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Original Article

Assuring Quality amidst Political Intrigue in Higher Education Institutions

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This article provides an anatomical analysis of the political intrigue within quality assurance and management mechanisms of higher education institutions in East Africa. Actionable strategies are hence proposed for circumventing the negative effects of such intrigue in order to ensure quality service delivery within the institutions while respecting the need for diversity and innovative practices in research and education. We recognize that the primary responsibility for quality assurance and quality management lies with the higher education institutions themselves, rather than with any outside body. The article therefore discusses issues of autonomy internal to the institutions and those external - between the institutions and regulatory cum oversight bodies that have perpetually riddled the efficiency of quality enhancement. The article draws its data and information from international, national, and institutional policies as well as refereed studies on quality assurance and quality management, especially those highlighting political intrigue in the processes. It has been observed that quality assurance of higher education processes is desired to enhance quality in the response of higher education to labour market needs. However, the article reveals the existence of immense negative politicking and intrigue in the quality assurance processes in higher education institutions in East Africa which are responsible for compromising the quality of services delivered by the institutions. It is argued that being an indicator for organisational performance, the continuous monitoring and enhancing of quality of higher education should be the primary goal and objective of all stakeholders of higher education in East Africa, meaning that quality assurance processes should be embedded in the conducting of the routine business of the institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

Quality assurance can be defined as those systems, procedures, processes and actions intended to lead to the achievement, maintenance, monitoring and enhancing of quality (Rami & Lalor, 2008). It is also the careful and systematic appraisal practice of an organisation or curriculum to ascertain whether or not satisfactory standards of education are met (Hayward, 2001). An efficient quality system entails quality control, quality assurance, and quality improvement which enables an organisation to achieve, maintain and improve quality. Quality assurance is, therefore, a quality management measure that provides confidence in the public and stakeholders that the quality requirements of an institution are fulfilled (Manghani, 2011). With specific reference to higher education institutions, quality assurance can be referred to as a collective process by which the institutions ensure that the quality of the educational process is maintained to the standards set or expected of them (Wilger, 1997). This implies that there are many different layers of regulation and quality assurance.

Higher education in East Africa is characterised by multiple quality assurance challenges as a result of under-funded massification. For instance, classrooms are largely overcrowded with very high student-staff ratios in most programmes, which does not allow for individualized attention. In such circumstances, teaching methodologies and curricula are teacher-centred, atypical of higher education teaching and learning for creating

knowledge. Study duration is often long and drop-out rates are high. Such quality concerns are situated in contexts with little, mainly ineffective, internal and external quality assurance structures. To make matters worse, the existing external quality assurance structures are caught in the web of a heavily centralized financial system for a supposed to be independent body. By and large, such a body is reduced to a beggar of sorts in order to survive.

Over the years, the demand for better quality higher education has given rise to quality assurance agencies to provide oversight in these institutions. However, the institutions continue to be all the more highly politicized as they negatively compete to attract and retain students, staff, and other resources in the face of economic challenges. Aware that the quality concerns of the western world have not been spared politicization as they became associated with the (lack of) competitiveness of higher education (Reichert, 2007). We argue that issues of autonomy internal to the East African higher education institutions and those external – between the institutions and oversight bodies – are responsible for the perpetually riddled efficiency of quality enhancement. Ansah et al. (2017), Kayombo (2015) and Mhlanga (2010) all cited in Atibuni (2020) observe that higher education institutions in (East) Africa mainly copy the quality assurance frameworks of developed countries instead of conceptualising their own frameworks suited to

delivering quality higher education outcomes in the context of Africa.

Hence there is a notable degree of reliance on external or international expertise in developing most quality assurance frameworks in higher education institutions in Africa. Similarly, Harvey (2018) notes that some governments and agencies ignore problems in other countries and institutions when implementing accreditation systems to the extent that they grossly inhibit mobility with other countries and institutions. Thus, the quality assurance mechanisms, both internal and external, do not undertake the requisite controls over the institutions due to the fact that they are often compromised to overlook certain key quality aspects. These compromises are fostered through all manner of strategies including corruption, threats, withholding of funds, and other malpractices. Hence, merit-based recruitment, student-centred learning, continuous assessment, flexible learning paths, and infrastructural investment continue to remain a dream way off from realization. Worse still, a general stay-safe attitude and resentment continue to quietly kill the institutions, leaving “window-dressed” institutions run in accordance with the QA frameworks.

In this article, we provide an anatomical analysis of the political intrigue within the quality assurance and quality management mechanisms within the higher education institutions in East Africa. The discussion in the article brings to the fore the fact that moving our socioeconomic standards to higher levels using higher education as a tool of transformation requires highlighting the political intrigues, problems, and challenges within the higher education institutions so as to solve them. We recognize that the primary responsibility for quality assurance and quality management lies with the higher education institutions themselves, rather than with any outside body. The article draws as its data information from international, national, and institutional policies as well as refereed studies on quality assurance and quality management, especially those highlighting political intrigue in the processes. The article is envisaged to be a handy reference material to policymakers, accrediting and certifying bodies, professional agencies, higher education institutions, practitioners (educational managers, academic staff, quality assurance and

quality management systems practitioners), researchers, and students interested in minimizing intrigue and hence improving the quality assurance and quality management systems. Before looking at the various political intrigues within East African higher education institutions, we first explore the role of quality assurance in higher education institutions.

Roles and Functions of Quality Assurance

Quality assurance serves various functions both internal and external to the institution. According to Harvey and Green (1993), the notion of quality can be seen as an exception, perfection, fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformative. Barnett (1992, p. 61) observes that quality higher education is a process through which: -

Students' educational development has been enhanced ... not only have they achieved the particular objectives set for the course but, in doing so, they have also fulfilled the general educational aims of autonomy, of the ability to participate in reasoned discourse, of critical self-evaluation, and of coming to a proper awareness of the ultimate contingency of all thought and action.

This shows that quality assurance of higher education is targeted towards the development of quality human resources in the country by regulating the processes that impart to students' skills that enable them to serve in different socio-economic and political capacities. Accordingly, this is in line with what Mammen (2006, p. 640) says, that “Every higher education institution should be looking constantly for ways to enhance the capabilities and talents of both academics and students in order to gain necessary competitive edge.”

Strydom (2001) posits that the reasons for quality assurance at the institutional level are manifold, including enhancing the academic offerings of the institutions, affirming to the general public that minimum standards have been observed in generating the outputs, and also confirming to stakeholders that a specific set of expert and scholastic principles is accomplished. In terms of human resource production, a rigorous quality assurance process gives confidence to the general

public that people with relevant and useful knowledge and skills are fed into the different areas of industry and commerce. Society needs skilled and knowledgeable graduates as key drivers for economic development. Blankley and Booyens (2010) observe that a country's capacity for a knowledge-based economy significantly depends on highly trained workers. Therefore, quality assurance serves as a mark of authenticity of the products of an institution to serve the needs of society.

Quality assurance imparts an "international readability of curricular structures" which reciprocally "increase cooperation and competition, mobility and institutional good practice, with quality enhancement occurring as a natural consequence of wider and deeper comparisons," Reichert (2008, p. 6). This further increases among nations a mutual trust in each other's quality assurance systems which resultantly increases trust in the quality of higher education provision in those systems, thereby promoting cross-border movement. This trust arises because at the institutional level quality assurance sharpens strategic reflection on, and addressing issues of developing beneficial institutional perspectives in decentralized institutions, combining disciplinary with interdisciplinary developments and institutional structures, developing fair and merited processes of rewarding performance in a non-mechanistic manner while observing mutual interdependence and yet autonomy, combining bottom-up development drive with institutional quality standards, and identifying and supporting institutional priority areas. In other words, quality assurance tries to persuade constituents both internal and external to an institution that the institution has forms that deliver great outcomes. In all this, quality assurance acts as a mechanism of attracting funding from the government and other agencies to empower quality culture within the institutions.

However, Castell (Lockett, 2006) argues that Third World higher education institutions – including those in East Africa – are mainly state apparatuses used for the generation and reproduction of nationalist and culturally assertive ideologies. In this case, the ideological function of immediate economic, social and political processes has tended

to crowd out the epistemic function of research and scholarship. Lockett notes with concern the fact that in pursuing the government interests, external quality assurance agencies often use policing style and show of might rather than a quality improvement approach. All this confirms our fear and hence serves as a basis of our conceptualization that the landscape of quality assurance in higher education institutions in East Africa is riddled with politics and intrigue to the detriment of achievement of the functions of quality assurance in the institutions and indeed for the countries.

POLITICS AND INTRIGUE IN HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE

We assert that quality assurance systems are primarily national, so national politics is clearly a major playing field for quality assurance. Atibuni (2020) observes that different countries and higher education institutions in Africa in general (and East Africa in particular) are at different levels of development and quality assurance. Harvey (2018) decries the excessive politicization of quality assurance in various nations, citing excessive bureaucratisation of procedures, increased administrative workload for academic staff, stifling of creativity and individuality and a lack of trust and de-professionalisation of academic staff. Resource allocation is notably based on centralized implementation of decentralization, who is where, give and take, etc, which can be described as the veiled intrigue.

There is also a noteworthy selective application of the standards at various levels; within an institution by the internal quality management systems, between institutions by the external (National and Regional) quality management systems. In this way, quality assurance mechanisms end up serving mainly accountability rather than improvement purposes to the extent that the notion of quality education is replaced by quality assurance processes. This impacts negatively on the legitimacy of the internal and external quality assurance mechanisms, thus resulting in a host of other issues that instil fear, resentment, and animosity within the institutions. These issues include, but are not limited to, student involvement and support in quality assurance and management; regularity of assessments and reviews;

effectiveness of feedback; the political nature and divide between private and public institutions; intrigue in teaching, research, and community engagement; peer reviewers, appointments, and independence of officers in charge of QA and QM; the cost of quality assurance and quality management; and the controversial handling of quality by academics, deans, and institutional leadership. We then wrap up with a discourse of how to enhance robust quality assurance and quality management in higher education institutions in East Africa in the realm of a politicized arena.

Student Involvement and Support in Quality Assurance and Management

Quality is the obligation of everybody in an institution. Graduate employability is one of the critical definitions of an effective quality assurance; the capacity of the graduates to contribute to economic growth and development through fitting into the available jobs as well as creating own employment is a mark of a high-quality higher education institution. According to Allan (2006), the ‘graduate-ness’ of a higher education graduate is indicated by the possession of ‘hard’ skills related to subject-specific knowledge as well as ‘soft’ skills which are desirable attitudinal and behavioural characteristics. Both sets of skills are fostered in students through a meticulous quality assurance process. It goes without saying that the purpose of higher education is to allow students to explore and advance new frontiers of knowledge in different areas of life and subject disciplines.

However, there are prevailing gaps such as low students’ academic achievements, low attendance rates, high dropout rates, and poor personal developments (Andrews & Higson, 2008). These issues characterize the East African higher education system, and in turn, manifest weakness in the quality assurance system. Rami and Lalor (2008) similarly noted in a European setting that students had almost no formal input into monitoring or evaluating the quality of teaching and learning despite the fact that their regular feedback was acknowledged as essential in the ongoing improvement of quality in the teaching and learning. These are more or less political issues given that the upsurge in the number of higher

education institutions and student population is a consequential kneejerk reaction of governments to respond to the educational demands of politically engendered massification and commercialization of education.

Under such circumstances, students who ordinarily would not qualify for formal higher education, but who have the means to pay tuition, are admitted and “pushed” through the system. The same applies to staff who are able to buy their way into the higher education service. The end result, as seen above, is garbage in—garbage out. In addition, there are very few, if any, restricted avenues through which students can contribute to the quality of input and throughputs during their tenure in higher education institutions. The one available option is after graduation through participation in tracer studies. These studies are also manipulated to suit the positive publicity of the institutions, implying that the students’ honest contributions are twisted to bring out a dishonest view of the institutions. Yet, a more meaningful engagement of students in QA process as an on-going process for improvement, a form of evaluation for progress, approach with adequate objective sensitization of the students on their role in improving the quality of higher education would yield more sustainable results.

Internal versus External Quality Assurance

Quality assurance is meant to be an on-going ceaseless, dynamic, and responsive process involving many procedural instruments including external examination, professional accreditation, institutional audit, national graduation tests, information tools and benchmarks. However, on the one hand, the dominant activity of quality assurance in higher education institutions in East Africa is curriculum and course accreditation which is largely an external quality assurance instrument (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2004). Accreditation is the most dominant instrument in force because without it a programme or course cannot run, implying that the institution will not be in business and hence suffer financial crisis. In that case, it is a ‘very necessary’ financial expense. The national external quality assurance agencies in East Africa that carry out accreditation, though largely technical and autonomous from the elected policymakers, are more of political entities whose

roles are sometimes dictated by the elected policy-makers, and the “big brother” institutions. In this case, it is not very uncommon for them to perform rubber-stamping roles or in some instances “ignore” flaws or approve programmes retrospectively in the pretext of reputation of the big brother.

There have also been cases where different regulatory and oversight agencies, especially professional bodies, disagreed on certain minimum requirements. A case in point was when the national quality assurance agency in one East African country accredited a programme, yet the overarching East African agency recommended the programme to be closed on grounds of inadequate infrastructure and staff. On the other hand, the other internal quality assurance instruments which are otherwise critical to the setting, maintaining, and monitoring of the quality of teaching-learning and research processes in the institutions are neglected on the grounds of being unnecessary expenses that cause financial loss to the institution, or the purported reputation of the institution and individuals’ whose programs are to be approved.

Internal quality assurance as a continuous process is often used by management as a quality-enhancing tool. However, as noted by Reichert (2008, p. 8), if the tool is administered too frequently, “this may result in evaluation fatigue and routine which would negate the motivation and the willingness to engage in genuine dialogue.” And this is often the case in the local institutional politics: a lot of demand is made on staff to do paperwork at the expense of productivity, which generates resentment, especially given that the results of such paperwork are used for witch-hunting. On the other hand, external quality assurance processes are very infrequent, partly because institutional managements are reserved to invite the agencies due to the perceived costs, and also because the agencies rely on technical staff from the various institutions who are difficult to mobilize and fit into the same convenient period of time for an external evaluation process. Such local political issues interfere with the operationalization of internal and external quality assurance mechanisms.

Peer Reviewer Appointment and Independence

The ideals of quality embodied in the internal and external quality assurance mechanisms are largely a reflection of the peer reviewers. It is very difficult to achieve an all-inclusive contribution in determining and achieving quality criteria. It is practically difficult in the East African setting to make a careful choice of peers for external quality assurance exercises. Often times the few expert staff available are the same ones serving in three or four different institutions, meaning that they cannot be sufficiently distant from the institutions they are sent to evaluate. This implies that it is difficult to avoid being too closely linked to the reviewed unit or in a conflict of interest toward it. This would have been averted by including international peers, but these are very expensive to contract. Besides, the international peers from outside East Africa might not be conversant with the higher education system in East Africa, hence there are risks of compromising reliability and validity of the exercise.

Institutional Autonomy

As noted earlier, many quality assurance models in developing countries are influenced by popular models imported from the colonial masters whose education systems are still in force in the former colonies. In addition, some of the educational providers in East African countries are foreign. As observed by Oladipo et al. (2009) cited in Atibuni (2020): -

Some foreign educational providers come along with poor quality programmes; different quality standards; indifference or general ignorance to the national criteria, local needs and policies; issues of comparability of quality of education; less qualified staff; and lack of clear information. Many of them are insensitive to issues of cultural differences and recognition of qualifications outside of their mother countries. But because they are rich in most cases, they fraudulently manipulate the national quality assurance agencies and get more favours. Hence the operations of some regulatory agencies are discriminatory between foreign and local institutions.

It becomes politically difficult to turn down programmes of these foreign educational providers because of the power they wield over economic decisions.

Another point of contention is the lack of harmony between the various curricular of similar institutions awarding the same or nearly the same degrees. In the current setting, students in East African universities cannot readily transfer credits because despite following the same national and East African standards in programme development, there is no comparability and mutual recognition of content for easy transfer of credits from one institution to another. The challenge is real and yet political: each higher education institution claims and engrosses in uniqueness in course names, course codes, course content, and programme rationale that sets it as different from similar programmes of other institutions. Such a complication hampers the production of a unified graduate pool with the same skills set for the country, leave alone the region. As noted by Minelli, Rebor, and Turri (2008, p. 69), the politics of external quality assurance results in “degenerative phenomena connected to irresponsible management of autonomy such as the unusual proliferation of universities and degree courses or the career structure of academic and non-academic staff that is not based on their merits.”

The Political Nature and Divide Between Private and Public Institutions

Higher education institutions in East Africa can be categorized as private and public institutions. The public institutions are established by an act of the parliaments of the various East African nations. They often enjoy political immunity in addition to state funding. The private ones are established by non-governmental foundations such as religious organisations and business persons with an extended aim of driving the agenda of the foundation in addition to making money. External quality assurance processes, though meant to apply equally to both the public and private institutions, do not bear the same consequences for both. Whereas public institutions are readily granted a grace period after the quality review process for implementing the recommendations, the same is often not the case for private institutions. Public

institutions that are recommended for closure are usually quickly bailed out with resources for the improvements. This is not guaranteed for private institutions.

Despite the government funding of public higher education institutions, the majority of the programmes and students are privately sponsored. In this regard, the provision of education in private institutions is not to any degree very different from that in the public institutions. However, the lengthy bureaucracy that is followed in making administrative decisions and procurements in public institutions causes a lot of delays and compromises the quality of services and hence slows service delivery in the public institutions to the extent that the private institutions seem to fair better. It is not uncommon for the employment market to prefer students from some private institutions in certain fields, especially those whose main aim is the provision of education, not profit maximisation, while registering disappointment with the quality of graduates from some of the public institutions.

Among the private institutions, those established by individuals rather than corporate bodies tend to focus more on profits for sustainability. They charge exorbitant fees to meet their running costs, and in most cases cannot keep up to the demands of quality as required by the national and regional quality assurance agencies. However, their continuity or closure in delivering educational services depends on the nature of the relationship that exists between the owners and the political decision-makers. In short, the regulation of higher education institutions is framed on risk-based regulation, which means that the monitoring of institutions is selective, based particularly on considerations of established track records of regulatory compliance, financial soundness and good internal (risk management) controls. Governments prefer low-risk high-value and high-risk high-value programmes and institutions to high-risk low-value and low-risk low-value institutions in that order. By and large, the public institutions score better on cost-benefit analysis and stand better chances of continuity than their private counterparts, but most enduring private institutions are owned by politically favoured investors.

Intrigue in Teaching, Research, and Community Engagement

Teaching and learning in higher education have a direct bearing on the type of graduate that higher education institutions produce as a result of the different curricula and pedagogical approaches. Higher education, according to the National Assessment and Accreditation Council of India (NAAC, 2007) is purposed to produce a skilled and qualified human resource base, empower students with research skills, guarantee effective management of teaching and learning processes while ensuring improved completion rates among students, and extend life chances. This implies that higher education processes and procedures such as teaching and learning should always be subjected to rigorous quality assurance processes to ensure fitness of purpose and fitness for purpose (Netshifhefhe, Nobongoza, & Maphosa, 2016). In this regard, the notion of quality should be a bottom-up methodology and all stakeholders of the institution need to be aware of why and how of the quality assurance processes, a state mainly existing in dreams.

Unfortunately, rather than viewing quality assurance as a professional exercise which forms an integral part of academics' professional lives (Nyenya & Bukaliya, 2014), many academics in East Africa view quality assurance as a management task that is meant to ensure that they comply with certain expectations regarding their work. They therefore respond to demands of quality grudgingly, and on many occasions, as expected, to the detriment of the learners, parents, and financial supporting offices. Wherever quality assurance is perceived as keeping professors from their research and teaching rather than helping them achieve even better and more innovative results in teaching and research, it has capped its own lifeblood. Reichert (2007) enumerates a number of quality problems including overcrowded classrooms; very high student-staff ratios, which did not allow for individualized attention; outdated teaching methodologies and teacher-centred curricula; long study duration and high drop-out rates. With the realization of their rights and demand for getting quality for their cash and time used, students who feel disgruntled sometimes use unbecoming strategies including destructive strikes to get their

voices heard and needs met. In response, the governments use military force to quell such uprisings. In the end, an issue that quality assurance would have handled results in extensive loss of time, property, and sometimes lives. The core issues of the struggle between the authorities and disgruntled students and staff are more often than not arrived at as long as the strike has been quelled. The result is the cyclic contestations between the parties, resentment, failure to fully commit oneself to the institution, especially for faculty.

The Cost of Quality Assurance and Quality Management

Higher education is acclaimed as a primary agent of the socio-economic transformation of nations. There is currently an expanding demand for higher education due to technological progression and a technology-driven knowledge economy. But technology is costly! Therefore, higher education in the current era is costly: all modern teaching and learning, as well as research equipment, are expensive. More so, ensuring that the inputs and throughputs are the right quality to achieve the intended educational objectives requires technical expertise which is itself expensive. Witte (2008, p. 49) notes that "quality assurance costs resources" and "programme accreditation is too costly and time-consuming" despite the accreditation systems and quality assurance systems being underfunded. Witte further posits that building up functioning internal quality management for teaching is a demanding and resource-intensive process. Most governments are not very ready to fund the accreditation and internal quality assurance processes; institutions are expected to generate funds internally to fund such projects. In most cases, it takes forever to set some programmes running because of delays due to financial constraints. Experiences of injecting time and expertise in reviewing and evaluating programmes in certain institutions are demoralizing to many academics who end up seeing no benefit of such a waste of energy. Many academics are getting to resent programme evaluations, seeing them as mere bureaucracy. The corrupt tendencies that riddle our institutions cause quality assurance to be regarded as a project not worth spending money on due to its qualitative outputs aimed for a common good. The processes are many a time so technical that the

avenues for the selfish and corrupt tendencies are maximised.

THE CONTROVERSIAL HANDLING OF QUALITY BY ACADEMICS, DEANS, AND INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP

The concept of quality is understood differently by different stakeholders. For some, it means 'standard' while for others it means 'excellence' (NAAC, 2007). As a standard, quality is assessed in terms of a set of norm-referenced standards that are built around what is expected at the minimum and beyond. While excellence quality stands out as a demonstration of 'zero defect' and the highest level of satisfaction of the stakeholders. In higher education, the objective is to achieve the 'standard' and move towards 'excellence'. According to Reichert (2007), one should mention the time and willingness of academics, deans and institutional leadership to take the evaluation process and recommendations seriously. Academics engaged in teaching and research look at the standard aspect of quality whereas administrators consider the excellence bit of it. However, Wilger (1997) cautions that quality and its confirmation ought to be seen fundamentally as an expert issue, not an administration capacity. Middle-level academic leaders often get caught up between the two extremes because of belonging to both.

It is worth noting that most top management positions in higher education institutions in East Africa are politically attained. Meritorious positions are mainly technical positions where one's academic qualification speaks for them, but even then, influence peddling of know-who to attain such positions is commonplace in East African institutions. The challenge with this, as noted by Hopbach (2014), is that political decision-makers apply a significantly different approach to the purpose of quality assurance that is not at all confined to the 'traditional' twin purpose of accountability and enhancing teaching quality.

For the politically influenced administrators, quality assurance, more than serving an accountability goal, is a tool of transparency and comparability, to say nothing of quality enhancement (Dano & Stensaker, 2007). On the other hand, the internal stakeholders including

academics and academic leaders seem to lean more towards the ideas of improvement and enhancement in a quality assurance system in higher education institutions (Rosa et al., 2014), other administrators performing purely non-teaching functions focus on the accountability paperwork. Reichert (2007) notes that the most limiting factor for quality enhancement is not the nature of internal or external quality assurance but the limits to resources when room for improvements is identified. These limits are imparted by the administrative staff whose approach to quality assurance is accountability-driven. Higher education institutions need to have a conducive environment that fosters quality as everybody's obligation without discrimination.

Kohler (2008) notes that in most institutions quality management and quality assurance cycles are the responsibility of the university management with little, if any, involvement of departments who are supposed to be the implementing agents. There is often inadequate coordination between the departments and the relevant administrative units in charge of quality assurance. The departments are not adequately equipped with resources and do not have influence at the various levels of operation of the higher education institutions. The lack of such coordination systems makes it difficult to support and implement quality assurance within the institutions.

Enhancing the Robustness of Quality Assurance and Quality Management in Higher Education Institutions

The occurrence of (local) politics and intrigue in quality assurance and quality management mechanisms in higher education institutions speaks to the need to engage in conversations on strategies of enhancing robustness. There are several ways of ensuring quality assurance. As asserted by Reichert (2007), quality enhancement is the sum of many methods of institutional development, ranging from competitive hiring procedures, creating appropriate funding opportunities, to facilitating communication between disciplines and supporting innovative initiatives through institutional incentives.

At a foundational level, there is a need to ensure that curricula have both fitness of purpose and fitness

for purpose to ensure the relevance of the programmes to societal needs. In ensuring quality, the whole set of processes from curriculum planning, management issues as well as teaching and learning processes would require thorough examination. This is a type of internal quality assurance measure which places emphasis on internal improvement. This can be achieved when faculties, departments, and programmes have internal curriculum committees responsible for timeously reviewing programmes and courses (Carter et al., 2011) to suit changes in societal needs and advances in knowledge. As noted by Peters (1996), quality assurance measures are vital in adding value to the product and therefore are best applied during the process of implementing a programme and not merely inspecting the final product. Hence the need for the periodical reviews.

Evaluation of teaching and learning by students and lecturers' peers is another internal mechanism of quality assuring teaching and learning. According to Greimel-Fuhrmann and Geyer (2003), students' evaluation of teaching gives students the opportunity to reflect to the lecturer his or her strengths and weaknesses. This also shows lecturer accountability to students as the lecturer will have to address weaknesses in order to enhance teaching and learning. Borrowing from the European Association of Universities (EUA, 2005; Reichert, 2006; Sursock, 2004), there is a need to promote a quality culture approach of quality management strategies, shifting attention to more development-oriented and value-based aspects. This approach entails involving multiple internal and external stakeholders. It promotes a bottom-up rather than a top-down implementation of quality assurance although recognizing the dire necessity of a strong institutional leadership to start and promote the process. Theories and models informing quality assurance of teaching and learning processes in higher education should, therefore, move away from quality control focus, where the emphasis is on looking at the finished product to total quality management where the processes are monitored to ensure a quality product (Allais, 2009). This calls on the participants to exhibit certain qualities and dispositions required for achievement in the work environment including adaptability and versatility; ease with differences; inspiration and steadiness; high moral standards; inventiveness and creativity;

and capacity to work with others, particularly in gatherings and exhibited capacity to apply these abilities to complex issues in a genuine setting.

With specific reference to assessment, formal and summative assessment instruments and activities should be subjected to moderation as a quality assurance measure. Moderation standardizes assessment to ensure that assessment measures are reliable, valid, and fair. This implies that stakeholders need regular refresher training in moderation and evaluation processes to address the quality of assessment of teaching, learning, and research. In particular, courses on the quality of student supervision and supporting structures in teaching and research that help the students to prepare for diverse and often interdisciplinary academic or professional practices should be enhanced. Emphasis should be put on student support and information aimed at graduate success, with the demand for including students as active participants in quality assurance processes. As alluded to by Reichert (2007), quality can be ensured while respecting the need for diversity and innovative practices in research and education.

Responsible ministries and funding agencies have to provide, as required, the funds needed for implementing quality assurance measures. However, despite the need for national regulations and a heightened demand for accountability, the funding agencies should accept that institutional autonomy is a necessary condition for effective quality assurance. Without such autonomy, coherent institutional quality assurance will remain impotent and hardly worth the trouble. Likewise, only very few ideas for improvement can be realized without extra resources.

CONCLUSION

Quality assurance of higher education processes is desired to enhance quality in the response of higher education to labour market needs. Graduates of higher education institutions are supposed to be "employable", even though agreement on what such sustainable employability would mean in terms of student competencies and desirable learning outcomes remains a heated and largely unresolved topic of discussion. However, it has been realized, as discussed in this article, that there

exists immense negative politicking and intrigue in the quality assurance processes in higher education institutions in East Africa which are responsible for compromising the quality of services delivered by the institutions. We argue that being an indicator for organisational performance, the continuous monitoring and enhancing of quality of higher education should be the primary goal and objective of all stakeholders of higher education in East Africa, meaning that quality assurance processes should be embedded in the conducting of the routine business of the institutions. Strategies need to be instituted to foster acceptance and perception of quality assurance and quality management by all stakeholders as a fair part and parcel of the running of higher education. It is clear from the scope of the arguments that the radical change required in the quality assurance system will not be delivered through voluntarism or through market forces. Therefore, the various states need to intervene and regulate quality assurance in higher education institutions without interfering with the autonomy of the institutions. The state should leave the curriculum content, pedagogy, and research to the expertise of individual academics and their disciplines and institutions.

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