Enhancing Quality in Education: Compatibility of Quality Assurance Mechanisms with the Goals of Higher Learning in Tanzania

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Abstract

This study investigated the compatibility of quality assurance mechanisms in the selected universities with goals of university education as provided by the Tanzanian Commission for Universities (TCU). The study employed a qualitative research approach and adopted a multiple case study design. It involved 27 participants, including three quality assurance officers, three academic officers, three heads of departments, and eighteen student leaders. Data were collected through interviews, focus group discussion and documentary review, and were analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that the compatibility of implementing quality assurance among those institutions tended to be insignificant because the quality assurance mechanisms focused on the cognitive processes of teaching and assessment without following the qualifying framework set out by the TCU. The study concludes that such irregularities negatively impact the implementation of quality assurance, and recommends addressing inconsistencies by ensuring that the quality assurance mechanisms focus on the intended curriculum.

Keywords: Higher Education Institutions, Quality Assurance Units, Tanzania Commission for Universities, University Qualification Framework

Introduction

While the necessity for enhancing Higher Education quality has always been around, its importance took a fresh impetus with the coming of globalization since 1990s. In Europe, for example, the process of enhancing quality culminated in the formation of the Bologna process in 1999, aiming to harmonize quality assurance standards among the member states of the European Union, hence setting up the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Among the objectives of the Bologna process included forming Europe of knowledge economy, promotion of employability and international competitiveness (Gruzina et al, 2020; Kaçaniku, 2020). It also aimed to establish a system of easily comparable degrees, establishment of credits as a means of promoting mobility for academics, researchers, students and administrative staff. The Bologna process further sought to harmonize curricula developments, inter-institutional cooperation and integrated programmes (Bennet et al., 2010; Gruzina et al., 2020; Kaçaniku, 2020). Arguably, the global perspective towards globalization of Higher Education focuses on the attainment of world-class standards. Among the characteristics of world-class standards higher education include production of high quality skilled human capital so as to create jobs, successful business and prosperity, competitiveness in the global knowledge economy, excellence in research, and serving needs of society (Asgari, et al., 2021; Bejinaru & Prelipcean, 2017). Hence, the objectives of Higher Education institutions include enabling them to serve as the engine of the economy. In sub-Saharan Africa, organs such as such Harmonization of African Quality Assurance and Accreditation [HAQAA] and African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance [SG-QA] form examples of efforts to harmonize quality assurance process (Ayoo et al., 2020). Likewise, in East Africa, the

Inter-University Council for East Africa [IUCEA] serves as an organ for the same purpose among the member states (IUCEA, 2010). However, the quality assurance efforts in the African region are incomparable to those of the developed economies and their links tend to lack a serious implementation perhaps due to their economic backwardness and lack of will to implement internal quality audits and tracer studies (Mgaiwa, 2018; Mrema et al., 2023). It is like each country prefers to handle quality assurance matters on its own. This, among other factors, explains why African Higher Education and universities are regarded as the first and second-generation institutions compared to the third and fourth-generation ones in the advanced economies (Asgari et al., 2021; Lukovics & Zuti, 2015; Mirzaie et al., 2018; Oztel, 2020; Wissena, 2009; Zuti & Lukovics, 2017). As such, the quality assurance processes in the lower economies such as Tanzania have lessons to learn from the experience of the world-class institutions.

Statement of the Problem

For the institutions of higher learning to make a significant contribution to economic growth and global competitiveness, improvement in the quality of academic programs and institutions is imperative. This, in turn, requires the quality assurance units in the institutes of higher learning to oversee the quality of curriculum implementation and evaluation processes in line with the postulated qualifying framework. There are, however, significant differences among the higher learning institutions' handling of quality assurance processes in the world. In the developed regions, there is harmonization of quality assurance processes in a manner that the frameworks for implementing higher education cover broader areas of the economy. This is mainly the case in Europe following the Bologna process (Bennet et al., 2010; Gruzina et al., 2020; Kaçaniku, 2020). Hence, quality assurance processes in the institutions of higher learning in the advanced economies closely link with the needs of the knowledge economy characterizing them. On the contrary, the lower economies, such as Africa and Tanzania in particular have little harmony with the regional higher education institutions to be able to enjoy the advantages accruing from the institutional collaboration. Although it is understood that the effectiveness of quality assurance can be evidenced through graduates' self-reliance, creativity, life skills and competencies in solving their own and society's problems (Mohamedbhai, 2014; Sumra & Katabaro, 2016), little is known how the quality assurance processes link with the established framework in Tanzania. Further, it is not clearly known how the QAUs identify and address the inconsistencies emerging during curriculum implementation and evaluation processes. Therefore, it was deemed imperative to assess the extent to which quality assurance (QA) mechanisms link with the TCU's UQF goals.

Research Objectives
The study was guided by three objectives namely to:

1. Explore participants' understanding of quality assurance processes in relation to the goals set out by the university qualification framework;

2. Assess the quality assurance practices for monitoring curriculum implementation processes in relation to the university education goals set by TCU; and

3. Explore the quality assurance units' procedures for addressing emerging inconsistencies during curriculum implementation in line with the envisaged goals of university education.

Literature Review

The survival and thriving of the higher learning institutions hinges on the effectiveness of their quality assurance units. The enhancement of the quality assurance units is therefore one of the pivotal roles that higher learning institutions embrace in efforts to attain their goals of teaching, research and community service. In the advanced economies of the world, such as Europe, quality education in higher learning institutions is organized not to serve the goals of a single institution but rather the globalized system. For instance, the Bologna process influenced reforms on developing quality assurance and enhancement through the harmonization of higher education standards across Europe (Bennet et al., 2010; Gruzina et al., 2020; Kaçaniku, 2020). The higher learning institutions in the advanced economies, also known as knowledge economy universities always aspire to maintain the world-class standards that link the roles of professionals, scientists and entrepreneurs for the socio-economic development of their nations (Lukovics & Zuti, 2015; Wissena, 2009; Wright et al., 2008). Their higher learning institutions have clear dynamics of interactive relationships between the government, industry and universities, which Saad and Zawdie (2011) refer to as triple helix model of innovation and technological processes. It is unfortunate, however, that on the contrary, institutions in the lower economies, such as Tanzania, lack connections with the economy as their counterparts, such that some of their graduates fail to be accommodated into the labour market. Hence, their operations, confined to teaching, research and community service do not adequately and clearly establish links as is the case with the knowledge economy universities. Taking the case of the TCU's UQF, the most successful institutions' quality assurance processes are those that meet the competencies stated in the framework (TCU, 2013), but the measure of their success may not compare with those institutions from the knowledge economy.

One of the current public concerns with respect to higher education in Tanzania is on whether the graduates from the institutions of higher learning possess the requisite competencies by accreditation organs, such as TCU, including capabilities to solve the challenges facing society (Mgaiwa, 2021; Mirondo, 2017; Mpehongwa, 2013). Those graduates coming from the institutions of higher learning need to assume a leading role by applying skills, values and knowledge they have gained to help themselves, their governments and fellow citizens in

development processes. Considering the importance of the quality of graduates, those institutions' quality assurance mechanisms are expected to ensure they produce graduates who can meet the labor market needs (Massaro, 2010; Materu, 2007; TCU, 2012). Despite the presence of the quality assurance mechanisms within the institutions of higher learning in Tanzania, there is still a public concern on the quality of students completing higher education studies as majority of them fail to demonstrate the expected competencies of their levels, which is revealed by their lack of self-reliant skills and creativity in dealing with societal problems (Mohamedbhai, 2014; Sumra & Katabaro, 2016). For example, the survey of employers conducted in the five East African countries commissioned by the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) in 2014 indicated that 61% of the graduates in Tanzania were found to be 'half-baked', 'unfit for jobs' and 'lacking job market skills' (Mohamedbhai, 2014).

Massaro (2010) argues that due to the global increase in labor market competition, the notion of quality assurance has become crucial in institutions of higher learning. This is one of the areas that need specific standards to assure quality in order to produce graduates who can compete in the labor market. QAUs are established to help those institutions adapt to changes and to keep up with the standards set out by the accrediting institutions. Nkunya (2008) states that quality in higher education is determined by five key criteria: first, views by the students and parents on expected achievements; second, institutional commitment to satisfy political and stakeholders' expectations; third, achievement of institutional vision and mission; fourth; adherence to internal policy, and fifth, accountability to stakeholders. Nonetheless, operations of the institutions of higher learning in Tanzania fail to meet the aforementioned criteria as their QAUs' operations are not carefully aligned with the postulated University Qualifying Framework (UQF) that emphasizes competence-based teaching while those institutions largely apply content-based teaching. In spite of TCU's guidelines and framework (TCU, 2012, 2019), it is not clearly known how the paradigm shift from content-based to competence-based curriculum is perceived by members of the quality assurance units as well as those implementing curriculum at the institutions of higher learning. While studies (Moshi & Komba, 2015; Mushi, 2017) noted that quality assurance processes enhanced students' suitability for labour market, TCU's (2013) tracer study established that only the institutions that implemented its qualification framework achieved that suitability. Hence, doubts on quality assurance in relation to the labour market persist (Sumra & Katabaro, 2016; Suleman, 2018). This infers that the QAUs in the institutions of higher learning need to re-organize their frameworks to ensure there is a clear balance of the knowledge, skills and values competences to achieve the goals.

Research Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research approach in gathering and analyzing data. Qualitative approach was deemed relevant for this study because it provides a comprehensive interpretation of narrative data from participants' point of view in their natural settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Silverman, 2013), and also provides

reflexivity and transparency in the research process (Patnaik, 2013). The approach adopts the interpretivist paradigm to understand the inner feelings and concerns of research participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). The study adopted a multiple case study design in which three universities were involved out of 54 (in the context of Tanzania, all institutions of higher learning accredited by the TCU are referred to as universities, while other institutions of higher learning not under TCU are under the National Council for Technical Education (NACTE). Multiple case study design was important in this study as researchers sought to trace what transpired in more than one institution of higher learning concerning the quality assurance processes. Having learnt that some universities had their programs deregistered on the basis of quality issues (Kolumbia, 2016, Peter, 2020) the researchers thought it imperative to involve three universities as unit of analysis. As such, Yin (2014) maintains that when the research process involving cases is given careful attention, the high-quality case study can be produced, as it enables researchers to identify patterns and themes across cases through comparing and contrasting findings across the cases. Yin (2014) and Stake (1995) associate the design with the increased chances for establishing the external validity, generalizability of the research findings and exploring complexity of a phenomenon in detail.

Research sites, target population, sample size and sampling procedures

The study was undertaken in the Arusha region, Tanzania, which was purposively selected as most of the institutions of higher learning in the region had experienced the TCU sanctions through deregistration and banning of their programs. The target population consisted of academic officers, quality assurance officers, heads of departments (HoDs) and student leaders from those three universities. As of 2023, there were 54 universities accredited by TCU (TCU, 2023). Whereas the academic and quality assurance officers could be either academicians or non-academicians, HoDs were essentially academicians who performed administrative roles in addition to teaching. Hence, in the study, HoDs were purposively selected as they played dual roles; both as part of the administration and instructors representing the perspective of the curriculum implementers. The sample consisted of 27 participants who were purposively selected by virtue of the positions they occupied, and was obtained considering the point of saturation (Silverman, 2013). The study sample included one academic officer, one quality assurance officer, one HoD and six student leaders in each institution, who were purposively sampled as they were information rich concerning the aspects of quality assurance in relation to the goals set by TCU. Two of those institutions were privately-owned, under Christian dominations, while one was a public institution of higher learning.

Data collection methods

Data were gathered by using semi-structured interviews, where the interview schedule with questions was used to facilitate the interaction with the participants in seeking their understanding and experience of the matters related to QA mechanisms and TCU goals. Semi-structured interviews were deemed suitable for the purposively-selected

participants and were administered to individuals on the face-to face basis so as to gain personal insights (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Silverman, 2013). For student leaders, focus group discussion (FGD) was used with a view to empower student teachers to share their experiences freely. Those leaders were encouraged to feel free and to discuss openly the issues presented to them regarding QA mechanisms. The documentary review involved accessing both primary documents (course outlines, examination papers, course assessment forms) and secondary documents (prospectuses and TCU guidelines). The documents reviewed helped in an analysis of the TCU goals as indicated in the UQF and policy documents and guidelines on one side and the actual practices through the course outline and examination papers, on the other.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed thematically as they emanated from the interviews, focus group discussion and review of documents (Varpio & Kiger, 2020). Data from review of documents were subjected to content analysis, while those from the taped interviews and FGD were transcribed to allow the visual sight and coding process. Copies of transcripts were made available for the participants to approve what they had said. The researchers read and re-read the transcripts to make meaning of the data as Cohen, Manion & Morrison, (2011) guide. After familiarization with the data, coding process began, where related information in the form of words, phrases, lines and paragraphs was identified. Related information was then assigned codes and related codes formed themes of the study. For instance, the developed codes depicting participants' responses to the first objective included 'perceptions on teaching' (in relation to goals), 'dissatisfaction with teaching and learning process', 'biased teaching'; while the emerging theme was 'participants' perspectives' of processes. Other themes representing the second and third objectives respectively included 'QA practices for implementation' and 'management of implementing gaps. The generated themes provided the basis of the study results.

Ethical considerations

The ethical issues and considerations were emphasized, including obtaining research permit, institutions and participants' anonymity, confidentiality and respect throughout the research process. Researchers gathered data only after they had made themselves familiar with the context and built rapport with participants.

Results

The results of the study were organized according to the themes that emerged in the study.

Participants' perspectives on quality assurance mechanisms in relation to TCU goals

The first research objective sought to explore participants' understanding of the quality assurance mechanisms in relation to the TCU framework guiding the teaching, assessment and evaluation processes. The researchers' assumption was that quality assurance mechanisms involved monitoring of curriculum implementation in a way that

knowledge, skills, and values competences are balanced as a way of producing competent graduates. Responses varied among participants as those playing the managerial roles (academic officers and quality assurance officers) claimed that the implementation processes were all-encompassing while those engaged with the actual processes of teaching and learning, that is, heads of departments and student leaders perceived the processes to be inadequate. Thus, while the administrative position viewed that the quality assurance mechanisms matched the TCU goals, the teaching and learning perspective thought that those mechanisms focused more on the knowledge aspects and paid little attention to skills and values competences. One perspective of the managerial side was that:

> Our quality assurance unit plays a decisive role in monitoring teaching and learning. Comparing the situation before the establishment of this office and afterwards, there is a great change in terms of accountability among the teaching staff and students' learning. Previously, all quality matters were centered to the office of the deputy principal (academics) hence academic staff were not closely monitored thus doing things as they wished. Nowadays, they are very careful since the office produces and communicates reports to the academic staff indicating strengths and weaknesses of everyone in the institution (Interview with the Academic Officer, Institution 'A', 8th November, 2022).

Another academic officer from institution 'B' added that their QAU had developed several mechanisms like course evaluation forms and tracer studies for undergraduate students which was seriously monitored by the QA unit, which helped much in improving teaching and learning processes at the institution. The officer remarked that:

> The QAUs have significantly changed the behaviours of the course instructors as there are varieties of tools to determine their implementation of the curriculum and the attainment of learning goals. Course instructors' work is closely monitored; their teaching schedules are assessed from time to time, which makes them follow the schedules appropriately. This implies that students' learning is facilitated (Interview with the Academic Officer, Institution 'B', 3rd November, 2022).

The heads of departments (HoDs), who played the dual role as part of administration at the lower levels of the institutions of higher learning as well as course instructors provided their insights with regard to the link between the QA mechanisms in relation to the envisioned goals. They appreciated that the QAUs performed a commendable work in fostering teaching and evaluation processes. Nonetheless, they doubted the compatibility of the teaching and evaluation procedures in achieving the TCU goals, claiming that the structural aspects were featured with several constraints that limited teaching processes to attain the envisaged goals. They were of the view that the infrastructure in their institutions constrained the practicing of some important teaching functions, citing for example, lack of time for tutorial sessions, shortage of venues and insufficient instructor-student ratio, all of which affected teaching that is supported by practicing and reflection of what things mean in real life as guided by the TCU goals. With such observations, it is apparent that the teaching and evaluation processes cannot guarantee the attainment of the competences expected by the TCU. One of the HoDs views were as follows:

If one reads and reflects on the TCU guidelines, one may note that there is much to be desired. Those guidelines require students to be able to develop competences that, in the end, they would be able to solve real life problems. The QAUs as I can see are doing their share of responsibilities but one can ask some reflective questions like: How effective do they monitor the formative assessment? How can they monitor teaching to ensure that students develop the competences expected of them in situations where only lectures are given without seminars and tutorials? How do they monitor learning that ought to occur through outdoor activities? (Interview with the HoD, Institution 'A', 17th November, 2022).

The HoD's remarks provided food for thought when considering the teaching and learning environment at the institutions of higher learning in relation to the class size. As such, the HoDs were concerned that the possibility of meeting the ideals for the degree programmes was largely determined by the structural factors of the institutions, which limited teaching and learning processes for producing competent graduates.

The FGD conducted with the student leaders indicated that they were aware of the quality assurance mechanisms and provided some examples of activities of the QAUs in supporting their learning. They provided examples such as students' filling of the course evaluation forms, attending QA meetings where they presented the students' concerns and getting solutions and prompt feedback for the quality matters they presented. Nevertheless, they expressed concerns regarding instructors' engagement of students as class sessions were dominated by lectures followed by tests and examinations at the end of the semester. In one of the focus group discussion sessions, a student leader had this to say:

Let me provide my experience of QA issues that I gained in relation to the ideals expected of us for the whole year that I have been serving as a student leader. What exactly happens is that the QAU monitors the quality of education well and asks us to openly report any anomalies and this is what we do. What I can see is that there is very little time and space for practicing what we learn or even discussing analytically the issues we are learning. We get lessons, then write two tests and then we sit for the University examination and then the semester is over. I think something more needs to be done if we are to learn to become problem solvers who are ready for life out of the university (FGD with Student Leader, Institution 'B', 24th November, 2022).

The student leaders' views that they shared in the discussion in all three higher learning institutions indicated their appreciation of the role that the QAUs played in monitoring the qualitative aspects of teaching and evaluation. However, student leaders provided their doubts on the education processes that they claimed to be devoid of active and meaningful learning. This was due to the prevalence of lecture sessions that were not supported by any form of application that would enable them to transform their knowledge, skills and attitudinal dispositions. Hence, student leaders' views echoed those of the HoDs that questioned the QAUs in taking the leading role in ensuring the matching of QA mechanisms with the TCU guidelines. This implies that the 'intended curriculum' and 'attained curriculum' were not compatible.

Quality assurance practices for curriculum implementation in relation to the TCU goals

The second objective of the study sought to assess the quality assurance practices for curriculum implementation processes in relation to the intentions set by TCU. The focus was to obtain participants' experience of the quality assurance units' efforts to link curriculum implementation practices with the intentions envisaged, which encompassed knowledge, skills and values competences. The participants whose views were valuable were the academic officers and quality assurance officers on the one side and HoDs on the other, as student leaders did not indicate a meaningful experience. Findings revealed that while the managerial position indicated that the QA practices were targeted towards the goals envisaged, the HoDs pinpointed some pitfalls that constrained the QA practices towards the postulated goals. Both the academic and quality assurance officers provided examples of the quality assurance practices, claiming that their institutions had designed evaluation forms which were presented to individual course instructors for them to see how they were assessed by the students so that they could improve their teaching and evaluation processes. During the interview in one of the institutions, the quality assurance officer said:

> Our QAU communicates the students' evaluation with the course instructors so as to enable them make self-assessment, but if it happens that the instructor does not correct the reported weaknesses, the unit requests the management to intervene. However, the purpose is not to punish someone but to address deficiencies in the teaching and evaluation processes so as to improve (Interview with the Quality Assurance Officer, Institution 'A', 11ᵗʰ November, 2022).

The quality assurance officers generally stated that their offices served as reflective mirrors as they helped course instructors to reflect on their work and improve, claiming further that in education, there is always room for improving performance. They claimed that through QAUs, course instructors' delivery of their lessons was made to attain the intended curriculum. It was also revealed that the QAU organized internal workshop training for the course instructors with a view to update the course instructors' performance. Besides, the study revealed that the QAUs had devised various mechanisms for monitoring course delivery, including course evaluation forms which were filled by students at the end of each semester to show their levels of satisfaction with each of the course instructors' conduct and prowess. It was also revealed that there was special examination moderation forms used to certify that all principles of constructing examinations were adhered to. Further, QAUs checked the table of specification and examination standards and format as per institutional set criteria before students sat for each examination. These findings indicated that the quality assurance mechanisms in ensuring assessment of students in the selected institutions were in place. With these claims, the quality assurance officers were satisfied that their institutions implemented curriculum in a manner that focused attainment of the TCU guidelines. The HoDs' position was that the QAU practices tended to be too superficial as their mechanisms could be relevant should they have considered the classroom realities before designing their forms. They claimed that the QAUs tended to base their practices on top down rather than the bottom-up approach.

Quality assurance units' management of implementation gaps from the teaching processes

The third research objective was designed to determine the QAU' management of implementation gaps emanating from teaching and learning. Scholars (Harvey, 2004, Harvey & Williams, 2010) view implementation gaps as the differences between the planned outcomes and real outcomes of the implementation process. In the context of the university qualification framework of the TCU, which emphasizes the use of competence-based curriculum, learning outcomes involve acquisition of knowledge, skills and values (TCU, 2012). Hence, the researchers' assumption was that the quality assurance units played the role of identifying the implementation gaps and managing them so that the teaching and learning processes matched with the goals. Both the academic officers and quality assurance officers mentioned the course evaluation forms and examination moderation forms as tools for monitoring teaching and learning. The HoDs and student leaders, on the other hand, viewed the course evaluation and other end of semester documents as necessary but insufficient in accomplishing the goals, asserting that they were simply knowledge-based thus biased. They also decried the timing of administering those documents, stating that they were more summative than formative. A few voices presented by participants included one by a quality assurance officer in institution 'B', saying:

> If I were asked to explain how we manage the implementation gaps, I would say we are well organized. We have mechanisms to hold instructors accountable to ensure they do their work. Remember that hardworking is one of our vows which we cherish as a faith-based institution. So, we follow up very closely to ensure that people fulfill their obligations to the maximum (Interview with QA officer, Institution 'B', 24th November, 2022).

The academic officer from Institutional 'C' had similar views with one from Institution 'B', saying:

> Considering that this is a religious institution, we expect that the teaching, learning and assessment procedures should be associated with the high level of integrity. We therefore remind course instructors to build a rounded person in our students, leave alone teaching them their subject content. In my opinion, we are doing better than most of the universities. Besides, we have several mechanisms to promote values of caring, responsible citizenry and respect through our extra-curricular activities (Interview with the Academic Officer, Institutional 'C', 7th November, 2022).

The views of the QA and academic officers were contrasted by those of HODs and student leaders whose views resonated. They tended to be dissatisfied with the processes of striking balance between knowledge, skills and values competences as guided by the TCU goals. Overall, these participants were of the views that the skills and values competences were not assigned equal weight as the knowledge dimensions, which jeopardized the attainment of the goals. Two of the HoDs from two higher learning institutions had their statements noted:

> I think either the quality assurance members do not have guts to resolve the knowledge, skills and values competences equation, or they fear to initiate innovative strategies to balance the equation. In fact, there are cost and structural implications related to actual process of balancing

these aspects. For instance, it requires financial and human resources to engage in skills provision and supervision, but also it requires a close follow up and counselling to manage emotions, dispositions, attitudes and caring. Those things are not easily available (Interview with the HoD, Institution 'A', 8th November 2022).

The HoD from Institution 'C' retorted by providing what was referred to as 'best practices' that the quality assurance unit in their college resorted to in balancing the knowledge, skills and values in relation to the espoused goals, saying:

> In theory, the quality assurance unit in our institution keeps on reminding us that we are duty bound to ensure we prepare responsible citizens in our students through their office's notice board as well as preparing and distributing flyers on the matter. In practical terms, I have never seen how this is done as there is no schedule for those activities (Interview with the HoD, College 'B', 24th November 2022).

The student leaders in all the three institutions of higher learning had somewhat similar views on quality assurance units' management of implementation gaps in their respective institutions. During the group interviews, they stated that the skills and values competences occurred by chance rather than being planned and were not assigned the same weight with the academics. In one of the focus group sessions, some student leaders who were in their final year noted that the values and skills aspects were only emphasized during practicum, and stressed that those competences were of equal significance with the knowledge dimensions. As such, student leaders decried the institutions of higher learning institutions' quality assurance for not balancing the three aspects as emphasized by the TCU goals.

Findings from the review of documents revealed that the QAUs at each institution of higher learning had devised some guidelines which were useful in monitoring the quality of education offered. Documents such as course evaluation forms, pre-examination moderation forms, post-examination moderation forms, and monitoring form for the conduct of university examination were meant to ensure internal QA. The moderation of university examinations also involved reviewing of the course outlines derived from the university prospectuses. Essentially, the review of documents included accessing TCU guidelines that the QAUs were exposed to, including, for example, the UQF and handbook for standards and guidelines for university education in Tanzania (TCU, 2012, 2019). It is from the review of documents that the present study established that the curriculum intentions that QAUs designed were not compatible with the actual teaching, learning and evaluation as they overlooked skills and values, hence implementation gaps as the third objective revealed.

Discussion

The focus of this study was to establish whether there was compatibility between the quality assurance mechanisms applied in the selected universities with the university education goals as stipulated by TCU's university qualification

framework. That is, the study sought to assess the functionality of the QAUs in linking the intended, implemented and attained curricula (Akker, 2003) in the higher learning institutions. Some literature refers to this aspect of compatibility as 'fidelity of implementing' (FOI) curriculum (Al Hinai & Al Jardani, 2020). The purpose of FOI is to determine the extent to which the goals laid down are taken into account during curriculum implementation. The results of the study reported the doubts among study participants, particularly the HoDs and student leaders regarding the prospects of the QAUs in the institutions of higher learning spearheading the teaching and evaluation processes to link with the TCU guidelines. One of the causes for the doubts was the confusion arising from the evaluation processes which those institutions and their QAUs relied on, which is, standardized testing. It is argued that the standardized or high stakes testing is cognitive-based, under the cognitive processes approach or paradigm (Eisner, 1985; Volante & Earl, 2004), which is challenged for being biased (Ball, 2008; Qi, 2008). Hence, the TCU guidelines, which are competence-based (considering the university qualification framework levels) are not compatible with the QAU mechanisms guiding teaching and learning in the institutions of higher learning.

Other scholars share the inconsistencies reported in the findings. Harvey, (2004), Harvey and Williams (2010), Mgaiwa and Ishengoma (2017) particularly, claim that the implementation of quality assurance policies in the institutions of higher learning can be constrained by a lack of understanding and obligation among staff, as well as lack of clarity of the guidelines. Harvey (2004) attributes the complications to power struggles and conflicting interests, claiming further that whereas the frameworks are designed to promote accountability and transparency, they can be misused and disregard some members, such as those in the lower ranks. The claims made by these scholars seem to apply in the Tanzanian higher learning institutions particularly considering the understanding of the framework among the implementers. Even the practices meant to ensure the intentions and the teaching and learning practices do not seem to be compatible, which suggests the need for correcting the situation in the context of Tanzanian higher education.

Conclusion and Recommendations

On the basis of the findings, this study concludes that there was a mismatch between the QA mechanisms in the institutions of higher learning and the goals provided by the accrediting authority, the TCU. This mismatch was revealed by the misunderstandings of participants regarding QA mechanisms in relation to the goals stipulated by TCU. Although the academic and QA officers claimed things were in order, the HoDs and student leaders pinpointed some pitfalls that indicated the incompatibility between intentions and processes that jeopardized the production of competent graduates who are competent and suitable for the labor market needs. Further, it was revealed that the practices for ensuring that curriculum implementation and UQF goals were matched were inadequately in place, and QAUs did little to address the inconsistences. The study therefore recommends, firstly, that there is need for TCU and the institutions of higher learning to keep on enhancing understanding of the UQF

among the higher learning institutions stakeholders. This follows the study HoDs and student leaders' views that there were inconsistences in teaching in relation to the UQF. Secondly, the institutions of higher learning through their QAUs need to devise clear and effective mechanisms for integrating those competences and ensure they are applied in teaching, learning and evaluation. Thirdly, the QAUs need to devise means for addressing the implementation gaps and expand the modes of assessment throughout semester so that skills and values are equally weighed as knowledge aspects.

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