

# THE GLOBAL CHALLENGE OF QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: AFRICA MATCHING AND COMPLIANT?

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*Assoc. Prof. Neema-Abooki*

*East African School of Higher Education Studies and Development,  
College of Education and External Studies,  
Makerere University,  
Uganda.*

## **Abstract**

*This paper dwells on the imperatives of quality and proposes a quadruple-fold system. Ultimately it propagates for a QUEST Analysis and a Quality Culture in higher education in native Africa.*

**Key words:** Africa, Higher Education, Quality

Education is regarded as a powerful tool for the development of any nation. ,, [Etymology]. ... Armstrong (2012) defines education as the process of facilitating learning or acquiring of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits. Equidistantly, Mahere (2015) highlights that the better educated the society, the fairer, more cohesive and innovative it can be. This therefore points to the idea that the art of acquiring knowledge and development of the power of reasoning and judgment in preparation for any career by any individual for any possible contribution to national development is majorly a reserve of the education system and the institutions therein. Therefore, to be part of the globalized world, every nation must transform its education system to meet the critical and all areas that facilitate national development (Mutinda, 2014).

Meanwhile Higher Education is an important ingredient in the economic and social development of a country (Lao, 2015).

Higher education institutions become established to therefore address human resources needs by producing graduates with relevant knowledge, skills and attitude for the labour market and improving the country's ability to social political developments. Accordingly, higher education institutions are established to address human resources needs by producing graduates with relevant knowledge, skills, and attitude for the labour market and for improving the country's ability to socio-political

development (Asamoah and Mackin, 2015). Sustainable growth in Africa is hence contingent upon the capacity of nations to diversify their economies and thus train human capital that will help to carry out and support the needed transformation.

Reasons as to why QUALITY is required in Higher Education (HE) are outlined by Mayunga (2010) as follows:

- a) Academics want to train graduates who meet the needs of society.
- b) Higher Education Institutions like to deliver a “product” that is wanted and also like to be proud of its graduates.
- c) The labour market expects higher education institutions to provide the students with adequate knowledge, skills and attitude important for the right job fulfilment.
- d) Internationalization of the profession and a world that is becoming a global village brings greater competition than before. A university not only has to compete inside the country, but also with other countries worldwide.
- e) Globalisation not only has negative aspects, but also positive ones. It offers our graduates the opportunity to enter the world market, but under the condition that the degree qualifications have quality.
- f) There is need for “consumer protection”: our students and their parents are spending a lot of time in and money on their education. Therefore, they have the right to receive a quality education.
- g) The relationship between HE and society changed. Society became increasingly interested in higher education. Also the relationship between higher education and the labour market became a topic for discussion. Some disciplines, for example social sciences, psychology and history, have a lot of students, but few available jobs. Other disciplines like engineering often had a shortage of students, and society could use more graduates. Such a situation caused pressure on higher education to steer the student flow in the desired direction.
- h) Quality has become increasingly important for higher education institutions, because of the question as to whether it is still possible to deliver the same quality within the given frameworks.

In the subtle mid of Sidha (2013), quality refers to the totality of features and characteristics of a product of service that bears on its ability to satisfy the stated or implied needs.

Suffice to observe herewith that HE systems worldwide have become more complex, increasingly more so in the coming years. At the same time, the system is facing unprecedented challenges arising from the convergent impacts of globalisation, massification of education, the increasing importance of knowledge as a main driver of growth, and the information and communication revolution (Robertson, 2010). Yet, the existential requirement is that they ought to become “quality systems”.

A quality system, defined by Manghani (2011), is the organizational structure, responsibilities, processes, procedures and resources for implementing quality management.

Coupled with the foregoing is the fact that higher education has witnessed rapid expansion in the number and variety of providers. These include private institutions, open universities, cross boarder providers, and short-cycle providers. The truism is that across the globe business companies and institutions of higher learning are faced with a challenge of competition. Thus, implementing a quality management system based on either ISO 9001 or one of the related standards such as AS9100, ISO 13485 or ISO/TS 16949 is becoming a necessity other than a requirement (ETI Group, 2014).

Yirdaw (2016) holds that an effective and efficient quality higher education system is vital to sustainable economic development in developing countries. This therefore points to the idea that all facets of the system have to be addressed and understood in order to realize intended results. Nyathi (2016) also emphasized that if quality is to permeate all levels of higher education, the concepts, methods and procedures must be accessible and understandable to all stakeholders. In amity with the status quo, Mala (2010), Rezvaya (2011) and Yirdaw (2016) subscribe to the following as contributing factors to quality higher education:

### **Governance and Leadership**

Governance in higher education is hereby construed as the structure and process of college and university decision making at the institutional system wide or state level (Yirdaw, 2016). A balanced education structure allows the institution to be autonomous and flexible in accomplishing its mission. However, governance is usually hindered by the need to respond to diverse environmental issues, weak mechanisms for faculty participation and the need to respond more efficiently based on shorter desired time frames. Rezvaya (2011) advises that the impact of political interference cannot be taken lightly especially in a politically dynamic and economically marginalized Africa. Yirdaw (2016) also insists that it's difficult to govern a university in an environment where market and related external forces hold higher education accountable for results rather than for processes. Therefore for higher education to meet the standard of quality both the results and process have to be attended to with caution.

The notion of Governance and leadership implies Total-People-Management. This guarantees top management commitment to the quality management system through providing effective leadership, communication and uniting every member of the institution to achieve the institution's desired goals. This also involves providing resources necessary to accomplish the quality requirements. Referred to is also involvement of people: There should be total participation and involvement of every member of the institution in the quality management system; hence, involvement of

top managers, middle level managers, academic and non-academic staff and the students. Implied as well is customer focus: this relates to the identification of the needs and expectations of the customers and ensuring such are achieved satisfactorily.

A balanced education structure in terms of governance and leadership allows the institution to be autonomous and flexible in accomplishing its mission.

- **Financial resources**

The International Journal of African Higher Education [INHEA] (2014) contends that the major crisis of public universities in Africa is lack of adequate funding. Equidistantly, Kasozi (2015) asserts that while student numbers have grown considerably since the 1970s, this growth has not been matched by the provision of sufficient financial resources to provide adequate learning facilities for them.

Public Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) therefore are currently facing rapidly rising costs and limitations in governmental funding. Accordingly, PHEI need financial sustainability to operate effectively and remain competitive. PHEI are increasingly challenged by cost pressures that are high and rapidly rising. In the longer term, these pressures have resulted in costs outrunning available revenues. Indeed, contemporary universities are facing unprecedented challenges, particularly in terms of matching revenue to escalating costs and accommodating increasing demands for growth and higher quality to remain globally and nationally competitive. To this end, Financial Sustainability (FS) has become a pertinent issue for Higher Education Institutions (HEI), both public and private, to thrive (Bateh, Heaton, Arbogast, and Broadbent, 2013). (Hint on other resources ...Critical Factors: PRIMO-F)

- **Qualification of staff and students:**

Mala (2010) contends that compliance with standards presupposes that the institution should assign responsibility for academic programme coordination as well as curricular development to persons academically qualified in the field. In other words, the institution is required to hire faculty with requisite qualifications with due focus to accomplishing her mission and goals. In determining qualification, consideration is desired to be given to such factors as the highest degree earned as well as competence, effectiveness, work experience and other documented support. In so doing the students selected on merit for different programmes shall then meet national and global standards required for productive, innovative and creative human resource.

Regarding academic standards and quality, the University should hence ensure that its academic standards are at least as high as those in comparable institutions and do match external competition. According to Jones (2012), the quality of academics should ensure a learning environment in which the content of

programmes, learning opportunities and facilities are fit for purpose. Understandably therefore, these academic programmes should be at the core of the higher education institutions' teaching mission as they provide students with both academic knowledge and skills including those that are transferable; which fact may influence a student's personal development and may be applied in their future careers (Aitken, 2015). This means that the university ought to be committed to reviewing its activities systematically to see whether it can identify features of current practice that can be improved upon (Brown and Glasner, 2011). As intimated by William, Lao and Materu (2010), the university should also systematically look ahead considering 'where it wants to be' and taking the necessary steps to ensure it gets there. Academic Programmes should also be designed with overall programme objectives that are in line with the institutional strategy and should have explicit intended learning outcomes (Santangelo and Tomlinson, 2009). In the prompting of Karge, Phillips, Jesse and McCabe (2011), students and other stakeholders should be involved in designing the courses and / or programmes which in turn should enable smooth student progression and define the expected student workload and reflect the overall purpose of higher education while subject to a formal institutional approval process. To maintain academic standards, Marshall and Rossman (2010) assert that the university is responsible for assuring itself that the quality of the learning opportunities provided for its students enables them to meet the standards of the awards for which they are studying. Accordingly, the university should endeavour to enhance the quality of the student learning experience by reviewing its systems and the information generated, while ensuring that her processes for the management of academic quality and standards are fit for purpose. In fact, "sound processes produce quality products" (Lomas, 2015).

Both the quality and commitment of staff are critical to maintaining and enhancing the high quality of learning and teaching (Minter, 2011). According to Okebukola (2015), depreciating qualifications among the teachers, research capacity deficit and inadequate *facilities* are among the 10 major challenges faced by African HE. (... The rapid increase in student numbers in the public universities has not been matched by expansion of physical facilities and academic infrastructure; some of the existing infrastructure is inadequate, dilapidated and in bad state of despair (Gudo, Olel, and Oanda, 2011). Most of the buildings of higher education institutions were built in the colonial period to serve the needs of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.

This said, one needs to take cognisance of the fact that the few higher education institutions created in colonies did not even have independent existence as autonomous African institutions; instead, they were extensions of universities in the Metropolis. ...[ Institutional autonomy and academic Freedom:.. These twin-stances should *be sine qua non* for the university to strive towards attainment of the desired and set goals for quality. ...[ Mission, Vision]... This stance assumes that the university is most effective when it is "left to itself", and can determine its own

priorities according to universal criteria, independent of the particularities of a specific geographical, national, cultural or religious context. “As higher education institutions’ systems expand, it becomes increasingly difficult for centralized bodies such as Ministries of Education to be involved in the day-to-day management of each university. As a consequence, there is a need for HEIs to be granted more management and academic freedom and institutional autonomy (Ashcroft and Rayner, 2015). When the University of Dakar was established, for instance, a decree from the French Ministry of Education named it as the eighth university in the French Higher Education System, Appointment of teachers, curriculum compositions, programmes, and even graduation approval used to be decided by colonial authorities based not on the interests of African societies but on colonial powers. Only those institutions that had attachment to the missionaries were able to get funds and support from the colonial masters (Lulat, 2003). May be that could explain the challenges university education is facing up to today (Assie-Lumumba, 2006).

To restore the quality of Higher Education in many of the faculties and departments to internationally acceptable levels, this key-note address calls upon African governments to undertake rehabilitation, modernization and expansion of infrastructure, among other salient issues in universities. The current funding of libraries in public universities ranges from 1.3% to 5% of annual university expenditure. There is need to raise the library budget to an acceptable and supporting level.

The students on their part should be encouraged and should be given chance to engage in the assurance and enhancement of academic quality if universities are to exhibit themselves as committed to providing a high quality learning experience (Josset-Bass, Sharan and Sharan, 2012). For, the direct contribution students make through providing feedback, advice and suggestions is critical in all quality enhancement and assurance processes (Josephs, 2013). For proper management of academic standards and quality, key stakeholders such as Students, External Examiners and Employers, Professional / Statutory / Regulatory Bodies and Industrial / Professional Partners, where appropriate should take part in consideration of proposals and consultations to provide externality and objectivity (Jeremeh, 2011).

Students are the first, and therefore indispensable. customers in a University. Accordingly, African universities should take note of the observation of Tibenderana (2013) that they have been criticised for producing graduates who have no entrepreneurial skills.

- **External quality assurance agencies**

In order to ensure that learning is fit for purpose, concern should be laid on the impact of external evaluations of the institution and its programmes. Mala (2010) observes that this is sometimes viewed as assault to the academic freedom and institutional autonomy by the state and managerial powers. Nevertheless, an institution should put

interest on aspects like external evaluation for the sole purpose of ensuring quality in order to enhance the *quality* of all operations and products of its institution. This should be done in conformance to standards, effectiveness in achieving institutional goals and satisfaction of the stakeholders.

Quality has therefore incessantly been something society has strived for since ancient human civilization (Mooney, 2013). The concept of quality derives back as far as specifications for buildings in ancient Greece to the Egyptians building the pyramids. Goods would be inspected by other guild masters to ensure that a standard of quality was maintained by members within the guild (Quevauviller, 2009). As the world changed, the Industrial Revolution started the modern ideology of quality assurance borrowing the methods prescribed by Frederick Winslow Taylor, a scientific management theorist, whose ideas catapulted the methods of efficiency and productivity in manufacturing. These methods included training employees rather than having them train themselves, implementing and enforcing stringent documentation and protocol based on scientific study, and dispersing work equally among workers and managers (Yanli, 2016).

To date, the means by which business/service providers differentiate themselves from their competitors is through quality maintenance which has remained the most important attribute that creates value about the product/service for the receiver (Baird, 2013). Winning companies are those that meet quality standards and for whom customer services is an obsession in every single market in which they operate (Harvey, 2002). Hence, relative terms such as “better”, “superior”, and “acceptable” are applied to judge quality; and that since businesses are leaders in quality assurance, non-business organisations such as higher educational institutions are here to benefit from the important lessons learnt by business (Baird, 2013).

Equidistantly, educational quality necessitates holistic policies with reference to recruitment processes, maintenance mechanisms, working conditions as well as professional development and welfare of students (Wanzala, 2013).

Nevertheless, defined from the higher education context, quality – like in other contexts – remains a relative concept that means different things to different people. For instance, while discussing the quality of an higher education institutions (HEIs), students may focus on the facilities provided and the perceived usefulness of education for future employment. Teachers, on the other hand, may pay attention to the teaching-learning process. Management may give importance to the institution’s achievements. Parents may consider the achievements of their children. The employers on their part may consider the competence of the institution’s graduate (IIEP-UNESCO, 2014). QAA (2015) refers academic quality as to how and how well the higher education provider supports students to enable them to achieve their award. It covers learning, teaching and assessment, and all the different resources and

processes that a provider puts in place to help students progress and fulfil their potential.

**Quality is Classified as Being**

1. Purposeful (Institutional products and services conform to a stated mission/vision or a set of specifications, requirements, or standards, including those defined by accrediting and/or regulatory bodies);
2. Exceptional (Institutional products and services achieve distinction and exclusivity through the fulfilment of high standards);
3. Transformative: (Institutional products and services effect positive change in student learning [affective, cognitive, and psychomotor domains] and personal and professional potential); and
4. Accountable (Institutions are accountable to stakeholders – for, the optimal use of resources and the delivery of accurate educational products and services with zero defects) [Schindler, Puls-Elvidge, Welzant, and Crawford, 2015].

Quality of education is therefore defined as outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society.

Quality is achieved when the HEIs are able to translate the needs of the stakeholders including Government, employers, students and parents into Goals and Aims which can later be achieved when educational Activities, research and community outreach are efficiently and effectively conducted (Teshome, 2012)., Meantime, Yanli (2016) epitomizes that one needs to perceive that a sustainable quality programme enhances employment opportunities, improves the education and training of future employees, harnesses future leaders, facilitates an enabling learning environment, and enriches the academic and intellectual landscape. Thus it fuels the engine of economic and social development at the national, regional and international levels.

All in all, quality, according to Yirdaw (2016), is conformance to the mission specifications and goal achievement within a publicly accepted standard of accountability and integrity. The issue of education quality therefore presupposes an environment where learners acquire capabilities they require to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to a peaceful and democratic society and enhance their wellbeing. Mahere (2015) and Morgan (2016) identify the following as some of the aspects as dimensions of quality education:

**Equity:** This was looked at as non-discrimination on the basis of personal and social circumstances such as; gender, ethnic origin and family background. It is assumed that these cannot pose as obstacles to achieving education potential and that all individuals reach at least a basic minimum level of skills.



- Contextualization and relevance: quality education cannot be based on a blue print that is applicable in all situations. Therefore, solutions and adaptations of the education system must be based on the real needs of the country and or the community.
- Teaching and learning: quality education puts the learner in the centre and helps the learner reach his/her full potential.
- Sustainability: education change processes often need time to be realized, therefore, the foundation upon which education is laid must be rooted in the life orientation of its implementers and recipients.
- Approach: quality education aims at developing a balanced set of capabilities required for its recipients to become active contributors to national and global development.
- Learning outcomes: after completing a given level of education, learners should have developed a minimum standard of skills, therefore quality education requires a results oriented approach.
- Institutional governance; capacities of education institutions are built through supported autonomy. Institutional leaders are set free to access resources, partnerships and trust from the concerned stakeholders in order to realize excellence in the service they offer. All stakeholders must partner with the institution in order to develop graduates who are individually successful, economically productive and actively engaged citizens.

In line with the foregoing, William, Lao, and Materu (2010) hold that “fitness for purpose” and “transformation” are the two most appropriate definitions of quality. The stance of the trio was catapulted by a small-scale research with a sample of senior managers in higher education institutions. Suffice however to note that the term “quality” did not exist in the lexicons of most universities until a some decades ago, when centrally planned provision for an elite gave way to large-scale provision for a large proportion of young people, and increasingly, non-traditional mature groups (O’Neil and Palmer, 2004), Accordingly, the nature of higher education especially in the developing countries like Africa observed significant changes. The elite university turned into an institute of mass higher education, creating pressure on national budgets. This stance was aggravated by economic recessions. Herewith should be noted the rampant craze of mushrooming of private universities. As regards quality, is this a curse or a blessing? Let this be food for thought for all involved in the education, especially high education of our citizens.

Taking into account the phenomenon of global competition, Watty (2008) clarifies that for universities to fit globally they should set a quality information flow and management process to determine and accomplish the standard of institutional quality service. This, according to him, should be done consistently and continuously to satisfy all stakeholders

In fact, Information about HE Provision represents the autonomy of higher education providers (Kelly, 2015). The information should therefore be examined to fit-for-purpose and should ultimately be accessible and trustworthy. It is this trustworthy that promotes public confidence and assurance relying on public understanding of the achievements made by universities such as, admissions, awards, courses, management structures, qualifications, research and innovations, publications and internal and external connections (Attila, 2011; Lomas, 2015)..

### **Way Forward**

Universities in Africa should endeavour to imbibe in the following approaches:

1. Process approach: All activities in the institution of higher learning should be treated as a process. Treating all activities so ensures a systematic definition of activities in order to meet the desired goals and establish the required resources to meet the set goals.
2. Continual improvement: This ensures that the entire institution of higher learning appreciates the fact that continual improvement of the institution is a never ending process. It should involve developing goals and measuring progress towards achieving those goals in a continuous manner to ensure that quality becomes and remains part and parcel of the institution.
3. Systems approach to management: this requires identifying all of the processes in the institution and their interconnectedness to ensure that they are all managed well to complete the system. This should be done in a way that it does not antagonize the harmonious operation and the interdependence of the units.
4. Factual approach to decision making: this component is research based and involves methods of collecting and analyzing data and then using such findings to make sound decisions on what path the institution should take. Makerere University for example is currently grappling with the challenge of delayed payments of staff salaries and other allowances like incentives. Accordingly, Universities should endeavour to establish the ultimate panacea that ensures that the university stands as entrepreneurial and generates income from multiple sources to ensure financial sustainability and total sufficiency.

The foregoing does not negate from the phenomenon that Institutions meet a number of barriers when they attempt to implement an effective quality system. While some of these hindrances could be external to the organizations, others are generated internally. ... *Hence the need for PESTLE-SWOT ANALYSIS. ....*

This key-note address does not in the least claim exhaustion of such an intriguing areas as global challenges of higher education in Africa. It only reminds as of the existential imperative to QUEST (quality on every single task) Analysis. Is Africa hatching to match? Universities in our continent ought to be complaint with the “quality culture”. Culture affects and governs all facets of life by influencing

values, attitudes and behaviour of a society. The culture of an organisation relates to the unique modes of carrying out the activities within the particular organisation/institution. The nature of organisational culture is largely influenced by the cultural orientations of the individuals forming it (Kwasi, 2012). Hence the home-work question: To what extent do African Universities have a quality culture?