

Quality Assuring Teaching and Learning Processes in Higher Education: A Critical Appraisal

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ABSTRACT Universities, the world over, seek excellence in teaching and learning. Emphasis is put on quality of all university processes as universities seek to satisfy major stakeholders. Quality assurance of teaching and learning processes and procedures is important in order to ensure that relevant and useful graduates are produced from universities. In the concept paper the researchers explore the concepts quality and quality assurance. A link is drawn between quality assurance and teaching and learning processes in higher education. Theories underpinning quality assurance in higher education are explored, importance of quality assurance is examined and the different dimensions quality assurance could take in teaching and learning are discussed. The researchers further discuss challenges associated with quality assurance in higher education, draw conclusions and make recommendations towards quality enhancement in university teaching and learning processes.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education processes and procedures such as teaching and learning should always be reviewed, examined and critique to ensure fitness of purpose as well as fitness for purpose. Quality assurance is the careful and systematic appraisal practice of an organisation or curriculum to ascertain whether or not satisfactory standards of education are met (Hayward 2001). In this view, quality assurance becomes an integral measure of ensuring standards are met. Similarly, Peters (1996) claims quality assurance measures are also vital in adding value to the product and are best applied during the process of implementing a programme and not merely inspecting the final product. Quality assurance is a quality management measure which provides confidence that quality requirements are fulfilled (Manghani 2011). To this end, quality assuring becomes an important aspect of the maintenance of quality as well as ensuring accountability. Teaching and learning in higher education has a direct bearing on the type of graduate that universities produce as a result of the different cur-

ricula and pedagogical approaches. The issue of graduate employability is a critical one as the quality of university graduates is evaluated against capacity to contribute to economic growth and development. Any higher education system becomes a waste if it produces unemployable graduates as well as those that cannot create own employment. Allan (2006) describes gradueness in terms of the skills a graduate possesses. These include 'hard' skills related to subject specific knowledge as well as 'soft' skills which refer to the ability to do something based more on attitude and behaviour. Through meticulous quality assurance of teaching and learning processes in higher education, an attempt is made to ensure that appropriate graduate attributes are imparted to students. Andrews and Higson (2008) note the skills gap between what university graduates possess and what employers look for. This becomes a problem if university programmes fail to adequately prepare graduates for the job market. This alludes to the issue of quality and how it can be assured to ensure a match between graduates knowledge, skills and values and job market expectations.

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Quality Assurance and Its Purpose

Quality assurance is a global issue that calls for greater accountability and reflection in higher education institutions' ways of conducting business. In the South African higher education

system “quality assurance practices and procedures differ from institution to institution” (Strydom and Lategan 1998: 73). Literature contains many definitions of quality assurance in higher education. According to Wilger (1997), quality assurance in higher education can be referred to as a collective process by which the higher education institution as an academic institution ensures that the quality of educational process is maintained to the standards it has set itself. Through its quality assurance plans a university has the capacity to fulfil itself, its learners and intrigued outer stakeholders that its courses meet the fitting scholarly and proficient measures, the targets of its courses are proper, the methods picked and the assets accessible for conveying those goals are suitable and sufficient, and that it is striving consistently to enhance the nature of its courses.

Wilger (1997) expounds further that this definition incorporates a few key measurements of value confirmation in advanced education. Firstly, quality assurance concentrates on methodology; it tries to persuade both inside and outer constituents that an institution has forms that deliver great outcomes. Furthermore, quality assurance makes express responsibility for quality at different focuses inside the institution. Quality is the obligation of everybody in an institution. Thirdly, quality assurance is a ceaseless, dynamic, and responsive procedure which incorporates solid assessment and input circles. Compelling correspondence is key to a fruitful quality assurance framework. At its centre, quality assurance poses the question, “How does an institution realize that it is accomplishing the sought results?”

Strydom (2001) expresses that the reasons of quality assurance at the institutional level are to enhance the institutions and their academic offerings. It gives affirmation to general society in regards to the accomplishment of the obliged general level of value. Quality assurance also gives confirmation to general society and different stakeholders that a specific set of expert and scholastic principles is accomplished. It shows viability and gives responsibility with respect to whether institutional and programme plans are satisfied to a palatable level. It exhibits impact of productivity in all capacities of the institution at all levels and allows decisions to be made in the institutions in admiration of funding from the government and to empower quality

advocacy choices to be made in institutions and higher education in general.

Kis (2005) expresses that quality assurance methodology can fill two real needs: change and responsibility. Quality assurance for responsibility reasons focuses around criteria situated around outside powers and organizations, for example, the Higher Education Quality Committee in South Africa. They go for reinforcing outside understanding and control, with probability of undertaking outer remedial activity, if essential. Quality systems for development purposes go for advancing future execution instead of making judgements on past execution. The criteria and methodology utilized are proposed to fortify the conditions, inspirations, degree and level of information of higher education institutions towards quality change.

As indicated by Wilger (1997) the literature on quality assurance in higher education underscores that a compelling quality assurance framework rests on a few presumptions, including: institutions have overall characterized missions and objectives, which are generally imparted and saw through-out the institutions; obviously characterized quality inside the connection of their mission and objectives; and that institutions have solid correspondence systems. An institution that fails to offer these “preconditions” will have a troublesome time actualizing a fruitful campus-wide program of quality assurance.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND ITS ROLE IN SOCIETY

In order to discuss and learn more about quality assurance in higher education, we should ask ourselves, *what is higher education and what role does it play in society?* The role higher education can and should play in South Africa’s reconstruction, development and transformation can be traced back to the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE Report 1996). The NCHE (1996: 65) states that ‘higher education is a key allocator of life chances for the individual.’

This shows that higher education is responsible for human resource development in the country by imparting to students skills that enable them to serve in difference socio-economic and political capacities. Accordingly, this is in line with what Mammen (2006: 640) says that:

Every higher education institution should be looking constantly for ways to enhance the capa-

bilities and talents of both academics and students in order to gain necessary competitive edge.

Pavlenko et al. (2008) argue that important in this view is the issue of the quality of higher education programmes and teaching and learning processes. Similarly, university graduates have to be comparable to graduates from other universities and even have competitive advantage.

In a diversified society like South Africa, higher education means different things to different people. Higher education is not only about the higher level of educational structure in the country. In terms of the level, higher education includes university teaching and learning towards which students' progress to attain higher educational qualifications. The purpose of higher education is to allow students to explore and advance new frontiers of knowledge in different areas of life and subject disciplines. NAAC (2007: 5) is of the view that:

Higher education is about knowing more and more about less and less. It develops the student's ability to question and seek truth and makes him/her competent to critique on contemporary issues. It broadens the intellectual powers of the individual within a narrow specialisation, but also gives him/her a wider perspective of the world around.

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council of India (NAAC 2007) highlighted four prime purposes of higher education. The first is the production of a skilled and qualified human resource base. In this view, higher education should provide knowledge, skills and values that make graduates relevant and useful in the labour market. This will ensure growth and development in society. Higher education should also empower students with research skills. This will ensure production of qualified scientists and researchers who would always spearhead innovations in society.

The core business of institutions of higher learning is teaching and learning. Higher education should guarantee effective management of teaching and learning processes. Higher education institutions should, therefore, seek to find ways to enhance teaching and learning as well as measures to ensure improved completion rates among students. Higher education is also responsible for extending life chances. Students should be given access to higher education as

well as higher chances of success in it (Akoojee and Nkomo 2007).

It is very interesting that all these four concepts of higher education are not exclusive. Rather, they are integrated and give an overall picture of what higher education is. If we look at the activities of universities and universities of technology in South African, we will realise that teaching and learning, research and community engagement form three main functions of higher education.

A reflection of the different purposes of higher education as shown in the foregoing discussion shows that higher education has a crucial role to play in society. In terms of human resource production, higher education ensures that people with relevant and useful knowledge and skills are fed into the different areas of industry and commerce. Skilled and knowledgeable graduates are key drivers for economic development. Blankley and Booyens (2010) observes that highly trained workers are significant in enhancing a country's capacity for a knowledge-based economy.

Being an indicator for organisational performance, the quality of higher education should be the primary goal and objective of all higher education institutions. Higher education institutions should aspire to satisfy the requirements of their students, staff, stakeholders, society, and applicable regulatory requirements.

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In order to understand the concept of quality assurance in higher education it is very important to define *quality*. Integral to any quality assurance system in higher education is a working definition of quality. Most of the literature on quality assurance assumes that individual higher education institutions or group of institutions will develop a working definition of quality. Few writers have actually articulated a definition of quality, particularly with respect to higher education. This is because quality is a much debated term and this means that it means different things to different people.

Linguistically, Cloete (1997: 2) argues that quality has at least three different meanings. Firstly, quality can mean a degree of excellence. Secondly, it could be a characteristic or attribute. And thirdly, quality could mean better than

something else. In higher education the concept has remained elusive and ill-defined. The concept is 'multidimensional and subjective' and there are as many 'qualities of higher education' as there are sets of objectives and criteria that can be related to higher education.

Philosophically, Cloete (1997: 5) expresses that quality can be approached from an 'essentialist', 'nominalist' or an 'objectivist' perspective. The essentialist perspective attempts to identify the critical aspects of quality. The nominalist point of view, in contrast, regards the search for absolute descriptions as rather unimportant and accepts that there are as 'many definitions as there are stakeholders and purposes'. This viewpoint places emphasis on understanding of quality where some agreement can be reached. The objectivist approach, on the other hand, attempts to apply common methods across a system to obtain an 'objective operational measure' of quality.

Barnett (1992: 61) provides a 'suggestive' definition to define 'quality' in higher education as:

a high evaluation accorded to an educative process, where it has been demonstrated that, through the process, the students' educational development has been enhanced ... not only have they achieved the particular objectives set for the course but, in doing so, they have also fulfilled the general educational aims of autonomy of the ability to participate in reasoned discourse, of critical self-evaluation, and of coming to a proper awareness of the ultimate contingency of all thought and action.

In such a definition, importance is placed on achievement of set objectives as well as overall student development. This suggests that quality assurance should serve particular and specific purposes in higher education.

Gueorguiev (2006) defines quality as the degree to which a product or service meets certain expectations. On the other hand, Harvey and Green (1993) list five separate approaches to describing quality. They argue that quality is seen as far as being *remarkable* (surpassing elevated expectations and passing an obliged standard) furthermore as far as *consistency* (displayed through 'zero-imperfections' and 'taking care of business the first run through', making quality a culture). It is additionally taken regarding *fitness for purpose*, which means the product or service meets the expressed reason for its

existence, client particulars and fulfilment), and also *value for money* (through proficiency and viability); and as *transformative* (as far as qualitative change is concerned).

According to Mammen (2006), these diverse thoughts of quality lead to a conclusion that the quest for a widespread meaning of quality has been unsuccessful. Instead of searching for a solitary definition for quality in higher education, one ought to take a look at the distinct recognitions it involves.

A working meaning of quality is indispensable to any quality assurance framework in higher education. The vast majority of the literature on quality assurance accepts that individual institutions or group of institutions will create a working meaning of quality. Few authors have really enunciated a meaning of quality, especially regarding undergraduate instruction. According to Wilger (1997) the individuals who have characterized quality have recommended the accompanying few intriguing things to note about the attributes of quality and these incorporate specialized information or capability in a significant field and education (for example, correspondence and computational abilities, mechanical aptitudes). There is likewise the issue of being 'without a moment to spare' learning capacities that empower graduates to learn and apply new information and aptitudes as required – frequently alluded to as life-long learning abilities. Quality likewise guarantees the capacity to settle on educated judgements and choices (accurately characterized issues, assemble and examine pertinent data and create and execute appropriate solutions) and the capacity to function in a worldwide group, including learning of diverse societies and setting and also remote dialect abilities. There is additionally a scope of qualities and disposition required for achievement in the work environment including: adaptability and versatility; ease with differences; inspiration and steadiness; high moral standards; inventiveness and creativity; and capacity to work with others, particularly in gatherings and exhibited capacity to apply these abilities to complex issues in genuine setting.

It is clear that the characteristics of quality found in the quality assurance literature are largely conveyed in the language of external stakeholders, mainly those who employ graduates. Wilger (1997) further notes that the list of quality characteristics is all-inclusive and any sensi-

ble attempt to achieve it would essentially require the contribution of all members in an institution and not individual members. The issue of achieving quality, therefore, requires team effort.

According to NAAC (2007) the concept of quality is not very easy to define and it is contextual. Some may take quality to mean 'standard' while others may take it to mean 'excellence'. These views differ because of how values operationalized in individual, institutional, and national practice. According to Ashcroft and Foreman-Peck (1996: 21) "standards can be defined in terms of minimum 'threshold' by which performance is judged". In this context, quality is assessment in terms of a set of norm-referenced standards (such as the HEQC Criteria for Programme Accreditation) that are built around what is expected at the minimum and beyond. In contrast, is the consideration of quality as excellence (similar to what Green and Harvey calls as exceptional). Excellence is a performance stage of exclusiveness that is distinctive from many others and stands out as demonstration of 'zero-defect' and highest level of satisfaction of the stakeholders. In higher education, the objective is to achieve the 'standard' and move towards 'excellence'.

SIGNIFICANCE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Lecturers, Deans, heads of divisions, Vice Chancellors and Deputy Vice Chancellors, planners and policy makers in any tertiary education institution dependably have this inquiry as a main priority. It is not in light of the HEQC order that we ought to consider quality; rather quality ought to be a bottom up methodology and everybody to be aware of why we ought to stress over the nature of our teaching and learning and the nature of our scholastic projects and higher education establishments.

In perspective of the inconceivable education and social difficulties confronting South Africa today, higher education institutions should get to be intensely mindful of the need to work as proficiently and beneficially as could be allowed. The significance of higher education for the advancement of perfection, aptitude and information prompting general improvement in economy can't be undermined. Globalization of higher educational administrations has turned into a zone of key centre for some nations, and

South Africa specifically. Higher education assumes a real part in fuelling the financial advancement of the nation and this obliges a shift as far as administration and service delivery is concerned. Higher education institutions must get to be more creative prompting quality institutions of learning creation and dissemination (Ali and Shastri 2010).

Higher education is progressively being examined on its value to its stakeholders. Despite the fact that benefactors assume a pivotal part in guaranteeing quality, the exploration discoveries proposes that the premise for any viable quality ought to move past the conventional statutes to make it reflect neighbourhood needs and substances inside a universal setting guided by powerful quality monitory and assessment components (Abukari 2010). The setting in which higher education institutions work has had significant changes of the previous decades. This has included expanding interest for higher education, technological progression, developing learning economy, and weight on higher educational institutions to react to the needs and desires of stakeholders in addition to everything else. These progressions are recognized to present real difficulties to higher education overall and have headed a few institutions to change. Correspondingly, nature of a few institutions' strategies and practices on teaching and learning, are progressively being expressly focused around the degree to which core activities generate income and reinforce national monetary intensity (Abukari 2010).

A percentage of the reasons depicted in the literature, particularly by the Council on Higher Education (2001), on why we ought to stress over quality and quality assurance in higher education incorporate the issue of competition. South African higher education has since entered another administration, where competition among higher education institutions for students and funding is profoundly noteworthy. With globalization and the Global Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), the higher education environment has been seized by expanded competition. So as to get by in such a circumstance, higher education institutions need to stress over their quality.

There is additionally the component of client fulfilment. Learners, parents or financial supporting offices as clients of the higher education institutions are presently exceedingly aware

of their rights or getting quality for their cash and time used. They are presently requesting great quality teaching and getting employable skills sets, and subsequently higher education institutions ought to always stress over the pertinence of their courses and academic programmes to the needs of the market. Regarding keeping up standards, higher education institutions are constantly worried about their norms and keeping them up consistently quite a long time. To keep up the benchmarks, the higher education institutions ought to deliberately endeavour deliberations to enhance nature of their teaching and learning as well as their academic offerings.

Quality assurance has a component of responsibility. A great part of the current backing for quality assurance is commenced on the statement that higher education needs a reinforced arrangement of responsibility. Numerous concerned parties, especially those outer to institutions, accept that a reliably high level state of university teaching and learning is no more ensured and that higher education institutions should eagerly take part in quality assurance processes. Supporters of quality assurance view responsibility as essential to fulfil outside constituents as well as a precondition for development, particularly in undergraduate training (Wilger 1997). Each higher education institution is responsible to its stakeholders regarding general society and public and private funds utilized on it. Sympathy toward quality will guarantee responsibility of the funds used and advise the stakeholders about taking proper choices. Subsequently, quality assurance can be considered as an observing component.

There is additionally a need to enhance employee spirit and inspiration. The higher education institution's sympathy toward quality will enhance the spirit and inspiration of the staff performing their duties and obligations. On the off chance that a quality assurance framework is set up, the inward methods would be precise, making each division inside an institution supplementing one another's administration area and aiding in creating inner client fulfilment, prompting high confidence and inspiration. Regarding validity, renown and status, higher education foundations are worried about quality, persistently and not just on occasion, they will accumulate believability to people and their establishments in light of consistency prompting practice, status and brand esteem.

Quality assurance additionally empowers institutions to improve their images and perceivability. Quality higher education institutions have the ability to pull in better stakeholder backing, such as getting excellent students from far and close, expanded donational gifts from humanitarians and subsidizing organizations and higher executive enthusiasm for simple placement of graduates.

POLICIES INFORMING QUALITY ASSURANCE IN SA HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

Quality assurance has become a matter of great importance to the South African higher education system. "The institutionalization of quality assurance is firmly on the agenda of higher education in a number of developed and developing countries around the world" (CHE 2001: 3). According to the CHE (2001), quality assurance system is intended to ensure that higher education and training programmes at under-graduate and postgraduate levels are relevant and responsive to the needs of learners, employers and other stakeholders within the context of the social, intellectual and economic requirements of societal development. For the system to be implemented there should be policies and procedures (regulatory frameworks) which guides, govern and ensures that the intended goals are met.

"Transformation of higher education in South Africa is part of its broader process of political, social and economic transition, which includes political democratization, economic reconstruction and development, and redistributive social policies aimed at equity" (DOE 1997: 5).

Within the South African higher education context, a number of legislative instruments e.g., the SAQA Act, the Skills Development Act and the Higher Education Act, highlight the role of Quality Assurance in delivering key national objectives of equity, transformation and development. The South African higher Education Act 101 of 1997 as amended gives a clear guide on where and how higher education should be restructured given the history of discriminatory exclusion in the country.

There are different crucial Policy and Legislative frameworks which form the basis for the quality assurance within the South African higher education context. The Report of the National

Commission on Higher Education, a Framework for Transformation (1996) is one such policy framework. According to the Council on Higher Education (2001) the focus on quality and the role of quality assurance in a transformed higher education system is stated in the recommendations stated of the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) report.

The CHE (2001: 2) referred to the NCHE (2001) which states that:

Comprehensive, development-oriented quality assurance system is central to the creation of a single coordinated higher education system.

According to the CHE (2001), the NCHE Commission argues that quality assurance mechanisms are essential to tackle differences in quality across institutional programmes and it also saw quality assurance as an important element of the new form of governance proposed for higher education as well as one of the ways of drawing private higher education into the new system.

The issue of quality assurance in higher education institutions is also contained in the Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education, 1997. The CHE (2001), mention the white paper 3, as one of the critical document within the South African Higher Education which guides the transformation process and how quality assurance can be addressed. It identified quality as a critical principle for the restructuring of higher education. The White Paper 3, DOE (2001), states that:

The pursuit of the principle of quality means maintaining and applying academic and educational standards, both in the sense of specific expectations and requirements that should be complied with, and in the sense of ideals of excellence that should be aimed at. These expectations and ideals may differ from context to context, partly depending on the specific purposes pursued.

Through the establishment of the quality assurance system in the country, the White Paper proposes that the primary responsibility for quality assurance should rests within the higher education Institutions themselves, but it further argues that there is an important role for an umbrella of national authority responsible for quality promotion and assurance throughout the system.

The Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 provides for the co-ordination of quality assurance in South African higher education through the HEQC which is established as a permanent committee of the CHE. This act stipulates that the HEQC and the CHE should comply with the policies and criteria formulated by the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) in line with Act No 58 of 1995 and also provides for the delegation of any quality promotion and quality assurance functions by the HEQC to other appropriate bodies, with the concurrence of the CHE.

The HEQC's functions in the South African Higher Education context include among others, accreditation of academic programmes for the public and private higher education institutions, institutional Auditing and Quality promotion within the Higher education system. According to the CHE (2001), the HEQC operate within the agreed framework which is underpinned by the formulation of criteria and procedures in consultation with higher education institutions, formative notion of quality assurance, focused on improvement and development rather than punitive sanction and a mix of institutional self-evaluation and external independent assessment.

The South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) Act, 1995 also provides for the development and implementation of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF), for this purpose to establish the South African Qualifications Authority; and to provide for matters connected therewith. Where in the objectives of the NQF are:

... to create an integrated national framework for learning achievements; facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths; enhance the quality of education and training; accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities; and thereby contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large. (SAQA 2005: 1).

According to SAQA (2008: 5) its function is: *"to oversee the development and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and ensure the achievement of its objectives in accordance with the implementation*

framework it has prepared after consultation with the Quality Council's (QC's), to advise the minister and the minister of labour in terms of this Act, to formulate and publish policies and criteria for the registration of bodies responsible for establishing education and training standards or qualifications; and the accreditation of bodies responsible for monitoring and auditing achievements in terms of such standards or qualifications.

The above policies are only the few to mention among others that guides and informs the quality assurance in South African Higher education system.

THEORIES INFORMING QUALITY ASSURANCE

There are a number of theories that inform quality assurance processes and procedures. The first conceptualisation of quality assurance is modelled around internal quality. This model is premised on educational effectiveness for the achievement of set goals. Quality assurance, in this regard, focuses on the improvement of internal environment and processes to ensure effectiveness of learning and teaching for the achievement of planned goals (Cheng and Townsend 2000). The three major models informing internal quality are goal and specification, process and absence of problem models. The goal and specification model is content that an educational programme has pre-stated goals and its quality is measured by the achievement of the set goals (Cheng 2011). This is some kind of internal quality, as already alluded to. Some of the indicators of quality according to the goal and specification model include students' academic achievements, attendance rate, dropout rate, and personal developments, number of graduates enrolled in universities or graduate schools and staff's professional qualifications.

On the other hand, quality assurance processes and procedures can be informed by the Process Mode. The model advances the view that it is the processes in the institution that determine the quality of output and the degree to which the planned goals can be achieved. Teaching and learning processes, for example, determine the quality of the educational programme and ultimately, the quality of the learner produced. In this view, quality ceases to be look-

ing at the achievement of stated goals but examining the processes to ensure an expected end product. In ensuring quality, the whole set of processes from curriculum planning, management issues as well as teaching and learning processes would require thorough examination. This is a type of internal quality assurance which places emphasis on internal improvement.

There is also the Absence of Problems Model which advances the view that if there are no glitches, difficulties, defects, weaknesses and dysfunctions in an education institution; this institution is of high education quality. In this view, quality becomes the absence of problems and troubles inside the education institution. In order to avoid challenges in the system, quality assurance takes the form of institutional monitoring and reporting to ensure no problems and deficiencies arising from its operation and structure. In relation to teaching and learning in higher education, there may be need to put in place strategies to monitor teaching and learning processes and report challenges. This is important for institutional improvement.

Theories and models informing quality assurance of teaching and learning processes in higher education should, therefore, move away from quality control focus, where the emphasis is on looking at the finished product to total quality management where the processes are monitored to ensure a quality product (Allais 2009). An attempt to look at the finished product may not be helpful as it may come too late to improve the products. However, if quality assurance processes are embedded in the conducting of business there is a likelihood of improving systems and end-products.

QUALITY ASSURANCE AS A PROFESSIONAL TASK

There are instances where academics in universities view quality assurance as a management task that is meant to ensure that they comply with certain expectations regarding their work. Such a view is a very unfortunate one as quality assurance should be viewed as a professional exercise. Nyenya and Bukaliya (2014) argue that quality assurance initiatives should be an integral part of university academics' professional lives as quality should be at the forefront of whatever they do.

Reichert (2008) advances the view that academics in universities should assume a quality culture. In this quality culture, academics would not see the need to improve processes and procedures as a management issue imposed on them. It will be incumbent upon every individual in the university to ensure quality in every aspect of dispensation of duty. It is only when everyone understands the importance of quality assuring teaching and learning processes and procedures that teaching and learning would be improved and quality of products would meet expectations of society.

A participatory quality culture in an institution of higher learning places emphasis on the establishment of internal quality assurance mechanisms (Lueger and Vettori 2008). Such mechanisms assist to ensure accountability on the part of academics in institutions of higher learning. A quality assurance culture is, therefore, based on the need for accountability. There should be a move away from imposed quality control to empowering academics to take control of quality in their teaching and learning (Kember 2000).

IMPORTANCE OF QUALITY ASSURING TEACHING AND LEARNING

According to Biggs (2002), the idea of quality enhancement is central to improving teaching and learning and quality assurance clearly has a role to play in improving quality in higher education. This statement is supported by Chong and Ho (2009), who argues that Quality assurance is vital to ensure the continuous improvement of the content, delivery and development of initial academic preparation. Chong and Ho (2009), further argue that Quality assurance should be seen as a means of improving the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the Higher education institution. The CHE (2012) further argues that enhancing the quality of teaching and learning is a key strategic focus area in higher education. From a national perspective, “the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) has identified the improvement of teaching and learning to be of critical importance for improving success rates and has acknowledged the strategic role of the monitoring, evaluation, and financing of teaching and learning” (CHE 2012: 1). According to the CHE (2012), the importance of investment in teaching

and learning is also underscored in the 10-Point Plan for higher education and training developed by the Development Bank of Southern African (DBSA), commissioned by the DHET.

The CHE (2012) refers to McCormick (2009) who argues that public accountability demands on higher education institutions, especially in relation to the quality of teaching and learning, are increasing and higher education institutions have to find ways of providing evidence in concrete, observable and measurable ways of what they are doing to improve teaching and learning.

According to Biggs (2002), institution of higher learning needs not only to design its teaching delivery system in accordance with its espoused theory, but also to establish built-in mechanisms that allow it, like the individual reflective teacher, to continually review and improve current practice. New content knowledge, educational innovations, a changing student population, and changing conditions in the institution and in society, all make such a review necessary. This statement is in line with Loukkola and Zhang (2010), who argue that once a programme is up and running, the frequency and means for monitoring it also vary from one institution to another. Each institution can have its own means and ways of monitoring and quality assuring its existence. Ensuring the quality of teaching and learning can be done in different ways. The most common strategies of ensuring the quality of teaching and learning within the Higher education institutions include among others self-reflection and review of teaching practice, departmental course review processes, summative Course and Teaching Evaluations, peer review processes, teaching and Learning Surveys, induction processes and training programmes for staff new to university-level teaching or supervision, Annual Performance Review processes where academic staff reflect upon teaching skills and set objectives for teaching development, faculties or schools report on pass rates to Education Committee identifying actions to address any issues raised etc.

According to Chong and Ho (2009), an overall quality assurance processes will streamline academic, operational and developmental activities to better serve the demands of higher education academic programmes because quality assurance framework covers key aspects of programme delivery and development to connect student’s entry profiles to beginning teacher’s

competencies. These writers further outline that if quality assurance framework is implemented in a good manner it serves to achieve intertwined goals of organizational efficacy and quality teaching and learning, on that it will serve as a guide to link the myriad operational and developmental processes in programme management and assessing the effectiveness of the enhanced curriculum

Chong and Ho (2009: 304-305), proposes that:

Quality assurance system should ensure the full interaction between the academic tutors, programme offices and student teachers on matters related to programme curricula and that quality teacher development programmes, integrate academic and professional learning and provide strong understanding and experience in aspects of teaching as a career while quality programmes should empower student and teachers by giving them the flexibility and skills they will need to cope with changes in the educational landscape.

According to Biggs (2002), Assuring and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in universities is currently of major concern. This is one of the reasons why the CHE is also moving from the audit type of approach to address low throughput in South African higher education and embarking on the quality Enhancement Project which according to Biggs (2002) is getting teachers to teach better. The QEP is going to replace institutional audits in the second cycle of quality assurance.

Biggs (2002: 2) further argues that:

Prospective QA is concerned with assuring that teaching and learning does now, and in future will continue, to fit the purpose of the institution. It also encourages continuing upgrading and improvement of teaching through quality enhancement (QE). The aim is to establish a teaching system that meets these requirements.

The issue of quality assurance of teaching and learning to ensure fitness of purpose becomes a very important aspect of safeguarding relevance.

WAYS OF QUALITY ASSURING TEACHING AND LEARNING

There are several ways of ensuring internal quality assurance of teaching and learning. The most important issue is to ensure that curricu-

lum in higher education has both fitness of purpose and fitness for purpose. Faculties, departments and programmes in any university should have curriculum committees. Curriculum committees should meet regularly and for the purpose of constantly reviewing programmes and courses (Carter et al. 2011). This will ensure that programmes and courses offered are relevant. This is an important quality assurance measure.

On the importance of ensuring timeous curriculum review exercises in universities, Bland et al. (2000) argue that changes in societal needs and advances in knowledge also require that programmes and courses offered in universities change accordingly. This is all about ensuring relevance of the programmes to societal needs. Graduates with knowledge and skills that are irrelevant to societal needs are not useful hence the need to always ensure that university academic programmes are in line with the changes in society. Curriculum committees that understand their role will be in a position to review and revise curricula as required.

Evaluation of teaching and learning by students and lecturers' peers is one important internal mechanism of quality assuring teaching and learning. Greimel-Fuhrmann and Geyer (2003) argue that students' evaluation of teaching gives students the opportunity to reflect to the lecturer his or her strengths and weaknesses. This also shows lecturer accountability to students as the lecturer will have to address weaknesses in order to enhance teaching and learning. In a related study on students' evaluation of teaching, Greimel-Fuhrmann and Geyer (2003: 232) found students saying that:

A good teacher is concerned about students' progress in learning and eager to convey new content to them, does not proceed too quickly and is naturally able to maintain student discipline in class.

Such feedback assists the lecturer to understand what students require from him or her and adopt teaching styles that suit the needs of the students. In underscoring the importance of students' evaluation of teaching, Chen and Hoshower (2003) note that:

Student evaluations of teaching effectiveness are commonly used to provide formative feedback to faculty for improving teaching, course content and structure.

The importance of students' evaluation of teaching as an internal quality assurance measure can, therefore, not be overemphasised.

Lecturers should also open up spaces to peers and allow them to sit in their classes, observe and give critical feedback. This is an important quality assurance measure. Farrell (2011) notes that in the past lecturers found it difficult to allow peers to observe their teaching yet such approaches are common now in universities. It is always important to obtain feedback from peers on one's teaching approaches with the view to improve practice. On the importance of peer evaluation of teaching, Farrell (2011: 6) states that:

The ultimate benefit of having your teaching peer reviewed is that it allows an individual to receive feedback on their teaching from a different perspective to the traditional – and what is sometimes the only – source of feedback on teaching: students.

In this view, the lecturer gets feedback from a colleague who is also an expert in the field who may comment on complex issues such as content accuracy. Student feedback may not be as comprehensive and as detailed as one would get from a peer.

Internal and external moderation of assessment activities plays a crucial role in quality assuring assessment in higher education. According to McNamara (2000: 144) moderation is:

The process of reconciling or reducing differences in the judgements and standards used by different assessors within a rating procedure, usually at meetings of assessors at which performances at relevant levels are rated independently and then discussed.

Moderation, therefore, assists in standardising assessment and ensuring that assessment measures are both reliable and valid. Consistency of judgement regarding the quality of students' work is also ensured through moderation. Formal and summative assessment instruments and activities should be subjected to moderation as a quality assurance measure.

CHALLENGES IN QUALITY ASSURANCE

Building an effective quality assurance system for higher education may consist of a number of different entities and processes acting together. These may include an institutional program, voluntary accreditation and government

and national policy. The majority of literature on quality assurance in higher education focuses on institutional quality assurance systems. Most authors agree that quality assurance is an area in which the academy itself is best equipped to lead. This also requires full participation from all various constituents within the institution. However, according to Wilger (1997: 8):

The institutions must be willing to take the initiative or they will risk intervention by the government or the statutory bodies with the stake in the academic enterprise. Most authors also agree that an honest, open dialogue across affected constituents is a key starting point in developing an effective quality assurance system.

According to Van der Westhuizen (2002: 69):

"The advancement of national and institutional quality assurance and administration frameworks is frequently constrained (legitimately or wrongly) into a particular bearing by outside and inward environmental impacts".

In South Africa such impacts assumed a real part in both the national higher education strategy advancements and in addition in the usage of the higher education strategies institutionally.

Different writers have attempted to push issues more specifically identified with building a powerful quality assurance framework. These issues could be vital when discussing quality assurance in the South African setting. Several authorities such as Van der Westhuizen (2002), Pretorius (2003), Boyd and Fresen (2004), Bornman (2004), Brits (2005), Mentz and Mentz (2006), Loots (2008) as well as Venter and Bezuidenhout (2008) recognize a portion of the issues impacting the journey for successful quality assurance framework and administration as objectives and targets. Objectives and goals of institutions are remarkably amazing and hard to expound. Agreement with respect to objectives and their accomplishment is regularly needed because of scholarly opportunity, institutional self-rule and the way that the institutions are non-profit organisations. On administration, the circumstances in regards to quality assurance administration in higher education gets to be more troublesome when considering that institutions are moving towards an association with government and with different stakeholders in higher education. Regarding self-sufficiency, assurance management is the obligation of individual institutions and they are required to be freely responsible. Institutional independence

and scholarly opportunity are regularly confounded and both can get to be reasons for institutional disappointment to conform to what the legislature and statutory bodies are stating. On the issue of responsibility, it is critical to note that responsibility in different parts of society has ended up progressively essential. Higher education is, no doubt tested to clarify to society everywhere what it is doing and how well it is getting along it. Institutions are constantly stood up to with the need to demonstrate their significance and quality.

On scholarly portability, the expanded universal versatility of students, lecturers and researchers has prompted need to comprehend the proportionality of capabilities, benchmarks and credits. Hence more consideration needs to be paid to quality assurance management frameworks. As far as information gathering and openness, a few institutions have decently created systems for information accumulation and data about inputs, procedures and conclusions of the scholarly undertaking. Despite the fact that management information systems have enhanced, at times are even now falling behind.

On the issue of funding and finance, subsidizing for quality assurance administration and management obliges levels of funds that are simply not generally moderate. As of now, the South African higher education system needs to accomplish more with less because of the past imbalances in the system. The budgetary assets are essentially not sufficient and in this way the current subsidy cash is not completely subsidized by the government. The writers concur that any manifestation of quality assurance is expensive in both time and exertion. The massification of higher education is seen as the most obvious requirement in quality assurance management. The quick growth of the student body amid the later past decades notwithstanding the going hand in hand with increment in the quantity of fields of study has strengthened talk and the sum and course of open consumption for higher education. Higher education institutions in South Africa have diverse histories, student bodies, languages of instruction, and a diverse faculty, bringing about genuine contrasts in scholastic guidelines in different institutions.

Most writers additionally concur that scholastic quality is best ensured when the obligation regarding it is found as nearly as would be prudent to the methodology of teaching and

learning. Quality and its confirmation ought to be seen fundamentally as an expert issue, not an administration capacity (Wilger 1997). Higher Education institutions need to give an environment inside which quality is everybody's obligation and inside which self-discriminating duty to its support and upgrade is some piece of the professionalism of all faculty and staff. Building such a culture of quality where thoughtfulness regarding quality saturates each part of the institution is a high need in effectively actualizing a successful quality assurance framework.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded from this discussion paper that quality assurance should be an integral part of teaching and learning in the university. All teaching and learning activities from curriculum planning to assessment should be based on ways that seek to enhance quality. The issue of quality is important as universities seek to remain relevant by producing graduates that fit in society and serve to drive the socio-economic and political functions of society. Academics in universities should understand and embrace the concept quality assurance in order to be accountable in their teaching. Accountability is made to all stakeholders, particularly students. Quality assurance should be taken as a professional exercise and not an externally driven management initiative.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made:

- Staff academic development functions in universities should place a lot of emphasis on the quality assurance of teaching and learning processes.
- Academic developers in universities should seek ways of developing and nurturing quality culture among academics.
- Every Faculty and Department should have clear quality assurance policies in place and such policies should be periodically reviewed.
- There should be quality assurance committees in faculties and departments and such committees should oversee the implementation of quality assurance policies.
- Curriculum committees should be in place in every department and such committees

should play active roles in ensuring that curricula are timeously reviewed and linked to stakeholders' expectations.

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