Influence of University Review Models for Improving Higher Education Quality Assurance in Kenya

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Abstract - *Declining quality assurance (QA) and stakeholders ' expectations are critical emerging issues in Kenya's higher education and development sector. Whereas universities are well placed to prepare human capital resources, there is growing worry that many universities rely heavily on theoretical pedagogy in teaching and learning as opposed to practical, hands-on, research and application. Quality assurance is a concern in the initiation of liberalization and globalization and therefore universities are not meeting stakeholders' expectations. This paper focuses on statistical process control and total quality management as emerging portents by reflecting on university review prototypes as a measure to combat quality assurance issues in Higher Education. Using the content analysis technique, the study explores the current quality assurance policy framework and handbook on processes for quality assurance in higher education and relevant scholarly literature in the body of knowledge to conclude. Results show evidence of a downward trend in quality assurance in universities. The study links decreasing quality of higher education to skewed content design and delivery at universities. Unvarying unrest amongst university staff demanding pay rise has negatively affected the inspiration of staff, leading to inefficient and ineffective service delivery. The study asserts that industry involvement through partnerships to design and develop market-tailor-made curricula is a significant preposition for quality assurance. The study recommends that the Government of Kenya apportion more resources to universities for studentship support of staff to pursue research; design market-tailored programmes; and, harmonize salaries of university staff with public civil servants for motivation and effective quality service delivery.*

Keywords- *Quality assurance Prototypes, University Curricula, Stakeholders Expectations, Review, Higher Education*

1. INTRODUCTION

World universities play a crucial role in human resource and capital development in a country. According to the Universities Act No. 42 of 2012 universities have the mandate to teach and train; conduct research, innovation, and consultancy and community service. In the exercise of these powers under the Universities Act, a university should be guided by national values and principles of governance set out under Article 10 of the [1]; and, for this resolution, should promote the quality and relevance of university programs. In line with this proposition, it's worth noting that Kenya's national long-term development blueprint- the National Vision 2030 accurately places a lot of responsibility on universities in delivering their mandate of capacity development to transform Kenya into middle middle-income and knowledge-based economy. To achieve these national objectives, quality assurance is prioritized as a critical preposition for the achievement of excellence in universities' curricula design and development, research and innovation, infrastructural development, and compliance to university quality standards and framework for the value of money.

Quality assurance is a continuous process by which a university can guarantee that the standards and quality of its educational provisions are being maintained or enhanced [2]. The conception of quality includes concepts of fitness of and for purpose; value for money and transformation; developing the capabilities of individual learners for personal enrichment as well as the requirements for social development, economic and employment growth [3] Quality in Higher Education, according to Article 11 of the World Declaration on Higher Education published by the United Nations in 1998 indicates that quality assurance is a multi-dimensional concept, which must embrace all its functions and activities: teaching and academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, faculties, equipment, services to the community and the academic environment.

Quality assurance should take the form of internal self-evaluation and external review, conducted openly by independent specialties, if possible with international expertise, which is vital for enhancing quality [4]. This means that quality assurance enhancement is the sum of many methods of institutional development, ranging from competitive hiring procedures, and creating appropriate funding opportunities, to facilitating communication between disciplines and supporting innovative initiatives through institutional incentives. Thus, quality development in higher education is a great deal more than the formal quality assurance processes that policymakers like to focus on when they speak about quality in higher education [5]

1.2 THE MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

The beliefs of quality assurance and strategic management using the Balanced Scorecard Approach are based on the assumptions: "You can get what you can measure" and "You cannot manage if you cannot measure". What this means, is that universities need to develop performance quality indicators intended to monitor quality assurance. Performance indicators for quality assurance are defined as measures that give information and statistics context; permitting comparisons between fields, over time, and with commonly accepted standards. They provide information about the degree to which teaching and learning quality objectives are being met within the higher education sector and universities. [6] The justification behind performance models and indicators in higher education is to ensure the education provided to students equips them for employment and provides the nation with a highly skilled workforce that supports economic growth. However, it is not focused solely on economic value; educational, social, and political values also influence the development and use of performance models and indicators [7], [8], [9].

It is for this resolve that there is general agreement that quality assurance for "Value –for-money-audits" is increasingly becoming a concern in all public and private services and higher education in Kenya is not an exception. The governments, the students and their families, the employers, and the fund providers increasingly demand value for their money and desire more efficiency through teaching. It is disheartening that many universities rely on theoretical pedagogy in teaching and learning as opposed to practice, research, and application. The country is witnessing high unemployment among university graduates yet there are projected shortages in many industries with some high-tech companies already complaining about a lack of highly trained workers. The question many stakeholders of higher education pose is whether or not university curricula are relevant and market-tailored to offer a window of employment returns to university graduates. The Ministry of Education through the High Education Loaning Board (HELB) officials are looking forward to an assurance from universities that taxpayers' money from the exchequer is well spent and adds value for money.

With the advent of the liberalization of higher education the question of how universities can best meet the burden of "assuring quality" as well as "value for money" is almost as difficult as defining the notion of quality [10] rightly agree in their research paper that standards are rather difficult to grasp and often get lumped together with similar concepts such as indicators, benchmarks, measures, and norms, and for this reason, recommend that it is important to consider which quality notions they are built upon or aim at. Similarly, [11] in his research paper entitled University Education Liberalization Process and Challenges in Kenya: Options for Strategic "Planning and Management" asserts that African universities, in particular, are struggling to emerge from a decade of crisis. Several challenges; rapid growth, the brain drain, frequent labor strife, campus closures, institutional deterioration, waning relevance, and declining education quality – have produced a generation of graduates feared to be less capable and qualified than they were ten years ago. Reflecting on this growing scholarly body of knowledge, the contributions of the present paper must unveil knowledge critical for content development and also inform policy.

The study is guided by two specific objectives: explore quality assurance policy framework and regulatory standards for compliance; and examine challenges of university quality assurance for "value of money" in Kenyan universities.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is theoretical and descriptive employing content analysis techniques to study and analyze existing quality assurance policy frameworks for best practice in higher education in Kenya. Emphasis has been given in the paper on the analysis of Standards and Guidelines for Commission of University Education and Universities Regulations as well as global best practices on issues of quality assurance in universities. Other critical study documents include quality assurance handbooks prepared by the Inter-University Council for East Africa; quality assurance reports; and, manuals relating to quality assurance and compliance. It is worth noting that the websites of universities in Kenya were visited to establish quality policies and confirm the existence of quality assurance directorates and the nature of qualifications of directors for quality fit and practices in a university. The conclusions of the study results were drawn considering the nature of quality assurance audits and reviews of higher education as an antidote for meeting stakeholders' expectations and the value of money, in general, to inform policy and contribute to content development.

2.1. THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The conceptual model for this study on the higher education subsector provides a foretaste of an interplay of variables of the study. The variables therein are quality assurance input, process, and output which directly impact university programmes. The

conceptual framework also indicates that to attain quality education, there are important processes; the management process, teaching process and learning, research, and community service processes. Thus, there is the development of management quality indicators (leadership, decision-making), teaching quality indicators (teaching efficacy, teaching methods), and learning quality indicators (learning attitude, attendance rate) at individual universities.

At the national level, performance indicators are designed to: ensure accountability for public funds; improve the quality of higher education provision; stimulate competition within and between institutions; verify the quality of new institutions; assign institutional status; underwrite transfer of authority between the state and institutions; and, facilitate international comparisons [12]. Quality assurance by this model is to ensure smooth, healthy internal processes and fruitful learning experiences [13] in the university. Thus, universities will utilize the quality performance indicators to monitor their performance for comparative purposes; facilitate the assessment and evaluation of institutional operations; provide information for external quality assurance audits; and, provide information to the government for accountability and reporting purposes [14]

To achieve effective quality assurance and compliance measures mentioned above, universities may need to formulate structures and mechanisms for monitoring quality assurance control procedures to maintain or enhance quality educational provision. Secondly, comply with the set standards and guidelines, lastly, conduct quality audit reviews both internally and by an external body to ensure that there is institutional compliance with quality assurance procedures and standards under the regulatory body; and, for this case the Commission for University Education guidelines. The quality audits should encompass how the university takes account of these matters in its strategic planning, management process, and internal processes. On the other hand, the national aim of quality audits is to support universities in their quality management and performance enhancement [15] for the value of money.

To operationalize these quality components at the university; the university management must keep in view the following quality elements: Quality of staff, student support services; quality of facilities and infrastructure; the quality process of programme specifications, the content of the programme, and organization of the programme, instructive concept/teaching-learning strategy and student assessment procedures, rules and regulation in a university.; quality output that consists of student evaluation, curriculum design, staff development activities, research outputs and funding and; benchmarking and strategic partnerships output. The outcomes of higher university education for the stakeholders should be achievements on the part of quality graduates who are fully equipped with relevant skills and knowledge capable of fitting into the job market or self-employment jobs. At this point, high university education is comparable to the cost of investment and value of money. Now, questions arising about existing gaps between quality assurance and value for money referred to as "the maximum value output of every Kenyan spent on education" are critical and imperative for investigation in this study. This article therefore is an attempt to unveil new knowledge on this critical area that has drawn public concerns and interest in particular "stakeholders" of the higher education subsector in Kenya.

3. QUALITY ASSURANCE STRUCTURE AND REGULATIONS FOR STANDARDIZATION

Quality standards are of undisputed importance within all types (i.e. institutional, regional, national, or international) of QA systems in higher education. The national quality assurance system is usually composed of the evaluation activities of the agencies responsible for the quality evaluation [16], [17]. Quality assurance has the aim of providing stakeholders with evidence that quality is maintained, standards are attained in all areas; and, that agreed processes in the university are operated correctly and professionally. The University's Quality Assurance Framework, explains the range of delivery models and arrangements and identifies the quality assurance that underpins the international operation. In other words, the Quality Assurance Framework brings together all the relevant policies, procedures, guidelines, and codes of practice associated with standards and assurance under the overarching processes of approval, monitoring, and review. Besides, the Quality Enhancement Framework provides the backdrop to the approach taken to quality in the higher education sub-sector. The Strategy has five main elements: a comprehensive programme of subject reviews that are run by institutions themselves; enhancement-led Institutional Review.

(ELIR) which involves all of Kenya's higher education institutions over a five-year cycle; public information about quality, intended to meet the needs of a range of stakeholders; student engagement in institutional quality systems; and, a national programme of enhancement themes. In doing so, the Government of Kenya through the Commission for University Education has put in place robust procedures for assuring quality and standards of their provision. The Commission through the Standards and Guidelines and University Regulations provides a framework of quality assurance and compliance for both private and public universities. These instruments form a basis for the Commission to exercise its mandate to regulate, coordinate, and assure quality in higher education under part II section 5 (1) [18]. The Commission operates on the principle of best practices and while emphasizing that quality

assurance is a continuous process requiring flexibility and adjustments, a lot of emphasis is placed on structured pre-determined standards.

According to the Standard and Guidelines and University Regulations, the quality assurance framework broadly consists of two major components namely: (1) the regulatory component at the level of Commission for University Education; and (2) the institutional component at each university level. Overall, the regulatory component of the quality assurance framework components in Kenya" 's higher education system consists of mechanisms to ensure quality through institutional accreditation; accreditation of individual programmes; encouragement of Merit-based admissions into higher education institutions; credit accumulation, and transfer; enhancement of the quality of teaching staff; streamlining of examination regulations; emphasis on student's assessment of academic staff; emphasis on adequate institutional infrastructure; collaboration with professional bodies; and, regulating cross-border higher education among others. The Commission has made great strides in ensuring the maintenance of standards, quality, and relevance in all aspects of university education, training and research. The Commission continues to mainstream quality assurance practices in university education by encouraging continuous improvement in the quality of universities and programmes.

To understand fully the purpose of quality assurance measures for compliance in universities, it's important to appreciate the integrated institutional approaches to quality improvement aimed at the elimination of unnecessary duplication, reduction of burden, and, most importantly, promotion of synergies. The integrated institutional approach includes mechanisms of quality assurance such as approval and review procedures for study programmes; the external examiner system; procedures for staff appointments and promotions; regular student feedback and complaints procedures; an institutional research function that generates indicators of performance; facilities and resources for staff development and training; recognition, rewards and incentives for exceptional contributions by staff and students; Institutional; local strategic planning processes; and, promotion of university modernization and improvement [19].

On the part of continuous improvement for quality assurance, CUE standards and guidelines envisage that universities at bear minimum provide opportunities for feedback mechanisms for student evaluation of teaching, administration, and other services; conduct a regular review of academic, administrative, service and support units; formulate structures for formal mechanisms for approval and review of study programs with external inputs. For this reason, the quality system in each university must recognize explicitly the importance of active student involvement in evaluations, particularly in reviews of academic departments and units providing services directly to students. As is necessary for effective participation, individual students, class representatives, and Student Union officers need to be involved in many levels of the evaluation processes. By good practice, it is for external processes to decide to what extent this objective is being achieved. Quality assurance reviews are carried out in academic, administrative, and service departments, and as appropriate in schools, faculties, and study programmes. Thematic reviews of university-wide issues (research, examination, and assessment procedures) are also carried out.

Commission for University Education (CUE) regulations provide that each of the universities has a quality directorate with responsibility for quality assurance and quality improvement in academic, administrative, service, and support areas. Working within the common set of principles outlined in standards and guidelines and University Regulations, each university must devise a quality assurance and improvement framework. The roles of the quality offices vary according to institutional structure but normally include: providing professional support for the development of university policy about quality assurance and improvement in line with good international practice; driving new initiatives designed to resolve issues arising repeatedly in review reports; promoting a sense of ownership by individual departments and units of the university's quality assurance and improvement systems and procedures; supporting departments and units in implementing internal and external quality review processes; publishing review reports and other relevant reports; working with the other universities and with the CUE to improve cooperation in support of the Universities research projects and annual conferences.

There is also a particular emphasis within the quality offices on encouraging innovation in teaching and learning, together with the promotion of teaching excellence as a scholarly activity [11]. Attention needs to be drawn provide the cyclical quality assurance model. Adopting this model, universities within their mandate and QA policy have to conduct internal and external audits of programmes. The model indicates that regular, annual, periodic, and eternal quality assurance of the university is important. The QA focuses on all aspects of the university as drawn from the strategic plan.

For individual universities, the list may vary but typically includes all staff in all categories; Graduates/alumni as individuals and as members of alumni organizations; a wide range of enterprises, businesses, and agencies as employers of graduates; Research and project partners; professional bodies corresponding to the relevant qualifications offered; local and regional communities; the

national community as represented by Government agencies, particularly those concerned with higher and university education; and the; International bodies and agencies acting in many roles.

Where the relevance and importance are clear, specific stakeholder groups will usually be represented explicitly by a designated member of the review group, or by representatives being allowed to meet the group. For example, the views of employers are seen as particularly relevant in the case of units educating graduates for specific industries or sectors, and a representative is usually included in review groups in these cases. Where the opinions of professional bodies are important, there is usually a parallel accreditation process with reports shared across both processes [20]

It is worth noting that resource management in higher educational institutions needs to be viewed by all managers of higher education as a strategic aspect that if managed well can enhance quality. As higher educational institutions continue to change owing to the changing environment in which they operate, efficiency and effectiveness in managing the various resources become essential. This calls for a deliberate effort to link the processes of resource management to the functions of planning, leading, staffing, and controlling, implying that adequate resources should be allocated and used in managerial areas with the greatest contribution to educational outcomes.

The increasing demands of accountability in higher education resulting from declining funding and the increasing proliferation of a variety of stakeholders have among others placed higher educational managers in the spotlight for being champions of the „value for money" proclamations. The emerging results equally imply that higher education managers need to sometimes take the initiative in assessing how effectively and efficiently the resources –material, financial, and human controls are utilized. This is because it is first, the performance of these managers is ideally to be measured on their capacity to „manage the resources" and second, they have the key to the vision of their institutions. In the changing environment of higher education in developing countries, the critical mandate for higher educational institutions can only be realized if there is quality education meeting the expectations of society and other stakeholders. Resource management contributing to effective management systems is a possible answer to this goal [21]

4. CHALLENGES OF QUALITY ASSURANCE TOWARD STAKEHOLDERS' EXPECTATIONS

Systems of education in all parts of the world are in a state of change with increasing interest in upholding the notions of accountability, value for money, and greater access. Increasingly, the measurement of educational outcomes is a core ingredient of assessing the value offered in any higher educational system [22]. In Kenya for instance the focus on higher education has been where universities are seeking more effective systems to address the increasing dissatisfaction of stakeholders on the quality assurance phenomenon. The Commission for University Education report reveals worrying trends in Quality assurance in universities in Kenya.

The CUE report identifies several areas of quality assurance concerns: missing marks, delayed completion rates, and unaccountability for students at all levels; the quality of school-based programmes offered by many universities is wanting. The programs do not afford adequate contact time between the learners and their lecturers, do not afford the learners sufficient exposure to quality degree research, library time, and interaction between the learners themselves; rampant abuse of the "Executive" degree programs, including using such qualifications for admission to academic programs as well as gaining employment, as academic staff, in the universities; some universities were offering programmes that were not approved by the Commission; abuse of the award of an honorary degree to individuals without distinguished and outstanding personal, career or public service accomplishments; some universities were not strictly adhering to the admission criteria. For example, some students were securing entry to undergraduate programs using pre-university and bridging programmes, which are not recognized in Law; rampant abuse of the Credit Accumulative and Transfer System; It was observed, from the Audit, that many universities did not have anti-plagiarism policies and systems.

In some respect, this has allowed universities to engage in anomalous practices in the preparation of theses and dissertations by their students; the authenticity and validity of certification in some universities were weak; in many universities, the lecturer-to-student ratio was prejudicial to quality teaching, research, and accurate assessment. This is the greatest challenge to the provision of quality education in most of our universities; many universities were not adhering to the ratios of full-time to part-time staff, as provided for in the Standards and Guidelines. In addition, the number of non-academic staff was found to be higher than the number of academic staff, thereby straining the resources allocated to the core functions of teaching and learning. In this respect; finally, the audit established that many universities have not instituted internal quality assurance policies, systems, and mechanisms, in line with the Universities Regulations

Conceptualizing the concerns and challenges of quality assurance raised by the CUE report, the university should demonstrate her commitment to public protection by assuring the quality of learning, teaching, and assessment in academic and practice placement settings; assuring that programs are approved before students are enrolled; integrity and accuracy of uploads to the register when students complete a programme; provision of student-support services that promote equality and diversity, for example, disability services and learning support services; policies and processes for programme approval, re-approval and periodic reviews.

Student information systems that accurately record learning achievement and hours completed for award and eligibility to register; have policies in place that promote innovation, research and scholarship in programme delivery; service level agreements / learning and development agreements with practice placement partners; partnership commitment from the industry to ensure safe and supportive practice learning that demonstrates the professional values and behaviors' of students; policy and processes for student-placement allocation including processes for determining new placement areas; policies and processes within academic regulations for assessing theory and practice, for example, no compensation criteria for assessment; Appropriate skill mix of staff; appropriately qualified and updated lecturers; practice lectures sign-off mentors and mentors; world class and modern library facilities accessible to students; ICT facilities with appropriate links to programmes related software and resources; Staff development policy; Research and scholarship policy; have policies in place that promote innovation, research and scholarship in programme delivery; Complements and complaints policy and processes put in place..

Reflecting on the outcomes of the university audits conducted in 2017 in Kenya, it is worth noting that overhauling of quality assurance structures and systems in universities through reforms by the government of Kenya through the Commission for University Education (CUE) is imperative. The reforms should seek to assure education stakeholders of accountability, efficiency, and managerial competence of University Management as well as to undertake note of monetarist economic policies for the value of money which advocate commoditization of education.

This is in line with Moore [23] who proposes a model of public value which opines that to create public value, University Management must address three key areas: services reassurance - that, there should be cost-effective delivery and provision of high-quality teaching and learning services based on appropriate pedagogy; outcomes/deliverables of university graduates with appropriate and relevant employability skills- that, this entails performance achievement of desirable results at the workplace; and, trust/integrity as provided by the chapter six of the Kenyan Constitution 2010 - that, this is about development and maintenance of a high level of trust between citizens and government in the engagement of public and private service delivery. Further, the Government of Kenya should widen the range of high-quality higher education providers to stimulate competition, increase choice for students, and deliver better value for money for both taxpayers and students across the higher education sub-sector. Equally important is the issue of promoting good quality provision to ensure a regulatory regime that has the capability/competence to guard against poor quality provision in universities in Kenya.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In the 21st century, students and sponsors are discerning and looking for world-class universities for the value of their money. The stakeholder's" sharp eye on the current situation in Kenya with increasing austerity in universities (overcrowded lecture halls; increasing teaching loads, outdated library holdings, less support for faculty research, substituting higher cost full-time academic staff for lower cost part-time faculty; deterioration of buildings, loss of secure faculty positions, shortening the academic calendar, poor curricula design and faculty brain drain to abroad) have a direct relationship with dwindling quality assurance of high education. This is in line with a university audit report conducted by the CUE that reveals a worrying downward trend in quality assurance in universities in Kenya.

Influence on the potential of university quality assurance models to improve compliance, the present study has come up with several recommendations: that universities need to embrace in their quality policies and framework and implement them fully: conduct regular, periodic, annual results-based quality assurance audits and reviews both internally and externally; The University Management agree on quality assurance outcomes to monitor and evaluate so that there is no confusion whatsoever: ensure outcomes come from strategic priorities of the university; develop key indicators to monitor outcomes: assess the degree to which outcomes are being achieved; gather baseline data on indicators for result area. Plan for improvements by setting realistic targets.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study proposes that it is advisable to set intermediate goals since most outcomes are long-term, complex, and not quickly achieved; monitor for results: establish data collection, analysis, and reporting guidelines, establish means of quality control; and, determine what findings are to be reported, in what format and at what intervals; sustain the monitoring and evaluation system: implement a long-term process including building and maintaining elements of a sustainable quality assurance system.

To achieve these quality assurance strategies universities must create quality assurance directorates with appropriate qualifications of personnel for ownership and accountability to the CUE quality audits and reviews. More importantly, the university must base the quality audit on a program theory and logic model; define the appropriate audit methodology; use process analysis and formative audit and review strategies; build audit capacity among staff; communicate the findings of the quality audit and develop a follow-up action plan as a way to promote the use of audits and reviews findings for continuous quality improvement of service delivery for the value of money.

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BOOK CHAPTERS
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Publications
Research Gate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jeremiah-Onunga
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