THE STATE OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS IN UGANDAN UNIVERSITIES: ISSUES, OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract:

It should be been within the interest of any university to know and ensure quality in the teaching and assessment of its students. The services offered by universities include; teaching of students, undertaking research and offering community service. These to be attained effectively, universities should institute quality assurance systems in order to ensure that they offer quality services to their stakeholders. This paper highlights, the implementation of internal quality assurance systems in universities in Uganda, and the region as a means of improving the teaching and learning of the students. It has been observed that many universities in Uganda and in the region have not enhanced their quality assurance systems, and thus offering pitiable services to their stakeholders. Research has shown that putting in place functional internal quality assurance systems is the only way universities can advance and also enhance quality in the services they offer. Some universities in Uganda and in the region have been found to lack the will of advancing and enhancing functional quality assurance systems despite having the means. On the other hand, though some universities have the zeal to implement and operationalize quality assurance systems, they lack adequate resources while quality assurance is attached to a price. It is recommended that universities in Uganda and in the region should ensure that quality assurance systems are in place and also, allocate adequate resources to quality assurance activities within their universities.

Keywords: quality assurance systems, issues, opportunities, challenges, East Africa

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1. Introduction

Despite the nature, vision, mission, funding (private or government), size of the university, all universities should implement internal quality assurance to ensure that their teaching and learning of the students is adequate (Estermann & Pruvot, 2011; Henard & Leprince-Ringuet (nd); Belawati & Zuhairi, 2007; Markwell, 2003). This is because in a university teaching and learning are the most important activities which need to be handled with utmost care. The term quality has no definite definition as mentioned in the various studies, meaning that quality is subjective in nature and context related. The term quality has been interpreted differently by the different stakeholders (government, lecturers, students, parents, etc.) within the higher education setting (Nyangau, 2014).

In various studies, quality has been defined as measure of perfection, fitness for purpose, adherence to standards, customer satisfaction, and value for money, among others (Nyangau, 2014; Strydom, et al., 1997; Harvey & Green, 1993; Fourie, 2000). Though definitions such customer satisfaction are used in several studies, it is difficult to know who the customer is in an education setting; that is, employer, students, or the university where the students study (Vroeijenstijn, 2001). However, quality is not uniform in all universities as universities might differ in their missions, visions and philosophies. A quality institution is that which is accountable and satisfies the demands of the different stakeholders (Biggs, 2001; Mishra, 2006; IBAT, 2011; Parri, 2006). At the same time, university programmes which meet quality standards should able to meet the standards, criteria, approaches, and should be able to cover adequate skills, knowledge and attitudes required by the students, lecturers and labour market (Strydom & Lategan, 1997).

Other terms used in the implementation of quality assurance systems in universities include; *Quality Assurance,* which is the guarantee given by an education institution that it is confident and certain that the standards and quality in its educational programmes are maintained and enhanced. *Quality Control* refers to procedures of monitoring standards and quality to achieve the intended standards. *Quality Assessment* which is the external evaluation undertaken to test the quality of programmes and systems in an institutions. *Quality Culture* is the creation of high level of internal institutional quality assessment mechanisms within an institution, and *Quality Audit* which is the process of examining institutional procedures for assuring quality and standard, and done in the required way to achieve the programmes objectives.

According to the different studies done in quality assurance in the various universities all over the world, it has been explicitly mentioned that quality assurance is the 'heart' of quality service delivery in higher education institutions (EUA, 2008; CHES, 2011; Jongbloed, 2008). Quality assurance in universities provides a basis for training in higher education, implementation and monitoring policies and procedures, and streamlines assessment procedures and standards. It ensures that the general programme validation standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance are in place, among others (DIT, 2010; EUA, 2007; Stella & Bhushan, 2011). Therefore, it should be within the mandate of every university to promote a quality assurance culture within all their departments and units, and involving all its stakeholders to achieve its desired goals (Henard & Roseveare, 2012; Nyathi, et al., 2011; Mishra, 2006).

The recent transformations in higher education have ignited 'heated' debates on the role of internal quality assurance mechanisms in ensuring quality in higher education institutions (DAAD & UNESCO, 2012). This has been due to the changes which have evolved within the higher education sector in the recent times. With the rapid changes in higher education today, quality assurance has been taken on to maintain quality in all services provided by these universities (Bunoti, 2012; Kurasha & Gwarinda, 2010; Padro & Veenstra, 2013; Weber & Sjur, 2005). In higher education institutions quality assurance systems should not be looked at as an end in themselves but as tools to enhance quality, increase transparency and create trust among stakeholder in higher education (EUA, 2012; ADC, 2009; DAAD & UNESCO, 2012). Specifically, quality assurance systems in universities are supposed to take stock of higher education reforms, identify demands for capacity development, to develop a shared vision within the university and to share experiences on quality assurance principles. Also, quality assurance should put in place procedures and mechanisms to foster and support opportunities for quality assurance within the university (EAQAHE, 2007).

In Uganda, the practice of quality assurance in universities is derived from acts of National council for Higher Education and the Inter-University Council for East Africa (Nkunya & Joseph, nd; IUCEA, 2010). By practice the effort to enhance quality assurance in most of the Ugandan and East African universities is a new phenomenon which has just been initiated in the regional universities, a decade ago after the creation of the regional quality assurance commissions (IUCEA, NCHE, TCU & CHE) and networks (UUQAF & EAQAN). This effort is a direct replica of the Bologna process which brought changes in the European Higher Education (Abdul-Razak, 2012; Zeleza, 2012; Kinser & Hill, 2011). The same idea of ensuring quality assurance in universities

has spread to East, Central and West Africa, and many other regions of the world (Tuning, 2011).
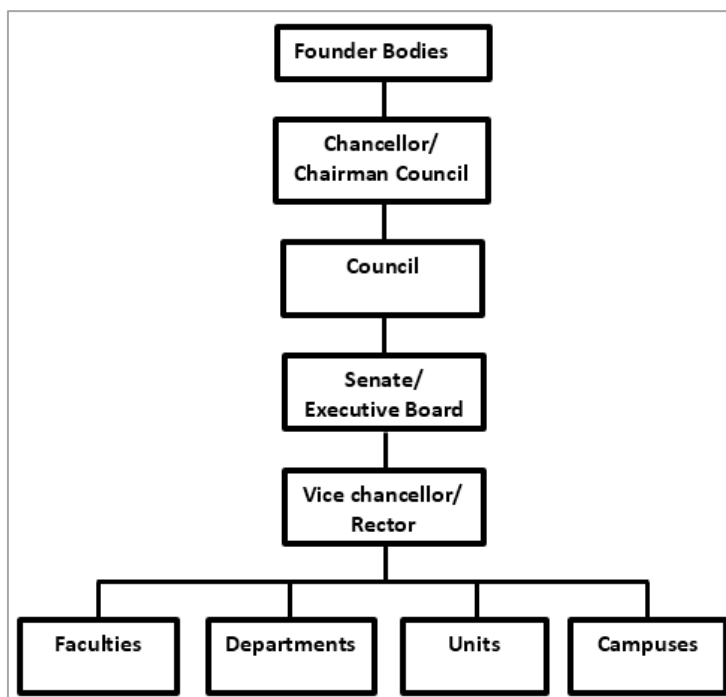
2. Types of Universities in East Africa

In Uganda, there are basically two types of universities, that is, private and government funded (public). The private universities in Uganda today are twenty-nine (29) while the governments funded are seven (7). It has been noted that government universities enroll larger numbers of students than their counterparts (private universities) (Otto & Musinguzi, 2012). Private universities enroll relatively fewer students than their counterparts (public universities), and they mainly depend on tuition fees as a source of funding. This has seen some private universities tend to aggressively look for money from the students by enrolling many students to *'survive'* not considering the quality of education they offer to them. This has tempted some universities to admit students with low/ minimal grades, and sometimes those who do not qualify for some courses. This has led some universities to produce *'half-baked'* graduates. Such scenarios have led governments to establish National Councils and commissions for higher education and other regional bodies like the Inter-University council for East Africa (IUCEA) to control the quality of education offered by the higher education institutions (Jowi, et al., nd).

3. Internal Quality Assurance Systems

The major role of Quality Assurance in modern universities should be to maintain the minimum standards in teaching and learning of the students (IBAT, 2011; Mishra, 2006). This should be attained by having good internal quality assurance systems and structures (EUA, 2008). Good internal quality assurance systems should be able to establish proper evaluation of the university systems derived from the institutional quality culture (Loukkola & Zhang, 2010). As part of the quality systems, the universities should have in place a functioning institutional quality assurance policy. There should be a policy statement that ensures that a quality culture is in place in that particular institution (Henard & Roseveare, 2012; IBAT, 2011; Loukkola & Zhang, 2010). Universities should have a well specified organization structure showing who heads the other as well as their job description. The structure should show the university top management (Vice Chancellor/ Rector) which monitors the university action plan and also ensures that funds are available. The structure should also show the academic councils and their responsibilities clearly highlighted, academic committees, registrar and his responsibilities, the programme coordinators (Deans and Heads of

Departments) and their responsibilities. An assisted or monitored students' administration and other relevant departments should be in place within the structure of any good university (Trowler, 2010; IBAT, 2011; Henard & Roseveare, 2012).
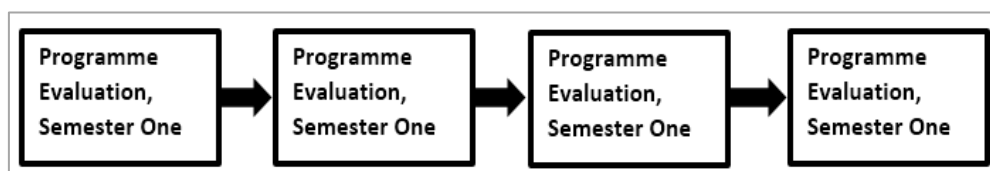

Source: NCHE university structure

As per the internal quality assurance systems, there should be outlined procedures for designing new programmes. This includes the preliminary approvals of programmes at the institutional level, process outline, new programme designs, and approval of programmes at the institutional level (Dorset College, 2011; Mishra, 2006; IBAT, 2011). Institutions with good quality assurance systems should have proper admission criteria for their students' intakes (Bunoti, 2012; CHE, 2004). The process of admission using good internal quality assurance systems should highlight the recruitment process of the students, application and registration procedures (ENQA, 2008; IBAT, 2011). There should also be an admission policy in place with students' placement assessment if they are a requirement, management control systems in admissions, and monitoring and review of the admissions process procedures within that particular university (IBAT, 2011).

As an internal quality, assurance mechanism universities should take interest in the procedures of management of programmes within the different university faculties, departments, and units (Henard & Roseveare, 2012). Universities should highlight the role of programme coordinators and their roles in ensuring that the programmes are adequately administered (IBAT, 2011; Henard & Roseveare, 2012). The role of the

programme coordinators should entail the general academic planning, management and development of programmes, development of assessment schedules, and support to the students on an agreed criteria or standard. The other roles of coordinators which would be mentioned include managing the teaching and assessment of programmes, examining the instruments used for programme evaluation, assessing the programmes on agreed standards, giving feedback of the evaluation to students on time, as well as maintaining the records. In contemporary universities, programme coordinators communicate to students the available resources or facilities, and monitor standards in a programme (IBAT, 2011).

In the procedure of management of progammes there should be pogramme teams as a quality control mechanism. The programme teams would comprise of all the programme coordinators and lecturers who undertake the subjects or courses within a given programme. The programme teams should ensure that courses are allocated to lecturers who are competent to teach them, with appropriate time for them to prepare, and subject to verification from the academic quality assurance committee which monitors them (IBAT, 2011). Also, as part of the procedure of management of programmes, there should be a student complaint policy or procedure which is either formal or informal. Informally, students and staff should be able to resolve their grievances between themselves, while formally the university systems are followed to resolve the same (IBAT, 2011). In the procedures of management of programmes there should be monitoring of the results by the students most especially the continuous assessments. There should also be programme evaluation by both lecturers and students on set procedures in the management of programmes (Fleischman & Williams, 1996). As an internal quality assurance mechanism, there should annual course and programme evaluations to evaluate whether the programmes have achieved their goals or not (Henard & Roseveare, 2012; NCAAA, 2012).

Source: NCHE, UOTIA

Universities world over transact marks or grades as part of their majors business which are generated by undertaking assessments on students (Matovu & Ainol, 2014). As part of the internal quality assurance systems, assessment rules, guidelines and processes need to be streamlined for clarity to all the stakeholders prior to the assessment. In the assessment process, the university should clearly communicate to students and other

stakeholders what entails of their assessments (IBAT, 2011). The major components of the university assessments are usually course works and final examinations. This would involve detailing the course outline from which they would be examined, and the time the assessments are expected. It would also be important for the students to understand the rule and regulations before the time of the assessments (University of Ulster, 2013). This as part of quality would show transparency and fairness in the whole assessment process. The stipulated rules and regulations should mention the conduct of both students and lecturers during the examination process, setting and marking standards of examinations at the university, procedures and rules governing submission of course works, plagiarism, and many others (IBAT, 2011).

The procedures of the learners' assessment should involve the responsibilities of both the lecturers and the students in the assessment process (O'Farrell, nd). That is, who has more responsibility over the other, and in which type of assessment? For the type of assessment to be given to the students, for example, for continuous assessment, the students should be highlighted on the assessment policy to avoid shifting of goals when it comes to time of assessment (IBAT, 2011). Continuous assessments which are allowed and are adequate for students as per the particular university should be clearly mentioned; assignments, case studies, oral presentation, in class assessments or tests and many more. Again, for the procedures of the learners' assessment, assessment submission criteria and quality control in the marking of continuous assessments and final examinations should be highlighted. This would make lecturers be fair in marking, transparent in grading, display awarded grades to the students, and review of scores before communicating them to students as a quality control mechanisms. There should also be documentation for further reference, procedures of returning assignments to students, and recording results (Biggs & Tang, 2007; IBAT, 2011).

There should also be examination procedures as part of the quality assurance mechanisms which would entail how to set and handle examinations in the university, nature of examinations to be set, and what time is appropriate to conduct examinations and where (Makerere University, 2007). The examinations procedures as part of the internal quality control mechanisms would comprise of the internal and external grading systems. In situations where rechecking of examinations would be done, the reviews and rechecking procedures need to be highlighted and understood by the entire stakeholders in the assessment process. In other aspects of the procedures of learners assessment there should appeal processes through which students who have unfairly been assessed can get justice (Macquarie University, 2008). This should detail the procedures and who handles issues of injustices which would arise in the assessment process (IBAT, 2011).

As part of the internal quality assurance systems within universities, the university should have proper review process to the given programmes they conduct for better service delivery to their clients (Stassen, et al., 2001)). This could mention the review process and when, and who should do the review for a given programme. There should also be procedures and policies for evaluating quality assurance in the whole university (NSCAD, 2009). This would comprise of self-evaluation procedures and policy review of quality assurance. There should be procedures of recruitment, selection, placement and development of the university staff as part of the quality assurance systems in any university (EUA, 2008). The recruitment, selection and appointment procedures should be fair in line with quality, and as just as possible. Once lecturers have been recruited and placed there, should be appropriate performance appraisals to the lecturers and avail staff development programmes to those who have skills which are inadequate (Bunoti, 2012; Henard & Roseveare, 2012; IBAT, 2011).

Again, for the proper implementation of internal quality assurance there is need for the universities to have procedures of evaluating the premises, equipment and facilities. This should be in a faith of putting quality infrastructure and facilities, and maintaining them. There should be also listed performance measures, procedures of evaluating resources and services, information Technology (IT) facilities, among others (IBAT, 2011).

4. Purpose of the Literature Review

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the quality assurance systems in universities in Uganda, and the East African region. This paper has been based on the review of literature of internal quality assurance systems in East African universities, and other parts of the world. Different quality assurance techniques, procedures and methods have been reviewed to highlight the quality assurance situation in the East African universities, both in Uganda and other countries in the region. Also, the different frameworks used to enhance quality assurance have been put into consideration to highlight the actual state of quality assurance systems of the universities in Uganda, and the region.

5. Literature Review Methods

The approach used in undertaking the literature review was purely qualitative in nature, taking consideration of documentary review and meta-analysis methods. The

documentary review method was used because the research immensely required review of literature in form hard and soft copy documents. This included both published and unpublished documents in the area of quality assurance in Uganda, and other region in East Africa. The meta-analysis the conclusion were arrived at using the simple majority consensus and also benchmarking from other universities in the world like USA, Europe, and Asia. For documentary review and meta-analysis methods the documents in the reference list of this paper were reviewed. The two methods were used to have a detailed synthesis of the quality and quality assurance systems in the universities in Uganda, and in the region (east Africa) at large. Both published and unpublished documents were analyzed qualitatively to highlight the issues, opportunities and challenges affecting the quality and quality assurance systems in Ugandan and East African universities at large.

6. Opportunities

With quality assurance systems in place in all universities in Uganda, the following are hoped to be realized. Once all universities in East African region have implemented the quality assurance systems, it is hoped that there will be an easy way in which the university management and quality assurance commissions (IUCEA, NCHE, CHE, &TCU), and networks will be able to enhance quality higher education in the region. To a greater landscape, this will lead to the improvement of higher education within the entire region of East Africa.

With the universities engaging in quality assurance activities and also getting support from quality assurance networks like UUQAF, EAQAN, and IUCEA among others, this would bring about increased national, regional and global networking in the East African universities. This would not only sell the name of the universities abroad but also the countries at large. Having set up national and inter-government organization to carter for higher education within East Africa, this has greatly led to the harmonization of the education system in the region, though not yet fully realized. This has been done at the national and regional levels within East Africa to guarantee quality of education offered in the competitive academic world of today. In an effort to implement the quality assurance strategies in the regional universities, universities will be able to design their policies and their operation procedures, put in place functional resource mobilization units, and also outsource funders to their various projects. Universities at the same time will develop functional quality assurance frame works and also carry out all their activities as planned in the budget in order to maintain quality (EUA, 2005). As another aspect of quality assurance, institutional departments

and unit would be able to submit periodical financial performance reports which are another aspect of quality assurance mechanisms (Kis, 2005).

In an urge of improving quality of education in East Africa, many universities have started to embrace technology in their teaching and learning of students as a means of ensuring the quality of teaching students, and in the management of the institutions (Sife, et al., 2007). With the adoption of technology, it is hoped that universities will embrace it in offering open or distance learning so as to take education to regions which do not have universities (Sife, et al., 2007; Matovu, 2012). This is because technology can allow students to access lectures at their homes, and also share resources using the various available e-platforms (Matovu, 2012).

In implementing quality assurance systems, it helps universities to take on adequate human resource (Henard & Roseveare, 2012). Quality assurance initiatives in universities always direct them to look for competent lecturers in delivering content to the students. By universities taking on competent staff, universities will offer better service to their clients or students. With competent staff employed in universities as a quality assurance mechanism, this would also make universities become centres of excellences. Universities which excel would take up such opportunities to be taken on centres of excellence in higher education and research which would be as a result of implementing functional quality assurance systems. This would make universities be part of the beneficiary of multimillion projects which would be brought to the region to promote higher education and research in the various Niche areas.

Putting in place the required quality assurance systems in universities, the university staff are likely to improve on their management skills, improve on the university curriculum, lecturers to teach adequately using modern facilities of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), while also students will attend and study adequately using the available resources (Henard & Roseveare, 2012). Having quality assurance systems pushes universities to have ICT policies and operational procedures, maintain up-to-date communication infrastructures, and also fully integrate management information systems. Such would greatly improve their services delivery to their clients and all their stakeholders. Also, as part of the quality assurance systems in the universities, universities should have an ICT quality assurance framework to support the institutions (Inglis, 2005; Fallshaw & McNaught, 2005). There should also be revision of the ICT policy and master plan regularly, as well as developing an ICT policy that meet the day's standards. The ICT and ICT policies in the universities should be geared towards improving the teaching and learning, and research in the universities (Opati, 2013).

As part of the universities' quality assurance systems universities should be able to expand and diversify students and staff exchange programmes. Students freely transferring credit accumulation units from one university to another means that these universities have comparable standards. This should be done in line with well-developed staff and students exchange policies and programmes in the various universities. There should be a harmonized university curriculum and qualification framework in the region, as well as a support fund for the exchange programmes. Universities in the East African region should be able to integrate the research programmes for all the countries in the region to participate and benefit as well. Niche areas should be decided by all the East African countries in which the research would be undertaken. All universities in the region should look out to having integrated guideline for universities taking the research. This would ease the student and staff exchange programmes within the region. Training programmes should be part of ensuring quality research in the university setting to administrators and the academic staff (lecturers). Training programmes, research and project management for administrators and academic staff should be implemented to improve on their efficiency (Henard & Roseveare, 2012; OECD & IMHE, nd).

Having problem-based training to the staff in universities would enhance the quality assurance systems and also, lead to the establishment of functional quality assurance and research systems within the universities in the region. This goes hand in hand with appointing staff in the research units or departments, establishing research nodes at universities, and also organizing workshops or training to enhance the capacity of the university staff in teaching and conducting research at the university and regional level (Amini, et al., 2009; Rice, 2010; Tettey, 2006). Again to increase the quality of research done by the individual universities in the region there should be a database or repository for the researches done by the different universities at national and regional levels, provide incentives for the excelling members of universities in research, solicit funds for research from government and other non-governmental organizations, while also promoting regional partnership and networking in research.

7. Challenges

Some of the great challenges which affect higher education institutions in Uganda and the region are to achieve the desired quality in higher education; the access to higher education is very low and poor funding to higher education institutions (Barr, 2001; Johnstone, nd; Bennett, et al., 2010). This has been noted in both to private and government funded universities on matters relating to quality assurance. In Uganda,

there are more private universities than public universities; that is, seven public (7) and twenty-nine (29) private universities. The number of private universities in the country and the region is growing at a fast rate to meet the increasing numbers of students joining higher education institutions (Bunoti, 2012; Materu, 2007). The number of private universities superseding that of government universities has created a challenge in which some universities admit students for survival, which would compromise the quality of education the universities offer to the students (Gudo, et al., 2011; Bunoti, 2012).

Also, among the major challenges which are affecting universities in Uganda and the region is the implementation of quality assurance systems which includes lack of adequate physical infrastructure and facilities. Some universities in Uganda lack enough physical infrastructures and facilities such as office space for their full-time staff, lecture rooms and cafeterias for the students (Kwesiga, 2013). In some universities, there are no enough lectures rooms for students to undertake their lectures (Bunoti, 2012; Gudo, et al., 2011). Without adequate physical structures, this also affects use of ICT, where there are no rooms or facilities to keep important technological gadgets such as computers in these universities.

Another challenge, universities have no adequate and competent human resource to ensure that quality is offered in all services. In the Uganda today, very few universities can meet 40% of its full-time human resource requirements. Most universities rely on part time staff that has no full-time commitment to their jobs. Also, in terms quality most universities have teaching staff of the lower ranks (Teaching assistants, assistant lecturers, and lecturers) than those of higher ranks (senior lecturers, associate professors, and professors). According to the NCHE (2011), higher education institutions in Uganda have roughly 12.8% of their academic staff with PhD's, 48.1% with masters' degrees and 39.1% of their staff with bachelor's degree (NCHE, 2011). In some universities where quality assurance systems have not been implemented is because the staff in the quality assurance departments have undefined roles and functions. Some staff in the quality assurance departments and units has titles that are not aligned with their job, functions and responsibilities. Heads of some quality assurance department have been called *Quality Assurance Officers or coordinators* which do not match with the work they do, and status. This has also been coupled with some universities not availing office space for their quality assurance staff, to operate in corridors and *'brief cases'*.

Finances have been mentioned to be key drivers in implementing quality assurance and quality assurance systems in universities. Many universities in Uganda and the region lack adequate financial resources to implement functional quality

assurance systems and activities (Materu, 2007; Asiimwe & Steyn, 2013; Kasozi, 2003; Chacha, 2007). In some universities, the effect of inadequate financial resources has been due to lack of prioritization and allocation of resources to core institutional activities like quality assurance. But as well, some universities which have the funds have no will to put implement quality assurance systems and activities which has left quality assurance issues in these universities *'wanting'*. Most of the quality assurance activities in the region have been greatly supported by external funders such as DAAD, DIES, and HRK, among others. With the reduction of funding to quality assurance activities in the East African region come next year (2015 – 2016) by DAAD, this is likely to affect the activities of quality assurance implemented by IUCEA and other quality assurance networks (UUQAF & EAQAN). The reduction of funding of quality assurance activities will later be reflected in the quality of graduates produced by the universities.

There has been a mismatch in what the universities teach and what is really required in the field by the employers, visa vie the demands of the economic development of the East African countries (Weligamage, 2009). This has been aligned to lack of functional and adequate quality assurance systems within the universities (Osinulu & Amusa, 2002; Henard & Roseveare, 2012). What is mostly taught in the courses students learn at the university level needs to be refocused to match the needs and the demands of the society where the universities are situated. This can only be achieved by involving quality matters into the curricula development for the various universities to make them not only *'fit for the solution'* but also *'fit for the purpose'*.

As part of the challenge to quality assurance quality assurance systems, universities have been greatly faced with internal and external conflict in their leadership (West, nd; Asiimwe & Steyn, 2013). This has posed challenges to the implementation of quality assurance systems and have resorted themselves into struggles of leadership. Such struggles have been the genesis of choosing university leadership basing on the day's politics other than the required competencies in management skills (Asiimwe & Steyn, 2013). This has hindered the universities to tackle appropriately new challenges in higher education management dynamics, leading to inadequate institutional reforms and service delivery inefficiencies (NCHE, 2011). Despite of several trainings to universities through the various quality assurance networks and informing universities of the adequate university organization structures many universities have no quality assurance policies and personnel in their organization structures. For example, very few universities have fully operational quality assurance directors and departments or units. This has made such universities

to lag behind in issues of quality assurance and also to implement quality assurance systems.

In ensuring quality assurance systems in universities, national governing bodies have not come up with a unified quality assurance qualification framework and grading systems that would harmonize the education system in East Africa (MOE, 2012). Without a unified grading system, universities in the region cannot guarantee that the qualifications from all the higher education institutions in East Africa are uniform. Such inadequacies have hampered the mobility of labour force trained from within the region (East Africa) to cross the borders within the same region even with bigger opportunities within the regional countries (UNDP, 2011).

Ensuring quality in the universities, it should also comprise of students being able to access the required resources in terms of text books, internet and other reading materials (UNICEF, 2000). Most universities in the region have inadequate books in their libraries, and even those which are there are outdated (Kavulya, 2004). Universities' subscription to the internet services and databases is inadequate; that is, they procure small band width and rarely subscribe to other resources like journals and web-web resources (Basaza, et al., 2010; Gudo, et al., 2011; Echezona & Ugwuanyi, 2010). Failure for most of the universities to employ ICT or e-resource databases this has fixed universities to the traditional methods of teaching their students of 'talk and chalk' (Kruijer, 2010). Very few universities have come up to integrate technology in their teaching methods to improve on the quality of teaching to their students. Universities still think that students should sit in the lecture rooms to take notes from their lecturers as the only way of studying (Sellers, et al., 2007; Fry, et al., 2009).

In addition to having limited resources, universities have kept on duplicating study programmes. Changing of names for programmes from one university to be implemented in another university without any improvement or reduction is a fashion today in universities. Universities lack creativity in what they would like to offer to their students and feel proud to offer what other universities have offered. If there were technical problems in developing a curriculum of one university other universities will take on those problems if they entirely copy the curriculum without scrutiny. It can be noted that these are bad tendencies which should be desisted from in higher education institutions as they are institutions to generate knowledge, not to reproduce what has been produced by other universities.

Universities with large enrolments but with limited infrastructure and facilities have faced problems of students overcrowding in the lecture rooms, students having lectures through windows, and some missing seats to keep standing throughout the lectures (Nyangau, 2014). According to research, bigger numbers of students would

study from their homes even without coming to the university premises, to reduce congestion when ICT is used in teaching (Matovu, 2012). In other quality challenges, universities in the East African region have in general not fully developed a quality assurance culture to their students and lecturers, not taken peer reviews to their programmes and institutions, and do not bench mark from other universities. Universities in the region have not yet appreciated the role of peer to their programmes and institutions. In Uganda and East Africa at large, some institutions have resisted internal self-assessments as well as external assessment. Self-assessments and external assessments are like a *'mirror'* to which universities should always check themselves for improvement purposes. Most universities think that by externally assessing them their programmes will be criticized or will be closed if they are not adequate.

Also, without proper instructional quality assurance mechanisms in Uganda, universities have failed to attend to some of their key roles in delivering their services. Universities have mostly dealt with teaching of students while little has been done to community service, and almost none to research. In most of the universities in Uganda less has been done to create a regional coordinating initiative to promote research among the East African universities. There is also lack of a regional respiratory on higher education research were students and the community would access the researches done for community development.

8. Solutions

In solving some of the quality issues in the universities in Africa, East Africa and Uganda several bodies have been set up to improve the quality of service in these universities offers which include; initiative on Quality Assurance for the East African Cooperation (EAC), Inter-University Council of East Africa (IUCEA), German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), and Southern African Cooperation. Others include Association of African Universities (AAU), African Union (AU) policies on higher education, and African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN), among others (DAAD/UNESCO, 2012). Most of these organizations have come up with an aim to improve the internal quality assurance systems and also harmonize the education system in East Africa and Africa as a whole. Such support systems have strengthened and supported thematic academic forums, enhanced university leadership skills and competences, promoted regional and international networking of universities, and also enhanced curriculum development strategies in the various universities in the East African universities (IUCEA, 2011; DAAD & UNESCO, 2012; Huisman, et al., 2012).

As part of the quality control mechanisms, the universities have also been helped to link their teaching to community development which has greatly been done through research (IUCEA, 2011). University quality assurance systems have been improved through diversification of the on-going quality assurance activities so as to enhance regional and international comparability of the quality standards of education provided in the region (Friend-Pereira, et al., 2002). This should be realized through establishing an East African credit transfer system to facilitate and harmonize higher education quality standards and systems in the region (IUCEA, 2011). Through the East African regional networks, a regional repository for higher education research should be created that would support education development and reforms within the member countries (Förg, et al., 2009; Mohamed & Fullard, nd; Meek, et al., 2009).

To realize greater achievements, universities in the region should establish a qualification framework which would harmonize the education and training systems in the East African countries (Hoosen, et al., 2009; Knight, 2013; Nkunya, 2011). This would help universities in the region to produce students with almost similar skills, competencies and qualifications across the region (IUCEA, 2011). Emphasis should also be put on activities like the inter-university sports and games because they reflect integration of the East African region (IUCEA, 2011).

There is needed to come up with an East African quality assurance policy which would carter for all the universities in the region, but also considering their difference. Developing the policy should be through awareness and consultations from all the East African stakeholders of higher education so as to have consensus. There should also be internal and external assessments programmes and the institutions because they help to check on the university programmes and the institutions themselves. This would help university to have a self-reflection and also bench mark from other universities from the region, and all over the world. In other aspects which would be undertaken to improve the internal quality, assurance systems in universities in Uganda and the region would include all universities adopting the Inter-University Council for East Africa guidelines and using them to assess their quality both internally and externally. Also, there should be capacity building on good quality assurance practices to the university staff in the region, empower higher education commissions in their respective countries to control quality, and also have regular inspection of the commissions to the universities.

9. Recommendations

Quality assurance systems should be put in place in all universities to ensure that their students get quality education. With proper university quality assurance systems,

universities should highlight proper development needs, trail excellence, teach required skills and knowledge relevant to society, train graduates who are competitive and promote sustainable development and growth by producing graduates who possess adequate knowledge and skills (IUCEA, 2011; Henard & Roseveare, 2012).

With the proper implementation of the quality assurance systems, it hoped that institutions in the country and the region will operate on the same quality assurance framework, provide an opportunity for staff to participate in institutional affairs, motivate staff and also retain them. With good quality assurance, systems in place there should be coordination of research projects, programs, quality assurance processes, student and staff exchange and academic dialogue forums at regional level. There should also be structured institutional operations supported by appropriate policies and procedures and also to able to forge local and international cooperation and partnerships for supporting core quality assurance activities in the region.

10. Conclusion

In the development of the quality assurance systems in Ugandan and East African universities, the regional quality assurance framework should be fully operational with given benchmarks for universities, put in place the East Africa credit accumulation units and transfer systems, as well as the East African Higher Education Quality Seal (Musyoki & Karimi, 2011; CHE, 2012). As a matter of quality assurance, there should be recognition of academic qualifications across borders in Uganda and the entire East Africa. This would be through developing a qualification framework for East Africa and also to sensitize stakeholders about the same. As well, there should be a regional higher education accreditation system in the region. This would be in charge of the regional accreditation and harmonizing institutional frameworks.

Also, in strengthening quality assurance mechanisms in Ugandan and East African universities there should be quality assurance units or departments at the university level, appoint a quality assurance officer who have quality assurance skills and competencies, establish regional networks for quality assurance, publish quality assurance training modules, and promote and support Total Quality Management (TQM) practices in the universities.

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