

THE IMPACT OF QUALITY ASSURANCE MEASURES
ON ACADEMICS' PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES:
A CASE STUDY AT THE MAURITIUS
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

ROODRADEO BEEFUN

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ABSTRACT

Most Tertiary Education Institutions (TEIs) have set up quality assurance processes to ensure quality of teaching and learning. The importance of quality assurance mechanisms in TEIs is revealed in the literature review which commends that clearly defined and effective quality assurance (QA) policies are necessary.

The purpose of this study is to explore academics' understanding on the impact of QA practices on their professional practices in a TEI at the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE).

Data for this research has been gathered from the analysis of selected institutional texts on QA and in-depth interviews carried out with academics from different departments, schools and with varying years of experience at the institution. The data were analysed, segmented into categories to look at relationship and patterns. The phenomenon of QA in a specific context has been investigated through a qualitative research approach.

The findings of this study show that academics viewed QA practices as positive. The academics described that the implementation of QA has led to quality in academic and administrative practices in higher education and has also contributed to standardization, transparency and quality in teacher training. The empirical data confirmed that there is a wide gap between the expectations of academics with regard to QA processes and what actually has been accomplished.

The study suggested that the lack of an established institutional text on QA processes and procedures of how QA should be carried out confine the implementation of QA initiative at institutional level. There is a clear indication from the respondents of this study that the relationship between quality and quality assurance is not well defined.

One of the key findings of this study is that the academics forcefully defended the boundaries of academic work and felt that the additional burden associated with an increasing change. QA practices have just been added into the traditional scope of academic work

An important conclusion can be drawn from this research is that the apparent complexities for implementing an effective QA mechanism in this particular context are mainly due to the lack of participation, cooperation and involvement between academic staff and institutional management.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certified that I have supervised / read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in quality and scope, as a thesis for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

.....

Prof Dr Tie Fatt Hee
Faculty of Law
Universiti Malaya
Supervisor

Examination Committee:

.....

Prof Dr Pradeep Kumar Nair
Deputy Vice Chancellor
Taylor's University
Examiner

Prof Dr Abdul Ghani Kanesan Abdullah
School of Educational Studies
Universiti Sains Malaysia
Examiner

.....

Dr Sheila Cheng Chuen
Dean, Faculty of Business, Hospitality
& Communication Studies
Asia e University
Examiner

.....

Prof Dr Siow Heng Loke
Dean, School of Graduate Studies
Asia e University
Chairman, Examination
Committee

This thesis is submitted to Asia e University and is accepted as fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

.....

Prof Dr John Arul Philips
Dean, School of Education & Cognitive Science
Asia e University

.....

Prof Dr Siow Heng Loke
Dean, School of Graduate Studies
Asia e University

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis submitted in fulfilment of the PhD degree is my own work and that all contributions from any other persons or sources are properly and duly cited. I further declare that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. In making this declaration, I understand and acknowledge any breaches in this declaration constitute academic misconduct, which may result in my expulsion from the programme and/or exclusion from the award of the degree.

Name of Candidate: Mr. Roodradeo Beefun

Signature of Candidate:

Date:

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List of Abbreviation

BRP	Business Process Reengineering
EER	External Examiners Report
HE	Higher Education
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HOD	Head of Department
HOS	Head of School
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
LFQ	Lecturer Feedback Questionnaire
MIE	Mauritius Institute of Education
MIS	Module Information Sheet
PBL	Project Based Learning
QA	Quality Assurance
QAD	Quality Assurance Department
SFQ	Student Feedback Questionnaire
SMC	Senior Management Committee
TEC	Tertiary Education Commission
TEIs	Tertiary Education Institutions
TF	Tutorial Form

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The idea of carrying this research is mainly to emphasize on the quality assurance in a tertiary education institution and the occupation of the academics. It is an exploratory case study. This opening chapter gives an insight of the proposed research. The domains of quality assurance and academics' work are highly relevant but they seldom tend to overlap. This research tries to bring the discussion closer along with by applying quality assurance theory to academic work in higher education at the Mauritius Institute of Education.

“Neoliberalism is a political movement which supports the ideological belief that competition, privatization and open market forces strengthen the economy” (Shanahan, 2009). Globalisation has become an ideological discourse due to a perceived immediacy and necessity to respond to a new international setting. In the twenty first century, higher education plays a major role as it generates knowledge which is the main key for the economic development and the overall economy. “On this premise the importance of higher education with regards to the development of the economy may not be underestimated” (Ali & Shastri, 2010:7). In the global work place, an understanding of quality has become an essential life skill that is as fundamental to success of companies and institutions as literacy and numeracy. Quality assurance practice has become

universal, extending to the public and private domains. In higher education, as in business, globalisation is an ever-present phenomenon and quality assurance [QA] is being used to ensure quality.

The development and application of the policies underlying the QA in Higher Education [HE] has turned out to be a prime apprehension to national and international bodies, and particularly to Higher/Tertiary Education Institutions [HEIs/TEIs] operating in several national contexts, mainly in the UK and Australia. These changes bring new scopes in the way quality is understood and also create doubts over the ways QA forms our beliefs and therefore require a deep investigation into the political and economic drivers that have contributed to such changes.

According to De Wit (2011), the international dimension of higher education has become more central on the agenda of international organisations and national governments, institutions of higher education and their representative bodies, student organisations and accreditation agencies. Based on the literature there is a connection between globalisation and internationalisation of HE; positively, these had been viewed as the primary drivers for the approach of QA in a HE setting. As Morley (2003a) states, that with the introduction of QA in the HE sphere has been legitimated by the growth of TEIs all over the world. A call for additional robust and rigorous QA system have been introduced in the educational field as a mechanism of benchmarking technique and as a strategy of ensuring standard practice within HE settings (Seto& Wells, 2007). Thus QA is assumed to be effective in a more standardise and inert conceptualisation of HE

strategies based on a predetermined criteria. The apparent objectives of QA can be transparency and accountability, to make operations more efficient and visible. Its procedures and results have appeared to be varied, confused and challenged (Vidovich & Porter, 1999). Face to this complex and challenged history and because of drastic differences it becomes difficult for the internationalisation of QA and its transfer through nations (Morley, 2003a). The implementation of QA depends highly on the nation-specific contextual settings.

Quality has a wide definition within HE, which leads to varied interpretations. In simple terms, it is not easy to pull upon one definition to cover all circumstances. Sadler (2009) states that quality is context bound. Morse (2006) had indicated a large implementation gap influencing the transportability of skills within international boundaries. She contends that the variations among nations and regions create uniformisation of learning goals unrealistic internationally. Besides, the effect of globalisation, the literature review on QA reveals additional complexities. QA strategies may bring about unexpected outcomes and variations in specific context. Thus, standard is defined and employed in a varied way ranging from a broad definition of describing good practices to a narrow definition of an administrative necessity (Kohler, 2009).

Despite the fact that QA has been connected to responsibility and institutionalization in HE, especially in the United Kingdom (Brown, 2000; Hobday, 2000; Newton, 2000), a few UK-based research discoveries draw the consideration on