

An Assessment of the Internal Quality Assurance Mechanisms at the Open University of Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess the status of Quality Assurance systems at the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) as well as give recommendations for improvement. The study employed the exploratory sequential mixed methods design that had three phases. The study sample comprised of one senior staff from the Quality Assurance directorate and 12 Heads of departments. Data was collected through an interview and a questionnaire. Qualitative data was analysed thematically while quantitative data was analysed descriptively using frequencies and mean. The study established that OUT had put in place an elaborate Quality Assurance (QA) framework with a directorate of QA headed by a director under the office of the Vice Chancellor. The university also had an IQA policy document as well as a QA handbook. The QA directorate had embraced the use of ICT as it employed online tools for monitoring various activities in the institution. The university also carried out a Self-Assessment every five years. However, the IQA at the university was faced by the following challenges: inadequate funding, understaffing of the IQA directorate, negative attitude by university staff towards QA staff, lack of involvement of HoDs in planning QA activities amongst others. The study recommends the following: the university should adequately staff and fund the QA directorate; the QA directorate should develop its activities in a participatory manner; and the QA directorate should increase sensitization of the university community on QA policies and issues.

Key words: Internal Quality Assurance, University, Directorate, Policy, Heads of Department

INTRODUCTION

This study sought to assess the Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) system at the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) which is a fully fledged, autonomous and accredited public University in Tanzania, established by an Act of Parliament Number 17 of 1992. The university operations are governed by the Universities Act No. 7 of 2005 and the OUT Charter and Rules (2007). OUT offers certificate, diploma, degree and postgraduate courses through the blended learning mode which combines open and distance learning with face to face sessions. These programmes are offered in OUT's five faculties and two institutes which are: Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Faculty of Business Management, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Science, Technology and Environmental Studies, Institute of Educational and Management Technologies, and Institute of Continuing Education (OUT, 2019). OUT has its headquarters in Dar es Salaam, the biggest city in Tanzania and the country's commercial centre. However, being an Open University, OUT operates through a network of about 30 Regional Centres, 10 Coordinating Centres and 69 Study Centres spread throughout the country including the Islands of Zanzibar and Pemba. OUT has registered students from other countries in Africa such as Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Namibia. The university is headed by a Vice-Chancellor who has three deputies (Resource Management; Academic; and, Learning Technologies and Regional Services). The Vision of OUT is *'to be a leading open online University, in knowledge creation and application'* while its mission is *'to provide relevant, quality, flexible, accessible, and affordable open online education, research, and services to the community for the social economic development of Tanzania and the rest of the world.'* By June 2018 OUT had a total of 304 academic and 302 non-academic staff. Between 1999 and 2018, OUT had cumulatively enrolled 134,042 students and out of which 35,777 (26.7%) had graduated over the same period. Of the 35,777

graduates, 15,971 (44.6%) were awarded bachelors, degrees, 14,608 (40.8%) received certificates and diplomas while 5,198 (14.2%) got post-graduate qualifications (OUT, 2019). This statistic (26.7%) on the graduates over a ten year period indicate a low graduation rate which could be an indication of internal efficiency challenges at OUT. Internal inefficiency could be represented by low graduation/completion rates, long average duration of study per graduate, high repeater rates and high drop-out rates. This study was carried out as part of the requirements of the Staff Mobility Programme of the Inter University Council of East Africa (IUCEA). The lead researcher was a beneficiary of the programme as a visiting scholar at OUT for a period of three months in 2018. The purpose of the study was to assess the status of Quality Assurance mechanisms at OUT as well as give recommendations for improvement. To achieve this goal, the study was guided by the following questions: What quality assurance policies had been put in place at OUT? What was the level of awareness of the quality assurance policies by members of university? What quality assurance strategies had been executed at OUT? What challenges impacted on quality assurance at OUT?

Literature Review

Despite Higher education institutions' concern about the quality of their teaching and learning, research and community service, there lacks a common definition of quality education and quality assurance practices (Reda, 2017; Loukkola & Zhang, 2010). Reda citing Adamu and Addamu (2012, p. 838); Neubauer and Gomes (2017); and Vukasovic (2012) notes that Quality has different meanings for different people, and the approaches to quality assurance practices have considerable variations across different contexts and upon individual perspectives. According to Harvey and Green (1993), quality assurance can be looked at from five approaches: quality as

exceptional (Exceeding high standards); quality as perfection (Achieving goal with a zero defect); quality as fitness for purpose (Meeting the stated purpose); quality as value for money (Maintaining efficiency and effectiveness) and quality as transformation (Maintaining qualitative changes). Quality Assurance systems are one of the main tools that have been introduced to ensure quality in higher education institutions. It is argued that quality assurance processes are important to higher education institutions as they offer ways for verifying objective evidence of processes, assessing success of implementation of processes, judging if defined targets have been effectively achieved and adducing evidence for problem solving (Mgaiwa,2018; Allais, 2009).

Other benefits of quality audits are transparency, learning and enhanced status of work (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Stensaker, 2008; Haapakorpi, 2011) as well as meeting students' expectations (Vukasovic, 2012). UNESCO (2018) citing Brennan and Shah (2000), point out that IQA can have an academic, managerial, pedagogical, or employment focus. Vukasovic (2012) noted that Higher Education Institutions'(HIE) quality assurance played a role in attracting not only students but also employees adding that the sector was experiencing staff mobility due to its employees searching for an institution which had tried to maintain its quality. Although there are different quality assurance models in higher education, much of the literature seems to be in favour of the systems model which has the input, processes and output dimensions (Ayalew *et al.*, 2009; Biggs, 1993). The systems model postulates that higher education institutions interact with the environment by receiving input from that environment, transforming the inputs and eventually delivering outputs to the environment. An international survey conducted by IIEP/UNESCO established that IQA in higher education served both

externally and internally driven purposes (UNESCO, 2018). The former included compliance and accountability to the requests of national authorities or external stakeholders while the latter comprised performance assessment, institutional learning, and management improvement aimed at improving internal processes and strengthening institutional self-regulation. The study also established that IQA was driven by both improvement and compliance. Improvement was mainly focused on academic activities and institutional performance assessment while compliance was addressing external standards, accountability to government and society, institutional learning, improvement of management, and equitable resource allocation.

The external drivers seem to be a major force in IQA in higher education in many countries. Ryan (2015) suggested the need to have Internal Quality Assessment framework across the countries. In Europe, for example, the Bologna process which strives to increase comparability of degrees and learning outcomes across European university systems to enable increased student and staff mobility across European higher education institutions has hastened the introduction and elaboration of quality assurance in higher education institutions (Teichler, 2012). The Bologna process has led to the establishment of formalized external QA mechanisms and internal QA mechanisms (Bollaert, 2014). Massification and internationalization of tertiary education as well as the increased focus on employability have also been cited as drivers of quality assurance in higher education (Bollaert, 2014; UNESCO, 2018). Another reason behind the increasing emphasis in QA is the changing landscape of Higher education. According to Markus and Philipp (2018) universities are attracting the 'non-traditional students' and 'mature students'. The former enter university education with a vocational education background and

professional experience rather than merely with a secondary school education certificate while the latter comprises students returning to higher education after a professional career ('life-long learning'). The African Union articulates the need for quality and quality assurance in higher education and training for Africa's investment in the education of its youth to yield demographic dividends (African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2018). However, despite the importance of QA in higher education, its implementation has not been devoid of challenges. Markus and Philipp (2018) note that many academic staff and other stakeholders have viewed the rapidity and impact of the QA change processes as more of a burden than an opportunity. This explains the resistance witnessed when QA is first being introduced in many institutions (Anderson 2006, 2008). The other challenge facing QA is structural. Ehlers (2009) & Harvey (2016) as cited in UNESCO (2018) note that Universities worldwide were struggling with certain challenges related to IQA which included:

Developing cost-effective IQA, in which tools and processes are well articulated between each other and function together as a system; integrating IQA with planning, management, and resource allocation; striking the right balance between management, consumer, and academic interests; finding or setting up appropriate mechanisms to make best use of evidence to enhance programme quality and student employability; finding the right balance of centralized and decentralized structures; and, last but not least, designing IQA that supports the development of continuous quality-enhancement processes in a university.

Other challenges facing QA in Higher Education institutions in developing countries include securing adequate financial and competent human resources, fragile information systems and scarcity of data (UNESCO, 2018). Lack of balance of foci of QA has also been cited as a challenge to successful implementation. A study carried out in Ghana found out that IQA frameworks gave most attention to programme areas such as teaching and learning while giving least attention to facilities despite the fact limited facilities pose a major challenge to the quality of higher education outcomes of the universities (Francis *et al.*, 2017). This concurs with the findings from UNESCO (2018) that noted that most QA frameworks neglect to monitor some areas like student assessment systems, the physical environment, and the employability of graduates. A study by Muhammad *et al.* (2017) on problems and issues in relation to QA in higher education revealed that students, teachers and Heads of Quality Enhancement Cells (QECs) face diversified problems and issues such as lack of resources, lack of professional development, lack of awareness related to latest researches, lack of assessment & evaluation system, incompetent administrative staff, lack of guidance and counselling centres, lack of linkage between industry and universities, less number of permanent faculty and lack of feedback system.

Methodology

The study employed the three phase exploratory sequential mixed methods design. The first phase entailed the collection and analysis of qualitative data. This was followed by the development of a questionnaire for heads of departments. The questionnaire was administered to sampled heads of departments in the third phase after which the data was analysed and compared with the qualitative data. The target population comprised of 29 persons who included 2 senior staff at the Directorate of Quality Assurance and 27 heads of academic departments. Purposive sampling was used to pick one senior staff from the Quality Assurance directorate for the Key Informant Interview. Simple random sampling was used to select the 12 Heads

of departments who responded to a questionnaire. The study adopted the assessment tool in the Quality assurance Handbook by the Inter University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) in the development of the data collection instruments. Qualitative data was analysed thematically while quantitative data was analysed descriptively using frequencies and mean.

Results and Discussion

IQA policies and Awareness

The study first sought to find out what IQA structures and policies had been put in place at OUT and the level of awareness of the same by members of university community. The study established that the university has an elaborate QA framework. The university has a directorate of Quality Assurance under the office of the Vice Chancellor. The office is headed by a director who is a senior member of academic staff. The office also has a deputy director who is also an academic member of staff. The directorate reports directly to the Vice Chancellor. The directorate has three divisions namely: Department of Monitoring and Evaluation; Department of Statistics and Records; and, Department of Risk Management and Certification. The university also has an Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) policy document which is available in both hard copy and electronic form. It was reported that the policy was developed in a consultative manner that ensured engagement of different stakeholders. In developing the policy, the university charter, Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) guidelines and IUCEA guidelines were used as the guiding frameworks. The policy spells out the roles of the different stakeholders as well as ensures their participation in various activities, for example curriculum review. It was pointed out that there were plans to review the policy to reflect the changes that had taken place in the university especially the shift to the online mode of teaching and learning. To triangulate the data discussed above that was obtained from the Key Informant interview, Heads of Departments responded

to items in the questionnaire focusing on various aspects of the IQA policy. They gave their responses on Likert scale of Four showing their agreement or disagreement with the statements given on various aspects of the IQA policy. Their responses are given in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: HOD’s Assessment of Various Aspects of the IQA Policy

S. No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
1	I am familiar with the university’s policy on Internal Quality Assurance	16.7% (2)	66.7% (8)	8.3% (1)	8.3% (1)	2.92
2	The university’s policy on internal quality Assurance been cascaded to the department level	8.3% (1)	66.7% (8)	16.7% (2)	8.3% (1)	2.75
3	All staff members in my department are familiar with the university’s policy on internal quality Assurance	0% (0)	50.0% (6)	33.3% (4)	16.7% (2)	2.33
4	The university has a Quality Assurance Handbook	16.7% (2)	33.3% (4)	50.0% (6)	0% (0)	2.67
5	The university Quality Assurance Handbook is known to all staff	0% (0)	16.7% (2)	66.7% (8)	16.7% (2)	2.00
6	The university has a clear formal strategy on Internal Quality Assurance	25.0% (3)	41.7% (5)	33.3% (4)	0% (0)	2.92
7	The roles of all stakeholders are clearly described in the Internal	0% (0)	75.0% (9)	25.0% (3)	0% (0)	2.75

S. No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
	Quality Assurance policy					
8	The University's Quality Assurance Directorate links well with the department on quality issues	8.3% (1)	75.1% (9)	8.3% (1)	8.3% (1)	2.83

From Table 1.1, it is clear that a majority of the HODs were familiar with the IQA policy (84.4%; Mean 2.92). This concurs with the qualitative data which indicated that the IQA policy was available in both hard and soft copies. The development of the IQA policy documents by the university was conducted to meet its internal quality objectives as well as in conformity with the requirements of the external regulators like TCU and IUCEA which is in agreement with UNESCO's study that QA serves both internal and external drivers(UNESCO, 2018). A majority of the HODs (75%; Mean 2.75) were also in agreement that the university's IQA policy had been cascaded to the department level. However, this did not translate to an increase in familiarity of the IQA policy by staff members. Indeed, 50% of the HODs disagreed with the statement that '*All staff members in my department are familiar with the university's policy on internal quality Assurance*'. This implies that there is a difference between cascading the IQA policy to the department level and members familiarity with the content of the policy. Opinion of the HODs on the availability of a Quality Assurance Handbook to all staff was also equally divided with 50% agreeing and a similar percentage disagreeing. This is quite telling especially coming from HODs who are expected to be the implementers of policies at the departmental level. Other statements

by the HODs that supported the qualitative data were: The university has a clear formal strategy on Internal Quality Assurance (66.7%; Mean 2.92), The roles of all stakeholders are clearly described in the Internal Quality Assurance policy (75%; Mean 2.75), and the University's Quality Assurance Directorate links well with the department on quality issues (84.4%; Mean 2.83). Though the ratings by HODs on various aspects of the IQA policy are high, there is still room for improvement as ideally, agreement from the HODs should be 100% as they are key players in implementation of policy.

IQA Strategies

The study also sought to identify the IQA assurance strategies executed at OUT. The study established that the university executed several IQA strategies as discussed below.

Monitoring

The qualitative data revealed that the IQA policy gave a framework for monitoring various activities in the university. One key activity that is monitored is students' academic progress. The study established that this is conducted once a year through a survey that normally covers 50% of the Regional Centers. The survey uses a questionnaire that is administered to students to monitor the teaching and learning process. The study also established that every year, other surveys are conducted covering the following academic areas: Graduation, Examinations, Teaching Practice and Field Practicals. Data from these surveys are analyzed and reports written. The reports are then submitted to the University Quality Assurance Committee that is chaired by the Vice Chancellor for discussion. The outcome of the University Quality Assurance Committee meetings is in the form of directives that constitute Corrective Action on the thorny issues identified from the monitoring. Feedback to students takes place in

two main ways: One, through implementation of the Corrective Action which means that the problem is addressed and the students can see the action taken. Two, communication is normally given to students on steps taken to address the academic bottlenecks during the face-to-face sessions. The study also revealed that the directorate also collects data from graduates and employers every five years. For the graduates, a tracer study is employed while for employers and other stakeholders, a customer satisfaction survey is conducted. The last survey was conducted in 2014. Furthermore, feedback from stakeholders is also captured during the development and review of the University Quality Assurance policy. In the Regional Centres, members of the local community including the local administration are usually part of the Management Board and they give feedback on quality related issues. To triangulate the data discussed above that was obtained from the Key Informant interview, Heads of Departments responded to items in the questionnaire focusing on various aspects of monitoring in the IQA policy. They gave their responses on Likert scale of Four showing their agreement or disagreement with the statements given on monitoring of various aspects of the IQA policy. Their responses are given in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2: HOD’s Assessment of Various Monitoring Aspects of the IQA Policy

S. No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
1	Student academic progress is systematically recorded and monitored	25.0% (3)	66.7% (8)	8.3% (1)	0% (0)	3.17
2	Feedback to students on academic queries is given promptly	8.3% (1)	75.1% (9)	8.3% (1)	8.3% (1)	2.83

S. No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
3	Corrective actions on students' queries are made where necessary	16.7% (2)	66.7% (8)	8.3% (1)	8.3% (1)	2.92
4	The department has a structured monitoring system to collect information about the success rates and the drop out among the students	8.3% (1)	33.3% (4)	41.7% (5)	16.7% (2)	2.33
5	The department has a monitoring system that captures structural feedback from the labour market on its academic programmes	8.3% (1)	33.3% (4)	41.7% (5)	16.7% (2)	2.33
6	The department has a monitoring system that captures structural feedback from alumni	8.3% (1)	33.3% (4)	41.7% (5)	16.7% (2)	2.33
7	The department monitors the research output of its staff (number of publications)	8.3% (1)	58.3% (7)	33.3% (4)	0% (0)	2.75
8	The department monitors the number of research grants won by its staff	16.7% (2)	33.3% (4)	41.7% (5)	8.3% (1)	2.58

Table 1.2 shows that there was agreement as well as disagreement between the qualitative and quantitative data on some aspects of monitoring of the IQA policy. According to the HODs, the university was doing well with regard to monitoring students' academic progress. The following statements got strong support from the

HODs: Student academic progress is systematically recorded and monitored (92.7%; Mean 3.17); Feedback to students on academic queries is given promptly (85.4%; Mean 2.83); and, Corrective actions on students' queries are made where necessary (85.4%; Mean 2.94). These views support the qualitative data that pointed out that the university undertakes surveys to monitor the teaching and learning process as well as other academic areas such as Graduation, Examinations, Teaching Practice and Field Practicals. As pointed out earlier, the results of these monitoring surveys are discussed by the University Quality Assurance Committee and Corrective Action taken in form of directives and policies. The strong agreement by the HODs on the above monitoring activities could be construed to mean that the Corrective Actions taken after the IQA monitoring surveys had a positive impact on service delivery at the department level.

On the other hand, there were some monitoring activities that received negative ratings from the HODs. For example, a majority of the HoDs (58.4%; Mean 2.33) disagreed with the statement that *'The department has a structured monitoring system to collect information about the success rates and the drop out among the students'*. This is serious indictment as the absence of such data means that the university cannot effectively gauge its degree on internal efficiency. Similarly, a majority of the HoDs (58.4%; Mean 2.33) also disagreed with the statement that *'The department has a monitoring system that captures structural feedback from the labour market on its academic programmes'*. This finding is also disturbing as it means the university may not gauge degree of external efficiency (how graduates fit in the labour market). Finally, a majority of the HoDs (58.4%; Mean 2.33) also disagreed with the statement that *'The department has a monitoring system that captures structural feedback from alumni'*. This means that the university may be missing critical information from its Alumni which could be useful in review of academic programmes or creation of external networks. These last two

findings contradict the qualitative data as cited earlier which indicated that the university collects data via a survey from its graduates and employers through a survey every five years. This could mean that the departments are not involved by the directorate in designing and executing the surveys. The above could be described as structural weaknesses in the QA process at OUT which concurs with observations made by Ehler (2009) and Harvey (2016) about structural weaknesses in QA systems in Higher education institutions.

Periodic Review of the Core activities

Qualitative data revealed that periodic review of all the university programmes is conducted every five years in conformity with the University Charter and TCU guidelines for re-accreditation. This is conducted in the form of a Self-Assessment the last one having been conducted in 2016 and which the respondent gave an overall rating of 4 out of 5. The last self-assessment was done in 2016. This process is meant to improve quality, enhance the university's accreditation prospects and give the university a competitive advantage in the market. This concurs with UNESCO's (2018) observation that QA is driven by both internal and external drivers and serves the dual purposes of improvement and compliance. However, it was pointed out that the Quality Assurance Directorate is usually unable to implement all Corrective Actions necessary to meet the various targets due to financial constraints facing the university. This constraint caused by inadequate financial resources resonates with the findings of Muhammed *et al.* (2017) and UNESCO (2018). To triangulate the data discussed above that was obtained from the Key Informant interview, Heads of Departments responded to items in the questionnaire focusing on various aspects of review of activities in line with the IQA policy. They gave their responses on Likert scale of Four showing their agreement or disagreement with the statements given on review of core activities. Their responses are given in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3: HoDs' Rating of Review of Core Activities

S. No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
1	The department makes use of students' lecturer evaluation on a regular basis	16.7% (2)	66.7% (8)	8.3% (1)	8.3% (1)	2.92
2	The department makes use of students' course evaluation on a regular basis	16.7% (2)	75.0% (9)	0% (0)	8.3% (1)	3.00
3	The department uses the outcomes of the student evaluation for quality improvement	8.3% (1)	75.1% (9)	8.3% (1)	8.3% (1)	2.83
4	The department provides the students with feedback on what is done with the outcomes of the evaluation	0% (0)	58.3% (7)	33.3% (4)	8.3% (1)	2.50
5	The department has formal mechanisms for the periodic review of the courses and the curriculum	8.3% (1)	91.7% (11)	0% (0)	0% (0)	3.08
6	The department has formal mechanisms for regular review of research outcomes from its staff members.	0% (0)	58.3% (7)	33.3% (4)	8.3% (1)	2.50
7	The department engages in community outreach	8.3% (1)	58.3% (7)	33.3% (4)	0% (0)	2.75
8	The department does periodic review of its contribution to society and the community	8.3% (1)	41.7% (5)	50.0% (6)	0% (0)	2.58

Table 1.3 shows positive rating of review of most of the core activities by the HoDs. Some of the activities with good ratings are: *'The department makes use of students' lecturer evaluation on a regular basis (83.4%; Mean 2.92)'; 'The department makes use of students' course evaluation on a regular basis (91.7%; Mean 3.0)'; 'The department uses the outcomes of the student evaluation for quality improvement (83.4%; Mean 2.83)'*. However, 41.6% (Mean 2.50) of the HoDs disagreed with the statement that, *'The department provides the students with feedback on what is done with the outcomes of the evaluation.'* This lack of feedback to students on how the outcome of the evaluation is used could lead to lethargy on their part and thereby compromise future evaluations. Similarly, 41.6% of the HoDs disagreed with the statement that *'The department has formal mechanisms for regular review of research outcomes from its staff members.'* This could be a pointer that review of research outcomes is still a grey area in the university. Review of contribution of the department to the society and the community did not rate highly in the departments (50% disagreed). This could be a pointer of a disconnect between the university and the community and can be tied together with the earlier observation about lack of structural feedback from the labour market which could lead to lack of external efficiency for the university. This is in line with the observation made by Ehlers (2009) and Harvey (2016) about structural weaknesses in the QA systems in Higher Education institutions.

Quality Assurance of the Student Assessment

Student assessment is a critical function in the teaching-learning process. Qualitative data established that the Directorate of Examination Syndicate (DES) is responsible for the entire examination process at OUT. For each subject, DES keeps a data bank of questions and it is also responsible for security of the examinations. The staff in the directorate are scrutinized and vetted to ensure high standards of

integrity. Examinations are transported to regional centers under tight security. DES appoints invigilators who supervise the students write their examinations. Once the examinations have been done, all the scripts are transported to the headquarters where marking is done. Each head of department mobilizes his/her members of academic staff for the marking exercise which is done centrally in a designated room. The Quality Assurance directorate employs various formal and informal tools and methods to check compliance with examination procedures. For example, questionnaires are used to collect data from students, invigilators and security personnel on various aspects of the examination process. There is also another questionnaire that is issued to lecturers to assess the marking and grading process. The Directorate also collects data informally through talking to students, lecturers, security personnel. Data is also collected through observations and security cameras. To triangulate the data discussed above that was obtained from the Key Informant interview, Heads of Departments responded to items in the questionnaire focusing on various aspects of review of activities in line with the IQA policy. They gave their responses on Likert scale of Four showing their agreement or disagreement with the statements given on review of core activities. Their responses are given in Table 1.4.

Table 1.4 HODs Rating of Quality Assurance of Student Assessment

S. No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
1	The university has a clear criteria for assessments	58.3% (7)	41.7% (5)	0% (0)	0% (0)	3.58
2	The university has standard assessment procedures	58.3% (7)	41.7% (5)	0% (0)	0% (0)	3.58
3	The university has regulations to assure the quality of assessment	41.7% (5)	58.3% (7)	0% (0)	0% (0)	3.42
4	The regulations are known to both staff and students	16.7% (2)	50.0% (6)	33.3% (4)	0% (0)	2.83

Table 1.4 shows that there was strong agreement by the HODs on various measures taken by the university to ensure Quality Assurance of students' assessment. There was a 100% agreement with the following statements: *'The University has clear criteria for assessments'*, *'The University has standard assessment procedures'*, and *'The University has regulations to assure the quality of assessment.'* These findings concur with the qualitative data that indicated that the university has put in place elaborate and stringent measures to ensure the quality of the assessment process. However, the only grey area is the lack of 100% knowledge of the regulations governing assessment by both staff and students (33.3% Disagreed).

Quality Assurance of Staff

The study also sought to assess the quality of human resource management practices in the university with a focus on appointments and appraisal. When it comes to appointment, it was pointed out that the QA director usually participates in the interview process and also cross checks documents submitted by applicants. With regard to staff appraisal, the QA staffs are usually invited during the review process.

However, the Key Informant Interviewee acknowledged that it was a challenge for the QA directorate to ensure the quality of the appointment procedures and gave a rating of 3 out of 5. To triangulate the data discussed above that was obtained from the Key Informant interview, Heads of Departments responded to items in the questionnaire focusing on various human resource management practices. They gave their responses on Likert scale of Four showing their agreement or disagreement with the statements given on human resource management practices. Their responses are given in Table 1.5.

Table 1.5: HoD’s Rating of Human Resource Management Practices

Quality assurance of staff						
S. No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
1	The university has adequate staff appointment procedures	25.0% (3)	58.3% (7)	16.7% (2)	0% (0)	3.08
2	Appointment of staff is done in a fair and transparent manner	25.0% (3)	58.3% (7)	16.7% (2)	0% (0)	3.08
3	The university has adequate staff appraisal system	41.7% (5)	41.7% (5)	16.7% (2)	0% (0)	3.25
4	Staff in the department are satisfied with the appraisal system	8.3% (1)	66.7% (8)	16.7% (2)	0% (0)	2.75
5	The university regularly organizes staff capacity development activities	16.7% (2)	50.0% (6)	33.3% (4)	0% (0)	2.83

Table 1.5 shows that there was high agreement by HoDs on various measures taken by the university to ensure quality assurance of human resource management practices. The following statements elicited strong agreement from the HODs: *'The University has adequate staff appointment procedures'*; *'Appointment of staff is done in a fair and transparent manner'*; *'The University has adequate staff appraisal system'*; and, *'Staff in the department are satisfied with the appraisal system.'* The apparent grey area is with regard to the university holding regular staff capacity development activities where 33% of the HoDs disagreed. Overall, these findings from the HoDs do compare favourably with those from the qualitative data where an overall rating of 3 out of 5 had been given.

Quality Assurance of Facilities

The study also sought to establish the status of the teaching-learning facilities as perceived by the respondents. The Key Informant Interviewee gave an overall rating of 3 out of 5 with regard to quality assurance of facilities. It was pointed out that the QA directorate usually undertakes audits of the facilities and writes reports to management giving recommendations on the required Corrective Action. However, quite a good number of the recommendations are usually not implemented as the management cites lack of funds. One such recommendation that the QA directorate had given but had not been implemented called on improved infrastructural development in the Regional Centres since they are the ones which serve the biggest number of students. Failure to implement it means that the quality of the teaching-learning process in the Regional Centres is compromised. The QA directorate employs online tools for monitoring various activities in the university. For teaching and learning, the university has embraced the use of Turnitin software to check plagiarism. To triangulate the data discussed above that was obtained from the Key Informant interview, Heads of Departments responded to items in the

questionnaire focusing on various aspects of teaching-learning facilities. They gave their responses on Likert scale of Four showing their agreement or disagreement with the statements given on human resource management practices. Their responses are given in Table 1.6.

Table 1.6: HoD’s Rating of Quality of Teaching-Learning facilities

Quality assurance of facilities						
S. No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
1	The department has adequate number of computers for staff	8.3% (1)	33.3% (4)	50.0% (6)	8.3% (1)	2.42
2	The department has adequate access to the internet for staff	25.0% (3)	58.3% (7)	16.7% (2)	0% (0)	3.08
3	Students have adequate access to ICT infrastructure for teaching and learning	25.0% (3)	50.0% (6)	25.0% (3)	0% (0)	3.00
4	The department has developed digital content for all its programmes	25.0% (3)	75.0% (9)	0% (0)	0% (0)	3.25
5	The university has adequate library facilities at main campus	25.0% (3)	66.7% (8)	8.3% (1)	0% (0)	3.17
6	The university has adequate library facilities at Regional centers	8.3% (1)	50.0% (6)	41.7% (5)	0% (0)	2.67
7	The university has adequate laboratories	0% (0)	8.3% (1)	83.4% (10)	8.3% (1)	2.00

Table 1.6 shows agreement and disagreement on quality of teaching-learning resources between the qualitative and quantitative responses.

The following statements on teaching-learning resources received strong support from the HoDs: *'The department has adequate access to the internet for staff'*; *'Students have adequate access to ICT infrastructure for teaching and learning'*; *'The department has developed digital content for all its programmes'*; *'The university has adequate library facilities at main campus'*. These findings concur with the rating of 3 out of 5 given in the KII. However, there was disagreement with the following statement: *'The university has adequate library facilities at Regional centers (41.7% Disagreed)*; and, *'The university has adequate laboratories (91.7% Disagreed)*. This also concurs with the views expressed earlier in the interview that QA directorate had given recommendations for infrastructural development in the Regional Centres but which had not been implemented by university management due to financial constraints. Scarcity of resources as a constraint to QA as cited here concurs with findings from Muhammed *et al.* (2017) and UNESCO (2018).

Quality Assurance of Student Support Services

Student support services are critical, more so in an Open and Distance Learning university context. Data from the KII revealed that the university had made efforts to give information to students from both the headquarters and the Regional Centres and gave an overall learner support rating of 4 out of 5. It was observed that the university through the directorate did a Customer Satisfaction Survey in 2017 that gave insights on areas of learner support that needed improvement. To triangulate the data discussed above that was obtained from the Key Informant interview, Heads of Departments responded to items in the questionnaire focusing on various aspects of student support services. They gave their responses on Likert scale of Four showing their agreement or disagreement with the statements given on human resource management practices. Their responses are given in Table 1.7.

Table 1.7: HoDs Rating of Student Support Services

S. No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
1	The department gives relevant information to students expeditiously	8.3% (1)	83.4% (10)	8.3% (1)	0% (0)	3.00
2	The department has the means to communicate to students	16.7% (2)	83.3% (10)	0% (0)	0% (0)	3.17
3	The department has a formal mechanism of giving academic advice to students	8.3% (1)	66.7% (8)	25.0% (3)	0% (0)	2.83
4	The department's staff act as mentors to students	33.3% (4)	58.3% (7)	8.3% (1)	0% (0)	3.25
5	The department often reaches out to struggling students	8.3% (1)	50.0% (6)	41.7% (5)	0% (0)	2.67
6	The university has an effective student welfare system	0% (0)	58.3% (7)	41.7% (5)	0% (0)	2.58
7	The students have a peer support structure	0% (0)	83.4% (10)	16.6% (2)	0% (0)	2.83

Table 1.7 shows agreement between the HoDs and the KII on various aspects of student support system. There was strong agreement that the departments have the means to communicate to students and gives relevant information expeditiously. There was also agreement that the departments have a formal mechanism of giving academic advice to students and that their staff acted as mentors to students. The chairpersons were also in agreement about the existence of a students' peer support structure. However, the departments seemed not to be doing very well with regard to reaching out to struggling

students (41.7% Disagreed). Another grey area with regard to learner support services is 'student welfare system' as 41.7% of the HoDs felt that it was not effective.

Challenges Impacting on IQA

The study also sought to identify the challenges constraining the effectiveness of IQA at OUT. The QA directorate faces a number of challenges in implementing the Self-Assessment which is critical for IQA as pointed out by the respondents. Staffing of the QA directorate was identified as a challenge by both the KII and the HoDs. The challenge of staffing is manifested in two ways: understaffing and inadequate staff capacity. That the QA directorate did not have adequate staff came out clearly in the interview when it was pointed out that it required six support staff for its three divisions but only two were in place. The issue of lack of capacity of the staff in the QA directorate to handle quality issues was brought to the fore by the HoDs. One of the HoDs stated that,

'There is lack of Quality Assurance experts to work in the QA unit' while another identified 'Lack of capacity building for the quality assurance department.'

This lack of capacity impacted on the ability of the directorate to cascade QA training to the other members of the university. One HoD stated that the directorate *'does not support capacity building of the staffs'* while another added that *'Quality assurance activities are not clearly defined to HoDs and staff.'* This lack of adequate human resource capacity to drive the QA agenda at OUT concurs with the findings of Muhammed (2017) and UNESCO (2018). Lack of robust engagement of the university community by the QA directorate also emerged as weakness. One HoD accused the QA directorate of lack of *'strategy to reach out to the needy students and staff'*, while another added that *'HoDs*

are not involved in planning of Quality Assurance activities.' This lack of a participatory approach to QA issues may lead to a sense of alienation and lack of ownership by the university community. These challenges mirror what Ansah Franers et al (2017) described as lack of balance of focus in QA issues. Other related challenges cited by HoDs were unavailability of the QA guidelines and the QA Handbook on the university website and low enforcement mechanisms of QA issues. Funding was cited as another challenge by both the KII and the HoD. It emerged that not all Corrective Actions recommended by the directorate after quality audits were implemented due to constraints in the university budget. This is in agreement with the findings of Muhammed (2017) and UNESCO (2018). Negative attitude of university staff towards QA staff was cited as another challenge. Again, this is not unique to OUT as it has been documented in other institutions by other scholars, for example Anderson (2006; 2008) and Markus and Philipp (2018). The over bearing nature of the government was cited as another challenge to IQA in that it had affected the universities by eroding their autonomy and freedom in decision making *'as they now have to seek approval from the government for almost everything'*. This, it was noted, had an impact on quality as the university delayed in making critical decisions that were vital for quality processes and outcomes.

Conclusions

The study concludes that OUT, driven by both improvement and compliance needs, had put in place a Quality Assurance (QA) framework that was implemented through the QA directorate. However, although the university had an IQA policy document and the QA handbook, not all members of the university community were familiar with these documents. The study also concludes that although IQA policy gave a framework for monitoring various activities in the

university, it lacked a structured monitoring system to collect data on both internal and external efficiency. The study also concludes that the overall success of IQA at the university was constrained by the following challenges: inadequate funding; understaffing of the IQA directorate; a negative attitude by university staff towards QA staff; lack of regular meetings between QA directorate and university members; lack of clear definition of QA activities to HoDs; and, lack of involvement of HoDs in planning QA activities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study makes the following recommendation with a view to improving OUT's IQA functions. One, the university should sensitise staff on the QA policy and increase access to the QA handbook. Two, the university should strengthen the QA monitoring system to enable structured collection of data on internal and external efficiency. Three, the university should adequately staff the QA directorate as well as build the capacity of the staff to handle QA issues. Four, the university should also adequately fund the QA directorate as well as the various corrective actions recommended by the QA office. Five, the QA directorate should develop its activities in a participatory manner as it also increases sensitization of the university community on QA policies and issues.

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