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James Williams (ed.)

QUALITY MANAGEMENT

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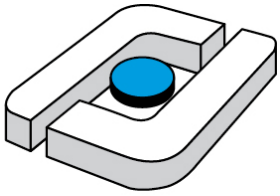

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CONTENTS

INTRODUTION

James Williams

MARIHE QUALITY MANAGEMENT MODULE

This book contains a selection of some of the best essays submitted as the final assignment of the MARIHE Quality Management Module. The book is a reflection of the quality of the students' work but also gives credit to the engagement and passion with which the students addressed issues relating to quality management in higher education. The students come from a wide range of countries from across the world and this diversity is reflected in the subject matter of the essays.

THE MODULE

To date, the Quality Management module has run for four consecutive years and is usually one of the first modules taken by the students on the MARIHE programme. It runs for a week and it provides a valuable basis on which the students build their further studies. Quality management, arguably, runs through all aspects of higher education, so it is appropriate that it is the first module, inviting students to challenge their existing beliefs about quality in higher education.
The Module is carefully balanced between theoretical and practical. It challenges the students to think carefully about what is meant by the term 'quality' in the context of higher education and encourages them to engage with the growing research literature. At the same time, students are given concrete examples of the challenges facing universities as they seek to complete in a global context. Students are required to apply theory to practice.
The taught sessions during the Module cover a range of key areas. The Module begins with a reflection on how quality is defined in the context of higher education. There are sessions on how such definitions are operationalised, with perspectives on the development and management of universities. There are sessions on quality assurance agencies and their work. There is a session on feedback mechanisms and how to collect feedback from different stakeholders. The Module then explores the notion and implications of quality culture and the impact of quality management.
Teaching on the module is a mixture of presentations from the staff and student discussion groups. Staff input reflects their particular experiences and interests. The lead lecturer focuses on the theoretical aspects of quality, providing access to the research in the field; the second lecturer provided a hands-on management perspective; the session on quality assurance agencies has been led by the head of the Austrian Quality Assurance Agency. The students are encouraged to contribute in class discussions and this has proved effective.
The Module is assessed by four assignments. The first is a review of a chosen published work, either an article in an academic journal or a book. The second, performed on the last day of the Module, is a group presentation on any chosen topic relating to quality management. The third assignment is an essay on any chosen aspect of quality management. The fourth assignment has been a task to imagine the University of the Future. The focus of this e-book, however, is the third assignment, the quality management essay, because it is both the largest of the assignments and attracts the highest proportion of marks.

THE QUALITY MANAGEMENT ESSAYS

The students were incredibly engaged in the work they were asked to do. Students were encouraged to make their own choice of subject for their assignments. Hence, there was an incredible variety in the subject matter. Some assignments addressed broad issues of quality management whilst others focused on specific issues from their own countries. This provided a fascinating perspective on higher education.
The topics chosen by the students for their final assignments has been hugely varied and reflects a wide range of interests. In all, 77 essays have been submitted from across the four cohorts of the MARIHE programme. Nine of the essays have been reproduced in this book: they were chosen because they were the highest scoring of the essays.

The most popular single issue was that of how to engage students in quality management processes. Twelve of the essays dealt with student feedback processes as part of the quality improvement process. Four of these explored the value of student feedback in the students' own countries. Four essays were written about the challenges to engaging students in the quality management process.

An example of an essay on student feedback is by Isil Guney from Cohort 2, who asks whether student feedback is one of the cornerstones of quality assurance, following the title of Patrice Mertova's 2010 edition.

Nineteen students explored issues relating to the development and challenges of quality management in their own countries. Eight essays looked at the general development of quality management in the students' own countries. An example of this topic is the essay by Alexandra Zinovyeva from Cohort 4, who discusses the development of internal quality assurance in Kazakhstan, using academic perceptions of the issue.
Five essays explored the challenges facing quality assurance in specific countries. Four students explored the challenges of importing models of quality assurance into their own countries. An excellent example is the essay by Patricia Akamp from cohort 4, who explores the use of quality evaluation tools and cross national learning/importation of models.

Quality management in the context of internationalisation and globalisation attracted some interest, unsurprisingly, given the nature of the Marihe programme and its students. Essays have been written that explore the challenges of assuring the quality of transnational higher education (TNHE) programmes, online learning and massive open online courses (MOOCs). An example of work on quality assurance and TNHE is the essay by Van Truong from Cohort 4, in which she identifies the responsibilities of receiving countries in quality assurance in cross-border higher education. An excellent essay on MOOCs was written by Jon Maes from Cohort 3. Some interest was shown in areas relating to defining quality and its potential for stimulating institutional and sector change. Three essays looked specifically at how quality is defined, including one on the notion of quality as a transformational factor for stakeholders and institutions. An excellent example is the essay by Inga Zalyevska, who explores the relationship between quality assurance and change in higher education.

Four essays looked specifically at the challenges of developing effective ranking systems. One essay looked specifically at the U-Multirank system. An excellent example is the essay by Rediet Tesfaye Abebe from Cohort 1, who discusses the value of ranking in higher education, asking whether this was 'A True Quality Evaluation Tool or a Misleading Indicator'.

Three essays took as their subject the question, raised by Jan Erik Karlsen at the 2012 EAIR (European Association of Institutional Research) Forum, whether quality management was an 'Empty Signifier' or a 'Useful Vehicle of Continuing Improvement'. An excellent example is the essay by Ayenachew Aseffa Woldegiyorgism from Cohort 1.

Several students wrote essays on aspects of external and internal quality monitoring and the development of quality culture. Three essays discussed the appropriateness to higher education of approaches such as Total Quality Management. Three essays took as their subject aspects of external quality monitoring, in the main, focusing on their own countries, but not exclusively. An excellent example is the essay by Krisztina Jaksa from Cohort 1, who discusses the role of the External Examiner, asking whether this was an inspector or critical friend.

CONCLUSIONS

Although the four cohorts were in many ways very different from each other, they all shared a high level of engagement with the issues around quality management. Overall, the essays that are reproduced in this book reflect both the high quality of the work produced by the students during the Quality Management Module and that engagement.

IS STUDENT FEEDBACK CORNERSTONE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE ?

Işıl Güney

ABSTRACT

Questions of student feedback are one of the main concerns of discussions in quality assurance. Studies about student feedback and their contribution to quality abound in the literature. In this sense, the aim of this paper is to analyse the idea of student feedback being the main pillar of quality assurance. It is agreed that student feedback is an integral part of quality assurance and argued that in order for it be effective, it needs to be administered properly and stakeholders should be well integrated into the process.

Key words: student feedback, quality assurance, holistic approach, stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, massification of higher education and expansion of higher education institutions resulted in concerns about quality of education. The growing consumerism of higher education led to ever-increasing demands for accountability by public and governments and involvement of students to quality assurance processes. Hence, collecting and analyzing student feedback have become an integral part of quality assurance processes in higher education. With students being the main stakeholders, student feedback has been regarded as “the cornerstone to an efficient quality assurance system” (Nair et al 2010) and become a highly debated issue in quality assurance and enhancement. In that context, the aim of this article is to identify debates and discussions revolving around the concept of student feedback and quality in terms of validity, data collection methods, implementation and stakeholder involvement. It is argued that although student feedback is considered as the key component of quality assurance, its effectiveness depends on how properly it is administered and how well other stakeholders are integrated into this process. To this end, a literature review of articles in the scholarly articles and books in the field of quality and higher education is made.

DISCUSSION

Student feedbacks are, most frequently, criticized in terms of their validity. Jukka (2014, pg. 197) summarizes the factors affecting the validity of student feedbacks. Firstly, the students’ assessments may be affected by teacher’s charisma, gender, race, age, physical attractiveness and some personal traits. Students may give higher grades to instructors who give higher grades. Secondly, Spooren et.al (2013, pp.609-617) claim that students’ perspective of good teaching might differ from the administrators. Thus, students may reflect their own understanding of good teaching in student teacher evaluation. In a recent study, Bennett and Kane (2014) found out that students having different levels of engagement and study orientations attributed different meanings to questions in the United Kingdom’s National Student Survey. Another problem is that the instruments designed for student evaluation of teaching may not be covering the relevant content about the characteristics of an effective teacher and might fail to measure what it intends to (Spooren et.al, 2013).

That feedback is collected efficiently and effectively is also essential (Lecker and Neill, 2001). Although student feedback can be collected with several methods, questionnaires are most commonly preferred. However, Harvey (2011, pg.7) argues that questionnaires are poor ways of gathering student feedback. Firstly, they provide no clear information to students about the value or use of the data given. Secondly, surveys almost never reflect student concerns and issues, which results in students’ use of open comments for complaints yielding a contradictory result with the closed questions. Finally, surveys do not ask students’ opinions about improvements and they are not involved in the design of the survey. This results in students’ indifference since they know that no action is taken based on the survey results. (2011, pg.7)

Harvey (2011 pg.18) suggests a far more effective means of collecting student feedback for the teaching staff, which is thorough direct dialogue that can take many forms such as face-to-face

discussion groups within the classroom, through blogs, online discussion groups or webinars. Yet, the most value forms of receiving feedback is the informal, unprepared feedback in classes, during tutorials, in corridors, during coffee-breaks or through e-mails. He also states that qualitative feedback is far richer and meaningful in terms of improvement purposes than answers from standardised quantitative questionnaires.

How academic staff responds to student feedback is another area of challenge for student feedback. Leckey and Neill (2001) note that academic staff's skepticism towards student feedbacks stem from their belief in students' being untrained assessors, feedback system's imposition by the college hierarchy and its use as a mechanism for control and action by managers. Douglas and Douglas (2006) reiterate the perception of some academic staff that students are not competent to evaluate their skills. In his case study of Seashoal Lows University, Padro (2011) draws attention to the fact that feedback has been used as the primary factor in deciding faculty promotion and tenure, which created dissatisfaction among the faculty and its related university organizations. Another source of discontentment is the lack of incentives or rewards for good teaching whereas there is action by managers in case of poor performance.

However, some studies indicate positive attitudes of academic staff towards student feedback with improved student satisfaction, morale and motivation to change their teaching desire. In their study of the teaching quality in Hong Kong, Massy and French (2001, pg.38) found that academic staff were eager to discuss with students and acted upon student feedback. As Harvey puts it (2011, p17), student's evaluation of teacher performance has a limited function if it is not administered correctly in that while lecturers become cynical as student evaluations are used for controlling, students become disinterested as they barely get feedback. Thus, it fails to become an improvement-oriented tool.

Another area in student feedback discussions that needs attention is how they are integrated into institutional quality improvement policies and processes. To ensure a sound quality improvement, student feedback data must be processed into useful information within a regular and continuous cycle of analysis, reporting, action and feedback so that it can be used to create change within an institution (Harvey, 2011, pg.5). As Harvey (2011, pg.6.) puts it, the institutions need to have in place a system for this cycle that can identify and delegate responsibility for action; encourage ownership of plans of action, require accountability for action taken or not taken, act upon student feedbacks and informs students about results of feedbacks and commit appropriate sources. To this end, Harvey (2003, pg.4) developed a model of satisfaction cycle which covered the phases of student determined questions, questionnaire distribution, analysis of results, report, noting areas for action, consultation process, action plan, implementation and monitoring, feedback to students. However, in this cycle, there seems to be a gap in many higher education institutions between data collection and effective action, which is termed as "closing the loop" (Neill 2010, pg.25). Powney (1998), who used the concept of closing loops in report about the impact of student feedback on students' subsequent learning, claims that the loop is seldom closed as students are not given feedback about action resulting from their feedbacks, which ends up with less student participation and skepticism about feedbacks. Moreover, in many cases, collected students feedbacks are not analyzed properly, or turn into a set of statistics and tables, which have little value for action and limited circulation (Neill, 2010, pg.25). Similarly, James Williams (2011, pp.153-154) draws attention to the fact that student satisfaction increases over time when an institution takes real action on data from student feedbacks. Action to be taken should not be attempting to satisfy students' expectations but to engage students so that realistic solutions for all stakeholders including academic staff can be achieved. Students can be communicated about the results of feedbacks through various channels such as flyers leaflets, bulletin boards, student websites, student radio, student unions.

Student feedbacks are also criticized for ignoring transformative views of learning and taking into account facilities and teaching (Harvey 2011, pg.20). However, Harvey underlines the importance of giving students feedback on their work and learning along with getting feedback from them on their learning environment. He also emphasizes the difference between completing the feedback loop, which means informing students about actions taken after student feedbacks and feedback to students on their work and learning either through commentaries with summative grading or formative assessments (2011, pg.20) Student feedbacks are used for a variety of purposes. Williams and Cappuccini-Ansfield, (2007, p. 171) highlight the different purposes of UK National Student Survey and Student Satisfaction Survey. While NSS paves the way for nation-wide league tabling of institutions comparing them in terms of value for money, the SSS enables mutual feedback processes involving students in the quality processes.

CONCLUSION

The review and analysis of the literature indicate that student feedback is considered as an integral part of quality assurance process in higher education. As argued by Harvey (2011), one should be cautious in that it is a powerful but not the single only for making changes. However, it affects quality of teaching, improves institutions, and enriches students' learning and hence, assures and enhances quality. While student feedback is a cornerstone of quality assurance, its effectiveness depends on how well they are administered and how well other stakeholders are integrated into this process.

Integration of stakeholders necessitates freeing feedback from being a one-way direction. Feedback needs to be embedded into dialogue and interaction between students and teachers. Yet, students and teachers are not the only stakeholders in this process. An effective feedback mechanism requires a holistic approach with active involvement of all stakeholders. As discussed by Williams (2011, p.143), in institutions acting upon student feedback, the feedback process is incorporated into the institutional management structure. In their study about how student feedback cycle is managed in higher education context, Roxå and Mårtensson (2011) describe a systemic, well-organized organized method of feedback collection and action where university leadership, program leaders, lecturers and students collaboratively participate. However, the authors make implications for the importance of effective leadership in supporting the process.
This brings one to another challenge which requires active participation of stakeholders at a university; closing the loops when acting upon student feedback. How will the loops in this interaction be closed? What other channels might be used? While some studies (Puteh and Hadina Habil 2014) offer establishment of special units within the universities, others might use student unions, media and informal ways to close the gap. Implications for further study might include what students' reaction to those channels and feedbacks will be.

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A QUIET REBELLION: ACADEMICS' VIEW ON INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE IN KAZAKHSTAN

Alexandra Zinovyeva

INTRODUCTION

"Imagine a child choosing a new toy. What would drive their choice? Vivid colors, shine, peculiar shapes rather than versatility, resistance to damage and durability. The wrap, which does not necessarily coincide with the contents but is easy to depict. And now imagine a student, or rather a parent, who eventually pays for the education, choosing a university. The rank, the number of stars gained, the number of foreign professors employed, the graduation rates. Accountability so to say. But is this "paper accountability" accountable nowadays, or is it just a wrap which does not necessarily coincide with the contents?" – Prof. X of East Kazakhstan State University.

(Kazansky L.M., unfinished research "Academic resistance to internal quality assurance schemes", interviewee, 2014)

The comment, stated by Prof. X at one of очередной plenary department meeting can identify a certain mistrust to national accountability schemes, being not a singular case, and not even the one, occasionally met in Kazakhstan. It is a stigmatic view, explicitly expressed by the majority of senior academics and implicitly imposed to the junior newcomers to the field. (Tamilin, 2011, p.14). With the introduction of new accountability tool as internal quality assurance scheme at the universities (the reform took place in 2010), the key actors being examined are questioning the reliability of the "accountability" mixing it up with questioning the effectiveness of internal quality assurance schemes introduced the same year and serving for providing this "accountability" reports. Why has this discredit towards accountability arose among academics and is "paper accountability" a reality reflection or a formal framework to attract more stakeholders?

SUPERFICIAL ANALYSIS: INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEMES TO PROVIDE ACCOUNTABILITY

It has only been twenty-four years since the official name "The Republic of Kazakhstan" was introduced to the rest of the World. Gaining independence from The Soviet Union as well as undergoing a radical shift from socialistic towards capitalistic model of governance impacted all aspects of political and social life of a new-born country. Doubtless, the system of higher education has indeed experienced significant changes in shape and dimensions, being transformed by market-economy. The current state of higher education in Kazakhstan is a consequence of the transformation process, which gradually eradicated the system driven by idealized social relationship and regulated economy. Trying to learn from the best practices, the policy makers bred the idea to modernize the higher educational sector through introducing new models of governance as well as to offer an internationally recognized quality of education. For this purpose, apart from national quality attestation framework, the government introduced a new internal scheme of assuring quality on institutional level, which, regarding to academic performance, comprised the academic mutual evaluations once a month, weekly self-reports, the statistics on graduate and admissions rate, course assessments by students etc. However, the Ministry of Education and Science of The Republic of Kazakhstan revised the national curriculum for all subjects to meet the international expectations limiting the academic freedom further. The data, received directly from the universities, is used officially to provide accountability of this entities. Certainly, the external examinations as attestations are undertaken every 5 years, however it has proved to be more formal and in reality rely on internal quality assurance reports rather than on real assessment tools. (Tamilin, 2011, p.17). The fact, that official figures appearing on the ministry website appear directly from the universities themselves might question the reliability of the data as universities, trying to attract more stakeholders, can potentially diverge and present inaccurate results to satisfy the social expectations, which has been the case with several universities (Temir Zhol, article 13). For instance, in 2012 The State University of Karaganda was accused of presenting inaccurate data after a more detailed international accreditation procedure taking place at the university (Temir Zhol. Article 13). The scandal did not breed much tension in the society, as it was dealt internally and was not exposed to the open public, however it was welldocumented and

revealed later. This case exemplified the luck of governmental control over internal quality assurance mechanisms implemented at the institutional level and there would not be any wonders why academics could resist to recognize the importance of this measures considering them somewhat irrelevant.

GOING DEEPER: "OVER-MY-DEAD-BODY" APPROACH

The academic resistance to recognize internal quality monitoring mechanisms as ones possibly leading to quality enhancement but rather fictional result for better accountability might have originated a way ago the case described above. With the introduction of additional quality monitor control the academics were obliged to fill in a considerable amount of additional paper work, which, as the research claims (Davidov M.P., 2014, p.55) is perceived by the academics, who are mostly engaged with lecturing at teaching educational institutions rather than research activities, as unnecessary exercise not fruitful in results. According to Trowler, 1998, academics should be "makers" and "shapers" of the policies regarding quality assurance. However, this bottom-up approach is barely implemented in Kazakhstan, as the policies are proposed by the government and further developed by the rectorate, not involving academics in the revision (Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Education", 2010, revised). The workload, which is defined by the National Standards of Education, does not include extra hours, spent on peer-evaluation, selfreflective reports, self-assessments and students' feedback analysis. This additional documentation, which is meant to be used for personal development, is compulsory for submission to the administration, making it potentially dangerous for the reputation of a specific professor. Apparently, the fear to ruin the reputation can lead to less self-criticism expressed in the documentation which might lessen the value of such exercise. The quality then will be viewed not as added value or transformation of the student but complying with the requirements set from above.

This concern that `quality' is not seen by academics in terms of `improvement', but as something that is externally imposed, also extends to external monitoring (Newton, 2000, p. 15).

As Underwood (1998, p. 52) suggests:

"If improvement is happening [in the sector], it is more as a result of the stick than the carrot. One would love to believe that intense debate and reflection on teaching and learning and the student experience of higher education is taking place across the system: but the phrase `siege mentality' may be nearer the truth."

This theme is also taken up by de Vries (1997, p. 96), who expresses concerns about how preparing for external assessment masks reality from the gaze of external assessors (Newton, 2000, p. 15):

"Consequently, surface issues are brought to the fore and the covert remain intact. The result is that cosmetic enhancement is often effected and the losers are the students and the education process itself."

The academics in Kazakhstan view the quality assurance mechanisms as the ones deteriorating the educational process itself as distracting the professionals from their main activity as well as discouraging the academics in broad sense. Not surprisingly, the majority of academics identify themselves as opposers to internal quality assurance mechanisms implementation. The assumption, that misleading in some way internal quality reports form the national accountability display is in the heart of academia. So-called "over-my-dead-body" approach (Watty, 2006) seems to be omnipresent and dealing with explicitly it can bring another challenge and another wave of resistance.

CONCLUDING REMARK

"Accountability ? Everybody talks about our rank and the employment rates, but has anybody questioned, how we collected this data, has anybody put any doubts on my peer-reviews? Maybe I am just sitting in my office and trying to get rid of this extra work, filling in the forms as fast as possible and do not even care how my counterpart performed today on the lesson? No, I do not believe it, as neither of my colleagues does." – Professor Y at Al-Pharabi Kazakh National University

There have been 1087 interviews conducted with the professors of state and national universities to investigate into their attitude to quality assurance policies, their reflection in accountability reports and real quality improvements (Tamilin, 2011). The research was interrupted with no obvious reason. Nevertheless, the interviews clearly identified the quiet rebellion, the inherent objection of the academic staff to the policies and reforms they had to be imposed to. However, the unfinished research, as well as the research of Newton, 2000, reveals that `quality policy' becomes changed in the implementation process, that `quality' may become preoccupied with accountability rather than improvement and enhancement, and that, given the influence of context, there is no `blueprint' or ideal model for a quality system, then how the academic community responds to these new monitoring arrangements will continue to demand the close attention of researchers (Newton, 2000, p. 26).

Could it be a sign, that Kazakhstan is still too young to adapt rather than adopt the policies and best practices and the reluctance coming from the bottom should be overcome before imposing the regulations and setting standards? It certainly could. It could also signify the importance of reconsidering the direct approach used to impose the internal quality assurance mechanisms. It could even identify the current problem with the luck of real accountability as expressed by the key actors of educational process – academic staff. Regaining the trust in accountability and quality assurance positive impact is a national challenge, which will fortunately be recognized.

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THE HOLY GRAIL: LEARNING LESSONS TO NIGERIA FROM RESEARCH QUALITY EVALUATION SYSTEMS IN THE US AND THE UK

Patricia Akamp

ABSTRACT

By exploring impact studies of quality assessments and accreditation systems relative to the improvement of research outcomes of higher education institutions (HEIs) one can have a better understanding of the current situation and to some extent analyse what aspects of different models are vertically scalable (that is, for developed and developing countries). This paper looks at two successful models where research has been fostered: the US and the UK. It draws from their experiences and look for learning lessons which can serve as inspiration to other countries going through the process of designing their own research evaluation systems. In this case the study looked at Nigeria and concluded that the most important lesson it can take from the US and UK research evaluation system is to understand the rationale used in order to implement such models, and contextualize such rationale to its own priorities in order to develop a sustainable vision and define its place in the knowledge economy.
Key words: research evaluation systems, market-driven, state-led, developing countries.

INTRODUCTION

Following the new public management model in the late 70's (Gruening, 2001), business-like quality assessments such as Total Quality Management emerged in the 90's (Morgan & Murgatroyd, 1994). So around late 80's, early 90's a few countries started to implement business-like quality evaluation systems in the education sector. To explore research quality evaluation systems in this light is important because (ideally) this is the process that checks and classifies the value of all new knowledge produced by (HEIs within) a state, providing the much needed benchmark data with which a state can situate where it stands in the knowledge economy. What does it mean to lag behind in the knowledge economy? In economic terms the quaternary sector is the most advanced sector of the economy and the one to be expanded, so performance is a must. "Quaternary industries arise from breakthroughs in science and the outcome is social transformation. Novel solutions to human problems are developed, and choice in the marketplace expands. With new markets, new business practices come into being and the dynamics of human relationships change as the new technology is taken into households." (Anderson, 2002). Here, the new dynamics of the education sector where universities' progression focuses mainly on academic rankings to meet government funding criteria are less important than the potential that quality assessments hold as a supporting tool for development. Thus this paper aims to answer the following question: Considering the pros and cons of each approach: the more market-driven (US) vs. state led (UK) to research evaluation what are the lessons to be learnt for less developed countries with low levels of preparedness to implement research evaluation systems (Nigeria)?

METHODOLOGY

I will use the case study method to assess the two approaches, focusing on the US, UK and Nigeria. Through review of literature I will develop a comparative rationale between the countries while addressing the concerns outlined above about research quality performance. The choice for the UK, the US and Nigeria attempted to represent the best research performance, strong state regulation and low preparedness (please see Table 3 for more detailed explanation on the choice of each country). My analysis will rely upon primary and secondary sources. To understand the creation and implementation of state led research evaluation systems, such as PBRF, the study drew on the New Managerialism theory (Deem, 2011) (competition, output oriented, etc.) and Principal-Agent theory (with quasi-market incentives aligning research production to the principal agent's interest).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research evaluation systems, as part of evaluation assessments in the HE sector, first took place in the US. The US has pioneered the methodology and different measurement approaches in the

analysis of higher education (even as a new field of study). Rankings started as early as 1925 and the initial system was used until the 50's, ending in 1959 when peer review came to existence. Funding allocation, among other awards and developments, were allocated according to such reviews. However since the 80's OECD members started adopting indicators as part of their research evaluations and funding allocation (Sanyal, 1992). Please, see Table 1 at Appendix for an overview of evaluation indicators and techniques for research and Table 2 for an overview of pros and cons of each methodology. Performance based research funding (PBRF) is the most contentious system among all research evaluation systems, the one of highest state regulation. Yet it is increasingly being adopted by developed countries hence it is worth to analyse this model more closely. Through literature review it became clear that there are two main general views on PBRF: as a state control tool and as a quality enhancement tool.

PERFORMANCE-BASED RESEARCH FUNDING AS A STATE CONTROL TOOL: MARKETIZATION OF ACADEMIA

According to the literature review these are some of the main disadvantages of implementing PBRF system: high cost; may lead to homogenization of research; may discourage more risky research; may encourage 'publication inflation'; may encourage 'academic' research; separates research from teaching; rewards past performance; may lead to excessive government 'interference' (Iorwerth, 2005); the design of PBRF is based on cost-benefit calculations which can imply governments decide how much complexity is worth the cost (may lead to a not optimal design); may discourage interdisciplinary research; may discourage potential new areas of research; may diminish national and cultural identity; may diminish broader societal and economic outcomes from research and overall, it may diminish novelty, innovation, intellectual diversity (Hicks, 2010).

PERFORMANCE-BASED RESEARCH FUNDING AS AN ENHANCEMENT TOOL: ADDING VALUE TO THE SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY IN GENERAL

Scholars often associate the adoption of state regulation on research quality with the new public management approach. According to the literature, some of the benefits of state regulation on research evaluation are: a) increased productivity; b) stronger market influence, c) citizen oriented; d) stronger institutional autonomy; e) strengthening the state capacity to formulate, evaluate and decide education related policies; f) output oriented leading to .transparency and accountability (Hicks, 2010) (Kettl, 2000). Also, some advantages of PBRF found in the literature are: meritocratic; improve individual and institutional performance; competition may lead to increased efficiency; encourages research to be properly finished and disseminated; public accountability for government funds; encourages explicit research strategies; provides mechanism to link research to government policy; concentration of resources enables best departments to compete with world leaders (Iorwerth, 2005); introducing contestability to encourage research; excellence as defined by the academic elite (Hicks, 2010).

RESEARCH EVALUATION SYSTEMS: THE UK AND THE US

The three common ways by which HEIs are connected to their supporting networks (be it the government or the private sector) is through accountability, trust and markets (Iorwerth, 2005). In the US for example, the main link is the market, so HEIs are accountable and report on their research quality and productivity to their customers and partners (students, parents, alumni, and institutional partners) to build or maintain a relationship of trust. On the other hand, for EU members, including the UK, states are still responsible for most of HE funding for research and so, their main link is trust (through public funding). Yet accountability is also high here because these are advanced democracies and public opinion exerts a strong influence on political decision making. Meanwhile, in Nigeria for example, despite the fact that the main link is also trust (public funding), other variables come to play, such as corruption. Trust on the government is low and the state is generally not as accountable to the public. Also the demand for public institutions is much higher than the offer and the private sector is not as regulated as in developed countries, which leads to an unhealthy market competition (quality is disregarded here). In addition, when looking at the nature of quality, the perception of quality in HE in developing countries still tend to be that quality is exceptional (a more traditional notion of quality), rather than one that nurtures quality culture (Harvey & Green, 1993).

US: A MARKET-DRIVEN RESEARCH EVALUATION SYSTEM

The higher education system in the US is mostly composed of universities (degree granting institutions) and colleges. As of 2013, it had with approximately 7234 HEIs, of which 4706 degree granting institutions, 1738 2-years colleges and 2968 4-years college (U.S. Departament of Education, 2015). When the US government issued the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) in 1993, requiring that all federal agencies developed a 5 year strategy plan, measuring and reporting on their activities annually (COSEPUP C. o., 1999), a domino effect started to formalize the state policies related to research grants to HEIs (as concerns over audits and further review were raised). The open discussion led by the Committee on Science, Engineering and Public Policy (COSEPUP) in 1999 was reflective of the public discourse in academia and the views on how research should be evaluated: considering the differences between basic vs. applied science. According to COSEPUP the most effective way to evaluate research quality is through expert review, including different methodologies such as: quality review, relevance review and benchmarking to determine levels of quality, relevance and leadership. However, the framework for research evaluation in the HE sector in the US is more market driven and to measure and evaluate research quality performance in the US is difficult. "[Though] input control is exerted in academia, a formal periodic performance control on the basis of defined criteria (output control) is not widely used. Rather universities, such as Harvard, use the performance management method of relying on the basic principle of a thorough selection of qualified scholars (by a rigorous use of academic standards)" (Ringelhan, Wollersheim, & Welpe, 2015).
Similar to Canada, the US national government does not control the operation of HEIs, yet it does ensure the marketplace remains healthy for a productive competition among institutions. Federal funds are available for private and public institutions through open competition and regulation is strong. It is in the hand of each HEI to decide which groups of researchers (individuals or groups) deserve the opportunity to join the competition, these usually are sheltered and sponsored to do so. In a mixed system private universities and public universities (in their majority owned by their state) compete individually, however alliances are encouraged for such research proposals (as it builds competitive advantage and so, teams develop naturally, as it should be in a highly competitive and yet healthy, free market). The impact of politics is stronger on public institutions and of course, politics vary from state to state, some exert more direct control and others have a more developed regulatory framework, taxpayer support (and subsidies) also vary depending on the state. Hence a HEI in a state will experience a unique level of research evaluation depending on the different regulations it has to undergo (Capaldi, Lombardi, Abbey, & Craig, 2010).

UNITED KINGDOM: QUASI-MARKET INCENTIVE (STATE REGULATION THROUGH PBRF)

The HE profile in the UK includes app. 90 universities, 40 HEIs (teaching and research) and 22 colleges (mostly teaching) (De Boer, et al., 2015), it seems small in comparison to other countries, but the economic impact from this sector is paramount to the British economy. Such importance is clearly understood from the model adopted in the UK, where the government exerts a stronger role creating a quasi-market environment. Jacob succinctly explains the rationale of funding as incentives in research evaluation systems (Jacob, 2011) :
"The initial logic underlying science policy dictated that competitively allocated funding would focus on strategic priorities, collaboration and so on while block grant funding would be used to promote capacity building and basic research (Weinberg, 1963, 1964; Rahm et al., 2000; Stokes, 1997; Guston and Kenniston, 1994; Jacob and Hellström, 2012). This logic also fitted with the linear model of innovation that was the dominant orthodoxy. Many industrially developed countries have, however, reduced the portion of R&D funding allocated in this fashion for a number of reasons. Chief among these is the desire to increase the capacity to steer research funding more directly and to couple public research to specific societal objectives. Some countries have chosen to retain direct institutional allocations, but to make some portions of this funding performance sensitive. Thus far, most of these seem directed at increasing publication output as, despite the prevalence of rhetoric about relevance and social impact, bibliometric measures still dominate impact evaluations of research (Bozeman and Sarewitz, 2011; IDRC, 2011)."

Research Excellence Framework: enhancing research quality ?

According to De Boer (De Boer, et al., 2015) the effects of REF since its inception can be explained through three stages:

1. Selection: REF has gradually excluded funding from nationally-recognized research levels, nationally-excellent research levels, internationally-recognized and finally internationally-excellent research levels. Since 2012 only the highest levels (world-leading and world-class) have been funded.
2. Concentration: As a result, quality related (QR) funding has concentred in fewer institutions. That means now 10 out of 130 institutions receive half of the HEFCE funding (1.6£ bi), the top 4 receive app. 30% of the total funds (but this percentage has also been increasing overtime). 9 institutions (Colleges) receive no quality related funding and 49 less than a million.
3. Moderation: From the start RAE- REF has followed a trend that has ensured low funding fluctuation, so HEIs could plan themselves accordingly.

In addition, the impact of REF on faculty has been drastic, promoting competition to extremely high levels: in 1996, internationally leading departments accounted with 11% of the staff assessed, by 2001 the percentage had increased to 19%. Also, staff members rated as doing work less than nationally regarded suffered a sharp decrease, from 6,000 in 1996 to less than 700 in 2008 . This outcome was in alignment with the objectives proposed by REF and considered as a positive impact for the country, advancing UK position in the knowledge economy. Nonetheless, it can also be viewed as an indicator of how much "academic career mobility or ingression" this system allows for, with the approach of rewarding the best (and despising the rest). This not only contributes to the stratification of the research system, as it has economic implications in less developed regions, smaller cities and smaller institutions, but also reinforces social stratification in relation to research as a career choice for it is most likely only really wealthy students can afford education in the top HEIs. Regardless of REF's social impact, most importantly, many scholars have questioned whether the quality of the research being produced has really been enhanced. As Moed (Moed, 2008) has eloquently posed, "[t]he use of citation analysis should be founded on the idea that citation impact, though a most useful and valuable aspect in its own right, does not fully coincide with notions as intellectual influence, contribution to scientific progress or research quality" . Leydesdorff (Leydesdorff, 2007) complemented his idea by explaining that "[p]ublications contain knowledge claims that compete for proving their value at the level of (one or more) scientific discourses. Citations can be considered indicators of diffusion at the network level and cannot inform us about the intrinsic quality of research at the site of production. Knowledge claims in publications provide the variation" (Leydesdorff, 2007). "The emerging knowledge-based economy may have more need to stimulate variation than to increase selection pressures."

NIGERIA: LOW PREPAREDNESS

The higher education profile of Nigeria (as of 2013) had a total of 128 universities of which: 40 federal, 38 state owned and 50 private. In addition it also had 67 polytechnics and 92 colleges (Ogunkunle & Adekola, 2012). With a population of approximately 180 million people, 43% of those in the age range of 0-14 years old and 50% between 15-24 years old (CIA World Factbook, 2015), Nigeria will face intense massification of HE in the coming decades, especially as its economy grows. Ensuring quality will become a prime topic then. Currently, this is where Nigeria stand in the most well-known rankings:

Ranking 2015	University	Position
THE World University Rankings	Ibadan University	601 - 800
QS World University Rankings	0	0
Shanghai Ranking	0	0
Ranking Web of Universities (3 in the top 50 – Africa only)	Obafemi Wallow University University of Lagos University of Ilorin	25 48 50
SC Imago Institutions Ranking	0	0
U-Multirank	0	0
University-Industry Research Connections	0	0

Sources: The websites of World University Rankings, QS World University Rankings, Shangai Ranking, Ranking Web of Universities, SCImago Institutions Ranking, U-Multirank and University-Industry Research Connections (UIRC).

The rankings above are not determinants of Nigeria's research quality, since we have discussed the misleading belief of a positive correlation between quality and publication/citation (even if of high impact). However, Nigeria's HE sector is indeed performing poorly because HE has not been a priority in its government's agenda. As in many developing countries, the provision of primary and secondary education (there mostly public) requires much of the funds allocated to education. Nonetheless accountability is not new in Nigeria, as of early 90's universities already held external and internal evaluations of their academic programme, finance and HR management however research evaluation was not part of this model back then (Sanyal, 1992). Information about the model for research funding is not easily accessible, but literature indicates that most African states fund research through block grants to HEIs. In the case of Nigeria, the government has established reference points for quality enhancement and academic benchmarks based on competencies. The government also promotes private public
partnerships (PPP) envisioning the advancement of research and the HE sector as a whole (Ogbogu Christiana, 2013).

LIMITATIONS

Access to structured information regarding the research evaluation system in the US by a government agency was not easily accessible. Updated information regarding the education system in Nigeria, and policies related to performance-based research evaluations was not easily accessible.

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

PBRF systems have been adopted by 14 countries so far (De Boer, et al., 2015), so it is worth analyzing the rationale that has led many of these governments to adopt such model. For example, the UK was the first to implement this model in order to select where to invest its limited resources considering that research costs (in highly developed knowledge economies like the UK is increasing exponentially). However for example in other European countries such as Sweden the focus was on international positioning and in Spain the focus was to increase research productivity and diffusion nationally and internationally (OECD, 2010). All of these countries made their decision based on three main factors: research production status in the country, internal pressures and international positioning. Nigeria would benefit from similar analysis, taking a more conservative and pragmatic approach, looking where it is, where it wants to go and how its own research evaluation system could be designed in a way to assist its efforts to meet its visions and goals. Caution is paramount, since even developed countries fall pray of international influences and trends. Norway for example have tried for years to increase its investments in R&D to meet the standards set by OECD, comparing itself to Sweden's performance without acknowledging the importance of private demand in the dynamics of a heavily based knowledge economy (Roll-Hansen, 2009).
As new fads come and go (Public Administration, New Managerialism, New Public Administration, Governance and so on) the sphere of evaluation systems is also absorbing many of these influences (Impact factor, Impact, etc.). While deciding which research evaluation model to use Nigeria must consider its long term vision, economic and social considerations, yet it must not ignore the fact that accountability and transparency – in any form, can help to build social trust, which is lacking and in some aspects non-existent. This policy opportunity cannot be underestimated as it can enhance the development of indigenous solutions to the local problems which could bring about high profit (i.e.: there is a growing surge of great profitable inventions in developing countries – reverse innovation).

IN MORE PRACTICAL TERMS, BASED ON THE US MODEL, SOME LEARNING LESSONS FOR NIGERIA:

The government can develop evaluation model that enhances and foster reverse innovation (identify sectors, support local scientific communication and the culture of academic public, welcome media attention, support partnerships (PPP), foster Nigerian academic diaspora (i.e.: assessments could grade more points for programs of locals with leading Nigerian scholars abroad), encourage entrepreneurship. Parallel measures such as strengthening of its IP laws and scholarship programs to retain its brains would ensure sustainability.

LEARNING LESSONS FROM THE UK MODEL FOR NIGERIA:

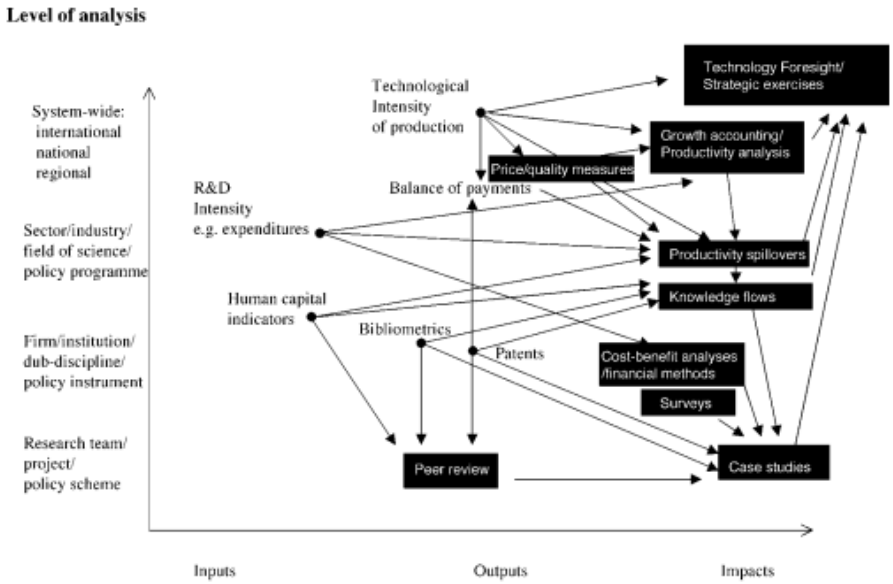
Since the most common reasoning for PBRF is research excellence, this model has a high cost and is not inductive to equity (encourage concentration) and diversity (does not afford broader goals). In the case of Nigeria though, a good aspect of adopting indicators only would be to increase productivity and diffusion of knowledge. In countries where academic publication is not a tradition this could be a productive exercise, if done in stages and offered steady and reliable funding incentives (a crucial aspect of the REF model in the UK). PBRF could also base on specific areas where research excellence could have compound impact and spin offs, based on Nigeria's strengths. In Brazil for example, Petrobras and Embraer have been sheltered and nurtured and research quality in those areas of expertise have traditionally been under stronger regulation and scrutiny (even at undergraduate level for program accreditation – as a response of strong Professional Associations).

CONCLUSION

Research evaluation systems can take place in more state-led models such as the one in the UK or more market-driven models as in the US. Research evaluation systems are important tools to help governments to direct areas of interests and expertise. However, more market-driven evaluation systems are more concerned with the longevity and protection of a strong culture of basic research (which in the US approach, is perceived as a long term process and must be free from set targets common in PBRF). Both models are a good representation of how important a self-assessment is and how pre-existing synergies, the nature of a country's main industries, the strength of its private sector and its economy history are important variables with direct impact in research outcomes. In both environments (US and the UK), the role of the government has been to strengthen its pre-existing strengths. Hence in the case of Nigeria, the high cost in more tailored research evaluation systems, the lack of a strong free market like in the US and its low preparedness may seem like impossible challenges to overcome, but Nigeria must look at them as opportunities. It is important to capitalize on successful rationales, and not necessarily adopt the same systems.

APPENDIX

Table 1. Overview of evaluation indicators & techniques for research



Source: (Kane, 2001) as cited in (Iorwerth, 2005).

Table 2. Pros and cons of current methods for evaluating research

Methods	Pro	Con
Bibliometric analysis	Quantitative; useful on aggregate basis to evaluate quality for some programs and fields	At best, measures only quantity; not useful across all programs & fields; comparisons across fields or countries difficult; can be artificially influenced
Economic rate of return	Quantitative; shows economic benefits of research	Measures only financial benefits, not social benefits (such as health-quality improvements); time separating research from economic benefit is often long; not useful across all programs and fields
Peer review	Well-understood method and practices; provides evaluation of quality of research and sometimes other factors; already an existing part of most federal-agency programs in evaluating the quality of research projects	Focuses primarily on research quality; other elements are secondary; evaluation usually of research projects, not programs; great variance across agencies; concerns regarding use of "old boy network"; results depend on involvement of high-quality people in process
Case studies	Provides understanding of effects of institutional, organizational, and technical factors influencing research process, so process can be improved; illustrates all types of benefits of research process	Happenstance cases not comparable across programs; focus on cases that might involve many programs or fields making it difficult to assess federal-program benefit
Retrospective analysis	Useful for identifying linkages between federal programs and innovations over long intervals of research investment	Not useful as a short-term evaluation tool because of long interval between research and practical outcomes
Benchmarking	Provides a tool for comparison across programs and countries	Focused on fields, not federal research programs

Source: (COSEPUP C. o., 1999) p. 19

Table 3. Best performance, evaluation system of highest impact and low preparedness: US, UK and Nigeria

Best research performance	Evaluation system with the strongest impact	Low level of preparedness
US	UK	Nigeria
Shanghai Ranking (33 out of the top 50) QS World University Rankings (18 out of the top 50) Ranking Web of Universities (33 out of the top 50) SC Imago Institutions Rankings *ranking for innovation – research ranking was not available (28 out of the top 50) THE World University Rankings (26 out of the top 50) U-Multirank and University-Industry Research Connections (UIRC) require refining for comparison, still the US is able to secure most of the first places for most of the areas.	REF is the largest research assessment in the world. To assess quality of research it applies peer review (and as of 2013 bibliometric data) through selected panels in three areas: 1) research outputs (65%); 2) the research environment (20%) and 3) impact (15%).	The choice for Nigeria was based on: location (Africa), language (English), size of population (largest in Africa), and level of preparedness (low in comparison to South Africa for example). It can be useful to understand how less developed countries can tap in the organizational developments of developed countries, what aspects are most relevant for contextualization and whether scaling PBRF is beneficial and sustainable for the long run.

GLOSSARY

Basic research: research that is successful when it discovers new phenomena, its social effect is the discovery itself making it quite independent as it poses and solves new problems, plays an enlightening role which relies on autonomy from politics and economics to perform (Roll-Hansen, 2009).
Applied research: research that is successful when it contributes to the solution of specific practical problems, the social effect of such is the recognition of those posing the problem (government, business, etc.), hence applied research has an instrumental role subordinate to politics and economics (Roll-Hansen, 2009).

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QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION: RESPONSIBILITIES OF RECEIVING COUNTRIES IN QUALITY ASSURANCCE IN CROSS-BORDER HIGHER EDUCATION

Truong Thuy, Van

ABSTRACT

The growth of cross-border higher education comes along concerns about quality issues. This essay focuses on explaining the rationale for putting more attention to receiving countries' quality assurance, given that literature in this area is rather limited and sending countries seem taking control. It also provides a summary of responsibilities that receiving countries should be able to implement in this multi-actor quality process.

DEFINITION

In this essay, the following definitions are used:

- Cross-border higher education (CBHE) - is used interchangeably with transnational higher education (TNE). The definition in UNESCO's Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education is used. 'CBHE includes higher education that takes place in situations where the teacher, student, programme, institution/provider or course materials cross national jurisdictional borders.' (UNESCO 2005);
- Receiving country is the country where the students and the partner, in the case of joint venture, are located. Other terms referred 'receiving country' in this paper are host country, importing country, recipient of CBHE;
- Sending country is the country where the institution providing cross-border higher education is located. Other terms referred to 'sending country' are home country, exporting country, provider of CBHE.

RATIONALE OF THE ESSAY

Internationalization trend has pushed forward enormous changes in higher education systems worldwide over the last twenty years. Aside from flows of students mobility is the emergence of programs and institutional mobility. Many institutions have reached out to students outside of their territories through franchising or twinning programs, branch-campuses or joint degree programs. The rapid increase in CBHE has also raised concerns about quality. There are gaps and variation in the policies of quality assurance in TNE. According to Knight (2007), the initial purpose of setting up quality assurance frameworks was to take care of domestic HE provision, but not including quality assurance in TNE. Another case study by Center for Higher Education Policies Studies (CHEPS) (Cremonini et al. 2012) also revealed that only very few quality assurance agencies have separated instruments and measurements dedicated to TNE. A survey by British Council (McNamara et al. 2013) found that a third of 25 studied countries had not had or had very limited quality assurance policies in TNE. Among countries where the quality assurance mechanisms were in place, regulations vary, making it difficult to collaborate internationally (Stella 2006). Capacity to deal with quality issues is also problematic and different from countries to countries. It was even stated that internationalization progress in HE will be no further developed if it does not deal with quality issues seriously, such as practices of quality assurance, recognition of diploma and study credits, and the equivalence of study programmes (Van Damme 2001). Quality became a central challenge and an important element to the development of TNE. It has become particularly crucial in receiving countries to assure quality of TNE. In many countries, reputation of Western education means quality (Cremonini et al. 2012). There has been fraudulent providers of TNE taking advantages of this prestige as well as the gap in the
importing countries' quality assurance regulations to provide low-quality programs with high cost, maximizing profit and disappearing from the host countries, or 'selling' degrees (Stella 2006; Cremonini et al. 2012; Knight 2006). Among different views on TNE, there is a critical view that TNE is disadvantageous for developing countries (Stella 2006), that their limited capacity to enter the global market of higher education would result in the risk of having various quality-related

issues. A good quality assurance mechanism, however, will help bring potential advantages of TNE to these countries.
However, it appears that literature on the role and responsibilities of receiving countries in TNE quality assurance is limited. Existing literature mostly discussed quality assurance in sending countries. As TNE quality assurance particularly requires the responsibilities of both ends, it is important to have a close look on that of receiving countries to provide a more comprehensive view on TNE quality assurance. This essay, through reviewing various academic articles on the topic, tries to define the roles of receiving countries in TNE quality assurance.

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN TNE AND THE ROLE OF RECEIVING COUNTRIES

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN TNE FROM PROVIDERS' VIEW

Literature shows the dominant role of sending countries in quality assurance in TNE. The review of national policies and regulations on TNE in 25 countries involving in CBHE (McNamara et al. 2013) indicated that in almost all forms of delivery, sending countries claim their responsibility to assure quality. Before that, an analysis of the codes of practices and guidelines in three major exporters of CBHE (Australia, the US, and the UK) by Smith (2010) had also shown that the home institutions rely largely on themselves in the quality process. The role of receiving countries as well as the collaborative relationship in quality assurance with their partner countries are barely considered.
The central attention of these documents is the equivalency of programs and the providers' adaptation to the local context of the receiving countries. One problem with this approach is who will be in the position to judge the 'local context compatibility' if not receiving countries. Collaboration with the receiving countries, or their host quality agencies in particular, is needed to evaluate the adaptability of a cross-border program to the local context. The UK's document even eliminates the adaptation to local practice as worrying that it might risk the consistency of the assessment. It leads to a question whether the lack of contribution from the receiving countries in the TNE quality assurance process means lower or higher quality. It is discussed in the following section.

THE ROLE OF RECEIVERS OF CBHE IN QUALITY ASSURANCE

The absence of literature of TNE quality assurance in receiving countries and the dominance of sending countries in this area do not mean receiving countries' participation and contribution in this area is not a matter. Conversely, they need to play a direct role to assure quality of CBHE, to protect students and other stakeholders in their countries from low-quality provision and spurious providers. It is because not all exporting countries have quality assurance mechanisms in TNE or not always TNE is assessed by external agencies. Some quality assurance agencies in home countries even claimed that they cannot have a careful look at quality assurance of TNE programs as the workload for domestic programs is already enormous (Stella 2006).
Furthermore, agencies in the home countries are not likely able to fully check all aspects of quality in TNE in the receiving countries due to variation in quality assurance regulations and the complexity of TNE (Stella 2006). In some countries, TNE quality assurance applies the procedures and regulations for domestic higher education programs. The problem is that non-traditional cross-border providers might not be registered in such system, such a case is commercial companies establishing their institutions in another country (Knight 2006). That means if these commercial providers establish HE programs in a country that does not have a quality assurance system in place to register these providers, such as in Sri Lanka and Russia (Nguyen & Shillabeer 2013), they are free from quality regulatory frameworks in both sending and receiving countries.
One could argue that too many regulations and quality assurance mechanisms established by different stakeholders at all levels (sending countries, receiving countries, international agencies) with different perception on quality would hinder quality process and create difficulties for the operation of cross-border institutions. Meanwhile, the other would also oppose that too many regulations or too strict regulations might make the HE market of a country less attractive to foreign providers. Though these arguments have some merit, the importance of hosting countries' active participation in the quality process is still emphasized. There would be risky to rely only on the home countries' reputation as quality, or assume that their quality monitor is efficient and sufficient enough. There would also be unrealistic to look for one single document that guide all cross-border activities internationally. UNESCO-OECD's Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border

Higher Education, for instance, is considered as recommending, not regulatory, and is certainly unable to covers in details all areas of quality assurance as well as use to fit all stakeholders' different needs (Stella 2006). It would be, however, ideal if sending and receiving nations in CBHE could collaborate in the quality assurance process. This, obviously, requires critical role of both sides.

Responsibilities of receiving countries should be emphasized, and include:

Assure the CBHE programs are suitable and useful to national development goals. In order to do so, the receiving countries first need to set clear objectives of importing education; whether there is a real need in CBHE; whether it is to complement the limited supply, to boost massification of HE, or to improve capacity of national systems through increasing cooperation and competition, or if it is due to political objectives. In some cases, CBHE is a part of bilateral or trade agreements that would ask the receiving country to adjust some regulations to facilitate the trade flow (Knight 2006), but these nations should have the right and responsibilities to determine that quality and goal orientation are achieved.

DEVELOP AN ENFORCEABLE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR QUALITY PROCESS IN TNE

As discussed throughout this essay, this is one of the most urgent requirements to deal with quality issues from TNE. In Asia, an active areas of TNE, some countries have regulated national quality assurance system for TNE, such as China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Japan, Indonesia, and Taiwan. China, for example, requires all cross-border educational activities must be in the form of joint venture with a local partner; while in Hong Kong, an institution is free to set up a programme or partnership with a local entity and required to register, except for distance programs (Knight 2006). However, there are nations with no regulation regarding cross-border HE at all, or with a limited and poorly performed one. Take an example of Vietnam: the country has issued first regulation on this topic since 2001 and a stricter one in 2012, but they are complicated and ambiguous, involving different governance layers, which results in loopholes for degree mills and rogue provision, and barriers for genuine providers to operate (Nguyen & Shillabeer 2013). It is necessary that the country established an enforceable national framework with clear responsibilities and relationship between all stakeholders in CBHE so as ongoing and incoming providers of TNE are confident to operate and students are protected. Establish registration and licensing system for TNE provision. This is particularly emphasized in UNESCO Guidelines (UNESCO 2005). It is challenging, though. Various cases poses concerns in registering and licensing (Knight 2006) such as whether it is possible to register a purely online program, or register commercial companies without presence in their home country. Assure the transparency and accuracy of information about CBHE to their students and other stakeholders. This could be done through setting up an information channel with a government body to receive and publish information on spurious provision, poor-quality programs or bogus establishment, and provide list of quality programs. It could also increase awareness and accessibility to regulations on registration, licensing, quality assurance and accreditation through formal channels, or implementation guidelines, as is done in China (Knight 2006). Collaborate with sending countries in the quality-monitoring process and promote collaborative relationship with quality assurance agencies at sending countries and with international organizations working in this field. This point is stressed in various literature (Stella 2006; Smith 2010; Knight 2006; Cremonini et al. 2012; UNESCO 2005). It is necessary to ensure the compatibility of the cross-border programs; to deal with issues of recognition of qualification and study credits; to determine the quality and validity of accreditation bodies; to detect bogus providers, degree mills, and accreditation mills; and to build mutual understanding and trust between systems. Despite of the strong need, it is rarely seen in reality. While ensuring equivalence and adaptation of the CBHE is often emphasized on the side ofsending countries, the importing counterparts seem focus on how these programmes fit and contribute to national objectives. Enhancing collaboration in quality assurance is required for both sides.

CONCLUSION

Quality issues have been one of the biggest challenges of the development of TNE as its volume and complexity grow. In this area, it appears that exporting countries are playing a prominent role. Receiving countries also need to seriously consider and be ready to take their responsibilities in assuring quality of TNE so as to protect their consumers and make the most of TNE. They should be able to consider the usefulness and suitability of TNE to their needs, develop their own regulations

on quality assurance, registration, licensing and accreditation, ensure accessible and accurate information to stakeholders, and collaborate and encourage collaboration with partner governments and quality assurance agencies.

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MOOCS AND QUALITY AS TRANSFORMATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Jon Maes

ABSTRACT

MOOCs, more formally known as Massive Open Online Courses, have attracted a lot of attention in the higher education industry despite their relatively short lifespan. Since their arrival in 2008, MOOCs have been praised by some as an innovative breakthrough while condemned by others as a harmful disruption. Embarking on a literature review that covers both sides of the debate, this essay applies Harvey and Green's (1993) notion of quality as transformation to MOOCs as a means of furthering the discussion for enhancing and empowering students' education experience.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Although heralded by some experts as one of greatest higher education innovations in recent years, MOOCs are not entirely new forms of schooling. For instance, correspondence courses were pedaled door-to-door in the United States as far back as the later part of the nineteenth century (Clark, 1906). By the 1920s, it is estimated that four times as many people were taking correspondence courses by mail than the total enrollment of students at American colleges and universities (Carr, 2012a). In fact, each major advancement in communication technology—phonograph, movies, radio, television, the computer, web 1.0—has revolutionized education for its time and invariably altered the monopoly that brick-and-mortar classrooms have enjoyed in society (Carr, 2012b).

Additionally, MOOCs in and of themselves are not a completely original phenomenon. The massification era emerging post World War II has made stadium-like auditoriums commonplace with professors giving lectures to student audiences in the hundreds to thousands, especially for undergraduate general education courses at public institutions. Other MOOC precursors include the arrival of open universities in the United Kingdoms and Canada during the 1970s as well as the Open Education Resource movement that began in the 1990s. At the same time, online learning in the United States continues to flourish with 6.7 million students taking at least one course via the Internet in 2013 compared to only 1.6 million students in 2002 (Allen & Seaman, 2013, p. 17).

However, it cannot be denied that MOOCs have their place in history. They are certainly renowned for the scale of their reach and the rapid speed of their growth. With the term "MOOC" first arriving on the scene in 2008, it only took the New York Times until 2012 to proclaim the "The Year of the MOOC" (Parr, 2013; Pappano, 2012). The title was accurately applied when considering that in less than five years the most popular MOOCs reached enrollment rates in the hundreds of thousands per course offering in partnership with reputable universities such as Harvard, MIT, and Stanford (Pappano, 2012). By 2013, Coursera alone has boasted total enrollments upwards of five million with edX reporting over a million users (Fowler, 2013).

On the other hand, MOOCs continue to receive negative press because of increasing questions of quality. Some educators speak out against MOOC saying they are ineffective and detrimental to higher education. One criticism is substantial attrition rates with many MOOCs reporting 90% or more of their registered students failing to complete the courses (Haber, 2013). There are those that contend MOOCs are expensive and time consuming to design, implement, and maintain (Saltzman, 2014). Meanwhile, there is growing backlash against MOOCs teaching methods in claiming that they are didactic, depersonalized, and incapable of replacing residential education (Marcus, 2013; Parr, 2013). These are just a few of the arguments that naysayers make against MOOCs.

Notwithstanding, there are various indicators that suggest MOOCs are not a quickly passing fad. Aside from the exponential increases in student enrollments, higher education institutions investing in MOOC technology is still on the rise with tech giants like Google joining the field (Straumsheim, 2013). Overall, the number of American colleges and universities that have MOOCs has expanded to 2.6 percent since 2008 with another 9.6 percent in the planning stage (Allen & Seaman, 2013, p. 8). While the shape and level of integration that MOOCs will take is left to be debated, it appears that MOOCs are here to stay for at least the immediate future. In this event, inquiries into the quality

of MOOCs becomes all the more imperative.

DEFINING QUALITY AS TRANSFORMATION

The theory of "quality as transformation" was coined by British scholars Harvey and Green in their 1993 scholarly inquiry Defining Quality. Despite being published over two decades ago, their insights are still held well-regarded in discussions about the quality of higher education today (Williams, 2014). Harvey and Green's primary conclusion is that quality has different conceptualizations that are dependent on the observer and the context (Harvey and Green, 1993). In other words, there is no universal definition of quality that is applicable for all higher education settings because it is relative to the processes and outcomes prescribed for the intended stakeholders. From this perspective, Harvey and Green propose "five discrete but interrelated categories" of quality as exception, perfection, fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformation (1993).

Quality as transformation observes the qualitative change that students go through because of from their studies. Applied to higher education, Harvey and Green trace this conception back to Western philosophical traditions that consider the impact learning environments have on students' cognitive transcendence or dialectical transformation. In this way, notions of quality are not limited to purely quantitative appraisals of university performance such as graduation rates, efficiency, or employability. Instead, students are the focal stakeholder in analyzing two related elements of quality as transformation. First is enhancement or the level of students' personal growth, skills development, and knowledge acquisition. Second is empowerment, which involves the amount of influence that students have over their own transformation. These two elements break from product-centered, business-type perspectives in measuring quality by the amount of value, self-awareness, and agency that students gain from their education. For example, relying less on statistical analysis of inputs and outputs by looking at a broader range of aspects such as evaluations of the learning and teaching process.

MOOCS AND THE APPLICATION OF QUALITY AS TRANSFORMATION

Through the transformative lens offered by Harvey and Green, investigations into the quality of MOOCs seek to determine the extent that students are enhanced and empowered. This includes considerations of learning and teaching as well as students' ownership in the education process. To this end, there are convincing arguments that MOOCs risk detracting value and depriving students of control over their learning.

From a pedagogical standpoint, there is no absence of reproaches against MOOCs. Even Downes and Siemens, the professors who are attributed with creating the first true MOOC, have publically denounced major MOOC providers for "simply repackaging what is already known rather than encouraging creativity and innovation" (Parr, 2013). They say newer MOOCs are no longer about experimentation and continuous improvement when the courses are composed solely of video lectures, old-style threaded discussions, and other repetitive sequences for learning, teaching, and assessment (2013).

Susan E. Lawrence, associate professor and Dean for Educational Initiatives at Rutgers University, agrees with Downes and Siemens. She charges faculty to distinguish themselves "as cultivators of the capacity for judgment and wisdom, not merely as purveyors of information" (Lawrence, 2013). Her main concern is that MOOCs disregard the traditional American undergraduate liberal arts educational mission that equips students with more than just content knowledge and occupation specific skills (2013). Higher education institutions must also give students opportunities to "grapple with enduring questions, think critically about values and beliefs…[and] practice moral decision making" to name a few of the competencies that employers are looking for (2013).

San Jose State University professor Thomas Leddy also holds the same reservations about the transformative quality of MOOCs. His concern is that the delivery methods of today's MOOCs are a threat to literacy, which he considers to be the most important value of education (Leddy, 2013). More specifically, higher education institutions are charged with preparing students to not only read critically, but also to reflect and intelligently comment on the content they are studying. This includes both oral and written responses as well as interactive activities with the professor and fellow classmates. However, these essential skills cannot be developed by automated courses that have limited to no human contact. Nor are students adequately challenged when the method of

assessment is restricted to multiple choice tests.

With these collective arguments in mind, a case can be made that the present MOOCs trend is neither enhancing nor empowering the student. MOOCs have evolved to become more massive than open with automation, standardization, and repetition replacing students at the center of the learning process. Online courses that are isolated and modularized will always have greater difficulty at adding value, which also raises related concerns for empowerment. Granted that MOOCs are open enrollment and provide diverse populations of students with access to courses that they would not be able to take otherwise. However, as Harvey and Green caution, having various education options to select from are "superficially liberating" if the courses do not provide a deep-learning experience (2013). In this respect, when MOOCs fail to challenge students intellectually or unsettle their preconceived ideas, they are not effectively facilitating students' empowerment.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Even in the face of mounting criticisms, MOOCs certainly have the capacity for achieving higher levels of quality as transformation. Even Downes and Siemens' original intentions when they created MOOCs were for an interactive and dynamic learning environment, despite recent signs indicating that these virtual classrooms are becoming more static and passive (Parr, 2013).

From the literature, the majority of pedagogical arguments against MOOCs condemn the platform without providing a viable alternative. This is not a constructive approach nor are MOOCs' deficiencies justification for the abandonment of these projects all together. As such, what can be done to improve MOOCs for greater quality as transformation? There are no easy answers to this question. In short, it is an enormous undertaking that requires a concerted effort by actors at all levels of higher education. Outlining a comprehensive set of solutions is also beyond the parameters of this written assignment.

That being said, there are two recommendation that can serve as starting points for further discussions about how MOOCs can better enhance and empower students. First is shifting the focus of away from MOOC student attrition to give more priority for repositioning students at the center of the learning process. While six figure enrollments rates turning into four figure completion rates is a cause for concern, educators and administrators still have a responsibility to the students who finish MOOCs. This includes course designs that allow for more interaction, creativity, and assessment variety. Second, is returning MOOCs to their initial purpose. Accomplishing this means higher education institutions must be mindful of their rationale behind offering MOOCs. For example, MOOCs should not be used as tools for raising student enrollments and boosting a university's brand. MOOCs should not be a cost cutting strategy for increasing the proportion of part-time, short-term professors that are detached and less invested in course outcomes. Ultimately, the closer that colleges and universities stay to the learners when planning and implementing MOOCs, the more likely that they will achieve superior quality as transformation.

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QUALITY ASSURANCE AND CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Inga Zalyevska

INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Changes in possibilities and demands of the world outside academia are increasingly challenging the relevance of university education. Knowledge and even structured learning experiences are becoming more accessible in the form of massive open online courses. At the same time, students are graduating into a more competitive environment which rewards multi-dimensional skills, personalities and professional experience – much more than might be developed through the traditional lecture and reading-based teaching. In response to this, alternative programs are springing up that prepare young people for active participation in the world. For example, the highly prestigious Thiel Fellowship provides 'a no-strings-attached grant of one hundred thousand dollars to skip college and focus on work, research, and self-education. [Fellows] are mentored by a network of visionary thinkers, investors, scientists and entrepreneurs, who provide guidance and business connections that cannot be replicated in any classroom' (The Thiel Foundation, 2013). In another similar initiative UnCollege, the graduation requirement is not a thesis but a real project that fellows need to complete under external sponsorship (UnCollege, 2013). In comparison to this, most typical university graduation requirements seem to be the more risk-averse option.

There is an argument to be made that quality assurance, especially in accreditation mode, perpetuates the same model of higher education. Some of the typical indicators of quality are the number of professors with terminal degrees, student to faculty ratios, student workload, etc. These indicators reflect the age-old assumption that a PhD-holder is the most valuable mentor, and the more time spent on task the better the outcome – lectures, reading and writing being the most common tasks called on to fulfill all sorts of learning outcomes. There is validity to this learning model, but it is also losing its value in face of rising costs and available non-university alternatives. The purpose of this paper is to see whether quality assurance challenges universities to reinvent themselves and respond to changing circumstances or, instead, ties them down to old ways. I will look at academic research on this issue, the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance and analyze some of the best practices from European Higher Education Area.

QUALITY ASSURANCE AS A HINDRANCE TO INNOVATION

In 2009 Peter Williams, former Chief executive of the Quality Assurance Agency in the UK, told the World Innovation Summit for Education that most accreditation systems are designed 'to try to ensure guaranteed and replicable outcomes to minimize risks of unacceptable variability in quality of standards', and thus stifle innovation in higher education (cited in Baty, 2009). The relationship between innovative practices in higher education and quality assurance was also the main theme for the annual European Quality Assurance Forum in the same year. One of the plenary speakers Bjorn Stensaker described how standardization and innovation are both a response to changes in the higher education environment. On the one hand, external political pressure and professionalization of higher education call for standardization and, thus, increasing similarity of the sector. On the other hand, the need to adapt to market needs and find a niche in order to compete successfully for students requires higher education institutions (HEIs) to become innovative in their offerings (Stensaker, 2009). At the same time, the stronger the market pressures for higher education providers to innovate and diversify, the stronger the political need to protect students from offerings that do not meet the definition or standard of higher education.

There are several studies pointing out that quality assurance is moving in the direction of stricter accountability. Report from European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA, 2008) established that most quality assurance agencies use a combination of two control-focused methods – evaluation and accreditation, with audit (considered a more flexible and enhancement-oriented approach) used only at a small minority of agencies. There are analyses at country level to the same effect. Hodson and Thomas (2003) analyzed the UK experience in quality assurance and concluded that universities are being increasingly pushed towards compliance with uniform external standards. They argue that external quality assurance was born out of the circumstances of the 1990's when expansion of the higher education sector made it necessary to

assure uniform standards, but this approach is not necessarily conducive to quality enhancement required for the new millennium.

A team of authors from the University of Antwerp looked at how an accreditation process taken too seriously inhibits creative reflection about core educational principles and processes of the administration. In Flanders, the peer review was the only method of quality assurance before 2005 when accreditation was added into the legislation. Under the added pressure of gaining or losing formal accreditation, the initial guidelines and standards for quality assurance have evolved into detailed listings of criteria. The authors observe that the preparation for the review panel turned into checking off a list of requirements and inventing ways for concealing drawbacks – 'there was an apparent fear to have a fundamental debate about a common understanding of the programme's basic principles' (Knoors, 2009, p. 37).

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND CHANGE IN THE ESG

The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) (ENQA, 2005) are now widely accepted throughout Europe by universities in designing their internal quality assurance systems and by agencies in carrying out external evaluations. Although intended as a most general guidance to be adapted to national circumstances, the ESG is perhaps the best source to look at in order to understand the overall philosophy of quality assurance across EHEA.

The term 'quality assurance' is used in ESG to include all three methods – evaluation, accreditation and audit. There is, thus, a spectrum of control that quality assurance implies here. At the same time, one of the basic principles in ESG is that quality assurance processes, in whatever form, should not stifle creativity and innovation. Beyond this basic principle, however, there is no further emphasis on whether or not innovation should be a regular process in the university strategy and practice. In other words, ESG are general enough to allow educational innovation but they do not explicitly recommend it as an element of quality. There is also no mention of benchmarking against other, non-university educational programmes, and in general, ESG assume a rather inward-looking perspective for the higher education sector. This is, perhaps, in line with the objectives of the document, since the original intention was to bring a European dimension to quality assurance and generally unify principles and practices in quality assurance of HEIs across the Bologna signatory countries.

The original edition of ESG was intended as a work in progress, and it is currently being revised following the publication of the report on the implementation and application of the ESG. A new declaration for the Context, Scope and Purposes of the ESG was agreed upon in February 2013, and it seems that the new Guidelines are meant to respond to new challenges to higher education, rather than solely the challenge of Europeanization in quality assurance (ESG Steering Group, 2013). The document discusses 'the demand for better skills and competencies', 'diversity in the student population', and the need for 'a fundamental shift in the provision of higher education', 'embracing flexible learning paths and recognizing competencies gained outside formal curricula'. In essence, there is recognition of the changed context that higher education institutions find themselves in, something that was not emphasized in the original ESG, and perhaps there will be more explicit discussion of educational innovation in the new edition of the Guidelines (expected in April 2015).

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND INNOVATION: BEST PRACTICES

UNIVERSITY OF ANTWERP

There are also examples of innovation-driven thinking in quality assurance, usually at the level of individual institutions and programs. For example, the University of Antwerp discussed above was prompted by the implementation of the formal accreditation system to improve its quality management system at the institutional level. Quality is now dealt with through the Working Group for Innovation and Quality Assurance and through faculty cells for innovation and quality assurance in education. It is interesting to note that educational innovation and quality assurance go side by side at the university. Innovation in education is also supported through the research done at Center of Excellence for Higher Education and by the university's Fund for Educational Development.

EIT

A forerunner in assuring innovation in its programs through quality assurance is the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). It delivers a brand of education that draws its relevance from societal and business needs, and explicitly integrates the three sides of the knowledge triangle – education, research and business-oriented innovation. The quality assurance system designed for accreditation and evaluation of EIT labeled programs is centered around three questions – whether business and education are linked in best possible ways, whether the best ways of teaching for creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship are employed, and whether optimal conditions are created for integrating students' experiences from business into research and innovation (Adamson, 2012).

There is a deliberate emphasis on innovation in education delivery. The core concepts in this respect are active learning and fit-for-purpose assessment. The EIT label presupposes active learning in contrast to traditional modes of teaching (e.g. lectures), as well as the ability to reflect on practical experience. In other words, active learning, according to EIT, is not just traditional learning with a few practical elements, but the kind of learning that develops both practical skills and the ability to theorize about practical experience. Fit-for-purpose assessment is the type of assessment that is relevant in both content and form. The EIT quality assurance looks for assessment methods that provide evidence of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship, as opposed to the traditional academic writing only, especially when it comes to thesis.

A common aspect in EIT vision and that of the University of Antwerp is that quality assurance and research on innovation in education are linked together. EIT is committed to research on teaching for the knowledge triangle and implementing the results in its programs, as well as disseminating these research results across EHEA.

CONCLUSION

This brief look at academic literature, European Guidelines and best practices by specific institutions shows that there are multiple aspects to the relationship between innovation in education and quality assurance. First of all, there is an agreement that quality assurance in the form of accreditation is necessary in times of massification, but runs the risk of inhibiting diversity and innovation in education if it devolves into a list of 'check-off' requirements. There are a few voices in the academic literature that are warning against the increasing focus on accountability and, thus, a mechanistic approach to quality assurance in EHEA.

In order for a quality assurance system to push an educational institution forward, it needs to be itself based on awareness of changes in educational landscape and societal demands, as well as on cutting-edge research in educational practice. When the relevance of university education itself is challenged, it is not enough to simply assure that a program provides, for example, the necessary number of lecture hours by qualified professors. This might keep universities doing the old things right, but not necessarily doing the right things. For these reasons, quality assurance systems at the University of Antwerp and the European Institute of Technology are linked to research on education. There is also a shift of focus in the European Standards and Guidelines on Quality Assurance from unification of standards to an acknowledgement of the profound changes in higher education.

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UNIVERSITY RANKING: 'A TRUE QUALITY EVALUATION TOOL OR A MISLEADING INDICATOR ?'

Rediet Abebe

ABSTRACT

This essay addresses the controversies surrounding university ranking systems. Arguments supporting the capability of rankings to operationalize and appraise quality using various indicators are made side-by-side with the critics that seriously attack its methodological biases and hence endorse its unwanted consequences as outweighing its benefits. This essay however identifies a compromise of these extreme points by outlining the need to make improvements to rankings for the advantage of higher education. Finally, it concludes by stressing that people in no way should take ranking results for granted and rely on them; rather to be skeptical and see them as one out of a number of tools used to assess higher education quality. The challenges of any attempt to measure quality as well as the greater likelihood of burgeoning ranking practices despite critics and shortcomings are also indicated.

INTRODUCTION

Now a day, different forms of university rankings have been increasingly gaining in importance around the world. The initial attempts emerged in the US in the early 1980s as a “consumer guide” targeting domestic academic leaders, students, rating agency, policy makers and other stake-holders (Liu and Cheng, 2005). It took a little more than two decades before the Shanghai Jiao Tong University made the first truly global university ranking (Rauhvargers, 2011). Today, there are various types of rankings based on purpose, the parameters measured, the presentation of the results or intended impact and others. This is because economic success and social progress are increasingly becoming dependent on knowledge and innovation, thereby resulting in a seemingly rising future importance.

However, rankings have always been one of the most disputed issues on higher education in media, political circles and academic community. Ranking groups often argue that rankings are more ‘objective’ measures enabling correspondence between the condition of ‘quality’ and the place of universities in ranking tables. Critics yet claim, measuring quality is rather difficult and if not, impossible, that ranking results, especially in the case of global league tables, greatly count on how indicators are chosen, and the way specific weights are assigned to them. The non-neutrality of the very concept of quality and the subsequent claims of accurate quality or excellence appraisals based on various less or more proxy gauging instruments also fall to the argued dark sides of the phenomenon.

Nevertheless, students, parents, media, politicians, different stakeholders and the society at large, often like the hierarchical positioning of universities in league tables and thus firmly believe that each universities positioned above are essentially ‘better’ than their counterparts below. Besides, growing interest in ranking results has been impacting the course of universities functioning: it has now become increasingly indispensable, for universities to appear ‘successful’, to achieve improvements particularly in those aspects that are relevant in rankings.

This essay, therefore, presents a detail discussion of this controversy and moves further to shading light on a possible compromise and a concluding remark. Relevant literatures and internet sources are consulted in an effort to present a clear picture of the arguments beyond reasonable doubt.

UNIVERSITY RANKING AS A TRUE QUALITY EVALUATION TOOL

The growing relevance of knowledge brought changes with regard to what is generally referred to as a “quality agenda”. Controlling compliance with standards of quality is now going out of the hands of academia-controlled self-regulation into legal and institutional arrangements. With this regard, rankings have been playing a role of key differentiator between legitimate institutions and programs. The quality concept is operationalized with the help of quality indicators and proxies. These include the alumni and staff winning major international awards, highly cited researchers in major research

fields, articles published in selected top journals, articles indexed by major citation indexes, and performance per capita. The data used to produce academic rankings is collected from various sources. Surveys and publically available information allow extracting opinions from various stakeholders, government agencies and various agencies involved in higher education and research. Data collected from Bibliometric/Scientometrics data bases, internet sources, and data collected from higher education institutions (HEIs) themselves enable capture the picture of institutional governance and research performance. The function of all these elements empowers rankings to genuinely appraise quality and be able to tell 'where' it is found and not. Besides indicating significant aspects of quality, development and use of quantified information through rankings provide a number of international significance presented below.

SHARED CRITERIA ON QUALITY APPRAISAL

The increasing acceptance and popularity of rankings encouraged the adoption of agreed definitions and compliance with agreed international standards at a more global context. This extends to issues regarding those aspects on which data is collected to appraise quality of higher education. It also paved the way for collaborative learning and sharing good practices.

INFORMATIONAL VALUE AND COMPARISON

Rankings provide the public with information and evidence on the standing of HEIs for individual or group decision making thereby enabling countries to gain a better insight into the performance of their own systems by way of comparing themselves with others. It also enables institutions to benchmark their own performance.

COMPETITION AND IMPROVEMENT

General rankings foster international initiative for competition and hence stimulate evolution of centers of excellence by serving as leverage to do higher education in more effective and innovative ways (Green Paper, and Sadlak, 2012). It serves to prompt improvement in teaching/learning, and research practices.

POLICY MAKING AND ALLOCATION OF FUND

When passing decisions on the allocation of resources or the structure of higher education systems, policy makers at national and regional level are increasingly taking ranking results into consideration (Rauhvargers, 2011). Rankings also initiate broader institutional and international discussions about what constitutes success and how it can be better documented and reported so that policies can be made based on verifiable evidences.

UNIVERSITY RANKING AS A MISLEADING INDICATOR

Despite their popularity for measuring quality and sorting results in simple formats, many have made strong arguments questioning rankings, and pointed out several reasons why rankings have been, on the contrary, claimed to be rather misleading quality appraisal tools. The overview of some major critics is presented as follows.

METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS: HOW FAR CAN WE TRUST INDICATORS ?

Prior to combining all the individual indicators into a composite score, they are subjected to a mathematical operation to make them dimensionless in effect creating a rather indirect link to what they supposed to have measured. In the process, based on their subjective judgments regarding which indicators are more important, ranking providers assign varying weights to indicators reflecting their own version of the quality conception (Rauhvargers, 2011). In addition, the fact that most indicators are proxies to aspects of true quality (e.g. measuring the quality of education by the number of alumni winning Noble Prizes in the sciences) results in a misleading and often non-objective ranking results with scores that usually are not the indicator value themselves but something else.

BIASES: MISSION, FIELD, LANGUAGE, PUBLICATION, SIZE, SCOPE, PEER REVIEW

Mission

According to Montesinos, Carot, Miguel, and Mora (2008), though universities have three fundamental mission (teaching/learning, research, and transfer of knowledge to society), rankings have been disproportionately addressing the second mission while partially covering the first, and hardly ever deal with the third. Such approaches therefore are bound to plant the seeds of skepticism in the minds of people as they fail to portray an accurate and comprehensive picture of the quality of a particular higher education institution.

Field and Scope

Most rankings are said to emphasize on institutions that specialize in natural sciences and medicine over those that are centers of social sciences, humanities and arts. Comparing quality between disciplines is fraught with difficulties since measures of quality are better aligned with some disciplinary pedagogical practices than others (Gibbs, 2010). Besides, world universities fail to obtain equal chance of being included in rankings as most league tables limit accessibility by ranking only few top institutions. The diversity of ranking systems is eventually doubtful.

Language, Publication, and Size

With English being an international language of the world of academia, global rankings favor English speaking scholars, publications and universities over non-English speaking ones. This has been the whole mark of bibliometric indicators. Even worse, large size institutions, and older publications have also been better incorporated in rankings than small institutions and recent and book publications.

Peer Review

Peer reviews as reputation surveys are also not free from biases as they often suffer from high unresponse rate; restricted to pre-prepared lists omitting out many universities and even whole countries; and the fact that the already built up reputation of institutions can influence the opinion of ‘peers.’

TRANSPARENCY ISSUES

Critics with this regard, center at lack of sufficient information on the identity of the ranking provider, the aims of particular ranking, and the target groups (Rauhvargers, 2011). Descriptions of methodologies are as well simplified making it difficult to understand what is actually being measured; how is the indicator value calculated from the raw data; how is final score calculated from indicator results and others.

IMPROVING QUALITY OR IMPROVING QUALITY POSITIONS ?

Universities, in the effort to improve their ranking situation, fall under strong internal and external temptation to make every effort to boost performance particularly on those aspects which are appraised by ranking indicators. This results in a more partial and rather surface level improvement on the part of HEIs following ranking results.

DISEASE TO OTHERS

As discussed earlier, rankings mostly tend to evaluate institutions by their research standards as a result they indicate a few ‘best’ hundred universities in the world. This however created a “social disease” a need to be ranked, for many well-functioning ‘normal’ universities which simply do their job (Sadlak, 2012). Eventually, judging higher education using the principle of quality assurance and the ‘fitness for purpose’ principle has been missing.

COMPROMISE

After presenting the central themes of arguments on both the bright and dark sides of university rankings, the essay here looks for a compromise in the effort to make a more realistic case. By now

it is clear that though serious criticisms against rankings' capability as a genuine quality evaluation tool, they are at the same time increasingly popular systems. Cognizant of this, the focus now therefore should be on how to correct mistakes and properly utilize rankings.
Regarding this, challenging tasks of improving ranking aspects lay ahead. Rankings should recognize that though shared objectives, no shared operational definition exist for 'equality'. Using terms such as excellence, reputation, recognition, fame, brand, and others denoting higher education quality therefore should be abandoned as they are misleading concepts. The Harvey and Green (1993) that quality is relative and often means different thing to different people is used to supplement this position. Sadlak (2012) also stressed that "collection of comparable data is feasible but it must be conceptually well-anchored and be based on mutual trust and shared objectives."
The other thing to seriously consider is the need to improve ranking methodology. The Green Paper clearly explained this concern as follows;
"Well-chosen metrics and indicators can provide effective tools for decision-making, based on each institution's strategic goals rather than a global conception of what an excellent university should be. If rankings are to be used, then they need to be within coherent sets of comparable universities, and choosing baskets of metrics, from the full set, that accurately reflect the nature of their engagements with society" (2008: 20).

In order to capture a more comprehensive view of higher education quality, fair assessment of HEIs regardless of their specialization, mission, size and language area is crucial. Sufficient information on the ranking purposes and goals; design and weighting of indicators; collection and processing of data; and presentation of ranking results helps improve transparency.
Furthermore, evaluation of ranking agencies themselves on a regular basis helps ensure the adequacy of their resources and the fairness and relevance of their impact on institutions (Vardar, 2010). Finally, progress in all these aspects enhances rankings' capability to initiate and promote genuine quality improvements, not just improving ranking positions, on the part of HEIs.

CONCLUSION

University ranking is a new phenomenon that is storming the realm of higher education quality. Despite different types, rankings generally indicate quality and excellence by means of arranging institutions in a particular order. However, the essay presented important controversies surrounding it. On the one hand, it showed that rankings operationalize the concept of quality and use a range of indicators that enable genuine assessment and provide a number of additional benefits. On the contrary, many attack rankings as non-objective, equipped with ill methodology, non-comprehensive, and lacking transparency which in effect makes them rather misleading. Acknowledging the relevance of these extremes, the essay argued for a possibility of compromise through outlining the need to improve ranking systems for the benefit of higher education. Therefore, people should be cautious about any ranking and should not rely on them either. Instead, people should use rankings simply as one kind of reference and make their own judgment about ranking results based on ranking methodologies. Rankings may be a good measure of quality as exception or excellence; however, overlooks other crucial conceptions of quality including 'fitness for purpose,' process quality, and transformation. Adding to these is skepticism of whether the quantitative methods of ranking can effectively show the conditions of aspects that can only be explained qualitatively.
In the end, it is important to always bear in mind that measuring quality is a challenging task as there are no commonly agreed conceptions of the subject. Trends indicate that the number of rankings is likely to keep growing and become specialized despite mounting critics.

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IS QUALITY AN 'EMPTY SIGNIFIER' OR A 'USEFUL VEHICLE OF CONTINUING IMPROVEMENT' ?

Ayenachew A. Woldegiyorgis

ABSTRACT

Is quality an ‘empty signifier’ or a ‘useful vehicle of continuous improvement’? This is only one of the multitude of questions and debates that still stand open around quality in the realm of higher education. Attempting to answer this question, one would be obliged to consider and examine a number of other questions, issues, arguments and debates related to the subject of quality. The question can be split in to two separate arguments. One argument is that quality, particularly in higher education, is a term that does not actually stand for anything concrete; rather it is an empty signifier with no practically identifiable mechanisms. The contrary argument, on the other hand, advances that quality uses empirical data, justifiable models and practical tools to deliver continuous improvements.
This paper first takes a panoramic look at the contending views, outstanding debates and questions in relation to quality in higher education with the purpose of establishing the ground from which the two arguments emerge. It then attempts to explain the two arguments at hand by using available literature. And finally concludes by arguing that the two are not the only possible ways to look in to the issue. Rather, relevance to context, balance between short term and long term results and the right choice of organizational mechanisms would determine the value and contribution of a quality process.

VIEWS ON QUALITY

Over the past few decades, quality has become one of the most frequently used but, perhaps, least understood words in the world of higher education. Quality has always been and continues to be a highly debated concept from its basic definition to its application and benefits. For some – the relativists – like aesthetics, it is on the eyes of the beholder; for others – the objectivists – it has specific attributes that can be consistently identified and transferred from one scenario to another. Its slippery nature is well illustrated in the very popular words of Pirsig (1974 sited in Mishra, 2006) in which he says that quality is something you know and you don’t know at the same time, something you feel but cannot describe, something you are not sure of its existence because you cannot explain it, something that you know it exists because you feel some things are better than others.

Having come from the manufacturing industry, quality has diffused in to almost every sector. In the initial days, in the United States and Japan statistical approaches, mathematical formulations and scientific modeling ruled the domain (Hogg & Hogg, 1995). Nonetheless, its adaptation in to the HE sector has fallen short on taking the proper shift in definition and its modes of application; it has been shallow and thinned by the exercise of academic freedom (Largosen et al, 2004).

The attempt to define quality and to create a common understanding of what it constitutes has continued in different ways. A more comprehensive understanding of quality has been given by Harvey and Green (1993) who identified five different approaches to defining quality. Quality as exceptional (exceeding high standards and passing a required standard); quality as perfection (exhibited through “zero defects” and “getting it right the first time”, making quality a culture); quality as fitness for purpose (meaning the product or service meets the stated purpose, customer specifications and satisfaction); quality as value for money (through efficiency and effectiveness, return on investment); and quality as transformation (in terms of qualitative change). Similarly, Mirsha (2006) has put forward an overall view on quality where the whole concept of quality revolves around few central ideas: quality as absolute (the highest possible standard), quality as relative (can be described in relative terms), quality as a process (conformity to the procedural requirements), and quality as culture (each entity is concerned and acknowledges the importance of quality).

On the contrary, Badley (1993) argued that there is no need to look for a simplistic definition of quality in HE. He claims that:

“What the university doesn't need, in my view, is a simplistic definition of quality. Quality is one of those especially slippery and empty terms which confuse us when we try to pick out a set of defining characteristics. Quality is what philosophers call 'an essentially contested concept', its contestedness coming from its being descriptively or cognitively weak at the same time as it is emotively powerful. Its status is high, its prestige is great, its trouble-making and mystifying character is immense and yet its meaning is elusive and vague. Why should we chase this chimera? It is a term which we hardly used or needed even five years ago in any of our discussions about education or teaching or learning. Indeed in our old elite system of higher education the prevailing term used to be excellence and we all thought we knew what that meant and where we could get it” (p.23).

These different notions of quality, and the existence of no agreement even on the need for a definition, have led some scholars (such as Reeves and Bednar, 1994 sited in Mirsha 2006) to conclude that the search for a universal definition of quality has been unsuccessful. Here, one can note that the concept of quality is amorphous that can only be understood contextually.

Regardless of the continuing effort and the large volume of emerging literature, the concept of quality remains surrounded by a number of questions still unresolved: What does quality exactly mean? How can quality be assessed/managed/improved? What does it specifically focus on? In the organizational system, where is the locus of control for quality? Should quality come from above or from below? Should quality be assessed/controlled by internal or external mechanisms? What should the relationship between academia and the management be like in pursuing quality? Etc. The confusions, the complexities and the unresolved questions give a way for different debates and arguments regarding quality in higher education.

QUALITY AS AN ‘EMPTY SIGNIFIER’

The claim that quality in higher education has become an empty signifier – standing for nothing more than repetition of some technical words with no particular and realistic effect – is based on two fundamental uncertainties. The first one is the lack of clarity about the very concept of quality itself. As long as there is no clear and explainable understanding of the concept, it is unlikely that it can be brought to the ground to produce any tangible effect. The varying notions and open questions set forth above make it difficult to arrive at a clear articulation of what is meant by quality and what it does in the higher education sector. While there is a discernible inclination to the fitness for purpose definition of quality, particularly in public higher education institutions, Turner (2011) argues that this rather simply begs a set of questions relating to purpose than answering the one about quality: “Does a large organization like a university have a single purpose? Is the purpose of a university constant over time? And whose purpose is important in assessing quality?” (p.1). The answers to all of these questions are highly disputed, and therefore, the time and effort spent attempting to define the purpose of the university may probably end up being useless in helping to understand the meaning of quality. Hence, all in all, the signification that goes with the term quality is perceived in many different ways by different people. At times the interpretations are incomprehensible. Quality could mean anything; and, in a way, meaning anything is equivalent to meaning nothing.

The other basis for this argument is, again, the lack of clarity with regard to what exactly should the focus of quality be in higher education. According to Westerheijden (2007), quality assurance systems appear in a confusing multitude of forms, with different goals, coverage, organizational setting, etc. Systems significantly vary in terms of their focus on teaching, research or community service as well as their emphasis on input, processes or output. Badley (1993) extends on the confusion in the definition of quality and elaborates that the point of focus is dislocated. He sees that the debate about quality in higher education is often “bogus and simplistic” (p.23). It is bogus not only because the central issues of higher education – good teaching and learning – are indirectly addressed but also because it is preoccupied with creating bureaucratic structures for quality assurance. The debate is also simplistic because it picks up the generic ‘fitness for purpose’ definition as a common meaning to resolve the prevailing confusion without sufficient discussions to arrive at a consensus.

Harvey (1999) also stressed the misconception of quality as a managerial rhetoric. The dominant ‘delegated accountability’ approach to quality which is focused on processes has resulted in skeptic views on the productive value of quality in building institutional quality culture, even where

procedures for quality are set in place, though not explicitly stated so. He gives the example of institutions where there is a well-developed culture of dialogue between teaching staff and students with outcomes in a form of amendment of course content, teaching style and assessment procedures. However this often goes unnoticed as a quality process because it falls short of the formalism commonly required.

It is argued that external evaluation, in particular, reaffirms the status quo and fails to address important issues about the nature of learning. External quality evaluation is over-concerned with methods and procedures that it has essentially overlooked substantial researches in to learning theory, the nature and style of learning, and classroom innovations (Harvey, 2002). Badley goes on even further arguing that, quality could be just a fashionable word used for the sake of making catchy reports in line with the interests of funding agencies. He underlines that the creation of quantifiable performance indicators does not guarantee a solution for the quality problem – "a collection of performance indicators is just a collection of data; and it remains meaningless unless the data is used along with educational values and principles in order to make educational judgments" (Badley, 1993, p. 24). In general, quality in higher education is a very fluid concept. Though it has undergone remarkable changes over the past few decades there is still no consensus about the concept as well as its practical application. Hence, it remains unpredictable, because the future will be, as Williams (2009, p.48) puts it, "determined by events which are unknowable at present".

QUALITY AS 'USEFUL VEHICLE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT'

On the other side of the quality debate, one can see the growing favor for quality, its far reaching application and a number of studies suggesting and explaining the benefits of quality as a means to ensure continuous improvement in higher education. Owing to the growth in application, emergence of national regional and international institutions [and networks] and increased research in quality, many more models and specific tools are emerging, making practical applications more concrete and commonly understood.

Quality in higher education has evolved from a state of vague concept to a set of clearly articulated practical procedures that are crucial in hosting continuous improvement and accountability at institutional and system level (Harvey, 1999). It has also been noted that quality in higher education is becoming more and more linked to strategic priorities and developing sustainable schemes, which Stensaker (2007, p.59) described as a development towards an era "where a more realistic understanding of what quality assurance and quality processes can or cannot do is prevailing". In other words, it is apparent that the quality process has resulted in the emergence of formal written guidelines for what actions could be taken in what situations. It has also made informed decision making possible through systematic application of data and information on issues such as performance, relevance and quality (Brennan & Shah 2000).

Besides, the availability of data regarding different aspects of institutional activities along with the greater promotion of stakeholder involvement through the quality process, has made it possible to open up the ´black box´ of higher education and to build a more collaborative and transparent institution (Stensaker, 2007). This, on the other hand, has not only made higher education institutions more consistent and predictable, but it also provides them with the opportunity to create a marketing and branding tool through their quality process (by articulating their goals, strategies and performances).

Through the use of different modes, (i.e. self-evaluation, best practices benchmarking, external quality monitoring, peer review, analysis of statistical information and/or use of performance indicators, surveys of students, graduates, employers and professional bodies), quality process serves a variety of purposes: promotes competition, ensures customer satisfaction, guarantees maintenance of standards, ensures accountability, creates credibility, prestige and status, and improve employee morale and motivation (Mishra, 2006).

Generally, the world of competition demands that higher education institutions continuously improve themselves to meet changing requirements of stakeholders. And that is possible only when they have a system that is used to diagnose their status quo and indicate ways of improvement – a quality process. According to Harvey (1999), the improvement function of quality process is to encourage institutions to reflect upon their current state and to develop what they have to do.

Kowalkiewicz (2007), taking the case of Polish higher education, has affirmed that there is a strong positive correlation between quality culture and quality of teaching. Similarly, Hogg & Hogg (1995) generally argued that a higher education institution can continuously improve by applying techniques of quality management, in particular Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI). Taking several examples from a number of US universities and colleges, they put forward practical suggestions that help continuous quality improvement applied across the spectrum of university, college, department and individual levels. They suggested some practical mechanisms that can improve quality using relevant statistical tools, such as: improving non academic student services, curricular improvements, working to increase collegiality within departments, promoting discussion related to CQI, needs to improve academic advising on a grass-roots level, beginning team projects soon after reading and learning the basics, course and methodology improvements, and personal and professional improvements for individuals.

In a nutshell, this argument maintains that quality in higher education has models that can be applied to serve specific purposes that relate to overall improvement. Quality process also uses a number of tools (e.g. process flow chart, graphs, Pareto analysis, fish-bone diagram, scatter diagram, check sheets, control charts) that signify the practicality of the whole process.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Generally there are two contending views on the role of quality (quality process) in higher education. One is that the term quality stands to be very ambiguous and represents no particular methodology or practical tool. It rather exists as simple rhetoric that focuses on things other than the actual substantive element of what higher education institutions do. The counter argument holds that quality processes are used to improve institutions and higher education systems at large by diagnosing weaknesses and suggesting practical mechanisms of correction. The fact that competition is ever growing and stakeholders are posing more complex and dynamic demand entails that higher education institutions have no choice but to continuously improve by engaging stakeholders and incorporating their inputs. To that effect the quality concept has grown clearer and more practical; it has become more integrated with strategic priorities and uses specific tools and techniques to diagnose and to rectify problems.

As elaborated in the previous sections, there are a score of scholars on both sides of the arguments. Nonetheless, it can also be argued that the truth in both of these arguments counts only to some extent. Context is the most important factor. In other words, the relevance and quality of a quality process depends on how well it takes a consideration of the respective contexts, and how well it balances between short term outcomes vis-à-vis long term benefits within the context.

[Higher] education being a service that is embedded with socio cultural values, political ideologies, philosophical virtues and the pride of sovereignty, it is hardly possible to forge a universal definition and practice of quality in higher education that works everywhere. Therefore, all questions and debates pertinent to quality have to be addressed within the respective contexts. Different systems have different meaning and approach towards quality. As Parri (2006) puts it, while in some countries the emphasis is on the consistent development of quality, the establishment of minimum standards takes precedence in other systems. It has to also be noted that quality in higher education is affected by strongly interdependent factors and to obtain the most sufficient assessment of quality, one has to consider as many factors as possible that appear to be relevant to the issues at hand.

Another important point to take in to consideration is that whether or not a quality system fosters a practical continuous improvement depends on how holistic and far-sighted it is. A disintegrated system that uses uncoordinated approach by different bodies will have such a chaos in its implementation that every concerned entity will have its own point of emphasis which leads to not only waste of resources, but also to the dissatisfaction of employees (and possibly other stakeholders) who later become nemesis to quality. Besides, falling victims to ‘naive realism’, it is not uncommon for policy makers to look for an oversimplification of complex concepts like quality (Costantinos, 2005). In doing so, they disproportionately focus on short term outcomes which happen at the expense of the long term benefits. That is another quintessential cause for the failure of quality in higher education.

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EXTERNAL EXAMINER: INSPECTOR OR CRITICAL FRIEND ?

Krisztina Jaksa

INTRODUCTION

The title of the paper was borrowed from the Higher Education Academy's handbook for external examiners and it is pursued further in this paper as it was left unanswered. The paper sets out to explore the main characteristics of quality assurance (QA) and quality enhancement (QE) and consequently the word QA is replaced with the word 'inspector' and the word QE with the word 'critical friend. In this context the External Examiner system is analysed in order to determine the nature of the relationship between External Examiners (EE) and higher education institutions (HEIs).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK IN THE UK

Universities in the UK have enjoyed a long tradition of autonomy and while the state intervention has been increasing in the last 30 years English Universities are still viewed to be relatively independent of the government when compared to many European countries (de Boer, 2007). However, this autonomy has increasingly been calling for more accountability measures. In addition, the last 30 years saw the transformation of the HE sector which from catering 6% of the population under 21 became responsible for educating 43% of those aged 18 to 30 to date (Deem 2004, p. 109). The demand for quality assurance (QA)became paramount when the sector saw a rapid expansion in 1992 when, through the Further and Higher Education Act, polytechnics were granted university status.
In response to these changes, the independent body Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), through the merger of existing entities with a quality assurance focus, was established in 1997 to safeguard quality across the sector. Its purpose has changed significantly since its inception; its current focus being on "examining the internal quality assurance systems at institutional level" (Lewis, 2012) and has been increasingly focusing on maintaining minimum standards through institutional audits. The main principles of QA in the UK are promoted by the Higher Education Academy and laid out in the 'Quality Code' promoted by the QAA.

The External examiner system is a component of the current QA framework; it has been in place since the 1880; which framework has gradually gained more importance until in 2012 it was identified as one of the most important element within QA framework. Chapter B7 of the The Quality Code states that "External examining provides one of the principal means for maintaining UK threshold academic standards" (p.2). EE are independent of the institution they inspect although at the same time they are selected and employed by them. Their main remit is to maintain threshold academic standards, to ensure that the assessment process is fit for purpose and that standard for a given academic level is comparable across the sector and to enhance quality (Quality Code, Chapter 7, 2012, p.7).

QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA) AS AN INSPECTOR AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT (QE) AS A CRITICAL FRIEND

A joint report by QAA, HEFCE and HEA "Quality enhancement and assurance – a changing picture?" in 2008 on the developments in QE and QA in the sector identified a shift from QA towards QE, a shift from audit checking towards a more developmental approach in the UK. To see what this development means the paper explores the characteristics of QA and QE.

QE is related more to the notion of reflection (Gvaramadze, 2008, p.448), it is seen as culture in which all activities have a QE element and continuous learning is encouraged (Gordon and Owen, 2009). It is viewed to be a continuous improvement where "quality enhancement means a constant effort to improve the quality of programme design, implementation and delivery" (Filippakou and Tapper 2008, p. 450). QE initiatives are of a 'bottom-up nature' and its emphasis on improving teaching and learning is more in harmony with the way quality is identified by academics (Hudson,

2010). Filippakou and Tapper (2008) point out that "quality enhancement can only blossom in the context of a flexible, negotiated evaluative model" (p.92) which description does not fit the current QA system as it will be demonstrated in the next section.
QA is often criticises for creating tension between those of being inspected and those of inspecting leading to the loss of trust (Smith and Oliver 2004). It has also been criticises for leading to the distortion of outcome of assessment (Trow 1995 p.22 in Harvey, 2002 p.206) and institutions adapting a culture of dramaturgical compliance (Barrow, 1999, p.33) especially in the light of recent developments where QA exercises are increasingly being seen as a marketing opportunity (Hodson and Thomas 2003, p.380). Furthermore, it is still perceived by many members of the academic community as compromising mutual trust and hence QA processes often face resistance especially from academics (Harvey, 2002, p.247). These characteristics, considered alongside the increased accountability precept of QA (Henkel 2004 in Gordon and Owen 2008, Kristensen, 2010) can establish that QA has a limited capacity to enhance quality (Filippakou and Tapper 2008, Hodson and Thomas 2003, Houston 2010, Coyle 2003).

Based on these characteristics the description 'critical friend' is attached to QE while QA is viewed taking on the role of an' inspector' with ticking boxes to ensure that set criteria are met.

While a shift away from QA toward QE is widely discussed within the sector the main drivers behind this shift, as identified in a recent report by the HEA are the interest of HEIs to look after their reputation given that the QQA reports increasingly affect the outcomes of national league tables. While the majority of respondents of this survey as part of the project "Quality enhancement and assurance – a changing picture?" (2008) were positive about QA processes on the whole, the external nature of these drivers is likely to put strain on honest QE initiatives. In addition, while most respondents made a very strong link between QA and QE the report itself questions this 'so claimed' harmony between QA and QE and suggests that historically QA has not been actively supporting QE:

"If the sector agrees […] that quality assurance would have no point if it didn't have this [enhancement] output, while at the same time a large part of the sector can be seen to be very actively building the links and structures to achieve that output, it raises an uncomfortable question about what all the QA processes have been doing prior to strong links being in place" p.46.

EXTERNAL EXAMINER: A 'CRITICAL FRIEND' OR AN 'INSPECTOR'?

In order to answer this intriguing question the word 'inspector' is replaced with QA and the word 'critical friend' with QE. The paper argues that while EE have the potential to fulfil the role of a 'critical friend' and enhance quality its ability to do so is limited due to the external nature of the systems. The next section provides a critical analysis of the documents that currently describe and shape the role of EE.

The Quality Code, published by the QAA describes the role of EEs as to maintain academic standards and to enhance quality; indicator 3 refers to the QE element:

"Awarding institutions expect their external examiners to provide informative comment and recommendations on good practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment observed by the external examiners and opportunities to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students". p.10

The knowledge of EE themselves being experienced teachers should naturally place EE as actors in the QE process. However, the externality of the system limits their QE capacity. The following section sets out to highlight the ways the EE reports feed into external audits and how they affect the overall reputation of HEIs.
'The handbook for external examiners' states that the EE report "constitute a crucial body of evidence for both internal quality assurance procedures such as periodic review and for external institutional review" (HEA, 2011, p.25). Furthermore, the response of the institution to this report is also scrutinised by the professional, statutory or regulatory body that might also be responsible for the QA of certain programmes. In addition, the powers of EE have been further strengthened as now external QAA review teams are allowed to have direct contact with EE prior to making their final decision about the quality education of HEIs.

The idea of considering EE as critical friend may derive from the notion that, as Smith and Oliver saw it "the relationship is inherently local, arising from in the personal, social relationships between an External Examiner, the course leader, the HoD and the department" (2004 p12). However, Smith and Oliver refer to the term 'critical friend' when describing the role of EE when feedback is given in informal ways. Others point out that as enhancing quality involves learning and as it means taking certain degree of risk it should take place in a non-judgemental setting where trust between correspondents is strongly established (Gordon and Owen, 2009, p.8). By making the EE system increasingly focused on accountability and linking it to audits and ranking processes the opportunity for QE becomes limited.

The role, due to its collegial nature, could easily be viewed as 'critical' but 'friendly. The HEA, in its handbook for external examiners, acknowledges the potential for those involved in the process being indeed confused about the nature of the role:

"It is common for an external examiner to establish a strong, collegiate working relationship with internal staff. In some situations and out of a sense of well-meaning loyalty the external examiner's report may not give sufficient gravity to a major problem […] or on the other hand it might be that staff dismisses the comments of EE" p.26

The report goes on to warn that if the above becomes an issues the tension will be recognised during the external QAA audit and such issues will lead to negative outcome. This approach to the relationship between EE and academics provides further evidence that the so claimed 'friendship' operates under great constrains and that the 'friends' every moves are monitored. In light of the recent initiative to increase the accessibility of the report lead to speculations whether this could create a two-layer feedback system one that is officially reported and one that is informal (Hannan and Silver 2004, p.3). While these issues are acknowledged, the QAA fails to address these in a meaningful way.

The language used in the Quality Code further supports the argument that EE are no friends to academics. It states that EE are 'appointed to scrutinise' (p.19) and that programmes are 'subject to scrutiny by EE' (p.6).
Further issues with the use of language arose due to the multiple purposes the EE's report. The HEA highlights that "the wording of reports must be carefully chosen in the light of the multiple audiences: staff, students, and senior staff from the HEI and external bodies such as professional regulators" (p.26).

CONCLUSION

The paper has established a connection between the interpretations of the roles of EE, which are 'critical friend' or 'inspector', with QA and QE. While the EE system is based on peer-review and therefore could be well-placed to serve QE and EEs have the potential to fulfil the role of a 'critical friend', EE system being closely linked to external audits and ranking limits its capacity to take up such position. The latest developments, such as usage of the EE report to increase the transparency of QA in HE further limits its QE potential. While the EEs are viewed as 'inspectors' and not as 'critical friend, their positive contribution to preserving the quality of education in England is widely acknowledged (Cooke 2003 in Lewis, 2012, Smith and Martin 2004). Having the role of EE acknowledged as 'inspector' would encourage the academic community and individual EE to realise the importance of training, which aspect of the EE system is currently highly neglected.

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