



STATUS OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PRACTICE IN SELECTED HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS IN TANZANIA

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Abstract: The study examined status of Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) practices in selected Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) in Tanzania. The study was conducted in three (3) HLIs one private and other public institutions in Dodoma region. The study largely employed mixed methods approach. Stratified simple random and purposive sampling procedures were used in selecting a total sample size of 106 respondents. Data were collected by using interviews, questionnaires and documentary review. Quantitative data were analysed by using descriptive statistics whereas qualitative data were analysed by using thematic procedures. The findings revealed that not only all surveyed HEIs have established QA directorate/unit but also, they have at least adopted some IQA practices for assuring the quality of higher education provided. It was also found that the management of QA across the surveyed HEIs appeared to be over centralized. There is inadequate collaboration between the QA unit/directorate and the various departments. In conclusion, although surveyed HEIs have made significant inroads into improving the quality of education they offer, they are bedevilled with many challenges. To improve their existing IQA practices to enhance sustainable quality, it is recommended that HEIs that have still not fully complied with TCU's directive to establish IQA structures should be compelled to do so as a matter of urgency. All HEIs should consider setting up IQA structures at the department/unit and faculty level to address quality issues and report to the heads of the quality assurance department/unit.

Key words: Quality, quality assurance, internal quality assurance.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The notion of quality is hard to define precisely, especially in the context of higher education where institutions have wide autonomy to decide on their own visions and missions. Any statement on quality indicates a certain relative measure against a common standard; in higher education, such a common standard does not exist. Various concepts have evolved to suit different contexts ranging from quality as a measure for excellence to quality as perfection, quality as fitness for purpose, quality as customer satisfaction, quality as value for money, and quality as transformation (in a learner) (Ballim, *et al.*, 2014). Some institutions have adopted the International Standards Office (ISO) approach in some of their activities. Depending on the definition selected, quality implies a relative measure of inputs, processes, outputs or learning outcomes. Institutions, funders, and the public need some method for obtaining assurance that the institution is keeping its promises to its stakeholders. This is the primary goal of quality assurance.

Increasing significance of higher education to competitiveness and economic development. Changes caused the transition to a knowledge economy have created a demand for higher skill



levels in most occupations. A new range of competencies such as team work, adaptability, motivation for continual learning and communication skills have become critical. Thus, countries wishing to move towards the knowledge economy are challenged to undertake reforms to raise the quality of education and training through changes in content and pedagogy. Recent researches have demonstrated that for developing countries and Tanzania in particular, Higher Education (HE) can play significant “catch-up” role in accelerating the rate of growth towards a country’s productivity potential (Okogbaa, 2016). The international community is also paying increased attention to this new thinking. The World Bank’s Africa Action Plan (2005) underscores the critical importance of tertiary education in building skills for growth and competitiveness in low- and medium-income countries (Nyarko, 2011). The Plan includes among its core actions during 2007–09, the monitoring and assessment of the quality of tertiary education and training, and the development and implementation of operational plans for IDA support to technical, tertiary and research institutions in at least eight African countries by FY08 (Okae-Adjei, 2016).

As a response, since the late 1980s, the global market for HE has been growing at an average rate of seven percent per annum. Worldwide, more than 80 million tertiary students pursue their studies with the help of 3.5 million additional people who are employed in teaching and related work (Badiru, 2016). This global trend is also reflected on the African continent. For example, between 1985 and 2002 the number of tertiary students increased by 3.6 times (from 800 thousand to about 3 million), on average by about 15 percent yearly (Alexander, 2000). In East African context, between 1990 and 2007 there was a proliferation of universities from 100 to 200 public universities, and from 24 to 428 private universities in the region respectively (Mgaiwa, & Poncian, 2017).

This surge of universities with seventeen years raises concerns over quality of education provided in these universities. Hence calling for a need of having a strategy of avoiding compromising quality in education by instituting appropriate regulatory systems. In this regard, the East African quality assurance framework was put in place to strengthen higher education in East Africa by enabling member universities to participate in cross-border education in and outside East Africa; setting common higher education quality standards for universities; promoting and safeguarding comparability and compatibility of higher education quality assurance standards in East Africa and with outside world; promoting graduate labour mobility regionally/internationally; and promoting uniform regional higher education benchmark standards based on international practices (Oyewole, 2010; Komba, 2017).

In Tanzania context, quality higher education and its improvement have always been issues of high priority on the educational agendas of the government and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The government commitment in assuring and controlling the quality of higher education in the country was first signified in 1995 when the government established Higher Education Accreditation Council (HEAC) (Komba, 2017; Peter, 2020). Thereafter, HEAC was replaced by the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) in 2005 (TCU 2015). TCU as the statutory body has charged with the responsibility of overseeing and controlling quality by setting criteria for recruiting academic and research staff, academic programmes, setting criteria for evaluating



and approving the quality of infrastructure, setting student admission criteria, assessment of students, grading system, classification, and recognition of awards (TCU, 2015). Arguably, aforesaid quality control mechanisms are used across universities and university colleges regardless of their ownership (Mgaiwa & Ishengoma, 2017).

A good number of researches shows that, despite the existence of the TCU provisions that require universities to conduct QA processes at institutional level, only 9 out of 35 HEIs which is equivalent to 25 percent of private HEIs fulfil these criteria and been accredited in 2016. Consequently, most of private HEIs have remained with provisional and full registration status (TCU, 2015). This evidence suggests that some HEIs in Tanzania are not conducting IQA process hence not complying with TCU regulations. For example, Kolumbia (2016) found that TCU revoked the earlier approval that established some of the HEIs in the country for non-compliance with law hence providing education below the required standards. Besides that, there is public concerns about the about the quality of graduates being produced by the HEIs in Tanzania. Notably, graduates who lack the competencies necessary for the 21st century knowledge-based economy, especially in the areas of creativity and critical thinking, ICT and problem-solving skills, innovativeness and communication. These are the important skills that the Framework for 21st Century Skills has advocated for quality education. The question that arises therefore is, could it be that the internal quality assurance practice is not well executed by the HEIs? This study sought to establish status of IQA and challenges affected its implementation in selected HEIs in Tanzania.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Dodoma region in three (3) selected HLIs, one private and other public institutions. The selection of the three HLIs was appropriate in that they have well established IQA unit and one institution was banned by TCU 2016 for failing to comply with TCU regulations. Given the nature of data collected in this study, the use a mixed-methods approach was adopted. Both qualitative data and quantitative data were collected concurrently for methodological triangulation and complementarity so as to offset the weaknesses inherent within methods. The design was also chosen on the ground that it would enable the researcher to summarize the responses of different groups of respondents and be able to collect their perceptions and opinions on whether or not IQA was practiced in their respective institution. The design was further adopted due to its ability to enable the researcher to collect multi-sourced data using various methods from a wide population in a short period of time.

The study used both stratified simple random and purposive sampling techniques to select HEIs, academic staff and quality assurance officials. The HEIs were purposively selected to have a mixture of both old and new ones with different ownership. Similarly, Quality Assurance officials were purposively selected by virtue of their positions, and therefore they were thought to possess credible and reliable information regarding the study in question. On the other hand, stratified random sampling was used to select academic staff member. In this regard, the respondents were chosen based on their merits and the roles they play in monitoring IQA processes in their respective HEIs. Therefore, a total of 100 academic staff sampled through a



stratified random sampling technique, and 6 quality assurance officials who were purposively selected making a grand total of 106 respondents were sampled.

Face to face interviews and close ended questionnaires were used in data collection. The questionnaires items focused on the IQA processes at institutional level which included monitoring of student admission procedures, monitoring of staff recruitment and development procedures, monitoring institution self-assessment exercise and conduct tracer studies. The questionnaires were preferred for data collection in this research because it was appropriate for collecting quantitative data and were administered to all 100-academic staff in sampled HEIs. Likewise, qualitative data were collected through face-to-face, unstructured interviews. This technique was deemed appropriate in this research because of its flexibility as it enabled both the researcher and respondents to get adequate information, clarifications and follow up questions on status of IAQ in HEIs in Tanzania. Data analysis was an on-going process throughout the data collection phase and thereafter. The data collected were sorted and placed in their respective categories in accordance with the study objectives. The researcher then analysed quantitative data obtained through questionnaire with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20.0 to generate frequencies and percentages of the data. On the other hand, data collected through interviews and documentary reviews were subjected to thematic analysis procedures.

3.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS

3.1 Status of Internal Quality Assurance Practice in Selected HEIs

The objective of this research was to examine status of IQA practice in selected HEIs in Dodoma region. At table 1 shows, a considerable number of the respondents 75(75%) agreed with the notion IQA office monitor student's admission procedures regularly only 18(18%) disagreed with the statement and others 7(7%) were uncertain. On top of that, 67(67%) of the academic staff agreed with the statement that '*IQA office monitor implementation of staff recruitment and development procedures in this institution/department*' whereas other 22(22%) disagreed and only 11(11%) were uncertain. Likewise, 63(63%) of academic staff agreed with the notion that IQA office conducted institutional self-assessment and share its report to all institution members whereas 53(53%) agreed the notion that IQA monitor implementation of students' assessment regulations.



Table 1: Status of IQA Practices in Selected HLIs

S/ N	Statement	Academic staff (n=100)					
		Agree		Un-certain		Disagree	
		F	%	f	%	F	%
1	IQA office monitor student admission procedures in our institution	75	75	7	7	18	18
2	IQA unit monitor implementation of staff recruitment and development procedures in our institution	67	67	11	11	22	22
3	IQA unit monitor availability of teaching and learning facilities	24	24	40	40	36	36
4	IQA office coordinate institution self-assessment exercise and share report to all institution members	63	63	2	2	35	35
5	IQA unit organize student's assessment of course content and teaching effectiveness at the end of every semester	49	49	17	17	34	34
6	IQA officers visit the lecture room to observe teaching and learning process	13	13	28	28	59	59
7	IQA unit monitor curriculum approval process	39	39	46	46	15	15
8	IQA unit monitor implementation of students assessment procedures	53	53	16	16	31	31

Source: Field data, 2019

Further analysis shows that 64 (64%) academic staff disagreed that IAQ office in their respective institution produce and share student's evaluation course report at the end of semester whereas only 19(19%) agreed while 17(17%) were uncertain. It was also established that 59(59%) disagreed with the notion that their IAQ office visited the classroom to observe teaching and learning process. However, 46(46%) of the academic staff were un-certain to whether their institution IQA unit monitor curriculum approval process or not whereas 39(39%) agreed with the notion and others 15(15%) disagreed. More importantly, 40(40%) academic staff were uncertain on whether IQA office in their institution monitor availability of teaching and learning facilities whereas 36(36%) disagreed with the statement and only 24(24%) agreed. From these findings one can argue that not only all surveyed HEIs have established QA directorate/unit but also, they have at least adopted some practices for assuring the quality of higher education provided. Most commonly employed practices adopted were students' admission, examination procedures, student's evaluation of courses and teaching effectiveness and institutional self-assessment. During interview, one QA director confirmed that:



In this institution we have managed to put in place all required instruments (policies, rules, procedures and guidelines) to regulate how academic staff, supporting staff, students and other stakeholders conduct their work, particularly at the undergraduate level. We have established quality assurance bureau, a clear policy and an action plan for QA practice.... more important we have prepared and put in place a number of QA monitoring systems and instruments, including students' evaluation course and teaching (Quality assurance director, 17, Nov, 2019).

Responding to the same question on status of IQA, another QA coordinator narrated that:

I can say that in this institution we organize student appraisal/assessment of course content and teaching effectiveness at the end of every semester...we believe by doing so...students get opportunity to provide feedback on effectiveness of their lecturers, course content and teaching and learning as a whole...most important we conduct curriculum review every after five years....it is only last year...we conducted a tracer studies with the same aim (Quality assurance coordinator, 19, Nov, 2019).

During interview, another QA director from one of the surveyed HEI, emphasize that,

QA directorate monitor availability infrastructure/equipment to sufficiently support the core activities of teaching and learning, research and provision of services to the public...our aim is to make sure that good and accessible social services are available to students by ensuring the provision and efficient management of these resources....we have place examination policy guidelines, used to regulate examinations...more importantly we have adopted external examinations system whereby examination questions, marking schemes and marked scripts are externally moderated by examiners from other HEIs in the country” (Quality assurance coordinator, 19th, December, 2019)

Two assertion show that some of the visited HEIs have put in place necessary instruments and system to ensure provision of quality education. Unfortunately, this was not reflected in one of the surveyed HEI, as senior QA coordinator show his disappointment:

In this institution, IQA unit is very new...actually we now trying to develop quality assurance policy and try to put some mechanism in place to make thing move...so I cannot say that we doing better...our unit was only established in 2017....now it is only two years...we have nothing concrete to show...but we are moving in correct direction...we have already formulated quality assurance committee” (Quality assurance coordinator, 7th, December, 2019)

The finding shows surveyed HEIs are at different stages in developing their internal quality management systems while some have established it others are in the initial stage.

3.2 Quality Assurance Challenges in surveyed HEIs

The table 2 presents the findings on the QA challenges observed in surveyed HEIs. It observed in table 2 that the most QA challenges faced by surveyed HEIs were: mismatch between number of



students admitted and available facilities/equipment (98%); in adequate number senior lecturers and professors (96%); lack of training on QA issues to academic staff (92%); lack of institutional quality assurance framework/policy (91%) and Inadequate budget to support quality assurance activities (86%). Table 2 presents the summary of the study findings.

Table 2: Academic Staff Views on Quality Assurance Challenges

S/N	Challenges faced by IQA practices	Academic staff (n=100)	
		f	%
1	Lack of training on QA issues to academic staff	92	92
2	Lack of cooperation between QA unit/directorate and head of departments or faculty or school	78	78
3	Mismatch between number of students admitted and available facilities/equipment	98	98
4	Inadequate budget to support quality assurance activities	86	86
5	Inadequate number of academic staff	75	75
6	In adequate number senior lecturers and professors	96	96
7	Lack of institutional quality assurance framework/policy	91	91
8	Lack of teaching and learning facilities	56	56
9	High cost of conducting tracer studies and using external examiners from outside the country	77	77
10	Lack of management support	79	79
11	Lack of quality assurance manuals	69	69
12	Dual responsibilities among academic staff members	70	70
13	Lack of effective IQA management system	58	58

Source: Field data, 2019

Interview findings also corroborated with questionnaire findings from academic staff. All interviewed quality assurance coordinators/directorate none of them had academic qualification related to QA issues. It was also found that some of them had limited experience on QA issues and not well motivated. As aptly captured by one QA directorate in one private HEI during interview,

We lack support from management...as QA problems we observed during monitoring are not well addressed by management...our office also lack working tools such as computer one has to use personal computer...we don't have also sufficient budget to support our activities hence working motivation is very low.



Interview findings also unveiled that although in some of the surveyed HEIs have QA guidebook but they did not have QA manual to guide their operations. In one institution visited had draft of QA policy which is not binding of the staff of the institution because it has not been approved by the relevant Boards. Moreover, in some visited HEIs, do not also have strategic plans for QA. As a result, QA issues are approached on ad hoc basis. More importantly, from the study there were strong suggestions that most academic staff members have not seen copies of the draft policy documents and therefore do not know their contents. During interview, one IQA coordinator expressed his concern by saying:

IQA roles and functions are not well stated and there is a sense of lack of ownership of QA arrangements by the academic staff in this institution...this is because only few administrative people like head of department and deans are involved in the preparation of QA policies.... hence most of the academic staff members are hardly involved...In other words, academic staff members have not fully embraced QA. They look at the IQA directorate/unit with suspicion” (Quality assurance coordinator, 20th, Nov, 2019).

The assertion shows that the management of QA across the surveyed HEIs appeared to be over centralized. There is inadequate collaboration between the QA unit/directorate and the various departments. Consequently, QA systems mooted and driven by institutional management are regarded as managerial and lack ownership by academic staff. During interview, another QA coordinator listed a number of challenges facing IQA as he says:

The IQA has been facing a number of challenges such as shortage of academic staff in some fields, multiple responsibilities by academic staff, over workload for some staff, large number of students, lack of teaching and learning facilities (Quality assurance director, 21th, Nov, 2019).

Quality assurance directors and coordinators in surveyed HEIs expressed concern regarding mismatch between the number of students admitted and the facilities or equipment available in the institution. For example, observation findings revealed that all three visited HEIs, computer laboratories and library facilities were not adequate to match the number of students enrolled. The concerns raised by respondents highlight the facilities/equipment challenges facing the institutions which served as threats to quality teaching and learning. Commenting on the situation during an interview, another QA coordinator said:

.... We have a problem with increasing numbers of students in this institution but we are not expanding the facilities. With what we have now, we do not do enough practical work in the laboratories because of the large student numbers. We have the lecturers but we have limited teaching facilities.....’Quality assurance director, 23th, Nov, 2019)

This indicates that surveyed HEIs did not comply with TCU requirement that institution should have adequate library and laboratories facilities. It was reported that computers in libraries and laboratories facilities in surveyed HEIs were not sufficient; they were too small for the large



number of students enrolled. As a result, students had to compete for small computers available in the libraries and library shelves also were not well stocked with modern books, a majority of the books being out-of-date.

During interview with QA directors/coordinators it was also observed that surveyed HEIs had ineffective mechanism for obtaining useful feedback from their graduates and employers. Thus, the HEIs did not conduct quality checks on graduate performance and employment. This undermined the quality of curriculum design and development in surveyed HEIs. It was also observed that all surveyed HEIs had inadequate number of members of academic staff with awareness and experience in conducting institutional self-assessment. In situations, where internal self-assessment exercises are undertaken, the institutions are unable to implement most of the recommendations due to financial constraints.

4.0 Discussion

The study revealed that not only all surveyed HEIs have established QA directorate/unit but also, they have at least adopted some practices for assuring the quality of higher education provided. Most commonly employed practices adopted were students' admission, examination procedures, student's evaluation of courses and teaching effectiveness and institutional self-assessment. This finding concurs with Cross et al (2015) study which found that most of the HEIs in Tanzania had comply with TCU directive by establishing IQA. Supporting importance of establishing IQA Mgaiwa and Poncian (2016) emphasize that Internal (institutional) QA is the internal policies and mechanisms of a HEI or programme which ensures that the HEI is fulfilling its purposes and is in conformance with the standards that apply to higher education in general or to the profession or discipline in particular.

The study revealed that quality assurance in surveyed HEIs faced many challenges. For example, in surveyed HEIs respondents expressed concerns regarding mismatch between the number of students admitted and the facilities or equipment available in the institution. For example, the study observed that in all surveyed HEIs computer laboratories and library facilities were not adequate to match the number of students enrolled. The concerns raised by respondents highlight the facilities/equipment challenges facing the institutions which served as threats to quality teaching and learning. Findings from this study in line with previous studies (Michael *et al.*, 2015; Smidt, 2015; Mgaiwa & Shengoma, 2017; Mgaiwa, 2018).

The study also revealed that all three visited HEIs had acute shortage of academic staff in senior position (i.e. senior lecturer) with adequate knowledge and experience regarding institutional self-assessment or tracer studies. Arguably, academic staff with lower ranks do not have sufficient capacity to handle serious quality assurance processes such as self-study, quality audit and external examination, and to conduct tracer studies. Badiru (2016) emphasize that for credible and trustworthy outcomes of tracer studies, there is a need that they are conducted by academics of senior rank. According to TCU, the minimum education qualification for academic staff in universities is a doctorate degree (TCU 2014). Therefore, the use of underqualified academic



staff, such as tutorial assistants and assistant lecturers, in universities suggests that quality assurance and control processes might be negatively affected. Success of internal audits, tracer study, institutional self-assessment and academic reviews depends on adequate and qualified human resources since effectiveness of QA processes is highly dependent on the quality, dedication and integrity of those implementing and conducting the processes (IUCEA, 2010; Haapakorpi, 2011; Okae-Adjei, 2016). Nabaho et al (2016) suggests that senior academic staff need to conduct peer reviews, quality audits, self-assessments if the processes are to be effective and credible. Quality university performance is a direct function of the quality and number of human resources available in order to perform its duties with minimum constraints. Shababi et al (2014) suggests that unequal and limited human resources have curtailed many private institutions' ability to respond to the policy demands with regard to quality assurance.

The study also revealed that management of QA across the surveyed HEIs appeared to be over centralized. There is inadequate collaboration between the QA unit/directorate and the various departments. Consequently, QA systems mooted and driven by institutional management are regarded as managerial and lack ownership by academic staff. The study corroborates with Cardoso et al (2016) study who found that one of the key constraints facing HEIs in their efforts to improve quality of education involves procedures for developing policies to establish appropriate quality assurance system and practices with clients' commitment and practices for achieving intended broad institutions mission, vision and goals. The systems and models of quality assurance system employed HEIs in the most of Sub-Saharan are either copied developed countries (Yang, 2011; Wangenge-Ouma & Langa, 2010) hence they cannot directly fit in most of Sub-Saharan Africa countries and Tanzania in particular since most of the quality assurance systems and models require adequate budget, improved technologies and advanced mechanisms which are less seen in most of Sub-Saharan Africa countries as a result countries need a number of years practicing the same rather than transferring in humpty dumpty. The situation leads to poor implementation of QA policy and hence prolonged blanket-blames to the community about quality of education.

Despite that, Tanzania Commission of Universities emphasise on the need of developing IQA in each HLI, however, the actual implementation of IQA in most of the HLIs has remained an unsatisfactory. Most of HLIs are on the process developing their own IQA systems and few available lack clarities and are not well integrated with institutional strategic plan. Suffice to say that, are not well known to key stakeholders (i.e. academic staff and students). According to Yang (2011) lack of knowledge, values, skills and organisation to empower the stakeholders may lead to poor or unsuccessful implementation of quality assurance programmes and policies. The study also revealed that limited training on evaluation and peer review to improve the academic staff skills affects the implementation of self-assessment. Creating awareness related to quality assurance policy and programmes through seminars and workshops, according to some participants, could help realise the importance of all institutional quality assurance processes and contribute to greater acceptance for implementation.



5.0 CONCLUSION

This study has produced insights into status of IQA practices in HEIs. Although surveyed HEIs have made significant inroads into improving the quality of education they offer, they are bedevilled with many challenges. To improve their existing QA practices to enhance sustainable quality, it is recommended that HEIs that have still not fully complied with TCU's directive to establish IQA structures should be compelled to do so as a matter of urgency. All HEIs should consider setting up IQA structures at the department and/or faculty level to address quality issues and report to the heads of the quality assurance directorates/units. The responsibility of IQA of HEI provided should ultimately rest with the institutions in partnership with regulator. The IQA directorates/units in the HEIs should be given adequate financial and material resources to operate with. The competences of their staff should be improved through regular training and workshops to reflect current issues in QA. It is also recommended that all the case institutions should have documented QA manuals which will guide their operations. The manuals should be reviewed periodically.

The HEIs should develop strategic plans for QA, support the plans through to their implementation and assess all major activities against quality standards. With strong leadership commitment, hopefully, this will gradually transform the organisational culture of each institution into quality culture. In the strategic plans of the various HEIs, there must be an appropriate balance between student numbers, on the one hand, and physical infrastructure, equipment and human resource capacity on the other hand.

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