

Quality Assurance Strategies In Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

This research article, titled "Quality Assurance Strategies in Higher Education Institutions, explored the significance of having quality assurance mechanisms in higher education. It investigated the challenges faced by higher educational institutions in developing countries, including inadequate infrastructure, irrelevant curriculum, and insufficient assessment methods, which stressed the need for effective quality assurance strategies. The article emphasized the crucial role of quality assurance in ensuring high-quality education, fostering positive learning outcomes, and contributing to societal development. The study proposed a holistic framework for quality assurance strategies, focusing on key elements such as clear vision and mission, program and curriculum design, qualified faculty, effective teaching and learning methods, infrastructure and facilities, research and innovation, and continuous assessment and improvement. Each element is discussed in detail, highlighting its significance in enhancing education quality. The article also examined the implications of poor quality assurance, including improper personnel selection, inconsistent curriculum delivery, inadequate infrastructure, decreased student outcomes, a lack of social impact, and student dissatisfaction. The research employed conceptual analysis as the methodology, aiming to comprehensively understand and clarify the concepts and implications of quality assurance in higher education institutions. The study concluded by stressing the importance of maintaining effective quality assurance processes in educational institutions, both for academic excellence and societal transformation. It evinced the need for transparent personnel selection processes, standardized curriculum design and delivery, investment in infrastructure, promotion of ethical values, encouragement of research and innovation, and continuous assessment and improvement to ensure quality education and positive societal impact.

Keywords: Quality Assurance, Strategies, Education, HEIs.

Date of Submission: 02-09-2023

Date of Acceptance: 12-09-2023

I. Introduction

Quality assurance in education has gained paramount importance in ensuring the delivery of high-quality education and fostering positive learning outcomes. In the context of developing countries, the quality of higher education institutions faces various challenges, such as lack of standardisation, ineffective teaching practises of faculty members, irrelevant staff qualifications, poor university infrastructure, outdated curriculum that does not match industry trends and technological advancements, inadequate funding and resources, poor graduate employability, ethical concerns for academia, and insufficient methods of assessing student learning outcomes. All these factors make the need for robust quality assurance mechanisms even more pronounced.

Protecting and ensuring the quality of education is an astronomical responsibility that requires a strong sense of responsibility. It is a matter of concern to the whole world, as every country tries to ensure that it has high-quality education.

Many countries in the world, as well as many educational institutions, are struggling with widespread poor quality education because they do not have effective strategies to improve the quality of their education systems.

The term quality assurance refers to “systematic, structured and continuous attention to quality in terms of quality maintenance and improvement” (Vroeijenstijn, 1995a).

Broadly defined, quality assurance is about systematic planning, monitoring and evaluation to sustain and improve on the standards of teaching, research and overall services in the colleges and universities to ensure efficiency in output. That is, the ability of higher institutions to meet certain criteria relating to academic matters, staff-student ratios, staff mix by rank, staff development, physical facilities, funding, administrative excellence and assessment of their outcomes (Opara, 2014; Ugodulunwa, 2015).

Education improves overall social life in areas such as economy, equality, peace, and social integration, and the opposite of this is that education is a key to escaping poverty. This is why the quality of education is one of the first five goals of the 2030 global goals. Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4 or Global Goal 4) is about quality education and is among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations in September 2015.

In today’s world, education is considered a must for any individual who aspires to be successful in life. Education is the key to success, and everyone should be educated.

When it comes to quality of education, there are many different definitions, but most would agree that a good education system encompasses three factors: quality, accessibility, and hope.

A strong education system is indeed characterized by several key factors: quality, accessibility, and hope. Let's break down each factor:

Quality: A good education system emphasizes high-quality teaching, relevant curriculum, and effective learning methods. It focuses on nurturing critical thinking, problem-solving skills, creativity, and a deep understanding of subjects. Quality education also encourages teachers to be well-trained and supported, ensuring they can provide engaging and informative lessons.

Accessibility: Accessibility refers to ensuring that education is available to all individuals, regardless of their socio-economic background, physical abilities, or geographical location. This involves removing barriers that might prevent certain groups from accessing education. An inclusive education system provides equal opportunities to everyone and addresses issues like gender disparities, disabilities, and socioeconomic inequalities.

Hope: Hope in the context of education signifies instilling a sense of purpose and aspiration in learners. A good education system not only imparts knowledge and skills but also nurtures a sense of optimism about the future. It helps students believe in their potential and encourages them to set and achieve goals, leading to personal growth and societal progress.

Combining these three factors creates a holistic education system that empowers individuals to contribute meaningfully to society and their own lives. It's worth noting that achieving these goals requires collaboration among policymakers, educators, families, and communities.

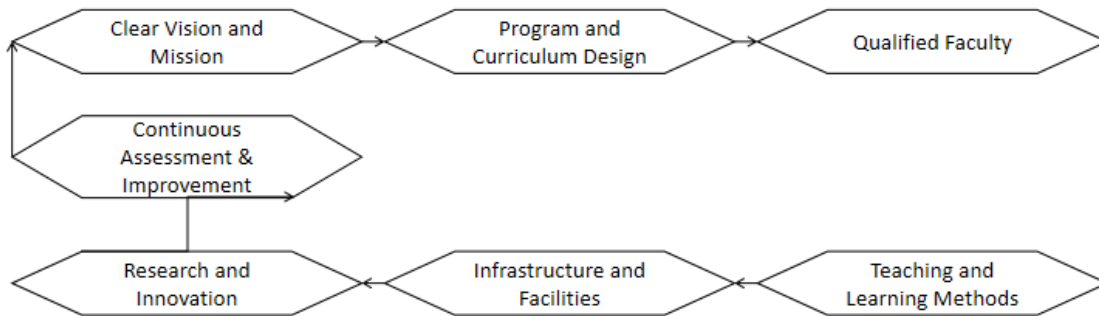
Unfortunately, these are often overlooked when comparing education systems across the globe. Most people in the world today have access to education, but not the quality that education should have.

Therefore, in order for us to have a quality education that is effective for society, this article tries to adequately understand world-class quality assurance strategies in education and specifically presents quality assurance strategies in higher education institutions.

II. Framework

Quality Assurance (QA) strategies in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are designed to ensure the delivery of high-quality education and services to community. These strategies encompass a range of activities and considerations that contribute to maintaining and enhancing the quality of education provided by the institution.

In order to have a reliable, quality education, the researcher developed and suggested considering the following illustrated elements:



Clear Vision and Mission

The late 1980s period witnessed the emergence of studies of how mission statement influences the organization's corporate image. Achua and Lussier (2016) defines organization mission statement as an enduring statement of purpose that distinguishes one organization from the other similar enterprises and organizations.

A well-defined and communicated vision and mission statement are fundamental cornerstones for any institution. These statements create a big-boned framework that lays the groundwork for the establishment of high-quality goals and objectives.

A clear vision articulates the institution's long-term aspirations, offering a compelling image of the desired future. Concurrently, a mission statement outlines the organization's core purpose, values, and primary activities. Together, these statements serve as guiding beacons, directing the institution's decisions, actions, and strategies. By aligning goals and objectives with this overarching framework, the institution ensures a cohesive and purpose-driven approach that enhances its effectiveness and impact.

Without having a clear vision and mission for an organization, we can't think about and talk about quality assurance. Vision and mission statements are what shape who we will be, how we look, and where we are going. The administrative staff of any university should keep in mind their institution's vision and mission and should communicate and share constantly with their stakeholders.

Program and Curriculum Design

The concept of curriculum is not very easy to define in any particular way. It has been conceived by different people from different perspectives. While some believe that its major concern is learning, the learner, and all planned and unplanned experiences of the learner, others believe that it is teaching and the teacher. Thus, Fafumera (1974:58), in a somewhat broad manner, defines curriculum as the whole of the educational process, that is, the total environment in which education takes place.

Program and curriculum design encompass the intricate process of formulating educational frameworks that are not only precise and structured but also appropriate and contemporary in nature. This multifaceted endeavour involves crafting academic programs and curricula that coherently integrate subject matter with real-world demands while concurrently reflecting the evolving benchmarks of various industries and the dynamic requirements of society at large. By diligently assimilating industry standards, the design ensures that students are equipped with the practical skills and knowledge necessary to excel in their chosen fields upon graduation. Simultaneously, the integration of societal needs ensures that the curriculum resonates with broader challenges and aspirations, fostering a generation of learners who are not only academically proficient but also socially conscious and responsive to the prevailing issues of the day.

Thus, the heart of program and curriculum design lies in its ability to strike a harmonious balance between academic validity, industry relevance, and societal significance, thereby nurturing individuals who are primed to make meaningful contributions in their careers and communities.

Qualified Faculty

The faculty members are the ones who determine the quality, morals, commitment, collaboration, and efficiency of the students. The person who has the highest responsibilities for this is the dean of the faculty and his/her head of departments.

In addition to that, qualified faculty is one of the foundational pillars for the effective functioning of any educational institution. To promote an environment of excellence and knowledge dissemination, it is imperative to exactly select faculty members who possess a high degree of qualification, substantial experience, and an unwavering commitment to the realms of both teaching and research.

A highly qualified faculty serves as the backbone of an institution, as they not only bring forth a diverse range of expertise and insights but also contribute to the holistic growth of students. With their profound subject knowledge and hands-on experience, they can provide students with practical insights that bridge the gap between theoretical concepts and real-world applications.

Moreover, faculty members who are actively engaged in research activities infuse their classrooms with the latest advancements in their respective fields, inspiring students to think critically and remain up-to-date with evolving trends. By symbolizing a passion for both teaching and research, qualified faculty members lay the groundwork for a vibrant academic community that enhances intellectual curiosity, innovation, and a deep-rooted pursuit of knowledge.

Teaching and Learning Methods

Teaching and learning methods play a crucial role in achieving quality education. The effectiveness of teaching methods can greatly influence how well students grasp and retain knowledge, develop critical thinking skills, and ultimately succeed in their academic accomplishments.

Active participation and learner engagement, understanding individual learning styles, integrating technology during teaching, nurturing the critical thinking skills of students, respecting learner abilities and backgrounds, motivating students curiosity about the learning subject, and effective assessment methods of learners' strengths and areas needing improvement are what cultivate students' learning progress and enable them to be qualified graduates.

Infrastructure and Facilities

In several countries, low level of education is due to inadequate level of physical facilities. Physical facilities provide students with adequate atmosphere conducive to learning. Modern physical facilities are important and have positive effects on students learning and performance (Shami & Hussain, 2005). School facilities are a major factor in ensuring quality education.

University infrastructure and facilities have an influence on learning outcomes. A conducive learning environment, including well-maintained classrooms, libraries, and study spaces, can enhance students' focus, concentration, and engagement. Clean and comfortable surroundings promote a positive mindset and make it easier for students to immerse themselves in their studies. A well-stocked library with sufficient study spaces encourages research and self-directed learning, enabling students to expand their knowledge beyond the classroom.

On the other hand, a very noisy and jumpy campus can be detrimental to students' performance as high levels of background noise interfere with hearing and concentration in the classroom; excessive classroom temperature impacts students learning; an infrastructure that is not accessible to all students, including those with disabilities, promotes exclusivity and causes many students to be left behind; and the absence of recreational facilities on campus like sports grounds and open spaces where students can have their discussions

and personal leisure complicates students' physical and creative well-being, which indirectly decreases their overall learning experience.

Blatchford et al. (2009) suggest that a negative relationship exists between class size and classroom processes. Class size differences may impact classroom processes, which in turn influence student attentiveness and active involvement with teachers and peers. Teachers in small classes are more likely to give individual attention to students, effectively control and manage the classroom, and build better relationships with students. Similarly, students in small classes may be more engaged in the classroom and more likely to interact with teachers and peers (Blatchford et al., 2009).

In Somalia, this is a major concern currently, where you can see a university that operates a building that was designed for family or for business, some of which are located in very populated and turbulent places.

Research and Innovation

The quality of education is elaborately linked to the promotion of Research and Innovation within an academic institution. By actively encouraging research and innovation activities, an institution promotes an environment where both faculty and students engage in cutting-edge exploration and discovery. This engagement not only expands the boundaries of knowledge but also enhances the overall quality of education provided. When educators are engaged in ongoing research, they bring the latest findings and methodologies directly into the classroom, enriching the learning experience with real-world applications and up-to-date insights.

Furthermore, research-driven education cultivates critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills among students. By involving students in research projects, they are exposed to hands-on experiences that go beyond traditional textbook learning. This improves a sense of curiosity, creativity, and an appreciation for the process of knowledge creation, which are all essential aspects of a holistic education.

The impact of research and innovation on an institution's reputation is also undeniable. Institutions that actively contribute to the advancement of knowledge through their research endeavors gain recognition within academic and professional circles. A strong reputation, in turn, attracts renowned scholars, researchers, and students, creating a dynamic learning community that further upgrades the educational experience.

Along with this, nurturing a culture of research and innovation directly enhances the quality of education by infusing it with current knowledge, practical applications, and critical thinking opportunities. The mutual benefits of improved education quality and enhanced institutional reputation make investing in research and innovation a groundwork of delivering a well-rounded and impactful education.

Continuous Assessment & Improvement

According to Ugodulunwa (2015), quality assurance is a continuous process of evaluating the quality of a system, institution or programme. It focuses on enhancing and improving the process that is used to achieve the outcome and directed towards certifying or guaranteeing the quality of an item.

Continuous Assessment is a method of obtaining information on what a student gains from schooling in terms of knowledge, industry and character development. In other words, Continuous Assessment considers students' performance in tests, assignments, projects, laboratory works, oral examinations, field experiences and other educational activities during a given period (i.e., semester, session or entire period of an educational level). As a point of fact, Continuous Assessment implies that records of students' performance must be continuous and systematic and such records must be carefully kept (Ibrahim, 2010).

Continuous assessment and improvement play a crucial role in ensuring the quality of education. As it involves the consistent evaluation of students' performance and understanding throughout their learning journey. Instead of relying solely on final exam results, lecturers should employ a variety of assessment methods, such as quizzes, assignments, projects, presentations, and field visits, to measure students' progress. This ongoing assessment provides timely feedback to both students and instructors. Lecturers and academic offices should realize that one or two assessments in the whole semester will make it difficult for them to judge students progress and decelerate students standards and academic proficiency.

To sum up, the researcher believes that proper practice of the detailed above elements can be a holistic approach to maintaining and enhancing the quality of education and services offered by higher education institutions, which can result in disciplined, actively engaged, thoroughly educated students who are real-life thinkers.

III. Methodology

The researcher used conceptual analysis as he wanted to comprehend, clarify, and analyse the content, relations, and implications of quality assurance in higher education institutions, which is one of the most commonly used vocabularies in HEIs operating in developing nations but is less written.

The use of this method enabled the researcher to investigate systematically, underline the meanings, and uncover the implications of various elements in the quality domain. This helped in dispelling ambiguity and fostering a more precise understanding of quality assurance within the higher education context. Moreover, the method allowed the researcher to explore various elements of quality assurance within HEIs in which their right use can contribute to the overall quality of education.

V. Implications

Poor quality assurance in education can have a significant impact on lowering educational standards. Quality assurance refers to the processes and systems put in place to monitor, evaluate, and maintain the quality of education being delivered. Therefore, when this quality awareness is missing or not effective, many challenges can happen, as detailed here:

Improper Personnel Selection

Improper personnel selection can have significant prejudicial effects on higher educational institutions, impacting various aspects of their functionality and overall success. Administrative staff, faculty members, and lecturers are the backbone of higher education institutions, responsible for imparting knowledge, managing operations, and shaping the academic environment.

When selection processes fail to identify individuals who possess the necessary expertise, dedication, and alignment with the institution's values, it can result in insufficient teaching quality, decreased research output, and a general decline in academic standards.

A lack of focus on quality during staffing can contribute to a negative institutional culture where self-complacency and mediocrity are accepted. This can reduce innovation and institutional improvement.

Moreover, a mismatch between the skills and responsibilities of the selected personnel can lead to frustration and burnout, reducing motivation and job satisfaction among faculty and staff. This, in turn, could impact student engagement, as disheartened educators are less likely to provide the inspiration and support that students need to excel in their studies, and this erodes an institution's reputation over time.

Inconsistent Curriculum Delivery

Poor quality assurance can result in inconsistent delivery of the curriculum. If the institution's quality unit is not properly working, some of the class course units can have fewer chapters than the standard, and other students can be victims of the lecturer's educational background. This means some lecturers teach learners chapters that relate to their educational background; they don't consider learners course relativity. Other lecturers might deviate from the prescribed syllabus, skip important topics, or fail to cover the necessary material in depth. This inconsistency can lead to gaps in students' knowledge and skills.

Inadequate Infrastructure and Resources

School facilities are the material resources that facilitate effective teaching and learning in schools. Castalsi (1971) defined them as those things of education which enables a skilful teacher to achieve a level of instructional effectiveness that far exceeds what is possible when they are not provided.

Buildings, classrooms, laboratories, and equipment-education infrastructure are crucial elements of learning environments in schools and universities. There is strong evidence that high-quality infrastructure facilitates better instruction, improves student outcomes, and reduces dropout rates, among other benefits.

Quality education requires proper infrastructure, including classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and technology resources. Poor quality assurance can result in insufficient investment in these facilities, making it difficult to create an effective learning environment.

Inadequate infrastructure and limited resources create significant barriers to effective learning and development. For instance, when a university lacks essential facilities such as well-equipped classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and technology resources, students are deprived of hands-on experiences and interactive learning opportunities, and this causes many HEIs to produce unqualified graduates.

Decreased Student Outcomes

Higher education quality assurance is gaining significant attention among higher education institutions worldwide. This attention comes mainly from the willingness of these institutions to meet the growing needs for quality education. Universities around the world continuously and competitively strive to achieve their institutional mission and objectives, which guarantee public satisfaction and stakeholders' demands (Angappapillai & Annapoorani, 2012).

Although most HEIs are aware of the importance of having a quality education system, many of their qualities are not what students and other stakeholders are willing to see.

Poor quality assurance in education can have a terrible impact on student outcomes, as it leads to a decrease in overall academic achievements and personal growth. When educational institutions fail to implement standardised quality assurance indicators, several issues may arise in terms of inadequate curriculum design, poor teaching methodologies and teaching materials, outdated instructional practices, poor practical skills for science students, insufficient student assessment and evaluation, and even student engagement in study, all of which keep students behind in the required skills, experience, and essential concepts they need to have in their specialisation.

All these are the most significant consequences of poor quality assurance, which reduces learners learning outcomes. And this, in the end, results in students graduating without the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in higher education or the workforce, contributing to a decline in the overall educational standards.

Lack of Social Impact

In our normal thinking, whenever we get new graduates, we are willing to have new innovators in all social sectors, but that will not be as much as we are willing if the quality of our education is not very qualified and not related to our social needs and real-world demands.

Students who lack positive social interactions, critical thinking, effective communication skills, a social attitude, patriotism, emotional intelligence, and global thinking capacity can't have a positive social impact on their social transformations.

Poor education quality can have far-reaching consequences for students' social impact. The effortless quality assurance of higher education institutions has resulted in poor influence, behaviour, graphology, critical thinking, communication, message delivery, and even attitudes among students towards their social development. And of course, universities should have a great influence on the mindset and type of students who graduate from them; a lack of this can even have a higher negative impact on the university's reputation in society and in global academia.

Moreover, the absence of nurturing behaviours and social skills in students can obstruct their capacity to build relationships and collaborate within their communities. A deficient educational environment fails to promote social transformation, preventing students from developing into proactive contributors to positive societal changes. Additionally, the issue of nepotism and a lack of patriotism in social life and workplaces in Somalia may result from education systems that fail to impart to learners the values of meritocracy and civic

obligations. Therefore, if universities don't have educational quality-mindedness, this situation often worsens and causes learners brain drain as bright minds seek better education opportunities elsewhere, depriving the local society of potential change agents.

Student Dissatisfaction

Neglecting quality assurance in education can significantly contribute to student dissatisfaction in various ways. When educational institutions fail to address student demands, staff qualifications, employee working hours, teaching methods, curriculum relevance, and assessment of students learning performance, students are more likely to experience poor learning experiences.

Being not quality conscious at an institution leads students to study irrelevant content, not be well-prepared for the job market due to inadequate education, face inadequate teaching resources, insufficient faculty support, biased evaluation methods, and fail to have what they are willing to have during the course enrollment. All these concerns combined can speed up learners discontent, frustration, disinterest, unmotivation, and disengagement from their studies.

HEIs should match students' expectations and the quality of education they provide, noting that students invest significant time, effort, and money in their education. Poor quality assurance can lead to dissatisfaction among students who feel they are not getting their money's worth. This can lead to high dropout rates and negative feedback, which can damage the institution's reputation and enrollment.

Lastly, the implications discussed above, including improper personnel selection, inconsistent curriculum delivery, inadequate infrastructure and resources, decreased student outcomes, a lack of social impact, and student dissatisfaction, emphasize the critical importance of maintaining effective quality assurance processes in educational institutions. Failing to maintain quality assurance not only affects the academic environment and student experiences but also hampers the institution's honour, threatens student success, and hinders its contribution to positive societal transformation.

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, maintaining a high standard of quality assurance in higher education institutions (HEIs) is crucial for continuing educational excellence, nurturing student growth, and contributing to positive societal change, and vice versa. Therefore, to have a great education, the researcher suggested the following recommendations:

Firstly, addressing the above-mentioned challenges and promoting quality in HEIs is very significant; thus, a well-skilled, merit-selected, and motivated workforce can drive innovation, enhance productivity, and contribute to the overall success of the organization. Therefore, the researcher is recommending transparent selection processes for administrative staff, faculty members, and lecturers. Educational institutions should focus on identifying individuals with the requisite expertise, commitment, and alignment with institutional values. Regular professional development opportunities should also be provided to enhance teaching methodologies, research skills, and overall competence.

Secondly, all HEIs are suggested to establish quality assurance units that strictly review and monitor the curriculum's content, structure, and delivery. Standardized syllabi, teaching methods, and assessment criteria should be maintained to ensure consistency across courses. Regular assessments and evaluations of curriculum effectiveness should guide continuous improvement efforts.

Thirdly, HEIs must prioritize regularly investing in infrastructure and resource centres, including campus environments, classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and technology resources. Adequate funding should be allocated to have laboratory facilities, the latest book versions, and technologies to solve their learners education demands.

Fourthly, ethics for students is a habit of how to behave, both in daily life in class, at home, and in the community. The existence of ethics that is upheld and respected by students and lecturers, of course, has an important reason that needs attention.

Thinking about and promoting ethical values, social responsibility, and critical thinking skills in learners can result in graduates who positively impact society. Quality education does not only help students develop academically but also socially, and it helps us produce responsible citizens who, in the future, can't be part of corruption, nepotism, plagiarism, and other harmful behaviours of societies.

Fifthly, quality assurance should extend beyond teaching and focus on research and innovation. A university is a place where scholars and teachers participate in the advancement, acquisition, and communication of knowledge in a liberal spirit and thus prepare students for their chosen professions and other aspects of life. Besides disseminating knowledge, universities also 'create' new knowledge through research and, consequently, provide platforms for updated learning based on existing as well as new knowledge 'created' through research. Therefore, a university faculty member is expected to engage as much in research as in teaching. Any system that promotes one activity at the cost of the other (teaching versus research) weakens the university. (Alexander, 1931).

Encouraging faculty and students to engage in cutting-edge research can enhance the institution's academic reputation and contribute to societal progress. Therefore, it is a matter of encouragement for universities to focus on research and innovation, as research is one of the tasks that universities are expected to do for society. Lecturers, administrative staff, and students should be trained in research skills, and the universities should have a research and innovation department that has its own budget and takes responsibility for strengthening research and innovation.

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