Implementation of Internal Quality Assurance in Polytechnics: Evidence from Ghana

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Abstract

Quality assurance in higher education has become a global issue. There has been a growing interest of governments around the world that higher education institutions in their countries need to provide quality education to their students. This study investigated the implementation of internal quality assurance in two purposively selected Ghanaian Polytechnics. Qualitative methodology was employed using in-depth interviews based on a case study research design. The participants indicated that the internal quality assurance systems and practices in place in the Polytechnics included areas such as the availability of internal quality assurance policy, teaching and learning processes, curriculum design, evaluation and review, research performance, extension activities, student assessment practices, student-lecturer assessment and student support services. Infrastructure challenges, funding and budget constraints, human capacity constraints and lack of quality culture were found to militate against the implementation of quality assurance in the Polytechnics. It was recommended that Ghanaian Polytechnics should have clear policies and associated procedures for the assurance of quality and standards of their programmes and awards. They should commit themselves explicitly to the development of quality culture and quality awareness. Also, the necessary learning facilities, resources and support systems should be provided by the Polytechnics to ensure quality of teaching and learning. The products, environments, programmes and services provided by the Polytechnics should be accessible and usable, to the greatest extent possible, by all categories of students. Assistive devices should be provided for persons with disabilities where needed. Building internal capacity for quality assurance was also recommended.

Introduction

Concern for the quality of higher education provision is a global phenomenon. Permutation of factors such as globalisation, mass higher education and diversity in its provision, decline in public investment in higher education, corporatisation of public higher education institutions and the adoption of digital technologies in the provision of higher education services have been tagged as the triggers (Altbach, 2013; Mohamedbai, 2008; OECD, 2008; UNESCO, 2004). These have led to changes in higher education policies, rules and practices worldwide (Vukasovic, 2014). Noticeable is the adoption of quality assurance as a measure which hitherto was an industrial practice. It is perceived to have the capacity to guarantee and enact stakeholders' expectation of quality (Ansah, 2015). Woodhouse (2006) defines quality assurance as those systems, procedures, processes and actions intended to lead to the achievement, maintenance, monitoring and achievement of quality. Other scholars have also defined quality assurance in different ways but the focus of this paper is not to unpack definitions of quality assurance.

Since the introduction of quality assurance in higher education, it has gained increasing favour and the attention given to it by higher education stakeholders has skyrocketed (Swanzy, 2015). Quality assurance now occupies a central place in higher education (El-Khawas, 2013). Many countries, especially, those in OECD have established comprehensive arrangements for quality assurance in higher education (Gallagher, 2010). Higher education institutions throughout the world today are focusing special attention on designing and implementing quality assurance mechanisms and systems in order to ensure that students receive high quality and relevant education and those degrees and diplomas are widely recognised. Such recognition is seen to be essential not only by national governments and employers but also by other higher education institutions and employers internationally (Harman, 2000). Additionally, UNESCO has set up a Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher education, which among other things, seeks to support capacity development for quality assurance in national contexts (Oyewole, 2012).

Recent developments in Africa's higher education systems point to an increasing focus on using quality assurance as an important mechanism to make African higher education more efficient and competitive (Jongsma, 2013; Kigotho, 2013; Materu, 2007; Mhlanga, 2008). The Association of African Universities (AAU) launched a Quality Assurance Programme in 1999 with the theme 'Developing quality assurance systems in African Universities' with funding from the Ford Foundation (Oyewole, 2012). Since then various African governments have institutionalised quality assurance or

are in a process of doing so. For example, in Nigeria, the National Universities Commission (NUC) is charged with the responsibility of assuring quality in higher education institutions (Akpan, 2014). Similarly, traits of quality assurance initiatives are eminent in the Ghanaian higher education landscape.

In Ghana, the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) has been established to regulate the higher education sector (Government of Ghana, 1992). The National Accreditation Board (NAB) is responsible for quality assurance in Ghanaian higher education (Government of Ghana, 2007). Ghana has specific quality assurance agencies that regulate the quality of specialised higher education institutions. For example, the National Board for Professional and Technician Examinations (NABPTEX) mandate cover curriculum enrichment, conduct of examinations and award of Higher National Diplomas (HND) in Polytechnics (Government of Ghana, 1994). The involvement of professional associations in quality assurance activities in Ghanaian higher education has also been noted by Materu (2007). These notwithstanding, an internal capacity for quality assurance within higher education institutions has been recognised as an essential component in addressing quality assurance holistically (Alabi & Mba, 2012; Njoku, 2012).

Polytechnic education emphasises the application of knowledge rather than the search for new knowledge. The thrust of Polytechnic training is on the acquisition of the relevant skills required to perform specific professional tasks without ignoring the underlying theoretical knowledge necessary for a proper understanding of the tasks to be performed. The Ghana Government's policy of converting Polytechnics into technical universities will take-off in September, 2016. This will help reposition them as strategic institutions for the training of highly-skilled human resource to drive the nation's socio-economic development and meet the exigencies of the rapidly changing, technology-driven work environment.   Also, this conversion will facilitate the achievement of parity of esteem with the universities without departing from the practice-oriented philosophy of Polytechnic education and training (Ministry of Education, 2014).

Quality Polytechnic education remains Ghana's hope of producing quality middle level manpower, improving productivity and reducing the high level of poverty amongst her populace. This implies that Ghanaian Polytechnics have no option other than to institutionalise quality assurance systems and procedures to complement the existing national external quality mechanisms to provide quality education. Regardless of the fact that the literature on quality assurance framework in higher education is growing, little is available on the implementation of internal quality assurance in Ghanaian Polytechnics. This study, therefore, sought to unearth the internal quality assurance practices of Ghanaian Polytechnics. It examined the prevailing

practices and challenges in putting in place effective mechanisms for internal quality assurance systems in the Polytechnics.

The following research questions guided the study:

• What is the nature of internal quality assurance practices prevailing in Ghanaian Polytechnics?
• What are the challenges facing the implementation of internal quality assurance in Ghanaian Polytechnics?

Methodology

The qualitative research approach was used for the study. The aim was to gain indepth understanding of participant behaviour and underlying reasons for such behaviour (Newby, 2010). The qualitative research paradigm enabled the researcher to interact with the research participants and understand the social world from their point of view and interpret them correctly.

Qualitative methodology agrees with a case study design. According to Yin (2003), Babbie (2007), and Creswell (2009) case study research provides rich and thick exploration into a single social phenomenon or situation. It excels at producing an understanding of a complex issue, and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research. The case study research is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin (2003).

Two key informants were purposively selected from a population of ten (10) Quality Assurance Officers from the ten (10) Polytechnics in Ghana to participate in this study because of their relevance to the study area, expertise in the field and accessibility to the researcher. These Quality Assurance Officers occupy unique positions in their respective institutions. This enabled the researcher to obtain rich data which was analysed following the approach of Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011). This approach entailed organising, synthesising, accounting for and interpreting the data collected according to themes as presented in the next section. Pseudonyms such as PA1 and PB2 had been used to replace the participants and the names of their Polytechnics.

Findings and Discussions
The Nature of Prevailing Internal Quality Assurance Practices in the Ghanaian Polytechnics Studied

The findings are presented and discussed under subheadings as follows:

Internal Quality Assurance Policy

It was found that the Polytechnics involved in the study have their respective internal quality assurance policies in place and these are gradually being implemented. These policies are based on the Strategic Development Plans of the Polytechnics in question and have full support of some staff and the rectors of both Polytechnics. The policies contain the guidelines for effective and successful implementation. This finding implies that the Polytechnics under investigation have policies that direct the implementation of internal quality assurance in their respective institutions. This is in line with the observations made by Makerere University (2007), which indicated that the aim of institutional quality assurance policy in higher education is to enhance the effectiveness of its core activities of learning, teaching, research performance, research training and management. The policy addresses all areas of the institution's activities focusing on their contribution to and in alignment with the institution's strategic goals; which is informed by its Strategic Development Plan.

Literature has shown that an internal quality assurance policy statement must explicitly contain the relationship between teaching and research at the institution; the institution's strategy on quality and standards; how the quality assurance system is organised; the responsibilities of departments, schools, faculties and other organisational units and individuals for assuring quality; the involvement of students in quality assurance; and the ways in which the policy is implemented, monitored and revised (IUCEA-DAAD, 2010).

It is evident from the literature that there can be no effective implementation of internal quality assurance system without a policy guideline and this should take into consideration the Strategic Plan of the institution and the role each constituent is expected to play. However, what was lacking in the studied Polytechnics was that the internal quality assurance policy did not have the full support of all the constituents of the Polytechnics, meaning, the quality assurance culture was not well-rooted in the Polytechnics.

Quality Assurance of Staff

It was found that the Polytechnics had mechanisms to recruit qualified staff. They had an open and participative mechanism for evaluation of teaching, research and work satisfaction of the lecturers. Their staff recruitment and appointment procedures include means of making certain that all new staff have at least the minimum qualification and the necessary level of competence. A participant stated that:

> *"The Personnel Unit under the supervision of the Registrar and in collaboration with the Appointments and Promotions Committee is*

> *responsible for recruitment of staff. Applicants are shortlisted and interviewed by a panel. Successful applicants are then recruited based on the Polytechnics statutes and recruitment policy"* *(Participant PB2).*

This finding implies that the Polytechnics have appropriate procedures in place to recruit competent and qualified staff. IUCEA-DAAD (2010) postulates that the academic staff is the single most important learning resource available to most students. It is important that those who teach have full knowledge and understanding of the subject they are teaching, have the necessary skills and experience to communicate their knowledge and understanding effectively to students in a range of teaching contexts, and can access feedback on their own performance. Higher education institutions should have means to satisfy itself that its staff are qualified and competent to conduct the core activities of the institution, which are teaching and learning, research and community service. There should be adequate staff appointment procedures, an adequate staff appraisal system and staff development activities.

Staff Development Policy

It was observed from the study that the Polytechnics had their respective Staff Development Policies in place which to a large extent guides professional advancement of staff. There are opportunities for further studies. Some staff had been sponsored by their Polytechnics to go for further studies after the waiting period. Some search for their own scholarships. The Polytechnics also give preference to staff development in certain areas that are crucial. Apart from these, seminars, workshops, in-service training, orientation programmes, retreat and refresher courses are organised for all staff. A participant noted that:

> *"The staff have opportunity for continuous academic progress and professional advancement. In house refresher courses are organised for staff. For example, the ICT Director organises workshop to train staff on the use and management of the Polytechnic database. Likewise the Director of Research and the Quality Assurance Officer etc. all organise workshop and seminars in their respective areas. In some cases, the staff are sponsored to attend workshops, seminars, and conferences; some of which are international in nature"* *(Participant PA1).*

It is important that employees are given opportunities to develop and extend their competency, expertise, ability and know-how and should be encouraged to value their skills. The European University Association (EUA) Quality Culture Project (2005 and 2006) had identified staff development as an important building block of internal quality assurance and

quality enhancement. It indicated that institutions should provide low-performing staff with opportunities to improve their skills to an acceptable level and should have the means to remove them from their duties if they continue to be demonstrably ineffective. Romina (2013) has posited that vibrant staff development programme on a continuous basis will help academics and non-academics to clarify and modify their behaviour, attitude, value, skills and competencies. In this way, they grow and develop in their knowledge and thus become more effective and efficient in the performance of tasks.

Research Performance

Findings showed that the two Polytechnics promote research culture among the senior members. The staff of these Polytechnics vigorously pursue their research interests. The stimulus for the deepening of research culture was partly as a result of a directive from the NCTE that if one is not a senior lecturer he/she cannot be a Head of Department. One of the participants indicated that:

> "The *euphoria to publish is so high among staff. The number of senior lecturers increased from 4 to 24 in less than three years. The NCTE directive that if you are not a senior lecturer you cannot be HoD was the propelling factor. Even when you are appointed in an acting position you can hold the fort for only one year*" (Participant PA1).

It could be deduced from this finding that the main push factor for research is career advancement. Apart from teaching excellence, the other pillar of a world-class institution must be its research. Higher education institutions are responsible for the generation and dissemination of new knowledge. The growing importance of knowledge-led economies has placed higher education at the centre of national competitiveness agendas. Higher education institutions are increasingly viewed by policy makers as 'economic engines' and are seen as essential for ensuring knowledge production through research and innovation and the education and continuous up-skilling of the workforce (Sursock, 2011).

Antony (2000) suggests that higher education institutions should have a vigorous and well scrutinised publication programme and actively encourage staff to publish. Since, generally, research is one of the core functions of institutions of higher education it is important to keep track of the research performance of staff. The popular slogan in Ghanaian higher education institutions is 'publish or perish (P or P)', meaning if one does not publish he/she will not be promoted; and will be eventually sacked.

Extension Activities

Findings from the study revealed that the Polytechnics were responsive to community needs and conducted relevant community/extension services and awareness programmes. One of the participants remarked:

> *"Community service is one of the main criteria for promotion; as such senior academic and administrative staff are all required to partake in activities that directly benefit the community and the society as a whole"* (Participant PA1).

This finding showed that people in academia no longer live on ivory towers. Higher education institutions are not only responsible for teaching and learning and doing research. They are also responsible for serving the society. In the face of globalisation and knowledge-led economies higher education institutions must be responsible for the production and dissemination of knowledge. This finding is in line with the view of Antony (2000) who wrote that one of the important parameters for internal quality assurance is that higher education institutions must promote faculty participation in consultancy and extension services. It is appropriate that each nation and higher education system aim to engage in activities and services that meet the needs and the culture of the local society.

Curriculum Design, Evaluation and Review

The study showed that the programmes of teaching and learning are consistent with the goals and objectives of the Polytechnics. The process of programme design, accreditation and review is well organised by the Polytechnics in collaboration with the regulatory bodies such as NCTE, NAB and NABPTEX. Feedback from academic peers, the regulatory and relevant professional bodies is used in the initiation, review and redesign of academic programmes.

Higher educational institutions should have formal mechanisms for the periodic review or evaluation of the courses and the curriculum. The confidence of students and other stakeholders in higher education is more likely to be established and maintained through effective quality assurance activities which ensure that programmmes are well designed, regularly monitored and periodically reviewed, thereby securing their continuing relevance and currency.

Kaysay (2012) notes that the best practices of internal quality assurance must focus on core educational processes involving coherence in the design, delivery, evaluation and/or review of the curriculum. This finding confirms the fact that quality assurance aims at protecting students against poor quality programmes and maintaining the credibility of qualifications, encouraging and supporting providers to institutionalise a culture of self-managed evaluation that builds on and surpasses minimum standards. In

addition, quality assurance increases the confidence of the public in higher education programmes and qualifications and facilitate articulation between programmes of different higher education sectors and institutions (CHEA, 2009).

Teaching and Learning

The Polytechnics have procedures in place to facilitate the effective running of the teaching and learning programmes. Lecture time-table is prepared at the beginning of each semester and classrooms are allocated for courses and year groups. Available teaching and learning materials are effectively utilised. HoDs are responsible for course allocation. One of the participants remarked:

> *"The Quality Assurance Office has effective monitoring system to track the effectiveness of teaching and learning activities" (Participant PA1).*

Teaching and student learning are central to the purposes of higher education institutions. At the undergraduate level, especially, the quality of student learning experience, the breadth and depth of learning attained by students, largely depends on the quality of teaching processes. The programmes of teaching and learning take account of individual differences among learners and offer academic flexibility. Kaysay (2012) suggests that improvement of teaching, learning and assessment processes should be the foci of the quality assurance practice. This shall also involve ensuring the coherence in curricula, teaching and learning, and assessment processes, checking whether the key educational processes are properly implemented, monitored and improved. Kaysay (2012) adds that teaching and learning process in a higher education institutions covers an array of activities that are embedded in its mission. The university academic calendar, the relevance of courses offered (as perceived by students), the level of intellectual stimulation in courses, variety of learning activities offered to students, and standards of lectures and presentations are some of the aspects of the teaching and learning process, which are important for achieving quality.

Student Assessment

The study indicated that procedures for students' assessment are rigorous, free and fair. The rules, regulations, guidelines and the grading system of each Polytechnic are written in the students' handbook and distributed to all fresh men and women on the day of matriculation to ensure that quality standards are met. NABPTEX Examination Guide regulates the conduct of examination in these Polytechnics. This is made available to all students. Examination questions are submitted to NABPTEX for moderation by external examiners to ensure that questions meet required standards.

Before the beginning of end-of-semester examinations, the Examination Officers organise orientation for all invigilators and supervisors on the roles they are expected to play during the examination period. Sitting arrangements of students are regulated to prevent any form of examination malpractices. Students' Identification Cards are inspected at the entrance of each examination centre and the students are thoroughly searched before they are allowed in. Also, strict invigilation is done to prevent any form of examination malpractice.

One of the participants noted that:

"*After the end of each semester examinations, committees are constituted to promptly investigate cases of alleged examination malpractices. Students found guilty are sanctioned to serve as a deterrent to others. These sanctions are based on established guidelines. This ranges from cancellation of papers to rustication for a stated period. Marked scripts of final year students and project works are also vetted by external moderators appointed by NABPTEX. Students who satisfy all general requirements of NABPTEX and the Polytechnic are awarded certificates after completion of their studies. NAPBTEX moderate examination questions, marked scripts of final year students and subsequently award certificates to graduating students" (*Participant PB2*).*

It could be deduced from the findings that the Polytechnics have appropriate procedures and guidelines for conducting effective, fair and transparent examination. Student assessment is one of the most important elements of higher education. The outcomes of assessment have a profound effect on students' future careers. It is, therefore, important that assessment is carried out professionally at all times and takes account of the extensive knowledge that exists on testing and examination processes. Assessment also provides valuable information for institutions about the efficiency of teaching and learner support.

Student assessment procedures should have a clear, pre-defined examination or other assessment methods in place; ensuring that those assessments are conducted securely in accordance with the institution's stated procedures, designed to measure the achievement of the intended learning outcomes and other programme objectives. A clear regulation covering student absence, illness and other mitigating circumstances is important. There should be clear and publicly available criteria for marking/giving grades. Assessment procedures must be strictly adhered. Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently. Quality assurance of assessment procedures facilitates international recognition of the standards of awards (ENQA, 2010; Loukkola and Zhang, 2010; Antony, 2000).

Student Support Services

The study indicated that both institutions have well-run support services (though insufficient and inadequate) to ensure the physical and intellectual health of all students. Tutorials, student advice and/or counseling services, sporting facilities/equipment and materials are available and accessible to all students but inadequate. One of the participants indicated that:

> *"Orientation programmes are organised for all fresh men and women each year. The topics include how to adjust to the new environment, teaching-learning, study skills, relationships, time management, management of finance, grading system, recreation, healthy living, conduct of examinations, the grading systems etc. Also, there is effective and vibrant guidance and counselling unit in place in each of the Polytechnics where students are encouraged to receive advice"* (Participant PB2).

It is important that the quality of student support is assured. IUCEA-DAAD (2010) suggests that in establishing a learning environment to support the achievement of quality student learning, physical and material as well as social and/or psychological environment that is supportive of learning and is appropriate to the activities involved must be considered.

Student-Lecturer Assessment

The study revealed that student-lecturer assessment is done just before the end-of-semester examinations. Students are made to assess each course and the lecturer who taught the course. The relevant areas of assessment include preparation and provision of course outline with references, coverage of course content, appropriate methods of delivery, materials and facilities, among others.

Students are the first to judge the quality of teaching and learning. They experience the delivery method. They have an opinion about the facilities. Despite this, the information given by students has to be counter-balanced by other opinions. Higher education institutions are to make use of student evaluation on a regular basis; the outcomes of the student evaluation must be used for quality improvement. They must provide the students with feedback on what is done with the outcomes of evaluation exercise or else, in future, students will not be enthused to engage in any student-lecturer assessment.

Challenges Facing the Implementation of Internal Quality Assurance in Ghanaian Polytechnics

The findings are presented under subheadings as follows:

Infrastructure Challenges

Responses indicated that the Polytechnics have inadequate physical facility to run the educational programmes and administrative functions efficiently. A participant indicated that:

"The design of the lecture theatres is unsuitable for effective teaching and learning. They are long rooms and those who sit behind are expected to see the illustrations on the board in front of the lecture theatre. The lecture theatres are relatively small in size. None of them can comfortably accommodate 200 students. The students are always crowded in these lecture theatres. The situation is very bad. The growth of the infrastructure does not keep pace with the admission numbers of the Polytechnic. The nature of the lecture theatre furniture is inappropriate and inadequate and needed immediate attention. ICT support is very minimal" (Participant PA1).

The participant asserted that:

*"The library space is inadequate. The major challenge is the seat capacity. The only library in the Polytechnic was originally built for about 200 students, but now the students are forced to crowd themselves inside. The library is not well stocked with current reference materials. There are no school level libraries and a handful of departmental libraries are available" (*Participant PA1).

Another challenge identified in one of the Polytechnics was reported by a participant as follows:

 "Lecturer recruitment is not tied to availability of office space. The lecturers are not having offices. The staff common room can accommodate only about 100 lecturers while the lecturer population is about 200. Some of the lecturers had no place to sit before or after lectures. Some of them had to attend to students who need their services outside the lecture theatre in the HoDs office, under trees or anywhere the students meet them on campus" (Participant PA1*).*

One of the major challenges revealed by a participant was lack of disability access. The participant noted that:

"None of the buildings in the Polytechnic has a disability access. The administration block, the lecture theatres, the computer laboratory all lack disability access. All the lecture theatres are located at the top so persons with disabilities (PWD) had to struggle to crawl up stairs in order to attend lectures. On some occasions, they are helped by friends to climb up. The administrative block made a provision for a lift but this had never been fixed. 'Last year, there was a student with disability who had to always crawl to the fourth floor to see the Rector'" (Participant PA1*).*

A participant from one of the Polytechnics reported that:

> *"The whole Polytechnic has only two physically disabled students.*
> *The computer laboratory is on the second floor of the storey building*
> *and they manage to reach it sometimes with the help of their course*
> *mates." Inside the computer laboratory, no provisions have been*
> *made for PWDs"* (Participant PB2).

Students rely on a range of resources to assist their learning. These vary from physical resources such as libraries or computing/ICT facilities to human support in the form of tutors and other advisors. Learning resources and other support mechanisms should be readily accessible to students, designed with their needs in mind. Higher education institutions must be responsive to feedback from users of these services. Abebe (2014) conducted a research on 'Institutionalisation of Quality Assurance in an Ethiopian Public University' and found that the availability of human, material, and financial resources necessary for institutionalising quality assurance was found to be inadequate; this may have negative effect on teaching and learning of students.

CHEA (2009) suggests that poor teaching and learning environment is one of the impediments of internal quality assurance in higher educational institutions in Africa. In 2012, Kahsay conducted a research into quality assurance in Ethiopian Universities and the analysis of the interview data showed that inadequacy of the available facilities and support services are major problems across the public universities in Ethiopia. Okae-Adjei (2012) found that enrolment at Koforidua Polytechnic did not match with the infrastructure (library, classroom space, laboratories etc.), faculty strength and resources, administration and management systems. This has gradually lowered the quality of teaching, learning and research functions of the Polytechnic. Appropriate teaching and learning processes and adequate facilities/equipment are necessary for effective teaching and learning but the converse is the reality in the Polytechnics.

The study showed that the physical environment of both institutions is not disability friendly. The facilities are inadequate with no easy access to all its constituencies. In the international higher education literature, an overarching theme is how disabled students face both physical and attitudinal barriers within the university environment (Paul, 2000). It is often a lack of planning to make buildings and curricula accessible, and a lack of academic and non-academic support that create barriers for disabled students' retention and achievement (Matshedisho, 2007; Mumba, 2009; Chataika, 2010).

Participation of disabled students in higher education is frequently discussed in terms of physical access and the shape and design of the built environment (Chataika, 2010). Universal design includes the built environment and is defined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) as the design of products, environments,

programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design. It includes assistive devices for persons with disabilities where this is needed. (United Nations, 2006). In the absence of an enabling environment for all persons, including those with disabilities, it is very difficult to expect the adoption and successful implementation of quality assurance in the Polytechnics.

Challenges with Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Evaluation

In one of the Polytechnics involved in the study**,** the participant narrated the following scenarios which related to teaching, learning, assessment and evaluation:

> "Internal quality assurance was a **'dead horse'** when I took office in June, 2014. It was there but not functioning. It would have to be **'awakened'**. 'You cannot expect it to be galloping'. The commitment to change takes time. But now I am beginning to enjoy a significant commitment and cooperation from staff. Students' know where to report when they have challenges with teaching and learning" (Participant PA1*).*

He continued that:

> "An attitudinal change to mainstreaming best practices is a matter of great concern. There is great resistance to change; imbibing new ways of doing things. Peer review was initially met with resistance from basic authors. There is serious resistance from all quarters. Some administrative staff feels you are instructing them so they are not ready to budge. 'Name calling and the like' are real situations. Some feel you want to remove them from their comfort zones. People have huge attitudinal problems and there is the need to 'format' people to realise the value of quality. 'A number of heads of units and sections are of the view that quality assurance is getting too powerful'" (Participant PA1*).*

He added that:

> **"**Almost all the lecturers are engaged in 'galamsey' (moonlighting). Each lecturer teaches students on distance programmes from three or four different institutions. How will they have time for their official work? Their health is our concern. Lecturers have been asked to submit to the administration the particulars of institutions they teach but they are yet to heed to this. Some of the HoDs who are supposed to ensure that course outlines are prepared are unable to do so because of their personal agendas. How can these HoDs ensure that the right things are done? Some lecturers come to class ill-prepared. When some of the students learn ahead and need to confirm their knowledge, they get angry. Some of them are not receptive to

students' questions. They either insult the students or become very evasive" (Participant PA1).

Moonlighting (doing work on the side) activities will definitely limit the time at the disposal of lecturers to effectively prepare for teaching. These challenges indicate the absence of quality culture in the Polytechnics. This has made some members of staff to get the wrong impression about the concept of quality assurance. They see Quality Assurance Officers as fault finders and impish intending to incriminate staff. IUCEA-DAAD (2010) identified challenges to internal quality assurance as lack of quality assurance awareness, resistance against innovations and resistance of staff because they feel threatened. Kahsay (2012) cited lack of staff commitment and engagement as a serious problems in adopting and implementing quality assurance mechanisms. Majority of the academic staff of one of the universities selected for Kahsay's study engaged in moonlighting to generate additional income without the knowledge of the employer university.

Seniwoliba and Yakubu (2015) conducted a study titled 'An analysis of the quality assurance policies in a Ghanaian University' and found that some staff view activities of the Quality Assurance Office with suspicion instead of seeing it as a transformative endeavour of the university demanding a collective responsibility. As a result of this perception, information on quality related matters is often viewed with some ambivalence. They argue that quality assurance is nascent and it may take time for quality culture to be built in the University.

Some challenges with assessment were reported. A participant observed that:

> *Some wrong perceptions and unethical practices also prevailed among some students and staff of the Polytechnic. Some of the students think if you are referred in end-of-semester examinations and you re-sit you have to pass at all cost regardless of what you write so they do not study for their re-sit papers. They cry foul if they are referred the second time. If a student failed in a paper some staff will come and tell you, for example, that 'this is my girlfriend' or 'this is my sister' so you should 'help her pass' Some lecturers feel too sympathetic to students' course. The Polytechnic wants to go beyond internal review and bundle questions and scripts to subject experts for review"* (Participant PA1).

Another finding from the study was that in one of the Polytechnics involved, though the academic calendar had schedule dates for mid-semester examinations, some lecturers did not adhere to them. They organised the mid-semester examinations just before the end-of-semester examinations. Thus, students were unhappy yet some of the lecturers refuse to change.

Student assessment in higher education institutions is considered one of the aspects of assuring the quality of teaching and learning. Student assessment that fosters sustained student engagement in learning is believed to enhance quality of student learning experience. The findings in this current study support that of Kahsay (2012) which showed that student assessment and grading practices at some of the public universities studied in Ethiopia are constrained by a multitude of complex problems and tensions, and these assessment practices negatively affect quality of student learning.

Participants from both Polytechnics reported that student-lecturer assessment is a form of internal quality assurance in which students assess their course lecturers. However, this is not often popular among lecturers. A participant indicated that:

> *"Lecturers think students are reporting their weaknesses, quality of curriculum delivery, exposing their truancy and possible excesses. If lecturers are queried they feel bad about the internal quality assurance process. Some indicate it is an indictment on them"* (Participant PB2).

This implies that those lecturers misconceived the whole exercise and its merits. This finding is in line with that of Abebe (2014) which showed that the Quality Assurance Centre of the Ethiopian University investigated suffers from negative attitude that the university community, particularly, the academic staff has towards it and its activities. The academic staff tend to see the Centre as an alien and a fault finder. They see its officers as people who only want to get others punished for their mistakes. No proper acknowledgement is given to the effort of the Centre. Academic staff do not see the activities of its staff as an important input to the overall university functions. The findings of Okae-Adjei, (2012) revealed that quality assurance has not been fully embraced by some staff members, who view the Quality Assurance Unit with suspicion. They perceive internal quality assurance process as a fault finding schema and, therefore, unwilling to accept the unit. Some others see its role as interference and policing.

Funding and Budget Constraints

A participant indicated that:

> *"Quality goes with cost and imputed value of cost is very high. The only source of funding for the internal quality assurance unit is Internally Generated Fund (IGF). Scripts had been marked but no payments had been made. Subject experts had audited scripts but there was no money to pay them. Fifty-four courses had been sent to be audited and the budget is so huge. The Polytechnic has not gotten enough funds. Everything academic involved the internal quality assurance unit, from curriculum development, course outline*

preparation through to examination and certification but most of the time funding is not forth coming. The mandate requires you to set standards. Budget constraints affect all these activities" (Participant PA1).

The need for adequate financial resources for effective and efficient actualisation of quality assurance activities was another challenge that came out clearly. Without adequate funding and sufficient budgetary allocation, the internal quality assurance standards cannot be met. Effective quality assurance depends largely on the availability of adequate funding.

The findings of the current study confirm that of Materu (2007) who reported that compared to more developed higher education systems in the world, quality assurance systems in Africa is still at an infant stage and thus confronted by many challenges. One of these challenges is limited funding. Kahsay (2012) observed that installing policies and structures for quality assurance may be considered an important step and can indicate commitment, but this by itself is not sufficient to effect change in quality of education. The policies have to be translated into action and the quality assurance office should be empowered to properly undertake its duties and responsibilities.

Human Capacity Constraints

Asked whether he had any formal training and certification in quality assurance, a participant explained that he had never pursued any academic programme in quality assurance. He further remarked:

"I have been appointed based on NAB requirement. I have attended a lot of capacity building   workshops and seminars. I am exposed to journals which published on quality assurance and the policy documents of seven universities on quality assurance. I am currently studying ethics policies of eleven (11) well-recognised foreign universities" (Participant PA1).

In the other Polytechnic, the participant indicated that:

*"He had applied for the position, was interviewed and recruited. He had attended a good number of workshops, seminars and conferences but had not done any academic course or pursued a programme in quality assurance. He added that the quality assurance office had only one personnel. The Junior Assistant Registrar does administrative work in the quality assurance office and has no knowledge in quality assurance. The only office equipment provided to the office is a desktop computer and a cabinet" (*Participant PB2*).*

Abebe (2014) found that capacity building for the quality assurance office staff of the European University where the study was conducted was a challenge. Staff involved in quality assurance endeavour were not adequately

trained. Most of the office staff also had disciplinary backgrounds that were unrelated to education and quality. The quality assurance office staff lack appropriate training and qualification. Kahsay (2012) found that in one of the universities, the quality assurance office was a one-staff office. It was not equipped with the required staff and resources to operate properly. Seniwoliba and Yakubu (2015) wrote that it was only the Director of the Directorate of Academic Planning and Quality Assurance (DAPQA) in the university who attended quality assurance workshops organised by external quality assurance agencies, while other members of staff in the Directorate stood aloff. Apart from that, there were no internally planned training programmes to equip the other staff with the necessary skills to make them function adequately.

A study conducted by Okae-Adjei (2012) revealed that there was inadequate staff at the Quality Assurance Unit of the Koforidua Polytechnic; and this affected the performance of the Unit. He concluded that a few staff in the Unit have very little experience in quality assurance matters. Romina (2013) found that most institutions of higher learning in Nigeria lack staff development programme for training and re-training of staff. Materu (2007) maintains that weak human capacity is one of the main current constraints to the development of quality assurance in Africa.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Efforts at internal quality assurance in the Polytechnics are still at the teething stage and thus confronted by many challenges. Though systems and practices are in place for assuring quality in the Polytechnics, some of these (systems and practices) are not adequate and efficient enough to assure quality and promote quality culture.

It is, therefore, recommended that the necessary learning facilities, resources and support systems should be provided by the Polytechnic authorities to ensure quality of teaching and learning. The design of products, environments, programmes and services should be made usable by all people, including persons with disabilities, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design. The universal design should be considered because it is an issue of social justice. Assistive devices for persons with disabilities should be provided where needed. The need for fire exits and alternative exits of buildings during disasters should be seriously considered.

Each Polytechnic has the responsibility for maintaining the quality of the education it provides and the standards of the qualifications it offers. It is important for these institutions to have clear policies and associated procedures for the assurance of quality and standards of their programmes

and awards. The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available.

Polytechnics in Ghana should commit themselves explicitly to the development of quality culture and quality awareness. The notion of quality culture embraces shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitments to quality and it is the most effective and meaningful way that quality assurance mechanisms can guarantee and improve quality levels and support dynamic change in higher educational institutions. They could develop and implement a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality and perpetuating quality culture.

The Quality Assurance Unit of the various Polytechnics with the support of management of the Polytechnics should create a desk within the Quality Assurance Office for information dissemination on quality assurance through workshops and seminars for all staff. This will enhance the idea of building a quality assurance culture in the Polytechnics. The external quality assurance body, NAB, should support Polytechnics to build internal capacity for quality assurance and ingrain quality culture. The management of each Polytechnic should make budgetary allocations for funding quality assurance activities.

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