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Review Article

An Exploratory Review of Literature on Quality Assurance Procedures in Universities in Developing Countries with Particular Reference to Public and Private Universities in Tanzania

Prospery Mwansa Mwila^{1*}, Paschal Wambiya² & Eugene Lyamtane²

¹Mwenge Catholic University, 1226 MWECAU Road, Tanzania

²Mwenge Catholic University, 1226 MWECAU Road, Tanzania

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*Corresponding author: Prospery Mwansa Mwila

Abstract

It is undisputable that by and large, the general citizenry and governments of the Sub-Sahara Africa is of late pretty much come to align higher education to economic assurance than ever before. This has witnessed a considerable increase in the number of institutions of higher learning established and a number of students enrolling into these institutions. It can be deduced that such an increase challenges the quality assurance in its provision. It is therefore imperative for African states to put a great deal of emphasis on quality assurance procedures as they discharge the provision of university education. This paper explores literature on quality assurance procedures in universities in developing countries with particular reference to public and private universities in Tanzania. The perception of quality in university education is first analysed alongside the divert views of quality assurance mechanism, and with the scaling up of the approaches to quality assurance. The paper concludes that universities in developing countries should aim at implementing quality assurance procedures for institutional effectiveness and service and/or programme quality.

Keywords: Quality, quality assurance framework, Bachelor of education programmes, IUCEA.

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INTRODUCTION

In Sub-Saharan Africa, University education is seen by governments as a way to economic development and progress and perceived by households as the surest way to higher wages and future prosperity - especially in the context of poor households [1, 2]. Consequently, an increase in university education desirability and effective demand has been on, with millions of students getting enrolled in universities and other tertiary institutions [3]. The general conviction is that university education is a fundamental complement to educational endeavours at different levels and in addition to national activities to help the development performance of various economic sectors. University education is expected to yield higher individual income and contributes to the construction of social capital and long-term economic growth [3].

According to World Bank [4], there has been a rapid expansion of university education with new universities being established in Africa, in the last decade. This has also augmented the respective enrolment rates. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the average enrolment rate in developing countries was

below 5 percent compared to the current average enrolment rate of above 6.2 percent per year in low- and lower-middle-income countries, and by 7.3 percent per year in upper middle-income countries [5]. The rate of increase in university enrolments in Sub-Saharan Africa, subsequently shall double in 5 years, to hit a growth rate of nearly or above 15 percent per year; the fastest in the world, so far. This notion was underlined by the World Bank Report 2017: "Sharing higher education's promise beyond the few in sub-Saharan Africa report" – depicting Sub-Saharan Africa, with the fastest enrolment rate in its tertiary/university gross enrolment ratio (GER) amid 1970-2013 at 4.3 percent every year, faster than the worldwide rate of 2.8 percent. Several reasons were adduced to this phenomenon, including: the rising interest driven by enhanced access to primary and secondary education; an increasing youthful populace; and employment moving far from peasant agro activities to advanced manufacturing and service sector [6]. Consequently, the heightened social and private desirability for university and other tertiary related education has particularly increased privately established higher educational institutions and enrollments. According to UNESCO;

"the number of enrolled students in African universities and other institutions of higher learning doubled from six million to more than 12 million in the last decade [7]."

In recent years, access to university education in Tanzania has expanded significantly. For example, there were only two (2) public universities offering university education in the early 1990s and enrolling below 10,000 students annually, as compared to the current fourteen (14) public universities and university colleges - annually enrolling above 39,000 students in the last decade (TCU guidebook 2018). More so, especially after the entrenchment of socioeconomic liberal reforms in sub-Saharan Africa, enhancing the innovativeness of the private sector [8, 9], twenty one (21) private universities and university colleges have been eventually established as of June 2019 - enrolling above seventeen thousands (17,000) students, annually in the last decade. Additionally, there is also another fourteen (14) public and two private non-university higher education institutions enrolling a further sixteen thousand students (16,000). In the academic year 2018/2019, over 224,080 students were enrolled in the higher education institutions in the country compared to less than 15,000 students in early 1990s, an increase of more than 59 percent (Universities and Economic Development in Africa, Tanzania case study, 2018).

The government has been putting resources into university education, among different ways, by giving low interest loans to university student through the freely subsidized Higher Education Students' Loans Board (HESLB), with the aim of improving the enrolment rate in universities. This is because the government intends to raise university enrolment rates from two hundred twenty four thousand and eighty (224,080) in the year 2017 to four hundred sixty eight thousand five hundred and thirty (468,530) by the year 2020 so as to meet the market demands. The Tanzanian Ministry of Education, Science and Vocational Training (MOEST), is cognizant of this huge task ahead of expanding university enrolment for the purpose of achieving full industrialization. MOEST has advanced that the plan to increase access and equity would be in line with improving the quality of education, a necessary concern in the Tanzania national second five year development plan (FYDP II-2016/2017-2020/21).

Perceived quality in university institutions in Tanzania

Literature reviewed on the state of quality in many Universities across the globe indicates that the rapid expansion of University education, particularly in the developing countries, has negatively impacted the quality of education offered. According to Banya [10], this problem has been manifested in deteriorating infrastructures, ill-equipped libraries and laboratories, poor faculty morale, and irrelevant curricula [10]. This inference has also been reckoned by World Bank [11] -

concluding that, hitherto, the fiscal and management challenges faced by developing countries have posed a considerable challenge to the sustainability of the ever rising number of established universities in these countries.

A cursory review of the literature indicates that the education system in Tanzania is currently undergoing serious problems that are impeding its overall performance and quality, particularly in privately established Universities [12]. According to Mosha [13]; Ishengoma [14] and Makulilo [15], literature also highlights the possible determinants for this phenomenon, as being: failure to implement effective and efficient reforms, deficient quality of instruction, lack of adequate funding and resources, poorly equipped training institutions, poor physical and social infrastructure, inadequate learning materials, narrow curricula scopes, wide teacher-student ratios, diametrically opposing harmony between general and professional courses, over-emphasis on theory vis- avis practice, unclear learning objectives, poor quality of textbooks, defective examination systems, and lack of supervision and accountability, research and evaluation of teacher training programmes.

the foregoing context, Tanzanian In government through the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST), has been warning universities to take heed and improve quality. In 2016, the Minister responsible for MOEST revealed that the government was evaluating a report on the quality of higher institutions in the country, in collaboration with TCU. The Minister further warned that once poor quality was detected the concerned Universities would be punished accordingly [16]. There is an assumption that education provided in public universities is of better quality and therefore it is private universities that must be subjected to quality issues [14, 17, 12, 18]. Universities, more especially privately established, are thus occupied with quality assurance procedures and guidelines and other means of attaining education quality; assuring quality of their services and products.

Contemporary scholars have defined education quality assurance variously. Otara [19], conceives it as the process of assuring society that education standards are adequate in an increasingly global market. For Massaro [20], quality education entails standing for the ability of an institution to satisfactorily train a graduate, to satisfy the needs for which a learning institution was established. It is further viewed as 'fitness for purpose'; ability to deliver output that meets the purpose for which an education programme is instituted and according to the needs of the stakeholders [21-24]. Other scholars [25, 17, 26] perceive quality in universities as a deliberate and systematic process by universities to constantly monitor governance and educational goals. The Inter-University Council for East

Africa [27], views quality assurance as a requisite to meet the needs of the stakeholders such as: government, employers, academic world, students, parents, and society as a whole. With this understanding, therefore, quality assurance in universities is aimed at making all the stakeholders to be assured that the purpose for which a particular academic programme was established has been achieved.

According to Woodhouse [28], Quality assurance procedures and guidelines can serve two major purposes: improvement and accountability. Accountability – (summative approach) A central aspect of accountability is "rendering an account of what one is doing in relation to goals that have been set or legitimate expectations that others may have of one's products, services or processes, in terms that can be understood by those who have a need or right to understand 'the account [28]. For this reason, universities in the country, especially privately established, should understand that accountability is usually, if not always, linked to public information and to judgments about the fitness of their services and products, the soundness or level of satisfaction achieved. Private established universities should understand that their institutions are accountable to different stakeholders including the government.

Quality assurance procedures and guidelines for accountability purposes in universities and other institutions of higher learning in the country should be based on criteria set down by the government through the Commissions of universities and by institutions themselves. They should aim at strengthening external insight and control, with possibility of undertaking external corrective action, if necessary. University reports of accountability should include explicit statements of outcomes and should be published. The purpose of the publication is to inform the stakeholders and the general public of the performance of their universities. As informed by various literatures, for example [29-31], this approach is common in other East African countries, for example Kenya, where there is a considerable institutional autonomy. When it comes to Improvement -(formative approach), procedures for improvement purposes should aim at promoting future performance rather than making judgments on past performance.

Divert views of quality assurance as hindrances to effective implementation of quality assurance in universities

In developing countries, Tanzania inclusive, there is some difference between the government and the universities- especially privately established, in their approach to quality assurance. Different literatures show that government has a more summative approach, while the approach of the universities tends to be more formative [32]. As argued by Gudo, Olel, and Oanda [32] governments and institutions of higher learning are

still opponents on the 'why' of external quality assurance. On the one hand, government is interested both in accountability and improvement. It aims at demonstrating to the society it makes justifiable decision on educational policy (such as allocation of funding or termination of academic programmes and closure of university institutions). On the other hand, the universities' main objective is quality improvement. Their concerns are whether it is possible to offer high quality education within the conditions set by the government regulatory bodies and to convince the public that the quality of their educational provision is the best possible. For most private established universities in the country, the most important function of quality assurance is an analysis of strengths and weaknesses and the formulation of recommendations for further improvement. However, universities also emphasise the accountability function of External quality assurance, particularly its role in the process of self-regulation, internal steering and quality assurance [14].

Another difficulty in assuring quality of university education in implementing effective quality assurance procedures and guidelines in universities as pointed out by Newton [33] is the importance of the 'implementation gap': defined as "the difference between planned outcomes of policy, or preferred definitions, and the outcomes of the implementation process [33]." Referring to a case study of a university sector college (NewColl), he suggests that there is a gap between what was designed into and expected of the quality assurance procedures and guidelines and what, at ground level, prevented this from being achieved. Newton [33] further argued that the views of 'frontline' academic staff engaged in the implementation of policy are particularly important, since they are 'makers' and 'shapers' in the policy implementation process, not mere recipients. Harris et al., [34] and Watty [35], referring to several case studies, suggests that academics adopt a variety of behaviours when quality led initiatives are implemented. It is argued that there seems to be little evidence that the majority of academics are embracing quality-change initiatives. One explanation may be that conceptions of quality can differ between academics and other stakeholders in universities, which generates a potential for conflict. Thus how policy is received and decoded by academic staff seems to be of particular importance. The success of a quality assurance system may be dependent less on the rigor of application or the neatness of the 'dry' documented quality assurance procedures guidelines per se and more on its contingent use by actors, and on how the quality assurance system, including procedures and guidelines is viewed and interpreted by them [33].

There is also the lack of preparedness of staff to quality assurance activities by universities and other institutions of higher learning [36]. Universities lack qualified quality assurance staff with sound skills and capabilities and/or mechanisms of analysis of the information gathered during the quality review, inadequacies of the selection process of and the training offered to evaluators, and the lack of effectiveness of evaluation committees. Similarly, the lack of sufficient training by universities in conducting self-reviews, the insufficiently explicit indicators and standards, and the usual change of external assessors or reviewers seem to hinder the success of quality assurance activities in universities, especially private established [14].

Another reported reason for the failure to implementation of quality procedures and guidelines in universities in the country is that quality assurance system is imposed on academics, who are, through internal mechanisms of audit and review, encouraged to use them. According to Chambulila [37] this encouragement is backed by the use of rewards and sanctions to ensure implementation. However, the ownership of the system, let alone its intended outcomes, is unlikely to be achieved when the development of the system is carried out at a distance from the academic to whom, and by whom, the system is applied [17]. Given this situation, there is a risk that quality assurance procedures and guidelines may lead to a dramaturgical compliance to the requirements of the system, instead of quality improvement. As suggested by Harvey and Green [38], our universities are in danger of facing the risk to emphasise procedural elements of quality rather than innovative processes. Continuous monitoring by a controlling quality assurance agency requiring overly bureaucratic procedures' will only result in detailed paper trails but entirely stifle development and innovation, leading to a continuous procedurising tendency and hence loss of the desired quality assurance.

What approaches to Quality Assurance should be emphasized?

Ensuring the desired quality assurance in universities and other institutions of higher learning is both the responsibility of the government – through the commission of higher education, and of the institution itself. However, the question of what approaches and how effective quality assurance systems should be designed and implemented is subject to wide debate. There is, for instance, a lack of clarity about what approaches of quality assurance should be emphasized, about the adequateness of diverse methods and instruments used by quality assurance agencies, or concerning the consequences of quality monitoring results [39, 40]. Thus, identifying the most common and important approaches of effective quality assurance systems in universities and other institutions of higher learning is rendered more complicated by the difficulties in measuring the effectiveness of such approaches. Scholarly writings also indicates that it is also difficult to know how the quality of university would have changed without education

implementation of important and common quality assurance approaches and/or procedures and guidelines [41, 42]. Moreover, it is not easy to measure the outcomes of quality in universities and other higher education institution because of many challenges [43]. It is thus upon the responsibility of each region, individual country and institution to effectively look into how to improve and manage quality assurance process/activities so as to attain the desired educative goals.

Available literatures, for example [22, 28, 44] has described three most important and common approaches in order to assure quality of services and products. The three main approaches to quality in universities and other institutions of higher learning are: accreditation, assessment and audit. These should be considered and implemented effectively. Audit focuses on internal procedures adopted by the universities in order to achieve its objectives while both accreditation and assessment monitor the quality of teaching and learning.

Accreditation

This is an evaluation of whether an institution or programme meets a threshold standard and qualifies for a certain status. As described by Darwin [22], obtaining accreditation may have implications for the university itself (e.g. permission to operate) and/or its students (e.g. eligibility for grants). The focus of accreditation is comprehensive, examining the mission, resources, and procedures of universities or programme. Accreditation is a widely used method in quality assurance in both developing and developed nations. In the United Republic of Tanzania, accreditation of both programmes and universities is the main quality assurance method used by the Tanzania Commission for Universities. Tanzania Commission for universities (TCU) is an agency/ institution that carry out the recognition of accrediting higher learning institutions and thereof ensuring quality [45]. Therefore, TCU as a quality regulatory body should only recognize and accredit universities, and also approve and coordinate the programmes that only meet the desired quality.

Assessment

Assessment is an evaluation that makes graded judgments about quality, in this respect it goes beyond accreditation that makes a binary judgment [44, 22]. Assessment asks "how good are the outputs?" Woodhouse [28], has pointed out that the output of an assessment is a quantitative evaluation, a grade (whether numeric, literal or descriptive). Programme and institutional assessments are often used by universities. Universities should there continue to design and use internal quality assurance framework for programme and institutional assessment in order to enable: (i) a continuous monitoring of educational activities based on a systematic analysis and evaluation of the requirements for each programme, (ii) an

evaluation of the education process based on the assessment of and/or verification of effects of education, compatibility of education programmes with the education outcomes, plan of study, verification of plans of individual courses, requirements set to research/ thesis, and implementation of professional practices, (iii) assessment of quality and conditions of carrying out didactic process based on analysis of data from the documentation of teaching process and evaluation of classes supported by anonymous survey of evaluating the implementation of the educational process, with questions about the curriculum, teaching staff, and organisation of education process and achieved learning outcomes, (iv) assessment of organisation and planning of didactic classes with strict observation of educational standards and regulations imposing standards, (v) the assessment of realization of assumed education outcome, and (vi) improving qualification of teaching staff as stipulated by the national standards and guidelines for teaching staffs.

Audit

A quality audit checks the extent to which the institution is achieving its own explicit or implicit objectives [28]. Quality audit is a three-part process, checking 1) the suitability of the planned quality procedures in relation to the stated objectives; 2) the conformity of the actual quality activities with the plans; and 3) the effectiveness of the activities in achieving the stated objectives". Audit asks 'are the processes effective?'; the output is a description of the extent to which the claims of the higher education institutions are correct. Academic audits are carried out at the institution level; they do not aim at making a comprehensively review of a higher education institutions' or programmes' resources and activities, nor do they directly evaluate the quality of teaching or learning. Rather audits mainly focus on those processes implemented by universities in order to assure and improve the quality of teaching and learning [46]. Universities should regularly carryout audit. It should be used on a regular base so as to check if institutional/ programme objectives are effectively leading to the desired outcomes.

CONCLUSION

It is undisputable that by and large, the general citizenry and governments of the Sub-Sahara Africa is of late pretty much come to align higher education to economic assurance than ever before. This has witnessed a considerable increase in the number of institutions of higher learning established and a number of students enrolling into universities. It can be deduced that such an increase challenges the quality assurance in its provision in ways such as achieving the objectives, implementation gap, and lack of preparedness of staff.

Literature proposes three approaches to quality assurance in university education. These include accreditation (an evaluation of whether an institution

meets the standards), assessment (an evaluation that makes a binary judgment about quality), and audit (a check on the extent to which the institution is achieving its own objectives). It is indeed imperative for African states to put a great deal of emphasis on quality assurance as they discharge the provision of university education. Certainly, the quality education is most likely to answer to the needs of individual citizens and the nation at large.

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