External Quality Assurance In Higher Education:

Nigeria and South Africa

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ABSTRACT

What is quality assurance? What is the purpose of higher education and how does it affect the way quality assurance is carried out? What value can be placed on quality assurance and could it enhance a student's learning outcome?

This research takes a reflective and critical look at these questions amidst the disparagement of quality assurance and problems issuing from practice. Aside from definitional issues, quality assurance has not fulfilled its expected purpose, which for all intents hinges on compliance and improvement. It is hoped that understanding the prevailing interpretation of quality assurance by regulators, a better grasp of the controverted issues could emerge and a renewed understanding of the meaning of quality assurance stimulated.

Using the methods of in-depth interview and analysing relevant documents, this thesis explored the extent to which quality assurance agents in Nigeria and South Africa engage with the epistemological basis of quality assurance. I highlighted deficiencies that offer compelling arguments for reforming the mechanism. I employed an emic and etic perspective and an interpretist approach underpinned by hermeneutics.

Diametrically opposed to the essential nature of quality assurance are the external control of quality assurance and the mistaken view that quality assurance is the preserve of a particular group. Also dysfunctional is the endowment of quality assurance with attributes from industry such as appropriating the concepts of quality control and auditability. Where accountability dominates, emphasis on improvement is not given equal priority. Besides, focussing on compliance yields compliant sinners causing unethical behaviour and declining standards to be prevalent in universities and among students. Nonetheless, quality assurance is valued and has brought some improvement albeit extracted under duress. The internalisation of the essential nature of quality assurance, and not just quality as a seven – letter word or it misrepresentation as minimum standard, requires a more strategic approach.

My original contribution to knowledge is the proposal of a mechanism for quality assurance, which is neither prescriptive nor presuming upon a political mandate. Embodying the scope of what quality assurance should entail, this mechanism crystallises the internalisation of quality assurance. It provides some clarification for quality assurance and offers a proposition for future research.

Key Words: Quality, Quality Assurance, Employability, Purpose of Education Teaching, Learning, Accountability, Value, Mandate, Incentive, Compliance, Improvement, Learning Outcome, Consequentialism.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to this University or any other institution for a degree, diploma or any other qualifications.

Signed:……

Theresa Udumaga Okafor

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I accept full responsibility for any insufficiency or error that could be imputed to this research.

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ACRONYMS

AAU	Association of African Universities
ABET	Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology
AMBA	International Association of MBAs
ANC	African National Congress
AUCC	Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CHEA	Council for Higher Education Accreditation
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CMEC	The Council for Ministers of Education
CMS	Church Missionary Society
COREN	Council of Registered Engineers of Nigeria
CSIR	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
CV	Curriculum Vitae

CVCP	Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals
CQAIE	The Center for Quality Assurance in International Education
DOE	Department of Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
EFMD	European Foundation for Management Development
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESECT	Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team
ESG	European Standard and Guideline for Quality Assurance
ESIB	National Union of Students in Europe
ESRC	The Economic and Social Research Council
EUA	European University Association
EQUIS	European Quality Improvement System
FET	Further Education and Training
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS)
GCE	General Certificate in Education
GIQAC	Global Initiative on Quality Assurance Capacity
GGP	Guidelines of Good Practice
HEBRG	Higher Education Better Regulation Group

HEFCE	Higher Educational Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
HEIAAF	Higher Education Institutional Autonomy and Academic Freedom
HEMIS	Higher Education Management Information System
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HERENA	Higher Education Research and Advocacy Network in Africa
HESA	Higher Education South Africa
HET	Higher Education and Training
HRSC	Human Sciences Research Council
ICAN	Institute of Chartered Accountants
IHEQN	Irish Higher Education Quality Network
INQAAHE	International Network of Quality Assurance for Higher Education
ISB	International Students Barometer
ISO	International Standards Organisation
JAMB	Joint Admission and Matriculation Board
LASU	Lagos State University
MAS	Minimum Academic Standards
MBA	Masters of Business Administration
NAAC	National Assessment and Accreditation Council

NBS	National Bureau of Statistics
NMC	Nigerian Medical Council
NOUN	National Open University of Nigeria
NPC	National Population Commission
NQA	Namibian Qualification Authority
NQF	National Qualification Framework
NUC	National Universities Commission
NSB	National Standards Bodies
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PEF	Programme Evaluation Form
PDCA	Plan - Do - Check – Act
PDSA	Plan – Do – Study – Act
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
QA	Quality Assurance
SAQA	South African Qualification Authority
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authorities
SIWES	Students Industrial Placement Services

SSF	Self Study Form
TEC	Tertiary Education Council
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA)
THE	Times Higher Education
TNE	Transnational Education
TQM	Total Quality Management
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UK	United Kingdom
UUK	Universities United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNISA	University of South Africa
USA	United States of America

CHAPTER ONE
THE PROBLEM AND THE CONTEXT
AN UNSUITABLE QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISM

1.1 INTRODUCTION

All too often, quality assurance is perceived as an external ownership of dramaturgical compliance to a narrow set of performance indicators, marked by legalism and ritualism, and stifling what makes improvement possible (Goffman, 1971; Barrow, 1999; Harvey 2002; Harvey and Newton, 2004). In Africa, Mokgalong (HESA, 2009) speaks about over-prescriptiveness and threat perceptions while Botman (HESA, 2009) notes some ambivalence between policy statement and practice. There are discussions on the perceived loss of autonomy and compliance activities (Okebukola, 2010; Jansen, 2009).

Even more alarming are disparaging remarks such as 'dangerous medicine' by Greatrix (2005), 'feeding the beast and meaningless rituals' (Newton, 2002) and 'symbolic violence' (Morley, 2003) in reference to the problems in assuring quality and standards in United Kingdom (UK) higher education. There have been contentions about who was right/who was meddling (Kealey, 2008; Alderman, 2009) or arguments about ineffectual regulation and/or quality assurance frameworks

(Greatrix, 2005; Newton, 1999, 2000; Brown, 2001; Harvey and Stensaker, 2007, 2008 and 2010) and about examining academics desire to dismantle government interference and/or bolster best practices (OECD and The World Bank, 2007; Salmi, 2008).

As a former board member (2009–2011) of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies for Higher Education (INQAAHE) and given my interactions with some of the representatives of these disparaging views of quality assurance, I have often wondered if quality assurance is 'inherently problematic'. Are Africans dealing with a problematic concept, or does the problem lie in the concept's interpretation aside from other contributory factors from the social, economic and political landscape prevalent in the continent?

It can be observed that unlike Africa, where the quality assurance systems have remained more or less static, the UK system within the last ten years has undergone many changes. However, does frequency of change, as Parry (2010) contends, raise questions about the overall purpose and effectiveness of quality assurances processes'? Is change symptomatic of effectiveness or of lack of perception? Weakened by these seeming internal contradictions and perhaps symptoms of rapid change, should a solution be sought by rejecting the current quality assurance mechanism, or by seeking a sustainable alternative or an overhaul of the system?

Considering quality assurance in the UK and its former colonies in Africa, there are more commonalities than differences and so, applying Greatrix's contentions about the UK's system in the African context, one wonders if Africa has inherited a 'fatal remedy' (Greatrix, 2005) for its institutions. This fatal remedy, Greatrix argues, would 'have a corrosive and deleterious effect on the standard and quality the framework is intended to assure'. Should Africa be looking towards 'a version of soft managerialism', as prescribed by Greatrix for the UK, which 'perhaps offers something of an answer, employing a suite of proxies for standards and internal controls supported by a degree of trust in the professionalism of highly motivated staff'? Has external quality assurance outlived its importance? Could there be a crisis of quality assurance that presents an opportunity for discernment and a potential that could shape a new future for quality assurance with compliance and improvement inseparably aligned?

Given these polemics, it can be argued that quality assurance is likely to remain a challenge for two sets of individuals. On the one hand, are the academics who will continue to demonstrate reluctance to any form of regulation especially external regulation. On the other hand, are the regulators who with a proper understanding of the requirements of quality assurance would need to set new rules, mindful of subsidiarity, and exercising a greater degree of collaboration and commitment, to prove the credibility of the exercise. Does there exist a single

mechanism that could satisfy all stakeholders, convincing them that the goal is indeed quality assurance within institutions and not merely 'maintaining auditability'. The latter option 'co-opts management systems to serve their ends' thereby making audit the primary consideration and with the same stroke, rendering the enhancement of quality insignificant (Greatrix, 2005; Pollitt, 1990; Power, 1999).

With some simplification, one could claim that some of these debates have been around for some time: those who see quality assurance as a nexus between compliance and improvement, those who deny such links claiming that it is all about compliance, and those who concede that the process is defective. Yet, compliance, as quality assurance regulators practice it, often breeds too much regulation: endangering internal improvement and transparency, whilst threatening the legitimacy and autonomy of academia. Also evident in the polemics are the disequilibrium of purposes, expected results, and outcome of quality assurance. In addition, several definitions exist that emphasise different aspects of quality assurance. Have these been helpful in achieving the set purposes of quality assurance, or have they simply been evasive?

It is this complex reality of quality assurance that give reasons to believe that quality assurance practitioners are not fully engaged with the meaning of the concept. It also gives rise to doubts as to whether a

strong link exists between the way quality assurance is expressed by regulators, and what is being practiced. Newton (2002) expressed this concern about the gap between what is planned or intended in policy underpinning quality improvement or enhancement initiatives, and what actually emerges. One could argue that what seems evident is a loose understanding of quality assurance practiced within the limits of compliance and inspectorial modes. As Newton (1999, 2000, 2002) observes in his analysis of the quantitative data of a survey he carried out in 1990, 'quality assurance only serves to meet internal and external accountability requirements'. Brown (THES, 2002) describes the forces of accountability as being strong while those devoted to improvement including the promotion of accountability remain fragmented. He then suggests that what is needed in quality assurance is 'more enhancement and a little less regulation'. Do these not imply the fact that the regulators themselves need some external regulation? Again, if that be the case, who gets to regulate the regulators' regulators? If we continue in that trend, would the chain of regulators not continue to grow indefinitely, ad infinitum and even at cross-purposes? At this point, a possible remedy could be fixed standards within which all regulators would operate. However, this raises yet another problem: the institutions could begin to resist external regulators all over again, with the claim that they would rather simply implement the fixed standards internally, than be subjected to external regulators whom they may

argue, have nothing new or spectacular to offer…the possibilities are indeed endless!

Rather than regulating the regulators, Harvey (1999) insists on engaging in a critical social research that centres on 'evaluating the evaluators'. This he describes should explore beneath the surface to 'dialectically deconstruct prevailing perceptions' and aid the 'reconstruction of alternative understandings of quality, quality improvement, and quality process'. This view expressed by Harvey is associated with the aim of this research.

1.2 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

Essentially the main research questions are: what do regulators in Nigeria and South Africa contend to be the meaning and purpose of quality assurance; how does that understanding of quality assurance affect its practice and what have the outcomes been?

First, in researching into the meaning of quality assurance, it needs to be understood that quality assurance is a recent concept in Africa. It had its roots in the colonial period and is somewhat affected by colonial experience and history. The prevailing norms and practices of quality assurance are also transmitted through professional associations, international conferences, journals and a few books. Bringing in the views of non-African quality assurance practitioners as will be done in

this thesis, by way of comparison, is not to privilege one regional above the other. This assumption would be counterintuitive. One cannot convincingly project a best practice in quality assurance because that would be subjective. There are many existing good practices of quality assurance regardless of region and if anything quality assurance is designed specifically to ensure its fitness for purpose but then again this begs the question 'whose purpose'?

Singh (2010), a South African quality assurance practitioner has mulled over these questions relating to models of quality assurance 'Whose perspective counts credibly as a global perspective'? 'Is it that of countries that are politically and economically dominant on the global landscape'? 'Is it useful to think of quality assurance centres and peripheries: the systems of countries with long traditions of quality assurance (for example, the United States (US) and the UK) become templates for emulation and adaptation in the peripheries, with the assistance of circulating professionals and consultants'? (Singh, 2010 pp. 189-192; Singh, 2011 pp. 6-8). These questions certainly do not lend themselves to easy answers and neither did Singh attempt to provide answers. Possibly because quality assurance practitioners are fully aware of the cross-cultural and 'colonising' influence of quality assurance and the increasing regional and international collaborations in quality assurance. Or perhaps the reason for leaving such questions

unanswered is to ostensibly avoid the 'tangles of geopolitics' (Singh, 2011).

The aim in this research, therefore, is to attempt to distil the local variations in the meaning given to quality assurance in Nigeria and South Africa from the point of view of the regulators of quality assurance. I hope to find this meaning through an appraisal of the evidence of regulation from my vantage point as Board Member of an international network of 200 quality assurance agencies. UK and US quality assurance practitioners are implicated in this research because quality assurance is diffusive and through meaning making, the way quality assurance has been adapted would become evident. This research would also show how the adaptations of quality assurance have been shaped by historical and political economies. Also, reflections on meaning are expected to have the potential of challenging the deficiencies of quality assurance and hopefully bring about the full communion with the depth and breadth of quality assurance. Through the interviews that would be analysed, I expect to achieve this aim as the interviews would assess quality assurance regulators' understanding of the concept and its features, which would provide complementary data to the literature and documentations on quality assurance. It is in fulfilment of this aim that the basis of selection of the interviewees was their role as senior quality assurance regulators and practitioners.

The purpose of quality assurance is an aspect of the meaning of quality assurance that this thesis examines, including correspondences between the purpose of quality assurance and the role of universities and whether this an area that needs some attention? A very old and current debate within academia is; what are these roles of universities (Newman, 1907; Kerr, 1963: Dearing, 1997; Humboldt in Hohendorf, 2000; Collini, 2012; Wolf, 2002; Holmwood, 2011; Singh, 2011; Thrift, 2014)? Admittedly, fundamental question exists about what the roles should be (Collini, 2012), but some can be identified to be: cultivation of the mind (Newman, 1907); social justice (Singh, 2011); public good (Thrift, 2012); utilitarian motives (Dearing, 1997; Leitch Report, 2006); teaching and research (Humboldt in Hohendorf, 2000); the development of highly qualified personnel and facilitating linkages, networks, and attracting talents who provide specialised services in the local community (Grossman et al., 2001; Wolfe, 2004; Bramwell and Wolfe, 2005). The list is not finite; there are overlaps and interconnectedness among them, but the central question is whether quality assurance has sufficiently impacted on the fulfilment of those identified roles of a university. Could quality assurance require that some attention be paid to students' employability? Should teaching and learning be done with a focus on job-market intelligence, employment and acquisition of those attributes as outlined by Harvey (2002), Elias et al. (1999) and Hillage and Pollard (1998)? These outlines include

'interactive attributes—communication skills, interpersonal skills and team working—and personal attributes, including intellect and problem solving, analytic, critical and reflective ability, willingness to learn and continue learning, flexibility and adaptability, risk taking and self skills' (Harvey, 2002 p. 2). If quality assurance becomes institutionalised, universities are not likely to neglect some of their most essential roles for the benefit of students: the human capital and the social capital networks that should be brokered in favour of employability of graduates (McGrath et al., 2010).

There is need to understand the meaning and purpose of quality assurance and what those mean to regulators, if any improvement is to be sought. Understanding the meaning of quality assurance would hopefully reveal how the concept impacts on practice because a notion about something tends to determine how it will be viewed, interpreted and used. Thus, the practice of quality assurance, the second broad aim of this research following from the conceptualisation of quality assurance, centres on process. Process in this sense identifies the procedure used to quality assure in determining whether the procedures used capture the elements that characterize quality assurance. This involves an examination of the features of external quality assurance in higher education in Nigeria and South Africa. These features would additionally generate the meaning of quality

assurance embedded in practice and most importantly the extent to which the meaning of quality assurance has been effectively captured.

In summary, my analysis uncovers the endowment of quality assurance and meanings that have shaped the practice (as well as misconceptions) of quality assurance. As already mentioned, this meaning does not in anyway represent an African quality assurance landscape because I am not sure one exists neither am I trying to privilege some kind of neocolonialism, Eurocentric or American landscape of quality assurance. The US has been drawn into this research because of the diffusion of knowledge of quality assurance as mentioned earlier. Besides additional evidence that quality assurance is diffusive are studies, which show that there have also been a prominence of US models and voices in European quality assurance (Rhoades and Sporn, 2002; Singh, 2011). This study, simply takes into account definitional issues existing in the body of literature on quality assurance and examines how they interact with the way quality assurance is understood in the specified African context, its practice and the outcome.

The final aim in this research is the outcome of quality assurance. Quality assurance ought to be a precondition for improvement and so this research examines evidence of such improvement, which ultimately should prove the value of quality assurance. Also the

outcome evaluates how quality assurance has attempted to improve the purpose of higher education and students' learning.

1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE COUNTRIES SELECTED FOR THE STUDY.

I am examining what quality assurance means to regulators, and how such meaning informs the management of same by the National Universities Commission, Nigeria (NUC) and the Council for Higher Education, South Africa (CHE) and the respective outcome. The countries selected for this research, Nigeria and South Africa, are of interest because they were former colonies of the UK, and a lot of practices in their higher education are derived from association with the UK and the US

My other reason for choosing Nigeria and South Africa is because these two countries occupy a central position in Sub-Saharan Africa given their economic resources and population. As a result of their rising development and importance, companies like Coca-Cola has relocated its headquarters from the UK to Johannesburg in South Africa. Nigeria on the other hand is the home of Nollywood, which is the biggest commercial force in the filmmaking industry in Africa (Mahajan, 2011). Nigeria also has massive oil wealth and 170,000,000 million consumers (National Population Commission, 2013), which has a critical advantage and might lead it to contest the position currently held by South Africa, the premiere destination for foreign investment, in some years to come.

Perhaps the study of quality assurance regulation in these two countries, if properly understood and primed, could provide signals on where improvement, if made, would benefit the rest of Africa.

A robust quality assurance could offer a remedy for some problems in the continent namely: 1) Poor quality of many higher education institutions; and 2) Lack of employability of graduates. (Dike, 2008; Babalola, 2008; Styrdom and Fongwa, 2012; John, 2012; Edukugho, 2012). A pool of quality graduates in learning, character and research are required if countries want to sustain and develop their economy. The benefits of a quality assured higher education on the other hand, can be expected to go beyond the immediate acquisition of an award to the demonstration of those skills, attitudes and attributes that make society a more sustainable place (QAA on skills for Employability, 2012). At no point in history has cultivating the right attitude become more desirable than now when economic inequalities, corruption, stagnant infrastructure, destructive riots, kidnapping, killing and bombing have become prevalent. Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives drew attention to the importance of the affective domain that includes attitude (Bloom, 1956). Attitude lies within the transformative education approach considered by Harvey (2005). Education that helps students develop the right attitude could engage their character and intellect (Newman, 1907) and bring about the fulfilment of the social justice role of education (Dewey, 1897; Weber and Bergen, 2005).

CHAPTER TWO
NIGERIA AND SOUTH AFRICA

2.1 THE EARLY BEGINNINGS AND CONTOURS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

Brennan (2001) remarked that the shape of quality assurance systems could be ostensibly determined by their purposes and contexts. Going by this definition, it could be supposed that quality assurance is not just a diffusion of practices for the attainment of certain educational goals. Rather, purposes and contextual issues could have considerable influence on what is considered to be quality assurance. Therefore, it may be normal to expect the concept of self-governance and self-critical higher education permeating the expectations of quality assurance in advanced countries of the West (Brennan, 1998). In such countries, where democracy is a long-standing factor, governments step back from direct control of institutions and that often results in a strengthened autonomy within such institutions. This is unlike African countries, who are experiencing their few decades of democracy and where higher education and specifically quality assurance are linked to their transformation agenda. In such developing economies, it may be normal to expect a dominance of externally regulated quality assurance. The reason for this, as some authors have considered, is that it would be natural to progress from a process involving considerable external

regulation when new institutions are set up to one involving greater self regulation (Mills and Fage, 1999).

Singh (2010) stated that purpose requires getting to the heart of how one defines quality assurance and the social purposes one connects to quality in education. The Literature Review Chapter will examine the definitional issues and some of the predictable elements of the purposes of quality assurance across diverse contexts. However, looking at context, which is the main preoccupation of this chapter, one could discern how contextual imperatives have shaped the purposes of higher education and how quality assurance connects with social purposes such as equity, social justice and social transformation of nations who struggled for independence from colonialism.

These contextual imperatives are present when one examines the higher education experience in Africa. This could lead to an understanding of the spirit that characterises higher education at a time when it was predicated on the search for knowledge to a time when it became marked by the politics of colonialism, independence and government control.

2.2 HIGHER EDUCATION EXPERIENCE IN AFRICA: INFLUENCE OF RELIGION AND EARLY COLONIAL ACTIVITIES

The history of higher education in Africa can be divided into two broad categories. First, the heritage acquired from a confluence of religion and early colonial activities then, second, the era of government interference. Religion, colonialism and national government have had, and continue to have a dominant influence in African education. Colonialism is known to have had a dramatic influence in shaping African universities, although the existence of higher education predates colonialism.

Higher Education experience in Africa started around the 3rd Century BC in Alexandria Egypt, and the ancient institutions known to have the vestiges of a modern university are the Alexandria Museum and Library, and the School of Alexandria. The sophistry of these ancient institutions counters the teachings of Eurocentric professors who taught that African higher education experience began with colonialism (Lulat, 2005).

The Alexandria Museum and Library was known as the famous library of classical antiquity (Atuahene, 2010) because it was a repository for a collection of books that attracted research scholars (Ajayi et al., 1996). Commenting on the collegiate system that existed at that time, Riad (1981, p. 123) remarked:

> Scientists and men of letters lived in this institution. They were housed and fed and were able to give themselves up entirely to their research and studies with no menial duties to perform. Its organisation was similar to that of modern universities except that the resident scholars were not required to give lectures.

According to Lulat (2005) and Okafor (2006), Egypt is credited as being the seat of ancient civilisation not just because of the existence of monasteries and monastic orders that promoted scholarly writing and universities, as already discussed, but also because Islamic traditions had an influence in the rise of early universities. Al-Azhar Mosque University established in Cairo in 969 B.C. taught Qur'an and Islamic law alongside subjects such as logic, grammar, and rhetoric. In 1961, this university, popular for training Muslim clerics, established faculties of medicine and engineering (FSTC, 2001; Zeleza, 2006; Atuahene, 2010; Lulat, 2005; Okafor, 1996).

One can see the role played by religion in these early higher institutions. One can also infer that the role of higher education during those early times was among others, a persuasive appeal to the Catholic faith or the Islamic faith. This explains why a number of publications were to provide an explanation to the faith, using philosophy and scientific arguments to counter the spread of Gnosticism. The spirit of

renaissance and the search for knowledge characterised these ancient institutions; unlike the universities that arose during the colonial period, which were induced by the politics of independence. It may then be fair to claim that universities are a reflection of their time.

The beginning of higher education in Africa was clearly the work of the early missionary activities. The purpose of the Catholic institutions can be said to resonate with what Newman (1907) described as training students in the 'philosophical habit of the mind', drawing from a confluence of biblical revelation and classical civilisation.

2.3 EARLY HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Missionaries in Nigeria, just as in the rest of Africa, had the greatest and most sustainable influence in higher education (Ajayi et al., 1996). The first formal missionary institution of higher leaning started outside Nigeria in Sierra Leone. It was the Fourah Bay College founded in Freetown Sierra Leone in 1827 (Ajayi, 1996; Okafor, 2005). Fourah Bay College influenced the development of formal education in Nigeria. The Church Missionary Society (CMS), for the training of teachers and clergymen, founded it. This college became affiliated with the University of Durham in 1876 and its curriculum, examination papers and scripts were set and marked by the University of Durham. However, the CMS still maintained its hold over subjects such as Biblical Studies, Classics, English, History up to the Conquest and

Mathematics. The Nigerians who attended Fourah Bay College returned to their own country to head the early secondary schools such as Methodist Girls' High School, Lagos; CMS Grammar School Lagos; Baptist Academy and Roman Catholic schools such as St Gregory's College.

In 1932, the government in response to the demand for higher education for many of these secondary-school leavers built the Yaba Higher College. The hallmark of this early institution is the mixed composition of students from Sierra Leone and other parts of Africa. Its programme were diversified and restructured to make them more responsive to market needs, and this was indeed a form of transnational education owing to its affiliation with Durham (Ajayi et al., 1996; Lulat, 2005).

2.4 EARLY HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Ajayi *et al.* (1996) and Okafor (1996) stated that missionaries such as the London Mission Society in the Eastern Cape, the Methodists in Natal and the Paris Evangelical Missions in Lesotho, were instrumental in the development of higher education in South Africa.

Aside from the missionary activities, there also existed affiliations with the UK. According to the Council for Higher Education (CHE), prior to 1994, the South African College and the University of the Cape of Good

Hope depended on the University of London for the accreditation of their qualifications (HESA, 2004). Scottish universities also heavily influenced the organisational structures of those universities. One of the institutions established in South Africa by the Scottish Presbyterian Mission was the educational institution of Lovedale in 1841. The aim of this institution was to train youth to take up roles as interpreters, evangelists and schoolmasters; although the curriculum expanded to include masonry, carpentry, wagon-making, smiting, printing and book binding (Groves, 1955). Lovedale, like its counterpart the Fourah Bay College in West Africa, influenced the spread of secondary schools in South Africa, East Africa and Central Africa and this created a need for further education.

Responding to this call for further education was the South African College established in Cape Town, which later become the University of Cape Town, and the Victoria College in Stellenbosch, which later became the University of Stellenbosch. As colleges run by private entities, the Government of South Africa in 1858 established a Board for Public Examination to examine candidates from these colleges. In 1873, the University of the Cape of Good Hope, which metamorphosed into the University of South Africa (UNISA), replaced this board. The admission policy of these early universities was discriminatory. Singh and Brennan (2011, p. 410) described the institutions at that time as:

> racially and ethnically biased higher education institutions, segregated classes, curricula and worldviews complicit or coexistent with apartheid ideology, security surveillance and harassment of staff and students, international academic isolation, censorship of books and academic materials and both acquiescence and resistance to apartheid.

Government involvement in South African education started as early as 1923, with the Higher Education Act that nominated four representatives into the Council of the Colleges. In that same year, a similar development was taking place in West Africa, where the British had set up an Advisory Committee for the formulation and implementation of its policies on education.

From these developments, one can see how religion gave the initial impetus for the creation of higher education and the early affiliations existing with the United Kingdom, which has since paved the way for government intervention and centralisation of education policies.

After independence, national governments tried to emphasise the role of universities in facilitating the transition to independence and socio-economic development (AAU, 2004). Government-driven interventions

were accompanied by regulatory interventions. The need to wrest education from political parameters or cohesiveness and balance accountability with enhancement remains the challenge. Could this be realisable if quality assurance is re-prioritised and linked to students' learning improvement?

2.5 GROWTH AND ENROLMENT OF UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA AND SOUTH AFRICA

Nigeria, Nigeria, like its counterpart South Africa, experienced a rapid growth in the establishment of both public and private universities. Starting with the University of Ibadan, established as an affiliate outreach of the University of London in 1948, the numbers of universities have increased to 128 comprising 50 (39%) private universities, 40 (31%) federal universities and 38 (30%) state universities (NUC, 2012).

Concerns have been expressed about where the priorities should lie, and the rationale behind building new universities while the old ones languished (Afonta, 2010; Odia and Omofonwan, 2007). The creation of more universities should not be a bad idea because hopefully, the more the universities, the more competition there would be among them. Perhaps, the leading ones in a bid to remain ahead will gradually cling tenaciously to the prevalent tenets of quality assurance. If this happens the chances of the lagging universities adopting the same processes as

the leading ones, should turn out to be reasonably robust. Nonetheless, whether the creation of more universities would solve the problem of the overwhelming number of students seeking admission remains a hotly debated issue. Implicitly, the overall importance of having more universities is not the question here. Rather concerns are being expressed over a situation which mirrors that observed by Wolf (2002), as she mused over the UK's situation where the demand for higher education is causing a 'constant downward pressure on costs and on real levels of spending' leading to government intervention, and reducing the assurance of 'quality' to a mere seven-letter word. Essentially, it can be seen that the massification of higher education and quality assurance does not seem to be compatible. While massification solves the problems of access, it aggravates the problem of quality assurance (Brennan and Shah, 2000; Trow, 2005; World Bank, 2002). For Nigeria, the fact remains that universities in the country are unable to absorb the number of qualified students seeking admission: neither has the creation of more universities solved the problem, or improved the overall quality. In 2012, 1.5 million candidates vied for 500,000 admission spaces: a marginal increase over the 1,493,603 who sought admission in 2011, and 1,375,642 in 2010 (Vanguard, 2012). The problem of access is further compounded with the staff and student strikes over deteriorating working conditions, cultism and the like, thus leading to

long closures of universities and a huge backlog of students awaiting admission.

At the convocation ceremony of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 2013, the Senior Economic Adviser, Africa Economic Policy Development Initiative, Obiageli Ezekwesili, who was the former Minister of Education in Nigeria and former Vice-President of the World Bank, lamented the paltry 4.3% of Nigeria's youthful population who had the opportunity to go to a university. This, she observed does not compare favourably with the 37.5% of Chile, the 33.7% of Singapore, the 28.2% of Malaysia and the 16.5% of Brazil. She explained that this could be the reason for the competitiveness gap between the same set of countries and Nigeria.

Perhaps the paradox of Nigeria, where wealth breeds penury and widens the competitiveness gap, could be partly explained by the overwhelming concerns about access, which is misaligned with quality and quality assurance. There is no disputing the fact that 'our governing class through the decades, have spent more time quarrelling over their share of the oil -national cake, than they have spent thinking of how to make it benefit the entire population' (Vanguard, 2013). Indicative of this observation is the news headline of 21st January 2013 in the Business Day newspaper, which alleged that the Nigerian Assembly's budget allocation awaiting the President's approval, which

was $995 million (N150 billion equivalent), is approximately 6.4 times higher than the $155million (N24 billion) allocation made to the South African parliament in their 2012–2013 budget. The disproportion becomes even more glaring when one considers that South Africa has a parliament of 490, which is slightly higher than Nigeria's 469 total National Assembly's memberships. We can consider this to be yet another reason why higher education is stagnating: the effect of corruption is pervasive.

In South Africa, the apartheid system reflected in their educational institutions resulted in 'entrenched gross educational disparities and inequities between different racial groups' (Sayed, 2000, p. 31). At the beginning of 1985, South Africa had 19 higher education institutions in total. They were segregated along racial lines: 13 were designed exclusively for use by the whites, two for Indians, two for the Coloured, and two for the exclusive use of Africans. (Cloete, *et al*, 2002). Even the programmes offered by these universities were segregated based on the assumed roles considered appropriate for the races. With the end of apartheid concerted effort to address inequities by providing increased access and massification of higher education became an important goal for a government committed to the principles of 'equity and redress as cornerstone principles for all educational policies' (Sayed, 2000, p. 31). One development in rectifying the segregated system was to increase the enrolment of black students to 60% (DoE, 2009). Results however

showed that black completion rates were less than half that of the white rates. The dropout rate of students calculated to be as high as 85%, continued unabated (HRSC, 2001; Letsaka, 2008). The high dropout rate existed mainly among the black population, who were underrepresented in the universities, and this was partly because of the apartheid history marked by racial segregation and marginalisation of the black population. According to Cosser and Letseka (2009) high school fees, high levels of unpreparedness and the difficulties of learning in English language were some of the factors that caused a high drop-out rate among the black students in universities. The *Higher Education Monitor*, South Africa (No 9, p. 35), referred to an HSRC study done in 2008, which reported that:

> Of the 120,000 students who enrolled for higher education in 2000, 36,000 (30%) dropped out in their first year of study and a further 24,000. Of these 120,000, only 26,500 (22%) graduated.

The Department of Education at that time issued a public statement in 2005, lamenting the dropout rate, which placed a huge financial strain on the economy. According to Pandor (2006), it was costing the National Treasury R4.5 billion in grants and subsidies to higher education institutions, without a commensurate return on investment. This high level of attrition in the number of blacks who graduated

meant a lack of equity of outcomes that evidently neutralised the gains made in access (Hay and Monnapula-Mapesela, 2009). Interestingly, this high drop-out rate is still prevalent in South Africa. Khumalo (2007) estimated that over 70% of students do not complete their degrees within three years, with some dropping out and others failing.

Today, the number of universities has increased to 23, comprising six (26%) comprehensive universities derived from a merger between smaller universities and technikons (polytechnics) in 2003, six (26%) universities of technology, and eleven (48%) traditional universities (CHE, 2012). CHE also states that as at January 2012, there were 88 registered private higher education institutions, and 27 provisionally registered higher education institutions (CHE, 2012).

2.6 COMMENCEMENT AND EVOLUTION OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

The start-up period of quality assurance in both countries provides insightful historical and, possibly, cultural antecedents to the evolution of quality assurance. Quality assurance in both countries cannot be divorced from the history and culture of both countries and, for the most part, government has dominated the history of quality assurance in both countries since inception.

Quality assurance in Nigeria commenced when Decree 1974 was promulgated, and vested statutory power on the NUC for University

Education. In 1989, the Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) document was produced by NUC and in 1990 the first set of programme accreditation was carried out. The start up of the external quality assurance process corresponds to the year the decree was promulgated, which accords legitimacy to the body charged with quality assurance.

Quality assurance however, evolved long before the decree was promulgated. In Nigeria, quality assurance is tied greatly to its British colonial heritage. The pioneer higher educational institution, the Yaba Higher College, was established as a result of agitations by the nationalists for a higher institution of learning in the country. There was no history of quality assurance but there were concerns over quality. After a high drop-out rate was recorded by the institution, the colonial government set up a commission, the Elliot Commission, in 1943 to report on the quality and resources of higher education in British West Africa and to recommend future university development in the area. It was following the recommendations of this commission that the first University in Ibadan became established as an affiliate to the University of London in 1948. The University of London controlled its quality assurance till 1962 when it became independent. The first generation universities: Universities of Lagos, Ife, Ibadan, Nigeria and Ahmadu Bello University had practices akin to quality assurance by the

Federal government, guided by the Ashby commission set up in 1959, before the advent of the NUC.

The Ashby Commission assessed the higher education needs of post-independence Nigeria, and outlined the relationship that ought to exist between the manpower needs and the educational system of a developing economy. This became a feature, which was to remain in the Nigerian policy on education and the subsequent decrees promulgated (ref: Decree 1 of 1974, Section 1:i). The recommendations of this commission led to the establishments of more universities in the region but these universities remained under close surveillance of the federal government who established them. It was on the basis of the recommendation of the Ashby commission that the NUC was set up to handle the onerous responsibility to control Nigerian universities:

> A National Universities Commission should be set up to have undisputed control over the affairs of the universities, particularly in terms of finance, staff and courses (Ashby Report no: 10)

From this quotation one sees that NUC in the earlier days was conceived as a government agency that would 'control' the internal affairs of universities. It seems that subsequent actions of NUC have been strongly influenced by these past policy legacies.

In South African the history of accreditation dates back to 1994: the advent of South Africa's first democratic government, which signalled significant policy changes in higher education. 1997 also marked the promulgation of the *Higher Education Act* that approved private higher education, an act that ushered in a proliferation of private higher education offered by both local and foreign providers. The courses offered were mainly Masters of Business Administration (MBA) courses, because of the large market share they attracted. In 2001, private higher education providers were required to register and have their programmes accredited. Some of these providers did not want to go through the accreditation exercise and so they withdrew their operations in the country. Of those who went through the accreditation exercise, 15 MBAs were withdrawn.

In a very similar fashion, which compares to the antecedents in Nigeria, there has been some early development of quality assurance in South Africa, which started through links with UK institutions as already discussed above. Dissensions and divisions, however, marked the early history of higher education in South Africa and the quality assurance policy existing at that time was largely fragmentary and biased. According to CHE (**Quality assurance framework 2012–2017, 2011, p. 1)**, institutions were divided on the basis of:

> Historically advantaged and historically disadvantaged higher education institutions (HEIs); English-medium and Afrikaans-medium institutions; universities and technikons which had created a range of perceptions, often based on prejudice, about the distribution of quality across the South African higher education system between public and private providers, shaped by their different purposes and roles in relation to the labour market.

Faced with the antecedents of apartheid, the post-apartheid democratic government engaged in a policy of higher education transformation by first commissioning a technical task team, the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE). This team recommended external quality assurance as a solution to tackling the quality differences in higher education as well as self-evaluation by autonomous institutions. The external quality assurance (QA) system as recommended would operate within the framework of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act with the HEQC fulfilling the statutory functions of accrediting programmes, institutional audit and quality promotion. The team's recommendation gave birth to the *Higher Education Act* of 1997, which established the Council on Higher Education (CHE) as an independent body that would advise the Minister of Education on matters of higher education policy. CHE would also perform quality promotion and QA functions through its permanent subcommittee: the

Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). The Act was amended so that the HEQC would report to SAQA, the Education and Training Quality Assurer (ETQA) for the higher education band of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The Act also allowed private providers to offer higher education qualifications, provided they registered with the Department for Higher Education and Training (DHET) and had their programmes accredited by the HEQC and the qualifications they offer were registered on the NQF by SAQA.

CHE (**HESA, 2004, p.146)** on SAQA's role stated:

> SAQA was established as the infrastructural cornerstone of an integrated qualifications framework, and of a coordinated external QA system. SAQA's functions as set out in the SAQA Act of 1995 included: registering standards-setting bodies, accrediting QA bodies (ETQAs), and implementing the QF. Accordingly, SAQA set about developing regulations for National Standards Bodies (NSBs) and ETQAs; requiring all HEIs to 'interim register' their qualifications on the NQF in an outcomes-based format; and establishing procedures for the preliminary accreditation of private providers and their programmes, in the absence of an HEQC which still had to be established.

With the establishment of HEQC in 2001, HEQC conceptualised and carried out the first cycle of quality assurance 2001–2004. Aside from the private providers, public providers who had been accredited by SAQA were also re-accredited by HEQC between 2002–2003. The accreditations at that period in general focused on the divisions that characterised the historically apartheid-borne higher institutions. The re-accreditation of private providers according to CHE (**HESA, 2004, p. 151)** was to address serious concerns including:

> Uncertain correlation between labour market requirements and private programme provision; uneven teaching and learning practices in private institutions owing to factors such as inadequately qualified staff and poor academic infrastructure and support; little knowledge of national policies and regulations; 'HE' qualifications that would more rightly be pegged in the Further Education and Training (FET) band of the NQF; and—for all the aforementioned reasons—qualifications that could not deliver what they promised.

As mentioned earlier, this 2002 re-accreditation exercise led to the sanction and ultimate withdrawal of 15 MBA programmes. CHE and DHET, which was Department of Education (DOE) at that time, claimed that the proliferation of MBA programmes was a grave concern

and there was a need to check that MBAs were in consonance with the transformative agenda and national priorities of South African education. On the other hand, it has been claimed that the CHE regulatory model imposed a generalist model on MBAs by insisting that the MBAs must use the action research method and must be devoted to South African issues (Blackmur, 2005). This proposition was adjudged by Blackmur to deviate from the fitness-of-purpose notion of quality assurance, besides it indicates the nature and dynamics of the command and control agenda regulation of providers' behaviour (Blackmur, 2005). On the other hand, one may consider that the indigenisation rationale contradicts Blackmur's argument about imposing a generalist model on MBAs. It can be argued that, there might be a high degree of subjectivity in Blackmur's opinion regarding the South African MBA's. Reporting on the 2004 accreditation, the Wits Business School attests to the authenticity of the exercise by the following publication in 2010.

> The re-accreditation was demanding and in line with international best practice. The process was the first of its kind in the world to be undertaken by a statutory body and attracted widespread international media attention for its innovation and thoroughness. The CHE enlisted the help of MBA experts from the United States, the Netherlands, Australia, Hong Kong and the UK to

> structure the evaluation and also invited all the local business schools to participate in the process. All procedures and evaluation criteria were measured against the standards set by international accreditation organisations such as the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) of the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD) and the International Association of MBAs (AMBA). Each business school was evaluated according to a set of thirteen criteria drawn up by these stakeholders, and each criterion was supported by a set of detailed minimum standards. All business schools had to complete detailed questionnaires and have site visits conducted on their campuses. They also had the opportunity to make submissions to the CHE and respond to any query throughout the re-accreditation.

MBA providers may also have been considered to be principally focused on profit because offering MBA was financially lucrative. BBC's reporter, Sean Coughlan, (8/12/04) who quoted the former minister of education Kader Asmal as saying that the international providers were 'not sensitive to local needs' because they simply cherry-picked the most lucrative services such as setting up business schools but 'did not always maintain the same standard'.

The withdrawal of some of these foreign providers when an Act called for regulation of private providers may be considered as proof of the noncompliant attitude of providers. If the foreign providers chose to defect rather than be accredited by being subject to the rules of the recipient country then that goes against some principles of quality assurance. On the other hand, the reason for defection could be an illuminating guide to improvement since there may be many reasons for defection ranging from a lack of faith in what is perceived as deterioration in a system to inability to measure up to newer demands. What can be deduced is that some suspicion and lack of trust existed between public higher education providers and the quality assurance agents. Difficult as it seems, a defection could be a great learning tool as its conceptualisation could help to 'set up the mechanism that turn the analysis of customer defection into an ongoing strategic system, closely supervised by top managers and quickly responsive to changing circumstances' (Reichheld, 1996, p. 2)

These antecedents go to show that quality assurance in Nigerian and South African higher education results directly from government's intervening reforms to improve quality and in doing this the government, through the NUC and CHE, pays particular attention to accountability. Accountability in itself tends to have a defining relationship with bureaucracy. According to SAQA in the publication 'NQF and its world' *(SAQA*, 2009, p. 53):

Quality assurance adds layers of detailed bureaucratic procedures to South African education and training. A provider might find itself, because of its different offerings, having to refer to any of about 32 key quality assurance bodies (if one includes the professional associations) in order to obtain accreditation and approval and to be able to have its qualifications recognized.

The challenge, amidst so much bureaucracy and accountability, is how quality assurance can be embedded within a quality culture that gives rise to internal efficiency, premised on institutional commitment to constant improvement and self-evaluation. This does not mean that accountability has to be dispensed with. Accountability is important but it has to be properly managed if it is to provide a basis for quality improvement.

2.7 RESULTING QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS COMPARED

National quality assurance systems existing in both Nigeria and South Africa are not just results of the socio-political history, context and purposes but can also be said to be results of what Singh, in reference to Rhoades and Sporn (2002), termed as 'diffusionary effect' of information sharing and developmental activities of INQAAHE and

various regional quality assurance networks as well as the activities of professional associations and internationally mobile professionals. Existing systems show a strong engagement with key premises in quality assurance but there could also be some 'threatening pathologies' (Singh, 2010, p. 2) of external quality assurance.

According to Okojie (2008), the accreditation exercise by NUC, Nigeria begins with a three months notice to the institution to be accredited. A 'Self Study Form' (SSF) comprising two sections is also forwarded for completion to the institution. The first section solicits general information about the university while the second section solicits general information about the programme to be accredited. NUC then constitutes an *ad hoc* accreditation panel that is invited to a coordinating meeting where the assessment tool and scoring sheets are discussed. Thereafter, a site visit is made for inspection and grading. The post accreditation processes according to NUC Nigeria are as follows:

- Analysing accreditation reports (Technical and Administrative).
- Ranking of programmes and universities, based on their accreditation status.
- Publishing of accreditation status of programmes.
- Issuance of certificates to programmes that earned Full and Interim accreditation results.

Table 2. 1: Programme Evaluation Form NUC/PEF, February 2005

S/N	Components	Sub-components
a)	Academic Matters	The programme philosophy and objectives The curriculum Admission requirements Academic regulations Course evaluation (examination and continuous assessment) Student course evaluation External examination system
b)	Staffing	Academic staff Non-academic staff Head of department/ discipline/sub-discipline Staff development
c)	Physical Facilities	Laboratory/clinic/studio facilities (area per student) and equipment Classroom facilities and equipment Laboratory size (area per student) and equipment Safety and environment
d)	Financing of programme by the university	
e)	Books, journals and other resource materials for the programme	
f)	Employer's rating of graduates, if any	

NUC assigns a particular weighting to each of the criteria above and the summation determines whether the institution has been successful in the accreditation or not. This approach is important as it validates compliance but quality assurance, as has already been in Chapter One, goes beyond the compliance mode.

From this exercise one can already identify some possible impacts namely reputation risks of institutions that are not granted full accreditation and the likelihood of a cover-up and even a public relations approach rather than a genuine opportunity for critical self-evaluation and enhancement possibilities. Also, quality assurance seems more of a ritualistic event than a work in progress. As a ritualistic event, it is not only cyclical but it is externally imposed and managed with a large amount of energy expended in collating information, collating scores (which is quantitative), preparing for site visits and perhaps providing a strong incentive for game-playing on the part of the institutions.

Peter Okebukola, the former Secretary-General of the National Universities Commission (NUC) produced a diagrammatic model of quality assurance:

Figure 2. 1: Quality Assurance Model – Nigeria

The main categorisations in this framework are quite similar to those of South African's programme accreditation criteria, which stipulates 'minimum accreditation requirements for programme input, process, output and impact' (Singh, 2004, p. 12). The only point of difference is the fourth criterion, which is impact.

This conceptual framework of Okebukola contains the checklist used by quality assurance regulators in assessing institutions. The Output category is still aspirational as there is no evidence yet on how the indices contained in the Output category are measured. The framework is linear and a linear paradigm rather than one that is circular and

adaptive might restrict innovation. A linear framework works best in a controlled factory environment and strictly speaking, serves regulatory purposes.

This framework also makes it difficult to deduce how the responsibility for quality assurance is devolved or decentralised. As a checklist, it is helpful as it provides a means for quality assurance regulators to track and examine the quality of provisions. The problem is that such checklists often lead to the phenomenon of 'bean-counting' (Harvey, 2002), and have been criticised by scholars (Harvey, 2002; Newton, 2002) as bureaucratic and doing little to help improvement of institutions. Besides, institutions learn to manipulate the system through 'game-playing'. This existing framework for quality assurance in Nigeria works best for accountability purposes.

In processing a programme accreditation, South Africa employs a four-staged process.

Figure 2. 2: (Framework for programme accreditation CHE, 2012)

When an institution completes an application for accreditation, the application is scrutinised through a preliminary analysis exercise. An incomplete application is returned to the institution. After scrutiny, an accreditation panel is constituted and they produce a report on the application, basing the outcome on fixed evaluation criteria. Recommendations made are forwarded to the institution. Three possible recommendations are:

- accredited
- accredited with conditions
- not accredited

A response is expected from the institutions, which serves as an opportunity for an institution with a failed accreditation to provide a representation for a re-evaluation. After this, no further opportunities for a representation would be granted. SAQA and DHET are informed on HEQC's final decision on institutions. HEQC is the permanent sub-committee of CHE that is responsible for accreditation.

Table 2.2 contains the criteria used by CHE in its programme accreditation:

Table 2. 2: Matrix for programme accreditation used by CHE

Input	Programme design Student recruitment, admission and selection Teaching and learning strategy Students assessment policies and procedures Infrastructure and library resources Programme administrative services Programme policies, regulations and procedures
Process	Process coordination Academic development for student success Teaching and learning interactions Students assessment practices Coordination of work-based learning Delivery of postgraduate programmes
Output and Impact	Student retention and throughput Programme impact
Review	- All of the above programme areas

Aside from the accreditation of its programmes, South Africa also has institutional audits as mentioned earlier. The institutional audits focus on institutional policies, systems, procedures, strategies and resources for the quality management of its teaching and learning, research, community engagement and academic support services.

The method comprises an institutional self-evaluation against a set of criteria provided by HEQC. These criteria take into account quality as defined by Harvey and fitness of purpose. They also consider the manner and extent to which institutions take into account national priorities and needs as well as their response to regional and international imperatives.

An institution gets at least a nine-month notification before an audit visit and after a successful institutional audit, an institution is allowed to apply for a self-accreditation, which lasts for a period of six years.

Unlike Nigeria, South Africa does not rank its institutions on the basis of audit judgment nor programme accreditation. According to CHE (2004, p. 18) the purpose of institutional audit is to 'encourage higher education institutions to engage in systematic and continuous quality improvement appropriate to their context as well as their mission and strategic goals'.

South Africa seemingly has a more robust system of quality assurance but again like Nigeria it is full of chronicling tips that balance between accountability and improvement because it is not premised on the expected amount of measurable outcomes.

As observed by Singh and Brennan (2011) institutional arrangements and behaviours are changed to meet the requirements of regulatory bodies. They commented that 'external quality assurance regimes have brought higher education more explicitly and answerably into the public domain'. In other words, these compliance activities derive not from concerns about the quality of the institutions *per se* but from 'the social purposes and goals postulated for higher education by governments and other external agencies' and 'it is not always clear how this advances quality learning, teaching, and research or leads to a power balance that improves the condition for academic work' (Singh and Brennan, 2011, p. 400).

2.8 INFLUENCE OF THE UK ON THE QUALITY ASSURANCE OF ITS FORMER COLONIES

Having looked at the historical experience of higher education in Nigeria and South Africa and the different challenges aggravated by enrolment demands, inequality of access as well as the quality assurance mechanism, an enumeration of the influence the United

Kingdom had on the quality assurance of the colonies will be undertaken.

Imperialism may have had a potent influence on the quality assurance of its former colonies but differences are also discernible because the evolution and identity of African institutions are the product of a complex interaction of certain factors such as culture, history, economy and external influences. This may be why some writers have shown a preference for the term 'interaction' between Britain and its colonies, rather than the 'impact' or 'imperialism' of Britain on its colonies (Marshall, 1996; Said, 1993). This presupposes that the colonies were not hapless people without a history. The discussion below contains some important milestones in the evolution of quality assurance in the region and provides some insights on how quality assurance is conceptualised and practiced.

Given the historical annexation of both countries (Nigeria and South Africa) as colonies of the United Kingdom, some similarities can be found in their higher education systems.

United Kingdom affiliations

Nigeria and South Africa had affiliations with British Universities for the award of degrees. Before independence, Nigerians undertook courses by correspondence with institutions abroad such as the

University Correspondence College, Wolsey Hall and Rapid Results College, all in Britain (Omolewa, 1982). The qualification obtained from those colleges was a General Certificate in Education (GCE), a pre-requisite for admission into tertiary education. In 1887, the colonial government in Nigeria requested that the University of London extend its examination facilities to Nigerians by correspondence and this gesture marked the beginning of the external degree programme, which has continued to date. In 1934, when the British Government established the first higher education system in the country, namely the Yaba Higher College, it was affiliated to the University of London. Unfortunately, this college suffered a remarkable dropout rate as a result of the extremely high standards. Reminiscence about this was narrated in a novel 'Man with Vision' written by Nina Mba (1992). She stated that standards were even higher than that of its parent body and so Ayo Rossini, even without a degree and a pass in his final examination, was employed by Shell because his interviewer at that time had a lot of faith in the high standards, making the protagonist the first Nigerian to work there. Through these historical affiliations, quality control was centralised because affiliate universities in the UK controlled the degrees awarded. Similar affiliations between South Africa and Scottish Universities has already been discussed.

Quality assurance as a government mandate

The beginnings of what could be called early traces of quality assurance and government involvement began with the British intervention in Nigeria. In 1943, the British government set up a commission of inquiry into the higher education needs of the region. This action of the government anticipated the principles of quality assurance in higher education. The criticism at that time was that the institutions established by the British failed to meet the higher education aspirations of Nigerians. These institutions were considered inferior to those in Britain and abroad judging by their curriculum, policy and administration (Anyanwu, 1987). To worsen an already bad situation, the products from these national institutions were placed in subservient positions to those who studied in the UK, thereby giving the graduates from the UK a competitive edge over those who studied in Nigeria. The two Commissions set up, namely the Asquith Commission under the chairmanship of Lord Justice Asquith to consider the development of higher education in the colonies, and the Elliot Commission under the Rt. Hon. Walter Elliot, carried out what could be considered a quality assurance of the existing transnational education at that time. The former, concerned with proposed universities and principles that should guide them, recommended a relationship with the University of London, and that the Inter-University Council for Higher Education be established in the Colonies.

Degree classification system

The degree classification systems used to differentiate the attainment of a degree holder such as first, two-one, two-two or third-class honours, used in both countries, are modelled after the UK system even though recently in the UK, there have been talks about changing the model.

Distinction in forms of higher education

The binary line dividing universities and polytechnics and what was known as technikons in South Africa is a UK heritage, even though the UK has since granted university status to polytechnics with a right to award their own degrees (Further and Higher Education Act. UK, 1992). A similar development took place in South Africa in 2003, where technikons either merged with universities or became universities of technologies. Polytechnics in Nigeria continue to exist to the present day. Government in the past has mooted the idea of granting polytechnics degree status, but each change in government disrupts these plans. The pre-1992 tensions of inequalities and funding that existed in UK Polytechnics are incidentally still evident in Nigeria.

System of quality assurance

All three countries have a system of quality assurance. In both Nigeria and South Africa, there is some convergence in the way quality assurance is carried out. The approach followed is similar to the approach in the United Kingdom, which involves a programme of self-assessment followed by peer review and report of findings. A lot of attention is paid to input such as resources, number and qualification of staff, entry qualifications and academic programme. Accreditation of national institutions in both countries is mandatory and, more often than not, focuses on regulation rather than to enhance accountability and quality improvement. There is also not enough emphasis on the importance of relating quality assurance processes with funding allocations. Nor has graduate employability and job performance been considered as a way to promote accountability. Although higher education in both countries enjoys significant autonomy in operations, they are highly dependent on government for funding. Development of quality standards and verification of compliance for transnational education require new skills, which are currently lacking.

Despite these similarities, there were situational differences between the two countries. Given their history of apartheid, the higher education that existed in South Africa before 1990 was fragmented and uncoordinated (Naidoo, 2004) because it was divided along racial and ethnic lines. Fragmentation had a severe effect on economic

development and the society (ANC, 1995). This remark by ANC alludes to the link between education and the economy.

Thus, the post-apartheid government alleged that the full benefits of remedying the fragmentation and unequal access could only be obtained through a merger, rather than a federated system. Such a merger could provide an opportunity for a strong leadership that could develop a new academic image. Such identity would inevitably inspire stakeholders whilst ensuring the continuation of national and international partnerships (National Working Group, 2002). Thus a *Higher Education Act*, 1997 (Act 101 0f 1997) was promulgated which repealed the entire *University Act*, 1955 (Act 61 0f 1995). Also revoked was the *Technikon Act*, 1993 (Act 125 of 1993).

With the presence of foreign providers after rationalisation in South Africa, quality became the next concern. To chart the course of higher education in South Africa, a White Paper on higher education was developed. The goal was to transform the system, which was largely un-coordinated and fragmented, so that it becomes better coordinated and more responsive to socio-economic milieu. This White Paper identified four instruments that provide for a more equitable and responsive system namely planning, funding, existing national qualification framework (NQF) and quality assurance. It is expected that these four instruments would remedy the country's historical

legacies of exclusion and inequitable development as well as address new social and economic needs given that higher education now exists in a global era and is also becoming more internationalised.

The four steering instruments to be managed by three different agencies were identified as follows:

a) Funding and Planning by the Department of Higher Education and Training formerly the Department of Education.
b) National Qualifications Framework by the South African Qualifications Authority.
c) Quality assurance by the Council on Higher Education.

DHET developed a framework that encouraging more planning and branding among institutions. Output (student and research output), target setting and attainment within institutions, cost efficiencies and effectiveness, funding for student equity and redress were also bolstered. It also established a regulatory framework for programme offerings and qualifications in public institutions needing approval by DHET. Private and transnational providers were authorised to operate as a trading company that has to be registered under the Companies Act of South Africa. Also, private and transnational providers had to sign a declaration of non-discrimination in relation to students and staff, as a way of promoting the agenda of redress and equity. It was also recommended that both private and transnational providers had to

be financially sustainable with viable monitoring and reporting systems.

Four foreign educational providers operating in South Africa at that time were from Australia, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Their student enrolment figure was 0.5% in comparison to the student number registered in all tertiary education in 2000. Three years later, South Africa's Higher Education Quality Committee disaccredited three of the four foreign MBA programmes which has already been discussed extensively above. In addition, because of concerns about the quality, it disenfranchised their educational programmes. Although the impact could be said to be marginal, it does not mean that marginal effect is not important. Often times, it is 'because of what happens at the margin that causes remarkable systems to evolve' (OECD, 2008).

2.9 THE DILEMMA OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality assurance agencies have often felt the need to constantly reassure the public that there exists an effective system to provide quality assurance services to both public and private providers. Given the public funding made available to tertiary institutions, it is reasonable to expect that these institutions remain accountable and that they meet acceptable local and international standards (Asmel, 2003; Okebukola, 2006). The usefulness of quality assurance has been in dispute in the world at large. There has been quality control in the

award of degrees by host institutions to their affiliates in the colonies, there was a re-evaluation-based quality control carried out through commissions of inquiry; and there were quality improvement steps laid out in the reports by the respective commissions. The inadequacies of these provisions, which are fixated on external quality control, failed to encourage internal self-regulation and quality enhancement. These inadequacies, coupled with the problems of access created an avenue for transnational education. Quality assurance in the post-independent era has features that seem identical to what obtains in the UK.

If African regulators, beneficiaries of evolving quality assurance systems of the West, understood the nuances of quality assurance, they would no longer have to navigate through some of the complexities that assumptions about quality assurance present, in order to replicate or adapt good practices. They would produce formulations in response to African contextual challenges, and these formulations would resonate with universal understanding of quality assurance.

It can be seen how provisions in Africa were parallel to those in the UK. Even though quality assurance is a recent concept in Africa, it had its roots in the colonial period. There was quality control in the award of degrees by host institutions to their affiliates in the colonies, there was a re-evaluation based quality carried out through commissions of inquiry, and there were quality improvement steps laid out in the

reports by the respective commissions. The current quality assurance systems still 'reflect colonial and postcolonial influences from the UK's higher education system but also political and education differences from it ' (Singh and Brennan, 2011, p. 402).

Although the UK system has evolved over time, the distinguishing features in its former colonies have undergone little and certainly not enough changes to impact meaningfully on educational and economic inequalities, or the quality of graduates and graduate employment.

In summary, these systems used to quality assure in Nigeria and South Africa have the propensity to promote quality control because what has undoubtedly been achieved is a steering towards the course of public accountability of higher education. It also requires new thinking about the meaning and purposes of quality assurance, a preoccupation of this research.

CHAPTER THREE
LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The apparent differences in the quality assurance mechanisms of Nigeria and South Africa and their shared similarities have been examined in Chapter 2. Also examined is how colonialism forms the historical context for the birth of the concept of quality assurance. Aside from colonialism, the hybridity of quality assurance we find in the region results from the social-political context and interactions with quality assurance literature and practitioners in other parts of the world. Chapter 5 takes a deeper look at the meaning offered to the practice as stated by the interviewed regulators themselves. Those interviews offer the potential for uncovering deeply held assumptions about quality assurance in higher education of both countries and the resulting issues. This literature review, as an antecedent, would serve to increase the understanding of the meaning making in Chapter 5. This is because it provides the context for the emergence and evolution of the concept of quality assurance that accounts for its nature whilst assessing its utility in the light of current practices in higher education in both countries.

This literature review chapter also takes into account the purposes of higher education whose link with quality assurance has hitherto been peripheral. Among the few scholars who have purported that there is an intrinsic relationship between quality and the purpose of higher education are Williams (2002) who states that the proper role of higher education needs to be established before quality assurance takes place. Correspondingly, Singh (2010) observes that purpose requires getting to the heart of how one defines quality assurance and the social purposes one connects to quality assurance in higher education.

The definitional issues of quality and quality assurance have also been set out including how they link with higher education. Accordingly, Greatrix (2005) observed that 'any serious evaluation of higher education must be concerned with the nature, meaning, exposition and exploration of the characteristics of, or evidence for quality itself'.

The research questions which are: what do regulators contend to be the meaning and purpose of quality assurance; how does that understanding of quality assurance affect its practice and what the outcomes have been, are positioned at the heart of this review. It is in addressing these research questions that the meaning of the concepts of quality, quality assurance and the purposes of higher education in extant literature are analysed in order to establish the gaps in the knowledge of quality assurance.

3.2 PERCEPTIONS OF QUALITY

Regardless of the period or context (but more especially in the 1990s), the concept of quality has attracted and continues to attract a lot of interest and debate, which have thus far yielded several competing definitions and discourses. The plethora of definitions range from those who believe the concept is too enigmatic to define (Vroeijenstijn, 1995; Scott, 1994), to those who provide definitions that have been described by Reeves and Bendar (1994) and Cameron and Whetton (1983), as inconsistent. In the opinion of Westerheiijden (1999), quality is lacking in theory, it is vacuous (Hart, 1997), and some people tend to define the concept by recourse to the enduring theme of 'fitness for purpose' which has been derived from the industrial model of quality (Ball, 1985; Greatrix, 2005; Woodhouse, 2012). Some protagonists as Woodhouse (2012) opined, would begin by saying that there is no consensus on quality and yet would quote a list of Harvey and Green's five meanings of quality from 20 years ago. Jung and Latchem (2012) argue that quality is a moving target because acceptance and expectations are always changing. Reeves and Brendan (1994) suggest that a pragmatic approach would be to explicate the concept by tracing its roots, examining the merits and demerits of different definitions, and explaining the compromise in accepting one definition of quality over another.

Concerning the asserted lack of dynamism and ambiguities associated with the concept of quality, one could assert that it is an unavoidable occurrence because life itself, like quality, is a constant entity with relative manifestations. So if, for example, a person defines thirst this minute as 'that slight feeling that makes one want to drink water' and another defines it in the same minute as 'that overwhelming feeling that makes one want to drink water', they are both individually correct. And because the earlier person may have been in thirst for a shorter period than the latter, and water becomes immediately available to the earlier person, he or she is more likely to value water less than the latter. Now if in future one definition is like some others before and after, for instance, succeeds in commanding some authority, is it not most likely that all other subsequent attempts at defining thirst would be quoted. Since definitions spring from experience, it somewhat explains when there is a new twist , or addition, to the words used, why definitions would remain basically constant.

3.3 EVOLUTION OF QUALITY

Quality is believed to have been derived from the Latin word *qualitas*, which means the nature or character that distinguishes a thing (Dictionary reference, 2012). Cicero is believed to have coined the word *qualitas* from the Ancient Greek word ποιότης translated as *poiotes*, which means 'quality'. The word quality is also believed to have been coined by Plato from ποῖος - *poios*, which means 'of what nature, of

what kind' (Wiktionary, 2012) Corresponding to these definitions is that which can be found in Wordnet dictionary: quality, is an essential and distinguishing attribute of something or someone. For these Greek philosophers, the nature or attribute ascribed to quality is 'excellence' (Kitto, 1951) and for Plato, excellence was absolute; it was the highest form of good (Pirsig, 1974). Although excellence continues to emerge with different nuances as a definition of quality, 18th Century industrialist began to question its practicality and cost effectiveness, and to suggest that consumers should be the final arbiters of quality (Johnson, 1988). Thus, a notion of quality as value (Feigenbaum, 1951; Abbott, 1955) began to emerge. Applied to goods, it was considered to be the sole responsibility of the buyer to check the quality before purchase and if the quality was bad, the artisan's reputation suffered (Dooley, 2000). Accordingly, Dooley argued that the term quality, during this period, had the 'industrial paradigm of *caveat emptor*'. *Caveat emptor* is a 16th century Latin term, which means 'let the buyer be aware'.

With the mass production of goods, the concept of quality became broadened in meaning. For instance, F. W Taylor introduced a system of division of labour, which brought in its spate a system of inspection known as quality control (Sallis, 2005). According to Juran (1973), Taylor 'separated work planning from execution'. Next, he created industrial engineers and other specialists to prepare work methods and

standards of a day's work. He then limited the foremen and workmen to 'control', i.e., 'to execute the plans and meet the standards' (Juran, 1973). Quality at this stage seemed to have assumed a meaning that had to do with a process of control to attain a certain standard. Today there are regulators who see quality strictly in terms of external control.

Taylor's design and its influence on quality assurance in institutions are limited for several reasons, one of which is the assertion that quality control was designed to detect defective products. This assertion may be necessary for mass-produced goods but, at the same time, really wasteful and expensive (Sallis, 2005). The limitation appropriated to the control system and indeed the attainment of quality was to be tackled by Shewart.

Shewart, a statistician in New York, developed the PDCA cycle, an acronym for Plan, Do, Check, Act (Shewart, 1939). This cycle would serve to curb wastage and delays in the production of goods. Building on the work of Stewart were Harold Dodge and Harry Romig and they introduced what was known as inspection-based quality control. At this point, the meaning of quality was further broadened to include an inspection component.

It was Deming however, another statistician mentored by Shewart, who augmented the work of Shewart by introducing an S into the PDCA cycle with S standing for Study, which supports quality improvement.

This buttresses the earlier point made about a new twist or addition of words. In the PDCA cycle by Shewart, C - Check means an investigation to see if countermeasures when tried out, achieved desired results. If there are no negative results, then the objectives have been accomplished. Its substitution with Study - S by Deming is because Study goes further than checking, S implies studying the results to determine what has been learnt and what went wrong. He described it in a flow chart as illustrated in Figure 3.1 below.

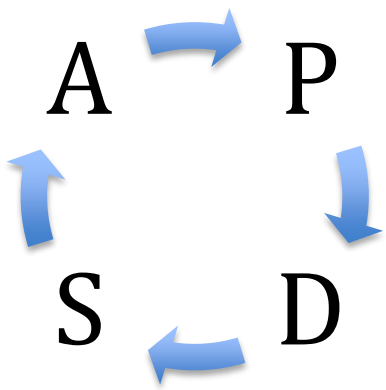

Figure 3. 1: PDSA Cycle: Deming 1993 modification of Shewart's PDCA cycle

In PDSA model, planning (P) stands for change or a test aimed at improvement; D means carrying out the change or test on a preferably small scale, S represents the results and learning points for improvement, and finally, 'A' stands for either adopting the change, or abandoning it altogether and running through the entire cycle again. Through this cyclical feedback loop, Deming proposed that the analysis

and measurement of business processes are important because they help to identify the sources of variation that could cause a product to defect. Through his management theory on the practice of continual improvement, Deming revolutionised the production of automobiles and indeed, the meaning of quality. The methods of Shewart and Deming are now described as 'statistical quality control'.

The understanding of quality nowadays draws largely from these industrial models, which perceived quality as creating conditions by which a standard is attained and improved. This definition of quality is somewhat contentious as will be discussed later. Nonetheless, this perception of quality is reminiscent of Brown's (1996) definition of quality, which envisages quality as an outcome of successful and consistent achievement of standard. Identifying sources of variations that might lead to product defects is appropriate in industry but does not synchronise with the purposes of quality assurance in education. As Liston (1999) argues, the purpose of quality assurance is not to evidence mistakes and shortcomings, but to learn from them and improve. The inspectorial-based quality control as conceived by these industrialists is the equivalence of compliance-led or inspectorial-based quality assurance, which is the practice among quality assurance regulators of the 21st Century.

The compliance transferred from the industrial world has become quite problematic for quality assurance in higher education. Furedi (2011, p.

3) argues that the culture of compliance puts academia on the defensive because they seek to 'minimize sources of disputes that have the potential to lead to complaint and litigation'. He calls this phenomenon, 'Defensive University Education', which he alleges: 'encourages a climate where academics are discouraged from exercising their professional judgment when offering feedback or responding to disputed marks'.

3.4 THE SHIFT IN MEANING FROM QUALITY CONTROL TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

After writing the prognosis of Taylor's quality control, Juran (1973) proposed a quality department whose sole responsibility he identified and summarised as follows:

1. Judging conformance by comparing results with specification.
2. Judging fitness for use on products that are not complaint.
3. Company-wide planning and coordinating quality. The quality manager plays a role in developing a uniform framework and in giving consultation services to the departments, in summarising the results, and in aiding the various managers to optimise the emerging plans.
4. Scorekeeping by keeping a regular report of results attained, so that appropriate action is taken if the financial goals and plans are not met.

5. Quality auditing whereby the finance function makes use of both internal and external auditors.
6. Diagnosing quality problems by tracing the process from symptom to cause, and from cause to remedy.

Crosby's four absolutes of quality management include defining quality as conformance to requirement; not goodness. His mention of goodness may have been by reference to Plato who interpreted quality as excellence and goodness being an attribute of that excellence. This, he felt, was to make everyone get the job right the first time. Once these requirements are set up and communicated, the onus falls on each employee to be held accountable for deviations.

Second, Crosby felt that prevention rather than appraisal is more likely to bring about a quality process. Appraisal done at the end would not have prevented the errors. Crosby also considered performance standards to be error free. He felt a zero tolerance would make all employees strive to be proactive rather than reactive. Finally, Crosby considered quality to mean the price of non-conformance rather than indicators, which cannot determine the true cost of quality. By Crosby's estimation, defects can cost the company 20% –35% of its revenue.

Crosby made an interesting analogy of quality, quality control, quality assurance and quality management. If quality were comparable to a car,

then quality control would be the instrumentation panel on the dashboard and quality assurance, the owner's manual. According to his description, quality management he described would be the philosophy a driver uses to correctly and safely manage a vehicle (Crosby, 1964)

These pioneers provide the vocabulary for contemporary quality assurance in higher education. Their usage of 'fitness for use' and conformance to specification contrasts with the Greek notion of excellence, but corresponds with the fitness for purpose categorised by Harvey and Green (1993) and an approach adopted by many quality assurance agencies. What Kogan (1998) describes as the drive towards managerialism in quality assurance, can be seen to have originated from the links between quality and accountability in these industrial models. Juran's proposal based on Taylor's quality control, sets up some rules of engagement and we can see the implication of these in agencies who consider themselves to be responsible for quality, and require universities to set up systems for managing accountability requirements. Juran's indicators may be peripheral to what obtains in countries with developing quality assurance systems. Juran's contributions to the quality debate differs from his predecessors, whose focus were more on quality control and product testing with limited self inspection. Quality control places a lot of emphasis on correctness with little or no concern about preventing errors. This is precisely the problem assailing quality assurance today because quality assurance is

judged from an industrial mind-set and its purposes, misrepresented.

Quality audit as formerly practiced by QAA and practiced in South Africa, is traceable to the audits that took place as part of a Taylor's scientific approach to quality control. Also corresponding closely with the usage of quality assurance is Crosby's contribution to the debate. Through his discourse on quality management, Crosby advocates the assurance of success rather than presenting evidence of failure, as is often the case with higher education quality assurance agents. This advocacy by Crosby is by far the most mature approach. This is not to dispute the fact that presenting evidence of failure is a first step towards the assurance of success just like in any reasonable endeavour, but rubbing in such evidence of failure so much so that success is not identified or begins to appear impossible, is in the same vein a first step towards the assurance of an almost, if not absolutely irrecoverable failure situation! If this becomes the case, then where lies the relevance of quality management and indeed quality assurance? Would it, therefore, not be valid under such circumstances to replace the existing label with a more appropriate one, viz. 'quality mismanagement'?

Table 3.1: The main proponents that influenced the quality assurance language and practices in higher education represented diagrammatically

Main proponents of quality	Their contribution to the language and practice of

		quality assurance.
1.	F.W Taylor and Walter Shewart.	Quality as integral. Quality control by foremen - element of craftsmanship. Quality was philosophical and experiential.
2.	Harold Dodge and Harry Romig:	Inspection based quality control. Standardisation Conformance. Control.
3.	Edward Deming	Statistical quality control
4.	Joseph Juran	Quality Assurance. Quality audits. Delegated involvement. Accreditation.
5.	Philip	Quality Management. Non- Conformance. Zero defects.

Crosby (1984) however, was one who could be said to have come very close to capturing the contemporary essence of quality assurance in higher education. He opined that quality management is something that must be imbued in an organisation from top to bottom. He considered quality as a 'commitment', as synonymous with 'integrity' and as that which should not be compromised to the slightest degree if it is to be fully effective.

Many of these aforementioned ideas about quality and quality assurance associated with industry have become quite developed by

higher education quality assurance theorists. We can deduce from the discussions above that the language from industry permeates quality assurance in higher education, and it is indeed problematic in the way it is conceived. There are those who disagree, saying that education has much to learn, and can benefit in a similar way, from industrial quality management. Between 1994 and 1996, there were clarion calls coming from Ho and Wearn (1996), Owlia and Aspinwall (1996), Indus (1996), Doherty (1998) and Chaston (1994), for wholesale adoption of industrial quality management systems such as ISO 9000 and Total Quality Management (TQM). But Greatrix (2012) argues that there has been no evidence to support the claim about transferring industrial models to higher education. The essence of the problem in doing so, he envisaged, would be the promotion of cost accounting over educational value and these would serve to undermine the fundamental purposes and role of universities, promoting compliance and game-playing.

One wonders at what point industries and academic institutions became one and the same, to the extent that they are allowed to be subject to the same quality processes and standards. Are academic institutions not supposed to shape qualitatively the orientation of those expected to graduate into society's industries? Are these industries in question not contrarily burdened with relatively varying purposes? Understandably, cost accounting is equally necessary in academic institutions for the purpose of administrative and ultimately academic

continuance; but still, academic continuance is in no way tantamount to academic value or quality. It may be argued that without academic continuance as inferred from above, we would have no reason to be speaking of quality.

Bolton (1995) notes that even though there may be some convergence, higher education and industrial models should be set apart. Greatrix (2012) cites the failure of the NVQ framework built on industrial model as a warning for those who propose them. He contends that when the language of quality assurance is appropriated by manufacturing terminologies, it leads to a conceptualisation of standards in industrial terms, and to the standardisation of the products, processes and inputs. Greatrix refers to the borrowing from industrial models as 'simplistic' and argues that an external quality regime does not necessarily improve quality Could these industrial borrowings be what might be affecting the way quality assurance is conceptualised in Nigeria and South Africa where more of an inspection-based quality assurance has been adopted rather than the Deming's PDSA cycle?

3.5 EMERGING DEFINITIONS OF QUALITY

According to (Sallis, 2005, p. 1)

> We all know quality when we experience it but describing and explaining it is a more difficult task… We often only

> recognise the importance of quality when we experience the frustration and time wasting associated with its absence…. Quality is what makes the difference between things being excellent or run-of-the-mill. Increasingly, quality makes the difference between success and failure.

This definition brings to mind the philosophical argument about whether empiricism is the basis of knowledge (Critchley, 2011). Can we really ascertain that something is of quality by judging through our sense experience alone? Rationalists such as Plato would argue that sense experience cannot provide certitude because that experience is constantly changing. Besides, we know about certain things such as mathematical reasoning prior to any sense experience. Sallis may have been trying to portray the difficulty in defining quality, but his transcendental assertion about quality makes it subjective. Sallis's definition is akin to Pirsig's (Pirsig, 1991, p. 73) who says that:

> quality does not have to be defined; you understand it without definition, ahead of definition. Quality is a direct experience independent of and prior to intellectual abstractions.

Does one, for example, see a student and because one likes the face of that student, one immediately attests that he or she is exposed to quality education. On the contrary, that student would have to manifest

such traits as are suggestive of exposure to quality education, for one to so attest. Hence, quality is detected from experience of impressive manifestation and the extents of impressions vary.

Woodhouse concedes to the definition provided by Ball (1985) that quality means 'fitness for purpose' (Woodhouse. 1999; 2012). This definition, so widespread and contained in Harvey and Green's list, was considered by Campbell and Rozsnyal (2002) as a criterion to establish whether or not a unit attains quality when measured against what is considered to be the unit's goal. The fitness for purpose definition as mentioned earlier is rooted in the industrial meaning of quality, where products are purportedly judged against their stated purpose(s). Like all other definitions of quality, it is slightly contentious but has its strengths. It recognises that quality is developmental in nature and purposes of quality may change; therefore 'fittingness for purpose' is in recognition of the appropriateness of any given specification and time. The weakness however lies in who defines purpose, and who determines priority in cases of conflicting purposes (Taylor, 1984).

Another definition of quality views it not as about experience but as about process. Quality is seen as an ever-continuous process of building, sustaining and keeping the flame of relationships burning by anticipating, assessing and fulfilling needs (Winder, 1993). Perhaps the

attempt in this definition is to capture the enigmatic nature of quality as something that is not fixed: a kind of formalised system that responds to the needs of the times. It does capture a specific characteristic of quality.

The concept of quality has also been defined from the customer's point of view. From the customer viewpoint, it is the extent to which the product in question meets the needs of the customer who purchases it (Gilmore, 1974; Levitt, 1972). It is the capacity of the product to satisfy the customer's wants (Edwards, 1968). The views of these two writers, ties in with the imperatives of quality described by Sallis (2005), namely, the moral and professional imperative of quality. Sallis asserts that:

> The customers and clients of the education service (students, parents and the community) deserve the best possible quality of education. This is the moral high ground in education and one of the few areas of educational discussions where there is little dissent… Closely linked to the moral imperative is the professional imperative. Professionalism implies a commitment to the needs of students and an obligation to meet their needs by employing the most appropriate pedagogic practices. (Sallis, 2005, pp. 3–4).

Sallis explains that the moral imperative and the professional imperative are among the four reasons why any educational establishment should be involved in quality. The other reason he gave are the competitive imperative, which causes educational institutions to work at improving the services they offer. The last imperative is the accountability imperative of quality which means that institutions should strive to meet the political demands for education by being more accountable and publicly demonstrate high standards. These imperatives of Sallis and the definitions of Gilmore and Edwards, suggest that the needs of the customer are at the heart of quality. But since students have different learning needs, does this mean that quality must be adaptable to suit those diverse needs?

From the service-based angle, quality is the congruence with the product's stated requirements (Crosby, 1979). Evidently a product does not have requirements. From the value-based point of view, there is congruence when there is a nexus between the price paid, and satisfaction obtained by the customer for the good or service provided (Broh, 1982). Quality is the way a product or service conforms to the specification, which it is designed for (Feigenbaum, 1983). Again in Crosby's, Broh and Feigenbaum's definitions one finds the fitness-for-purpose attribute of quality standing out. Though not explicitly stated, the key phrases 'congruence with… stated requirements', congruence between 'the price and the value' and 'the conformance with

specification' are all looking at an approach that is widely used by quality assurance agencies, namely fitness for purpose. Again, one can see that at the heart of this definition of quality is the need of the customer, and that the 'purpose' is determined by the customer's needs. In education, it is arguable whether fitness for purpose suffices as a definition of quality since it is somewhat fixed and cannot be seen to enhance or empower the learner. According to Harvey and Knight (1996), fitness for purpose is a weak operationalisation of quality.

There are definitions of quality that treat quality as a relative concept; relative to a set of requirements. Such definitions see quality as something that can be determined by comparison that is, by comparing it to a set of inherent characteristics with a set of requirements. If those inherent characteristics meet all requirements, high or excellent quality is achieved. If those characteristics do not meet all requirements, a low or poor level of quality is achieved (ISO, 9000; ISO, 9001; ISO, 9004).

So far, it can be seen that there is no single or uniform concept of quality. However, one definition that has become pervasive in higher education quality assurance agencies is the 'fitness for purpose' definition of quality, which will be discussed in detail in the next section. For now it suffices to say that the fittingness of stated purpose is an important criterion for quality assurance in industry as well as in higher education as we will come to see. As Woodhouse (2012) argues,

fitness for purpose provides an 'organising principle' for approaches to the achievement and checking of quality.

3.6 QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Today, the use of the word quality is not necessarily any more expansive than it had been before the 21st Century. As writers like Sallis (2005) observed, there is still a 'huge gap between the rhetoric and the real understanding of quality'. He alleges that 'the philosophies of the pioneers of the quality movement, Deming, Juran and Crosby, have not been translated very accurately into the practice of education'.

A similar observation was made by Newton (2002, p. 2), who stated that one of the lessons learnt during the quality revolution since the 1990s is:

> there is a gap between what we plan or intend in policy underpinning quality improvement or enhancement initiatives, and what actually emerges; while we should continually strive to improve the quality of the student and staff experience, the tension between 'accountability' and 'improvement' may not, ultimately, be reconcilable.

Brown (2005) provides a definition whereby he considers quality as an outcome-based maintenance and enhancement of standards, which is the product of successful and consistent performance by the student,

made possible by the conditions created by management and academic practices. Accordingly, Ball (1985) stated that external examining and accreditation are not sufficient guarantors of quality but that the institutions must meet necessary and sufficient conditions for quality. Could it then be that government's regulation on minimum standard and accreditation, which is seen to be synonymous with quality, is what makes the concept in higher education something vulgar and cynical? Or perhaps the constraints found in understanding quality assurance may be due to the complexities of the situational milieu. Vlãsceanu, Grünberg and Pãrlea (2007, p. 70) in defining quality see it as something situational:

> Quality in higher education is a multi-dimensional, multi-level, and dynamic concept that relates to the contextual setting of an educational model, to the institutional objectives and mission, as well as to the specific standards within a given system, institution, programme, or discipline.

Harvey, an authority in this aspect points out five salient points in the discourse of quality in higher education: excellence, consistency, fitness for purpose, transformative and value for money (Harvey, 2006). These opinion, also raise some very important questions.

Excellence ensures a high standard of academic achievement. The output of graduates and research findings should be subjected to a comparative study. The outcomes must also be globally comparable. Their academic standards can be guaranteed through a standards monitoring process such as that of an external examiner or through peers. Issues such as the quality of research, teaching, and student feedback, are critically considered.

Consistency implies perfection and zero tolerance for defects of any kind. The inherent meaning of the zero tolerance is the entrenching of a culture of prevention rather than merely inspecting. A key element in ensuring a culture of consistency is through the feedback mechanism from the members of staff and students.

Fitness for Purpose asserts that the stated expectation or specification is fulfilled. It rests squarely on the shoulders of the customer—the student in this case to assert that the education they receive is fit, and the providers are to ensure that what is provided meets the fitness requirement. Questions regarding fitness for purpose could include such as: 'Does the education received meet with the needs and aspirations of the student?' 'How relevant will the students be at the end of their studies to the larger society? How competent is the teaching faculty?'

Transformation finds out how the education received develops and empowers the student during the course of studies. How does this education add to the development of new knowledge? The empowerment process can be done in ways such as: assuring minimum service standards to students, feedback evaluation from them, and enhancing the students, critical introspective capability.

Value for money means a return on the investment. There is value for money when the service is provided with top class results at the lowest possible cost. However value for money is not just about high outcomes obtained at a cheap price. It is about good outcomes obtained at an appropriate price and not so good at a lower price. The mechanisms used to assess value for money include: first-year retention statistics, expenditure-per-student, rate of graduation, rate of employment for graduates, feedback from graduates with regards to the value and usefulness of the programme, career development potential and so on. The best providers of this feedback are the students, as they are the ones who pay for the educational service.

While one reiterates the scholarship of Harvey, it is still imperative to have a critique of the views held about higher education quality in the definitions he provided that even Harvey himself has challenged.

Excellence is subjective. *Times Higher Education Supplement* bases its rankings almost solely on the basis of reputation: history, wealth, and

research antecedent of the institution in view. The critical question is: 'does this solely guarantee excellence?' Are the interests of the students' interests best served simply because it is an ivy-league institution? If a student gets an education that best suits his purpose from a university in the lower league, is his degree going to be of less value even though it met his or her need? The reputation mechanism tends to focus more on issues such as scholarships, publications, research grants, and grades. While not disputing the fact that these are good, they however seems to whittle down the understanding of the real needs of the students. It is a well-known fact that there are changes in the world trends; recession and a paradigmatic shift in the economics. How well do the universities prepare their graduates to cope with these changes? All over the world, the emphasis in higher education and government policy is now on skills, talents and ideas. Can it be said that a university is truly excellent if it churns out graduates who are not being adequately equipped to sturdily face the future because of the idealism inherent in its curriculum?

Consistency could have a tinge of subjectivity when it comes to a comparative study. Some universities are known for their strengths in certain areas. What then is the basis for a general comparison, which is made amongst them, as the league tables seem to suggest?

Fitness for purpose as discussed earlier, is inadequate. It raises a barrage of questions: for whose purpose should it be fit? Is it the institutions', students' or societies'? How is this fitness assessed? Who does the assessment? For it to be regarded as fit, it must comply with not only the students' expectations but the societies' as well. If employers of labour who are key stakeholders in the society complain incessantly about graduate employability and competence; can the education of such graduates frankly qualify as being fit-for-purpose? On whose purpose it should be fit for; Woodhouse argued that the university has its purpose, which may be expressed in the mission, goals, and objectives. It must possess the structures to meet these purposes. Doing a critique of Woodhouse's assertion, it is evident that the many customers of higher education are the students, members of staff, government, and the society. These numerous customers have many needs. How then will we determine what is fit for purpose? Who then will even determine it?

On transformation, one can argue whether there exists any benchmark to measure how students are transformed. Is there any way to determine the depth of reflective thinking before they enter and leave the institution?

Does higher education really give value for money especially in the wake of the recessions and misrule in less developed economies that

lead to massive unemployment? There is a hue and cry about skill gaps especially in third-world countries. How well has higher education addressed this? Is there value for money if the possession of a certificate still makes one financially dependent? There seems to be the superiority of skills over talents worldwide. If greater value is being placed on skills, is there truly value for money in a higher education degree that may not guarantee bringing home the bacon?

Newton, (2002) grouped quality into categories derived from the result of the focus interview he carried out on academics during his research. Those concepts of quality explain the way academics in the UK perceived quality:

i) quality as 'ritualism' and 'tokenism'

academics use procedures primarily to satisfy external requirements; quality enhancement becomes a residual feature of quality systems.

ii) quality as 'impression management'

preparations for external assessment are carefully scripted and stage-managed.

iii) quality as a 'burden'

quality is perceived as an 'add on'; part of an inspectorial

compliance culture.

iv) quality as 'failure to close the loop'

key service areas are usually excluded from the formal system for managing academic quality.

v) quality as 'suspicion of management motives'

quality monitoring, externally or internally driven, viewed as an essentially managerial tool, which threatens academic or professional autonomy.

vi) quality as 'discipline' and 'technology'

academics perceive 'better systems' or 'improvements in quality assurance' as distinct from improvements in quality.

vii) quality as 'front-line staff resistance'

implementation requires 'ownership', but staff responds in different ways with varying degrees of enthusiasm and support.

viii) quality as 'lack of mutual trust'

systems emphasize responsibilities of front-line academics; perceived lack of reciprocal accountability on the part of management.

ix) quality as a culture of 'getting by'

academics constrained by lack of time; shift from 'resource-led' to 'improvement-led' culture associated by front-line staff with confusing demands.

x) quality and 'constraints on team-work'

quality improvement initiatives emphasize 'teams'; staff report situational pressures preventing this.

These concepts are all too familiar, even in Africa. It is what happens when there are manipulations of various sorts. Unfortunately, the intention to get accredited through the forms of manipulations described above, simply causes institutions and regulators to forfeit any prospect of engaging in 'quality enhancement-oriented work' Newton (2002).

The multidimensional concept of quality is again very closely mirrored in its multiple and sometimes conflicting usage in higher education. Unfortunately, the attention it gets in higher education is 'scant' (Burrows, Harvey and Green, 1992) or manipulated to serve auditing requirements (Newton, 2002). So here are the questions: Is accountability a sufficient basis to deliver quality improvement? Harvey (2011) and Greatrix (2012) would argue that it is doubtful. Would the transparency of institutions in maintaining the quality of

provision invariably diminish the need for intense external scrutiny? Newton would argue, possibly. Will compliance and improvement be reconciled if academics and regulators respond adequately to quality? My answer to that would be maybe because there is little or no evidence to support an affirmation that accountability is sufficient basis to obtain a quality improvement. According to Shore and Wright (2000), the transformation that the teaching of quality can have on the audit process still remains under-researched and under-theorised. What is known from the literature on quality is that its usage, drawn largely from manufacturing and business models, implies mainly exclusivity, conformance to specification and fitness for purpose, among others. However for most quality assurance agencies, the fitness for purpose seems most adaptable to higher education even though it is still somewhat complex. The major difficulty seen in appropriating fitness for purpose to quality in higher education is the difficulty in defining the purpose of higher education. It seems pertinent to examine the purpose of higher education to see what insights it can provide for situated meaning of quality and quality assurance.

3.7 THE PURPOSE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The purpose of higher education in Africa has been largely driven by its political and social agenda. Though the universities have been modelled after European and American universities, racial and participatory parity in South Africa and national consciousness and

nation building in Nigeria have been the main pursuits of these independent states. Therefore, higher education is seen as an appropriate context to achieve those principles. In South Africa, the National Commission on Higher Education in 1996, when it became the platform for the development of higher education in South Africa, sets out the purposes of higher education in South Africa which are:

> To meet the learning needs and aspirations of individuals through the development of their intellectual abilities and aptitudes throughout their lives. Higher education equips individuals to make the best use of their talents and of the opportunities offered by society for self-fulfilment. It is thus a key allocator of life chances, an important vehicle for achieving equity in the distribution of opportunity and achievement among South Africans.
>
> To address the development needs of society and provide the labour market, in a knowledge-driven and knowledge-dependent society, with the ever-changing high level competencies and expertise necessary for the growth and prosperity of a modern economy. Higher education teaches and trains people to fulfil specialised social functions, enter the learned professions, or pursue vocations in administration, trade, industry, science, technology, and the arts.

> Contribute to the socialisation of enlightened, responsible and constructively critical citizens. Higher education encourages the development of a reflective capacity and a willingness to review and renew prevailing ideas, policies and practices based on a commitment to the common good.
>
> To contribute to the creation and evaluation of knowledge. Higher education engages in the pursuit of academic scholarship and intellectual inquiry in all fields of human understanding, through research, learning, teaching. (The White Paper, 1997, pp. 7–8)

All these different but interrelated purposes are linked to the 'needs for social reconstruction and a better quality of life for all' (Singh, 2004). They are geared towards meeting the labour market needs, serving the common good, enabling equity and developing intellectual capacity and responsible citizenship on the part of the individual.

In Nigeria, there is The National Policy of Nigerian Education, which is geared towards addressing problems of educational relevance to the needs and aspiration of the people, and promoting national unity and national integration. The unpinning principles of this policy are:

> 1) the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity;

(2) the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society;

(3) the training of the mind in the understanding of the world; and

(4) the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies, both mental and physical, as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society (NPE, 1977).

The problem with these purposes of South Africa and Nigeria when viewed in the light of quality assurance are multidimensional. First, aligning academic quality evaluation with societal needs ignores the complexity and wider issues of quality and the quality assurance phenomena. It ignores, in particular, how institutions could be encouraged to develop a sharper focus on the their arrangements for quality improvements. Second, educational stakeholders have different and possibly conflicting purposes that may not necessarily align with those expected to be delivered by higher education institutions. Third, there is the requirement that quality assurance would become more 'socially reflective and less bureaucratically self-referential' (Singh, 2003) to serve those needs. The question then is 'should quality assurance develop more sustainable and socially oriented models'? The current quality assurance mechanisms are unlikely to meet these social

goals. This is because the purposes of education are much more comprehensive than those required or implied by the current quality assurance models that place little or no emphasis on employability, responsibility and balancing accountability and enhancement. Fourth, the absence of adequate funding is likely to make universities' purposes more market inclined and even donor inclined rather than meeting the standards of quality and quality assurance. Another important reason why the expressed goals are misaligned with quality assurance is because those purposes lie in the domain of the principle of utilitarianism. Utilitarianism sees the role of university as instrumental; existing to serve the economy and the goals of the economy being material wellbeing and financial goods. As a philosophy, utilitarianism sees the purpose of higher education as equipping students for a future trade or profession. This idea, in recent times, continues to influence discussions around the world such as in the UK's spending priorities reported in Browne's Report (2010).

In view of quality, utilitarianism is problematic. As expressed by Ritzer (1993) in his book *McDonaldization of Society*, the concept of utilitarianism could make higher education predictable and quantity, a surrogate for quality. Ritzer reasoned that with the market view utilitarianism ascribes to higher education, a situation could arise where:

> people would move from rationalized educational institutions to rationalized workplaces and from rationalized recreational settings to rationalized homes. (Ritzer, 1993, p. 23.)

Similarly, Collini (2010) imputes a 'philistine' label to an education that reduces its purpose to economic utility.

Utilitarianism is a philosophy with historical links to Jeremy Bentham, who discounted the important place given to classical education in Oxford and Cambridge (Schofield, 2004). John Stuart Mill popularised it. In his book *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* Bentham argues that every action is useful insofar it gives pleasure (Bentham, 1789). The pleasure being advocated by Bentham is not to be understood as a hedonistic pleasure but rather what he contends to be the absence of the pain of mental vacuity obtained through the fruitful pursuit of 'useful learning'. Stuart Mills who proposed the word 'happiness' rather than pleasure as a morally accepted goal revised this philosophy. In a broad sense, an action that maximises happiness is said to be of utility and such an action should only be restrained by the needs of others and the happiness of the rest of society (Mills, 1863). Interestingly, this philosophy is a kind of consequentialism which characterises alleged practices of quality assurance in institutions where seemingly the end justifies the means giving rise to the 'game-playing'

and 'impression management' Newton (2002) by institutions seeking satisfactory outcomes, whether accreditation or audit report. The morality of utilitarianism is premised on the happiness or pleasure benefits a given action produced for an individual or society.

Opposed to the utilitarianism purpose of higher education is Cardinal John Newman. Newman (1852) suggested how the university could serve society better and this, he argued, should be the primary end. He conceded this to be the 'cultivation of the mind' because the mind is the 'imperial intellect' and if it is properly trained and formed, would have 'a connected view' and the 'grasp of things'. He advocated philosophical knowledge as the purpose of higher education. Newman was not opposed to the links between education and the economy. Rather he was opposed to the instrumental rationality that structured education on market-defined criteria. He felt that mental refinement that comes from literary and philosophical training could equip an individual for different roles in life. He contended that for one to become a statesman, a lawyer or doctor, he would need the ability to think clearly to organise his knowledge and articulate his ideas, so as to effectively deal with questions at hand. Newman was also opposed to the compartmentalisation of knowledge, and advocated a principle of order whereby students would be able to able to perceive how each discipline relates to the rest. It is for this reason that he advocated the study of philosophy as a way of overcoming a fragmentation of

knowledge. He refuted secularism that excluded religious education from higher education, claiming that theology was needed to keep secular disciplines within their proper limits, and deal with questions that lie beyond their scope. Newman's concerns bordered on the quality of teaching and quality of students' experience: his arguments advanced a kind of wholesome experience that reverberates with faith in God and essence of man.

In these times of crises, especially when quality assurance is compromised by moral relativism, can it be argued that the moral vision envisaged by Newman may be more purposeful rather than the limited goals of the pragmatic calculations of utility and those which 'reduces university education and research to a calculable formula of knowledge production, or to use in the insipid management-speak term knowledge transfer, as if thought were itself merely a quantifiable known-sum to be transferred and managed accordingly' (Garland , 2008).

On research as a purpose of higher education, Newman, unlike Immanuel Kant and Alexander Humboldt who endorsed the importance of research and teaching as purposes of a university, did not see a role for research. He felt research was utilitarian, and conflicts with the goals of teaching. For instance, he stated that 'a professor who spends his day in dispensing his existing knowledge to all corners is

unlikely to have either the leisure or energy to acquire new knowledge' (Newman, 1852, p. 81). Newman was not opposed to research, but felt that a university should exist primarily for its students and that research should be carried out in specialist institutions. If one considers his position to research in the light of the 'publish or perish' climate in many African universities, Newman's idea about research may be considered inspirational. Pelikan's (1992) contention may also have some resonance because whilst not dispensing with Newman's argument about research, he sees the necessity for a more symbiotic approach that integrates rather than creates a dichotomy between the advancement and extension of knowledge.

Other purposes of higher education are the private and public benefits of higher education. The private benefit of education is a view shared by human capital theories developed by economists like Gary Becker, Milton Freidman and John Mincer, who allude to the cost of education to wage gains that accrue to an individual. Other adherents of the private benefit of education are Friedman and Friedman (1980). The adherents of the public benefits of higher education feel that the purposes of higher education go beyond the private benefits.

Those who oppose the public benefits of higher education are authors like Goldstein and Renault (2004), who argue that the magnitude of the contributions made by universities is marginal. In support of that view

is a study carried in Canada, which does not recognise any direct causal link existing between the university and development, and stated that Canadian universities are better seen as 'catalysts for development rather than drivers' (Doutriaux, 2003). This assertion by Doutriaux is contentious because it is not universities that contribute to public good directly but the products of universities, research and graduates, that contribute to the public good (way beyond any private gain). Scholars like Wolf (2002) have argued persuasively that there is little evidence in support of the public good benefit of education, unlike the private returns of education where ample evidence exists.

Recent evidence has come to show that higher education may boost personal earning power but there are many sizable public benefits too (Umbach et al, 2010; HEFCE, 2012); and that a direct and indirect link does exist between the university and the economy (Cowan 2005; Deiaco 2012). Alluding to this correlation between education and the economy is the Russell Group, comprising 24 leading UK universities, *The Russell* Issue 2, (2010, p. 1):

> UK competitors have recognised that their economic future lies in highly skilled individuals and high-tech businesses. They are pouring investments into their universities and research in order to develop the world–

> leading institutions, which they recognize will be the key to the success in a global knowledge economy.

Arguably, the assertion by the Russell group may have been for promotional purposes but the reality is that, Universities in the UK do make a contribution to the economy. In monetary terms, Universities in the UK contributed £3.3 billion to the economy in 2010–11 (HEFCE, 2012) while the wider impact of the higher education sector in the UK generated over £59 billion (UUK, 2009). In the same vein employability, which also includes the development of skills, can be alleged to be a growth determinant:

> Human capital, particularly graduate-level skills, is now the primary indicator of future economic growth. The proportion of our working population with graduate level skill along with science and research base, will determine the pattern of our future economic growth and our ability to achieve the innovation based economy that we are striving for. (Hackett and Jones, 2011)

Collini (2011) talks about universities being involved in what could be termed as credentialising. He described this as a mechanism for assuring society that only those with approved qualification will be allowed to practice a particular profession.

The advocates of marketisation claim that the market will provide value for money and ensure that the university sector will become more efficient and more responsive to the needs of society, the economy, students and parents. Marketisation is more of a political ideology as it is an economic phenomenon (Molesworth, Scullion, Nixon, 2011).

What in essence is being said here is that, poorly conceived purposes of higher education derails the purposes of quality and quality assurance, and would have a hampering effect on the higher education. There are direct and indirect links between the way quality assurance is conceived and practiced and the economy of a nation. In agreement with Wolf (2002), it is incorrect, for instance, to assume 'a simple, direct relationship between the amount of education in a country and its future growth rate', especially as this is indeed a quantitative measure that has no merit; especially, given the fact that Nigeria and South Africa are producing large numbers of graduates who are simply saturating the labour market with little or no job prospects in view. Admittedly, a problem or misconception arises when the impacts of quality are ignored because of a focus is on the obvious good associated with economic growth.

In essence, the kernel of the polemics on the purposes of higher education serve to demonstrate that the concern is sometimes about quantitative fixations and pursuits at the expense of quality and indeed

quality assurance. Arguably, some disenchantment with the links between education and the economy are trigged by concerns about government's spending priorities and education policies in the UK and Japan for instance. It can be seen that some of the critiques that argue against the 'education breeds economic growth' theory, allege that increase in student number without a corresponding increase in quality is what has led to the 'dumbing down effect' (Wolf, 2002).

Given the fragmentation in society and institutions, does reputation stand a chance in view of the purposes of higher education and should quality assurance target worldwide reputation as a component of improvement? Worldwide reputation is seen as one of the goals of internationalisation of higher education (Henard, Diamond and Roseveare, 2012). Brandenburg and Federkeil (2007) consider international reputation a concept that is difficult to realise. Nonetheless, Easton conceded that the notion of reputation should be a summary of a university's performance and he described this as a university's 'standing in the world of international scholarship, of the community in which it serves, among its alumni their friends and employers'. He acknowledges that reputation is intangible and certainly not easy but quoting a text from Shakespeare's Othello, which I feel summarises the tragedy of disreputable universities, Casio says to Iago:

> "Reputation! O, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial." (Othello: II, iii).

Easton, concludes by posing a fundamental question

> public policy might usefully ask itself whether a particular action enhances or diminishes the reputation of the nation's universities, and among whom.

It can be argued that academic quality cannot be attained without a focus by quality assurance regulators on the reputation of the university. Attaining reputation and its implication for quality assurance may well be subject for a future research.

3.8 QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Quality assurance ensures that the type of higher education obtained is worth the investment and ultimately, beneficial to both the recipient and the society at large. Dooley ascribes the coinage of the term quality assurance to Edwards who advocated quality as part of management's responsibility (Dooley, 2002 in reference to Gitlow, Gitlow, Oppenheim and Oppenheim, 1989). Quality assurance refers to the top echelon of the university being dedicated to quality improvement, adopting novel thought processes that can greatly improve quality, the encouragement of an all-inclusive management and teamwork, as well as the creation

of an efficient communication strategy, ensuring maximum human capital development. This definition places the onus of quality assurance on the top echelon of the university. Quality assurance however requires an institution-wide approach rather than creating a divergence between management and others.

There was the prominence of quality assurance in higher education in the United Kingdom in the 1990s. Besides the issue of university funding, it rose to prominence. Governments the world over have expectations from higher education such as: more responsiveness to the needs of the students and employers; cost effectiveness; should have greater relevance to economic and social needs; and institutions should be subjected to comparable benchmarks (Harvey, 1999). Quality assurance manifests itself internally and externally. External quality assurance is performed by an external organisation such as a quality assurance agency or a professional body. Some mechanisms used include:

- Quality Audit
- Quality Assessment
- Accreditation

Quality audit determines the adequacy of the quality assurance procedures in place in an institution. Quality assessment evaluates by taking into account the context, methods, levels, areas of assessments

and stakeholders' objectives and priorities (Sanyal and Martin, 2007). Accreditation, the most widely used method is the outcome of the quality assurance process. Accreditation a kind of formal recognition of a programme or institution by an external body, on the basis of an assessment of its quality, and resulting in a certain status regarding degree-awarding capacity, recognition of these degrees by third parties, credit-transfer to other accredited institutions, direct or indirect funding, and other external effects (Damme, 2000). The agency that accredits awards a recognition status for a given period after it has determined that an institution has met its mission and objectives, as well as the expectations of stakeholders including students and employers. Accreditation is what ensures that the purposes of quality assurance are met. The manifold benefits of accreditation include providing students with information about an accredited status, which means that the quality of an institution or its programme is certified by the accreditor to meet its (minimum) standards. An accredited status also means recognition by third parties, especially employers. Consumer protection is another benefit of accreditation and for government accreditation serves as a means of establishing market transparency and comparability of degrees.

There are other ways by which quality assurance is done in the higher educational institutions, which include peer review, performance

indicators, surveys of graduates/students and testing the knowledge, skills and competencies of students (Harman, 1998).

Building on progress made in quality assurance, countries such as England are moving from an evidence-based approach which had been integral to the institutional audits carried out, to an approach described as the 'risk-based approach' (HEFCE, 2012). Risk-based approach is not an entirely new concept because Wales, Canada, USA and Australian systems of quality assurance have some elements of risk-based approach (King, 2011; HEFCE, 2012). This approach, expected to come into effect in the UK in January 2014 (QAA, 2013), focuses on those institutions considered to be high risk, while reducing the nature, intensity and frequency of QAA external regulatory activities with institutions that have demonstrated a good track record in quality assurance.

The advantage of this selective approach is that it would strengthen quality assurance by making it more enhanced, proportionate, targeted and explicit (HEFCE, 2012). Varying the scale and intensity of quality assurance based on what is judged to be calculated risk might run the risk of regulators becoming isolated from institutions for an extended period, and this might result in a sort of 'risk incubation' (King, 2011, HEBRG, 2012). King (2011) also notes that another risk in the risk-based approach is that regulators would be 'prey to rapidly changing and

unforeseen circumstances because of an over-commitment to original risk assessment'. King also points out the complexity of categorising institutions into high and low risk. He contends that such categorisation would be public, and would most likely cause a lot of disaffection among institutions, as well as drag regulators into prolonged controversy. This goes to prove that quality assurance is indeed work in progress and very much at the developmental stage, even in the most developed countries.

A lot of reasons have fuelled the need for external monitors to keep an eye on the quality issues of universities. These reasons elucidated by Martin & Antony (2007) include:

Ever growing demand for higher education

During the period 1990–1991 to 2001–2002, the number of students in higher education worldwide rose from 68.7 million to 110.7 million (Sanyal and Martin, 2006). It is necessary for these institutions to have a check on them in order to safeguard the interests of the members of the public, as well as checkmate any potential abuse.

The Effect of Globalisation and Trade Agreements

'The world has shrunk into a global village' goes a now worn out cliché. Education is also affected by globalisation. Trade

agreements between countries have led to a greater labour mobility among professionals. Regional agreements have also led to an unprecedented movement of human capital in recent times. It is necessary for a comparison to be done so that professionals can know their true mobile worth in the market. Students are also not left out by the development. The Bologna Process in the European Region in 2010 established a common qualification structure in the European Higher Educational System, which includes the bachelors, masters and doctorate, a national accreditation mechanism, and the credit transfer system to aid student mobility.

The Novel Concept of Educational Management

The government in many countries of the world is fast relinquishing its total hold on the educational system. Deregulation and devolving of power is becoming the norm. There is now a greater need for these institutions to be more accountable to both their students and the public. They now have more pressure piled on them to provide useful information to the public about how they are run. Market forces have led to an ever-increasing demand for information, so as to make more informed choices.

Quality assurance can also be considered to mean all policies, processes and actions through which the quality of higher education is maintained and developed (Campbell & Rozsnyal, 2002). The National Union of Students of Europe defined Quality Assurance as 'the means by which an institution can guarantee with confidence and certainty, that the standards and quality of its educational provisions are being maintained and enhanced' (ESIB, 2003).

Different groups such as staff, students, institutions, agencies, employers, professional associations and governments, view the purpose, scope and focus of quality assurance in the ways identified by Middlehurst (2001). According to Middlehurst, the student sees quality assurance as the learning experience, security and transferability of qualification, recognition, currency and value. The employer is concerned about qualification, quality and standards, whereas staff are more likely to be preoccupied with learning experience and the education process. For government and regulating agencies, it is all about responsibilities and accountabilities, transparency and reliability of information about quality for the student, institutions and society at large. What Middlehurst has done in this definition, is to identify the key stakeholders in the higher education quality assurance process: the students, members of staff, employers and governments, including agencies and professional associations. Each of these groups has a divergent view to the entire process. These views represent

expectations from the quality assurance process, and the process needs to be carried out in such a way that it satisfies the yearnings of all these groups.

In a nutshell, here is what summarises what some of these groups want out of the process. The students want to be assured that their investment in education is not a waste; they want to be sure that the universities they attend are credible. Those who intend seeking paid employment want to have a degree that can compete favourably in the market. Members of staff want to conform to the curriculum and ensure they cover their lecture notes. The employer's interest is in the graduates' competence and grade quality, while the regulatory agencies want to ensure that the interests of the students and the larger society are taken care of adequately. The point of convergence is that the role of quality assurance should not be to create antagonism but to ensure that the avalanches of needs are met, as they are all complementary. A criticism of the university education is its theoretical framework that disconnects its graduates from practical realities. (Robertson, 2012). Quality assurance has to step in here, given that unemployment brought about by graduate skills shortage is now a global problem (Harris, 2012). When one begins to examine the delivery modes such as technology-mediated learning or transnational arrangement, definition becomes more complex because levels of expectations comprising support systems (technical, academic), issues of comparability of

qualifications, equivalence of levels and student protection, begin to take prominence.

Quality assurance, like the process itself, is meant to be indicative rather than comprehensive and for the purpose of this research; quality assurance in higher education could best be described by looking at the purpose it serves. Four purposes of quality assurance have been identified namely accountability, control, compliance and improvement (Harvey and Newton, 2005).

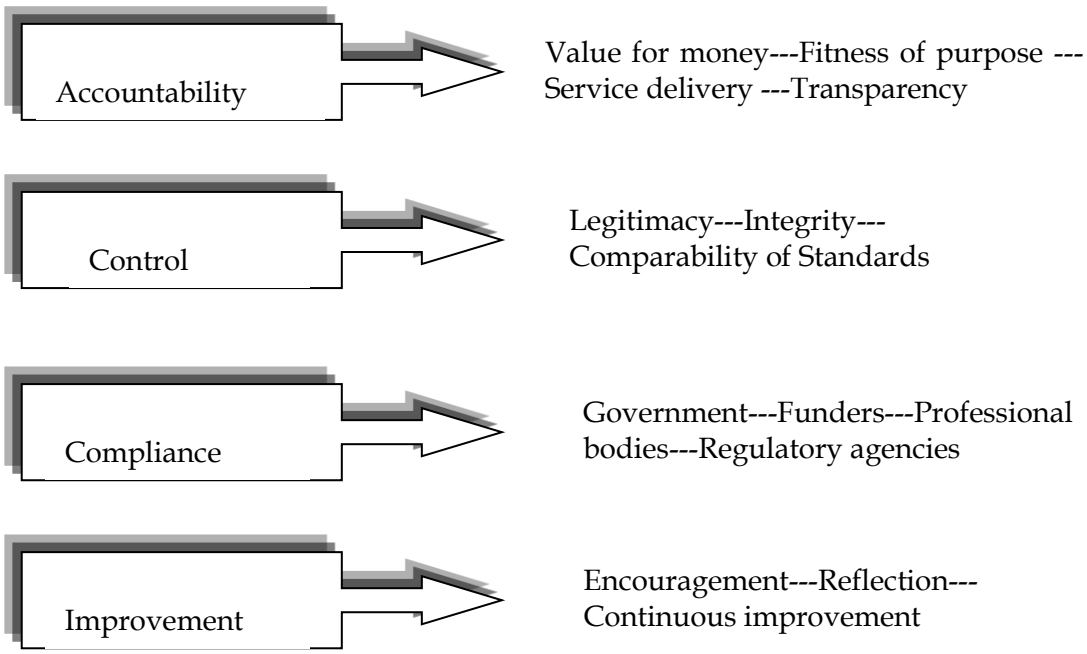

Figure 3.2: Purposes of quality assurance (adapted from Harvey, 2005)

3.8.1 ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is often considered to be the central aspect of quality assurance in higher institution and from what has already been

discussed regarding accountability, could accountability be said to be the defining characteristic of quality assurance. Could this be why accreditation, a product of accountability, becomes a check on minimum requirement—a compliance exercise. Accountability begins with the concept of fitness for purpose and the question asked would be: 'what is an institution being held accountable meant to be and do'? (Carey, 2007, p. 24).

Information gathering exercise in virtually unsupported institutions to determine their accountability may not suffice for an institution to be quality assured. Real accountability plays out when institutions act on information in a manner that is designed to change what they do in order to make them more successful than they would otherwise be. Real accountability is based on the view that institutions work best when motivations are internal and external. Accountability involves higher education institutions demonstrating their worth, taking responsibility for the service they provide, and accounting for their use of public/private resources. Accountability to students involves assuring that the programme of study is organised and run properly, and that an appropriate educational experience is both promised and delivered. It also involves the dissemination or availability of public information that can aid students in making informed choices. The process of accountability often involves standard checking through the use of performance indicators that may evaluate indices such as:

retention and completion rate of students; graduate employment statistics; research assessment exercises; entry and exit qualifications and value added.

Taking the indicator – entry and exit qualifications and its corresponding measure - value added, Bennett 2001 asserted that value added means what is improved about students' capabilities or knowledge as a consequence of their education at a particular college or university. Measuring value requires having assessments of students' development or attainments as they begin college, and assessments of those same students after they have had the full benefit of their education at the college. Value added is the difference between their attainments when they have completed their education and what they had already attained by the time they began. Value added is the difference a college makes in their education although admittedly, that difference in student is not always attributable to the college. Arguably, the assessment of value-added is at the core of any improvement-oriented, and transformative approach to quality assurance at the programme level. Value added is the enhancement that students achieve (in knowledge, skills abilities and other attributes) as a result of their higher education experience.

In the present context, the concept of real accountability described above is struggling to survive. Roger Brown, a former member of the

Higher Education Funding Council in the UK observed: 'we need more enhancement and a little less regulation in quality assurance.' He went on to describe the situation in the UK by stating that 'the forces of accountability are strong; those devoted to improvement including the promotion of innovation, are fragmented'. (Brown, 2002, pp.8-9)

Accountability in quality assurance cannot be discredited or belittled, especially when one thinks of the gross malpractices as catalogued by Salmi and Ballal (2006) in Table 3.4 : Types of Corruption/Fradulent Practice:

Table 3.2: Types of Corruption/Fraudulent Practice

Type of Corruption / Fraudulent Practice	**Definition / description**	**Perpetuators**	**Victims**
Financial Management			
Embezzlement	Stealing or misusing funds (including research grants); falsification of accounting records	Institution	State
Fraud in Public Tender	Offering bribes (monetary or non-monetary) to obtain contracts	Institution	State
Supplier Collusion	Illegal agreements, among institutions, on tuition fees and financial aid packages to avoid competition.	Institutions	Students

Academic Management			
Examination Fraud	Students cheating when taking exams or writing papers (copying, plagiarism)	Students	Institution
Unethical behaviour of faculty	Sale of exam questions or grades, obligation to buy private lessons or textbooks, nepotism, discrimination, sexual harassment	Faculty	Students, Employers, Society
Research Fraud	Research data and/or results are misreported and/or misused.	Faculty	Institution, State, Society
Unethical management of faculty career	Corruption in hiring and promotion; discrimination based on gender, political or ethnical grounds	Institution	Faculty, Society
Fraud in Quality Assurance Process	Bribes paid to accreditation bodies / external reviewers to gain / maintain accreditation; biased external reviewers; fake accreditation body	Institution, Accreditation Agencies	Students, Institutions not involved in fraud, Society
Information Management			
Provision of False Credentials	Students applying with fake or falsified records	Students	Institution
Data Manipulation	Supplying false or doctored data to government agency, accreditation association or ranking body	Institution	State, students, employers, society

Biased Information	University officials have special relationships with certain agencies offering services to students (US colleges favoring student loan providers).	Institution, Service provider	Students

Adapted by Sonali Ballal and Jamil Salmi; from Hallak and Poisson (2006).

Accountability would be meaningfully fulfilled, if it were blended with improvement. It is hoped that this research could potentially provide some insight into why accountability needs to be balanced with improvement-led quality assurance.

3.8.2 CONTROL

According to Harvey, control is about ensuring the legitimacy and integrity of the higher education sector, with special regard to consumer protection. In many institutions, control could be through financial control or adherence to decrees but more recently, control is being exercised through the medium of quality assurance. The control aspect of quality evaluation specifically addresses the comparability of standards, that is, the standard or level of student academic or professional achievement, nationally and internationally. Using externally set and marked examinations, specification of the contents of syllabuses and descriptors of outcomes, are some of the ways used to benchmark academic standards (Harvey and Newton 2004).

Harvey has been careful to point out that control, as a purpose of evaluation, is different from quality control as a technique that is used for checking quality at the end of a process (Harvey, 2004). The difference between the two is not as clear-cut, as the distinction is not necessarily that of process (as in the case of quality assurance) and end-product (as in the case of quality control), and this has been the source of a lot of confusion. In distinguishing the two principles, Mangino defined quality control as a system of routine technical activities, to measure and control the quality of the inventory as it is being developed; whereas in the case of quality assurance, it is defined as third party verification that ensures that objectives have been met (Mangino, 2000).

3.8.3 COMPLIANCE

Harvey views compliance as a means of ensuring that institutions adopt procedures, practices and policies that are considered by governments and financers to be desirable for the proper conduct of the sector and to ensure its quality. Compliance is also sought through quality monitoring, notably by professional or regulatory bodies that may use quality monitoring to check that their preferences or policies are being acknowledged or implemented. Compliance processes focuses on inputs such as facilities, curricula and staffing, as these impact largely on the outputs. Complying with requirements will result

in competent graduates, a process that can be checked through measurable, observable variables.

Quality assurance agencies have a role to play when it comes to compliance, for they guide institutions through a process of self-reflection. It has been argued that a compliance culture can be self-defeating, as it sometimes leads a university to concentrate effort on obtaining a positive accreditation decision rather than making a genuine effort to improve what is being done. Compliance can oftentimes lead to concealment of weakness for fear of the assumed punitive measures such weaknesses may yield. The primary responsibility for compliance rests with the universities and if universities are orientated and motivated towards commitment and self regulation then quality assurance gets a better chance of fulfilling its goals. As Harvey (1998) observed,

> Such compliance means that taken-for-granted practices and procedures have had to be confronted and clearly documented. 'It represents the minimum required shift from an entirely producer-oriented approach to higher education to one that acknowledges the rights of other stakeholders to minimum information and a degree of 'service' (Harvey, 1998, p. 241).

Compliance may also be linked to the political agenda to control resources. Compliance meets regulative and legislative needs of quality assurance but how well it addresses the improvement component of quality assurance, is yet to be determined.

3.8.4 IMPROVEMENT

According to Harvey, enhancement is less about constraint and more about the encouragement of adjustment and change. The improvement function of quality assurance procedures is normally about encouraging institutions to reflect upon their practices, with a view to enabling a process of continuous improvement of the learning process, and the range of outcomes. Improvement is one of the purposes of quality assurance but, by far, one of those that are largely ignored in practice. Improvement as a rationale for quality assurance should be external to the institution; it also include actions carried out by an institution before and after a quality audit. The compatibility and incompatibility of accountability and improvement has been the subject of many debates (Middlehurst and Woodhouse 1995; Kis 2005). As Woodhouse (1999) observes, 'it is more sensible to have the same agency sensitively attempting both, than to try to separate them'.

3.9 OWNERSHIP OF QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS

Ownership of quality assurance derives from the notion of quality culture and quality culture 'is shared values, beliefs, expectations and

commitments toward quality', and 'a structural/managerial element with defined processes that enhance quality and aim at coordinating efforts' (EUA, 2006, p. 10). A conclusion reached by the *Quality Culture* project (EUA, 2005, 2006) was that a successful quality culture is one that engages the leadership and the grassroots, namely the academic and administrative staff, students, as well as external stakeholders.

Summarising the discussions on quality culture from the First European Forum for Quality Assurance, Harvey in 2007 states:

> There is academic ownership of quality.
>
> There is recognition by academics and administrators, of need for a system of quality monitoring to ensure accountability (and compliance where required), and to facilitate improvement. However, this should not be a 'bureaucratic' system.
>
> Quality culture is primarily about the behaviour of stakeholders, rather than the operation of a quality system.
>
> The quality system needs to have a clear purpose, which articulates with the quality culture.
>
> A quality culture places students at the centre.

> A quality culture is about partnership and co-operation, sharing of experiences and team working.
>
> A quality culture is about supporting the individual as an autonomous scholar, but not at the expense of the learning community; there is a symbiotic relationship between individual and community.
>
> Leadership in a quality culture is inspirational rather than dictatorial. Leadership is at all levels in the institution and does not refer to just senior managers.
>
> A quality culture welcomes external critical evaluation from a variety of sources including formal external evaluations; external peers acting as critical friends, and internal peer review and support.
>
> At heart, a quality culture is about facilitating and encouraging reflexivity and praxis; self-reflection, developing improvement initiatives, and implementing them.

There may be suggestions as to whether quality culture is a component of quality assurance or the other way around but the challenge remains repositioning quality culture in quality assurance.

Quality assurance is first premised on promotion of sustained self-regulation, and whether institutions are taking the initiative in examining and evaluating the attainment status of higher education and research. Institutional ownership of quality assurance is the first sign of commitment to, rather than compliance with quality. A principle of good practice comes from the Irish Higher Education Quality Network (IHEQN) that states that the ownership and main responsibility of the quality assurance process resides with the provider—this is an essential condition for promoting internal quality cultures within higher education and training institutions.

Institutions need to set themselves at a high level and autonomously developing strategies for their attainment, together with modestly learning from accreditation exercise carried out through external quality audits.

3.10 QUALITY ASSURANCE STRUCTURES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Quality assurance structures are those internal mechanisms that an institution has in place to ensure that it is meeting its own objectives and predetermined standards. Some of these structures are identifiable in a quality manual, which acts as a central source of information for policies and procedures, and supports institutions in their aim to assure the quality of learning, teaching and supervision. A quality manual contains a framework for qualification titles, which help applicants,

students, employers, and other stakeholders to understand the university's awards, and to place them in context with each other, and with the awards of other institutions. Second, the framework would also demonstrate that appropriate progression occurs between levels before arriving at a final award. Third, the framework will facilitate the integration of each university's credits, modules, courses and awards into future global-wide initiatives. The quality manual of the University of Nottingham, UK for instance contains:

- Quality assurance structures managed by the Academic Affairs Unit of the university
- Recruitment and admissions managed by the Admissions Office
- Programme approval and review managed by the Academic Affairs Unit
- Assessment managed by the Examinations Office—although when it comes to extenuating circumstances, Registry is advisable
- Study regulations managed by Registry, but Academic affairs unit for Accreditation of prior learning
- Students with disabilities managed by students services
- Placement learning managed by the Academic Affairs unit
- Academic and personal support managed by students services
- Complaints and appeals managed by the Academic Affairs Unit
- Career Development managed by the Academic Affairs Unit in liaison with a centre for career development.

These various aspects contained in the manual are reflected in the internal structure set out by Quality Assurance Agency UK (QAA) below, for institutions that wish to be self-regulating.

Figure 2.5: Internal quality assurance structure (QAA, 2005)

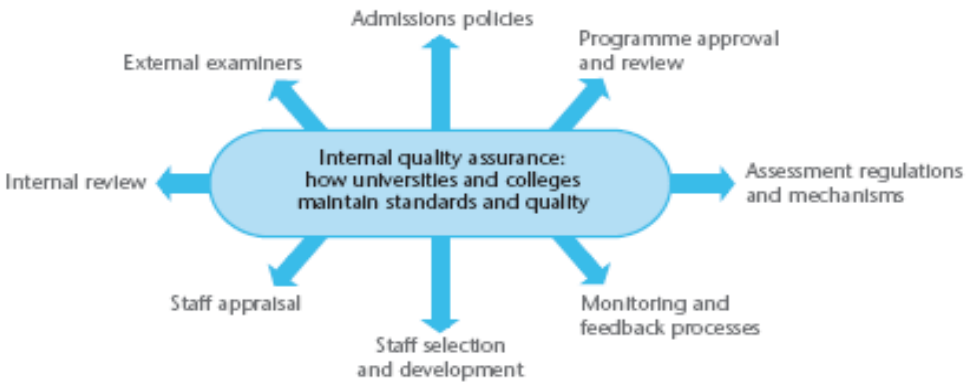

Figure 3.3: Internal quality assurance structure (QAA, 2005)

In effect, quality assurance structures should be viewed as a multi-dimensional concept, embracing the functions and activities: teaching and academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, internal self-evaluation and external review that are vital for enhancing quality.

All these structures are important but have only a limited application when it comes to employability. When it comes to employability of graduates, concerns about quality take on a different dimension, the key element being the need to protect the interests of students and facilitate their career and strengthen the capability.

3.11 EMPLOYABILITY IN QUALITY ASSURANCE

For transformative quality assurance to take place employability needs to be embodied in the quality assurance mechanism. Employability is deeper than just getting a job even though the term is often conflated with employment. Employability and employment are two different entities. While the first implies the competent capacity and access to secure the latter, the latter implies reward for such competent capacity. Even though it is the case these days that some people who do not qualify for a particular employment often secure employment rather than those who are eligible, the reality of incompetence at work for such unqualified persons, cannot be over-emphasized. However, the fact must be acknowledged that employability is interpreted in different industries, to mean different things. A graduate considered unemployable in one industry may be considered excellently employable in another and vice versa.

Universities UK (UUK) and the Confederation of British Industries (CBI) in 2009 defined employability as having:

> A set of attributes, skills and knowledge that all labour market participants should possess to ensure they have the capacity of being effective in the workplace—to benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy. (UUK and CBI, 2009, p. 12)

The CBI then goes on to identity eight skills that are often quoted by universities in the employability discourse. These skills are 'self-management; team-working; business and customer awareness; problem solving; communication and literacy skills; application of numeracy; application of information technology, and a positive attitude. Important as these skills are, the definition does not capture the full essence of employability. Also inadequate is the 2012 Global Employability Survey carried out by a Paris-based human resource consultancy, and a German research institute. It is misrepresented because its criterion for measurement is job employment upon graduation.

Yorke (2006, p. 6) in his analysis of the definitions provided by Peirce (2002) and by the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT), abstracted what he termed the three super-ordinate constructs of employability:

> employability as demonstrated by the graduate actually obtaining a job; employability as the student being developed by his or her experience of higher education (i.e. it is a curricular and perhaps extra-curricular process; employability in terms of the possession of relevant achievements (and implicitly potential).

These abstractions from Yorke are again skills based. It tells us that employability is not just the acquisition of a job, but the capability to function. In other words, employability is probabilistic. Also inferred from Yorke is that employability is co-curricular, that is, embedded and facilitated by the curriculum but dependent on the student's ability to derive from the provisions and experience of learning. Employability is also context-dependent, since a student who is employable must exhibit achievement appraised as relevant to a particular job. There are some social aspects of employability that are not captured in this definition. These aspects have been elucidated in a draft report of a comparative study on employability in England and South Africa (McGrath *et al.*, 2012). It revealed the dominant but limited understanding of employability as revealed by some of the students interviewed. They had an individualised notion that understood employability to mean possession of knowledge, skills and values that would enhance their opportunity to get employed. This understanding fails to recognise that importance of 'social capital networks' brokered by a staff and an institution and 'structural aspects of the economy such as availability of such jobs' which impact on employability. Although the study acknowledged that staff interviewed were aware of their role in modelling positive behavioural traits and facilitating relationships with future employers and the wider community, the study however identified certain considerations that merits attention when considering

employability. These considerations are adherence to the principles of inclusion and equity in facilitating social networks on behalf of the students.

3.12 QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PERMEATION OF REGIONAL BOUNDARIES

Described as 'travelling policy' (Lingard and Ozga, 2007), quality assurance has become universally known to permeate regional contexts that have varied political aspirations, historical contexts, educational capacities and priorities. The borrowing, influence and comparisons brought on by quality assurance are inescapable. Hence, when discussing quality assurance, there should be no suspicion that the particularities of any region are being over emphasized. What is evident is the utilisation of concepts obtained from a global experience, vast literature on quality assurance, and decades of different workshops and conferences organised by international and regional bodies.

With existing and emerging regional networks of quality assurance all over the world, efforts are being stepped up to improve the understanding of the mandate to quality assure. The World Bank, for instance, introduced a global initiative known as Global Initiative on Quality Assurance Capacity (GIQAC), aimed at supporting capacity building of quality assurance agencies in Asia/Pacific Region, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Arab Region. Two universities,

the New York City University and the University of Melbourne, started to offer a Post-Graduate Certificate in Quality Assurance in 2009 in a bid to educate quality assurance practitioners. This online programme developed in close collaboration with the International Quality Assurance Network for Higher Education (INQAAHE), is aimed at providing a well-informed perspective on the concept of quality, and frameworks used to define and measure quality through processes regarded as quality assurance. In South Africa for instance, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) recognizes that its practice must be guided by international debate on quality assurance in higher education and accordingly, it has a mutually benefitting relationship with Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) now replaced by Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA), the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in the UK, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) in India, the Namibian Qualifications Authority (NQA), and the Tertiary Education Council (TEC) in Botswana.

3.13 CRITIQUE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

Globally the validity of quality assurance has been challenged because we have a scenario where regulators favour regulation and institutions favour deregulation. There seems to be a never-ending conflict between scholars and the regulators. A report which has a scary caption "Engage with quality assurance or face state takeover, scholars told" (Attwood,

2009) succinctly captures this. It was a clarion call on academics to stop the government from eroding the autonomy of the universities. Then there is Greatrix's (2003) descriptions of quality assurance as 'fatal remedy' and 'dangerous medicine'. Peter Williams, a university don who later became the head of QAA after John Randall revealed in a lecture that when he assumed office, he had the vision of "a scholar-like approach to quality assurance and not one based on bureaucracies, committees and form-filling." It was rather contemptuous of the work of regulators, which reiterates the conflict between these two important stakeholders. Similar criticisms have been levied by Nigerian and South African academia. Adepoju and Akinola (2008) described the accreditation exercise as ritualistic and game playing. In South Africa,

Jonathan Jansen alongside Roger Southall, and Julian Cobbing, and Andre du Toit (Jansen, 2004; Du Toit, 2001; Southall and Cobbing, 2001) have criticized managerialism of the university system and how it undermines the collegiate atmosphere of the institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

Critically looking at how the evaluation process is done, why would peers trust their fellow peers whom they see as equals? How will the test of the skills and competencies of the students be done; with what benchmark? How objective is quality assurance? How measureable is it? Does it not have the risk of being left to subjective speculations? Is

quality really enforceable? Is it more legal than a development of the mores of a people? Can the passage of time make the intellectual community allies of quality assurance?

Quality can be assured only where compliance and constant improvement intersect, and are suited to the socio-economic milieu. A quality assurance method, which is evidenced on compliance and control, only leads to simplistic conclusions about successes and failures (Bradley, 2005). Quality assurance needs to be transformative. At the forefront of this transformative theory is Harvey, renowned in his exploratory discourse on the nature of quality, standards, and quality culture, and quality assurance. His argument is that transformative learning is not helped by what he describes as the positivistic pseudo-pragmatist attitude of quality assurance which remains at variance with the epistemological basis of modern learning theory: constructivism and transformative learning. Quality assurance, he holds, has failed to engage with learning because there is 'little evidence that quality assurance has improved learning,' and he attributes this to naivety regarding the epistemology of quality assurance, which results in no discernible quality culture in institutions. He describes quality culture as a lived experience and not a set of procedures, but observes that what obtains in institutions of higher learning is that:

> quality culture is the red herring, while quality assurance continues to ask the wrong questions .... On the other hand a lived quality culture can remain impervious to quality assurance processes while continuing to pay lip service to them (Harvey, 2009)

Harvey goes further to describe the two decades of quality assurance as decades of game-playing, a unilateral way of doing things that ironically is not fit for purpose, the game of quality culture and the ranking games. These games, he asserts, are conspiring to inhibit the examination of how students are learning.

Apart from Lee Harvey, there have been other strong views on how compliance-led quality assurance undermines improvement as it leads institutions towards 'ticking the boxes' (Stensaker *et al*., 2009) rather than demonstrating quality. It has been argued that focus on compliance rears 'beast-like' external quality assurance agents, requiring to be 'fed' through 'game-playing', by academics seeking to meet accountability requirements (Newton, 2000).

These problems point to the need of a model that is strategically aligned and efficiently implemented in such a way that it can generate greater value for students and the society as a whole. Such a model of quality assurance should be functional enough and flexible enough to accommodate those quality expectations, which are constantly

changing. Is it not about time we started to think of quality assurance as going beyond simplistic formulations such as compliance to a set of external procedures that have remained unchanged for many years.

Yet one overarching questions seems unanswered, that is, how quality assurance regulators in the two African countries under study benchmark themselves against these conceptualisations of quality assurance and what advantage has been derived from their use. Information about quality assurance provides little value to countries without interpretation. So what have the African quality assurance regulators been able to extract from the pool of discourses on quality assurance? Has there been an unswerving leadership buy in and adaptation into the potential quality assurance holds out for institutions? Given the irregularities and problems in Africa, can regulators get beyond the rhetoric and provide evidence of improvement brought about by quality assurance? Hopefully Chapter 5 would provide some of the answers to these questions.

CHAPTER FOUR
RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The interest in this research is partly because of the presupposition that quality assurance seems to be, first and foremost, compliance to external requirements that are stipulated in educational policies and enforced by quality assurance agents. Perhaps, preoccupied with operationalisation, without any regard to the epistemological nature of quality, quality assurance agents tend to disregard the transformative essence of quality. As a result, improvement becomes secondary to quality assurance rather than being its primary function. Compliance of any sort may never really lead to improvement, as it often tends to inhibit creativity, innovation, risk-taking and freedom to operate. Compliance also tends to accentuate ritualism and game playing in some institutions thereby resulting in a phenomenon known as consequentialism. Consequentialism is a philosophy that fails to provide guidance on what one ought to do; since the rightness and wrongness of an action is determined by the consequences it produces (Anscombe, 1958). Consequentialism becomes evident when academics use procedures primarily to satisfy external requirements and consequentialism is at variance with responsive quality assurance

because it could have serious knock-on effects on quality and the outcome of higher education.

Details of this plausible understanding and interpretation of quality assurance, and the problems associated with its practice, have already been given in previous chapters. The research design is one that enables a deeper understanding of how quality assurance regulators in Nigeria and South Africa have internalised and contextualised the concept, its purpose and outcome. Second, it provides some insight on the concept's various levels of intersection with reviewed literature and its practice in the United Kingdom, given the common colonial history of the three countries. Where relevant, inference was made from literatures that review the practice of quality assurance in the United States, as the intersection may have shaped and could shape quality assurance. The samples used for this qualitative inquiry have been taken essentially from the Nigerian and South African external quality assurance agencies, because they are two important African countries having a legacy of established quality assurance mechanism. Using the methods of in-depth interviews and study of relevant documents, I explored the extent to which these quality assurance, agents are fully engaged with the epistemological basis of quality assurance and alluded to deficiencies that offer compelling arguments for reforming the mechanism.

4.2 APPROACH TO DATA COLLECTION

Research methodology, it can be argued, is mixed in some way or another. Illustrations of mixed methodologies can be found in the writings of Creswell (1995) and Morse (1991) where a combination of two methods is done in the data collection stage, as opposed to a mixed model that combines two methods in practically all the phases of the research. I used multiple methods and methodologies that are somewhat overlapping, but also complementary. The aim is to attain a delicate balance of the benefits of each method, whilst allowing one to compensate for a possible deficit another may have.

I will start by introducing how I have used the emic and etic approach to serve the purposes of this research. Then I will show the key characteristics of my deployment of qualitative method and finally discuss other research methodologies that are situated within my qualitative research method.

4.3 THE 'EMIC' AND THE 'ETIC' APPROACH

The terms emic and etic are derived from the suffixes of phonemic and phonetic (Pike, 1954). Applying these terms to human behavior, Pike described the emic viewpoint as resulting from 'studying behavior as from within the system'. This is comparable to units of sounds in a particular language. In describing the etic perspective, Pike (1967, p.37) specified that the 'etic viewpoint studies behavior from outside a

particular system' and this is comparable to the way the phonetics of a language are the outsider's attempts to transcribe and compare sounds. Willis (2007), Merriam (2009) and Yin (2010) have described the emic as typically representative of meaning ascribed to a particular culture by members of that culture. The etic, in contrast, refers to an external view on that culture which could be pre-existing theories or perspectives (Lett, 1990; Willis, 2007). Although the emic and the etic perspectives are terms originally taken from the field of linguistics, their usage have since expanded and become adapted in anthropology (Harris, 1964). By 1970, their use became diffused in other fields of studies too (Headland, 1990). The etic perspective allows some comparisons to be made which enables the development of cross-cultural themes by the researcher (Morris et al, 1999). According to Anderson and Arsenault (2005, p. 125):

> First understand the phenomena through the participant's eyes, then place that understanding within your theoretical and conceptual framework of the phenomena and the participant's perspective with the goal of trying to define, unravel and explain their world.

McCutcheon (1999) puts this more succinctly by stating that if for instance one were interested in determining the history of a spoken language (emic), the identification of the family of which it is a member

and the comparisons made, that is, the etic perspective would be crucial. The example he cites is the language - Italian. If one is studying Italian then one needs to find out if Italian shares anything in common with other languages such as French and then how both languages are related to German, Latin, or Sanskrit

Using the emic (insider's perspective) as a researcher, I have tried to investigate into the meaning, purpose and understanding of quality assurance from the perspective of insiders, that is, the quality assurance regulators in Nigeria and South Africa. Using the etic perspective, I have taken into account documentations on quality assurance; UK and USA perspectives, where applicable; and my own experience as a board member of the International Quality Assurance Agencies for Higher Education (INQAAHE), as the basis for comparison and analysis.

My research, as mentioned earlier, is built on my 'etic' (outsider) status as a member and former director of INQAAHE which arguably is also an emic (insider) status as well. The observations and intuitive understandings I have about quality assurance in higher education are gleaned from being in the field. Rather than trying to eliminate biases and shortcomings, I identified them and monitored how they shape the interpretation of data. Also, as an elected board member of INQAAHE (2009-2011), I am in no way an independent observer. My interest in this research grew out of my own observations of the contradictions

existing between regulators that quality assure and institutions that are quality assured. Given the overall scheme of things, I attempted to understand the meaning that quality assurance holds for those who have a statutory responsibility for quality, and to clarify the theoretical notions of quality and quality assurance. Is quality assurance a regenerative or responsive mode with an improvement agenda for institutions and learning, or is it a reactive mode driven by compliance and accountability but bereft of trust and institutional autonomy. My membership with INQAAHE has been quite illuminating in that regard. INQAAHE offers its members a number of services that include access to extensive amount of information in quality assurance literature and analysis of reports on how institutions measure their performance against the Guidelines of Good Practice (GGP) developed by INQAAHE. The bi-annual workshops of INQAAHE are particularly helpful in understanding what really counts as the essential task of assuring quality in higher education. My membership to INQAAHE facilitated access to my interviewees in NUC and CHE in particular.

The 'Etic' (outsider's view) approach on the other hand, also refers to comparisons made with the UK and USA systems, where they are apply, as well as scholarly literature on quality and quality assurance within and outside the African region. As Lett (1999, p.130) contends, the Etic approaches are 'accounts, descriptions and analyses expressed

by the community of scientific observers'. Bringing in UK and USA perspectives enable comparison of the different nuances and meaning ascribed to the concept of quality assurance. These perspectives also provide a complete and more rounded picture of the concept.

Contrary to Pike (1967), who originated the use of those terms 'etic and emic' and authorises the use of emic at the expense of the etic, I do not wish to privilege one above the other. Admittedly, the problem with an imposed etic perspective implies overlooking context-specific aspects of quality assurance in Nigeria and South Africa. This amounts to what Pike considers to be privileging outsider's categories whilst ignoring a proper understanding of insider's perspectives. An emic bias, on the other hand, would undermine a proper analytic study and possible progress in quality assurance and quality assessment, which by its very nature is 'work in progress' (Purser, 2007. p.144).

As I put forward in Chapter 1, quality assurance practitioners are fully aware of the cross-cultural and 'colonising' influence of quality assurance and the increasing regional and international collaborations in quality assurance. Therefore, the aim of the research design is not to make a superiority claim, rather it is to provide reflections on the framework of quality assurance in Nigeria and South Africa which is expected to have the potential of challenging the deficiencies of quality assurance in these countries and hopefully bring about the full

communion with the depth and breadth of quality assurance for the advancement of knowledge.

4.4 THE QUALITATIVE NATURE OF THE RESEARCH

The emic and etic approach is one of the principle concepts guiding the research design but as mentioned earlier, the research is qualitative in nature. I opted for the qualitative method and the reason is because **q**ualitative method was developed in the social sciences to enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena. As such, it relies on 'meaning, concepts, contexts, descriptions and settings' (Primer, 2004). Qualitative method takes on an ideographic approach rather than a nomothetic one. It is conducted in a specific period and place, focusing on events, processes and behaviours in the immediate context. The qualitative researcher studies particular, yet holistic situations in order to obtain an interpretative and where it applies, an empathetic understanding. Qualitative data-gathering methods are often associated with the use of in-depth, open-ended interviews, direct observations and written documents (Patton 2002). Qualitative research method gives far more latitude to research subjects to share their own views. Some qualitative research methods are therefore characterized as inductive and exploratory.

In my literature review, I examined the epistemology of quality and quality assurance, as well as the relevant conceptual and definitional

issues. It is evident that quality assurance in both countries is a routine way to evaluate, assess and audit higher education provisions. Available evidence in the literature review is the indiscriminate borrowings of industrial models and the dissonance between the stated purpose of higher education and quality assurance practices. There is still a notable absence of active and responsive engagement with a quality culture. There is also the assumption that impact is made through compliance with processes of external quality arrangement. The drift therefore seems to be towards consequentialism without any meaningful ownership or control of the process. Using the qualitative method (interviews, examination of written documents), I collected first-hand data primarily from regulating agencies on their conceptualization of quality assurance and its implementation in order to explore the complex relationship between the concept and its practices.

I share a strong belief in the role that cultural, political and social contexts have to play in quality assurance, in both Nigeria and South Africa. The practices in both countries cannot be decontextualized from their culture and history. Some of these cultural and historical antecedents have already been discussed in Chapter 1 and 2. Another shortcoming, which I avoided, was to employ units of analysis without consideration to internal variations and local context.

Since this research raises questions about the impact of quality assurance, arguably, a predominantly positivist model would be inappropriate to explore the perception and impact of constructed meanings and dialectical analyses.

The qualitative method is more appropriate because even though it is a subjective, it is however characterized by a nominalist approach and a voluntaristic view of human nature. Qualitative method is ideographic with a tendency to specify and derive meaning from a contingent and subjective phenomenon. Qualitative method tends to be holistic, descriptive and naturalistic. (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992).

Rigour in the qualitative research derives from the interaction between the researcher and the participant(s) and the interpretation of perceptions. The issue of internal and external validity and reliability is not relevant in a qualitative design. The study is verified through the triangulation of data. Triangulation is discussed in more details in the other section of this research design.

There are a number of other methodologies that balance the emic and etic methodologies and are in conformity with my qualitative research method. These methodological approaches would be discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

4.4.1 INTERPRETIVIST APPROACH

According to Bascia et al (2008), methods of research oriented to the emic perspective tend to involve interpretative studies. I have also used the interpretivist approach, and the philosophy underpinning the interpretivist approach is hermeneutics. The interpretivist approach is often linked to a German Sociologist, Max Webber (1984-1920), although similar lines of thought exist in other fields such as Philosophy, Theology and Literal Studies. Max Weber and his contemporary Georg Simmel felt that polemics in matters of politics and other matters of ideological significance, required the social science procedures distinct to those found in the natural or physical sciences. Max Weber contends that human science should be concerned with 'verstehen' i.e. understanding (Kruger, 1987). The interpretivist approach focuses on understanding, as well as the processes by which meanings are created, negotiated, sustained and modified (Schwandt, 2003). It is an approach, which contends that knowledge of reality can be acquired through social constructions that can be found in language, shared meaning and documents, among others (Klein and Myers, 1999). In trying to understand a social phenomenon, the interpretivist paradigm does not assume a value-neutral stance (Orilikowski and Baroudi, 1991), but tries to understand the phenomena through accessing the meaning people assign to them - convinced that reality cannot be accessed without mediation of language and preconception (Orilikowski and Baroudi, 1991). Following an interpretivist approach,

the researcher's interpretation plays a fundamental role because 'subjectivity is brought to the fore and backed by quality arguments rather than statistical exactness' (Garcia and Quek, 1997). This approach was deployed in my thorough analysis of the language used by the quality assurance regulators in response to the research questions. It enabled me to provide deep insights into the meaning and perception of quality assurance, and to benchmark those insights, from responses received, against the portrait of quality assurance that has emerged from reviewed literature.

The interpretative approach differs from the positivist approach because the researcher is perceived differently in both. For the positivists, the researcher must be independent from what is being observed, and the study must be value-free and not guided by human interests or beliefs (Holden, 2004; Kura, 2012). Positivists also hold that explanations must demonstrate causality, and that research should proceed through a process of hypothesizing fundamental laws and deducing observations that will prove the truth and falsity of these laws (Straub et al, 2011). Concepts for the positivist are measured quantitatively, which is why they require a definition. Positivists also believe in making generalizations through statistical probabilities and random sampling. For positivists, hypothesis is meant to be tested in support of data. That approach generally assumes that reality is objectively given and can be described by measurable properties that

are independent of the researcher and his or her instrument. It is a natural science approach that generally attempts to test theory in an attempt to increase the predictive understanding of phenomenon (Harvey, 1994). The positivist researchers typically formulate propositions that portray the subject matter in terms of independent variables, dependent variables and the relationship between them. A positivist research requires formal evidence of formal propositions, quantifiable measures of variables, hypothesis testing and the drawing of inferences from the samples to a stated population (Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991).

Perhaps if the aim of this research was to develop propositions relating to effective quality assurance systems - and to demonstrate how regulating agencies can successfully adopt those, or if the aim was to test the causal relationship between a quality assurance system and an 'improved' institution, then a positivist approach would be my methodology. My aim, as stated earlier, is to provide a clearer understanding about the epistemology of quality assurance using Nigeria and South Africa as case studies and by implication, provide a basis for developing a more effective approach focused on improvement and responsive quality assurance. The latter being the case, a positivist methodology would be inflexible and artificial in determining the understanding of the epistemology of quality assurance, and its interpretation and translation by regulators.

Quality assurance is such a deep and complex phenomenon and this is what makes the positivist precision impossible and undesirable. Observations made about quality assurance by regulators vary because quality assurance is not a unitary process, but is one open to multiple interpretations. Meanings held about quality assurance are contestable facts. The spectrum of quality assurance in Africa from control to regulation is context-bound; therefore, the significance that history and context have on quality assurance cannot be determined without recourse to evaluation. A positivist approach would not capture the subtleties of meanings rendered by history, context and external quality assurance agents, in a research of this nature. This is why it would be problematic to address quality assurance appropriately if the epistemology is positivist, because one would fail to learn what is at the heart of the quality assurance in both countries. Quality assurance is a culture (Harvey and Green, 1993; Berings et al, 2010; Vlasceanu et al, 2004; EUA, 2006; Stensaker, 2005); a way of life, not just a set of procedures to be subjected to positivist empiricism. This research into the quality assurance in Nigerian and South African Higher Education does not predict or explain the distribution of some attributes in a search for abstract universals. Such are arrived at by statistical generalisations taken from a sample to a population, as a quantitative research method enables. Rather, it is a research interested in uncovering the meaning of quality assurance for quality stakeholders in

higher education. It is more concrete than abstract because it is a study, which resonates with stakeholders' experience of quality assurance in higher education in a vivid, sensory and contextual way; contextual in the sense that it is rooted in a context (the context being the two African countries whose practices of quality assurance in higher education are under inquiry), and the context is distinguishable from abstract formal knowledge derived from other research designs..

4.4.2 HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH

Hermeneutics is a philosophical tradition underpinning the interpretive approach (Walsham, 1995). Hermeneutics is the art of interpretation developed by Protestants in the 17th century, to be used as a means in interpreting the bible. It provides some insights into ways of interpreting textual materials comprising both written and spoken texts (Gadamer, 1998; Ricoeur, 1981). Gadamer believes that texts are culturally-bound and therefore context-depending, while Ricoeur points to the social, economic and political contexts that needs to be taken into account in an analysis. To get to know what meaning people ascribe to certain phenomena, the researcher focuses on different types of texts, orals and/or written (Cassell and Symon, 1994). The hermeneutics emphasizes on historicity and the significance of language as a vehicle for interpretive endeavours. Language and historicity are key dimensions for my qualitative inquiry. According to Gadamer (1996, p. 307), 'Part of real understanding is that we regain the

concepts of historical past in such a way that they also include our own comprehension of them'. Gadamer (1996, p. 388) also believes that understanding involves assimilating what is said in such a way that that 'it becomes one's own'. He writes:

> One intends to understand the text itself. But this means that the interpreter's own thoughts too have gone into re-awakening the texts' meaning. In this the interpreter's own horizon is decisive, yet not as a personal standpoint that he maintains or enforces but more as an opinion and a possibility that one brings into play and puts at risk. And that helps one truly to make one's own what the text says.

I concentrated on the historical evolution of quality assurance, its development and its cumulative impact on the present. My years of experience in quality assurance came to play in my interpretation because in a hermeneutical approach, the researcher engages in a process of self-reflection (Laverty, 2003). Hermeneutics is generally about seeking meaning, truth and consensus through interpretation modelled on conversation and dialogue. Through Hermeneutics, I arrived at an understanding of quality assurance, which was implicitly conveyed from the language used by the quality assurance regulators during their interviews.

Hermeneutics provides philosophical grounding for interpretivism. As a mode of analysis, it suggests a way of understanding textual data (Bleicher, 1980). Hermeneutics concerns itself with the meaning of a text or text-analogue (written or oral text). The basic question in hermeneutics is: what is the meaning of this text? (Radnitzky, 1970). Taylor (1976, p. 153) asserts that:

> Interpretation, in the sense relevant to hermeneutics, is an attempt to make clear, to make sense of an object of study. This object must, therefore, be a text, or a text-analogue, which in some way is confused, incomplete, cloudy, and seemingly contradictory - in one way or another, unclear. The interpretation aims to bring to light an underlying coherence or sense.

Hermeneutical analysis, as the object of the interpretive effort, is one of attempting to make sense of the organization. In an agency or institution, people (e.g. different stakeholders) can have 'confused, incomplete, cloudy and contradictory views on many issues' (Myers, 1994). Hermeneutical analysis aims to make sense of everything in a holistic way.

4.5 INTERVIEWS

As already mentioned, the aim of this research is to obtain evidence on how quality assurance agencies in Nigeria and South Africa formulate quality assurance, its purpose and outcome in higher education. This has been achieved through a series of semi-structured interviews, which gave regulating agencies the opportunity to supply information on a wide range of issues relating to conceptualisations, procedures, implementation activities and institutional performance. The questions are listed below:

1. Is Quality Assurance mandated by the government
2. What is the incentive for quality assurance
3. When did quality assurance start in South Africa/Nigeria and what are the perceived merits/demerits
4. What is the value of quality assurance
5. What are the main criticisms facing quality assurance in South Africa/Nigeria
6. Are there any quality improvements that quality assurance helped to initiate and sustain in tertiary education
7. What is assessed
8. What is the basic or foremost requirement by quality

assurance regulation bodies

9. Who benefits from Accreditation

10. What about the regulation of trans-national providers

11. What is the institutional response to accreditation

12. Do students input, employers have any part to play in accreditation

13. Who regulates the regulators

These questions designed for the interviews allowed the informants as much freedom as possible in their responses, as it is crucial for me to avoid any bias by not prejudging the evidence offered by them. The interviews questions were pre-formulated, but there was no strict adherence to them. New questions emerged during the conversations. 'Semi structured' takes the best of both approaches to interviewing (structured interview and unstructured interview) because it gives some structure, while allowing for some improvisation.

Interviews incorporate a process of the researcher's self-monitoring (disciplined subjectivity) that exposes the research activity to continued questioning and re-evaluation. Integrity in the research can be eroded when respondents lie, or misrepresent, or fail to disclose relevant data. (Burns, 1990, Morse & Richards, 2002). Independent corroboration from

multiple respondents will clearly improve the integrity of claims. Through the use of multiple sources to confirm findings that emerge, triangulation would be attained.

The interviews were not done in an attempt to build a consensus but rather, to provide a cross-reference that draws out the variances among quality assurance practices, as well as what they have in common. Underlining their practices is the meaning they have associated with quality assurance. Each interview lasted no more than one hour.

4.6 LIMITATION OF STUDY

a) Small sample size – Eighteen people were interviewed all together, comprising eleven quality assurance regulators in Nigeria and South Africa and seven others. This sample size is small but size is of less relevance in a qualitative research as there are no requirements to establish significant relations for generalizing or transferring results (Brutus et al, 2013). Besides there is the danger of saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1974) when further data becomes superfluous, as it adds nothing new to the discussion.

b) Exclusion of students and lecturers in the sampled population. Students and lecturers in institutions lie outside the scope of the research questions guiding this study, which focus on the

meaning, purpose and outcome of external quality assurance regulators as perceived by regulators themselves. Harvey (1999) proposed the need for a social science research that evaluates the evaluators in order to dialectically deconstruct the prevailing notion of quality assurance. Students or institutional survey would raise new questions on size, selection and appropriateness in context.

c) Access to more South African regulators in their existing multiple systems of regulation was limited. Time and money constraint by a researcher who is not resident in South Africa was inevitable.

4.7 TRIANGULATION

Triangulation is a term associated with navigation wherein two or more measurement points enable convergence on a site. Campbell and Fiske (1959) were the first to apply the navigational term triangulation to research. It is a technique, which involves cross verification from more than one source. It can be used in both qualitative and quantitative data but in qualitative inquiry, it serves as an alternative to reliability and validation of data, thus providing for trustworthiness of inquiry. Through triangulation, researchers can decrease the intrinsic weakness of bias, thereby counterbalancing the margin of error.

Denzin (1978) proposed four types of triangulation namely theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches, data sources, investigators and data method analysis. This research meets the criteria of triangulation defined by Denzin above, to some extent. Firstly with regards to the use of multiple methods, namely interviews and consultation of appropriate documents, whatever was disclosed by one participant was crosschecked against statements made by other participants within the same organization, as well as checked against what I read up in documents relevant to the phenomenon being observed. The goal of triangulation is not to arrive at a consistency across data sources or methodological approaches (Patton, 2002) because inconsistencies are advantageous in the sense that they enable a researcher to uncover deeper meaning in the data. By triangulating I was able to determine areas of agreement and areas of divergence on perspectives given on the research questions. The findings from these data sources were further compared with sources in the UK and USA given the historical influences and diffusion of knowledge of quality assurance overtime. This manner of comparison serves to develop a broader and deeper understanding of how different quality assurance practitioners view quality assurance and indeed provides a more comprehensive view of the phenomenon. It can be argued that if the different quality assurance practitioners interpret quality assurance the same way then validity or in this case commonality is established. The

goal in this research is not to establish commonality but rather triangulation is used to provide as much in-depth knowledge as possible on the phenomenon of quality assurance in a manner that show up similar or divergent patterns in ways of thinking about quality assurance. Triangulation is a means of achieving validity in a qualitative research (Mathison, 1988). Validity in qualitative research in general, 'refers to whether the findings of a study are true and certain – true in the sense that research findings accurately reflect the situation and certain in the sense that research findings are supported by the evidence' (Guion, Deihl and Mcdonald, 2013).

The term triangulation has being considered as 'a fixed point or object that can be triangulated' (Richardson and St Pierre, 2005). Both authors asserted that what we see depends on our angle of response and this does not depend on triangulation but rather, on crystallization. Crystallization-like crystals exhibits infinite varieties of shapes, substances, transmutations, multi-dimensions, and angles of approach. Since this research employs the interpretative approach, triangulation was demonstrated through multiplicity in data sources and methods.

4.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is an expressed need to support the integrity of any claims made. This is because qualitative research has been criticized as small, biased and anecdotal (Anderson, 2010;

Koch and Harrington, 1998). The trustworthiness of research results is therefore the thrust of any research. In the case of quantitative research, such standards are demonstrated through the criteria known as validity and reliability (Koch and Harrington, 1998). Qualitative research on the other hand precludes a priori control and it is highly contextual, multifaceted and flux. Qualitative research proves its trustworthiness through alternative paradigms, and credibility is one of such (Guba and Lincoln, 1985; Koch and Harrington, 1998; Koch, 2006). Koch and Harrington described credibility to be the consistency between a researcher's experience and how that experience coincides with the experience of the participants. My concerns in this research have been about my presuppositions about quality assurance regulators' understanding of quality assurance - and from their responses, the coincidences are all too evident.

The audit trail as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is another way that a researcher can authenticate his findings. This is done through the explanation on how a researcher arrived at his/her findings. Thus this chapter on research design, which explains how the data is collected and analysed, fulfills the demands of an audit trail..

Cronbach (1975, p.125) recommends that rather than generalisations, which are criteria proper to quantitative research, qualitative researchers, should be thinking in terms of hypotheses that reflect

specific conditions in a particular context. This has to do with hypotheses that take proper cognizance of local situations. The research outcomes could be monitored and evaluated, so that future choices or decisions are better informed. Cronbach opined that 'when we give proper weight to local conditions, any generalization is a working hypothesis not a conclusion'.

4.9 ETHICS AND ANONYMITY

Two important ethical principles adhered to in this research are consent and confidentiality. According to Faden and Beauchamp (1986) and Patton (2002), informed consent is a major principle that underlies how to treat research subjects who are free to decide whether or not to participate after being fully informed about the research endeavour. With regards to confidentiality, Patton (2002, p.6) posits that 'it is not always easy or even possible to measure the dangers of a certain context to a given population, let alone individuals. It is therefore essential to protect the identity of the person from whom you gather information'. Patton also states the importance of obtaining a formal ethical review before the data collection phase is initiated. Kadushin (2005) explains that anonymity and confidentiality are routinely granted to research respondents. Having obtained approval of the Ethics committee of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, I observed the ethical procedures by informing participants in writing about the purposes of the interviews, and how the information they

will give would be used (Appendix 2). They were informed that they were free to discontinue with the interview at any point in time. Every interview that I carried out was on appointment basis. Before proceeding with the interviews, a letter requesting a written consent was presented to the interviewees and acknowledged by them. I granted anonymity to the respondents by ascribing numerical labels to them during my analyses.

Access to my research subjects was easy because these participants voluntarily participated in the research. I knew majority of them by virtue of our common membership in INQAAHE. My Research supervisor recommended some South African participants to me. They freely allowed the interviews to be audio taped. In using this data entry mode requiring transcription, I have ensured that the identity of respondents and raw data are safeguarded.

4.10 SAMPLE SELECTION

There are two main types of sampling methods, and these are the probability and the non-probability sampling. Probability sampling is a method suited to quantitative research design. It enables generalization because of the large population size involved. Since the aim of this research is not to establish frequencies nor generalize meanings, the non-probability sampling is my natural choice.

My sample therefore is small, non-random and purposeful. Patton (2002), Fossey el al (2002) and Marshall (1996) recommend a minimum sample size, and acknowledge that sampling for a qualitative research, tends to be small because a large sample becomes not only time consuming, but impractical. A minimum sample size enables an expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon.

Yin (2005) calls the non-random sampling an information-oriented sampling. The contrary, which is the random sampling, would not produce the kind of insight required in this qualitative enquiry. Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003) speak of a 'diminishing return' when the sample in a qualitative research is too large. This they explained to be the point when data does not lead to any more information, and becomes repetitive. Glaser and Strauss (1967) described this phenomenon as the point of saturation, when the collection of new data fails to shed further light on the problem or inquiry. According to Mason (2010), the guiding principle for sample size is the concept of saturation. Crouch and Mckenzie (2006), and Parahoo (2006), point to how superfluous too large a sample in a qualitative interview can be. The ultimate drivers of the research design and the sample size are the aims of this research (Charmaz, 2006; Fossey et al, 2002)

Marshall (1996) contends that population should be known in a true qualitative sampling, and he asserted that likened choosing a

population at random for a qualitative research would be tantamount to *'asking a passer-by to repair a broken down vehicle'*. It would be more productive, he contends, to approach a garage mechanic known to have some expertise.

The sampling method I employed can best be described as the criterion-based selection, a term used by LeCompte and Preissle (1993) in preference to the purposive or purposeful sample. In the criterion-based selection, a list of attributes essential to one's study is created to reflect the purpose of study and provide guidance in identifying rich information. In studying quality assurance of Nigeria and South Africa, the criteria I have used for selecting my sample are firstly top-level executives responsible for quality assurance in higher institutions in both countries. Secondly, these top-level executives would have responsibility for quality assurance supervision, policy development and organizational strategy responsibility. They would have to have worked with the quality assurance-regulating agency for at least 5 years, as insurance that they understand its culture.

4.11 THE INTERVIEWEES AND THEIR AFFILIATION

Majority of those interviewed in Nigeria are from the National Universities Commission (NUC). NUC is the only regulatory agency for quality assurance of universities in the country. It metamorphosed from a mere advisory body in the cabinet office in 1962, to a full-fledged

regulatory body in 1974. I interviewed the directors and senior ranking officials who have a responsibility for quality assurance in higher education in NUC, Nigeria. Just like in South Africans, all interviewees selected for the purposes of this research are all key players in the quality assurance processes of their respective countries and/or are responsible for checking the conformity to criteria as guaranteed by the law.

It is obligatory for the NUC to control the university system. There is an underlying conflict between the statutory duty to quality assure, and the need to critically suggest ways that the quality of the universities can be enhanced. The NUC has been alleged to interfere in the internal affairs and running of some universities, leading to a severe conflict between them (Ajayi and Awe, 2007). It has also been alleged to overstep its bounds by determining laws, instead of merely suggesting recommendations in its dealings with the private universities (Fatunde, 2008). They have been accused of going as far as usurping the powers of the university senates in some schools by overriding their decisions (Haastrup and Adedokun, 2009). The erstwhile boss of the NUC: Prof. Peter Okebukola made a damning observation that improvement in the quality of graduates was found to mismatch the quality assurance efforts. For the way forward, he suggested that the quality assurance activities at both the federal and state levels should be re-doubled (Okebukola, 2010).

In South Africa, there are three agencies active in quality assurance duties: Council on Higher Education (CHE), South Africa Quality Assurance (SAQA) and the Department on Higher Education and Training (DHET). Mandatory quality assurance by these agencies was given prominence in the post-apartheid era. They canvassed sturdily that all programmes be properly accredited, otherwise they will not be entitled to government grants. After the fall of the apartheid regime in 1994, the efforts of the quality assurance regulators were geared towards redressing the stark inequalities in the educational system. A criticism was that the educational system was plagued by 'managerialism', which threatened to undermine institutional autonomy and academic freedom (Adams, 2006 Strydom and Fongwa, 2012). Jansen (2009), Mokgalang (2009) and Botman (2009) have all experienced some deficiencies in the quality assurance system of South Africa.

The following table contains a summary of my non-random interviewees

Table 4. 1: Summary of non-random interviewees

Serial No	Organisation	Position	Gender
1	National Universities Commission	Executive	Male
2	National Universities Commission	Executive	Male
3	National Universities	Executive	Male

	Commission		
4	National Universities Commission	Executive	Female
5	National Universities Commission	Executive	Female
6	National Universities Commission	Former Executive	Male
7	Council on Higher Education	Executive	Female
8	Council on Higher Education	Executive	Female
9	Council on Higher Education	Executive	Female
10	South African Qualification Authority	Executive	Male
11	Department of Higher Education and Training	Director	Male
12	Higher Education Quality Committee	Executive	Male
13	Council for Higher Education Accreditation	Executive	Female
14	The Centre for Quality Assurance in International Education	Director	Female
15-	Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology	Director	Male
16	Quality Assurance Agency	Director	Female
17	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education.	Director	Male
18	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education.	Board member	Male

a) Five people interviewed were from NUC, Nigeria. NUC is the only agency charged with the regulation of university education in Nigeria.

b) Three people were interviewed from CHE and CHE is the agency assigned with the responsibility of higher education quality assurance in South Africa.

c) One person was interviewed from SAQA, which has the overall responsibility of overseeing standard setting and quality assurance in South Africa, with particular reference to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

d) One person from the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), because higher educational institutions in South Africa must satisfy the registration requirements of DHET.

e) One former professor and director of quality assurance who retired from the NUC in 2009.

f) A former executive of the Council for Higher Education (CHE), and also a former executive of the International Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (INQAAHE)

4.12 MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

In addition, I have also reflected the views of other quality assurance practitioners with whom I have had conversations with in Nigeria, South Africa, the UK and USA. These include:

a) A Director of HEQC, a permanent sub-committee of CHE whose mandate includes quality promotion, institutional audit and programme accreditation.

b) A Director of CHEA charged with national coordination of institutional and programmatic accreditation in the USA.

c) A Director of Centre for Quality Assurance in International Education USA

d) A Director of ABET USA an accreditor of postsecondary degree granting programmes in engineering

e) A Director of QAA, UK - an agency that promotes public confidence in the \provisions and standards of awards in the UK

f) A Director of INQAAHE, a network of quality assurance agencies.

g) A writer and former director of research on quality, and a visiting professor at the Copenhagen business school.

These 'outsiders' are in keeping with the 'Etic' approach tradition explained earlier. In the same vein, I have found it important to draw on our UK and USA counterparts, where applicable. In the United Kingdom, quality assurance is done by the Quality Assurance Agency that was established in 1997. It is an independent body and one-third of its funding comes from annual subscription from universities and colleges, while the remaining two-thirds come from the public sector. In the United States, the quality assurance process is also independent of government. These two systems, non- governmental in nature, contrasts with those of Nigeria and South Africa where quality assurance is done solely through the government The USA and UK systems, for instance, do not have a Federal Ministry of Education - which means that their academics are insulated from any form of government control. Peers and not the government, which has a better tendency of being more respected, voluntarily do their accreditation processes. The Higher Education Institutions have the responsibility for academic quality. USA practitioners provide an interesting perspective because of their unique system, which was once acclaimed by *The Economist* magazine (September 10, 2005) as the best in the World. The Inside Accreditation (Volume 1 Number 3, October 19, 2005) alleged that the reason given for this acclamation is the USA's longstanding commitment to self-regulation, through accreditation.

When compared to the UK and the USA, quality assurance in Africa is still at its nascent stage. But even globally, the whole concept of quality assurance is still relatively new - and one could say experimental. In the UK for instance, universities like Oxford and Cambridge have been in existence since the 9th and 11th century and in the USA. Ivy League Institutions such as Harvard and Yale have existed since the 17th and early part of the 18th century. But it was not until the 20th century that QAA and CHEA were established in the UK and USA, for quality assurance and accreditation purposes. In an era of globalization and cross border education, it is important that regulatory agents really have what it takes to grapple with the challenges and benefits of quality assurance.

The main documentary sources reviewed are the South African Higher Education Act (SAQA Act No 58 of 1995), Section 5 (1)(a)(ii); Higher Education Act, No 101 of 1997 and Higher Education Amendment Bill of 2001. The documentary sources for Nigeria are the Decrees of the Federal Republic of Nigeria: Decree No 16 of 1985 as incorporated in the NUC amended Decree No 49 of 1988. Essentially, these documentary sources, by means of triangulation, provide comparative interpretation on the meanings emerging from the interviews. There are quotations from literature reviewed in substantive areas in a manner that provides insight into problems that can be delineated from the responses of research participants. In almost all the responses, the

hermeneutic key about the approach taken by quality assurance becomes discernible, as it reinforces and underscores the basis of practices in both Nigeria and South Africa. Others documents consulted include:

- Council on Higher Education (2010) Access and throughout in South African higher education: three case studies. Higher Education Monitor 9. Pretoria: CHE.

- Council on Higher Education (1996) Framework for transformation. Pretoria: CHE.

- South African Qualifications Authority (2009) NQF and its worlds. Pretoria: SAQA.

- Her Majesty's Stationary Office (1945) Cmd. 6647 Report of Commission on Higher Education in the Colonies. June 1945.

- Her Majesty's Stationery Office (1945) Cmdr. 6655 Report of the Commission on Higher Education in West Africa. June 1945.

- Federal Republic of Nigeria (1991) Report of the Commission on the Review of Higher Education in Nigeria Main (Report Longe) Lagos Federal Government Printer.

- Department of Education (1997) White paper 3. A programme for the transformation of higher education. Pretoria: DOE

- Federal Republic of Nigeria (1977) National Policy on Education Federal Ministry of Information Print Division.

- Council on Higher Education (2011) Framework for the Second Cycle of Quality Assurance 2012-2017. Consultation Document. February 2011. Pretoria: CHE

- Council o Higher Education (2009) Higher Education Monitor 8. The state of higher education report. Pretoria: CHE

- Council on Higher Education (2004) Higher Education Monitor 2: The state of the provision of MBA in South Africa. Pretoria: CHE

- Department of Education (1997) Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education. July 1997.

- Department of Education (1997) Higher Education Act 101 of 1997. January 1997.

Newspapers formed an important documentary evidence in this research because they provide first–hand testimony on an event as it occurs. They also provide additional content to issues on quality assurance, which may not be published elsewhere. Websites of the regulatory agencies in Nigeria and South Africa were also looked at and the website of CHE provided an invaluable source of information in particular. All the documents provided by CHE were posted on their website for easy access. That in itself indicates that the information given to institutions in South Africa on quality assurance are well documented by CHE.

4.13 MY POSITIONALITY AND THE OVERARCHING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research is carried out from the standpoint of my initial hunches as a former board member of the International Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (INQAAHE). Mindful of the contextual and definitional issues surrounding quality assurance, I explored, using the

emic and etic approach, the meaning that quality assurance holds out for its regulators in the specified regions, and its purpose. Also I have examined how that meaning of quality assurance affects its practice and what the outcomes have been. Using the interpretative methodology, I was able to expound and provide deep insights into quality assurance. The interpretivist methodology focuses on understanding (Schwandt, 2003). As an approach, which contends that reality is assessed through the medium of language (Klein and Myers, 1999), I have focused on the language used by regulators in their responses, to benchmark the meaning and perspectives of quality assurance. This approach is also in consonance with hermeneutics, which concerns itself with the meaning of a text or a text analogue (Radnitzky, 1970; Taylor, 1976).

The choice of qualitative research is congruent with the purpose of the research, and provides the basis and context for interpreting findings. The sample is small because of the detailing and intensity required from the opinion of quality assurance regulators in particular. The theoretical framework is inductive. Rigour and triangulation were employed to demonstrate the credibility of the research. The research by its nature is not obtrusive, because a prior relationship exists with quality assurance practitioners. However, ethical procedures were followed in obtaining approval for the research questions and in obtaining informed consent of participants.

So here are the three big research questions:

- What is the meaning and purpose of quality assurance?
- How does an understanding of its meaning influence the practice of quality assurance?
- What are the improvements/outcomes which quality assurance has helped to initiate?

These questions summarise the meaning, purpose, process and results derived from the practices of external quality assurance regulators, through the lens of the external regulators themselves. The interview questions focus on questions such as the mandate to quality assure; the incentive of quality assurance; the value, history and criticisms of quality assurance; what is accessed, and the outcomes of quality assurance, which serve to generate the data needed to understand the three overarching questions on meaning, process and outcome.

Given my own positionality, I have ensured that my data was drawn from multiple perspectives and multiple data sources. So my analysis involved constant comparison, explanation building, further literature review where needed, discussion of issues arising from the analysis of responses and theory building, which ultimately result in the formulation of a conceptual framework of quality assurance.

CHAPTER FIVE
DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

So far in Chapters 1 to 3, we have seen the problems issuing from what is perceived to be a misalignment between compliance check and improvement in quality assurance. We have also seen how some South Africans institutions find it hard to synthesize the multiple quality assurance agencies and managerialism of quality assurance. We have seen some of the concerns facing quality assurance in Nigeria. We have seen how colonialism, quality assurance networking and literature have led to a condition of hybridity in quality assurance. Also quite instructive is that since quality assurance commenced in Nigeria and South Africa, there have hardly been any literatures that show quality assurance practitioners stepping away from their authoritative claim to engage in reflection about their own practice and meaning of quality assurance. Could the lack of own awareness and reflectivity be the roadblocks facing effective quality assurance practice? We can argue that aside from reflections on meaning, another major setback for quality education occurs when the process that is meant to safeguard quality becomes a matter of quantifiable results and statistics, with compliance taking precedence over improvement.

This research attempts to answer the following questions:

- What is the meaning and purpose of quality assurance?
- How does an understanding of its meaning influence the way it is carried out in Nigeria and South Africa?
- What is the outcome of quality assurance: is this outcome desirable or deficit?

These questions and the responses obtained from the data collection could open up the space for greater reflections about quality assurance. In addition, the quality assurance framework in the next chapter, which does not claim to provide all the answers, gives several ideas that quality assurance practitioners and institutions could consider if they wish to promote innovative approaches to effective quality assurance.

With quality assurance marked by dissatisfaction and a dearth of perspectives on the meaning that guides the conduct of external quality assurance agents, the presupposition is that whatever is done by these agents, takes for granted, a deep, prevailing sense of what they understand quality assurance to mean. The essential task of these research interviews focuses on drawing out that meaning, purpose and to determine by constant comparison, if the understanding of quality assurance is in clear contrast with the views held about quality assurance in substantive literature and by other quality assurance practitioners or if it conforms to those views. It is hoped that through

the following analysis, the vision of what quality assurance can, and ought to, can be discerned.

5.2 THE MEANING OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

5.2.1 QUALITY ASSURANCE AS A MANDATE.

Quality assurance is a regulatory mandate and the idea of a mandate and how it is conceived and exercised is central to getting at the meaning of quality assurance. A mandate in common parlance usually carries the meaning of having the responsibility and authority to act in a certain area.

South African and Nigerian respondents answer to the question about the mandate of quality assurance, suggests that a divergence exists in the way the concept is understood and practiced in these national settings. A tension between the responsibility to control, as a way to fulfil this mandate, and the quality enhancement of institutions, is discernible. For some quality assurance agents in both countries, the justification for quality assurance is simply the existence of a government legislation that charges them with that responsibility.

The dictionary meaning of the word mandate represents an official requirement that must be complied with. It denotes a compulsory command to perform a specific action. Given this definition, mandate could be perceived as somewhat negative because it connotes

compulsion and compulsion of any form may be considered to be opposed to freedom. In law, people who act under compulsion, operate in a situation where they cannot act freely. Ferraiolo (2004) asserted that acting under compulsion entails the absence of free agency and moral responsibility. In education, involuntariness runs counter to arguments of academic autonomy and freedom.

However, if one considers that obligatory necessity is also a form of compulsion, then one recognizes that a mandate is not necessarily restrictive. Obligatory necessity is a form of compulsion, in the same way that human necessities like eating and sleeping are forms of compulsion wherein blames cannot be cast about freewill, because they are conditional on being alive and active. Thus, if the show of concern by a mother as to whether her child has eaten or had enough sleep or medication for instance, is never seen as a manifestation of witchcraft then the corrective activities of a legitimate (and hopefully genuine) quality assurance regulator should in like manner not be seen as a sheer manifestation of witch-hunting. So whether an agent is acting out of necessity or compulsion, the element of choice and volition may enter and regulate all his or her actions. The action in this context is quality assurance; that is, quality assurance as the amalgamation of internal and external processes in a given system, geared towards achieving a sustainable, fitting, observable, measurable and verifiable desired state.

The eleven interview responses obtained from the NUC (Nigeria), CHE, SAQA and DHET (South Africa), set out the statutorily responsibility of both NUC Nigeria and CHE South Africa, for quality assurance. CHE fulfils this responsibility for the promotion and assurance of quality in higher education, by contracting HEQC. The decrees and acts identified by respondents namely the Nigerian '*Decree of 1974*', and '*Decree No 16 of 1985 amended in 1988',* and the South African '*Higher Education Acts of 1997,'* are supposed to signal respective government endorsements of quality assurance by these agents.

NIGERIA

A respondent from Nigeria (NUC) asserts authoritatively:

> Yes; opposed to what happens in those regions (referring to the UK and USA), that of Nigeria is indeed mandatory in the sense that the Act of establishing the Commission makes it compulsory for these universities to undergo such activities that are established by the Commission.

Another respondent from the same organisation corroborates this respondent by stating that:

> University quality assurance is mandated by government through an act. Well initially it was a decree in 1974, later it

> got modified in 1985… the charge to quality assure the university was given to the National Universities Commission, and the commission is supposed to set minimum academic standards, as well as accredit all programmes that are run in Nigeria universities.

These responses explicitly affirm that a legitimate power has been vested on the NUC to carry out quality assurance activities, and that universities are obligated to comply. Another respondent from Nigeria (NUC) re-echoes NUC's legitimacy by claiming that the right to quality assurance is restricted to the regulators.

> Quality assurance in Nigeria is an exclusive preserve; a matter of quality in education is an exclusive preserve to federal government, and federal government therefore makes law as to what institution will conduct quality assurance on its behalf.

Examining closely the double use of the phrase 'exclusive preserve' in this response already gives a sense about how this authority is conceived. The phrase suggests that quality assurance agents may have become too dominant in their prerogatives, and have assumed some kind of exclusivity. Worthy of note is that at this point, in response to the mandate to quality assure, a role to quality assure has been not been ascribed to institutions. It is presumably conceived as a

one-sided affair, an existing mandate and institutions obligated to comply.

Could this perhaps be what has given rise to some kind of 'game-playing' by institutions, or the bitterness and isolation experienced by certain institutions? Could an emphasis placed on authority rather than on partnership carry the risk of being perceived as being patronising, dictatorial or inspectorial?

On the other hand, it could be that even the Federal Government finds itself under a form of compulsion to assure quality in academic institutions and that the assigned quality assurance regulators are in turn under compulsion to do their job effectively for the good of the institutions in question. Given this scenario, I am forced to ask: at what point should academic institutions begin to complain about quality assurance when, in the first place, they are expected to quality assure by virtue of their very existence and, in the final analysis, the activities of the eternal quality assurance regulators are out of concern, structured to ensure that they indeed quality assure?

A partnership between external quality assurance regulators and institutions may be deemed important but could it be that authority has the corrective ability needed to ensure quality in academic institutions? It may be argued that authority has the tendency to grow into a tyrant action inferred with the influence of power: 'all power

tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely'. If that becomes the case, and the affected institution is not smart enough to take necessary action against the tyrant authority, is it therefore not right to finally conclude that indeed, institutions as such cannot be trusted to act wisely on their own without authority as such?

In conclusion, emphasis placed on partnership rather than authority may be seen as emphasis placed on leisure rather than work between the institution and the regulators. The end of such a relationship is glaringly evident. It ends up being condescending or confrontational and signified by game playing.

With this notion of mandate, it is not surprising that the decree authorising NUC however, has been the subject of many crises between NUC and universities because academics have felt that their role was being undermined, and they were made to feel like employees of NUC. Gray Longe, the then Secretary to the Federal Government of Nigeria, in 1990 was commissioned to carry out a review of Higher Education in Nigeria. This commission known as the Longe Commission (1990–1991) alleged that NUC encroached and threatened the internal functions of universities. The resentment perpetrated is captured in this excerpt from the Commission's report:

> The Universities have also complained about the prescription of the curricula, rationalization of University

> courses and staff, and the issuance of pre-emptory directives to the Universities. The way in which NUC exercised its powers of coordination for a balanced development of the University system has appeared to the Universities as interference and more often than not, a hindrance to the effective functioning of the institutions (Longe Report, 1991, p.3)

The tensions and feelings of subordination of the 90's continued 10 years on in Nigeria. For instance, when lecturers faced a dismissal threat from the government during a period of academic strikes in 2001, NUC intervened by issuing circulars to universities, threatening to sack lecturers who failed to return to work after an ultimatum was given (Obasi, 2002).

In 2006, Ebenezer Babatope a politician in an article refers to the controlling stance of NUC and advocated the need for NUC to work in concert with universities (Guardian, 2006, p. 15)

> I am deeply in sympathy with the Universities in Nigeria today, as regards the outside controls they are subjected to. The Universities take directives from the Federal/State Ministries of Education, and from the NUC. Besides these, visitation can be ordered at any time by the Federal or State governments controlling the Universities

> respectively. While I admit that universities cannot be an island to themselves, we must be careful not to turn the outside agencies into the inquisitions whereby universities are constantly harassed and diverted from being real centres of academic excellence. The NUC is no doubt a necessary organization; the laws governing the council must be reviewed to make it work in harmony, in concern and in partnership with universities. Though the conditions are better now than in the past, we can still reasonably say that our universities are not totally free to pursue their set goals.

In an article of the University World News (2008), Tunde Fatunde reporting on the confrontation between NUC and private universities, quoted the Secretary General of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria as saying:

> It is very regrettable that the NUC has over the years, arrogated powers that do not belong to it. Where the laws empower it to make recommendations, it makes determinations and moves to execute its determination…. Does the enabling power of NUC empower it to override the decision of the senate to offer academic degrees to students of affiliate colleges?

In 2009, there were heated arguments between the Lagos State University (LASU) and the NUC, which developed into litigation. The disputes were over the decision by the NUC to revoke the license of certain external campuses and courses offered by LASU. The Vice-Chancellor of LASU was reported in the Daily Sun Newspaper (2009) to have stated that 'we at LASU do not accept a master-servant relationship…. We believe in responses and mutual respect'.

The 1974 decree or its application that has often been the source of dispute and this has still not changed although more recently, it is noticeable that there seems to be a diminishing aggression towards NUC unlike in the past when NUC was faced with a deluge of protests from the Academic Staff Unions of Universities in Nigeria.

NUC has the legitimate authority to expect that programmes offered in universities are quality assured and ultimately, this expectation can only be in the interest of universities themselves. The expectation as we can observe, has often given rise to tension and negativity from certain institutions. Could it be because of the meaning ascribed to the mandate to quality assure? Is this 1974 decree or its application in need of a reform?

The decree, assumed by a respondent to have bestowed an 'exclusive preserve' on NUC, dates back to the military era—an era renowned for the arrogation of power, and for undermining the authority of

higher education. Find below, this Decree No. 1 of 1974 as well as the subsequent amendments, which itemize the functions of NUC:

a) To advise the Head of the Federal Military Government, through the Commissioner, on the creation of new universities and other degree granting institutions in Nigeria;

b) To prepare, after consultation with all the State Governments, the universities, the National Manpower Board and such other bodies as it considers appropriate, periodic master plans for the balanced and coordinated development of universities in Nigeria and such plans shall include:-

(i) The general programmes to be pursued by the universities in order to ensure that they are fully adequate to national needs and objectives,

(ii) Recommendations for the establishment and location of new universities as and when considered necessary, and

(iii) Recommendations for the establishment of new faculties of post-graduate institutions in existing universities, or the approval or disapproval of proposals to establish such faculties or institutions.

In these opening paragraphs of the decree, it is evident that NUC's role is advisory. NUC's initial role was to act as a mediator between the Nigerian government and universities that were being created following independence in 1960. The aim of the government at that time was to centralize the management policy of universities. The plan for a balanced and coordinated development of universities was supposed to be carried out in consultation with relevant stakeholders, as outlined by the document.

In Section 4 (c-g) of the document, the ascribed role of NUC was outlined: it was to oversee the procurement and allocation of funds to the universities, to review the terms and conditions of university personnel, and to ensure that the university programmes corresponded to national needs and objectives.

> c) to make such other investigations relating to higher education that the Commission may consider necessary in the national interest;
>
> d) to make such other recommendations to the Federal Military Government and State Governments or to the universities relating to higher education as the Commission may consider to be in the national interest;

e) to inquire into and advise the Federal Military Government on the financial needs, both recurrent and capital, of university education in Nigeria and, in particular, to investigate and study the financial needs of university research, and to ensure that adequate provision is made for this in the universities;

f) to receive block grants from the Federal Military Government, and allocate them to universities in accordance with such formula as may have been laid down by the Federal Executive Council;

g) to take into account, in advising the Federal Military Government on university finances, such grants as may be made to the universities by State Governments and by persons and institutions in and outside Nigeria;

This section of the decree favoured working in concert with national interest, just as in the first part of the decree where it stated that NUC was to ensure that the programme pursued by the universities are 'fully adequate to National needs and objectives'. Up to this point, no mention has been made about how this valid national interest was to be balanced by universities' pursuance of their own goals and objectives; neither has there been any mention of students' needs or involvement. This raises concerns about the issues of institutional autonomy. Could

the insistence on 'national needs and objectives' give the impression of a prescription that hinders the implementation of global standards or the institutional capacity to innovate, especially given the challenges brought on by globalization, transnational education, graduate mobility, mutual recognition and the need to increase and diversify the range of students' learning outcome?

The decree in a later paragraph stipulates NUC's duty to set minimum academic standards.

> m) to lay down minimum academic standards for all universities in the Federation and to accredit their degrees and other academic awards after obtaining prior approval therefrom through the Minister from the President, provided that the accreditation of degrees and other academic awards shall be in accordance with such guidelines as may be laid down and approved by the Commission from time to time.

The minimum standards mentioned are desirable but remains at best, a very basic requirement. What becomes of universities who have surpassed the minimum? Or would it be right to assume that quality assurance after about thirty years of enforcing a minimum standards document is still at its 'foundational and baseline setting phrase where QA policies are being shaped?' (Singh and Lange, 2007, p. vii). How is

the enhancement component of quality assurance provided as a basis for review and audit? Enhancement is what makes the quality assurance discourse qualitative and analytical, but it is noticeable that enhancement does not form the basis for review and audit as much as accountability does in this decree. As Amaral and Maassen observed, there is a 'shift towards accountability when the will of the government predominates' (Amaral and Maassen, 2007, PAGE?).

Professor Placid Njoku, a former director of NUC, summarized the role of NUC as follows:

> NUC at inception was essentially advisory to Government on the financial needs of the Universities, and to ensure a balanced and coordinated development of University education in Nigeria. These functions were later expanded from 1974, when NUC became a statutory body. Such responsibilities as the collation, analyses and storage of data from Universities for advising government on planning and establishing new public universities, establishing new faculties or post-graduate schools in existing Universities, preparing periodic master plan for the balanced development of the Universities, establishment of academic standards and the enforcement of such standards, advising on the establishment of private

> universities and the setting up of visitation panels to Universities, etc., were included in the new mandate of the NUC

The tasks ascribed to NUC by the government as identified by Njoku can be summed up as advisory, standard setting and exercise of inspectorial powers, and these fall within the realms of accreditation and quality control that have been described in Chapter 3. Quality assurance on the other hand includes self-regulation, and hinges on a balanced scale of accountability and enhancement, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Prof Placid recommended that:

> NUC must coalesce its accreditation exercises with those of professional bodies such as the Nigerian Medical Council (NMDC), Council of Registered Engineers of Nigeria (COREN), Nigerian Institute of Quantity Surveyors (NIQS), etc. This will ensure that both the academic and professional evaluation of programmes can be achieved together in order to avoid any disparity in results

This suggestion coming from a quality assurance regulator of the NUC implies that consultation, collaboration and ownership of

quality assurance are not widespread. This implies that consultation is done when a policy is being promulgated.

The amendment of Decree 1 of 1974 in 1985, merely restates a reinforcement of NUC's 'exclusive constitutional Federal responsibility'. It must be noted however, that NUC has not worked in isolation. In fulfilling its mandate, NUC has invited experts from the universities and professional bodies and together they produced the minimum academic standards for all programmes taught in Nigerian universities. It is these standards that were used for programme accreditation in 1990, 1999 and 2002. The problem, it seems, lies more in perception; the way NUC perceives its role and how or whether this role is played out in a consultative bureaucratic manner, having all the vestiges of a top-down managerial approach; or whether it is done in a collegial, peer-review manner that reflects a collective responsibility to enhance quality.

SOUTH AFRICA

The same question about the mandate to quality assure was posed to the South African counterparts. South African respondent 7 from CHE stated:

> Yes, it has been going on now for almost a decade, and it was mandated in terms of the Higher Education Act of

1997. There, it was seen as one of the levers to change the higher education system, along with funding and planning

In the case of South Africa, the Higher Education Act 101 of November 1997 (amended by Act 55 of 1999, amended by Act 54 of 2000 and amended by Act 23 of 2001) provided a framework where the post apartheid government could exercise a stronger and more bureaucratic control of higher education in South Africa. The amended Act, a 50-page document, was aimed to address the historical inequalities in the South African Higher Education sector but nonetheless, there are strong indications that this act had a clearer policy on quality assurance. According to the Higher Education Act (No 101 of 1997), the specific functions of HEQC are to:

- promote quality assurance in higher education;
- audit the quality assurance mechanism of institutions of higher education;
- accredit programmes of higher education.

Clearly this is a policy expressed in a manner that takes into cognizance the institution's own internal arrangement for quality assurance, which it aims to audit. It is a policy that also sees the role of quality assurance agents as promotional. The South African Higher Education Act contains the following preamble:

> To regulate higher education; provide for the establishment, composition and functions of a Council on Higher Education (CHE); to provide for the establishment, governance and funding of public higher education institutions; to provide for the appointment and functions of an independent assessor; to provide for the registration of private higher education institutions; to provide for quality assurance and quality promotion in higher education; to provide for transitional arrangements and the repeal of certain laws; and to provide for matters connected therewith.

CHE fulfills this responsibility for the promotion and assurance of quality in higher education by contracting HEQC as indicated in Section 7 (1-2) of the Act, and both CHE and HEQC are subject to policies and criteria formulated by SAQA:

> The CHE must establish the Higher Education Quality Committee as a permanent committee to perform the quality promotion and quality assurance functions of the CHE in the terms of this Act.
>
> (1A) The Higher Education Quality is deemed to be accredited by SAQA as an Education and Training Quality

Assurance body primarily responsible for higher education.

[sub-s. (A1) inserted by s 1 of Act 23 of 2001]

(2)The CHE and the HEQC must comply with the policies and criteria formulated by SAQA in terms of section 5 (1) (a) (ii) of the South African Qualifications Authority Act 1995 (Act 58 of 1995).

The Education White paper 3 (1994) which preceded the Act acknowledged that the primary responsibility for quality assurance rests with the institutions but the Act would provide for the co-ordination of quality assurance in higher education through the HEQC, a permanent committee of CHE. The HEQC would be registered with SAQA, and its operations would be determined by CHE but within the guidelines provided by SAQA. Three principles underpinning the functions of HEQC in relation to quality assurance are, first, the formulation of criteria and procedures in consultation with higher education institutions; second, a formulative notion of quality assurance focused on improvement and development rather than punitive sanction; third, a mix of institutional self-evaluation and external independent assessments (Department of Education, 1997b, sections 2.69–2.71).

It is arguable however, whether these provisions in reality provide for quality assurance. The specific functions of HEQC have already been enumerated above, and they report to CHE. Also reporting to SAQA is yet another board which also has a responsibility for quality assurance, i.e., the Education and Training Quality Assurer (ETQA). This board, among other things, accredits institutions for specific standards and qualifications and promotes the quality of constituent institutions (SAQA, 1995, p. 27). Accordingly, institutions are permitted to offer programmes only after they have met HEQC's accreditation requirements, DHET's registration and approval requirements and SAQA processes. These ETQAs have to be accredited by SAQA and SAQA, when it accredited thirty-four ETQAs, indicated that there are areas where there is an overlap of quality assurance responsibilities and advised that the relevant professional bodies should enter a memorandum of understanding with HEQC.

Conceivably, this Act may suggest tensions in power relations in an overly bureaucratic arrangement among the different bodies who may clash over control. Since their roles for quality assurance may be somewhat overlapping if not conflicting, the quality assured may have conflicts about whom they have to answer to.

Strydom (2001) had a view about problems associated with different role players. He observed that the arrangement could make 'the

statutory process and policy development overwhelmingly complicated'.

> The work of CHE on the previously existing quality assurance of 'agencies' SERTEC for technikons and QPU for universities, should be regarded as invaluable. The lessons learnt from this investigation were taken seriously by CHE, and well reflected in the HEQC founding document of January 2001. However, it must be mentioned that different ambitious and complicated expectations with little co-operation and communication between organizations like SAQA and the DoE, are continuously being added to the role of HEQC and such tasks can seriously affect the approach of HEQC to quality and quality assurance...

Strydom considers the conflict and lack of support among quality assurance agents. He then remarks about the confusing policy statements and the seeming politicisation of the system, which is done at the expense of quality assurance.

> The messages received at the moment from the national policy level are confusing, and policy development is disorderly from an institutional point of view. There seems to be conflict and political manoeuvring for turf

> instead of a co-operation in the interest of quality assurance. (Strydom (2001, p. 13)

Webbstock (2002) also speaks about the mishmash of many role-players involved in quality assurance, and the deluge of policy documents that has led to a combination of stress and disillusionment.

Even for the HEQC the accumulation of policy documents could be quite disarming because the HEQC admitted that, without obtaining more resources from CHE, it cannot fulfil its mandate (CHE, 2003a, 2003b).

The task team on Higher Education, Institutional Autonomy and Academic Freedom (HEIAAF) set up by CHE in 2008 to investigate academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability in South African higher education also highlighted the problem of multiple agents, even though they seemed to be saying that it is unclear how much of the problems are really justified. This Task Team observed that:

> Regulations for the approval of new programmes—involving SAQA, the HEQC, at times the co-operative accreditation work of professional councils and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), as well as the DoE—are seen in some HEIAAF submissions as

> constituting an unacceptable set of bureaucratic barriers in the educational process. Institutional and other stakeholder submissions emphasise concerns about the role-confusions and bureaucratic burdens resulting from the process. It has not always been clear to the Task Team to what extent institutions conflate excessive bureaucratic procedures and demands, lack of regulatory co-ordination among multiple agencies, and actual violations of academic freedom or autonomy. (Section 3.2.4, p. 59)

NIGERIA

From other responses obtained from the interview on the mandate to quality assure, there seems to be a constant interchange between the terms quality assurance and accreditation, as though they were synonymous. In speaking about how this mandate is executed, the Nigerian respondent provided details on the accreditation exercise carried out in Nigeria:

> We have 3 statuses; you have either full accreditation which carries you through for five years, you have interim accreditation which is provisional and can only carry you for two years and you have a denied status which means

> that the programme is not valid, and it is not worth sustaining; we stop admission of students into that programme until that university is able to bring it up to an acceptable standard, and call NUC back to come and see what is on ground before they can bring in more students into that programme. This is what we have in Nigeria with regard to quality assurance; although there is another form of quality assurance in establishing an academic programme.

Evidently this respondent discusses the recognition status, accorded to a university after accreditation, as a form of quality assurance. The sanction that is described here has been adduced in Chapter 3 as a reason why some institution in a bid to obtain a positive response may resort to concealment or game playing (Newton, 2000)

> Before an academic programme can be established or approved to bring in students, the National Universities Commission must be involved. As the senate of the university approves that that programme should run in their university, they put down some facilities for it, human and material and then they apply to the National

Universities Commission for approval to run such programmes.

The three accreditation statuses awarded to institutions are full, interim and denied status. While interim implies a provisional approval, a denied status entails that a programme is not valid and so, implies a foreclosure of such an institution's ability to enrol or award students registered for the programme. The three accreditation statuses, awarded based on performance, are in effect a recognition function, and correspond with the globally understood definition of accreditation. When such function has a consequence as in the case of an institution, which is given a denied accreditation status and prohibited from admitting students into a programme, then the focus is obviously moving towards control.

NUC may look at this issue differently and claim that establishing minimum standards and verifying that institutions measure up to those standards is a form of quality assurance; but then, quantitative standards, as practiced by the NUC, tilts more closely towards accountability and control than enhancement. A stance, on the other hand, that emphasizes enhancement will entail examining teaching and learning processes, institutional performance and students' learning outcomes.

A South African respondent from CHE affirms that quality assurance became an enforceable mandate in the political agenda, given the political climate in the country, which considered quality assurance an important transformative indicator alongside funding and planning.

> Yes, it has been going on now for almost a decade, and it was mandated in terms of the Higher Education Act of 1997. There, it was seen as one of the levers to change the higher education system along with funding and planning; planning very much in terms of enrolment of students, and to see which could go to what universities and which could not go. But the third lever was quality assurance. Quality assurance was understood as an external process to check on the quality of what is offered.

Interestingly, this respondent alleges that 'quality assurance was understood as an external process to check on the quality of what is offered'. Here we have a statement that is in dissonance with the policy, and in consonance with NUC's understanding. It is also a parallel of industrial connotation of quality assurance as a 'check on' and an 'external process'.

South Africa also emphasizes the need for all programmes to be accredited, otherwise no funding. In addition, we are made aware that institutions tend to oblige because they are informed about the process,

and they are made aware that it is aimed at quality improvement. The picture that seems to emerge is that the intention is to carry out quality assurance; but what is actually being done is accreditation.

> Yes. I mean, all institutions have to have their programme accredited by the Council of Higher Education, by a special Committee on Quality Assurance. And the government does not fund all programme that have not met accreditation requirements. In relation to public higher education institutions, there is no legislation that says if you do not do an audit, something is going to happen to you; or you are not going to be able to do something. But so far, not one higher education institution has been told about an audit, and they did not want HEQC to come. I think what we did was to first discuss with the institutions that we were going to start the procedure of accreditation—and so far, we have done a full cycle of all this without any institutions telling us that they may be no longer interested.

Another respondent from CHE, South Africa, brings in the improvement component into the picture and also asserts that quality assurance is aimed at quality improvement, with internal quality assurance as a necessary component.

> Quality assurance was understood as an external process not just to check on the quality of what is offered in our higher education systems, but also to ensure that the institutions themselves became aware of quality assurance, and started to develop the internal quality assurance systems. So not only will it have an external arm; it will also have a promotional function in trying to get that going within the institution. The fundamental aim really, was not just about improving quality overall, but also assurance of the public education that is offered. Clearly for a long time, and putting it in a political context now, following first '94, there was a change in government and a change in the act of higher education, From all quarters—not only conservative quarters, there were concerns about: 'what is this new growing institution?', 'would we be able to deliver on the same quality before?', 'was that quality in itself okay, or would it be found wanting?'.

FURTHER DISCUSSIONS IN REFERENCE TO THE MANDATE

So far from the responses given by Nigeria and South Africa, it is not quite certain how the understanding of the mandate is practiced.

Some of the respondents, who were interviewed on the issue of mandatory quality assurance, have made some inferences about the

UK and USA situation, which needs to be addressed. A respondent from Nigeria (NUC) compared Nigeria with the UK and USA, while another respondent from the same organization, in justifying the government's mandate and government's involvement in quality assurance, tries to draw an analogy by referring to what he considers to be quality assurance in the UK, which has evolved—although it was originally operated as a government department:

> The UK system I'm aware, has actually evolved well. Initially it was a department in the Parliamentary Council that was responsible for quality that was largely government-related. But gradually, the QAA was established as a public government organization. And even though you call it voluntary, I know it is not; it is largely not.

After a description of UK system which indeed keeps evolving, although not in the manner described above, this respondent alludes to the American system.

> It is thought of in a way to be like the American system, but it is unique in its own way. The American system is just simply different; it is a group of colleges that actually form their own accrediting bodies to accredit them. In a nutshell, they would rather they present themselves to be

> accredited by those groups in a regular accrediting organization, which are actually supported and initially established by the college themselves. But it is not quite as totally without some form of regulation.

The respondent then goes on to infer that CHEA regulates, which is not the case.

> The Council for Higher Education and Accreditation (CHEA) actually regulates all of these and as such, government is involved—it is not free for all. Then within the US, there are also those professional bodies that have government-mandated to carry out professional accreditation in their areas of competence, with a view to ensuring that those who are graduating from the universities have the necessary knowledge, attitudes and skills to go into professions with the intention of becoming experts in their various fields, while performing at a certain minimum level.

His assertion about quality assurance in the UK being handled by a government unit in the past, suggests that CVCP did their own audit prior to the existence of QAA. This is not the case. What is I know about quality assurance in the UK (as well as in the USA), is that it is autonomous; an outgrowth of the higher education community and

therefore, deriving its legitimacy from higher education and not government. The body that carries out quality assurance in the UK, known, as the QAA, is an independent body established as a company limited by guarantee, and having charitable status. QAA England and QAA Scotland operate in different ways but all mentions of QAA will be in reference to the one in England. The company's members are sector representative bodies, including Universities UK (UUK) and GuildHE, but QAA has no formal links to government or individual higher education institutions. QAA receives its funding from HEFCE and other funding councils through contracts, and from higher education institutions through subscriptions, but it is operationally independent from these bodies in its day-to-day functioning (HEFCE, 2009). Those who fund QAA endorse the annual programme of their work but formally, they have no influence over the appointment of auditors or reviewers; nor can they influence the contents or outcome of an individual institution's audit or review. In the USA, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), which was again referred to by the Nigerian respondent, does not accredit. Rather, the Department of Education in the USA recognizes agencies that accredit, and then CHEA's role is to collate information about accrediting agencies. CHEA is an association of degree-granting colleges and universities that recognizes institutional and programmatic accrediting organizations. In fact 'CHEA describes itself as a national

advocate and institutional voice for self-regulating quality through accreditation' (CHEA, 2009).

Unlike in the UK and USA where quality assurance regulators are independent and autonomous bodies, the quality assurance agencies in Nigeria and South Africa are derived from, and dependent on government and perhaps, that partly explains the notions of control on the part of the quality assurance agents, and credibility on the part of the public. A public sector's audit on public universities could very easily be adjudged to be tantamount to being the judge, jury and executioner.

An analysis, of the insights provided on the meaning of quality assurance in this section, suggests that quality assurance is a consultative and bureaucratic verification of standards for both countries. Also quality assurance as an external process, is an understanding shared by the two countries (NUC and CHE Respondents above). For Nigeria, emphasis is placed on the legitimate authority vested in NUC, which has been described as an 'exclusive preserve' (NUC respondent). As stated by Njoku in his analysis of Decree 1 of 1974, the authority vested in NUC is understood to be a form of 'standard setting', 'inspectorial powers', 'accreditation', and 'quality control'. South Africa, on the other hand, does take into account institutional arrangement for quality assurance that it tries to

audit (CHE respondent) and according to its Education White Paper 3 (1994), the primary responsibility of quality assurance rests with the institutions. We have also seen some dissonance between policy and practice as revealed during the interview. We have seen the tensions in both countries created by overlaps of quality assurance responsibility in South Africa and the objections to what is considered to be the controlling stance of NUC.

Contrasted with the understanding of quality and quality assurance in Chapter 3, one can argue that quality assurance as exemplified in this section fits into the mould of the following proponents of industrial quality assurance: Harold Dodge, Harry Romig and to some extent Joseph Juran. These proponents represented quality as inspection-based quality control, standardization, conformance, control, quality audit and accreditation (See Figure 3.2 of Chapter 3). These are not sufficient considerations to allege that quality assurance is being practiced because noticeably absent are the imperatives for quality identified by authors like Sallis (2005) and Harvey (2006). Extensive discussions of these moral and professional imperatives that place commitment to students at the centre have already been done in Chapter 3. As Ball (1985) stated, external examining and the existence of a charter are not sufficient guarantors for quality. Rather what they guarantee is 'ritualism' (Newton, 2002) a situation where academics use procedures primarily to satisfy these external requirements.

In conclusion one can argue that meaning of quality derived here is certainly not inclusive of all the factors of accountability and enhancement, which understandably are the two pillars on which quality assurance is believed to hinge. Neither is quality assurance seen predominantly as the responsibility of institutions at least it is not explicitly implied in the responses given so far except as documented by South Africa. With this first section which is indicative of the meaning of the mandate to quality assure, a review of other aspects of the interview responses are needed to know whether responses may have some point of contacts or may be opposed to the literature on quality assurance.

5.2.2 QUALITY ASSURANCE AS A POLITICALLY DRIVEN MECHANISM

This section extends our understanding of the meaning of quality assurance. It shows how the differences in the origins of quality assurance account for the different ways the mandate operates in the respective places. Like other places in Africa, a political framework drives quality assurance in Nigeria and South Africa. The government of both countries became so involved in quality assurance, while seeking to rationalize and unify the higher educational offerings following the advent of independence, in the case of Nigeria, and the advent of post-apartheid, in the case of South Africa. These quality assurance agencies provide a legalistic formulation that virtually points to a discharge of accountability and provision of a recognition

status to signify that a programme has been accredited. An accredited status works well if quality control is the goal but quality control, however, does not fully address the impact expected by regulation, if quality assurance were fully functional. Quality assurance perceived as control, restricts and confines the practice to become a tool for accountability and public policy.

Unlike Africa, the political control of higher education quality assurance systems in the UK and USA are more subtle but it seems to be growing significantly and consistently since 1985. The apparent immunity enjoyed by these institutions can be attributed to the peculiar history of their educational institutions. The University of Oxford has many of its colleges built by private individuals. The origins of Cambridge University can be traced to 1209, when some scholars from Oxford fled to Cambridge after rancour with the local folks. Harvard was named after its benefactor: John Harvard. Yale traces its origin to clergymen in the 17th century, who established it for the training of political and religious leaders in the then colonial America. Leland Stanford Senior built Stanford in honour of his son, Leland Stanford Junior. These countries have a strong history of private sector or individual involvement in the founding of many higher education institutions. The United States Department for Education accredits CHEA, although CHEA remains independent of

government. CHEA collates information about accrediting agencies, and plays a key role in that regard.

NIGERIA

When Nigeria became independent, nationalist sentiments were high. We have seen the historical context of the founding of the early universities and their affiliations to universities in the UK. It is instructive to note that these universities were not built in the personal capacities of any individual. The nationalists took advantage of their political positions to found them. There was a lot of political interest in these universities, as the leaders of the newly independent nation were interested in the government influencing the trends of education. When the NUC was established in 1962 and became a full-fledged body in 1974, it catered exclusively for the needs of the government-owned universities. The governors of various states appoint the vice-chancellors of the state-owned institutions, as a result of the great political interest in the nation's educational sector (Fatunde, 2011). The President of Nigeria is automatically the Visitor to all federal universities in the country. He has the power to appoint the vice-chancellors of the federal universities. With so much government interest in these institutions, it might be far-fetched for quality assurance to be private sector driven.

SOUTH AFRICA

Likewise in South Africa, and details of this have already been discussed in Chapter 1, there was a great deal of political interest in higher education, because of the entrenched policy of racial discrimination suffered for many decades, during the apartheid regime. Government intervention was necessary to even out the educational imbalance that apartheid created; especially the segregation of universities based on race. The then President Nelson Mandela, the first democratically elected black leader in South Africa, stepped in by establishing the National Commission for Higher Education with the aim of transforming the sector. A subcommittee (Higher Education Quality Committee) emerged to manage quality in the two racially divided institutions (Smout, & Stephenson, 2001). For peace and stability, it was necessary for it to be politically driven.

DISCUSSION

Even though government involvement is historical, there are reasons to believe that quality assurance works best when it is understood to be the preserve of autonomous higher institutions, guaranteed by the institutions themselves: with agencies such as NUC and CHE concerned solely with performing periodic health checks. Perhaps, an analogy in public and health safety might be one way to perceive the concept of quality assurance. Health and safety assurance officials have an approach, which is evidence-based. All who have been trained in the

procedures understand health and safety concerns. Even though regulations are intensive, there is a continuous stress on the need for collaboration, consultation and co-ordination of activities in such a manner that everyone feels a sense of commitment and ownership for a common purpose. Having a statutory responsibility for quality assurance, is a duty that is best discharged through a co-operative approach in such a way that involves all educational stakeholders including institutions, students, as well as private and public bodies connected with the discipline area. Evident from the interviews, and more especially so in Nigeria, is the fact that quality assurance is understood in a restricted sense: it is referred to as maintenance or achievement of a minimum standard, and not as the totality of what promotes accountability and enhancement. So quality assurance is not about quality but about standards and standards differ from quality. An explanation on the way it is understood and used, could possibly be found in the statement made by Woodhouse (1999, p. 30) that quality assurance as a phrase refers to:

> policies, attitudes, actions and procedures necessary to ensure that quality are being maintained and enhanced. It may include any one or more of the approaches … [audit, assessment, accreditation]. Quality assurance is sometimes used in a more restricted sense, either to denote the achievement of a minimum standard or to refer to assuring

stakeholders that quality is being achieved (i.e. accountability).

Harvey and Newton (2005) and Newton (2006) provided a further distinction between the two interrelated concepts. They argued that quality refers to process, that is the quality of the educational process experienced by students, whereas standards refer to the intended or actual achievement or outcome. Standards could further be distinguished as service standards and academic standards, where the former represents the specified level of academic attainment and the latter are measures devised to assess the quality provided. In addition, Harvey and Newton (2005) explained that quality mechanism refers to processes of assessment, accreditation audit and external examination. The two are interrelated because it is the process that contributes to the intended or actual standard (Newton, 2006).

When quality assurance is operational, an external review would seek evidence of internal consistency. A process of this nature is likely to yield disclosure of performance, which is fostered because of a trustful relationship between the institutions and the external agencies rather than tension foisted when control is perceived. Institutions where such a relationship exists are more than likely to see criticism as constructive and such criticism when it is relevant and supportive of institutions who are affected negatively would normally be paired with training,

dissemination of helpful publications on quality assurance and good practice guidelines.

5.3 THE BALANCING ACT

Could the real meaning of quality assurance emerge if public policy and accreditation requirements are balanced with the improvement function of quality assurance? Part of the problem in Chapter 1 was about the imbalance between the two components of quality assurance, and the seeming dissonance between policy and practice. The meaning emerging from these interviews is that a dissonance and an imbalance possibly exist. Damme (2011) observed that the stringent external accountability function endangers the internal improvement function and as such threatens the legitimacy of the quality regime in the academic community. Too much emphasis on the improvement and enhancement function, on the other hand, takes the critical edge off the evaluative process. A balance would strengthen the internal governance of institutions and ensure that quality assurance becomes a level playing field for institutions, government, students and employers alike.

The balancing act in quality assurance requires that agencies are able to incorporate both the accountability and improvement function so that institutions practice a sustained process of self-assessment and use the results of the internal and external evaluation as a basis for self-

improvement. Another significant way to avoid tension and foster trust is to balance institutional autonomy with the accountability requirement of external quality assurance agencies. As David Woodhouse (2011) succinctly put it "Quality is not what external quality assurance agents do but it is what higher education institutions do". He then concludes that accountability for quality is what both institutional and external quality assurance agents do. He affirms that both institutions and agencies have some responsibility for accountability and autonomy. Agencies must exercise their gatekeeping role, being mindful and respectful of institutional autonomy. And institutions themselves should behave with integrity, and enable the validation of agencies so that quality assurance can work to their advantage and bring about institutional improvement.

5.3.1 INCENTIVE FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

The previous discussion on mandatory quality assurance elucidates the public policy rationale for external quality assurance, which uncovers a meaning that is tilted towards compliance and quality control. It also discusses the tensions that arise when quality assurance is perceived by institutions that feel that their autonomy is curtailed, as a top-down managerial function. And then it goes further to discuss the confusion that can arise by the problems brought on by the existence of multiple agents. It becomes evident that there is a need for

a mechanism or model that restores the balance between accountability and the enhancement functions of quality assurance.

The following discussion on incentives for quality assurance charts how the meaning, purposes and stimulus for quality assurance are increasingly being taken over by market rationales such as competition and ranking, which are fostered by what has been described as a reputational race. Incentives also disclose why sacrificing meritocracy to have a federal character as in the Nigerian case may favour a public policy rationale adjudged as favouritism, and could give rise to tension. Similarly, in South Africa, sacrificing meritocracy to make universities more accessible without addressing the root causes of marginalization has resulted in dropouts and more frustration.

Chapter 3, discusses some of the game playing that undermines the true nature of quality assurance. Could incentives be the reason for such? Incentives such as monetary and non-monetary stimulus could work in two ways. They could be good in the sense that they inspire efforts in attaining a desired state and could mobilize enthusiasm for quality assurance. They could be bad in the sense that people could look for ways to manipulate the process especially when the stakes are high. When incentives are counterproductive, they could give rise to cheating and other forms of unethical behaviour, which invariably

outweigh the bigger picture of any real improvement that an institution might desire.

SOUTH AFRICA

Most respondents agreed that perception plays a motivating role in quality assurance, as most institutions are aware that having a good accreditation status accords them some form of recognition and positive perception on the part of the public. There was some ambivalence on the question of incentive for quality assurance. The South African respondent from CHE is of the view that an accredited status does not necessary imply a differentiation in funding based on performance in accreditation. She holds that motivation is a factor for accredited institutions.

> Well, funding is not really an incentive; funding is something that may not happen. It is not that if you have a status that is accredited you get more, in that sense it is not, no. I think a lot of funny things have happened because the public has started learning that they should apply only to accredited programmes. It is important to have an accreditation. So institutions try to get their programme accredited so that's one. As a public institution you're keeping your prospective students and your employers happy in that sense

NIGERIA

There are reasons to suspect a political dimension as part of the incentive for quality assurance according to a respondent from Nigeria (NUC):

> A particular university, if it has good geographical strength of the students admission for instance or staffing, it gets some incentive from the federal government for doing that, that means you have a national outlook instead of getting all your students from just one particular area of the country, you spread it round the whole country and get incentives for doing that.

One of the merits of encouraging a geographical spread is the fact that the educational backwardness of states that do not have adequate representation in higher institutions is addressed. On the other hand, it is worth the effort of quality assurance agents to get the respective authorities to give due consideration to the reasons why some states are educationally backward. The problem may lie at the primary and secondary education level, and those areas need to be worked on so that pupils coming from those levels can become natural competitors with their counterparts in the educationally advantaged states. Allowing merit to be overshadowed by a reasoning based on federal

character leads to tension, and may be deemed as discriminatory by those whose merited position are denied or displaced.

SOUTH AFRICA

The South African respondent from SAQA also feels that incentives for quality assurance have more to do with improving education, and there is the return on investment view by government. If government invests in education, then government and the public (the tax-payers) can reasonably expect that institutions that are recipients of such investments are accountable:

> At the end of the day, I think it is about improving the quality of the educational process—I mean if one is talking from the perspective of government. A classic point here is if I pay for X, Y, Z I would like to see that the money is not wasted because it is taxpayer's money.

Another respondent from South Africa (SAQA) feels that incentive equals reputation, aspiration and competitiveness that amount to being ranked a world-class university.

> Quality Assurance as an incentive, is consistent with the University mission—that of being a world-class University and as far as international competitiveness is concerned, I

> think quality assurance is one of the hallmarks that would really propel one into that kind of category of Universities. I know for instance, that my University [refers to the University of Pretoria] is placed among the top 350 Universities in the world and part of this is partly driven by the quality assurance department here—and particularly when it comes to international benchmarking, we see quality assurance as one of the key drivers.

NIGERIA

A respondent from Nigeria (NUC), states that quality assurance is borne out of compulsion and so it is not a stimulus package:

> Well unfortunately, there are no known documented incentives for these institutions. So because it is compulsory, perhaps that is why there is no incentive for that purpose.

Another respondent from Nigeria (NUC) states that there are no financial advantages, except at the state level where performance is predicated on funding. The same respondent notes instances where a state university was granted more funds by the state government

because they had been awarded a denied status and an interim suspension by NUC.

Within the same country, another view is held by Nigerian respondent (NUC), that contravenes the view about no incentives. She cites instances of both monetary and non-monetary incentives. She identified a form of intrinsic motivation, where institutions experience pride as a result of high percentile score. She identified the core areas that attract high scores as academic content, staffing, physical facilities, and library. She also mentioned that with federal universities, the government sets aside a 'small incentive fund' for those who comply and meet the standards. She explained how an accredited status and a good score lead to high ranking on the league table done by the NUC and how this acts as a spur for competition among universities, where 'each university tries to out-do the other' and such competition engenders rationalization and specialization.

> The incentive for quality assurance is, let us start from the physical aspect of it. When a programme is assessed and the programme has full accreditation it is a pride to that university that you have scored nothing less than 70% overall and nothing less than 70% in the four core areas…. We also have ranking system where each programme is on a ranking, let's say medicine in university A, this year is top most, by next year another university could have

> performed better and come up as first so we have this competition, it engenders competition between the universities, each university tries to out-do the other.

The next description that follows refers to an improvement component of quality assurance although it is quite subtle. Here the respondent discusses how ranking gives rise to an incentive for improvement.

> It's bringing variety into what they are doing, the university goes to become a centre of excellence in a particular area of strength, you want to increase it and do better whereas in areas you feel you are not good enough and may be you think you may not be able to sustain, it also helps to remove them from your system, for instance you can decide to program a programme in your system, if that programme had gotten a denied accreditation, you look at your funds, you look at your resources, you feel you cannot sustain it for the next accreditation; instead of you to get another denied accreditation and its better for you to close it yourself.

The reference here has to do with some effects of quality assurance whereby universities rationalise their programme to serve the requirements of quality assurance. This raises new challenges about fitness for purpose, whose purpose would such rationalise serve? What about the student's interest which should be at the core of quality assurance?

> You rationalize such programmes out of your system, so that you now have programmes that you're sure of, you have programme that you are sure that any time there's an accreditation it will do very well and then you're sure of the quality of graduates that you are producing from such a system; then apart from that generally there's what you call incentive funds in the system, for the federal university for instance, the federal government makes available some little funds as incentive, for federal universities that have been able to standby and comply with the different standards. A particular university, if it has good geographical strength of the students admission for instance or staffing, it gets some incentive from federal government for doing that, that means you have a national outlook instead of getting all your students from just one particular area of the country, you spread it round the whole country and get incentives for doing that.

A point of interest in this lengthy response by this respondent include the reasoning that quality assurance leads universities to streamline their programmes, and to veto programmes that are not sustainable. Second, institutions that obtain full accreditation status, guarantee the quality of graduates. Third, incentive funds from the federal government vary and could be awarded on basis of a geographical mix of staff or students, for instance. There is also a view similar to that held by the South African agencies that 'excellent', competition among institutions and high institutional ranking are benefits and incentive for quality assurance.

The first two points could possibly be seen as some benefits of quality assurance but benefits, if any, in the remaining points are debatable. Excellence according to this respondent is achieved through stronger competition. This is arguable because cooperation as an approach should be the basis of development. Should a commendable quality assurance system be one that fosters cooperation among institutions and other stakeholders including students? Competition is a market rationale for quality assurance. One of the unintended effects of competition is that it tends to emphasize hegemony, a phenomenon that has been described as a 'reputational race' (van Vught 2008) i.e., a system whereby reputation is a major driving force that tends to gravitate towards cost explosions, thereby overshadowing the national interest needs for greater access and equality. Van Vught in *University*

World News described the reputation race as something triggered by greater competition between institutions and implied that universities inspired by competition would prioritize a pursuit for more resources in a self–reinforcing manner.

> They need these resources to recruit better staff, to offer more study grants, to upgrade their facilities, to improve their PR…. Richer institutions are more easily able to increase their reputation than poorer institutions. And this process is self-reinforcing: as the race goes on, the wealth inequalities and the differences in reputation tend to increase.

Ranking as indicated by a respondent from Nigeria (NUC), and the South African respondent (SAQA), may be viewed as useful because it presents easily interpretable information on the standing of higher institutions and, as such, would be an incentive for quality improvement and advertising. Ranking also stimulates and exacerbates competition rather than cooperation among higher education institutions. Ranking ignores the contexts in which the institutions operate and treats them in a homogenous way ignoring the huge varieties that exist among them. Ranking as an incentive for quality assurance may only be symbolic, as it may have a poor link to real quality assurance. This is because the indices used in ranking may only

serve a consumerist view of quality as threshold standards but do not, strictly speaking address, the 'value for money' nor the 'fitness for purpose' view of quality (Harvey and Green, 1993). Fitness for purpose implies that institutions have different purposes and are judged against those, unlike ranking that fails to consider institutional diversities, as institutions are judged against a set of generic criteria.

Ranking is based on what can be measured rather than on what may be relevant to distinctive institutions, as expressed in their institutional goals. Quality assurance then becomes simplified and subjected to generic quantitative or qualitative indicators as exemplified in ranking. Generalizations of this sort tend to focus on the institution as a whole, ignoring important internal variance. Also, such ranking can put unnecessary pressure on institutions. In the UK, there have been lots of disputes that sparked up when it was alleged that students' grades were being inflated in degree awards, because institutions felt pressurized by ranking tables' indicators (Lipsett, 2008; Shepherd, 2008; Alderman and Brown, 2008).

To view the motive for quality assurance as aiming to become a centre of excellence or topping the ranking, is a market rationale for quality assurance. A market approach is a relative concept of quality because it is more applicable to organizations and service standards, than to

academic standards. It also excludes some notions of quality, which have been identified by Harvey, and are recognised as hallmarks of quality assurance. These notions, reviewed in Chapter 3, are fitness for purpose, value for money and transformation of students through the learning process (Harvey and Green, 1993). Fitness for purpose motive involves remaining committed to one's self-defined purpose. It is not about what confers status or market choice but it is a concept that is respectful of institutional diversity. This concept expects an institution to be committed to its expressed mission, or the stated aims of its programmes of study. The role of external quality assurance would then be to judge the depth and relevance of that purpose within the institution's defined context since this serves as the basis for institutional improvement. Fitness for purpose is intrinsically linked with the accountability aspect of quality assurance, and the fitness of purpose view is what 'transmutes quality into quality assurance' (Harvey and Newton, 2007). Even though the value for money notion is a market view of education, it is important because it relates to cost effectiveness. It is not marketization or strictly speaking, a market rationale for quality assurance. One of the respondents from South Africa (DHET) identified this view as an incentive for quality assurance. Value for money like fitness of purpose is intrinsically linked with accountability, which naturally expects a return on investments. It requires that the maintenance or improvement of

academic outcomes, graduate standards and research outputs, should cost less or the same in terms of resources invested (Harvey, 2006). Students do not necessarily have to pay more for education if the same outcome can be achieved at a lower cost or a better outcome can be achieved at the same cost. The transformation view of educational quality assurance, like the fitness-for-purpose and value-for-money view is supportive of the theory of quality assurance. But unlike the two, which are accountability oriented, the transformative view of quality assurance is supportive of the improvement component of quality assurance. The transformative view of quality assurance focuses on student learning outcomes because it assesses students' acquisition of transformative knowledge, and skills that they can utilize effectively when faced with the work challenges they meet after graduation. The emphasis of external quality assurance therefore, would be on the standards of service and facilities that enable the acquisition of transformative skills such as analysis, critique, synthesis and innovation. Research standards for instance, would be assessed based on their impact in relation to their objectives. If the motive of quality assurance was to inspire centres of excellence, it could hinder the creation of knowledge-based institutions by focusing on a few, rather than on all students.

Incentives stir up renewed institutional interests in, and motivation for quality assurance. Such interests, if based on market forces such as ranking, competition and perception alone, may jeopardize transparency, as they may cause some 'game-playing' and perhaps foster window dressing by institutions who want to be part of the reputational race. Fitness for purpose, value for money and transformational view of quality correspond more to the nature of quality assurance, as they serve the dual purpose of accountability and improvement, with students' learning outcome being an important focus and incentive for gate-keeping. The former Executive Secretary of NUC, Professor Peter Okebukola, who carried out a survey on the trends of quality assurance in Nigerian higher education over the last 50 years with a special focus on the universities, stated that 'improvement in the quality of graduates was found to mismatch the quality assurance efforts'. He then suggested the need for 'invigoration of the quality assurance activities at the federal and state levels' (Okebukola 2010). Perhaps if the quality assurance agencies tried to bolster the transformative students' learning in institutions, then one could expect an impact on teaching and learning outcome.

5.3.2 COMMENCEMENT AND EVOLUTION OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

The commencement of quality assurance in both countries provides insightful historical and possibly cultural antecedents that impinge on the meaning and purpose ascribed to the concept. Quality assurance in

both countries cannot be divorced from the history and culture of both countries and for the most part, government has dominated the history of quality assurance in both countries since inception.

NIGERIA

From some Nigerian respondents (NUC), quality assurance commenced when Decree 1974 was passed into law and vested statutory power on the NUC for university education. Although another respondent gave the start date as 1989, when the Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) document was produced by NUC. Whilst another respondent gave 1990, when the first set of accreditation was carried out, as the start-off date. As it is evident from the responses received, the start up of the external quality assurance process corresponds to the year the decree was promulgated, which accords legitimacy to the body charged with quality assurance. For some others, the start date corresponds with activities leading up to and activities during accreditation of institutions and for others it is linked to the setting up of minimum standards. Again the meaning that can be deduced here is the focus on legislation of a decree and the maintenance of minimum standard at the start-up periods. No reference has been made about the collaborative role of institutions that ought to share equal rank with external regulators in quality assurance.

It seems however that quality assurance evolved long before the decree was passed into law in Nigeria and a bit of this has already been examined in Chapter 1. In Nigeria for instance, quality assurance is tied greatly to its British colonial heritage. The pioneer higher educational institution, the Yaba Higher College, was established as a result of agitations by the nationalists for a higher institution of learning in the country. There was no history of quality assurance, but there were concerns over quality. After a high drop-out rate was recorded by the institution, the colonial government set up a commission —the Elliot Commission—in 1943, to report on the quality and resources of higher education in British West Africa and to recommend future university development in the area. It was following the recommendations of this commission that the first university in Ibadan became established as an affiliate to the University of London in 1948. The University of London controlled its quality assurance till 1962 when it became independent. The first-generation universities, the Universities of Lagos, Ife, Ibadan, Nigeria and Ahmadu Bello University, had practices akin to quality assurance by the Federal government, guided by the Ashby commission set up in 1959, before the advent of the NUC.

The Ashby Commission assessed the higher education needs of post-independence Nigeria and outlined the relationship that ought to exist between the manpower needs and the educational system of a developing economy. This became a feature, which was to remain in

the Nigerian policy on education and the subsequent decrees passed into law (ref: Decree 1 of 1974, Section 1:i). The recommendations of this commission led to the establishments of more universities in the region but these universities remained under close surveillance of the federal government who established them. It was on the basis of the recommendation of the Ashby commission that the NUC was set up to handle the onerous responsibility to control Nigerian universities:

> A National Universities Commission should be set up to have undisputed control over the affairs of the universities, particularly in terms of finance, staff and courses (Ashby Report no: 10)

From this quotation one sees that NUC, in the earlier days, was conceived as a government agency that would 'control' the internal affairs of universities. It seems that subsequent actions of NUC have been strongly influenced by these past policy legacies.

These historical antecedents show that the early history of quality assurance encompassed audit of institutions and the role perceived for the regulators of quality is control. It turns out that this same idea of audit of institutions (South Africa) and external control (Nigeria) permeates the practice of quality assurance.

SOUTH AFRICA

According to South African respondents, the history of accreditation dates back to 1994; the advent of South Africa's first democratic government, which signalled significant policy changes in higher education. Another respondent gave the start date as 1997 when the Higher Education Act approved private higher education, an act that ushered in a proliferation of private higher education offered by both local and foreign providers. The courses offered were mainly MBA courses, because of the large market share they attracted. Another respondent from South Africa gives the date of commencement as 2001, when private higher education providers were required to register and have their programmes accredited. Some of these providers did not want to go through the accreditation exercise and so they withdrew their operations in the country.

In a very similar fashion, which compares to the antecedents in Nigeria, there has been some early development of quality assurance in South Africa, which started through links with UK institutions. According to CHE prior to 1994, the South African College and the University of the Cape of Good Hope depended on the University of London for the accreditation of their qualifications (HESA 10 years 2004). Scottish universities also heavily influenced the organizational structures of those universities.

Government dominance and external control marked the evolution of quality assurance in South Africa too. There are no indications on how institutions are co-opted into quality assurance. This early evolution of quality assurance seemed more compounded because it was marked by dissensions and divisions and so the quality assurance policy existing at that time was largely fragmentary and biased. According to CHE (QA Framework 2012-2017, 2011), institutions were divided on the basis of:

> Historically advantaged and historically disadvantaged higher education institutions (HEIs); English-medium and Afrikaans-medium institutions; universities and technikons which had created a range of perceptions, often based on prejudice, about the distribution of quality across the South African higher education system between public and private providers, shaped by their different purposes and roles in relation to the labour market (CHE, 2011, p. 1)

According to Bunting (1994) as reported in CHE (HESA 10 years 2004)

> Legally speaking, each university was a 'corporation' founded by an Act of Parliament—meaning that its functions were prescribed and could be terminated by the state. At the same time, in policy terms, a university was 'an independent sphere of societal relationships' (separate from the spheres of the state, religion and other spheres);

> meaning that for as long as it existed, the state could not interfere directly in its affairs. Neither could the university interfere in the affairs of the state by, for example, rejecting the state's designation of it for a particular 'race' group. (CHE, 2004, p. 23)

Faced with such antecedents, the post-apartheid democratic government engaged in a policy of higher education transformation by first commissioning a technical task team, the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE). This team recommended external quality assurance as a solution in tackling the quality differences in higher education as well as self-evaluation by autonomous institutions. The external quality assurance system as recommended would operate within the framework of the SAQA Act with the HEQC fulfilling the statutory functions of accrediting programmes, institutional audit and quality promotion. The team's recommendation gave birth to the *Higher Education Act* of 1997, which established the Council on Higher Education (CHE) as an independent body that would advise the Minister of Education on matters of higher education policy. CHE would also perform quality promotion and quality assurance functions through its permanent subcommittee: the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). The Act was amended so that the HEQC would report to SAQA, the Education and Training Quality Assurer (ETQA) for the higher education band of the National Qualifications

Framework (NQF). The Act also allowed private providers to offer higher education qualifications, provided they registered with the DHET and had their programmes accredited by the HEQC and the qualifications they offer were registered on the NQF by SAQA.

CHE (**HESA 10 years, 2004)** on SAQA's role stated:

> SAQA was established as the infrastructural cornerstone of an integrated qualifications framework, and of a coordinated external QA system. SAQA's functions as set out in the SAQA Act of 1995 included: registering standards-setting bodies, accrediting QA bodies (ETQAs), and implementing the QF. Accordingly, SAQA set about developing regulations for National Standards Bodies (NSBs) and ETQAs; requiring all HEIs to 'interim register' their qualifications on the NQF in an outcomes-based format; and establishing procedures for the preliminary accreditation of private providers and their programmes, in the absence of an HEQC, which still had to be established. (CHE, 2004, p. 146)

With the establishment of HEQC in 2001, HEQC conceptualized and carried out the first cycle of quality assurance 2001-2004. Aside from the private providers, public providers who had been accredited by SAQA were also re-accredited by HEQC between 2002–2003. The

accreditations at that period in general focused on the divisions that characterized the historically apartheid-borne higher institutions. The re-accreditation of private providers according to CHE (**HESA 10 years, 2004)** was to address serious concerns including:

> Uncertain correlation between labour market requirements and private programme provision; uneven teaching and learning practices in private institutions owing to factors such as inadequately qualified staff and poor academic infrastructure and support; little knowledge of national policies and regulations; 'HE' qualifications that would more rightly be pegged in the Further Education and Training (FET) band of the NQF; and—for all the aforementioned reasons—qualifications that could not deliver what they promised. (CHE, 2004, p. 151)

This 2002 re-accreditation exercise led to the sanction and ultimate withdrawal of 15 MBA programmes. CHE and DHET, which was Department of Education (DOE) at that time, claimed that the proliferation of MBA programmes was a grave concern and there was a need to check that MBAs were in consonance with the transformative agenda and national priorities of South African education. On the other hand, it has been claimed that the CHE regulatory model imposed a generalist model on MBAs by insisting that the MBAs must use the

action research method and must be devoted to South African issues (Blackmur, 2005). This proposition was adjudged by Blackmur to deviate from the fitness for purpose notion of quality assurance, besides it indicates the nature and dynamics of the command-and-control agenda regulation of providers' behaviour (Blackmur, 2005). On the other hand, one may consider that the indigenization rationale contradicts Blackmur's argument about imposing a generalist model on MBAs. Reporting on the 2004 accreditation, the Wits Business School attests to the authenticity of the exercise by the following publication in 2010:

> The re-accreditation was demanding and in line with international best practice. The process was the first of its kind in the world to be undertaken by a statutory body and attracted widespread international media attention for its innovation and thoroughness. The CHE enlisted the help of MBA experts from the United States, the Netherlands, Australia, Hong Kong and the UK to structure the evaluation and also invited all the local business schools to participate in the process.

The justification by WITS business school states that compliance was the basis of the judgement against the private MBA's that ultimately withdrew .

> All procedures and evaluation criteria were measured against the standards set by international accreditation organisations such as the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) of the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD) and the International Association of MBAs (AMBA). Each business school was evaluated according to a set of thirteen criteria drawn up by these stakeholders, and each criterion was supported by a set of detailed minimum standards. All business schools had to complete detailed questionnaires and have site visits conducted on their campuses. They also had the opportunity to make submissions to the CHE and respond to any query throughout the re-accreditation.

The respondent from South Africa (DHET) presents a another perspective on the MBA accreditation by revealing the general perception that some of the MBA providers were principally-focused on profit because offering MBA was financially lucrative as evidenced in the growing 'stock rise' of the parent institutions of these foreign providers. He also identifies the political transition that brought about certain policies, which lead some of the MBA institutions to withdraw freely since they choose not to subject themselves to accreditation.

> MBA is kind of a high currency qualification around the world, so they (foreign providers) were also coming in for it. In the country there were more than 20 MBAs being offered and some of them offered by the overseas institutions. And then we started to see those private institutions listings on the stock market, the companies that own those private institutions listing in the stock markets. And also the other reason for the takeover was because from about 1990 till about 1994 there was the transition….

This second reason given by the respondent alludes to non-compliance of the MBA's as their main reason for withdrawal.

> Then the policies started to flow after that and the regulation of private institutions and other policies, as these started to come in, you started to see the institutions slowly withdrawing because a policy is now in place…. So now they didn't want that, they wanted to have profit and not necessarily because they were operating legally. Of course there were some operating illegally—fly by night—but then you got one saying; fine now I'm going to be compelled to do this or that, pay taxes and all that, so then they started to withdraw one after the other.

This respondent's argument corresponds with that of the BBC's reporter, Sean Coughlan, (8/12/04) who quoted the former minister of education Kader Asmal as saying that the international providers were 'not sensitive to local needs' because they simply cherry-picked the most lucrative services such as setting up business schools but 'did not always maintain the same standard'.

The withdrawal of some of these foreign providers when an Act called for regulation of private providers may be considered as proof of the non-complaint attitude of providers. If the foreign providers chose to defect rather than be accredited by being subject to the rules of the recipient country then that goes against some principles of quality assurance. On the other hand, the reason for defection could be an illuminating guide to improvement since many reasons can predict defection ranging from a lack of faith on what is perceived as deterioration in a system to inability to measure up to newer demands. What can be deduced given the claim of Respondent 8 is that some suspicion and lack of trust existed between public higher education providers and the quality assurance agents. Difficult as it seems, a defection could be a great learning tool as its conceptualization could help to 'set up the mechanism that turn the analysis of customer defection into an on-going strategic system, closely supervised by top managers and quickly responsive to changing circumstances' (Reichheld, 1996, p. 2)

These antecedents go to show that quality assurance in Nigerian and South African higher education results directly from government's intervening reforms and in doing this the government, through the NUC and CHE, pays particular attention to accountability. Quality assurance, therefore, hinges on the notion of accountability. The problem with accountability is that it is just one aspect of quality assurance and, therefore, restrictive as accountability alone can be quite bureaucratic. According to SAQA in the publication (*SAQA*, 2009, p. 53):

> Quality assurance adds layers of detailed bureaucratic procedures to South African education and training. A provider might find itself, because of its different offerings, having to refer to any of about 32 key quality assurance bodies (if one includes the professional associations) in order to obtain accreditation and approval and to be able to have its qualifications recognized.

The challenge, amidst so much bureaucracy involved in accountability, is how quality assurance can be embedded within a quality culture that gives rise to internal efficiency, premised on institutional commitment to constant improvement and self-evaluation. This does not mean that accountability has to be dispensed with. Accountability is important but it has to be properly managed if it is to provide a basis for quality

improvement. Also I wonder if a process that is heavily associated with accountability and external control could genuinely inspire innovation and enhancement.

5.3.3 THE VALUE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

Having considered quality assurance in both countries as a government mandate influenced by certain historical antecedents and premised on the belief that institutions must be made accountable and controlled, this section analyses the value placed on quality assurance. Value connotes worth or usefulness. It also connotes desirability. If giving too much importance to accountability risks isolating faculties by effectively suppressing the sincere demands of critical self-examination then what is there to make quality assurance desirable and valuable by faculties—and invariably to students? One can also argue that if quality assurance is to have any meaning that meaning would be derived from the value placed on it. If there is no value, then there is no meaning because meaning arises before value does. Here are some values that one could argue have been placed on quality assurance arising from the insights given during the interviews and literature. These values can be adjudged to be the meaning or purpose or even the outcome that have been ascribed to quality assurance. I have grouped these into six categories:

1. Public symbol of legitimate higher education (meaning, outcome)
2. Access to federal, state and private funds and loans (outcome)
3. Student protection (purpose, outcome)
4. Promotion of Innovation and Development (outcome)
5. Requisite for licensure of professional examinations (purpose)
6. International mobility of students (purpose and outcome).

These six categories form the basis of my discussion on the perceived meaning, purpose or outcome of quality assurance in the two countries being critically studied.

5.3.4 PUBLIC SYMBOL OF LEGITIMATE HIGHER EDUCATION

Accreditation and other outcomes of quality assurance are supposed to signal to students and the public that an institution or a programme meets threshold standard. In Africa, several researches have been carried out to demonstrate choice of career and career preferences of students but I have not come across any study to show what influences students' choice of African universities and whether quality assurance has a role in that. A research in the USA has shown that the choice of a student beginning to process an entry to a higher educational institution may not necessarily be affected by the accreditation status of the institution. The majority of students in the U.S. exercise little choice

about where they attend because such decisions are influenced by institution location and price. Even where competitive markets do exist among selective institutions, information about academic performance is rarely decisive (Zemsky, 2005). Choice, according to ACT 2009 Report on a research in the USA, when it is used to determine the predictor variables in enrolment probabilities, is affected by three compelling factors namely mobility index, institution type index and selectivity index. Sa *et al*. (2008) asserted that socio-economic background and accessibility play a role in affecting students' decisions. Winston and Zimmerman (2004) identified another variable that could affect student's choice namely the observed peer characteristics. For many Nigerians, indices such as pricing or affordability, status symbol, flexibility of study, employability, stability, educational pedigree, ranking on the league table, impact of interaction with peers and quality of staff and state of origin may serve as separate compelling factors, and this could also be because they are not sufficiently informed about quality assurance and the role quality assurance could play in guiding value decisions. This could be partly the reason why when NUC issues a statement about the illegal activities of a national or transnational institution, such statement often has little or no impact on students enrolling in that institution. Such institutions continue to thrive, as students continue to patronize them for various reasons.

The extent to which quality assurance influences students' choices in Nigeria and South Africa may constitute material for future research but the bone of contention here is that there are permutations in the value attributed to quality assurance as a signpost for quality.

NIGERIA

Reflecting on the extent to which quality assurance represents the public symbol of legitimate higher education, the Nigerian respondent (NUC) assert that Nigerian Universities are '*semi-autonomous*' and what quality assurance does is to signal to the public that a particular programme has met required standard or to state otherwise where the reverse is the case. If the results of accreditation are published in the newspaper, the public may become discouraged. Seeing that certain programmes have been denied accreditation, 'people would be reluctant to choose them. Public perception would be affected and hence, subscription to such a university will inevitably reduce' says another respondent from Nigeria. Through quality assurance, parents and students are informed about the quality of the different programme and 'those who fund the programme can say that the resources they put into a particular institution or program are also being utilized to come up with products that are useful to society' (Respondent from Nigeria, NUC). Visioning students as 'products that are useful to society' as this

respondent states, is indicative of the consumerist view of education because the word 'product' is proper to a consumerist context. It is indicative of marketization, which Furedi (2011) finds disturbing because 'it attempts to recast the relationship between academics and students along the model of service providers and customers'.

SOUTH AFRICA

The South African Respondent (CHE) declared that quality assurance 'allows for acceptable and achievable standards and for review mechanisms to be put in place'. This she asserts gives rise to transparency and improvement:

> 'For the learner and also the external environment…it allows for improvement and it allows for continued and ample development because you can actually approach things in a developmental way…and then over time look to see that this is the way you want it to be'

Respondent from SAQA stated that quality assurance:

> 'helps you to make the kind of comparison in the global world and it's good for institutions to have an idea of who they are as far as other institutions are concerned in terms of competition in the world and getting the right <u>products.</u> Quality assurance helps not only the divisions in the

> University but also helps the players, the staff, the students to find a way of comparing themselves with their peers or international market, particularly the high competition that is on throughout the world in terms of employment and most employers most institutions and organizations would want to know where you've come from, how you compare with other institutions so the value of high quality assurance is to help us to keep at pace and also to evaluate ourselves and to presumably keep up with the standards some how, at least maintaining the standards and not letting it come down. That's my thinking'.

What stands out in the response given by SAQA is a discussion about the comparative value of quality assurance. The value presumably is that institution can through self-evaluation and external quality assurance compare themselves with one another and globally. However, it is unclear how this comparison is done or enabled by quality assurance

REVIEW OF BOTH COUNTRIES .

Essentially in both countries there is nothing to indicate substantially that quality assurance is a public symbol of legitimate higher education. Perhaps this may be due to insufficient awareness about the importance or even purposes of the quality assurance mechanism owing to the low

level of students' involvement in the process. The result of the non-involvement of students may be one of the reasons why quality assurance has not led to that expected level of improvement and also why uninformed students register with programmes and institutions that are not accredited or whose accreditations are denied. A typical case is Lead City University in Nigeria. When NUC proscribed its law, nursing and postgraduate faculty, this university still went ahead to graduate students from its law and postgraduate faculties, issuing eight PhDs. NUC then stepped in declaring the courses as illegal and stating that qualifications acquired by the students would not be recognized for employment and academic development purposes. This led aggrieved students on a rampage destroying facilities of the University. One wonders why these students subscribed to such a programme in the first place if it was illegitimate. There have been similar occurrences of students' rampage after NUC's pronouncement of sanctions such as in the case of University of Abuja's Faculty of Medicine in 2010, after the programme had run for five years. There is also the case of the proscription of University of Benin's Faculty of Medicine, which led to students' rampage, causing a deployment of policemen to calm the situation. These suggest an evident lack of confluence between choice of university and quality assurance or accreditation status. A lot of violence and disruptions could have been averted, if the quality assurance mechanism provided early warning signals. In an editorial of

the Punch, 2008, titled *NUC and illegal universities* the editors opined that:

> The Commission should not wait until parents' hard-earned income and the students' precious time had been wasted before coming out with the list of illegal universities. Regular public enlightenment on the implications of the unregistered universities will save innocent students and their parents the unnecessary financial and emotional trauma.

Admittedly, if the improvement component of quality assurance is addressed, then a university, which has received a license to operate, will be assisted to improve so that it does not falter

5.3.5 ACCESS TO FEDERAL, STATE AND PRIVATE LOANS AND FUNDS

Access to funding granted by quality assurance in Western countries is that students who attend colleges that are not accredited are ineligible for funding and visas and that invariably causes a major financial setback for those institutions. This explains why institutions are often quick to respond to concerns expressed in quality assurance reviews. This approach that can be rightly called the 'carrot' approach of quality assurance is somewhat different in Africa where the 'stick' analogy applies because any institution that fails to accredit its programme would be considered illegitimate, and the institution would face

sanctions. The fate of such students and funds that might have accrued to such programme then becomes contentious.

SOUTH AFRICA

The South African respondent from CHE, while responding to the question on incentives, stated that a direct link exists between quality assurance and funding. In the USA, for instance, there have been arguments that all ties existing between quality assurance and students' aid should be broken, as it has failed to achieve educational excellence or competence. ACTA, USA (2007) asserted that accreditation is no longer a reliable proxy for acceptable educational quality.

> Nothing in the accreditation process concretely measures student learning, instructional quality, or academic standards. Nothing measures whether students have made intellectual progress since high school or have attained a level of basic knowledge and competence that would be expected of college graduates. If the accrediting process were applied to automobile inspection, cars would "pass" as long as they had tyres, doors, and an engine—without anyone ever turning the key to see if the car actually operated (ACTA, 2007, p. 14.)

ACTA felt that if the government repealed the restriction against using student-aid money at non-accredited universities, accreditors would then have to prove their worth in the sense that if they had anything worthwhile to offer institutions, institutions will pay for their services. The presupposition here is that a free market in accreditation agencies will quickly stratify, with the toughest agencies attracting the best colleges and universities.

NIGERIA

In Nigeria, a different scenario exists because accreditation is declared not to be directly tied to funding. The federal universities in Nigeria receive the bulk of their funding from the government through the regulatory agency NUC that acts as a conduit (Decree No1 of 1974). More recently that role has become advisory. In 2000, the government directed that money should no longer be received and disbursed by NUC. To that effect, NUC began acting in an advisory capacity, liaising with the federal government and ensuring that allocated grants are received on behalf of the federal institutions funded by the Commission. NUC does this by conducting a Universities' Annual Estimates Hearing, wherein it determines the financial needs for recurrent and capital projects in a budget year of federal universities. The estimates obtained from this hearing are collated and submitted to the Federal Government through the Federal Ministry of Finance and

the National Planning Commission for Recurrent and Capital Grants. Although this gives the universities some degree of autonomy, NUC's involvement is to ensure that all projects and programmes on which funds are to be expended are those that have been approved by the NUC and that the universities now have what is known as an AIE that is the authority to incur expenses, which is defended by NUC. NUC's accreditation focuses among other indicators, on resources. And experience over the years has shown that the capital project development requirement or its deficit on the contrary, depends largely on the age of establishment of each university and so the NUC has developed a new capital fund allocation model, yet to be put into use. This model implies that older universities referred to as the first-generation universities would be required to spend a substantial part of their capital grant on rehabilitation of existing infrastructure, while the newer-generation universities spend more on putting up new structures. The model suggested the following ratio:

First Generation Universities: 40%, Capital/Rehabilitation Projects 60%.

Second Generation Universities: 70%, Capital/Rehabilitation Projects 30%.

Third Generation Universities: 90%, Capital/Rehabilitation Projects 10%

Inter-University Centres: 90%, Capital/Rehabilitation Projects 10%.

The state government funds the state universities that are directly under their jurisdiction, but quality assurance does impact on funding because as a respondent from NUC Nigeria noted 'a denied accreditation has always attracted extra funding from the state government'. *A* Respondent from (NUC, Nigeria) cites an example of a State Governor's gesture towards a state university, after accreditation results were published:

> And there had being instances when our National Universities Commission had to invite the proprietors of such Universities to the National Universities Commission. For instance there was an accreditation carried out in 2003 and a particular state University performed very poorly. It had 29 programmes running and out of which 22 were denied accreditation. When this was published the governor of the state was invited he came and he was shown the assessor's comments and assessor's grading, untouched, and he felt very bad because he never thought that the University was so badly managed.

This respondent in the following explanation, she gives, mentions what seems to be an improvement outcome of quality assurance.

> So that particular year, he pumped almost half of the money going to education into that University alone and made sure that things were properly done. Out of the 22 programmes that had been initially denied accreditation, 6 were accredited the following year and this trend continued until all 22 were finally accredited. But what that shows you is that University would not want to start a new programme until it has had full accreditation for all the pending ones.

A beneficial aspect of accreditation is when it brings about improvement in the manner described above. Funding is needed for improvement to take place and funding has often been the bane of the public sector—unlike the private universities who generate their own funds without depending on government funds. Well, unfortunately for the public universities, the government funds to the higher education sector are dwindling due to high maintenance cost in the public sector.

Government institutions often allege that inadequate funding is the main factor affecting standards, and the academia have often wondered about the basis for penalizing a university when adequate funding is not provided to enable them meet their quality goals. Given the situation whereby the state government comes to the aid of the ailing state university, it is safe to assume that quality assurance does act as a

panacea in some instances. Conversely, one wonders why financial paucity should only be remedied when a state university is sanctioned, and why education budgets have been low in the past. Nigeria is a signatory to the UNESCO charter, which prescribes a minimum of 26% of budget allocation to Education, but budgetary allocation to education has always been less than 15% in Nigeria. This is unlike South Africa where budget allocation to education takes the lion share and has been increasing over the years, amounting to 21% in 2011. In Nigeria, the government has also encouraged universities to become entrepreneurial by embarking on revenue-generating activities. The biggest challenge is whether this amount allocated to education and those accrued from entrepreneurial activities, would be properly utilized in ensuring that the objectives of education are effectively and successfully carried out.

SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, the respondents from CHE and SAQA unequivocally stated that access to funds has an indirect link:

> … Taking the private sector for example, if a person is not accredited, the department would not register it in the institution and they can't operate. Similarly, if a public programme is not accredited the department would not register that programme in fact.

The statement above from CHE was corroborated by a respondent from SAQA who stated that:

> If a public higher educational institution does not pass accreditation for a programme, it cannot open the programme and enrol students in the programme, in which case it will reduce the funding that those students could have accrued to the institution.

Another respondent from CHE explained that accreditation is a condition for the institutions to exist and so without accreditation, the issue about funding would not even arise. The problem here is that registration of a new programme is being equated with quality assurance. Quality assurance of programmes takes for granted the fact that the programme is already in operation, and that the quality of its offerings are being audited to verify their fittingness, and to spot areas of improvement. The problem is the outcome that can arise when accreditation and quality assurance are assumed to be synonymous.

Funding is essential for quality improvement to be in place but we have seen that it is not institutional performance in quality assurance that drives funding allocations. It is debatable whether or not funding should act as a spur for quality assurance because if funding is what drives quality assurance, then perhaps the value of education is misplaced: and future researches may have to look into new ways of

assuring that quality education is delivered to students. A quality assured higher education looks beyond funding, and demonstrates commitment to students' transformative learning and engagement with the learning process, which is validated by quality assurance agencies.

5.3.6 STUDENTS' PROTECTION

Students are the beneficiaries of any quality assured education system and indeed, the primary stakeholders. Decisions about quality assurance should make reference to how the fitness and effectiveness of the educational experience result in sound scholarship and competencies. This requires, in the first place, that quality assurance agencies set up and verify appropriate standards for students' learning outcomes. Second, to guarantee students protection, arrangements need to be made for incumbent students when a programme has been awarded a denied accreditation. Third, integrity of awards is yet another way to protect students; especially given the claims that some lecturers solicit cash or expensive gifts in exchange for grades or degrees. Integrity of award would be compromised when quality assurance is compromised. There are claims that a few universities offer cash to accreditation panels during visits in exchange for a good accreditation status.

NIGERIA

The *Nigerian Tribune*, 2011 reports that

> NUC accreditation exercises have witnessed the doctoring of documents, the hiring of "mercenaries" to stand as academic staff by both private and public universities, and monetary inducement of members of accreditation panels. Professors on accreditation, missions are provided with posh accommodation, monetary and other gifts to procure good reports by vice chancellors, regardless of the fact that the NUC had always made adequate allowances for persons on such assignments. Those who fail to provide such inducements end up with poor reports. If these malpractices are not reported and addressed, the situation will be worse when institutional accreditations commence. Because it lacks the capacity, the NUC is unable to detect some of these sharp practices relating to the actual personnel and claims of academic achievements by these institutions.

The National Open University of Nigeria in its instructional handout for Comparative Studies in Higher Education Systems, made an inference about cash for accreditation. Speaking about the proliferation of universities in Nigeria without even the minimum standards, it remarked that:

> One of the solutions is for government to enact laws which can be enforced by the appropriate agencies—not 'gratification collecting' inspectorate/supervisory personnel who will declare empty laboratories as being well equipped. Some NUC officials have been known to have compromised themselves during accreditation visits, through the receipts of brown envelopes. (NOUN, 2011, p. 235)

A member of the NUC did admit that at times institutions do make such offers but a view has been to accept the offer for fear that non-acceptance could be interpreted negatively and may jeopardize the safety of the accreditors. An example was given about how thugs accosted accreditors after an accreditation exercise, and how that the incident may not be unrelated to the 'hardened and unyielding' stance of accreditors who had been offered gifts and monetary awards, during that particular accreditation.

In the face of such unethical behaviours, where NUC fails to name and shame such institutions as a way to dissuade future occurrence, the quality of such programmes and future of such students cannot be guaranteed.

Another factor affecting student protection is the advent of borderless education and the difficulties involved in evaluating the fitness of such

provisions. Existing quality assurance mechanisms were created for the traditional universities and programmes. And although some efforts have been made to also create mechanisms for borderless education, the fitness is largely debatable and may require a radical reassessment of the quality assurance mechanism. Traditional models are very interactive by nature and students can learn from one with such learning affecting their cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. The very nature of borderless education constrains such learning by students. Not all disciplines can be offered effectively through the borderless type education; especially when it comes to disciplines requiring a lot of laboratory hands-on experience. Students in some parts of Africa may not have the resources to benefit fully from borderless provisions, because of the disparate availability of Internet connectivity and broadband size restrictions. Students are also more vulnerable to disreputable providers given the difficulties of control in borderless education.

Aside from borderless education, there is also the menace of exploitation by fraudulent education providers including degree mills and fly-by-night operators. CHEA described the many different guises of degree mills. Some degree mills blatantly offer to sell a degree and perhaps a transcript from a legitimate school. Others can be easily recognized by promising that an applicant can receive a degree in a very short period of time, sometimes as little as five days. Another type

of degree mill will purport to look at an applicant's life experience and award a degree based solely on a description of this experience. Others may require the student to submit papers or other assignments but still will provide the degree in a short period of time with much less work than would be required by legitimate institutions. An advertisement that claims a student can 'earn' a degree in much less time than it would take at a legitimate institution is likely evidence that the school is a degree mill.

At least 43 degree mills are believed to be operating in Nigeria in 2010 and the NUC has made a concerted effort to warn members of the public about their existence—and even to prosecute some of them in court so that students' fees can be recovered. South Africans have also been victims of degree mills. *Times Live* (2011) reported that a sham website advertised degrees from virtually every tertiary institution in South Africa, even offering a fax verification service that would authenticate any degree offered by them.

These degree mills are potentially harmful for the integrity of education because students who are in compliance with degree mills perpetrators lack academic preparation and are unprepared for whatever career the degree has illicitly been awarded. The victims are those unsuspecting students who suffer an irrecoverable financial loss given the inability of the quality assurance agency to act on time by warning, or involving

students in accreditation. This is how a weak system of quality assurance lends strength to these bogus providers who take advantage of students' desperation to gain a degree and their naivety about genuine providers.

More recently, government organizations and quality assurance agencies have been known to be working together to stop the deleterious impact of degree mills on students. Part of the task has been to contain an expansion of degree mills by making students aware of authentic institutions and also by creating tools for the identification of degree mills. Undoubtedly legitimate accreditation and other quality assurance agencies, international organizations, employers, education providers and students who rely on effective quality assurance, are increasingly facing some confusion over what is *bona fide*. UNESCO and INQAAHE have made several attempts to provide accurate and *bona fide* information by providing a blacklist of entities known to be bogus and a white list of those that are legitimate and recognized by competent authorities in one or more national education systems. INQAAHE in its interim report to the Board noted that a list may not be effective because of the volatility and ambiguity of bogus providers such as are notable in their shifting names, locations, web presence, ownership and interrelationships. A blacklist also invites legal challenges and there is no guarantee that official bodies threatened by

legal suits of bogus authorities would be given legal protection—especially in places where corruption is present and sovereign, and member states are found to be protecting suspect entities. Besides, very few countries have the resources to police the action of every provider, business or website.

There are other ways by which students may not be protected and whether these concerns lie within the purview of quality assurance is yet to be decided, as some of them are security-related issues, which can be safeguarded through internal control mechanisms.

During the interview, the Nigerian (NUC) respondent considered students' protection from one point: the point of view of employers. Employers 'upon enquiring can be told about the opinion of the regulator as to what the quality of a particular program is. Therefore the product of such a program will also benefit from the outcome of quality assurance in that way'.

SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, the CHE respondent viewed students' protection as the 'quality interview to try and make the students aware, what it is that they need to ask of an institution in order to find out what kind of programme they are going to be enrolling in, whether the programme

is accredited or not'. Another way that students' protection is guaranteed is given by another CHE respondent who asserts that:

> 'The greater proportion of the assessment scores is on academic content and teaching and that means that, that University is giving to the students what the students is supposed to have, which means that if that University is doing well now, it's now left to the students to study under that institution and make sure that they perform well, because we have more than 60% of an assessment based on academic content, on the teaching process, on the examination and reward discipline process'.

South Africa also premised that the value of quality assurance lies in the 'output' in obtaining 'the good student', 'value for money', and 'value for what you have spent to produce that student'. She goes further to explain that 'if you spend money and the product is not correct, the value is of less quality; so the value for any quality assurance can be measured in terms of the output '. The question to be asked is whether output is an adequate reflection of the value of quality assurance. Perhaps in industries, the value of any good industry may be judged by the output—the product. The value of persons goes beyond mere good grades or good students, as that would be a consumerist view. The value of any education should

be measured by the input, output and outcome. The value of education should be judged on the fitness of the institution to transform students, and the teaching and learning outcome as a result of this transformative learning. Transformation of students according to Mezirow (2000) encompasses the 'value-for-money interpretation'. Transformative learning could be seen as a process whereby a learner goes beyond a mere acquisition of knowledge and engages in a critical, reflective discourse which leads him to re-evaluate his or her assumptions, ultimately resulting in new ways of doing things. According to Mezirow (2000) it is 'becoming aware of one's own tacit assumptions and expectations and those of others and assessing their relevance for making an interpretation'. Campbell and Rozsnyai (2002, p. 20-21) envisioned quality as transformation, when it focuses:

> ... firmly on the learners: the better the higher education institution, the more it achieves the goal of empowering students with specific skills, knowledge, and attitudes which enable them to live and work in the knowledge society. This notion of quality may be particularly appropriate when there have been significant changes in the profile of learners, for example, when changes in society or politics have enhanced access to higher education for large numbers of disadvantaged learners.

The use of transformative learning in quality assurance as expounded by Harvey, relates to the empowerment and enhancement of the learner (Harvey, 1999).

> Developing critical ability is about students having the confidence to assess and develop knowledge for themselves rather than submitting packaged chunks to an assessor who will tell them if it is sufficient or correct. A critical ability enables students to self assess, to be able to decide what is good quality work and to be confident when they have achieved it. In short, an approach that encourages critical ability treats students as intellectual performers rather than complaint audience. It transforms teaching and learning into an active process of coming to understand. It enables students to easily go beyond the narrow confines of the safe knowledge base of their academic discipline to applying themselves to whatever they encounter in the post-education world. If the quality assurance is to have some value it needs to measure the transformative view of learning.

Essentially, students' critical ability or their ability to self assess is an important criterion if they are to become forward thinkers, and become relevant in life after school. External quality assurance needs to

measure how this criterion is enhanced or whether it is encumbered. This is why external quality assurance needs to take a leading role in ensuring that higher education provides a successful transformative experience. Examples of such transformation could be found in the discourse of Harvey and Knight (1996):

- shifting from teaching to learning;
- developing explicit skills, attitudes, and abilities as well as knowledge;
- developing appropriate assessment procedures;
- rewarding transformative teaching;
- encouraging discussions of pedagogy;
- providing transformative learning for academics;
- fostering new collegialism
- linking quality improvement to learning;
- auditing improvement.

The response from South Africa certainly touches on many of the points relating to students' protection. What is interesting is that from the two countries, no one touched the issue of students' involvement (and engagement) with quality assurance as a means of protecting students. External quality assurance agencies do not work in partnership with students or student representative bodies, which are then involved in setting the terms of reference for external quality review. This exclusion has to do with the authoritative rather than democratic nature of

quality assurance. Authoritative control-led quality assurance is unilateral as it fails to take into cognizance, students' involvement.

Given the menace of disreputable institution that are not accountable to anyone as they exist only to defraud students, it is only right to assume that when it comes to students' protection, quality assured institutions have significantly lower potential for abuse than non-quality assured ones. What is certain is that if security and integrity are compromised in an institution of higher learning then it is very unlikely that the quality of learning can neither be guaranteed nor verified. Security and integrity in Nigerian institutions have been compromised by constant strikes and closures of campuses affecting academic calendars, operation of cultism on campuses, misleading recruiting and admission practices, inadequate instructional equipment and practices, inadequate accommodation facilities, misrepresentation of accredited statuses, inadequate financial stability and non-viable education achievement.

In countries such as UK where there is little or no disruption of the university calendar, a National Students' Survey has been developed as a way of obtaining students' feedback and implicitly, an involvement in the quality assurance process. It is also questionable what is done with the feedback that students provide. Are the outcomes of feedback reported to students together with an action plan to address issues raised?

COMPARISON WITH UK

Comparing the standard of education between both countries and the UK (specifically considering for instance, the constant strikes and closure of campuses in Nigeria against the little or no disruption of the UK's university calendar), one can hardly resist acknowledging the high possibility of the issues raised by the students being collectively addressed, and instead of an action plan, evidences of actual action being put in place for all to see. I argue that if the issues raised by the students in the survey were consistently ignored, the students in question would not be participate in the National Students' Survey. Neither would the survey gain any recognition in this research. Nigeria and South Africa do not involve students in quality assurance. Students are only interviewed when visits take place but students are not empowered to evaluate alongside quality assurance agents, like it happens in most European countries.

So far, one can envision the many risks facing students: the risk of misinformation by rogue providers; the risk of deregulation by proscription of study course; the risk of low quality provision due to lack of rigour and corruption of external quality assurance agents; the risk of lack of employability and poor job performance due to absence of transformative quality assurance and finally, the risk of non-

involvement of students in quality assurance processes. Protecting students requires fostering cooperation between students and quality assurance agencies, by sharing information and giving students a more significant role in quality assurance, so that they have a contribution to make in banishing or reducing the risks. If students were aware of the existence of these risks, the impact of the risks could be minimized. Protecting students requires a reappraisal and improvement of the existing quality assurance models.

5.3.7 PROMOTION OF INNOVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Innovation involves risk-taking. It means creating space for entrepreneurship as a way of stimulating creativity in institutions. There are many ways that provide for innovation. It could be when a university develops new business models, breakthroughs in research output or partners with the relevant industry so that research findings could be turned into wealth creation, new products and processes (MIT, 2005; Forbes, 2005).

It has been alleged globally that the quality assurance of institutions does not promote innovation and development because external quality assurance agents are too prescriptive. Charles Miller in 2007 speaking at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington DC during a think tank event on 'Higher Education Accreditation: Evaluating the System and Possible Alternatives,' called accreditation the primary barrier to

innovation, change and competition. He argued that accreditation subjects colleges and universities to outmoded definitions of quality, which discourages experimentation in traditional institutions, thereby making it difficult for colleges with new instructional or business models to develop. Arthur J Rothkopf, present at the same event, who stated that universities themselves were so wedded to the *status quo* and were not open to change, corroborated his views.

NIGERIA

A Nigerian respondent from NUC cites examples of innovation in state-owned universities as situations where a denied accreditation attracts more money thereby making the university better equipped and contemporary. Other than this, it is difficult to discern sufficient, if any innovation and development taking place in Nigerian universities, as a result of quality assurance. The reason has often been to blame this on lack of adequate funding and government control but paradoxically, despite reduced budget allocations to universities, the Nigerian government continues to establish more universities for political reasons. Some of these new and existing universities continue to be marked by impoverishment due to compensation reductions, which often result in strikes, and extended closure. Reduced research focus

because of the brain drain or migration of Nigeria's strongest academics to more developed economies, seems to have also stifled hopes for innovation of whatever kind.

SOUTH AFRICA

A South African respondent from CHE identifies one of such innovations to be a quality promotion project carried out between CHE and a university targeted at improving assessment in large classrooms and this project turning out to be successful in practice. A publication about this work will be produced as a way of generalizing the good practice. Another example given by the South African respondent as evidence of innovation is how universities in South Africa are now managing budget, planning and quality assurance.

When one considers the time spent on preparing the necessary documentation for self-study evaluations, site visits and peer reviews during an accreditation, one wonders if the current practice of quality assurance may ironically be militating against desirable levels of innovation and development. A time-constraining accreditation may be considered as counterproductive as far as innovation is concerned.

Innovation is still quite difficult to audit because as Tagg (2002) noted, innovation by definition involves unknown experimentation and the development of previously untried materials, methods or ideas. It

suffices to say that while audit may offer no recompense for innovation that gives institutions an edge in social, technological or ideological changes, it does however reward those who meet prescribed targets based on what is known and established and this is what makes audit somewhat static.

5.3.8 REQUISITE FOR LICENSURE AND PROFESSIONAL EXAMINATIONS

According to Balasa (2013), licensure is the permission to practice a profession by a competent authority. Licensure may be granted on the basis of passing professional examinations, and fulfilling certain requisites for admission into a professional body.

NIGERIA

According to the Nigerian respondents, accreditation in Nigeria is not in all cases a requisite for licensure and professional examinations; there are different routes to professional qualifications in Nigeria and a degree is not often necessary since there are other qualifications that can be approved by the professional institute. For instance to become a chartered accountant, the professional body ICAN offers applicants two types of examinations: Accounting Technicians Scheme (ATS) (which does not necessarily require a degree) and the institute's professional examination which requires a degree. In banking, a school leaver can begin from the very base, which is to attain a certificate in banking, and from there ascend up through various other examinations. In South

Africa and indeed in the UK and USA, the situation described above is not any different.

Nigerian respondent 1, however, sees a contradiction with regards to professional bodies:

> Let's look at it this way, for the professional bodies we have problems with our laws. We've come to see that even though there is an exclusivity of the quality assurance activity vested in the National Commission, several other bodies; professional bodies also have something similar … but what value it carries is a problem because at the end of the day, ours is a constitutional issue. We felt that if we're working together there is no point trying to say I'm superior to you and what we are trying to do for any of those professional areas, is that we ensure that there are one or two slots for them to nominate one of their members

Again one can spot the meaning in the phrase 'there is an exclusivity of the quality assurance activity vested in the National Commission' and the phrase 'ours is a constitutional issue'. The understanding here is an authorised, controlling stance of quality assurance whose management is exclusive to NUC. Nonetheless this respondent confirms that NUC invites members of the professional areas to join the accreditation of an institution 'what we are trying to do is that for any of those professional

areas we ensure that there are one or two slots for them to nominate one of their members'. Apparently the onus for quality assurance does not seem to rest with the institutions but nominees from institutions are invited to participate in the evaluation. At least, one can decipher from the respondent that there is an involvement of professional bodies. The complexity of programme accreditation undeniably requires the assistance of professional bodies whose accreditation criteria aligns with the profession's curricula and instructional practices. Accordingly, employers can also report improvement in competencies in connection with students' learning outcome.

The Nigerian Respondent from NUC reports that conversely, certain professional bodies require that students who sit for professional examinations should be graduates from programmes that have been accredited by the NUC and:

> 'As long as we, the National Universities Commission, do not grant that recognition to an institution to conduct degree education then it will be regarded as not having met the minimum requirement and therefore ICAN will not accept qualifications from there'

SOUTH AFRICA

According to CHE (2003), South African Acts prohibit providers from offering programmes that lead to a professional qualification, if the relevant professional council has not accredited them. But there are some exceptions when some providers may legally offer programmes without accreditation. Such programmes having a non-accredited status would not receive financial support from the respective professional council but on the other hand, they could be given financial support as a kind of development assistance to enable them become accredited. In certain professions such as accounting, students would not be allowed to write the professional examination if they have not completed their qualification from an accredited provider.

By contrast in Nigeria, a student can write the accounting examination (ICAN), regardless of whether such student is a graduate or not. The ICAN examination itself is considered to be academically rigorous enough to attest student's competence. South Africa's policy on the other hand is based on the assumption that students without degrees have a minimal chance of passing. In professions such as the health profession, the Medical and Dental Board will not register a student who graduates from an institution that is not accredited. In contrast, the engineering profession permits all students to write its examinations irrespective of nature of the institution the student attended.

We have already seen the complicated system of South Africa where there are multiple quality assurance agencies. Through its permanent committee, the CHE established by the Higher Education Act (Act 101 of 1997 amended by Act 55 of 1999, Act 54 of 2000 and Act 23 of 2001), is responsible for quality assurance in higher education. Having itself being accredited by SAQA in March 2001 as the Higher Education and Training (HET) Band ETQA (Section 5(1)(b)(1) of the SAQA Act of 1995. Similarly, HEQC as an ETQA was accredited by SAQA, as an ETQA primarily responsible for higher education. In addition there are also the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) established by the Department of Labour (Skills Development Act, Act No97 of 1998), and their function is to monitor education and training in their specific sector (Section 10(1)(b)(iv). Like CHE and HEQC, all SETA have to be accredited by SAQA. There also exist the Professional Councils who establish, promote and control standards in education and training, relating to graduates who practice within a specific profession. Some of these professional councils are statutory while others are voluntary or non statutory. THE HEQC is expected to co-ordinate all these bodies (Education White Paper 3: 1997).

This set-up has some potential for confusion because of the overlaps and obvious duplication that exist and it is uncertain how coordination can effectively be handled without confusing or overburdening providers. For example the Engineering Council in South Africa is an

autonomous statutory body established by the Engineering Professional Act 2000 (Act No 46 of 2000). This Act empowers the Engineering Council with different categories of registration as well as accreditation powers to include accreditation visits to institutions, and accreditation of programmes offered by providers other than universities and technikons. They also set up and audit academic standards for purposes of registration, through a process of accrediting of engineering programmes at universities and technikons.

It is still unclear how effectively all of this is organised, or what approach would enable consistency and coherence within South African legislative and regulatory frameworks.

5.4 ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY

Academic freedom and institutional autonomy are oftentimes perceived to be at variance with quality assurance (Higgins, 2000; Jansen, 2004; Du Toit, 2013; Southall and Cobbling, 2005; Habib, 2006). If the onus for quality assurance rests with the institutions themselves then one argues why academic freedom and institutional autonomy should not be seen as complementary rather than being seen as conflicting.

NIGERIA

Some scholars from Nigeria have defined autonomy as a situation whereby an institution becomes self-governing, appoints its key officials, determines the service conditions of its staff, controls its students' admissions and academic curriculum, decides its own spending priorities and generally regulate themselves as independent legal entities without undue interference from the government and its agencies (Akinwumi and Afolayan, 2001; Babalola, Jaiyeoba and Okediran, 2007). This definition views autonomy in absolute terms and the difficulty is whether this concept of autonomy balances with accountability: a purpose of quality assurance. It is agreed that a university that has been given a license to operate can conduct its activities without undue interference and that such autonomy is what drives innovation and development. However there are other obligations that the university must heed to in order to gain public trust and those include fiscal obligation necessary for financial probity, and also co-operation with higher education stakeholders including government, for accountability purposes. Trow (1996a) mentions trust, formal accountability and markets as three forces that must govern autonomous institutions. Trust, he asserts, is what provides the greatest return for the least overhead cost. Trust according to the CHEA Report (2008) is maintained 'through transparency and self-correction'. Accordingly, if institutions lack candour in dealing with accrediting organizations, then public trust is ultimately forfeited.

SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, academic freedom and institutional autonomy are values contained in the South African Constitution (1996) and the 1997 White Paper. The South African Constitution (Chapter 2, Section 16) declares academic freedom as an aspect of freedom of expression. The constitution however does not provide any guidance on what this right involves and there are so many prevailing notions by South African academicians, contesting the infringement of this notion as indicated earlier. Jansen, during his lecture at the 41st TB Davie Memorial Lecture at the University of Cape Town South Africa in 2004, accused the government of nine 'specific actions that have contributed to this receding line of autonomy once bitterly defended within universities'. Jansen argued that the interventions by government are not 'unnecessary or avoidable or intentionally pernicious,' but have actually 'changed institutional practice' and institutions have become quite adept at dodging policies they do not like'. Jansen then drew a parallel between what prevailed during the apartheid government and in post apartheid times by stating that 'there might very well be a degree of political continuity between the de Klerk proposals for greater control over higher education (late 1980s) and the Asmal plans for greater state intervention in this sector (late 1990s)'.

Jansen's pronouncements stimulated a few refutations and certainly very interesting debates. The Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor,

dismissed Jansen's claim as a pretext for resisting democratic change and then asserted that 'we (meaning the government) cannot stand by and watch institutions collapse' (Sunday Independent, 2004). He then asserted that institutional autonomy cannot be absolute but must be moderated by accountability, and then blamed universities' previous inertia and maladministration for the intervention they are currently experiencing:

> Institutional autonomy cannot be unfettered and must be linked to the demands of public accountability. In particular, there is need for institutions receiving public funds to be answerable for their actions and decisions—not only to their own governing bodies, but also to the broader society. The unaccountable and laissez-faire development of South African higher education has greatly contributed to the inequalities and inefficiencies that we grapple with today. These include the unnecessary duplication of costly areas of study without due regard for quality, and ill-conceived public-private partnerships where the academic responsibility of public universities is abdicated in favour of financial gain and financial maladministration. (Sunday Independent, 2004, p. 2).

Jansen's (2004) contention is an important consideration for this research because it presents an important example of institutional position in the face of quality assurance practices in South Africa.

> The state now decides what can be taught, or rather, what institutions might be willing to teach without subsidized income, through skilful manipulation of the funding formula. What the "programme and qualifications mix" exercise does, in effect, is to authorize the state to decide what can be taught where, if at all, irrespective of the local demand or institutional capacity. Moreover, an unprecedented flourish of bureaucratic structures—the South African Qualifications Authority, the Council on Higher Education, the Department of Education—now create a series of approval barriers that must be scaled in order to have any new programme or qualification approved. So, it is not only that decisions about what can be taught are now centralized, but also there are structures of bureaucratic compliance to ensure that institutions act in accordance with such authority. (Jansen, 2004, p. 5)

His argument is re-echoed in Blackmur's (2006) contention about the command and control dynamics of South African's regulation agency and a generalist model by South Africa's quality assurance agents, for

insisting that MBA must use the action research method and be devoted to South African issues. Also, Jansen's observation of the problems associated in the unprecedented flourish of bureaucratic structures by the various quality assurance agents were similarly highlighted by Strydom (2001), when he contested the existence of too many quality assurance agents that made the statutory process and policy development overwhelming complicated. While it is not unusual for the radical reforms taking place in South Africa at that time to be met with some resistance and for government to have a rationale for financing universities, as indicated in the funding formula, Jansen's disputation indicates problems of non-inclusivity and possibly too prescriptive formulations in the quality assurance arrangement. Quality assurance requires democratic representation ensuring that sufficient consultation has been made with stakeholders. before policies are formulated and enforced.

Jansen also claimed:

> That the state now decides which institutions will offer what programmes. For example, the decision to close Mining Engineering at the University of Pretoria and transfer that responsibility solely to Wits University is a case in point. It is not only that the state withholds funding from new proposed programmes, but that it has taken it

> upon itself to close down existing ones. (Jansen, 2004, p. 5–6)

Mergers remain a historical fact in global higher education that always needs to be defended, as it could sometimes present itself as offensive. The South African mergers were highly publicized during the post-apartheid transformation as a way to create a more equitable nation: 'a rainbow nation' (a phrase credited to Archbishop Desmond Tutu). These reforms brought about a range of speculations about potential problems, and disappointing results such as job retention/losses (Curtis 2002), unwelcome compromises of various sorts (Kotecha and Harman, 2001; Humphrey 2003), xenophobia and language barriers (Mabokela and Wei 2007). Although many mergers were able to overcome anticipated barriers and withstood successful institutional audits, the early concerns raised by Jansen about the proposed merger may have been heeded. Today, both the University of Pretoria and the University of Wit remain the only two running Faculties of Mining Engineering. This could be indicative of how creation of awareness by faculties can facilitate positive resolution on the part of quality assurance agents.

Jansen's fourth contention was:

> That the state now decides how students will be taught by placing institutional qualifications on a national framework grid through which qualifications are

> organized and delivered. The requirement that learning outcomes should be specified, that assessment criteria should be made explicit, and that programmes should be "packaged" in particular ways are unprecedented intrusions into actions that were always considered the domain of the universities. Again, the issue for now is not whether such state interventions hold educational value or not; the point is that further ground has been lost in traditional areas of institutional autonomy. (Jansen, 1998, p. 218).

This again, is part of the concerns expressed by University of Wits over the disapproval of a mentoring course. It suggests problems associated with a too prescriptive framework. Although some would argue that the main problem with the national qualifications framework is the way it is conceptualized (Allais, 2003), or that the problem lies in power relation since the NQF is a 'top down initiative' led by government and its agencies on how a qualification should be designed, and so it is likely to face resistance from 'vested interests' (Young, 2005). But it is evident that a flaw lies in the idea that specifications can increase quality of education, and its seemingly insufficient consultation with universities. As McGrath (1996, p. 15) argues,

> The proposed structure for the NQF does little to dispel the view that its proponents are equally ignorant of the position and realities of the universities…. Furthermore, the proposed list of fields and NSBs in appendix B (but arising from earlier working group 9 deliberations) showed apparent contempt for academic conceptions of subject boundaries and the right of subject specialists to determine, or even have a say in determining, such boundaries. It also betrayed a heavy bias towards an instrumentalist view of knowledge, which seriously undermines the validity of academic pursuits.

Jansen's contention below about the funding formula demonstrates how incentive funding can bring about unintended consequences acting as a disincentive for quality.

> That the state decides on which programmes will be funded at what levels—but in ways that appear increasingly arbitrary such as the differential funding decision on what kinds of programmes are more desirable than others e.g., the funding formula privileging masters degrees by dissertation only, over those in which theoretical training takes the form of coursework—irrespective of whether the latter course of action

> strengthens and deepens the quality of the thesis research being submitted. (Jansen, 1998, p. 218)

The disjuncture perceived between institutional autonomy and accountability is a hindrance to effective quality assurance implementation. There were conditions in South Africa to justify the reform, given the historical context, but it is suggested that the government did not do enough to ensure that the principles of participation and collaborative intervention were followed and proper conceptualization was not sought before the enforcement of reforms in institutions.

Collaborative quality assurance is a precondition for quality assurance and the strongest way to guarantee a sustained and successful reform is through a vision that is shared by all stakeholders including government, industry, institutions and students. Reforms should also depend on circumstance and capacity, not on imposition by authority or a mandate. A successful collaboration is one that is premised on inclusiveness, trust, and creates a balance between autonomy and accountability. In a successful collaboration, government is less likely to be seen as the external intruder but rather, as the facilitator and supporter of reform. Prescriptive quality assurance could also defeat the whole purpose of this mechanism.

An example of the dissonance between academic freedom and quality assurance is contained in the discussion between the University of Wits and its HEQC programme accreditors. The bone of contention is the learning outcome, and a seemingly over-prescriptive approach. We have already seen in Chapter 2 that learning outcomes are useful, and their importance are understated in global quality assurance. Quality assurance has been criticized for not measuring learning outcomes and so, it is significant that learning outcomes forms part of South Africa's transformative agenda. Nonetheless, the formulations of learning outcomes at best should serve as a guide and not a prescription. When it prescribes, institutions are more likely to feel that their views are not adequately addressed. The main contention held by the academics of University of Wits' faculties was over the non-approval of a mentoring programme in 2004 and their suggestion that the academy, including HEQC, must address itself to the limitations of outcomes-based quality assurance. Below is an excerpt from the University of Wits in its appraisal of its programme accreditation. Quoting from the panel's recommendation, Wits states that

> The panel is concerned that your learning programme outcomes are not measurable e.g. you have used the phrase to develop an understanding '14 times. How does one measure understanding? (Shalem, Allais and Steinberg, 20011, p. 52)

then the following comment followed:

> So reads the official form from the panel of evaluators employed by the ETDQA, explaining the rejection of a short course on mentoring run by the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). The panel of evaluators (henceforth, the evaluators) had rejected our application for accreditation on the basis that the course did not seem to them to comply with the outcomes captured in the two unit standards against which we had attempted to get the course accredited. We had thought that outcomes are a guideline to be interpreted against the needs of a specific course, and the evaluators claimed to agree with this approach. But the language of their evaluation reports and the spirit of the discussions we held with them suggested that the evaluators used the outcomes in the unit standards in a far stronger way. When we challenged them on the rigidity with which they enforced their technical interpretation of the outcomes, they told us on the one hand, that "It's not us, it's the law", and on the other, that we should not call their processes technicalities because "this is what we have been struggling for, for many years". No matter how we tried to show that the course met all the specific outcomes of the unit standards, albeit through our

> list of learning programme outcomes that foregrounded content, the communication hit an emotional and conceptual deadlock that we were unable to break through. The evaluators were unable to see what our course consisted of, and unable to hear what we were saying about it. Why?

In 2005, CHE established a task team to undertake an independent assessment on the nature of government regulation, and to analyse the nature of government's regulation with particular reference to the concepts of academic freedom and institutional autonomy. Two years after the commissioning of this research, the task team convened a seminar to deliberate on the findings. Institutional autonomy according to the HEIAAF (2008, Section 2.4) can be figured as a continuum with five different stages. The first stage, which they consider to be virtually impossible, is the 'hypothetical absolute autonomy' implying total independence from external influence. The next stage is characterised as the 'TB Davie paradigm'. Thomas Benjamin (TB) Davie was a former principal at the University of Cape Town and he formulated a concept of academic freedom, which enjoyed a lot of popularity within the anti-apartheid circle. According to Higgins (2000), TB Davie declared academic freedom to be:

> Our freedom from external interference in (a) who shall teach, (b) what we teach, (c) how we teach, and (d) whom we teach'. In more detail, it stated that: 'we desire at all times (a) to be permitted to appoint our staff on the grounds of their fitness by scholarship and experience for the research and teaching for which they are needed, (b) that the staff duly appointed shall teach the truth as they see it and not as it be demanded by others for the purposes of sectional, political, religious, or ideological dogmas or beliefs, (c) that the methods of teaching shall not be subject to interference aimed at achieving standardization at the expense of originality or orthodoxy at the cost of independence, and, lastly, (d) that our lecture theatres and laboratories shall be open to all who, seeking higher knowledge, can show that they are intellectually capable of benefiting by admission to our teaching and are morally worthy of entry into the close intimacy of the great brotherhood which constitutes the wholeness of a university. (Higgin, 2000, p. 106)

Institutional autonomy is said to be bounded in TB Davie's notion of academic freedom but this notion sees freedom in the absolute sense. Arguably, academic freedom does not mean that faculties can teach indiscriminately regardless of the mission, purpose and objectives of

the institution and the needs of the students. As CHEA report (2008, p. 61) puts it

> Individual academic freedom still applies in the sense that faculty remain professionally free to address agreed-upon instructional goals in ways that they feel are most effective. But they remain obligated to teach in a manner that helps students reach agreed-upon learning objectives and to gather evidence about results.

TB Davie's definition does not take account of shared governance nor fiscal accountability. It was relevant during the apartheid era where there was neither integration nor mutual trust but it is no longer considered applicable in this new socio-economic context.

The next stage in the continuum is 'substantive autonomy' which comprises academic self-government, but sees it as coexisting with rights and duties of government. This substantive autonomy also encompasses academic freedom as the duty to provide higher education in a manner consistent with its status as a social good. According HEIAAF (2008, p. 12):

> Institutional governance is exercised to ensure that the institution serves social and public purposes—rather than functional and/or instrumental political, institutional or market goals. It is also exercised to support scholarship,

> academic freedom and other constitutive values of the academy integral to higher education's accountabilities to society.

The definition recognizes that institutional autonomy can be infringed by external influences such as government and the market, and by internal influences within the institution itself. It also recognizes a tripartite correlative rights and duties on the part of the academy, the government and society.

The next point in the continuum, which is the 'functional autonomy', encompasses the ability of the university to function independently without undue interference by external parties or forces. The last point of the continuum is the 'instrumental autonomy', which is pseudo autonomy whereby autonomy is completely non-viable because the university's purposes and governance must be completely subject to goals of government or market trends.

Even though substantive autonomy appears to be the desirable, none of the two countries understudied can be said to have practiced it constantly. In South Africa where substantive autonomy has indeed received a lot of attention, HEIAAF (2008) reports that some infringements have been alleged:

> Higher education institutions and other stakeholders claim that some aspects of steering by government impinge

> directly on the exercise of academic values, freedoms and expertise, or are seeking to shape the higher education system according to market or political imperatives. In addition, there is growing unease around prohibitions on the freedom of speech of academics, students and non-academic staff by some institutional management (as well as other actors on occasion). Modes of co-operation inside institutions and the sector, and between institutions and government, should actively consolidate substantive autonomy. Means to do so can be suggested. (HEIAAF (2008, Section 2.4.1., p. 39)

A number of scholarly discourses on academic freedom and institutional autonomy by Taiwo (2011), Lange (2013), Du Toit (2000) and Kruger (2013), form the basis of the following discussion. Autonomy with regards to quality assurance implies freedom from undue interference in scholarly and entrepreneurial activities, but it also implies forthrightness in relation to students, the academia and quality assurance agents. Financial probity and public trust are inclusive components of institutional autonomy. Autonomy also implies that an institution determines its own quality culture, which must not be externally imposed. This implies an existing relationship between internal governance and quality assurance; and anything that

constrains that relationship, may cause dysfunction in the system. One can thereby infer that autonomy and quality assurance are inseparable.

Academic freedom is a set of privileges with correlative responsibilities: the freedom to inquire, discover, publish and teach truth as a faculty member. All of these must be conceived within the bounds of responsibility. To exert oneself to the limit of one's intellectual capacities in scholarship, research, writing, and speaking requires acting on and off the campus with integrity and in accordance with the highest professional competence. The search for truth and the commitment to the truth of the academia is evidently a public good. Conversely, freedom cannot thrive in an environment fraught with instability, government interference and a lack of self-regulating internal and external quality assurance. Academic freedom is not a viable concept in a place where education is more of a privilege rather than a right. Neither can academic freedom prevail where programme accreditation is very prescriptive. The concepts of academic freedom and institutional autonomy on the other hand are not mutually exclusive. Institutional autonomy guarantees intellectual inquiry and intellectual freedom.

A South African respondent from CHE opined that:

> the kind of thing that may be intruding for university is telling them what they should do but then it depends on

> how you portray it. We live in a world of peers therefore it is not the QA that makes judgment on why they should do this. Rather it is still the same people who stay in the education centre, who mention the credibility of their own programme. In that sense, the institution is autonomous because we don't tell them what to do but peers tell them what is deficient then we ask them to address those particular issues in the interest of their student.

The comment by the South African respondent above coincides with the view of the Nigerian respondent, that there is indeed the practice of peer review when it comes to examining of sites and documentation of institutions. However, the peer-review system may guarantee the autonomy of academia but does not in the same manner guarantee the autonomy of institutions. Also, the process may be considered to be self-referential to the general public because, as peers, they may have a stake in the institutions under their review. Conversely, there is also the fear of reprisals as a lecturer in a federal university pointed out:

> The university may feel that these assessors coming from the University of Ibadan are too tough and they may want to revenge when it is their turn to assess.

NIGERIA

In Nigeria, academic freedom and autonomy are considered to be relative and depending on context. The system is also described as a peer-review system and so it is considered to be fair.

> But well, the question of autonomy and academic freedom are relative things that you can have more of or less of depending on the existing quality environment and some are quite happy with the regulatory regime that we impose on the university system and whereas a few think that perhaps the quality assurance regime is intrusive of their academic, not only academic aside, but freedom as a whole, as institutions; but what quality assurance does is to get hold of academics to tell us what they think should be the minimum requirement for a good programme and both from point of resources, and interaction between those resources, and both human material, and we call these things minimum standards and then we measure their performance against these standards.

This respondent explains minimum standard as a criterion for programme evaluation and how peer review is being carried out.

> At the end of the day it is they themselves and it is a peer evaluation as we as a National University Commission never bring in outsiders, we bring in their own fellow

> academics from other institutions to evaluate them and so to that extent it's really the university system evaluating itself, and we think it's a very fair system that does not in any way infringe on, they decide their curriculum, but then we are able to say that based on what we collectively as a university system agree should be a minimum standard, your curriculum has either met or failed to meet that standard that's all.

This closing remark brings to mind, the attitude of a basketball net (regulators) towards a basketball (institutions). Although poised to receive the ball at all times, the net also does not hesitate to expel the ball. If indeed a university is considered capable of setting valid minimum standards against which its performance can be measured by certain external regulators, then could such a university be considered sound enough to operate autonomously and should it be allowed to do so? Making institutions account for a set of minimum standards in respect of academic programmes is necessary and appropriate. The question is whether expert peers have been substantially involved in the construction and judgment of the standards and if it is a peer review system, why is there fear of reprisal and why is trust lacking. Peers because of their experience are in a position to provide expert advice because as peers they ought to assume collective responsibility for the improvement of quality.

Institutions in Nigeria cannot be said to, strictly speaking, enjoy academic freedom and institutional autonomy, although traces of such could be identified. Perhaps part of the problem could be that the country's institutions have often been at the mercy of the different political regimes. The military government with its culture of unitary command believed in a kind of totalitarianism that denied any form of academic freedom and institutional autonomy. During the tenure of democratically elected governments, the situation is not any better because institutions depend heavily on government funding and as such are subjected to interference from government; especially in the internal governance of the university.

An arrangement believed to be tantamount to the usurpation of institutional autonomy is the centralization of access to universities by the government. In the past, up until 1978, the power to determine who had access to higher education was vested in the Senate of the respective universities but the government by establishing the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), centralized admission into Nigerian universities. The Board currently uses a quota system as criteria for admission: merit 40%; catchment area of institution 30%; disadvantaged states 20%; discretion of the institution 10%. This arrangement has generated controversies. Another example believed to be against institutional autonomy is in the establishment of academic programme. A proposal to establish a new programme ought to

originate from the respective university departments and scrutinized by the faculty boards before consideration by Senate. The current practice requires an approval from the NUC. This involvement of the NUC is justified by the need to ensure availability of resources before the commencement of a programme. Again, this is could be judged to be a form of interference. Another area that could be infringing on autonomy is the role of the Visitor. The President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the State Governors are Visitors to Federal and State universities, respectively. The present arrangement gives the Visitor absolute power to appoint a vice-chancellor out of the three candidates recommended by the University Council. Lack of financial autonomy is another aspect constraining autonomy: the historical background of Nigerian universities makes absolute dependence on government for their financial requirements inevitable. For instance, available data indicates that 80% of the personnel expenses are paid; yet the welfare policy of the government also outlaws payment of adequate tuition in public Nigerian universities, yet without corresponding provision of adequate financial support for tuition by government.

As part of paving the way for institutional autonomy, the funds for Nigerian universities are no longer channelled through the regulating agencies in Nigeria, but are now managed directly by the governing councils of the universities. Although JAMB still exists, universities can now organize their own post-JAMB tests to determine eligibility among

those who supposedly passed JAMB. Nevertheless, academic freedom and institutional autonomy have still not reached the desirable stage, as universities are ever so often plunged into indefinite strikes. The last one recorded in Nigeria lasted five months ending October 2009. The reason for the 2009 strike in Nigeria is that government was accused of failing to keep its promise to sign an agreement that would, among other things, bring about a series of provisions that would actively protect and promote university autonomy and academic freedom.

In both Nigeria and South Africa, where there are varying degrees of contestations around academic freedom and institutional autonomy, we have also seen how quality assurance agencies have tried to address these contestations. South Africa set up a panel to investigate the accusations of infringement. Nigeria set into motions a number of reforms.

ANALYSIS OF THE RELEVANCE OF THE HEIAAF TEAM'S RECOMMENDATION.

Perhaps, the recommendations of the HEIAAF task team may have some relevance for both countries; it makes it incumbent upon governments through the quality assurance agents, to act in a 'facilitative and supportive' manner 'to promote and uphold academic freedom'. It also requires that government make resources available to higher education institutions to enable them 'to fulfil their share of

accountability for meeting public goals, and on terms which are conducive to the exercise of academic freedom' (HEIAAF, Section 2.5). Government is also required to have an attitude of willingness to explain itself to society and to accept the discipline of justifying its own behaviour when it seeks to impose accountability. Government is also expected to refrain from the one-size-fits-all approach, by embracing a form of regulation that is adapted to differentiated institutional missions and capacities. Would a democratic approach to institutional quality assurance, which involves all stakeholders and vests absolute responsibility on the institutions, with quality assurance agents acting as 'guides on the side', be a way forward?

5.4.1 ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability, as we have seen in Chapter 3, is a purpose of quality assurance. Also, we have seen that compliance-led quality assurance is accountability-based. Accountability has the full support of government that subsidizes public education and therefore, endorses quality assurance as its means of securing accountability. Quality assurance encourages a degree of compliance to policy requirements and serves to control a burgeoning private sector; especially in a world where public accountability is often put to the test. While many benefits can be accrued to the current practice of accountability-based quality assurance, yet given a situation whereby so much money and time is spent and sometimes there seems to be decreasing marginal returns, it

is logical for stakeholders to expect that QA procedures provide a rationale for ensuring that the level of resources devoted to institutions are utilized at an appropriate level. Accountability thereby provides a means for such verification.

Accountability is one of the main attributes of quality assurance and its importance lies in its bureaucratic relevance of bringing policies in line with practice and making institutions accountable. According to Harvey (2004, 2010), accountability is a quality monitoring procedure, which serves a variety of purposes alongside improvement and information. He identified three broad concerns of the accountability function. First, accountability to the external financiers of education (the government), which is the government, who have a right to expect that public money invested in education, is spent appropriately. Second, accountability required of private providers who are not funded by government, but are still required to demonstrate that the principles and practices of quality higher education are not flouted. The third aspect of accountability is that owed to students to ensure they obtain an appropriate educational experience.

The context of accountability in higher education is important but the net effect of over-emphasis on accountability is compliance. Compliance checks alone can negatively impact on higher education

performance and productivity. As much as many would like to see accountability de-emphasized, the current political and economic climates where public institutions are largely dependent on government funding, and where there are instances of abuse by bogus institutions, unethical faculties and pursuit of profit at the expense of quality, makes it unlikely for things to change. The challenge is how to increase the relationship between accountability and improvement, as well as how to ensure that there is proper stewardship of resources and that students acquire the skills and abilities needed after graduation. The hallmark of quality assurance is that which blends accountability with improvement and stretches beyond accreditation to benchmark students' learning outcome, innovative research and community service.

NIGERIA

Responding to accountability in Nigerian institutions, a Nigerian respondent from NUC asserts that:

> Those who fund the institutions would like to be assured that the institutions, I mean the products from those institutions are of good quality, because they fund them to bring out products that are useful to the society. Quality assurance is able to now indicate, whether or not, the institutions are meeting the expectations of their stated

> mission. The owners or founders of these institutions fund them to meet their mission and quality assurance is an evaluation of whether or not the institution are meeting their mission, to that extent, it promotes accountability.

Implicitly, accountability in Nigerian institutions is spurred on by the need to demonstrate the quality of the institutions to those who fund education, and to ensure that institutions meet their mission. Note the use of the word 'product' underlined above. Acclaiming students as products falls within the consumerist view of education. Students are participants in the educative process. Accordingly, as Harvey (2004, p.14) observed, education is not a service for customers much less a product to be consumed, but an on-going process of transformation. He saw this transformation as encompassing two elements: enhancement and empowerment. Enhancement is what leads to change in the participants while empowerment is when participants take ownership of their learning process; thus, increasing their sense of confidence and self-awareness. If quality assurance is to serve its purpose then a university's accountability process needs to monitor stewardship while at the same time, enhancing and improving institutions to ensure a proper transformation of students.

SOUTH AFRICA

According to CHE South Africa, accountability is important because government's funding of education is their way of fulfilling their obligation to support higher education as a public good and at the same time, government is provided with a powerful instrument for steering the system in the direction of specific national and policy goals (CHE, 2004: Section 11/1). In South Africa, private institutions do not get funding from the government but they are still accountable to government because they must demonstrate that they are financially buoyant. The same principle applies to Nigerian private institutions.

Financing for public institutions in South Africa was originally done on a cost-sharing basis with government contributing an average of 85% while institutions through tuition fees, donations, contracts or sale of auxiliary services, raised the remaining 10–25%. The net income portion varied from one institution to the other and was determined by institutional size. This system proved to be counter-productive because rather than diminishing, it seemed to perpetuate institutional inequalities. It promoted huge numbers of students' enrolment to less costly courses in the humanities and conversely huge dropout rates, while enrolment to the more costly courses in the natural sciences remained relatively low. Historically, white institutions, because of their prestige, had larger number of students' enrolment and completion rates, as well as, more research outputs, because they had more postgraduate students. As the market was decisive, financially

sustainable institutions sought to increase their cash base and thus, de-emphasized creative planning. In 2003, the funding formulae were then introduced comprising block grants and earmarked grants by government. The governments provided block grants using contribution by indices such as student enrolment including enrolling students from disadvantaged groups. As such, cost per student for different subject matter categories, improved graduation rates. There are also funds earmarked for the national student financial aid scheme, research development, foundation programmes, approved capital projects, interest payment on approved loans, and teacher development. The funding formula presents an incentive for efficiency and equity, because the principles governing the financing were in line with the transformative agenda to address the gross inequalities of the past and so the government, as NCHE (1997: Chapter 5) defined it, was guided by the principles of shared costs, development, equity and redress. CHE has a duty to ensure that institutions remain accountable, if they are to get any support from the government

5.4.2 CRITICISM OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality assurance in higher education has been the subject of a lot of criticism. Criticism is not unusual for any developing system or mechanism, more so with quality assurance that has often being described as work in progress—even by countries that have had years and years of quality assurance history. The World Bank stated, in a

Knowledge Brief (Webb, 2011), that 'The field of quality assurance in higher education is still in a state of adolescence, with varying and shifting approaches and confusion in both objectives and terminology'. Perhaps the confusion and unethical practices in institutions has not been made any easier by the approach of quality assurance regulators. Terminology also accounts for much of the misrepresentation as already observed in the section on the Mandate to quality assure, treated earlier in this Chapter. There is also the issue of imbalance between accountability and improvement, and not knowing where to draw the line between quality assurance and quality control.

NIGERIA

Speaking to the quality assurance agents themselves, a Nigerian respondent (NUC) sees two major areas as subject of criticisms. The first he identifies as programme accreditation without institutional accreditation and the second criticism he identifies is linked to minimum standards

> Well, two major areas in particular are criticized, one is programme accreditation. At the moment, there is this feeling that the entire business of the institution is not being scrutinized. The kind of resources that the institution has in place as well as the interaction between these

> resources is being assessed at the programme level. But then the governance structures as well as arrangement for ensuring the maintenance of quality have not been assessed; that is a criticism we are trying to address through institutional accreditation and that has been one form of criticism. The second criticism has been from people who feel that some of the minimum standards are rather high, higher than would be expected.

This respondent mentions the division that exists between institutional, and programme accreditation, and why programme accreditation, currently practiced in isolation, is inadequate. Institutional accreditation in places where it is practiced is understood to be a complement for programme accreditation because it applies to the institution as a whole and examines the vision, mission and goals of institutional governance and administration. Institutional accreditation also looks at the resources available for the university, effectiveness and efficiency, completion rates of students, financial management, stability and relationship with external constituencies.

NUC in Nigeria is currently considering institutional accreditation that would include, among all other considerations, a look at the discipline or moral life of students and research outputs. Yet a festering doubt became apparent when the NUC, in its 2009 conference in Abuja,

announced that institutional accreditation would be introduced to exist alongside programme accreditation; the news was received with a feeling of *déjà vu*. Akin Oyebode, responding to this news commented in the *Times Higher Education* (2009): 'enlightened Nigerians are apt to consider the trumpeted ambitions and promises of the self-same government with a big yawn'. He observed that the Academic Staff Union of Universities were entering their eighth week of strike that year because the government had failed to respond to a request for improved funding for facilities and staff emolument.

A Respondent from Nigeria (NUC) also revealed that the desires of quality assurance are not being served by peers or the government because of sluggishness.

> But we as a regulator, that's the National University Commission in particular as a regulator is of the opinion that the academics have placed this, sort of stress on themselves in that sense because it is they that were relied upon to advise us as to what the major standard was, it is they that are also relied upon to peer evaluate, and evaluate their own peers, within other universities other than their own so at the end of the day you say well, if you think so five years down the line we have opportunity to evaluate and then to renew these standards and so to that

> extent, yes. And again sometimes government, the ways of government are very slow. After we have reviewed standards and the process, implementation has been delayed and this is sluggishness because it is a government affair.

A Nigerian respondent from NUC also expressed concern about the quality of evaluators. He acknowledged that the institutions have reservations about the same reviewers being appointed all the time, as it may not give an opportunity for any existing bias to be double-checked by another because evidence taken from one source cannot be triangulated. The other concern expressed by the same respondent has to do with delays:

> For the university system one major problem criticism is, at times there is a little bias about the appointment of people\appointment of the reviewer. You find out that a particular person is appointed year in and year out for the same programme as if he is the only person in that area and if there is a bias to a particular university, that particular year they continue failing and continue getting wrong reports so that's one of the criticisms and again the other criticism is the delay in getting the report of accreditation that's a long delay.

NUC may be unaware of some of these criticisms facing quality assurance or simply has not done enough to address them, which is quite the contrary when we examine the South African situation. Without acknowledging the full gamut of problems, finding a solution may be far-fetched.

Adepoju and Akinola (2008, p. 97) pointed out eight apprehensions and criticisms facing the existing quality assurance in Nigeria:

1. General application of the criteria *vis-à-vis* the peculiarities of the respective institutions of learning in terms of age, population, and catchment area served, carrying capacity, vision and mission, etc.
2. Standardization of criteria (reliability and validity)
3. Time Frame—Time lag/span for the release of results
4. Politicization of the practice by the visitation team
5. Funding pattern
6. Lack of trust in the visitation team
7. Public relation funds syndrome
8. Selective treatment.

These reasons, they asserted is why some institutions do not accept the results of accreditation and ranking, particularly those that are not favoured by the results. They also reported some incidences of window dressing

> Accreditation exercise has turned into a ritual thus making it less effective. The practice is that before the arrival of the accreditation team, institutions of higher learning spend all available energy to prepare and put in place so many things that are not hitherto available. All they target is to survive the exercise. It is disheartening to observe that some institutions would not mind to go outside their institutions to acquire or borrow some items before the visit and return them all for the sake of the accreditation exercise. There are also stories of some institutions that are fond of using some academic staff members from other institutions to boost their staff list and pay them handsomely for the contract. Some institutions would not embark on mass recruitment exercise of staff or purchase necessary items except when accreditation exercise is fast approaching. All these window dressing styles are employed to survive the exercise and be awarded good grades.

SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, it has already been discussed how apartheid skewed and fragmented the country's education system as captured in this 1996 report:

> The deficiencies of the system of higher education inherited in 1994 included, "an inequitable distribution of access and opportunity for students and staff along axes of race, gender, class and geographic discrimination", "a chronic mismatch between higher education's outputs and the needs of a modernising economy", "a strong inclination towards closed-system disciplinary approaches and programmes that has led to inadequately contextualized teaching and research", "a lack of regulatory frameworks", and a very limited contribution to "constructing a critical civil society", (NCHE, 1996, pp. 1–2).

Most of the government's efforts to redress the inequalities were not necessarily seen to be in the interest of fairly autonomous systems existing at that time, even though there was a felt need to bring about some rationality in the systems. Conversely, resentments to on-going transformative agenda were sometimes viewed as insensitivity to the painful legacy of inequality, or dismissed as a neo-colonial concept. Higgins (2000) comments about such perceptions in speaking about the concept of academic freedom:

> In South Africa, I argued, academic freedom was in danger of becoming a received idea. One of the signs of this was

> that even trying to bring up the topic in discussions of higher educational policy tended to brand the speaker as reactionary or conservative before any actual arguments were made. Precisely because of this, I suggested, one of the tasks of the critical intellectual was to keep on thinking about academic freedom: challenging its status as a received idea by thinking about it critically, historically and theoretically, the better to make a constructive contribution to current debate and policy. (Higgins, 2000, p. 98)

South Africa has also faced considerable criticism, because of what academics considered to be managerialism in the system. Jansen (1998: p. 106-116) has been among the critics alongside Southall, Cobbling and du Toit who have criticized managerialism of the university system and how it undermines the collegiate atmosphere of the institutional autonomy and academic freedom. While Jansen tackles institutions like DHET, SAQA and CHE for their bureaucracy and for making severe incursions into institutional autonomy, du Toit, in his critique of Jansen, sees the threat as more of an internal threat rather than an external incursion as implied by Jansen. Du Toit (2000, p. 129) felt that the main threat to academic freedom was 'how to define and strengthen internal accountability, bearing in mind the growing pressures from external accountability'. His rhetoric on what he considers the 'intellectual

colonisation and racialization of our intelligentsia and academic institutions', also represents a possible threat, to academic freedom (Du Toit, 2001). Southall and Cobbing (2001) took the arguments of Du Toit further by arguing that South African institutions have actually moved from liberal racism to administrative authoritarianism, where academics were now challenged with different forms of managerialism coming from within the institutions themselves.

> Whereas previously, under apartheid, the principal threat to academic freedom was external to the 'liberal university' in the form of government pressure upon individual institutions and individuals to conform to state ideology and rubrics, the new threat is primarily internal, with academics become increasingly subordinated to administrators, who in turn are becoming increasingly intolerant of robust internal dissent. We identify this as expressive of a shift away from 'colonial liberalism' towards corporate authoritarianism. (Southall and Cobbing, 2001, p. 1)

De Toit's comment on the main threat to accreditation presents an interesting twist to the pre-existing notion about academic freedom, especially the lack of it. It makes one begin to consider the possibility of pretence by the academic institutions, in an attack-to-defend manner, towards external regulators. Is it possible that if energies were directed

on defining and strengthening internal accountability, then institutions would have little or nothing to worry about when external accountability comes to play? If every party affected by the shift from 'colonial liberalism' towards corporate authoritarianism assumes a transformative position, would it not to be safe to assume that the reign of peace between academics and administrators is thereby achievable?

South African respondent (CHE) identifies this criticism as being the inability of academics to understand why there is a need for external quality assurance.

> I think one of the difficulties is for institutions to actually understand why we are there to quality assure them rather than they themselves doing it and then at some point I think they criticize a lot about it being bureaucratic.

This response also seems to suggest that the responsibility for quality assurance rests with CHE; whereas, in reality, it is not CHE's policy.

Another respondent from CHE, South Africa, acknowledges that there are criticisms, even though institutions are fairly appreciative of the work done by CHE.

> I think there are criticisms in relation to the efficiency of the agency. I think people think and rightly so that it takes too long to audit, we haven't managed to create an

> efficient critical mass of good evaluators for the programme for example the different disciplinary areas that guarantee that we don't have glitches when we do programme accreditation. So I think that's some of the issues that worry the various system. In terms of the attitudes of the agency in relation to the universities, our external evaluation indicates that the institutions are fairly appreciative of the work that the agency has done

A South African respondent from DHET also speaks about criticisms surrounding compliance-led quality assurance, and how such criticisms led to the existence of performance measures. He also contends that the process is too burdensome, and without recompense to commensurate the additional work. He again underlined the important role played by internal quality assurance.

> You see, I think, there have been a number of different issues, you know depending on the kind of quality assurance model that people have used; on the one hand there has been the criticism about compliance for example and so what we have done is to put in place mechanism to look at the question of performance and so it is not just about making sure that there are binding statues that are in place but also making sure about what you get out of it.

> There is also the question about the resources such as money, time and people that are able to administer such and so these are the additional burden that people argue that has been placed on institutions already. The question people pose is 'who is going to pay for the additional burden that is being carried on'. And again, my view around this stuff is that, every organisation should have their internal quality assurance mechanism in place

South African respondent from (SAQA) feels that the body ought to be more engaging and pro-active in evaluating programmes as that would result in less resentment:

> In most cases, some of the institutions feel that they have not being fully consulted. When SAQA permitted some foreign programmes, there was a feeling that the government or authority should have intervened earlier; they did so afterwards and in the process they ended up accrediting only about a certain fraction of those who had actually started some programmes here, so they increasingly need to be more pro-active in that sense, this is one of the areas.

Aside from these criticisms, the legacy of apartheid is still discernible in the students' demography, which remains divided on the basis of race,

socio-economic status and completion rate. These divisions affect learning outcomes, an area that quality assurance is supposed to impact upon but apparently has not. As CHE (2010) reports:

The quality of the degrees offered is still uneven and it is not certain that employers are always satisfied with the range of knowledge, skills and competences shown by higher education graduates. Research on higher education indicates that the simultaneous delivery on all four levels of access, equity and quality is the mark of a successful and responsive higher education system. (CHE 2010, no 9, p. viii)

Even though poor learning outcome and drop-out rate is often attributed, and rightly so, to low-income families and poor academic preparation, universities' internal systems and quality assurance do have a role to play in the access, equity and quality conundrum.

Then there is the issue of fraud associated with remedying failure and dropout rates, which also points to inadequacy in the system. Quoting Jonathan Jansen of South Africa, the *Economist Magazine* (2011) reported that:

> University standards vary hugely. Jonathan Jansen, the first non-white vice-chancellor of the University of the Free State, says that at least three-quarters of South Africa's 23 higher-education establishments are "fraudulent and bad, not really universities at all". He cites exam standards being lowered to cut failure rates; students who "regularly

> trade their bodies" to pass their exams; others who blame their poor marks on "racist" teachers; and those who blatantly cheat and threaten to secure that piece of paper

NIGERIA

These malpractices are also present in the Nigerian education system where the government set up Decree 27 of 1973, and miscellaneous decree 20 of 1984 to curb examination malpractices, which prescribed a 21-year jail term for anyone guilty of such offence. Yet the miscreants have unfortunately remained undeterred. Magaji (2006) identified different kinds of examination malpractices in Nigerian institutions as impersonation, collusion between candidates, collusion between candidates and officials, assault and intimidation, mass cheating, teacher-student affair, bribery, spying, submission of multiple scripts, use of coded or sign language, and multiple entry for the same examination. Fasasi (2006) asserts that quality assurance has a role to play in the input, process and output of any educational system and then arrives at the conclusion that:

> Quality of inputs into education system would affect the quality of the examinees. High quality inputs are likely to enhance knowledge and skill acquisition. This will reduce the tendency to cheat in the examination. Poor teaching, learning and counselling activities in schools would have

> negative impact on the quality of knowledge and skills of the examinees. Finally, quality of examinees and the manner in which an examination is administered, would determine the extent of involvement in malpractices. (Fasasi, 2006, p. 18)

From the interview, it is evident that the criticisms facing external regulation are multi-faceted ranging from the perception of quality assurance as an inhibitor of institutional autonomy and freedom to the description of quality assurance procedures have been described as burdensome, intrusive and sometimes, challenging professional trust. Quality assurance has had no impact on improving learning and teaching, malpractices continue unabated. Enough has not been done to mitigate the risks of poor standards, examination malpractices and dropout rates. These criticisms constitute pervasive barriers to attaining the full impact of accreditation. The Nigerian quality agents feel that the introduction of institutional accreditation seems to be the solution that could tackle challenges; they also feel that closing the gap between the times of panel visitation and reporting, as well as the gap between publication of the reports and implementation, would avert a decline. The South Africans feel that better understanding of the role of the agent would help practice and implementation. Cooperation between institutions and quality assurance agents is also proffered as a solution. Also, being proactive in spotting problems so that they do not linger

before a belated action is taken and, certainly, the availability of more human and material resources, are part of the suggestions made by South Africans. If human and material resources were available, would they be enough motivation for institutions to establish and implement internal quality assurance processes and would they enable quality assurance agents to align accountability with improvement? Should regulators be looking at a new set of rules that align compliance and improvement in a functional quality assurance system, which incorporates ethics and responsibility as a means of achieving targets of quality assurance? Perhaps the highest moral standards imaginable needs to be demonstrated by faculties and demanded of students, mainly through example. Quality assurance agents need to demonstrate profound commitment to ethics. Perhaps it is by a shared fulfilment of the dictates of ethics rather than 'consequentiality' that universities can impact on the future.

The cyclical nature of quality assurance also means that problems might exist for some time before a regulating agency gets to detect them. On the other hand, if quality becomes part of the ethos of institutions and an internal quality assurance process exists, any teething problem would be resolved or nipped in the bud before any external scrutiny is applied.

5.4.3 QUALITY ASSURANCE AND RESEARCH

On the research front, there are views ranging from whether quality assurance of research has improved research or made it more cost effective, to the reality of trivial researches still being published.

SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa, according to UNESCO (2005) report is leading other African countries in terms of quantity of research output but according to the academia in South Africa, the quality is debatable. The South African funding formula that aims partly at helping institutions develop a stronger research culture by increasing research output has had the opposite effect:

> South African researchers publish as many papers as possible in the least demanding journals. Instead of encouraging publication in high-impact but demanding international journals with high rejection rates, researchers and their institutions are rewarded for short reports of dubious validity and value in fifth-rate journals. Only 57% of journal articles accepted for the publication count in 2006 were published in journals that were internationally accredited. (Vaughan, 2008. p. 4)

There were also complaints about some bureaucracy involved in the accreditation of South African journals, which did not favour peer review or local authorship and specific subject variation. Vaughan (2008) summarized a report made by Gevers et al (2006) on a *Strategic Approach to Research Publishing in South Africa*. Vaughan summarized the allegations as follows:

> the use of a bureaucratic as opposed to a peer-review approach to the accreditation of South African journals; ignoring field-specific variations in the annual rates of publication; a bias against co-authorship with international collaborators (e.g. an article on Nature where there is one South African author and three foreign co-authors earns 0.25 credits, whereas a paper in a local journal by four authors from a single institution, where the editorial board may even be from the same institution, yields 1.0 credits); and the absence of other stakeholders (besides the DoE) in developing the policy. (***Vaughan, 2008,*** p. 4)

NIGERIA

There is also a huge decline in research output in Nigeria where research output is a criterion for promotion in academia. Okebukola (2002, p. 5) summarized the following reasons for the decline:

- Lack of research skills in modern methods.
- Lack of equipment for carrying out state-of-the art research.
- Overloaded teaching and administration schedules which leave little time for research.
- Difficulty in accessing research funds.
- Diminishing ability of seasoned and senior researchers to mentor junior researchers due to brain drain.

Quality assurance has a lot to do if it is to optimize the research output in Africa, given that research is a core function of any university. Institutions could be encouraged to make better use of the new Internet technology and make available, open access to their repository of publications. This open access results not only in more citations to individual publishers but a growth in the knowledge economy, more visibility for Africa, and more impact brought on by research results. Certainly, the impact of training in research methodology that would yield more scholarly work, and the need for plagiarism checkers cannot be over-emphasized. The prevalence of plagiarism can only be checked,

if higher education gives some prominence to the training on why its avoidance is important and its infringement, subject to discipline. African institutions can also be equipped with some of the modern tools or software to help in detecting plagiarism, since part of the problem is the capacity to investigate aberrations. Plagiarism checking should also form part of the criteria for quality assurance.

5.4.4 QUALITY IMPROVEMENT INITIATED

NIGERIA

There have been a few quality improvements that quality assurance has helped to initiate in Nigeria. In recent times, quality assurance has led Nigerian institutions to acquire more resources. It is also leading to better-qualified staff, especially as NUC has insisted that the minimum qualification to lecture in a university should be a doctorate degree. Then there is also the initiative in Nigeria to include institutional accreditation to run alongside programme accreditation, as a way to strengthen the impact of the quality assurance mechanism. Some of these were the points made by the Nigerian respondent 1:

> I did talk about improvements in teaching, take for instance, you go out of the country, you find that some countries still use blackboards for instance, not the blackboard of the internet but the chalk board. Some

> persons will say, 'we have gone beyond this' in Nigeria. Teaching of large classes is another area you can note improvement, we know that access is one of our problems. How do you ensure you get across to the large class and ensure that you have their attention? So this concern has found solution in the area of ICT. Institutions now know that that is what should drive the system and some universities on their own, even though we have some initiatives that are on ground now, but some universities on their own have gone ahead to implement all those because they know that when the Commission comes to look at teaching and research facilities, they get points for the teacher who knows how to prepare his work and puts it on the web for the students to access. In many universities buildings you find them installed with facilities that make teaching much easier. So, we're saying that mode of delivery is then impacted

The second respondent from Nigeria mentioned that quality assurance has caused proprietors of institutions to give a lot of attention to the need to equip their institutions.

> Quality assurance has encouraged institutions to pay attention to matters of quality. And not only the institution

> but also the proprietors of these institutions, now resource the institutions better, any time we threaten; I'll say threaten because when we write letters to the universities that they should start their self study and that we are coming on a certain date, they quickly write to their proprietors and at such times, as opposed to prior times, the proprietors listen to them. As such, quality assurance has certainly helped the institutions to initiate and sustain some improvements in both their resources and operations.

If there were a culture of quality assurance, there would certainly be no need for a threat. Neither would proprietors await a threat to react or respond to institutional needs. Also the response given by NUC above seems applicable to private institutions alone; nothing has been said about government institutions where so many lapses exist and aging facilities still exist.

When this same respondent was asked why the quality of teaching and other resources does not reflect on the quality of graduates and international attractiveness, his assertion which was more of a refutation also provided very useful insights into the problems plaguing the society with regards to the quality of graduates.

> There is a phenomenon to sort of condemn everything that we have especially in the third world and even when we

> have good things we don't seem to give our- selves that credit that we have them. The universities are supposed to produce those who have sufficient knowledge, skills and behaviour to go into an area and eventually become experts, but not to be experts from day one, that's a mistake many people make and I disagree totally, that's one; two, these same fellows—Nigerians when they go abroad, at first they have problems with the equipment and so forth, it takes within six months before they come to the top of the class.

This respondent identified several reasons for the bad but erroneous publicity on the quality of graduates from Nigeria. First, he indicts employers who make unreasonable expectations from fresh graduates whom they want to perform as experts without giving them any form of induction.

> I have witnessed that over and over again. My own daughter is in the UK, she did her degree here (in Nigeria) and every interview she goes for, she gets selected for jobs. She didn't study one single course in the UK rather than just an induction wherever she was working. The quality is still there but of course we don't have as many as much opportunity for hands on experience because of one,

> overcrowding of most of the schools; because despite every regulatory mechanism we put in place the institutions still tend to be crowded; sometime in few cases where there's favouritism and those who are not suitable get employed.

Nepotism and Favoritism are among those practices that listed by Ballal and Salmi that are not in conformance with accountability. It is seen by this respondent as a contributing factor against quality.

> If not for this nepotism and favouritism, such people would be confined to the dustbin and they would not be in those places in the first place. Yet when they can't perform then some body would now point to the Vice-Chancellor who has nothing to do. Think of your relatives and mine that have gone abroad and how they have performed, they became honours students in a very short period. So what are we talking about in quality, because in relation to other countries, our own products become honours students in a very short period abroad?

This is reminiscent of Wolf (2002) who contends that higher education cannot produce work-ready employees any more than employers can provide teaching or training. Second, the Nigerian respondent cited examples of Nigerian graduates who go abroad and excel within a

short time. He refers to his own daughter as an example—that even though she did not have any UK qualification, she has been successfully selected for different job placements in the UK. He then attributes the lack of hands-on experience to overcrowded institutions. Finally accuses workplace nepotism that involves giving someone a position that is not based on merit but on kinship, which compromises performance and then gives rise to bad publicity.

From time to time one finds different kinds of condemnations of Nigerian universities, which the above respondent refers to. One of such condemnations can be found in The *Daily Sun* newspaper in its editorial page (2005) where it remarked about the survey carried out among nine universities across Nigeria and then arrived at the conclusion that:

> 'they are saddled with obsolete British imperial system equipment in their engineering workshops, equipment... which are ill-used, calibrated in imperial unit, while the entire world has switched to the System international (SI) unit'.

Adesoji and Abiodun (2010) also pointed out that there have been reports of 'result falsification, plagiarism, cheating, examination malfeasance, sexual harassment, contract kickbacks and the obligatory purchase by students of professional lecture notes'.

As the NUC respondent pointed out that it may be true that many times, Africans pay more attention to developments in the West and are quick to admit their own fallibility, as well as undermine the possibilities of their own advancement. But then complaints are rife from different sectors about problems in the university sector and one wonders if a structured quality assured induction programme might enable fresh graduates to make a positive impact in respective organisations while reducing the chances of attrition.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting as this respondent pointed out, that the 'phenomenon of condemning what we have' might have been nurtured by a lack of commitment to funding, alongside budgetary constraints. The implication of lack of adequate funding is what has led some unscrupulous academia to different forms of academic corruption, which may have had an eroding impact on quality. According to Teferra and Knight (2008, p. 341):

> 'The implications of a yawning funding gap include a relatively poor academic staff salary structure (a full professor earns about $1800 a month) which can lead to moonlighting, brain drain and academic corruption'.

These authors also observed that

> 'The obsolete teaching resources, out-dated research equipment and overcrowded classrooms and laboratories ...have a profound impact on the self esteem of most Nigerian higher education institutions and negatively affects their capacity to be active players in the international scene'. (Teferra and Knight, 2008, p. 341)

However, one wonders if the competitiveness and excellence achieved by Nigerians such as Wole Soyinka, the Nobel Prize laureate or Philip Emeagwali would have been tapped if they had remained in the Nigerian university system. Emeagwali won the Gordon Bell Prize (1989), the highest reward for technical innovation because he designed, developed, programmed and implemented the first wide-area information-sharing network system. He has since won 100 prizes for his work, and Apple has used his microprocessor technology in their Power Mac G4 model.

SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, a respondent from CHE asserts that it is hard to abstract or pinpoint quality improvement that quality assurance has helped to initiate because other factors outside quality assurance may

have influenced such improvement. She, however, identified the MBA review as the greatest positive effect on quality assurance because it sent a strong and unmistakable message across that no one is immune from regulation. She also identified institutional audit as value adding.

> It's hard to pin point things but I think that there is no doubt that internal quality assurance systems has moved across the board. I certainly think that there is a greater awareness in issues of quality. In terms of quality improvement in higher education and whether you can pick that out is not something I'm sure of, it's about the hardest thing to research, the hardest thing to abstract or attribute to particular factors because it could be a combination all sorts of things, it could be change management. It is hard to say if they can be directly attributed to quality assurance.

The accreditation of MBA's is identified by this respondent as being one of the major impact of accreditation.

Probably the biggest effect was in the national review on MBAs which was quite hard because people woke up and took notice saying; programmes can be closed up even if they were international institutions they might be closed up and everybody started to take notice and I think that's where it had its greatest

effect. On the other hand on a longer term I think the institutional audit probably did a lot to get everybody and institutions on board with the understanding of what the quality issues are, that we need to set targets measuring them and looking at constantly improving and finding ways to demonstrate that.

Another respondent from CHE South Africa identifies the distinguishing features of higher education during the apartheid regime and post-apartheid regime as indicators of improvement brought on by external quality assurance. She also mentions other areas such as teaching and learning, and student's participation in quality assurance.

> Look, I think, There are quite a number of examples, let me make a point, what distinguishes quality assurance if one looks at it from a pre 94 and a post 94 thing, this idea of having an external person, an external agency to come and give a view is quite critical. For me, that will be one of the most distinguishing factors. I can give you examples of teaching and learning and students participation in quality assurance. Teaching and learning is a permanent area of concern so we try to improve

Students' participation in quality assurance in South African institutions has been a controversial issue. In a survey carried out in 12

universities in South Africa presented by Bernadette Johnson as part of the Student Quality Literacy Project (2004), students reported that they were unaware of the existence of quality assurance structures because not enough information is passed across to them. Students also indicated their frustrations with the nature of representation, reporting that their voices were not heard and their concerns were easily discarded. A representative from the University of Fort Hare reported that:

> Fear of victimization tends to silence students. Power dynamics between student and staff with some of the later not embracing or taking too kindly to being questioned by students, especially because of the perceived culture that black students are to be seen and not heard. This is changing as we receive more and more cohorts of students who are assertive than the traditional students of the past who fell into these stereotypes

Developing the Student Quality Literacy Project as part of HEQC's work may have some potential because it centres on the role of students in improving the quality of provision at higher education institutions. The Student Quality Literacy Project skill (Naidoo, 2004, p. 4) entails:

- Awareness on how the higher education institution and programme work.

- Understanding what can be expected of quality higher education institution and programme.
- Using quality-related information to inform judgment and decisions about the quality of an institution and/or programme.
- Knowing how student opinion can best be heard and used in respect of the quality of institutions and programme.

Accordingly, this project is supposed to empower students on how to discern the legitimacy of claims by institutions and to make an informed decision before enlisting into a programme. For those who are already enrolled, the skills will enable them to evaluate the quality of the programme. Harvey (1996 in Naidoo, 2004) on students as participants in the quality process stated that students should be

> Empowered not just to select their own curriculum, nor monitor the quality of the service they are provided, nor even to construct their own contract as valuable as all these things might be- but empowered as critical and transformative thinkers (Harvey, 1996, p. 10)

The cyclical nature of the external quality assurance process places a real limit on the ability of quality assurance agents to focus on teaching and learning. However students as active participants who have a stake in learning and as the ever-present observers and recipients of learning, can, in fact, impact on the teaching and learning criterion of quality improvement.

The Students Quality Literacy Project in South Africa is laudable because it signals an interest in students' involvement but the scope, nature and effectiveness of such involvement are yet to be determined. As Naidoo (2004, p. 5) points out:

> Prospective students need information to take decisions about institutional and programme choice. South Africa has to respond to this need, especially in the view of the great demand but limited understanding of higher education on the part of many students

A respondent from South Africa DHET cited the development of the National Qualification Framework, which enables comparison across institutions, as an aspect brought about by quality assurance. This is an arguable assumption because the NQF was not primarily about quality assurance and, certainly, was not brought about because of quality assurance concerns. The NQF, however, does relate to quality assurance because of its focus on learning programme development, delivery, standard setting and the assurance of the quality of learning achievements (Nkomo, 2000 p. 7). The linkage is stated in this publication by SAQA, the implementing agency for NQF

> Traditionally, approaches to quality assurance and quality management are associated with industry and manufacturing in respect of products and services. Within education, the setting and maintenance of standards has

> been concerned with achievements of learners at exit or qualification points. Implicit in SAQA's implementation of a total quality system for the NQF is the understanding that quality assurance, quality management and accreditation are not things or products; rather quality is a process. (Isaacs, 2000, p. 10)

Ability to attract foreign students could be an indicator of quality, and it is certainly a criterion that features in ranking by the *Times Higher Education* (THE). This performance indicator is considered to be the key to success on the world stage because it signals how global a university is in its outlook (THE, 2013). According to Akpan (2012), the global rating of universities, globalization via the presence of international academics and students, is a key element that affects the ranking of a university negatively or positively. In that regard, the Nigerian higher educational sector is in dire need of reforms, with regards to its attracting of international students. A Professor Emeritus of the University of Ibadan, Professor Ayo Banjo who was its former vice-chancellor opined that the instability of the academic calendar, as a result of strikes and students' unrest, does not make Nigerian Campuses attractive to foreigners. After Independence up till the mid-1980s, the universities were a hub that attracted researchers, scholars, academics and students from far and wide. As a result of infrastructural problems, autonomy crises, and parlous funding, the reverse is now the

case (Dike, 2012). A core reason why Nigerian Universities perform poorly in the global ranking is because they cannot attract foreign members of staff and students.

South Africa has emerged as the preferred destination of most African students who want to study in Africa but outside their home countries. In 2007, there were 60,000 international students representing 8% of the total student population (Macgregor, 2010). According to the CHE (2009), the number of foreign postgraduate students was 10% in 2004, and rose to 13% in 2007. In spite of this commendable growth in the number of foreign students, the attempts to increase the number of foreign postgraduate students are being seriously hampered, due to lack of an adequate supervisory capacity. This has serious implications on the sustainability of the number of students that would be attracted there in the future as it casts a slur on the strength of its research output which is a sturdy element of the academia (CHE, 2004).

According to UNESCO's *Global Flow of Tertiary–Level Students*, South Africa hosts a total number of 60,856 students in its country, while only 6,166 students study outside the country. For Nigeria, there are no data on foreign students in the country but 38,851 Nigerians study abroad (UIS, 2013). Arguably, this could be indicative of the declining quality and standards. Table 5:1 below shows the number of Nigerians studying abroad in comparison to other countries.

Table 5.1: The number of international students in the UK higher education system in 2008–2009

Nigeria	14,380
Kenya	2,394
Libya	2,112
Ghana	2,033
Zimbabwe	1,740

(Source: HESA International Student Record 2008–09)

The improvements in the South African system, which suggests a positive impact of the quality assurance system among other contributing factors, is causing South Africa to have an attractiveness as a host country for international students (See Figure 5:1 below). Unlike Nigeria, South Africa is fast becoming a receiving country for transnational education indicative of the improvements made in the system after apartheid. A news bulletin from South Africa's *Campus Daily* (2010), quoting CHE, reported that a quarter of all doctoral graduates in South Africa are foreigners and in 2006 the record revealed that more than 205,000 of these students were from Sub-Saharan Africa. This same report however states that 'efforts to grow research postgraduates are however thwarted by lack of supervision capacity' but it also reported that even though South Africa enjoys a leading position in research output when compared to other African countries, most of these researches emanate mainly from 5 out of its 21 universities.

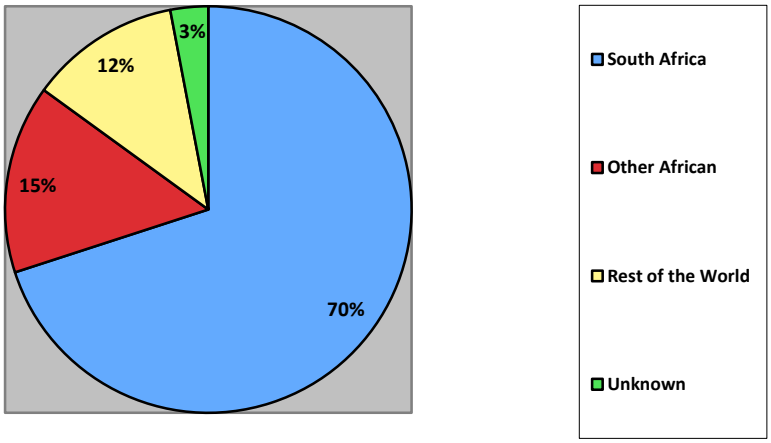

Figure 5.1: Statistics of foreign students in South African higher education institutions (Source: HEMIS (2000), Stat SA, Chapter 3 p. 27)

Research output is similarly another indicator of quality and in the South Africa region, that of South Africa prevails, it amounts to 64% of all researches undertaken in Africa (Yusuf, MacKenzie, Shall, & Ward, 2008). This result however is skewed because only five universities (University of Cape Town, Pretoria University, Stellenbosch University, University of the Witwatersrand and University of KwaZulu-Natal) dominate the production of research in South Africa. Together they produce more than 60% of all research and post-graduate outputs. The other main contributors to South Africa's research output are the nine science councils (most notably the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and the Agricultural Research Council (ARC); the national research facilities (e.g., South African Astronomical Observatory and the Hartebeesthoek

Radio Astronomical Observatory) and some government research institutes (such as the National Health Laboratory Services and the South African National Biodiversity Institute) (CHE, 2009).

DISCUSSION

Although there is little research on the impact of quality assurance, what is indisputable is that quality assurance has made things more transparent, through more documentation. The value of any improvement initiated by quality assurance ultimately accounts for international attractiveness in any university, among other factors. The UK's system like a magnet has drawn many international students with Nigeria topping the list as seen above. In fact UIS (2013) reports that the total number of mobile students hosted in the UK is 389,958.

The UK's dominant market positioning is partly indicative of its quality system which always seeks to provide a more informed understanding and collaboration in its quality assurance provisions whilst paying increasing attention to enhancing students experience and factors that help to shape them. The International Student Barometer (ISB), a global benchmarking study of the expectations and experiences of international students, carried out a survey in 2009 among 100 universities in the UK, that reported overall students' satisfaction as 81%: a slight increase from the previous year's survey that reported

80%. There are arguably several factors responsible for quality performance resulting in high reputation and high student experience but there is no denying the fact that quality assurance has a part to play. Quality assurance is also being deployed for marketing purposes, which would not have otherwise been possible if there were no perceived impacts or improvements brought on by quality assurance. Arguably, quality assurance may be giving UK institutions an advantage over African institutions; UK universities boast about their QAA endorsement, which are often deployed as a powerful public relations and marketing tool as evident on the home pages of these UK institutions. Although it can be argued that the marketability of United Kingdom's qualifications worldwide predates QAA, but by checking on how the universities continue to maintain and improve quality, QAA fulfils it role in safeguarding quality. Most of all, QAA's influence is about improvement rather than compliance and accountability. Africa students, for instance, are willing to pay five times as much in school fees and living expenses to get a UK qualification; whereas in Africa, there are several students dropping out of school because they cannot afford to pay the tuition fees already heavily subsidized by the government. There may be wider contextual issues affecting the access to universities in Africa and mobility to foreign universities but the fact remains is that a quality assurance system that builds on improvement would have more appeal and be more stable than one built on

compliance and accountability. External ownership of quality assurance focuses attention on meeting bureaucratic imperatives rather than on improvement (Harvey, 1997). In Table 5:2 below, the figures of demand for UK education continues to grow on a yearly basis.

Table 5:2 Figures for non-EU students given Entry Clearance to come to the UK over the last few years:

Table 5.2: Figures for non-EU students given Entry Clearance to come to the UK over the last few years (Source: Home Office Quarterly Statistical Summary, August 2010)

	Students	Student visitors	Total
2007	224,000	6000	230,000
2008	209,000	42000	251,000
2009	273,000	38,000	311,000

This is evidence of how foreign universities are profiting immensely from the inability of Nigerian universities and the National Universities Commission to revamp the worrisome higher educational system. *Punch (2010)*, a Nigerian newspaper reported that the Nigerians studying in Britain and America may have spent over N137.023bn on tuition and living expenses in the last two academic sessions, a figure which represents more than a quarter of the Nigeria's entire educational budget. About 10,090 Nigerian students were reported to be studying in the UK, based on the number of those who obtained

visas in 2008–2009. The figure may have been up to 28,500 but, incidentally, 65% were refused visas according to a correspondent from the British High Commission quoted by the editor of the newspaper, James Azania. The reasons given for this huge drift of student is the instability in the Nigerian universities, and conversely, better learning resources available in the UK: especially coupled with the equipping of students with a rigorous training in academic research through dedicated supervision and better employment prospects, by the UK.

5.5 WHAT IS ASSESSED?

It has already been stated that Nigeria at the moment offers only programme accreditation, whereas South Africa offers a combined strategy of programme accreditation and institutional audit. It is not the purpose of this research to determine which works best but it is important to look at what each country holds out for its institutions.

NIGERIA

Nigerian respondent 2 from NUC has given a comprehensive list of physical resources, including human and material, which are assessed by the external quality assurance agents.

> Well, we assess everything that goes into bringing out a product from the university, from the point of view of entry requirements we assess the records, the sort of

> people that have been granted admissions, whether those entry requirements are being maintained and kept, whether the processes are adhered to. We then check on the quality of entrants, we then check on the quality of staff as well the qualification that they have, the experience, terms of seniority and how adequate the staffs are, We also look at the infrastructure, whether the infrastructure needed to produce good quality are there, and if the standards are being met.

The checklist is detailed and while NUC determines the programme, rather than the Senate of the universities, the institutions determine the content.

> We also look at provisions like the micro resources that are available for use by the student of a particular programme, how current they are, whether they are adequate in qualities and so on and so forth. We also look at the curriculum, the content, what is the curriculum like because the institution have independence to produce their own curriculum to decide their own curriculum and then of course we look into the internal efficiency and the, and such internal efficiency as the rate of failures and so forth and graduation rate.

In the quotation below, this NUC (Nigeria) respondent mentions employability in the limited sense. The evidence sought for employability is not specified and the mention of checking employer's comments on graduates seems far-fetched as there do not seem to be statistical data on graduate track survey. This respondent was also quick to dismiss using employability as a yardstick to judge the quality process and this is indicative of the dispensability of employability in the existing Nigeria quality assurance framework.

> Finally, we get some information on employability where those information are not available we look at employer's comment on the graduates of the programme. Where we can't get it, then we leave that out of the evaluation process. I hope I've given you a whole run down there are many, generally what I've given you should cover most of what was done.

These descriptions on what is assessed focus on a compliance check directed at the processes guiding students' admission, as well as the quality of resources involved such as staff, students and infrastructure. The programme accreditation also examines the currency and adequacy of teaching resources cum curricula contents. According to this respondent, the internal efficiency of the programme

is determined by failure rates, graduation rates and employability of graduates but there is no enforcement on employability.

Programme accreditation by an external agent provides some credibility, because of the strong message it sends out to students and the general public that a certain programme has been verified. We are not told if the programme facilitates by verifying institutional processes of internal quality assurance. The process described by this respondent is certainly accountability. Again, note the use of the word product underlined in the response above. Graduates from universities are referred to as products, which clearly they are not because education is not about manufacturing or consumerism. It is the seventh time such usage has been noted in different respondents from Nigeria and South Africa. Products are pre-set but students on the other hand, undergo a transformation and become more discerning and therefore, cannot be stereotyped in business or market models. Speaking at the University of St Thomas in Minneapolis in 2000, Vaill (2000) states:

> That Education is clearly a service and not a product and therefore the heavily units-of-products mode of thinking characteristic of business may not hold in a service

endeavour. Many businesses, of course, are learning these difficult lessons as well as higher education.

A product-thinking mode may not be responsive to the requirements of quality assurance, and it is in keeping with the industrial quality control orientation. According to Greatrix (2012, PAGE) the language of quality assurance when appropriated by terminologies from the manufacturing sector, leads to 'conceptualisation of standards in industrial terms—and to the standardization of the product, processes and inputs'. The checklist identified by the Nigerian respondent, as what is assessed may be a good starting point, but it is certainly not sufficient because it is complaint based.

The second Nigerian respondent from NUC identified the areas that are assessed, *viz.*, 'the staff, student ratio, staff development, space per student, and the space available'. Table 5:3 below are abstractions from the components for accreditation used by NUC.

Table 5.3: Programme Evaluation Form NUC/PEF, February 2005

S/N	Components	Sub-components
a)	Academic Matters	The programme philosophy and objectives The curriculum Admission requirements Academic regulations Course evaluation (examination and continuous assessment)

		Student course evaluation External examination system
b)	Staffing	Academic staff Non-academic staff Head of department/discipline/sub-discipline Staff development
c)	Physical Facilities	Laboratory/clinic/studio facilities (area per student) and equipment Classroom facilities and equipment Laboratory size (area per student) and equipment Safety and environment
d)	Financing of programme by the university	
e)	Books, journals and other resource materials for the programme	
f)	Employer's rating of graduates, if any	

NUC assigns a particular weighting to each of the criteria above and the summation determines whether the institution has been successful in the accreditation or not. This approach is important as it validates compliance but quality assurance, as has already been examined, goes beyond the compliance mode.

SOUTH AFRICA

A South African respondent from CHE asserts that with institutional audits, they assess the 'fitness of purpose' and 'fitness for purpose' of higher education and this is done against 19 criteria set out in the quality assurance framework. Woodhouse (2012) has questioned the distinction between fitness for purpose and fitness of purpose, saying fitness for purpose also includes the concept of fitness of purpose. He argued 'how can you determine whether a purpose itself is fit unless you are ascertaining what it is fit for?'. The South African respondent considers fitness of purpose as having to decide whether institutions are doing the right thing and fitness for purpose as pertaining to doing the right thing. Fitness for purpose is a way of assessing quality. Fitness of purpose is a bit of a misnomer as it is the criteria by which fitness for purpose is evaluated, so fitness of purpose is not a definition of quality but simply a prescribed list of criteria.

With regards to the programme, the South African respondent states that:

> How you evaluate the programme design depends on what stage the programme is, it depends on the programme. You evaluate if the programme design is appropriate at the level at which the program me is being offered. You evaluate if it is a professional program me for example and whether there is sufficient work in the field of

learning in the design of the program me, the abilities of the lecturers offering assessment

South Africa, according to the CHE respondent, also examines leadership and management; the systems that are used within an institution to recruit staff, to approve programmes, and to deal with plagiarism. They also validate infrastructure such as laboratories, and assess whether the teaching staff have the right qualifications.

This level of assessment certainly has more to do with the qualitative, and is more versatile. Consistency and appropriateness are also evident in the response given, which corresponds to the requirement of quality assurance. Noticeably, there is no mention of the role of students even though in reality, students have a role in South Africa and that role has been contested by students themselves as discussed earlier. There is also no mention of the improvement component. In both countries, quality assurance more than anything else serves a public purpose and that is to inform the public that an institution has been externally audited and verified, and meets the prescribed standard. We are not told what value students' participation and internal quality assurance by institutions themselves bring to the external verification process..

5.6 INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE TO ACCREDITATION

Despite the criticisms facing quality assurance, institutions in Nigeria and South Africa avail themselves to mandatory quality assurance as it provides them with an opportunity to demonstrate that they are achieving quality in provision, and possibly providing high quality learning opportunities. Nonetheless, we have seen that institutions still treat regulating agents with suspicion, and find the procedure taxing. Also, the high presence of impression management and malpractices raise doubts about how quality culture has infused institutions.

NIGERIA

Speaking about the early days of quality assurance, respondent 1 from Nigeria identified a period of transition when institutions were ignorant of the processes of quality assurance. He also provides examples of instances where unethical practices continue to be manifested:

> I want to tell you something that I don't know whether it is really right to say so but you will manage the information. In a good number of cases—yes, because when the process began, early 80s, early 90s many university didn't do well, because they didn't quite understand the process, they didn't know what to do but year in year out they began to

> see, protest the benefit and then understood what is required to get along in the system. So if you took a copy of the minimum academic standard, whether it is a minimum academic standard or a benchmarked minimum academic standard, it gives you for the programme say pharmacy; these are the minimum courses that you won't find and that these are the minimum equipment that you require to run this program, floor space, library size and whatever is prescribed.

The minimums standard enumerated here is the compliance to a set of indicators. It is still the material aspect of quality assurance that are the focus here.

> Because of the nature and that people have felt that if for any reason our programme is denied, what will my state government say even when they have not provided funds or as a private university that means people will stop coming to enrol for that programme. We have reason to believe that some cheat in the process. Some would borrow a microscope to say they want to make up the minimum requirement. There are a few reports here and there which

This respondent mentions an on-going investigation into the misconduct described above, and that may also be the reason why NUC

has insisted that all equipment be visibly engraved with the name of the respective institutions. This is evidence of one example of what NUC has done to remedy an otherwise bad situation.

> I expect our monitoring teams are working on right now, so it doesn't make us happy and it doesn't portray us well too because sometimes we get to a place and say oh this programme has full accreditation and somebody says this programme cannot but based on what we met on ground at the time of visit you cannot deny. So we have reason to believe that it happens so that is where we are working on now

To curb further acts of game playing, NUC has devised other strategies in situations described below by the second respondent from NUC:

> Well the institutions have responded to accreditation mostly in a very positive way, there have been a few institutions that have sometimes tended to invade and corrupt the process by bringing in borrowed equipment and borrowed resources generally, including equipment, sometimes even teachers that are really not theirs, wherever we have been aware, we've taken all kind of measure to checkmate that.

This respondent explains further the systems put in place by NUC to safeguard quality. This provides a concrete example of game-playing (Harvey and Newton, 2002) and the counter-productivity of a complaint system, which yields compliant sinners.

> By having accreditation simultaneously within a given region for a given programme and we have several teams, just going at the same time accrediting and assessing of the same programmes at several institution at the same time, that are contiguous. This makes it difficult for one institution to carry their equipment to the next one and at the end. They've been cases where someone says we were at university X the other day and today we're meeting you here so which one are you affiliated to, there is one case like that, I recall one case.

The third respondent from Nigeria mentions that when he was in the university system, NUC's role was disliked and treated with a lot of scepticism but when he relocated to NUC, he began to exercise a lot of diplomacy:

> Knowing that we're coming from a place where the criticism has always been very high so if at any time one goes out address our colleagues, I would have a way of putting the issues to them and letting them know that we

> are one and the same and these are the things I know now. I have felt this is how we can meet ourselves midway and I can say that in recent times there has been an improvement in that relationship beginning with the Vice-Chancellor who has also now come to understand what quality assurance is all about, rather than being aloof. So rather than say you must do this, you must do that and we move and say, ok this is the reason why this and this should be done in this way. The relationship may not be perfect now but there has been an improvement. The other thing we might need is diplomacy at the highest level of our government, so it becomes easy when NUC is coming.

SOUTH AFRICA

Asked about institutional response to quality assurance, the response from South Africa was affirmative but we have already seen that some tension does exist. On whether external agents are aware of any form of disenchantment or game playing by institutions, respondent 8 from DHET South Africa states that there are indications that some misdemeanours do exist, which he describes as 'quite unlikely to be sustainable'. This respondent also mentions triangulation as a means to uncover any such discrepancies:

> I mean here in South Africa, it would be very silly of institutions to try to do that, it's a pity that some do try to do that then after a while they suddenly realize that it is impossible to take in all these things, this is why I was saying earlier on that these are quite a number of factors that come into play because this is one aspect we are looking at, and this is where the whole notion of triangulation is very, very important, are the facilities consistent with what the students say? And how often are those facilities used if at all? So there are quite a number of issues that come into play so it would be quite silly you know.

This respondent also feels that South Africa is exemplary because of the improvement component of quality assurance.

> I think our institutional response is exemplary and from the reports that have come out, because the way it is viewed is very important we see the whole process as one of helping the institution to improve as I said it is a question of benchmarking and also ensuring that your standards are maintained.

DISCUSSION

George Peterson, responding to my question on institutional response to quality assurance, alleged that it is quite double-sided because of what he considered to be the 'push-back' and 'pride' factor.

> Pushback when it becomes too threatening. The whole culture of evidence environment is threatening to some people. It is because if you truly do use data to make decision, then that data has to be known to people. Pride—This is easily and comfortably manifested by people; pride when quality is expressed. Pride when you can demonstrate through evidence that your students are learning and learning effectively. There is a great deal of pride in that. This is one institutional response you will want to build on.

This remark ties with the Nigerian respondent's because a lack of understanding about quality assurance and what it entails, may be daunting to institutions and regulators alike. The former higher education leader now drafted to NUC is well aware of this perception challenge and from what it seems, NUC is working towards an improved relationship. Quality assurance information cannot remain within the orbit of a few professionals.

South African respondents in this section failed to provide concrete evidence on institutional response. Some institutions in the UK for instance, take considerable pride when their good practices are highlighted in the regulating agency's reviews, and such results become marketing tools. On the web page of African universities, there is little evidence of any link between internal and external quality assurance, and no mention of regulating agencies such as that abstracted below from the web page of the University of Nottingham:

QAA assessment

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) works with higher education institutions to define, safeguard and improve academic standards and the quality of higher education in the UK.

In the most recent QAA Institutional Audit (2009) the University received the highest possible commendation and was praised for a number of features, including the contribution of our Graduate and Student Service Centres to supporting and enhancing the student experience and the University's systems for listening and responding to the student voice.

Quality standards

The University is committed to maintaining quality standards with the following approaches praised by the QAA.

Quality Manual

This University publication identifies quality systems and provides a reference point for staff and students

School review

These reviews include systematic checks on Schools' level of understanding and compliance with the Quality Manual. A process which includes strong student participation' http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/about/facts/teachingquality

The impression given by this is that external and internal quality assurance both represent a visible and significant part of institutional claim to quality.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this section, however, was to gain a bit of insight on external quality assurance regulators' perceptions on institutions' response to accreditation. If external agents are fully aware of institutional attitudes, then it would be helpful to know what external agents have done with that information, how they respond to

suggestions and whether suggestions are investigated and acted upon. A lot of discussions go round students' surveys and the usefulness of such surveys in improving students' services. There have also been research activities into getting an overview of internal quality assurance activities carried out by institutions, but very little is known about research activity done to measure institutional response by external quality assurance agents. The Dutch inspectorate is one example of where reviews are assessed and followed by a supervision of the implementation of remedial measures by the educational institutions (Court of Audit, 2000). This sort of study may have important implications for practice and innovation.

5.7 WHO REGULATES THE REGULATORS?

The focus of this section is to assess whether external quality assurance agents are subject to any form of regulation that might advance the quality assurance of institutions, encourage improvement and demonstrate accountability, so that the methods they use could be adjudged to be appropriate and fair. We have already seen the meaning of quality assurance by regulators in Nigerian and South African institutions. We have also seen that the quality arrangement is based mainly on compliance to specified standards, without a clear focus on enhancement or at least some indications on how enhancement is being promoted particularly in Nigeria. Quality assurance has certainly brought some developments in both South Africa and Nigeria but

improvement is still necessary. We have also seen the attitudes of institutions towards quality assurance, which portray a wide spectrum of a number of things ranging from pride, distrust and sometimes characterized as adversarial rather than collegial or constructive criticisms. These challenges in Africa are not peculiar to the continent but are part of the global concerns about quality assurance agencies in general. A place like Europe is taking some of the concerns about quality assurance seriously and among other things, has set up a system that enables it to demonstrate and assure quality. Find below, the *European Standard and Guidelines for Quality Assurance* (ESG) by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA, 2005), which refers to:

- standards for internal and external quality assurance arrangements for higher education institutions;
- internal quality assurance standards for quality assurance agencies;
- cyclical review of national quality assurance agencies; and
- a European register of quality assurance agencies.

As Williams (2007, pp. 7–8) stated, these ESGs are not designed to be prescriptive or provide countries with a 'compendium of detailed procedures' and much less, a European quality assurance system.

Rather it is to be seen as a source of assistance and guidance, 'a view of what should be done not how it should be done'.

This 2003 development in Europe is a form of self-reflection, to ensure that agencies have in place 'a process for their own accountability', which will ultimately facilitate 'the credibility of the quality assurance agencies', 'assist the move towards mutual recognition' and the 'mutual trust between agencies and institutions'. (ENQA, 2005, pp. 5–8.)

In Africa, there seems to be very little room for self-reflection because the activities of the quality assurance agencies in Africa have been primarily focused on control of the higher education sector and the demands of accountability.

NIGERIA

On the question of who regulates the regulator, one expected a reflective device aimed at assessing the existence of self-improvement and self-regulation mechanisms but the respondent from Nigeria said 'nobody'.

> Nobody. Except well, if you use the word in a stricter sense, nobody, no such institution is put together or established. NUC belongs to AAU, Association of African universities. Incidentally we have external assessors, for sometime now we've been having external persons on

> accreditation exercises from outside Nigeria, from sister institutions like NUC, maybe that's to check our activities and for other people to review it to see what we do and pass their comment in that sense, but in a strict sense no we don't have any regulator, but belonging to an organization like AAU if there are things we do, that are not appropriate, you know, people could comment on it, it could be peer reviewed in that setting, apart from that there is no organization set up to review NUC.

By networking and meeting with AAU and by inviting external accreditors from other quality assurance agencies to peer review, NUC believes its process is credible. The mention of AAU by this respondent is a new development for quality assurance in Africa and this has been made possible by funds made available by the Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity (GIQAC), set up the World Bank. GIQAC has provided support to AAU to assist African quality assurance agencies. This initiative has given rise to a network of quality assurance agencies called AfriQan, the African Quality Assurance Network formally founded in Dodowa, Ghana in 2009 in collaboration with AAU. The objectives of this network are to:

1. Promote a culture of quality assurance in higher education in Africa.

2. Foster collaboration and linkages among quality assurance bodies within Africa.
3. Advance good practice in the enhancement and maintenance of quality higher education in Africa.
4. Collaborate with quality assurance bodies in Africa in capacity building.
5. Facilitate research into the practice of quality assurance in higher education for purposes of improving the quality of higher education in Africa.
6. Provide advice and expertise for the development of new national and sub regional quality assurance bodies in Africa.
7. Assist members of the Network to articulate standards of institutions operating in member countries.
8. Foster harmonization of standards for quality assurance across countries in Africa.
9. Facilitate international recognition of qualifications to enhance mobility of staff and students in Africa; and
10. Promote the interests of Africa in other networks and international organizations with related focus.

The objectives are developmental and at least, are leading to a growing awareness of quality assurance in the African region although the network is not without some teething problems. Members of this network have complained about the organization being quite insular,

and about huge communication gaps that exist since countries are hardly made aware of any of its activities that would lead to the realization of the objectives specified (Members at the INQAAHE biennial workshop in Abu Dhabi, 2009 and Madrid, 2011).

This respondent from Nigeria makes it very clear that NUC is accountable to the government and its ministries. So essentially, quality assurance in Nigeria is all about accountability and being accountable.

> There is accountability at all levels we are accountable to the government that placed us there as the regulator of university education. We have the ministry of education as the principal organ of government that we report to, that asks us questions as to whether we're meeting our mission, we also have the national assembly that comes around to ensure that the resources that are given to us are being deployed to meet the purposes to which those resources have been provided and of course, other government organisations, even the ministry of finance does regulate some of, from the financial angle that our books are properly kept and so forth so we are being policed by the other regulators.

SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, the quality assurance agencies are accountable to the government but there are indications that South Africa avails itself to external reviewers and SAQA would be called in to arbitrate if a dispute arose.

> In CHE, well, we are set up in terms of the statute and we are for the most part funded by government. So we do have to report to ministry to show that we are also carrying out our mandate so that's the main thing. We are also obliged to have external reviewers ever so often, mostly internationally. So we are obliged often to keep benchmarking with other councils and I'm not quite sure of that because the legislation just changed but if they were major issues with institutions we do have appeal processes which are kind of independent of us. We also have South African Qualifications Authority, which could be called in when there is a dispute. It is quite a few checks and balances and there is a lot of report.

Should regulating the regulators simply serve accountability or a dispute settlement function or even serve a self-defence/self-justification role, even though those could be secondary benefits? Would it not be better for regulatory agents to be guided by the principles of internal reflective criticism that is external to the

organization and that is peer–review led or done by international reviewers aimed at improving a given organization's operation and fully respectful of the diversities that are region or nation specific? Involving international reviewers would be determined by the importance an agency applies to international recognition and cross-fertilization of ideas. Regulating the regulators could also serve some important purposes such as ensuring that rules of engagement between external quality assurance agents and stakeholders such as institutional staff and students are maintained.

5.8 CONCLUSION

This research started by expressing concerns over the growing problem of quality assurance in Nigeria and South Africa. However a failing quality assurance system is not an aberration that needs to be obliterated but one that needs to be cautiously examined and better understood. To provide this understanding, I examined definitional and contextual issues around quality assurance. By interviewing quality assurance regulators and analysing extant literature I uncovered deeply held assumptions about quality assurance.

I discovered the obscure meaning of quality assurance and the strong impact of industrial models that have inhibited the full benefits of compliance moderated by enhancement. The meaning, purpose and outcome ascribed to quality assurance increasingly point to

accreditation, audit and control. Even where documentations show that quality assurance is the goal, the practice falls short of its intention. Pondering on my findings and contrasting them with literature, I discovered a subtle yet unmistakable sense that even the real concept of accountability as a purpose of quality assurance is lost. This is because the underlying practice and meaning of quality assurance suggests more of control and compliance checks. If regulators practiced the real concept of accountability, then the kind of behaviour in Figure 2.4 as categorized in Chapter 3 by Salmi and Ballal (2006) would be absent and we know from the findings that this is not necessarily the case. To properly address the full ambit of quality assurance, accountability and enhancement need to imbue the overall approach by regulators in cooperation with the institutions. A quality assurance mechanism should not one that restricts but one that facilitates and is linked to students teaching and learning and the outcome attained.

The literature tells us that constraints found in quality assurance may be due to the complexities of the situational milieu and we have seen that the colonial experience in both countries seem to have necessitated a assurance mechanism geared towards achieving national goals. So even though quality assurance is 'congruent with stated requirement', which is arguable, fitness for purpose as seen in the literature remains a weak operationalization of quality (Harvey and Knight, 1996). The weakness lies in the fact that it is yet to be seen how fitness for purpose

as a concept of quality assurance empowers and enhances the learner. What fitness for purpose achieves, according to the literature, is that it provides an 'organising principle' for the quality monitoring approaches (Woodhouse, 2012). The moral and professional imperatives of quality and quality assurance require more such as commitment to the learner who deserves the best possible quality of education and institutions are obligated to meet these needs by employing the most appropriate pedagogic practices (Sallis, 2005). An important approach to quality assurance would be what Crosby, as far back as 1984, conceived to be assurance of success rather than presenting evidence of failure, or success, as the accreditation or audit exercise tends to do.

Other factors revealed in the course of this analysis are how institutions have become quite adept at game playing and how incentives for funding and research have become disincentives for quality. Absent in the practice of accreditors is a true sense of collegiality between the regulator and the regulated because quality assurance is not premised on trust and the inclusiveness of all relevant stakeholders. We also find that government involvement in quality assurance is historical and its intrusiveness continues to be experienced as constraining rather than facilitating and supportive. We have also seen that ethical issues such as cash for accreditation and bullying continues to cause potential harm to the quality of institutions. Also

hampering standards are degree mills and favouritism since those who benefit from such practices evidently would lack the necessary academic preparation. The risks of lack of employability and poor job performance are also glaring, due to the absence of a transformative quality assurance system. Also revealed are the problems associated with traditional mechanisms adjudged to be unsuitable for cross-border provisions. Or it could be that transnational education is rendering the traditional concept of quality assurance obsolete? Then there is the problem of consistency and coherence because of multiple audits in South Africa. Each interviewee's response and the analysis on the mandate, incentive, value and other aspects of quality assurance that have been reviewed of quality assurance add an important focus on the meaning they give to the concept. Quality assurance remains at the mercy of political instability, heavy dependence on government funding, and the assumed idiosyncrasies of the same reviewer appointed to the same institution year after year, preventing any advantage that could be gained from triangulation.

We do not improve institutions by driving external quality assurance out of existence, contrary to what the university academic sceptics of quality assurance think. Arguably there is the need for a more strategic approach and essentially one that practices the substance of quality assurance and not just having the label**?** What then are the possible directions for the future of quality assurance in higher education? Can

quality assurance be made to interface with the purposes of education and theories of students learning? A deeper understanding lies with the true essence of quality assurance than the one offered by the regulators that have been interviewed.

CHAPTER SIX
A MECHANISM FOR INTERNALISING QUALITY ASSURANCE

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the preceding chapter, the meaning, purpose and outcome of quality assurance have been examined through the lens of the quality assurance regulators themselves. Also examined, in an earlier chapter, are the existing frameworks of quality and quality assurance used by the regulators in both countries under investigation. In suggesting directions for the future, I will present a mechanism to be discussed at a future workshop on quality assurance. This mechanism exemplifies what a good quality assurance system should look like. It shows that if quality improvement is to be achieved then a lot of attention needs to be paid to internalising quality assurance. Harvey and Newton (2004), Horsburgh (1999) and Vroeijenstijn (1995) are among those who advocate a focus on internalising quality assurance through internal processes.

6.2 A MECHANISM FOR INTERNALISING QUALITY ASSURANCE

This mechanism in Figure 6:1 below incorporates the meaning, purpose and outcomes thereof. It does not provide all the answers but it opens

up the space for greater reflection and experimentation with issues underlying the various aspects of quality assurance. As an integrated mechanism for quality assurance, it attempts to illuminate the different aspects of the respectable scholarship on quality assurance and education. It is hoped that it will provide a valuable substructure upon which the true nature of quality assurance emerges and is practiced.

The mechanism does not seek to define quality assurance because definitions have the potential of setting limits to what a thing can do. However, it portrays the nature of quality assurance as habitual and comprising all strategic actions that complement one another in order to affect the course, goals, outcomes and improvement of higher education. Course in this sense means process. The habitual nature of this mechanism aims to address the limitations that have been identified in the cyclical nature of regulation.

As indicated in Chapter 2, the cyclical nature of the former places a real limit on the ability of quality assurance agents to focus on teaching and learning because problems might exist long before a regulating agent gets to detect them.

This proposed mechanism is part of the evolutionary process of quality assurance. It articulates the evolution of external quality assurance from a self-referential status that hitherto expects compliance to a set of

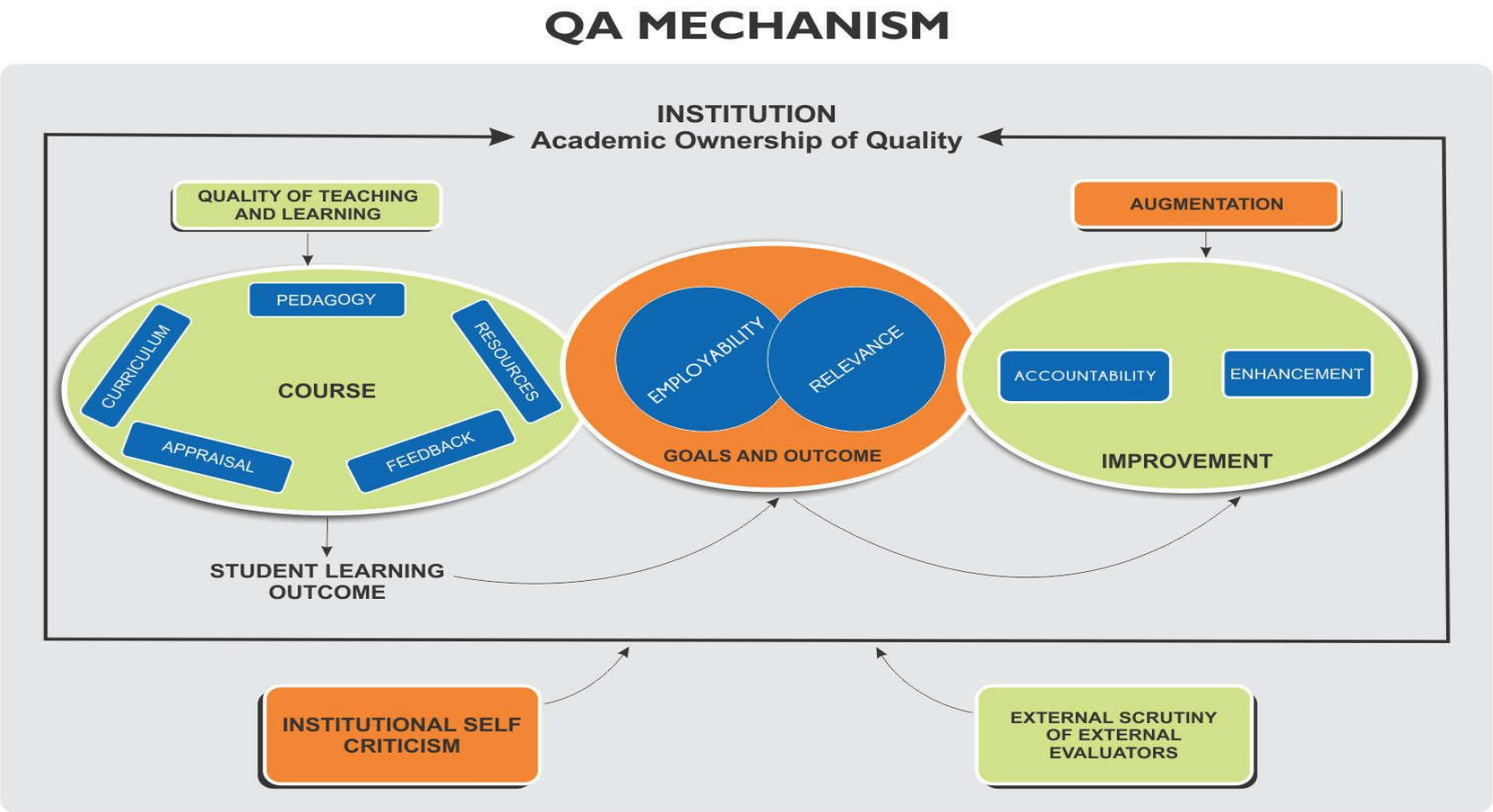

Figure 6.1: Mechanism for internalising quality assurance

performance indicators to one, which positions transformative students as the core and objective of institution-led quality assurance. It moves away from external quality assurance, which bypasses the transformative quality of teaching, quality of students learning and the essential purpose of higher education learning to a more internalized form of quality assurance. We have seen in Chapter 3, where the commencement and evolution of quality assurance were discussed extensively, how quality assurance is considered as an external process mandated by the government. South African and Nigerian interviewees in Chapter 5 confirmed this external stance or understanding of quality assurance as an external process. Using the words of one of the Nigerian respondents, quality assurance is 'an exclusive preserve'. The existing regulatory framework discussed in Chapters 2 and 5 is evidence of this externality which is a parallel of the industrial connotation of quality as a 'check on and an external process'. Undeniably, teaching and learning are part of the previous regulatory frameworks in both countries especially for South Africa. However, the way teaching and learning were expressed seemed like operationalization because they were specified in quantitative terms and codified as a set of criteria to ensure accountability. For teaching and learning to be transformative rather than mechanistic there needs to be a deeper level of integration which addresses not 'what' the students will become (quantitative measures) but 'who' they will

become (qualitative measure that merges character with learning). Transformative teaching and learning enhances and empowers students. In this transformative experience, quality is not attained by regulation but through critical engagement (Harvey and Newton, 2007) that addresses students learning outcome. This is why the proposed mechanism presents a menu of strategies that could be used to address the inability to affiliate quality assurance processes with the improvement of student learning outcomes (Harvey and Williams, 2010).

As part of the internalisation strategy of this mechanism, the ownership of quality assurance rests with the institution unlike previous frameworks where institutions are passive owners. In the Chapter 3, I discussed the quality culture where Harvey (2007) talks about 'an academic ownership of quality' which 'welcomes external critical evaluation. Higher education institutions therefore, own this mechanism because the onus for quality assurance of institutions rests with higher education even though it is subject to external scrutiny of regulators.

The mechanism does not dispense with external quality assurance rather it guarantees that higher education institutions would subject their activities to the review and constructive criticism of peers and

external regulators. It also serves as a reference point for institutions' self-criticism. Harvey emphasized that this sort of reflexivity is at the heart of quality culture, as discussed in Chapter 3. He acknowledged that quality culture is about facilitating and encouraging reflexivity and praxis; self-reflection, developing improvement initiatives and implementing them (Harvey, 2007)

The mechanism is not meant to prescribe the rules that should govern the way institutions, nor quality assurance agents, should behave. It is essentially supposed to guide action so that quality assurance regulators can begin to look beyond the material aspects alone. Prescription is something the academic committee disregards if one considers the previous discussions in Chapter 5 on the Longe Commission (Nigeria) where one of the complaints against NUC was about the 'prescription of the curricula'. Similarly in speaking about the South African system, Jansen, as discussed in chapter 5 indicated the problems of non-inclusivity and too prescriptive formulations of the quality assurance arrangement (Jansen, 2004). University of Wits, as seen in chapter 5 contended that a 'too prescriptive approach is the reason why their mentoring programme was contested by the quality assurance committee (Shalem, Allais and Steinberg, 2009). The mechanism as a guide would provide for unquestionable autonomy of the institutions.

A closer discussion of the different aspects of the mechanism brings out other benefits.

6.2.1 COURSE

The mechanism provides external regulators with the context of what a good quality assurance system should look like. This is the context suggested by Harvey, a 'context in which efforts are linked to the development of transformative learning' discussed in earlier chapters (Harvey, 2009). Harvey and Williams in writing about what quality assurance has had to offer in the last 15 years lamented the fact that quality assurance narrowed its focus to procedures that operated from a level that is distanced from the practice of teaching and learning (Harvey and Williams, 2010). The course part of this mechanism therefore is designed to re-conceptualize the quality of teachers and the quality of students learning. We have seen that 'teaching and learning strategy' and 'teaching and learning interactions' form part of the indices in the programme accreditation of South Africa just as teaching and learning processes is also part of the indices in the Nigerian regulatory framework. It is debatable how transformative these are since they merely constituted indices for 'check on'.

The mechanism on the other hand requires, as Harvey has often reiterated, a reconceptualization of the pedagogic process and an ideological critique of the purpose of learning and, contingent on that, of the evaluation of quality' (Harvey, 2009). Harvey relates teaching pedagogy to the empowerment and enhancement of learners and the ability of quality assurance to measure this transformative view of learners (Harvey and Knight, 1996; Harvey, 1999).

Regarding the course, the two formidable areas of concentration are 1) the quality of teaching as it affects the quality of students; and 2) the quality of students' learning. The quality of teaching is a very important factor influencing the quality of students' learning. The quality of teaching is influenced by the quality of the teacher. The course supports a judicious decision on investment in teachers' so that they can enhance the quality of the curriculum, teaching quality (pedagogy and resources) and the resulting students' achievement (quality of degree or other awards). It entails self-assessment, peer review and appraisal by students and the effective decision following an appraisal. Quality assurance at this stage is to ensure that the evidence gathered is robust, well founded and functional. The external agents' purpose would be to ensure that the evidence is not based on mere hunches but on the existence of a quality culture. This resonates with the point made earlier about quality culture involving 'critical

evaluation from a variety of sources including formal external evaluations' with 'external peers acting as critical friends, and internal peer review and support' (Harvey, 2007).

6.2.2 QUALITY OF TEACHING

In reference to a document by OECD (2012, p. 8) on fostering the quality of teaching, OECD contends that a new paradigm for teaching is needed because 'Graduates are entering the world of employment that is characterized by greater uncertainty, speed, risk, complexity and interdisciplinary working'. It asserts that university education should be one that equips students with the 'knowledge, skills, values and attributes' to thrive in it. The way OECD conceives the new teaching and learning paradigms (OECD, 2012, p. 9) does not include how students can be equipped with values nor the importance of external environment as it affects acquisition of skills and empowerment of learners. Nonetheless, a very important point made by OECD, which has some implication for this research, is that there is a requirement for teachers as subject experts to have the pedagogical skills for delivering students' learning outcomes.

NUC's request that university lecturers should have PhDs ignores the unintended effect of lack of rigour in obtaining one within one's institution, which signals issues of credibility. Demanding a PhD is

putting emphasis on becoming a subject matter specialist, as the PhD is expected to produce. I would reiterate that the emphasis could be on being academically qualified and equipped with pedagogical skill. I feel that rather than insist on a doctorate for every university lecturer, however important it may seem, the focus ought to be on appraising and strengthening the teaching pedagogy of lecturers, which invariably improves students' learning outcome. External quality assurance needs to measure how students engage with teaching pedagogy in transformative ways (Gibbs, 2010; Entwistle, 2009). This level of engagement on the part of students is engendered by the quality of teaching (Ashwin, Abba and McLean, 2010).

In Chapter 3, I discussed the purpose of education: particularly the views of instrumentalisation *versus* liberal education. The vision being cast by respondents about the purpose of education is employment after higher education but should it not, in addition, be tilting more towards 'cultivation of the mind' (Newman, 1996), so that students can 'unfold further as productive virtuous citizens that contribute to the common good. The Philosophy of Nigerian education corresponds to this integration of values. Some sections highlight moulding the character and development of sound attributes and morals (Philosophy of Nigerian Education, Section 4, No 18: d), and the inculcation of the right types of values for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian

society (Philosophy of Nigerian Education, Section 1 No 7:b and Section 8 No 59:b). In South Africa, their higher education policy focuses more on redressing 'past discrimination', and education is also seen as a way to contribute to 'social, cultural and intellectual life' by preparing 'enlightened, responsible and constructively critical citizens' (DOE, 1997:1.12, 1.3). These aims are further elaborated in the South African Education White Paper (No. 3). The moral relativism in South Africa requires that universities pay some heed to the moral dimension, especially if quality assurance is to endure. When one considers what is happening in education, one sees a collapse of public morality, which points, among other factors, to the inadequacies of the current system of quality assurance.

The quality of teaching, in summary, should be seen as an actionable knowledge in education, which involves making learning a process of engaging learners transformatively and a product of such interactions. Underpinning these interactions, which involve lesson preparation, teaching pedagogy, learner assessment and reflective teaching, are several educational philosophies and psychologies of learning. It is important that lecturers in universities cease to depend on obsolete notes prepared many years ago, and begin to expend the enormous amount of effort needed to design lessons that would maximize those

interactions whilst incorporating the teaching of ethics and value education. There is need for an alignment between their incorporation of values in subject matters and their own personal behaviour as lecturers, so that the consciousness of students can comprehend values formulated and practiced. Obsolete teaching resources is an observation made earlier by Teferra and Knight (2008), in Chapter 5, which they said negatively impacts on Nigerian students becoming active players. Just as OECD observed earlier that university education should equip students with values. Values are also part of the goals of the philosophy of Nigerian education (Philosophy of Nigerian Education, Section 4, No 18:d) that was discussed earlier.

6.2.3 QUALITY OF STUDENTS' LEARNING

We have already seen in the previous chapters the numerous calls for students learning outcome as a product of effective quality assurance. At the core of student's learning outcome is the quality of student's learning. Relating to students' learning is a quality code published by QAA in June 2012 after its consultations with institutions, which spanned from February to April 2012. It envisions students' engagement in the context of quality as embracing two domains:

> Improving the motivation of students to engage in learning and to learn independently and the participation

> of students in quality enhancement. Quality assurance processes, resulting in the improvement of their educational experience. (QAA, 2012, p. 2)

QAA also stipulates seven indicators on how institutions can help students' engagement enhance their learning experience. One of these is by closing the feedback loop that has always existed, wherein students are not informed about how their responses to surveys have resulted in improvement. This code has been met with the criticisms by those who feel it shifts the responsibility for learning (and quality assurance) to students (Williams, 2012; Brown 2012).

Students need to be increasingly involved in the teaching and learning process and take ownership of their learning (Harvey, 2007; Alaniska *et al.*, 2006; Jung and Latchem, 2012). Harvey (2007) stated that transformative learning is not just about increasing a student's reservoir of knowledge rather it is the 'evolution of the way students approach the acquisition of knowledge and skills and relate them too a wider context'. Studies on technological competencies, learner's prior experience and perceptions should be applied to improve the quality of students experience as much as the instructional design should place value on ethics.

The quality of teaching and quality of students' experience need to be considered as the foundational and, indeed, the most reasonable

premise for the encounter between regulation of quality assurance and the institutions. Often, scholars are bound by the juxtaposition between compliance and improvement, or feel around for a single definition because of the burden of the plethora of definitions of quality assurance, which have simply evolved and accumulated in the course of history. While I continue to concede to the fact that aligning compliance and improvement is an important building block in quality assurance, the quality of teaching and quality of students learning are what would enable this improvement to take place. They influence the learning outcomes and are, by far, a reasonably fair representation of institutional quality assurance. Also, it is worth considering that it is not only the assessment or appraisal of students and the degrees awarded that are important but also essentially the course organization, the teaching-learning encounters by competent staff, brokering relationship with future employers and students' feedback, are complementary and fundamental. These should form the basis of institutional self-evaluation and external quality assurance.

Quality of teaching should incorporate training in virtues, which imply nurturing students in a habitual and firm disposition to do good by modelling those good habits. There have been studies, which show that education can reduce crime because of the impact it has on student through its effect on 'patience' and 'risk aversion' (Lochner and Moretti,

2004; Oreopoulos, 2007). If teaching and learning are not channelled towards ensuring the identification and safeguarding of the integral good of the human person as conditions for peace, then where could one possibly find recourse? There is growing evidence to show that improving education has a causative effect on crime reduction (Machin, Marie and Vujic, 2010).

In summary, course in the mechanism supports and evaluates all these issues in anticipation of the end result, which is improvement. The decisions arrived at would then serve as the starting point for a new Course review. The Course level is supposed to serve as a point for constructive discourse rather than a checklist. Its adaptation from one institution to the next is supposed to vary. Its adaptation by an institution would prove the ingenuity of the institution and reveal good practices that can be shared by other institutions. Being self-evaluative, it provides a process that offers opportunities for enhancement, and quality management of institutions.

It goes without saying that funding will help 'the Course to stay on course'. Universities need to be better resourced and lecturers need to update their knowledge of technology—this would facilitate the expected learning outcome of students.

6.2.4 GOALS AND OUTCOME

The goals and outcome level in the quality assurance mechanism deals with employability of graduates and relevance. Both will be treated separately and their interconnectivity will also be discussed. Evidently, they are linked with the quality of students and quality of students' learning that is contained in the course aspect of the mechanism

Employability of graduates as we have already seen in Chapters 2 and 5 goes deeper than the classical definition provided by Pollard and Hillage (1998) involving gaining, maintaining and switching employment and finding fulfilment. We have also seen other definitions suggesting that employability factors are predicated on an individual level, ones personal circumstance and other external factors (McQuaid, Green and Danson, 2005). Harvey (2002) like McQuaid *et al*. (2005) also pointed out factors such as age, gender, ethnicity and personality traits that could influence employability. Similarly, extraneous socio-economic variables that are national or region-specific can affect employability (Yorke, 2006). Such extraneous factors as already seen in the context of Nigeria and South Africa are political instability, nepotism, ethnicity, tribalism, and racism to mention a few. Yorke (2004) and Knight (2002) also argued that the understanding of employability, which fails to include metacognition and an understanding that enables an individual to operate in situations of complexity, is a simplistic notion of employability. This relates to what Bridges (1993) in Yorke (2006) considered to be the 'transferring skill'.

He contends transferring skills to be those higher order skills that enable selectivity, adaptability and application of skills in differing situations, contexts and across cognitive domains.

The British Council sponsored comparative study on employability in the college sector of England and South Africa seen in Chapter 2, carried out by McGrath *et al*. (2010), sheds further lights on employability. This study viewed employability through five interacting lenses namely the student, staff, employer, policy and institution.

Employability in this mechanism bearing in mind the wide ranging views already discussed encapsulates all that is done by an institution in response to enhancing its curriculum, pedagogy, brokerage to create social capital networks and simulation of work place habits that would garner benefits for the students. .

Enhancing the curriculum would be to ensure that the curriculum goes 'beyond the ordinary' (McGrath *et al*., 2010) to equip students with the relevant skills, competences and attitudes in pragmatic ways. This would involve the teacher modelling some of the expected skills and attributes. It also involves facilitating access to social capital networks in such a manner that institutions become a kind of proxy social capital. These strategic alliances should be evidenced and measureable.

Misrepresented employability agenda is that which is leading institutions to the extreme of 'claiming time on syllabi at the expense of academic subjects and inculcating market values at the expense of free and critical thinking'. The description above was alleged by a former student, Steve Sarson (in THE, 2013), who expressed feelings of frustration in having to prepare and critique a *curriculum vitae* as part of a history lesson while he was at university following an employability agenda. The limitation in the UUK/CBI Global Employability survey, and universities guided by such an agenda is the focus on having skills that enables getting a job or transition from graduation to workplace. Other limitations is seeing employability as involving graduate track study and the tool in capturing such data which may be quite expensive and quite frankly, impractical. Certainly a structural aspect of the economy which has to do with job availability (McGrath *et al.*, 2010) or living in a location that holds no job prospects may also limit or moderate the effects of employability. Nonetheless where employment is not available such as when students or institutions are located in areas that are geographically isolated, there is the likelihood that such students would be disadvantaged. To redress this, ties could be forged with distant partners. A student could equally choose to relocate to a location that offers more opportunities.

I consider constant development of the skills of teachers should be seen as an aspect of employability, so that the teacher is competent enough to model, facilitate, reconfigure and transmit the entire core, generic and transferable skills identified as well as create brokerage opportunities. The transformation of institutions is key so that it becomes more entrepreneurial, giving and creating prior employment opportunities that enables students to gain expertise by undertaking job assignments that stretch their capabilities. The relationship building between institutions and the labour force addressed by McGrath *et al*. (2010) would accrue important benefits to the employable student as well as produce collective benefits for network members namely the institutions, the employers, the state and the students.

Harvey's contribution on employability also serves to elaborate further on how I envision employability in the mechanism. Harvey (2002, p. 3) distinguished two aspects of employability:

> the employability potential of the individual (a matter of self development) and the actual employment of the individual (a matter mediated by external factors).

The employability potential is contingent on the individual but fostered by the institution. The university does not have to engage students in separate tasks like writing CVs in a history lesson as identified by the former student Steve Sarson (THE, 2013). Rather, a teacher whose pedagogic style involves cultivation of relevant skills and attributes and

simulation of the internal dimensions of the workplace through modelling incorporates employability skills in a taught discipline. Certainly, extracurricular activities offered by the school which include career counselling services, Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES), short employment opportunities, evidence of institutional links with the industry and suchlike, play a key role. The institution could influence the second aspect, which in Harvey's opinion is outside the scope of the institution. This occurs as already discussed through a diffusion of employability skills and 'relational access' to social capital networks' (McGrath *et al.*, 2010). It should also be seen as the long-term effect of university graduates nurtured in ethics, and who uphold the values of ethics in society. Employability is not a private affair. It is wholly private and wholly public. A student equipped with employability skills influences his environment and changes the moral fabric of society. This assertion is in keeping with Newman's vision on the purpose of a university discussed in Chapter 3. Newman contends that education is the formation of character which transmits something individual and something permanent; but Newman also argues that benefits are not restricted to the individual but diffuses to the civil society and raise the 'intellectual tone', 'cultivate the mind', and 'give enlargement and sobriety to the ideas of the age, and facilitate the exercise of political power, while bringing refinement to public life'.

Having expounded on the remit of employability, embedding employability in a quality assurance mechanism requires that both internal and external quality assurance agents provide evidence on the impact of employability activities.

6.2.5 RELEVANCE

Relevance interacts with employability. Relevance ensures that the strategic aims of education are maintained, and that institutions remain relevant to national and global research needs and whatever problems they are trying to solve. This level is central to the ability to prove or disprove the competency of an institution. It would be irrelevant to speak about brokering relations with social networks if universities are not seen to be relevant to the needs of the society that they serve or in which they are located. It can be argued that relevance is what enables students to remain competitive in a global society. Gibbons (1998) states that knowledge is no longer a 'self-contained activity' and that accordingly the most competent universities would be those who create a presence for themselves within that range of problems context in ways that facilitate the attainment of their institutional goals. Relevance also means that in brokering ties with social networks,

institutions should not assume that employers are all knowledgeable. According to McQuaid, Green and Danson (2005, p. 192):

> There is a need for improved communication between training providers and the employers to ensure that the training being provided is relevant to both employers and employees, but also to challenge some of the attitudes and practices of employers.'

This is where research on the part of the institution comes in, as research should have consequences for broadening the flow of knowledge or altering patterns of behaviour. For teachers to be relevant, they need to see teaching as a researchable and researched disciplined (Elton, 2008, 2011). Research is particularly important is seeking relevance, Gibbons (2000, p. 50) speaking about universities wishing to participate at the forefront of research, states rather succinctly:

> At the very least, they will have to become more open, porous institutions vis-à-vis the wider community, with 'fewer gates and more revolving doors'. They will have to become more entrepreneurial in the ways that they utilize their 'intellectual' capital and this may mean experimenting with much broader range of contractual employment arrangements.

This statement by Gibbons corresponds with some of the views expressed earlier about employability and entrepreneurial universities and brokering social capital networks.

Relevance is also in consonance with Kerr's views discussed in Chapter 3 because he sees teaching and learning as proper to a university, as it leads to its continuous discovery, national development and growth. Kerr's idea of a multi-university is one of combined roles of teaching, research and service.

6.2.6 IMPROVEMENT

The final stage is the extraction stage of information for the purposes of improvement. This is the Improvement level. Improvement as an essential component of quality assurance was discussed extensively in Chapter 3. Improvement is the design stage, where the institution designs what can fix the identified shortfalls, and institutionalize what triggers growth. It is at this point that the consolidation of all the different levels is considered and reporting is done. In other words, based on the mechanism, institutions can investigate the joint effect that enhanced pedagogy, resources, curriculum, employability and relevance have had on student's learning outcome, i.e., how features of the entire mechanism have shaped transformative learners. This

consolidation stage has the ability to deliver insightful performance feedback and a basis for decisions on improvements to be made. The improvement stage is a habitual stage and is supposed to stimulate reflection and dialogue about quality assured practices. Consolidation removes the danger of relying on a narrow set of information in judging performance and performance drivers.

6.3 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I have tried to articulate how the proposed mechanism presents sequential steps that support the refining of the existing quality assurance mechanism of higher institutions. It is interactive, as each successive step interacts with the other in a kind of mutually causative way. The aspects mentioned are not amenable to quantification through some form of measurement and calculation, as that would be reductionist and put limits on the mechanism's flexible adaptation by institutions.

The conceptualization and operalisationalisation of this mechanism is more in tune with internalization of quality assurance whose ownership rests with the institutions. It remains subject to external scrutiny of quality assurance agents who are supposed to play a facilitating role based on the evidence of students learning outcome. It

expects quality teachers to model the behaviour that transformative students are expected to exhibit as well as playing an instrumental role in brokering relationships between students and social capital networks. It breaks away from the existing system of quality assurance, which has a factory-line approach to regulation, which sees regulation only as inputs that yields certain fixed and measurable external outputs. The mental model behind the former approach stresses the need for minimum standards and, therefore, the need for compliance and control. The behaviour generated by such thinking pattern is a monopoly of regulation by regulators, rhetoric, and game playing by institutions. The proposed mechanism on the other hand, guarantees that a quality culture is internalized in institutions as that encourages reflexivity. The mechanism is a guide, which involves a reconceptualization of the pedagogic process informed by the purpose of higher education and quality assurance aimed at enhancement and empowerment of learners.

CHAPTER SEVEN
IMPLICATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

I have brought to bear on the serious issues posed by quality assurance, my years of experience as a board member of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). I have looked backward and forward in examining perspectives on quality assurance and reflected on several questions.-What precisely is understood by the term quality assurance? Does it have any link with the purposes of higher education? How does it improve institutions learning outcomes? What consequences do the answers to these questions have for the future of quality assurance and higher education?

These questions were informed by my growing concern for the future of higher education and the idealised notion of quality assurance that departs from the holistic view: making quality assurance synonymous with compliance, abused by control and, at best, a mere regulation exercise.

The complexity about what defines good quality assurance and the ambiguity in the practice of quality assurance have been criticised by Nigerian and South African scholars such as Jansen (2009), Mokgalong (2009), Botman (2009) and Okebukola (2010). In what seemed like provocative departures from conventional thinking in the UK, quality assurance is now being considered as ineffectual (Parry, 2002; Brown, 2002; Power, 1999; Kealey, 2008; Alderman, 2009; Harvey and Stensaker, 2007), a 'dangerous remedy' (Greatrix, 2005), and a 'symbolic violence' (Morley, 2003). In essence, the confusion and tensions associated with quality assurance assail not just Africans, but also countries like the UK that have had a long history of quality assurance.

If UK scholars demur about quality assurance, does it necessarily reduce the value that we Africans try to build upon it? Nonetheless, it is worth considering the fact that external quality assurance is still being practiced and upheld in the UK. One can argue that this signifies the need for research that could bring quality assurance to gain the assent of scholars whilst fulfilling its purpose.

What are the reasons for this dilemma in which quality assurance finds itself? Amidst such acclaimed perils, does quality assurance offer any opportunity for improvement of teaching and learning? Could there be possibilities beginning to develop in Nigerian and South African

institutions that indicate that, quality assurance could improve the quality of teaching, quality of students' experience, and the learning outcomes?

In writing up this thesis, I sought to disclose what regulators think about quality assurance. To gain some insights into the meaning of quality assurance, I did not ask direct questions such as 'what is quality assurance?' Neither did I ask 'What does quality assurance have to do with, the economy and purposes of education?' My interview questions were aimed at distilling the truth about the meaning; not the rhetoric of quality assurance. As such, I felt that such direct questions would yield calculated and measured responses about the material expertise or 'knowledge about' quality assurance. My interest is meaning making of quality assurance because one can argue that comprehension and understanding are quite different. Would a clear understanding of the meaning of quality assurance by regulators reveal insights into how quality assurance is a missed opportunity and has failed to systemize transformatory education and nation building? What, then, is quality assurance and what consequences does it have for the future of higher education in the country? Can a reflection on meaning and integration of core ideas of quality assurance change reactive and incremental attitudes?

7.2 KEY STEPS AND FINDINGS

In deepening an understanding of quality assurance, I interpreted and expounded on existing knowledge of quality assurance that bears a thematic relation to the research, while taking the particular circumstances of Nigeria and South Africa into account. Also, aspects that could be of national interest and possibly influence practice by creating qualitatively driven and credible quality assurance systems, were discussed.

Approaching the context from a variety of angles, I observed how location made some parts of Africa penetrable to European explorers, and how historical affiliations with UK universities set in motion, a western-styled education which was to have the greatest and most sustainable impact on the higher education and the embryonic future of quality assurance in the region.

Tracing the growth in economy and number of institutions plus emerging regulatory frameworks that followed post-independent higher education, I noted how these institutions did not remain impervious to the pervasive influence of politics and corruption. Neither did the mandated regulatory framework have any meaningful impact on the fragmented, declining and parlous state of higher education. Problems of access gave way to students' mobility, bogus institutions, and establishment of foreign institutions.

It has been observed that the sledgehammer of quality assurance agencies, when they began to evaluate institutions, failed to bring about the desired level of improvement. Their actions bred suspicion on the part of disgruntled academia and foreign institutions. In some cases, they led to the development of a phenomenon known as consequentialism. Though accused of managerialism, bureaucracy and in some cases of being too prescriptive, inept and overstepping their bounds, quality assurance agents continued to justify and impose their mandate.

Interview of regulators and review of extant literature on the mandate, incentive, value, and evolution of quality and quality assurance, helped me to get to the root of my questions and extract the meaning of quality assurance. I also established the points of similarity and divisions between the past and present understanding of the concept. Using multiple qualitative methods to interpret, understand and provide meaning, I pointed out the fragmented nature of the concept and the lack of dialogue with the quality assurance scholars.

I have argued that countries including Nigeria and South Africa are in a sense stuck with the industrial status quo as earlier identified in the literature on industrial models of Taylor, Juran, Stewart, Deming, and the analysis of such models by Ball (1985), Greatrix (2005) and Woodhouse (2012).

I found in answer to my research questions that quality assurance means establishing minimum standards and, surprisingly, after 30 years of quality assurance in these countries, baseline standards remained the focus and measure of quality assurance. NUC Nigeria sums up their mandate of quality assurance as comprising advising, standard setting and exercise of inspectorial powers—and these fall within the realms of accreditation and quality control. Minimum standards tend to be minimalistic. Arguably, institutions could settle for the least they have to do and such approach would hardly encourage any form of innovation. Quality control and quality assurance may be interrelated but they are different. They differ because quality control in an industrial setting detects error and so properly speaking, it is used to verify the quality of output. Therefore, it is a reactive way of gauging and monitoring quality. Whereas, quality assurance is a proactive process of managing for quality. Harvey (2006, p.15) states that 'in higher education quality is about development and improvement which is embodied in the transformative approach'.

Obscurity in meaning and the strong impact of industrial models have inhibited the full remit of quality assurance, which hinges on compliance moderated by improvement. An enhancement component is not the basis for review or audit; rather, it is the aftermath or happening by chance as disclosed by a Nigerian respondent citing the case of state universities in Nigeria, which became fully resourced

when a punitive measure was threatened by NUC after accreditation. In both countries, quality assurance also equates to managerialism and this has not escaped the criticisms of South African scholars such as Southall, Cobbing, du Toit and Jasen. Nor has employability gained the understanding and visibility that is in tune with current debates on how employability can impact on effective and transformative quality assurance.

I discovered that quality assurance is used as a way to make the institutions accountable and therefore, emphasis is on compliance (Nigeria and South Africa's insistence on compliance), prevention, external accreditation (Nigeria's external accreditation), audit of quality systems (South Africa's quality audit), and cause-and-effect analysis. The kind of accountability that exists is both political and market-centred; and since institutional enhancement and external accountability are not always in sync, finding the balance is really the key.

Regulation in both countries is externally imposed' and requires that institutions provide evidence that they conform to an established standard and so the incentive is for such an institution to want to look as good as possible. This is unlike improvement-led quality assurance where institutions faithfully detect and report any existing deficiency, so that they can be acted upon. The improvement-led quality assurance

is certainly the best. In my opinion, at least some improvement(s) do occur; not just temporary window dressing improvements, but permanent actual improvements, quality notwithstanding. A control mind-set turns quality assurance into a kind of administrative activity.

Quality assurance was not linked with the purposes of education by any of the respondents, nor was employability in the matrix used for accreditation or response given by any of the respondents. Rather, driven by a political framework and legislative formulations, the purposes of quality assurance are for political rationales. An example of such can be found with a South African respondent that talked about a world-class institution, geared towards meeting national needs and objectives. Strictly speaking, there is neither much room for the lofty ideals envisaged by Newman, nor even the practice of the philosophies of education, which in both countries relate to character and learning. It can be argued that ignoring the philosophies of education in both countries could be the reason for the moral relativism we are witnessing on campuses and among regulators?

The acclaimed mandate to quality-assure provides regulators with a picture of quality assurance in which improvement could not find a meaningful place. Accordingly, the conceptual basis for a mistaken notion of quality assurance is what a Nigerian respondent termed an 'exclusive preserve'. With institutions left in the lurch, tension was

inevitable and so, game playing defeated the purposes of education in the short and long term.

Unexpected findings that emerged from the analysis of the interviews and literature review were not only the universality of the definitional issues and tensions of quality assurance, but there are also ethical issues impeding the true practice of quality assurance. Ethical issues such as cash for accreditation, game playing, bullying, degree milling and favouritism, continue to cause potential harm to quality assurance.

A true sense of collegiality is absent between the regulators and the regulated because quality assurance is not premised on the trust and inclusiveness of all relevant stakeholders. Of the many risks already identified during the interview are those facing students such as the risk of misinformation by rogue providers; risks of deregulation by proscription of course of study; risk of low quality provision due to lack of rigour, cheating and corruption of external quality assurance agents, the risk of lack of employability and poor job performance due to absence of transformative quality assurance and, finally, the risk of non-involvement of students in quality assurance processes.

I realized that quality assurance is still developing in the region. Its consciousness has yielded more resources to universities facing proscription in Nigeria. It is also leading to human capital investment as more staff are registering to obtain a PhD in fulfilment of a

requirement by NUC. To strengthen the impact of quality assurance, changes are gradually being embraced. For instance, Nigeria is considering introducing institutional accreditation alongside programme accreditation. For South Africa, quality assurance has helped the transition of segregated pre-apartheid institutions into regulated post apartheid institutions. It has also influenced teaching, learning and students' participation in quality assurance. There is potential in what has been described as the students' quality literacy project being developed in South Africa.

7.3 REFLECTIONS ON LIMITATION OF STUDY

One of the limitations identified in Chapter 4.1 is the failure to collect and analyse data from institutions in Nigeria and South Africa. My decision not to interview stakeholders in Nigerian and South African universities and explore the situational factors is a limitation in this study. This is because they could have provided more insight on the tensions, implementation gaps and impact of quality assurance. Such studies on academic response to quality assurance by the academia have remained largely unexploited (Newton, 2000). The impact of such studies, aside from contributing to the understanding of external quality assurance, would identify implementation gaps on the part of the academia. Also, they could possibly highlight internal situational conditions and contexts that affect students learning outcomes; and perhaps any liability for any deficiencies on the part of the academia.

Undoubtedly to carry out such a survey among academia, meaningfully, would require an excessive amount of time for sample selection, gathering, analysing and interpreting data.

Also a students' survey on quality assurance might have revealed how much awareness exists about quality assurance thereby creating a platform for discussions on what they need to know about quality assurance. The perception of students could also impact on how effectively students can be engaged and how that engagement could facilitate the enhancement of quality assurance. Again, time constraints and other associated costs in selecting, gathering, analyzing and interpreting data have made a students survey of this nature impracticable.

It can be argued however, that concentrating on the meaning of quality assurance among regulators was my focus and to extend the scope to include lecturers' and students' survey would have made the research too broad to be contained within the resources available. However, my inability to carry out a survey on students and lecturers in higher institutions in order to gauge the meaning of quality assurance, could actually serve as a topic for future research.

Time constraint was another limiting factor. I would have loved to interview many more practitioners in South Africa so that more cross-referencing to verify the views across a plethora of regulators in CHE,

HEQC, DHET and SAQA would have been revealing. There again, it would became rather expensive to do so, as that would require remaining in the hotel in South Africa or even to cover expenses for a third visit.

The sample size is small because of the qualitative nature of the research. A large sample size would have provided for more triangulation Nonetheless, Lewis and Elam (2003) and Glaser and Strauss (1967) all speak of the danger a large sample size in qualitative research. When a sample size is too large, the data become repetitive and thereby counter-productive. The ultimate drivers for sample size as Charmaz (2006) and Fossey et al (2002) contend, are the aims of the research. My aim as elaborated in Chapter 2 resonates with Harvey's argument about deconstructing the prevailing notion of quality assurance by evaluators in a manner that aids the reconstruction of a renewed understanding of quality and the quality process.

While the underlying principle for this research may deserve some merit, the environment can certainly subvert any achievement that quality assurance could have. Newton (2002), Knight and Trowler (2000) and Ramsden (1998) warned about such situational and operational factors associated with pre-existing local and cultural practices.

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7.4 CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE

From the vantage point of being a former board member of the international quality assurance agency of higher education, and having overseen the practice of quality assurance in six continents, I have produced a mechanism that hopefully can enhance the understanding of the purpose and practice of quality assurance in institutions. Historically, quality assurance was seen as an external intervention to counter unhealthy behaviour in institutions. Focusing on external interventions and compliance checks alone are, as we have seen, fraught with misunderstanding and lead to limited success. Besides,

innovative institutional teaching and learning outcomes may remain untapped.

Quality assurance differs from the production-line model practiced by manufacturers, which has been implicit in the current practice of the higher education sector. Wielding a mandate or focusing on a punitive measure for failing to meet the minimum standards criteria would not achieve improvement. That seems to me like using power to coerce conformity. Quality assurance is not power coercive because power cohesion depends on administrative systems and bureaucracy for its evaluative strategy (Adelman and Alexander, 1982). Also, the prevailing epistemology of quality assurance with an emphasis on compliance and improvement as an appendage undermines the true nature of quality assurance. When external regulation forces internal changes, it is best described as accountability and not quality assurance. Accountability, when it drives institutional process, is bound to be bureaucratic and managerial.

The centrality of quality assurance requires considerable consideration about the purposes, philosophies and values that should underpin university education. It requires self-criticism of the worth of a university's teaching and learning processes. Therefore, external quality assurance agents should play the vital and facilitative role of nurturing self-regulating, sustainable and innovative institutions. It involves the

mutual development of both staff and students' capabilities and responsibilities. It requires a delicate balance between accountability and improvement. Considering the accountability dimension, Harvey and Stensaker (2013, p. 30) posited that accountability in itself could be interpreted as 'a balancing act'. This is an observation shared by Djelic and Sahlin Andersson (2006). They all agree that accountability relates to a balancing of interests of educational stakeholders as well as identifies and creates the designs and organizational solutions that develops rather than weakens trust. For accountability not to be a form of power game (Harvey and Stensaker, 2013) or game-playing and impression management (Newton, 2002), higher education institutions 'could take a more pro-active role' (Harvey and Stensaker, 2013, p. 38). Perhaps the importance of my proposed mechanism makes sense in the light of the concluding remarks of Harvey and Stensaker (2013, p. 38), in their reports from a comparative study on systems of quality assurance in 19 countries around the globe including Nigeria and South Africa.

> What seems to be missing in the many comprehensive quality assurance systems developed during the last two decades is valid and reliable information on the core processes of higher education—teaching and learning.

The mechanism I have proposed emphasizes internalising quality assurance and it takes into cognizance the key components needed for quality assured institutions. Being an open system, it demonstrates the constant dialogue between internal and external quality assurance. Just like the human system that requires life sustaining oxygen from its surrounding, so does the mechanism require strategic input from 'teaching pedagogy', 'resources' and 'reconfigured curriculum', for its sustainability. It is a mechanism that is adaptable, as well as capable of self-correction and growth. In effect, quality assurance would no longer be seen as static, exclusive or a status. Rather, it becomes an on-going, fit-for-purpose process whose responsibility in the first place lies with the institutions themselves, with external quality assurance agents playing a facilitating role.

Arguably one can contend that clinging to a concept of quality assurance that is exclusive and domineering, which neither balances accountability and improvement nor has a deep awareness of how teaching and learning leads to employability would cause disaffection and carry little or no moral authority. Focusing on compliance fails to convey a real sense of quality assurance. The proposed mechanism calls for new directions in quality assurance. It is not a radical new beginning but it evolves from the existing process and understanding of quality assurance. With the existence of quality assurance networks, meetings and workshops across the globe, the knowledge of quality

assurance is constantly increasing and changing which inevitably needs to affect the purpose, practice and outcome of quality assurance.

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APPENDIX I

Oral Interview Schedule

Timing: 1hr – 1hr.30mins

Type: Semi structured

Manner: On appointment basis and following a written consent from the interviewee. Questioning, Voice Recording and Jottings

General Questions

1. Is Quality Assurance mandated by the government
2. What is the incentive for quality assurance
3. When did quality assurance start in South Africa/Nigeria

and what are the perceived merits/demerits

4. What is the value of quality assurance

5. What are the main criticisms facing quality assurance in South Africa/Nigeria

6. Are there any quality improvements that quality assurance helped to initiate and sustain in tertiary education

7. What is assessed

8. What is the basic or foremost requirement by quality assurance regulation bodies

9. Who benefits from Accreditation

10. What about the regulation of trans-national providers

11. What is the institutional response to accreditation

12. Do students input, employers have any part to play in accreditation

13. Who regulates the regulators