

Adopting Quality Assurance Standard to Enhance High Operational standards in State Universities, the Zimbabwean Context

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Abstract: The study sought to determine the Implications of Quality Assurance Standards of the Zimbabwe Council of Higher Education (ZIMCHE) on Zimbabwean State Universities. For decades Zimbabwe had prided itself of having one of the highest literacy rates and churning out high quality human capital regionally and internationally. Lately sentiments have been expressed suggesting that the quality of education in Zimbabwean State Universities has been declining due to the economic meltdown of the past decade which incapacitated the supervisory body (ZIMCHE). In executing this study nine (9) State university Vice Chancellors, nine (9) senior officials from the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, twenty-one (21) Faculty Deans, fifteen (15) ZIMCHE board members and six (6) Student Representative Bodies [Zimbabwe National Students Union] (ZINASU) and the Student Solidarity Trust] were sampled. The major findings from this research were that ZIMCHE was very relevant and its standards are generally effective despite the fact that the body has had to grapple with funding and human capital constraints among others. The study therefore notes that ZIMCHE and its quality assurance standards play a pivotal role in the enhancement of quality in university education. The researchers recommended the restructuring of the ZIMCHE board to accommodate other members from industrial and professional bodies in a bid to enhance independence, the undertaking of income generating projects by universities to supplement their budgetary requirements, increased budget allocations to the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education and the development of better problem solving methods to ensure that students were not prejudiced by ZIMCHE's action on universities. While the current study and others studies have focused on the quality of teaching and learning, it is strongly recommended that future research explores the quality of research.

Key words: quality assurance; quality control; standards; accreditation; economic meltdown; quality of research; quality of education.

I. INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe is highly recognized for having the highest literacy rate in Africa of ninety-two percent and one of the highest globally (UNESCO Report, 2010), its products are highly regarded worldwide. The education system, like in many countries around the world consists of three levels of primary, secondary and tertiary education. At primary level, all schools, public and private offer the same Grade 7 examinations which are administered by the Ministry of Education. Similarly, all government secondary schools offer

Zimbabwe Schools Examinations Council (ZIMSEC), although private secondary schools may choose to offer ZIMSEC or Cambridge Examinations and or both. Polytechnic Colleges and other technical colleges all sit for Higher Education Examination Council (HEXCO). Yet in higher education, that is, state universities quality assurance is the mandate of the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE). While this is so the examinations unlike in the levels alluded to above are not uniform, each university has its own standard of examination although we seem to be moving towards a system similar to that of HEXCO.

According to the Census 2012 national report by the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT), Zimbabwe has a population of about 13 061 239. It has a robust higher education system which consists of state and private universities, teachers' colleges and polytechnics. Zimbabwe has ten state universities, namely, University of Zimbabwe (1957); National University of Science and Technology (1991); Bindura University of Science Education (1996); Zimbabwe Open University (1998); Midlands State University (1999); Chinhoyi University of Technology (2001); Great Zimbabwe University (2002); Lupane State University (2004); Harare Institute of Technology (2005) and Gwanda State University (2012) (**Ministry of Higher & Tertiary Education 2012 Annual Report**).

The establishment of five more universities between 1999 and 2005 prompted a relook at quality assurance in university education. It was observed that the current economic challenges facing Zimbabwe have caused a significant decline in quality standards at state universities. The establishment of a new body that would advise the Minister on all relevant issues as well as evaluation of the performance of higher education providers, standardization of higher education, qualifications and accreditation became necessary. Consequently, ZIMCHE was established in 2006 to guarantee and sustain quality in university education in Zimbabwe, for purposes of this study we are only going to focus on state universities only even though private universities fall under the jurisdiction of ZIMCHE.

In the quest to unearth quality issues at state universities, the researchers will also pay some attention to the following challenges at state universities which are believed to have

significant influence on quality standards. While in Zimbabwe the number of graduates has increased significantly since independence (1980) this has not translated into positive economic development. The Nziramasanga Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training (1999) also found out that the education system had lost direction and was producing graduates who were arrogant and unrefined. Employers charged that graduates from colleges and universities were too theoretical, had wrong attitudes and were unwilling to learn. According to Nherera (2000) students in the continent face the problem of unemployment since employers feel universities are offering courses that are not in line with their requirements and graduates are ill equipped for the jobs available. The challenge is to produce graduates who can create employment and can be absorbed by industry.

In some universities in Zimbabwe the lecturer produces the course outline, delivers lectures to students, sets and marks both assignments and examinations, and ultimately the lecturer determines the passing or failing of students. This has implications on quality and accountability to stakeholders. In some of these institutions the use of external assessors is a requirement expected of departments but may be neglected due to lack of enforcement.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW QUALITY

Assurance defined

In the era of increased globalization, quality assurance in higher education is critical in every country's strategic plans to enhance competitiveness and to meet international expectations and standards. Quality assurance is a way of measuring, improving, and maintaining the quality of any human activity that has a value. It may be academic, sports performance, business, or economy. Quality assurance is a means of ensuring that the best practices are encouraged in a social system. Kisailowska (2002) noted that quality assurance principles are a certain form of naming and ordering the actions that are necessary for assuring the quality, for instance of teaching, that later is internally measured and evaluated at a given university, and also externally, during an accreditation process. As a result of this, quality assurance principles are to be used as indicators to ensure compliance. It is noteworthy that quality assurance principles regulate both the external and internal activities of an educational institution.

Quality assurance is a proactive means of ensuring quality in any organisation. Quality assurance in education aims at preventing quality problems and ensures that the products of the system conform to the expected standards. Ebong and Efue (2005) state that it is a holistic term that is directed towards education as an entity. According to the authors, it entails the suppliers and consumers and all the various activities put in place to produce quality products and services. Besides, Enaohwo (2003) submitted that the concept of quality assurance in the education system can be looked at from two angles, that is the internal perspective (within the

system) and the external measures (checks and balances by the regulatory agencies).

Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Quality assurance in higher education has become not only an institutional or national issue

but also a global one. Universities and colleges throughout the world today are focusing special attention on designing and implementing new quality assurance mechanisms and systems in order to ensure that students receive high quality and relevant education and that degree and diplomas are widely recognized. Such recognition is seen to be essential not only by national governments and employers but also by other universities and employers internationally.

According to Mohamed (2008), quality assurance in higher education can be defined as systematic management and assessment procedures adopted by higher education institutions and systems in order to monitor performance against objectives, and to ensure achievement of quality outputs and quality improvements. Essentially, quality assurance systems aim to provide appropriate evidence to substantiate claims made about quality and so to enable key stakeholders to have confidence about the management of quality and the level of outcomes achieved.

Quality assurance serves a number of purposes. Apart from protecting student and employer interests and facilitating international recognition of the standards of awards, it is an important element for public accountability purposes, particularly to satisfy taxpayers about value for money and that government subsidies are supporting education activities of an appropriate standard. Quality assurance helps inform student choice, especially in the light of a growing diversity of course offerings. It also can contribute to improved teaching and administrative processes and help disseminate good practice, leading to overall system improvement.

According to the British Standard Institution (1991), quality is defined as "the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs". On the other hand, Green and Harvey (1993) identify five different approaches to defining quality:

- In terms of exceptional (exceeding high standards and passing a required standard);
- In terms of consistency (exhibited through "zero defects" and getting right the first time", making quality a culture);
- As fitness for purpose (meaning the product or service meets the stated purpose, customer specifications and satisfaction);
- As value for money (through efficiency and effectiveness); and
- As transformative (in term of qualitative change).

In line with the above notions from different scholars concerning quality, Reeves and Bednar (1994) concluded that

the search for a universal definition of quality and a statement of law like relationship has been unsuccessful. The researchers however, believes that fitness for purpose captures all the essential aspects of quality and in the context of higher education it is the ability of a holder of a qualification to efficiently and effectively meet the demands of the workplace.

Implications of Quality Assurance in Higher Education

According to Deming (1986), quality assurance in higher education poses great deal of implications which can be summarized as follows:

- Leadership and commitment of top management plays a significant role in quality improvement. Therefore, senior officials at institutions of higher learning should take the initiative to spearhead the upholding of highest standards of quality.
- Creating an environment for learning and staff development as crucial in doing tasks right every time.
- Adopting new philosophies and technologies that can improve quality.
- Encourage team work and participatory management.
- Develop a communication strategy to report progress and results.
- Recognize the efforts of staff without creating a competitive environment.
- Put appropriate systems and processes in place as per the needs of the stakeholders.
- Encourage quality circles and instill a culture of quality.

In summary, these points encourage leadership support and enhancement of quality assurance initiatives by lower level university employees. Quality assurance is an on-going process whereby universities must constantly hold workshops, seminars and symposiums aimed at conscientising their staff on quality control issues with regards to institutions of higher learning. It therefore, provides a sense of involvement which also aids the implementation of agreed quality decisions.

The Relevance of Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Studies have shown that higher education is key to active societal participation, which subsequently increases economic growth. Quality education is a fundamental requirement to gain access to knowledge (Materu, 2007). This makes the condition of higher education very critical in any nation. Due to its impact on economic growth and development, most countries have rapidly expanded access to higher education. However, in order to achieve world class standards, there is a need for quality assessment and continuous improvement (Harman, 2000), this includes both accreditation of academic programmes and quality assessment of the institution. For this reason, quality assurance in higher education has moved from being an institutional or national concern to become a global concern. The world over, institutions of higher learning are forced to devote special attention to development and

implementation of quality assurance systems to ensure provision of high quality and appropriate education which will be recognized internationally. Both developed and developing countries have set up bodies responsible for quality assurance in higher education in line with global trends towards improvement of education standards in higher education. Their mandates are all similar to promote and co-ordinate education provided by institutions of higher education and act as a regulator in the determination and maintenance of standards of teaching, examinations, academic qualifications and research (Tam, 2002).

There has been a global shift to ‘massification’ in higher education, this in turn leads to a rise in the modes of course delivery from face-to-face to distance (and some instances, virtual education), and a diversity in institutional arrangements leading to franchising arrangements with organisations where the franchising institute may have very limited control. All these, present challenges to the effectiveness of institutional quality controls (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs-Australia, 2010). Competition in the provision of higher education forces institutions of higher learning to develop strong links with stakeholders. Such moves can only materialize on the proper evidence of demonstrating high quality in service and skills of graduate. Therefore, formal, transparent and credible quality assurance systems guarantee the success of institutions of higher learning, and ensure easy and objective comparison by interested parties thus relevancy of quality assurance in higher education.

The need for establishment of a board to look at quality assurance in Higher Education.

Some critics argue that despite the need for quality assurance there is no need for a separate body to look into quality assurance as institutions of higher education can effectively do this on their own. According to Vroeijenstin (1995) quality assurance could not be effective if higher education institutions are left to look into it on their own, as this would create conflict between serving improvement and serving the accountability. However, establishment of an independent entity helps to keep these two separate and thus achieve the government objective of quality assurance and the aims of the institutions. Woodhouse (1999) asserts that the two purposes are incompatible, and thus it is essential to have a separate organization because higher education institutions may turn a blind eye on key accountability information that is essential to improving quality. Harvey (1997) alludes that if higher learning institutions were to focus on both may divert focus from improvement in teaching and learning to compliance which may be detrimental.

Addressing quality assurance requires an external organization (Thune et al, 1996). An external organization guarantees integrity; especially from an international perspective. It also helps to enhance improvement by providing advice to institutions and undertaking research and benchmarking. According to Thune (1996) additional

advantages of external quality assurance include; impartiality, credibility, authority comprehensiveness, consistency and transparency.

On the other hand, Brown (2000) argues that those employed in higher education, have always handled both accountability and improvement. Moreover, self-evaluation is the norm in higher education, and has always yielded positive results (Saarinen, 1995). It is argued that government is always the greatest investor in higher education and would never penalize or closedown institutions, thus using development of government quality assurance organization would make it difficult for the government to combine its aims (Middlehurst and Woodhouse, 1995). According to Askling (1997) internal quality assurance is problem-driven, and thus useful for improvement compared to external which is not sensitive to internal needs. Knight (2001) suggests that more emphasis should be on internal quality improvement rather than external. According to the survey by Harvey (2002) external quality assurance inhibits innovations as it employs rigid evaluation criterion and may lead to internal systems being determined by requirements of an external organization (Williams, 1997).

External quality assurance is likely to be a cost and be inefficient (Middlehurst et al, 2002). Moreover, external monitoring only provides a snapshot of the situation at a certain interval of time. The greatest danger of external quality assurance is that it tends to develop a 'compliance culture' (Williams, 1997), and worse still people can 'cheat the system' as they learn the 'rules of the game'. Another sentiment is echoed by the scholar Stensaker (2003), that external quality assurance is related to the potential political and economic gains of being a 'good implementer' and managers and other stakeholders have an interest in developing a successful image of their own efforts. Stensaker (2003) warns against the risk of similar tendencies in studies of the impact of external quality assurance.

In light of the Zimbabwean situation the researchers believe that the establishment of ZIMCHE obligatory, firstly because it was observed that the establishment of so many universities in such a short time had led to the decline of quality standards. Secondly, because of government's deliberate policy to increase access to higher education so as to correct historical imbalances and propel socio-economic development and lastly, the economic meltdown which became more pronounced from the year 2000 resulted in the exodus of highly qualified and experienced staff and the failure to sustain some traditional quality assurance procedures in higher institutions for example, the reduction in research activities and the non-engagement of external examiners in all examination sessions due to reduced funding. Thirdly, the establishment of a national higher education quality assurance agency would be in line with regional and global trends for the purpose of assuring quality in higher education. Practically all countries with several universities have found it necessary to have a body responsible for quality assurance.

Some equivalent bodies to ZIMCHE are the Tanzania Commission of Universities, the Kenya Commission for Higher Education and the Council for Higher Education in South Africa.

Approaches to Quality Education

According to Woodhouse (1999), there are three main approaches to quality assurance and quality assurance agencies can adapt to one or more of these according to different educational systems and traditions. These quality approaches are namely **accreditation**, **assessment** and **quality audit**.

Accreditation is an evaluation of whether an institution or programme meets a threshold standard and qualifies for a certain status. Obtaining accreditation may have implications for the Higher Education itself, for example permission to operate. The focus of accreditation is comprehensive, examining the mission, resources, and procedures of a programme (Dill, 2000). The output of an accreditation is a yes or no decision.

Assessment is an evaluation that makes grade judgments about quality; it goes beyond accreditation that makes a binary judgment (Dill, 2000). Assessment asks "how good are your output"? The output of an assessment is a quantitative evaluation, a grade (whether numeric, literal or descriptive) (Woodhouse, 1999).

Quality Audit checks the extent to which the institution is achieving its own explicit or implicit objectives (Woodhouse, 1999). International Standards (1994) defines quality audit as a three-part process, checking: the suitability of the planned quality procedures in relation to the stated objectives; the conformity of the actual quality activities with the plans; and the effectiveness of the activities in achieving the stated objectives. Audit asks "are your processes effective (Woodhouse, 1999).

With globalization, the impacts of international standards are increasing and public demand for transparency and accountability is on the rise. It is now a challenge to educators and policymakers to set appropriate standards which draw on and reflect the unique history, needs, and expectations not to forget the stakeholders at large. Furthermore, they are expected to put in place mechanisms to enforce those standards and to monitor performance in quality assurance. Recent studies have demonstrated that for developing countries, higher education can play a key "catch-up" role in accelerating the rate of growth towards a country's productivity potential (Bloom, et al. 2006).

Models that are used for Quality Controls

There are different meanings and interpretations of quality hence for models as well. Across the world, institutions follow different models of quality assurance, particularly country specific and institution specific models. According to NIST (National Institute of Standards and technology, 2006),

there are five popular models of quality assurance namely: **Baldrige criteria, ISO 9000, Capability Maturity Model, Six Sigma and Total Quality Management.** The researchers will not dwell on Capability Maturity Model because the tool was intended to evaluate the ability of government contractors to perform a contracted software project which is not applicable to the study.

Six Sigma

'Six Sigma' originated at Motorola in the early 1980s. Since then, it has been used in many business establishments covering General Electric, Ford, Sony (Goffbett, 2004). Sigma (s) is the letter in Greek alphabet used to denote standard deviation in statistics. Its main objectives are to reduce variation and defects, increase customer satisfaction and increase profits. Six Sigma as a philosophy is concerned with its customer focus and creative process improvements. The method of Six Sigma is a systematic process covering five steps: Define-Measure-Analyse-Improve-Control. Goffbelt (2004) emphasised the concept of Six Sigma and its methodology which has a lot of significance to educational institutions since it believes in teamwork, which is in tandem with the activities in education. The role and responsibilities of team members in Six Sigma projects are also outlined and involve people who are trained in the process.

International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 9000

In Greek, ISO is a term meaning uniform, homogeneous, equal, and ISO may be seen as a shortened version of this word (Sprow, 1992). The scholar further states that the ISO 9000 standards were originally conceived for companies in the manufacturing industry to predict the reliability of the products and quality control. However, since the 1990s the application of this standard has spread to other sectors including education and training. Van den Berge (1998) states that "ISO 9000 certification indicates that the organization is able to meet the needs and demands of its customers in a planned and controlled manner. But this does not necessarily indicate the products are also of quality." An ISO 9000 certificate for an education and training organization provides "assurance that it is well organized and that the outcomes of programmes and courses meet the intended goals and needs of the users, however, it does not necessarily guarantee that each content of these courses and programmes meet particular educational standards" (Van den Berghe, 1998). The ISO 9000:2000 is based on a process model that emphasizes continuous improvement. According to Kartha (2004), eight quality principles are outlined as follows:

Customer focus: Organizations depend on their customers and therefore, should understand current and future customer needs, should meet customer requirements, and strive to exceed customer expectations.

Leadership: Leaders establish unity of purpose and give direction to the organization. Their responsibility is to create

an internal environment that can facilitate achievement of the organization's objective.

Involvement of people: This principle stresses that people at all levels are the essence of an organization and they should be involved for organizational benefits.

Process approach: A desired result is achieved more efficiently when activities and related resources are managed as a process.

Systems approach to management: identifying, understanding, and managing interrelated processes as a system contributes to the organization's effectiveness and efficiency.

Continuous improvement: A permanent objective of the organization should be continuous improvement of its performance.

Fact-based decision making: Useful decisions are based on the analysis of data and information.

Mutually beneficial supplier relationship: An organization and its suppliers are interdependent and a mutually beneficial relationship enhances the ability of both to create value.

Baldrige Criteria

According to Owlia (1996), Baldrige Criteria originated in the United States of America. The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award is the highest award for performance excellence managed by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). The American Society of Quality assists in the administration of the award. In order to promote quality awareness and recognize quality achievements, the Congress established this award in the year 1987. The education criteria for performance excellence are designed to help organizations use an integrated approach to organizational performance management that results in delivery of ever-improving value to students and stakeholders, contributing to education quality and organizational stability; improvement of overall organizational effectiveness and capabilities; and organizational and personal learning (Owlia, 1996).

A brief description of the categories in Baldrige Criteria is as follows:

- *Leadership:* The leadership category examines how an organization's senior leaders guide and sustain the organization. The way an organization's governance addresses the ethical, legal and public responsibilities.
- *Strategic Planning:* An organization's strategic objectives and action plans are examined. It also analyses how strategic objectives and action plans are deployed, changed and progress is measured.
- *Student, Stakeholder, and Market Focus:* This examines how an organization determines the requirements, expectations, and preferences of

students, stakeholders, and markets. There is a student and stakeholder relationship.

- *Measurement, Analysis and Knowledge Management:* This examines how an organization selects, gathers, analyses and improves its data, information and knowledge assets. It also examines how the organization reviews organizational performance.
- *Process Management:* This focuses on an organization's core competencies and work systems, and examines how it designs, manages and improves its key processes to achieve organizational success and sustainability.
- *Results:* This category examines an organization's performance in all the above six categories and improves in key areas – student learning, budgetary provisions, faculty and staff results, leadership (Owlia, 1996).

The **Baldrige** criterion makes use of the ideas behind other quality assurance models and is adaptable. Any organisation (Zimbabwe Higher Education sector included) can take advantage of the criteria. State universities are encouraged to use creative, adaptive and flexible approaches which foster incremental and breakthrough improvement through innovation. The criteria require institutions to choose from tools such as the Lean, Six Sigma and International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) 9000, Balanced Score Card and Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) among others those that are most suitable and effective considering their circumstances in order to make improvements. Properly used such tools are a contributor to achieving excellence in Zimbabwe's university education.

Total Quality Management

Trait (1993) stated that Total Quality Management (TQM) evolved as an overriding concept in the field of quality in recent years. The scholar further states that this method assumes that quality is what the consumer of the service or product perceives. "TQM is a people driven process. It involves changes in people's attitudes primarily. In addition, it deals with process orientation and continuous improvement of the process. It strives for empowerment and autonomy of the people involved in using production processes. It asks people to continuously look for new ways to adapt to the changing environment. It is a continuous improvement plan, with an effort to bring out the best for the stakeholders as well as for the institutions" (Trait, 1993). Total Quality Management has five components namely customer, continuous improvement, training and development, teamwork and measurements.

- The customer can be anyone who receives or is affected by the product, process or service, and thus customer can be external or internal.
- For innovation and excellence to come, continuous improvement is highly important. Improvement should aim towards 'zero defects'.

- In order to successfully implement total quality, the staff should be open minded and continuously updated and trained.
- Teamwork and involvement of all stakeholders is key to success.
- The success of total quality management implementation is the ability to monitor the progress and review the objectives.

Having discussed the different approaches to quality assurance, there is no universally accepted definition for quality, and the writers may in the last resort point out that quality is a philosophical concept. To sum up, the number of diverse definitions of quality is an indication that quality has been a contested concept particularly in the field of higher education.

Approaches used for quality assurance in Higher Education

So far the literature review has focused on general concepts in quality assurance and it will now look at some countries that have followed the quality concepts in higher education. As noted earlier the ZIMCHE quality was adopted from developing countries namely Tanzania, Kenya and South Africa and it is of this view that empirical evidence is to be scrutinized. In addition, developed countries like Britain, United States and Australia are also scrutinized.

A case of United States of America

According to Eaton (2000) quality assurance in higher education institution is done through the accreditation process, which ensures that education providers meet, and maintain minimum standards of quality and integrity regarding academics, administration and related services. The scholar also notes that there is no federal agency or ministry to control or oversee the post-secondary education institutions. The accreditation is carried out by private, non-profit organizations designed and recognized for the specific purpose. Thus, external quality monitoring is used in quality assurance in higher education.

A case of United Kingdom

Established in 1997, the Quality Assurance Agency for higher education is a centralized independent body funded by subscription from universities and colleges of higher education in the United Kingdom (UKDES, 2003) quality assurance's role is to provide public assurance that standards and quality within higher education are being safeguarded and enhanced. Quality assurance is done primarily through institutional audit and subject reviews. The institutional audits ensure that higher education institutions are:

- Providing awards and qualifications of an acceptable quality and an appropriate academic standard and
- Exercising their legal powers to award degrees in a proper manner where relevant (United Kingdom code, 2003).

A case of Australia

Universities and higher education institutions are self-accrediting bodies. They typically have in place a system of formal, cyclical reviews involving external assessors, for evaluation of programmes and organizational units. The quality assurance process in this country's universities include:

- Graduate destination surveys and student evaluation surveys;
- Accreditation/approvals from professional associations for courses such as health, medicine and
- Use of external examiners for higher degrees (AUQA, 2008).

According to the Australian Quality Assurance Handbook (2008), universities themselves meet the costs of audits. It is the responsibility of the institution concerned to take action on the audit report. Since, the report forms the basis of funding by the Commonwealth or the relevant state or territory government, failure to respond appropriately to the reports could lead to reduction on funding.

A case of Kenya

According to Commission for Higher Education Handbook (2009), the rapid expansion of higher education, entrance of market forces in higher education delivery and the globalization of education necessitated the formation of structures, mechanisms, standards and guidelines to quality assurance. The Ministry of Education spends more than 12 per cent of its annual budget on higher education. Consequently, the larger portion of allocation to its public universities caters for salaries of university staff and very little money is left for teaching and learning materials and equipment. Since the Government does not have a distance education policy for Higher Education in place, there is no specific provision for distance education in the overall national budget. As a result, institutes and faculties of distance education in the university have to generate funds for running programmes, general planning, coordination, supervision and evaluation of the programme. In most cases, money generated from distance Education programmes subsidise other conventional programmes. Furthermore, innovations in distance education have heavily relied on unsustainable sources of funding, especially donor funding.

A case of South Africa

In South Africa the Higher Education Quality Control (HEQC) spent a great deal of time consulting with stakeholders during preparation of policies and standards and, as is the tradition in contemporary South Africa, took those consultations into consideration in preparing standards. Indeed, some critics of the HEQC argued that it spent too much time consulting. HEQC attached great importance to having an "upfront communications strategy" and was sensitive to concerns that while they had communicated well with the universities HEQC is currently working to improve

its public communication strategy (Kingsley and Orivel, 2006). The HEQC has also tried to enhance the effectiveness of site visits by conducting post-site visit surveys which have proven helpful in revising their policies and procedures. In several countries, pre-accreditation visits to institutions to explain the procedures and to give staff a chance to ask questions were reported to be very well received (Fred, 2000).

There are three types of universities and together they offer a full range of courses leading to internationally recognized qualifications. All public universities conduct research, which supports teaching and is frequently aimed at tackling the challenges that face South Africa and the developing world (South Africa Higher Education Quality Control handbook 2009). There is world-class research generated in many fields, concentrated in the country's top research universities. Public funding of higher education has increased in recent years and universities have received a major funding boost from government to refurbish buildings, construct new facilities, upgrade equipment and libraries, improve outputs and produce more science, engineering and technology graduates.

Lessons Learned from the above countries.

The preceding sub-sections provided a brief overview of the quality assurance experiences of some selected countries in terms of the approach, purpose, scope and criteria for quality assurance. The analysis of the review indicates that there are some similarities and differences among the quality assurance systems of the selected countries. Regardless of the approaches followed, the purposes of quality assurance include the elements of both accountability and improvement in most of the countries. The scope of quality assurance in higher education is teaching, learning and research in most of the quality assurance systems in place, though some countries consider additional elements.

Nevertheless, there are variations in terms of the approach and level of quality assurance among the quality assurance systems. Some countries employ institutional and program accreditation as their approach to quality assurance like in the United States of America and United Kingdom. Still others like Kenya adopt institutional accreditation. South Africa uses the combination of program accreditation, institutional audit and assessment. In the United Kingdom and Australia, institutional quality audit is the approach for quality assurance. Also, evidence regarding student-learning experience is not a common feature of the quality assurance systems. Some countries employ external examiner system or professional licensing like United Kingdom and United States of America. In developing countries funding for quality assurance in higher education comes from the national budget at a small margin.

Finally, the lesson that can be drawn from such variations is that the system of quality assurance must be in consonance with the historical and educational context of a country. The authors argued that the necessary and sufficient conditions for efficient quality assurance are not present in developing

countries. This suggests differences in quality assurance practice between developed and developing countries.

ZIMCHE as A Quality Assurance Board in Zimbabwe

ZIMCHE was created through an Act of Parliament (Chapter 25:27) which was promulgated in 2006 to repeal the National Council for Higher Education Act (Chapter 25:08) and to require ZIMCHE to register and accredit institutions of higher education. The mandate of ZIMCHE as provided for in Section 5 (1) of the Act is to promote and coordinate education provided by institutions of higher education and to act as a regulator in the determination and maintenance of standards of teaching, examinations, academic qualifications and research in institutions of higher education. The Act further states in Section 6 (d) that the function of Council is to design and recommend an institutional quality assurance system for higher education, that is, a system whereby the courses, programmes and degrees offered by institutions are evaluated on a regular and objective basis, and to recommend to the Minister institutional quality assurance standards.

The ZIMCHE Act, therefore, clearly mandates ZIMCHE to be the gatekeeper of standards in higher education institutions. The coming in of ZIMCHE managed to assist many higher education institutions to improve their standards. ZIMCHE sets the benchmarks in consultation with these institutions and in adherence to international standards. ZIMCHE assists institutions to establish internal quality assurance units as well as to improve quality of provision in general. Apart from the advisory role, ZIMCHE also monitors and accredits programmes offered by institutions. Any programme that does not meet quality standards is suspended.

Constraints of Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Fred (2000) notes that effective quality assurance depends largely on the availability of highly qualified faculty members and administrators within institutions and competent professional and technical staff. The success of accreditation, audits, and academic reviews is particularly demanding of human capacity since the legitimacy and credibility of the results is so dependent on the quality, dedication, and integrity of the people who serve as peer reviewers, the administrators and faculty members who prepare the self-assessment and collect needed data at institutions being reviewed, and the professional staff in the national quality assurance agency who eventually review the panel reports and disseminate the results to stakeholders and the public (Fred, 2000). In developing countries there is brain drain, professionals are leaving their countries for greener pastures leaving the inexperienced personnel to run the institutions resulting in compromising quality. In addition, lack of appropriate training for those involved in quality processes leaves a lot to be desired.

Costs and Funding Constraints

Compared to developed countries, higher education systems in the world, quality assurance systems in Africa are still at an

infant stage and thus confronted by many challenges (Barnett, 1992). Quality Assurance costs money and time of highly-skilled individuals. Though effective, system-wide program accreditation is costly and involves large numbers of people and complex logistics. Countries need to make frank assessments of their financial capacity to undertake the range of possible quality assurance activities and tailor their systems to their unique financial situations, as well as to their human resource constraints. Higher education institutions are in serious financial crisis despite mass production (Barnett, 1992). Moreover, student fees are government controlled not to mention decaying infrastructure.

Need for Effective Communication

Kingsley and Orivel (2006) mention the importance of consultations throughout the process of developing and implementing a quality assurance system as critical. The scholars site Mauritius as a good example because prior to the introduction of accreditation for private institutions, the institutions were given opportunities to provide feedback on the guidelines prepared by the Tertiary Education Commission. The feedbacks served as a useful resource in the revision of the Tertiary Education Commission Act. In the end, private institutions were generally pleased with new the legislation and felt that accreditation of their programs by the Tertiary Education Commission enhanced their legitimacy (Kingsley and Orivel, 2006).

Autonomy for Quality Assurance (QA) Agencies

Quality Assurance agency is responsible for assuring its own quality as there is normally no other oversight body responsible for this function (Green and Harvey, 1993). The legitimacy of the quality assurance processes by national agencies, therefore, depend in large part on keeping the process transparent, open, and free of political and special-interest influences.

Balancing Quality and Quantity in Higher Education

Tiropanis et al (2009) argue that maintaining quality has the highest priority to any organization and it is mostly appropriate to the higher education institutions. Higher Education Institutions should care about the quality of learning and teaching because it is the only way to become recognized globally. The higher education institutions will lose their potential customers if they cannot assure high quality standards. This also implies to quantity; institutions must bear the consequences of mass production as this also compromises quality. To improve the quality of learning and teaching, According to Tiropanis et al (2009), higher education Institutions can enable access to learning and teaching material across institutions, therefore, students can get more information about their subject enabling teachers to have more information and teach broadly in an area.

Quality of research in Higher Education.

To be the best in the world in research, higher education institutions need to strengthen their research capacity

(Innovation and Skills, 2009). In order to achieve this challenge Institutions, need to develop multidisciplinary centres bringing together many areas of expertise and building relationships between teams in universities and industries to establish their research capacity (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2009).

Managing mass production in Higher Education.

There are so many factors have that have contributed to mass production in higher education namely political, social, economic and technological. Due to technological advancement, higher education is not only available through face-to-face conventional mode, but also available through distance education and e-learning models. There are many variants of educational provisions (Stella and Gnanam, 2004): distance education; twinning arrangements; study abroad semesters; corporate universities; franchised operations; and virtual universities.

Of these, the distance education provision is predominant with the virtual or the e-learning option gaining momentum due to availability of computers and the internet. According to Prasad (2006) "Distance education, which is considered an important solution to meet the demands for mass education in developing countries, without quality may instead become a big problem".

III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Exploratory Research is used to develop a better understanding of the phenomena being studied. According to Crotty (1998), exploratory studies are a valuable means of finding out what is happening, to seek new insight, to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light. Exploratory research was employed as the researchers sought to identify what really ZIMCHE was all about, its mandate, structure, legal framework and various other issues pertaining to quality assurance in universities. Having understood this, a foundation was laid for the researchers to fully outline the implications of ZIMCHE quality assurance standards on state universities. Exploratory research allowed the researchers to identify the root cause of problems of quality assurance in state universities and the adequacy of ZIMCHE's standards in successfully curtailing the recurrence of quality problems in state universities.

In this study the researchers collected data through a detailed questionnaire and also from interviews. In addition, open-ended questionnaires and more and more probing helped the researchers as respondents described more and more information concerning quality assurance. Due to the fact that universities are complex organizations, the researchers came up with a sample size population which was interviewed while some were given questionnaires to gather relevant data. Interview questions consisted of open-ended questions to allow more probing while questionnaires consisted of both open-ended and closed ended questions. This was done in

order to get vast information concerning quality assurance in state universities as well as in ZIMCHE.

There are essentially two main types of research methodology. These are quantitative and qualitative methodology. Mixed methods design is one in which both quantitative and qualitative methods are used to answer research questions in a single study (Mertens, 2005). Mixed methods approach is useful to develop a better understanding of complex phenomena by triangulating or corroborating or complementing one set of results with another and thereby enhancing the validity of inferences (Mertens, 2005). By integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches, however, the deficiencies of one approach can be offset by the advantage of the other (Creswell, 2003). The study therefore, used a mixed methods approach.

Sampling techniques

In executing this study nine (9) State university Vice Chancellors, nine (9) senior officials from the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, twenty-one (21) Faculty Deans, fifteen (15) ZIMCHE board members and six (6) Student Representative Bodies [Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU) and the Student Solidarity Trust] were sampled. The organizational characteristics of the state universities were used as a basis for selecting the sample universities.

Data presentation and analysis

Data analysis refers to the process of bringing order, structure and interpretation to the large volume of data collected (Masiwa and Kabanda, 2006). This means that the researchers had to prepare the data for analysis, conduct different analyses and move deeper into understanding the data. In this study, the data collected through questionnaires was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences computer software. In addition, the data collected was thoroughly checked before processing. The processed data was presented in the form of tables, charts and graphs. The tables were used for data presentation because they made the analysis and interpretation easier. Qualitative analysis was made by the use of statements to develop themes emanating from the data obtained.

IV. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Relevance of quality assurance by ZIMCHE in a turbulent environment.

Sixty (60) percent of the respondents indicated that the current political and economic environment is convenient for ZIMCHE quality assurance standards because from the period 1999 to 2005, five more universities were established and increased intakes were observed, this prompted ZIMCHE to control the service providers by ensuring quality. Another reason noted was that of intense competition between the universities themselves which triggered unethical practices in the absence of a quality assurance supervisory body and was

likely to ruin the entire university education system. Therefore there was need to ensure quality all the time so that quality graduates were produced for the benefit of the country and economy. Twenty-four (24) percent indicated that there was no need to have quality assurance in this turbulent environment because in order to ensure quality there must be adequate resources in place like infrastructure, finance, manpower just to mention a few. The respondents also highlighted the issue of brain drain resulting in most institutions being insufficiently staffed and programmes being taught by unqualified personnel. Therefore, it was not ideal because current conditions require special considerations which might fall short of ZIMCHE standards. Sixteen (16) percent of the respondents were not sure whether or not the prevailing turbulent environment was convenient for ZIMCHE quality assurance standards.

The researchers found out that ZIMCHE quality assurance was relevant in a turbulent environment due to the increased demand for university education propelled by the government's policies to deliberately increase access to education to correct historical imbalances and to boost socio-economic development. Secondly, Zimbabwe's economy experienced a 10-year freefall which saw the exodus of many skilled lecturers, trimming of university research budgets and non-engagement of external examiners and invigilators due to funding shortages, therefore an oversight of this may reach destructive levels. Lastly, the researchers found out that it was in line with regional and global trends as the assuring of quality in higher education is very critical in view of the economic growth, development of cross border higher education provision, regional integration and globalisation. As noted in literature review ZIMCHE adopted this system from developing countries namely Tanzania, Kenya and South Africa.

The researchers also found out that highlights of ZIMCHE reports on programme assessments and institutional visits were brought to the notice of the government for redress. These respondents commented on the deficiencies like poor infrastructure; poor equipments and areas that needed improvement but nothing has been done resulting in compromising the quality. For example, some of the sampled institutions hire learning facilities which are not even conducive for learning purposes but for strategic planning purposes.

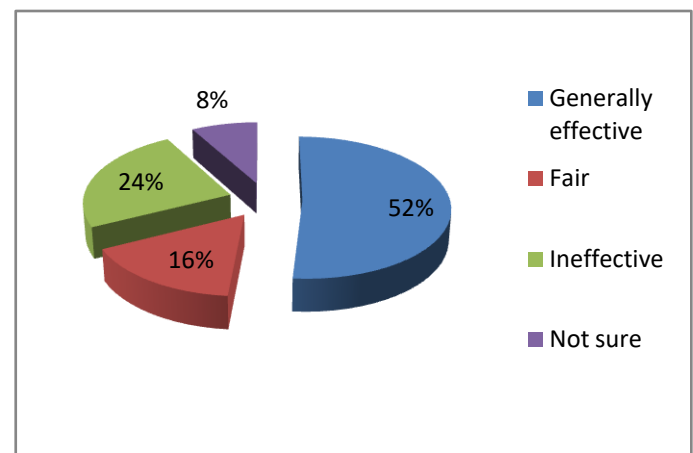
Tools and Approaches put in place by ZIMCHE to ensure quality assurance

The study found that a number of approaches to quality assurance have been adopted in Zimbabwe with most of them subjected to constant review for improvement. The responses which the writers gathered from interviews with senior officials in institutions indicated that various approaches have been adopted by institutions. The researchers also learnt that on-going internal evaluation was a feature of academic life

where institutions undertake effective self-evaluation of their internal processes which also contribute, to different kinds of external evaluation and audit. On the other hand, approaches such as the external examiner system and the use of student feedback for improvement were employed in all institutions. Some of the tools mentioned included different circulars to be adhered to by institutions from ZIMCHE concerning requirements for the introduction of new programmes, structure of degree programmes, course benchmarks as well as guidelines for a new university to offer postgraduate programmes only to mention a few. For programme accreditation or evaluation, the key areas of concern which the researchers gathered were programme curriculum, staffing, examinations, external moderation, academic regulation, provision for student assessment of course content and teaching and for peer and professional assessment of content of teaching, physical facilities (lecture rooms or halls and library). In summary the effectiveness of tools and approaches used by ZIMCHE responses were analysed as show in the figure 2.

Figure 1 below shows that 52% of the respondents from questionnaires rated the tools and approaches used to be generally effective and the reasons were that they provided the necessary checks and balances that were necessary to reduce or compromise of learning standards posed by the intense competition between the institutions of higher learning. Also noted was the fact of previous actions taken on errant universities for example NUST on its PhD programme which was adjourned and required to follow required procedures. This implied that there was an effective approach by ZIMCHE to ensure quality assurance is observed in higher institutions.

Figure 1: Effectiveness of Quality assurance tools and approaches used by ZIMCHE



Source: Primary data

Twenty-four (24) percent of the respondents rated approaches and tools used by ZIMCHE as ineffective due to the following reasons:

- Shortages of the human capital necessary for the execution of accreditation, assessment and audit processes.
- Lack of effective communication between ZIMCHE and its stakeholders.
- Funding constraints since it is dependent on hand-outs from the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education.
- Quantity and quality balance implications.
- Some of its Quality Assurance standards criteria are based on foreign benchmarks which might be too ideal for the Zimbabwean setting.
- Its role is limited to that of advisory to the Ministry of Higher and tertiary education.

Some respondents (16%) indicated that ZIMCHE's quality assurance standards were fair. Only a handful (8%) of the respondents were not sure about the effectiveness of ZIMCHE standards probably due to twisted perceptions pertaining to the actions to suspend some programmes conducted by ZOU and NUST. These actions some analysts argued were not done above board and posed confusion on the effectiveness of the regulatory body's quality tools and approaches.

The conclusion reached by the researchers was that in as much as all the tools and approaches were in place, ZIMCHE is not resourced adequately both human and finance in order to be able to undertake its quality assurance process effectively and efficiently. At the moment ZIMCHE looks at more than ten (10) state and public universities to ensure quality. In addition, the government has a plan in place to have a university in all provinces. As the population of higher education of the country increases it will be impossible for ZIMCHE to undertake its quality assurance process if it is not well resourced.

There should be an improvement in the tracking system to ensure that institutions are observing the ZIMCHE mandates and ensure that within the institutions themselves the quality assurance is taken very seriously. One senior official in a higher institution pointed out that there should be more frequent and in-depth institutional audits, a system of tracking how the graduates of an institution were doing in the world of work, and the need for a more systematic way of keeping statistics on institutions.

Lastly, the institutional quality tools and approaches lacked follow ups by the external body. The findings revealed that from the four state universities considered in this research, only two agreed that lecturer-student evaluation forms were really taken seriously for consideration in terms of internal quality assurance tool. Therefore, there is a need to strengthen the approach of external quality audit in order to monitor the operations of institutions.

Constraints of implementing quality assurance in Higher Education by ZIMCHE

This was a qualitative question which required the researchers to analyse the responses based on interviews and open-ended

structured questions. The researchers found out that this study demonstrated that quality of education particularly student learning, was threatened by problems abounding quality of educational inputs, processes and outputs in the four universities. Also, shortage of qualified and motivated teaching staff, and inadequacy of physical and financial resources to support quality learning were major challenges across the universities. Such contravention would obviously jeopardize the quality of education in the universities. The researchers also gathered that state universities rely on government funding which has reflected a negative trend in terms of fulfilling the mandate of ZIMCHE quality assurance due to limited funding.

On the other hand, the researchers observed that ZIMCHE does not support state universities with any funding; each institution was required to observe quality assurance using its own funding. The ZIMCHE Act clearly mandates it to be the gatekeeper of standards in higher institutions but the question now is how they can manage to fulfil its mandate when it does not have the resources and funding to support the state universities because some are old while some are new. All these universities have their own missions, objectives, values and preferences.

When asked about their views on the current state of the staff compliment at state universities fifty-four (54) percent of the respondents indicated that it is average because the nation was still on a recovery path from a decade long economic meltdown and modalities to lure back some of the university staff which fled the nation for greener pastures was still bearing fruit. Twenty-two (22) percent of respondents stated that the current state of university staff compliment was poor and they pointed out that this was due to the fact that there was an increased demand for university staff against a shrinking supply forcing universities to compromise ZIMCHE quality assurance standards by recruiting less experienced and qualified staff simply to meet their staffing needs. For example, some institutions if not, all indicated that their master's programmes were still being taught by lecturers with masters yet according to the ZIMCHE requirement they were supposed to be taught by PhD holders only. Sixteen (16) percent of the respondents highlighted that the current state of the staff compliment at universities is excellent due to improved working conditions that were attracting high calibre staff which used to be absorbed by the private sector but cannot be absorbed due to the adverse macroeconomic conditions. Also better working conditions compared to shrinking industry were luring highly qualified and experienced staff from different companies to engage in part-time lecturing, an example was ZIMRA and Ernst and Young employees, bankers and insurers who are lecturing courses in their fields of expertise. Eight percent (8%) of the respondents were not sure of the current state of university staff compliment because most are leaving going to further their education and only to return after four or five years or even going forever leaving the gaps unattended because the government froze all posts.

ZIMCHE has insufficient qualified staff to help the institutions that would require long-term and close guidance and monitoring to sustain quality programmes. In relation to the state owned institutions financial constraints have limited their capability to maintain expected standards. They have also experienced difficulties implementing recommendations and rectifying deficiencies that have been identified by accreditation panels. To add on the findings revealed that ZIMCHE was handicapped in many respects in terms of the support and guidance which it is expected to offer to the institutions under its jurisdiction.

Dealing with problems associated with existing programmes.

The results show that 9 out of 12 interviews conducted by the researchers concurred that ZIMCHE's quality assurance standards had implications on programmes already running at state universities and their arguments were based on the actions taken by ZIMCHE on ZOU where the degree in counselling was not spared from suspension because the university failed to meet set standards, despite the fact that there were students who were almost graduating. The Board has been able to expose certain institutions that have not been operating properly.

Two interviewees had a parallel view and their arguments were that the quality assurance standards do not have any implications on programmes already in existence because the industry continued to recognise with no doubt certain qualifications for example a medicine degree from NUST despite it being suspended for failure of the university to meet ZIMCHE standards for conducting that degree programme, the industry continued to recognise such degree holders.

Thus researchers concluded that the ways that ZIMCHE uses in dealing with errant universities are not effective given that some universities had their programmes suspended before any evaluation of the programmes were made, also the decision to take such actions were affected by the council without the institutions being given the opportunity to remedy the problems identified.

ZIMCHE should put in place measures that try as much as possible to protect students from any actions taken against a university for failure to meet quality standards. The protection of students within the system is critical in the light of the importance of the impact of accreditation arrangements on students and the options that are available to them upon completion of their qualification. A number of modalities can be expedited by ZIMCHE to achieve this and this may include the following:

- That a student be able to enter a programme at an accredited institution (either at the same level or at an agreed level).
- That a student be able to write professional examinations regardless of the institution where the student is registered.

Executing quality assurance in line with international best practice

Seventy-eight percent (78%) of the interviewees agreed that ZIMCHE quality assurance is executing its mandate well vis-à-vis international best practice and other quality management based on the output of graduates whose qualifications were recognized internationally and not mentioning the high demand of their skills. A number of common features were observable in the specific strategies that were employed by the quality assurance board compared to international. There was convergence in the development and approval of new programmes. All institutions indicated that they have instituted formal programme approval procedures through deliberations by various committees prior to submission to the external agencies for approval. Supporting this view, one Vice Chancellor interviewed pointed out that ZIMCHE concentrated on accreditation, that is, it was interested in the minimum requirement expected for an institution to operate. Because of the proliferation of higher institutions in the country with competition for students, "we have to meet the minimum standards established by ZIMCHE to survive in the competitive world; therefore, we have to comply with the directives of the National quality assurance body ZIMCHE".

The use of an external examiner system was a common practice among the institutions and this was supported by the literature reviewed from different scholars. All institutions which were highlighted in literature review as one of the international countries practicing quality assurance had relatively to Zimbabwe robust internal quality assurance structures and procedures in place like all higher institutions have developed documents, online or hard copies that describe the internal quality management systems and provide information on policies, regulations, processes, responsibilities and systems. In addition to literature review, the systems in higher institutions have developed and apply institution-wide, faculty and programme specific policies on assessment.

As noted earlier in literature review, ZIMCHE is a registered member of Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA) therefore it must be seen to abide by the tenets of the agency and also to demonstrate that its procedures follow the stated guidelines. These guidelines are intended to promote good practices and to assist agencies to improve their quality by building on existing experience. The twenty-two (22) percent arguments against the view postulated by the interviewees were that of poor infrastructure as well as funding. The literature review noted that some universities like in the United Kingdom and Australia institutional quality audit is the approach to quality assurance and they employ external examiner system or professional licensing to do the quality assurance. However, here in Zimbabwe funding for quality assurance comes from the national budget at a small margin.

The researchers concluded that the world was now a global village and as far as education is concerned especially having

been rated as the highest in terms of literacy, we cannot be left in isolation. If there is a system that is being recognized internationally and has proved useful elsewhere, adopting the practice is the way to go. Based on empirical evidence from the documents and the interview data, it was clear that though progress is being made by ZIMCHE and higher institutions towards the improvement of the quality assurance certain gaps still existed like failure to recognise the unique conditions present in Zimbabwe, lack of internal quality control systems in institutions, human capital constraints, funding just to mention a few.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Deregulation of ZIMCHE by Government

The government must deregulate the ZIMCHE quality assurance body. Deregulation of education means relaxing or dismantling the legal and governmental restrictions on the operations of ZIMCHE quality assurance body in this instance. If deregulation is effected on ZIMCHE there would be enhancement in terms of rational and efficiency in allocation of resources since there would be more players in the university system. Secondly, it will be easy to raise alternative ways of funding universities because the presence of private hands in university education can be considered as an alternative means of funding university education in the country. Lastly, this will help align with practices in other parts of the world because based on our literature review countries like United Kingdom and Australia both private and public sectors of the economy are involved in the provision and management of university education, therefore it will also work in this country if adopted.

Increase Budget Allocation

ZIMCHE must lobby from the government for an increased budget allocation in order to enable it to fulfill its mandate on state universities. The government of Zimbabwe through its Ministry of Higher and Tertiary education should ensure that ZIMCHE has sufficient financial resources to facilitate the conduct of effective accreditation, assessment and audit processes

Professional and industrial bodies to be taken on board by ZIMCHE

ZIMCHE should include industry personnel and also professionals from other bodies i.e. Institute of Certified Chartered Accountants of Zimbabwe (ICCAZ), Insurance Institute of Zimbabwe (IIZ), Bankers Association of Zimbabwe (BAZ) and so forth. The Board only contains academic people, without any professional ones. Inclusion of these groups is envisaged to help in fusing academic and the practical aspects as far as quality is concerned. An example is the need to include the Bankers Association of Zimbabwe in as far as the banking and finance qualification are concerned because these (BAZ) better understand financial sector dynamics and their participation will help in reconciling the variance between theory and practice.

Need for better communication

ZIMCHE should improve its communication with state universities because the researchers found out that its communication is not effective. In literature review, different scholars mentioned the importance of consultations throughout the process of developing and implementing a quality assurance system. It has been noted that ZIMCHE's methods are not effective and this stalls compliance because it is easy to manage quality when the assessment criteria is properly communicated to the institutions that are subject to such.

Alumni Support

State Universities must seek for support financial support from its former students in order to meet the ZIMCHE mandate of quality assurance. In the study it was unearthed that universities are facing an acute shortage of resources and it was also noted that other countries were benefiting from their alumni, a platform which was greatly underutilised in Zimbabwe. An examples of such an initiative is the "Support Your University Campaign" in May 2012 spearheaded by Deputy Prime Minister Professor Arthur Mutambara and meant to raise over US\$70 million for the University of Zimbabwe, although the researchers could not get more detailed information concerning this campaign. It is with this in mind that the researchers recommend the establishment of vibrant alumni departments which use various mechanisms to connect with and garner support from alumni networks, this allows former students to play a central role in sustaining the institutions in various forms which include fund raisings, donations of funds and materials, opportunities for internships and contributing to the development of the curriculum to suit industry needs.

Leadership Commitment

Lastly, the researchers recommend that there should be leadership commitment both in ZIMCHE as an external and state universities as internal bodies in order for an organization to have one common goal of quality assurance and this can be achieved through leadership commitment. In the literature review the researchers mentioned that the effective quality assurance depends largely on the availability of highly qualified members and administrators. The university boards are also not proactive in playing their supervisory role and in stimulating the implementation of the provisions of the proclamation concerning quality enhancement instead they are reactive when they see the circulars coming from ZIMCHE concerning standards to be adhered to. The lack of staff capacity and motivation in turn affects the engagement in quality assurance. The universities are also facing shortage and improper utilization of critical learning resources and facilities to run their programmes as discussed earlier that some end up hiring venues which are not conducive for learning purposes but for strategic planning environment. Therefore, the researchers encourage leadership commitment both internally and externally to address these

issues as one because together we stand and divided we fall. Effective leadership ensures that people in an organization use the skills and abilities most effectively and efficiently to achieve organizational goals.

Recommendations for Further Research

In order to come up with a detailed analysis of the implications of ZIMCHE's quality assurance standards, the researchers recommend the broadening of the focus by researchers from being biased principally towards quality assurance systems that assesses quality of teaching and learning to include quality of research.

VI. CONCLUSION

The focus of this study was to analyse all the factors that affect ZIMCHE in its mandate as the custodian of quality standards in higher education particularly in state universities since it was observed that the market-driven approach to education was a necessity in order to meet international standards. The researchers found that ZIMCHE as a quality assurance body had managed to make a huge turnaround in state universities by maintaining its standards in line with regional and global trends in view of economic growth. In addition, tools and techniques which they use are generally effective though they need some bit of polishing up to meet their mandate. However, constraints like funding, infrastructure and staffing in addition to the absence of a supportive internal and external environment quality assurance support remained a big obstacle in the context state universities. The researchers concluded that ZIMCHE was relevant in this turbulent environment in order for the state universities to compete globally. The key recommendation to ZIMCHE were to ensure that it includes professional and industrial bodies in all its decision making so that they help in fusing academic and the practical aspects as far as quality assurance is concerned. Most of all there was need for better communication channels to make it easy to manage quality when the assessment criteria were properly communicated to the institutions.

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