



Implementation of internal quality assurance in Zimbabwean universities

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Abstract

The study aimed to establish internal quality assurance practices in the academic staff at Chinhoyi University of Technology. The mixed method strategy and the convergent parallel design were adopted for the study. A questionnaire with both closed and open-ended questions and an interview guide were enlisted for the study. Simple random sampling was employed to select 40 academics to complete the questionnaires. Of these, 10 respondents were purposively selected for interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences and qualitative data were coded and put into respective thematic areas. The main findings were that the quality assurance practices were characterised by limited student engagement, staff resistance, limited financial support and weak quality culture. The main deficiencies were management decisions not informed by quality data metrics and limited commitment to quality issues by staff.

Keywords: Culture, quality assurance, quality culture, internal quality, external quality;

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1. Introduction

The quality of teaching and learning has been on the radar as a critical strategic issue in higher education institutions (HEIs) globally for several decades now (Enders & Westerheijden, 2014; Materu, 2007). In Africa, before independence, the quality of teaching and learning in universities was in the hands of the European counterparts under the auspices of the affiliation framework (Materu, 2007; Vesela & Klimova, 2015). After the attainment of independence, quality-related issues were left in respective institutions for the majority of African higher education institutions. Hence, the quality of teaching and learning was not in the best of shape (Shabani, Okebukola, & Oyewolele, 2014; Zavale, Santos, & Dias, 2016). So, there was a dire need to move and address this anomaly by putting in place mechanisms to draw on specific sets of quality standards and integrity in African HEIs.

The drift towards the establishment of quality assurance (QA) agencies in Africa was associated with the need to transform the higher education sector. About 70% of QA agencies have been established since the 1990s (Materu, 2007; Shabani et al., 2014, p. 150). This shows a deliberate and concerted effort towards transforming the HEIs in Africa, although a lot still needs to be done in this regard. In the same spirit, the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE) was established through an Act of Parliament in 2006. The main role of ZIMCHE is to promote and coordinate education provided by institutions of higher education and to act as a regulator.

ZIMCHE has inspired and supported HEIs in Zimbabwe through the establishment of internal quality assurance (IQA) units geared at enhancing quality and integrity in respective institutions (Garwe, 2019). This shows that IQA is a relatively new phenomenon in Zimbabwean universities; structures and processes are most likely not streamlined; and as such, there are bound to be several teething problems in these institutions. Hence, the need to examine the features and challenges of IQA in Zimbabwean universities and suggest appropriate remedies to alleviate the prevailing situations.

1.1. Literature review

QA is considered a well-organised and planned set of policies, processes, procedures and activities conceived to appraise, sustain and enhance the quality of HEIs (Garwe, 2019). Vlăsceanu and Grünberg (2007) projected that QA should not be confined to quality management, quality control, quality enhancement and quality assessment. According to Vlăsceanu and Grünberg (2007), QA is a comprehensive idea encompassing policies, procedures and activities implied in the terminologies associated with the evaluation of HEIs for quality improvement and accountability. This serves to illustrate that QA is a broader and pragmatic concept ceasing with the enhancement of service provisions and accountability that requires careful planning and meticulous implementation.

The policies and procedures driving QA are a product of deliberations muted at external and internal levels, culminating in IQA and external quality assurance (EQA) structures. IQA is established within the HEIs and EQA at the national level. According to Kahsay (2012), IQA is concerned with practices used by HEIs to monitor the quality of their education and EQA refers to national practices employed by external agencies to assure the quality of HEIs and programmes. IQA is the responsibility of respective HEIs focusing on quality enhancement and promoting a quality culture, whereas EQA is the activities conducted by external national QA bodies focusing on verifying the extent to which HEIs fit their mandate or meet specified standards. Hence, IQA is often basically targeted at improving HEIs, while EQA is geared towards ensuring their accountability (Kahsay, 2012; Voinea & Turculet, 2019). So, in a way, IQA and EQA are complementary in enhancing quality and accountability in HEIs to the stakeholders.

1.1.1. Quality perspectives

According to Trowler (2008), quality as a culture takes on board both cultural and managerial components. The cultural component relates to the institutions' values, expectations and commitment to quality, as well as to the academic community's engagement with quality issues (Seyhan, 2021; Trowler, 2008). The management component relates to tools and procedures of quality management. So, quality can be appraised as the culture of an institution. Although values and expectations do vary concerning academic areas of specialisation, it is rational to expect shared 'values, beliefs, expectations and commitment towards quality' (ENQA, 2015) by the majority of institutional players, for one to safely proclaim that institutional culture of quality does exist. The agreed manner in which the institution conducts its business denotes its perspective of quality. The commitment of the academics and support staff to the processes designed to enhance quality is an essential ingredient for the quality of educational provision (Cardoso, Rosa, & Stensaker, 2016). Implied is the idea that quality as culture is only feasible through the total commitment of the university community and demands teamwork.

The managerial quality perspective relates to a more formal dimension of quality which takes cognisance of the institutional structures, processes and procedures aimed at improving quality. This managerial component includes the internal arrangements supporting the institution's staff in their daily work, including activities related to the promotion of quality (Cardoso et al., 2016). Hence, quality may be considered to be the responsibility of all institution community members. Furthermore, quality is based on the ability of an institution to fulfil, first and foremost, the requirements of the academic community. This idea is consistent with the projection of quality portrayed as a vehicle for institutional transformation and continuous improvement (Cardoso et al., 2016). It may be argued that the factors influencing the development of IQA practices are associated with the advancement of institutions' quality services provision and the creation of a promotive setting for innovation.

According to Rosa et al. (2012), improvement and innovation are two facets of assuring quality in HEIs. The improvement component fosters the proposition that QA is a critical ingredient for innovation, which is underpinned by assessment. The thrust of QA practices is premised around the improvement of teaching and learning processes and the development of academics' skills and competencies (Rahimi, Soltani, & Ghamarnia, 2020; Rosa et al., 2012). The innovation aspect of QA is concerned with examining existing scenarios and making efforts to come up with new academic practices, teaching and learning methodologies and relating teaching, research and institutional management (Rosa et al., 2012). This calls for examining the existing practices in an institution and developing them further through capacity-building. The scenario advocates for the university community members' self-introspection, personal awareness, critical reflection of practices, responsibilities and commitment to duty. Hence, innovation in QA practices calls for risk-taking in individual undertakings and the university community at large.

Of late, there has been an increasing adoption of market mechanisms as instruments of public policy, which augurs well with the high level of autonomy availed to HEIs. Cardoso, Rosa, Videira, and Amaral (2018) argue that when competition is stiff and the state leaves institutional behaviour unregulated, it is likely that HEIs may not interpret and serve the public interest. The challenge may be that autonomous HEIs competing in the market may resort to pursuing strategies that may not augur well for the public interest. Progressive governments believe increased market competition is the critical ingredient that may transform bureaucrats into flourishing entrepreneurs. However, for market convenience, both consumers and service providers require accurate details about the price, calibre and key attributes of the products and services being offered. Hence, QA may be a source of relevant client-driven information and a means of ensuring that institutions advance public interest.

Quality as compliance focuses on quality as a way of higher education centres' compliance with externally prescribed quality policies and guidelines (Cardoso et al., 2016; Dzvimbo & Kwandayi, 2020).

To this end, quality as compliance ensures that the external aspects reigning HEIs and how they implement them define what is considered a quality and how it may be guaranteed. The motive is to enhance institutions' transparency, accountability, efficiency and responsiveness to changing external demands (Dzvimbo & Kwandayi, 2020). In essence, the thrust is to guarantee efficiency and adaptation to the new demands for the provision of quality services and goods to the key stakeholders. Hence, external agencies need to play a critical role in guiding, supporting and monitoring quality practices in HEIs.

Quality and its assurance are associated with the concept of fitness for the purpose and value for money. HEIs are called upon to be accountable to both the national government and the consumers of their services and outcomes (Ozberk & Baskan, 2018). In designing and enacting their IQA practices, public institutions are guided by external prescriptions enunciated by the state and its surrogates (Huang, 2017). This serves to emphasise that the development of IQA practices in HEIs is regulated by the national QA systems and the obligation to be accountable to the nation. These factors seem to be in line with the control and communication purposes for assuring quality in higher education proposed by Rosa et al. (2012). The control function relates to QA providing internal and/or external feedback based on the appropriate decision taken. At the institutional level, the communication function relates to the advancement of transparency, trust and marketing information. Institutions should be able to communicate effectively with all of their stakeholders that they offer quality services commensurate with the investment made (Labadze et al., 2021; Rosa et al., 2012). This perspective is also supported by Veiga, Rosa, Cardoso, and Amaral (2014) who project that QA practices need to be centrally managed and guided by external demands. It is anticipated that touring the line may result in accountability to the nation and improved quality of data put in the public domain about the institutions' activities.

QA as a consistency is concerned with the processes and their manifestations rather than the systems and practices supporting it (Maimuratovna & Tokenovna, 2022). The thrust is that customers demand consistency as the basis for making informed purchase decisions. Quality is concerned with a standard practice that does not vary significantly with time. This relates very well to the academic standards prescribed for the assessment and validation of university education processes and results concerning instruction, scientific research and public service (Sari, Firat, & Karaduman, 2016; Stensaker, 2014). This implies the consolidation of the concept of elimination of defects, in a product or service provisions as long as one works within the confines of the specifications defined by the respective HEIs. These perspectives are derived from industry and commerce. There is a need to modify them so that they apply to the education sector. Hence, evidence-based strategies of quality hinged on the principle that standards should drive IQA practices. This is consistent with the principle of quality as consistency, as the planned processes and outcomes should be conveyed consistently (Harvey & James, 2010; Uzunboylu & Altay, 2021). To that end, quality as a consistency is focused on a systematic process that provides evidence and can lead to improvement of HEIs practices.

1.1.2. Challenges of QA implementation

The implementation of QA in Africa is riddled with several challenges associated with developing countries (Materu, 2007; Odhiambo, 2014). The high cost of QA activities is aggravated by inadequate financial resources associated with developing countries. National governments and donors have provided the bulk of funding for EQA and IQA. The financial constraint is a thorny issue for both national and institutional QA structures. At the institutional level, HEIs budgets barely include QA enterprise. The second challenge is the lack of professionals grounded in QA issues at both the national and institutional levels (Dzvimbo & Kwandayi, 2020; Odhiambo, 2014). This challenge is associated with doubts about the legitimacy of QA and its acceptance as a profession in its own right. Hence, it becomes difficult to take on board and consider QA as a utilitarian process, if the human capital championing it is suspect (Materu,

2007; Odhiambo, 2014). The QA exercise needs to be staffed with appropriately qualified personnel and expertise if it is to be taken seriously by higher education practitioners and other key stakeholders. Such a critical unit of a university cannot be run entirely by para-professionals and demand acceptance and respect from the university community. Persons involved in QA activities need to be competent and discharge their duties professionally, diligently and ethically to be accepted by the lecturing staff.

The third challenge to QA practices is associated with the engagement with varied key stakeholders in the QA activities, especially external constituencies, such as professional bodies and employers (Ntim, 2014). Worse still, in some situations even the participation of internal stakeholders, particularly students, non-academic staff and academics, is ineffective (Huang, 2017; Ntim, 2014). This may be a reflection that some key higher education stakeholders may not be taking QA issues seriously. Such a scenario may not augur well for the effective implementation of QA practices in HEIs. The fourth limitation is the lack of autonomy: the financial dependency of national QA agencies on governments makes them susceptible to political manipulation (Hayward, 2006; Huang, 2017; Materu, 2007). In the same vein, the reliance of IQA departments on the university leadership may seriously impinge on their improvement and accountability assignments (Adamu & Addamu, 2012). The lack of autonomy is a serious handicap in the effective execution of IQA responsibilities in HEIs. The extent to which QA bodies exercise their responsibility may depend on the whims of the sponsor which may be detrimental to effective practice.

The fifth problem relates to the IQA definition of quality standards and criteria which are mainly based on international benchmarking and rankings that are accused of lacking grounding in the African context (Okebulola, 2015). There is a strong feeling that the standards and criteria designed at the international level require to be contextualised to the African setting (Okebukola, 2015). It is only proper that African QA systems domesticate the globally designed standards to suit their respective working environments for effectiveness and tangible outcomes. The sixth obstacle is the call for continental and regional harmonisation of the national QA structures and practices (Dzvimbo & Kwandayi, 2020). In that regard, many initiatives have been undertaken, such as the African Quality Rating Mechanism and the Europe–Africa Quality Connect Project, but the African space of QA is still far from being interconnected (Okebukola, 2015; Shabani et al., 2014). Despite these efforts, a lot of groundwork needs to be covered for sanity to prevail in the QA systems and practices in the African higher education space.

The seventh challenge relates to effective decision-making informed by the results of quality analysis of data and information (Ramirez & Christensen, 2013). This calls for the need to evaluate institutional performance and use the information to improve services and guide institutional development. Concerning accountability, the auditing and assessment results by EQA may guide decision-makers concerning the appropriate status of institutions or programmes. Focusing on improvement, the assessment results may avail valuable information on institutional areas that require more financial support. In the majority of cases, decision-makers disregard or lack the technical expertise on how to utilise the data collected through QA. It can be argued that management in HEIs is not taking advantage of QA data to make decisions with due respect to improving their institutions' performance.

Uzunboylyu and Altay (2021) project that QA in institutions of higher learning undergoes rebuke due to negative attitudes. In the same vein, Dzvimbo and Kwandayi (2020) and Okae-Adjei (2012) argue that QA was not appreciated by the majority of academic staff as they viewed it as a management tool to whip them into line. This serves to illustrate that academic staff mistrusts QA practices and personnel as they view them as management tools to whip them into line. Resistance to QA activities in universities by academic staff could be attributed to a lack of awareness, the inertia to innovations and insecurity (IUCEA-DAAD, 2010). From this perspective, it would appear like the academic staff is not well informed about the intentions and imperatives of QA in the university system. Failure to overcome this huddle

may be disastrous since academic staff plays a critical role in higher education service provision. The academic staff are responsible for designing, planning and executing educational programmes and participate in assuring their quality. Hence, what academics perceive as quality and its assurance, specifically concerning the factors related to its development, its implementation features and its impacts become pertinent to its sustainability or demise. The success of QA practices largely depends on the acceptance, commitment and effective execution of academics.

1.1.3. Zimbabwean QA context

The Zimbabwean QA national system was enacted in 2006. It is responsible for the accreditation of study programmes, institutional evaluation and the certification of internal QA systems. The Zimbabwean QA system is relatively new; however, there are indications that the government has prioritised the higher education reform agenda at both national and institutional levels. In recent years, the development of these systems assumed a critical thrust cognisant that individual HEIs ultimately is responsible for their quality (Garwe, 2019). The success of IQA systems implementation highly hinges on teaching and non-teaching staff residing in respective HEIs (Cardoso et al., 2018; Dzvimbo & Kwandayi, 2020). The transformation of IQA systems rests with the individual institutions' community members' commitment to reform practices and setting the continuous improvement agenda. Hence, it becomes pertinent to examine the views of academics towards IQA systems being implemented in their institution. Although the study focuses on the Zimbabwean setting, it may also be of value to other communities, as it may extend knowledge on how academics are grappling with IQA practices.

1.1.4. Chinhoyi University of Technology (CUT) IQA context

The paper examines the IQA system at CUT a young developing institution established in 2001 by an Act of Parliament. The university has been subjected to several changes consistent with other old African universities. These include a rapid increase in enrolment, dwindling government funding and diversification of academic programmes among others (Dzvimbo & Kwandayi, 2020; Zavale et al., 2016). The CUT QA policy was approved in 2014 and a unit was established to spearhead the QA agenda at the university. The QA directorate has put in place structures in the departments/units to coordinate quality issues. The diagram below shows the management of the IQA model at CUT.

Figure 1. The QA management model at CUT

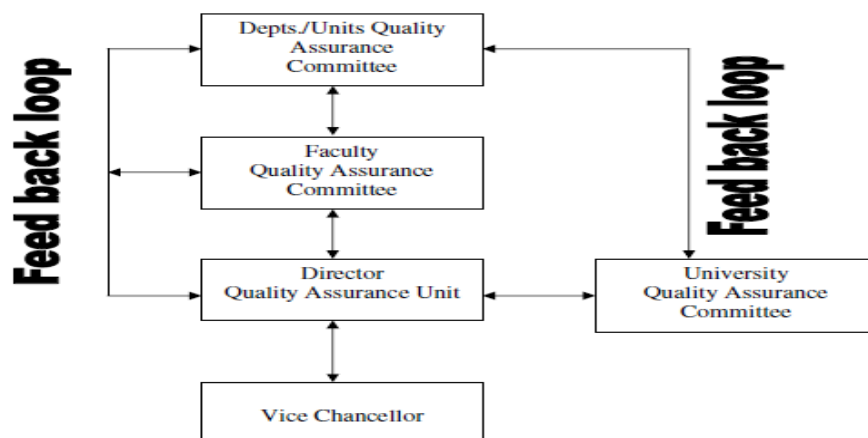


Figure 1 shows the QA structure put in place to monitor IQA mechanisms in units and departments through the Departmental Quality Assurance Committee (DQAC). The DQAC reports to the School Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC). The SQUAC, in turn, reports to the director of the QA unit. The director of the QA unit receives feedback from the departmental, faculty and University Quality

Assurance Committee and reports to the vice chancellor for quality enhancement and innovation. Continuous improvements demand regular feedback and feed-forward mechanisms, such as follow-up activities and remedial actions. This paper seeks to provide an analysis of the perceptions of academics of QA practices and challenges encountered by academics within CUT as envisaged by the QA model.

1.2. Purpose of the study

IQA is a critical aspect of HEIs concerning ensuring high-quality teaching and learning. However, IQA is a fairly new phenomenon in African institutions of higher education and QA problems continue to increase (Maseru, 2007; Sari et al., 2016; Shabani et al., 2014). There is limited research that has focused on IQA systems recently established in individual HEIs (Adamu & Adamu, 2012). To this end, this study intended to examine the IQA practices and challenges that were encountered by the CUT academic staff. It was envisaged that the findings of the study would assist the CUT academic staff in realising their strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improvement concerning QA practices.

1.3. Research questions

The following research questions were raised:

1. What were the perceptions of academic staff members on the QA practices being implemented at CUT?
2. What challenges were being faced in the implementation of QA practices at CUT?

1.4. Significance of the study

The study has significance concerning strengthening QA practices at CUT and beyond. Improved QA would improve the learning, teaching, research, innovation and community engagement at CUT and enhance graduates' competencies and employability. The nation and the international community may benefit from the quality services provided by CUT graduates in the local community, industry and commerce. The findings of the study may be valuable to other HEIs in the country and beyond operating in similar environments.

2. Materials and methods

The study adopted a mixed methods approach and a convergent parallel design. The convergent parallel research design is associated with the collection of quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously, analyses the data sets separately and merges the results during interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Fischler, 2014). Hence, merging is on data collection methods and data interpretation. As such, the main thrust is to collect different but complementary data on the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The convergent parallel design promotes corroboration in the execution of the same study.

2.1. Data collection instrument

A questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions and an interview guide were enlisted to solicit the data to enhance data triangulation. The study participants were drawn from CUT academics.

2.2. Participants

40 participants were purposively selected for the study based on their teaching experience and availability to complete the questionnaire. Then, 10 respondents were selected to participate in the interview based on their teaching experience and availability.

2.3. Data analysis

Data were analysed through SPSS 20 for quantitative data and thematic areas were used for qualitative data.

3. Results

Table 1. Distribution of the participants by gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	31	77.5
Female	9	22.5
Total	40	100.0

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents (77.5%) are male. This is an indication that the academics at CUT are male-dominated.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents by academic rank

Status	Frequency	Percent
Lecturer	19	47.6
Senior Lecturer	15	37.5
Associate	04	10.0
Full Professor	02	5.0
Total	40	100.0

Table 2 shows that the majority of respondents (52.5%) are senior academics. The presence of senior academics in the mix should guarantee credible results based on their experience and professionalism.

Table 3. Distribution of respondents concerning teaching experience

Teaching Experience in Years	Frequency	Percent
0–5	5	12.5
6–10	15	37.5
11–15	15	37.5
16+	5	12.5
Total	40	100.0

About (50%) of the teaching respondents have more than 10 years of teaching experience in a university setup (Table 3). This is highly commendable and their experience concerning curriculum change is likely to give relevant and credible information to this particular study's findings.

3.1. What are the perceptions of lectures on the QA practices implemented at CUT?

Table 4. Student engagement as a barrier to the enactment of IQA

Item	SD	D	A	SA	M	SD
Student Involvement in IQA is Inadequate	2.5%	22.5%	50.0%	25.0%	2.98	0.768
Students' Evaluation of Modules and Learning Outcomes is Problematic	2.5%	17.5%	62.5%	17.5%	2.95	0.677
Regular Graduate Employment Data is Lacking	10.0%	0	55.0%	35.0%	3.25	0.603
Standard Feedback from Employers is Lacking	5.0%	7.5%	40.0%	47.5%	3.30	0.823
IQA Processes are Relevant to Employers and Student Employability	2.5%	5.0%	47.5%	45.0%	3.33	0.701
Average					3.16	.712

From Table 4, 'IQA processes are relevant to employers and student employability' is indicated by a frequency of 92.5% and a mean of 3.33. This may be an indication that academics consider IQA practices as a critical ingredient for student employability. However, the indication that 'Students' evaluation of modules and learning outcomes is problematic' (80%; 2.95) is worrisome. This portrays that students' involvement in IQA is very minimum, which is an unwelcome developmental finding.

The interviews raised issues and concerns about student involvement in IQA practices. Three thematic areas emerged from the interviews, namely limited capacity-building opportunities, limited student engagement and lack of standard feedback from the employers. Prominent among them was the limited involvement of students in evaluating the learning/teaching services availed to them. The majority of respondents (90%) acknowledged the significance of engaging students and prospective employers in QA practices in the university. The first issue to be explored was the limited capacity development opportunities availed to the academics.

3.2. Student engagement

Student involvement in QA is a critical ingredient for the improvement of teaching/learning services afforded to students by any institution. Hence, students need to evaluate the quality of service at their disposal. The academic departments need to capture students' sentiments and act upon them. However, the sentiments below from about 80% of the interviews seem to suggest the minimum engagement of students in QA.

Lecturer C: 'Students are rarely involved in assessing my lectures and modules'.

Lecturer F: 'I have not been availed of the students' lecture and module evaluations for the past four semesters'.

From these sentiments, one can deduce that the level of student engagement in the institution is low. In addition, the feedback from students is not taken seriously by academic departments since lecturers may not access student feedback in some situations. This is detrimental to IQA and the academic departments concerned need to take corrective measures.

3.3. Student-employer engagement

Engagement of the academic departments and the prospective employers of the graduates need to be a continuous process. Captains of the industry and commerce contributions to student development are

critical so that the expected competencies are developed in the students. Student development is a shared responsibility between academic institutions and industry and commerce. However, some of the sentiments below from the academics are seen to shade unconstructive engagement between the employers and academic departments.

Lecturer B: ‘The reports from the industrial attachment supervisors are mainly used for student assessment purposes’.

Lecturer E: ‘Students’ industrial attachment reports are rarely analysed and utilised for curriculum improvement purposes’.

From these sentiments, it may be deduced that employer data is not being utilised to contribute to the improvement of internal capacities concerning teaching/learning, planning and decision-making matrix. This implies the obtained student data from the employers is not significantly contributing to the overall student learning experiences. This is an unfortunate development that may indicate a lack of visionary academic leadership and poorly articulated procedures to monitor internal operations.

Table 5. Inadequate training, coordination, and experience as hindrances to IQA enactment in HEIs

Item	SD	D	A	SA	M	SD
Lack of Training and Experience in IQA	0	17.5%	70.0%	12.5%	2.95	0.552
Capacity-Building in pPublic universities is not Adequate	0	22.5%	55.0%	22.5%	3.00	0.679
QA is Associated With Resistance from Staff Members	5.0%	15.0%	72.5%	7.5%	2.83	0.636
Lack of Coordination Through Inadequate Task Analysis	2.5%	22.5%	62.5%	12.5%	2.85	0.662
Lack of Coordination Through Inadequate Target Group Analysis	5.0%	17.5%	65.0%	12.5%	2.85	0.700
Average					2.81	0.646

From Table 5, one can argue that ‘lack of training and experience about IQA’, indicated by 82.5% and a mean of 2.95, is a significant hindrance to effective enactment of IQA in the higher education sector in Zimbabwe. This could be associated with a lack of financial support for the capacity development of academic staff in quality issues. Resistance to QA by academics (indicated by 80%, $M = 2.83$) is an issue of concern in the institution. A mean of 2.81 and a SD of 0.646 serve as strong indications that lack of training, capacity development, staff resistance, inadequate task analysis and target group analysis are strong barriers to the implementation of QA practices in the HEIs. The inadequate task analysis may be an indication that those championing QA in the institution are not adequately prepared and lack the expertise to effectively execute the task.

From the interviewees, the same issues were reinforced by the majority (90%). The main issues raised were inadequate staff capacity development, resistance to quality issues by staff and inadequate task analysis. The first port of call will be resistance to QA issues by staff^{3.4}. *Limited capacity development*

Academics need to be involved and socialised towards QA practices to enhance their commitment to the practices. Promotion and strengthening of the quality agenda call for the appreciation of the basic tenets of QA so that they can actively be part of the quality system. However, sentiments from the majority (80%) of the interviewees seem to indicate that academics consider themselves passengers in the gravy train due to a lack of awareness. Some of the sentiments from the respondents below serve to illustrate their standpoint.

Lecturer C: ‘QA is seen as extra work by academics’.

Lecturer D: 'QA issues seem to be centred on academics only'.

Lecturer E: 'QA personnel collects a lot of data; however very tangible and usable results are visible on the ground'.

The above perspectives demonstrate that academics attribute QA to the personnel who orchestrate the exercise. Consequently, academics are not actively involved in QA, but rather just abide by it whenever required. This is an unfortunate development that needs urgent attention so that the academics participate in working towards a common goal.

3.5. Staff resistance to quality issues

Views from some of the respondents illustrate the stance of the academics concerning QA issues. The following views from some of the interviewees suffice to demonstrate the current scenario prevailing in the institution:

Lecturer F: 'Resistance from members in the implementation of QA practices - there is too much intimidation at the expense of motivation and so members fail to comply'.

Lecturer B: 'There is a lack of ownership on policy strategies as this seems to be imposed and a must-do without fail measure'.

Lecturer D: 'Academics view the QA unit as a policing or inspectorate unit'.

From these sentiments, it can be inferred that academics resist QA practices. This could be emanating from a lack of trust between the academics and management.

3.6. Inadequate task analysis

QA personnel need to understand how the university community performs its QA tasks and attain the intended goals. This may assist in increasing productivity and comprehension of quality issues. However, sentiments from about 90% of the interviewees seem to depict a contrary environment. The following sentiments from some of the respondents serve to illustrate the situation on the ground:

Lecturer F: 'Too much information provided or required without adequate time given to synthesise or digest the requirements'.

Lecturer B: 'QA personnel collect a lot of data from academic departments, however, there is minimum utilisation of the collected data'.

Data are collected by QA personnel for different levels of management for improvement purposes. So, the issue may not rest with task analysis only but action taken by authorities after receiving the analysed data. The utilisation of the data depends on the management's perception of the data. The culture of utilising QA findings in management is low in the institution. The continuous improvement mode is still new in the organisation.

Table 6. Quality culture as a barrier to the implementation of IQA

Item	SD	D	A	SA	M	SD
There is a Marked Lack of Professional QA Expertise	7.5%	27.5%	50.0	15.0%	2.73	0.860
Staff Members Not Aware of QA Concepts	5.0%	32.5%	55.0%	7.5%	2.65	0.700
There is a High Risk that Quality Concepts are Implemented in a Way That Fails to Comply With Existing Regulations	0	27.5%	65.0%	7.5%	2.80	0.564

QA Concepts Implemented Without a Deep Understanding of Their Pedagogical Function	7.5%	12.5%	60.0%	20.0%	2.93	0.797
Lack of Communication Between QA Units of the Different Public and Private Universities	2.5%	22.5%	52.5%	22.5%	2.95	0.749
Average					2.81	0.734

From Table 6, the majority of respondents (80%) indicated that ‘QA concepts are implemented without a deep understanding of their pedagogical function’, with a mean of 2.93 and SD of 0.749. This may be an indication of a lack of proper grounding in QA practices within the university community. The mean of 2.88 and mean of 0.734 point to the lack of deep understanding of QA practices and effective utilisation in HEIs.

The majority (90%) of interviewees lamented the lack of deep understanding of QA among academics. The following pronouncements from the respondents serve to exemplify the standpoint:

Lecturer A: ‘There is a low-level articulation of QA process and procedures among academic staff members’.

Lecture C: ‘There is a need to develop effective leadership and management skills that are key in the provision of quality teaching and learning as well as quality service delivery, create platforms for dialogue and discussions on key issues that affect quality’.

From these sentiments, one can deduce that the tools and procedures of quality management are in place but poorly articulated. Academics subscribe to quality and follow quality guidelines, but may not consistently take quality-focused actions.

Table 7. Quality Management Decisions as a Barrier to IQA Implementation

Item	SD	D	A	SA	M	Sd
Influence of Institutional Boards of Management is Problematic (as They View IQA as Involving Financing)	0	30.0%	57.5%	12.5%	2.83	0.636
Affiliated Institution’s Role in Quality Management Decisions Presents Barriers	0	32.5%	62.5%	5.0%	2.73	0.554
The Government’s Role in Quality Management Decisions Presents Barriers	2.5%	37.5%	40.0%	20.0%	2.78	0.800
The Structural Influence of the National Accreditation Body (ZIMCHE) Presents Barriers	2.5%	42.5%	37.5%	17.5%	2.70	0.791
Financial Barriers	5.0%	5.0%	45.0%	45.0%	3.30	0.791
Average					2.87	0.714

From Table 7, the majority of respondents (90%) with a mean of 3.30 and SD of 0.791 indicated financial management decisions as significant barriers to the implementation of QA practices.

From the majority of interviewees, the significant theme that emerged was the limited financial support for QA practices in the institution. Some of the sentiments from the respondents serve to illustrate the perceived existing position.

Lecturer C: 'More financial support is needed as QA is a venture that requires large capital investment for effective implementation'.

Lecturer B: 'QA concerns of lecturers concerning resources availability and digital competencies are not taken seriously by management'.

Institutional support for the provision of quality and means to enhance it are quite critical for the effective implementation of quality. From the sentiments above, limited financial support is a major factor accounting for some gaps in QA effective execution. The institution needs to mobilise resources for staff development in QA.

3.7. Challenges to QA

The discussion on academics' perspectives of QA practices has yielded deficiencies or gaps in the institution. These deficiencies put a dent in the effective implementation of QA in the institution. The main gaps in QA are limited student engagement, resistance by academics, limited financial support, management decision-making not based on quality metrics and weak quality culture.

4. Discussion

The results of the study portray that students' involvement in IQA is very minimum, which is an unwelcome developmental finding. This finding is consistent with those (Huang, 2017; Ntim, 2014) who project that participation of students in IQA is ineffective. There is a need to seriously consider taking an aggressive approach to take students' engagement in IQA to a higher level.

The findings indicate a lack of financial support for the capacity development of academic staff in quality issues. Resistance to QA by academics is an issue of concern in the institution. This finding is consistent with IUCEA-DAAD (2010), who projects that resistance to QA activities could be attributed to lack of awareness, the inertia to innovations and insecurity. Lack of knowledge about QA activities may be a serious handicap in academics' engagement in the exercise.

From the results of the study, it can be inferred that academics resist QA practices. This could be emanating from a lack of trust between the academics and management. This finding is consistent with Dvimbo and Kwandayi (2020), Okae-Adjei (2012) and Lucas (2014), who project that QA was not appreciated by the majority of academic staff as they view it as a management tool to whip them into line. This is an unprecedented development since QA rides on trust and teamwork.

The results of the study may be an indication of a lack of proper grounding in QA practices within the university community. This finding is consistent with Dzvimbó and Kwandayi (2020) and Odhiambo (2014), who lament the lack of professional grounding in QA personnel at both the national and institutional levels. The mean of 2.88 and SD of 0.734 point to the lack of deep understanding of QA practices and effective utilisation in HEIs.

The results also indicated financial management decisions as significant barriers to the implementation of QA practices. This may suggest that financial-related management decisions have critical implications on IQA in HEIs. This finding is consistent with Huang (2017) and Adamu and Addamu (2012), who project that the financial dependency of national QA agencies on governments makes them susceptible to political manipulation and that the reliance of IQA departments on the university leadership may seriously impinge on their improvement and accountability assignments.

5. Conclusion

The QA practices are characterised by limited student engagement, inadequate staff capacity development, low utilisation of quality data for continuous improvement, weak quality culture, poor quality management decisions and limited financial resources. The challenges to QA practices are poorly

articulated procedures to monitor internal operations, limited knowledge of QA, mistrust between academics and management, lack of common definition of quality in the institution, academic staff resistance and limited management commitment to QA.

The promotion and strengthening of the quality agenda require more attention. An institutionally agreed definition of quality should be in place. Student engagement in QA needs to be optimised. Capacity-building should be directed towards the enhancement of the quality culture in the institution. Visionary leadership in planning and decision-making should be informed by QA statistical data analysis. The institution needs to vigorously mobilise resources for the effective execution of QA practices.

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