Quality Assurance Practices in Higher Education Institutions: Lesson from Africa

Haruni J. Machumu[1]   Sipora H. Kisanga[2]

1. Department of Education Foundations and Teaching Management, Mzumbe University
    P.O. Box 5 Mzumbe- Morogoro, Tanzania
2. UNICEF- Iringa Sub Office, Education Specialist, P. O. Box 577 Iringa, Tanzania

Abstract

This paper examines how quality assurance (QA) is viewed, implemented, practised in higher learning institutions. It addresses its essence and development in higher education. It discusses what quality, quality assurance and systems, procedures and mechanism employed to improve quality of education offered. The study employed desk data that involves analysing information that already exists and realist and meta-narrative reviews to synthesis of data. The paper also traces back current initiatives made by higher education institutions (HEIs) to address quality assurance practices (systems, policy and strategy) in Africa. However, the paper tries to answer a long-term unanswered questions that although there are quality assurance agencies, policy and mechanisms practised in most of higher education institutions in Africa; why some of graduates are blamed to lack appropriate competency? Do HEIs quality assurance practitioners rethink and act according to the growing demands for improved quality assurance practices worldwide? Do HEIs have quality supporting staff, administrative staff and librarians who can act accordingly to produce quality graduates?

Keywords: Quality, quality assurance, higher education, Africa

1.   Introduction

The role of higher education institutions (HEIs) in human capital development, research and technological innovation cannot be underestimated. All over the world investment in higher education is a critical component of national development. Nations today depend increasingly on knowledge, research-based-evidence, technological innovations and up-to-the-minute skills which are by product of HEIs. It is commonly presumed that formal schooling is one of several important contributors to the skills of an individual and to human capital (UNESCO, 2005). Expounding on this further, Harbison (1973) and Hénard and Mitterle (2010) argue that the wealth of nations depend on their capacity to develop their human resources and not so much on their physical resources. According to Ojiambo (2009) any country which is unable to develop skills and knowledge of its people and to utilize them effectively in the national economy will be unable to develop anything else. It is well-established that nations invest in higher education because society expects to benefit from its contribution on national development in three principal ways (Adamu and Addamu, 2012). First, society expects its higher education institutions to produce highly skilled personnel in technology, teaching, medicine, law, engineering, management and other professions; second, higher education institutions have the responsibility of producing their own corps of academic personnel that is, the intellectual resource pool that will, through scientific research generate new knowledge and innovation to solve developmental problems. Third, higher education institutions produce teachers, doctors, legal officer, administrators and managers for other levels of human resources development institutions (Faganel & Dolinšek, 2012; Ekundayo & Adedokun, 2009).

To achieve the principal ways in it's thrice, higher education institutions are forced to set and regulate their programmes in accordance with regulatory organ aiming to ensure quality of education offered. To assure what HEIs are offering, the term accreditation, standards, and quality dominate many forums in higher education. Window is open for every HEIs to practice QA strategies for its survival. HEIs are encouraged to conduct window-shop before buy-in. The truth is that QA is walking with us; live with us; we practise it whether knowingly or unknowingly. If QA strategies cannot be appropriately practised HEIs cannot survive any competition around everywhere.

The question is why QA in higher education has become a big business in both developed and developing countries; and/or in both private and public institutions? Bosu & Amakyi (2014) provides a general answer that population quality and knowledge constitute the principal determinants of the future welfare of mankind. Nevertheless, globalization, internationalization of higher education, free market system, development of national qualification framework, (a case of Tanzania (2011); South Africa (1995); Mauritius (2001); Tunisia (2007) to mention a few) and US system of quality assurance is also perceived to be reasons for trading quality assurance in higher education around the world.

In a nutshell, QA in higher education institutions is responsible for safeguarding the public interest in sound academic standards of higher education qualifications (taught and research). It also informs and encourages continuous improvement and control in the management of quality of education offered in higher education institutions (see Pozo *et al.,* 2013; Bunoti, 2012). HEIs are encouraged to take a nuts-and-bolts approach in

developing, finding and implementing appropriate QA practices (policies, systems, strategies, and procedures) to improve quality of education in HEIs for community services, education management system, good governance and clients' satisfaction is a key role to boost higher education provision and economic profitability in developing countries.

The idea has been viewed as a public concern, while other take it as private venture since little has been associated with QA in HEIs. For example, since the evolution of QA in USA practices in higher education as a mechanism to promote and enhance quality of education offered; however, poor students' academic performances have been a common tendency not only in HEIs but also in lower levels. The idea is evidenced and proved with high blanket – blames on influx of jobless in the society, educated people engage themselves in illegal cases (drug trafficking, human trafficking, sexual harassment, sexual business), lack of good initiative ideas, innovative, creative mind among graduates - all these are said to be associate with kind of education provided to some of graduates (Kisanga, 2014 and Chetsanga, 2011). For example, head of government communication unit for public service recruitment secretariat said in a news conference on 24th March, 2014 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania that "despite having the required qualifications, the majority of graduates in the country fail to get employed because their CVs are not written properly" (Kisanga, 2014). He went further by saying that "the situation at hand proves that graduates who seek jobs only went to the universities to earn degrees, not to acquire actual practical skills that will enable them work professionally in different sectors," This is contrary to the fact that higher education had proved to be prime engine of social and economic development among nations and with increasing demand of QA policy, mechanisms and practices in all HEIs. In this case, there is an urgent need of shift in paradigms by taking considerations of educational innovation in QA practices, improved e-learning and online learning for success improvement of graduates' employability skills and work oriented knowledge. QA assurance practices in HEIs can be improved only by implementing new learning paradigm.

The Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) in highlighting the need for QA, points out that no university will survive the present competition with other universities in the country, in the region and the world without paying attention to QA.[1] HEIs like many other organization including business-oriented firms and industrial sectors are attempting to redefine and re-organise their traditional practices of generating quality client service for successful implementation of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in which quality of education is enshrined. QA is increasingly becoming an important aspect of higher education in developing countries, as expressed in the development of relevant policies, structures and systems at national and institutional levels (Okebukola, 2012).

One of the main challenges facing HEIs in its efforts to improve quality of education involves procedures for developing policies to establish appropriate QA system and practices with clients' commitment and practices for achieving intended broad institutions mission, vision and goals (Mourkani and Shohoodi, 2013). The systems and models QAS used in most of developing countries are either copied from US or European(see Inter-University Council for East Africa/DAAD, 2010) and Newton, 20130 - the situation where these models or mechanisms copied cannot directly fit in most of developing countries since most practiced model need improved technologies, enough budget and advanced mechanisms which are less seen in most of developing countries as a result countries need a number of years practicing the same rather than transferring in humpty-dumpty. The situation lead to poor implementation of QA policy and hence prolonged blanket-blames to the community about quality of education. To this end, HEIs must satisfy the needs of clients (public) in ways that contribute to long-term trustworthiness. In today's fast-paced world of education development in attempting to thrive within a growing global competitive labour-market and working environment; the quality to which HEIs serves its clients must maintain an equal emphasis as that of its strategic goals, mission and vision. According to Bunoti, (2011) and Bosu and Amakyi (2014) QA helps to achieve the stated vision, mission and goals of HEIs.

2. The Context of the Problem

A great deal is known about QA in HEIs but unfortunately not much is known about its practices (systems, policy, implementation strategies or interpretation and procedures) employed to assure quality. It is well known that there are internal and external QA practices. HEIs conduct internal QA practices by means of students' assessment, peer-reviews of publications, and reflective practices. Also, HEIs try to improve and enhance students' welfare and support system; monitor staff teaching and students learning; as well as promoting quality research and publication (CHE & AfriQAN, 2012). External practices are enhanced, maintained and monitored by QA agency of respective countries or regional. For instance in Tanzania, Tanzania Commission for Universities has been engaging on screening students via electronic system known central admission system (CAS) to guarantee that they have the required qualification for admission into HEIs for a particular programme. Appropriate quality benchmarks have been employed in most of African HEIs aiming to reduce brain drain and enhancing brain circulation. Also, HEIs have been evaluated externally for accreditation purposes; the exercise

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[1] http://www.qab.udsm.ac.tz .

involved external organ which assign individuals of higher integrity to conduct evaluation on various issues pertaining to quality of services offered. However, it is a public concern that QA practices employed in most of HEIs do not work properly and that its procedures and practices are not well known and conceptualised to the majority of education stakeholders (Materu, 2007; UDSM, 2007). As a result, blames about quality of programmes offered and products (graduates) have increased among education stakeholders. The evident is wide and openly due to lack of competencies and employability skills to most of graduates; difficult to compete in competitive labour market and difficult to invent new business venture for self-employed (Mhalanga, 2008; Kitila, 2013). Hence, experience has shown that low quality of graduates has been reported in several countries both developed and developing.

However, in most of African countries, there is an open and wide link between low quality of graduates and QA practices since without well coordinated, controlling, and maintaining appropriate QA practices; no HEIs can prove to produce high quality graduates (World Bank, 2003). For instance, in most of HEIs lack trained personnel in QA   as a result some of HEIs opt to appoint available staff to shoulder on the position prior undergoing basic training on QA. For example, experience shows that QA officers work in discouraging environment. They do not have enough office space, working tools, no defined boundary between official duties and other administrative work.

In support of that Adamu and Addamu (2012) add that "it is always difficult for any nation to maintain quality standards in the midst of rapid enrolment expansion" (Saint, 2004), because expansion and quality are often in constant counter-play, especially so where resources (i.e. staff) are in short supply (Teferra, 2007). Most of quality assurance officers have capacious responsibilities, they do teach, research, supervise students, assess students' academic progress, attend training abroad, organise QA workshops and conduct evaluation and make follow-up. Moreover, it seems that there is incompetency among QA officers that lead to poor QA practices. In this regards, if there are incompetency among QA officers automatically most of QA practices will not be implemented appropriately; and its multiplier effect can be witnessed on end product (students, publications and service rendered to the community and other partners).

The situation has been affecting country economy due to fact that a good number of graduates are neither employed nor easy sponsored to initiate small but efficiency development projects. For instance, education offered has forced most graduates out of productive work (jobless). As Kisanga (2014) puts "the situation at hand proves that graduates who seek jobs only went to the universities to earn degrees and higher diplomas, not to acquire actual practical skills that will enable them work professionally in different sectors". It should be reiterated here that quality is determined by the product users, clients or customers and to some extent by society in general. In this trend, setting and monitoring quality education can be enhanced through appropriate QA practices - system and associated procedures which are essential elements HEIs. Instead of compulsory accreditation of institutions or study programmes HEIs are obliged to establish internal quality management systems (internal quality assurance agency) which in one way or another is responsible for daily ensuring, maintaining and improving quality assurance practices. For example, in East Africa, IUCEA directed HEIs to establish department, bureau, or directorate responsible for QA.

There is a general feeling that education imparted with curricula that are limited to parochial concerns may no longer be adequate in the face of the prevailing global situation (Fabiyi & Oladipo, 2008). It is a concern that quality education is an essential aspect for social and economic development. Most of studies in developing countries reveal that, quality education is measured by the extent to which the training received from an institution enables the recipients to think clearly, independently and analytically to solve relevant societal problems in any given environment (Saint, 2004; Tefferra, 2007 and Materu, 2007). QA in higher education implies the ability of the HEIs to meet the expectations of the users of manpower in relation to the quality of skills acquired by their outputs (Ekundayo and Adedokun, 2009). It suffice to argue that QA in higher education is the ability of the HEIs to meet appropriate criteria relating to academic and administration matters: staff-student ratios, staff mix by rank, staff development (professionalism), physical facilities, supporting staff, funding systems, and adequate library facilities. Adequacy of various inputs in higher education system, in terms of quality and quantity practices, exercises tremendous influence on QA in the higher education system itself. QA is a supplement and a domesticated version of quality management to improve quality of education offered in HEIs and should be clearly noted here that improved QA practices is not a panacea of all management strategies to all organization (Kumar et al., 2013).

3.   Methodology

Unlike primary research which involves the collection of raw data through experiments and research subjects, this paper employed secondary data (desk research) method. The search for accurate data pertinent to the topic both published and unpublished data were systematically conducted. The existing internet based information on QA practices was collected. In addition to that, QA policies, analytical reports, newspaper, magazine and journal content, statistical publications, conference proceedings, communication, workshop agreement and endorsement

were analysed to get appropriate data. The data collected showed typically what was going on in Africa in regard to QA practices on the time of writing this paper. Research reports with solid arguments were analysed and discussed well to facilitate understanding of the topic in detail. The paper used both realist review and meta-narrative reviews to synthesise the information (SOPHIE, 2013). Realist reviews are a set of relatively new approach to synthesizing research that seeks an explanatory focus. At its core, realist reviews unpack the mechanism(s) of how and why complex intervention thrive or fail in particular settings. On the other hand, meta-narrative review is one of an emerging menu of new approach to qualitative and mixed-method systematic review whereby review seeks to illuminate a heterogeneous topic area by highlighting the contrasting and complementary ways in which researchers have studied the same or a similar topic (Wong, et al.,2013; Barnett-Page&Thomas, 2009).

4.   Initiatives to promote QA Practices in HEIs

In East Africa (Tanzania for instance), although there is significant progress towards both internally and externally validated QA practices in HEIs, much remains to be done. What is widely known is that the country via TCU had been engaging on quality assuring of admission of students in HE and programme management system (CHE and AfriQAN, 2012). On the other hand, Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho, Nigeria and Kenya have been practising programmatic accreditation and institutional registration/accreditation via respective QA agency (Adamu and Addamu, 2012). In addition to that in Ethiopia for example, higher education relevance and quality agency practise institutions participation of private HEIs and other stakeholders in the assessment of the status of QA in private HEIs systems (Mulu, 2012). DRC Congo goes beyond by practising school control and organisational audit and sustainability. In this case, there is far-reaching need to address QA focussing on the growing demand on improved QA practices towards successful enhancement of quality education in HEIs and advancing global understanding and acceptance. Addressing effort made in East Africa for instance, Buchere (2009) argue that in 2006 three East African higher education regulatory agencies –The Commission for higher Education in Kenya, National Council of Higher Education in Uganda and Tanzania Commission for Universities- signed a memorandum of cooperation in a bit to streamline and harmonised higher education accreditation, QA practices and procedures in the region.

The story is endless. Several nationals have their own accreditation systems and agencies in Africa; others being new while others existed for a number of decades. In Kenya accreditation body was established in 1985, followed by Nigeria in 1993. Both Kenya and Nigeria bodies at the beginning used to assess, evaluate and accredit private HEIs and programmes only. In Ghana for instance, National Accreditation Board (NAB) was established in 1993 with the enactment of the NAB LAW 1993 (PNDCL 317), to contribute to the furtherance of better management of tertiary education as a QA Agency (NAB, 2009). NAB practice academic audit as well as affiliation system. This is a commendable effort in Africa. Apart from that it is also informed that African Continental Agency is underway (Ezin, 2013). The need was initially addressed on accreditation and QA Workshop on establishment of a continental accreditation agency for higher education in Africa held on 10-11st April, 2013 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The overall objectives of the workshop include: exchange experiences and views among participants on QA and accreditation mechanisms in Africa; spot comparable practices that create basis for regional and continental harmonization in QA practices; identify areas of collaboration between QA and accreditation agencies towards harmonization at regional and continental levels; and to create basis for establishing a Continental Accreditation Agency; critically examine the technical, financial, and administrative issues with regard to establishment of a continental Accreditation agency; and to spell out the specific roles of African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN) in launching the Continental Accreditation Agency.[2] According to Ezin (2013) initiatives in higher education quality assurance shall be better coordinated and aligned towards a common Africa vision by identifying opportunities for synergies to optimise positive outcomes, and avoid unnecessary duplications.

In Africa, efforts have been focused in three directions: training of external QA agencies staff (both technical staff and board members who are responsible for policy formulation and accreditation decisions); training of academic and administrative staff within HEIs via workshop and seminars (the case of Mzumbe University in Tanzania) to enable them engaging on self-assessment exercises and to develop and implement realistic and quantifiable improvement plans; finally, training of external reviewers (the case of TCU, IUCEA, African Union) to support the work of existing QA agencies within the region. Different strategies have been used, depending on development of national QA experts and bodies, and the specific needs of network members (UNESCO, 2007).

From our observation, Africa and other part of the world experience important missing initiatives that could transform the present situation into bright future of HE. For instance, in Africa there is a far-reaching need to have quality assurer boards responsible for appointing QA staff to conduct institutional assessment while staying on the same institutions (though doing other duties such as assisting on teaching and learning) for at least one

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[2] http://hrst.au.int/en/content/accreditation-and-quality-assurance-workshop-establishment-continental-accreditation-agency-

semester (i.e. four months)- thereafter information obtained on QA practices should published as important findings. Also the board should be responsible for registration of academician/staff who aspire to be independent QA specialist in HE. Also there should be well-organized short and long term training to QA staff ranging from three to six months. Another importance observation is that in some countries there is no close follow-up within HEIs after being accredited as a result HEIs conduct their business in their traditional way "as business as usual". African Union should initiate QA institutional stay scholarship to oversee whether what are practice in respective countries are the same as what are enshrined on policy documents, This could be a bright future for Africa to strengthen quality education offered.

5. Evolution of Quality and Quality Assurance in Higher Education
- **Quality in Higher Education**

Higher education institutions should strive to promote quality and to be frank five elements should be bear in mind when promoting quality in education: the teacher, the student, the curriculum and the government will (aims, goals via policy, order and directives). These can be aligned with other factors including learners' achievements, teaching and learning approaches, both academic and administrative staff professional development, instructional innovation as well as the nature (physical, cultural, political and social) of the HEIs. The recent discussions in the field of quality and QA in higher education are quite unanimous in advocating promoting, improving and maintaining quality education in higher education institutions (Basheka et al., 2013). Quality in education connected to internal quality assurance which refers to efforts for improving the internal environment and processes such that the effectiveness of teaching and learning can be ensured to achieve the planned broad goals of education provision (Cheng and Tam, 1997). Any discussion on quality assurance in higher education should start with highlighting the evolution of "quality". On the same vein, discussion on quality and QA in higher education should look at concept and theories underpinning quality and approaches to quality (industrial and stakeholder perspectives) which together involve traditional peer review, the assessment-and-outcomes movement, the total quality management (TMQ), quality assurance control (QAC), quality improvement, enhancement and accountability and performance indicator of reporting. Also involves the moral and ethical dimensions of quality and ideals and design principles governing quality assurance (Grady, 1998).

It is a concern of this paper to conceptualize the concept of quality since it facilitates and enhance understanding of the context of discussion itself. The concept of quality is perceived differently, as there are different fields of study that address the same issue such as manufacturing industry, management, engineering and health. The evolution of quality and its journey, go beyond the time of medieval ages whereby the notion of universities comes into being. So neither quality nor QA is new. What we experience now is technological advancement and popularization of higher education, increasing private HEIs, enhancement and improvement. In its stake, for instance, we are told that mediaeval universities had no libraries, laboratories (i.e. computer lab, language lab), and museums; however, higher education of the 21st century is the lineal descendant of mediaeval universities of Paris and Bologna, and have the same collegial atmosphere as others in the world (Charles, 2007). In Africa for instance, most HEIs have their roots in university colleges created during colonial period. After independence, most of them transformed in full fledged university and obtained support from respective government.

The fundamental structure, governance and organization are the same, and the historic commitment to maintain standards of institutional quality and accountability, particularly with regard to program review, evaluation and assessment, is unbroken. In that time, professors and individuals of high rank were responsible for safeguarding institutional quality. Princes and Popes were used to control the institutional standards of mediaeval universities by granting charters. In recent time, for example, President of United Republic of Tanzania is responsible for granting charter to higher education institutions that fulfill criteria for being chartered (Frazer, 1992; Materu, 2007).

As time goes on around 18th century, the German contribution of the conception of a university as a research institution, which redefined their quality, and accountability of universities was witnessed. By then German Universities such as University of Berlin innovated new things such as laboratory and seminar mode of teaching and learning whereby the majority of students worldwide were attracted to learn the tone of German excellence, which made Germany the intellectual capital of the world, the place to which scholars and scientist looked first for light and leading (Charles, 2007). During the year 1950s the US accreditation system was leading among other system of higher education. The system is undergoing modification and changing time to time and now is as quality assurance. It goes beyond 1950s whereby a system that increased close government oversight of colleges and universities by adherence to carefully crafted process of self-study and peer reviewed (evaluation).

In higher education the concept of QA is much more complicated than concept of quality in other fields such as industry and engineering since higher education institutions have broad autonomy to decide their visions and mission even core values although they tend to perform similar functions (teaching, research and community outreach). This complication poses a direct attention on quality of higher education. Conceptually, quality (as opposed to quality of higher education) means the product (graduate, research outputs) or service (teaching and

learning, publications) does what intended to do. Scholars of high integrity in the field refer to quality in specific ways, including: a creature of political fashion (Becher, 1999); multi-faceted (Frazer, 1992); elusive (Neave, 1994); contentious (Taylor et al., 1998) and slippery (Espinoza, 2013). Although, the term quality is also a perceptual, conditional and somewhat subjective attribute and may be understood differently by different scholars, its outset should be recognized.

Nkunya (2008) had an opinion that in higher education quality is determined by views of students and parents expected achievement, institutional commitment to satisfy political and stakeholder expectations, achievement of institutional missions, adherence to internal policy, accountability to stakeholders. Although, the future of quality and QA in higher education in most of developing countries is bright - quality in higher education still is viewed on eyes of its producers as well as consumers of quality such as parents, students, teachers and institutions. Whereby fit for purpose is determined; meeting conforming to generally accepted standards as defined by QA bodies, appropriate academic and professional communities.

In management for instance, the users of products or services are the decision makers of its quality. Mhlanga (2008) and Dill (2010) support that physical products of a production chain have to meet the exact pre-specifications of the desired product, in its perfect form, without any defects. In education, this is difficult since no knowledge is perfect since its outputs are multi-facet and multi-disciplinary. That means we cannot define a graduate as a perfect or zero error or defect no matter how knowledge is superior, however, this is only for mass production in manufacturing or processing industry (Lenga, 2009). That is to say quality in higher education came with advent of industrialization as the need to ensure that product (graduates) conformed specifications (job descriptions, duties and expectation) escalated and customers began to demand value for money (Sallis, 1996).

Defining quality in African context Materu (2007) and Bunoti (2012) asserts that any statement about quality implies a certain relative measure against a common standard; in higher education, such a common standard does not exist. Thus why, in education quality makes the difference between success and failure since it is very easy to feel when it is lacking. When high failure is experienced among students, poor service delivery among graduates, poor quality of publications that do not conform to international standard, it means that something went wrong in regard to quality. When the stakeholders and community accuses HEIs to produce low-quality product, it means that something is not operating well either due to failure of external or internal systems of assuring quality assurances.

- **Quality Assurance in Higher Education**

Quality assurance has been perceived differently by different scholars. Historically, the notion of QA in higher education is largely dominated by the formal tradition of accreditation in Europe and United States: a system that largely staved off close government oversight of colleges and universities by those institutions' adherence to carefully crafted processes of self-study and peer evaluation (Jones & Jones, 2011; and Kumar et al., 2013). In the US the state of affair grew rapidly in power and prestige starting in the 1950s focusing on institutions, professional or specialized accreditation in fields such as medicine, teaching, engineering and law. In this regard, QA is multifarious and sometime vaguely defined by its practitioners. To others, QA is viewed as a European version of accreditation used in US. Expounding further on the need for QA in higher education African Virtual University (2012) argues that underlying rationale of QA in higher education is:

> "...to ensure that institutions effectively and efficiently deliver education, training, research and community services which are of high quality and which produce socially useful and enriching knowledge as well as a relevant range of graduate skills and competencies necessary for social and economic progress..."

From these observations, there is a need to define QA in higher education according to its importance in terms of economic and social advancement. And the whole community should be striving to ensure HEIs are working tirelessly to provide what is needed in the market, rather than just producing big number of graduates without skills and enough knowledge to be competitive in global economy. However, QA is rooted in minimum thresholds of educational quality as it is seen as a necessary measure to inculcate public confidence in the quality of higher education provision and provide the foundations for the development and support of excellence at all levels of higher education and training (African Virtual University, 2012).

The concept of QA seems to be relatively new (but there is no new on that) due to rapid expansion in higher education provision as witnessed recently in most of African as it was happening in other places a number of decades ago. Any emphasis on QA in African perspectives needs to respond to the societal demand. In this context, QA essentially means measures, or a set of measures, taken by an institution to satisfy itself and demonstrate to its clients that has constant capacity to keep its promise to deliver goods and services of the desired standard (UDSM, 2007). It seems to be a total, holistic process concerned with ensuring the integrity of outcomes. This places the responsibility for quality with the factory (university) itself, and thus is expressed through its relationship with its customers. Mahfoodh (2013) argues that QA recognizes the autonomy of institutions and seeks to enhance their capacity to operate in a responsive way. It can be noted that individual

universities have a responsibility of assuring the quality of their graduates for public concern and not private venture to win the market. As centers of excellence, higher education institutions have always regarded quality as a crucial factor in building reputation and winning admiration and support from the public. In consideration of various regional and national QA agencies the following definitions tend to dominate:-
The National Council for Higher Education of Uganda defines QA as:

> "…the mechanism put in place to guarantee that the education is 'fit for purpose,' i.e., is good. Every higher education must have appropriate and effective internal structures and mechanisms for monitoring its quality control procedures to ensure QA…"

The Commission for University Education of Kenya defines QA as:

> "…the means by which an institution can guarantee that the standards and quality of its educational provisions are being maintained and/or enhanced. It is the means through which an institution confirms that conditions are in place for students to achieve standards set by the institution…"

In a nutshell, manifestation of adequate definitions of QA depends highly on the institutions' mission, vision and goal to be achieved. As for example, to guarantee standards and maintain quality by having appropriate internal structures and procedures for monitoring quality of education offered. Thus, the process of establishing stakeholders' confidence that provision (i.e. input, process and outcomes) fulfills expectations or measures up to threshold minimum requirements is what constitutes QA systems, procedures and practices (Mourkani and Shohoodi, 2013). For instance, the growing influence of international ranking systems, are placing pressure on accreditation agencies to move beyond their traditional roles in quality assurance and accreditation and to respond to growing demand for information accessible to the general public, and improved QA practices. This make QA noted as a systematic and continuous attention to quality and quality improvement, accountability or enhancement (Lenga, 2009).

6.   Different Understanding of Quality and its Applicability

As there is different perception in regard to quality, and QA, the same can be noted in approach and applicability. Various understanding have evolved to suit different contexts ranging from quality as a measure for excellence to quality as perfection, quality as value for money to quality as customer satisfaction, quality as fitness for purpose to quality as transformation (in a learner)(Harvey and Green,1993). The fact is that quality and QA has been equated with formal accreditation by a recognized body. For example: Catholic University of East Africa, University of Nairobi-ISO 9001:2000 certified; and Jomo Kenyatta University -ISO 9001: 2008 Certified; Moi University -ISO 9001:2008 Certified Institution, and Management Accountancy Training (MAT)-Uganda these and many others in Africa they are accredited with ISO 9001 to signify quality of programmes offered. International Organization for Standardization (ISO) is voluntary organization that emphasis promotion of quality through conformance to a process and commits to creating a large array of tools and training services to help all organizations acquire knowledge of standards.

In support of that Moi University on its quality statement asserted that 'the university is an ISO 9001:2008 certified institution, with quality processes and procedures in place, reflected in quality curricula and services offered to student by academic, administrative and support staff; working in an enabling and conducive environment; in all its campuses strategically placed in various parts of Kenya.[3] However, during discussion on regional workshop on Higher Education Quality Management in East Africa held in Kenya from 23rd - 27th May, 2011, it was observed that the ISO quality management system was not sufficient in judging the quality of higher education. While ISO quality management systems focused on processes, those of universities focused on QA and management including the quality of resources. South Africa Higher Education Quality Committee (CHE) (2004) notify that quality encompasses fitness for purpose, value of money, and individual and social transformation, within an overarching fitness of purpose framework. Thus, quality in higher education lies in attaining, maintaining and improving institutions excellence in learning, teaching and research. It should further be emphasized that quality concerns with making the best use of resources (efficiency/value of money) and being accountable to individuals and the communities which higher education institutions affect.

Also different in conceptions of quality are treated differently. As for example, quality concept is observed in QA policies and guidelines document of specific institutions. Moi University through its directorate of QA claim to ensure that quality teaching, training, research, extension and outreach services offered to student (both local and international); researchers and professionals. That means even national education policy must spell out what kind education should be offered and to what extent should be practiced. In this regard, the embracing national perception of quality automatically reflects higher education institutions in its QA policy framework, this is evident in East Africa for instance, and the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) institutions' QA policy (2007) reads:

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[3] http://mu.ac.ke/newqa/

> "...quality can be described as the totality of features and characteristics of a service or object that bear on its ability to satisfy the stated or implied needs…"

That means there had been always different conceptions in terms of quality in higher education and the debate is endless; to this end the notion of quality education vary according to person understanding, core activities pursued purpose of such education, national development goals as well as expectations of customers. As noted, the most common used definition of QA is "fitness for purpose" to individual, nations, community and beyond periphery. In this paper, quality relates to what higher education institutions have set to achieve in terms of its mission, vision, and goals. That is intrinsic quality (i.e. the development of an erudite class of individuals who are fascinated by knowledge for knowledge's sake) and extrinsic quality (development of individuals directly responsive to socio-economic needs of society) (Sallis, 1996; UDSM, 2007).

Both intrinsic and extrinsic quality conform to primordial approach that higher education are whether "social institution" (whose main functions are the cultivation of good citizenship, the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage and the formation of skills and character in the students) or an "industry" (it emphasize that higher education institution is an 'industry' that sells goods and services, trains an important part of the workforce and fosters economic development)". In industrial aspect it is a function that defines and implements the processes necessary to produce quality products and services, reviews operational activities within the information systems organization to assure compliance to those quality processes, monitors costs associated with the failure to meet quality objectives, and promotes general quality concepts through training and education (Espinonza & Gonzalez, 2013).

UDSM (2007); Materu (2007); Makerere University (2007) and Rhode University (2003) argue that in a system where emphasis is on intrinsic quality, the mechanisms to check and monitor quality tend to be implied and systemic rather than explicitly stated and measured. This has largely been the case with most higher education institutions up to a few decades ago. However, currently the issue of quality has become critical in many countries that are expanding enrolments, improving learning infrastructures, installing audio visual and building well equipped auditoriums rapidly to achieve Education for All by 2015. This is what is associated with massification of HEIs. However, in countries with constrained resources like most of developing countries, the successful effort to increase access to basic education has often led to declining quality of education in other levels such as secondary and currently higher education. For instance in Tanzania, in a search for the factors that promote quality, countries' programs (*i.e. Secondary Education Development Plan, Higher Education Development Plan and the newly initiated Big Results Now*) as well as the literature increasingly emphasize teachers, schools, colleges, universities and communities as the engines of quality, with teacher quality identified as primary focus.

HEIs advocate to improve and maintain quality by striving to produce outstanding internationally accepted graduates who are innovative, analytical, articulate, balanced and adaptable ever changing world, with a life-long love of learning; and to struggle, through teaching, research and community service, to contribute to the advancement of their nation wellbeing. Most of international treaties and in United Nations conference declarations and commitments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); The Washington Accord (1989) - professional engineering; The Sydney Accord (2001) - engineering technology; The Dublin Accord (2002) - technician engineering; Education for All (EFA) 1990 and The Dakar Framework for Action and Millennium Development Goals remain silent about QA, but emphasizing quality of education offered to be improved. This is a gap and a loophole for most of higher education institutions to provide education unguided for not being sure of what should be provided and focused. It is still debatable higher education institutions are producing quality graduates in regard to market needs or they are just increasing number of graduates to attain a particular accreditation/recognition?

7.   Governance Arrangements and Quality Assurance

Governance in higher education refers to the means by which HEIs are formally organized and managed. It is the way HEIs operate; the internal structure, organization and management of autonomous institutions. Governance has become a major leverage tool for improving quality in all aspects of higher education (Hénard & Mitterle, 2010). Meanwhile, QA has increased worldwide with a view to addressing the balance between autonomy granted to institutions and accountability. Governance arrangements and quality guidelines play similar roles in helping institutions become more effective. Governance arrangements clarify institutional structures and procedures, notably toward governing board members. Quality guidelines focus on planning processes and the nurturing of a quality culture. Most governance arrangements in HEIs are advisory board in nature, which allows the institution to use them in its own way. To some extent, governance arrangements signify a cautious approach to help institutions progress without hampering the diversity of higher education.

8.   Quality Assurance Systems

QA in HEIs are associated with some procedures, system, criteria and mechanism practised in higher education

institutions. A QA system is a way of checking, through continuous monitoring and evaluation of performance and through the collection of evidence, that any organisation is continuously improving what it does and how it does it. Systems of QA have been applied in HEIs as a mechanism for assuring quality of education offered. A way in which measuring what HEI does against other HEIs doing similar work or against set, recognised standards. Two QA systems are found and practised in most of HEIs in Africa: internal and external systems of evaluation. Internal QA system is not encouraging; it is difficult externally to survive from stiff competition around. For example, examinations results are used in most of developing countries to monitor performance. This thrust is in line with Leowarin (2010) view that examination feedback improves quality of education offered in HEIs. Most QA systems in HEIs are externally accredited, for example, in Tanzania the Commission for Universities (TCU) is used to conduct external evaluation.

In this regard, QA system can be conceived as a formal organized sequence of activities in higher education that combines assessment and evaluation of the existing situation, making rational decisions about necessary changes, development of plans to effect such changes, implementation of these plans, and reassessment to determine that the desired changes have taken place. A system of making sure that education output (graduate) meets the stakeholders intended expectations. QA system in HEIs involve among other internal QA (self-analysis, quality plan, monitoring, evaluation); external assurance (benchmarking, audit, assessment, review); accreditation, accountability and finally continuous improvement (Mahfoodh, 2013). As consequence, higher education is becoming more transparent and credible for citizens, employers and students within and outside the country. In this regard, According to (Dill, 2010) QA is also linked to professional mobility and a growing number of regional and international integration processes. This raises the need for more effective mechanisms, systems for the professional recognition of higher education credentials. Most studies on QA in higher education highlights main two components of QA systems as illustrated in figure 1 including internal QA system and external QA system.
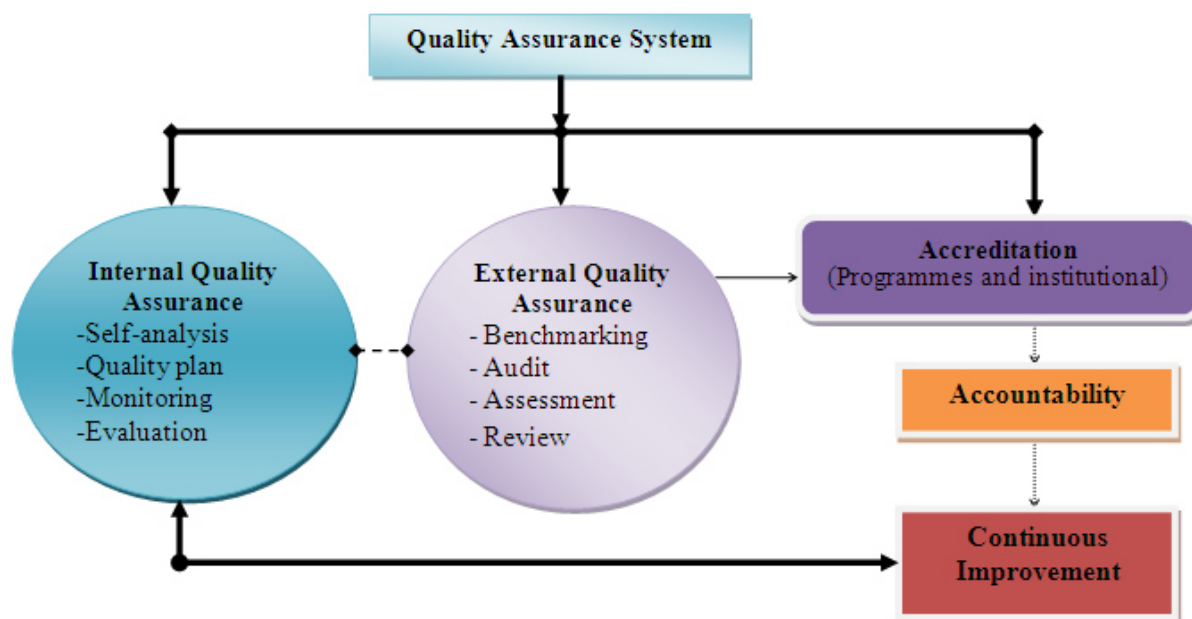

Figure 1: Quality Assurance Practices in HEIs

9. Internal and External Quality Assurance Systems

•   Internal Quality Assurance System

The primary responsibility of higher learning institutions lies on providing quality education to its clientele. Noted the booming of higher learning institutions offering higher education as a result of globalization epoch call for accreditation as only techniques to ensure what is provided are recognized internally and beyond boarders. Responsibility for QA lies within each institutions (Dill, 2010; Espinoza & Gonzalez, 2013). In Tanzania, for instance, QA agency i.e. TCU require each HEIs to establish QA unit which shall be used to safeguard and monitoring institutions activities. The aim among others is to assist HEIs to pursue their efforts to enhance the quality of their activities through the systematic introduction of internal mechanisms and their direct correlation to external QA that is mainly done by QA agency, in this case the TCU.

According to Dill (2010) internal QA refers to those policies and practices whereby academic institutions themselves monitor and improve the quality of their education provision. As UNESCO (2013) affirm that internal quality assurance (IQA) refers to each institution's or programme's policies and mechanisms for

ensuring that it is fulfilling its own purposes, as well as the standards that apply to higher education in general, or to the profession or discipline in particular. Higher education systems located in centralized countries emphasize bureaucratic input steering, while decentralized countries leave much of the authority to higher learning institutions (HLIs) to establish their own QA system (UNESCO,2006).

HEIs are informed to formulate and implement QA policy as a guideline for assuring quality of activities conducted within institutions. The policy should show associated procedures employed for the assurance of quality of their programmes and awards. The quality of HEIs has suffered in many countries due to economic constraints, commercialization, human population growth and a shift in priorities from advanced levels to basic education (Bunoti, 2012). There are strong expectations that QA mechanisms within institutions will ensure continuous quality control (as it is used to be in private HEIs) and improvement.

- **External Quality Assurance System (EQAS)**

External quality assurance (EQA) refers to the actions of an external body, possibly a QA agency like TCU in Tanzania, which assesses the operation of the institution or its programmes, to determine whether it is meeting the agreed standards. EQA systems include the following mechanism accreditation, review, assessment and evaluation or audit. EQAS mechanisms can address the shortcomings of traditional mechanisms for QA found in both administrative realities (Newton, 2013; Stella and Martin, 2007). The aim is to achieve accountability and enhance institutions performance. Indeed, national authorities are often far away and not able to judge fairly the quality of academic programmes and institutions. At the same time, it is difficult to compare standards when academic institutions are both providers and judges of their own services. EQA is necessary in order to prove to the public that the goals set by the institution will be achieved.

In addition, globalization is widely affecting higher education and creating new challenges for its regulation and steering. While the provision of higher education is becoming ever more diversified, globalization also creates the need for more standardization so that qualifications can be more easily assessed. This is why there is a demand for EQA system in many administrative cultures and traditions. Instead of existence of QA agency like TCU with both mandatory and statutory responsibility to practice EQA audit for an existing HEIs, nobody, however, is actually able to prove that the quality of the higher education programmes and graduates has improved significantly (Manning, 2013; Parri, 2006). Although, EQA system has been relying on the following recognized strategies (i) use of internal quality assurance procedures (ii) development of external quality assurance processes (iii) criteria for decisions (iv) processes fit for purpose (v) reporting (vii) follow-up procedures (viii) periodic reviews (ix) system-wide analyses (Maguire, 2013). There is a notion that quality needs to be assured for the benefit of students, teachers, HEIs, employers and society more generally (Williams, 2013), since quality can only be assured by those who are involved in the teaching/learning activity: everything else is observation, commentary, facilitation or interference. In developing countries there in no other measures than can be used as yardsticks for quality of education rather than students grades, attendance figures, staying-on rates, exclusion rates, teacher qualifications, and students-teachers ratios. We need to use appropriate QA systems assure quality not only because we provide service but also meeting basic legal standard to our service users. However, any QA systems employed which may not be externally evaluated system.

10. Conclusion

The debate of quality education is currently related to paradigm shift from accountability to improvement and enhancement of QA practices in higher education and it has been clouded by a slew of slightly differing definitions and understanding of what is actually meant by the term quality education. Arriving to a common understanding, one can conceive that quality education connote high standard of educational services provided at schools, colleges or universities. The primary concerns are parents and students in particular and society at large. To parents quality education is only measured by good academic performance which determine someone qualification beyond doubt. In this regard, quality education is judged by the core clients who are largely recognized everywhere in the society. Quality education means achievement of basic learning; and it increased through teacher training, allotted budgets, equipment, international opening and learning from others. It can be viewed as a means to break away from the current limitations in learning of most classrooms in terms of teaching and learning process as well as assessment procedures. It involves blending technological development and instructional practices that allow free interaction such as combinations of both face to face and online learning.

However, any kind of education offered whether being formal, informal or non-formal should strongly abide to the principles of lifelong learning which in turn aim to improve quality education. The principles also influence better practices above average and maintenance of QA aspect. This line of thinking is commonly applied in most of African states. For instance, most parents are comfortable when their children are passing exams. In Tanzania for example, it can be found that many private educational institutions (pre-primary, primary, secondary and by some means in higher learning) are striving for excellence on examinations' results rather than what the students have acquired for their long life and for working life after school; what they really know and have in their mind for their future career. The tendency is not only happening in Tanzania but also other countries of the world are

affected by this inclination. The question is how sure we are that: better score is a quality education? What quality practices can make better scores among students?

QA practices should be implemented in HEIs and even if QA practices are associated with cost tag since there is no free lunch. Specific standard that cover a wide range HEIs work and operations expected to meet should be notified. However, there is no methodology set as evidence that an HEI had achieved the standards that is concern. To this end, improved QA practices are effective instrument to help HEIs achieve quality brand in the eyes of their stakeholders (UNESCO, 2007); the importance of establishing a new quality 'life style' of the people, products and services. Also, address the importance of team building and changing the work culture of staff as well as continuous assessment is crucial in QA and improved institutional performance and work satisfaction can result from enhanced good QA practices. QA practices in HE are associated with insurance relevance of programmes, greater linkages with productive sectors & setting minimum academic standards and improve employability of students.

As an educational practitioners and teacher-educators, experiences inform that QA system is working properly as a results of appropriate QA practices and quality education offered which can be determined by the way we structure our education focusing on teaching and learning environment; increased research output, and content (curriculum and instruction). Not only that but also human resources (recruit and retain qualified both academic and non teaching staff), infusing technology and pedagogical approach such as blended learning; abilities of students (output-performances-to their future career) to solve problems pertaining to their professions. To this end, standards should be our pillars to assure QA practices are implemented successful in most of HEIs. In Africa, we need to rethink and act on what quality assurance practices must be implemented. We need to go beyond normal QA practice and HEIs capacity by employing new models as such of those proposed by DAAD; and we need to develop QA system, criteria and procedures that has direct link to current education condition in most of African states and lastly we need to meet standards set by governments, national agencies or professional bodies.

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