Autonomy and Interdependence of Higher Education Quality Assurance Mechanisms in Africa

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This is a conceptual critical review paper. It analyses the match and mismatch between the autonomy and interdependence of internal and external quality assurance mechanisms in higher education institutions in Africa as they strive to deliver quality graduates. The mark of quality of graduates is their employability and relevance in the job market. However, the current generation of graduates of higher education institutions in Africa is often blamed for negative issues regarding accountability, control, compliance, and improvement. Considering accountability, the graduates are noted to offer less value for money, fitness for purpose, and quality service delivery and transparency in the world of work. Their legitimacy, integrity, and standards when compared across the board is often questioned. The paper unravels the fact that these quality concerns are a result of the challenges of autonomy and interdependence between internal and external quality assurance mechanisms operating in the institutions. It asserts that the negative traits indicate that the curriculum, pedagogy, resources, appraisal, and feedback systems of courses taught to these graduates while still studying at the higher education institutions had gaps due to ineffective quality assurance.

Keywords: external quality assurance, higher education institution, internal quality assurance, quality assurance mechanism.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Education in general, and higher education in particular, has been variously acclaimed as fundamental to the construction of the knowledge economy of society in all nations (El-Maghraby, 2012; Kisanga & Machumu, 2014; Mulu Nega, 2012; Oladipo, Adeosun, & Oni, 2009; World Bank/UNICEF, 1996). Malcolm (El-Maghraby, 2012; Gillis, 1999) points out that the wealth and/or poverty of nations depends on the quality of higher education at the present more than ever before in human history. Oladipo and colleagues particularly point out the causal relationship between heavy investment in higher education and economic growth and social development in developed nations.

Research indicates that major and drastic changes including massification of education, greater diversity in terms of programme provision and student types, matching programmes to labour market needs, shrinking resources, heightened accountability, and indirect steering of higher education (Kayombo, 2015; Mulu Nega; 2012) are already shaping the higher education landscape in Africa. Governments in several African countries

have inevitably allowed and even encouraged private providers, distance education programs and foreign institutions to provide higher education. This has accordingly ushered in the establishment of private higher education providers in addition to massive private sponsorship in public institutions to complement the very few slots offered on government sponsorship in the public institutions, which is quite insignificant to accommodate the skyrocketing numbers of qualified candidates seeking to attain higher education (Galafa, 2018). This has caused a disproportionately larger fraction of higher education institutions as well as programmes and students in public universities and colleges in Africa to be private.

These developments have come with a down side to the quality of education offered in the higher education institutions in Africa. Galafa (2018) notes that the provision of higher education by the disproportionately higher percentage of private institutions in addition to the privately sponsored provisions in public ones is characterised by chaos. Hayward (2006) observes that private higher education institutions are mainly of poor quality and that many are more interested in making money than providing a quality education. El-Maghraby (2012) confirms that many higher education institutions in Africa do not like to seek accreditation from the agencies set up for that purpose, and so the quality of their students and staff as well as programmes, scholastic and physical resources does not match the required standards.

On the other hand, Swanzy, Langa, and Ansah (2018) posit investment in quality higher education as Africa's best chance of speeding its development and helping it become competitive in the knowledge-driven economy. Kisanga and Machumu (2014) proffer quality assurance as the main driver of investment in quality education, arguing that no university will survive the present competition with other universities locally and internationally without paying attention to quality assurance. Luckett (2006) notes that fostering quality assurance is deemed to lead to the

improvement of higher education management capacity, which in turn should provide the conditions for high quality provision, which will reciprocally produce large numbers of high quality graduates, which will lead to national economic and social transformation and development.

This paper is concerned with the match and mismatch between the autonomy and interdependence of quality assurance mechanisms – internal and external – which should be emphasized in the provision of higher education in Africa in order to make the purported impact. Scholars such as Harvey (2018) and Okoche (2017) have argued that internal quality assurance is more critical and paramount in the pursuit of quality in the provision of university education as it promotes improvement of standards, as opposed to external quality assurance by national accreditation bodies which merely drives accountability. The paper seeks to provide answers to questions of what the common grounds of autonomy and captivity are between the two quality assurance mechanisms, what challenges are experienced in quality assurance due to the issues and concerns of autonomy and captivity between internal and external quality assurance, and how these challenges can be overcome. It is argued in the paper that both internal and external mechanisms of quality assurance should be fostered in the higher education institutions in order to strike a balance between improvement and accountability.

The paper is structured in such a way as to smoothly transit from an understanding of the key concepts of quality and quality assurance through the purpose of quality assurance to the contextual and conceptual scopes of quality assurance. Then a synthesis of the critical issues concerning the autonomy and interdependence of the internal and external quality assurance mechanisms in higher education institutions in Africa is presented as a gist of the paper. The benefits and strategies for enhancing autonomy and interdependence of the mechanisms is then capped. The following sections give an

understanding of the meanings of quality, quality assurance, internal and external mechanisms of quality assurance with reference to higher education.

II.   MEANING OF QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION (HE)

Oladipo et al. (2009) and LH Martin Institute/INQAAHE (2012) note that "quality" is a slippery concept with many definitions, meaning that it implies different things to different people. Accordingly, it could mean what best satisfies and exceeds customers' needs and wants, in which case it can be said to lie in the eyes of the beholder. Okafor (2015) similarly posits quality to be a multi-dimensional concept with various interpretations, such as excellence, perfection, value for money, transformation, meeting customers' needs, conformity to standards, fitness for purpose, and fitness of purpose. Kisanga and Machumu (2014) submit that quality is best determined by the product users, clients or customers and to some extent by society in general. However, there has got to be a reference point or established standard against which the quality of a product, service, or phenomenon is gauged as relatively below, same to, or superior to other similar ones. Given that quality is generally associated with the level and quality of education, then it is imperative to focus attention on what the term means in the realm of higher education.

According to Vlsceanu, Grünberg, and Pârlea (2007, p. 70), "Quality in higher education is a multi-dimensional, multi-level, and dynamic concept that relates to the contextual settings of an educational model, to the institutional mission and objectives, as well as to specific standards within a given system, institution, programme, or discipline." Quality education, according to Mosha (1986), is thus "measured by the extent to which the training received from an institution enables the recipient to think clearly, independently and analytically to solve relevant societal problems in any given environment" (pp. 113-134). This implies that quality higher education is inferred from the ability or degree to which a higher education institution conforms to the established standards of relevance and appropriateness of programmes, student admissions, staff recruitment, infrastructural development, and managerial processes in order to effect teaching and learning, research, and community outreach for which it is established. In other words, the quality of a higher education institution is to be judged from the input, throughput, output, and outcomes of the institution; meaning that it is a continuous rather than a one-step process. This leads us to the meaning of quality assurance.

III.   MEANING OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

El-Maghraby (2012) presents many terms associated with quality improvement in higher education. These include Quality Assessment, Quality Assurance, Quality Control, Total Quality Management (TQM), and Quality Audit. "Quality assurance" stands out as the most popular, conventionally accepted as an "all-embracing term referring to an on-going, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) the quality of a higher education system, institutions, or programmes" (Vlsceanu, Grünberg, & Pârlea, 2007, p.74). Oladipo et al. (2009) posit that higher education quality assurance is about consistently meeting product specifications or getting things right the first time, and every time as far as academic matters, staff-student ratios, staff mix by rank, staff development, physical facilities, funding, and adequate library facilities are concerned. To Alele – Williams (2004), quality assurance is a mechanism which indicates the pre-eminence and special features that make a higher education institution distinct from other forms of institutions.

All these definitions point out an accountability and improvement function of quality assurance. From the definitions, quality assurance can be taken to mean all activities that are aimed at ensuring that the process and product of an educational system serve fitness for and of purpose. This implies that as a regulatory mechanism, certain minimum standards are put

in place for the continuous monitoring of the quality of input, process (throughput), output, and outcomes of the higher education institution. The indices chosen should cover the inhibiting and facilitating entry behaviours, characteristics, and attributes of learners; entry qualifications, values, pedagogic skills, and professional preparedness of teachers; structure of the curriculum and learning environment of the teaching/learning process; and the adequacy and regularity of the flow of operational funds. Netshifhefhe, Nobongoza, and Maphosa (2016) allude to the fact that quality assurance measures are vital in adding value to the product and are best applied during the process of implementing a programme and not merely inspecting the final product.

Quality assurance has two components: internal and external. El-Maghraby (2012) categorizes quality assurance into 'institutional' and 'programme or professional'. Institutional quality assurance is when the institution as a whole is accredited, in which case the accreditation review process focuses on evaluating the institution as an entity. In the 'program or professional' quality assurance, a specific program of study offered by an institution is accredited, in which case the accreditation review process focuses on just one department, program or curriculum (Koenig, 2004). It should be noted that both the institutional and programme arms of quality assurance do fit into internal and external quality assurance.

IV. MEANING OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

According to various scholars including Kisanga and Machumu (2014), Mulu Nega (2012), and Odera-Kwach (2011), internal quality assurance refers to an institution's own mechanisms such as having and practicing certain policies within its policy framework to attain its own objectives and standards in a manner that ensures and improves its quality. UNESCO cited in Kisanga and

Machumu affirms that internal quality assurance ensures that the institution is fulfilling its own purposes, as well as the standards that apply to higher education in general, or to the profession or discipline in particular.

Based on the fundamental idea that quality assurance is mainly the responsibility of the institution itself (El-Maghraby 2012), higher education institutions often have their internal mechanisms to ensure good performance. Processes within the internal mechanism usually include, but are not limited to, policy and procedures for quality assurance; approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards; assessment of students; appraisal of teaching staff; learning resources and student support; information systems; and public information. Higher education institutions are largely independent in instituting and actualising these processes, but also yield to oversight by external quality assurance agencies.

On the other hand, according to Kisanga and Machumu (2014), Mulu Nega (2012), and Odera-Kwach (2011), external quality assurance is performed by an independent organization or quality assurance agency external to the institution to determine if the institution meets the agreed upon or predetermined standards that apply to higher education in general, or to the profession or discipline in particular. External quality assurance often includes accreditation, review, assessment, and evaluation or audit of the inputs, throughputs, outputs, and sometimes outcomes of the higher education institution. The aim of external quality assurance is mainly to provide accountability and enhance the institution's performance.

External quality assurance is often the preserve of an independent agency with legal autonomy. The agency is often comprised of a governing board composed of members from various sectors that represent higher education stakeholders in the country. It usually operates under an appropriate quality assurance framework that is sensitive to local context and is consistent with international

practices, using transparent procedures so as to ensure accountability. In order to efficiently and effectively perform its functions, the external quality assurance agency needs to be adequately financed and resourced with competent staff and external reviewers of unquestionable integrity. The agency needs to continuously review the impact of external quality assurance processes on the higher education system it oversees so as to appraise its relevance.

V. NEED FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Hayward (2006) notes that the main reason for quality assurance in higher education institutions is the desire to improve quality, be competitive internationally, protect the public from fraud, and be accountable to the stakeholders. According to El-Maghraby (2012), quality assurance helps the institutions to improve their internal coherence and provides an opportunity for regular interactions between the programmes and universities in a given setting. It also encourages exchanges with other peers from other institutions through quality assurance and accreditation bodies and agencies. LH Martin Institute/INQAAHE (2012), drawing on European Standards Guidelines (2005, 2007) and Woodhouse and Stella (2008), summarises the functions and hence need for quality assurance as; to foster accountability, safeguard academic standards, enhance user protection, provide independently verified information, assist institutional efforts in quality control, and standardise operations within the institution.

Brennan and Shah (Mulu Nega, 2012) posit four forms of quality values that quality assurance seeks to attain. These include academic, managerial, pedagogic, and employment focus values. The academic values emphasise establishment of and adherence to broad disciplinary and professional authority among the staff and students. In imparting managerial values, the basic assumption is that good management can produce quality, in which case quality assurance serves as a tool of management

to foster quality within the institution. Pedagogic values lay emphasis on teaching skills and classroom practices; effective pedagogy is claimed to yield quality student learning in terms of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes as required by the job market. Employment focus values target graduate output characteristics, standards, and learning outcomes such that the learners are accordingly provided with more experiences/training outside the classroom setting with a semblance of the job market so that they graduate 'fit for purpose.'

Brennan and Shah reviewed 12 quality agencies (LH Martin Institute/INQAAHE (2012) and identified 10 statements of purpose for quality assurance. These include the following:

- To ensure accountability in the use of public funds;
- To improve the quality of higher education provision;
- To inform funding decisions;
- To inform students and employers;
- To stimulate competitiveness within and between institutions;
- To undertake a quality check on new (sometimes private) institutions;
- To assign institutional status;
- To support the transfer of authority between the state and institutions;
- To encourage student mobility;
- To make international comparisons.

With specific reference to external quality assurance agencies, LH Martin Institute/ INQAAHE (2012) identifies the following functions:

- To develop standards and procedures for self-assessment and external review
- To manage data on higher education institutions
- To select and train of external reviewers
- To liaise with higher education institutions on the quality assurance processes and site visits
- To monitor, make decision and report to the public on key quality outcomes

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- To manage appeals of higher education institutions (if any)
- To organize capacity building interventions
- To promote external relations and networking with other quality assurance agencies

Each of these functions encompasses a number of administration, coordination and decision-making roles and responsibilities that overlap.

Mhlanga (2010) notes that internal quality assurance systems are generally associated with institutional improvement while the external systems are associated with ensuring compliance of the institution with set standards and provision of accountability to the stakeholders. In order to realise the need for quality assurance, the quality assurance agencies must observe certain basic principles as described below.

VI.   BASIC PRINCIPLES OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

- Providers of higher education have the primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance;
- The interests of society in the quality and standards of higher education need to be safeguarded;
- The quality of academic programmes need to be developed and improved for students and other beneficiaries;
- There need to be efficient and effective organisational structures;
- Transparency and the use of external expertise in quality assurance processes are important;
- There should be encouragement of a culture of quality within higher education institutions;
- Processes should be developed through which higher education institutions can demonstrate their accountability, including accountability for the investment of public and private money;
- Quality assurance for accountability purposes is fully compatible with quality assurance for enhancement purposes;
- Institutions should be able to demonstrate their quality at home and internationally;
- Processes used should not stifle diversity and innovation.

The violation of any of these principles could interrupt the harmony between internal and external quality assurance mechanisms in the African higher education space. The section below highlights the context of quality assurance in Africa which could provide a recipe for violation of the quality assurance principles.

VII.   THE CONTEXT OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN AFRICA

Quality assurance systems are a relatively recent development in Africa (Swanzy et al., 2018) with Kenya being the first country in Africa to set up an external quality assurance agency for higher education in 1985. However, Materu (2007) notes that the concept is gaining momentum as a result of the growing importance of private tertiary institutions and private sponsorship in public institutions whose activities need to be regulated. This implies that though the majority of the African countries have national quality assurance agencies established by an act of parliament to oversee the quality of higher education in both public and private institutions in the respective countries, there are still some countries within the continent that do not have quality assurance mechanisms. It further implies that even within countries that have quality assurance mechanisms, not all higher education institutions and even departments and faculties within the institutions undertake quality assurance with the same zeal, mainly given the diverse understanding and practices of quality assurance.

However, a study by Swanzy et al. (2018) reveals a cohort of recent developments in Africa which indicate that quality assurance is being upheld as an important mechanism to make higher education more relevant to developmental needs. The study unveils several initiatives by the African Union such as the Association of African Universities (AAU), the African Higher Education Harmonization Strategy, the Tuning Africa Pilot Project, and the African Quality Rating Mechanism, to promote quality and excellence in

Africa's higher education systems. Another more recent initiative is the Joint Africa–European Union Strategic Roadmap 2014–2017 which emphasizes quality assurance as the primary action line to strengthen higher education in Africa. A yearly International Conference on Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Africa has also been established as a platform to develop ideas and suggest strategies for the provision of quality education.

The African Union has further identified quality in higher education as one of the focal points in the Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa (2006-2015), which resultantly has caused the development of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (2016-2025). These initiatives are aimed at producing a harmonized higher education system characterised by enhanced trust and confidence, quality, relevance and sustainability. Subsequently, the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF) has been established in response to the desire to achieve harmonized quality assurance practices in the continent. PAQAF sets the principles and rules of engagement for higher education institutions and agencies in the continent.

A number of regional quality assurance agencies have also been formed to upscale the regional networking and mobility of students and staff in the regional blocks. These include the African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (CAMES), the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA), and the Council for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Arab countries. Over time, a number of quality assurance networks have also been established across Africa. Notable among the networks are the African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN), the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE), and the Southern Africa Quality Assurance Network (SAQAN)

According to Swanzy et al. (2018), about 25 African countries had established national quality assurance agencies by 2015 to oversee their higher

education systems, and some others were at advanced stages of establishing theirs. The national quality assurance agencies are either semi-autonomous or part of the government's departments. Their mandate is mainly to undertake external quality assurance activities through accreditation of higher education institutions and programmes. They are also responsible for periodic monitoring and evaluation of the quality assurance aspects in higher education institutions as well as auditing the institutions for continuous enhancement of quality. These activities entail assessing inputs, processes, outputs, and sometimes outcomes of the institutions through the use of external peer reviewers and making decisions with regard to quality aspects of the institutions based on predetermined minimum standards.

Generally, more emphasis has been placed on external agencies with relatively little attention given to institutions. So, the focus of quality assurance is seen to be more on compliance and accountability rather than improvement of the institutions, which could potentially threaten the autonomy of the institutions. The institutions are usually captives of a witch-hunt by the external quality assurance agencies. However, in many of the countries, support is being provided to enhance internal quality assurance activities in the higher education institutions so as to blend logically with the external quality assurance activities.

VIII. CONCEPTUAL SCOPE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

Middlehurst (2001) describes five key dimensions of the scope of quality assurance. These include regulation, the educational process, curriculum design and content, learning experiences, and outcomes. The 'regulation' dimension encompasses everything to do with but not limited to legal frameworks, governance, responsibilities, and accountabilities. The educational process dimension deals with quality of admissions, registration or enrolment, curriculum design and delivery, support for

learning, and assessment of learning. Curriculum design and content dimension entails mechanisms for validation and approval frameworks, levels and standards. The dimension of learning experiences involves consumer protection, enhancing students' experience, and handling of complaints and appeals among others. Outcomes dimensions involves ascertaining the quality of qualifications, certificates, transcripts, security, transferability, recognition/currency and value. This scope includes what Okafor (2015) describes as the input, throughput, output and outcome of quality assurance.

Luckett (2007) poses a set of critical questions that a conceptual scope or framework of quality assurance should be able to capture. These include 'Who decides what counts as quality?' 'Who decides what the criteria or measures of quality should be?' 'Who owns the quality system?' 'For whom is the evaluation done?' To answer these critical questions, she proposes a modification of Barnett (1999) and Trow's (1999) frameworks. The proposed framework (Figure 1) is used for analysing quality systems at programme, institutional, and national levels.
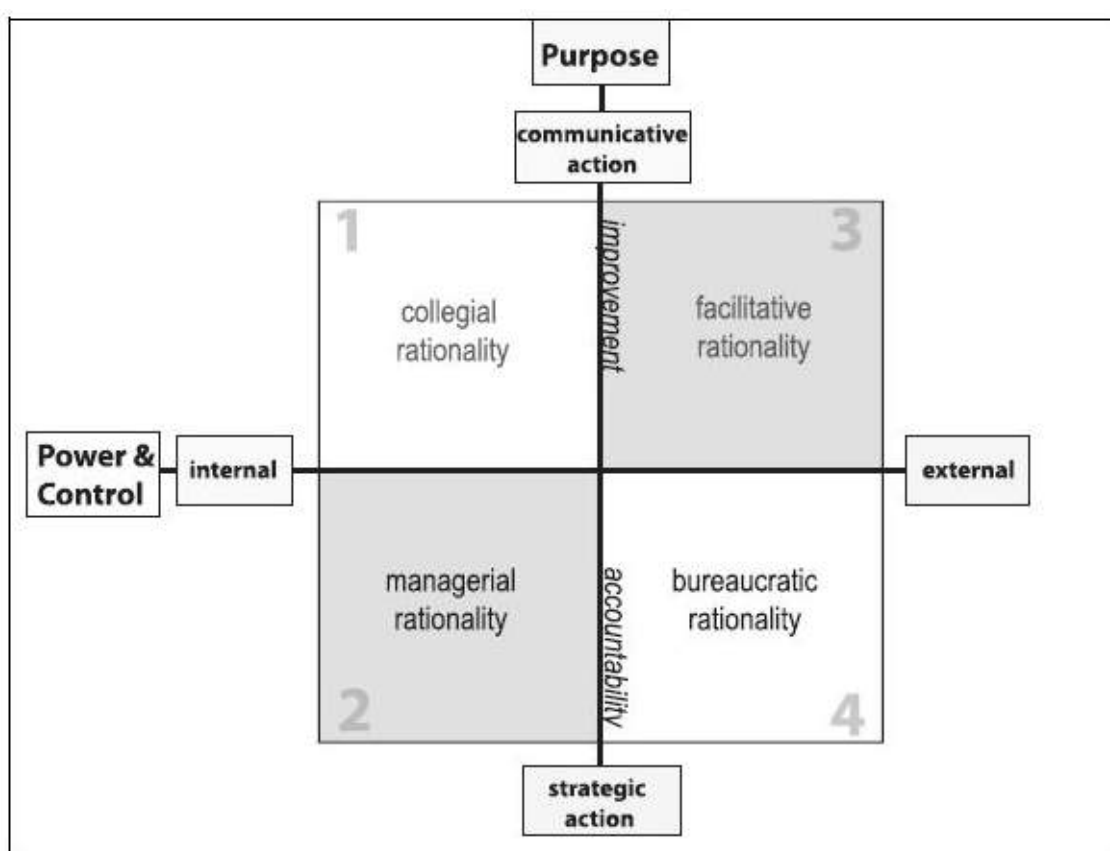

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Analysing Quality Assurance Systems. Adopted from Luckett, K. (2007). The introduction of external quality assurance in South African higher education: An analysis of stakeholder response. *Quality in Higher Education*, *13*(2), 97-116.

The framework in Figure 1 indicates that quality assurance is motivated by two main dimensions: 'power and control' and 'purpose'. The 'power and control' dimension on the horizontal axis shows that quality assurance systems are owned and controlled by actors internal as well as external to the institution. In answering the critical questions

of 'who conducts the evaluation?' and 'to whom are they accountable and in whose interests are they acting?' posed by Luckett (2007), 'power and control' dimension considers the former as nonsignificant while the latter takes precedence. In this case, both the internal and external mechanisms of quality assurance impact on and

reinforce each other in striving to achieve the functions of the institution. The mechanisms are shown to have similar strengths and weaknesses for the institution based on power relations.

The 'purpose' dimension on the vertical axis provides answers to Luckett's (2007) questions of 'who is to be enlightened by the evaluation?', 'who determines the evaluation criteria?', and 'to what extent is the self-understanding of those being evaluated enhanced as a result of the evaluation process?'. Accordingly, self-understanding is maximised when it is self-generated within the institution, and minimised when other-generated from outside the institution; implying that internal quality assurance maximises, while external quality assurance minimises, systemic improvement. Following Habermas's (1987) framework, when the purpose of quality assurance is to communicate the status of performance (communicative action) rather than to judge (strategic action), members of the institution develop mutual understanding because of being considered genuine persons (as subjects) rather than as objects.

In the framework adopted in Figure 1, Luckett (Mulu Nega, 2012) presents four ways of thinking to quality. These include collegial rationality, managerial rationality, facilitative rationality, and bureaucratic rationality. Collegial rationality and managerial rationality are generated from within the institution and hence constitute internal quality assurance, while facilitative rationality and bureaucratic rationality are driven from outside the institution and hence constitute external quality assurance. In collegial rationality, the quality assurance system is under the control of academic peers internally within the department or faculty. Managerial rationality is driven by the cadres of management within the institution with the assumption that good management is key to quality, and hence quality assurance serves as a management tool. In facilitative rationality, external quality assurance agencies play a support role to the institution to enable the members of the institution to up their performance in critical areas of the quality assurance chain. Meanwhile in bureaucratic rationality, the norms are external to the institution, and imposed on the institution. Bureaucratic rationality typically serves an audit or accountability function with an emphasis on fitness for purpose and value for money.

The origin and operationalization of managerial and bureaucratic rationalities impart compliance tendencies in the quality assurance procedure such that the purpose seems to be 'strategic action'. On the other hand, collegial rationality and facilitative rationality are geared towards institutional improvement such that the strategy of quality assurance is mainly communicative action. However, in practice, there is often tension between the autonomy and interdependence of internal and external mechanisms of quality assurance in higher education institutions in Africa. One mechanism is often held captive by another such that rather than improving quality and providing effective accountability, the process of quality assurance ends up eroding quality through generating unnecessary conflict within the institution and between the institution and the external quality assurance agencies. The critical issues of autonomy and interdependence of quality assurance mechanisms are synthesized in the following section.

Critical Issues of Autonomy and Interdependence of Internal and External Quality Assurance Mechanisms.

According to Hayward (2006), the gateway to economic growth and development of a country is the full participation in knowledge societies of the country's higher education institutions as engines for that transformation. However, Hayward admits that there is very little evidence about the link between quality education and economic growth for Africa. Instead, Kisanga and Machumu (2014) assert that there is an open and wide link between low quality of graduates and quality assurance practices in most African countries. The disjoint between the university outcomes and market demands exists because of lack of appropriate, well-coordinated, controlled, and maintained quality assurance practices both

internal and external to the institutions. The ultimate aim of quality assurance is employability and relevance of the graduates in the job market. According to the World Bank (2003), higher education institutions cannot produce high quality graduates without adequate investment in a well-coordinated quality assurance framework encompassing both the internal and external mechanisms.

Okafor (2015) notes that the current generation of graduates from higher education institutions in Africa is characterised and so often blamed for negative issues regarding accountability, control, compliance, and improvement. Considering accountability, the graduates are noted to offer less value for money, fitness for purpose, and quality service delivery and transparency in the world of work. Netshifhefhe et al. (2016) similarly note that there is a skills gap between what university graduates possess and what employers look for.

According to Dada, Wunti, and Martin (2017), the public concerns on the ill preparedness of graduates for work and further studies in higher education institutions in Africa and elsewhere in the world are as a result of poor quality human, physical, and financial resources in the institutions. Ansah, Swanzy, and Nudzor (2017) similarly note that the higher education institutions are indeed characterised by negative factors including limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, inadequate staffing, low research output, and limited graduate employable skills. These grossly compromise the graduates' legitimacy, integrity, and standards when compared across the board. In short, there is a blame game (Figure 2) within the quality assurance process as to who contributes most to the poor quality of educational outcomes.
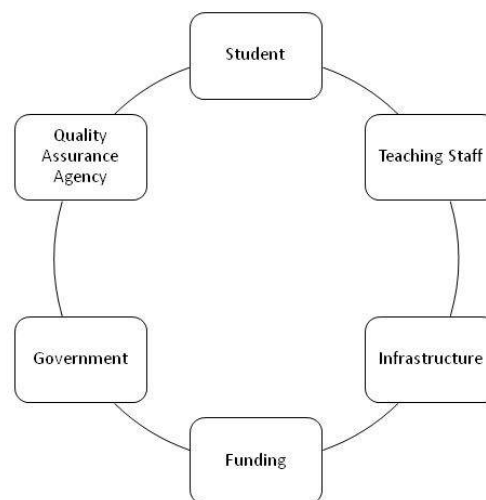

Figure 2: The blame game within the quality assurance process in Africa. Adapted from Okafor, T. U. (2015). *External quality assurance in higher education: Nigeria and South Africa* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Nottingham, the United Kingdom.

According to Oladipo (2009), there are scores of unemployed graduates roaming the streets of cities and towns in Africa, and more embarrassingly, some who are lucky to secure employment have to undergo remedial training in order to bridge the huge knowledge and skills gaps left over from the training institutions. Kisanga and Machumu (2014) argue that jobless graduates engage in illegal cases of drug trafficking, human trafficking, sexual harassment, sexual for money. Oladipo enumerates other defining characteristics of the higher education context in Africa including a poor state of economy, weak internal capacity, poor governance, poor research activities, brain drain, political interference, incessant industrial actions, unruly and destructive conduct of undergraduates, poor preparation of entering students, unsuitable policy environment, poor funding, shortages in instructional materials, laboratory equipment and poor library facilities, questionable government policy of automatic promotion at the primary and secondary levels of education. All these indicate that the curriculum, pedagogy, resources, appraisal, and feedback systems of courses taught to students at the higher education institutions in Africa have gaps.

This tends to negate the tenet of higher education as a producer of a quality workforce for national development. This ultimately begs for conscious continental, regional, national, and institutional efforts to boost the quality of the academe and hence graduates in the continent.

The IUCEA (2014) argues that in the face of globalization which has led to increased internationalization of higher education, there is need to develop strategies to ensure comparability of degrees and certificates, transferability of educational achievements and international competitiveness of both institutions, staff, students, and graduates of higher education institutions. It therefore becomes very critical for African countries, regions, and institutions to establish quality assurance mechanisms to guard the standards of their higher education systems and programs to suit both local and international standards.

However, Ansah et al. (2017), Kayombo (2015) and Mhlanga (2010) observe that higher education institutions in Africa mainly copy the quality assurance frameworks of developed countries instead of conceptualising their own frameworks suited to delivering quality higher education outcomes in the context of Africa. Hence there is a notable degree of reliance on external or international expertise in developing most quality assurance frameworks in higher education institutions in Africa. Similarly, Harvey (2018) notes that some governments and agencies ignore problems in other countries and institutions when implementing accreditation systems to the extent that they grossly inhibit mobility with other countries and institutions.

Oladipo et al (2009) observes that some foreign educational providers come along with poor quality programmes; different quality standards; indifference or general ignorance to the national criteria, local needs and policies; issues of comparability of quality of education; less qualified staff; and lack of clear information. Many of them are insensitive to issues of cultural differences and recognition of qualifications

outside of their mother countries. But because they are rich in most cases, they fraudulently manipulate the national quality assurance agencies and get more favours. Hence the operations of some regulatory agencies are discriminatory between foreign and local institutions.

Luckett (2007) observes that the idea of quality involves issues of power and values, and that the introduction of a national quality assurance system is likely to be embroiled in efforts to empower new interests and challenge traditional values. As noted by Hayward (2006), it is difficult to find an approach to quality assurance that fosters improvement, encourages quality inputs, points faculty to areas and resources that will improve teaching, research, and service quality simultaneously. According to Mhlanga (2010), most universities in sub-Saharan Africa are torn between addressing issues of redress, social transformation, and accountability on one hand and the struggle to maintain high levels of scholarship that can give them international competitiveness on the other hand. The redress, social transformation, and accountability arm of the tension involves enrolling greater numbers of learners from disadvantaged social groups of society under the oversight of external and politically motivated quality assurance agencies. This compromises the envisaged high standards of scholarship that are usually promoted by internal quality assurance policies and practices of the institutions. This indicates that there is tension between the internal and external quality assurance mechanisms in the higher education institutions.

Different African countries and institutions are at different levels of development and hence quality assurance. Hence institutional autonomy of internal and external quality assurance varies from country to country across Africa. Many African governments are in a drive to institute internal and external quality assurance mechanisms in higher education institutions with an aim of addressing the concerns of employers in various markets about the poor performance of

graduates (Hayward, 2006). The move is also aimed at curbing the concerns about competition of private tertiary institutions, many with dubious quality, which constitute the majority of higher education providers, with public ones, and the impact of foreign providers within the countries. Garwe (2013) observes that private institutions face more quality assurance challenges as a result of poor financial resources. Hence, they are not capable of acquiring adequate human and material resources to support quality teaching and learning, thus they mainly depend on part-time teachers or those who are on sabbatical leave, mainly from public institutions.

Matei and Iwinska (2016) argue that internal quality assurance has a positive effect on quality improvement, though mostly in developed countries. Hayward (2006) notes that the internal-external quality assurance process in Africa is often compromised by peer reviewers who are not experts in their fields, those who are unprepared for the site visits, or those insensitive to the need to be impartial and respectful throughout the site visit and peer review process. Harvey (2018) laments that quality assurance processes mainly emphasise accountability rather than improvement to the extent that the notion of quality education has been replaced by quality assurance processes. Apart from decrying the excessive politicization of quality assurance, Harvey notes that there is also excessive bureaucratisation of procedures, increased administrative workload for academic staff, stifling of creativity and individuality and a lack of trust and de-professionalisation of academic staff. This impinges on the legitimacy of the process as it instills fear and animosity within the institutions and between the players involved in the two quality assurance mechanisms.

Relatedly, Castell (Luckett, 2006) argues that higher education institutions are dynamic systems with contradictory functions in which research and scholarship (epistemic function) should be protected from immediate economic, social and political processes (ideological function). However, it should be noted that Third World

universities – including those in Africa – are mainly state apparatuses used for the generation and reproduction of nationalist and culturally assertive ideologies. Luckett observes that the ideological function has tended to crowd out the epistemic function. In pursuing the government interests, external quality assurance agencies often use policing style and show of might rather than a quality improvement approach. According to Jonathan (cited in Luckett), whereas the state needs to intervene and regulate higher education in the public interest because the radical change required in the system will not be delivered through voluntarism or through market forces, the state should leave the curriculum content, pedagogy, and research to the expertise of individual academics and to their disciplines and institutions.

The use of internal quality assurance protocols as a basis for external quality assurance operations often compromises external quality assurance outcomes. Given that officers of internal and external quality assurance mechanisms are vastly incompetent (Kisanga & Machumu, 2014), it is to be expected that the sharing of protocols will lead to poor quality assurance practices. Moreover, as observed by Tamrat (2019), the process is already awash with political interference at national and institutional level, and intrigue at personal levels. In addition, Tamrat contends that internal quality assurance is nearly always captive to external quality assurance in terms of deficiencies such as lack of leadership support, lack of resources, exclusive focus on the academic wing as contrasted with research and administrative functions of universities, challenges of overburdened and limited quality audit staff and a high staff turnover rate. In many cases, higher education institutions are required to cover the costs of external quality assurance processes.

Moreover, the quality assurance practices do not explicitly include student engagement. Coates (Harvey, 2018) argues that quality assurance needs to take account of student engagement in developing productive learning. Not listening directly to students continues to impose negative

effects on the success of internal quality assurance systems, holding them captive to the external agencies who often have the financial muscle to conduct student surveys to pin down the internal mechanisms.

Another critical issue that requires attention in the internal-external debate of quality assurance is the discouraging work environment of quality assurance officers. Kisanga and Machumu (2014), Harvey (2018), and Swanzy et al. (2018) note that quality assurance officers in Africa often do not have enough office space, working tools, no defined boundary between official duties and other administrative work. Most of the officers have capacious responsibilities including teaching, research, supervision of students' research, assessing students' academic progress, attending trainings, organising quality assurance workshops, conducting evaluations, and making follow-ups. Coupled with the incompetency among the quality assurance officers as noted above, low staff morale and poor performance in nearly all aspects of the input, throughput, and output of the educational process are eminent. The ultimate negative multiplier effect is witnessed in poor student outcomes, low quality publications, and almost zero community engagement. Otherwise, harmony between the internal and external mechanisms yields tremendous benefits to all stakeholders.

IX. BENEFITS OF INTERDEPENDENCE OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS

Concurrent and harmonious undertaking of internal and external quality assurance yields great dividends at institutional, national, as well as international levels. Harvey (2018) argues that external processes are a necessary prerequisite of internal improvement. Mhlanga (2010) observes that the internal-external link serves both an accountability and self-enlightenment function through regular and systematic self-review processes. The accountability function enables external stakeholders to understand better what goes on in the institution, and self-enlightenment

has great potential for enhancing institutional improvement. Hence, interdependence of internal and external quality assurance mechanisms ensures that higher education institutions and programmes largely meet benchmark standards set at national, regional, and international levels. It further ensures that the institutions and their programmes move in a set direction towards continuous quality improvement.

Harvey (2018) observes that a combination of external and internal processes instills rigorous course approval procedures, increased awareness of students' perspectives on teaching, and an intensification of debate about effective learning. An effective external quality assurance process is a necessary condition for the development of institutional structures such as internal quality processes and specialist quality units that promote quality culture within the institution and can be used as an academic management tool to legitimise cultural and organisational change. Gift and Bell Hutchinson (Harvey, 2007) note that a synchrony between the two mechanisms offers a means of modernizing systems, citing an example in Germany where the implementation of accreditation procedures marked a fundamental shift in the relationship between higher education institutions and the state. It also generates interdepartmental competition for resources which boosts teamwork among the staff and hence improvement in research, teaching, and community outreach.

Hayward (2006) reports that peer reviewers learn useful lessons from site visits, which lessons are useful for improving quality at their own institutions. In case the reviewers are drawn from both the public and private institutions, then the interdependence of internal and external quality assurance will promote the mutual existence of public and private higher education and ease transfer of credits. Institutions are also able to benchmark and incorporate diversity in their own courses, delivery mechanisms, and creation of a unique identity through programme diversification. This produces graduates with higher employability because employer attitudes

are raised due to enhanced stakeholder confidence.

X. STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING THE AUTONOMY AND INTERDEPENDENCE OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS

To achieve the ultimate aim of quality assurance, that is, employability and relevance of the graduates, there is need to ensure quality independence and interdependence of internal and external quality assurance mechanisms. Strategies targeting continuous improvement in teaching and learning processes and facilities; programme design and review; staff recruitment, welfare, and continuous professional development; service delivery and infrastructural development; as well as community engagement should be well thought out and implemented. As stated by Kayombo (2015), the establishment of effective quality assurance systems beyond those of institutions and nations should be set as a precedence in every agenda of the institutions and governments.

According to Tamrat (2019), the establishment of a continuous and sustainable quality improvement scheme at the institutional level and at the level of academic disciplines should be top on the institutional priorities. Such an internal system would serve as a precursor to the national external quality assurance mechanisms like accreditation and quality audits. Galafa (2018) urges universities to work on achieving and maintaining the minimum standards set by the national agencies in order to avoid claims of bias but rather promote collegiality between the institutions and agencies. Swanzy and Potts (2017) recommend transparent and merit-based staff and student recruitment processes as the roots of a quality link between internal and external quality assurance mechanisms. The staff recruitment processes for both systems should include staff induction, laying bare and upholding the staff rules and regulations, staff formal appraisal methods, staff workshops and seminars,

further studies for staff, and short training courses for staff.

The student recruitment process on the other hand should include student orientation, simulated workplace for students, student academic counselling, student disciplinary associations, student graduation ceremonies, and alumni tracer studies. Akpan (2011) Quality in higher educational institutions is influenced by the quality of students admitted from the lower levels. It has been observed that students in secondary and post-secondary institutions are no longer committed to hard work and scholarship but rather they tend to gravitate towards cultism and examination malpractice. Where the majority of students admitted into higher education institutions are from the examination malpractice and cultism backgrounds, the institution has more work to do on the youths to get them to see the need for hard work on their studies.

Where the government provides student loan schemes, private universities should also be considered to host the students as they are also helping in the expansion of access to higher education (University World News, 2013). This would amicably resolve issues of equity and quality of entry students. In addition, the government would then have more say and control over the private providers. In the same vein, another workable strategy is to affiliate private universities to reputable public universities (Galafa, 2018). This would foster collaboration in various fields such as research projects and quality assurance. The private universities would benefit tremendously as they stand to learn a lot from the established public institutions in various practices.

With regard to funding of the quality assurance processes, Dada et al. (2017) suggest that the governments should set up special budgetary allocations for the national agencies to conduct accreditation and audits. This would ease the financial strain on the institutions which usually lack the financial muscle to effectively provide for all their needs in addition to cost-sharing the

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expenses of external quality assurance processes. Compromises such as lack of thoroughness of appraisals and audits that arise as a result of the institutions paying the national agency reviewers for external quality assurance are eliminated. Another effective strategy proposed by Hayward (2006) is for the government to partner with existing professional associations (or groups of professionals) to develop an external quality assurance process which meets both national and professional needs. Membership of such associations is often at a fee, and so the government would be saved the costs of accreditation and audits.

According to Luckett (2006), the nature of the relationship between the state and higher education needs to be rethought to inculcate more of a social contract. Mhlanga (2010) argues that the state should engage more in facilitation rather than in interference in developing and maintaining robust quality assurance systems. Luckett (2007) suggests institutional mergers of historically disadvantaged institutions with selected historically advantaged institutions as one of the social contract facilitations. Hayward (2006) however warns that the process should be transparent, open, and free of political and other non-academic influences in order to uphold its legitimacy. Hayward further insists that the national quality assurance agencies should handle a limited number of program reviews in order to be effective.

In a review of studies on quality assurance, Hayward (2006) captures a number of other strategies that can enhance the autonomy and yet interdependence between the internal and external quality assurance agencies. These include upholding the payment of peer reviewers, holding continuous consultations between the internal and external mechanisms, and using technology to ease the quality assurance process. Harvey (2018) argues for transparency and reciprocity between internal and external quality assurance agencies, noting that such reciprocity reduces the potential for dissembling and game playing. However, he warns that too much reciprocity could lead to 'negotiating the truth' which damages the credibility of the quality assurance process.

XI. CONCLUSION

This paper notes that the graduates of higher education institutions in Africa are largely wanting in skills of being innovative, analytical, articulate, balanced and adaptable to the ever changing world. The graduates are accused of lacking the love for life-long learning and they struggle to contribute meaningfully to their personal as well as national wellbeing. This is largely attributed to the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the autonomy and interdependence between the internal and external quality assurance mechanisms which are supposed to be mutually reinforcing. The paper argues that it is necessary to foster the independence and interdependence of internal and external quality assurance mechanisms to ensure that the purpose of quality assurance – employability of the graduates – is achieved. It is recommended that institutional leaders as well as governments give the needed attention and deploy appropriate resources towards strengthening the link between the internal and external quality assurance mechanisms in order to foster institutional changes and meet emerging challenges in a manner that promotes quality culture in the higher education institutions. In essence, quality assurance should be a continuous rather than a one-stop process.

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