Initiative (2020-2023), or HAQAA2, is being implemented on behalf of the AUC and the EC by a consortium of four organizations: OBREAL Global as the coordinator, AAU, DAAD, and ENQA.

One of the key activities under HAQAA2 is the operationalization of the AQRM. The AQRM is a tool to facilitate a culture of progressive quality improvement in African higher education

institutions implemented via self-evaluation exercises and external validation. The AQRM has been developed by the AUC through extensive dialogue with the African higher education community, including the AAU. The AQRM not only encourages the advancement of internal quality assurance practices but offers a strong foundation for advancing harmonization among African higher education and mutual recognition of degrees and academic qualification. The AQRM is indeed one of the necessary instruments for the appropriate functioning of PAQAF, which seeks to provide a continental platform for enhancing the provision of quality higher education and promoting compatible methodologies.

The latest version of the AQRM instrument contains 49 specific indicators (Governance and Management; Infrastructure; Finances; Teaching and Learning; Research, Publication & Innovation; and Societal Engagement) for institutional quality review and 35 indicators (Programme Planning and Management; Curriculum Development; Teaching and Learning; Assessment; and Programme Results) for program-level review.

The AQRM is not a ranking instrument, and it does not promote the listing of institutions in a league table. Rather, the AQRM allows for classification of institutions and programs into five categories:

0 = Poor Quality	1 = Insufficient Quality	2 = Satisfactory Quality
3 = Good Quality	4 = Excellent Quality	

The rating mechanism is basically an instrument of institutional self-assessment, with the purpose of promoting the improvement of the quality of higher education institutions in Africa. The AQRM tool has two broad components; the first is the online questionnaire, which African HEIs are expected to complete for purposes of self-improvement. The second component is the validation of the online questionnaire (or Site Review Mission) designed to assess the veracity of the completed questionnaire. Here, some selected institutions will be visited by international external reviewers to authenticate and validate the information contained in the completed questionnaire.

The outcomes of the AQRM exercise will be an evaluation report that will be made public as a means to further promote AQRM in Africa and also, more generally, transparency around institutional quality culture. It is expected that the institutions that participate will have a valuable opportunity to enhance their internal QA procedures and 'quality culture' and contribute to the African higher education harmonization objectives more broadly.

The European Commission, in collaboration with the African Union Commission in the context of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy, provided funding for the Site Review Mission of the AQRM exercise under the aegis of the HAQAA Initiative for 15 universities in Africa in June-July 2017. The purpose of the AQRM review missions was to further promote ownership of the AQRM through the participation of the 15 selected universities (both public and private) across the five regions of Africa. The review visit to the 15 self-selected universities was preceded by a technical meeting held in Accra, Ghana from 28 to 29 March 2017 to prepare the selected institutions for the AQRM institutional evaluation. The technical meeting was attended by three major groups: the African QA experts; the European QA experts; and the representatives of the 15 participating universities.

Objectives of the AQRM Tool

The overall objective of the AQRM tool is to support continuous quality improvement and ultimately create a quality culture in African HEIs with a view to making them globally competitive and locally relevant. The specific objectives of the AQRM include, to:

- Establish an African system that will ensure that the performance of higher education institutions can be compared against a set of commonly agreed criteria, taking into account the local context of higher education delivery as well as international good practices.
- Help higher education institutions carry out self-evaluation exercises and support the development of a culture of continuous quality improvement.
- Pave the way for African universities to be globally competitive, while being locally relevant.

Components of the AQRM Exercise

The AQRM has been defined to have two broad components namely (i) self-completion of the online Questionnaire by the institution; and (ii) Site visit by independent, external panel of quality assurance experts to the institution to verify information contained in the Questionnaire. In this sense, the completion of the online survey tool should ideally be complemented with a verification visit, conducted by an external expert panel. In the context of the initiative ‘Harmonization of Quality Assurance and Accreditation Phase II (HAQAA2)’, funded by the EU’s Pan African program (2019-2022), African HEIs will have the opportunity to apply for verification visits.

Overview of the AQRM Questionnaire

The AQRM survey questionnaire consists of three parts, namely: Background information (section 1); self-rating at institutional level (Section 2); and Self-rating at program level (Section 3).

Section 1: Background information which addresses (a) the institution’s general information, (b) the institution’s profile, (c) students’ profile, (d) facilities, (e) faculty/staff profile, (f) governance and management, (g) teaching and learning, (h) linkage with the industry sector, (i) research and community outreach, and (j) internationalization.

Section 2: Self-rating at institutional level comprising key reference points and standards for quality rating that address (a) governance and management, (b) infrastructure, (c) finance, (d) teaching and learning, (e) research, publication and innovation, and (f) community/societal engagement.

Section 3: Self-rating at program level comprised of key reference points and standards on quality rating of programs that address (a) program planning and management, (b) curriculum development, (c) teaching and learning, (d) assessment, and (e) program results.

The rating scale comprises five levels. Institutions are asked to rate themselves against standards defined under each reference point, by assigning a value (0, 1, 2, 3, or 4).

- 0 = Poor performance
- 1 = Insufficient performance
- 2 = Satisfactory performance
- 3 = Good performance
- 4 = Excellent performance

Based on institutional information submitted, a score is given from 0 to 4 for each criterion. The scores are summed to provide a subtotal for each category of criteria. The rating of institutions or programs is determined according to the overall total score. There are 49 institutional-level standards and 35 program-level standards. The AQRM addresses the

African Union’s priorities in the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2016-2025, which is the African Union’s continental framework for enhancing educational development and supports institutional quality culture and consequently promotes the quality of African higher education.

Rating Criteria of the AQRM Questionnaire

The African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM) employs specific quality criteria on different focus areas against which the quality of higher education institutions can be rated through a self-evaluation exercise and external validation. The AQRM focuses on both program and institution level, with major focus areas shown in the following table (Table 1).

Table 1. AQRM Criteria

Major Areas at the Institutional Level	Major Areas at the Pprogramme Level
1. Governance and management	1. Program Planning and Management
2. Infrastructure	2. Curriculum Development
3. Finances	3. Teaching and Learning
4. Teaching and Learning	4. Assessment
5. Research, Publication & Innovation	5. Program Results
6. Societal Engagement	

For each of the areas, the AQRM includes specific standards against which institutions can assess their own quality levels. As indicated previously, the institutional-level assessment involves 49 specific indicators, while in the program-level assessment the rating mechanism comprises 35 specific indicators. It bears repeating that the AQRM is not a raking tool and does not promote the listing of institutions in a league table. The AQRM allows for classification of institutions and programs into five categories mentioned above: Poor quality, insufficient quality, satisfactory quality, good quality and excellent quality, but no comparisons between institutions or program is conducted.

The rating mechanism is basically an instrument with the purpose of promoting the quality of higher education institutions in Africa. Based on the institutional information submitted, a score is given from 0 to 4 for each criterion. The scores are then submitted up to provide a subtotal for each category of criteria assigned as shown in Table 2 below. The rating of institutions or program is determined according to the overall average of the total score.

Table 2. Specification of quality rating

Rating score less than 1.0	Poor quality
Rating score between 1.0 and 1.99	Insufficient quality
Rating score between 2.0 to 2.79	Satisfactory quality
Rating score between 2.8 to 3.5	Good quality
Rating score greater the 3.5	Excellent quality

Conclusion

Higher education in Africa has witnessed a rapid expansion in the last two decades. While this expansion has led to an increased access, the quality of the education provided by the existing and newly established higher education institutions has continued to raise serious concern. Also of concern is the need to ensure that higher education in Africa measures up to acceptable international standards, embracing comparability and compatibility of curricula regionally as well as internationally, in a bid to promote cross-border education within and beyond the

African continent. Quality assurance in African higher education is at the top of the region's development agenda. There are a number of new developments in this field all designed to enhance the quality of higher education and engender institutional cultures of quality and enhance the quality of African higher education.

The current paper has discussed in detail only three of the plethora of current developments in the field of QA (Tuning Africa; ASG-QA; and AQRM). This is by no means exhaustive, nor does it represent a comprehensive detailing of the three concepts discussed. However, they provide a veritable context for what the higher education landscape in Africa and globally is contending with. At the heart of this discourse is internationalization and collaboration in higher education that promotes teaching and learning, as well as research and original knowledge production. Nowadays, the majority of undergraduates spend at least one semester abroad, faculty in different countries collaborate on research projects, and a student in Singapore can obtain a Yale degree without ever visiting the United States. Universities are no longer islands unto themselves, but rather members of a dynamic, evolving global campus.

The cross-pollination of students, faculty and ideas has brought issues of quality assurance to the fore, particularly how academic quality at universities is defined and measured, and how these standards compare between countries. As the internationalization of higher education continues to spread, there comes a pressing need for institutions around the world to work together to establish a shared global system of quality assurance. One of the eminent personalities that is at the center of the global discourse on QA and its ramifications is Dr. Judith Eaton, the president of CHEA (Council for Higher Education and Accreditation) of the USA.

Dr. Judith Eaton has been an ardent proponent of internationalization and collaboration, and how they affect quality of higher educational delivery. As a proponent of self-regulation of academic quality through quality assurance and accreditation, she has offered her views over the past several decades on the history, functions and issues facing quality assurance and accreditation today. Dr. Judith, as the President of CHEA, told *University World News*. "The more understanding we have about quality assurance, the more we can work with one another, and that's extremely valuable."

Quality assurance, she argues, is crucial on a number of levels because it holds a university accountable by assuring taxpayers (in the case of a public university) and the government alike that its teaching is of a high standard; it gives students a reliable platform to compare different courses and universities; and it gives a university national and, in many cases, international recognition of the standards of its degrees. The foregoing is a distillation of the importance of international cooperation in quality assurance in higher education for peer learning, knowledge sharing and networking, and underlines the significant contribution of Dr. Judith Eaton has offered in that regard.

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Chapter 31

Quality Assurance Improvement in Mexico

Rodrigo Guerra

For the last decade, the Mexican government has been making important efforts to strengthen higher education in order to make it more available for more of its citizens, especially youngsters. This premise was considered as the basis for the social and economic development of both the population and the country.

Following this premise, since the decade of the 90's, the government increased the number of public Universities to around 1,000. These universities enroll, to this date, around 2.5 million students (60% of the total of higher education students). It must be said that public universities are practically free of tuition costs.

The education system in Mexico is overseen by a Ministry of Education that is responsible of the authorization of private Universities, as well as of all the programs they intend to offer. Today, there are around 2,200 private universities that enroll 1.66 million students. These students and their families pay the full tuition since they cannot access public funding. Unlike other countries, neither private universities nor enrolled students receive any financial aid from the government, nor fiscal incentives, but they are authorized to operate and regulated by the Education Ministry. Private universities are also required by law to offer scholarships to at least 5% of their enrollment.

The authorization the Ministry grants for both the opening of universities and of each and every program they offer, includes a review and approval of the curriculum, the list of teachers and the university's facilities, including materials, service areas and labs. This process does not include a quality assurance process. As a matter of fact, to this date in Mexico, quality assurance is a voluntary process for universities (public or private). However, accreditation has been seen as a good way to differentiate the value and the commitment of universities, especially in the private sector. Currently FIMPES is working with Congress on a new HE laws that will include some level of operating incentives for those Universities with Quality Accreditation.

The rapid growth of higher education in Mexico arose the question of quality assurance. Since public universities are granted with autonomy, their process of developing their offer is totally independent from the Ministry of Education. As stated before, these universities receive public funds but do not register their programs in the Ministry, unlike private universities. On the other hand, the explosive growth of private universities without a proper control by the Ministry of Education, nor a commitment to quality by the institutions was an opportunity for a "for-profit" sector of higher education, using sometimes questionable practices.

This conflict of quality vs. coverage has been studied from different perspectives, since private education has served as an important way to increase the number of students with access to higher education, which has been used by the government as a way to accomplish its goal of increasing coverage of higher education creating the social mobility opportunities for graduated professionals.

All these challenges made necessary the creation of quality assurance organizations to develop accreditation processes for programs and institutions. FIMPES was a pioneer in the matter, developing its institutional accreditation process in 1992. After this process was implemented,

several agencies were born with the purpose of certifying the quality of higher education specially at program level.

After FIMPES, other organizations that focus on the accreditation of programs were created. These entities have focused on the accreditation of specialized programs and oversee the specific curricula and academic requirements for the development of professionals in one field of study. Several public universities have made efforts to have their programs accredited, especially since that gives them access to additional budgets. Private universities, on the other hand, have also made important efforts in the matter regardless of the important efforts cost these processes bring.

The Mexican Federation of Private Institutions of Higher Education (FIMPES), is since 1982 an agency that represents the positions, promotes and credits quality among private higher education institutions in Mexico. To this date, 111 universities with close to 800,000 students enrolled, are members of our Federation; that level of enrollment is quite important since there are approximately 1.6 million students in around 2,200 private universities, out of a total of 4.1 million students in higher education in our country. FIMPES, in fact represents close to 50% of total private HE enrollment, and around 17% of total HE Mexico students, which gives us the moral endorsement of society.

Back in 1994, FIMPES developed an institutional accreditation system to allow private universities to demonstrate their value and to have the opportunity of participating in a peer review process. To this date this system is public proof of quality with the recognition of society. For over 25 years, FIMPES has grown to become the only private institutional accreditation agency and today it has the only institutional accreditation system that focuses on assessment and results of alumni, including employability and professional development.

FIMPES considers institutional accreditation as a mechanism through which, an accreditation organization, which works through collegiate bodies, trustworthy as being objectives, independents and transparent; validates that an institution that:

- a) Is what it says it is.
- b) Provides what it offers to provide.
- c) Guarantees the minimal standards of quality needed in a serious academic offer and demonstrates public commitment to the elevation of its quality levels in a continual improvement process.

The system's mission is the educational improvement of the affiliated institutions to promote the improvement of Mexican higher education quality, the successful achievement of common interests and the establishment of more and better possibilities of collaboration among its members.

The benefits for the universities are:

- They will identify the common points and differences in relation to the criteria of the accreditation system, minimal requirements to the achievement of a quality education project.
- They will manage to complete a self-diagnosis of their processes.
- They will document their processes and systems, and they will manage to create their own quality model, based in the needs of the institution.
- They will be able to publish that they have the FIMPES accreditation.

Our accreditation system has evolved consistently according to the needs of society. Today it is on version 4.1, which includes an important focus on institutional effectiveness and oversees key indicators, as well as aspects related to academic integrity.

FIMPES' accreditation system requires each university to develop its own criteria to measure institutional effectiveness according to its features and institutional purposes. The differences among the 111 universities affiliated to FIMPES make it impossible to have a unique assessment system. Each university must focus on the development of an assessment model for both academic and institutional effectiveness, according to its mission. All the universities must develop, at the same time, planning and assessment models that promote the participation of the members of their communities. These models must be related to all the decision processes (at all levels), understanding that effectiveness in institutional planning and assessment requires a process that is flexible, relevant, simple and responsible.

FIMPES encourages that the universities demonstrate the accomplishment of its mission, vision and purposes, while focusing of its social responsibility and demonstrating that their alumni are more competent. In all these processes the opinion of the internal and external stakeholders (students, teachers, parents, staff, alumni, employers and society) is extremely relevant. During the self-study stage several mechanisms are used in order to gather information that allow the University to corroborate the level of accomplishment of its institutional mission.

Something important to be mentioned is that FIMPES institutional accreditation system includes criteria related to the opinion of important external stakeholders. During the visits, focus groups with alumni and employers are held in order to gather their opinions. We have also developed different ways of collecting information. Our universities have made great efforts to communicate more efficiently with employers and alumni in order to update the programs. We consider communication with stakeholders as one of the most important challenges to keep working in. In the last version of our accreditation system five core skills were included as mandatory for demonstration of being worked developed by our universities in their students; these are: oral communication, written communication, critical thinking, digital literacy, mathematical reasoning.

Version 4.1 of FIMPES institutional accreditation system allows universities to obtain an accreditation for 3, 5 or 7 years, according to the demonstration of accomplishment of the criteria. These levels of accreditation encourage universities to focus in their areas of opportunity according to its institutional purposes, more than on the criteria imposed by an external agency.

In an effort to be transparent and have more information to support and improve quality assurance, all the accredited universities have to provide FIMPES with an update of their key indicators. This allows FIMPES to make an assessment of the universities' progress and if necessary, serves as the basis for a new visit. The development of this information system has allowed FIMPES to gather information to prove the value of private higher education, besides the coverage rates.

FIMPES has been addressing the issue of academic integrity the last couple of years and included a related criterion in order to motivate universities to demonstrate their efforts and results on this critical subject, beyond plagiarism. Our concept of academic integrity includes social responsibility as well as the efforts to build a better world through common good and quality assurance.

Our universities have been working on academic integrity as a way to fight against academic corruption. The good practices that CHEA and UNESCO developed served as a basis for FIMPES' efforts towards the promotion of academic integrity; FIMPES is currently using the experience and information to research on the matter. Academic integrity is also being measured in a combined effort with an external organization. The universities that volunteered to participate in this process are building their own plans for inserting academic integrity as a regular activity in campus.

Mexican society has been making steady progress to recognize quality assurance as a means to ensure a better future for HE graduates as well as to improve country competitiveness and social and economic development. In this regard, it is very important for FIMPES to be in contact with international quality assurance practitioners to learn from their experiences and share good practices.

Since 2012, FIMPES has been working with the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC or WASCUC), through a memorandum of understanding that has allowed us to have an international opinion of our system. The interaction with representatives of WASC has been an enriching experience; they have supported us as observers in the different stages of the accreditation process: in situ visits and committee resolutions. All the observers have left reports that allowed us to make adjustments and improvements to our system. Representatives of FIMPES have also participated in different events and workshops with WASC and have also been part of on-site visits. The experience of sharing experiences with another QA agency has enriched and expanded our vision and scope of our work.

CIQG's International Quality Principles have also been evaluated and applied by FIMPES in order to promote their use in our universities. FIMPES worked with several of our universities which explained and shared their good practices in the matter. The International Quality Principles document was published and presented to the membership. In the improvement of FIMPES' accreditation system, external factors and stakeholders' needs have been considered. We believe that quality assurance agencies need to include more criteria related to what society requires, including academic integrity, graduate employability and country sustainability. Given the dynamic changes in required skills, industry 4.0 is creating the most important issue to address in the next ten years, will be to make the communication and cooperation between HE and the productive sector more effective.

We have finished developing this paper as our universities are making relevant efforts trying to figure out the best and safest way to restart education in campus, or with the necessary time, to plan for a 100% online offer or probably a mix of both, considering the Health Department Rules. For a QS Organization like FIMPES, the challenges ahead are important as we have to prepare not only to catch up with our accreditation goals for 2020, but to adjust our accreditation system to recognize the changes that our universities will implement for different but important reasons, whether financial or academic. In spite of all the current events and challenges we are and will continue to face, we look forward to keeping our commitment to quality assurance as we approach the beginning of a new decade, no matter how different 2021 and beyond will look like.

Chapter 32

Quality Here, Quality There, Quality Everywhere: Comparing the Higher Education Quality Assurance Agencies in Ghana, Nigeria and Burundi

Fred Awaah, Adekunle I. Oladejo and Bugoma Suwadu

Introduction

At the 2009 UNESCO Bamako international conference on quality assurance in higher education in Africa (ICQAHEA), Africa, relative to other regions, was assessed to have a young higher education quality assurance system. In spite of this neophytic attainment, there is heightened eagerness in the region in three directions- establishment of national quality assurance agencies where these do not already exist, strengthening existing agencies, and fostering sub-regional collaboration (Okebukola, [2012](#)). Okebukola's observation may be linked to the growing need for quality assurance in higher education within the global higher education space.

Quality assurance in higher education has become a necessary tool to enhance global educational competitiveness. Though with snail space, Africa has tapped into this to enhance quality within its higher education space. This has not been without challenges. In a critical review of quality assurance in higher education in Africa to identify recent results, challenges, and actions required to move towards the construction of the African higher education and research space (AHERS), Shabani, Okebukola and Oyewole ([2017](#)), identified the limited human capacity of quality assurance agencies, ineffectiveness in implementing harmonization strategies, and the lack of tools required to compare qualifications as the factors responsible for the decline in quality in higher education within the region. The Shabani et al. ([2017](#)) study proposes an integrated and holistic conceptual framework for analyzing quality assurance by reviewing the various initiatives implemented in recent years. This calls for an investigation into the standards and regulations set by individual African quality assurance agencies at the national levels – Ghana, Nigeria and Burundi in perspective.

While the overall investigation of quality assurance is an important discourse, the African case is necessary within these times with African scholars urging educational stakeholders to imbibe culturally relevant measures in every sphere of Africa education (See Awaah, [2014](#)). He argues for instance that, cultural methods of teaching will enhance students understanding of the Africa educational space and by extension ensure academic quality within the continent (see Awaah et al., [2021](#)).

Unveiling the Quality Assurance Literature

Kisanga ([2014](#)) asserts that higher education institutions are forced to set and regulate their programs in accordance with regulatory organs aiming to ensure the quality of education offered. To assure what higher education institutions (HEI) are offering, the term accreditation, standards, and quality dominate many forums in higher education (Kisanga, [2014](#)). He argues that a window is open for every HEI to practice quality assurance (QA) strategies for its survival. If QA strategies cannot be appropriately practiced, HEIs cannot survive any competition around everywhere (Kisanga, [2014](#)). In line with Kisanga's observation that, if QA strategies cannot be appropriately practiced HEIs cannot survive any competition around everywhere, this study proposes to study higher education quality assurance agencies from three countries in Africa, in a bid to identify their successes, challenges, difference and

similarities to foster the learning of acceptable benchmarks and pursuing corrective measures where necessary. The study, therefore, investigates the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC), the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), the National Universities Commission of Nigeria (NUC) and the National Commission for Higher Education (NCHE) of Burundi.

The need to examine the three quality assurance agencies stems from the fact that, longitudinal and transversal, across the length and breadth of higher education in the world, there is no one-size-fits-all when quality and quality assurance is the discourse (Oladejo and Ebisin, 2021). Institutions, countries and regions make specifics according to needs and aspirations and that is what makes quality and how it is being assured. In a recent collection by Okebukola (2021) on what is perceived as quality by various academics across Africa, the collections reflect that truly, quality like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. For this discussion, we sampled ten from this collection by Okebukola (2021) as hosted on the website of the Virtual Institute of Capacity Building in Higher Education.

“Quality is defined as the state of having things at their desired perspectives.” – *Umar Musa Yar’adua*

“Quality is the standardized minimum to which an outcome could be judge as productive.” – *Chike Anibeze*

“Quality is a desired standard relating to excellence.” – *Nasiru Yakubu*

“Quality is the acceptable standards for global best practices” – *Johnson Fatokun*

“Quality is a perceived standard of excellence on a particular output.” – *Morounkeji Olanrewaju*

“Quality is the status that something is expected to attain.” – *Kabir Mohammed*

“Quality is the valuable and acceptable standards that meets requirements and specification.” – *Rukayyatu Gurin*

“Quality is the acceptable which is set by an organization/institution to promote productivity and good outputs.” – *Grace Olutayo*

“Quality is the inherent property of an object, being or system that enables it to be adjudged as being better or more excellent in comparison to a similar one, in regard to its functions and suitability for use.” – *Bulus Gyang*

“Quality is an attribute which distinguishes a product or service from others and assessed against some minimum standards.” – *Peter Okebukola*

Classifications of Quality

Given the different perspectives from which these sampled definitions and others have been offered, it is reasonable to agree that by definition, quality can be classified as:

- i- norm-referenced – when quality is adjudged in comparison with other products
- ii- criterion-referenced – when quality is adjudged in comparison with a set of criteria

- iii- product-based – when quality is adjudged based on the attributes of the product
- iv- user-based – when quality is adjudged based on customers satisfaction; and
- v- value-based –when quality is adjudged based on value for money (Okebukola, 2021).

Fitness for purpose and conformance to requirements as commonly used in the world of quality and quality assurance truly exemplifies the nature of quality in theory and practice. However, adapting quality and quality assurance from the world of business and production where it originated, to the sphere of higher education, will not be as simple as described by Aristotle. In his words – “an examination of a knife would reveal that its distinctive quality is to cut, and from this, we can conclude that a good knife would be a knife that cuts well.” According to Friend-Pereira, Lutz & Heerens (2002), the application of quality assurance in the sphere of higher education, while having the same base objectives of defining and recognizing quality, is somewhat complicated by the important socio-economic role that education plays in developing local, national and global societies.

“Quality in higher education, according to Article 11 of the World Declaration on Higher Education published by the United Nations, is a multi-dimensional concept, which should embrace all its functions and activities: teaching and academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, faculties, equipment, services the community and the academic environment. It should take the form of internal self-evaluation and external review, conducted openly by independent specialists, if possible, with international expertise, which are vital for enhancing quality. Independent national bodies should be established and comparative standards of quality, recognized at international level, should be defined” (Friend-Pereira et al., 2002).

Quality assurance is a set of planned and systematic activities implemented to maximize the probability that minimum standards of quality in education are attained (Okebukola, 2004). Quality assurance in higher education helps to ensure that the purpose for which an institution or a program is created is achieved and improved upon. It checks and balances the operations of the system at all times so much that every single function is aimed towards achieving the mission and vision of the system. In the words of Bogue (1998), quality assurance in higher education is an activity as much personal as systemic, as much moral as technical. Effective quality assurance in colleges and universities is built on thoughtfully crafted systems and on the caring and courage of those who hold those learning climates in trust.

It will appear that, with good quality assurance mechanisms, the claims of students’ difficulties in the understanding of some concepts as reported by some researchers will be minimal. This is more so when the pieces of evidence of common educational challenges among the three countries have been established by research (see Okebukola et al., 2020). In a survey of the views of African scholars on what quality assurance is (Okebukola, 2021), diverse opinions that perhaps answer the first question raised by Bogue (1998) were shared. Is the quality of an educational program or institution to be found in its reputation or its results, in the rigor of the process or proof of outcome? Here are excerpts of the survey by Okebukola (2021):

“Quality assurance in higher education is the process of setting up audit and compliance mechanism in ensuring that the right people, right resources and conducive environment are deployed to ascertain that teaching, learning and research take place in an educational institution.” – *Olusegun Vincent*

“Quality assurance in higher education is a process that ensures that standards set by organization/institutions are maintained and reflect in the quality of its output.” – *Grace Olutayo*

“Quality assurance in higher education is the planning, strategizing, implementation and enforcement of acceptable standards of global best practices for effective delivery of academic services at every level of educational management.” – *Johnson Fatokun*

The Quality Framework

The framework that holds quality assurance in higher education is a tripod of input, process and output. To achieve the essence of a given institution of higher learning all the elements of input variables, process variables and output variables must be quality assured. This general framework for quality assurance was developed by Okebukola, Shabani, Sambo & Ramon-Yusuf (2007) and it is as described in figure 1.



Figure 1: General Framework for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Methodology

This study is a desk review. The quality assurance literature interrogated provided baseline information on how quality assurance agencies in the various countries in this study operate. The study specifically reviewed the literature on these quality assurance agencies, their challenges and successes, their similarities as well as their differences. The baseline literature for the study were gleaned from the websites of the QA agencies in the three countries. A full bibliography of information sources reviewed is reported in the references section.

Quality Assurance Agencies in Ghana

Quality assurance in higher education in Ghana was previously handled by four agencies; the National Accreditation Board (NAB), the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE), the National Board for Professional and Technician Examinations (NABPTEX) and the Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (COTVET).

The National Accreditation Board (NAB) was established in 1993 by PNDC Law 317 1993 (National Accreditation Board [NAB], 2020) and tasked with categorizing tertiary institutions,

evaluating and establishing the equivalence of credentials local and abroad as well as training experts in client institutions (NAB, 2020).

The National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) was established by Act 454 (1993) with the duty to advise government and tertiary education institutions on policies and regulation of tertiary education in Ghana (Joblist Ghana, 2016). Further, the National Board for Professional and Technician Examinations (NABPTEX) was also constituted in 2004 and tasked with ensuring quality assurance in polytechnics. The final quality assurance agency, the Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (COTVET) was established to coordinate and oversee all aspects of Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Ghana (Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training [COTVET], 2020).

Ghana Tertiary Education Commission

A cursory observation at these institutions reveals overlaps in their mandates. Also, there was the need to establish a single quality standard for all higher education institutions in the country. This called for the synchronization of these organizations to reduce waste and streamline efforts to improve quality assurance in higher education in Ghana. On 21st August 2020, the Ghanaian government took the first steps towards this harmonization process when it merged NABPTEX and COTVET (COTVET, 2020). The Ghanaian government took it a step further with the creation of the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC).

Legal Establishment

The Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) was created out of the amalgamation of the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) and the National Accreditation Board (NAB) under the new Education Regulatory Bodies Act, 2020 (Act 1023). (Ghana Tertiary Education Commission [GTEC], 2020).

Mission and Vision

While the GTEC has not made this information public yet, it is worth reporting the mission of its predecessor organization, the National Accreditations Board. To provide the best basis for establishing, measuring and improving quality in tertiary education through accreditation, quality assurance and determining equivalences of qualifications. The vision of the National Accreditations Board is to guarantee a world-class quality higher education.

Functions

The Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) was established to regulate tertiary education in all of its forms to promote (a) efficient and effective administration and accreditation of tertiary education institutions; principles of tertiary education institutions providing consistent quality of service; and knowledge advancement and application through teaching, scholarly research, and service. The commission's duties are further classified as general; advising; coordinating; regulatory; accrediting; and any other function required to achieve the commission's objectives (GTEC, 2021). The commission explains these functions as captured in the ensuing.

General Functions of the Commission

The commission shall, in the performance of the general functions, ensure that tertiary education institutions apply the highest quality standards and relevance of teaching, learning and research programs and outcomes; promote equitable and inclusive access to all tertiary education programs and services; promote transparent governance and best practices, including reporting and checks and balances to ensure full accountability; promote a culture of

independent, life-long learning and scientific and technological inquiry among staff, students and the wider society; promote affirmative action for persons with disabilities and other marginalized and disadvantaged groups and promote non-discrimination policies and practices.

Advisory Functions of the Commission

The advisory functions of the commission include advising the minister on the establishment and development of tertiary education institutions in the country; providing advice and guidance on the general direction of development, orientation and mission of public and private tertiary education institutions in line with national development goals and objectives and having regard to an optimally diversified and differentiated tertiary education system which shall in particular cover the programs to be pursued by tertiary education institutions regarding the relevance of the programs to national development; the development and location of tertiary education institutions; and the establishment of new academic units in tertiary education institutions.

Also, the advisory functions include inquiring into the financial needs of public tertiary education institutions and advising the minister accordingly; recommending to the minister for the preparation of the annual national education budget; block allocation of funds towards running costs, and grants towards the capital expenditure of each public tertiary education institution, indicating how the allocations are to be disbursed; advise a public tertiary education institution on the appropriate measures to generate additional funds for the public tertiary institution; and application for and acceptance of local and foreign assistance per government policy; recommend standards and norms on governance, financing, academic programs, staff costs, accommodation and time utilization, for the approval of the Minister; and advice on funding and support for needy students.

Further, the commission shall advise the president, through the minister, on the approval and grant of a charter to public and private tertiary education institutions in the country, the commission shall advise the Government on the structure of the tertiary education system taking into account the need for diversification and differentiation to meet the demands of sustainable national development.

Coordinating Functions of the Commission

The coordinating functions of the commission include acting as an agency for channeling external assistance and funding to public tertiary education institutions; collate, analyze and publish information on tertiary education in the country; coordinate the planning of the tertiary education system in line with manpower needs and national development goals; create a platform for regular interaction between industry and academia and provide a hub for mutually beneficial interaction and the articulation of national interest within the tertiary education system.

Regulatory Functions of the Commission

The regulatory functions of the commission include ensuring the implementation of approved regulations and national standards and norms concerning tertiary education institutions; approve the establishment of tertiary education institutions; regulate the structure of tertiary education in the country; develop policies and regulations to advance the conduct of research and innovation in public tertiary education institutions; develop norms for the allocation of grants to drive tertiary education policy based on national development priorities; undertake or cause to be undertaken, periodic or ad-hoc visitations, regular inspections, monitoring and evaluation of tertiary education institutions to ensure compliance with the provisions of this Act or Regulations made under this Act.

The functions further include to set up and operate a tertiary education institution information management system to enable real-time access to decision support data of all tertiary education institutions; develop and implement policy on criteria or requirements for admission to tertiary education institutions in the country; receive annual reports from tertiary education institutions three months after the end of each academic year; approve the establishment of new academic units in tertiary education institutions being mindful of cost-effectiveness and alignment with institutional mission and mandates and national development objectives; establish links with relevant national and international stakeholders necessary for the attainment of the objects of the Commission; verify the authenticity of all certificates, diplomas and degrees upon request; and make recommendations to the Minister to ensure discipline in tertiary education institutions.

Accreditation Functions of the Commission

The commission is responsible for the accreditation of public and private tertiary education institutions; and programs of public and private tertiary education institutions; determine the requirements for the maintenance of standards of physical infrastructure, governance systems, human resources and financial sustainability in the tertiary education sector; the programs and requirements for the efficient and effective operation of a tertiary education institution and maintenance of acceptable levels of academic or professional standards in the institution; and the levels of all qualifications awarded by recognized or accredited institutions including professional institutions in the country or elsewhere.

Successes of the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission

The commission has ensured that tertiary education institutions adhere to the highest quality standards and that teaching, learning, and research programs and outcomes are relevant; promote equitable and inclusive access to all tertiary education programs and services; and promote transparent governance and best practices, including reporting and checks and balances, to ensure full accountability; promote a culture of independent, lifelong learning, as well as scientific and technological inquiry, among staff, students, and the general public; affirmative action for people with disabilities and other marginalized and disadvantaged groups; and nondiscrimination policies and practices in tertiary institutions.

The commission has also directed the development, orientation, and mission of public and private tertiary education institutions in line with national development goals and objectives, and with regard to an optimally diversified and differentiated tertiary education system, which includes the programs to be pursued by tertiary education institutions with regard to the relevance of the programs to national development; the development and location of tertiary education institutions; and the development and location of tertiary education institutions as well as the creation of new academic units in tertiary institutions

GTEC has overseen the implementation of approved regulations, national standards, and norms governing tertiary education institutions; approved the establishment of tertiary education institutions; regulated the structure of tertiary education in the country; and developed policies and regulations to promote research and innovation in public tertiary education institutions; Set up and maintain a tertiary education institution information management system to enable real-time access to decision support data of all higher education institutions; and design grant allocation standards to drive tertiary education policy based on national development priorities.

The NAB brought sanity into the Ghanaian higher education landscape. NAB ensured that private higher education institutions (PHEI) met certain criteria for accreditation and protected customers. NAB also instituted sanctions for PHEIs that flouted regulations (Tsevi,

2016). This confirms the earlier assumption that the GTEC was created not because its predecessors were failing but, in an attempt, to streamline their operations and reduce cost and waste.

Challenges of the Council

The GTEC, however, has inherited some challenges that were plaguing its predecessors. Tsevi (2019) found that evidence of challenges of the quality assurance process such as conflicting requirements from the NAB and mentor institutions, duplication of activities, the perception of public higher education institutions being favored over private ones, non-compliance of institutions to the timeframe given for program and institutional accreditation and lack of regular communication about an institution's charter request were challenges that were plaguing the National Accreditation Board. It is imperative moving forward that GTEC focuses on these challenges in bids to improve the existing state of quality assurance in Ghana's higher educational system.

National Quality Assurance Agencies in Nigeria

The higher education system in Nigeria is divided into three, namely: the college of the education system; the polytechnic system; and the university system. The college of the education system is saddled with the responsibility of producing quality teachers with the minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession in Nigeria. A graduate from this system earns a national certificate in education (NCE) award. The polytechnic system incorporates mono-technic and other specialized technical institutions. The system is responsible for the establishment and maintenance of minimum standards in polytechnics and other technical institutions in the federation, accreditation of academic programs in all technical and vocational education (TVE) institutions for the award of National Diploma (ND); Higher National Diploma (HND) and other similar awards.

The university system in Nigeria is the highest tertiary education provider in the country and it is saddled with the responsibility of overseeing the all-around affairs of universities in Nigeria. Like in most other parts of the world, the system produces high-skilled manpower within the context of the needs of the nation; conducts research; trains researchers; and disseminates the results of conducted research. By the provisions of the national policy on education, universities in Nigeria are expected to pay particular attention to research and the promotion of indigenous knowledge. Awards issued by universities in Nigeria include ordinary diploma, post-graduate diploma, bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, Doctor of Philosophy, Doctor of Science and recently, Doctor of Education.

The following agencies are responsible for assuring quality in the Nigerian higher education space:

- 1- National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) –For colleges of education
- 2- National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) – For polytechnics
- 3- National Universities Commission – For universities affairs.

National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE)

Legal Establishment

The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) was established by Decree 13 of 1989 to supervise all aspects of non-degree teacher education and teacher professionalism in Nigeria. On 1 January 1993, Decree No.12 amended the establishment of Decree No.13 of 1989 as a completion of the tripod of excellence in the supervision of higher education in the country and introducing changes to the commission. The establishment of the commission was

a resultant effect of the utmost importance accorded to quality teacher education by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Since its inception, the Commission has continuously pursued goals of quality assurance in teacher education. The pride of the commission is based on the seminal philosophy in the National Policy on Education (NAPE) which states that “no education can rise above the quality of its teachers....” In 2018, the Nigerian Senate proposed a change of NCCE’s name to the National Commission for Teachers Education (NCTE).

Mission and Vision

To produce well-motivated teachers of world-class quality with high personal and professional discipline, integrity and competence for the expanding basic education sector. The vision is to make the Colleges of Education center of excellence in teaching, learning and research to facilitate the production of top-class teachers, highly motivated and fully prepared for teaching at the basic education level.

Functions of the NCCE

The commission is mandated by the decree to perform the following functions, among others:

- Make recommendation on the national policy necessary for the full development of teacher education and training of teachers.
- Lay down minimum standards for all programs of teacher education and accredit their certificates and other academic awards.
- Approve guidelines setting out criteria for the accreditation of all Colleges of Education in Nigeria.
- Determine the qualified teacher needs of the country for planning training facilities and in particular; prepare periodic master plans for the balanced coordinated development of Colleges of Education.
- To advise on and take steps to harmonize entry requirements.
- Consider any matter pertaining to teacher education as may be referred to it from time to time by the minister.
- Inquire into and advise the federal government on the financial needs of the colleges and receive block grants from the government and allocate them to the colleges based on the approved formula.
- Collate, analyze and publish information relating to teacher education in the country.
- Undertake periodic reviews of terms and conditions of service of personnel in the Colleges of Education and make recommendations thereon to the government.
- Make recommendations on the development of pre-vocational, technical, agricultural, business and home economics education in primary and secondary schools and advise as to what necessary facilities would be provided for them: The course requirements, the relative contribution of government and industry and how to ensure that women take full part in these.
- Recommend to the visitor of the college that visitation is made to the college as and when it considers it necessary.

Success Stories

- The commission has been able to determine and unify the academic contents of National Certificate in Education (NCE) programs and the personnel requirements for the mounting of the programs.
- The commission, currently, is overseeing 146 colleges of education that have been awarded the National Certificate in Education (NCE). 21 are federal institutions, 47 belong to the state government, while 55 are privately owned.
- Repositioning of objectives of setting up teacher education agency.

- Curriculum reforms from primary to secondary education levels and improved human resource development.
- A systematic accreditation of NCE programs and periodic monitoring of physical structures are undertaken regularly, while linkages of the colleges with ICT facilities and components for effective communication, data generation and training have been executed.
- Harmonization of NCE curricula with the NERD.
- Development of a framework for new colleges and production of a quality assurance tool kit.
- Establishment of quality assurance units in every college and published 11 volumes of statistical digest on colleges of education and NCE-awarding institutions.
- Publication of the status of academic standards in 21 federal colleges of education and 27 states and the privately owned.

Challenges

- Owing to inadequate funding, some of the colleges, federal, state or private, are not up-to-date in terms of having current accreditation status.
- The production of specialized and right caliber of teachers to teach at the various levels of basic education.

National Board for Technical Education (NBTE)

Legal Establishment

In response to the acute shortage of technical manpower identified by the federal government as a major constraint towards the execution of the third national development plan in 1975-80, the government in 1972 established the then National Science and Technology Development Agency (which later metamorphosed to Federal Ministry of Science and Technology) which set up a working committee on scientific and technical manpower and science education. The committee produced a report on middle-level technical manpower and their training. The committee in its report recommended that a National Board for Technical Education be created which should be charged with the implementation of its recommendations.

The National Board for Technical Education was established by the federal government under Act 9 of January 1977. In August 1985 and January 1993 respectively, the federal government enacted Act 16 (Education (National Minimum Standards and Establishment of Institutions) Act) and Act 9 (Education (National Minimum Standards and Establishment of Institutions) (Amendment) Act). With these Acts, the functions of the Board were extended to include accreditation of academic programs in all Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) institutions. Act No.9 of 1st January 1993 further empowered the Board to recommend the establishment of private Polytechnics and Monotechnics in Nigeria.

Mission and Vision

To promote the production of skilled technical and professional manpower for the development and sustenance of the National Economy. The vision is to be a world-class regulatory body for the promotion of Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Nigeria.

Functions of NBTE

The functions of the Board as contained in its enabling Decree 9 of 1977 are as follows:

- Advise the Federal Government on and coordinate all aspects of technical and vocational education falling outside the universities.
- Determine, after consultation with such other bodies, the skilled manpower needs of the country in the industrial, commercial and other relevant fields.
- To prepare periodic master plans for the balanced and coordinated development of polytechnics which include the preparation of the general programs to be pursued by polytechnics to maximize the use of available facilities and avoid unnecessary duplication and giving recommendations for the establishment and location of new polytechnics.
- Inquire into and advise the Federal Government on the financial needs, both recurrent and capital, of polytechnics and other technical institutions.
- Receive block grants from the Federal Government and allocate them to polytechnics in accordance with such formula as may be laid down by the Federal Executive Council.
- Act as the agency for channeling all external aid to polytechnics in Nigeria.
- Advice on and take steps to harmonize entry requirements and duration of courses at technical institutions.

The recent acts (Act No.9 of 1st January 1993) extended the functions of NBTE to include:

- The establishment and maintenance of minimum standards in polytechnics and other technical institutions in the Federation.
- Accreditation of academic programs in all technical and vocational education (TVE) institutions for the award of national certificates and diplomas and other similar awards.

The National Universities Commission (NUC)

Legal Establishment

Following the recommendation of the Ashby commission on higher education in Nigeria, the National Universities Commission (NUC) was established in 1962 as an advisory agency in the cabinet office. By implication, its role was to advise the Federal Government on the financial needs and development of university education in Nigeria. In 1974, Gowon's administration ordered the reconstitution of the commission. This led to the establishment of the NUC as a statutory body under the enacted Decree No. 1 of 1974. The Commission has gradually transformed from a small office in the cabinet office to an important arm of government in the area of development and management of university education in Nigeria, and currently, the National Universities Commission (NUC) is a parastatal under the Federal Ministry of Education (FME). The Commission has a governing council, its executive secretary is Professor Abubakar Adamu Rasheed MNI, MFR, who assumed office on August 3, 2016.

Mission and Vision

To ensure the orderly development of a well-coordinated and productive university system that will guarantee quality and relevant education for national development and global competitiveness. To be a dynamic regulatory agency acting as a catalyst for positive change and innovation for the delivery of quality university education in Nigeria.

Objectives/Functions

- Advise the executive on the financial needs of universities
- Coordinate the development of universities in Nigeria
- Allocate and disburse federal grants and external aid to universities
- Research and advice executive on topics relating to higher education development in Nigeria

- To advise the executive on the creation of degree-granting institutions
- To advise the government on the creation of faculties within Nigerian universities
- Approve all academic programs run in Nigerian universities
- Approve the establishment of all higher educational institutions offering degree programs in Nigerian universities
- Ensure quality assurance of all academic programs offered in Nigerian universities; and
- Channel for all external support to the Nigerian universities.

Success Stories

The commission has recorded a number of successes since its inception. These successes can be attributed to the quality of leadership, dedication and commitment of the staff, the quality of its Board members, cooperation received from universities and support from the federal government.

- In 2002, NUC conducted an accreditation and quality survey and ranking of state and federal universities.
- The commission has established an electronic network to link research activities within universities to one another.
- On 3 February 2021, the National Universities Commission approved additional 20 Private universities which has now made 99 approved private universities in Nigeria, which also included Mewar international university promoted by Adhyay international making it the first Indian university to expand its campus to Nigeria in the Nasarawa State.
- The National Universities Commission has currently approved twelve universities for distance learning centers in Nigeria.
- The NUC has recently issued guidelines for cross-border provision of university education in Nigeria to provide a framework for quality provision in cross-border university education. These guidelines set out processes and requirements for registration/licensing, accreditation, monitoring and evaluation of programs delivered in Nigeria through TNE (QAA country report: Nigeria, 2019).
- The NUC has recently developed guidelines for the regulation and quality assurance of ODL as well as other types of TNE including collaborative partnerships and branch campuses.

National Commission for Higher Education – Burundi

In 2007, the republic of Burundi joined the East African Community (EAC) that was established in 2000 and currently comprising six member countries: Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda (EAC, 2021). In the treaty for the establishment of the East African Community (EAC), the member countries have signed an agreement to undertake concerted measures to foster cooperation in several fields including education and training in the community by the harmonization of education and training systems to enable them to be comparable and compatible among member countries (EAC, 2015). When Burundi joined the community, there was a need for an agency to ensure the quality assurance in high education to align with EAC standards.

Following this, the Republic of Burundi established the National Commission for Higher Education (NCHE) which was set up by Decree No 100/12 of 10 January 2008 on the establishment, organization and functioning of the National Commission for Higher Education in Burundi (CNES, 2021). Later in 2011, the NCHE became functional by Decree No 100/5 of 5 January 2011 appointing its members. Since then, the NCHE has been subjected to reorganization to improve its functioning. For example, in 2014, it was reorganized by Decree No 100/258 of 14 November; recently in 2019, Decree No. 100/026 of January 30, 2019, appointing members of the National Commission for Higher Education, "CNES" recognize 21

members of CNHE. From a legal point of view, the CNES is governed by Law No. 1/22 of December 30 on the reorganization of higher education in Burundi. The Commission is functioning under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

Summary of Decrees Relative to the Functioning of the National Commission for Higher Education

The following decrees form the legal basis of the National Commission for Higher Education (CNES, 2021):

January 2008: Decree No. 100/12 of January 10, 2008, on the creation, organization and functioning of the National Commission in Burundi; January 2011: Decree No. 100/05 of January 5, 2011, appointing the members of the CNES; February 25, 2011: Installation and launch of the works of the CNES by H.E. the 2nd Vice-President of the Republic; December 2011: the promulgation of Law No. 1/22 of December 30, 2011, on the reorganization of higher education in Burundi; May 30 and 31, 2012: validation workshop for twelve draft decrees and implementing orders for Law No. 1/22 of December 30, 2011, organized by the CNES under the patronage of the Ministry in charge of higher education; and in November 2014: Decree No. 100/258 of November 14, 2014, on the reorganization and functioning of the CNES.

Mission and Vision

The general mission of the commission is to advise, regulate, monitor and evaluate higher education in accordance with Decree No. 100/258 of November 14, 2014, on the reorganization and operation of the National Commission for Higher Education. The vision of Burundi higher education governing body is to promotion of quality and efficient higher education meeting the socio-economic expectations of society.

Functions

The functions of the supervisory body are as follows: propose guidelines in the development of actions for the planning, implementation and control of higher education per the general policy of the government; provide advice and opinions to the responsible minister on any file or project concerning higher education; ensure compliance with professional conduct and ethics as well as standards for recruiting teaching staff within higher education institutions; propose legal texts governing higher education; analyze the compliance with national, regional and international standards of texts specific to educational institutions, including the academic regulations of various public and private higher education institutions; ensure permanent control of compliance with the conditions for the opening of establishments and the approval of educational programs; pilot the process of harmonization of the higher education training offered; analyze and approve training offers submitted by higher education institutions.

Other functions include; to determine the criteria for passing classes and cycles in higher education institutions; coordinate the evaluation activities of higher education institutions and monitor the implementation of the BMD reform, including the establishment of quality assurance and monitoring of the accreditation system; examine the application files for equivalence of programs and advise the responsible Minister; set the criteria for student mobility, capitalization and transferability of credits; ensure the harmonization of the Burundian higher education system with the higher education systems of other countries in general and those of the sub-region and the East African Community in particular; contribute to the promotion of higher education by encouraging publications, organizing training and seminars, and giving suggestions to the Government to support higher education in all aspects.

Success Stories

- Creation of a website at the following address: "<http://www.cnesburundi.org>".
- Digital Platform of e-learning to help the actors involved in the CNES to develop their skills by using the tools provided online and necessary for rapid and effective reinforcement of knowledge. It also provides a better understanding of its use in different training, assessment and even blended learning projects, part of the work being done online and part face-to-face. The e-learning platform is available on the site <https://cnesburundi.com/index.php>? However, this platform has never functioned, it was just set up but there are no courses that have been delivered until now.
- Creation and validation of documents comprising requirements and guidelines for self-assessment for all institutions involved in high education in Burundi. This capacity-building function of self-assessment is particularly important in Burundi where capacity remains very weak. However, this document has been criticized to be a questionable tool because it is not comparable to other countries, thus it does not represent a reference of standards for accreditation.
- Creation and validation of “National Qualifications and Certifications Framework” – (CNQC) documents as part of the alignment of the legal and regulatory framework of the education system in Burundi with the National Development Plan of Burundi –PND (2018-2027), which is part of the follow-up to a set of discussions carried out since 2014 within the framework of the integration of Burundi into the EAC. This document would help to (i) give a regulatory basis and increased readability to the Burundian nomenclature of qualification levels and (ii) align the Burundian nomenclature with the nomenclature defined by the framework of the East African Community of qualifications. Unfortunately, no follow-up of its application has been done.
- The prohibition of enrollment of new students in some institutions that did not meet the required conditions for the academic year 2018-2019 in Burundi. This prohibition concerned nine institutions, as well as the Ministerial Orders withdrawing the opening authorization and temporary closure for two institutions.

Challenges

- There are too many missions entrusted to the commission without exact specification of their implementation, which impedes its successful implementation.
- No strategic plan details each mission, its objective, the expected results, the persons responsible for carrying out the mission as well as the tool for evaluating the execution of the mission.
- No assessment tool from the Commission itself (NCHE). Follow-up of requirements filling for institutions.
- No harmonization of accreditation programs to the East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EAQFHE). Until now, the Burundian institutions have not yet accreditation from anywhere, resulting in the non-recognition of Burundi’s diploma outside the country.
- There is no specific budget to implement the missions for the NCHE leading to its overlap in the implementation of the missions.
- The CNHE is more theoretical on paper than being practical to assure the quality of the high education system in Burundi.

Similarities and Differences among the three Quality Assurance Agencies

Legal Frameworks

All the higher education quality assurance agencies are based on established legal frameworks in their respective countries. There are differences in each legal framework that make one unique from the other but overall, they all give power to these higher education quality assurance agencies to enable them to carry out their mandates. For instance, the existing Ghanaian and Burundian legal frameworks allow for only one higher education quality assurance agency: the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) in Ghana's case and the National Commission for Higher Education in the Burundian case. In the Nigerian case, however, the existing legal framework allows for three higher education quality assurance agencies, each to take care of a specific sub-sector of Nigerian higher education. The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) for colleges of education, the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) for polytechnics and the National Universities Commission for universities.

Mission and Vision Statements

A cursory glance at the vision and mission statements of all the quality assurance agencies listed in this study indicates that they are formed to monitor and ensure sanity in the higher education sector of whichever country they are in. They ensure the implementation of approved regulations, standards and norms among higher education institutions. The specific language of the statement may vary, but the agencies are ultimately created to maintain the sanity of their assigned areas.

Functions

All the quality assurance agencies are created to provide certain general, advisory, coordinating, regulating and accreditation functions. However, the particular circumstances of each quality assurance agency guide implementation of its functions. For instance, since GTEC is now responsible for all quality assurance in Ghanaian higher education, it has been structured to carry out all the functions of its predecessors. It is not specialized in a particular higher education sub-sector. However, the Nigerian situation is different – organizations are specialized since they deal with specific sub-sectors of Nigerian higher education. For instance, the National Commission for Colleges of Education handles all quality assurance functions relative to colleges of education while the National Universities Commission deals with the same relative to universities. Also, while the higher education quality assurance agencies in Ghana and Nigeria focus on the needs of their country, the NCHE of Burundi, also focuses on the harmonization of Burundi's higher education system with those of the other countries in its region.

Common Success Stories

Private higher education institutions in Africa have been successful in four areas: Widening access to higher education in the continent, improving the quality of education, improving students experience and increasing the recognition and marketability of their degrees (Setswe, 2013). This is largely due to the influence of these quality assurance agencies. For instance, NAB ensured that private higher education institutions met certain criteria for accreditation and protected customers. In Burundi, NCHE also prohibited the enrollment of new students in some institutions that did not meet the required conditions for the 2018/2019 academic year, ensuring sanity in the Burundian higher education sector.

Crosscutting Challenges

All the quality assurance agencies are challenged with the basic issue of finances. These quality assurance agencies have to compete with agencies from other sectors of the economy for limited government resources. This usually means that they have to operate with resources less than what was budgeted for. Some challenges are also specific to each quality assurance agency.

For instance, in Ghana, GTEC's predecessor NAB was accused of favoring public higher education institutions over private ones leading to non-compliance. In Burundi, there is no specific implementation plan for the mandate that has been given to the NHCE.

Also, there is no assessment tool from the commission itself. Apart from these empirical common challenges, the education literature also registers some educational challenges that may be attributable to the QA agencies. For instance, Okebukola et al. (2020) provides glimpses of transactions in chemistry classrooms in five African countries (Burundi, Ghana, Morocco, Nigeria, and Senegal) during the COVID-19 lockdown. They report that members of the secondary school community in the countries including teachers, students, and school managers were unprepared for the unprecedented demand in shift from a face-to-face to an online delivery system. Their study is a pointer to a common challenge that the QA agencies face.

Further in a study of higher education in Ghana and Nigeria, Awaah et al. (2021) established a common challenge between the two countries. They report that students not having previous backgrounds in the study of Public Administration and syllabus being too wide accounts for difficulties in the study of the subject in both countries. This may be as a result of weak inputs, processes and leading to bad outputs; reflecting the components of the quality assurance model espoused by Okebukola, Shabani, Sambo & Ramon-Yusuf (2007).

Years of Operation

Significant gaps exist among the agencies in the three countries. All the three quality assurance agencies in Nigeria; NUC (1962), NABTE (1977), and NCCE (1989) have long been in existence and functioning before the agencies in Ghana and Burundi. The first and earliest of the quality assurance agencies in Ghana (NAB and NCTE, 1993) was established 30 years after the first agency was established in Nigeria, while the quality assurance in Burundi is more of a great-grandchild to that of Nigeria. In Burundi, the National Commission for Higher Education (NCHE) which was established in 2008 is 46 and 15 years younger than the NUC in Nigeria, and NAB in Ghana respectively, and has only been functional for 10 years (became functional in 2011).

The differences in the periods of establishment could imply differences in performance as the older agencies are expected to be more experienced in their operations than the recently established ones. However, it may be wrong to conclude that the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) which was created in 2020 is less experienced as compared to the agency in Burundi. This is because the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) was created from the harmonization of four long-established agencies.

Conclusion

Our desk review concludes that, although there are different higher educational needs in the three different countries, the quest for quality is critical to all. This is evident first by legal backing for the establishment of the quality assurance agencies in these countries; the established functions they have harnessed, and the successes attained within the constraints of inadequate funding.

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Part F

TELESCOPING INTO THE FUTURE/FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Chapter 33

The “New Normal” and the Puzzle of Accreditation Reform

Susan Phillips and Kevin Kinser

Introduction

Accreditation in the United States (USA) is under pressure: Once a forthright system of quality assurance and improvement drawing on academic expertise, respecting institutional mission, and adhering to a process of self-study, accreditation for higher education has been asked to serve many more masters, and to adapt to the ever-changing social and political climate. It has been stretched and reshaped to meet new demands, creating a system that would be barely recognized by its progenitors, and – some argue – not doing much to advance higher education. With many avenues for critique and controversy, the current state of accreditation in the USA – the “new normal” – is in desperate need of reform.

Accreditation in Need of Reform

Scholars of higher education accreditation in the USA often point to the proud traditions of this voluntary, nongovernmental quality assurance system spanning over 150 years: With no central governance, nor a single model of compliance, the US system of accreditation is supposed to afford the opportunity for diverse institutions to be innovative and mission-driven, to engage in ongoing self-study and quality improvement, and to inform and to be informed by knowledgeable peers. For specialized or program accreditation, it provides similar opportunities in specific areas of study and professions.

Despite this broad and honorable goal, there has been ongoing debate over the contours – and even the adequacy – of US accreditation. Unlike the quality assurance mechanisms in most other countries, accreditation in the U.S. has additional complexity in its relationship to student aid. This relationship was launched in 1944 when what is known as the “GI Bill” created an enormous expansion of students seeking access to, and funding for, higher education. With the rising interest that veterans had in higher education funding through the GI Bill, the federal government sought a way to ensure that the funding provided was used towards education of high quality. Accreditation agencies were tasked with this job in 1952, and – for the over 70 years since – have been the path to access for federal student aid authorized under Title IV of the Higher Education Act.

With the addition of this gatekeeper role, accreditation became “voluntary” only for those institutions whose students did not want or need access to the over \$120 billion available annually in federal student aid. With the broadening array of providers of higher education, along with the scandals in the for-profit sector (Kinser & Zipf, 2019), there has been rising caution about the wisdom of unchecked innovation. With an expanding distrust of institutions and a desire for simple and common metrics for accountability, there has been a declining tolerance for diversity of mission and a corresponding increase in demands for uniformity.

With an increasing level of student debt, there is growing concern about the outcomes for students – and even about whether higher education is “worth it.”

In each of these areas, accreditation has been labeled both the enabler of the problem and the solution to the consequences. While some see its mission as an invaluable resource to ensure the quality of the system, others look at it as a barrier to needed reform. Stakeholders advance very different views of what higher education needs from its accreditation system – and what that system of accreditation can and should provide. Along with – and perhaps overshadowing – traditional accreditation focuses on quality improvement; accreditation is increasingly called to serve many – and often conflicting – newer masters.

To provide a snapshot of some of the sources of pressure, consider the voices of critical stakeholders: In the accreditation community, leaders note tensions between quality assurance and quality improvement, and think they are being unfairly blamed for not addressing flaws in the system that are outside their control and responsibility. Institutions and other education providers often think of accreditation as providing little value for such a costly and intrusive process, and argue the result is stifling innovation and restricting autonomy. Policymakers see accreditation as an archaic practice that does not serve the taxpayer well nor does it meet the nation’s economic interests. Consumers have little idea what accreditation represents and are expecting better protection against high prices and hidden connections to subsequent employment.

As can be seen in that brief snapshot, accreditation stands at a pivotal and contested space. Along with the traditional accreditation focus on quality improvement, accreditation is increasingly called to serve significant roles in addressing such things as regulatory compliance, consumer protection, innovation, transparency, return on investment, and accountability. Many masters are placing claims on accreditation, with contradictory interests and confusing messages.

And, as the charge to accreditors grows, it is clear that no one is happy: Institutions feel burdened, policymakers are frustrated, consumers are vulnerable, employer needs are unmet, and accreditors are under fire. This is not mere turbulence that will pass. Rather, as Judith Eaton (2016) has said, we are now living in a “new normal” world of U.S. accreditation. That “new normal” arises from new demands from government and the public. Where the historical task of accreditation was to apply standards of performance and to assist in improving quality, the “new normal” requires a task more focused on compliance and transparency with respect to expectations largely advanced by government, with attention from students and a media-informed public.

Where the practice of accreditation was once self-study and peer review with recognition of institutional mission and autonomy, the “new normal” casts those core processes as methods to serve verification of compliance with largely nonacademic governmental priorities (such as cost, debt level, and loan default). Where accreditation once served a formative process, the “new normal” reflects more summative judgment. The traditional values of U.S. higher education accreditation – commitment to mission, academic freedom, and institutional autonomy – become abridged with increasing calls for uniformity, rising political and social advocacy, and declining trust in institutional judgment. In the “new normal,” accreditation reform is a given; what reform should look like, however, is not.

Critical Issues for the future course of U.S. higher education accreditation

A host of stakeholder voices point to what – from their perspective -- the current system needs. We find many valid – and contradictory – perspectives exist on what is wrong and how to fix it. The lack of consensus shows how accreditation reform is a complex and highly contested puzzle. Furthermore, the many stakeholder voices for reform often advance a desired

resolution, and each of those proposed solutions is notable and worthy of consideration. Taken together, however, what is clear is that no single perspective (or solution) is enough to design a future course. Rather, charting a path forward in this “new normal” is a complicated puzzle, and one that confronts us all. Considering Eaton’s leadership and a broad array of stakeholder views, we would argue that the puzzle includes a number of critical issues that must be considered if accreditation is to retain its valued strengths and also respond to the emerging context of higher education and the “new normal” of accreditation.

These critical issues include, first, understanding what accreditation is--in all its complexity--as well as understanding the diverse system of higher education it attempts to oversee. Second is the challenge of understanding “quality” in higher education in a way that is both measurable and valid. Third is how to account for accreditation’s trifold mission of quality assurance to serve regulators, quality improvement to support institutions, and quality indicators for consumer protection. Fourth is about what information is needed to serve these missions, including how to ensure its accuracy, appropriate use, and transparency. Last, the fifth issue concerns how to make room for innovation. None of these is simple, each brings several pieces to the larger puzzle, and all are interconnected. What is needed, and what we offer here, is bringing together these five critical issues, and considering the implications of each for reform in the “new normal” of accreditation.

Issue #1: Higher education in the U.S. is diverse and its oversight is complicated

As obvious as it might sound, any consideration of the puzzle of accreditation reform must recognize the diversity, variability, and untidiness of both accreditation and the system of higher education in the U.S. that it oversees. In terms of accreditors, alone, the number of agencies is in the hundreds, working with a wide range of institutions and a variety of academic programs. Their geographic scope varies as well. Just recently, accreditors once known as “regional” now potentially can take on a national scope. Some accreditors serve as gatekeepers to the over \$120 billion in annual federal aid, whether as part of their founding history or not, while others are not involved in federal student aid at all.

The system of higher education that U.S. accreditors oversee is not even really a system at all. There is not a national ministry of education in the USA – so there are at least 50 different sets of rules governing the operation of higher education providers. And the public, private-not-for-profit, and private-for-profit sectors all have different sources of regulation and pressure in their oversight. The vast number of private institutions means government authority is further limited, with everything from religious orders to venture capitalists influencing the mission and activities of the sector.

To complicate matters further, the oversight of higher education in the U.S. has been traditionally the responsibility of a triad of actors, ideally working in concert. Accreditation is one of the three – but only one. In designing any kind of reform, the role of the other two partners – the federal and state governments – must be considered as well. While the federal government takes a single approach to approving accreditation agencies to provide the sole path towards federal student aid, the different states each have a unique – and often wildly different – approach. Some states operate tight control and accreditation requirements, while others allow institutions of higher education to operate with limited external oversight.

With so many variations in accreditation agencies, institutions, and state and federal rules, any proposed reform can have unpredictable and unintended consequences. We see this even in the way accreditation now works as a quasi-regulator creating a very messy solution to the problem of the federal government’s increasing role in funding higher education in the 20th century. It emerged through incremental decisions over time, interpreted and implemented by accreditation agencies as state and federal government demands have shifted, even as the system of higher education has grown exponentially and changed dramatically. The choices

made more or less sense along the way, but the cumulative result we see today was never intentional. Simply put, if starting from scratch, no one would design it this way.

And, despite the messiness of where we are now, quality assurance is necessary for a modern system of higher education. Evaluation of institutional and program quality cannot be avoided, especially when no single observer – whether peer reviewer, policymaker, or member of the public – with expertise to assess the range of activities the U.S. system encourages. There are issues of local, regional, state, national, and global importance. Students and employers need to know which institutions to trust. With both institutional autonomy and governmental control important, we need to have structures to address accountability and stakeholder interest, while simultaneously appreciating the competitive environments that proprietary information needs to be protected. Higher education is expensive, too, and the financial realities of students, institutions, accreditors, investors, and taxpayers must be considered. Each of these perspectives, alone, is marked by important but incomplete or contradictory knowledge, and each is interconnected with the others. With complex problems like this, it will always be hard to find consensus on solutions. Indeed, the problems themselves are open to debate. These are the features of the “new normal” of accreditation.

So, we must take as a given that accreditation operates in this complicated and messy system. So far, the diverse perspectives on reform show very different perceptions of how the accreditation system works, varying understanding of the system of higher education itself, and different definitions of “the problem.” And, although it may seem like the easiest solution, it just is not practical to assert a single definition of the problem or push a preferred reform, without considering the ramifications for all the interconnected parts. Further, some may see the path forward through wholesale change, to just erase the whole system and start over again. But serious proposals must recognize that it all needs to work within a messy, complicated, and important system. Each element and point of view really matters.

Clearly, the path forward is not simple or obvious, and all voices need to be in the game as reform is underway and the rules are being negotiated. Key is to design reforms based on a better understanding of the source(s) of the problem, while recognizing the messiness and complicated nature of U.S. higher education and the role of accreditation within it. While there will certainly still be disagreement at the margins, and likely some continuing central debates, it will be important that we all have a consistent accounting of the issues at play and how reform, no matter the format or intent, will affect the system as a whole. While our well-intentioned actions may still become the source of new problems, we should be clear-eyed about our intent and rigorous in our assessment of the results of reforms.

We also need to design reforms in our “new normal” that do not damage the assets of the current system. That is, even with the zeal of reformation, there are important strengths and values that should be retained. Eaton (2018) points to several of these that can serve as guideposts to ensure that what is good is sustained. If we are to sustain the diversity of institutions of higher education in the U.S., then any reform must find ways to honor the diversity of missions that they pursue. If the academic enterprise is to continue as a place of intellectual autonomy, then any reform must place the task of judgment on the shoulders of knowledgeable peers, rather than on the less knowledgeable and arguably more costly alternatives. If quality *improvement* is to continue as a goal of accreditation, then the process of honest institutional self-appraisal will be an essential tool. And if we want higher education to improve, then we must ask of every reform effort, “how does this advance educational quality?”

Issue #2: The Problem of Defining Quality

Understanding what quality is and how to measure it is one of the most debated aspects of accreditation. Ironically for a system designed to measure and assure quality, accreditation

does not have a simple or direct answer to the problem of defining quality. Many definitions coexist, and they are often contradictory and either overly simplistic or frustratingly vague. While there are recognized “traditional” definitions of quality in higher education, there are also alternative definitions emerging from many quarters. Traditional definitions have tended to focus on the context and resources that an institution brings to bear on the educational experience. Is there a clear academic mission? Are there qualified faculty? Is the curriculum appropriate? What support services are available to students? Alternative definitions vary widely, with some – such as graduation rates, student learning outcomes, and post-graduate licensure performance –connected to the academic teaching and learning enterprise. Other alternatives, such as loan default rates of graduates, post-graduate income, or the impact of the institution on the local economy, are less connected.

Often, the “traditional” and “alternative” definitions are pitted against each other in an “inputs versus outputs” argument. Those focused on inputs suggest that quality is more likely to exist when systems and structures are in place to facilitate a strong learning environment. Those on the outputs side believe that quality is reflected in what a student gets out of the educational experience, and not in what the student encounters when he or she arrives on campus. The dichotomy of the debate when framed this way is actually not very helpful. It is reasonable to assume that higher quality resources as well as better use of what resources are available both generate positive and desirable results. In fact, much of the current practice in accreditation has already evolved from considering inputs as the primary form of evaluation to also examining indicators of student learning and achievement as outcomes.

It is not a large leap to move from the inputs-outputs debate to the larger question of what, exactly, is “quality” in higher education. Maybe we could agree that graduates should be employed, but would we agree about what counts as an adequate income? Do we simply make sure that the education provided is sufficiently rigorous for the degree awarded, and not concern ourselves with what student might do with the degree or its value in the labor market? Perhaps quality also means that public resources in support of education are directed appropriately and managed without risk to the taxpayer? Or that the institution’s mission is fulfilled? Those graduates become exemplary citizens. All these definitions (and more) are plausible, from different viewpoints, and all contribute to the larger challenge of defining exactly what it is that accreditation is supposed to assure and improve.

A significant part of this challenge stems from the institutional diversity that marks the U.S. system of higher education. The relevant outcomes for a research university are different from those sought by a community college. An online professional school attracts different students than a residential liberal arts college. This diversity would seem to dictate a mission-driven approach, where quality and outcomes are tailored to institutional mission. While mission-driven quality dovetails with the diversity of institutions in the U.S., it also leaves open the problem that an institution can assert a quality definition that is self-serving unless there are common standards all must meet. Further, such individualized approaches to defining quality makes it difficult to compare across institutions – an exercise valued from some policy and consumer perspectives. Nonetheless, a one-size-fits-all approach does not address the legitimate and important differences among institutions. Indicators need to vary to recognize that higher education institutions have different curricula, enroll different students with different reasons to attend, and serve interests that vary across a wide range of domestic and global stakeholders.

There is simply no consensus on what outcomes we should be paying attention to, who should judge their value, or whether institutions, programs or students should be the focus. We could measure quality in terms of demonstrated competencies, standardized test scores, diplomas received, or some version of being healthy, wealthy, and wise. And, beyond the student’s goals and the institution’s purpose, policymakers have other concerns as well. For example, the fiscally attentive might want to measure the impact on taxpayers, such as income earned, and

subsidized loans repaid. The consumer protection advocates might look at time to completion, student costs, and job prospects.

To complicate matters further, across all the possible legitimate outcomes of interest, accreditation may not necessarily be the entity best entity for evaluation. Even though there are changing expectations for what is to be achieved by higher education, accreditor expertise or capacity may not be suited to evaluating a given metric. So, even if we all agreed that income to debt ratios are important indicators of quality that does not mean that accreditation agencies should take on the responsibility of collecting the data and evaluating compliance with some agreed-upon standard.

Finally, we face another dilemma when it comes to measuring quality. Even if we all agree on a relevant outcome and an accreditation review is the proper venue to evaluate it, there is still the challenge of actual measurement in an objective and scalable manner. Student learning outcomes, for example, may only be visible through imperfect proxies such as grade point averages, critical thinking assessments, or certifications based on an external exam. Further, the choice of quantitative or qualitative measurements introduces variability in the extent to which the evaluation is considered objective or relative. Does the student “meet expectations” or earn 87 out of 100 points? Taking these issues together, the “lamppost problem” shows up clearly: looking for your lost keys under a lamppost because you can see better is no different than measuring learning by checking the most easily calculated indicators. Assessment always necessitates evaluating the validity and reliability of the measures themselves.

How, then, can we approach reform, in the “new normal?” The challenge of defining and measuring quality cannot be solved by forging a new measuring tool nor by shifting allegiance from process to outcome. Nor can it be solved by adopting a singular focus. In the “new normal” of accreditation, it has become common to veer towards definitions and measurements of quality that mainly arise from governmental policy interests, and that can be displayed simply and understood easily. Metrics such as graduation rates and loan default figures dominate public-facing information systems (see, for instance, U.S. Department of Education, n.d.) and become routine points of inquiry in the evaluation of whether accreditors are reliable judges of quality (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). While this may begin to address the concerns of some, it offers an incomplete view. To be meaningful, quality definitions must be concerned with the wide variety of student goals, with both broadly defined and narrowly targeted missions, and with policy goals that change over time. And to be trustworthy, efforts to evaluate quality must be made with a full awareness of the challenges of measurement.

Issue #3: The Many Missions of Accreditation

Observers will quickly affirm that the purpose of accreditation – its mission -- has expanded considerably over the last few decades, and that accreditors themselves are no longer the “owners” of accreditation policy. Who “owns” accreditation policy, now, and what, exactly, does this policy cover? Pieces of policy about higher education quality are in federal law and regulation, in state law and regulation, and in the rules of the private entities that serve as accreditation agencies. And what accreditation policy is supposed to DO is even more diffuse: Is policy supposed to assure quality? Nudge institutions to improve? Protect consumers? Although *quality assurance*, *quality improvement* and *consumer protection* might seem like similar missions, they actually involve different stakeholders, methods, and goals. Indeed, like higher education itself, accreditation is an aggregation of different missions, layered on over time by a succession of stakeholders who laid claim on accreditation for particular purposes. This raises many questions to consider in the “new normal,” and in any effort towards reform.

Perhaps the most basic of these questions arises from the national context. As noted earlier, the oversight of higher education in the U.S. is supposed to be shared by three partners. In theory, the Triad of oversight by the states, federal government and accreditation agencies

creates a comprehensive model for the oversight of higher education. Accreditors focus on academic quality; states authorize institutional operations and keep an eye on consumer protection; the federal government attends to matters of concern to federal financial aid. However, the Triad is not equilateral with respect to the authority of each of the three parts. The federal government holds clear power over accreditation in the assignment to them the role of gatekeeper to student federal aid. In turn, states vary widely in their interest and capacity for consumer protection functions (although their authorization of institutional operations has recently become more uniform) (Fain, 2019).

Furthermore, shifts in any one leg of the Triad inevitably impact the role and effectiveness of the other two, and the shifts in the federal and state legs have yielded an increased regulatory role for accreditation. From the increased regulatory expectations for accreditors arises another question: Can (and should) accreditors be “regulators?” Having been assigned as the gateway through which federal student aid flows, their function as part of the governmental regulatory apparatus has been in place for over 50 years. Can they function effectively in this role? And should they even, have it?

There are several intertwined threads to consider here, beginning with what it is that a regulator does. In mechanics, a regulator is designed to maintain a *desired* characteristic. In policy, regulators establish desired standards and hold industries accountable for maintaining them. Automobiles should have seatbelts. Alcohol should not be sold to minors. Manufacturing plants should not emit toxic fumes. Higher education should... But what would be the desired characteristic best to complete that sentence? We well know that a new administration brings new “desires” for higher education, and even that “desires” might well vary from one corner of the government to another. This creates a principal-agent problem (Ewell, 2018).

The government as the principal gives its agent accreditor the responsibility for some regulatory tasks because they have the expertise to get it done. A new principal then changes direction and asks for something different from the agent, who is expected to simply shift direction as priorities change. But accreditation agencies have their own expertise to bring to bear and also keep their own goals in mind as they work to fulfill the changing directions from the government principals. The growing mismatch between what the government is asking and what accreditors may provide creates an unsustainable tension.

Another of the intertwined threads to consider is that accreditation is, in effect, self-regulation. A principal-agent problem again emerges, accreditation agencies not only serve the federal government, but they also act on behalf of their member institutions. In this view, with institution as principal and accreditor as agent, the student’s interest does not necessarily have a voice. Further, it can be argued that the model of accreditors being membership organizations creates a conflict of interest, with those being regulated also setting the terms of their regulation. This sets up the potential for regulatory capture, allowing institutions free range to operate as they see fit while being protected from outside competition.

An accreditor (the agent, from this perspective) may only be able to take actions that boost their institutional members – the principals – and may have limited capacity to actually hold their member institutions accountable for any activity or outcome other than ones the institutions themselves designate. Rules in the Higher Education Act do prevent accreditation agencies from having a too close relationship with any “affiliated trade association or membership organization,” but the lack of independence from the members themselves remains a potential sticking point for consumer protection. While there is public vigilance about quid pro quo actions, there remains a risk in handing over-regulation to such constituent organizations.

This is not to say that quality assurance should occur without consultation and involvement of those with expertise and experience running institutions of higher education. But there does need to be acknowledgment of the risk of the current model and more explicit ways to address

those risks. To which leg of the Triad that risk mitigation belongs -- whether accreditation, or the state or the federal government -- is a matter that still needs to be resolved. A third thread embedded in this part of the puzzle comes from the very real proposition that accreditors are not even very good at being a regulator (Fuller & Belkin, 2015; Waldman, 2015). With billions of dollars of financial aid at stake, some institutions have clearly acted in ways that accreditation processes are not well-designed to counter. And, perhaps worse yet, accreditors might well fail to provide the student consumer protection functions assigned to them by states (Douglas-Gabriel, 2019).

A fourth thread -- a thick and knotty rope, some would argue -- stems from the volume of federal student aid in the mix. Some have argued that eligibility for federal student aid should be delinked from accreditation. If aid were not in the mix, then the focus could be on providing information on academic quality, while some other entity in the Triad takes on aid eligibility questions. As satisfying a solution as that might seem, it raises new concerns about what happens to quality assurance without accreditation agencies providing that review. If the need to preserve federal student aid eligibility no longer incentivized institutions to participate in accreditation quality assurance and improvement, how many would continue to seek and accept the advice and judgment of these agencies?

The other side of the coin is also disheartening: if aid is awarded without consideration of academic quality, would economic based return on investment become the only relevant outcome for higher education? And if one insists that academic quality is still relevant, and accreditors are foreclosed from the process, then might college and universities find themselves now answering to a federal bureaucracy for such assessments. This would likely be even more intrusive than the current system, and certainly would constrain the values of independence and autonomy that undergird the US system of higher education.

Raising these concerns about the role of accreditation as a gatekeeper for federal funds, however, does not mean that they will drive decision-making about the future of accreditation. Many critics argue that accreditation is incapable of serving as a proper agent for the federal government, especially given how vital student aid is to the functioning of the system. Another system -- any other system -- would be preferable. But what system could actually do a better job of protecting the governments over \$120 billion investment? How would the enormous costs of individually evaluating institutional activities be paid for if the membership fee funding model is tossed aside, and volunteer peer reviewers can't be counted on? It seems unlikely in this era that a new division of the Department of Education -- or Department of Commerce -- would be established to take on that role. It seems clear that there would be a real financial cost to replace accreditation in its gatekeeping role for federal aid programs.

We just do not know what that cost is, because it is currently hidden in the dispersed budgets of the designated accreditation agencies. We also have no sense of how a replacement would impact the diversity of higher education, the ability of colleges and universities to act in the public interest, or the international standing they currently enjoy. And, perhaps even more importantly, to take such a move is to gamble with the value of educational quality and its effectiveness as a core institution in society. Each of these threads -- the nature of regulation, the risks of self-regulation, the poor track record as regulator, and the role as an agent of federal aid regulation -- all raise significant questions about how -- and if -- accreditation can serve a regulatory, compliance-focused function, and whether -- and if -- this should be the main focus of reform efforts.

Setting regulatory reform aside for the moment, there is a separate -- but, of course, connected -- question about whether quality improvement, quality assurance or compliance, and consumer protection missions can even coexist within one entity. Some argue that accreditation should just place the consumer protection role or quality improvement function in the foreground. Indeed, focusing on improving higher education or providing an objective

source of information for students would be much simpler when more than \$120 billion in federal student aid is not in the picture. In support of this, we can look to the accreditation work that U.S. accreditors undertake internationally.

Here, there is no U.S. government role, and no federal student aid at stake – leaving the motivation for engaging in the system only about establishing quality metrics and legitimacy in the global marketplace for education. There is also a case to be made for accreditors stepping out of the role of federal regulator, and replacing that function with a simple, federally run financial audit process (Neal, 2008). Some would even argue that even having accreditation as a regulatory gatekeeper to federal student aid does not do much to mitigate the risks surrounding using taxpayer dollars to support higher education (Bergeron, 2018).

From this vantage point, delinking eligibility for federal student aid from accreditation approvals would be a natural step. If access to federal student aid were removed from the various functions of accreditation, then the definition and enforcement of quality standards would move away from governmental mandate and towards agreements emerging from the constituent institutions. There may also be a case to be made for removing the consumer protection function from the accreditor role. With the diversity of institutions, the diversity of accreditors, and the diversity of elements under review in an accreditation process, it is hard to imagine accreditation would really be the most effective source of consumer information about institutions of higher education without resorting to crude, one-size-fits-none metrics for evaluation.

Offering comparable information about, say, graduation rates tell the consumer very little when institutions vary so widely, and when students pursue their education in them for so many different reasons. (However, as noted in the next section, institutions *themselves* could be better at disclosing consumer information relevant to their particular mission, offerings, and student motivation and outcomes.) Further, despite easily issued claims that an accreditor can (or should) “shut that place down,” accreditors have no such power. State authority governs institutional operations – and the regulation behind that authority varies by state. Decisions about providing effective consumer information might well be better driven by market forces and targeted to meeting the full range of student needs (see, for instance, social mobility index, 2019, or launch my career, n.d.).

How, then, can we approach reform, with these many missions and many masters? In reviewing the issues associated with the multiple expectations, it seems very likely that much of the foundation giving rise to the “new normal” can be found in the threads outlined above. With the assignment of a federal regulatory role, the government interest and influence on what accreditation looks like climbs. With a concerned public, and inconsistent state consumer protection, the press for an active watchdog function expands. These forces, in turn, may well crowd out consideration of the nuances of academic mission and quality, and also set into the background the whole quality improvement function. Of course, one path towards reform would be to roll back those multiple expectations: Assign the federal regulation function to some other quarter and get the states to step up their consumer protection functions. Given the questions noted above about delinking accreditation from federal aid eligibility, this might not be such a wise step. And, given their history and the number of other weighty challenges they face, it seems unlikely that states will coalesce into a uniform and active stance on consumer protection.

Instead, a better path might focus on what kind of reform might clarify – or at least not further complicate – the many missions and masters that accreditation serves. For instance, in the “new normal” if aid is continued to be linked to accreditation, there will likely be a need to rethink the principal-agent problems. Recall here that the federal principal tasks the more knowledgeable accreditation agent to perform a needed function. How might the knowledge of accreditors be put to best use? Could the federal government find ways other than mandated

easy but clumsy metrics to reassure themselves that their dollars are adequately guarded by that knowledge?

When the priorities of the federal principal change (as they are wont to do, every 4 or 8 years), how could those priorities be managed by the federal government, rather than rather than by the accreditors? For the member institution-accreditor problem, might there be a way to insert a focus on students and their experience as a mitigation strategy against conflicts of interest? Or, extending that focus further, might there be more ways in which the consumer protection functions of the states might be brought to bear on principal-agent problems that occur within their borders? And, from a different angle, might the gatekeeping function be more broadly shared across the Triad, with, for example, a multi-key strategy for opening the gate with financial viability evaluated in the federal domain, academic quality in the accreditation domain, and consumer protection in the states of operation.

Navigating multiple expectations in the “new normal” would also call for finding ways to bring the role of quality improvement more into the foreground while also appreciating the nuances embedded in the diversity of institutional missions. With quality improvement as a goal, might there be ways for accreditors to work more with their constituent institutions to create their own meaningful comparison benchmarks through similarity of dimensions such mission or students served. Further, might this (or other) quality improvement efforts be considered in service of the quality assurance and consumer protection missions?

Issue #4: Accreditation in the Age of Information: What Information is Relevant and Useful?

Accreditation in the U.S. operates within a context of increasing curiosity and inquiry about the processes and outcomes of accreditation (and perhaps also increasing suspicion about what is being held private). Further, there is more data about different elements of student experience and institutional performance, more easily accessed and more easily shared. Taken together, these trends yield rising calls for more information and transparency on the part of institutions and accreditors. When it comes to information, our collective bias tends to be that more is better. Data is absolutely necessary to the accreditation process, and transparency is clearly useful in helping to interpret decisions and holding organizations accountable. What, then, could be problematic about information and transparency for accreditation reform?

One response to this question arises from posing another: How transparent should (and can) accreditation be? Current practice lacks transparency in significant ways. Confidential self-study reports and confusing terminology, for example, make the accreditation process difficult to fathom even for those who work in higher education, let alone the average consumer. There are no readily accessible reporting mechanisms that let the general public see the inner workings of accreditation and help them fully understand the underlying issues that may be revealed, even as accreditors and recent federal reporting requirements mean that more information is available now than ever before.

However, even with more transparency from the accreditation process, it is often difficult to identify what information is really useful to help the public or policymakers really understand what is happening at a given institution. It is doubtful that reading through the 200+ pages of an institution’s self-study would be an activity readily undertaken by the public – nor would such a reading provide the kind of information that would be useful for a prospective student or interested consumer. The same “usefulness” issue arises when evaluating even the information provided in an agency’s decision documents. For example, from one accreditor, an institution can receive a sanction called a “Denial of Reaffirmation of Accreditation with the Imposition of a Sanction,” which actually allows it to keep its accreditation. Alternately, an institution might receive “Accreditation Extended for Good Cause,” that is actually a warning that deficiencies still exist, and the institution is in danger of losing accreditation. Agency policy

documents clearly spell out the definitions of these statements, but the labels seem to be poor signals to the public about the true status of an institution.

Apart from these consumer information concerns; questions also arise for institutions and accreditors about what kinds of information should be shared and what should remain confidential. Some details of institutional functioning, financial standing, and academic program projections must be handled with discretion. And given the goal of honest self-reflection within a model that includes both formative and summative assessment, institutional leaders should be able to trust that not every disclosure of a problem--or critique of a process--will be publicly aired. A system that required complete disclosure would inevitably lead to an adversarial system necessitating expensive forensic investigations to uncover what the institution might prefer to reserve. Perhaps, then, a middle ground might be that some subset of information is confidential, but all institutions should disclose most of the self-study to the public, including outcome metrics relevant to standards.

Determining where that middle ground lies, though, remains a point of controversy. As it stands now, virtually nothing is disclosed without the consent of the institutional leadership. The accreditation agency has typically provided very limited information about the review, especially if the outcome is positive. While sunshine laws and norms around government accountability often require public institutions to provide more information about the accreditation review, private institutions do not have the same expectations or pressure to reveal their internal documentation to those outside the accreditation process. Widespread and uniform disclosure is not a likely candidate for voluntary adoption and probably would require some additional legal or regulatory guidance to enforce new expectations along these lines. Or, if some confidentiality is to be permitted, how should information about the accreditation review be made available? Redactions of some sort might be used, but would that be under the control of the accreditor or the institution? Disputes over what information is revealed and what is redacted would need to be resolved, likely in the same cloistered discussions where the current issues with a lack of transparency would still thrive.

Clearly, the many calls for more transparency are important to heed, and not all of them make sense – or could be easily operationalized -- when examined more closely. That said, it is useful to acknowledge that information plays several different roles when we consider quality in higher education, and to consider some caveats on those roles. For example, information transparency is often promoted to enhance accountability. But transparency does not necessarily mean anything revealed is relevant or useful. The presentation of information can still be confusing or misleading (whether or not that is the intent). As a second example, information also serves the roles of fraud prevention and consumer protection.

Identifying bad actors and keeping consumers from being taken advantage of is certainly a laudable goal. But if fraud *prevention* is the goal, accreditation may not be the best venue for that mechanism. And, in yet another example, information also is a tool to help students understand their options and consider how well a given institution will meet their goals. While this would potentially be a valuable consumer resource, there is no structure in place that allows students to compare institutions with anything more than superficial statistics or via commercialized college rankings. Attempts to create such a structure have not panned out (Glastris & Kelchen, 2018), and it is not clear that it would be wise to add this regulatory function to the roster of roles that accreditation already has.

This discussion would not be complete without the recognition of how expensive information can be to gather, analyze, and prepare for public review. Virtually all institutions now employ staff just for this purpose, augmented by ad-hoc teams put in place to prepare a self-study for the periodic accreditation review. The cost also extends to the accreditation agencies themselves, including attending to the potential liabilities inherent in asking for information that give such intimate insight into the academic resources and financial viability of an

institution. What information is collected and for what purpose has deep consequences for accreditation with constraints not easily waived away. How, then, can we approach reform, in the “new normal” age of information? Perhaps it is best to frame the issue, first, as one about identifying the goal. What purpose is to be served? Is information to be gathered and disclosed so that the public understands the rationale for an accreditation decision? Or perhaps consumer protection is paramount? Accountability for quality assurance may be another goal, especially when accreditors fail to act when they should.

These goals suggest very different paths forward with respect to the types of information that are relevant to collect and what is necessary to reveal. Yes, we can assert that more information would be good, but it seems necessary, first, to discuss what we are trying to achieve with information before such an assertion can have a practical impact. Debates about goals aside, it is important to recognize that data of all kinds are more available than ever and restrictions on data are increasingly difficult to justify and sustain. The focus still should be on data for quality improvement that is at the core of the accreditation process. We need to consider not only what is desired, but also what would be helpful tempered by what is possible. Eaton’s portrait of the “new normal” addresses these issues, when she points out that not all information is needed or relevant. However, she argues, one way to rebalance the government-heavy character of the “new normal” would be for institutions and accreditors, themselves and in conjunction with each other, to take a more active role in defining, managing, and providing accurate, useful information in consumer-friendly ways. A case has also been made for an amplified role for accreditors, in particular, to take leadership in making information relevant and understood (Studley, 2018).

Issue #5: Making Room for Innovation

Accreditation is consistently critiqued for being resistant to innovation. It is argued that accreditors as membership associations offer too much ground for inbreeding, too few ways to break with tradition, and even an incentive for those “in the club” to try to eliminate competition from outside innovators. Are these critiques valid? In some ways, yes, and intentionally so. As the guardian of quality, the accreditation process must be inherently skeptical of claims about quality that have not yet been verified. Accreditation agencies generally start with the foundation of what has worked in the past, and demand evidence before accepting new claims of success. While this might seem like rigid adherence to tradition of one already “in the club,” it is actually a key way that accreditation offers confidence in its assurance function and provides fiscally responsible protection for federal student aid.

In other ways, though, there is a paradox, in that the process of accreditation also inherently promotes innovation. With their quality improvement mission, accreditors look for institutions to identify where they are not meeting their goals and what they plan to do to change. Those changes, by definition, are innovation (and, of course, are subject to the same skepticism outlined above). “How do you know this is good (or better)?” is a question wisely posed regardless of whether the new activity is the product of tradition – or of inspiration or evaluation (or both). It is also of note that the eligibility requirements and quality standards of an accreditor are under regular review – presumably with that same skepticism – thereby ensuring that eligibility and quality review are grounded in evidence.

This paradox of accreditation having both conservative tendencies and an improvement culture is an essential tension within accreditation. Openness to change – and requiring evidence of benefit – is exactly what quality *improvement* is about: identifying what can be better, figuring out how to do better, and demonstrating that something better has indeed occurred. But this paradox gives rise to challenges for both institutions and accreditors: Institutions or other providers who seek to innovate (whether currently accredited or seeking to become so) might well find themselves in the odd situation of being both successful in identifying places for improvement and also guilty of doing things too differently; accreditors, with their mission for

quality improvement, might find that they have success in facilitating change in some ways, and also guilty of creating a barrier to change others.

The conditions that give rise to these contradictions stem from the reality that although we tend to regard innovation as good, not everything that is “new” is automatically favorable. Some change actually is the old method, just painted differently. Some changes turn out to be worse than what was done before. The “new” is not always better, and goal of quality assurance and improvement is only served if an accreditor can tell the difference between a transformative breakthrough and an outrageous scam. Consequently, accreditation must necessarily be cautious about novelty, and must have reliable ways of appraising if what is new is indeed good (or better). Although endorsing an innovative practice quickly has some appeal, the rewards of doing so are often not as great as the risks for students (and for the federal student aid) if the new practice ends up producing worse outcomes. Move too quickly, and students can be harmed, and public dollars wasted. Move too slowly, and progress in higher education is thwarted.

How, then, can we approach reform, to make the right space for innovation? There would be considerable agreement with the idea that we need to make the right place for innovation in higher education. Change is inevitable and improvement is essential. But how do we do so, and also recognize that a greater speed of change will inevitably need a higher tolerance for failure? Making room for innovation in the “new normal” might well arise from government and accreditors alike offering a bit more flexibility in how the quality assurance tasks is approached. A recommitment to the quality improvement elements of accreditation would help. And, while one would not want to divorce the quality review process from the expert judgment of knowledgeable peers (who may well be more familiar with tradition), there also needs to be nuance in drawing the line between “bad actors” and “innovative actors.”

With this in mind, it might be worth considering whether there needs to be a designated space for innovation for which the evaluated outcomes are not yet known. One option might be an accreditation entity that is tailored specifically for trying out new, experimental activities and that offers the kind of formative tolerance that gathering evidence about a new practice warrant. Such an option might include a level of oversight that is connected to the level of risk that the innovation poses. Existing accreditation agencies could also develop innovative subsidiaries or develop partnership with other educational innovators to serve the same purpose. We do not suggest throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Rather we think innovation has a place within the existing accreditation frameworks that can serve current institutions well while also forming a sandbox environment to try out new models and evaluate nontraditional educational entities. If the ultimate test of merit is quality assurance and quality improvement of higher education in all its forms, this would continue the conservative strength of accreditation today and combine it with the mindset of transformation that has greater tolerance for risk.

The puzzle: What is the path forward in the “new normal” of accreditation?

Higher education accreditation in the U.S. is a complex puzzle, with many interrelated (and often conflicting) elements. There are many goals assigned to accreditation, many definitions of the quality it is supposed to oversee, many calls for information about institutions and about the accreditation process itself, and many ways in which the forward progress of higher education could be fostered or thwarted. And, in the “new normal,” we can see a weightier hand of government, a rising array of inquiries from a concerned public, and a shrinking respect for institutional diversity and autonomy. How, then, do we chart a path forward? One course of action, of course, is to do nothing. For those daunted by the complexity of this puzzle, doing nothing would be appealing. But for those who assert that the time for the old system of accreditation has passed, and that the needs of the higher education system in the USA will soon outstrip accreditation’s ability to keep up, such a path of least resistance is unacceptable.

Furthermore, that path ignores the fact that very few stakeholders are happy with the status quo.

The challenges presented by the 2020 onset of a global pandemic, however, suggest doing nothing is not a viable option. Institutions were forced to make a quick pivot to alternative modes of education, making decisions that have had enormous consequences with financial, organizational, and governance implications. Colleges and universities are facing nearly insurmountable challenges in how and when and where education is offered, and in how and when and where its quality can be evaluated. Accreditation systems will need to consider and respond to the new environment. To this, we would emphasize that institutions (and accreditors) having to move fast is not an excuse to lower the bar or to implement short-sighted solutions that would only add to the patchwork that is the puzzle of accreditation reform. Sustaining standards of quality is still important, even in challenging times, and even when there are more than enough other pressing issues to address the needs of a struggling populace.

With the pandemic – or any of the other disruptions that will inevitably appear over time – there is challenge, and with challenge there is opportunity: opportunity for rethinking, redesigning, reforming. And, as we have said earlier, that opportunity is best addressed with full consideration of the multiple elements and points of view that make up the messy, complicated, and important system that we have. We would argue that reform is not only inevitable but also desirable. That said, it is important to recognize – and sustain -- the strengths inherent in the current U.S. system of accreditation: There is respect for the autonomy of higher education, and for the growing commitments from institutions to support and advance the knowledge economy. The current system reflects and values a diversity of student goals and institutional missions.

There is both an appreciation of the value of providing a public good, and recognition of private gains. It has inspired quality assurance models across the globe. Policymakers continue to endorse it as the path towards access federal dollars, even as accreditors resist being constrained to only serving as a gateway to student aid and insist on sustaining their commitments to serving institutional needs and an improvement-oriented--rather than compliance-oriented – agenda. If one is looking for a structure with the capacity to develop and support a transformative higher education enterprise, accreditation is well-positioned to be the core entity that will shape what the system will look like in the coming decades.

The “new normal” does not mean the strengths of the old normal lose all relevance. Mindful of this even as change is envisioned, what might be the path ahead? As we have argued above, no single perspective (or solution) is enough to design a future course. Rather, the solving the puzzle of reform requires attention to a number of critical issues that must be considered if accreditation is to retain its valued strengths, respond to the emerging context of higher education, and be shielded from incurring more unintended consequences.

While we would hesitate to forecast exactly what the puzzle solution looks like, we would certainly hope for a system of accreditation that we can trust to catch bad actors and work with those who want to get better. We would expect one that is open to innovative models and methods while continuing to value the expertise of academics built over time. We would insist on continued respect for institutional diversity as a transformed system of accreditation pushes colleges and universities to be responsive to changing demographics, technology, and societal needs. It should appreciate its place in the global higher education marketplace, but not succumb to market pressure over public service.

Transparency with respect to quality assessment to help people make decisions about higher education – whether students, policymakers, or institutional leaders – would be at the core. And finally, the transformed system should continue to foster a commitment to mission-focused institutional autonomy and academic freedom all in the service of student learning. And we would echo Eaton’s reminder that, ultimately, accreditation needs to be about what

happens for students, and that institutions, policymakers, and accreditors all have responsibilities in achieving these goals.

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Chapter 34

How Confidence in Skills and Abilities May Affect "Higher" Education Quality Frameworks

Lucas Kavlie

Introduction

The American public has a general distrust of higher education. Attending college—not just graduating from college – used to grant assurance of higher-level thought and advanced levels of skills. Having attended college was a status symbol that invoked awe in the general public. At some point in the late Twentieth Century, these correlations began to fray. While moving towards the second quarter of the Twenty-first Century, employers see growing gaps in the career readiness of college graduates. For example, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (“NACE,” 2019) found that 95.1% of employers consider “professionalism/work ethic” to be “essential” or “absolutely essential” for college graduates, yet these same employers only observe these levels in 46.5% of college graduates – a 48.6% gap between desire and observance. Similarly large, negative gaps exist for “communication” (44.2%), “problem-solving” (38.6%), and “leadership” (25.9%). In other words, the products of college education are not meeting the needs of the labor force in the United States.

In order to function well, each society must have individuals who have skills and abilities, regardless of where these skills and abilities are learned. The ability to communicate goes beyond two people speaking the same language, for example. Communication requires the ability to convey a message to another that is able to be understood by a receiving individual in the way it was intended to be received. Conveying simple messages is an ability, but the receiver’s ability to interpret the message with all of the nuances intended by the sending individual is a skill. Miscommunications can occur through misinterpretations of the message (e.g., “At the fork in the road, I should turn left?” “Right.” “Okay, I will turn right.” “No, you will be right [correct] to turn left.”), through ambiguity in the message (e.g., “My house is the third one on the left.” “Which street are you referencing, what is the crossroad, and which direction will I be traveling?”), or through other intentional or unintentional ways. Individuals in a functioning society must learn nuances in communication and be willing to ask enough questions to alleviate as many misinterpretations as possible.

At birth, individuals enter a life-long pursuit of knowledge. At an early age, most people enter a formal system of education that has been structured to assist parents in curating the skills and abilities needed to function in society. Through different levels of education (usually defined by an annual path of progression), the individual gains information that has been shaped to produce a person who is able to function at the completion of this formal training. This progression is only possible, however, due to the complicated structure of knowledge attainment that has been created. Progressing from Grade 1 to Grade 2 is logical, but the progression only occurs if the individual has succeeded in obtaining the skills and abilities needed to complete Grade 1.

What level of skill or ability is needed at each point of progression is the source of debate by scholars, practitioners, parents, and other interested parties. Though the intent of this debate is to produce an individual who is ready to contribute to society upon reaching the legal age of adulthood (which in the United States occurs on the person’s 18th birthday), each person should continue to learn beyond the attainment of age 18 and completion of Grade 12. The legal age of work in the United States is 14, so many individuals are contributing to society through labor

while in Grades 9, 10, 11 and beyond. The positions that these teenagers are taking are usually classified as “entry-level jobs,” which include additional training and development to help the person understand the tasks while building skills and abilities to progress into positions requiring advanced skills and abilities. Where does postsecondary or “higher” education fit into this scheme?

As noted at the beginning, attainment of a degree does not mean that graduates have the skills and abilities needed to succeed in the workforce. Without this connection, higher education moves away from “professional development” and moves towards “personal development.” Personal development, too, is beneficial for the individual student; but the pure cost of a higher education credential is too steep to return mere personal development for most consumers’ investments. There must be a better way to ensure that skill and ability attainment is entwined with the credential – even if students choose to pursue a degree that is not immediately tied to a profession.

Selingo & Sigelman (2021) concur and suggest this alternative: “Providing students, regardless of their major, with the skills that employers are seeking should be part of every academic department’s curriculum. For example, psychology, a perennially popular major with more than 100,000 graduates a year, is a field with limited prospects for those who don’t pursue advanced studies. But a psychology major who acquires data analysis skills through research or internships can unlock more than 100,000 additional entry-level jobs paying on average \$60,000, versus \$39,000 for psychology majors overall” (a 53.8% increase in pay with minimal investment of additional courses).

If there is no direct tie to a profession or a tenuous tie to a profession, the credential should include additional, marketable skills that will help in job attainment from the outset. Better yet, all credentials should have a tie to a profession through the mapping of skills in each offered course! “A comprehensive skills map...can serve as a lingua franca, creating a common language for educators and industry. As a consequence, colleges and universities across the nation can play a central role in helping learners at all stages of life to capitalize on their experience and prior learning, while also identifying and filling the skill gaps that hold them back from achieving their goals” (Verougstraete, 2019).

The big issue in moving from traditional forms of higher education programming to a skills-based form of higher education programming is the current higher education quality/regulatory framework, which was built on the backs of individual courses and tied to a “credit hour” in the early 1900s (Laitinen, 2012).

There is a robust regulatory schema in place in American higher education. This schema is disaggregated and left to each state to oversee, for the concept of “education” is not found in America’s legal cornerstone, The Constitution of the United States. According to Amendment X (ten) of The Constitution, “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.” An important fact in American civics is that we are the “United States [plural] of America” rather than the “United State [singular] of America.” Each state is governed by a system that roughly mirrors the national system, yet each state has the power – through the Tenth Amendment – to regulate education. Differences abound in legislative and regulatory frameworks and in implementation strategies of each American jurisdiction.

Similar to how geopolitical boundaries around the world may place homogeneous people groups into two or more countries, the boundaries of each individual state within the United States may separate ideologically similar people. Nonetheless, the representative democracies of the individual states have dictated rules, standards, and policies that guide each state’s educational system. Some states have joined together to create educational consortia, and some of these consortia have joined together to create higher education areas that mimic higher

education areas globally (e.g., European Higher Education Area). All of this is accomplished to attempt to standardize the nomenclature when we compare educational attainment from one jurisdiction to another, but the regulatory structure may allow large deviations between baccalaureate graduates from two institutions.

To help standardize the nomenclature within colleges and universities, higher education quality frameworks exist. Inside the United States, beyond the quality frameworks for each state (three examples include the Georgia Nonpublic Postsecondary Education Commission, www.gnpec.georgia.gov; the South Dakota Board of Regents, www.sdbor.edu; and the Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education, www.ppse.az.gov) are voluntary quality assurance agencies (three examples include the New England Commission of Higher Education, www.neche.org; the Distance Education Accrediting Commission, www.deac.org; and the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges, www.accsc.org).

A common denominator in most quality frameworks is a focus on certificates and degrees. This focus makes sense when considering the membership of the organizations is colleges and universities, but what happens when the credentials deviate from the needs of the consumers of the credentials? With greater deviation between employer needs and university graduates, something needs to change. Either employers will begin to seek alternate providers of skilled labor (which has been happening among the primary and secondary educator workforce where the requirements to become a teacher have created Alternate Routes to Licensure or Alternate Routes to Certification), or the providers of skilled labor will need to rethink their production lines.

All of this information was relevant before the global pandemic known as COVID-19, but the pandemic exacerbated each aforementioned issue. Regulatory frameworks that were built to create standardized labor forces were severely disrupted as the fieldwork portion of the degree was eliminated from the program. Individual states established emergency rules to help candidates progress through completion of a degree, but those rules may affect the skill of the future licensed professional. If these rule changes prove to have minimal-to-no effect on the future licensed professional, agencies must ask questions like, “Why have we included these requirements and/or barriers to entry for this profession?” According to Emily Bogus (2020), “...rule-making agencies will need to look at the temporary agency policies and determine whether any of them should be made permanent.” These are precisely the questions that need to be asked by all quality frameworks.

The pandemic has given an opportunity to reexamine quality frameworks and decide what matters. Though most quality assurance agencies have a keen interest and/or standards for students learning outcome data, those data continue the focus on what institutions want to produce. Showing evidence that students are meeting the desired outcomes does not prove that these outcomes are worth producing. Going further, attempting to raise the percentage of students who are attaining these outcomes may be incentivizing inequities or exacerbating equity gaps. Rather than working to build personalized pathways for the success of each student, aggregated student learning outcome data suggest that raising entrance barriers (e.g., higher GPA on entry) will bring better students and ensure that more students will meet the outcomes and/or measures of success that the institution has created.

Where is the industry in this equation? Why do small groups of people in isolated program councils help to dictate the needs of multiple industries when aggregated data such as NACE’s *Job Outlook* are proving large gaps? It is time to rethink how confidence in skills and abilities may affect higher education quality frameworks before industry completely circumvents the tertiary education system for its talent pipeline. So, what do we currently know? We know that postsecondary education follows secondary education. Wrong! Several jurisdictions have built systems to allow the equivalent attainment of higher education concurrent with the attainment of secondary education. AP exams, CLEP exams, dual enrollment systems of concurrent

attainment of secondary and postsecondary credits, et cetera demonstrate that the barrier between secondary and tertiary levels is permeable if not imaginary.

We know that postsecondary education is needed to get a good job. Wrong! From the highest pulpit in America, Executive Order 13932 of June 26, 2020 stated, “This order directs important, merit-based reforms that will replace degree-based hiring with skills- and competency-based hiring and will hold the civil service to a higher standard – ensuring that the individuals most capable of performing the roles and responsibilities required of a specific position are those hired for the position – that is more in line with the principles on which the merit system rests.” This order opened the door for individuals without a college-level education to enter into public service positions that have historically overlooked individuals without a degree-in-hand. Where many job descriptions have “minimum education requirements” that include a college credential, job descriptions for federal employment eliminated this minimum requirement to maximize the pool of talent available to hire.

We know that higher education graduates leave their institutions prepared to do what needs to be done in their first jobs. Wrong! Though colleges and universities are working to develop skills and abilities in each graduate, there is a disconnect between what academics want their students to know and what employers need their students to know. “Higher education institutions should be talent engines that foster innovation and competence development, without being hostages of organizations, however, a fruitful collaboration may be co-constructed and fostered. In addition, despite several studies approaching this concern, there is still insufficient understanding of how these competencies can be fostered and developed” (Abelha et al., 2020).

We know that graduates get great jobs as soon as they finish their programs. Wrong! Fewer than three of five graduates will find employment at-or-above their level of academic attainment. Those who become underemployed out of college are “five times more likely to remain so after five years than those who are not underemployed in their first job. And once in that rut, the chances of escape are slim” (Burning Glass Technologies and Strada Institute for the Future of Work, 2018). So, what is true about educational attainment? We know that earning higher education degrees remain the best pathway to career and family success and that children of college graduates are more likely to persist to college graduation than first-generation students at universities (Cataldi, Bennett, & Chen, 2018). In other words, institutions and quality assurance frameworks owe it to the next generation of society to find out ways to ensure that a college education remains attainable. To remain attainable, we need to find ways to consider the transformation of higher education.

Interestingly, Judith Eaton discussed transformation in a *Change Magazine* article in 2018: “Factors [transforming higher education] include significant growth in the importance of at least some postsecondary education in a society that increasingly values knowledge or service jobs over manufacturing jobs but lacks patience for, e.g., a four-year degree. They also include a reaction to the ever-increasing price of higher education even as it is increasingly essential. There are ongoing calls for ‘higher education’ to cost less and to find means to achieve this, including the urgency of sustaining the decades of commitment to expand access to higher education. Finally, expanding digital technology makes education possible from iPhones, iPads and laptops.” This means that quality assurance frameworks must figure out how to change the belief systems to support the continued attainment of tertiary education around the world. With each gap in belief versus reality, however, quality assurance frameworks have work to do. Starting with “Why?” (Sinek, 2019) is a good place to begin.

Why do we need quality frameworks? Higher education credentials should have value; but in order to have value, an item must have an assessed worth. The assessment of higher education credentials is currently conducted by higher education professionals, as the entire system of assessment and verification is internally governed. Faculty create programs and courses. To

verify attainment of course materials, faculty create assessments. Faculty administer assessments and give a level of attainment (i.e., grade). This system of value is reinforced within our quality assurance frameworks, as most frameworks use peer review as the method of verification. To other tertiary education providers, the verified, assessed education should have value; yet even this is suspect when considering the transferability of credit from one institution to another.

Another disconnect comes with regulatory entities. Depending on the quality framework established by the regulatory entity, the value of internal assessment is either reinforced or bolstered. Some entities require additional coursework that may or may not directly relate to the future career (e.g., a course in state history to become a physics teacher). Some entities require external experts to evaluate the proposed curriculum and accept any and all suggestions as requirements to be included in the final version of the degree offering – disregarding the lack of published requirements for the offering. Frameworks should bring relative parity in offerings across institutions. After all, a person with a baccalaureate in engineering from one jurisdiction should have equitable parity in skills and abilities with a similar degree holder from a separate jurisdiction. This is not the case, however, and these disparities in credential holders are causing angst among employers who must retrain the individual in a manner that serves that employer.

A relative model of success in career framework would include a national career organization which has a corresponding license in many jurisdictions. That career organization would standardize requirements for similar educational attainment (specific courses or competencies rather than a specific degree) and would establish a nationally normed assessment of practical competence. After passing the courses or obtaining the competencies, the assessment verifies the individual's competence to allow entrance to the licensing queue. The licensing queue verifies the person's identity and professional ethics before issuing the credential. The credential will require continued education to ensure current knowledge, which would ensure a cycle of continued skill and ability development of each licensee.

Backing up to the “similar educational attainment” requires the establishment of standards of practice. If those standards are created in a vacuum, they may or may not have relevance to the profession, rendering them useless. If they are created within the auspices of a quality framework, they will be useful for ensuring the competence of future practitioners. Managing quality frameworks for degree programs in nursing, teaching, or physical therapy are logical; but what should be done to assist programs in liberal arts, the humanities, or other indirect-to-professional pathways? Not everyone will use the undergraduate program in humanities to bridge to a graduate degree in a professional pathway (e.g., jurisprudence, library and information sciences, or clinical mental health counseling). Harkening back to Selingo & Sigelman, graduates from these programs should have an understanding of basic marketable skills that will bolster their ability in the advanced field or fill an in-demand need in the current marketplace (e.g., coding, finance and accounting, or change management).

Helping students obtain those skills and abilities could be required by local quality framework agencies, but each additional requirement adds length and cost to programs that are currently bloated. Frameworks typically analyze and update their standards on a cycle, and the updates should consider ways to increase the graduates' relevance to the community at large. When updating, agencies must consider the timeline for implementing new standards; otherwise, issues can abound. For example, state reporting systems with clear outcome measures do not immediately promote program improvement in institutions. They are built to assure good teaching is occurring in the K-12 classrooms with the desire to use the data to inform the educator preparation programs that produce future teachers.

However, programs producing future teachers take more than four years to complete (on average). As an example, the data from last year's teachers (the 2019-2020 academic year) are

just now being sought and tabulated. These data will be available in late 2021 (maybe) or in early 2022 (hopefully). These data are given to institutions for their improvement of future teacher pipelines, but institutions should not make changes with one data point. They should use at least two, preferably three points – pushing the start of changes to 2023-2024. These data points will inform program improvement after the internal and external approval processes for program changes are exhausted, which is an 18-24-month process. Therefore, the earliest a program change usually can occur as a result of the state reports from the 2019-2020 academic year is in the 2026 start – from which students will not graduate until 2030. By the end of this 10-year cycle, the institution has already undergone another accreditation visit, multiple program review cycles, and other changes to strengthen its program in ways that may have been informed from state data obtained in earlier data cycles.

Education needs the ability to move faster than most education quality frameworks allow, and it can be done with the help of frameworks that consider the programmatic alignment with the standards of the profession (if applicable) and the outcomes of the earned credential such as placement rates, employer satisfaction, and economic return on the former student's educational investment. One organization that has begun this trek and should be monitored for its future success is the Educational Quality Outcomes Standards (www.eqos.org).⁷⁵

With all of the quality frameworks that exist in tertiary education, a caution is in order: quality frameworks must find ways to trust each other's processes rather than require institutions to endure multiple evaluations of the same content. A wonderful example of collaboration exists in the United States and should be adopted on a regional or global scale: State authorization reciprocity.

Earlier in this millennium, as online education became more prevalent (not to be conflated with more trusted or more trustworthy), students began to take education that was delivered in another jurisdiction. Without the requirement of sitting in a physical classroom, students were able to enter their classroom while on vacation in California, after being transferred to New York, or during a temporary military assignment in Guam. Unfortunately, this “freedom” was reined in by federal government who issued a rule that required institutions to obtain approval from each state in which they had a student (34 C.F.R. § 600.9). Institutions who focused on developing online instruction now were required to obtain approval from each state in which current and prospective students resided – even temporarily. Obtaining approval showcased the disparities in the approval processes, as some of the agencies conducted full program reviews with subject matter experts – even if the program was already approved and/or accredited by another recognized quality framework.

To alleviate the duplicative work across America, a group banded together to form the first state authorization reciprocity agreement, which resulted in the establishment of a new organization, the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA, www.nc-sara.org). Each state is required to pass laws to allow the state to enter the agreement. When the state passes the law, they apply to the National Council for participation. As part of participation, the state oversees domestic education providers who educate students in other states and agrees to “not apply [distance education] requirements, standards, fees, or procedures to any non-domestic (out-of-state) Institution that participates in SARA” (Policy 2.5k, 2020).

To date, NC-SARA has participation from all states except California, which helps save thousands of institutions the time, energy, and expense of obtaining and maintaining approvals around the country; however, the global pandemic proved that this process needs to be expanded further to allow other countries to agree to the same protections. For example, needs for trained healthcare professionals rose around the globe at the same time that over 1.5 billion

⁷⁵ The author was involved in the drafting of the standards that now formulate this independent organization.

students were displaced. A United Nations report on ...called for governments to provide “distance learning solutions that use multimedia approaches to ensure learning continuity” which would require “public and private partners to design and develop innovative and equitable solutions adapted to a wide diversity of contexts” (United Nations, 2020). With the global move to online learning and the movement of healthcare professionals (some of whom are tertiary students), the nation-by-nation requirements for authorization may be negatively affecting students’ ability to continue their educational endeavors. As a result, an international reciprocity agreement is warranted.

Those who were studying to enter professions may have moved from one jurisdiction to another, possibly for reasons beyond their abilities to control. When moving, they subjected themselves to another jurisdiction’s requirements for the profession which may have added to their program requirements, lengthened their degree plan, and/or added unnecessary costs. A simple way to get around this issue would be to standardize the process for licensing in multiple jurisdictions. A reciprocity agreement for professional fields is warranted.

“We need new visions for tomorrow’s technology and tomorrow’s learnings. We need a college culture which provides help to get to the future – to create ‘tomorrow’s people.’ We need to avoid ‘trained incapability.’ We need the humanities... [In a successful vision of the future] Management has avoided ‘sellout’ to vocationalism and separate training centers. They have worked with boards to provide leadership that ensures institutional integrity in the face of state control and regulatory agencies. They have argued effectively for quality while preserving access. They have been creative in providing leadership which creates that intellectual tradition, creates a college culture, and creates tomorrow’s people,” said Judith Eaton in 1983. What was said in a futuristic manner resounds like a gong today, and quality frameworks should be listened to.

In the post-COVID world of tertiary education, quality frameworks must partake in retrospection and introspection. If institutions decide to reinforce the system that has been in place for hundreds of years, they will face increased scrutiny from the consumers of their products – their graduates’ employers. Without meeting the basic needs of these future employers, their graduates will no longer be in demand. Without the demand for graduates, institution’s supply of students will decline further, creating a death spiral for collegiate education.

To raise the confidence in skills and abilities of tertiary graduates, higher education quality frameworks need to focus on the needs of employers and the wants of students. Deep examination of each standard should focus on why the standard was established and whether that standard maintains relevance to students, graduates, and employers. In some cases, standards need to be strengthened to reinforce the connection the standard has to satisfaction, quality, or relevancy of the skill or ability. In other cases, standards need to be combined or removed – especially when the standard is duplicative with other quality frameworks. Adding short phrases such as “Unless approved by another quality assurance agency, an approved institution must demonstrate...” should help to eliminate the duplication that leads to higher costs without additional assurances among the institutions.

Since higher education exists to support the global supply of knowledgeable workers, it behooves higher education quality frameworks to strengthen the tie of their approved institutions to the needs of the future employers. In the wake of the pandemic, frameworks must work together to increase the public’s confidence in their existence. “This may mean that higher education is moving away from its traditional, primary investment in itself as first and foremost an academic enterprise devoted to intellectual development. Increasingly, higher education “quality” may include how well higher education meets these social service as well as academic needs” (Eaton, 2020). Hopefully Dr. Eaton rests assured that the next generation

of professionals in accreditation is carrying forth her legacy to protect the value of higher education quality frameworks around the world.

Chapter 35

Restructuring assessments and monitoring of quality assurance, policy implementations and international cohesion in post-21st century higher education

Adenike Ogunshe

Introduction

Higher Education, also known as tertiary education, refers to all post-secondary education (universities, colleges, polytechnics, technical training institutes, and vocational colleges), which impact individuals with adequate education and relevant job skills, to play active roles in communities and societies (World Bank, 2017). The goals of HE had always consisted of an informed developmental preparation of students, for personally satisfying and socially useful career, and responsible citizenry (Keniston, 1960). Thus, responsible governments increasingly realize that the entire educational system, from early childhood, through tertiary education, must reflect new socio-economic needs of global economy, which increasingly demands better trained, more skilled, and adaptable academics and workforces. However, large numbers of students put strains on publicly funded HEIs; while many countries with limited resources struggle to finance growing needs of larger students' populations (World Bank, 2017). Globalization and global challenges, internationalization, commodification of knowledge, marketification of certificates, suboptimal institutional governance and leadership, and survival of HEIs, additionally pose significant challenges to development and transformation of HEIs for the 21st century HE.

Considering that good leadership refers not only to competence but transformative practices that can enhance opportunities for rethinking sustainability of educational policies, HEIs in present times, must enhance, not only structures, operations, relationships with stakeholders (students, parents, governments, employers, international bodies, and society) but also the QA profiles, which are very essential key success and survival strategies. QA autonomy and professionalism, external QA assessments and evaluation would expectedly provide independent and objective perceptions, in transparent evaluation of HEIs and better delivery of high-quality education, by focusing appropriately on implementations of education policies. Paying adequate attention to HE quality, through stronger pre-HE learning experiences and outcomes; students' admission mechanisms, equal opportunities, academic curricular, academic freedom, and adult education are compelling perspectives, when addressing HE, students' quality, and post 21st century HE. In order to achieve expected goals, especially for the 21st century and post 21st century HE, there is need to go back to the past, and revisit the educational structures and philosophy, through the kaleidoscope of effective and professional QA.

Restructuring and Repositioning Quality Assurance for Evaluating, Monitoring, and Assessing Institutional Policies on Leadership and Leadership Styles of Heads of Higher Education Institutions. There are different leadership styles, from the very strict and acidic, to the very lenient styles, and the indifferent styles. But principally, leadership effectiveness is usually determined by leadership styles (Ali Hassan et al., 2018); while leadership styles and governance particularly play key roles in outstanding academic outputs of HEIs, especially, in transformations of institutional structures, mechanisms, and performances. Effective leadership in the context of HEIs is therefore, attributed to leadership styles, of not only heads of HEIs but also, of those associated with related external and internal factors that impact HE and HEIs (Al Khajeh, 2018; Bolden et al., 2008; Helland and Winston, 2005; Herth, 2007; Hussein and Abdul Rahman, 2012; Jones et al., 2012; Khetarpal and Srivastava, 2000;

Kiplangat, 2017; Kiplangat, 2017; Peterson & Luthans, 2003, 2005; Waheeda & Shaheeda, 2018).

There is no single leadership style, which is the single best for HEIs but, some leadership styles give better results than others, although, the best form of leadership would be a hybrid of most appropriate leadership styles that assure best HE quality. It is not surprising though, that HEIs leaders sense tension between many competing forces, yet, by paying close attention to personal, social, structural, contextual and temporal dimensions of leadership, it may be possible to alleviate to certain degree, such conflicts and complex pictures which appear, with respect to scope and depths of changes that occur in HEIs' governance reforms (Larsen et al., 2009; Leiber et al., 2015). As HEIs are distinctly different intellectual-intensive organs, with their own peculiar characteristics and governance principles, QA academic leadership must strategically influence sustainability of the missions, visions, and objectives of the HEIs; such that, HEIs must be committed unto leaders with behavioral competence and resourceful preparedness that can ensure academic culture of high core values, as well as QC and QA ethics.

Leadership and QA are so closely interwoven that one needs the other for survival, such that, the success of QA system depends on the support of administrators of HEIs. Hence, ideal QA should always assess, monitor, and control strategic management mechanisms of HEIs, for enabling improvements in HEIs (Kahveci et al., 2012). At the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and its Member States were called upon to pursue capacity-building for QA in HE, and to put in place, appropriately structured QA systems and regulatory frameworks involving all stakeholders, particularly, in developing countries (Tang, 2013). The need to regulate leadership styles in HEIs, for better performance and capacity-building in QA can be rightly considered as, unfamiliar and unconventional, in present times. However, the importance of QA in leadership of HEIs, and vice versa, are primary hallmarks of establishing and sustaining a culture of quality and core values, at all levels of HE. These are especially for the purpose of implementing strategies and cohesion, with more positive inclusive attitudes towards quality initiatives, and appropriate balance of QA and quality enhancements.

Leaderships and factors that affect leaderships in HEIs somehow correlate, due to various vertical and horizontal leadership structures and organograms. Studies also reported that among the most prominent factors that tremendously affect, influence, and mitigate against leadership in HEIs, are those within, and withal HEIs (figure 2). Those factors from within or outside may however, have cross-sectional influence on each other, i.e., external factors may originate or be influenced by internal factors, and vice versa. Factors that internally or externally affect or influence HEIs may also be advantageous or disadvantageous, just as some external and internal factors that impact HEIs are circumstantial, while some are actually put in place by the leaders, to purposely support their leadership styles.

The Assistant Director-General for Education at UNESCO, Stefania Giannini, called for more universal perspectives and cooperation, to correct imbalances, and unite disparate entities towards common goals, through challenging movement towards international cohesion, achievable by internationally shaping of HE; increased interest in international studies, diversification across HEIs qualifications, exchange of knowledge of different spheres (Hughes and Byrom, 2019). For HEIs to play the afore-mentioned critical roles, there must be (i) Smart policy design, a policy that is well justified, offers a logical and feasible solution, to policy problem, will determine to a great extent, whether, and how the policy can be implemented; (ii) Inclusive stakeholders' engagements (Viennet and Pont, 2017; Stensaker, 2018). Strong HEIs foster unity within societies; thus, putting necessary factors in place, for appropriate policy implementations and international cohesion in the 21st Century HE, actually demands unique leadership.

Societal, political, fraternal, resources and funding are external factors with maximal influence, but can have negative impacts on HEIs, if allowed to adversely influence internal factors. Female-gender issue is also a subtle, highly inconsequential factor in HEIs, mainly due to, discontinuous interlinking influence from external (national and international) Gender-related bodies in charge of women affairs. Purposeful inclusion and value-driven administration are among the most-critical factors for maintaining integrity and quality of HEIs; although, they can be tactically or directly maneuvered by HEIs leaders, for personal or fraternal gratification. These result in tremendous compromises of HEIs, and negatively impacting influences are however, due to ineffective appropriate QA in HEIs.

“Ethical leadership is knowing your core values and having the courage to live them in all parts of your life in service of the common good.” – *Center for Ethical Leadership*

Studies also highlighted the impact of HE leadership on organizational outputs, but with societal progresses and conventional changes; thereby, often causing values to shift, but which have been reported as the biggest challenge to ethical leadership. At times, more traditional models of leadership are also in direct conflict with ethical leadership. In addition, leadership organograms of HEIs are mostly classified wrongly, and as such, there is mostly, a general *unholistic* upward and downward discontinuation in QC and QA for HEIs leadership and responsibilities structures, especially, at critical control points. As an example, in institutional structures of universities, as depicted in Figure 3, the visitor/founder, ministry of education, external members of governing council, external representatives of congregation and alumni usually constitute the pre-chancellery. Chairman of Governing Council (Pro-Chancellor), vice-chancellor/president, deputy vice-chancellor(s) constitute the Chancellery, while the vice-chancellor, deputy vice-chancellor(s), registrar, bursar and librarian constitute the Principal Officers.

Other post-chancellery leadership structures and responsibilities include Provosts of College of Medicine, and other colleges, deans, directors of institutes or centers, heads of departments, administrative/registry personnel. But the third structures are not usually directly continuous up to the pre-chancellery. Whereas, in spite of some resistance to QA processes, commensurate QC/QA should be applicable at the critical control points, to ensure that university leaderships, are continuous, from the pre-chancellery, all the way down the leadership and responsibilities structures, and from down, all the way up. The same should be applicable to all HEIs.

It is believed that the HE sector requires a less hierarchical leadership approach (Jones et al., 2012), which should strongly consider administrative rather than management context of leadership styles, especially, in less advanced countries. Development of culture of quality reportedly requires strong, collectively committed stewardship in HE, as QA can only be effective when all stakeholders understand and embrace its challenges and benefits (Tang, 2013). These qualities express the need for appropriate ethical application of QA, to enhance leadership in HEIs, and to have holistic overviews of quality-assured activities in HEIs, since leadership distinctively impacts, HE and HEIs.

More transparent and effective policies and QA implementation processes also need to be revised, to adapt to ideal, concrete, and valuable leadership and governance systems expected of 21st century HE. The fact that in some developing countries, HEIs are deeply intertwined with local and national politics has made it difficult to disassociate HE leadership from compromised applications of leadership responsibilities, including adequate control of HEIs. Whereas the importance of uncompromised ethical leadership is quite enormous. Restructuring QA assessments, evaluation, monitoring and regulations of leadership styles and responsibilities by internal and external agencies, as well as, followership engagements, for post 21st century HE must, therefore, be prioritized. This is because putting specific policies into practice affects the educational system on several levels (Viennet & Pont, 2017).

It is quite crucial that the 21st century HE leadership be structurally reformed, as being mentally and socio-dynamically inclusive, and as earlier suggested, possess values that are encompassing, building collaborations between academics, non-academics, executives, and professional staff. More importantly, structural QA reformation must target, Inclusive Subsidiary Stakeholders (ISS), which are, external and internal HE leaderships, external and internal stakeholders, grants/fellowships providers, international assessments / evaluations agencies for HEIs, and entire society at large

Restructuring and Repositioning Quality Assurance for Evaluating, Monitoring, and Assessing Institutional Policies on Academic Contents

HE is central to competitiveness in an increasingly globalized world, a vital affirmation and principle that guide the Education 2030 Agenda, with the theme “Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all.” To make HEIs locally relevant and globally competitive (UNESCO, 2019), HEIs usually present their mission / vision statements, and strategic plans, to showcase various quality profiles, for relevance and universal significance, particularly, on studentships, staffing, teaching and learning, research and collaborations, community services. Much more importantly, quality-assured implementations of appropriate policies, institutional statements, including pre-prepared policies for unforeseen HE-related circumstances, like the COVID-19 pandemic, are actually paramount in HE and HEIs.

QA and Policies on Higher Education Studentship

Enrollments into HE has reportedly increased globally, even with global demand for HE projected estimated 263 million students by 2025 (Tang, 2013). Increasing demand for quality education that is commensurate with increasing demand for QA is an exceptional driver for HEIs’ achievement of excellence, at local and international levels. To move HE towards 21st century status, in realizing quality-associated expectations from HEIs, scholarship of teaching and learning must be addressed as a new paradigm. This is necessary because, as the quality of global education and rankings of HEIs is on the increase, contrary is the case in some HEIs, especially, in many developing countries; where quality of educations has drastically reduced, from bottom-up.

In some of such HEIs, many students who are not competent to be admitted into HEIs, are not only admitted, due to reduced quality in admission mechanisms, such students can also graduate through defective and compromised academic (mediocre contents) mechanisms. Admission mechanisms of such HEIs must therefore, be totally overhauled, in order to have standardized enrollments, contrary to disturbing factors that mitigate against transformation mechanisms of HEIs. Students who are not academically highfliers must be challenged for comparably competitive admission criteria, ideal for 21st century HEIs, and which must be commensurate with standard, global admission criteria into HEIs. COVID-19 pandemic scenarios will also tremendously affect global mobility of students; thereby, making it necessary for new paradigms on studentship in HEIs, to focus more on distance learning and online teaching and learning.

In the past, most private institutions had moved in the direction of increased selection of students, towards those who merit admission opportunities, and the same trend is still observed in many private HEs in advanced countries. Although, some government HEIs still adopt merit-based admission policies in many developing countries; admission criteria in private HEIs are not so distinctive, as they are majorly funded by students’ tuition fees. It is not only financially wasteful and personally frustrating (Keniston, 1960) but also morally disturbing for every secondary (high) school graduate to be admitted into HEIs, only to be withdrawn after the first, second or third year. It is also compromising to ensure that such

students are graduated from HEIs, at all costs, by compromised quality of education. Thus, unfit and unwilling students should not be admitted into HEIs, so, that serious best attention can be given to studies. It is assuredly suicidal on the short run or long run, to pull down academic standards for unfit and unwilling students (Keniston, 1960), who are awarded degrees of low academic rigor (Kigotho, 2020).

Equity is another hallmark of 21st century HE, and appropriate QA for transparent assessment and evaluation is advantageous for integrity in HEIs students' admission criteria. So, 21st century institutional policies and their implementations are expected to be uniform across same academic strata, both in public and privately owned HEIs; vis-à-vis, each category of HEIs must operate same or similar high-quality admission criteria, as generally commensurate with national or international standards. Benchmark Minimum Academic Standard (BMAS) in private HEIs must not be different from those of government (public) HEIs. There must be equity, equality and fairness, in admission of students into HE, based on comparative competitive performances (merit), rather than admission-placements based on gender, sex, race, geographic location, as quota system can lead to herd academic-inferiority. Considering a case scenario:

Restructuring QA policies must ensure standards of educational performances are exceptionally high, to meet with international (global) standards, and students' academic capacity for learning must not be underestimated or under-programmed. Above all, students should be enrolled in particular career courses that fit their academic aptitude, rather than courses of interests or financial status. Situations wherein there are serious compromised academic standards by commodification and marketization of HE, especially in some privately owned HEIs, is highly unacceptable, but appropriate QA, with professional touch can ensure holistic feedbacks, to address such arbitrariness.

QA and Adult-(Mature)-Studentships in Higher Education

“University of Maryland University College (UMUC) first opened its classrooms in 1947 as a special college at the University of Maryland, created specifically to serve the state's returning World War II veterans with GI Bill in hand.” – *Susan C. Aldridge*

It is nevertheless inevitable that some people, for whatever reasons, would not be able to complete their education, and will need to return to learning, after a period of time. Thus, high-quality education, and training that are accessible to all, should be available to anyone, anywhere, and at any time (Aldridge, 2012), being crucial for achievement of free, fair, and open society. Viable routes back into learning for adults at HEIs are therefore, quite important (Liberal Democrats, 2009). Globally, adult education has played a continuous role in helping adults reach better lives, such that countries have productive workforces, and economic stability.

For major HE transformation therefore, HEIs must work for promotion of social change and development, by playing active roles in promoting adult learning, whereby, an adult-student can join HEIs at appropriate levels (Heagney and Benson, 2017; Narang, 1997). Increasing awareness on need for quality education for both children and adults; improved basic education and lifelong learning, are opportunities for adults, which will assist them in overcoming educational deficiencies that can hinder their productivity, responsible participations in life, and in national growth (Eyre and Pawloski, 2013), particularly, in reducing insecurity.

Adult students are mostly quite different, in that they are experienced, mature, with lots of responsibilities, like having families and careers. They tend to be highly self-directed and problem-oriented learners, with clear academic goals in mind, and mostly tied to professional

advancements. They also have strong penchants for meaningful, experiential learning, and are good human indicators of poor or more-promising academic options, when their needs go unmet (Aldridge, 2012). Most adult/mature students in today's HEIs rightly have high expectations about quality of teaching, contact-time, curricular, and availability of quality accommodation which are indirect ways of raising standards and means of self-regulations of HE.

By so doing, pre-HE levels also increasingly become important, self-regulatory, bridging-mechanisms into HEIs, for impacting quality-assured in pre-HE teaching and learning. As earlier indicated in Figure 5, a structurally reformative quality-assured education is also a correctional mechanism for out-of-school and drop-out-of-school children, youths and adults. Government must, therefore, accept adult education as its responsibility, and institutionalize it in HE, as done in several countries (Narang, 1997; Stanistreet, 2019) not simply as departments of adult education but, as adult students having equal opportunities to return to regular HEIs, for HE degrees.

“Truly, the learning process never ends. It has been said that he who does not increase learning, decreases it. You, adult educator, are the increasers of learning.” – *Senator Jacob K. Javits (NY), Galaxy Conference (1969)*

As the quality of teaching and learning is variable, certain issues need to be addressed, to maintain quality of education for adult (mature) students. HEIs should be institutions that forge new trails in adult-focused curricular designs, instructional methodologies, distance learning delivery, and special-learners-services to adult students. Also, to remain internationally competitive, and withstand challenges of globalization, basic teaching and learning skills that are commensurate with expected educational standards for adult/mature students need to be improved. Considering that academic curricular for programs registered for by adult students, may consist of courses that are not domicile in the program, it is appropriate to ensure mechanisms that will make such courses easier-to-be-adaptable for adult-friendly programs and academic curricular in HEIs.

A growing number of well-known or/and yet-to-be-confirmed factors are at play, in transforming or tremendously challenging how HEIs operate or influence teaching and research functions. But more could still be done by HEIs, employers, and government, to encourage adult students' continuation of HE. Afore-mentioned salient issues that point at rethinking and re-strategizing appropriate QA in 21st century HE and HEIs are quite necessary, for assessment, evaluation, and monitoring adaptable programs and curricular, for adultstudents. QA in Re-shaping Educational Curricular and Re-designing Courses/Course Delivery Methods

“What should our students be able to do out there that we are responsible for teaching them in here?” – *UMUC Undergraduate School*

A major critical and essential factor for meeting academic needs, and ultimate success of HE students is the curriculum, which plays a significant role, particularly, with regards to development of career-relevant programs and course-works, which should enable students to navigate more successfully from coursework to real work. Adaptable curricular, based on required HEIs' mission, vision, academic contents, instructional technologies, and career-relevant skills; when delivered within ideal learning environments, boost students' learning retention. Thus, 21st century HEIs curricula must be academically flexible and transformational, to address the rapidly revolving and emerging needs of both a changing workforce and a changing world, which is currently reflected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Focus on relevance and flexibility of curricular becomes the driving force behind high quality ranking HE. In pursuance of reinventing outstanding academic curricular for HEIs, it is important to reshape and re-design internal and external QA methodologies, for regular review of HEIs' academic programs and courses/program curricula. External (foreign) QA is a most likely foolproof check and/or moderating strategy for internally designed QA, to assess academic curricular. Modeling QA into interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary programs and courses is also an integral part of the mechanisms for 21st century HE. Restructuring QA, to ensure continuous improved quality for all academic programs, and courses' curricular; and re-designing courses/course delivery methods are classical high-impacting structures expected of a 21st century HE.

Citizen Curricular develops knowledge, skills, and understanding needed by students to play active roles in democratic societies as, active and responsible citizens that believe and identify with justice, rights, and responsibilities (Bailey, 2002; Bascopé et al., 2013; and Connell, 1992). Teaching such values across the HEIs curricular is a distinguishing feature for 21st and post-21st century HE. In evaluating COVID-19, it must now be a global submission that more responsive learning needs of students, even beyond conventional classrooms should include evidence-based, health-structured courses (Toquero, 2020) that can be designated as general studies courses. These courses may consist of microbial health, public & global health, antimicrobials, biomedical health, environmental health and policies, hygiene practices, mental health, medical services, social health, medical peace work, international health, health surveillance, health statistics, forensics, zoonoses and nosocomial infections.

QA and Students' Industrial Work Experiences

Adequate preparation of students into graduates that can withstand the basic rigors of post-educational world is also a hallmark of a 21st century HE. Students' industrial work experience or industrial attachment schemes are also driving forces of post-educational competence, and for that to meet expected standards, QA of HEIs must be restructured, such that students' industrial work experiences can be classified as high standard and sustainable. Similarly, restructuring QA of HEIs to meet high-standard, qualitative and competitive research outputs, while cultivating QA culture for sustainable high-standard institutional performances and academic standards, with competitive transferable skills, is imperative. A very ideal post-21st century HE will even involve pre-HE pupils and students in strategized industrial work experiences.

QA and Pre-Higher Education

Educational strata in almost every country are classified as, pre-primary (pre-elementary), primary (elementary); junior and senior secondary or junior and senior high school; and tertiary level, which basically consists of colleges, polytechnics, and universities. Meanwhile, when discussing students' educational quality, linking HE quality to stronger pre-HE learning experiences and outcomes ought to be a compelling perspective. From pre-HE to HE, education must be viewed as series of discrete layers of continuing processes, with intellectual development of individual student considered. Also, individual differences in aptitude and capacity for intellectual maturation are so wide, that no single academic order of progress is possible.

Therefore, a new concept of unity of quality-assured educational processes, from crèche and kindergarten, to HE or professional institutions must be ensured, and with each stage as a preparation for the subsequent stage. Maximum flexibility, which will ensure that every student may proceed as far, and as fast, as the ability and interest permit must be fashioned in (Keniston, 1960), while special needs schools must also be a priority.

There are usually more pressures on universities for enrollments, compared to other HEIs, particularly in developing countries. Students who are not academically fit for direct admission into universities either spend several years seeking elusive admission into government universities, or gain admission into private universities, where admission criteria are less stringent, in developing countries. Brilliant and average students who are also cut off from admission by merit, due to admission by ethnicity, also put more pressure on annual university enrollment exercises. Vocational education (considered to be inferior to mainstream HE), is also not effectively restructured to attract more applicants.

Well-structured educational layers can enhance better academic outcomes for most of the annually turned-down direct applicants into universities, some of whom can ultimately perform better, later in universities, if initially admitted either through colleges, polytechnics or professional institutes. Entire pre-HE phases are, therefore, quite vital for exceptional studentship in HEIs. Furthermore, many out-of-schools youths and adults are non-literates because there are generally, no proper special needs schools, especially, primary (elementary) schools, for teaching special needs pupils and students, particularly, slow-learners or autistic students. As earlier advised by Keniston (1960), there should be transfer of centers of interest in HEIs, from institutions to individual students and intellectual growth.

In some developing countries, many elementary and secondary schools' teachers (mostly of public schools), are either not dedicated or not competent, which is defective to students' learning abilities. So, correctional and inclusive QA mechanisms, with common and core basic skills, information, and experiences appropriate for intellectual level of students are expected at every teaching stage. To also ensure sound training in basic subjects, and provide necessary preparations for advanced studies at HEIs, irrelevant subjects at pre-HE, particularly, secondary (high) schools, should be eliminated. The same must be applicable to HE courses that are arbitrarily introduced, in most cases, as General Studies.

Restructuring QA for Evaluation, Monitoring, and Assessing Appointments Mechanisms of Post-21st Century HEIs Staff

Academic Staff members of HEIs play critical roles in diligently fulfilling applicable HE laid-down mandates (Kiplangat, 2017), and also for improved HE-rankings. So, credible HEIs appoint and promote academic staff through transparent, equal opportunities, and open-system mechanisms. For many distinguished HEIs, academic staff can be appointed internationally, and from other HEIs, based exclusively on merit. This type of appointment is a measure of transforming HE, and ultimately, enhancing how teaching and research functions are performed. Overall effects are advancement in technological innovations, accountability modalities like, global rankings, which influence international reputations of HEIs, and quality culture that promotes willingness of academic staff in HEIs to translate QA-produced evidence into innovative teaching and attitudes (Tang, 2013). Distinctive feature in HEIs is that most teachings are carried out by those also active in research, while academic link between HEIs lecturer and student is commonly informed by interest in cutting-edge research, scholarship, and teaching (Williams et al., 2009).

Nonetheless, academic staff must best advance careers, and raise extra funds through research. As HEIs are not research institutes, credits for research must not be at the expense of credits for teaching, and academic staff must have capacity to enhance timely teaching, with cutting-edge, relevant research that address local, national, regional, and international emerging or re-emerging issues. The challenges and satisfying rewards of research make HE an attractive career, and according to Williams et al. (2009), promotions at all levels should be dependent, not just on research but also, rewarding significant contributions to teaching and administration. More so, for a 21st century HE, the faculties must spend most of their time, lecturing on research-based findings, rather than spending more time on administrative roles,

and personal political, religious, and social activities that are not research-based, and/or teaching-based community services.

It has been predicted that competition in the near future would be on human capital, such that countries will be able to attract talented and very qualified Staff, and then provide opportunities to improve their skills (Hughes, 2019). So, further to excellence and innovation in teaching and research, availability of professional development to all lecturers; restructuring QA mechanisms for evaluating, monitoring and assessing appointments and promotions of 21st century and post-21st century HE-compatible faculties is a must; just as applicable to students' admissions criteria.

Restrictions on research freedom and freedom of speech in HE is similarly of particular caution in academia. It is critical that HEIs retain considerable autonomy and intellectual freedom, as HEIs must offer an arena for new ideas and thinking, which may question established traditional wisdom (Salmi, 2013). More importantly, there must be government scrutiny for academic and teaching qualities, research publications output, community services by faculties and organizational restructuring, in order to justify accessed funds from governments or founders (in cases of private HEIs), and grants-awarding bodies.

Restructuring for Autonomy and Professionalism of QA in HEIs

Autonomy of HEIs QA and professionalism of QA personnel are paramount, not only for the survival of HEIs but also for impactful HE and HEIs in the 21st century. Appointments of directors and personnel of QA directorates are by superior administrators, who are presidents, vice-chancellors, rectors and provosts of respective HEIs. Thus, QA autonomy will ensure transparency, and uncompromised control and regulations of HE and HEIs. Inclusiveness of international, professional QA bodies (societies) in assessment of professionalism in HEIs, through QA certifications, regular reviews of HEIs' QA policies, compliance, and mechanisms of operations, is a robust, transparent, high-standard external scrutiny of QA in HEIs, particularly, for long-term impactful evaluation, monitoring, and assessment of the 21st century and post-21st century HE. In addition, national and global engagements and reputational impact assessments of HEIs' QA can be determined. Such professionalism in QA of HEIs will signify professionalism in QA of the 21st century and post-21st century HE.

Among other advantages of having QA autonomy and professionalism are, meritorious implementation of competitiveness in QA, for diversities and diversified quota; restructuring inclusive assessments; monitoring of QA policies and implementations; collation and dissemination of self-evaluation and peer-reviewed staff/student assessments; credible teaching, learning, research activities, innovations, academic outputs; quality-assured institutional resource-verifications and accreditations, and institutional assessments of HEIs. QA autonomy will also ensure responsible leadership, ideal QC/QA standards for ethical conducts in implementing appropriate HE policies, particularly, with regards to international cohesion, as collaborations, partnerships, academic outreaches, teaching and learning, staff development, curricular reviews, research, campus operations, are among the policies that can support sustainable development implementations, and enactment of relevant policies in HEIs (Gaus et al., 2019; Vargas et al., 2019). Unbiased assessments of students, staff, parents/guardians, state/federal governments, employers, international ranking bodies and organizations, can also be satisfactory through autonomous and professional QA, which has direct bearing on the overall quality of 21st century and post-21st century HEIs, and society.

Futuristic Structural Reforms for the 21st and Post-21st Century HE and HEIs

“Best Leadership is, saying to Subordinates, *thou shall go far in life!*” – Adenike A.O. Ogunshe

For structural reforms in HE, leadership, interpersonal and communication relationships, intellectual capacities, value-driven work management, gender and purposeful inclusions are

among critical factors that deserve significant structural reforms. Also deserving structural reforms are, learning experience sharing, sustainability of institutional performances, and academic standards (teaching and research qualities), with competitive transferable skills, appropriate QA for evaluation, monitoring and assessing HEIs engagements, and reputational impact assessments on national and global scales.

General studies curricular also demand emerging and re-emerging reinventions, to meet up with always changing or trending local, national and global issues like, assisted-fertility, climate-change, insurgencies, politics and diplomacy, aquatic-plasticity, epidemics, local neglected infectious diseases and pandemics, like COVID-19. There must also be adequate structural reforms on implementations of appropriate QA for commensurate funding, staff employability initiatives, students' admission criteria, academic evaluations of students' performances and Staff promotions, citation index-supremacy phenomenon, and employers' ratings. These structural reforms must focus on transformation of societies and pre-HE impacts on HE.

QA is generally termed as a holistic mechanism that overviews all the processes in, HE and HEIs, in order to serve expected quality standards to students, staff, and all other stakeholders (within and beyond HEIs). A major structural reform of note therefore is, to inculcate commensurate QA syllabus into educational curricular at every stage of educational assessments of students; all through, from elementary, up to HE level. These reforms will not only serve in training pupils and students as early as possible on expected outcomes of subjects taught but will also train students on how to assess taught gains and teaching delivery of teachers, without common biases.

Teachers would also be assisted in assessing learning contents and abilities of students. In addition, a determination of how to maintain level of desired quality at every level of educational processes, and a QA framework for generating strategic information on assured academic quality and standards, specific knowledge skills, HE management and evaluation of implemented policies would be possible. HE had always focused on reinvention but in the year 2020, had fast-forwarded the world and HE to uniform adaptation of digital existence, at least mostly!

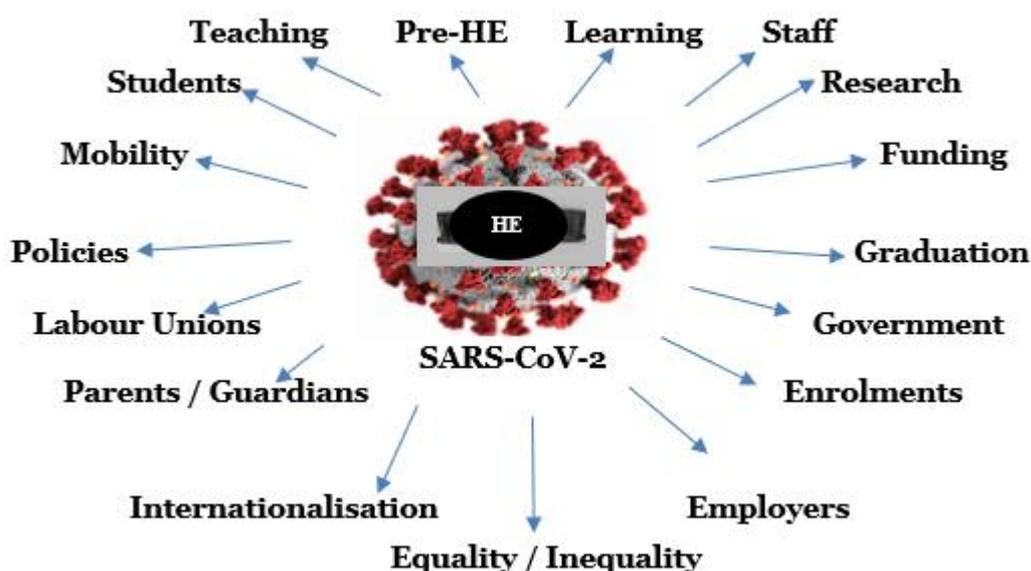


Figure 6: Major COVID-19 Impacted Multilevel Organizational Structures of HE Communities

QA Structural Reforms for SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19 Scenarios in HE and HEIs

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a communicable respiratory disease caused by a novel strain of coronavirus, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), formerly, 2019 nCoV, which originated in Wuhan, China. By January 30, 2020, the WHO Director-General declared the COVID-19 outbreak a public health emergency of international concern under international health regulations (2005). Significant morbidities and mortalities were later recorded globally, due to COVID-19, the infection, which reportedly spread to all continents, and about 200 countries around the globe had as at date, over 103 million cases and 2.2 million deaths, especially, due to co-morbidities (Ogunshe et al., 2020). HE seemed not to be severely affected because of quick shutdowns of all schools, although, massive deaths were recorded domestically, and in hospitals / treatment centers.

The massive and global impacts of COVID-19 on HE and HEIs include pandemic-induced losses (endowments, grants, funding, physical interactions, in-person/in-class teaching, students/staff mobility, internationalization, students' retention, drop in revenue from foreign students, etc.). In addition, as a continuation of COVID-19 pandemic-related learning losses, the line of severe divide will be much wider and deepened, particularly, between developed and developing/underdeveloped countries. Thus, education systems around the world are urgently recalibrating, to a rapidly changing post-COVID-19 pandemic world, although, effects would be different between pre-HE and HE. These confirm that COVID-19 is an opportunity to reimagine and reinvent teaching and learning, by modernizing HE and other education systems for the 21st century pre-HE and HE, particularly, for participation in the emerging global workforce and SDGs.

Following the impact of COVID-19, most highly prioritized and inclusive, response measures by 21st Century and post-21st Century different types of HE should target the academic continuity, by remediation of learning loss from shutdown of HEIs; policies to support the emotional, financial, mental, physical, social and public health of students and staff, specifically associated with *out-of-home environment* physical classrooms/HEIs; reinventing in-person and distance learning and/or online support, including massive open online course (MOOC); understanding and addressing the challenges and limitations of new reality of digital/remote learning, such as, electricity and internet issues, practical classes and examinations; responses to technical issues; safe reopening and returning to HEIs. Special collaborative focus should highlight continually upgraded knowledge sharing, on rapid-prevention and rapid-responses to HE-associated emergencies. It also lies on HE frameworks to always consider valid evidence-based pre-HE scenarios, especially, those with special needs, to reduce inequalities in pre-HE and HE, under emergency global learning conditions.

Conclusion

The need for quality in HE is enhanced by global trends in HE and society, such as increased internationalization and changes in paradigms of higher learning, diversification of provisions and use of ICTs, massification of HE, inter and intra-regional mobility, increased focus on QA, qualifications frameworks and employability of graduates, emergence of competition among institutions, and moving towards building futuristic HE and research areas. However, HE, a vehicle for technological change, as well as economic and social transformation through dissemination of knowledge, creation of innovation and promotion of sustainable development is facing a host of external and internal challenges, regarding its core values and purpose.

Notwithstanding, QA is viably promising and is a standard instrument for evaluating and monitoring responsible stewardship and educational quality in HE across the world. To have quality outcomes of high academic standards in HEIs, governments must demonstrate strong commitments, through adequate funding, to reposition QA, for proper evaluations, monitoring and assessments of teaching, learning, academic performances, and academic engagements in

HEIs. This is in realization of a competitively globalized and international cohesion, for post-21st century HE. Educational strategies must be branded for robust internal and external high standard QA principles, in evaluation, monitoring and assessing implementations of transparent academic institutional policies, as well as regular reviews of HEIs' QA policies that are ideal for the post-21st century HE.

Amid challenges now facing HE, there is need for a paradigm shift in appointing new breed of leaders capable of navigating the new complex HEI environment. Institutional leadership is a critical factor in HE QC, for sustaining and improving quality and performance. Involvement of students in QA initiatives and processes will provide opportunities for them to develop their abilities in analyzing the quality of their academic programs and learning needs. Application of appropriate QA in pre-HE education stands to enhance HE with significant impacts and incorporating external views into internal quality management system can further ensure that societal needs and international standards and trends are integrated into HEIs.

Establishing solid QA system for greater accessibility to e-Learning, which can be evaluated by all stakeholders in the educational sector, as an integrated part of HE, to provide adequate training for academic professionals, HE providers, and quality evaluation experts. In the strategic plan of HEIs, more attention must be paid to developing internal QA system, to achieve desired graduate attributes for graduate employability or further learning. Autonomy, professionalism, structural reforms in QA, and external evaluations and monitoring are key factors for quality-assured policy implementations and international cohesion for 21st Century HE and post-21st century HE.

The current fatal global detour in HE, due to COVID-19 pandemic has hastened the *future to the present* time, although, impacts of COVID-19 on HE is peculiar to different countries. Expected post-Covid-19 pandemic changing global trends, however, call for educational countermeasures and prioritized reforms of QA in HEIs Strategic Plans, in readiness for foreseen and unforeseen circumstances. Critical Control Points to be prioritized in HE, as COVID-19 hazards include: missing physical interactions, in-person & in-class teaching vs. online-lectures, current & emerging labor-saving new technologies vs. human presence, globalization vs. de-globalization, strategic academic planning, with new learning environments and tools; post-COVID-19 pandemic emotional intelligence skills and behaviors; online practical science classes and examinations; and digital divides due to online education, COVID-19 globally created intense concern and uncertainty, including vaccine hesitancy. Coincidentally, in 2019, the World Health Organization listed vaccine refusal as one of the top 10 global health threats (WHO, 2019). SARS-CoV-2 vaccine that is ineffective, or worse still, has severe adverse effects, is a serious cause for concern, therefore, as convincing evidence of vaccine safety and efficacy is quite necessary (Toquero, 2020), there still must be serious consideration for proper cold storage (-70°C to -80°C) facilities for procured vaccines, particularly in low- and lower-income tropical countries, to ensure public health safety and non-wastage of money.

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