INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PRACTICES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EVIDENCE FROM A GHANAIAN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract:

Providing quality education has become a policy priority in higher education systems around the world in recent years. This study investigated internal quality assurance practices in higher education in a Ghanaian university. The study was a descriptive survey that aimed to assess the adequateness and effectiveness of the internal quality assurance (IQA) structures and practices in place at the university. It examined the extent to which institutional quality assurance arrangements, guidelines, and strategies were introduced by the university to ensure the quality of its educational provisions. The study population consisted of the teaching staff (senior members) and third and fourth-year students from eight faculties and three schools of the University, including the Director of the Academic Planning and Quality Assurance Directorate. A purposive sampling approach was applied to choose the six representative faculties and two representative schools. From each faculty and school, two departments were randomly selected. A systematic random sampling technique was employed to select six lecturers and 20 students from each academic department. In total, a sample of 416 respondents was involved in the study. Two sets of questionnaires were adapted and used for the study, one for students and the other for teaching staff. The findings revealed that quality assurance systems and practices are at work at the university and that they improve the quality of internal processes that influence teaching and student learning. It was, therefore, suggested that the university take concrete steps to establish and document clear policy guidelines and related procedures that will consolidate the progress made in assuring the quality and standards of its programmes and awards. The university needs to consider making an explicit commitment to developing a culture and awareness of quality. It is also important for the university to design and implement progressive quality improvement strategies that will perpetuate a quality culture.

Keywords: internal quality assurance practices, higher education, Ghanaian university, quality of provisions, quality teaching and learning

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1. Introduction

Worldwide, providing quality education has become a policy priority in higher education systems (Enders & Westerheijden, 2014; Harvey & Williams 2010; Seyfried & Pohlenz, 2018; Yuan, Minghat, & Talib, 2021). Quality issues are crucial to nations and their institutions of higher learning at the level of policy decisions (Rosa & Amaral, 2014). The higher education landscape has undergone an unparalleled degree of transformation over the past decades due to the growing demand for quality education globally (Datta & Graves, 2021). The questions raised about the quality of tertiary education have triggered a transformation of policies, regulations, and practices in this field (Vukasovic, 2014). These transformations have resulted in increased public expectations of higher education, new roles and responsibilities for academics and administrators, and new approaches to knowledge production and transmission (Datta & Graves, 2021). Morley (2003) argues that quality has become a universalising meta-narrative. Thus, quality in higher education is a fundamental primacy. It must be achieved by taking into account issues of relevance, equity, cost, and international standards (Mishra, 2007). The plethora of change processes, both at individual and organisational levels calls for higher education institutions (HEIs) to re-examine the quality of their provision (Datta & Graves, 2021).

Quality higher education is essential for political and economic growth (Fadeeva, et al., 2014). Many nations are questioning whether their higher education systems are fit for purpose, to provide the necessary education and training for students and society (Mishra, 2007). Stakeholders, such as government, industry, and society at large, want to be assured that students will acquire the required knowledge after graduation, that state-of-the-art programmes and courses are offered and that new knowledge is generated through research. Higher education institutions (HEIs) need to establish, through their institutional leadership and unparalleled strategies, the quality of education they provide (Harvey & Askling, 2003), especially in African countries where higher education is essential for capacity building and professional development to facilitate the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Swanzy, 2015). Mishra (2007) argues that in developing nations, in particular, scarce resources should not be wasted on HEIs that fail to meet these key objectives.

Historically, the notion of quality has been examined and remains a subject of increasing attention in contemporary times (Reeve & Bednar, 1994). Mishra (2007) maintains that "*quality is a concept; it is a philosophy; it is a journey; it is also what we practice*" (p. vi). According to ASHE (2022) "*quality assurance is an all-embracing term referring to an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) the quality of a higher education system, institutions, or programmes*" (para. 1). Quality assurance is often linked to procedures to improve the accountability of HEIs to external stakeholders. It encompasses the core activities of higher education, namely teaching, research, and service to the community (Swanzy, 2015).

Quality assurance in tertiary education is an indispensable constituent of national development (Mishra, 2007). The World Bank highlights the significance of establishing strong quality assurance systems as a necessary tool to meet emerging challenges in higher education, including the continuing rise of internationalisation (World Bank, 2002). Similarly, Jonathan (2000) reports that the Association of African Universities (AAU) has undertaken to work with its member universities to establish national quality assurance systems. Similarly, UNESCO has urged its member states to establish and strengthen appropriate quality assurance systems and regulatory frameworks with the participation of all stakeholders (UNESCO, 2013).

Internal quality assurance (IQA) systems are known as key elements of institutional autonomy, accountability, and integrity (EUA, 2010). These systems focus primarily on the development of the curriculum, teaching, learning, and research, which have remained traditionally the main tool in the process of knowledge generation (Paintsil, 2016). IQA unit/directorate is established within an institution to promote quality culture. Its main responsibility is to facilitate the design and operationalisation of systems and structures to ensure the quality of academic activities. It prepares the institution for review by external quality assurance agencies (Alzafari & Ursin, 2019).

In Ghana, quality assurance in HEIs started in the 1990s, mainly in response to the surge in private HEIs providing tertiary-level education. To ensure quality and standardisation of procedures in higher education provision, it became mandatory for HEIs and their programmes to be accredited (Tsevi, 2015). The National Accreditation Board (NAB) and the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) were hitherto the two regulatory bodies responsible for ensuring the quality of Ghanaian HEIs. In 2020, NCTE and NAB were amalgamated under the new Education Regulatory Bodies Act of 2020 (Act 1023) to constitute the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC). The Commission's objectives include regulating higher education in all of its aspects to nurture effective and well-organised administration and accreditation of HEIs, and the principles of consistent quality delivery by HEIs. Furthermore, the Commission shall ensure that HEIs maintain the highest standards of quality and appropriateness of teaching, learning and research programmes, and outcomes (GTEC, 2022).

From the above, it is clear that in Ghana, improving the quality of higher education has always been a priority issue on the political and educational agenda of the government and HEIs respectively (Boateng, 2014; Swanzy, 2015; Tsevi, 2015; Utuka, 2012). Like other developing nations, Ghana has adopted several approaches to addressing the issue of quality in tertiary education, similar to those in Western countries. HEIs in Ghana have also introduced various practices and processes to ensure the quality of education they provide (Yankson, 2013). Despite these efforts, in a study entitled: "Quality assurance in higher education: a comparative study on provisions and practices in New Zealand and Ghana", Utuka (2012) finds that the quality of educational provision at the institutional level was marred by weak internal structures, inadequately documented policies, inadequate external involvement, ineffective self-assessment and financial constraints requiring urgent policy attention. Researchers such as Boateng

(2014), Painstil (2018), Swanzy (2015), and Tsevi (2015) have studied various aspects of quality assurance in HEIs in Ghana and reached similar conclusions.

The university involved in this study (University A) created its Academic Quality Assurance Unit (AQAU) in 2008 to establish institutional quality assurance mechanisms, which would safeguard academic excellence, accountability, and integrity. The AQAU was re-branded in 2014, as the Directorate of Academic Quality Assurance (DAQA) to mirror its extensive functions. At present, a new name "Directorate of Academic Planning and Quality Assurance (DAPQA)" and a new structure have been approved by the Vice-Chancellor and ratified by the University's Academic Board. All these efforts, which are still in their infancy, aim at improving academic quality. However, little is known empirically about internal university quality assurance practices and whether these practices are sufficiently adequate and effective in improving quality and promoting quality culture. It is within this background that this research was designed and undertaken. It, therefore, sought to explore the adequateness and efficacy of IQA practices in place at University A. It examined the extent to which the university has formulated and implemented strategies, policy guidelines, and institutional arrangements for assuring educational quality and building a sustainable culture of quality.

2. Method

This section describes how the research was carried out. It explains the study design, population, sample and sampling procedure, data collection instrument, pre-testing of research instruments, the procedure for data collection, and ethical considerations.

2.1 Design of the Study

The descriptive survey design was adopted and used for the study. The aim was to generalise from a sample to a population to infer from the attitudes, nature, or behaviour of the population (Ary, Jacobs, Irvine, & Walker, 2019). Best and Kahn (2006) maintain that descriptive research is interested in the circumstances or associations that prevail, for example ascertaining the characteristics of the practices, situations, and attitudes that prevail, the opinions that are expressed, the processes that take place, or the trends that develop.

2.2 Population of the Study

The study population was lecturers and third and fourth-year students of the eight faculties and three schools of the selected university, including the Director of the Academic Planning and Quality Assurance Directorate. Two representative schools and six faculties were selected using the purposive sampling technique (Bryman, 2016; Creswell, 2013). Within each faculty and school, two departments were randomly selected. A systematic random sampling technique was employed to randomly select six lecturers and 20 students from each department. This was done to give all academic

departments an equal opportunity of being involved in the research (Mostafa & Ahmad, 2018). The Director was purposively selected and included in the sample to enable the researcher to obtain information-rich cases (Bryman, 2016; Creswell, 2013). A sample size of 416 respondents was involved in the study. The sample comprised 96 lecturers, six from each of the 16 academic departments, and 320 students, 20 from each of the 16 departments.

2.3 Research Instruments

Two sets of questionnaires, one for students and one for lecturers were adapted and used for the study. The instruments were designed and used by Kahsay (2012) to study quality assurance in Ethiopian higher education. The questionnaires were a combination of closed and open-ended questions. The structure of the instrument was consistent with a four-point Likert-type scale by Best and Kahn (2006). The instruments included items on procedures, systems, and practices associated with quality assurance. The purpose of the questionnaires was to collect quantitative data. The questionnaires were pre-tested at a Faculty of Education, University for Development Studies (UDS). The purpose of the pre-test was to establish the face validity and reliability of the instrument and to improve the items, format, and scales. To ensure a high degree of validity, lecturers and graduate students from the faculty were contacted to review the questions. The questionnaires were also assessed by the study area experts to determine whether the items could measure the intended content (face validity) (Mohajan, 2017; Taherdoost, 2016). The instrument's reliability was estimated on scaled items employing Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and yielded a reliability coefficient of r = 0.70 (Mohajan, 2017).

2.4 Data Analysis

The SPSS software was used to code, enter, clean, and analyse the data obtained. The quantitative data was reduced to descriptive statistics such as percentages, frequencies, and cross-tabulations (Abbott, 2016). The findings were presented under themes derived from the data and the related literature reviewed for the study.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

This study considered ethical issues such as respect for the rights of research participants, adherence to the research site, and full and honest reporting of the research (Creswell, 2007). To carry out this study, the researcher sought consent from the participants, informed them of the nature and purpose of the study, and ensured the confidentiality and anonymity of the information collected. Permission was obtained from the participating university before the study was carried out. To ensure the anonymity of the university and the respondents, the approval letter from the university was not attached. In addition, a pseudonym, University A, was used to represent the name of the university in the study.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Introduction

The findings of this study are presented and discussed under the themes emerging from the literature review and data analysis. These themes include internal quality assurance policies and institutional arrangements, IQA methods, and processes employed by the university, the extent to which IQA measures/activities are being practiced by the university, and the progress so far.

3.2 Internal Quality Assurance Policies and Institutional Arrangements

IQA systems include, among others, explicitly articulated institutional frameworks, policies, guidelines, and strategies that define responsibilities and accountability for quality at all levels. The results are analysed to identify extant quality assurance frameworks and policies at the university.

3.2.1 Responsibility for Quality Assurance in the University

Table 1 shows the perception of staff of the importance of the actors who have the responsibility for assuring the quality of academic standards in the university.

Table 1: Responsibility for assuring quality in the university

	N	To limited extent (%)	Somewhat important (%)	Important (%)	Very important (%)	Total (%)
Ghana Tertiary Education Commission	90	2.2	4.4	17.8	75.6	100.0
The University Management	88	0.0	4.5	11.4	84.1	100.0
Faculties / Schools / Departments	90	0.0	2.2	37.8	60.0	100.0
Academic staff	90	0.0	6.7	40.0	53.3	100.0
Students	88	0.0	4.5	50.0	45.5	100.0
Employees	68	2.9	16.6	21.6	58.8	100.0

The data in Table 1 show that more than 90% of the staff interviewed perceived all the stakeholders listed above as important actors in quality assurance at the university. It was evident from the data that the majority of staff respondents have the view that these stakeholders play a crucial role in ensuring the quality of education at the university. These results are in line with the views of Lenn (2004) and Billing (2004) who state that assuring quality in tertiary education is a matter of control by accredited external institutions and internal quality control. External institutions mainly serve as an impetus for self-directed and self-evaluation improvement in quality. The social approval and integrity of HEIs or programmes are thus improved by internal and external quality assurance systems and procedures.

3.2.2 Awareness of Quality Assurance Policies at the University

The data analysis was conducted to understand the extent to which respondents were aware of the university's institutional quality assurance policies and structures. Figure 1 shows their opinions on the knowledge of quality assurance policies at the university.
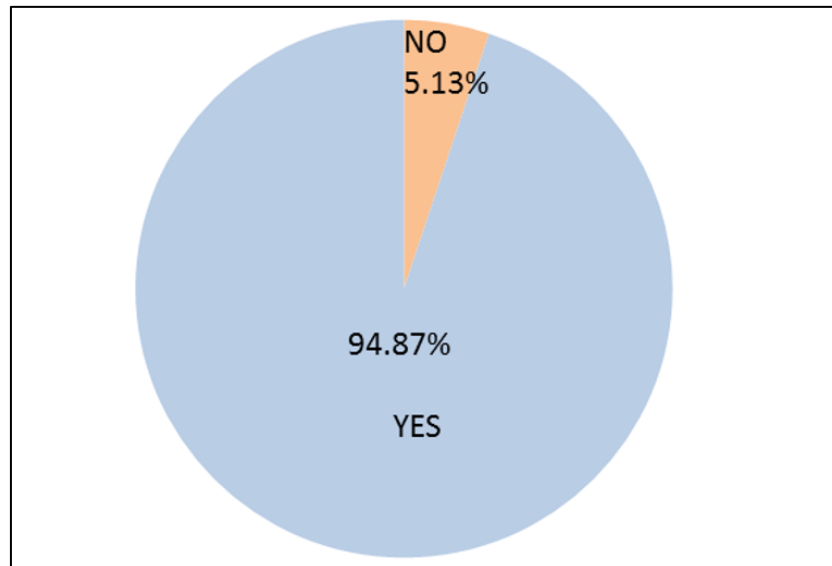

Figure 1: Awareness of quality assurance policies and structures as perceived by staff

From Figure 1, 94.87% of the staff surveyed indicated that they were aware of the university's quality assurance policies and structures, while 5.13% stated that these policies did not exist. The data implies that quality assurance policies and related procedures exist at the university as the majority (94.87%) of the staff respondents agreed with this statement. The existence of quality assurance policies and related procedures would, therefore, ensure quality monitoring of quality assurance systems and practices in the university.

The finding is in line with the strategies outlined by European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA, 2005). According to these strategic guidelines, HEIs need to have a policy and related procedures for the assurance of quality and standards of the programmes and the degrees they offer. Furthermore, they should make an explicit commitment to developing a culture that acknowledges the value of quality and its assurance in their activities. These guidelines are adopted by the quality assurance regulators for the implementation of IQA in HEIs in Ghana (Boateng, 2014).

3.2.3 Implementation of Internal Quality Assurance Activities

Table 2 shows the perception of staff on the implementation of IQA measures at the university.

Table 2: Staff perception of the implementation of IQA activities in the university

Practices	Yes implemented (%)	Currently implementing (%)	Planning to implement (%)	We don't have (%)	Total (%)
Define quality standards/indicators for teaching and learning in all programmes	33.3	57.1	7.1	2.4	100.0
Develop quality assessment guidelines	23.8	50.0	14.3	11.9	100.0
Establish institutional structures and responsibility for quality improvement	28.6	52.4	19.0	0.0	100.0
Provide procedures, and guidelines to safeguard teaching quality	32.6	53.5	14.0	0.0	100.0
Implement constant programme and curriculum review	29.3	31.7	36.6	2.4	100.0
Organising constant staff meetings to deliberate on education quality and student learning	21.4	26.2	27.4	25.0	100.0
Improving student learning using outcome of programme/course review	23.8	57.1	16.7	2.4	100.0
Creating a culture of quality and common values in all departments	27.9	48.8	18.6	4.7	100.0

The data presented in Table 2 show that approximately 26.2% to 57% of the staff surveyed believe that quality assurance systems and practices are currently implemented by the university, while 21.4% to 33.3% believe that the measures or activities have been implemented. The differences in the respondents' perceptions of the implementation of quality assurance methods and measures corroborate Gvaramadze's (2008) view that within the same HEI the notion of quality culture varies between working groups such as university management, teaching and administrative staff, students, and student organisations. This may be the result of the diverse nature of internal stakeholders in higher education, each with a different perspective on quality.

Furthermore, differences in perception can be attributed to a lack of awareness and apathy. Wahab (2010) believes that the quality implementation strategy can only be effective if all members of an organisation are aware of it and if all members are involved. For Wahab, all stakeholders must be committed to participating in building a quality culture. This finding is also in line with the notions of Noble (2008) who observes that in applying quality assurance principles to ensure quality in HEIs, it is necessary to take into consideration the context of the institution. Indeed, HEIs are seen to function differently from commercial and manufacturing enterprises in terms of culture, governance, and technical experiences (Noble, 2008).

3.3 IQA Methods and Processes Employed by the University
The possible variables were listed and administered to the staff and students surveyed with the intent of understanding the usage of existing quality assurance processes and methods in the university. The results are presented in Table 3 and Figure 2.

3.3.1 Use of Quality Assurance Methods

Table 3 shows the perception of the staff regarding the quality assurance methods/tools used by the university for improving quality assurance.

Table 3: Use of quality assurance methods as perceived by staff

Methods and procedures	N	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total (%)
Needs analysis for programme development	90	91.1	8.9	100.0
Structured programme evaluation or review	90	93.3	6.7	100.0
Evaluation of learning objectives	90	95.5	4.5	100.0
Stakeholder consultation meetings	90	74.4	25.6	100.0
Self-evaluation by institution	90	83.3	16.7	100.0
External reviewer activities	90	88.9	11.1	100.0
Conducting alumni surveys	90	43.9	56.1	100.0
Prospective graduates exit interviews	90	17.1	82.9	100.0
Peer evaluation	90	30.0	70.0	100.0
Student evaluation	90	88.6	11.4	100.0

Table 3 shows that a large number of lecturers who participated in the survey, ranging from 74.40% to 95.5%, responded positively to almost all the methods and procedures presented to them to express their opinion, except for conducting alumni surveys, prospective graduate exit interviews and peer review of teaching. It can be inferred from the data presented in Table 3 that the quality improvement methods and procedures employed by the university, as perceived by the staff, are: needs analysis for programme development, structured programme evaluation or review, evaluation of learning objectives, stakeholder consultation meetings, self-evaluation by institution, external reviewer activities, and student assessment. A majority (74.40% to 95.5%) of the staff approved these methods and procedures as quality improvement activities implemented by the university.

The results of students' perceptions of the methods used by the university to improve the quality of teaching and learning are presented in Figure 2. According to Figure 2, the results of the analysis indicate that the students surveyed perceived four methods and procedures for the improvement of teaching and learning quality. These are: regular evaluation and revision of programmes or curricula, assessment of learning outcomes, institutional self-evaluation, and student evaluation of teaching.
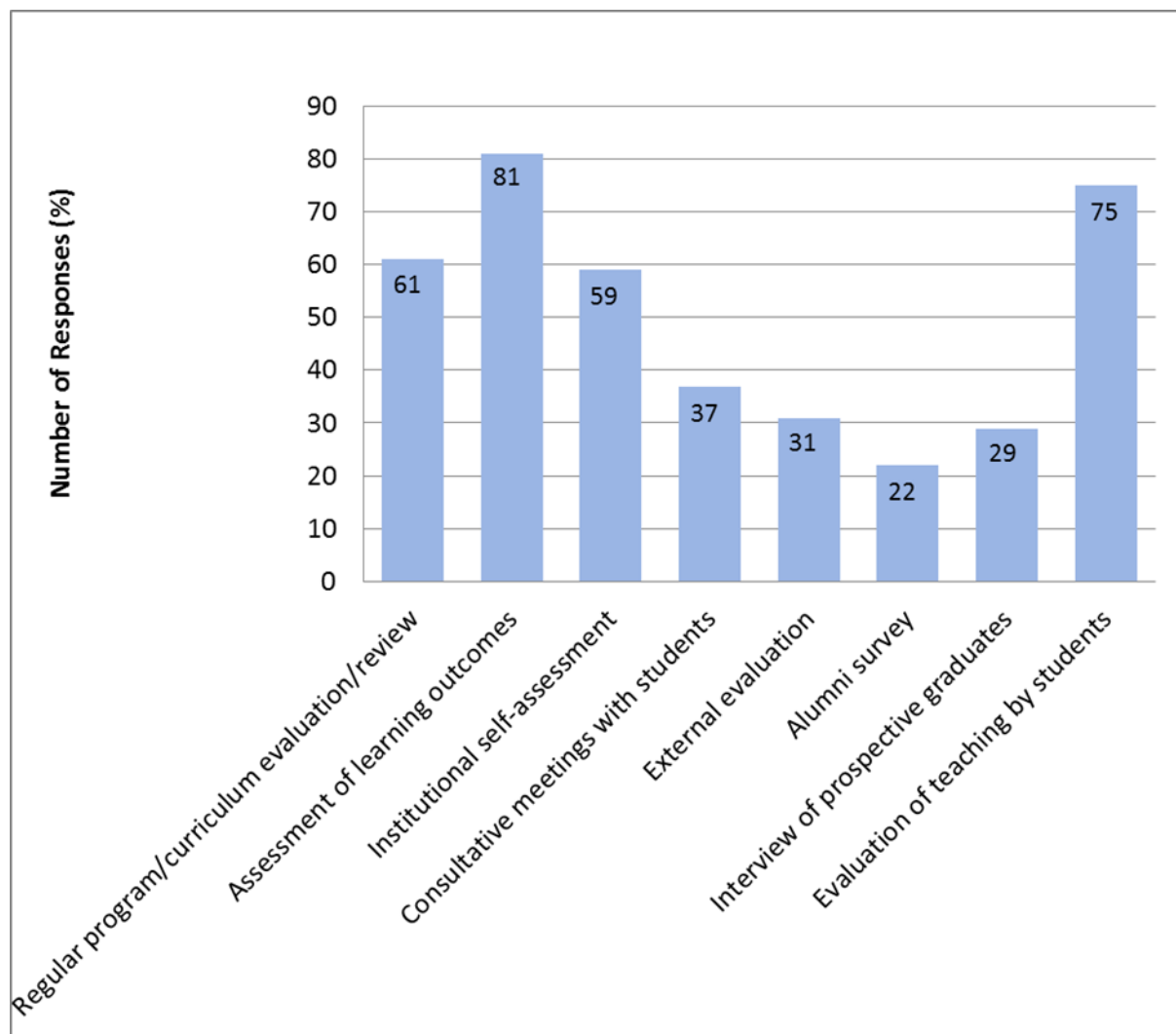
Figure 2: Student perception of the use of quality assurance methods

The staff and student respondents, therefore, believe that several methods and procedures are used to improve the university's quality assurance of teaching and learning. The students' opinion does not differ from that of the staff. Students consider the methods to be regular evaluation and review of programmes or curricula, assessment of learning outcomes, institutional self-evaluation, and student evaluation of teaching. These methods and procedures are valuable for quality assurance systems as they include the internal and external quality assurance processes that HEIs should use to promote quality assurance of teaching and learning (Monyatsi & Ngwako (2019). IQA involves anything that an institution does internally, with no external influence, to maintain its quality at a high level. The findings indicated that the university uses internal quality activities as methods and procedures for quality improvement. These findings are in line with the views of Badley (1993) who positions that universities see themselves as quality institutions. The programmes run by the institutions are presented in brochures and manuals as quality products. The internal stakeholders are students, staff, and faculty.

3.3.2 Student Involvement in Quality Assurance Activities

Quality assurance practices are effective when students are involved, committed, and actively engaged. Involving students in quality assurance processes and self-assessment is in line with the views of Kahsay (2012) who proposed key characteristics of good practice essential for the operation of effective quality assurance systems in HEIs. One of these characteristics proposed by Kahsay is student participation. Kahsay suggests that quality assurance systems need to recognise students' role in improving quality and this comprises creating a learning atmosphere that guarantees the active engagement of students in quality assurance processes. The data regarding student participation are presented in Table 4 and Figure 3.

Table 4: Student perception of their involvement in institutional activities

Statement	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total (%)
Departmental meetings on quality of educational provision	51.20	49.80	100.0
Meetings organised by faculty on quality-related issues	59.0	41.0	100.0
University-wide meetings to discuss academic matters	68.70	31.30	100.0
Completing questionnaires on student learning experience And associated issues	51.80	48.20	100.0
Surveys related to programme/course assessment	68.40	31.60	100.0
Completing questionnaires on effectiveness of teaching and evaluation	70.10	29.90	100.0
Review of curriculum	38.20	61.20	100.0
Self-evaluation at the institutional level	38.70	61.30	100.0
Assessment by external bodies	29.30	70.70	100.0

The results in Table 4 indicate that about 70% of the students participated in filling in questionnaires on teaching effectiveness and evaluation; more than 68% participated in university meetings to discuss academic issues and filled in questionnaires on programme or course evaluation. More than 50% participated in departmental meetings on teaching quality; faculty meetings on issues related to teaching quality and completed questionnaires on programme/course evaluation. Just over 38% were involved in programme review and institutional self-evaluation. Involvement in external evaluation had the lowest percentage at 29.30%. These results imply that students are not very much involved in programme review, institutional self-evaluation, and external evaluation.

Figure 3 shows the number of times departments hold meetings with students on quality assurance issues concerning teaching and learning.
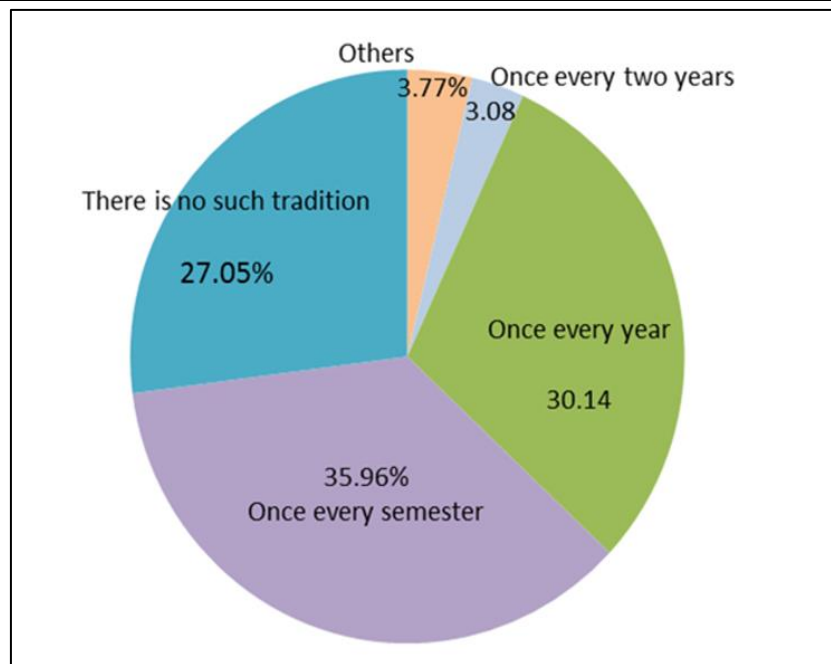
Figure 3: Number of times departments conduct meetings with students

In Figure 3, it can be inferred that departments meet with students to deliberate on issues associated with quality of delivery and student learning, but not regularly. This is because students are divided as to how often these meetings are held. Valuing the role of students in improving quality is indispensable for quality assurance systems. Dill (2006), Harvey and Newton (2004), and Kahsay (2012) contend that with professional engagement the quality of student learning can be sustained. They suggest that this creates a learning environment that ensures students are actively involved and engaged in learning and quality assurance processes. Ryan (2015) argues that as students are at the heart of higher education and invest time and money in the system, their involvement can improve quality assurance processes. Thus, student participation in quality assurance initiatives facilitates the development of skills such as good communication, critical thinking, and strong leadership skills. It also ensures transparency of the IQA process, performance, and subsequent improvements.

3.3.3 Important Areas of Quality Assurance
The results of the staff's perspective on the key areas regarding quality assurance and quality assurance procedures at the university are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Important areas of quality assurance as perceived by staff

Quality Parameters	N	Not at all Important (%)	Somewhat Important (%)	Important (%)	Very Important (%)	Total (%)
Institution's mission and educational objectives	88	0.0	9.1	27.3	63.6	100.0
Administration and management	86	2.3	14.0	23.3	60.5	100.0
Learning infrastructure and resources	88	0.0	13.6	22.7	63.6	100.0
Relevance of programme and curricular	88	0.0	6.8	27.3	65.9	100.0
Procedures for teaching / learning and examination / assessment	86	0.0	9.3	9.3	81.4	100.0
Student enrolment and provision of support	86	0.0	11.6	32.6	55.8	100.0
Progression of students	86	0.0	11.6	25.6	62.8	100.0
Academic support services	84	0.0	9.5	28.6	61.9	100.0
Learning experiences of students	86	0.0	9.3	32.6	58.1	100.0
Employment of graduates	82	0.0	14.6	39.0	46.3	100.0

From Table 5, findings indicate that more than 83.8% of the staff respondents perceived all these quality assurance parameters as very important procedures for assuring quality in the university. These results imply that the university has established standard procedures for quality assurance. Quality assurance involves systems established by HEIs to maintain and enhance the quality of their teaching and related activities. Harvey and Green (1993) note that quality assurance consists of procedures and mechanisms intended to satisfy stakeholders in tertiary education that institutions put a high premium on the implementation of policies to maintain and enhance their effectiveness. This view is supported by scholars (eg., Friend-Pereira, et al., 2002; Swanzy & Potts, 2017) when they claim that quality assurance is the extent to which an institution can guarantee, with certainty and confidence, that the quality and standards of the education it provides are constantly maintained and improved.

3.3.4 Implementing IQA Measures/Activities in the Institution

The respondents assessed the status of the implementation of quality assurance approaches within the university based on a list of likely parameters presented to them. The analyses and discussions are presented here. Table 6 shows the degree of implementation of these quality assurance measures from the perspective of the staff.

Table 6: Degree of implementing quality assurance approaches from staff perspective

The extent to which quality assurance is	Not at all (%)	Somewhat (%)	To some extent (%)	To a very large extent (%)	Total
Communicated among staff, students, and other important stakeholders	6.8	9.1	40.9	43.2	100.0
Associated with quality of student learning	6.8	13.6	43.2	36.4	100.0
Related to enhancing the quality of teaching and assessment	4.5	6.8	36.4	52.3	100.0
Linked to the accomplishment of complete mission and goals of the school / faculty / department	4.5	13.6	31.8	50.0	100.0

Table 6 shows that staff respondents (72.1% to 88.9%) feel that internal quality assurance methods or measures are communicated to staff, students, and other important stakeholders. Approximately 9.1% to 25.6% of the respondents believed that these activities are somewhat carried out in the different faculties and schools, while 2.3% to 6.8% felt that these activities are not carried out at all. It can therefore be inferred that, to a large extent, internal quality assurance approaches at the faculty/school and department level are made known to staff, students, and other important stakeholders, relates to the quality of student learning, improve the quality of delivery and evaluation, and the achievement of the holistic mission and objectives of the faculty/department.

This result is in line with Gvaramadze's (2008) view. Gvaramadze argues that quality indicators are instituted in a programme to meet its original and distinctive philosophy. Thus, the responsibility for the quality of the programmes lies with the department/faculty, in which the quality culture generates a unique identity. This issue is also highlighted by Lomas (2004) who maintains that concern for quality must be natural to the staff of a department, faculty, or institution and part of their corporate responsibility. The communication of internal quality assurance methods with stakeholders is consistent with Wahab's (2010) suggestion that commitment to a quality culture entails the participation of all important stakeholders.

3.4 The Extent to which IQA Measures/Activities are Being Practiced by the University and the Progress so Far

This section analyses and discusses the data on the extent to which quality assurance measures are practised by the university and the progress made so far. The staff respondents were asked to rate the extent to which quality assurance activities are practised/implemented at the university by indicating their level of satisfaction based on a given list of possible parameters.

3.4.1 Influence of Quality Assurance on Teaching and Learning

Staff perspective on how quality assurance practices impact the enhancement of everyday teaching and learning is presented in Figure 4.
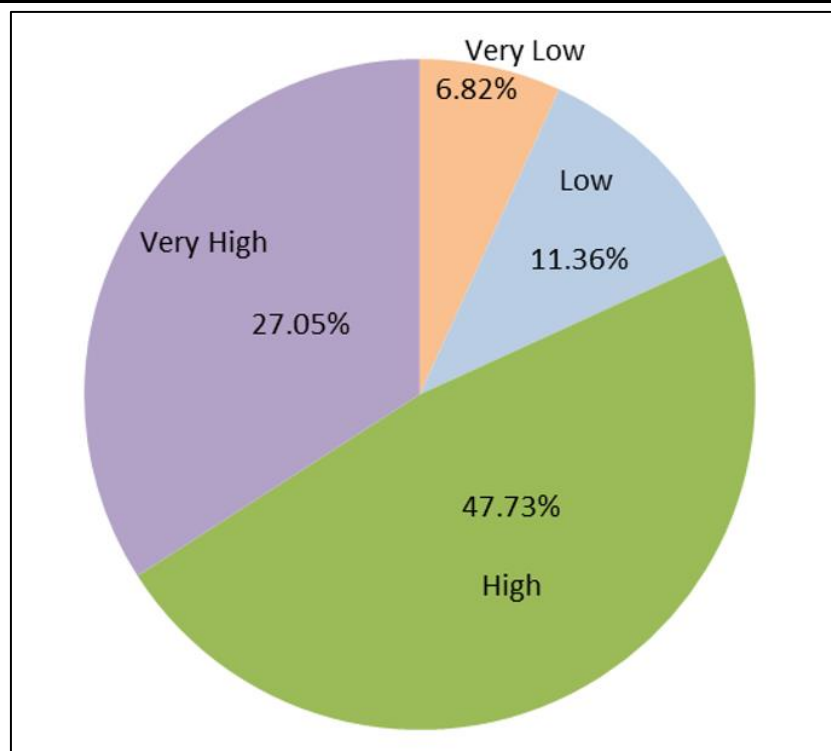
Figure 4: Influence of quality assurance practices on teaching and learning

Figure 4 shows that the majority of the staff respondents (81.82%) felt that implementing quality assurance approaches and strategies has a high (47.73%) and very high (34.09%) impact on day-to-day teaching and learning in the university. However, about 11.36% and 6.82% felt that the quality assurance practices had a low and very low impact on teaching and learning respectively. The finding shows that the implementation of quality assurance approaches has improved everyday teaching and learning in the university. This finding corroborates the views of Kahsay (2012) that the ideal, good, flawless, or effective organisational practices that characterise outstanding or model quality assurance systems improve teaching and learning. According to Kahsay, well-established and organised quality assurance systems enrich students' learning experiences when HEIs take ownership of them and external quality assurance agencies support and facilitate their role.

3.4.2 Staff and Student Satisfaction with IQA Practices

A robust, sound and strong quality assurance practices can be achieved only with the involvement and commitment of management, staff, and students. It demands that all stakeholders are actively involved and committed. In this context, staff and students were invited to express their views on involvement in quality assurance activities and/or practices. The responses are presented in Tables 7 and 8.

Table 7: Level of satisfaction of staff with IQA practices

Staff satisfaction regarding	N	Very dissatisfied (%)	Dissatisfied (%)	Satisfied (%)	Very satisfied (%)	Total (%)
Leadership commitment to quality improvement	90	2.2	13.3	51.1	33.3	100.0
Academic staff commitment to quality education	90	2.2	11.1	80.0	6.7	100.0
Staff involvement in quality assurance practices	88	0.0	15.9	70.5	13.6	100.0
Collective responsibility and framework for implementation of quality assurance	86	0.0	18.6	69.8	11.6	100.0
Consultation and cooperation between the various actors in the implementation of quality assurance	86	0.0	23.3	69.8	7.0	100.0
Student recruitment and admission practices	88	11.4	45.5	36.4	6.8	100.0
Staff recruitment and development practices	88	0.0	43.2	50.0	6.8	100.0
Teaching, learning, and assessment practices	90	0.0	8.9	73.3	17.8	100.0
The total contribution of the implementation of quality assurance to improving the quality of education	90	0.0	17.8	71.1	11.1	100.0

The results in Table 7 indicate that 91.1% of the staff surveyed were satisfied with teaching, learning, and assessment practices. More than 80% were satisfied with the management's commitment to improving quality, the teaching staff's dedication to improving the quality of education, participation in practices that safeguard quality assurance, the collective responsibility and framework for implementing quality assurance, and the total contribution of quality assurance implementation on improving the quality of education in the university. About 76.8% were satisfied with the consultation and cooperation between the diverse players in implementing quality assurance, while 56.8% were satisfied with recruitment and staff development practices. About 43.2% were dissatisfied with student recruitment and admission practices. The results imply that, except for student recruitment and admission practices, more than 50% of the staff surveyed are satisfied with the university's internal quality assurance practices.

Table 8: Level of students' satisfaction with internal quality assurance practices

Institutional commitment	Very satisfied (%)	Satisfied (%)	Dissatisfied (%)	Very dissatisfied (%)	Total (%)
Leadership commitment to improving student learning	19.5	41.1	26.4	13.0	100.0
Commitment of academic staff to high-quality teaching	19.9	56.0	17.9	6.2	100.0

Participation of students in quality assurance practices	18.2	42.4	24.8	14.6	100.0
Professional competence of teaching staff	34.2	50.2	11.0	4.6	100.0
Implementing the academic calendar of the university	46.9	33.6	13.7	5.8	100.0
Appropriateness of course offerings	40.4	41.7	11.4	6.5	100.0
Degree of cognitive stimuli in the course	29.1	50.1	16.9	3.9	100.0
Range of learning opportunities available	23.5	47.9	20.8	7.8	100.0
Lecture content and presentation standard	30.6	46.3	17.9	5.2	100.0
Diversity of evaluation methods	25.8	44.6	20.2	9.4	100.0
Clearness of evaluation and scoring procedures	18.9	43.3	27.7	10.1	100.0
Promptness of feedback	14.7	29.3	34.2	21.8	100.0
Efficiency of feedback techniques	15.3	36.1	31.3	17.3	100.0

The results in Table 8 indicate that more than 80% of the students surveyed are satisfied with the professionalism of the lecturers, the academic scheduling, and the adequacy and appropriateness of course offerings. Over 70% indicated that they were satisfied with the dedication of the teaching staff, teaching quality, degree of thought stimuli, range of learning opportunities, lecture quality and standard of presentation, and diversity of methods of assessment. More than 60% were satisfied with the management's commitment to improving student learning, student participation in quality assurance practices, and the clarity of assessment and grading criteria. About 51.4% were satisfied with the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms. No more than 44% of the students surveyed were satisfied with the timeliness of feedback. The results imply that apart from the timeliness of feedback, more than 50% of the students surveyed were satisfied with the university's internal quality assurance practices.

From the results in Tables 7 and 8, it can be deduced that the university is effectively implementing internal quality assurance mechanisms and is gradually building a quality culture where all staff members take ownership of quality issues. Frazer (1994) suggests that when an institution values quality assurance, it becomes a self-reflective community of faculty, learners, administrators, and support staff, all contributing and working towards uninterrupted quality improvement. Frazer's tenets are in keeping with the emerging argument that quality assurance should be seen as a practice and not as a one-off incident (Doherty, 2008). In line with this, Mishra (2007) argues that quality assurance arrangements in HEIs need to be appropriate to guarantee their proper implementation. He proposes that quality should be seen as a culture. If it is perceived as such in an institution, then it becomes the responsibility of all.

3.4.3 Competences Acquired during the Study

Quality higher education must equip learners with the appropriate knowledge and skills to make them competitive in the global knowledge economy. In this study, the analysis of student satisfaction data is regarded as significant, on the assumption that students are the rightful assessors of the quality of what they learn. Accordingly, students were invited to rate, on a 4-point scale, their satisfaction level with the attainment of eight competencies. Table 9 shows the students' perception of the competencies acquired during the study.

Table 9: Student satisfaction with the competencies acquired during the study

Teaching assessment	Very satisfied (%)	Satisfied (%)	Dissatisfied (%)	Very dissatisfied (%)	Total (%)
Knowledge of the subject	35.2	46.9	13.0	4.9	100.0
Skills involved in problem-solving	27.0	46.9	19.2	6.8	100.0
Analytical and critical thinking skills	31.6	47.9	16.3	4.2	100.0
Hands-on skills	25.4	41.7	18.2	14.7	100.0
Communicative skills	37.1	41.0	18.2	3.6	100.0
Ability to work in a team	35.5	43.0	16.3	5.2	100.0
Research competence	31.9	42.3	16.9	8.9	100.0
All-round preparation for a professional career	44.3	43.0	8.80	3.90	100.0

The results in Table 9 show that over 70% of the students surveyed are satisfied with subject matter knowledge, problem-solving skills, analytical and critical thinking skills, communication skills, teamwork skills, ability to conduct research, and general career preparation skills. Practical skills received the lowest percentage of responses, at 67.7%. In addition, analysis of the data showed that students perceived the usefulness of their learning experience in terms of developing their general and specialised skills, including professional preparation for their careers.

3.4.4 Influence of Quality Assurance Activities

The effective implementation of institutional quality assurance should have a positive influence on teaching and learning activities in HEIs. Staff perceptions of the influence of quality assurance practices are presented in Table 10.

Table 10: Staff perception of the impact of quality assurance practices

Quality assurance practices	Not at all (%)	A little (%)	Affected (%)	Very much affected (%)	Total
Academic preparedness	4.5	13.6	72.7	9.1	100.0
Motivation to learn	9.3	11.6	76.7	2.3	100.0
Self-confidence	9.3	14.0	72.1	4.7	100.0
Interest in the course being taught	7.3	12.2	43.9	36.6	100.0
Attitude towards the field of study	7.0	25.6	51.2	16.3	100.0
Value orientation towards quality learning	4.7	23.3	62.8	9.3	100.0

Engagement and commitment to studies	9.3	20.9	62.8	7.0	100.0
Academic competence	2.4	21.4	57.1	19.0	100.0
Problem-solving skills	7.0	44.2	37.2	11.6	100.0
Critical/analytical thinking skills	4.7	46.5	37.2	11.6	100.0
Communication skills	7.0	39.5	44.2	9.3	100.0
Teamwork	2.3	48.8	41.9	7.0	100.0
Time orientation	11.6	39.5	44.2	4.7	100.0
Relevance of study program for future career of students	2.3	14.0	65.1	18.6	100.0

Table 10 shows the perception of lecturers on the impact of implementing quality assurance practices. According to Table 10, the majority of the respondents (89.70% to 97.70%) answered in the affirmative to the question of the perceived impact of quality assurance practices at the university. Thus, respondents felt that quality assurance practices promote academic preparation, motivation to learn, interest in the course they handle, attitude towards the field of study, and the value of quality learning orientation. In addition, these practices were perceived to have enhanced commitment to studies, communication, teamwork, problem-solving, time orientation, and the import of the study programme to the students' subsequent careers. It can therefore be inferred that implementing quality assurance practices has, to a large extent, influenced the staff and students of the university. The Canadian Council on Learning (2009) also states that the quality assurance mechanisms employed by HEIs are essential for monitoring, maintaining, and improving the quality of teaching, learning and research as defined in the institution's mission.

IQA practices concentrate on nurturing a culture of endless improvement efforts among teaching staff, leading to continuous quality enhancement and the maintenance of a quality culture in HEIs (Tavares et al., 2017). Quality assurance practices, therefore, serve as mechanisms to ensure appropriate learning processes, whether it is a measure of control on what is allowed as a higher education experience, a guarantee that an institution complies with the fundamental demands, or that it is answerable to its relevant partners, including the financiers and the learners, or that it has the necessary mechanisms to improve the processes of student learning (Monyatsi & Ngwako, 2019).

4. Conclusions

In higher education, quality assurance describes the mechanisms and procedures designed to demonstrate to relevant stakeholders that institutions value the application of sound policies to support and enhance institutional effectiveness. Quality assurance refers to the ability of an institution to state with confidence that the quality and standards of its educational provision are maintained and continuously improved.

The study focused on the IQA procedures used by the university uses to promote the quality of teaching and learning. The findings of this study supported much of the extant literature cited above. The results showed that the university is doing its best to

improve the quality of internal processes that influence teaching and learning. Quality assurance systems and practices, although a recent phenomenon in the university, are effective and adequate in improving the fundamental processes that impact teaching and learning. Although the university's IQA efforts are still in their infancy, they are sufficiently functional to contribute to improving teaching and learning. The quality systems, mechanisms, and practices implemented are useful for assuring quality in the university and are sufficiently adequate and effective to ensure quality and promote quality culture.

5. Recommendations

The findings of the study led to the following recommendations:

1) The university needs to have clear policies and related processes to ensure the standards and quality of its offerings and qualifications. These systems and policies should be documented formalised, visible, and publicly accessible.
2) The university should make an explicit commitment to develop and communicate a quality culture. The need to build and maintain a framework for continuous quality improvement and perpetuate quality culture was also recommended.
3) The external quality assurance body, GTEC, needs to support HEIs, including University A, to consolidate and maintain an internal quality culture ensuring that institutional quality assurance processes are strengthened.
4) The university management should support the quality assurance unit in its efforts to upscale and consolidate the necessary academic quality improvement activities at the university.
5) The quality assurance unit with the support of the university management should create an environment conducive to the dissemination of information on quality assurance through workshops, seminars, internal memoranda, and newsletters to all staff. This will help to build, deepen and maintain a strong quality culture in the university.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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