



ENHANCING QUALITY EDUCATION IN UNIVERSITIES THROUGH INNOVATIVE IQA TOOLS

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Abstract:

The rapid expansion of enrolment in universities that is unmatched with expansion of facilities and infrastructure has continued to raise concerns about the quality of higher education institutions (HEIs) and their programmes. In addition, the rising graduate unemployment has attracted the resurgent debate on the quality of graduates churned out by universities. These concerns have prompted the development of external quality assurance (EQA) mechanisms in higher education across the globe where governments are involved in the quality control of the institutions' programmes through periodic external assessments which include accreditation, quality audit, and evaluation. Notably, quality assurance (QA) was initially externally driven. However, it has recently become a requirement for HEIs to set up internal quality assurance (IQA) systems for monitoring and managing quality. In this paper, IQA is viewed as a system of a set of integrated policies and practices at HEIs which manage, implement, and adapt quality assurance processes, instruments, and measures to fulfil external standards and criteria as well as internal standards and objectives. This paper reviews literature on the tools used by universities to enhance IQA with a view to making recommendations on innovative tools that could enhance best practices and standards of delivering relevant quality education at this highest level of learning.

Keywords: quality education; internal quality assurance tools, innovation

1. Introduction

Quality assurance is one of the key issues in contemporary policy debates at the international, national and institutional level which has become a major concern for higher education across the world. While the quality of universities was unquestionable when they were serving a small elite, HEIs are under pressure to change and adapt to the needs of today's society. Questions about quality and graduate employability are the focus of higher education policy in many countries (Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumberg, 2009). This has led to the introduction of comprehensive and systematic

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approaches to control and enhance quality and relevance of education in HEIs in many countries (Martin and Stella, 2007).

The move towards integrating quality assurance into higher education started in Bologna process in Europe. The goals of the process were to strengthen the attractiveness and competitiveness of European higher education and to foster student employability and mobility within the region. Notably, Bologna process has grown and changed, and now touches almost all aspects of higher education including student engagement in quality assurance processes, feedback mechanisms for teaching and learning, and staff awareness of quality enhancement processes (Gvaramazde, 2008). The move has also enhanced the international co-operation in higher education, and this has improved the quality, transparency and comparability of degrees and studies that have been involved in the accreditation process. Comparability enhances mobility of graduates and eases credit transfer process across universities regionally and internationally and also. It further allows graduates to compete for international jobs (Pereira, Lutz & Heerens, 2002). This is crucial because today's world is interconnected and movement from one country to another has also been smoothly enabled by air and other forms of transport.

Bologna process has influenced external quality assurance (EQA) agencies and regulatory bodies such as the Commission for University Education (CUE) to periodically assess the quality of HEIs and/or their programmes through accreditation, quality audit, or evaluation. However, HEIs are globally assumed to bear the main responsibility for the quality of their services (ESG, 2015). Thus, they are expected to set up IQA mechanisms which comply with the requirements of national EQA agencies or regulatory bodies, but also to generate information that responds to institutions' own requirements for internal quality monitoring and management (Señal et al., 2008). Considering the context of a university is crucial because each operates in a different environment with its own unique vision and mission.

However, integrating quality assurance into higher education is today a challenge because most of the established traditions of IQA are no longer adequate to meet the challenges of the dynamic society. For instance, Martin (2018) maintains that although some quality assurance (QA) are formalized, their operation is often informal and they are not institutionalized to enhance ownership of quality management by all employees. Thus, concern with IQA has become a major strand of institutional reform worldwide. Universities should institutionalize IQA to enhance an institutional culture of quality for the purpose of quality improvement in education.

The international spread of the IQA institutional reform movement entails that policies, structures, and processes vary across national and institutional boundaries (Pratasavitskaya and Stensaker, 2010). This entails that IQA relates to diverse understandings of quality, many of which are contextually determined (Harvey and Green, 1993), reflecting different national, institutional, and disciplinary traditions and cultures. However, the differences reflected by the national, institutional and disciplinary traditions and cultures demonstrate unity in diversity of IQA systems as each is required to align with EQA policies and standards.

Brennan and Shah (2000) note that an IQA can focus on academic, managerial, pedagogical, or employment while Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2005) observe that the dominant approaches to IQA emphasize the quality of student learning, and this makes it have a prime purpose of enriching the learning experience for students. Such differing views shows the need to educate employees and all stakeholders on quality management in education, to enable them strike a balance on the focus of IQA to avoid emphasizing academics at the expense of development of learners' professional and personal skills.

Lain and Magin (2003) maintain that while IQA is primarily concerned with the enhancement of academic quality, it also has the potential to establish necessary linkages between academia and the labour market. Further, the researchers argue that procedures linked to the quality assurance of academic programmes are very commonly concerned with the question of whether or not a programme is sufficiently aligned with the competencies needed in the labour market. IQA is also concerned with the collection of information on the success in the labour market of graduates of a given academic programme, and of the graduates' and employers' opinions on the relevance of the programme in light of their professional realities. This presents a very comprehensive scope of what IQA entails. However, gathering quality data requires HEIs to develop innovative tools that can yield the information needed to beef up the data gathered with the tools outlined.

Lain and Magin (2003), and Martin (2018) emphasize that although IQA activities can focus on different functional areas of HEIs (including teaching and learning, graduate employability, governance and management, research, community outreach, income generation and community services and international cooperation), teaching and learning remains the primary focus of IQA. The focus on teaching and learning seems to imply that universities are still emphasizing academics at the expense of developing students with personal and professional skills. A balance between academics and graduate employability skills is necessary if HEIs are to respond to the labour market demands. In addition, the dimensions of IQA identified above imply that HEIs have an obligation to assure learning effectiveness, teaching effectiveness, efficiency and resource adequacy, responsiveness to academic and corporate needs, and alignment with external requirements.

To ascertain that these obligations are realized, an institution should devise appropriate IQA tools for assessing each dimension. This is crucial because, Martin (2018) observes that international trends in HEIs reveal gaps in the development of IQA tools. For instance, IQA tools to monitor student assessment systems, the physical environment, and the employability of graduates are often neglected. There are also a variety of understandings of IQA. In addition, different IQA systems have different orientations and use diverse tools and instruments. Consequently, IQA means different things in different places. However, despite the differences, Martin (2018) the researcher em(Martin, 2018) notes that there is a general agreement that linking IQA tools with other university functions, establishing effective formal and informal communication

structures for IQA and evidence-based dialogue on quality improvement among university stakeholders are critical in enhancing effective IQA.

The following section discusses the IQA tools employed by universities to enhance the quality of education in teaching and learning, employability and governance and management.

2. Teaching and Learning

This dimension of IQA focuses on the enhancement of teaching and learning in relation to course, student experience, and academic staff performance. Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2005) emphasize that IQA should have a prime purpose of enriching students' learning experience. In addition, assurance of effective learning requires establishing whether students learn what the programme goal intends them to. On the other hand, teaching effectiveness requires establishing whether the teachers and teaching methods are adequate for the programme goals and level. Assurance of efficiency and resource adequacy requires establishing whether teaching infrastructure, facilities and resources are adequate with regard to the programme goals. The most commonly used tools for assuring quality in teaching and learning are student/course evaluation and student satisfaction surveys on the programme. Universities should explore the benefits of using other tools outlined in this study in their context or innovate new ones to supplement what they are currently using. They should also balance academic- and employability-related IQA tools so as to avoid an excessive specialization of university graduates. A brief discussion of the tools is provided below.

2.1 Student/course evaluation

This is the most widely used tool for monitoring the quality of academic staff performance in universities. The tool uses survey questionnaires to collect information from students on 1) teachers' punctuality, attitude towards students, preparedness for class, mastery of subject matter, effectiveness of learning activities in enhancing learning, promotion of learning, encouragement of student participation and availability of faculty for help, suitability of evaluation methods on student learning, time allocation, interaction with students, feedback to questions, and classroom management; 2) the course with reference to the provision of a clear course outline, relevance of reading materials, alignment of assignments with course objectives, inclusion of current developments in the field, and satisfaction regarding the stated course objectives; and 3) students including readiness for class, participation in class, seeking help from teachers, enjoyment, and sense of achievement (Martin, 2018). However, universities vary on their focus on course evaluation. New trends combine questionnaire-based course evaluation by students with a qualitative course evaluation via student representatives should be embraced to enhance a holistic approach. Student/course evaluation should be supplemented with self-evaluation to enhance systematic evaluation of the consistency between the university's mission and existing

practice. Feedback from the tools should be systematically used to improve teaching and learning and decision-making processes such as staff promotion.

2.2 Academic staff assessment

Academic staff assessment through supervisors and peers is another crucial component of an IQA system that could help to monitor the quality of academic staff performance. It should be used to supplement student evaluation. Teachers should also be encouraged to examine their own performance through self-reflection of their teaching practice. Further, annual performance appraisals by immediate supervisors such as Deans or Heads of Departments should be carried out to examine a broader range of activities carried out in the course of a year, including staff contribution and performance related to teaching. Similarly, classroom supervision of academic staff can be conducted by academic authorities (e.g. heads of department) in certain contexts. Further, academic staff may be assessed by peers on their research performance and productivity, at either national or institutional level on the basis of a set of predesigned criteria. Feedback from such assessments could be used to provide mentorship opportunities to improve the teaching capacity of academic staff in general and to coach those who are in the early stages of their career (Martin (2018)). However, the researcher laments that mentorship and coaching is a critical support to young faculty that is rare, in universities. This could be attributed to the very high student-teacher ratios in universities as a result of high rocketing student numbers that has led to overstretching facilities and resources. Reforms are imperative if universities are to be rescued from this status quo to enable them provide quality education through teachers who are continually empowered through systematic mentorship and coaching.

2.3 Teaching supervision system

This is a new system that universities could explore to improve teaching and learning. It involves administrators, leaders and students in classroom observation of teaching. Where it is in use, class representatives collect feedback from other students for mid-term evaluation and report it to the counsellors and deans in charge of academic affairs. A mid-term teaching inspection meeting is then convened in each college where deans of schools, students and counsellors are required to attend in order to respond to issues identified by students and deliver feedback to relevant teachers. The system is reported to help teachers to investigate relevant issues, enforce the rules of exams, and facilitate timely reaction to feedback from students. It also helps administrators to develop a deeper understanding of the quality of teaching (Martin, 2018). Universities should explore the system to diversify the scope of tools for the purpose of enhancing quality improvement.

2.4 Unit self-evaluation

This refers to the self-assessment of various university departments. The aim of this tool is to encourage departments to improve their educational, research, and social outputs, and to make the management of these tasks more scientific and standardized. Areas of

self-evaluation include student performance of continuous assessments and final examinations, teachers' use of Power Point presentation materials, student assignments, quality of examination papers and dissertations. Other innovative ways of integrating stakeholders' perspectives in IQA include self-inspection, self-diagnosis, self-feedback, and self-modification (Martin, 2018). Universities could borrow from these innovative devices to improve teaching and learning as they also creatively devise their original relevant tools.

2.5 Programme evaluation

This tool assesses the adequacy of learning objectives and the extent to which the modes of delivery and the available resources in a programme serve those objectives. Programme evaluation is conducted by academic staff, students and external stakeholders including professional bodies and regulatory organ of the government. It is based on indicators related to certain process indicators such as student–staff ratios, student progression, and completion (Martin, 2018). Programme evaluation goes through a process of self-assessment at programme level, followed by validation by external reviewers.

Self-evaluation is carried out by academic staff and students to measure the extent to which expected learning outcomes are being met and to ensure the quality of each programme. Universities involve various stakeholders (including academic and administrative staff, students, alumni, industry representatives, and professionals/practitioners) in the self-assessment of programmes on account that the programme relevance and responsiveness to the needs of students and employers has become increasingly important today as employers continue to raise concerns on lack of employability skills by graduates churned out by universities.

Universities should emphasize on students' perspectives in reviewing programmes by using educational experience surveys for both new students and graduating students to measure the level of student satisfaction with programme curricula and assessment methods. The findings from the various stakeholders are compiled in a self-assessment report (SAR) which is sent to the external peer reviewers or regulatory body, who evaluate the programme, based on the SAR and their own observations during a pre-arranged site inspection after which a university is expected to develop an improvement plan based on the recommendations in the SAR and the external peer review report.

However, research shows that universities have diverse approaches to evaluating programmes. In some universities, each academic programme has a programme advisory committee composed of employers, alumni, and other external stakeholders, but also a student advisory committee. Both committees take part in the annual programme evaluation process conducted at the university. Some universities evaluate programmes through student surveys based on which the perspectives of students in the final year of their studies are drawn to enhance the programme quality. Educational experience surveys to new students in addition to graduating students, and the data are used for the assessment of academic programmes. This is a testimony that

programme evaluations are increasingly based on stakeholder participation rather than the sole assessment of programme intended learning outcomes by the academic staff. This tool is used in many countries in response to the demands of accreditation.

2.6 Student Satisfaction Survey

The survey measure the level of both new and graduating students' satisfaction with programme curricula, assessment methods and the broader student experience in the programme including their satisfaction with student support services. For graduating students, the survey further investigates their level of satisfaction in relation to professional development and academic growth. Results of the surveys are used by the departments and university leaders to enhance improvement of the programmes (Martin, 2018). It is crucial for universities to regularly conduct such surveys in order to continually improve curriculum delivery and also ensure that student support services are improved and diversified.

2.7 Teaching analysis poll (TAP)

This is a qualitative tool used to provide lecturers with detailed, activity-oriented feedback throughout the course. The analysis is conducted by a consultant, who provides students with an opportunity to reflect on questions in a selected course including: What helps you the most to learn in this class? What impedes your learning? How can improvements be made? The TAP consultant clarifies the opinion of the majority and individuals, providing relevant suggestions to the issues being raised by students. A TAP therefore enables students to engage actively in the feedback process, while a course is still running. The TAP consultant further presents a summary of the poll's results to the lecturer in a follow up meeting and discusses problematic issues of the course. The feedback helps teachers to enhance classroom interaction, student learning, and teaching strategies, thereby creating a collaborative and interactive learning environment (Martin, 2018). Universities should complement course evaluations and student surveys with new IQA approaches such as TAP in order to diversify IQA processes for the purpose of enhancing improvement of IQA.

2.8 Student workload assessments

Student workload assessment helps to gather information on each course and monitors its work schedule as well as its students' workloads. It examines the total number of classes each student attends, the number of taught courses they take, the amount of coursework they are assigned, and the requirements for completing those assignments. This enables the university to understand the workload of students in order to increase the effectiveness of education in the classroom and facilitate a better environment for study (Martin, 2018). A university should provide students with a clear criteria on the minimum and maximum workload to enroll for in a programme on semester basis and the conditions to satisfy to qualify to take a maximum load (eg the minimum GPA of not less than 15 credit hours in a semester). The tool helps the university to ascertain that students are meaningfully occupied with sufficient and manageable workload in

each session. Determination of the amount of workload should factor in the number of hours a student is expected to put into individual study activities (including assignments, term papers and library research input by a student for each contact hour. Workload assessment should be emphasized on the basis of its strength in increasing the effectiveness of education in the classroom and in facilitating a better environment for study.

2.9 Monitoring of student assessments

This can be done through university-wide standards for student assessment procedures and regular monitoring of student success through indicators based on laid down internal rules and regulations, or within the framework of processes in a quality manual and the regular monitoring of student assessment procedures through either external examiners or indicators. (Martin, 2018). Universities should embrace best practices in monitoring student assessment in order to align with international standards of assessment.

2.10 Assurance of learning process (AOL)

This tool measures the extent to which students achieve programme learning goals. It has three phases: measurement phase, action plan and implementation and impact-assessment. In the measurement phase, a condensed measurement report which specifies a qualification profile in terms of learning goals, competencies, and sub-skills for each programme is generated by an AOL core team. Measurement method such as exams, theses, and projects is developed at the measurement phase, together with rubrics based on which the qualification profile of each programme is assessed. Action plans are developed to address problems and issues identified at the previous phase. The progress and achievements of each action is evaluated by programme managers and an institutional coordinator. AOL focuses on ensuring the quality of the learning process and aligning learning objectives with students' competencies (Martin, 2018). Universities should explore this innovative approach to IQA as a supplement to the commonly used IQA tools.

2.11 Student progression studies

Progression studies involve longitudinal assessments follow-up of selected students at key moments of transition within a study programme (e.g. first year, mid-term, and final year). Panels are used to collect information about students' socio-demographic backgrounds, career plans, motivation, satisfaction, and desired and acquired skills over their entire student life-cycle through online survey questionnaires. Information related to students' experience in study programmes is gathered (such as daily study routine, study conditions, and the problems and needs of the students). The panels are conducted at the beginning, middle, and end of their studies, and three to five years after completion. Analysis of student panels is used to monitor student study progress throughout the years of their study at the university. It also helps to identify individual and institutional determinants of study success and therefore improve study conditions.

Student panels can also be used to complement the graduate tracer study. A university should decide on the relevant IQA tool out of the available ones to serve its context and need.

3. Employability

Lain and Maginn (2003) emphasizes that universities should engage in collecting data on the success in the labour market of graduates of a given academic programme, and employers' opinions on the relevance of the programme in light of their professional realities. A university is expected to collaborate and network with the industry to ensure that professionals are involved in periodic reviews of a programme and its organization and also engaged in mentoring students on the labour market skills. This helps to align a programme sufficiently with the competencies needed for employment. Further, the researchers assert that there is a lack of 'methodologically more comprehensive and empirically more reliable knowledge about the effects and mechanisms of action of QA measures. They also note that the aspect of context and how it influences IQA is widely under-researched and recommend that HEIs should employ innovative practices and good principles for effective IQA to help make it sustainable as a means of enhancing the quality and relevance of higher education in different contexts. In agreement, Martin (2018) notes that the increasing diversity and differentiation of higher education requires IQA to adapt to its specific context to ensure it is fit for its purpose.

However, Ehlers (2009) and Harvey (2016) assert that universities worldwide struggle with challenges related to IQA such as developing cost-effective IQA, in which tools and processes are well articulated between each other and function together as a system; integrating IQA with planning, management, and resource allocation; striking the right balance between management, consumer, and academic interests; finding or setting up appropriate mechanisms to make best use of evidence to enhance programme quality and student employability; finding the right balance of centralized and decentralized structures; and designing IQA systems that support the development of continuous quality-enhancement processes. Universities should institutionalize IQA to enhance effectiveness in the quality of education. This is crucial because research indicates that IQA has positive effects on teaching and learning, employability, and management. For instance, it enhances improvement of the quality of study programmes through changes in content coverage, assessment systems, and teaching and learning methods.

However, universities differ in their IQA focus; while some place the issue of employability at the centre of their strategic orientation; others emphasize the importance of academic quality (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) over employability. Further, in universities where academic staff view employability as being of lower importance, there seems to be a fear that an excessive emphasis on employability could narrow the definition of employability to the skills needed for a particular job. The varying perspectives on employability are associated with factors which include

importance of employability in the national policy framework, the types of faculties and orientations of programmes. For instance, in countries like Kenya with a high level of graduate unemployment, universities are quite sensitive to employment concerns (Muindi, 2014). In contrast, little attention has been paid to employability in South Africa, where graduate unemployment has not been a major challenge until recently (Altbeker and Storme, 2013; Makoni, 2014; Moleke, 2005; SAGEA, 2015). Striking a balance between academic and employability is needed to ensure a holistic approach to education.

The following section briefly discusses the tools for enhancing students' employability.

3.1 Graduate tracer study

Graduate tracer study involves recent graduates in evaluating the relevance of the education offered at university to the needs of individuals and the job market by tracking their career status and professional progress. It uses a questionnaire which asks the graduates to 1) indicate their employment status, the nature and prospects of their position (if they are employed), and the location of their employment; 2) indicate their opinion of the education and professional development they received at the university and to provide suggestions as to how the university's job-placement services, development system, professional guidance, and entrepreneurial training could be improved. Graduates from a given academic programme could also be surveyed through tracer studies at specified intervals of six months, one year, or three years after graduation, to gather data on their entry into the labour market and their opinion of the relevance of the programme from which they have graduated. Feedback from graduate tracer studies are used to review curricula and improve approaches to teaching and learning and/or student support services (such as job-placement services) with a view to enhancing the employability of students (Martin, 2018).

However, Teichler (1999) and European Commission (2014) report that most developing countries do not conduct tracer studies regularly and further note that tracer studies have low response rate to the questionnaire which limits the generalizability of the findings and their usefulness in making decisions for programme reforms. These are rather unexpected research findings because escalating graduate unemployment has made the search for improved employability become a major issue in higher education policy.

3.2 Employer Satisfaction surveys

Employer surveys seek to establish the needs of employers on the basis of evaluation of graduates. The surveys ask employers to rate the specific university's graduates against other university graduates, by indicating their strengths and weaknesses, and recommending essential skills for the labour market. They also include questions about overall satisfaction with the graduates, their reasons for choosing the graduates from the specific university, their assessment of the abilities and work-readiness of the graduates, and the workplace performance of recent graduates from the university.

Further, the surveys could be conducted to collect information from employers on their appreciation of graduates with regard to the extent to which they think they fulfil the requirements of the labour market. Other links between academic programmes and the labour market include monitoring the quality of internships, involving professionals in curriculum development, discussions with employers during programme reviews, employers' presentations and simulations of professional interviews with students, external accreditation of programmes and tracking graduates by means of administrative data from the social security system enhance the link. However, Martin (2018) reveals that the focus of most of these methods tend to be on graduates' entry into employment, the nature of the 'first job after graduation', the 'suitability' of the job, and the 'preparedness' of the graduate to perform it. The scope of the data should include more information on longer-term experiences and progression within the labour market to broaden the perspective of the labour market demands. Diversifying the scope may also require universities to use a variety of tools to enable them collect detailed information that encompasses the full scope of the market in order to enhance improvement of the programmes.

4. Governance and Management

Reforms in National governance today require HEIs' IQA mechanisms to use key performance indicators (KPI) to monitor strategic planning objectives. The indicators comprise internal target- and service-level agreements, which university leadership agrees with academic or administrative units (or both) based on outcomes expected from the work of the unit. Evaluation of administrative units is conducted together with target- or service-level agreements to assess whether specified objectives have been achieved. External certification of certain management processes e.g. International Organization for Standardization (ISO) are also used to reform and standardize the work of administrative units. In line with the discussion, Rivas (2014) observes that effective Quality Assurance & Performance Improvement (QAPI) programmes are essential to improving performance. He also notes that quality assurance is concerned with the processes of meeting standards and assuring that care reaches an acceptable level and continuous performance improvement.

New trends in IQA focus more on designing innovative structures for IQA and integrating individual QA tools into an IQA system. This requires a university to come up with relevant tools to evaluate various aspects of quality assurance and disseminate the collected data to all stakeholders, and establishing how the feedback can be best used to enhance improvement. This means that a quality assurance system has to respond to a wide range of different stakeholders' needs. For instance, academic staff may be interested in ensuring the quality of their research and teaching activities, while deans may be more focused on how to fulfil external quality standards for study programmes in each faculty. The leadership may think about adequate incentives for recruiting and retaining academics in the organization. A well-functioning quality

assurance system should address and balance these different perspectives and demands (Martin, 2018).

The differences in perception and approach to IQA imply that staff in universities participate in IQA unawares due to poor awareness of the existence of IQA policies and practices outside their department or faculty and this limits their understanding of how the different tools and frameworks of IQA fit together because line managers do not communicate to them a change in policy, the outcome of a discussion, or feedback from research (Martin, 2018). Universities should establish clear communication structures to close this gap. Further, research reports indicate that many academic and administrative staff members participate in IQA system such as curriculum review, without realizing that they are involved in IQA as they do not associated the review with overt quality assurance. This calls for appropriate communication by the management about the objectives of the university's academic project, the role of IQA in relation to it, and the tools and policies supporting it to all levels. (Martin, 2018). Self-reflection and peer teaching are other innovative approaches. The following section discusses tools for IQA in management.

4.1 Innovative tools for enhancing quality in management

Universities could explore the following emerging tools or develop those that fit their context to enhance effectiveness in IQA.

4.1.1 Service-level agreement

This tool is based on a set of regulations concerning employment conditions including employment opportunities, employee contracts, employee evaluations, and dismissal procedures. The tool helps to summarize, assess the employee's performance, fulfilment of responsibilities, and development of the employee's performance. The results are then recorded, filed and used to decide whether or not to continue employing an individual (Xiamen University in Martin, 2018).

4.1.2 Target-level agreement

This instrument is associated with the monitoring and evaluation of set objectives, both of a quantitative and qualitative nature, at the level of units and/or individuals. Target agreements are mainly between units and the university management. The target agreements are developed on the basis of the objectives of an institutional strategic plan. Target-level agreements are sometimes combined with the use of incentives (such as access to staff development opportunities) to support innovative practices of decentralized units or encourage personal involvement in target agreements (Xiamen University in Martin, 2018). It is crucial that universities work out how feedback can be facilitated systematically to academic and administrative staff to ensure that the information derived from IQA tools is used effectively for continuous improvement.

5. Conclusion

Universities should establish effective IQA systems and link them with other university functions to enhance the quality of education. They should also establish effective formal and informal communication structures from the executive to all sectors in order to enhance effective implementation of IQA. In addition, universities should strike a balance between academic and employability skills to avoid theoretical orientation of the programmes above labour market skills. They should also be cognizant of the internal and external factors that condition the effective operation of IQA and enhance leadership support. Employees and stakeholders' participation in the IQA activities should be encouraged within their context even as they align with the central system that is embedded with the university mission. Universities should also develop quality assurance tools to enable them evaluate employees and stakeholders' performance for the purpose of quality improvement. Further, universities should align their IQA activities with internal standards and objectives as well as external standards and criteria at regional, national and international levels to ensure comparability and competitiveness of degree programmes for the purpose of credit transfer across universities and to ensure that graduates are able to compete for international jobs.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Institutionalize Policy Manuals and Quality Related Documents

Quality related documents should be embedded with the university's strategic plan to ensure that all staff and students are aware of them and are also implementing quality. This entails mainstreaming IQA mechanisms and instruments with the other components of the university management system namely strategic plan, the operationalization of strategic goals through the development of plans and programmes, target agreements, and management control.

6.2 Creating Administrative Structures for Improving and Assuring Quality

The organizational structure should create administrative structures responsible for improving and assuring university quality standards at all levels of the university (including academic and administrative units, departments, collegial bodies, and committees) to support IQA processes and tools supporting the work of individuals responsible for quality assurance.

6.3 Integrate Quality Assurance with Management

Quality assurance processes should be an integrated part of actual management or developmental processes of a university to ensure that all staff and students are conversant with the processes and that they participate in implementing IQA. This decentralization of IQA has the potential to entrench a university culture of quality in all departments while the central management is still expected to play its significant role in quality assurance.

6.4 Network with the Industry

Universities should network with the industry to ensure that professionals are involved in the initial development of a programme, its implementation and periodic reviews in order to fine-tune curricular structures and course plans to reflect market needs, provide career counselling services and other student support services (including mentorship and coaching by professionals from the industry on labour market skills, innovation and entrepreneurship). They should also continually carry out graduate tracer studies, employer satisfaction surveys, and job market analyses to increase the relevance of its programmes to the job market

6.5 Make Quality Assurance Accountable to all Stakeholders

IQA should be accountable to all stakeholders in order to strengthen quality culture through their participation in IQA instruments and processes. This ensures that the IQA system is institutionalized and cannot be easily changed, even when leadership changes.

6.6 Ensure Efficiency and Adequacy of Resources and Responsiveness to Academic Requirements

Universities should ensure efficiency and resources adequacy, responsiveness to academic and corporate needs and alignment with external requirements. For example, teaching infrastructure facilities and resources should be aligned to programme goals in order to enhance effectiveness in teaching and learning.

6.7 Enhance Communication Flow to all Levels from the Executive

Universities should have appropriate communication (both formal and informal) at all levels about their IQA policy and manual, the objectives of the university's academic project, the role of IQA in relation to it, and the tools and policies supporting it to ensure effective implementation of the contents of quality in the manuals. Also, feedback from qualitative and quantitative IQA tools should be integrated to avoid an information overload.

6.8 Link IQA with opportunities for staff development

IQA should be linked with staff development. Feedback from student evaluation of courses could for example be used to improve young teachers' performance by involving top-performing teachers to provide 'mentoring' for them. Progress files for young teachers should be systematically used to keep track of their improving performance and accumulation of experience.

6.9 Follow up on IQA Feedback Processes

Universities should emphasize follow-up actions and feedback processes to enhance effective functioning of the formalized IQA system. They should also integrate perspectives of all stakeholders who are actively engaged in the provision of

information for IQA at the university (students, alumni, academic and administrative staff, and employers) in order to use the feedback for improvement.

6.10 Ensure IQA Tools are Compliant with External Standards

IQA tools and processes should enhance organizational learning and control. They should also be compliant with external standards to enhance national, regional and international competitiveness of the programmes and credit transfer

6.11 Devise innovative Quality Management Tools and Ensure they Function as a System

Universities should come up with innovative cost-effective IQA tools and processes which are well articulated between each other and also function together as a system. They should further integrate IQA with planning, management, and resource allocation and also ensure that IQA mechanisms suit their vision and values as well as the context different stakeholders in various sections of the organization. This would enhance systematic collection of perceptions data from different university stakeholders and effective utilization of the feedback for improvement of quality in education.

6.12 Strike a Balance in IQA mechanisms and processes

Universities should balance academic and employability-related IQA tools so as to avoid an excessive specialization of university graduates.

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