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Institutional Constraints Affecting Quality Assurance Processes in Tanzania's Private Universities

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify the institutional constraints of quality assurance processes in Tanzania's private universities and colleges. The descriptive survey design combines qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Purposive, stratified, and random sampling procedures are used to select a sample of 486 participants in the study who comprised 191 academic staff, 291 students, and 4 quality assurance officials from four private universities. Questionnaires and interviews are used for data collection. The findings indicate that inadequate financing, lack of capacity in terms of adequate, qualified and experienced human resources to undertake quality assurance functions, lack of clear and viable quality assurance policies, lack of awareness on quality assurance issues, and lack of academic leadership were the identified major institutional constraints to quality assurance processes in Tanzania's private universities. The theoretical and policy implications of these findings are also discussed.

Keywords: quality assurance, constraints, private universities

Résumé

La présente étude a pour but d'identifier les contraintes institutionnelles des processus l'assurance qualité dans les universités et collèges privées en Tanzanie. Le plan de sondage descriptif combine les approches de recherche qualitative et quantitative. Des procédures d'échantillonnage intentionnel, stratifié et aléatoire ont été utilisées pour sélectionner un échantillon de 486 participants

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dans l'étude qui sont composés de 191 personnels académiques, 291 étudiants et 4 officiels de l'assurance qualité issus de quatre universités privées. Les questionnaires et les entretiens ont été utilisés pour la collecte de données. Les résultats indiquent que les principales contraintes institutionnelles aux processus de l'assurance qualité au niveau des universités privées tanzaniennes sont l'insuffisance du financement, le manque de capacité en termes de ressources humaines qualifiées et expérimentées adéquates pour entreprendre les fonctions d'assurance qualité, le manque de politiques d'assurance qualité claire et viable, le manque de sensibilisation sur les questions d'assurance qualité, et l'absence de leadership académique. Les implications théoriques et politiques de ces ont été abordées.

Mots clés : assurance qualité, contraintes, universités privées

Introduction and Background

Until 1995, the Government of Tanzania (GOT) was the sole provider of university education, through the University of Dar es Salaam and Sokoine University of Agriculture. Both institutions, however, grew slowly in terms of student enrolments while Tanzania lagged behind other sub-Saharan African countries in terms of participation rates in higher education, number of universities and higher education outcomes (Ishengoma 2007).The increasing social demand for higher education, along with the demand for different types of university education, led to the initiation of policy measures to stimulate private sector involvement in university education in Tanzania. The GOT provided an enabling environment through legislation for the private providers of higher education to work effectively, which saw the repeal of the Education Act No. 25 of 1978, and the passage of the Education Act No. 10 of 1995 (United Republic of Tanzania (URT) 1999), marking the emergence of private universities in Tanzania. Since the repeal, the liberalisation of higher education has significantly increased the number of private universities (PRUs) in the country to include ten PRUs with full registration, and eleven university colleges with both full and provisional institutional registration (Tanzanian Commission of Universities (TCU) 2012a). However, student enrolment remained low for the following two decades. In 2011/2012, 46,995 students were enrolled in private institutions, accounted for 29.7 per cent of the total 157,812 Tanzanian university students (URT 2011).

The quality of education offered in PRUs was questioned among higher education stakeholders with respect to lower qualifications of academic members of staff; often staffing with primarily assistant lecturers, few doctoral prepared faculty professors and retired academic staff from public universities (Ishengoma 2007; Sabaya 2006; Simon 2010; TCU 2015). In 1995, the GOT established the

Higher Education Accreditation Council (HEAC) in order to register and accredit public and private universities. In 2005, the TCU replaced the HEAC (TCU 2012b) as the statutory body charged with the responsibility of overseeing and controlling the quality of post-secondary education. Within this mandate is the responsibility of controlling and ensuring adherence to the pre-determined standards approved by TCU in order to enforce regulations to guide the conduct and quality of universities and university colleges. The TCU is further charged with overseeing and monitoring the quality of infrastructure, criteria for recruiting academic and research staff, academic programmes, admission criteria, assessment of students, grading, classification, and recognition of awards (The Universities Act No. 7 of 2005).

The establishment of a higher education quality assurance structure has not translated directly to the ability of the commission to enforce that universities achieve acceptable quality standards. Quality assurance systems in private universities and university colleges remain weak and ineffective (Ishengoma 2007; Materu 2007). The purpose of this study is to identify the institutional constraints in conducting quality assurance and control processes in PRUs in Tanzania.

Study Method

This study uses a descriptive survey design. The design permits the researchers to summarise the characteristics of different groups and measure the attitudes and opinions toward the constraints and strategies of institutional quality assurance and control processes. The design also allows collection of qualitative and quantitative data using various methods from a wide population in a short period of time.

Setting and Sample

The study was conducted in four universities and university colleges in Tanzania. These universities and university colleges included: Ruaha University, Muslim University of Morogoro, St. John's University of Tanzania and St. Augustine University of Tanzania. These universities were randomly selected to represent the major zones in the country.

To obtain an acceptable and representative sample size for this study, researchers adopted a formula from Yamane (1967 cited in Israel 1992), to calculate proportionate sample size for survey studies of a given population. For the formula, researchers chose a 95 per cent confidence level and .05 precision level. Yamane's formula for calculating survey sample size in proportions is:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n is a sample size, N is total target population and e is level of precision. With the total target population of 21,126 academic staff and students from sampled PRUs, the proportionate sample size of each category of respondents totaled 191 academic staff, 291 students, and 4 quality assurance personnel, yielding a total sample of 486 respondents from the named institutions.

Data Collection and Analysis

Questionnaires were administered to 191 academic staff and 291students from four private universities and university colleges in Tanzania. The questionnaires solicited information on the constraints affecting quality assurance processes in Tanzania private universities. Qualitative data were collected through face-to-face unstructured interviews with four quality assurance officials. The interviews revealed the day-to-day constraints in the implementation of quality assurance processes in PRUs in Tanzania and the strategies implemented to address the challenges.

Collected data were sorted and placed in respective categories as per study objectives. Resurrectionists quantitative data obtained through questionnaires through SPSS© v.20 to calculate frequencies and percentages of the collected data. Qualitative data were coupled with the quantitative data to support the findings. On the other hand, data collected through interviews and documentary reviews were subjected to thematic analysis. Thematic analysis allowed for the analysis of qualitative data on the basis of relevant themes. In this study, thematic analysis involved six major stages: familiarisation with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report (Greener 2011; Yin 2011). Thematic analysis for qualitative data simplified interpretations of the data presented largely in narrative and descriptive form.

Findings and Discussion

Key Findings

The study objective is to identify the institutional constraints to quality assurance and control processes in PRUs in Tanzania. Study findings revealed four primary institutional constraints: 1) inadequate funding of quality assurance processes by the institutions; 2) lack of institutional capacity in terms of trained human resources in quality assurance in higher education; 3) lack of viable institutional quality assurance frameworks and policies; and 4) poor or lack of academic leadership and lack of awareness among academic staff about quality assurance issues.

Table 1: Institutional Constraints of QA and Control Processes in Private Universities (N=482)

Institutional Constraints to QA Processes	Academic Staff /Student Responses			
	Academic Staff Frequency	Students Frequency	Total	Relative Frequency
Inadequate funding of QA processes by the Institution	142	188	330	.247
Lack of human resource capacity in QA issues	133	196	329	.246
Lack of institutional framework/policy	128	150	278	.208
Lack of academic leadership	80	153	233	.174
Lack of awareness	42	124	166	.125
	525	811	1336	1.00

Approximately two-thirds of all survey respondents reported inadequate funding of quality assurance processes by institutions and lack of institutional capacity in terms of human resources as the major constraints to quality assurance and control processes at the institutional level, Other constraints reflected concerns with the lack of viable institutional frameworks/policies on quality assurance (58 %); lack or poor academic leadership to enforce quality assurance procedures (48 %); and lack of awareness of the importance of quality assurance processes (34 %).

Interview findings mirrored the survey findings in terms of challenges of inadequate funding, lack of awareness about quality assurance processes among students and academic staff and poor support from university administration. In addition, the interviews revealed issues in terms of lack of qualified academic staff, low academic qualifications among academic staff, as well as resistance to enforce quality assurance and control procedures among academic staff. Inadequate funding and lack of awareness were pointed in each of the surveyed PRUs, while lack of awareness and poor support from university management were reported in three out of four surveyed PRUs.

Inadequate Funding and Costs of Quality Assurance at Institutional Level

Quality assurance directors and coordinators in all private universities surveyed expressed concerns regarding the acute shortage in the budget for conducting institutional quality assurance and control processes. Respondents revealed that institutions do not budget for the high costs of quality assurance implementation processes, or the budgeted funds are not disbursed. As a

result, quality assurance processes in PRUs were not effectively conducted due to limitations in financial support. For instance, a quality assurance coordinator reported that:

> …, all of these processes are costly, just imagine you take a foreign external examiner, it is obvious you need to pay for his/her air ticket, hotel and honoraria. This costs the institution a lot of US dollars and particularly when you have many courses and degree programmes to be examined or reviewed. We would like to have even peer reviewers from classical universities like Harvard or Cambridge but the institution does not have that financial capacity to cover the costs… some times even to run the QA directorate the cost are also unbearable. Last year my assistant coordinator resigned because of acute shortage of funds to run the directorate. (QA Director PRUY 14/5/2013)

The finding implies that many quality assurance and control processes are not effectively conducted because of high implementation costs. In order to conduct quality assurance processes effectively, seminars and workshops, which are also costly, are paramount in order to ensure PRU administrators appreciate the importance and imperative of quality assurance. This finding is similar to Materu's (2007) argument that without adequate funding, institutional quality assurance processes, credibility, and integrity of their outcomes are threatened. Therefore, the cost of conducting quality assurance in private universities constrained PRUs from conducting quality assurance processes given the meagre financial resources available for that purpose.

Lack of Human Resource Capacity

Both the shortage of qualified staff and a disproportionate number of lower academic ranked staff were seen as contributing to a lack of human resource capacity in the implementation of quality assurance processes in the surveyed PRUs. Table 2 presents representation and qualification of academic staff in surveyed PRUs.

Table 2: Academic staff qualifications at participating private universities

Academic Qualification	**Surveyed Private Universities**			
	W	X	Y	Z
Professor	0	0	9	1
Associate Professor	1	0	7	2
Senior Lecturer	3	0	9	0
Lecturer	2	0	31	2
Assistant Lecturer	70	21	181	31
Tutorial Assistant	24	36	34	7
Total	**100**	**57**	**271**	**43**

Source: TCU, 2015

Academic staff with lower ranks do not have sufficient capacity to handle serious quality assurance processes such as institutional self-assessment, quality audit and external examination, and to conduct tracer studies. In their observation, Badiru and Wahome(2016) argue that for credible and trustworthy outcomes of tracer studies, there is a need that they are conducted by academics of senior rank. A similar observation was noted in one interview as noted below:

> …however, a big challenge we have now is inadequate number of lecturers and their low qualifications. Most of our lecturers hold masters [sic] degrees and bachelor's degrees, therefore to a large extent we are compelled to use part time lecturers from the University of Dar es Salaam and University of Dodoma. Therefore when we want to conduct comprehensive quality assurance activities such asself-assessment and internal audits we completely fail. (QA Coordinator PRU X 30/4/2013)

At another university, when probed about constraints of quality assurance processes at an institutional level, the respondent stated:

> For our case, actually we have inadequate number of academic staff in some departments especially natural sciences but the other thing is their ability and experience to QA issues as you know the idea of QA is new and we as institution are not familiar yet with the concept of QA as, so when it comes to conducting QA processes in our institution, we find ourselves in most cases at the crossroad. (QA Director PRU Z 8/5/2013)

According to TCU, the minimum education qualification for academic staff in universities is a doctorate degree (TCU 2014).Therefore, the use of underqualified academic staff, such as tutorial assistants and assistant lecturers, in universities suggests that quality assurance and control processes might be negatively affected. Success of institutional self-assessment, internal audits, external examination and academic reviews depends on adequate and qualified human resources since effectiveness of QA processes is highly dependent on the quality, dedication and integrity of those implementing and conducting the processes (Materu 2007; Matimbo 2002). Hayward (2006) suggests that senior academic staff need to conduct institutional self-assessments, peer reviews, and quality audits if the processes are to be effective and credible. Quality university performance is a direct function of the quality and number of human resources available in order to perform its duties with minimum constraints. Woodward (2003) suggests that unequal and limited human resources have curtailed many private institutions' ability to respond to the policy demands with regard to quality assurance.

Lack of Institutional Framework/Policy

A majority of academic staff and student respondents indicated a lack of institutional quality assurance policy despite evidence of such policies obtained through document reviews and interviews with quality assurance directors and coordinators. During the course of the study, all surveyed PRUs provided institutional quality assurance policy documents.

These contradicting findings suggest these policies are not public or widely disseminated to stakeholders, including academic staff, management and students. The consequences of this knowledge gap of the policy presence include a division of power between those who know and do not know, resistance to implementation and a lack of engagement in the implementation of the policies. The ultimate outcome is the risk of negatively impacting on the quality of education provided. There is a need for institutions to ensure the compliance of TCU guidelines, and create an environment where faculty and administration alike are guided by coherent internal quality assurance policies that can be easily interpreted by stakeholders for implementation purposes, and subjected to regular external stakeholder reviews.

Lack of Academic Leadership

Academic leadership provides direction to the vision/mission, leadership and administration, and requires senior academics with specialisation in academic leadership. Ideally, administrators, managers and leaders of higher education institutions, including universities, should be ethically moulded, have high levels of integrity and demonstrate experience in leadership, management and administration, apart from being senior academics (Black 2015).

Nearly half of survey respondents pointed to the lack of academic leadership as a constraint to institutional quality assurance processes. Through the interviews, there was a view that top and middle managers do not adequately provide academic leadership, particularly in terms of quality assurance processes, due to their lack of status as senior academics and minimal knowledge of quality assurance. The TCU stipulates academic qualifications, rank and experience for top leadership in both PUs and PRUs (TCU 2014:6). Actual qualifications of deans and heads of departments in surveyed PRUs are reflected in Table 3.

Table 3: Academic Qualifications of Middle-level Managers in Surveyed Private Universities

Institution	PhDs	Deans' Academic Qualifications		Head of Departments' Academic Qualifications		
		Masters	Bachelors	PhDs	Masters	Bachelors
W	2	2	0	2	7	0
X	1	3	0	0	5	0
Y	2	3	0	2	9	0
Z	3	3	0	1	7	0
Total	**8**	**11**	**0**	**28**	**0**	**0**

Source: Field data (2012)

Only 50 per cent of those holding the position of Dean were PhD prepared, whilst this number dropped to 15 per cent at the Head of Department level. In most surveyed PRUs, academic staff not only lacked necessary academic leadership qualifications but also adequate qualifications to be academic staff. Academic staff with minimal qualifications and experience cannot provide academic leadership to the level of deanship or other leadership positions in the university. As a result, this deficit in qualifications and credentials can be expected to negatively impact on the effective practice of institutional quality assurance processes to both academic staff and students in PRUs.

Lack of Awareness Among Academic Staff and Students on Quality Assurance Issues

According to survey respondents, nearly one-third lacked awareness of quality assurance issues; as well, three out of four interviewees asserted that lack of awareness is a limitation to quality assurance processes at their PRUs. For instance, as one interviewee stated:

> …and may be lack of awareness and knowledge among stakeholders, you know QA is a new concept, the concept that is not known to many stakeholders, so when you tell individuals and particularly academic staffs may be you are supposed to do A, B, C to assure quality… in most cases they would resist and tell you that, 'we have been in this institution for years and we have never heard about that'. (QA Director PRU Z 8/5/2013)

Another participant asserted that:

> The big thing is the mindset of the people in their faculties, especially in accepting to conduct QA processes in their respective departments. Some individual teachers resist to easily accepting QA as a new culture that is to

> be embedded in our departments especially when you ask people to conduct self-assessment or tracer study. (QA Coordinator PRU W26/4/2013)

These findings suggest that there is inadequate involvement of stakeholders in designing and implementation of QA programmes in PRUs. Yang (2011) identified that the lack of knowledge, values, skills and organisation to empower the stakeholders may lead to poor or unsuccessful implementation of quality assurance programmes and policies. Watty (2003) found that limited training on evaluation and peer review to improve the academic staff skills affects the implementation of self-assessment in PRUs. Creating awareness related to quality assurance policy and programmes through seminars and workshops, according to some participants, could help realise the importance of all institutional quality assurance processes and contribute to greater acceptance for implementation.

Conclusion

This study examined the institutional constraints inherent in conducting quality assurance and control processes in Tanzania's PRUs. The study revealed several institutional constraints that curtailed PRUs' efforts in effectively conducting institutional quality assurance and control processes. These constraints included inadequate funding of institutions to the departments or bureaus in charge of quality assurance activities, lack of institutional capacity in terms of adequate qualified and experienced human resources, lack of awareness among stakeholders, and poor or inadequate academic leadership with clear and viable institutional quality assurance policies.

On the basis of study findings, a number of conclusions may be drawn. First, the institutional constraints PRUs face in conducting quality assurance processes affect their effectiveness in managing the quality of higher education they provide. As some of the quality assurance processes are integral to the accreditation process, these constraints contribute to a disjoint between the expectations of TCU and the PRUs, making it difficult to regulate and monitor quality. Second, constraints on the institutional quality assurance processes profoundly affected the extent to which PRUs adequately conduct the processes. As such, deficits may undermine not only the quality of education provided by PRUs, but achievement of accreditation and reaccreditation. Finally, in order to address these constraints, intervention measures are important both at the institutional level and at the level of TCU. It is recommended that PRUs ensure budget considerations for conducting sufficient quality assurance processes as an important component of institutional reputation.

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