



Getting Ready for Accreditation: Internal Quality Assurance in Teacher Education Institutions in Ghana

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Abstract. The importance of tertiary education cannot be over emphasized. Tertiary institutions provide a nation with varied human capital essential for building and growing the economy of a nation. Human development through the provision of teachers is a valuable role that teacher education tertiary institutions play. The teacher training colleges in Ghana are in the early days of being tertiary institutions. In tertiary institutions where accreditation is required for operation, better education management with emphasis on assuring quality is sine qua non. Quality assurance is pivoted to the continuing operations and success of a tertiary institution.

This paper examined the implications of the transition to tertiary status and the urgency and importance of internal evaluation practices in the colleges of education. The paper also addressed internal quality assurance from total quality management and systems thinking perspectives and identified four pillars as anchoring internal quality assurance: creating quality institutional climate, promoting quality assurance at the departmental level, shifting focus from quality assurance for accountability to quality assurance for improvement and engaging in reflective practice and peer review as major tools to facilitate quality assurance.

Keywords: Quality Assurance, Institutional Climate, Teacher Education

Introduction

This paper focuses on higher education accreditation and internal quality evaluation practices with particular reference to teacher education in Ghana. The critical issue being the role quality assurance plays in tertiary institutions in the light of the new paradigm shift from accountability to improvement and its implications for the public colleges of education presently in the transition phase of becoming fully fleshed tertiary institutions. The government of Ghana established a national quality assurance agency, the National Accreditation Board (NAB), to be responsible for quality assurance in higher education within Ghana (Utuka 2011). Institutions to be accredited by NAB are those that have demonstrated their commitment to the maintenance of acceptable standards (Association of African Universities, AAU, 2008). All the Colleges of education have obtained preliminary accreditation from the NAB. Interim accreditation is granted two or three years and the institutions need to ensure they observe internal evaluation practices in order to be ready for re-accreditation.

The transition of Teacher Training Colleges

Colleges of Education formally referred to as Teacher Training Colleges are the main institutions that provide teacher education for teachers at the Basic level. The Institute of Education in University of Cape Coast, has the responsibility for the examinations, curriculum development, research and outreach of the 38 Public Colleges of Education in Ghana. Presently these Colleges of Education are in a process of transition into tertiary education institutions. Their mandate is to train individuals to be professional teachers. In September, 2007 all of the 38 Public Teacher Training Colleges which were under the Teacher Education Division of the Ministry of Education, were upgraded into Colleges of Education and placed under the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE). The Colleges of Education are therefore now regarded as tertiary institutions. This process aimed to further build up the country's human resources and improve academic standards of education institutions. The Colleges of Education moved from certificate awarding institutions

to diploma awarding institutions. All the Colleges of Education are affiliated to the University of Cape Coast, which awards the Diploma in Education to graduates (NAB, 2009).

Tertiary or Higher education institutions in Ghana have adopted various processes and practices (such as external examiner system, programme and course approval procedures, evaluation of teaching and course, and student feedback) for the assurance of quality of education provided (Utuka, 2011). The Public Colleges of Education for instance have an external examiner system managed by the University of Cape Coast, whereby the university under the Institute of Education manages examinations, sets and moderates examination questions and administer examinations. There is an award committee that comprise some principals of the Colleges, the Director and Senior Members of the Institute of Education in the University of Cape Coast, the Vice Chancellor of UCC, Dean of the Faculty of Education UCC, NCTE, representatives from Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT) and West Africa Examination Council (WAEC). This committee is responsible for issues related to administering of examinations, and presentation of examination results. The assessment of examinations scripts is organized by the Institute of Education whereby there is a structure made up of subject chief examiners, team leaders and markers selected from tutors from the Colleges of education and the university of Cape Coast.

Presently there are a number of challenges in relation to ensuring quality in Colleges of Education in Ghana as they go through the formative stage of being tertiary institutions. According to Ndago (Chairman of Conference of Principals of Colleges of Education) the transition of Colleges of Education to the tertiary sector can be described as frustrating, uncertain and disconnect between what we know about tertiary status and reality on the ground (Daily Graphic Dec 16, 2011). Many changes are occurring such as the management of the institutions as tertiary institutions, change in curriculum, and the upgrading of all resources, be it human, physical and material facilities.

In order to contend with these challenges and changes mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure resource availability and quality education. The focus should be in the following areas; determination of performance areas and identification of issues to be addressed (IQAC, 2011). Consequently the issue of quality assurance is relevant and important to the Colleges of Education. Quality assurance is a planned and systematic review process of an institution or programme to determine whether or not acceptable standards of education, scholarship, and infrastructure are being met, maintained, and enhanced. In order to ensure quality in the delivery of education, the diploma programme being run by the colleges had to undergo a process of acquiring accreditation from the National Accreditation Board (NAB). It is presently acknowledged that quality higher education is crucial to national development (AAU, 2007). It is therefore important that the Colleges of Education continue to strengthen the structures of internal evaluation so as to assess themselves as they prepare for the next phase accreditation.

Urgency for internal evaluation practices for reaccreditation

The development and utilization of quality assurance mechanisms to improve or upgrade educational institutions are essential for their growth. It is critical that educational institutions are able to develop strategies and structures for self introspection that will ultimately lead to the improvement of the institutions and in this case prepare them for accreditation. Internal evaluation practices are procedures and systems put in place within educational institutions that promote self evaluation to maximize its output. This is important as the institutions are able to set goals and targets and assess if these are being achieved. Internal evaluation enables the institution assess its current position in terms of goal achievement, processes carried out and resources available, determine where it wants to go, and how it is going to get there.

Having internal evaluation practices is important because of the demand for efficiency and effectiveness from all stakeholders. The reduction in public funding of

educational institutions has increased the stakeholders of education that are directly involved in funding and supporting educational institutions. These stakeholders, who include industry, communities, students and educational institutions, expect that the colleges of education are accountable for any assistance given. Accountability means ensuring that any costs incurred will accrue the maximum benefits for the students and stakeholders. With the student population growing at a faster rate than the available facilities in the majority of Ghanaian tertiary institutions, quality assurance is essential to ensure that the education processes within the institutions are efficient and effective. Internal evaluation practices are also needed to ensure that all students who enter and leave the institutions obtain the best education with the available resources.

As a result of internationalization and globalization there is an increasing mobility of students and academics across national frontiers; it is therefore important that the quality of an institution be recognized in another country (Mohamedbhai, 2008). It is imperative therefore to ensure the relevance of programmes provided and the employability of student graduates within and outside the country. This will lead to internal harmonization between existing Colleges of Education making them nationally and internationally acceptable.

The use of internal evaluation practices leads to the improvement in the general management of the institutions. They are able to focus on setting goals, monitoring processes, achieving goals and being accountable which ultimately lead to quality outputs from the Institutions. The outputs of the Colleges of Education include quality training offered to students which leads to quality teachers. This ultimately improves the quality of basic education which is a major challenge in Ghana today. In order to succeed in being accredited, it is imperative that effective internal evaluation practices are emphasized to ensure quality training in the Colleges of Education and ultimately quality teachers in our basic schools. Quality education starts with quality teachers.

Implications for internal evaluation practice

Four pillars that anchor internal quality assurance practices in an institution, and promote their effectiveness are identified when internal quality assurance is examined from both the total quality management perspective (TQM) and the systems thinking framework (Tsinidou, Gerogiannis, & Fitsilis, 2010). The four pillars address (a) creating quality institutional climate, (b) promoting quality assurance at the departmental level, (c) shifting focus from quality assurance for accountability to quality assurance for improvement, and (d) engaging in reflective practice and peer review. The pillars are predicated on the urgency for establishing a new paradigm for assuring internal quality in institutions. The new paradigm places emphasis on doing the right things well, in a manner that meets the criteria of producing quality graduates resulting from total quality management and total stakeholder satisfaction (Chetsanga, 2010). The emphasis on total quality management and systems thinking focuses quality assurance on inputs, throughputs, and the outputs of the institutions. That is, there is the need for quality assurance from the moment students enter the institution through to the time the students graduate.

Creating quality institutional climate means building QA into the everyday life of the institution. Additionally, the process of building QA into the everyday life of the institution is seen as the shared responsibility of all members of the institution; staff (both academic and administrative) and students. Creating QA simply means that internal quality assurance will address all the dimensions of institutional climate, that is, the ecology, the milieu, the organizing system, and the culture of the institution. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1991) refer to the dimensions of institutional climate that constitute the key result areas for internal quality assurance as the institutional tangibles, responsiveness, reliability, and assurance respectively.

First, quality assurance focusing on ecology of the institution examines the state and appearance of physical facilities, plant, and equipment and addresses questions such as: what is the state of the facilities in the institution? Key issues for

consideration include meeting adequacy, usability, accessibility, adaptability, and safety. Nightgale and O'Neil (1997) opine that facilities in the institution should support teaching and learning; that is, they should be fit for purpose.

Second, quality assurance focusing on milieu of the institution interrogates how people treat one another in the institution and also how power is exercised. Internal quality assurance should thus examine the relationships existing in the institutions and the support services provided by the institution to promote teaching and learning, as well as to meet the expectations of the stakeholders.

Third, quality assurance focusing on the organizing system looks at how the institution structures its activities (e.g., curriculum). It examines the extent to which the institution is able to offer knowledge, skills, and services accurately, dependably, and timely. Key questions examined should include, *how are the graduates of the institution perceived on the job? Are students completing programmes on time in the institution?*

Fourth, quality assurance focusing on the culture of the institution examines the values and philosophy that guide the way the institution conducts its affairs, especially the attention and care the institution offers to the stakeholders. It addresses the confidence and trust the stakeholders hold towards the institution.

The second pillar focuses on the role of the various sectors of the institution, specifically, the departments, in promoting quality assurance. The departments are the engines that drive the activities of the institutions. Drawing from the principle of subsidiarity that decisions are best taken at points closest to where the action is; quality assurance should be brought down to the various departments. Quality assurance thus becomes an integral part of the activities of the department. Hence, when the Quality Assurance unit of an institution makes references to Implementation Units of quality assurance in the institution, the institution will be making references to the activities of the departments in ensuring quality. The intended outcome of having quality assurance in the departments is that quality assurance will no longer be perceived as just a unit of the institution, but a way of life in the institution. Bringing quality assurance to the departments is consistent

with the classical definition of quality assurance; explicit commitment and practices to the development of an institutional culture which recognizes the importance of quality and the continuous enhancement of quality of services.

The third pillar is a paradigm shift in focus from quality assurance for quality control or accountability to quality assurance quality improvement and enhancement. Quality assurance for quality control or accountability deals with adequacy – that is, relating quality assurance to processes which assess whether minimum acceptable standards are in place in a tertiary institution. Quality control therefore is the means through which an institution ensures and confirms that conditions are in place for students to achieve the standards set by it or by another awarding body (Quality Assurance Agency, QAA 2004). Quality improvement on the other hand identifies developmental processes, such as the strengths and weaknesses of institutions and takes deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of learning opportunities in the institution. Adapting the work of Swinglehurst, Russell, and Greenhalgh (2008), the shift in focus is illustrated in table 1.

Table 1 Quality assurance paradigm shift

QA for Quality Control/Accountability	QA for Quality Improvement/Enhancement
Focus on teaching	Focus on Learning
Teaching as individual performance (seeing the teacher as individual practitioner)	Focus on teaching as collective practice (emphasizing collaboration between teachers and across disciplines)
Focus on monitoring/judgment	Focus on professional development
Focus on top-down implementation by by management not actively involved in teaching	Active engagement of all (senior staff and teachers during implementation)
Focus on documentation	Focus on discussion

The fourth pillar specifically addresses actions that are central to best operating practices of individuals in the institution that will facilitate optimum performance to enhance teaching and learning. Individuals are to engage in

reflective practice and submit to peer review. Reflective practice entails an on-going process of examining how one is performing a task and determining the approach that works best to facilitate teaching and learning (Schon, 1983). Reflective Practice moves practitioners from their knowledge base of distinct skills to where they are able to modify their skills to suit specific contexts and situations, and eventually to invent new strategies to improve their performance (Larrivee, 2000). Reflective practice is the continuous integration of tacit knowledge and theoretical knowledge.

Peer review refers to processes to improve performance quality through professional critiquing and sharing of good practice among staff. Ordinarily, peer review entails having a colleague reflect back to a person how he or she is executing tasks. It involves direct observation, followed by supportive feedback, and the offering of constructive advice (Kinchin, 2005). Peer review is formative, that is, emerging issues are used for continuous professional growth.

Anchoring quality assurance on the four pillars gives new meaning to quality assurance in institutions. When you get into an institution, you experience quality being assured because quality assurance forms an integral part of the day-to-day activities of the institution and every member of the institution continues to explore ways to improve performance.

Conclusion

Better education management is not only becoming a policy priority for institutions, but *sine qua non* for their continuing existence. In the era of free market concept and competition, it is quality that sets one institution apart from the rest. The long-term survival of institutions depends on how good their services are, which is mostly measured by the calibre of graduates they produce. The assurance of internal quality becomes the tool to enable an institution to guarantee that standards and quality of its provisions are being maintained and enhanced. When internal quality is assured, there is integral combination of quality student admission, high quality lecturing staff, and high quality programmes and

resources. The institution in turn produces students who have the expertise that meets stakeholder expectations.

The pursuit of internal quality assurance by colleges of education should not become a choice, but a norm instead. The assurance of internal quality will enable colleges of education have in place planned and systematic actions, necessary to provide adequate confidence in stakeholders that the programmes the colleges offer satisfy requirements for accreditation.

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